Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs

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Mission
Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs is a concrete manifestation of James Madison University’s commitment to meet both the educational requirements of its students in a changing world and its own need to respond to the “real world” challenges faced by society today.

Goals
The institute advances several university priorities:
- offering quality academic programs.
- being innovative in developing programs.
- developing optimal student competencies in written and communication, critical thinking, information systems, and quantitative literacy.

Activities
The Nelson Institute Seminars provide justice studies majors and other interested JMU students the opportunity to engage in directed, practical, problem-solving exercises in the field of justice studies in small group (“task force”) settings under the supervision of a faculty member. The seminars provide a space where students are charged with finding a solution to a contemporary policy problem. They offer a unique opportunity for students to engage in policy-oriented research that integrates classroom instruction, out-of-class group learning activities, and civic engagement and service learning opportunities. The institute also provides students with the opportunity to present their findings to a regional or national audience.

As a complement to the seminars, the Nelson Institute brings guest speakers to JMU who are experts in the subject of the seminar to enhance the learning experience. Funding is made available to help students present their research at regional and national conferences as well as to travel to talk with government, NGO and private sector officials about the policy problem they are working on. Students present their results at a variety of venues including the College of Arts and Letters’ student conference, Mad Rush, the conference organized by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Cultures, and regional conferences such as the Virginia Social Science Association meeting.