

**JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY  
POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT ALUMNI BOARD**

**Annual Report 2019-2020**

November 2020

Dear Alumni, Students, Faculty and Friends:

On behalf of the Political Science Alumni Board, I am pleased to share this (albeit belated) report summarizing the major programming, fundraising and operational activities of the Board over the past academic year.

The 2019-2020 academic year was certainly unlike any other. In past years, the Board primarily worked to refine and improve on a core set of events related to the functions of our three substantive committees: student outreach, alumni engagement, and fundraising. This year, however, the Board had to be responsive, innovative, and engaged amidst change and shocks at the university and national levels. At the beginning of the 2019 school year, a shortfall in freshmen matriculation prompted the university, department, and alumni to develop initiatives to attract the best students amidst declining demographic trends of high school graduates. The COVID-19 global pandemic disrupted in person events during the spring 2020 semester and delayed the university's 2020 Giving Day. Seniors also graduated into the worst recession since the Great Depression and sought out job preparation and advice from alumni. Shortly after, unrest over systemic racism and racial inequality caused employers, universities, and individuals to reflect and examine on ways to promote a more inclusive society. The Board was not insulated from any of these effects and strived to respond to each challenge.

-Sincerely,

Sean Lowry (INTA 2010), President

## Student Outreach (Chair: Jason Goodfriend)

The Board held two events on campus: our flagship, Alumni Day event on November 11, 2019 (Veteran's Day) and Mock Interview Day on February 17, 2020 (Presidents' Day). Our fall Alumni Day programming included: individual resume review sessions in the morning, an informal lunch networking event in the D-Hall food court, an afternoon alumni panel, and a student-alumni networking reception.



*Photos from Alumni Day 2019*

The spring semester Mock Interview Day was targeted to graduating seniors and upperclassmen to prepare them for job and internship interviews. Approximately 28 students signed up for interviews scheduled throughout the day. Participants were given mock position descriptions and were asked to role play.

Thanks to the initiative of two senior POSC majors and Student Government Association (SGA) leaders, several members of the Board also participated in a virtual career advice panel on April 8, 2020. The panel, "Launching a Career in Troubled Times," featured Board speakers that graduated during the Great Recession or assisted students as they entered the workforce.

## Alumni Engagement

(Chair: Judith Russo)

On October 17, 2019, the Board co-hosted an event that was part of the JMU Washington Center Public Affairs Roundtable Series featuring Walter Shaub (BA '93). Mr. Shaub is senior director of ethics for the Campaign Legal Center. He joined the center in 2017 after resigning from the Office of Government Ethics, where he had served as director since 2013. The event, titled *Restoring Government Ethics: Challenges and Opportunities*, was conducted in a conversational format moderated by Dr. Bill Hawk, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of JMU's Ethical Reasoning in Action Initiative. The conversation focused ethical reasoning that might come up in everyday situations in a public affair workplace, as well as controversial issues of ethics stripped from the headlines. Student participants in the JMU Washington Semester as well as local alumni were in attendance.



*Photo credits: Amy Joseph (JMU)*

On December 10, 2019, the Board also held its annual, early career event: Next Steps: Strategies to Advance your Career from Fellow Dukes. This event, held at the JMU Washington Center, used a speed networking format where five or six tables were led by one or two experienced JMU alumni assigned to focus on a specific topic such as “Getting the most out of networking events” and “Tips for a successful meeting.”

## **Fundraising**

(Chair: Susan Atkinson)

The Board closed in on a major fundraising milestone during its end-of-the-year fundraising campaign during the last months of 2019. Approximately \$9,697 was pledged or received from 24 individual donors, not including \$2,000 in corporate matches. (For comparison, the 2018 challenge raised approximately \$9,613 from 31 donors.) These contributions enabled the JMU Washington Semester Endowment Fund to surpass the \$100,000 level.

This achievement is a testament to the Board's fundraising strategy and efforts. Upon launching the Washington Semester Scholarship just a few years ago, the Board initially focused its fundraising efforts on contributions to the Washington Semester Expendable Account, enabling the Department to immediately begin issuing scholarships to Washington Semester applicants with financial need. After building up the balance in the Expendable Account, the Board switched over to the Endowment---looking to plant the seeds to spin off financial awards in perpetuity. (Approximately \$108,000 is needed to eventually spin off a \$4,300 scholarship capable of offsetting the extra program costs of the Washington Center for a student with financial need.) In other words, the Board has raised much more than just \$100,000 for Washington Semester scholarships over the years.

JMU's university-wide 2020 Giving Day event was cancelled in the spring due to the economic effects of COVID-19. As a result, the Board and the Department lost an opportunity to add to the Washington Semester Endowment Fund account balance.

### **New Initiatives: Freshmen Recruitment and Racial Inclusion**

In support of the University's broader efforts to improve matriculation rates and attract the most promising high school graduates, the Board supported the Department's freshmen recruitment efforts. Board members personally wrote postcards congratulating to hundreds of applicants that were admitted to JMU and showed an interest in one of the Department's majors. Members of the Board also spoke at on campus CHOICES events for admitted students and their families and distributed a one-pager about the Board.

The Board also responded to the nationwide calls for racial justice by drafting and approving a letter to President Alger. The letter called for concrete university actions to address institutional racism and inequality at JMU. The Board was one of the first alumni organizations to write such a letter to Office of the President. The letter also detailed several steps that the Board planned to take to increase its diversity and promote more inclusion of Black members of the Department's alumni base. Furthermore, the Board voted to add its name as one of the first alumni organization supporters in favor of an SGA Bill of Opinion to rename certain buildings on campus (Maury, Jackson, and Ashby Halls). Both items are included at the end of this annual report.

**Nominations**  
(Chair: Ashley Burgess)

The Board amended its bylaws to expand the number of Members from 15 to 17 and clarified that “alumni of the Department” includes minors. The Board made these changes partly to help spread the work of many of its events and activities across more hands, and partly to enable the Board to attract and recruit more diverse members. After making these changes, the Board shared its call for nominations with other JMU alumni groups (e.g., JMU Alumni Association, Black Alumni Chapter). Ultimately, the nominations Committee presented five new candidates for the Board’s approval. Three of the candidates filled vacancies created by members cycling off while the other two represented a net increase in the size of the Board.

**JMU Alumni Board Members 2019-2020**

Ashley Burgess, Past President  
Sean Lowry, President  
Jamie Lockhart, Vice President/President-Elect  
Caitlin Havron, Communication Director

Austin Adams  
Meagan Allen  
Susan Atkinson  
Greg Bahou  
Robert George  
Jason Goodfriend  
Kirsten Kazlauskas  
Ronny Lau  
Jamie Jones Miller  
Judith Russo  
Georgette Sierra

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On June 10, 2020, the voting members of JMU Department of Political Science Alumni Board ("the Board") approved two actions:

- The following letter, delivered via email to JMU President Jonathan Alger and JMU leadership.
- A request submitted to the JMU Student Government Association (SGA) to add the Board as a supporter of the [Bill of Opinion](#) Renaming Campus Buildings (Ashby, Maury, and Jackson Halls).

June 10, 2020

Jonathan Alger  
President, James Madison University

Dear President Alger,

The Department of Political Science Alumni Board, like many extensions of the JMU community, devoted significant time last week to develop actions it will take to address the detrimental effects of systemic racism on Black Americans. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, the Board held its last quarterly meeting of its annual cycle. During this meeting, the voting alumni members of the Board (as well as non-voting faculty, administrators, and students) focused largely on racial injustice and antiracist strategies. We voiced our sympathy and support for the national movement that emerged in the wake of George Floyd's killing at the hands of police, and the killings of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. We also expressed our frustrations openly with racial inequality in various forms at JMU. This conversation was far from comfortable, as it exposed some inconvenient truths about our own shortcomings in developing a diverse and inclusive Board.

We would like to share with you the list of actions items that the Board generated in response:

- **Recruitment:** We are purposefully seeking out and encouraging highly qualified Black candidates and people of color to apply for the Board. In addition to our calls for applications via email and social media, each current member of the Board has been encouraged to reach out individually to potential candidates. Our call for applications has also been received by the President of the JMU Black Alumni Chapter, for distribution to the Chapter's members.
- **Programs:** We will be more purposeful in recruiting Black and diverse volunteers to participate in our events. We will also organize events that inform students about career pathways in social justice and feature speakers who can serve as role models for Black professionals in public affairs.
- **Fundraising:** We are working with the Department to review criteria for Board-supported scholarships, such as the Washington Semester Scholarship and any future fundraising campaigns. In addition to financial need, evaluation of applications for these high-demand scholarships could also take into account other factors, such as the promotion of diversity and students that intern with organizations that promote social justice.
- **Partnerships:** We will engage in partnerships to produce programs and events with a racial equity and inclusion lens and which are led by diverse alumni and student groups. We will also build partnerships with faculty and centers at JMU that promote civic engagement and an open forum on some of the most difficult issues in civil society, such as systemic racism in America.

We are detailing these initiatives so that we can be held publicly accountable for following through on them. We also hope they can serve as a starting point for reflection and dialogue for other alumni organizations and for the university itself.

Similarly, we urge you to use your position as President to address institutional racism and inequality at JMU. University structures, procedures, and programs should be reviewed for both explicit and implicit racial bias against Black people. JMU is known as a place where people hold doors open for one another. However, we all know that despite this branding, JMU has not taken sufficient actions to intentionally welcome Black students, faculty, and staff through its doors. We, as an active arm of the JMU alumni network, hope to see these words turn into genuine strategies that deliver actual results and are sustained over time:

- **Genuine:** In that they are sincere and are driven by the input and active participation of Black students, faculty and staff, and alumni.
- **Actual:** In that they result in systemic and institutional changes and composition of the JMU community, and do not serve merely in token amounts. This is particularly the case with Black representation on campus, a goal that can often become diluted among broader calls for “diversity.”
- **Sustained:** In that they are not merely recommendations from the top or confined within the responsibilities of a single corner of the university’s organization chart. Instead, they should be implemented on the ground, university wide, and assessed and reevaluated for their effectiveness.

We believe that such an approach is essential for an inclusive community at JMU. And only an inclusive community will truly be capable of “preparing students to be educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives” in this age.

Sincerely,

The Members of the JMU Department of Political Science Alumni Board