

A seminal moment in the history of JMU

For most of us, the concept of a historical moment evokes memories of the past. I clearly remember watching a black-and-white television as a child, when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon 50 years ago. And I can tell you where I was when the second plane hit the World Trade Center. But really, history is unfolding constantly all around us. It's just not always so clear in the moment which events will become notable historically.

So, it was without fanfare in late February that the General Assembly passed, and the governor signed into law, a management agreement between James Madison University and the Commonwealth of Virginia that provides the university with greater autonomy from state procedures. The agreement confers upon Madison "Level III Autonomy," and achieving such status acknowledges that the university maintains paramount academic, financial and administrative standards. JMU joins the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, William & Mary and Virginia Commonwealth University as the only institutions in the commonwealth to enjoy such status. Rankings are great, and JMU receives lots of high rankings. But this distinction is rooted deeply in our fundamentals.

Now, I am fully aware that such an occurrence might be viewed as an administrative triviality compared to the world-changing events I cite above. But considered in the context of our history as an institution, I believe strongly that this accomplishment ought to be considered significant. For JMU to join four institutions founded many, many years before Madison—institutions considered public Ivies and universities ranked among the top 100 research institutions nationally—is solid confirmation of our eminence.

While our team in the Division of Administration and Finance, ably led by Charlie King, deserves the credit for preparing and stewarding this agreement through the legislature, I'd like for you to consider that all of us who belong to the JMU community are responsible for raising our status to such a height.


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Because JMU is relatively young as an institution (compared to UVa, Tech, William & Mary and VCU), professors currently on the faculty—along with longtime staff, active faculty emeriti and alumni enjoying mean-

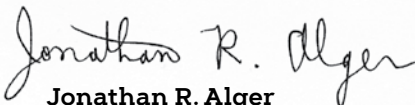
ingful and productive lives—were all part of our ascent. Together, our community helped to build an acclaimed institution that has come a long way. That is a historic accomplishment of which all of us should be proud.

As is the case with every issue of *Madison*, you will find stories about members of the JMU community who continue to build our greatness. This issue's cover story celebrating the 50th anniversary of the James Madison University Foundation supports my case that people currently connected to the university are responsible for our reaching the pinnacle accorded by the General Assembly. Fifty years is a relatively brief lifespan for a university foundation. And the fact that the JMU Foundation's investment performance is second-best in Virginia speaks volumes.

Coverage of the regional *Unleashed* events captures well the excitement our alumni are bringing to this campaign for the university. Every event was hosted and led by alumni, and I couldn't be prouder of how the JMU faithful have taken up the mantle of helping to truly unleash the university's full potential. Our elevation to Level III Autonomy while we're in the midst of *Unleashed: The Campaign for James Madison University* could not be better timed or more expressive of my point above about who is responsible for our success as an institution.

Among the many other stories included in this issue, one that expresses most eloquently why JMU has risen to such status so quickly is the Paul Jennings Hall announcement. An institution with the fortitude to deal openly with complex and difficult issues such as James Madison's ownership of slaves is one that will rise and persist formidably. The idea of naming a building on campus for Paul Jennings has been discussed for years. But the fact that this particular effort began with students ought to give *Madison* readers a strong sense of hope for our future. These are serious and thoughtful young people already making an impact on the national dialogue surrounding slavery's legacy and the persistence of racism. That really matters and embodies why JMU is now officially considered among the best institutions of higher education. 





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