# THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

# THE VISITORS OF JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

## Minutes of the Academic Excellence Committee

The Academic Excellence Committee met on Thursday, September 18, 2025, in the Highlands Room of the Festival Conference and Student Center at James Madison University. Nicole Palya Wood, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

### Present:

Bolander, Jeff

Galati, Tom

Mauck, Joely

White, Jack

Wood, Nicole Palya

### Others:

Baron, Kenn, Professor, Psychology

Buswell, Katherine, Psychology major; Criminal Justice minor

Kolvoord, Bob, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

L’Esperance, Mark, Dean, College of Education

Lovell, Sharon, Dean, College of Health and Behavioral Studies

Maxwell, Paula, Associate Vice Provost for Curriculum

Prins, Sam, Dean, College of Science and Mathematics

Sarco, Misha, Geology Major, Environmental Engineering concentration

Scherpereel, John, Professor, Political Science

Schreuders, Alida, Master of Public Administration program, International Stabilization and Recovery concentration

St. John, Kristen, Professor, Geology and Environmental Science

Zimmerman, Traci, Dean, College of Arts and Letters

#### Approval of Minutes

On motion by Tom Galati and seconded by Jeff Bolander, the Academic Excellence Committee minutes of April 10, 2025, were approved.

#### Academic Affairs Divisional Update

Provost Bob Kolvoord began his remarks by acknowledging the recent passing of Ben Delp, a long-time colleague who will be greatly missed. The provost then delivered a divisional update, including the completion status of the five major goals for the previous academic year. Highlights include increased shared governance; the collaborative creation of an Academic Affairs R2 statement; and progression to the next stage of re-imagining the core curriculum.

**Academic Affairs Priorities and Six-Year Plan Academic Initiatives**

The provost articulated the division’s six goals for the academic year. They include moving to the next phases of multiple projects, including advancement of the general education reform, integration of AI across the curriculum, and advancement of Reengineering Madison. Other key focus areas include shared governance and strategic planning, as well as building on the Okanagan charter. Provost Kolvoord shared the Academic Affairs components of the university’s six-year plan. He detailed the academic initiatives included in the plan presented in Richmond to the Op-Six, the budget details of which were presented to the Audit and Physical Development committee. Top priorities include continuing to meet the Commonwealth’s workforce needs through stellar academic programs and promoting student, faculty, and staff success. He also explained the need for expansion of the College of Health and Behavioral Studies building to accommodate our thriving health care programs. The review concluded with a preview of curricular changes anticipated in the next few years, which includes creating new programs to meet growing needs and closing programs to reflect changing demand.

**Faculty and Student Research Vignettes**

Provost Kolvoord moderated a panel featuring three student and faculty pairs on their collaborative research. Students delivered project lightning talks, highlighting how they gained workplace experience through hands-on research. The provost moderated a panel in which each student shared what surprised them about their research experience, and the faculty members discussed the value of engaging students in scholarly work. The panel concluded with questions from the committee.

**Research Roundtable with the Deans**

Dr. Mark L’Esperance, Dean of the College of Education; Dr. Sharon Lovell, Dean of the College of Health and Behavioral Studies; Dr. Sam Prins, Dean of the College of Science and Mathematics; and Dr. Traci Zimmerman, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, participated in a high-level roundtable discussion centered on research, scholarship, and creative activity. Each dean shared insights into how these efforts are reflected within their respective colleges and various disciplines; emphasized the value of research for faculty and students; highlighted anticipated research opportunities; and addressed specific challenges the colleges face. The panel concluded with questions from the committee.

**Curriculum Updates**

Dr. Paula Maxwell, Associate Vice Provost for Curriculum, presented two curriculum proposals for committee approval.

The first was a new graduate degree program, the Master of Education in Transition Services in Special Education. This program will enhance the skills of educators to fill emerging jobs focused on transition planning and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Upon completion, graduates will be equipped to pursue employment as transition coordinators or equivalent positions and will meet the eligibility requirements to receive the DCDT Transition Specialist Certification. The committee heard details on the program’s employment demand, duplication, relationship to existing degree programs, return on investment, and resources. Pending board and SCHEV approval, the degree would launch in Fall 2026. The program would be self-sustaining; no new resources would be required.

On motion by Tom Galati and seconded by Jeff Bolander, the committee unanimously approved the new Master of Education in Transition Services in Special Education degree program.

The second proposal was to establish a new graduate certificate program in Data Science. This program would provide graduate-level training in data science to supplement students’ disciplinary knowledge in physical, biological, and social sciences, which will equip them with technical competencies crucial for data-driven industries. The committee heard details on the program’s employment demand, duplication, and resources. Pending board and SCHEV approval, the certificate would launch in Fall 2026. The program would be self-sustaining; no new resources would be required.

On a motion by Tom Galati and seconded by Jeff Bolander, the committee unanimously approved the new Graduate Certificate Program in Data Science.

There being no further business, on the motion of Tom Galati and seconded by Jeff Bolander, the Academic Excellence Committee meeting adjourned at 2:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Palya Wood, Chair

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David Kirkpatrick, Secretary to the Board