



Minority Programmers
Association

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MPA's Response/Actions for Campus Inclusivity/Diversity

To: diversity@jmu.edu

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Subject: Response to Building Renamings With Sustained Solutions for JMU Diversity

Dear JMU,

We appreciate that the JMU administration is starting to take steps to tackle systemic inequality within its educational system, however, we feel that this is a result of public outcry rather than an internal yearning to make a change. As a result of this sentiment, we believe JMU must make drastic changes to combat this or in addition to dealing with a pandemic, our campus will be strife with racial tensions, radicalization, and civil unrest this coming fall semester.

Education Is the key to upward mobility. It is the gateway for all marginalized people to build generation wealth and we are strong believers that any limitations to its access is a direct attack on the future of all of our minority populations. Changing the names of confederate buildings is not enough, in fact, it may be interpreted as JMU trying to wash away its racist history without making substantive strides to tackle inequality in the institution's foundations. The fact that we have to even ask and this has not already been changed is a sign that we cannot trust this institution. The fact that we are even naming any building to white families who give the school money best depicts JMU's true intentions. The ISAT building isn't the Lee Building of Science, it is the Integrated Science & Technology building because that is what is going on in that building. We cannot keep naming buildings after people who we will eventually find acted in a way that our future Dukes deem as socially unacceptable. It is clear that BUILDINGS DO NOT CHANGE THE OVERALL CONDITIONS OF OUR PEOPLE.

What we need is investment in diverse faculty, staff, and students, coupled with building a sense of community that attracts the brightest minds in all of our communities regardless of race. In 2050, caucasians will eventually be the minority and we would hate to establish a system that makes them feel the same way we do today. We do not standby exclusion of any type.

So what are some measures as a community we can take in order to combat this? We have developed a brief list of actions JMU can take today. Although there are many measures excluded, and many solutions we can only develop through trial/error, sustained dialogue, and further research, we believe the following concerns are both reasonable and attainable.



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Actions JMU Can Take Today for More Inclusive/Diverse Community

- Diversifying College's Administrative Councils with Racial/Ethnic Minorities
 - [College of Business Board of Advisors](#) (entirely white)
 - [Finance Executive Advisory Board](#) (entirely white)
 - [JMU Alumni Association Board of Directors](#)
 - Currently only 2 African Americans on the Board and no other minorities
 - [CISE Executive Advisory Council](#)
 - Currently [David Lee](#) is only racial minority and [David Chipman has sadly passed away on March 17](#)
- Funding for a Minority Programmers open lab/TA Hours For all students to gain assistance with programming problems
 - Currently no assistance for ISAT, COB, Engineering, Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics majors for their programming problems, only in Computer Science Open Lab Hours
 - Hiring of Team of 10 Part-Time Minority Programmers Teaching Assistants
 - M-Thurs 5-11PM, Friday 5-9PM, Saturday 12-5pm, Sunday 12-11PM (44 Weekly Hours * (\$8-\$10 HR RATE) * 2 - 3 TA's Per Shift ~= \$1000 Weekly for Staffing
 - In Existing ISAT/CS Building Computer Lab (No Additional Cost Maintenance Costs)
- A Student Representative on **ALL** of the following Colleges' Diversity Councils
 - [College of Business Diversity Council](#)
 - [College of Arts & Letters Diversity Council](#)
 - [College of Science and Mathematics Diversity Council](#)
 - [College of Integrated Science and Engineering Diversity Council](#)
 - [College of Health & Behavioral Studies Diversity Council](#)
 - [Provost's Faculty Diversity Council](#)
- A Minority Programmer Student Representative on [Task Force on Inclusion](#)
- An introductory programming course within the [Rockingham-Harrisonburg Regional Jail](#) or [Augusta Correctional Center](#)
 - Teaming up with Last Mile, [Valley Justice Coalition](#), [Minority Programmers Association](#), JMU CS Department, and Captain Wiemer to institute this program
- Student Review Process for School Resource Officer and Other University Police Department Officials facilitated by D.E.E.P Impact with Coalition of [CMSS](#) Umbrella Organizations
- A Racial Evaluation of the Disciplinary Measures of OSARP, Honor Council, ORL, and Title IX

The Minority Programmers Association is an international network of professionals and students using STEM to unify programmers from all backgrounds to develop humanitarian solutions. With our origins in James Madison University we highly value that our founding institution reflects the diversity of our global network. We are a grassroots organization and we hope the JMU administration understands the passion behind our requests.



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From,
The [Minority Programmers](#) Community



JMU's Original Email To Student Population

Dear JMU Community,

In the days since the killing of George Floyd, as well as the earlier killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and all those whose names must not be forgotten, much has happened in the world since our last message to the University community on this subject. Issues of systemic racism that have long plagued our nation, and in particular laws and practices that have suppressed the rights of Black Americans, are at the forefront of national and international attention. Members of the JMU community have actively participated in discussions and actions near and far, insisting that real change and reform are needed and reminding us of the hard work ahead for us all. During these extraordinary times, we want to acknowledge the stress, pain, anger and overall burden within our Black community and our overall stress as a JMU community as well. Along with other institutions in society, it has been and will continue to be our responsibility and commitment to address disparities within our community moving forward.

Your Input

This tumultuous and difficult moment requires a combination of deep listening, thoughtful discourse, and most of all action. For these reasons, and in keeping with our mission as an institution of higher education, we have sought to create opportunities for members of our community to have their voices heard, to listen and learn, to offer tangible ideas, and to help us find ways to work together on solutions to the serious challenges we face. If you have specific ideas and recommendations about educational programs or other initiatives, please email them to diversity@jmu.edu.

Teaching and Learning

We have held several virtual town hall meetings and other online discussions for faculty, staff, students, community members and other constituents, and are grateful to the hundreds of people who have already participated. These virtual events have provided an opportunity for individuals to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns about these issues, and to offer suggestions for concrete steps JMU can take going forward. The Center for Civic Engagement recently hosted a [virtual conversation](#) with the police chiefs from Harrisonburg and JMU to



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discuss rethinking policing and building community trust. Forums have also been hosted for faculty and staff, as well as students, to voice their thoughts on racial inequity.

Working Toward Equity

These are not new topics or concerns at JMU, and we are approaching them in a systematic and multi-faceted way to effect real, long-lasting change. We are building on the work of the Diversity Task Force, and the subsequent [Task Force on Inclusion](#), that analyzed many aspects of University life and that provided a far-reaching set of recommendations to improve our institution.

The Task Force on Inclusion, for example, examined classroom inclusivity, student campus climate, employee climate, and the University's history and context. We are moving forward with preparations for a campus-wide climate study, and have also taken steps such as amending faculty searches to ensure diverse candidate pools, developing opportunities for student feedback on classroom inclusivity, and enhancing our Preparing Future Faculty program (directed at helping emerging scholars of color complete their degrees and gain teaching and research experience). These Task Forces and working groups have included students, faculty and staff, and we will continue to seek to ensure that diverse constituencies and voices participate in these endeavors in the future.

Our next steps include continuing to strengthen our internal and external resources and leadership on these issues. For example, in spring 2020 we created the position of Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Student Affairs and plan to fill that position by the fall semester as an exception to the current hiring freeze due to the economic impact of the pandemic on the Commonwealth's budget. We are also developing plans to create a new advisory group on diversity, equity and inclusion that will report to me, and will include student, faculty, staff, community, and alumni representation.

In addition, we are continuing to look at ways in which to incorporate issues of race and equity more thoroughly into the curriculum across the University, possibly including General Education. This week, Academic Affairs announced that it is providing additional funding for our area studies programs that include Africana, African-American and Diaspora Studies; Latin-American, Latinx and Caribbean Studies; and Asian Studies. This commitment includes a permanent, central visible location for the African, African-American, and Diaspora Studies (AAAD) program, and plans to enrich the programming and curriculum.

Campus Building Names

The History and Context working group of the Task Force on Inclusion shared faculty and student [research](#) on the history of our institution, including examination of the history of three buildings on campus that were themselves renamed in the early 20th Century for individuals who fought for the Confederacy -- Jackson, Maury, and Ashby. Many members of our community have raised concerns about the names on these buildings and have called for the removal of these names. The History and Context working group made recommendations about next steps regarding potential removal of these names and of subsequently renaming



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them, starting with Jackson Hall, which is closed for this coming academic year and under renovation. We are actively reviewing this issue, understanding a sense of urgency of action as well as the sensitivity and importance of this subject for many members of our community. Accordingly, we are committed to an educational and inclusive process as we move forward on this issue, in keeping with our mission and our values. **We invite you to share your thoughts on this topic [here](#).** We appreciate your willingness to share your perspectives as part of this process.

We will continue to share updates and communications on these issues in the days and months to come. We're thankful to the countless individuals across campus who have already contributed to the complicated and messy work of self-examination, and recognize there is much hard work ahead. As we seek to do the difficult work of dismantling racism and promoting equity, we must find ways to come together, listen to and learn from one another, and create a more fully inclusive campus. That is not an easy task, but it is part of the high calling of higher education and the JMU spirit of possibility.