

04/03/26 Highlights

Subject: Academic Affairs Highlights

Dear Colleagues,

I'm relieved April 1st didn't fall on a Friday. I would have been sorely tempted!

Today's note is coming to you from Hue, Vietnam. I've been abroad this week working to bolster our relationships with institutions in Korea and Vietnam. I've been reminded of the importance of international collaboration and of the perspective that is gained by interacting with people in other cultures (I've also been reminded of the challenge of shifting your biological clock by 13 time zones!). I'm looking forward to seeing us continue and augment our activities in East Asia.

I've also been thinking about change over the last couple of weeks, for a number of different reasons. Next week, I'll pick up that strand in a little more detail.

More locally, my thanks go again to all of the faculty who have been involved in developing our new general education program framework over the last four years. This marks a major milestone for the renewal process!

By the time you receive next week's highlights, JMU will have inaugurated our seventh president, Dr. James Schmidt. I hope you'll be able to participate in some of the inaugural events going on throughout the week.

And now, let's hear about some of the exciting things your peers are accomplishing.

- Dr. [Dayna Henry](#) is doing some innovative and collaborative work with artificial intelligence! As part of the SCHEV grant-funded [AI in Teaching and Learning Project](#), the associate professor in the Department of Health Sciences and assistant director of the Center for Faculty Innovation Scholarship Area co-authored an article in the recent special artificial intelligence-themed issue of [Journal of Higher Education Management](#). "[From Silos to Synergy: Statewide Collaboration as a Model for Ethical and Scalable AI Integration](#)" describes how her joint efforts with faculty from the centers for teaching and learning at George Mason University and the University of Virginia brought together faculty, staff and students from across the state to create research informed AI educational development opportunities. This [initiative](#) was also a finalist for the 2025 [POD Innovation Award](#), which recognizes creative ideas for educational development.
- Faculty, staff and a student from the Center for Global Engagement (CGE) and Center for Assessment and Research Studies (CARS) recently teamed up on research published in the [Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice](#). Associate Director of CGE International Student and Scholar Services [Marlena Meikrantz Sharp](#) and Dr. [Sara Finney](#), professor of Graduate Psychology and associate director for student affairs assessment in CARS, along with one of Sarah's graduate students, published "[Factors Affecting International Student Success in Higher Education: A Needs Assessment to Guide Differentiated and Intentional Programming](#)." They found that noncognitive factors

such as self-efficacy and sense of belonging significantly influence international students' academic success, with meaningful differences across subgroups that can inform more targeted and intentional programming.

- Congratulations to Dr. [Chris Berndsen](#), professor in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, and his mentee, Sara Scanlan (CBC '26). Sara won the worldwide [Protein Data Bank presentation award](#) at the [American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology](#) meeting for her poster presentation “Structural Mechanism of Malate Dehydrogenases and Support for the Reciprocating Mechanism of Catalysis.” Their research collaboration highlights how MDH uses conformational changes in the active loop to facilitate the reversible conversion of malate to oxaloacetate.
- Dr. [Cara Meixner](#), professor of Graduate Psychology, was a keynote speaker at the [2026 NASHIA Seed Summit](#), an annual convening of leading scholars and practitioners on brain injury. Her talk was titled “Living with Chronic Brain Injury: The Role of the Caregiver.”
- Dr. [Lee Brown](#), assistant professor in the Department of Biology, recently organized and led a panel discussion, “Building a Pollinator Haven at Home: A Conversation With Local Home Gardeners Making It Happen,” for the annual [Pollinators In Your Yard](#) event, hosted by the City of Harrisonburg’s Public Works Department. Dr. [Heather Griscom](#), professor in the Department of Biology, was a panelist, along with two other Harrisonburg residents with amazing pollinator-friendly yards. Lee was also interviewed by [U.S. News and World Report](#) for [an article](#) on the recently released size of the overwintering monarch population in Mexico.

Hope you find some time to get outside and enjoy some of the anticipated beautiful weather this weekend – with or without bees. Be sure to send some accomplishments for you – or your colleagues – to provost@jmu.edu so we can highlight your interesting work!

Sincerely,

Bob

