



July 17, 2024

Dear Faculty and faculty emeriti,

As JMU begins the search for its next president, the 11-member search committee includes 7 BOV members and only 1 faculty member. We believe, just as the unanimously passed [Faculty Senate Resolution](#) suggests, that the marginalization of faculty in this crucial decision signals a rejection of faculty expertise and violates fundamental principles of shared governance.

In a letter to the Board of Visitors Rector-Elect and search chair Suzanne Obenshain, the JMU-AAUP Executive Committee advocated for a presidential search committee on which faculty represent the majority. This, we believe, would appropriately reflect the central role faculty should play in the governance of universities.

The Rector-Elect's refusal to modify the committee composition to make it genuinely cooperative is troubling. Effectively excluding faculty from the deliberations of the search committee, as the Rector-Elect has done, violates fundamental principles of shared governance, as spelled out in both AAUP and Association of Governing Boards (AGB) guidelines. The [AAUP says](#): "Joint effort of a most critical kind must be taken when an institution chooses a new president. The selection of a chief administrative officer should follow upon a cooperative search by the governing board and the faculty, taking into consideration the opinions of others who are appropriately interested". The [AGB states](#) that the "committee should...be broadly representative of an institution's major constituencies, and therefore include representatives from the faculty and, in smaller numbers, perhaps administrators, alumni, students, or members of the broader community." The current composition fails in this regard.

For additional context and information, please read the AAUP Executive Committee's letter and Rector-Elect Obenshain's response on the JMU-AAUP website (aaupjmu.com).

The BOV's dismissal of the crucial role of faculty in the shared governance of JMU reinforces a dangerous and problematic dynamic in which managerial strategies rather than academic values and transparent decision-making processes rule.

Faculty expertise and priorities should play a foundational role in the process of choosing a university president. If you are concerned by a top-down process that excludes invaluable faculty insight and limits faculty contribution in the process by which we choose our next university president, we urge you to act.

What can you do?

1. Participate in the Presidential Search in all ways allowed by the BOV – e.g. the [listening tour on July 18](#)!
2. Send a letter/email to the Rector-Elect (rector@jmu.edu) - template below
3. [Contact the Breeze](#) to ask for in depth reporting on this issue.
4. Comment on our [blog post](#) or contact aaupjmu@gmail.com to support academic values, transparency and shared governance.

Let your voice be heard!

In solidarity, the JMU-AAUP Executive Board

Contact the AAUP-JMU chapter at aaup.jmu@gmail.com and visit aaupjmu.com



A possible email to Rector-Elect and Search Chair Obenshain:

Dear Rector-Elect Obenshain,

As a JMU faculty member, I oppose the current composition of the presidential search committee. At present, while seven Board of Visitors members are on the committee, only one full-time, instructional faculty member is included. This is, in fact, equivalent to the number of students (one) and undermines the faculty's central role at the university.

Faculty are the heart of an educational institution and must constitute the majority of any committee tasked with vetting and recommending the institution's next president.

I oppose the marginalization of the instructional faculty. In this search committee, and all such search committees, instructional faculty should have a majority role.