

## Groups & You

During your time at James Madison University both on and off campus organizations may invite you to become involved. The great majority of these groups are well meaning and constructive, whether they are political, social, service, religious or philosophical in nature.

Student Organization Services maintains information on recognized organizations at JMU. We believe that becoming involved in campus activities and organizations can be as valuable and educational as your classroom experiences.

There are many individuals and groups who would like to share their ideas with you. Often, these “ideas” include values and beliefs they hold about the world around us. They may approach you after class, in the residence hall, outside Dukes, on the Commons, or elsewhere. In addition to sharing with you the answers they have found to life’s questions they may seek to enlist your time, energy, and resources in endeavors they believe to be worthwhile. In short, they may ask you to join their groups and make contributions to their causes.

Although it is healthy for groups to further their causes and recruit new members, some groups use recruiting tactics that are deceitful, manipulative and coercive. Such groups may at first take an unusual personal interest in you, which may be gradually combined with increased demands on your time and commitment.

These demands may tempt you to drop out of school, reject held values, abandon friends and family, and virtually change your identity. Of course, such groups do not announce their intention to undermine your ability to think independently; their tactics can be sophisticated and subtle.

Ask the group:

- What national groups, if any, is the group affiliated with?
- What has this group accomplished during the last six months?
- What values does the group advocate?
- How is the group funded?
- What commitments of time, money, and other resources does the group expect of its members?
- Are members assigned fixed quotas?
- Does the group encourage members to continue their studies, to succeed academically, and to graduate?
- How difficult is it to leave the group?
- Why was I selected by the group?
- To what extent are professional or volunteer staff involved with the group?

This information is designed to alert you to the existence of such groups, to equip you with some questions to ask their recruiters and to identify some people on campus whom you can call if you have questions. We hope that you will be able to make your own decisions about your associations, your education and your life without undue pressure from others.

Manipulative tactics include:

Love bombing – group members give prospects an overwhelming sense of acceptance

Isolation – prospects are isolated from friends, family and activities

Removal of privacy – prospects are never left alone

Sleep deprivation & fatigue – a person’s resistance is broken down by long hours spent working for the group

Confession – prospects share their “sins” with the group and in turn these sins are used to instill guilt and shame on the person

Elitism – anyone outside the group is said to be not worthy, evil or damned

After you have answered the questions about the group, you may decide to continue being involved with the group. However, if you decide that the group is not right for you, you have the right to disassociate yourself from the group, and to be free from all forms of persuasion and coercion by the group.

Ask yourself:

- Did members satisfactorily answer the questions I asked?
- Does the group seem to have simplistic answers to complex world issues?
- Does the group encourage questions and discussion about its beliefs and practices?
- Does the group want its members to give up their traditions and beliefs?
- Does the group allow members to have quiet times alone, or time with friends outside the group?

If you are having difficulty deciding if a certain group is right for you, discuss the matter with someone whose judgment you trust. Friends, relatives, professors, counselors, campus chaplains could offer advice. Student Organization Services is also prepared to provide information and assistance at any time.