

## The spirit of possibility

**D**riven by a deep commitment to learn about and report on “the will of the people,” Dr. George Gallup founded the American Institute of Public Opinion in 1935. When his survey method correctly predicted that Franklin Roosevelt would win the 1936 presidential election—contradicting other popular polls at the time—the institute’s credibility soared. Soon after, with the national newspaper syndication of “The Gallup Poll,” and nearly constant citations in the press, the name “Gallup” became the most trusted source for opinion research on issues of every sort.

To this day, Gallup continues to explore the public’s opinion on myriad topics, including the well-being of college and university graduates. In 2014, Gallup partnered with Purdue University to survey more than 29,000 adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher on a number of dimensions shaping their personal well-being, including a feeling of purpose, a sense of community, financial stability, social support and physical health.

With such a large sample size, the resulting “Gallup Purdue Index” is regarded as an extremely reliable source. What is most interesting about the index—and exciting to me as president of James Madison University—is that the factor most correlated with a higher sense of purpose and well-being among graduates is having had a faculty member take personal interest in them while they were a student. Anyone with even a passing familiarity with Madison knows that this is a welcoming place where excellent faculty really do care about students as people. Alumni tell me all the time that their best memories of JMU are the relationships they built with professors, staff members and their fellow students. It’s really what sets Madison apart.

**‘We’ve always believed that the Madison Experience was superior. Now we have objective data to support that belief.’**



Now we have very credible confirmation that this is so. In 2016, JMU contracted with Gallup to survey our alumni. They were asked to rate themselves against the same dimensions used in the Gallup Purdue Index. On every dimension of well-being, JMU alumni scored not only far above the

national average for graduates from all colleges and universities, but they also scored significantly above the average of alumni who graduated from the Top 100 colleges and universities in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings.

The full report from Gallup will be completed in October. But right now, all throughout this issue of *Madison*, you will see stories that provide clear examples of the kind of engagement that leads our graduates to feeling a sense of purpose in their lives and to finding well-being in every aspect of their experiences. Truly, these pages burst with exuberance and the spirit of possibility. Enjoy.

Finally, on a personal note, as a university president I get to view higher education from a unique vantage point. Day in and day out, working with a diverse team of talented people, I grapple with the challenging yet highly rewarding decisions required to run a big university. I also get to welcome new students and their families to campus every summer. But this perspective did not prepare me for the feelings I have experienced during the last six months as my wife Mary Ann and I toured colleges and universities with our daughter Eleanor, a rising

high-school senior who plans to major in theater.

Seeing institutions of higher education from the shoes of a parent of a soon-to-be college student has given me a different lens on the value and importance of our work at JMU. First, to parents of current and prospective JMU students, my sense of responsibility for having your trust—enough trust in JMU to send us your precious daughters and sons—has increased even further. As we approach this important transition in the life of our own immediate family, my devotion to assuring that your sons and daughters have a wonderful learning experience at Madison has taken on another dimension. And second, Madison is an incredibly special place. Of course, I already knew that. And Gallup just confirmed it with their thoughtful and penetrating research. But having toured some highly regarded peer institutions and seeing them through the eyes of a father and a potential tuition-payer, the specialness of Madison has been confirmed for me in a new and more personal way. ✉

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