

**BOARD OF VISITORS  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Meeting of  
Tuesday, April 4, 2023  
Merten Hall, Hazel Conference Room (1201)**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Rector Horace Blackman, Vice Rector Simmi Bhuller, Secretary Jon Peterson, Visitors Lindsey Burke, Anjan Chimaladinne, James Hazel, Mehmood Kazmi, Michael Meese, Carolyn Moss, Robert Pence, Nancy Prowitt and Robert Witeck.

**ABSENT:** Visitors Reginald Brown, Wendy Marquez and Dolly Oberoi.

**ALSO, PRESENT:** Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Faculty Representative; Sophia Nguyen, Undergraduate Student Representative; Ayondela McDole, Graduate Student Representative; Gregory Washington, President; Ken Walsh, Executive Vice President of Strategic Initiatives & Chief of Staff; Mark Ginsberg, Provost and Executive Vice President; Deb Dickenson, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration; René Stewart O'Neal, Vice President for Strategic Budgeting & Planning; Paul Liberty, Vice President for Government and Community Relations; Anne Gentry, University Counsel and Sarah Hanbury, Secretary pro tem.

**I. Call to Order**

Rector Blackman called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

**II. FY 2024 Financial Plan**

Deb Dickenson, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration, presented on the FY 2024 financial plan. Ms. Dickenson highlighted the following items:

- FY 2024 Financial Plan, Proposed Tuition & Fees:
  - This is the proposed plan for consideration of approval at the Board meeting on May 4, 2023.
  - The plan is consistent to what was provided at the February 23, 2023 Board meeting and at the student tuition townhall on March 21, 2023.
- Mason's Strengths / Mason Is Rising:
  - Ranked first in Virginia for Innovation.
  - In the top 10 for undergraduate cybersecurity among public universities.
    - On January 9, 2023 Mason hosted a hands-on CyberSlam event for high school students which was led by Liza Wilson Durant, Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives and Community Engagement. There was participation from 400 students from five counties and 22 high schools. This was a high-tech event with members from the Secret Service and Homeland security in attendance. The Cyber Slam demonstrates the impact that Mason has on the community. Due to the growth in this area, there is a new cybersecurity graduate degree and will be working on a PhD program.
  - Other highly ranked Mason programs include but are not limited to a Part-Time Law Degree, Homeland Security and International Policy.
  - Some of Mason's offerings are receiving world and global recognition such as the Scalia Law School, which is ranked 28<sup>th</sup> worldwide.
  - Mason is the largest public research university in the Commonwealth.
  - Mason drives economic growth in the Commonwealth. 86% of a recent Mason graduating class went into their field of choice and into a position related to their career. The median salary for this group was \$70K.
  - Mason is Meeting all of Governor Youngkin's and Secretary Guidera's goals for higher education with growth in degrees, enrollment and graduate success.

- Mason is Growing:
  - Mason grew during the pandemic.
  - Spring international enrollment is up 25%.
  - More than 16% of 2020 Virginia high school graduates applied to Mason.
- Financial Aid by Funding Source (See graph for specifics in the meeting materials.):
  - Considered when planning for each fiscal year.
  - State aid will increase by \$27M in FY24. Excited for this additional aid.
  - State aid is increasing.
  - Aid provided by Mason is increasing at a faster rate than state aid.
  - Mason's aid is funded through tuition increases. About one-third of the proposed tuition increase would go toward financial aid, to help with accessibility and affordability.
  - Mason's portion of financial aid has quadrupled since 2013. In 2013 Mason funded about \$26.2M in aid and in FY23 that amount was \$102M.
- Average Total Aid Received, By Title IV Receipts, By Income Level:
  - The amount of financial aid that Mason provides, exceeds the cost of tuition and fees. The additional aid can assist with food, books and housing.
  - Last year \$1M was added to Stay Mason Emergency Aid Fund. Continuing to infuse aid in this fund to help prevent financial challenges or crises for students which is currently around \$3M.
  - The fall 2022 tuition credit and Stay Mason Student Support Fund were funded through the University's reserves, which is not a sustainable model.
- Commonwealth Budget Update:
  - Legislative budget delayed which impacts the ability to plan effectively for the upcoming year.
  - Submitted a funding disparity request of \$18M from the state, which is pending.
  - Trying to increase salaries in order to keep critical faculty and staff which is funded in part by tuition increases. This past week a hiring delay was implemented to ensure that only critical vacancies are being filled to help manage Mason's bottom line.
  - If the funding requests are allocated, Mason would eliminate the FY24 in-state undergraduate tuition increase.
- Current Commonwealth Budget:
  - Current House Recommendations:
    - Maintained financial aid recommendation from last session for FY24: \$27M for Mason.
    - Increased compensation from 5% to 7%. Mason's share of the increase is not yet determined.
    - Provided \$75M (\$6M for Mason) to keep tuition moderation at no more than 1%.
    - The Governor issued the following tuition statement on March 15, 2023, "Given the ongoing and uncertain outcome of the budget discussion, you should not rely on increased general funds to mitigate tuition increases. Your commitment last year to maintaining flat tuition made a difference for families. I'd like to set an expectation that our institutions will do everything possible to reduce costs, maximize efficiencies and minimize tuition increases for in-state students."
    - Increased Mason maintenance reserve by \$895K for FY24 to \$6.2M.
  - Senate Recommendations:
    - \$1B more to appropriate than House due to tax cuts.
      - \$15M for financial aid (on top of \$27M previously approved for FY24)
      - \$20M operating increase.
      - \$8M for deferred maintenance.
      - 2% increase in compensation (bringing total to 7% on July 1)
  - Mason's Challenge:
    - Mason needs growth in state support, as costs are growing higher than CPI. There have been increases in contract service cost.
  - Funding Challenges:

- Mason funds the Virginia Military Survivors & Dependents Education Program, which is expected to be \$8M a year.
- Tuition Recommendation, presented by René Stewart O’Neal, Vice President for Strategic Budgeting & Planning:
  - Proposing a flat \$300 increase in tuition for all students regardless of student level or residency.
  - If Mason receives the funding request of \$18M from the Commonwealth the tuition increase will be eliminated for in-state undergraduate students.
  - The two major revenue sources for Mason are tuition and state support. If one decreases the other must increase to cover rising costs.
  - Mason has the fifth lowest tuition of the six R1 universities in Virginia.
  - Mason has had two limited tuition increases over the last four years.
  - FY24 Budget:
    - A 5% to 7% state-authorized compensation increase is anticipated for FY24.
    - A 4% to 13% escalation in operating costs in contracts and services. Janitorial services contract costs have almost doubled in two years.
    - Core investments to be made in academic research and student support services.
    - Mason is providing a high-quality education and student experience to more Virginia residents at a lower price point with fewer overall resources than R1 Virginia peers. Mason is a great value, but it is increasingly challenging to leverage its resources to support institutional priorities. A tuition increase is necessary to have the resources to cover Mason’s core mission.
- How Tuition Supports Students:
  - The tuition increase will be invested in academic and student success initiatives for improved retention and graduation rates:
    - Coaching and advising resources.
    - Mental health and well-being services.
    - New academic programs.
    - Expanding regional campus services.
    - Increased on-campus student employment.
    - Critical faculty and staff hires to support enrollment.
    - Optimize research impact.
    - Expand partnership programs to enhance workforce development.
- Fee Recommendation, presented by Ms. Dickenson.
  - Recommending a 3% mandatory student fee increase that will be focused on many areas, one of which is student transportation.
- Proposed FY2024 Tuition & Fees
  - Flat \$300 increase for all students.
  - 3% increase in mandatory student fees.
  - Tuition increase will be eliminated pending state approval of Mason’s broader funding requests.

Ms. Dickenson concluded her report and opened the floor for questions:

- Visitor Hazel inquired if the budget will be known at the May 4, 2023 Board of Visitors meeting. Paul Liberty, Vice President of Government and Community Relations, responded that the budget will not be known by May’s meeting.
- Visitor Hazel then inquired what individual board members can do on behalf of the university to support the state funding requests. Mr. Liberty stated that he is happy to share the names of the conferees in both the House and Senate for the purpose of contacting them to express interest in supporting Mason. Mr. Liberty advised discussing how to make Mason stronger moving forward and to not pick a House or Senate budget.
- Visitor Peterson inquired, other than janitorial, what other expenses significantly increased. Ms. Dickenson responded that all contract services increased such as dining, landscaping and repair services. The lowest

increase that has been seen for the next year is four percent for a small contract. For large contracts such as electricity and utilities are all increasing at a pace of six to 13 percent.

- Visitor Iturregui noted that in September Mason was facing a \$430M funding gap, \$60M deficit and a compensation gap of \$32M. Visitor Iturregui inquired if these figures remain the same or have they increased. Ms. Dickenson responded that all three areas will grow.

Rector Blackman thanked Ms. Dickenson and Ms. Stewart for their reports and relayed that there would be further discussion at May's meeting.

### **III. Public Comments**

There were four registrations for oral public comment (**ATTACHMENT 1**) and no registrations for written public comment. Rector Blackman allotted two minutes for oral public comments. Rector Blackman called Jaelin Mitchell to the podium to provide his comment. Mr. Mitchell began speaking about Mason's spring 2023 commencement speaker. Rector Blackman paused the comment to relay that the purpose of this public comment period is related to tuition and fees, that he will allow comments on graduation after the comments on tuition and fees. Two oral comments were provided from students on tuition and eight students provided oral comments regarding the commencement speaker. Please refer to the meeting's video recording for specifics: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/8557205/video/812805095>.

### **IV. Adjournment**

Rector Blackman called for any additional business to come before the board. Hearing none, he adjourned the meeting at 11:20 a.m.

Prepared by:

Sarah Hanbury  
Secretary pro tem

Attachment 1: Public Comment Registrations (1 page)

Board of Visitors Full Board Meeting  
 April 4, 2023  
 Public Comment Registrations

<p><b>1. Name:</b> Jaelin N. Mitchell (Oral Comment) <b>Mason Affiliation:</b> Student                  Phonetic Pronunciation: Jay-Lin Mitch-el</p> <p><b>Comment:</b> N/A (Oral comments only)</p>
<p><b>2. Name:</b> <u>Marcara C. Wright (Oral Comment)</u> <b>Mason Affiliation:</b> <u>Student</u></p> <p><b>Comment:</b> Comments to support Jaelin Mitchell!</p>
<p><b>3. Name:</b> <u>Pearl Renwick (Oral Comment)</u> <b>Mason Affiliation:</b> <u>Student</u></p> <p><b>Comment:</b> Supporting Jaelin Mitchell to speak to the Board of Visitors on behalf of the student body.</p>
<p><b>4. Name:</b> <u>Dunni Oni (Oral Comment)</u> <b>Mason Affiliation:</b> <u>Student</u></p> <p><b>Comment:</b> Jaelin Mitchell to speak on behalf of the GMU Student Body</p>