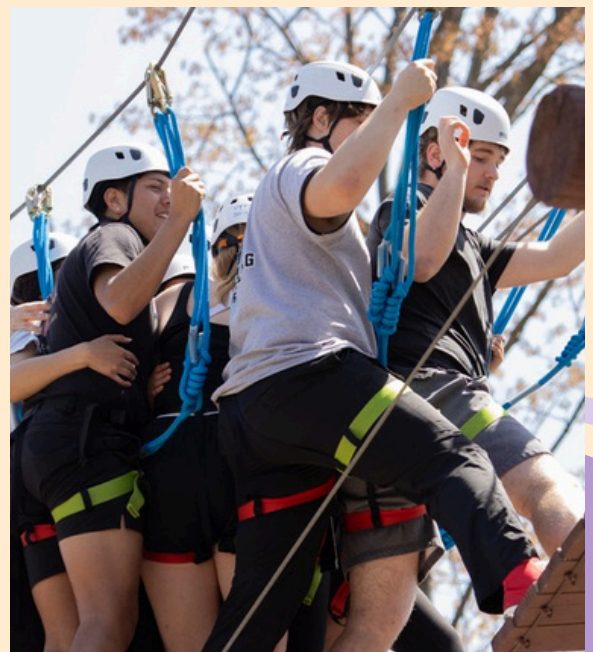


VALLEY SCHOLARS



SUMMER NEWSLETTER

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



Student Showcase

Valley Scholars students shared how their academic journeys have prepared them for their post-secondary goals. At our Student Showcase, 9th and 11th-grade scholars presented to families, university partners, and community supporters about the growth they've made in critical areas such as self-reflection, problem solving, and goal setting—essential skills for their future success. 11th graders built on their years of programming by presenting their postsecondary plans. A key focus of their work was learning how to make informed decisions about their futures. Personal assessments helped them identify strengths, research college options, and begin to map out a meaningful path forward. In both groups, students practiced articulating their ideas with clarity and confidence, gaining real-world experience in presenting themselves and their goals—skills they'll carry with them into college and beyond.

Design for Learning

To thrive in college and beyond, students must learn to solve real-world problems with confidence. This spring, 9th-grade Valley Scholars built those skills through a two-day design-thinking workshop with JMU's X-Labs. Students worked in teams to develop creative solutions, build prototypes, and present their ideas to address a littering problem they identified in their communities. This experience strengthened skills including collaboration, communication, and critical thinking that will be invaluable as they progress into post-secondary education.



Serving Their Communities

Valley Scholars students strengthen their sense of civic responsibility through hands-on service. Students step outside of their daily lives to build empathy, responsibility, and a sense of connection to the world around them by engaging in volunteer opportunities. This year, their experiences ranged from supporting local organizations like Gift 'n Thrift and Relay for Life to participating in a creek cleanup that emphasized environmental stewardship. Through these activities, students not only contribute to important causes but also develop a deeper awareness of community needs and the impact of their actions. These lessons foster a lifelong commitment to service and a stronger connection to the places they call home.



Developing the “Strength First” Mindset

To prepare students to grow around and overcome challenges throughout their postsecondary journeys, Valley Scholars partnered this fall with the College of Business to offer 11th graders a two-day program centered on the CliftonStrengths® Assessment. Students explored their top strengths—such as leadership and creativity—and learned how to apply them in real life. Understanding their strengths helps students build resilience and adapt to new situations with confidence. Through group discussions and activities, they reflected on their unique talents and practiced using them confidently. By building this strength-first mindset and self-awareness, students left the program ready to make thoughtful decisions about their futures and face obstacles with purpose.



Experiencing Living History



This Summer, our rising 9th-grade students attended their first Valley Scholars Summer program to build investigative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. This 4-day program had immersed students in the work of historians and encouraged them to engage more deeply with the past. By stepping into this role, students learned how to ask meaningful questions, thoroughly examine sources, and clearly communicate ideas. Students were able to build these skills by analyzing artifacts and investigating the historic sites of Monticello and Montpelier through an archaeological lens. This type of intellectual engagement pushes students to rely on the critical thinking skills crucial to their success and form habits of curiosity that will serve them well throughout their entire academic journey.

While 9th-graders were learning skills required to analyze history, rising 11th-graders were building on theirs at the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum. By engaging directly with artifacts from the World Wars and examining President Wilson's leadership, students practiced interpreting complex historical narratives and connecting past events to broader global themes. The experience encouraged them to ask thoughtful questions, evaluate sources, and consider the role of preservation in shaping public memory.



Outdoor Teambuilding

This Summer, our rising 10th and 11th-grade students participated in outdoor programming designed to strengthen confidence, resilience, and teamwork while exposing them to the natural resources of the Valley. Each experience was designed to push students outside their comfort zones, challenging them to trust themselves and one another. Rising 10th graders completed a three-day aquatic skills program that began in a pool, moved to Switzer Lake, and culminated in a canoe trip down the Shenandoah River. Two weeks later, rising 11th-grade students took on outdoor challenges that pushed them to recognize their capacity for growth and deepen peer connections. 11th-graders took on the Blue Ridge Tunnel and the High Knob Fire Tower trail hikes before ending the week with the high-ropes course at JMU's UREC, reinforcing trust, collaboration, and perseverance. These shared challenges helped students learn to adapt under pressure and thrive in a new environment.



Preparing for Their Next Step



The college application process can feel overwhelming, so Valley Scholars students participated in a 2-day Summer program designed to demystify the application process and set them up for success. Rising seniors were introduced to essential topics for the application process, such as the FAFSA, requesting letters of recommendation, and navigating the Common Application. Program staff introduced students to the college application essay prompts and helped them brainstorm to give them a head start in the Fall. To familiarize themselves with some of the resources and people they will interact with as JMU students, Valley Scholars also met in small groups with college representatives for roundtable discussions. This focused approach served as an introduction to what programming will look like for seniors this Fall.

Madona, Harrisonburg City

For Madona, Valley Scholars isn't just about college preparation; it's about building confidence, resilience, and perspective. Through programs like Ethical Reasoning, she's gained a deeper understanding of values like empathy and responsibility. And by stepping out of her comfort zone, whether on a ropes course or in AP classes, she's discovered new strength in herself.

"Valley Scholars has helped me grow socially and push myself to improve."

Most of all, Madona says, *"They push you to be better, to try new things. It's the encouragement and community of supportive peers and staff that's the strongest difference."*



SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT



SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Rekik, Rockingham County

Rekik's experience with Valley Scholars has been transformative. Coming from a low-income background, she once saw college as out of reach. That perspective changed throughout her time in Valley Scholars.

"Valley Scholars is the only reason I could think of college as something attainable... It's like a beacon of light."

Rekik believes that mentorship, academic guidance, and long-term goal-setting provided by the program are her key motivators. *"Having a goal gave me a purpose,"* she shared. One of her most memorable experiences was a Summer entrepreneurship workshop with the College of Business that encouraged creativity and problem-solving skills, which she's excited to take into her future. Now, as she looks ahead, Rekik says, *"I can really do anything... I just have to see it."*

CONGRATULATIONS HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2025!

We are excited to congratulate the members of the 7th cohort of Valley Scholars on their graduation and successful completion of the Valley Scholars program. This Fall, 24 Valley Scholars will be attending JMU, with an additional 9 attending other colleges or universities.





CORWIN
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

Valley Scholars



Carhartt
ETHAN
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

Ethan



SKYLAR
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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CALISTA
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SAMUEL
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ADAY
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HALEY
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VICTORIA
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EMILY
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ZAYLEIGH
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ANASTASIE
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LEVI
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AMY
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DENISE
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GIOVANNI
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



EVELYN
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NIA
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ANGELY
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY



Ashley
ASHLEY
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY



JOSE
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY



TIFFANY
LAUREL RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Tiffany
Valley
Scholars



KAYLYNN
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

Tiffany
Valley
Scholars



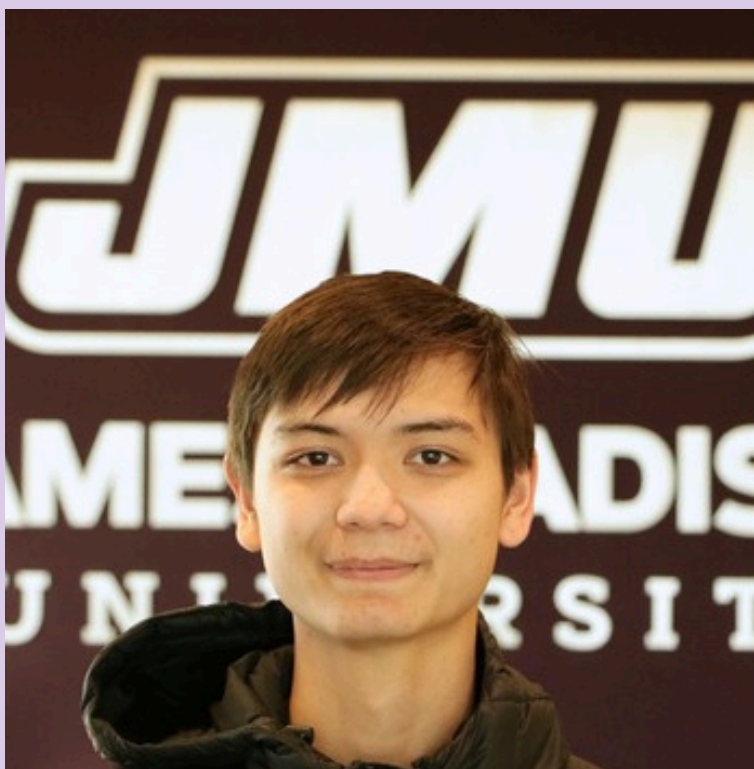
KAYLEIGH
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



MATT
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY



JOSALYN
VIRGINIA TECH



JADEN
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY



ABIGAIL
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY



CELEBRATING MILESTONES AND LOOKING AHEAD

This year, Valley Scholars proudly honored 33 remarkable students who have demonstrated tremendous growth through 5 years of rigorous, intentional programming designed to prepare them for college and beyond. As students prepared to conclude their time with Valley Scholars, three student speakers reflected on their journeys, the support of the Valley Scholars community, and the strength they uncovered as they overcame obstacles together. As these students transition to their dream of attending college, we excitedly welcomed 43 promising 8th-grade who are ready to become the first generation to graduate college in their family. Thank you for your continued support of the Valley Scholars mission and students.