

This draft is subject to change through robust campus conversation led by vision teams of faculty, staff, and students. Teams will refine strategies and metrics, identify resources, and determine viability. Last Updated: January 2026

JMU 2040 Draft Vision

By 2040, James Madison University will be nationally recognized for creating a new model for higher education. We will redefine the role of the university as the preferred partner, collaborative innovator, and visionary research leader in service to the Shenandoah Valley, the Commonwealth, and the nation. By guaranteeing our graduates have the power skills needed to succeed in society, we will provide an educational experience defined by the value it provides to students and the impact our graduates make on the world.

To achieve this vision, we are establishing the following guidepost goals.* These audacious outcomes will keep us focused on the future as we develop strategies, create new initiatives, and allocate resources:

By 2040, JMU will:

- Set the standard among peer institutions for student success and graduate outcomes, consistently achieving retention rates of at least 95%, four-year graduation rates of 80% or above, and career outcomes of 98% within 12 months of graduating.
- Ensure that all students will participate in a work-based learning experience before graduating.
- Reach a 40% acceptance rate.
- Receive recognition for being #1 in the country for Undergraduate Research Accomplishments.
- Create and expand graduate and professional programs responsive to the Commonwealth's needs and achieve top tier research status, surpassing \$50 million in annual research expenditures and doubling the number of research doctorates awarded annually.
- Receive recognition for being #1 in the country for civic engagement and dialogue.
- Rank in the top 50 nationally among public universities.
- Increase the on-campus housing capacity to at least 60% of the student body.
- Be known as the Commonwealth's preferred partner and a catalyst for regional innovation, collaborating with industry, government, and community organizations to translate discovery into impact. Collaborative ventures will top \$XXX annually (amount TBD).
- Secure \$XX in capital investment.

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- Consistently compete at the highest level of the NCAA, as evidenced by finishing in the top half of athletic programs in the Learfield Director's Cup standings.
- Achieve sustained philanthropic giving exceeding \$50 million annually, expanding scholarships, faculty support, and strategic initiatives.

*These guidepost goals are still in draft form and should not be considered final.

JMU 2030 Strategic Plan Draft Pillars

To realize our 2040 vision, we must begin with steady, strategic progress. The first milestone is our 2030 strategic plan, which outlines the key pillars that will guide our priorities over the next five years. Through targeted strategies and initiatives, we will advance these pillars and lay the foundation for continued momentum toward our bold long-term goals.

1. Enhancing the Value, Purpose, and Impact of a JMU Education through the Madison Promise

Anchored in pathbreaking education, discovery-driven innovation, and real-world application, the Madison Promise is our guarantee that JMU graduates will develop the skills, purpose, and confidence to create the future through learning that meets the changing demands of today and tomorrow. The Madison Promise is a shared commitment between the university and its students, families, employers, and society. It affirms that JMU will provide a dynamic, future-focused education that develops the knowledge, skills, and character graduates need to thrive. Students commit to pursuing academic excellence and personal development, engaging fully in the academic and co-curricular life of the university, and contributing to a community grounded in curiosity, collaboration, and civic responsibility.

- **The Employment Guarantee.** JMU is committed to ensuring that every graduate who fulfills their end of the Madison Promise will achieve a positive career outcome—employment, continued education, volunteer experience, or military service—within one year of graduation. Graduates who have not yet reached that milestone will receive personalized support through career coaching, alumni and employer networking, and access to additional education or internship opportunities at no cost.
- **The Employer Guarantee.** JMU stands behind the career readiness of every graduate. If an employer identifies a gap in a graduate's power skills--oral

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communication, written communication, self-awareness and interpersonal competence, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and the ability to engage in constructive dialogue across difference--within five years of graduation, JMU will provide up to 12 credits of additional JMU coursework and individualized coaching to strengthen those skills at no cost to the graduate or the employer.

- **Power Skill Development:** JMU will embed the development of *power skills*--essential capacities for informed citizenship, collaborative problem-solving, and effective leadership--through all aspects of the JMU experience. All students will develop measurable skills in oral and written communication, self-awareness and interpersonal competence, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and dialogue across divides.
- **Civic Learning for All:** JMU will prepare students for a polarized world where they can engage in constructive dialogue across difference. Through a shared curriculum, which includes constitutional literacy, civic leadership, and civil discourse, we will ensure that all students develop the capacity to listen critically, question with curiosity, consider differing ideas with fairness, and approach difficult conversations with confidence.
- **Information, AI, and Financial Literacy.** JMU will prepare students for a rapidly changing technological and economic landscape by ensuring all graduates can think critically about information, use AI tools creatively, responsibly and ethically, and apply financial literacy to make informed, values-driven decisions in their personal and professional lives.
- **Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE).** JMU will ensure that students can apply their knowledge in professional settings and build professional relationships through Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs). Every JMU student will participate in a Work-Based Learning Experience prior to graduation; WBLEs may include internships, research roles, community projects, student employment, and course-embedded collaborations.
- **Reimagining Campus Student Work.** JMU will reimagine student employment to expand access to meaningful on-campus work that contributes to learning, belonging, and preparation for life after graduation. The university will grow opportunities that help students connect classroom learning with professional and personal development, as well as reimagined scholarship opportunities. Through the expansion of Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs) and the creation of a complementary Work-to-Learn (WTL) program, JMU will build a campus employment model that supports student growth and success. A JMU Work-to-

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Learn program will increase the number of paid on-campus roles for students, prioritize access for students with financial need, and elevate the educational value of student employment by ensuring every student employee benefits from intentional supervision, mentoring, and skill development.

- **Madison Mentors.** All students will participate in a structured mentoring network that provides sustained support and connection with peers, alumni, and professionals from entry through graduation.
- **Community Impact and Problem Solving:** Every first-year student will complete a multi-credit, team-based problem-solving course addressing local and global issues.
- **Value, Access and Affordability.** We strive to deliver an educational experience that provides graduates with an exceptional return on their investment, preparing them for lifelong success and meaningful contributions to society. We are committed to expanding access and affordability for all students.

By 2030, we will make progress towards our vision in the following ways*:

- Set the standard among peer institutions for student success and graduate outcomes, consistently achieving retention rates of at least 92%, four-year graduation rates of 70% or above, and career outcomes of 98% within 12 months of graduating.
- Provide opportunities for all students to participate in a work-based learning experience. Student participation will exceed 80%.
- Achieve sustained philanthropic giving exceeding \$40 million annually by 2030, expanding scholarships, faculty support, and strategic initiatives.
- Guarantee students will have a positive career outcome within 12 months of graduating, or they will be offered free career coaching, networking, or access to internship opportunities and up to 12 credits of additional education at no cost.
- Guarantee to employers of JMU graduates that their JMU grad employees will be proficient in identified power skills, or we will provide up to 12 credits of additional coursework and coaching to the employee for free.

*These metrics are examples and still in development. Values shown here reflect possible targets for consideration.

2. Charting a New Path as a National Research University

JMU will become a preferred research partner and catalyst for innovation throughout the Commonwealth and in select fields of opportunity nationally. To do so, it will create a distinctive, new model for national public universities by accelerating opportunities for

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graduate and undergraduate research, and also expanding focused, impactful scholarly innovation and graduate education. Faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates will collaborate as partners in discovery, linking teaching and research to address pressing challenges and enhance JMU's national reputation for excellence.

- **Build Research Capacity for National Impact.** JMU will invest in research infrastructure and faculty development, strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, and expand partnerships with federal agencies, corporations, and foundations to grow sponsored programs and advance discovery.
- **Undergraduate Research as a Defining Strength.** JMU will build on its strengths in student research by making participation in undergraduate research and creative inquiry a core part of the JMU student experience. The university will expand opportunities for students to engage in research in all disciplines and recognize faculty contributions to this work in hiring, development, and promotion.
- **Advance Graduate Education for National Prominence.** JMU will expand graduate programs in fields of existing research strength and workforce demand. Graduate students will play a central role in the university's research enterprise and mentoring undergraduate researchers.
- **Research Centers of Excellence:** JMU will establish pathbreaking interdisciplinary centers that bring together faculty, students, and external partners to tackle society's most pressing needs in areas such as health innovation, sustainability, cybersecurity, education, and data science. These centers will serve as hubs of collaboration and discovery with regional and national impact.
- **Research to Impact.** JMU will build robust systems to support intellectual property development, licensing, and startup incubation. We will position the university as a driver of innovation with measurable impact in the marketplace and society.

By 2030, we will make progress towards our vision in the following ways*:

- Receive recognition for being a top institution for Undergraduate Research Accomplishments.
- Create and expand graduate and professional programs responsive to the Commonwealth's needs and achieve top tier research status, surpassing \$35 million in annual research expenditures and increasing by 50% the number of research doctorates awarded annually.

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3. Fostering Partnerships to Meet the Needs of the Shenandoah Valley, Commonwealth, and the Nation.

JMU will be the Commonwealth's most trusted, responsive, innovative, and preferred university partner, linking students and faculty with industry, government, and nonprofit collaborators to translate discovery into real-world solutions that fuel discovery, entrepreneurship, and economic development in and beyond the Shenandoah Valley. Through collaborative partnerships, JMU will position Virginia as a national leader.

- **Creating and Strengthening Regional Talent Pipelines.** JMU will expand and create academic programs and partnerships that prepare our students—undergraduate and graduate—to serve the Commonwealth and the region's workforce demands. The university will collaborate with industry, nonprofit, and government sectors on customized workforce-development initiatives, develop stackable credentials and certificates aligned with industry needs, and scale lifelong learning opportunities for alumni and the broader Virginia community.
- **Committing to Place-Based Initiatives.** JMU will contribute to our regional economy by accelerating strengths in interprofessional training, community engagement, and service delivery across the Commonwealth and beyond. Areas will include rural health, light manufacturing, education, and agricultural sectors.
- **Regional Commercialization Network.** JMU will lead a Shenandoah Valley commercialization and entrepreneurship network, convening schools, businesses, medical systems, and community organizations to turn discoveries into new businesses, quality jobs, and community impact while attracting investment to the region.

By 2030, we will make progress towards our vision in the following ways*:

- Be known as the Commonwealth's preferred partner and a catalyst for regional innovation, collaborating with industry, government, and community organizations to translate discovery into impact. Collaborative ventures will top \$XXX annually (amount TBD).

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4. Creating an Innovative Campus Community

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To support our vision for next-generation learning, research and partnership experiences, JMU will transform its physical environment to be sustainability-focused and deeply integrated with its community. The campus of the future isn't just a place of learning; it is an anchor and hub for cultural, educational, and economic collaboration that will bring in revenue to allow for further investment in our academic mission.

- **Design a New Campus Commons.** JMU will transform the neighborhood on the east side of Bridgeforth Stadium into the new center of campus: a vibrant hub that unites learning, living, and community engagement. The redevelopment will include a new student union, student housing, and mixed-use spaces that stimulate local economic growth and enhance campus life.
- **Create a University-Community Innovation District:** JMU will reimagine the relationship between campus and community through mixed-use development on and near campus that brings together corporate research, student and community housing, and other community-facing amenities.
- **Maximize Facility & Stadium Utilization.** JMU will serve as an anchor for the region's cultural, recreational, industry, and athletic events by hosting concerts, tournaments, and conferences in campus venues. The university will expand youth camps and corporate retreats and partner with regional tourism to drive year-round events and community engagement.
- **Create Integrated Academic and Residential Spaces.** JMU will design and construct modern, flexible learning and living environments that foster collaboration, creativity, and engagement. New facilities will intentionally connect academic, residential, and community life, integrating classrooms, research labs, and living-learning communities with spaces that invite partnership with industry, government, and nonprofit collaborators. These spaces will bring to life the university's vision for an integrated academic community that connects living, learning, research, and collaboration.

By 2030, we will make progress towards our vision in the following ways*:

- Secure \$XX in capital investment
- Increase the on-campus housing capacity to at least 35% of the student body
- Complete the renovation of Johnston Hall
- Complete the expansion of the College of Health and Behavioral Studies

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Call to Action: Aligning Mission and Investment

JMU will align mission and investment to prepare our students to be educated and enlightened citizens leading productive and meaningful lives. JMU's rise in national prominence will be powered by a comprehensive effort to attract and secure transformative investment in the university. To accomplish our vision, we will actively engage state and federal partners, philanthropic supporters—including alumni, parents, and friends—as well as public and private foundations, corporations, and individual investors. This is an open invitation to join us in shaping the future of higher education through shared vision and commitment. Together, we will build a university that leads with purpose, innovation, and public impact.