

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Q&A

Taking a stand

Jewel Hurt is a sophomore honors student double majoring in political science and public policy and administration. The Roanoke, Virginia, native currently serves as president of the Student Government Association and was a member of the governor's Millennial Civic Engagement Task Force. Hurt is on the pre-law track and hopes to pursue a career in public service after graduation.

Madison: Why did you want to get involved with the Student Government Association?

Hurt: I was introduced to SGA in my first class as a college freshman. I sat in the front row beside the SGA Academic Affairs chair, and he encouraged me to look into the organization. I ran for freshman class president and lost. Nevertheless, I saw the Student Government Association as an opportunity to do something bigger than myself and knew that a title wasn't necessary to make a difference.

Madison: What does civic engagement mean to you?

Hurt: Civic engagement is so much more than voting in elections. Civic engagement involves taking a stance on issues affecting the community, participating in service to help those in need and working actively to initiate positive change.

Madison: How does the SGA represent JMU students' interests, and how do you encourage students to become involved in the democratic process?

Hurt: The SGA is comprised of several



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committees that each have a specific focus in regard to serving students. Along with committee work, all senators have the ability to introduce resolutions or bills of opinion to emphasize, recognize or show support for any given issue or matter concerning student life. Since being president, I have worked hard to get students more involved by reaching out to clubs and organizations through a series of listening tours. I believe we cannot simply expect students to come to us when they have a problem. Instead, the SGA should go to the students and elicit their recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

Madison: Talk about your role with the governor's Millennial Civic Engagement Task Force, how you got involved and

why you feel it is important as a college student to be involved.

Hurt: Over the summer, I was asked to serve on former Gov. Terry McAuliffe's Millennial Civic Engagement Task Force to help identify barriers that may keep young people from participating in the political process. Serving on the task force allowed me to see that civic engagement is a topic that colleges and universities should be consistently working to improve on. Student voices matter, and we must make sure that both university administrators and state legislators are listening to our concerns and aware of our needs.

Madison: What will you take from your experience with the SGA that will help you in your career?

Hurt: My experience in the SGA has been invaluable in terms of showing me what it means to be a true public servant. The Student Government Association has a primary goal to serve and represent the students, and that's not always an easy task. With this being said, everything worth doing comes at a cost, and you can't quit when it gets hard. I hope to take this lesson with me through life as I embark on a career in public service. 