



December 10, 2021

Dear President Alger and Provost Coltman,

In September 2021, the JMU Academic Affairs Division under the direction of Provost Coltman announced significant changes made in the faculty hiring protocol at JMU, in the form of the recently promulgated *Academic Affairs Guidelines for Recruiting and Hiring Faculty* (<https://www.jmu.edu/academic-affairs/documents/faculty-hiring-manual.pdf>).

These new guidelines substantially erode the role of faculty in the selection of new faculty colleagues in their departments. Moreover, these guidelines were developed and adopted without proper consultation with the Faculty Senate, whose function, according to the JMU *Faculty Handbook*, is to “represent the faculty in the consideration of all policies that affect the academic climate and direction of the institution or the faculty as a whole.” Despite the fact that departmental instructional faculty are ten-month employees, the guidelines were finalized during the summer and “established” in September 2021.

The American Association of University Professors’ seminal 1966 *Statement on Shared Governance* enunciates the principle that “the faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter, and methods of instruction, research, faculty status” and that “faculty status and related matters are primarily a faculty responsibility; this area includes appointments [and] reappointments.” As the *Statement* continues, “the primary responsibility of the faculty for such matters is based upon the fact that its judgment is central to general educational policy...scholars in a particular field or activity *have the chief competence for judging the work of their colleagues.*” Moreover, as the AAUP affirms in *On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom*, “Scholars in a discipline are acquainted with the discipline from within; ***their views on what students should learn in it, and on which faculty members should be appointed and promoted, are therefore more likely to produce better teaching and research in the discipline than are the views of trustees or administrators.***”

Similarly, the JMU *Faculty Handbook* in III.A.2 identifies “the standards of the academic discipline” as a key parameter for the exercise of academic freedom to teach, research, and publish. It vests responsibility for the decision for offer of appointments -- upon the rendering of due deliberative judgments on candidates on the part of the search committee -- with “the AUH or hiring authority...subject to approval by the dean, the appropriate vice president, the president and the BOV.” It vests responsibility for offers of appointment in deans *only* in the limited case of appointments to AUH positions (*Faculty Handbook* III.C.3).

The recently promulgated guidelines are in direct contravention of AAUP **and** *JMU Faculty Handbook* principles and declarations.

The guidelines explicitly deny to the faculty its right to make competent, nuanced judgments and differentiations among candidates for appointment to faculty positions, and to embody those judgements in our final report to the AUH. The problematic provisions of the new guidelines include but are not limited to: the prohibition on a ranked list of finalists; the prohibition of enumerating strengths and weaknesses; and the ability of the search committee to consult with references. Without any clear rationale, the guidelines instead transfer these prerogatives to the AUH, dean, and the provost, thereby leaving crucial questions about how the final selection of a candidate will be made by those administrators unsettled and ambiguous, thus creating a situation rife with possibilities for abuse. Moreover, while the provost has claimed that rankings by departmental faculty expose the university to legal liability, that claim has not to date been corroborated by the university attorney.

The expertise of faculty lies at the very foundation of research and teaching – i.e., of the university’s primary mission. As both the AAUP and *Faculty Handbook* recognize, departmental faculty are the relevant experts. Shared governance and academic freedom rest on faculty expertise. Together, these core values enjoin explicit recognition that instructional faculty search areas must, once the department is given permission to hire, be determined by departmental instructional faculty; that instructional faculty search committee chairs must be selected by departmental instructional faculty; that instructional faculty search committee members must be selected by departmental instructional faculty; that instructional faculty search finalists must be determined by these search committees without interference; and that instructional faculty finalist candidate rankings be determined by departmental instructional faculty.

Faculty expertise is the foundation of research and teaching. So, faculty expertise lies at the bedrock of the university. Any hiring guidelines that undermine faculty expertise, therefore, undermine the bedrock values of the university. But this is precisely what the new guidelines do.

Given the dubious process by which they were constructed and adopted, their content, and their consequent contravention of longstanding normative principles of academic freedom, transparency, shared governance, and disciplinary competence, affirmed by the AAUP (and *JMU Faculty Handbook*), the *2021 Academic Affairs Guidelines for Recruiting and Hiring Faculty* should be immediately rescinded. Any legitimate overhaul of hiring guidelines must proceed in a manner explicitly approved by the Senate, the faculty’s chief instrument of shared governance, and in accord with those principles.

We respectfully request that the provost provides, in written format, her specific rationale for the new guidelines before or by December 20, 2021.

Sincerely yours,

AAUP-JMU Executive Council  
Doe Polanz, President, outgoing  
Bill White, President, incoming  
Maureen Shanahan, Vice President  
Jennifer Lang-Rigal, Secretary and Treasurer

cc: Val Larsen, Faculty Senate Speaker