

**BOARD OF VISITORS  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Presidential Search Listening Session for Students**

**September 3, 2019**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Co-Chairs Shannon Davis and Jimmy Hazel; Student Representative Camden Layton

**I. Call to Order**

Co-Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. She thanked those in attendance and introduced herself. Camden Layton introduced himself and stated his role as the student representative on the Presidential Search committee. Co-Chair Hazel introduced himself and his role on the Board of Visitors and on the Presidential Search Committee. He thanked those in attendance, noting that the representatives from the committee were present to listen to the student body's thoughts on what to look for in a new president, answer questions and inform them of the process. He spoke to the initial steps of the search committee and the advertisement placed in the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Co-Chair Davis spoke to the goal of the Listening Session as being a forum to listen and elicit thoughts and ideas from the Mason community. She stipulated that speakers be honest and use a microphone for the public record. Co-Chair Hazel provided background to early administrative efforts following Dr. Cabrera's departure notice and the appointment of Interim President Holton. He noted that in August the Presidential Search Committee was formed and is composed of representatives from the Board of Visitors, George Mason University Foundation (GMUF), students, faculty and staff. He spoke to the efforts of the committee to have as much representation from all of the Mason communities as possible for their input in composing the Presidential job description and launching the search website. Co-Chair Hazel noted the various advertisements for the position and the use of a search firm. He spoke to initial interest in the Presidential position and his confidence in the potential candidate pool considering Mason's location, academic achievements and recognition. Co-Chair Hazel noted that ideally, the Presidential Search Committee intends to announce a next President at the February 2020 Board of Visitors meeting with the new appointee beginning in the summer of 2020.

**II. Listening Session**

Co-Chair Davis provided a prompt by asking the audience to consider the ideal characteristics of the President of George Mason University, note two to three characteristics, and to share them. Co-Chair Hazel added that questions were also welcome. The Co-Chairs recognized students and faculty from the audience.

A student question centered on a student focus group who met with leadership during the summer regarding feedback on Presidential characteristics. The student

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asked how this group was chosen. Co-Chair Hazel responded, noting his attendance at that meeting, and reported that the focus group was chosen from a diverse group of students who were on campus and could meet during Mason's annual Planning Conference. He noted that they had a good discussion surrounding what was working and not working at the University. The student shared qualities in a new president as transparent and accessible, he expressed concern of Listening Session timing, and provided comments related to improvement of campus culture. Co-Chair Hazel responded noting the committee's commitment to provide transparency during the Listening Sessions. Student Representative Layton also responded noting a future feedback form that would be provided on the Presidential Search Website once it was launched. He spoke to the challenges of class conflicts and conveyed the committee's commitment in future to offer Listening Sessions at varying times. Co-Chair Davis commented on past Listening Sessions for Faculty and Staff in the evening to accommodate schedules and the possibility of offering evening Listening Sessions in future. She thanked attendees and encouraged them to provide more adjectives, characteristics, and experiences that described a President.

A faculty member provided comment to the need for a responsive President, noting past campus issues and the need for a responsive administration and appropriate public relations communications. Co-Chair Hazel noted accountability as a factor and the faculty member agreed.

A student provided comment as trust being important quality in a new President. She spoke to open forums with students as a way to build trust with the student population and accountability in the administration.

Co-Chair Davis encouraged attendees to provide feedback. She noted her appreciation of honesty in the speakers and opened the floor for questions. Co-Chair Hazel asked the audience to share their experience of things working at Mason whether inside or outside of the classroom.

A faculty member commented on diversity as being important, and as one of the aspects of Mason that is working.

A student stated she was a freshman. Co-Chair Hazel asked her to share why she chose to attend Mason. The student shared that she chose Mason based on the location, that it is close to home, and the university is close to Washington D.C. with many opportunities for a good education and experience. She spoke to the involvement of a President and the development of a relationship with the University community.

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A student shared comments surrounding past incidences of sexual assault on the Mason campus, hiring of Justice Brett Kavanaugh and sustainability. Student Representative Layton responded by sharing the efforts of the student government in response to Title IX campus issues shared at a townhall meeting.

A student shared comments regarding donor influence, the sustainability department and noted positive feedback on the greenhouses and gardens on campus. Co-Chair Hazel responded and noted that he appreciated hearing both positive and negative comments and thanked the student for his feedback.

A student shared comments on the Student Health Advisory Board which provides feedback and policy recommendations to various Mason departments. He noted the opportunity for a new President improve services related to Title IX. He mentioned the shortage of CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) counselors.

A student questioned the direction that the new president would take the university. Co-Chair Davis responded and noted Mason's current plans and the commitment to them. She commented on the Presidential job description and Mason's strengths as a university. She noted Mason's goal to provide access to excellence and the connection to continued enrollment growth. Co-Chair Hazel spoke to the University's Research 1 status and noted that Mason is headed in the right direction. He commented on the continuation of current initiatives and need for continual improvement. He spoke to the position as an open opportunity and the possibility of finding a President with a new vision.

A student provided comment on the credit cap and asked for an explanation. Co-Chair Davis noted it was her understanding that it was a joint decision made by several departments. She added that the rationale she was provided was that the funds from the credit cap would provide additional financial aid and scholarships to support current students. She noted that Provost Wu would speak to the credit cap during the Faculty Senate meeting the next day and invited students to attend.

A faculty member provided questions regarding the Listening Session recordings, information and how the information will be disseminated to the community. Co-Chair Davis shared that a Presidential Search website would be launched, and it will provide links to the recordings, a comment forum, and updates on the committee's progress. She spoke to the intent of the committee to continually engage with the community throughout the search process and as far as the Commonwealth laws allow. She noted that Search website will provide all relevant information and once it is launched an announcement will be made through as many channels as possible. Co-Chair Hazel noted that the search was still in the very early

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stages and that the focus of the committee in recent weeks was the advertisement due to the publication deadline. Student Representative Layton provided comments on the location of the search committee site, through a link in the University leadership website.

A student asked questions regarding feedback during the Listening Session and its inclusion in the Committee's work. Co-Chair Davis responded in the affirmative, listing the feedback received which included responsive, communicative, understands big picture ideas, willing to be involved in the details, understands breadth of the campus community and issues, builds partnerships and is committed to diversity and inclusion. She reported these attributes were being incorporated in the position description. Co-Chair Hazel commented that the community feedback will help the committee ask the correct questions during the interview process. Student Representative Layton noted that hearing characteristics of the ideal candidate and student concerns will help him represent the student voice.

A student had a question related to the distribution of power between search committee members. Student Representative Layton commented that the committee members were all equals. Co-Chair Hazel noted that while committee members all have input, half of the committee are members of the Board of Visitors because ultimately the decision is a Board responsibility. Co-Chair Davis added her comments and noted that Board of Visitors is committed to working together and to be responsive to the Mason community. She noted that the Board has been inclusive and she noted her confidence in them.

A student comments regarding the composition of the Presidential Search Committee and questioned the majority Board representation, the participation of George Mason University Foundation (GMUF) and a CEO. Co-Chair Hazel responded by outlining the responsibility of the Board of Visitors as outlined in the Code of Virginia, as the reasoning behind the majority BOV representation. He commented on the importance of business industry partnerships with Mason having a role on the committee.

A student commented on the timing of the Session and the conflict with classes. She also suggested the integration of technology in future Listening Sessions such as live streaming Sessions on Facebook and providing a brief video synopsis and a comment section for interaction and feedback.

A student commented on the ability to provide Listening Sessions with Presidential candidates. Co-Chair Hazel responded by informing the audience of the importance of confidentiality. He noted reasons for anonymity including that an announcement

could jeopardize a candidate's current employment, but also noted that the committee would provide an opportunity with candidates to the best of their ability within the constraints of confidentiality. Co-Chair Hazel spoke to providing Listening Sessions every 30 – 45 days as an update on the committee's work. Co-Chair Davis commented on the challenges of confidentiality and added that a Presidential appointment announcement will not be made during the Winter Break. She noted the goal of the committee is to announce a President by the February 2020 BOV meeting.

A student comment centered on the conflict of candidate confidentiality and the student/faculty/community need to know. She suggested providing anonymous mission statements from candidates to the Mason community.

A student questioned when a new President would begin. Co-Chair Hazel responded noting it depended on the candidate, but the expectation would be to begin in the summer of 2020.

A student asked for clarification on the suggestion of providing anonymous mission statements from candidates and if that was a confirmation that it would be implemented. Co-Chair Davis noted that it was part of her notes as a suggestion and would need to be approved by the committee. Co-Chair Hazel concurred. Student asked for clarification on the role of the Board of Visitors and that of the President. Co-Chair Hazel responded and expounded on the division of authority between the Board and the President. He noted that day-to-day operations were delegated to the President.

Student Representative Layton commented on efforts to reach students regarding Listening Sessions and providing an update every 30 - 45-day. A student commented that Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings beginning at 7:30 p.m. would work best, with a two to three-week notice, noting email as the best way to communicate with the students.

**III. Adjournment**

Co-Chair Hazel adjourned the meeting at 3:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie T. Barton  
Administrative Coordinator  
Office of the President  
George Mason University