

DIRECTIONS

# Problem-solving in every discipline

At Madison, the link between engagement and innovation is readily apparent

**T**he essay series *Presidential Perspectives*, authored by university presidents across the nation, is in its 10th year of publication. I was asked to contribute to this year's series, themed "Campus Transformations." As you likely know, we are working to continue Madison's exciting ascent by focusing on the university's vision to become the national model for the engaged university: engaged with ideas and the world. In my *Presidential Perspectives* chapter, I make a very direct link between engagement and innovation:

"... a critically important outcome of our focused and intentional emphasis of engagement [is that] those engaged develop a creative and innovative problem-solving mindset much in the style of traditional entrepreneurs, but in every discipline. The innovation and creative problem-solving taught in entrepreneurship programs typically housed in colleges of business can be translated into programs in health care, the arts, public administration—you name it—by intentionally defining, propagating, and assessing engagement. This is powerful."

I highlight this because the link between engagement and innovation can be found throughout this edition of *Madison*, manifesting itself in exciting and important ways across nearly every discipline and pursuit.

Guest columnist Yvonne Harris, JMU's vice provost for research and scholarship, writes on Page 22 that, "Solving the big problems of our day will require a team-based approach, comprised of a diversity of experience, education and methods." As a terrific example, she cites "the JMU Drone Project, which saw 42 students from seven majors utilize unmanned aerial systems technology to tackle six real-world challenges: air pollution, river mussel populations, telemedicine, traffic monitoring, landmine detection and landmine disarmament." You can read more about this project on Page 34, and discover how our distinct combination of engaged learning, community engagement and civic engagement can lead directly to innovation and discovery.

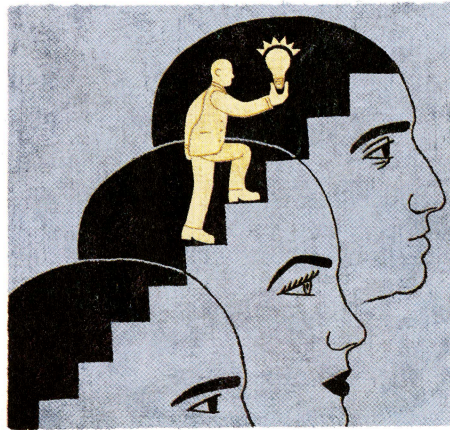
**'... we at JMU are working to instill in every member of our community the *spirit of possibility* that animates the necessary and critical function of innovation.'**

In this issue you will also learn about University Innovation Fellows, which engages Madison students to help us seek new and innovative ways to improve the university. This spring, our University Innovation Fellows received training at Stanford University and at Google headquarters, and presented at SXSWedu. Fellow Chris Ashley ('17) says of his experience, "When we flew back to Virginia last year, we hit the ground running and we were absolutely fired up. We'd just been out at Stanford and Google, some of the most

innovative places in the country, and we wanted to bring that same culture, that same excitement, that same spark we experienced to all the students at JMU." Again, engagement leading to innovation.

While my portrayal of innovation as a direct byproduct of engagement seems linear, it is also cyclical—and alumnus Jeff Tickle ('90) is a fine example of why. Following an endowed gift to the JMU College of Science and Mathematics, Tickle—a successful industrial entrepreneur—decided recently to support our innovative School of Engineering program with a \$2.5 million gift. Jeff attributes his engagement with JMU as inspiring him to help our School of Engineering be as innovative as possible. "JMU engineering is going places," Tickle says, "and I hope to be another cog in the wheel to get it there." Engagement can lead to innovation, but in this case innovation inspired engagement.

At its most basic level, engagement constantly exposes students and faculty to situations in which the first question to be asked is, "What is possible?" Of course, asking "What is possible" is the fundamental step of innovating. And so by embracing engagement in all of its forms, we at JMU are working to instill in every member of our community the *spirit of possibility* that animates the necessary and critical function of innovation. We owe this to our students and we owe it to society as together we face unpredictable economic, social and political realities.



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