

# Steering the CoB

*Busing brings experience and enthusiasm as new dean* BY STEPHEN BRIGGS

In talking with Mike Busing, it's hard not to be swept up in his enthusiasm for all things CoB. As newly appointed dean of the College of Business, you might think that spark is part of his new role—but it has been a constant in his career.

Born into an Indiana family of business owners and educators, the hybrid seeds of Busing's future sprouted early on. "I recall working in the family meat-processing plant in a department that vacuum-packaged hot dogs and hams. It was an assembly line operation, and I routinely witnessed things like

machine breakdowns and process bottlenecks. I recognized these as problems and was intrigued by them. My operations management classes at Purdue [University] allowed me to think about how to make the operation more efficient."

A few years later, with a fresh Ph.D. in industrial management from Clemson University in hand, Busing started his academic career at JMU as an assistant professor of operations management—and is still here, after 23 years. *Madison* sat down recently with Busing to find out what's new.

**Madison:** You were part of one of the first teams to teach COB 300, the required, 12-credit-hour core course that integrates finance, management, marketing and operations. What do you recall about how COB 300 started?

**Mike Busing:** I was, and I really enjoyed delivering the curriculum with a team of faculty. One of my research interests is pedagogy in business education. A colleague of mine, Raktim Pal, and I co-authored a paper about the benefits of delivering an integrated curriculum. The main benefit, of course, is a deeper understanding of how business functions as several interrelated areas and disciplines. The paper was published in the *International Journal of Production Economics* and is still cited today.

**Madison:** What prompted your move into administrative roles?

**Busing:** Some things in life are about being in the right place at the right time, and this might have been one of those. I

received the phone call in late December 2009 from former dean of the College of Business Robert Reid, asking if I would consider serving as the director of MBA programs. During my tenure as director, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked our online Information Security Program ninth in the nation (2014 ranking) and the quality of our students, instruction and employment outcomes improved dramatically.

This gave me the confidence to apply for the associate dean for academic affairs position in 2015. I am a "people" person, and administrative roles are all about relationships, strategic vision and making sound decisions. In the associate dean's role, I was instrumental in our 2016 AACSB [The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business] visit. JMU is among a group of 5 percent of those schools that are accredited by the AACSB. But we're even more elite than that—we're one of [just] 187 institutions that maintain separate accreditations for business and accounting programs.

In June 2018, Provost [Heather] Coltman asked if I would serve as interim dean for the College of Business. After a couple months

of my "realistic job preview," I decided to make an application for the national search to become our permanent dean.

**Madison:** How do you envision the college evolving in the coming years?

**Busing:** The way our students learn is changing at a fast and furious pace. While I believe we will continue to offer our current undergraduate programs' core curricula, I believe that we will focus on engaging our students in highly impactful ways—more than ever before.

My vision is a College of Business that will offer high-engagement learning opportunities for all of our students. For example, we know that internships are critical for students, and technology will open access to these internships so that students can complete the work experience in a virtual way. In the future, I believe that we need to strive for 100 percent of our students to engage in one or more internships during their undergraduate careers. In fact, the Hart School of Hospitality, Sport and Recreation Management [at JMU] already does this.

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We need to move away from the undergraduate experience being considered highly transactional to something that is more of a partnership throughout individuals' professional careers. We need to be prepared to offer stackable certificates and specialized master's programs that allow our alumni to retool as needed.

### **Madison:** How does the CoB stay abreast of new developments in how business is conducted?

**Busing:** We have a wonderful Board of Advisors for the College of Business. Many of these individuals hold C-suite positions in major corporations. Some are serial entrepreneurs. Others work for government agencies. Regardless, these individuals are our “pulse” on how business is conducted and what skills and abilities our graduates will need to be successful upon graduation. Also, our academic departments in business, the Hart School and School of Strategic Leadership Studies are all engaging with successful alumni. Finally, our faculty research informs our curriculum. In addition to basic or discovery research, our faculty members engage in both “applied or integration/application” and “teaching and learning” pieces that inform our curriculum.

### **Madison:** Is it possible for a college to be “agile” given how fast the world changes?

**Busing:** We are fortunate at JMU. We have an administration that is very supportive of the missions of the individual academic colleges. Provost Heather Coltman is all about JMU's campus being known for the type of “disruptive innovation” that will enhance the ability of our students as they pursue productive and meaningful lives. So, yes, it's this kind of thinking that promotes the responsiveness required to be a top-notch business program.

### **Madison:** How will the new CoB Learning Complex better serve students?

**Busing:** Learning is so different now. It is less about lecture-style classrooms, so this flexible space is really big for us. Of course, the technology is going to all be state of the art.

The new learning complex will be full of areas for students to experiment with new ideas in a low-risk environment, and all the learning spaces—the Major Laboratory for Innovation, Collaboration, Creativity and Entrepreneurship; the Leslie Flanary Gilliam Center for Entrepreneurship; and the Gaglioti

Capital Markets Lab, which is going to be new and refreshed so it is a new space—are going to be some of the best in the country.

Ideally, I see our majors collaborating with students from disciplines outside of business—like performing arts, engineering, health and behavioral studies, education, and arts and letters. These students will be developing their ideas to solve real problems in the Major Laboratory for ICCE, then bringing those ideas to the Leslie Flanary Gilliam Center for Entrepreneurship to gain market traction. All of this is going to enhance what we're trying to do in the classroom.

I'm excited to get in there and watch students and faculty engaging and doing things that are going to change the world.

### **Madison:** Do you miss teaching?

**Busing:** I do miss teaching. Teaching is, after all, why I pursued a Ph.D. in the first place. After spending an entire day in the dean's suite or in meetings all around campus, I pass through the lobby on my way to the parking lot. I see students working on projects, completing homework assignments and studying for exams. This always makes me pause to reflect upon why we are all here—and that's because of the students. 