

10/10/25 Highlights

Dear Colleagues,

A happy Friday to everyone. I want to start with a tip of the Provost's cap to the team that created and led the SOMOS Latinos in Leadership conference. Drawing JMU students, staff and faculty, along with students from local colleges and high schools, the conference is an annual fall highlight. I had the chance to be in the audience as veteran reporter (and JMU alum!) [Jim Acosta](#) had a fireside chat with former U.S. Attorney General [Alberto Gonzales](#). It was a fascinating conversation and a reminder of why we do the work that we do.

In October, faculty and staff across the university are acknowledged for their [years of service](#) to JMU. Within our division, I was honored to recognize 22 staff members, representing 310 years of service, and 206 faculty members who embody 3,115 years. That is a tremendous number of years, but it pales in comparison to the ways the university has benefited from your time and effort. Thanks to each of you, again, for your work and the way you represent our division.

As usual, we have a lot more to celebrate across Academic Affairs: please have a look at the highlights of your colleagues.

- If you're looking for engaging reading over the weekend, Dr. [Dan Schill](#), professor in the School of Communications and affiliate professor in the Department of Political Science, just had a new work published. [Political Communication and Digital Advocacy: Strategies and Implications](#), co-edited by Schill and J.A. Hendricks, is part of Peter Lang's [Frontiers in Political Communication](#) series.

Schill and Hendricks also co-authored the opening chapter, "Trust, Truth, and Technology: Political Communication in Polarized Times." The book features contributions from scholars at Kansas State University, Arizona State University, the University of Arkansas, the University of Delaware, the University of Missouri, Illinois State University and other institutions.

- The Department of Philosophy and Religion teaches students to engage critically with ideas and values *and* prepares students for the workplace. Associate professor of Philosophy Dr. [Anne van Leeuwen](#) is teaching an undergraduate course on the philosophy of pedagogy: Practicing Philosophy with Kids. This course, offered in partnership with Harrisonburg City Schools, meets the criteria of a [work-based learning experience](#) (WBLE), increasing students' career readiness.

As part of the course, 18 second through fifth grade students meet weekly with JMU undergraduates for an afterschool philosophy club. During these meetings, students discuss philosophical ideas and questions, like "What is bravery?" or "What is justice?" using storybooks and activities such as drawing, photographing, building and exploring as the medium. Based on this successful pilot, there are plans to expand this club to include additional elementary schools in the spring. The initiative received external support from [PLATO, the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization](#).

- Dr. [Kirsty McKenzie](#), assistant professor in the Department of Geology and Environmental Science (GES), and Dr. [Steve Whitmeyer](#), associate dean in the College of Science and Mathematics and professor of Geology were awarded an [USGS EDMAP](#) grant for their project “Bedrock and Surficial Geologic Mapping of the Blue Ridge to Valley and Ridge transition within the McGaheysville 7.5’ Quadrangle, Virginia.” This project funds mentored research experiences for six GES students in GES undergraduates to produce a combined bedrock and surficial geological map of the McGaheysville 7.5’ quadrangle, Virginia.

Students will receive training in digital (bedrock and surficial) field mapping, remote mapping of surficial deposits, and the production of geologic mapping products using [ArcGIS Pro](#). A key component of this research is defining the relationship between surficial deposits and bedrock units within the McGaheysville 7.5’ quadrangle, which will allow better understanding of the structural nature of the bedrock contact(s) and the transition from the Blue Ridge Geologic Province to the Valley and Ridge Geologic Province. Additionally, the relationship between surficial deposits and bedrock geology will provide a basis for identifying regions that are more susceptible to hazards such as debris flows in this area.

- Fasha Strange, who provides academic support within the [College of Integrated Science and Engineering](#), was acknowledged this week for her many years of service to the university, the most of any Academic Affairs staff member recognized this year.

We worked together for many years in the School of Integrated Sciences, then the Department of Integrated Science and Technology, and I can vouch for how much the students absolutely love her. Students would make a beeline for her office to talk to her and get her advice. I’m sure that’s continuing now that she has moved to the Department of Engineering. Fasha is warm and welcoming and makes the students (and faculty) feel at home. She brightens every workplace of which she’s a part and is a valued colleague.

I’d love to keep sharing examples of your engagement, research and achievements. Send those highlights for yourself – or a colleague! – to provost@jmu.edu.

Sincerely,

Bob