

10/17/25 Highlights

Dear Colleagues,

Another week has somehow managed to come and go, and Fall Break is soon upon us. This time of year, I find, is one of the most beautiful for the Shenandoah Valley. I think my New England upbringing spawns an abnormally deep connection to the changing colors of autumn leaves (the raking required upon their fall swiftly brings me back to Earth!).

With Fall Break just around the corner, we're marking the mid-point of the semester. We've gotten a lot done in Academic Affairs since August! I want to thank everyone who joined in on the College Town Halls with President Schmidt – we've had a lot of great input. We're making good progress on our ambitious three-headed Fall 2025 agenda items ([Core Curriculum Reform](#), [Strategic Planning](#), [Faculty Handbook Revision](#)). Thanks for your continuing contributions to each element.

I think we're all ready for the break, including the Friday email, which will take next Friday off. I hope the short break gives you the opportunity to do whatever recharges you. Enjoy these achievements until then.

- Here is a great example of innovation in artificial intelligence and collaboration across colleges! A faculty team was awarded a \$1 million grant from the [National Science Foundation](#) (NSF) to launch [Uncovering Potential – Paving Career Pathways to AI with a Special Focus on Rural Areas](#). This initiative will expand access to AI education and career opportunities for individuals in rural communities, where access to emerging technology careers is often limited.

The project will be led by associate professor Dr. [Ying Jin](#) in the College of Education, with co-investigators Dr. [Rhonda Syler](#), associate professor of CIS/BSAN; Dr. [Elham Torabi](#), associate professor of CIS/BSAN; and Dr. [Maryam Sadat Sharifian](#), associate professor in the College of Education. They will collaborate with the global technology company [CGI](#). The team will design innovative pathways that combine education, mentorship and experiential learning to help rural participants pivot into AI careers.

- The [Morrison Bruce Center](#) (MBC), housed in the College of Health and Behavioral Studies, was selected as a host site for the espnW [Global Sports Mentoring Program](#) (GSMP) for the first time. Kinesiology associate professor Dr. [Cathy McKay](#), executive director of the MBC; Health Science associate professor Dr. [Jill Lassiter](#), associate director of the MBC; and Kinesiology associate professor Dr. [Lori Gano-Overway](#), MBC faculty collaborator for the GSMP program, coordinated the visit this fall.

The GSMP is an initiative of the [U.S. Department of State](#) and [espnW](#), designed to pair emerging leaders from around the world with U.S. host organizations for a month-long mentorship. The program's mission is to foster cross-cultural collaboration and expand opportunities for women and girls through physical activity, sport and leadership development. During her time here, [Jelena Pavićević](#), JMU's delegate from Serbia, engaged in professional development, networking and hands-on learning while also sharing valuable global perspectives. She spoke with three academic classes; spent time with JMU coaches, faculty and students; and crafted an action plan focused

on building global connections through the power of sport, physical activity and mentorship.

- Faculty in the College of Education are continuing to expand the constituents we serve (and maybe create some future Dukes!).

In the COE [Young Children's Program](#) (YCP), director Amy Taylor oversees a team that was just named to the 2025 [Virginia Department of Education VQB5 Improvement Honor Roll](#). This recognition is reserved for returning [Virginia Quality Birth to Five](#) programs that have [demonstrated significant growth in CLASS® scores](#) from the previous year. These teachers have almost doubled the number of enrolled students in the last year.

There are a lot of new faces in the JMU [Laboratory School for Innovation and Career Exploration](#). Dr. [Donica Hadley](#), director of the Lab School; Dr. [Kristina Doubet](#), professor of Middle, Secondary and Math Education; and [Xavier Grier](#), community engagement liaison for the Lab School, welcomed an additional 200 ninth graders from four Rockingham County Public Schools this year. An additional 28 high school teachers also joined.

Don't let the rest of the semester pass you by without submitting to provost@jmu.edu. Be sure to add highlights for your colleagues, too!

Sincerely, Bob

