

**BOARD OF VISITORS
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Planning Conference Meeting
Thursday, July 30, 2026
Horizon Hall**

MINUTES

PRESENT: Vice Rector Sumeet Shrivastava, Visitors Anne Altman, Bruce Caswell, Thomas Davis, James Dyke, Paul Misener, Trevor Montano, James Moran, Delbert Parks, Jon Peterson, Shawn Purvis, Jeffrey Rosen, George Schindler, and Jennifer Taylor

ABSENT: Visitors Alacbay and Spence.

ALSO, PRESENT: Rachel Spence, Staff Representative; Solon Simmons, Faculty Representative; Nilima Mow, Graduate Student Representative; Griffin Crouch, Undergraduate Student Representative; Gregory Washington, President; Rose Pascarell, Executive Vice President and Chief of Staff; Marion Underwood, Provost and Executive Vice President; David Drummey, Interim University Counsel; and Bridget Higgins, Secretary pro tem.

Call to Order and Introduction of Board of Visitors:

Vice Rector Shrivastava called the planning conference to order at 8:24 a.m., welcomed Visitor James Dyke to the Board, and recognized President Washington for his State of the University.

Welcome Remarks & State of the University:

President Washington summarized the successes of the previous year with increased undergraduate and law school enrollment, fiscal growth, and higher fundraising outcomes than initially projected. Mason opened new centers and institutes and was named one of Carnegie's six Very Large R1 Opportunity Universities.

President Washington welcomed Marion Underwood as Provost and Executive Vice President; Daniel Kelly as Dean of the Antonin Scalia Law School; and announced Rose Pascarell as Executive Vice President and Chief of Staff.

President Washington continued by describing Mason, and higher education at large, as facing a relevancy challenge with AI rivaling traditional classroom instruction, a collapse of public trust, and the enrollment cliff. All of this, including the significant decline in international graduate students and research grants, impacts the cross-subsidy financial model and revenues relied on by the institution.

According to Dr. Hilton Root of the Schar School of Policy and Government, a great sorting is taking place within higher education with winners consisting of a small set of elite research universities or vocational/profession-focused institutions serving regional demands. Regional and tuition dependent schools would be hollowed out, requiring mergers, specialization, online focus, size reduction, or closing. For Mason to be successful, the university must leverage its R1 research, location to federal procurement officials, and workforce pipelines while adapting its AI implementation, adapting to continuously credentialed programs with stackable paths, and an emphasis on life-long learning.

President Washington proposed eight bold bets to address current challenges:

1. Establish Dual College and a Reimagine Education to the Doctorate (RED) Task Force by creating competency-based and time-variable programs of 3-year, 4-year, and stackable paths on one transcript.
2. Establish predictive success and admissions by supporting every student when they fail so they do not stop out. Support a College of Lifelong Education.
3. Initiate AI co-pilots for every student, professor, and administrator to support AI fluency across all majors.
4. Faculty roles would increasingly shift from lecturing to mentoring, accelerate research activity, and support degree attainment. Governance provides support for faculty and students to sustain increased tempo.

5. Establish the Budget Model so that tuition accounts for less than 25% of revenue. Subsidies, subscriptions, and partnerships provide the remainder.
6. Establish the Lab-to-Launch initiative by leveraging Innovation Districts to turn discovery into businesses and jobs.
7. Curricula co-built with employers utilizing the region's tech, cyber, health, and defense industries.
8. A dual campus consisting of a premium residential core plus a global, digital, and physical campus spanning Fairfax, Korea, and the Gulf region.

The university has started to advance these bold bets in three key areas:

1. Mason will host the first open-source quantum computer on a university campus, partnering with DOE, NIST, NSF, MITRE, Booz Allen Hamilton, QED-C, and Mid-Atlantic Quantum Alliance.
2. General David Allvin will prepare Mason's leaders, evaluate and recommend opportunities to the university's defense-related research, and build strategies that make Mason a preferred partner of the U.S. military as Vice President for Leadership and Strategy.
3. Expand and enhance research impact and success through Phase Two of the Grand Challenge Initiative.

President Washington introduced Dan Greenstein, Chief of Industry Transformation, Ellucian & Chancellor Emeritus, PASSHE.

Success drivers for inclusive transformation. What the research shows.

Dan Greenstein began his presentation with data that supports President Washington's description of the trends in higher education: half of public universities are at or above risk with regional comprehensive and doctoral professional universities experiencing structural pressure requiring major intervention. Research institutions, enrollment of over 20,000, durable demand, cost discipline, and a mission focused program portfolio are generally more resilient.

Mason's primary risks are:

- Higher acceptance rate: engaging at-risk students is expensive. Applications and admissions are up but margins are declining, so while Mason has a good balance sheet, there is not much in reserve for future shocks. The time to act is while there are reserves.
- Reliance on research expenditures: with the retraction of federal research funding, public-private partnerships are necessary.
- Net tuition is 21.5% below peers: Mason has made the choice to build its business model around their social mission but with an impact on revenues.
- Admitted student yield remains at 20%: Despite the higher acceptance rate, admitted students are choosing Mason's peers.
- Mason's endowment is 84% below peer median: Endowment returns, though a helpful buffer, do not make a significant financial impact.

Now is the time for Mason to make a choice to admit like an open university, graduate like an elite university, and research like a flagship university.

It will take the following operating model to execute President Washington's vision:

- Units will need to work together in pursuit of entrepreneurial resources for the benefit of the university over the unit so there is no redundant effort.
- Governance will be necessary to manage coordinated efforts to determine enrollment, budgets, and data sharing. Budget is strategy.
- Do right by students. Focus on the yield, retention, completion, and credential productivity of every student to generate the revenue strategy. Non-degree, stackable credentials support students with their varied situations.

- Technology and AI needs interoperability between multiple systems to generate coherent analytics in the short term and can create stackable credential sequences in the near term.

The role of the Board is to look critically at major initiatives using data-coherent decision making while providing consistent governance with unified standards and priorities.

Discussion ensued.

Vice Rector Shrivastava asked where to find research funding that does not come from the federal government. Dr. Greenstein responded that with the shift of funding going towards industry comes a shift in research from pure to applied research. Institutions need to be agile to adapt to these changes.

Visitor Davis asked about how to resolve the tension between open admissions and declining standards. Dr. Greenstein reframed the question, offering that with multiple pathways and supports, students can better align their interests and skills to a wide range of degree and non-degree programs.

Visitor Peterson asked how Mason would make up the revenue with students ending their time at Mason in less time than is the current standard. Dr. Greenstein replied that students go through Mason's programs faster, opening the opportunity for others, which maintains the same year to year numbers. Admissions and student support will shift by serving students with a diverse set of demographics and needs.

Dr. Mohan Venigalla stated that he is open to the idea of accelerating programs but asked how it would be accomplished. Dr. Greenstein replied that through stackable credentials, students will return as life-long learners.

Dr. Armarda Shehu asked that with AI providing quicker solutions, how can everyone move together in the same direction when currently the work of shared governance comes from building relationships over spreadsheets. Dr. Greenstein responded that AI would enrich shared governance by accomplishing the analytics so that people can focus on decision making.

President Washington thanked Dr. Greenstein and provided an overview of the logistics of the breakout sessions. Participants were asked to engage in those sessions and follow the agenda through lunch and the remaining breakout sessions with a final assembly at the end of the day.

Breakout Session #1:

The Board and meeting participants proceeded into the following breakouts.

Topic 1: Fiscal Sustainability

Trishana Bowden, Vice President, Advancement & Alumni Relations/President, GMUF
Dan Stephens, Interim Senior Vice President & Chief Financial Officer

Mr. Stephens began the session by providing details of the fiscal challenges the university currently faces, resulting in a projected \$12M deficit for FY27 due to lost revenues from international enrollments and federal research funding while labor, benefits, utilities, compliance, and deferred maintenance costs are rising. With tuition politically capped and endowments, gifts, and auxiliary revenues unable to offset shortfalls, the university's financial buffer has significantly diminished.

Mr. Stephens highlighted several approaches that Mason is pursuing to manage this deficit:

- Pursue a performance-based funding model with the General Assembly. Commonwealth appropriations do not correlate with enrollment but are instead based on identified needs, resulting in chronic underfunding.
- Utilize Mason's debt capacity. Mason is projected to be debt free in 2042 and with the Board's approval of increased debt capacity on April 30, 2026, at an Aa3 Moody's rating, the university can address critical needs without harming its credit rating.
- Pursue Full Tier 3 Cash Management Authority from the General Assembly. Mason has had Partial Operational Authority since 2021.
- Budget mitigation strategies. Mason continues to advance strategic efforts that support revenue growth, debt optimization, and cost savings.

Ms. Bowden provided the history of the university's philanthropic campaigns and the current success of Mason Now: Power the Possible. Philanthropy can solve some of Mason's fiscal challenges by providing affordability through scholarships, quality faculty through endowed positions, and AI and tech resources through corporate partnerships. To maximize the potential of Mason giving, financial participation of the Board of Visitors and Board of Trustees is needed at 100% which is a clear message and supports engagement with prospects, collaborations with faculty, staff, and alumni, and multi-unit transformational giving.

Participants were asked to discuss questions on additional alternative revenue and cost mitigation strategies including how Mason can create a compelling connection for future donors, how to utilize board members to engage the General Assembly for Mason priorities (a "Special Equity Appropriation") and adoption of a "Performance-Based Funding Model" and identifying university initiatives that are most compelling to donors and alumni.

Lunch Recess

Breakout Session #2:

Topic 2: Demographic Sustainability

David Burge, Sr. Vice President for Enrollment Management & Student Achievement

Rose Pascarell, Executive Vice President & Chief of Staff

Ajay Vinzé, Interim Provost & Executive Vice President

Dr. Vinzé introduced the session by providing an overview of the demographic challenges facing the university and summarizing that Mason must adapt to a more diverse population of learners through increased competition and stronger workforce alignment with measurable outcomes.

Demographic Challenges

1. Declining traditional markets for higher education.
2. Changing perceptions of higher education and increased competition.

Mr. Burge provided details of Mason's enrollment over the previous ten years. Regionally, the population of high school students will be in decline, resulting in increased competition for every student. The region has the largest concentration of collegiate recruiters outside of California, leading many of these students to choose to go out-of-state. The number of international students is expected to remain in decline due to federal cuts to student loans.

Direct Admissions and the ADVANCE programs have brought increasing numbers of enrolled students, with Mason's High School Direct Admissions (HSDA) program expanding to eighty schools in FY27.

3. Diversity of academic preparation and increasing demands on services.
4. Rising expectations of flexibility and focus on outcomes.

Ms. Pascarell advised that the diversity of student academic preparation has increased demand for student services and rising expectations of flexibility on outcomes. Currently, 46% of students have a diagnosed mental health condition, fewer high school students are academically prepared for college compared to pre-Covid standards, and social-development milestones (i.e., a driver's license, drinking, participating in the labor force), are delayed with today's student compared to their peers twenty years ago.

Mason addresses the needs of these diverse populations through student services, that include:

- Centralized tutoring and supplementary instruction for courses with lowest student outcomes.
- Student Success District provides academic support, academic advising, career services, student success services, AI literacy and learning supports, and technology and proactive outreach and engagement.
- Patriot Connect for student success uses predictive analytics to create actionable interventions with behavioral data.
- Affordability measures that address students' primary concern about college.
- University Career Services uses platforms like Handshake and MasonWorks to prepare graduates for first jobs that are more proving grounds than entry level positions.

5. Misalignment between education pathways and workforce demands.

Dr. Vinzé concluded the presentation with reimagining the delivery of education with new offerings that address new market realities by considering stackable and flexible degrees, shortened degree completion, lengthened degree completion to spread tax benefits, Executive PhD programs, graduate degrees in partnership with industries and institutions, prior learning credit, and a Pan-Asian task force to look beyond Korea.

Participants were asked to discuss questions on redefining value in an era of higher education skepticism; providing student success with evolving student needs, expectations, and preparation; and considering the credentials and programs that will attract students not presently engaging in higher education.

Breakout Session #3:

Topic 3: Technological Sustainability

Charmaine Madison, Vice President and Chief Information Officer

Andre Marshall, Vice President for Research, Innovation & Economic Impact

Amarda Shehu, Vice President & Chief AI Officer

Julie Zobel, Senior Vice President & Chief Operating Officer

Dr. Zobel introduced the session by providing an overview of the technological challenges facing the university, highlighting that these challenges are interconnected and require a coordinated, institutional response.

1. AI is outpacing higher education's ability to adapt.

Dr. Shehu stated that with accelerating change from AI, Mason has been a leader in Virginia and will continue to adapt by providing student support of AI literacy and necessary skills for graduation, faculty support to adapt and create effective practices, and redefine academic integrity through policies.

2. Technological disruption of research.

Dr. Marshall described how the norms, security, infrastructure, and priorities of today's research have been transformed through AI-driven technology. Researchers must study, deploy, and adapt to emerging technologies in

real time. Building a modern AI-research enterprise will align policy, security, infrastructure, and innovation to provide relevant, secure, and impactful research. Mason has expanded its research capacity through Virginia's first quantum computer, Mason Enterprise, Lab-to-Launch, and Nexus 234.

3. Technology equity gap.

Dr. Madison described the challenge of the disparity in student AI literacy that reinforces existing inequities that could lead to unequal exposure to privacy and security risks. Mason provides universal AI access through PatriotAI and Microsoft Copilot to all students, faculty, and staff along with trainings, hackathons, LinkedIn Learning, AI ambassador internships, and targeted outreach to underserved students.

4. Data privacy and cyber risk as a defining institutional challenge.

Dr. Madison continued by explaining the threat landscape, with cybersecurity, modernization, compliance, and cost management risk outpacing traditional technology and funding models. Mason is addressing these risks through leadership, governance, identity and access management, infrastructure modernization, secured AI access, and tiered usage for maximum Return on Investment (ROI).

5. Shifting career pathways and skill demands.

Dr. Shehu concluded by asking how Mason should prepare graduates, so they are trained for mid-level employment with AI fluency. To address this issue, Mason is building AI capability across the workforce and preparing graduates to work alongside AI through experiential learning, an AI competency framework, and rapid skill pathways.

Participants were asked to discuss questions on what a Mason education should guarantee in an AI-enabled world and how to measure success, and strategies to accelerate AI adoption while preserving trust, security, access, and institutional values.

Path Forward & Closing Comments:

President Washington closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their engagement and participation in support of one of the most significant transformations of the university.

Reflection and discussion ensued.

Visitor Peterson remarked that he was surprised at the level of hacking that the university endures. It will take big, swift action to support students, faculty, and staff.

Visitor Schindler praised the presentations made by the leadership team and Dr. Greenstein. The rich discussion will support the significant change President Washington has proposed.

Visitor Caswell commented that he would like to know more about how Mason will manage the transformation and communicate with those who need to better understand the approach so they can become champions of change.

Visitor Dyke expressed interest in creating an aggressive, focused message to the legislative and executive branches for why they need to support Mason. There is significant interest in Richmond in demonstrating support for the institution following events affecting the university last year.

Visitor Moran echoed the praises of the quality of the day's presentations and content. He added that Mason can play a consequential role given its location in the home of the federal government and is a less partisan institution that should be subsidized to prepare the next workforce. Mason should continue to push for globalization of its students and facilities.

President Washington expressed appreciation to the dedicated staff for their organization of the day's events and invited Vice Rector Shrivastava to provide his conclusions.

Recess

Vice Rector Shrivastava concurred with previous comments, adding that every BOV committee meeting agenda will include an update on what Mason has accomplished to advance the president's vision. He then reminded the Board that the Annual Meeting would begin the following day at 9:00 a.m.

Vice Rector Shrivastava adjourned the session at 4:47 p.m.

Prepared by:

Bridget Higgins
Secretary pro tem