

Motion to Respond to Sexism at JMU

Recently, across Harrisonburg, members of the James Madison University community displayed misogynistic, homophobic, obscene, and otherwise intolerant and demeaning banners and signs. As University Spokesperson, Bill Wyatt, noted on October 18, these messages contradict the values of JMU. These intolerable banners and signs sent a terrible message to JMU students, faculty, and staff. They disgraced JMU and the larger Harrisonburg community. They dramatically overstepped the bounds of civil intercollegiate competition and turned an opportunity to showcase our school spirit and hospitality into an exercise in degradation.

The JMU Faculty Senate calls on the JMU community to respond to instances of misogyny, homophobia, racism, and all forms of intolerance, indecency, and disrespect with an unequivocal message: such conduct is reprehensible. Indeed, the behavior on display in October—which comes out of a broader culture of incivility and disrespect—obstructs our mission to “[prepare] students to be educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives” and our vision “to be the national model for the engaged university.” When a community fails to call out incivility and identity-based discrimination, it encourages destructive behaviors and alienates faculty, students, and staff members. Faculty and students cannot teach, learn, and conduct scholarship and creative endeavors in an atmosphere of harassment.

The Faculty Senate proposes a robust and multifaceted response not only to specific incidents, but to a general culture that encourages the behaviors like those witnessed in October. First, we propose revisions to the Student Standards of Conduct that clearly prohibit threatening messages and behaviors that demean, dehumanize, and threaten the safety of any members of the JMU or Harrisonburg communities and their guests. Furthermore, we call for consistent enforcement of the Standards of Conduct and the proposed revisions. Second, we call on the university leadership to visibly support an inclusive culture that aligns with the stated mission and vision of the university. Noting the importance of freedom of speech in a democratic society, and dedicated to the protection of free political speech, we must nevertheless recognize that toxic, salacious, and violent messages and behaviors betray our purpose as an educational institution. Our mission is to educate enlightened and productive members of a civil and humane society; we have a responsibility to do so.

The James Madison University Community must act.

Appendix to Proposed Resolution: Suggested Action Items

1. Revise Student Standards of Conduct to include prohibition of violent or threatening messages that promote a culture of intolerance and disrespect.
2. Promote public awareness within the JMU community of the revisions to the Standards of Conduct and the rationale for those revisions.
3. Engage in dialogue with the university's senior leadership to discuss opportunities to promote collaboratively a more inclusive culture.
4. Establish a hotline to report incidents of violent or threatening messages, speech, or behavior.
5. Expand the Dukes Step Up program to include refresher and/or reinforcement programming through the General Education curriculum, upper division coursework, and/or extracurricular activities.
6. Support CARE's programming related to affirmative consent education within the JMU community.
7. Demonstrate a firm commitment to enforce all standards of conduct.