

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Graduates Speak Out:
A Summary Of Comments About JMU From Recent
Graduates, August 2006



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Introduction

Annually the JMU Office of Institutional Research collects information from recent alumni about their current employment and/or graduate school enrollment. The university is particularly interested in how well the alumni felt they were prepared for life after college and the types of jobs or graduate school experiences they have. Over the years alumni have found good jobs and had very positive graduate school experiences. An overwhelming percentage of alumni would recommend JMU to potential new students.

This research represents the recent efforts of the Office of Institutional Research. OIR has been collecting data on students for more than 30 years. However, most of these data have been numerical (how many students do we have, what are their demographics, what is their graduation rate, etc.?). In recent years OIR has devoted significant research to understand the JMU experience for students and graduates. For instance, two years ago OIR produced a summary of recommendations for new students from recent grads (“This Is Not Your Mother Talking”) and a summary of suggested preparatory actions for juniors and seniors from graduates who have been away from JMU two years (“This Is Not Your Father Talking”). These studies have been well-received by the JMU community. It is hoped that this study will enhance the knowledge of the members of the JMU community about the factors that have the greatest impact on students and graduates.

In the three years that OIR has conducted the graduate employment survey, graduates have been asked to state the most positive and negative factors in their JMU experience that would lead them to recommend or not recommend JMU. The graduates were also asked to describe what faculty did that had a particularly positive impact on their JMU experiences. These data have been systemically analyzed to gain further insight into the JMU experience for recent alumni. The purpose of this report is to summarize what recent graduates believe to be the most important aspects of their JMU experience. Through this information we hope to gain further insight into the factors are most important to graduates and what affects graduates’ (and current students’) overall opinions about JMU.

Over the years OIR’s research has found that the opinions of men and women quite frequently differ on several dimensions. At times there are also differences between white and non-white students and graduates. This research explores the differences between these demographic factors.

Specifically, what do we want to know, and how do we plan to use the information? We wish to gain insight into the JMU experience that might help improve the experiences for all students. What factors are most important to students? Do the experiences of men and women, and whites and non-whites differ on important dimensions? The results of these analyzes will be reported by OIR to JMU's senior management and to the university community.

Three major questions were posed to recent alumni on surveys and will be the focus of this research.

- Factors in your JMU experience that were so positive that they would lead you to recommend JMU to prospective students.
- Factors in your JMU experience that were so negative that they would lead you NOT to recommend JMU to prospective students.
- Can you think of any JMU faculty who had a particularly important impact on you? In shaping the way you think about yourself, or life, or the world around you, or your future? If yes, tell us what this faculty member did that had such a strong impact.

Methodology

The data for this study come from the responses of 1,168 alumni who graduated during 2004-05. The response rate was 38 percent. These alumni were surveyed within 60 days of their graduation. Only 155 (13 percent) made no comments to any of the three questions.

A new text analysis tool from SPSS[®] was employed in the analysis. SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys (1.5)[®] is a tool that allows users to create categories of responses that are based on a linguistics engine designed by SPSS[®]. Once the categories were developed and refined, the categories coding schema were imported into the alumni employment survey data file so that frequency counts and correlations might be created to test for differences between different types of students. For example, this allowed for comparisons between male and female students on stated positive aspects of JMU.

OIR conducted two types of statistical analyses to determine significant differences between groups. For data on an interval-level scale, we compared group means using t-test procedures. When we encountered non-interval level data, we conducted chi-square analyses. As there were multiple group comparisons, we adjusted the p value of .05 for a family-wise error rate. Essentially this means that the p level (.05) was divided by the number of comparisons. For example, if there were four (4) comparisons, the new critical p value would be .0125. To find statistical significance the p value must be \leq .0125, instead of .05. When there were fewer comparisons, we adjusted the p value accordingly.

More importantly, we examined the effect size differences for statistically significant findings. Effect size indicates the "practical significance" of the

differences between groups. Whenever you have a large sample, the odds of finding statistical significance are greatly increased just by virtue of the sample size. Practical significance, on the other hand, tells us the meaningfulness of statistical significance, regardless of sample size.

Cohen's *d* is the difference between the means of two groups divided by the pooled standard deviation of the two groups. Both chi-square values and means were converted to *d*. In general, an effect size *d* of .2 would be considered small, .5 is moderate, and .8 is large. For example, a *d* of .25 indicates that one-quarter standard deviation separates the two means. Cohen has noted that many effect sizes in personality, social, and clinical-psychological research are likely to be small, so in the context of the first-year survey, effect sizes of .2 would be more meaning given that this is an attitudinal scale.

Results

The results are organized by questions posed to students. A summary of the most important factors are presented first and are followed by analyses of differences by gender and ethnicity (whites and non-whites). Finally, a sample of comments about each factor are listed to help the reader gain a better understanding of each factor.

Question #1:

“Factors in your JMU experience that were so positive that they would lead you to recommend JMU to prospective students.”

Seventy-six percent of the respondents made at least one positive comment. The table below displays the frequency of responses by category. The two most frequent comments were about high quality faculty and fellow students.

Factor	Responses	
	N	Percent All Respondents
High quality faculty	356	30.7
Fellow students	239	20.6
JMU community and campus atmosphere	201	17.4
Campus facilities and beauty	200	17.3
Opportunities for personal growth	193	16.7
Overall quality academics, including majors	162	14.0
High quality staff	72	6.2
Classes and information learned	54	4.7
Harrisonburg and surrounding area	50	4.3

Comparisons were made to determine whether males and females differed in the percentage that mentioned each category. The table below displays the percentage of males and females who mentioned each category and the results of a chi-square analysis of differences. Female students were more likely to

mention campus facilities and beauty. However, the effect size between males and females is small.

Factor	Male Percent	Female Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
High quality faculty	27.7	32.2	30.7	2.512	.113
Fellow students	17.3	22.4	20.6	4.156	.041
JMU community and campus atmosphere	17.1	17.4	17.3	.016	.899
Campus facilities and beauty	12.9	19.5	17.2	8.112	.004* d=.168
Opportunities for personal growth	17.1	16.3	16.6	.112	.738
Overall quality academics, including majors	14.6	13.5	13.9	.254	.614
High quality staff	4.2	7.3	6.2	4.298	.038
Classes and information learned	4.2	4.9	4.7	.289	.591
Harrisonburg and surrounding area	4.7	4.1	4.3	.223	.637

* Statistically significant at $p \leq .006$

Comparisons were made to determine whether there were differences in the percentage of white and non-white students (all other ethnicities combined) that mentioned each category. The table below displays the percentage of whites and non-whites who mentioned each category and the results of a chi-square analysis of differences. There were no significant differences between white and minority graduates on positive aspects of JMU.

Factor	Non-White Percent	White Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
High quality faculty	29.6	30.8	30.7	.065	.798
Fellow students	12.0	22.0	20.6	5.832	.016
JMU community and campus atmosphere	21.3	17.0	17.3	1.223	.269
Campus facilities and beauty	15.7	17.3	17.2	.176	.675
Opportunities for personal growth	14.8	16.8	16.6	.291	.590
Overall quality academics, including majors	14.8	13.8	13.9	.088	.767
High quality staff	7.4	6.3	6.2	.183	.669

Factor	Non-White Percent	White Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
Classes and information learned	5.6	4.6	4.7	.218	.640
Harrisonburg and surrounding area	4.6	4.3	4.3	.032	.858

* Statistically significant at $p \leq .006$

Sample Comments About Positive Aspects of JMU

High quality faculty

“Faculty and staff at JMU were always willing to help students. The students define JMU, instead of JMU defining the students.”

“Faculty dedicated to teaching and knowing students, not just to their personal success as professors.”

“The most amazing faculty you could ever ask for, beautiful campus, the surrounding area, sport club opportunities, you can’t come to JMU and not be able to find something to join and become a part of, there is a club for everything.”

“Caring professors. So many opportunities presented both academically and socially. A strong sense of pride among the students and faculty at JMU. Even though the school is large, I have always felt the strong ties towards each other in our community”

“Everyone here is unbelievably friendly and welcoming. The faculty is willing to help you with anything and everything that you are having issues with, and the other employees always have a smile on their face ready to answer any questions you have. It is an excellent institution that challenges you to do your best, and will help and guide you to success.”

Fellow students

“Amazing student body. Once I came out of my shell to meet new people and open up to new experiences, I completely fell in love. The amount of student-run activities and opportunities for involvement are incredible, and working for these extra-curricular programs is where I met some of my best friends from JMU.”

“As a whole, JMU is very low key, laid back, and relaxed. Students are incredibly friendly and trustworthy. I never had to worry about anything being stolen. Also, while not necessarily very racially diverse, the students are diverse in their perspectives and ways of thinking.”

“I truly value the friends that I made during my years at JMU. I love the school and everything I learned, but I would not change my friends for the world.”

“It’s comprised of an amazingly nice group of students who make it easy to travel hundreds or thousands of miles from home and feel welcome.”

“JMU students are so friendly. Holding doors, saying "bless you" when you sneeze, and smiling at you when you walk by all make me wish I were still in Harrisonburg. That and the campus is beautiful, the classes are interesting, the food is good, and the marching band makes going to the football games absolutely worth it.”

JMU community and campus atmosphere

“The people and the atmosphere at JMU. There is such diversity and such a variety to offer anyone to make them feel like they have a home away from home.”

“The people and the atmosphere. The thing I noticed most when I came here and saw through my years was the quality of people we have on campus. Everyone is very friendly and JMU promotes a very social atmosphere.”

“The relationships with other students and the camaraderie was fantastic. A great community atmosphere! Lots of activities offered. Never bored!”

“General population attitude-school spirit, nice holding-doors-for-you type of people. Well known in Virginia as a fine institution; a parent-friendly school.”

“School spirit and sense of community, excellent content in education program, enjoyed a gorgeous campus, loved my job as a cadet.”

Campus facilities and beauty

“Beautiful campus, really good food, not too big and not too small, really good education, if a problem comes up usually its easy to find the place to be helped, had the time of my life!!”

Campus is beautiful, a lot of room to spread out, everything in Harrisonburg is so close you really don’t have to go far to find anything, good-looking women.”

“Also, the campus is gorgeous and the food is so much better than other colleges. Most of our colleges are top notch... the person will get a good education here.”

“I love the campus and the surrounding town of Harrisonburg. I love the house that I lived in and my street. Everything was mostly user-friendly. I spent a lot of time at the library into wee hours in the morning and I always felt comfortable walking around alone, at night (not that I recommend it but it happens). I love my email account.”

“The campus is absolutely amazing and the setting of Harrisonburg is one that is just right for the feel of JMU. Great experiences and many avenues of being able to ‘follow your own path.’”

Opportunities for personal growth

“My college experience was great because I chose to be involved and make it great, but I appreciated the wide variety of opportunities JMU offered me to get involved on campus. I also loved the friendly people at JMU.”

“THE PEOPLE. The people are amazing. The school is rather big, so it is hard, at first, to find your niche and get settled in (at least it was for me). But there are SO many opportunities to get involved in something...anything on campus, that you must actively avoid these opportunities if you are not interested, because they are offered to you almost on a daily basis.”

“The opportunities available and at your fingertips, and those people who are not only willing to help but willing to show you how to access their expertise and more.:

“Wow, too many to list. Will highlight a few instead. Virtually unlimited opportunities for involvement in just about anything one can think of. The willingness of the university to work with you to start something that does not currently exist. The environment breeding academic, professional, and social development. Tight knit campus community. Bargain price as well. Oh, and can't forget UREC.”

Overall quality academics, including majors

“The academic atmosphere is not high pressure, but a quality education is received. The social atmosphere at JMU rivals any other institution in the country. There is something for everyone. People who go to other schools think they have a good experience, but only JMU grads know what a superior college experience is all about.”

“A hands-on approach to learning at school large enough to provide impressive facilities/events and with departments small enough to provide individual attention.”

“Friendly atmosphere; got good general overview education as well as specific training in my field, met great people to keep in touch with after college.

“My education set me apart in job interviews, people were impressed by my attending JMU.”

“I grew up in a college town and the student body is so much more considerate than what I have experienced at home. The stress on a well rounded education was wonderful in broadening my knowledge base and the life lessons learned are unforgettable.”

High quality staff

“A constant desire to improve from all faculty and staff, innovatively using the resources that they have to improve all aspects of the school.”

“Everyone here is so personable and friendly and the staff really tries to help you.”

"I loved my time at JMU. It has a great atmosphere and I was able to succeed academically and socially. JMU has great faculty and staff that are always willing to help. I thoroughly enjoyed my 4 years at JMU."

"My JMU experience was completely 100% positive. The faculty and staff are truly one-of-a-kind. They are incredibly supportive."

"The education is top-notch, all the professors are there to teach and help the students learn. They are available to talk to and work with - not consumed and holed up in their offices with research. The overall spirit of the student and staff population - what I like to call, the Purple Pride, is such a welcoming and inviting presence on campus. Everyone loves being here and it shows. You will never find a prettier campus with more caring people. There are a million things to get involved in and speak your mind. I appreciate the opinionated students who are always willing to take a stand for something. The giving nature of our students is awesome - I love that people wait in line for an Alternative Spring Break trip. There is nothing more rewarding than helping others. I believe everyone at JMU believes the same thing."

"The people...students, faculty, and staff, at JMU are AMAZING. I had an incredibly positive experience in a supportive environment, surrounded by people that were all equally committed to JMU and education."

Classes and information learned

"Faculty are amazing - always willing to help."

"Great school, great people, great class atmosphere. The class sizes were a huge plus (while being at Virginia Tech I had some classes with 500 students and I'm sure you can imagine what its like trying to compete with the other 499 kids for 1-on-1 time with the prof.). The nice remote location helped, and the scenic beauty of the surrounding areas around WV border and further outside of Harrisonburg area are unique."

"I felt there were chances to pursue classes and activities that related to my varied interests."

"Making some great friends, lots of interesting classes, good professors, fun classes with lots of hands on experience. Small classes which allow you to develop good personal relationships with professors and other students, awesome campus/great place to go to school."

"Taking a variety of classes which enabled me to broaden my horizons during my academic years at JMU. Variety of classes which were not a part of my major (liberal arts classes)."

Harrisonburg and surrounding area

"Cheap cost of living. Quiet town, lots of time to study. Outdoor recreation opportunities are enormous."

"Harrisonburg was a great, safe community. Shenandoah Valley beautiful. Friendly people;-Overall I absolutely loved JMU and everything that it had."

“There's plenty to do in Harrisonburg, from the new shopping center to the old stores on South Main St. Classes are small so teachers can really help you out if you have problems.”

“JMU is located in Harrisonburg in which living expenses are fairly cheap compare to Northern Virginia.”

“The friendliness of the professors, the prettiness of campus, the city of Harrisonburg, being in the mountains, the great churches in the area, the great organizations on campus. The location of the campus is close to anything (ex: white water rafting, D.C., skiing, hiking, beach not far). The people are friendly and the size of the campus is not overwhelming.”

“Town itself is very friendly, rich with outdoor activities, cheap living, simple, nice change of pace from the Tri-state area.”

Question:

“Factors in your JMU experience that were so negative that they would lead you NOT to recommend JMU to prospective students.”

Thirty-four percent of the respondents made at least one negative comment. The table below shows the number and percent of respondents that made a negative comment.

Factor	Responses	
	N	Percent All Respondents
Parking	92	7.9
Academic difficulties	78	6.7
Diversity	66	5.7
Lower quality instructors	65	5.6
Poor courses	63	5.4
General Education difficulties	60	5.2
Harrisonburg and local area	45	3.9
Academic advising	39	3.4
Lack of resources	27	2.3
Police	15	1.3

In general, these graduates were pleased with their JMU experiences as evidenced by the fact that the largest negative aspect mentioned was parking at less than eight percent. Graduates who made at least one negative comment were less likely (96 percent vs. 99 percent) to recommend JMU to a potential student.

Comparisons were made to determine whether males and females differed in the percentage that mentioned each category. The table below displays the percentage of males and females who mentioned each category and the results

of a chi-square analysis of differences. Males more often mentioned Harrisonburg area and police as negatives. However, the effect sizes are small and indicate that these differences between males and females are small.

Factor	Male Percent	Female Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
Parking	7.4	8.0	7.9	.104	.747
Academic difficulties	5.9	7.0	6.7	.502	.479
Diversity	3.7	6.8	5.7	4.556	.033
Lower quality instructors	4.2	6.2	5.6	2.067	.151
Poor courses	4.7	5.7	5.4	.519	.471
General Education difficulties	6.2	4.5	5.2	1.533	.216
Harrisonburg and local area	6.2	2.5	3.9	9.684	.002 * d=.187
Academic advising	3.2	3.3	3.4	.008	.929
Lack of resources	2.5	2.3	2.3	.056	.813
Police	2.5	.5	1.3	8.330	.004 * d=.170

* Statistically significant at $p \leq .005$

Comparisons were made to determine whether there were differences in the percentage of white and non-white graduates that mentioned each category. The table below displays the percentage of whites and non-whites who mentioned each category and the results of a chi-square analysis of differences. One in five non-white students mentioned diversity as a concern while only one in 25 white students mentioned diversity. The effect size is moderate.

Factor	Non-White Percent	White Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
Parking	10.2	4.5	7.8	.956	.328
Academic difficulties	3.7	7.0	6.7	1.730	.188
Diversity	21.3	4.1	5.7	53.638	.000 * d=.441
Lower quality instructors	3.7	5.7	5.6	.778	.378
Poor courses	4.6	5.6	5.6	.193	.660
General Education difficulties	0.9	5.6	5.2	4.42	.035

Factor	Non-White Percent	White Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
Harrisonburg and local area	1.9	3.9	3.7	1.118	.290
Academic advising	0.9	3.2	3.0	1.716	.190
Lack of resources	2.8	2.2	2.2	.159	.690
Police	0.9	1.2	1.2	.059	.808

* Statistically significant at $p \leq .005$

Diversity was more likely to be mentioned by non-whites. However, the types of diversity mentioned varied. For some graduates diversity meant the male-to-female ratio while for others it meant ethnicity. While less than six percent of graduates mentioned diversity as a major negative aspect of JMU, these graduates were far less likely (26 percent) to recommend JMU to potential students.

		Mentioned Diversity as a Negative		
Recommend JMU		No	Yes	Total
Very likely	Count	912	40	952
	Percent	95.8%	4.2%	100.0%
Likely	Count	157	20	177
	Percent	88.7%	11.3%	100.0%
Not likely	Count	17	6	23
	Percent	73.9%	26.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	1,086	66	1,152
	Percent	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%

Chi-square = 31.903; $p \leq .000$

Sample Comments About Negative Aspects of JMU

Parking

“Difficulty in finding parking. Expensive parking passes. Obsessive ticketing.”

“Frankly, the parking situation really needs to be addressed---having to leave for campus so early in the day simply to make sure you have a place to park!!!---it's really a problem!”

“Many JMU students now live off-campus and commute to class. The infrastructure of campus does not have what it takes to get these students to class on time. There is only one road through campus and there aren't half as many parking lots as there should be. The Harrisonburg Transit system is beneficial, but often times the buses are overcrowded.”

“The ONE negative thing about JMU is the parking. Parking is and has been awful, and it doesn't seem like it will be getting any better in the near future.”

“The only major thing I could NOT stand about JMU was the parking situation... I felt like they would build more buildings and never take care of parking. It was frustrating, time consuming, and unnecessary.”

Academic difficulties

“Competitive majors - not being able to complete a desired degree in 4 years. I was able to, but others were not.”

“I sometimes felt that programs at JMU were less professional than at other schools.”

“I was really disappointed that my degree did not include my major of concentration. It only stated I had a Bachelor of Science Degree, not majoring in Public Administration. No one will know in 10 years or even now what my degree was in, as a Bachelor of Science can include many areas of concentration. I'm really angry over this. If I had known I may have chosen another college to attend.”

“In some departments/majors, JMU is not challenging enough academically.”

“JMU should work on offering more elective courses. My major was business, but I also had other interests. I wanted to take more non-business courses, but JMU did not offer variety of choices, such as Korean language. Also, there are several courses that would not let me take, such as Piano 101. It would be nice if there was a policy that would let me take those courses even though I may not be in that particular major.”

“My department did not have any job fairs and did not offer any guidance or direction for what to do after graduation or what types of jobs would hire in my field.”

Diversity

“I feel that JMU needs to keep working VERY hard to diversify the campus more.”

“I felt as a whole the school--faculty, staff, and students--are not accepting of anyone 'different.' By the word different I mean anyone who is not a conservative white upper-class heterosexual Christian.”

“JMU is actively trying to force minority students on campus, whereas the administration should be trying to recruit the SMARTEST students who also fit in with the friendly JMU atmosphere, regardless of their ethnicity or background.”

“JMU should continue to focus on increasing diversity when accepting students for enrollment. I was disappointed throughout my college experience by the lack of diversity about campus.”

“Student body has too little diversity socio-economically, in life experiences, ethnically, and culturally.”

“The amount of activities to do on the weekends and sometimes the lack of diversity, not necessarily color, just people from different backgrounds.”

“The makeup of the student body being a vast majority upper middle-class white people and only a very narrow perspective on the world for a college campus as well as Harrisonburg in general.”

“Diversity issues, more emphasis should be placed on different cultures and societies.”

Uneven quality instructors

“Some teachers, especially in the xxx department did not live in the real world. Instead, they were out to make you stumble rather than succeed. Xxx teachers were more straightforward with what they wanted.”

“I would have some words of warning about certain professors or classes, but nothing that would drive me to tell someone to not pick JMU.”

“Professors that did not know how to balance their advising and teaching duties, which left them very virtually unavailable.”

“Not an especially academic school, courses are not very specific or interesting. I don't feel that I was challenged academically in the classroom. Most classes are lectures that appear to be regurgitated book reading on required courses. Professors should teach specific subjects that they are FASCINATED with...not general courses that are required in the department. I've heard this from many students who have been disappointed with their classroom experience, feeling that they've actually learned nothing. Certainly TOO MANY GEN-EDS!!”

“Professors that do not prepare their lectures. They get off track easily. They don't project their voices. Their lectures are disorganized. They mispronounce terms that they really should know. They are unprofessional in their demeanor towards students.”

“Some faculty are not very informative or are impersonal toward their students, which discourages someone like myself who wishes to have professors that actually know my name and care about my goals.”

Courses

“Certain classes should be harder and more challenging. Especially some upper level business classes close to graduation!”

“Difficult to register for open classes, even as a first semester senior.”

“Early on in college classes were hard to get into, or over filled. I would like to see a better student/teacher ratio.”

“It took me six years to complete my degree, also, I was frustrated by the lack of distance learning available to undergraduate students.”

“It was extremely difficult to get classes. I was a senior, having to get overrides into almost all my classes, including Gen-Eds that I had had to wait till my senior year to take because they were filled up all four years. Seniors should NEVER have to get overrides into courses. They have been there long enough to deserve a little bit better treatment when it comes to getting the classes they need in order to graduate.”

General Education difficulties

“Extensive Gen. Ed. program that doesn't allow for enough options/electives.”

Gen-Ed Program shouldn't exist unless it is funded correctly. Large waste of time. Should have a system like Brown where I could have simply had 2 majors and been more prepared for my career.”

“Many of the GENED classes aren't relevant to anything you will ever want to do.”

“None-except perhaps the GENED requirements that put me in a crunch spring semester senior year.”

“Some of the GENED program classes I would not recommend, not that they were negative just that I'd have rather gotten in the extra classes of more interest to myself. But at this point you're not going to get around them.”

Harrisonburg and local area

“Lack of college town atmosphere in some respects. Not as many stores, bars, etc. around town.”

“Isolated from civilization.”

“Not much to do in town, have to make your own fun. If you don't like the country, or are a "city" person. This might not be the place for you.”

“More so the city of Harrisonburg and their negative attitude towards the students and the lack of off-campus life.”

Academic advising

“Advisors. There needs to be a better understanding of the academics between the advisors and the registrar.”

“Bad advisor when I first started and the horrible rules that the colleges are coming up with, especially the rules of the xxx.”

“First semester advising. Seriously, I think freshmen deserve one-on-one guidance for choosing courses especially with an online course selection program that is new to them.”

“I don't feel that the advising was as good as it should have been. I tried meeting with my advisor, but she never had time to meet.”

“Structure of the advising system. It is primarily based on student initiative.”

“The fact that my academic advisor seemed to have really cared less about me or my courses. As a result I had to stay the extra semester.”

Lack of resources

“Alumni need to strengthen loyalty and thusly endowments. JMU is held back by insufficient funding.”

“Due to lack of funds you have to apply to certain majors within JMU. If you are not accepted you may end up studying something you are not crazy about.”

“Growing number of students without a growing number of resource capability.”

“Lack of money given to departments that deserved it.”

Police

“The town has an unfriendly feel. The police, while necessary, are far too strict. It's college, students should be allowed to experiment with what the world has to offer more than what is allowed by the local law enforcement.”

“The police around here are ridiculous, while many are doing their jobs to protect us, there are some who are just out to hand out tickets for nothing to make a quick buck.”

“There is nothing wrong with JMU except cops.....let the kids be kids....nothing ever got too out of hand.”

Question:

“Can you think of any JMU faculty who had a particularly important impact on you? In shaping the way you think about yourself, or life, or the world around you, or your future? If yes, tell us what this faculty member did that had such a strong impact.”

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents described an important impact from at least one faculty member. Two categories of impacts stand out: faculty showed significant interest in the student and provided needed guidance; and faculty that had exceptional teaching ability.

Factor	Responses	
	N	Percent All Respondents
Showed significant interest in student and provided needed guidance	543	46.9
Exceptional teaching ability	361	31.2
Highly qualified and passion for subject	71	5.8

Factor	Responses	
	N	Percent All Respondents
Provided useful course content	25	2.2

Comparisons were made to determine whether males and females differed in the percentage that mentioned each category. The table below displays the percentage of males and females who mentioned each category and the results of a chi-square analysis of differences. Almost half of the graduates indicated that faculty interest in them and appropriate guidance was very important. Females were more likely than males to mention faculty interest, guidance and passion for their subject, but the effect sizes were relatively small.

Factor	Male Percent	Female Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
Showed significant interest in student and provided needed guidance	40.1	50.3	46.9	10.922	.001* d=.12
Exceptional teaching	31.4	30.9	31.2	.035	.852
Highly qualified and passion for subject	3.0	7.6	5.8	9.888	.002 d=.19
Provided useful course content	2.0	2.3	2.2	.094	.759

* Statistically significant at $p \leq .0125$

The comments about faculty were compared across whites and non-whites. No statistically significant differences were found.

Category	Non-White Percent	White Percent	Percent All Respondents	Statistical Significance	
				X ²	Sign.
Showed significant interest in students and provided needed guidance	54.6	46.2	46.9	2.793	.095
Exceptional teaching	23.1	31.6	31.2	3.282	.070
Highly qualified and passion for subject	4.6	5.9	5.8	.309	.578
Provided useful course content	0.9	2.3	2.2	.850	.357

* Statistically significant at $p \leq .0125$

Sample Comments About Faculty Impact

Showed significant interest in student and provided needed guidance

“He respected his students and treated us as equals. He truly wanted to know what was going on in our lives and what we honestly thought about everything. He cared about us as students and as people. He was passionate about the subject as well. These things made us all want to go to class to hear what he had to say and learn what he had to teach. I looked forward to every class with him.”

“This Faculty Member helped me out when I was in need particularly when I figured out I was not graduating in May and what options I had in order to walk in May and take summer classes in order to graduate in time. This faculty member also tried to help me figure out what to do in order to make the best of my situation. Thanks.”

“I had a marketing teacher that wanted her students to succeed in school as well as after our commencement. This teacher kept her office door open and welcomed her students to come in and talk about job opportunities, and has offered me a bounty of helpful recommendations.”

“The professors who impacted me created environments and opportunities for learning. This took place in and out of the classroom. The effective professors I had inspired me with their passion for their field; their excitement overflowed in such a way that I took an initiative in my education. Some faculty members created personal relationships with their students. I have been invited a professor's home; this experience complimented my "in class" learning.”

“My advisor was amazing. He went above and beyond the call of any professor I have ever known. He respected me and cared about my future in the university and in the real world. He changed my outlook on life to one of hard work and gave me a drive for success.”

“This faculty member not only helped me select my major, he also was genuinely concerned about my well being. He took it upon himself to ask how I was doing outside of the classroom, and posed questions to me without helping me with the answers, making me think about what was important in my life.”

“This faculty member struck me as the smartest person I'd ever met going through this University. His kind and gentle nature along with his strong belief in each one of his students added encouragement to every person who knew him. He taught us how to appreciate the differences the world has to offer and how to learn from the past. Such an incredible person loved by all who will never be forgotten.”

Exceptional teaching

“There were three professors who changed me academically. Many students do not realize that they are actually STUDENTS even though they are living far from home (which makes most students, or at least me, feel independent and "grown up"). These three professors helped me realize that. They didn't do anything

significant, but every day when I went to class, they made me feel like I was there for a reason, which is to learn, enjoy being a student, and taking responsibility as a student.”

This professor made learning fun. Although the class was a general education class and most students were not thrilled to be taking it, she made the class and the material come alive. Putting the material into an everyday context and watering down the scientific words helped us get to the root of the learning and overall curriculum. She obviously worked hard at what she did to prepare her lectures and lessons; she expected the same from us. In return, the hard work paid off and was all the more rewarding. Additionally, the class was a larger lecture style class. But, this professor made it a point to learn everyone's name. This changed the environment of the classroom and climate of learning. All in all, I learned to appreciate a subject and way of thinking that I would not normally have taken the chance to learn.”

“One of my professors second semester senior year just had a completely different view on teaching and on the world after college. To have him be one of my teachers was refreshing and inspiring. It was one of my most demanding classes, but putting forth that much effort made me proud of my work and excited to start the "real world.””

“This faculty member conducted his classroom as prep for the real world working environment to encourage leadership and enhance efficiency by starting with the person that we are and knowing our inner self so that we are cognizant of what we can contribute to the group as a whole. He genuinely took interest in every student by meeting us for coffee once a week.”

“Pushed me to do well when I was not trying my hardest, supported me with both personal as well as academic problems, introduced me to areas of psychology that are not taught in general courses which helped me to clarify my graduate school and career plans.”

Highly qualified and passion for subject

“He was so powerful and influential for all his students because he was passionate. It was obvious that he loves what he does at JMU and really attempts to make a difference in the lives of his students.”

“I had a few professors who had an impact on me at my time at JMU. I think much of it had to do with the fact that the professor was personable and actually enjoyed the subject that he taught. When a professor has that sort of passion for what they do, it got the students involved and made me realize that I could reach my full potential and made me more willing to learn about a subject I may not have necessarily done otherwise.”

“He always was so helpful and knowledgeable about his field of study and set an excellent example for all his students, to learn and travel and grow individually. I have so much respect for him and he knew all of his students’ names and info and really got me interested in studying Latin America.”

“This faculty member challenged me by setting a great example. I admire and respect her and wanted to do well in the classes I took with her. Her support and guidance in my final year at JMU were amazing.”

“He is the most amazing teacher I have ever had anywhere during any course of education. He introduced a way of thinking that most of us had never tried or even begun to have thought about. Through my time at JMU under his direction, I learned to think not only outside the box, but way outside the box! He taught us to not only see a bigger picture of life, but to realize the important parts of living as well as design. Every little part of life was a joy to him and therefore brought joy each day into our lives. I can't think of a greater impact than he has had on my life.”

“This faculty member was able to overcome hardships and still be excited and enthusiastic about his/her field. He was able to share that enthusiasm with students in a way that made them believe anything was possible.”

“The professor was very dedicated to teaching, and was genuinely interested in the material. He also took us on field trips and had a lot of materials that coincided with the material. He taught me that it is important to love what you do, and he seemed genuinely happy with his life and his work.”

“She was very clear in her expectations of her students and passionate about her subject. She made everyone feel as if they could succeed and would.”

Provided useful course content

“I had a number of professors that I decided to take a number of classes with throughout my time at JMU. The reason I kept going back to the same teachers was because I felt they had teaching styles that meshed particularly well with my learning style, not to mention, their lectures/discussions were very thought-provoking and interesting. I got the feeling that those certain professors really wanted to be in front of a class to express education to students and not just as a formality of their research or degree.”

“Made us apply what we were learning in the class to the real world. Made class very challenging but in the end everyone's hard work paid off in our grades.”

“Gave valuable information that caused the class to think about schools, how they are shaped by society, what the positives and negatives of the current school system are, and what are reasonable ideas/ways to make positive changes for the future.”

“Talked about personal experiences related to the class, gave materials to use in workplace, made class interesting, minimal lecture-maximum hands-on learning, expert in the field.”

“I did undergraduate research, working closely with a member of the biology faculty, for three years. This research and her advice and assistance, taught me more about biology than I could have learned in a class alone.”

Recommend JMU

Are there any relationships between comments categories and the likelihood of recommending JMU to a potential student? The table below compares the likelihood of recommending JMU across several dimensions: gender, race/ethnicity, made at least one positive comment, made at least one negative comment, and made or did not make at least one positive comment about a faculty member.

	Number and Percent			Significance	
	Very Likely	Likely	Not Likely	X ²	Sign.
Male	317 (79.6%)	73 (18.3%)	8 (2.0%)	4.570	.102
Female	633 (84.5%)	102 (13.6%)	14 (1.9%)		
White	834 (83.6%)	148 (14.8%)	16 (1.6%)	7.985	.018
Non-White	85 (78.7%)	17 (15.7%)	6 (5.6%)		
Made at least one positive comment	740 (84.7%)	123 (14.1%)	11 (1.3%)	15.614	.000*
Made no positive comment	212 (76.3%)	54 (19.4%)	12 (4.3%)		
Made at least one negative comment	290 (74.0%)	88 (22.4%)	14 (3.6%)	32.182	.000*
Made no negative comments	662 (87.1%)	89 (11.7%)	9 (1.2%)		
Made at least one positive comment about a faculty member	652 (83.8%)	116 (14.9%)	10 (1.3%)	6.787	.034
Made no positive comments about a faculty member	300 (80.2%)	61 (16.3%)	13 (3.5%)		

- $p \leq .017$

Comparisons were made between the three different combinations of made/did not make positive comments and likelihood (very likely, likely, not likely) of recommending JMU. The only statistically significant difference was between “not likely” and “very likely” (chi-square = 11.349, $d = .217$). Graduates who made at least one positive comment were more often “very likely” to recommend JMU than were alumni who were “not likely” to recommend JMU.

Comparisons were made between the three different combinations of made/did not make negative comments and likelihood (very likely, likely, not likely) of recommending JMU. There statistically significant differences between “not likely” and “very likely” (chi-square = 9.677, $d = .200$ (small effect size)) and between “likely” and “very likely” (chi-square = 24.847, $d = .30$ (small to moderate effect size)). Graduates who made at least one negative comment were more

often “likely” to recommend JMU than were alumni who were “very likely” to recommend JMU.

Finally, comparisons were made between the three different combinations of made/did not make a comment about faculty impacts and likelihood (very likely, likely, not likely) of recommending JMU. There was statistically significant difference between “not likely” and “very likely” (chi-square = 6.444, $d=.163$ (small effect size)). Alumni who made at least one positive comment about faculty impacts were more often “very likely” to recommend JMU than were alumni who were “not likely” to recommend JMU.

Since the likelihood of recommending JMU can be considered an interval variable (1,2,3), it is possible to use a parametric statistic (t-test for equality of means) to determine whether there were differences in the likelihood of recommending JMU between these groups. The following statistically significant ($p<=.001$) differences were found:

- Graduates who listed at least one positive factor were more likely to recommend JMU than those who did not list at least one positive factor ($F=50.797$, $p<=.000$).
- Graduates who listed at least one negative factor were less likely to recommend JMU than those who did not list at least one positive factor ($F=111.69$, $p<=.000$).

The number of positive comments, negative comments, and faculty experiences was correlated with the likelihood of recommending JMU. The number of positive factors listed by each graduate was positively related to a positive recommendation ($r=.127$, $p>=.000$). The greater the number of negative factors was negatively related to a positive recommendation ($r=-.207$, $p>=.000$).

Discussion

Annually the JMU Office of Institutional Research collects information from recent alumni about their current employment and/or graduate school enrollment. Over the years graduates have found good jobs and had very positive graduate school experiences. An overwhelming percentage of alumni would recommend JMU to potential new students. In the three years that OIR has conducted the graduate employment survey, graduates have been asked to state the most positive and negative factors in their JMU experience that would lead them to recommend or not recommend JMU. Also the graduates were asked to describe what faculty did that had a particularly positive impact on their JMU and life experiences. These data have been systemically analyzed using SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys[®] to gain further insight into the JMU experiences for recent alumni. The purpose of this report is to summarize what recent graduates believe to be the most important aspects of their JMU experience.

The following findings appear to be the most relevant and are offered for consideration.

- Most positive factors of the JMU experience (75 percent of respondents listed at least one positive factor):
 - High quality faculty (30.7 percent of respondents)
 - Fellow students (20.6 percent)
 - JMU community and campus atmosphere (17.4 percent)
 - Campus facilities and beauty (17.3 percent)
 - Opportunities for personal growth (16.7 percent)
 - Overall quality academics, including majors (14.0 percent)
- Most negative factors of the JMU experience (34 percent of respondents listed at least one positive factor):
 - Parking (7.9 percent of respondents)
 - Academic difficulties (6.7 percent)
 - Diversity (5.7 percent)
 - Lower quality instructors (5.6 percent)
 - Poor courses (5.4 percent)
 - General Education difficulties (5.2 percent)
- Positive actions taken by faculty (68 percent of respondents listed at least one positive action):
 - Showed significant interest in student and provided needed guidance (46.9 percent of respondents)
 - Exceptional teaching (31.2 percent)
- Significant differences on factors between males and females and between white and non-white alumni:
 - Women are slightly more positive about the JMU campus and its facilities than men.
 - Men are slightly more negative about the Harrisonburg community and police.
 - Non-white graduates are more negative about diversity at JMU than are white students. One in five (21 percent) of non-white graduates listed diversity as a problem compared with one in five (4 percent) white graduates.
 - Graduates who mention diversity as a problem are less likely to recommend JMU to potential students.

There is a very high degree of positive feelings about JMU among recent graduates. Ninety-eight percent of graduates would recommend JMU to potential students. Seventy-five percent of the graduates listed at least one positive factor

in their JMU experience while only 34 percent listed at least one negative. Sixty-eight percent of the graduates mentioned at least one experience with faculty that was very beneficial to them.

Graduates are most positive about their faculty and fellow students. No negative factor was listed by more than eight percent. The bottom line for most graduates as it related to their educational experience is that they know that someone cares about them and that those with whom they have contact are knowledgeable about what they teach/do and the guidance they provide (caring and competence).

The lone negative for a relatively large number of non-white graduates, most prominently, is diversity. Twenty-one percent of non-white graduates listed diversity as a negative factor while less than five percent of white graduates listed diversity. Graduates who listed diversity as a negative factor were less likely to recommend JMU to a potential student.

There are certainly issues raised in this report that should be considered by faculty, administrators and staff in their relationships with students. However, the overall opinions of JMU's graduates are extremely positive. For the vast majority of graduates, JMU's students, faculty, staff, and administrators are likely to have long-lasting positive impacts.

Questions about this research should be directed to the JMU Office of Institutional Research at 568-6830 or ask-oir@jmu.edu.