

02/27/26 Highlights

Dear Colleagues,

It was quite foggy as I walked in this morning, and it got me thinking about a number of things. We're at a time of year when spring feels tantalizingly close yet just out of reach, and the semester is still taking shape. The new strategic plan is within sight, but its exact form is fuzzy. And yet with a bit of patience (and some sunshine), everything will come into focus. Yup, sounds like the end of February! By the way, the Arboretum is quite pretty and a little spooky in the fog.

Ready for a look at the array of activities your colleagues have been up to?

- It seems we introduced a few new fans to "[With Good Reason](#)" with [last week's email](#). Tune in again to hear from another JMU professor on a completely different topic: black holes. Einstein theorized their existence, but it wasn't until the 1960's we observed them for the first time. Dr. [Anca Constantin](#), professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy says black holes occur throughout the universe, but we can only see the hungry ones. [Tune in](#) to hear more.
- Congratulations to Dr. [Melissa Alemán](#), professor of Communication Studies, and her co-authors on receiving the top paper award at the [Eastern Communication Association Conference](#), Voices of Diversity Division. The paper, "*I don't like to be asking for the basics because the basics are something that should already be in existence, right?*" *Voices of International Graduate Students' Academic and Social Experiences at a U.S. University*, was co-authored with two of her graduate students.
- Faculty from the Architectural Design program are getting noticed! A project by instructor [Andrew Morrell](#) and visiting assistant professor of Architectural Design [Lemara Miftakhova Morrell](#) was featured in the 2026 Winter/Spring Edition of [Abode Magazine](#). They were also highlighted in the national publication [VIE Magazine](#). The article, "[A Renovation from the Heart](#)," speaks directly to their practice, craft and its relevance to pedagogy, specifically mentioning JMU and reflecting on how they teach and approach architecture both in professional practice and in higher education.
- Dr. [Maryam Sharifian](#), executive director of [JMU CARE](#) and associate professor in the College of Education, published the chapter "[Humanitarian Crisis in Syria](#)," in the newly released Springer Nature volume [Education of Young Children Caught in Disasters: Multidisciplinary Perspectives and Interventions](#) (Vol. 19).

The chapter provides a rigorous, research-based analysis of the Syrian humanitarian crisis and its profound implications for young children, educators and schooling infrastructures. Her work advances the global discourse on early childhood education in conflict settings and offers evidence-informed guidance for program development, educator preparation and interagency coordination.

- The [Advising Resource and Collaboration \(ARC\) Network](#) at JMU recently hosted its fourth annual "Day of Community Conversations" advising conference, with 90+ registrants

from local colleges and universities. The conference invites advisors and advising partners to facilitate conversations around advising best practices and resources. This year's conference included 9 concurrent sessions and a keynote from [Dr. Josh Bacon](#), author and JMU CoB advisor. [Kelly Schuhmann](#), health professions advisor, and [Jennifer Jackon](#), transfer advising coordinator, co-chaired this year's conference committee, with planning assistance from academic advisors [Amber Loyacano](#), [Annette Fornadel](#), and [Kristen Crawford](#) and conference co-sponsorship from the [CoB Advising and Support Center](#), the [College of Education](#), [JMU Libraries](#) and several units from [Student Academic Success](#) (University Advising, Pre-Professional Health Advising, and Student Success Analytics).

The ARC Network, currently overseen by graduate programs coordinator in the College of Education [Danielle Maxham](#), is a team of 12 JMU advisors who plan opportunities for community and professional development for advisors.

Monday marks the start of a new month – an excellent time to submit some of your achievements for inclusion in future Friday emails. Send news for you and your colleagues to provost@jmu.edu.

Sincerely,

Bob