

Institutional Peers Task Force Final Report

Spring 2024

Membership

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Charge: The work of the Institutional Peers Task Force is to advance the university's ability to make data-informed institutional improvements across campus by identifying National University/R-2 peer groups across a variety of areas including but not limited to research, academics, compensation and athletics. The work of this task force provides JMU with tools to support university efforts to adapt to the changing needs of the Commonwealth and our students and will contribute to the establishment of our distinctive identity within the National University/R-2 community.

Final Report

The Institutional Peer Task Force (IPTF) has successfully completed its work, culminating in this final report that encapsulates their dedicated efforts. We commend the committee members for their unwavering commitment over the past two years and the thoughtful outcomes they have produced.

The overarching goal of the task force was to establish a robust process for identifying purpose-driven peer institutions. Subsequently, this process would be used to compile a peer institution list for James Madison University (JMU) as a proof of concept. Looking ahead, other divisions or stakeholders with distinct purposes for their peer groups may follow similar procedures, albeit with tailored subsets of the listed variables and potentially different weighting schemes.

Toolkit development

During the Fall 2023 semester, a subgroup within the IPTF diligently developed a purpose-driven toolkit. Drawing insights from best practices at other institutions, they crafted a process to identify a purpose-driven institutional peer group. Going forward, this toolkit will be collaboratively implemented with Planning, Analytics, and Institutional Research (PAIR) and made available to university stakeholders going forward.

Implementing the Toolkit

To determine the most relevant variables for selecting peer institutions, the IPTF distributed a list of key factors to the President's Cabinet, Academic Council, the Compensation Advisory Council divisional leadership, and the Faculty Senate Steering Committee. Almost 60 stakeholders provided feedback on the critical variables to consider during the peer institution selection process. After the survey, the following nine variables were deemed essential:

1. Graduation Rate
2. Instructional Faculty Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)
3. Percentage of Full-Time Instructional Faculty
4. Total Enrollment (Headcount)
5. Percentage of Full-Time Students
6. Percentage of Undergraduate Students
7. Public Funding per FTE
8. Research Expenditures
9. Percentage of Pell Grant Recipients

Furthermore, the IPTF sought input from the same stakeholders regarding the relative weights assigned to these variables when determining our peer institutions.

The task force analyzed two sets of lists: one with weights applied to the variables and another where all variables were equally weighted. Remarkably, the ten institutions most similar to JMU remained consistent across both scenarios. These institutions are as follows:

1. Appalachian State University
2. Miami University-Oxford
3. California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo
4. Illinois State University
5. Grand Valley State University
6. Western Washington University
7. University of Oregon
8. West Chester University of Pennsylvania
9. University of Rhode Island
10. Towson University

This list was shared with Academic Council and Division Heads. Both groups showed support for this peer group as a reflection of institutions that are comparable to JMU on the specific variables. As we discuss JMU as a student-centered research university, it is noteworthy that the above list contains a mix of R1, R2, and large Master granting institutions.