



## College of Visual and Performing Arts

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Greetings Colleagues,

It's hard to believe that this is the last week of what has been a semester filled with unprecedented challenge. I am humbled at your creativity and innovation as you have adapted your arts curriculum to ensure our students receive the best education possible.

As the semester winds down and everyone gets to take a breath, I am sure you, like everyone, will wonder about our next steps... "What's next?"

To quote our brilliant colleague, Dr. Bethany Nowviskie, Dean of Libraries:

*"To start with my very simple observation about the period we're currently experiencing: Welcome to peak ambiguity."*

As I have been sharing in these updates and in meetings with the School Directors, there continues to be difficult challenges ahead in all aspects of our lives, but we, as yet, still do not have enough solid information or data to make decisions. Of course, we are all wondering about when things will reopen in our community and what possible contingencies the University and College will need to plan for in Fall 2020. The ambiguity of our current situation, our "peak ambiguity" can prove to be challenging to our sense of stability and safety. This can lead to suspicion and skepticism, even as we are all working in good faith to find solutions. Acting on

our limited data is not the most prudent choice, even if it is more expedient. I have asserted here and in other forums that I will keep you informed as things develop, and I remain committed to that level of communication. More information regarding enrollments, state budgets, Board of Visitors decisions, and tuitions is forthcoming – add to that the developing data from our public health officials, epidemiologists, and researchers. Our planning and deliberations will be informed by all of this. Faculty and staff are key stakeholders, so please share with your School Directors or Supervisors any thoughts, concerns, or suggestions you may have as we move through “peak ambiguity” towards some greater clarity.

As we move towards final exams and the end of this academic year, I wanted to share some updates with you:

- Help us celebrate the hard work and dedication of the graduating class of 2020! Work with your area to create an on-line celebration of your students work. It could take the form of a Facebook video or gallery, a YouTube video, an e-newsletter; the possibilities are endless. Whatever the form it takes, please send a photo, a brief description, and a link to Wren Stevens ([stevenwr@jmu.edu](mailto:stevenwr@jmu.edu)) so she can post it to the CVPA website. Also work with your school director to ensure it also appears on the school's website.
- CVPA deposits are ahead of where we were at this time last year. I want to congratulate and thank everyone involved in the recruiting process, especially those folks who have participated/planned our virtual recruitment events. For all those communicating and working with prospective students...your hard work is paying off and we are grateful. Keep up the good work!
- Tenure and Promotion decisions have been delayed by the inability of the Board of Visitors to gather in-person and vote on the President's recommendations. This meeting will happen in mid-May, so there is no reason to be concerned that the university is not moving forward and confirming these accomplishments.

I want to thank those of you who have reached out with stories of your and your students' successes. They are not only inspiration to me, but they are also of interest to university leaders. Please continue to share them by sending them to Wren Stevens ([stevenwr@jmu.edu](mailto:stevenwr@jmu.edu)), and if feel free to include a photograph that we could share with others. This week I offer my congratulations to:



The annual Art History Forum went virtual last Friday! Co-chaired by **Dr. David Ehrenpreis** and **Dr. Sarah Brooks**, over 300 people viewed presentations by three exceptional art history students:

- **Jennifer Weiss**, mentored by **Dr. Maureen Shanahan**, explored “The Mystical World of Painter Hilma Af Klint: A Close Look at Her Turn to Abstraction.”
- **Michelle Moore**, mentored by **Ms. Ginny Soenksen**, examined “Complexities and Connections: The Art of Bob Bilinyara and Jack Kala Kala”, two Australian bark painting held by the Madison Art Collection.
- **Kirsten Bonner**, mentored by **Dr. Aderonke Adesanya**, studied the use of “Afrofuturism & Afro-Surrealism in the Art of Krista Franklin.”

Every year at this time the School of Theatre and Dance shares readings of the full-length plays written in Advanced



Playwriting taught by **Ingrid De Sanctis**. Those readings happened this year, but instead of being in Wayland, they were online. Thanks to 46 actors who signed up to be readers for the 11 plays in class, the readings will be livestreamed on our class Facebook page for the next four weeks.



The Presser Scholarship is made possible by the Presser Foundation, established in 1939 by Theodore Presser to promote the best in music performance and education in American Universities. JMU is among an elite list of institutions that are fortunate to be given this award every year. The Presser Scholarship is awarded to a rising senior music major in recognition of his or her outstanding academic achievements as well as contributions to the School of Music and the University. The 2020-2021 Presser Scholar is **Mason Moy**. Congratulations, Mason!



**Ben Steinhauer** is JMU's Student Employee of the Year. He works in The School of Theatre and Dance. Congratulations Ben on this accomplishment!

This semester has been one of unprecedented challenges for you, but everyone of you has met those challenges with brilliance and creativity. Here is but a glimpse of the amazing stories that were shared with me this past week:

Art Education student **Jennifer Cartwright**, found herself without a Cooperating Teacher when the K-12 schools closed. She worked with University Supervisor **Maribeth Nolde** and her mentor **Dr. Roger Tomhave** to explore other options. Maribeth Nolde stepped up to the challenge and worked as Jennifer's on-line Cooperating Teacher and Dr. Roger Tomhave shared her reflections and lesson plans to create inspiring studio art lessons for young children. Jennifer has since been interviewed and hired as the new art teacher at John Wayland Elementary

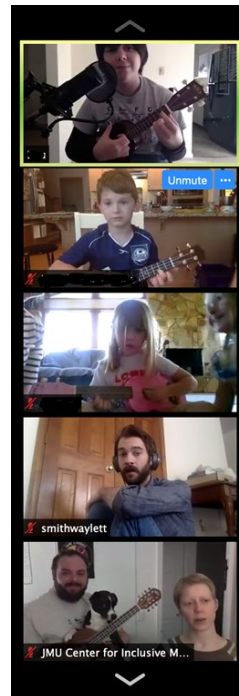


School in Rockingham County!

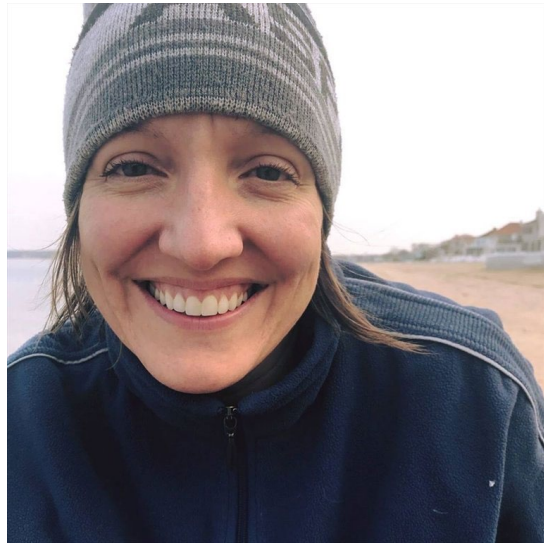
In this photo, Jennifer's students made accordion books to practice identifying colors.

This Friday will be CIME's fifth set of JMUke jams for kids and adults! So far there have been 126 registrants across 11 states! In addition to CIME students, staff, and faculty, there have been some exceptional guest facilitators:

- **Isabel Florimonte** (JMU '19), Music Teacher, Harry E. James Elementary School (Hopewell, VA)
- **Ty Napierskie** (JMU '20)
- **Kathryn Rathgeber**, Assistant Director, JMU Office of Disability Services
- **Nikki Shawn** (JMU '20)
- **Martin Urbach**, NYC Public Schools Music Teacher; Founder, Liberation Drum Circles



In **Jessica Del Vecchio's** World Theatre History II course, students study 19th c. melodrama and then students work in groups to make their own short melodramas, which they present to their classmates at the end of the semester. Of course, this semester we can't do group performances in the same way. Instead, the students are individually pitching their contemporary melodramas via short videos and submitting brief written proposals in an assignment that mimics real-world scenarios. To raise the stakes a bit Jessica's friend, producer **Caleb Hammons**, a Tony- and Obie-award



winning Senior Producer at the Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College in New York, with Jessica will select the strongest proposals, and, during finals week, Caleb will announce via video whose melodrama will be granted the imaginary production at the Fisher Center.

Thank you, not just those listed above, but everyone who has gone the extra mile this semester to make what has been a challenging situation, an exceptional educational environment.

Best of luck to each of you as you prepare final examinations and work on the momentous task of end of semester grades.

Ruben Graciani, Acting Dean  
College of Visual and Performing Arts

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