

Shared Governance at James Madison University

Statement of Mutual Understanding

Shared governance is a form of governance in higher education through which core institutional stakeholders—primarily administrative leadership, faculty, and governing boards—work together to make decisions that impact the institution. Facilitated by structures and processes, shared governance ensures that those with the most relevant expertise have a primary decision-making role in their respective areas.

Shared governance and academic freedom are inextricably linked and essential for fulfilling JMU's academic mission. Bound by the norms of honesty, integrity, and responsibility, academic freedom is the principle that scholars and educators can teach, research, and express ideas related to their scholarly expertise without censorship or fear of retribution. Academic freedom also protects the right of a faculty member to speak freely when participating in institutional governance, as well as to speak freely as a citizen.¹ Shared governance at JMU rests on a commitment to transparent and meaningful collaboration in a framework of academic freedom.

Stakeholder Responsibilities

In the context of shared governance, faculty, administrators, and board members have the following primary responsibilities.

- **Administrative Leadership:** setting and carrying out institutional vision, overseeing financial health and viability, and leading strategic planning.
- **Faculty:** establishing and maintaining academic quality and responsibility, including teaching, curriculum, scholarship and creative inquiry, and setting and upholding standards in their disciplines.
- **Governing Board:** hiring/supervising the president, fiduciary oversight, and accountability for fulfilling institutional mission.

Indicators of Shared Governance

Shared governance can be assessed as healthy and successful when the following norms and practices are present.

- Collaboration and shared responsibility among administrators, faculty, and governing board members.
- Open, clear, and consistent communication across all relevant groups.
- Efforts that demonstrate good faith in advancing the university's academic mission and core values.
- A commitment to fostering a culture of trust, mutual respect, and accountability within the JMU community.

¹ In its 1940 statement of Academic Freedom, the AAUP advises that when faculty speak as citizens, "their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution."

- Accessible information that supports transparency in decision-making processes.
- Inclusive practices that engage administrators, faculty members, staff, and students.
- A shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, especially related to stakeholder dominance, primacy, and joint authority.
- A commitment to enriching decision-making by seeking input from a broad range of JMU community members.