



Focus on James Madison University

James Madison University, located in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Mountains, offers a wide array of programs for 20,000 students, 18,000 of whom are undergraduates. The new state-of-the-art science facilities as well as the renovated older buildings are evidence of an infusion of funds into this public university, which distinguishes itself through its focus on undergraduate education and its commitment to providing both a liberal arts foundation and applied learning experiences in which students tackle real-world problems.

Among the most popular course of study are pre-professional programs in the health sciences (including Nursing), Business, Communications, Education, and Music. Also increasingly attractive to students is the relatively new College of Integrated Science and Engineering which offers a six-year-old accredited program in General Engineering as well as Computer Science, Integrated Science and Technology, and Intelligence Analysis (a major that prepares graduates for a variety of fields including business).

Programs across the curriculum are designed with an eye to ensuring that students obtain the skills and knowledge employers and professional schools are seeking. So, for example, the Music Industry concentration is open only to Music majors because experience has shown that a strong foundation in music is generally needed for employment in the music or recording industries; graduates trained in business or technology alone have much more difficulty landing the jobs. Also, JMU students majoring in all the arts are strongly encouraged to participate in weekend workshops the university provides to help them develop entrepreneurial skills.

The school is also proud of its high graduation rates and low costs that resulted in Kiplinger's ranking it number 20 in its 2013 list of "100 Best Values in Public Colleges."

All applicants are admitted directly to the university, and then declare their majors sophomore year. Some majors, like Business and Engineering, are restricted to top students in their pre-requisite courses, and others require an audition or portfolio that students have the opportunity to prepare during their first three semesters at JMU.

By the time they graduate, eighty percent of JMU students have had one or more experience doing research, an internship, or a practicum. The university has no doctoral students, so even first and second year undergraduates have opportunities to do mentored research, many of them using the high-tech laboratory equipment.

The student-to-professor ratio is 16:1, and two-thirds of the classes have fewer than 30 students, so opportunities for close relationships with faculty are more prevalent than in many other schools of this size.

A beautiful brand new Student Support Center has brought together all the support services under one roof in a central location to make it easier for students to access everything from tutoring to counseling to career services. This building also has two eateries and study space where students can eat while they work.

Harrisonburg is quite rural although it is becoming more of a college town with an increasing number of establishments catering to students, but it has long been unusually diverse because it is home to Rosetta Stone and Homeland Security. The surrounding area provides plenty of opportunities for outdoor activities like hiking and apple and pumpkin picking. On campus students enjoy supporting the D-1 sports teams and watching performances by not just their classmates, but also major stars like Bobbie McFerrin and Patti Lupone. Approximately 15% of students choose to go Greek.

Housing on campus is guaranteed freshman year, and approximately one-third of students are living on campus at any given time. The others are primarily in apartments right near by.

The university aims to have 30% of its students from out of state, but since the yield is lower for out-of-state applicants, they are admitted at a higher rate (63% for out-of-state versus 55% for in-state). In evaluating applicants, the admissions office considers the following, listed in the order of their importance: curriculum, grades in core courses (not GPA), test scores, essays, recommendations and activities. Demonstrated interest is not considered. For all admitted students taken together, the median SAT's (Critical Reading and Math only) are 1180 to 1270, and median ACT's are 26 to 28.