

**BOARD OF VISITORS
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Planning Conference Meeting
July 28, 2022
MINUTES**

PRESENT: Rector James Hazel, Vice Rector Horace Blackman; Visitors Reginald Brown, Lindsey Burke, Anjan Chimaladinne, Juan Carlos Iturregui, Wendy Marquez, Michael Meese, Carolyn Moss, and Nancy Prowitt.

ABSENT: Secretary Simmi Bhuller and Visitors Mehmood Kazmi, Jon Peterson, Dolly Oberoi, Robert Pence and Bob Witeck.

ALSO, PRESENT: Erin Rogers, Staff Representative; Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post, Faculty Representative; Sophia Nguyen, Student Representative; Ayondela McDole, Student Representative; Gregory Washington, President; Ken Walsh, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff; Mark Ginsberg, Provost and Executive Vice President; Deb Dickenson, Interim Senior Vice President for Administration and Finance; Christine Landoll, President of Alumni Association; Robert Matz, Campus Dean, Mason Korea; Board of Visitors Committee Faculty Representatives, Members of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, Members of the President's Council and Members of the Alumni Board Presidents.

I. Call to Order

Rector Hazel called the planning session to order at 8:17 a.m. and introduced Dr. Washington for opening remarks.

II. Welcome Remarks, Agenda Overview & Key Milestones/Achievements

Dr. Washington provided remarks with the following highlights:

- He introduced two new Deans, Ingrid Guerra-López, College of Education and Human Development and Ajay Vinzé, School of Business followed by the new Board Members that were in attendance, Reg Brown, Lindsey Burke and Michael Meese.
- How Are We Doing:
 - Mason is doing well despite the continued pandemic:
 - There has been a 5.2% increase in undergraduate enrollment.
 - A 6% increase in grad school enrollment.
 - Research expenditures increased by 15%.
 - Graduation rates dropped by about 1%.
 - The percent of online classes increased.
 - Student debt increased by 3.2%.
- This Is Who We are:
 - Mason's law school is ranked 30th overall and is a top 12 public law school.
 - Per the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), Mason is ranked ninth for a public institution in free speech.
 - Mason provides an excellent return on investment and is ranked second in Virginia for earnings to debt return.
- Mason Students:
 - The top five bachelor's programs are Computer Science, Information Technology, Biology, Criminology, Law and Society, and Government and International Politics.
- Mason and National Graduation Rates:
 - Mason's graduation rates are consistent across ethnic groups.
- Who Are We:
 - Mason enrolls cohorts of students who look like the state.
 - Graduate all those cohorts with no-gaps and no excuses.

- Provide opportunities and experiences to all.
- Strive for faculty and staff to reflect the state's population.
- Diversity and inclusion are intentional, not coincidental.
- Not just limited to higher education but also assist with K-12 education.
- Focus and solve the big problems and grand challenges.
- Mason is a performance culture, not an entitlement one.
- Peer Analysis Over Ten-Year Span:
 - Undergraduate Enrollment:
 - William and Mary and the University of Virginia have intentional flat enrollment rates.
 - Old Dominion University and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) are trying to grow without success.
 - VCU was substantially larger than Mason ten years ago and now Mason is larger.
 - Commonwealth Funding:
 - Mason is growing the most and receiving less general fund appropriations per in-state ungraduated student FTE (full-time equivalent) than other state institutions. This is an issue that needs to be resolved.
- Challenges:
 - There is an enrollment cliff due to demographic changes. Between 2026-2031 the number of high school graduates is expected to drop nine percent.
 - The value proposition of higher education is in question.
 - There is a mental health crisis.
 - There is a changing funding model.
 - The cost of living in the region is high.
- What Does Transformation Mean:
 - Leverage education to move from the knowledge and degree business into the success business.
 - Include non-traditional learners and take them to where they want to be.

III. Framing of the Day

Provost Ginsberg provided brief remarks and framed the day:

- Mason brings students to a point where they can achieve success in their life.
- Freedom and learning are the two most important words for Mason.
- The Mason mission was read: George Mason University is an innovative and inclusive academic community committed to creating a more just, free, and prosperous world.
- Our Values:
 - Our students come first.
 - We thrive together.
- Know where Mason has been, but look forward to what Mason wants to become.
- Mason must meet needs, fill gaps and exceed expectations.
- Mason's biggest constraint is resources.
- Today is about adjusting to better meet the needs of today and tomorrow and how Mason can more effectively and successfully thrive together.
- It really is Mason's Time.

IV. Breakout Sessions

Provost Ginsberg, provided instruction for the breakout sessions. Each station will run for 18 minutes and will move on a rotating basis. Q&A along with discussion is encouraged. The station list follows:

- Station #1: Strategic Plan – Facilitated by Ken Walsh
- Station #2: Mason Student Success – Rose Pascarell and David Burge
- Station #3: Research – Facilitated by Andre Marshall and Paula Sorrell
- Station #4: Faculty & Staff Success – Facilitated by Mark Ginsberg, Erin Iacangelo, Melissa Broeckelman-Post and Kim Embry

V. Financial Framework

Deb Dickenson, Interim Senior Vice President of Interim Senior Vice President for Administration and Finance presented the following financial framework:

- Mason's Financial Position is Stable:
 - Financial stability is strong; great to say post COVID.
 - Achieved Tier 3 status just before the pandemic which allowed Mason the ability to issue debt.
 - Inaugural Issuer Rating and stable Aa3 outlook.
 - During the SACSCOS Recertification, there were no financial findings which is almost unprecedented.
- Key Financial Metrics:
 - Operating cash flow margin is improving which is a financial resource used for investments.
- Moody's Debt Rating Scorecard (Aa3):
 - A lower score is better.
 - Mason is trending toward the next level rating (Aa2) which could be achieved this year.
- Financial Challenges Looking Forward:
 - Funding disparities.
 - Lean staffing.
 - Focusing on projects with return on investments.
- Enrollment Growth:
 - Mason's enrollment growth doubled Virginia Tech's (VT) over the last ten years.
 - Mason is responsible for 85% of the Commonwealth's enrollment growth.
- Tuition and State Funding Disparities:
 - Mason receives the lowest state support per peer institutions.
 - The BOV established a Special Tuition Committee to make tuition recommendations for the remainder of the academic year. The tuition increase that was previously established is needed.
- Allocation & Tuition Gaps:
 - \$2,665 gap between Mason's undergraduate in-state tuition and mandatory fees and the average for other R1 institutions in FY22.
 - \$1,682 gap between Mason's appropriation per Virginia student and average appropriation for all other Virginia higher education institution in FY22.
- Increasing Mason Aid:
 - Mason's aid has more than doubled as a percentage of overall financial aid.
 - Federal, State and all other aid has steadily decreased as a percentage of overall financial aid.
- Operational Efficiency:
 - Mason has significantly fewer employees per student than nearly all its peers per FTE.

- Market Compensation:
 - More than 250 faculty below minimum market range.
 - From a staff standpoint, Mason cannot meet offers for the same position that other universities are offering in the same area. Other universities have counter-offered \$25,000-\$37,000 more for an \$80,000 position that Mason offered.
- Cost of Living:
 - The DC Metro area is the fifth highest cost of living in the United States. For example: A two-bedroom apartment near Mason's campus costs about \$3,000-\$3,500 a month while a comparable apartment near peer institutions costs between \$900-\$2,000 a month.
- Cumulative Impact of State Funding Disparity:
 - Mason would have received an additional \$436 million if the average state appropriation per in-state student (excluding aid) of five peer doctoral institutions between FY13 and FY22 was received.
- Financial Services Roadmap:
 - Mason streamlined and modernized its systems and processes.
 - Redesigned the chart of accounts which went live on July 1. This reduced Mason's accounts from 2500 to 1100.
 - Committed to operational efficiency.
- Student Services:
 - Enhance student engagement across modalities.
 - Standardize the student experience.
- Research Administration Roadmap:
 - Streamline and enhance research administration. This helps the researcher to focus more on research due to spending less time on administration.
- Leveraging Existing Resources & Strategic Investments:
 - Renovating existing assets to extend useful life and enhance functionality.
 - Classroom technology refresh for consistency of appearance and capabilities across all campuses.
 - Extended the useful life of Harris Theatre for 20 years with half the budget it would have cost to replace the building.
 - Investing strategically in new projects to support future growth.
 - New forensic sciences outdoor lab which is only one of eight in the world.
 - The Police Drone Program was founded in 2018 which provides supports to state, national, federal and local agencies. Mason is at the top of the field in deploying this technology.
 - Mason continues to make the best use of limited resources, investing in its people, systems, and students.
- René Stewart O'Neal, Associate Vice President for Strategic Budget and Planning presented the following operating budget information:
 - FY23 Proposed Operating Budget:
 - The Board approved Mason's \$1.436 billion operating budget on June 29, 2022.
 - Investment in faculty and staff through competitive compensation.
 - Investment in students through increased financial aid.
 - Focus on efficiency through conservative allocations for core budget needs.
 - The budget is tight and not able to provide the investments that are needed for the most critical priorities. A more sustained funding model

- is needed to diversify revenue streams and provide increased resources so Mason can continue to grow and thrive.
- Undergraduate & Graduate Enrollment Growth:
 - Mason has experienced a steady increase in total student enrollment, averaging 1.9% annually since FY13.
 - Undergraduate headcount has shown steady growth.
 - Graduate and Law School headcount have shown continued growth since prior declines.
 - Six-Year Operating Plan: FY23 & FY24:
 - Submitted a plan update to the state on July 11, 2022 as required. The eight operating strategies remain unchanged.
 - Operating Budget Challenges:
 - There was one limited undergraduate tuition increase in last three years which was \$450 in FY2021.
 - No increase in FY23 mandatory student fees.
 - Tuition increases used to fund additional institutional aid.
 - Tuition increases used to fund salary increases and employee competitive market adjustments.
 - Ms. Dickenson presented on the following items:
 - The following are capital funding projects that are being submitted to the state:
 - Fuse at Mason Square
 - Student Innovation Factory Building
 - Interdisciplinary Science & Engineering Building 1
 - Business School
 - Critical Deferred Maintenance Phase 1
 - Fuse at Mason Square:
 - First P3 at Mason.
 - Unprecedented public-private partnership.
 - \$77M raised off-balance sheet/off Mason's credit for commercial space.
 - Lease-up risk transferred to private partner.
 - Public-Private Partnership (P3) & Other Opportunities:
 - Mason is assessing opportunities for development and utilization of existing assets. Without large capital gifts only one or two potential initiatives will be selected.
 - Mason is driving Virginia higher education enrollment growth by 85%:
 - A lean, efficient operator.
 - Managing & mitigating risks.
 - FY24 Base Budget Planned Funding Request:
 - Base budgeted shortfalls have been funded through position vacancies and reserves.
 - Annual base budget funding gap with inflation adjusted is \$51.2 million.
 - Ms. Dickenson summarized that Mason is all together financially different so please let Richmond know that financial assistance is needed.

VI. Morning Recap

Dr. Washington recapped that despite the fiscal challenges, he is pleased where Mason is at and added that Mason has always done more with less. Provost Ginsberg followed up noting that Mason's approach is fearless when facing the big issues.

VII. Lunch Recess

Rector Hazel called for lunch recess at 11:57 a.m. and advised the planning session would reconvene at 1:00 p.m.

Rector Hazel reconvened the planning session at 1:05 p.m.

VIII. Branding

Paul Allvin, Vice President and Chief Brand Officer, provided the following branding information:

- Mason: Building a National Brand:
 - Mason is in a competitive Market. There are 13 institutions advertising in Northern Virginia.
 - Competition is increasing and universities are advertising heavily in Northern Virginia:
 - The University of Maryland Global Campus has a budget of \$34 million a year while Mason's budget is \$1 million.
 - Virginia Tech is spending in excess of \$3.6 million.
 - The University of Virginia is spending \$3 million.
 - Major universities are operating or expanding Northern Virginia campuses such as Northeastern University, UVA and Virginia Tech.
 - Virginia Tech is expanding its presence in Northern Virginia by advertising in airports, on buses, apparel in the Fairfax Costco and have gift cards at a local Safeway.
 - To counter act the competition, Mason is trying to gain national recognition through renewing the Mason brand:
 - Per the data collected from Sunshine and Bourbon last year, Mason stakeholders are optimistic, energetic, risk-tolerant, forward-thinking and scrappy.
 - Four Pillars of Mason's Brand that its identity is being built around are diversity, inclusivity, grit and audacity.
 - Mason is all-together different. This tag line is derived from Mason's four pillars. The following video was played:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24zkOmV5mp0>
 - Brand penetration is being accomplished through the following media sources:
 1. Paid through digital news media, transit (airport, metro), Sponsorships and event venues.
 2. Earned through national, DC & Virginia, trade media and student media
 3. Social
 4. Owned such as gmU.edu, email, GMU-TV and campus venues>
 - Five things to look for next:
 1. Brand language training and resources.
 2. Refreshed brand visuals.
 3. More community visibility.
 4. More brand extensions.
 5. Region in-reach, national outreach.
 - Mason's Spring 2022 Commencement Recap video was played as it sums up everything Mason is:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UVYSoBqXIk>

IX. Breakout Sessions

Rector Hazel provided instruction for the following breakout sessions:

- Station # 1: ARIE – Our Path Forward – Facilitated by Sharnnia Artis & Kim Eby
- Station #2: ADVANCE & The Mason Virginia Promise – Facilitated by Janette Muir, Paula Sorrell & Jason Dodge
- Station #3: Philanthropy & Comprehensive Campaign Planning – Facilitated by Trishana Bowden
- Station #4: 2022-2023 Legislative Priorities – Facilitated by Paul Liberty

X. COVID: A Look Back & Moving Forward

Julie Zobel, Associate Vice President, Safety, Emergency, and Enterprise Risk Management provided information on Mason's COVID response which was presented in four sections:

1. Foundation:

- Planning for a Safe Return to Campus:
 - A chart was referenced which highlighted the governance structure.
 - A dedicated project management team helped coordinate meetings, developed timelines, charters and deliverables for each working group and identified inner dependencies between groups.
- The Emergency Management Foundation housed the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), Communicable Disease Plan (CDP) and the Patriot Tiger Team Report (PTTR) on Fall 2020 Operations.
 - COOP provided direction on how Mason performs critical functions during an emergency.
 - The CDP became a guide for Mason's COVID response.
 - The PTTR solved the complex problem of developing and delivering a quality education during the pandemic.
 - Mason implemented these plans in coordination with the Fairfax County Health Department, Virginia Department of Emergency Management and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).
- There was a central coordinated response via Safety, Emergency, & Enterprise Risk Management (SEERM).
- The Public Health Foundation was highlighted for managing the Box-It-In strategy.

2. Response:

- Dave Farris, Executive Director, Safety and Emergency Management began this segment by showing a Mason COVID Response Retrospective Video.
- March 2020 – May 2020, Challenges and Responses:
 - In March 2020, Mason was reassured that COVID was not going to be a big public health threat. Despite that assurance, Mason was monitoring what was going on and had a communicable disease plan in place.
 - Abrupt transition to online learning.
 - Suspension or modification in operations.
 - Anticipated the financial impact to better position Mason to receive aid when it became available.
 - The response to these early changes was activating Mason's emergency plans.
 - Outbreak Mitigation and Management:
 - This consisted of an interdisciplinary team in coordination with public health officials to handle potential campus outbreaks.

- Exposure protocols were developed such as the Mason COVID Health Check.
 - When appropriate interventions would occur to quarantine, perform targeted testing or modify events.
 - June 2020 – August 2020, Challenges & Responses:
 - Resumption of on-campus activities during the fall through the Safe Return to Campus Plan.
 - Educating the campus community with the new safety protocols through mandatory training, website and communications.
 - Provided safety and cleaning supplies University wide.
 - Limiting occupancy in classrooms and public areas by reconfiguring spaces and removing furniture.
 - September 2020 – August 2021, Challenges & Responses:
 - There was a resurgence of COVID which continued the mandate of face coverings, physical distancing and completion of the COVID HealthCheck.
 - There was a demand for testing with limited testing capacity. At this point a lab was setup at the SciTech Campus which allowed Mason to process more tests. Began with a nasal swab testing process that was performed at the underground parking deck of the Ángel Cabrera Global Center. Mason later moved to a saliva test which allowed for more testing locations. Today more than 265,000 tests have been provided at Mason.
 - Mason staff managed mass vaccination clinics. A total of 120,000 vaccines were provided by Mason. Mason continues to provide vaccines and boosters on the Fairfax Campus.
 - September 2021 – Present, Challenges & Responses:
 - Greater densities on campus so public health and safety precautions were maintained while reviewing plans and protocols.
 - The primary concern was vaccinating the community.
 - The community became fatigued and complacent in dealing with the COVID precautions.
 - The Omicron variant hit.
 - Due to the impact on the student body, increased support services were provided.
3. Impact:
- Ms. Zobel began this segment by highlighting the university cases across the United State in May 2021. Mason's had 923 cases while the next lowest cases shown on the slide was 4,312.
 - Due to Mason's media communications, the community was well informed of Mason's low transmission rates and the measures taken to keep the community safe.
 - Campus presence increased beginning fall 2021.
 - Due to Mason's efforts, the dedicated quarantine and isolation facility never exceeded 1/3 of its capacity.
 - There was student involvement in COVID solutions which enhanced their experience and experiential learning opportunities. They checked in vaccination clinic participants, some were able to administer vaccines and science majors were hired to work in the testing lab.
 - The creation of online and hybrid courses during the pandemic paved the way for continuing hybrid courses.

- Mason's response had a significant impact on the region. Mason's on-campus testing reduced the burden on regional testing facilities. Mason's mass and mobile vaccination clinics increased the overall regional vaccination rate.
- 4. Strengths, Risk and Opportunities:
 - Key Success Factors:
 - Governance structure with diverse membership.
 - Countless hours of work over evenings, weekends and holidays for more than 2 years.
 - Adherence to scientific principles and guidance even when unpopular.
 - Faculty committed to delivering courses differently.
 - Set up of a 13,000 weekly capacity testing program.
 - Was among the first university to require vaccinations.
 - Additional Success Factors:
 - Decisive leadership through the pandemic with clear communication.
 - Decades of practice in emergency management gave the expertise needed to managed the operation impacts of COVID.
 - Positive relationships with state and local partners were critical in obtaining supplies, understanding guidance, getting approval for plans, and bench marking.
 - Community's adaptability to change their behavior.
 - These factors allowed the campus to reopen safely, with no major outbreaks while continuing to provide quality instruction and research throughout the pandemic.
 - FY23 Enterprise Risk Mitigation Efforts:
 - Will focus on fully transitioning COVID operations from an emergency state to a steady state.
 - Focus on active threat preparedness.
 - Continue to address Human Resources and IT infrastructure needs.
 - To close, Dr. Zobel offered a video which highlighted the impact that Mason's approach to COVID had on the community.

XI. Reflections & Closing Comments

Dr. Washington closed the meeting by noting he hoped everyone gained an idea of what Patriot Spirit looks like. He thanked everyone for attending and helping to build the next great public research university.

XII. Adjournment

Rector Hazel called for any additional business to come before the board. Seeing none he adjourned the session at 4:40 p.m.

Prepared by:

Sarah Hanbury
Secretary pro tem