

**BOARD OF VISITORS  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Continuing Education Session  
Tuesday, April 5, 2022  
Merten Hall, Hazel Conference Room (1201)**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Rector James Hazel, Secretary Simmi Bhuller, Visitors Juan Carlos Iturregui, Mehmood Kazmi, Wendy Marquez, Ignacia Moreno, Carolyn Moss, Edward Rice, and Robert Witeck.

**ABSENT:** Vice Rector Horace Blackman, Visitors Anjan Chimaladinne, Dolly Oberoi, Jon Peterson, Nancy Prowitt, Paul Reagan, and Denise Turner Roth.

**ALSO, PRESENT:** Erin Rogers, Staff Representative; Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post, Faculty Representative; Steven Zhou, Graduate Student Representative; Natalia Kanos, Undergraduate Student Representative; Gregory Washington, President; Ken Walsh, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff and Sarah Hanbury, Secretary pro tem.

**I. Call to Order**

Rector Hazel called this session to order at 1:05 p.m. Rector Hazel noted that the purpose of this session is to provide an additional opportunity to meet the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia's (SCHEV) continuing education requirement under § 23.1-1304. He stated that this continuing education session has been designed specifically for Mason's Board with the assistance of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), and in consultation with SCHEV.

Rector Hazel introduced AGB representative, Dr. Paul Friga, adding that he will present on two topics and after each discussion will follow. Rector Hazel noted that pre-read materials were provided to the Board in preparation for this session and that he looked forward to robust conversation on these topics.

**II. AGB Presentation & Discussion**

Dr. Friga began by providing information about himself; he was raised in Virginia and his father was a community college president in Virginia. Dr. Friga is currently a Clinical Associate Professor of Strategy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with 20 years of experience as a professor, researcher and consultant. Dr. Friga stated that if anyone is interested in more information about today's topics they are available on his website (<https://paulfriga.com/>).

- A. Best Practice for Effective Boards (More Effective Governance Structure and Process & Macro Trend in Higher Education)
  - Resolutions for Improving Governance
    - Dr. Friga noted that he would provide three ideas for improving governance and upon getting to the discussion portion of this topic, would like to receive the reactions to the ideas as well as brainstorm ideas for possible consideration of new practices but not make any commitments to these ideas.
      - Get More Strategic
        - More strategic and less operational. Strategic planning deals with prioritization of resources, shifting into new products for higher education such as less degrees and more certificates. Strategic planning is of higher impact than that of the traditional operational campaign.
        - Best Practices Checklist/Brainstorming
          - Boards

- Clarify the role related to strategy and accountability (oversight).
    - Invest more time in strategic discussions and less in operations.
    - Be thinking about the big picture for your institution and what is unique or special to Mason.
    - Have very succinct statements for strategy instead of a long paragraph.
    - To summarize, Dr. Friga gave advice to the Board on how to receive Dr. Washington's strategic plan once it is available.
  - Visitor Moreno inquired how much engagement is appropriate for the board regarding strategic planning. Dr. Friga suggested setting three priorities with their own set of objectives. The board then asks and monitors the progress of those priorities.
    - Campus
      - Clarify the role related to strategy and accountability (execution).
      - Articulate multiyear strategic vision, priorities and initiatives.
      - Dr. Friga also suggested doing multi-year financial planning, if not happening currently, not just monitoring finances annually.
- Examine Structures
  - A modern goal of board structures is to have more diversity; not just diversity in background and nationalities, but diversities of thought. Rector Hazel noted that Mason's Board has a faculty representative, staff liaison, undergraduate student representative and postgraduate student representative as non-voting members. Dr Friga appreciated this information as a nod to increasing diversity and perspectives.
  - How often has the committee structures been updated over the past decade or two.
    - Boards
      - Move to more ad-hoc committee structure. For example, Human Resources (HR) is a critical issue across higher education due to changes in the workforce and the availability of talent is going down. Competition for talent is great especially in places like information technology (IT) and student services. Develop strategies for HR in terms of faculty and staff.
      - Recruit more diverse profiles and talent; this approach provides greater perspectives.
      - Meet more often (virtually and in-person). Rector Hazel notified Dr. Friga that Mason's BOV has to meet in-person as the executive order that allowed virtual meetings expired and further explained the state rules that must be followed if more than two board members meet.
    - Campus
      - Take Inventory of names and position descriptions of administrative leaders.

- Benchmark against peers. To assist in making decisions about resource allocations. Such as, is Mason adequately invested in Career Services.
- Modernize structure. Look outside of higher education for examples of how to modernize the campus structure.
- Improve Stakeholder Interactions
  - Boards
    - Include campus representative to board and committee meeting to improve transparency. Mason is already doing this by way of the faculty, staff, and student representatives.
    - Spend time on campus to understand the culture and perspectives outside of meetings.
  - Campus
    - Report out on objective performance metrics around priorities.
    - Involve campus leaders in long-term thinking session and seek creative hypotheses for changes. Strategic plans are typically every three years.

Dr. Friga wrapped up the first topic by discussion principles of trusteeship:

- Think Strategically
  - Ask insightful questions and listen with an open mind.
  - Focus on what matters most to the institution's long-term sustainability.
  - Learn about your institution's mission constituents, culture and context.
- Understand Governance
  - Embrace the full scope of your responsibilities as a board member.
  - Respect the difference between the board's role and the administration's role.
  - Be an ambassador for your institution and higher education.
- Lead by Example
  - Conduct yourself with integrity.
  - Think independently and act collectively.
  - Champions justice, equity and inclusion.

Dr. Friga opened the floor for questions on his first segment. Discussion ensued about Mason's budget process and the role of State Government in that process.

Visitor Moss inquired if Dr. Friga has done any best practices on how universities can align their strategic plans and strategic thinking, not only with the boards but also with the business community and the community at large. Dr. Friga stated that the more those groups can be involved in the strategic planning process the better. Use the groups as a resource for input on the draft strategic plan and then get them involved as a partner in an advisory group, for example. Rector Hazel noted that Dr. Washington created an advisory board from the local business community to help raise awareness of the Amazon deal with Mason's Arlington campus to help make that project successful and so far, it has been.

- B. How Service of the Governing Board is Unique from Other Board Service
- One of the most significant macro trends for board discussion today.
    - The higher education market has experienced nine consecutive years of enrollment decline on a national basis; contracting from approximately 21 million to 18 million students. Traditional high school graduate numbers have been down over the past eight years and will continue to decrease the next nine years. To handle this, think about

- graduate growth and create a plan to increase new graduate programs and grow existing ones. Offer joint degrees with other institutions.
- Other good board topics for discussion
    - There is a movement toward lower tuition. Dr. Friga inquired what Mason's tuition rate was which Dr. Washington provided. Dr. Friga noted Mason's tuition cost is a good deal. Dr. Friga cited the Georgetown Study of Return on Investment (ROI) ranked Mason 1,415 out of 4,500 institutions across the country after 10 years. After 15 years, the aforementioned study ranked Mason 263 out of 4,500 institutions. Dr. Friga states that Mason is an incredible value with room to increase tuition.
    - Institutions need to have a differentiation and not all be the same.
      - Visitor Moreno noted that Mason is a research one institution which is one differentiation.
      - Rector Hazel noted that 50 years ago Mason had 4,000 students and now just short of 40,000 students. Dr. Friga stated that Mason's differentiator is that it's agile, connected to industry and growth oriented.
    - Think more about adult learning and advanced professional degrees. Do not solely focus on the 18-24-year old age group. Invest in executive education and not just for business but other programs as well, such as law.
    - Assist underserved students by increasing accessibility and increasing financial aid.
    - Virtual campus services are here to stay and those three areas are IT, student mental health and HR.
    - Another suggestion is to look for more international programs. Rector Hazel informed Dr. Friga of Mason's Korea campus.
    - Dr. Friga believes that faculty will become more like free agents and teach at multiple institutions.
  - Dr. Friga opened the floor for comment.
    - Rector Hazel commented about Mason's greatest opportunity in partnering with the Virginia Community College System which allows students across the state to obtain a two-year degree and then come to Mason to complete a four-year degree.
    - Dr. Washington inquired what three areas should an institution be most concerned with over the next three to five years; Dr. Friga responded with products, partnerships and profitability. In regard to products, offer new degree, new non-degree and new online programs and increase partnerships with your state legislature and other institutions. If profitability is an issue for Mason, pay attention to that.

### **III. Adjournment**

Rector Hazel adjourned the session at 2:32 p.m.

Prepared by:

Sarah Hanbury  
Secretary pro tem