



The James Madison University Quality Enhancement Plan

The Madison Collaborative: Ethical Reasoning in Action is a university-wide program designed to teach, nurture, and model ethical reasoning skills. It embodies and complements the university mission as we promise to prepare students to be “educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives.” College students face increasingly complex decisions as they graduate and join the workforce and their communities. Often these decisions have ethical complexities and implications that require sophisticated reasoning abilities.

Resulting from a two-year QEP development process involving faculty, staff, students, and administrators, James Madison University identified an *Eight Key Questions* framework for use when facing choices and decisions of ethical significance. The *Eight Key Questions* draw upon multiple revered ethical traditions, touch the typical and most salient ethical considerations raised when addressing complicated issues, and, with modest adjustments, capture the core values of different cultural traditions. Coordinated and enhanced curricular and co-curricular opportunities using the *Eight Key Questions* help prepare JMU graduates with a critical thinking skill-set.

The Madison Collaborative goals are to:

1. elevate the campus-wide understanding and discourse on ethical reasoning as a teachable, evaluative process;
2. provide a unifying framework that aligns campus efforts to teach and assess ethical reasoning; and
3. encourage multiple avenues of intentional connection among personal, professional, and civic application of ethical reasoning skills in the classroom, co-curricular activities, and student life.

JMU’s Center for Assessment and Research Studies was involved from the QEP’s inception and contributed to articulating seven specific student learning outcomes (cognitive and attitudinal). The Center designed, tested, and used four proprietary assessment instruments to establish baseline data prior to any implementation of the QEP and continues to use these instruments as part of the overall QEP assessment plan.

The implementation of the QEP depends upon a modest full-time staff that works with a guiding council and a growing (at the time of this writing 120+) network of faculty and student affairs professionals. JMU faculty who are content experts educate other interested faculty, Student Affairs professionals, and administrators about the foundational concepts and nuances of the *Eight Key Questions* so that they may integrate them into their General Education courses, major courses, student life programs, and staff development programs.

Implementation activities are scaffolded, beginning with August orientation when faculty, staff, and peer leaders introduce incoming first-year students to the *Eight Key Questions* in discussion-based case study sessions centered on allocating scarce rescue and recovery resources after a natural disaster. Building on this introduction, an online, case-based opportunity, the Madison Collaborative Interactive, is planned for implementation in year two. Student Affairs uses the *Eight Key Questions* strategy in areas including Residence Life, Judicial Affairs, University Recreation, and student organizations. Across disciplines and in general education, faculty are including ethical reasoning content in their instruction, learning activities, and assignments. This campus-wide effort to teach ethical reasoning skills will help our students become the educated and enlightened citizens our mission calls upon us to create.

For more information, please visit www.jmu.edu/mc or contact Madison Collaborative chair and professor of philosophy, Dr. William J. Hawk at hawkwj@jmu.edu.