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**THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
THE VISITORS OF JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY**

**Minutes of the Academic Excellence Committee**

The Academic Excellence Committee met on Thursday, November 7, 2024, in the Highlands Room of the Festival Conference and Student Center at James Madison University. At 1:00 p.m., the meeting was called to order. Jack White, chairing in place of Nicole Palya Wood, offered a welcome and expression of sympathy to Nicole’s family in her absence. He also expressed gratitude for the work being done by the division to respond to questions being asked by the board.

**Present:**

Bell, Dickie	Galati, Tom
Bolander, Jeff	White, Jack

**Others:**

Hadley, Donica, Executive Director, Lab School for Innovation and Career Exploration  
Haynes, Miles, International Affairs major, Class of 2026  
King, Charlie, Interim President  
Kolvoord, Bob, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs  
L’Esperance, Mark, Dean, College of Education  
Petrecca, Devon, Economics major, Class of 2024  
Rubi, Sofia, Biology major, Class of 2027  
Ryan, Nais, History major, Class of 2025  
Taylor, Amy, Director, Young Children’s Program  
Thelk, Amy, Associate Dean, College of Education  
Westley, Libby, Director, University Career Center  
Whitmeyer, Steve, Associate Dean, College of Science and Mathematics  
Zhou, JY, Executive Director, Center for Global Engagement

**Approval of Minutes**

On motion by Jeff Bolander and seconded by Tom Galati, the Academic Excellence Committee minutes of September 12, 2024, were approved.

**Academic Affairs Divisional Update**

After welcoming the committee and extending the division’s sympathies to Wood’s family, Provost Kolvoord delivered the divisional update. Committee members heard about the decennial Furious Flower Poetry Conference, held in September. He also provided information on a new collaboration with Alamein International University in Egypt. Through this exchange agreement, students can earn a dual-degree in Information Technology by taking courses at both universities.

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Provost Kolvoord provided a framework for the rest of this meeting, and committee meetings going forward. The underlying theme for the year will be highlighting academic preparation for future career opportunities. This will allow Academic Affairs to receive valuable feedback from board members directly related to students' futures.

### **College of Education Initiatives: Lab School and Young Children's Program**

Dean Mark L'Esperance introduced two key College of Education initiatives. Executive Director of the Lab School for Innovation and Career Exploration, Dr. Donica Hadley, gave an overview of the school's initial year. There are currently 100 ninth-grade students from two high schools in Rockingham County enrolled. For Year 2, they are projected to enroll 300 total students, with additional ninth and tenth grade students from the other two Rockingham County high schools. The primary goals for the lab school are, first, to "become the premier innovation hub for research and development in teaching, learning, and leadership," and second, to "maximize all students' potential academic and social growth." The committee was asked for their feedback in establishing apprenticeships and internships that leverage public and private resources statewide. Suggestions included making connections with state agencies and local governments, leveraging board member connections with employers, and contacting private industries and chambers of commerce in the area.

Young Children's Program (YCP) Director Amy Taylor and College of Education Associate Dean Amy Thelk shared information on the existing program and future plans. The YCP, housed in Anthony-Seeger Hall, currently serves 94 students aged 2-5 years old, with a mix of students that are children of JMU employees and students, and children from the larger community. There is a long waiting list for the program. The Young Children's Laboratory School at Memorial Hall is scheduled to open Fall 2025, with capacity of 120 students ages six weeks-24 months. The staff will conduct research projects in collaboration with the JMU Center for Advancement Research in Education. YCP at Anthony-Seeger will remain open with capacity for 50 students. In addition, COE plans to add capacity for child minding, which is hourly, drop-in childcare limited to three-hour sessions per Virginia regulations and provides a more flexible option especially convenient for students who are parents. The committee was asked for their thoughts regarding challenges and opportunities they are likely to encounter as YCP doubles its capacity.

### **Work-Based Learning**

Co-chairs of the cross-divisional Work-based Learning Experience (WBLE) Committee Libby Westley, Director of the University Career Center, and Dr. Steven Whitmeyer, Associate Dean of the College of Science and Mathematics, provided a status update on work-based learning experiences at JMU. The committee's priority is working closely with partners inside the institution and across the region to generate opportunities for student work-based learning opportunities while meeting workforce needs.

Between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024, students had access to apply for 31,167 internships through Handshake—3,204 of those in Virginia – through 4,938 employers. They asked the committee's feedback on proposed future initiatives, particularly related to enhancing collaborations with industry that will increase WBLE opportunities. Responses from the committee included expanding involvement with alumni and looking beyond the local area for placements.



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### **Internships Abroad Panel**

Dr. JY Zhou, Executive Director of the Center for Global Engagement, briefed the committee on JMU's international internship program, highlighting current successes and outlining future goals for expanding the program. The student panel featured four undergraduate students majoring in Economics, International Affairs, History, and Biology who shared their experiences interning in Germany, Ghana, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The students focused on how they applied their academic knowledge in professional settings abroad and the benefits they identified as resulting from their cultural immersion. They also reflected on how these experiences influenced their career aspirations. Dr. Zhou then presented the program's future objectives and invited committee input related to anticipated implementation challenges, which include increasing student access, expanding partnerships, and broadening internship opportunities across various industries and locations. The committee inquired as to the type of resources that were needed – staff or scholarships – and asked about student success metrics. They also encouraged more promotion of the opportunity so students would be aware of the option.

### **Topics of Interest for Future Meetings**

The committee discussed topics they would like to cover at future meetings. Suggestions included AI, entrepreneurial programming, and academic support for struggling students. In addition, questions were raised about how JMU, particularly CHBS, can contribute to the good of the commonwealth.

There being no further business, on the motion of Jeff Bolander and seconded by Tom Galati, the Academic Excellence Committee meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jack White, Chair for Nicole Palya Wood

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David Kirkpatrick, Secretary to the Board