

8/23/24 Provost's Welcome to Fall 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the 2024-25 academic year at James Madison University. We're excited for the fall term to get in motion!

It's wonderful to see the campus once again bustling with faculty, staff and students – it is quite a change from the summer. Not that it wasn't busy in Harrisonburg, with quite a few changes occurring. My role is one of them: I'm Bob Kolvoord, and I'm honored to be serving as the Interim Provost. For those that don't know me, I'll spare you the long biography and give you just a sentence or two. I'm a Professor in the School of Integrated Sciences, where I've taught for many years. My research centers on the impact of geospatial technologies (such as GIS) on how students think and solve problems. My most recent administrative assignment was serving as the dean of the College of Integrated Science and Engineering since its inception 12 years ago.

In the provost's role, I'll be working closely with Interim President Charlie King. He served for many years as the university's Chief Financial Officer and Senior Vice President for Administration and Finance before retiring in 2021. Late this spring, after the Board of Visitors was notified of former President Alger's move to American University, Charlie stepped out of retirement to serve as the interim president until a new president is named. You'll be hearing regularly from him throughout the year.

I'm delighted to welcome our new faculty and staff to our community. I had the opportunity to meet many faculty and staff members at our opening divisional meeting last week, and I look forward to getting to know more of you this year.

As we discussed at the opening meeting, standing still means falling behind in the current landscape of higher education, and we can't afford to do that. We have some things in motion on campus that require our attention and need to continue to move forward. Here are five things that I'd like to work with you on in the upcoming year:

- Core Curriculum Reform. We've begun the process of looking at our core curriculum (General Education), and it's time to move that process forward to begin to explore and develop models for a new core curriculum. Deans Fletcher Linder and Bethany Blackstone have been leading that effort and will reach out. Let me be clear – we will not decide on a new core curriculum this year, but we'll have models that are well thought out, both pedagogically and administratively, for consideration by the next

president and provost. In parallel, we'll also take the time to revisit our C&I process (it dates back 30 years as well) to make sure it's garnering the needed faculty feedback and moving proposals through efficiently. More details will be forthcoming about how you can get involved in the next couple of weeks.

- **Artificial Intelligence.** This technology continues to evolve and while our AI Task Force had a good first year, there's a lot to consider in terms of AI's uses in teaching and learning, as well as what our graduates need to know about using AI ethically and effectively as they move out of JMU and into the workplace. The AI Task Force will be sharing opportunities to engage at whatever level you feel comfortable. Student use is a reality, and we need to continue the conversation about what place this tool has in our work.
- **Reengineering Madison.** Our efforts to remake our technological infrastructure continue, and I want to thank those of you that have already started using MyMadison Connect to advise students. The central idea behind Reengineering Madison is to update our technology to better serve our students and ourselves. Change is never easy, and we have a number of resources for those of you that are advisors not yet in the CRM to ease the transition. We're also going to update our Access and Identity Management system. I'm sure by now you have heard that one of the benefits of this move is that the password change interval changes to annual rather than every 3 months!
- **Shared Governance.** Shared governance is an important pillar of effective institutions of higher education, and we've made some good progress on this front of late. However, it is clear to me that we need to get the primary stakeholders to agree on a common definition of shared governance. In consultation with Faculty Senate Speaker Kathy Ott-Walter, I'm asking the Shared Governance Implementation Task Force to begin their work this year by trying to wrestle this to the ground by interacting with faculty, administrators and our Board of Visitors to get us a common definition. Once we have that, we can get to work on implementing policies and procedures that support that definition.
- **R2/National University Status.** Last year, we spent time in each of our colleges talking about what R-2 means for JMU. Last week, Academic Council spent a significant amount of time working through your thoughts and having a spirited discussion. We're working to close the loop and share with you a coherent vision and path forward for us in this space. Please know that our commitment to teaching remains a guiding star for us as we understand who we are in the R2 space. The JMU of today is not the same as the

JMU I joined 30 years ago, and the JMU of years ahead won't be the same as today. We'll continue to work together to forge this path.

I'd like to thank you each of you for the work you're about to do, for the students you'll teach and inspire, for the scholarship and creative activity you'll continue, for the service you'll participate in to keep our institution and your disciplines moving, and for the programs and activities you'll support.

We are the right people to move this institution forward and to help it continue to evolve and aspire to excellence. We are the right people to help a new generation of students develop their talents and discover their intellectual passions. We are the faculty and staff of Academic Affairs.

Thank you. Let's have a great year.

Bob