

The Madison Experience is superior in American higher education

The *Wall Street Journal* in cooperation with *Times Higher Education* conducts an annual college ranking that is unique in that current student voices are its basis. About 200,000 college students at almost 1,000 U.S. colleges and universities are asked questions that matter to them and to their families, questions about whether they feel engaged in the classroom, have decent access to their professors, believe they will graduate on time, etc. This methodology is in stark contrast to college rankings such as *U.S. News & World Report*, which surveys university presidents, provosts and deans of admissions on their perceptions of their fellow institutions.

In *The Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education U.S. College Rankings 2019*, published in mid-October, students were asked, “If a friend or family member were considering going to a university, based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend your college or university to them?” Students gave their schools a score between 0 and 10 with 0 being “not at all likely” and 10 being “extremely likely.” At a time when the value of higher education is increasingly questioned by some, one might expect a broad decline in the number of students recommending their institution, which there was. But a few campuses

buck that trend in the 2019 report, and I am proud to say that the No. 1 most recommended university in the United States is James Madison University. Stanford University is second. Let that sink in.

That Madison is the most highly recommended university in the nation ought to be wonderfully affirming for everyone in our community. It says that the qualities of the Madison Experience are indeed superior in American higher education. When considered in the context of other research, one can begin to assemble a theory of how real and

solid value can be rendered in the lives of learners. Recent Gallup research revealed that JMU alumni lead lives with a sense of well-being, purpose and meaning at a much higher degree than the average of their peers who graduated from other institutions, including the top 100 universities ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*. Gallup research also concluded that having a professor or mentor take personal interest in a student is the top college experience leading to a life of purpose and meaning, which we all know is a hallmark of the Madison Experience. Taken together, *The Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education* ranking and the Gallup

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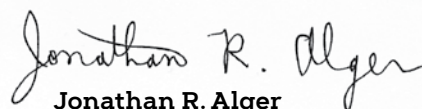
Such distinctions come at an interesting time. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently issued a report titled “Sustaining the College Business Model: How to shore up institutions now and reinvent them for the future.” The report offers solutions to institutions finding it challenging to remain viable in an era of declining state support and declining student populations now that the millennial generation has graduated. The report states, “Small private colleges and regional public universities especially are scrambling to cover costs while seeking to improve their market positions.” Should it be worrisome to the community that JMU is technically classified as a regional public university? The report goes on to say, “Whether they limp along or manage to prosper is largely a matter of the vision and will of campus leaders.” This is important.

Homecoming Weekend 2018 ought to give you confidence that the vision and will of campus leaders is clear and strong. Despite bad weather scaling back the profile of some events, you likely heard that the university launched the public phase of a comprehensive fundraising campaign designed at elevating private support for JMU and raising our public profile. Many in the audience at launch events remarked with great enthusiasm that the campaign name is incredibly apt. *Unleashed: The Campaign for James Madison University* suggests that we are on the cusp of even greater times for the institution. Our ranking as the nation’s No. 1 most recommended university by *The Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education* suggests that this is so.

What you might not have heard is that many of the campus leaders supplying the vision and will are our alumni, parents and friends. These volunteers who make up the *Unleashed* Campaign Steering Committee guided the planning of the campaign launch all along the way. They are the ones telling us that it’s time to take JMU to the next level, and *Unleashed* is the vehicle designed to take us there. But it will require everyone in the JMU community to step forward and say, “I’m in!” The campaign case statement says it best:

Together we proclaim that nothing is more important at Madison than producing educated and enlightened citizens, and nothing means more in the world than to see their talents, skills and passion for *Being the Change* fully *Unleashed*. With everyone’s commitment, we can fulfill the spirit of Founding Father James Madison’s call for a national university dedicated to the public good. *It’s time.*

It’s time, indeed!



Jonathan R. Alger

president, James Madison University