

8/22/25 Highlights

Dear Colleagues,

The Friday e-mail is fit and tan (what SPF is appropriate for an anthropomorphized digital communication?) and ready for the new term. Congratulations, we've reached the end of the first week of the new academic year, and it has been great fun seeing the campus come back to life, bustling with new student energy and excitement.

As we welcome our nearly 5,000 new students, I'd also like to let all our new faculty and staff know how glad I am you've chosen to join us at JMU. We've got new faculty and staff in all of our colleges and over 35 different academic units and areas. You come from a wide variety of backgrounds, disciplines, geographical locations, types of institutions, and research and scholarship interests, and I couldn't be more excited for you to join us.

I told our new students at their convocation on Sunday afternoon the secret to academic success was simple: Go to class. I'm sure they listened intently and have been showing up! As they start their course work and so many other academic activities, they will quickly learn what I have known for years: Our faculty are brilliant and engaged teacher-scholars who will impress them every class, and our staff are friendly, efficient, and supportive professionals who will help them to make the most of their time at JMU.

In future weeks, I'll share more about our priorities for the year. In the meantime, I do hope you'll engage with the core curriculum reform process (please reference yesterday's email).

For now, let's end what I hope was a great first week by highlighting some accomplishments from across Academic Affairs.

- Mentorship from Professor of Biology Dr. [Conley McMullen](#) is paying off for Biology students! At the [Virginia Academy of Science](#) annual meeting, two students were awarded for their [presentations](#): Brooke Thomson received the Baker Award in the Botany section and Carrie Chambers received the Harvill Award in the Botany section.
- Assistant Professor in the School of Integrated Sciences Dr. [Giangiuseppe Pili](#) is helping Intelligence Analysis students gain global attention. The students' work is being featured in numerous [international publications and conferences](#).
- Congratulations to Dr. [Rhonda Syler](#), associate professor and R. Jarl Bliss Faculty Fellow in the Department of Computer Information Systems and Business Analytics, on being elected chair of the [Commission on Information Technology for the City of Alexandria](#). The commission advises city leadership on critical initiatives, and this year's focus includes open data, AI readiness and digital equity. As chair, Rhonda will offer valuable insights into workforce trends and technology policy, enriching both her research and teaching as she continues to prepare students for emerging opportunities.
- Department of English Instructor [Julie Sorge Way](#), who received the 2024-25 [General Education Distinguished Teaching Award](#), also won two awards/prizes from the [Research Society for Victorian Periodicals](#) (RSVP): the [Patrick Leary Field Development Grant](#) and the [Sally Mitchell Dissertation prize for](#) her thesis, "Inviting Submission: Isabella Beeton at the Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, 1856-1865." She is the first in the RSVP's history

to win both the Mitchell dissertation prize and the Leary Grant. The Leary, in its 9-year existence, has tended to go to senior scholars and teams.

- I'm delighted to recognize multiple staff members in Academic Affairs who received [Advanced Administrative Assistant Certificate Program](#) certificates at the recent [2025 Administrative Professionals Conference](#). These certificate programs, offered through [Talent Development](#), require a significant investment of time and effort, and their completion reflects a strong commitment to professional development.

Congratulations to [Bree Emurian](#), Senior Administrative Assistant to the Dean, College of Science and Mathematics; [Heather Roberts](#), Building Operations Coordinator, Libraries; and [Marissa Zane](#), Office Manager, Department of Health Professions/Physician Assistant Studies.

Participation in these programs is high, and more staff will be recognized next week.

Please send teaching, scholarship, awards, and any other highlights and accomplishments to provost@jmu.edu. Send yours and those of your peers! I look forward to sharing more good work next week.

Sincerely,

Bob