The nights grow cooler and trees turn color and then become bare, but it is hard to believe that the fall semester is almost over. Nearly 4000 new freshmen and over 700 new transfer students entered the JMU community this fall, and, for almost all of them, their first experience of JMU academic programs is within the General Education Program. A number of changes to registration procedures were initiated this past summer, including collecting more information from students about general education preferences and then using that information in preregistering them for their first-semester schedule. Initial responses from both students and advisors are very positive, and planning is underway to expand this approach further for 2009.

The fourth annual General Education Student Conference was a splendid success. It is wonderful to see how enmeshed in JMU culture this yearly event has become. We celebrated with our students, their families and their faculty sponsors the extraordinarily high quality of the class work that students produce in their General Education classes. Dr. Michael Moghtader, the winner of the 2008 General Education Distinguished Teacher Award, gave a powerful keynote address at the conference banquet, arguing for the interrelatedness of coursework across the General Education Program in preparing students to acquire confidence and to practice for the real-world situations in which college learning is utilized.

At the end of September, several groups of faculty traveled to Asheville, NC, to make presentations at the annual conference of the Association for General and Liberal Studies (AGLS). They came back energized by their experience and proud of the respect for our program that they saw among conference attendees. Two of their presentations were voted among the top group from this year’s conference and will be featured in the next AGLS newsletter.

The General Education Program is indeed fortunate to have so many dedicated faculty who continue the tradition of innovation in the classroom and commitment to the liberal education of all JMU students.

One piece of unfortunate news is that, in an uncertain budget situation, we made the difficult decision to suspend the General Education Summer Grants and the General Education Assessment Fellowship for 2009. It is our hope that we will be able to reinstate both programs in 2010.

Best wishes to all of you for a successful conclusion to the semester.

Cluster Four Coordinator Changes

Dr. Jessica Adolino served as the Cluster Four coordinator from 2005 – 2008. She is now serving as the acting department head for Political Science. We wish Jessica the best and thank her for her service.

Dr. Charles “Chris” Blake has agreed to serve as the interim Cluster Four coordinator. Chris joins us for a one year time period while maintaining his faculty position with the Political Science department.
The fourth annual General Education Student Conference was, once again, a highlight of Family Weekend for participating students, their families and faculty. The conference is a venue to showcase exceptional, creative and lively work produced by students in their General Education courses.

Forty-eight students gave paper presentations worthy of professional academic conferences on Friday, October 3rd. Laura Bock, pictured above, received the Dean’s Recognition Award for her presentation on the Allegory of Music. The award was presented at the banquet held for student presenters, their families, session moderators and faculty sponsors.

Session topics, mirroring the diversity of courses taught in the GenEd program, included historical views of Imperialism and recent global history, individual and global health issues, art history, human rights, literature, understanding and the representation of native Americans, and explored the music of Vietnam, Cuban Rap, and Garba Dance and Music.

The fourth annual General Education Student Conference was, once again, a highlight of Family Weekend for participating students, their families and faculty. The conference is a venue to showcase exceptional, creative and lively work produced by students in their General Education courses.

AGLS Conference

Earlier this fall, several teams representing JMU’s General Education Program visited beautiful Asheville, North Carolina, where they participated in the 48th Annual National Conference of the Association of General and Liberal Studies. The first JMU session, “Displacing Wikipedia: Information Literacy for First Year Students,” showcased recent efforts by Charles Harris, Lynn Cameron, Herb Amato, and Jeanne Martino-McAllister to promote the use of three online informational literacy modules (ILMs) to facilitate a consistent emphasis on information literacy in Clusters Two through Five. In another session, “Assessing Students’ Appreciation of the Arts and Humanities,” Meg Mulrooney and Christine Harmes discussed an innovative instrument for Cluster Two that maps students’ written “appreciation” responses to a 5-level aesthetic development scale. A final session, by Gretchen Hazard, Cathy Snyder, and Ron Cereola, “Incorporating Personal Fiscal Responsibility as a Critical Thinking Component of the General Education Curriculum,” explored the innovative approach to “business” taken in Cluster One’s GBUS 160: Business Decision Making in a Modern Society.

Each room was filled to capacity, with some people sitting on the floor and others standing outside in the hallway. The Q&A portions of the sessions were lively, and many of the conversations spilled over into the evening receptions. Further proof of the teams’ success came the following week, when two of them were asked by AGLS to submit articles for the organization’s next newsletter. Gen Ed staff also participated in another activity of note. On Saturday morning, some of them met with Dr. Tom Steen, Director of Essential Studies, the general education program at the University of North Dakota. The AGLS implemented this year a new consultancy program intended to match teams working on specific general education issues with experienced colleagues from other campuses. Several years ago, UND did an interesting longitudinal study of its students’ attitudes regarding their general education program, and its method might prove useful for JMU.
Cluster Two Self-Study

Following a Spring 2006 directive from the GEC, Cluster Two undertook in AY2007–08 its first self-study (Cluster One completed its own study 06–07; Cluster Three will do its in 08–09 and so forth through all five clusters). The need for self studies came about when GEC members recognized that, in the absence of periodic Package reviews, which were required as part of the original 1996 Gen Ed Program governance structure but ended with the package system, the only opportunity for formal reflection and analysis came during full program reviews, which take place at ten year intervals. The last such review occurred in April 2002.

The self-study process for Cluster Two was loosely modeled on the one pioneered by Cluster One. To wit, the Cluster Two committee met on August 23, 2007 and drew up four broad goals intended to address matters of concern to its own members:

• To survey students concerning their ability to appreciate the arts and humanities
• To evaluate the function and delivery of individual courses within the cluster
• To consider how Cluster Two advances university-wide initiatives (particularly diversity) and reinforces Cluster One objectives (particularly critical thinking)
• To review and evaluate the innovative methods of assessing the cluster’s new, overarching goals and group-based objectives.

To quote from the final report, the “results reveal a healthy, well-functioning unit that enrolls 6-7,000 students a semester …Student surveys, for example, indicated that the nine credits of coursework in Cluster Two successfully meet the unit’s overarching goals regarding the arts and humanities and that the content of these courses is widely applied in other areas of the curriculum and regularly referenced outside the classroom. Similarly, the self-study showed that the function and delivery of cluster courses is very good. Syllabi reviews found not only a high degree of alignment with the three specific sets of cluster objectives, but a substantial effort to advance the critical thinking competency of Cluster One and the university-wide diversity initiative. Last, the report outlines recent work to improve assessment instruments and procedures. It indicates an exciting, new direction for the cluster’s assessment as well as its abiding commitment to academic excellence.”

The full report is available at www.jmu.edu/gened/genedcouncil.html.

Nominations for the Fifth General Education Student Conference

Students deserve recognition other than grades for exceptional work in GenEd courses. If a student in your general education course has produced outstanding work worthy of conference presentation, we encourage you to nominate him or her for the Fifth Annual General Education Student Conference. Nominations are now being accepted for student work produced during the Fall ’08 semester. Go to www.jmu.edu/gened/studentconference.shtml for more information.

Top five reasons to nominate a student for the General Education Conference:

1. Students deserve recognition other than grades for exceptional work in GenEd courses.
2. The conference allows JMU to exhibit student work for parents and classmates.
3. Nominated students work with the nominator as a mentor.
4. Students obtain firsthand experience in presenting at an academic conference.
5. Students develop citizenship skills by taking responsibility for their ideas and their impact on various groups of academic/nonacademic audiences.
GenEd Summer Grants and SAGE Grants temporarily suspended

In an effort to support the state budget challenges, we are temporarily suspending the Summer Grants for the 2008/2009 academic year. The primary purposes for the awarding of General Education Grants are to strengthen the teaching in the General Education program and to encourage collaboration among faculty in developing new courses for clusters, in revising existing courses, in developing assessment methods for a cluster, or in other projects relevant to the program. We look forward to the return of these grants in the future. For additional information, go to www.jmu.edu/gened/grants.shtml.

In an effort to meet the growth of the JMU freshman class, new approaches were implemented this summer. Overall, we believe all of the Orientation Programs went well last year. These areas seemed particularly successful with many positive comments from students, parents, and Freshmen Advisors. The areas of Orientation from this past summer that appear to have gone well are:

• separating the Parents and Students during registration and all activities after the University Welcome, including lunch
• pre-registering all students for six to twelve credit hours, based on their General Education preferences and/or their selected major
• piloting the Gold Advising Group; this pilot allowed groups of no more than six students per day to meet with their Freshman Advisors prior to an individual advising/registration session
• providing a consistent message throughout the day, from the upper administration and faculty, on academic rigor and making healthy choices
• refocusing the selection and training of the OPAs (Orientation Peer Advisors) to better highlight their achievements in areas of academics and service

However, there are areas where some modifications are needed to better meet the needs of all involved parties. The areas for which we have heard some concerns pertain to the following:

• There is still some difficulty finding the fifth class for students who are pre-registered for only six credits.
• There was not enough travel time in between some sessions.
• The University Welcome had a great deal of information packed into a small amount of time.
• The Gold Advisors would like to have more time during the Group Advising Session prior to meeting their students individually.

Before moving this year’s upcoming Summer Springboard to allow all students to meet with their Freshmen Advisors one-on-one, the Group requests comments from anyone who is willing to send them to us. If you have comments with regard to Transfer or First-Year Summer Orientation, please send them to Herb Amato at amatohk@jmu.edu, or to anyone on the Orientation Implementation Group. We welcome your feedback.
Nominate a colleague for the 2009 Provost Award for Excellence in Academic Advising

The Provost Award for Excellence in Academic Advising recognizes JMU advisors who have made significant contributions and superlative achievement in the delivery of quality academic advising. All full-time faculty whose primary responsibilities are teaching and who spent a portion of their time providing academic advising services to students during the 2008 calendar year may be nominated. Recipients will receive a $1,000 honorarium. Recipients cannot receive more than one advising award within a five-year period.

Nominations will be accepted from students, colleagues, department heads and alumni. Self nominations are also welcome. For additional information, go to www.jmu.edu/universitystudies/advising_award.shtml.

Congratulations to Dr. Kenn Barron and Ms. Paula McMahan. Both were recipients of the 2007 JMU Provost Award for Excellence in Academic Advising and were submitted as candidates for awards with the 2008 National ACademic ADvising Association (NACADA). Kenn was a winner in the Faculty Academic Advising Category and Paula received a Certificate of Merit in the Academic Advising, Primary Role Category.

For more information on nominating a colleague, contact Catherine Crummett, crummecm@jmu.edu or Lee Ward, wardwl@jmu.edu.

The Human Community
JMU health science professor Debra Sutton has dedicated her career to the cause of disease prevention and the critical role that education plays in that endeavor. She couples her common sense approach to health care with a strong dose of optimism. "Everything is connected. It is a lesson that I’ve been fortunate to know for many, many years and one I hope my students will learn," she says. Her efforts in HIV/AIDS prevention certainly lend proof to that belief. Sutton’s Study Abroad trip to South Africa in 2007 allowed her students to see firsthand the effects HIV/AIDS has had on the country’s communities and the efforts under way to curb the epidemic. The trip also put Sutton in contact with a JMU alumna, Amy Porter Zacaroli (’88), who, along with her husband, runs 25:40, a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving children orphaned by AIDS. Their chance meeting helped lay the foundation for Sutton’s Study Abroad trips to South Africa in summer 2008. Once again, JMU students will have a chance to see Be the Change in action -- witnessing how the lives of those who might otherwise be doomed by HIV can be drastically changed when compassion is put into action.

"I want people to see that something good can come out of something bad."