

DIRECTIONS

## A bird's-eye view of issues facing higher education

**R**ecently named to the board of directors of the American Council on Education, I was honored to be asked to serve as one of that organization's representatives at the biennial Transatlantic Dialogue in Florence, Italy, this summer. Presidents and other higher-education leaders from the U.S., Canada and Europe convened to engage in an in-depth conversation on contemporary issues facing higher education, including the role of universities in supporting and sustaining democracy, the impact of travel bans on international students and maintaining access to quality higher education. As JMU now has a seat at such lofty international convenings, and as we seek to pursue our vision to be a national and international model of the engaged university that is engaged with ideas and the world, I was struck by the importance of having improved air access to our own campus now that United Airlines partner SkyWest is flying in and out of Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport.


The Shenandoah Valley is renowned for its natural beauty. And Harrisonburg—known as the Friendly City—has the reputation of being a welcoming community. These features are no small part of why JMU is so popular. But for some of our students, especially those from outside Virginia and from other countries, our location can seem somewhat remote. That remoteness just got a lot easier to traverse now that daily flights are connecting us with Washington-Dulles and Chicago, gateways to the nation and the world. Our cover story for this issue of *Madison* highlights this new form of access, along with another stunning new accommodation: the Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Center. Coming to fruition as the result of a four-way partnership among the university, the JMU Foundation, the city of Harrisonburg and dpM Partners, owned by alumnus Paul Gladd ('87), this new addition is a game-changer for our campus and community and a tremendous resource for convenings of all kinds. These developments are helping us to bring our vision to life in exciting and tangible ways.

Also in this issue, you'll read about a fascinating collaboration between JMU engineering and music students and Harrisonburg City Public Schools, aimed at designing and building musical instruments for elementary students with varying physical and cognitive challenges. Such an experience for the 160 first-year engineering students and 12 sophomore music education students—and the elementary student beneficiaries—is an excellent example of engaged learning and community engagement intersecting. It also represents another important academic intersection: STEAM. That's STEM—science,

technology, engineering and math—plus the arts. STEAM is a critical differentiator for the American economy, and providing such opportunities for our students can be a differentiator for their futures, too.

You will also read about alumna Kristen Cavallo ('91), who took the reins as CEO of The Martin Agency late last year amid a sexual misconduct scandal in the executive suite there. Cavallo, who is outspoken on the issue of sexual misconduct, is leading the storied advertising agency out of the scandal in an admirably brave and novel manner.

The issue of sexual misconduct has affected all major institutions and organizations in our nation and society, JMU included. The university strives to provide a safe and secure learning environment for all students. We recognize that all members of our community—including students, faculty, staff and others—have important roles to play in preventing and responding to issues and instances of sexual misconduct.

While the university is investing large amounts of financial and human resources in improved training and prevention programs as well as adjudication processes, we recognize that substantial long-term progress on this issue requires a bold, comprehensive and forward-looking approach. As an educational institution that has long been focused on the value and importance of personal relationships in the learning environment, we will focus even more attention on healthy relationships and healthy choices from the start, before sexual misconduct occurs. Working with our student body, we will provide all students with resources and training on how positive, mutually respectful, interpersonal relationships develop and flourish. The university's existing Title IX Task Force will be replaced by the new Sexual Misconduct Prevention Alliance. With wide-ranging membership representing many departments and constituencies and including students, this alliance will bring together existing and new resources that will be integrated into nearly every organizational and programmatic area of the university. At JMU, we do our very best work, and accomplish our very best results, when we work together across disciplinary and programmatic lines to address problems of this complexity and scope. This public health and safety issue demands nothing less, and together I believe that our community is up to this urgent, important and timely responsibility. 



**Jonathan R. Alger**

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