

UNIVERSITY LIFE IN REVIEW

SUCCEED

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Prioritizes
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Nurturing Learning, Engagement, and Community

Friends of the Mason Community,

The start of a new academic year at George Mason brings with it a sense of excitement and new beginnings. We returned to a bustling campus life with signature events and activities such as [Welcome2Mason](#), the [Get Connected Fair](#), [Career Fair](#), and [Family Weekend](#). We formally welcomed our new students at [Convocation](#) in the Eagle Bank Arena, where Doc Nix and the Green Machine instilled a sense of Patriot Pride with the [George Mason University Fight Song](#). Students, staff, and faculty alike have sought out good luck by rubbing George Mason's bronze toe on the statues displayed at the Fairfax and Mason Korea campuses.

“This year, the Dialogue Across Differences (DxD) initiative offers a framework for engaging with students in productive discourse, helping them to find common ground, and gain appreciation for our shared humanity.”

What's also usual for the start of an academic year is the inevitability of the unexpected. An ever-shifting national and global landscape influences student life in ways we can't always predict. External factors present students with unique challenges, but also with great opportunities for learning, engagement, and community.

This year, the [Dialogue Across Differences \(DxD\)](#) initiative offers a framework for engaging with students in productive discourse, helping them to find common ground, and gain appreciation for our shared humanity. This work includes a greater knowledge and understanding of freedom of expression

in an environment of safety, civility and respect. We are committed to increasing the skills students want and need to navigate with resilience, compassion and innovation to make their own mark on the world.

This issue of Succeed highlights the Mason commitment to increasing student learning, engagement, and community:

- ✓ The long-standing [Mason Votes](#) initiative has empowered students to be informed and engaged citizens during election season and beyond.
- ✓ Inspiring a culture of kindness across the George Mason community through [Mason Chooses Kindness](#).
- ✓ Our commitment to inclusive, innovative student engagement through GAMEason and the expansion of the Esports program.
- ✓ A new Restorative Justice program that is helping students to constructively right their wrongs.
- ✓ Reflecting on spiritual development to improve student mental health and well-being.
- ✓ The upcoming Student Activities and Engagement Building, a multi-use facility centered on engaging student organizations, recreation activities, and the Green Machine.
- ✓ The evolution of [University Life at the Mason Korea campus](#) over the last 10 years.
- ✓ Student and alumni profiles, and a spotlight on our University Life staff.
- ✓ Creative ways alumni and community partners have continued to impact student success.

We continue to transform our University Life division to be more agile and responsive, and we invite you to engage with us as we double down on our commitment to student success in all forms.

I hope you'll find the stories in this issue as inspiring as I do. Together, we are building a better future where Every Student Succeeds.

With gratitude,



Rose Pascarell,
Vice President for University Life





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2023-2024:



As of July 2024, **3100+** students have taken action in support of their mental health by registering for TimelyCare.



UL Student Success Coaches held
6,400+ student appointments



Patriot Experience engagement increased by **7%** with the completion of
83,650+ items across the areas of Global Citizenship, Career Readiness, and Well-Being.



The Student Support and Advocacy Center distributed **\$1,134,389** to students in need. *(Funds were drawn from the Stay Mason Student Support Fund and the Student Emergency Assistance Fund)*



University Life led hundreds of events across all Mason Campuses engaging
38,000+ students.

12,000+ Mason students and alumni attended at least one of 6 career fairs held by **University Career Services**.

1,400+ students participated in **Residential Learning Communities (RLCs)**.

340,000+ swipes into the Mason Recreation Facilities were accessed by nearly **25,000 students**.

900+ students participated in **Mason Recreation Club Sports**.

Student Media Sports Team broadcast
108 Mason athletic games on ESPN+. **63** men's and women's basketball games streamed online via gomason.com.

Mason Recreation's Now What practical sessions were featured in the March 28, 2024 issue of *Inside Higher Ed.*: *Student Wellness Tip: Helping Students Navigate Sticky Situations*.

votes

Empowering student voices through civic engagement

Prior to the November election University Life administrators, Kathryn Mangus, Alissa Karton and Jason Hartsel were unified in this certainty: Mason students would be educated, informed and aware of the issues driving campaigns and they would be ready for their voices to be heard, regardless of party affiliation.

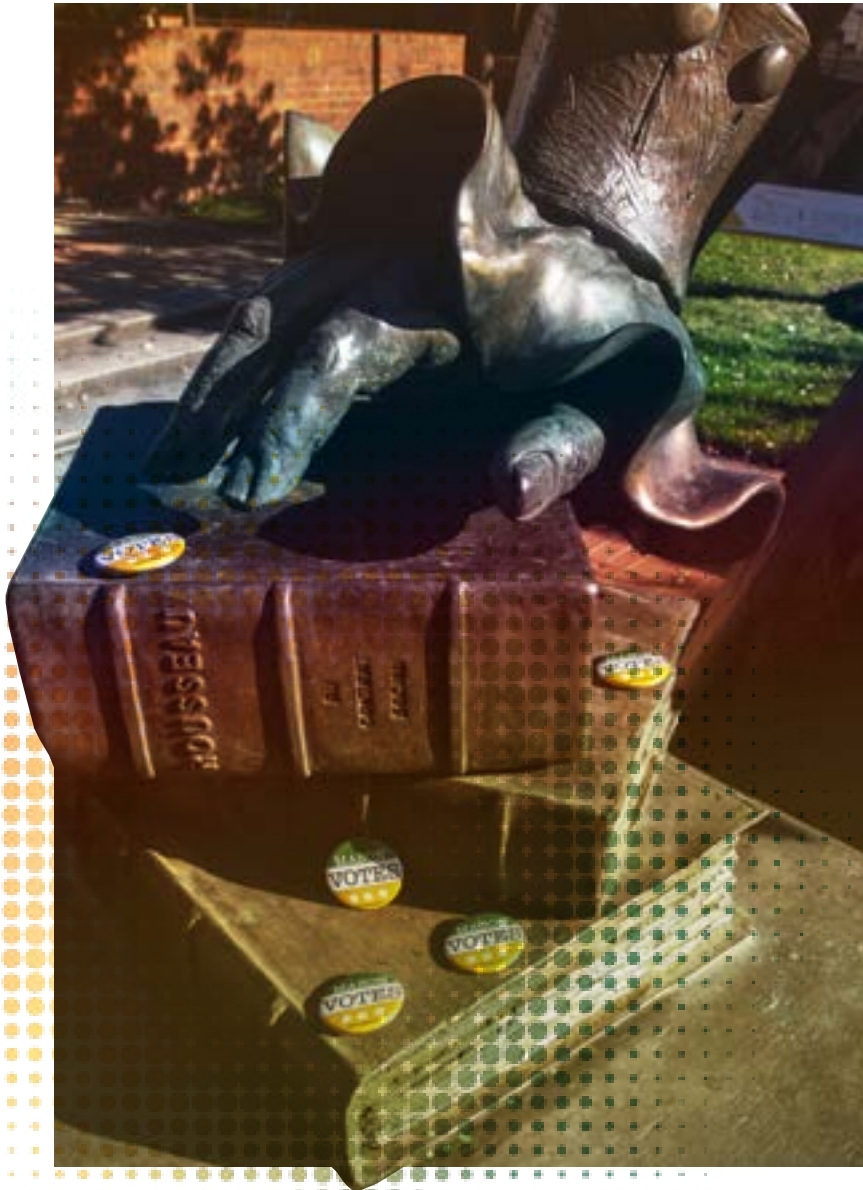
Our goal is to help students learn how to understand peoples' differences and recognize that we don't all come at issues through the same lens.

"We are living in a politically charged environment that can be an educational moment for all of us, and there is a lot of student interest in the outcomes and what it means for their futures," said Mangus, Director of Student Media.

"As a university, our goal is to help students learn how to understand peoples' differences and recognize that we don't all come at issues through the same lens. We want students to have the ability to appreciate and value diversity of opinion in a civil context."

The Mason Votes initiative, which launched during the 2008 election cycle and continued with student-driven multimedia coverage this fall, is the primary platform for student reporters and editors to report





“We wanted students to see themselves as part of the process, and to spark an engaged community.”



the news and provide opinion-based content designed to engage the Mason student body. Through the initiative students partner with campus administrators to educate and create awareness on voting and elections. Mason's Office of Community Engagement and Civic Learning (CECIL) and the Schar School of Policy and Government collaborate with University Life in this effort.

Through the Mason Votes website, which is run by Student Media, Mason has shown a long-standing, non-partisan commitment to encouraging student political engagement.

Karton, Assistant to Vice President and Director of Special Projects for University Life, recalled that the site was created as a central location for the articles, podcasts and video content being produced during experiential learning surrounding the electoral process. From the beginning, Karton and others were galvanized by the campus response and interest.

“We wanted students to see themselves as part of the process, and to spark an engaged community,” Karton said.

That has happened at Mason as shown in a report from the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education at Tufts University, where researchers conducted a National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement at the collegiate level.

Mason consistently records higher student voter registration figures and voting rates than similar institutions, with almost 72% of eligible registered voters casting a ballot compared to a 66% national average.

That's important, the study authors say, because voting is habit-forming and young voters will usually continue as voters in subsequent elections. They continue by saying the active voters are more likely to be visible to and to be contacted by campaigns, highlighting their ability to raise key topics.

'Front-row view of history'

Mason's proximity to Washington, D.C., puts the university and its students in prime position for candidate visits and rallies with their supporters, events that amp the excitement and makes elections more relevant to students, said Hartsel, the Assistant Director of Student Media.

Over the years, visitors have included

72%

of eligible registered voters at
Mason cast their votes compared
to a 66% national average.

President Joe Biden, President Barack Obama, Vice President Mike Pence, Bernie Sanders, Andrew Yang, Elizabeth Warren, Vice President Kamala Harris, and John Kasich, either as candidates or just before announcing their aspirations.

"Our student media leaders are in the position to be alongside national media reporting on the election, and that's an amazing experience that just doesn't happen at other universities" Hartsel said. "They have a front-row view of history with access that is one-of-a-kind."

"They take it very seriously that their accurate reporting has a role in helping shape informed voters' opinions."

The process of covering an election gives students the opportunity to develop career-ready skills including writing, interviewing, and critical thinking that will serve them well as they seek internships or employment.

Dialed-in for diligence

Hartsel also points out that for many students, this will be their first year of being able to cast a presidential vote, a fact that raises the importance of

STUDENT PROFILE

Zayd Hamid, Manassas Park, VA
2024 Public Administration graduate
Master of Public Policy student at Mason's Schar School



The reach and impact of Mason graduates is not lost on Zayd Hamid, whose undergraduate days lasted only three years while featuring accomplishments that were recognized at the university, state and national levels.

Hamid, who was selected to give the 2024 student commencement address, was the first recipient of Student Advocate of the Year from the National Institute for Lobbying and Ethics, he represented Mason students while speaking to congressional staff at a panel on education affordability led by the Association for Public and Land-grant Universities among other leaders of the Student Aid Alliance.

Along the way, and also while working on election campaigns, he recalls routinely bumping into Mason alumni, who were leading discussions on public policy, education funding and other important issues, a path that he envisions as part of his future as a lobbyist.

"I found the more I dove into the political arena in Northern Virginia and (Washington) D.C., the more I saw Mason graduates shaping the vision for our region and our country," Hamid said. "They are opening doors

to help people like me get there, and I want to be a part of the next step (for future Mason graduates).

"A Mason education prepares people to make an impact, and it's a powerful brand with people working to solve grand problems that no other university can match. Mason is unique in the breadth and depth of what it offers and how it stays with you for your career."

Hamid was part of Mason's student government and Mason Lobbies, which takes students to the state capitol to lobby state legislators on matters that affect Mason students. Those experiences helped crystallize and confirm his political aspirations.

As a first-generation student who paid his own way through Mason's Honors College, Hamid cherishes the connections he's made with Mason faculty as well. He says his professors have gone out of their way to prepare and mentor him.

"They are world-renowned and willing to help at every turn," Hamid said. "It's inspiring to see how much they care and what they are willing to do to help students."



awareness of candidates and their stance on issues.

"You can be part of the larger conversation when you know what is going on," Hartsel said. "This is their future that they're covering (as Student Media) or discussing on and around campus, and we want them

to make informed choices."

Mason Votes, in addition to candidate profiles, event coverage and hosting debate watch parties, works to make elections relevant to what affects and interests college students.

The effort goes beyond just reaching students who already have an opinion or are otherwise politically engaged, Karton notes. This year, Mason Votes is producing a public service announcement targeting students who can vote, but don't intend to cast a ballot.

The clip asks students to identify an issue close to them and then evaluate how that could influence or motivate them to vote. It's a way to see beyond the veneer of candidates and that those matters are relevant at the local, state and national levels.

"We try to offer something for everyone," Karton said. "We want all students to feel like they have a voice."

STUDENT PROFILE

Rodney Rhodes, Botetourt County, VA

2023 Sport and Recreation Studies graduate
Master of Sport Management student in the school of Sports,
Recreation and Tourism



While growing up in rural Virginia, Rodney Rhodes's parents always told him he could win an argument with a rock and that he'd end up talking for a living.

Turns out they were right – at least about his voice turning into a career – as the aspiring sports broadcaster has developed his craft during four years of undergraduate study at Mason and while working to finish his masters in Sports Management in Spring 2025.

"Sports have always been my true passion," said Rhodes, who completed a 400-hour internship with Mason's Student Media Sports Broadcasting Team in 2023 and then took the reins as the Assistant Broadcast Director in 2024. "It's fast-paced, it's exciting, every day is new, and Mason's given me so many opportunities to get experience and to learn."

Rhodes entered Mason because of the Sport Management Program's reputation for excellence and the university's setting that took him out of his comfort zone of a small town and into the experience

of city living. It was "a no-brainer" to stay for graduate school based on the connections he made and the path he envisioned for success under the tutelage of David Carroll, faculty advisor for Mason's sports broadcasting team.

"I wouldn't know anything about sports broadcasting without David, he's amazing," Rhodes said. "He's taken the time to give me direction, showing me that it's not always just the big things that are important because the little things are so valuable, too."

That meant learning every role from graphics and camera work to technical directing and doing color commentary. The Sports Broadcasting Team covers over 100 Mason sports games a year that are streamed on ESPN+.

"That's a big deal, it's experience that says more than anything on a resume," he said. "You've lived it, and you've led it. You don't get that chance everywhere."

MAMAVA LACTATION POD SEDULOUS GIVES BACK

Sedulous and SYBA establish a lactation facility in Fenwick Library

A new sight now greets visitors to Fenwick Library's first floor: a large blue compartment that sits just inside the doors facing the quad. This is a [Mamava lactation pod](#), a private space that offers a clean, comfortable site for the needs of nursing parents at Mason, and it is there thanks to the generosity of two corporate friends of the university.

"This fills a community need," emphasized Rose Pascarell, Mason's Vice President for University Life. "We want every student to feel welcome and respected as an individual and so we work to be responsive to individual circumstances."

Sedulous Consulting Services, who donated the pod to Mason, is a cybersecurity engineering services firm, offering IT solutions and strategies to the government and private sectors. The company is one of Mason's partners in Virginia's Commonwealth Cyber Initiative, but for Sedulous's president and chief executive officer Omar Dennis, the connection to Mason is personal: his son is a 2024 Mason graduate.

Sedulous originally invested in a Mamava pod for its own team members. When the company was later able to offer dedicated office space to those colleagues, it sought out an organization who could benefit from receiving the pod.

"I was talking to my son last year as he was about ready to graduate," said Dennis. "I was asking how his friends were, and he kind of reminded me that there are people in school who are mothers. It's not just traditional-age students; there are moms, dads, and nursing parents. So, we thought it was a great idea to contact Mason."

Student-parents are part of Mason's diverse student body, and their unique needs are served by Contemporary Student Services (CSS) within University Life. Launched in 2019, CSS offers a community to students who

bring to Mason more life experience than "traditional" college students, including adult learners, veterans, transfer students, students who commute to campus, and student parents.

"We know that nationally, one in five undergraduates is a student parent—in Virginia, that number is one in four," said CSS Director, Dr. Joianne Rodgers.

Working with the nonprofit Generation Hope, CSS launched a student-parent task force to consider issues confronting student-parents, including lactation facilities on campus.

"We found that while people do appreciate having the existing spaces, there is a need for more space in some areas of our campus that are not well-served," said Adrienne Jones, a performance management and employee engagement specialist in Mason's Human Resources office who helped administer a survey for the users of Mason's lactation facilities.

Through the generous gift from Sedulous and its business partner, SYBA, the Mamava pod now resides in the lobby of Fenwick Library.

"This is a proof point that Mason is seeing and recognizing the variety of life experiences our students bring with them," noted Rodgers."

By Anne Reynolds



Dr. Sharnnia Artis, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer;
Dr. Liza Wilson Durant, Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Community, James Villa, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Sedulous, Omar Dennis, President and Chief Executive Officer at Sedulous,
Dr. Joianne Rodgers, Director of Contemporary Student Services, Anne Osterman, Dean of University Libraries, and Rose Pascarell, Vice President for University Life



CAMPUS
ENGAGEMENT
TIP:

Inspire Kindness

In 2020, Mason Chooses Kindness was created at George Mason to focus on kindness among students, faculty, staff and alumni. Each year, a cohort of 100-plus volunteer ambassadors model kindness and share resources.

A 2010 study from the University of Michigan found college students of the 2000s were less empathetic than college students in the 1980s and '90s, and a 2022 article in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health further found college students had less cognitive empathy and increased

anxiety and depression as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

George Mason's Center for the Advancement of Well-Being created an initiative in 2021 to encourage students, faculty and staff members to show kindness to one another.

Within [Mason Chooses Kindness](#) (MCK), hundreds of community members serve as kindness ambassadors, offering programming to promote exploration and engagement around the theme of kindness and modeling how to treat others with intentional grace.



5 PILLARS OF MASON CHOOSSES KINDNESS:

- ✓ Education and Awareness
- ✓ Positive Connections, Creativity
- ✓ Courageous Advocacy
- ✓ Compassion
- ✓ Well-being

Adapted from an article by Ashley Mowreader

Why kindness?

In 2013, George Mason established well-being as a commitment in its 10-year strategic plan, and the Center for the Advancement for Well-Being leads the initiative, collaborating with stakeholders to create a common theme.

"In early 2020, and not knowing that COVID was around the corner, we chose the theme of kindness," says Dr. Nance Lucas, Executive Director and Chief Well-being Officer. "Mason Chooses Kindness was intended to be a theme only for the 2020–21 year. Given its success and how much it was resonating

with our community members, we decided to continue expanding it over the years."

The goal of MCK is to "create and sustain a kindness revolution," according to the Mason website. Kindness, as defined by the institution, is intentionally engaging in positive action that is friendly, caring and compassionate toward oneself and others.

"We know from the science of well-being that kindness is an antidote to loneliness and depression," Lucas says. "One of our goals is to increase awareness about the impact of kindness, including ordinary examples like holding the door open for others or [other actions] that require more of us."

MASON CHOOSES KINDNESS PROGRAMS:

MCK TOOLKIT



The **MCK Toolkit** offers community members resources to learn about the impact of kindness and how they can spread it within the institution, classrooms, workplaces or their personal lives. The tool kit features peer-reviewed articles on kindness and student testimonials on the importance of kindness.

PATS FOR PATRIOTS



Pats for Patriots is a program that allows campus stakeholders to share recognition with one another through words of affirmation. It is a free and easy way outside of formal award/recognition processes to thank, recognize and show appreciation for a Mason colleague or student who has taken the time to do something kind, generous or thoughtful towards others. Since launching, the MCK team has received over 700 nominations for Pats for Patriots.

KINDNESS AMBASSADOR PROGRAM



Kindness Ambassador Program is the inaugural cohort was made up of 175 faculty, staff and students. To be an ambassador, a campus community member must be someone who shares compassion toward others, has an enthusiasm for spreading kindness, radiates positivity and joyfulness, and finds joy in helping others. Kindness ambassadors are responsible for modeling how to engage with others kindly and for spreading awareness of MCK tools, resources and events.

Scaling up

"What we discovered is that kindness has become a unifying force at Mason, bringing together so many of our students, faculty and staff in programs like the Mason Kindness Ambassadors and Pats for Patriots," Lucas said. "Unfolding MCK has been like leading a social movement. It's had a snowball effect—as more people learn about it, they want to be involved."

- MCK has scaled since launching, with 225 ambassadors in the 2023-2024 academic year, up from 200 in the 2022–2023 school year.
- Other units have expanded the mission and reach of MCK. Mason's Costello College of Business has its own kindness initiative, the goodwill team, which is

responsible for highlighting and encouraging kindness among the college. The college also incorporates kindness and well-being into its professional development courses, BUS 103 and 303.

- MCK recently partnered with the Patriot Pantry to create kindness cards for pantry users before the winter break and with Mason Athletics to hold a kindness-themed game.

Forrest added "Our hope this that we can sustain the work we are doing and continue to increase the number of kindness ambassadors and the overall level of kindness across Mason."

#BeKind



GAMEmason grabs students' attention, sparks tech sponsorship

In September, Mason's Center for the Arts became the hub for the sixth iteration of GAMEmason, a two-day gaming convention that features varsity esports team competitions, educational sessions, industry guest speakers as well as arcade, tabletop and console gaming opportunities.

The interactive, experiential event is the product of Student Involvement working in collaboration with Mason's Computer Game Design program and GMU Esports leadership to create the country's largest university-sponsored in-person gaming event.

Competitive players, casual gamers and community

members are welcomed at GAMEmason, where this year's tournament featured some of the best college players in Super Smash Brothers Ultimate Crew Battles (4v4) and Chess (4v4).

It also drew the attention of Lenovo and Intel, technology companies that help sponsor the event and are actively involved with and engaging Mason students seeking careers in the gaming and computer industries. Lenovo also featured GAMEmason in its "TrackPointsTalk" podcast series that serves as the source of tech trends that affect educational settings.





STUDENT PROFILE

Graham Harper, Springfield, VA
Mechanical Engineering
Expected Graduation / Spring 2026



There was a time during Graham Harper's first year on the Mason campus that he considered leaving the university.

Mason's Esports program changed his mind and his student trajectory by inserting him into a community where he was comfortable and launching a leadership drive that he hopes will one day land him a career in the aerospace industry, ideally at NASA.

"I'm a competitive person, and I'd always played sports and been in the band, but when I got to Mason, I didn't have that anymore," Harper said. "I'd always played esports as a hobby, and when I joined Mason's team, I found that there were others who shared my passion and interests in the games and beyond."

Harper quickly rose to the manager of the Super Smash Bros. Team, and in the fall of 2024, he took over as the president for the entire GMU esports, a Registered Student Organization that has about 3,500 unique followers on Discord and 1,000 others on different platforms.

Harper has found Mason's program to be unique

because University Life supports esports, but the team started as a grassroots venture that grew organically. Other schools, he says, throw money at esports programs to build a following.

"Here, it's everybody working together and building something consistent, and not just chasing the next thing," he said. "We are a home for students and then we work hard to be the best we can."

Esports have honed Harper's leadership skills as he constructs teams that excel in the game but also as a cohesive unit.

"The mental aspects and a player's ability are important, but you've got to get an understanding of peoples' strengths and weaknesses, their personalities and more. Are they going to help the entire group, or are they not going to lift up their teammates?"

"There's a lot going on, and (the lessons learned are) about way more than a game. What I've learned and what my teammates have learned in esports will follow us for the rest of our lives."

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:

Pilot program focuses on effort to
**'make it
as right as
possible'**



It would be easy to assume that Brent Ericson, Assistant Dean and Director of Student Conduct, spends his days thinking about how to discipline students who have broken university rules and regulations.

However, Ericson instead focuses much of his time and effort on impacting student success and helping return students to the right path for their future.

That goal has led Ericson and his team to revisit history when looking for a new way forward in the realm of correcting student behavior. This fall the office led a Restorative Justice pilot program that features non-punitive measures to repair harm that is inflicted through destructive or inappropriate acts.

Ericson explains that Restorative Justice, which dates back to indigenous groups, brings together students who have caused harm to the community with those who were impacted to find the best course of resolution and restoration for the wrongdoing.

"If I caused the harm, the question becomes how do I make it as right as possible," Ericson said. "Is it an apology, restitution, community service or an educational program about what I did wrong?"

"It's not just about discipline, it's about taking ownership of the harm brought to a person or to a group and understanding how it affected them. The

opportunity to learn is really high and the potential for personal growth is great."

The process also gives the impacted party(ies) a chance to address the perpetrator to express their feelings and work through the harm.

"This gives a voice to the person who was harmed," Ericson said. "It helps them feel whole again."

"This gives a voice to the person who was harmed. It helps them feel whole again."

Potential examples of how the conduct office would use the Restorative Justice program include theft, property damage and vandalism, among others, Ericson said.

In a hypothetical scenario, if a student damaged a residence hall common area, the Restorative Justice process could include a representative from the facilities and housing departments as well as students who were affected by being unable to use the space. The process would also involve a supportive advisor



for the student who initiated the wrongdoing who could help advocate for them.

"It intentionally brings together all of those who have an interest," Ericson said. "It's not about ganging up on somebody. The point is to help them understand, and the purpose is to heal a community."

Research shows that restorative practices provide students with the ability to self-regulate their behavior because they are more conscious of how their actions can inflict harm. Simply handing down a sanction may offer little to no benefits for the harmed party; this doesn't necessarily make it right in the victim's eyes and does nothing to improve the community at-large. Recidivism is rare among subjects who are granted Restorative Justice treatment, Ericson said.

The pilot project started small with only Ericson and one member of his staff trained to manage the dialogue process. The aspiration is for Restorative Justice to gather wider use on campus as more people can be educated as leaders in this practice. Mason's Restorative Justice reach could also expand to cover other acts of impropriety, including academic misconduct such as cheating on an exam or inappropriately using artificial intelligence for class assignments.

Ericson is encouraged by the level of support he has received from Mason's administration in adopting the ideas behind Restorative Justice. During the University Life summer 2024 Student Success Symposium he had the opportunity to share about the Restorative Justice thought process with colleagues - he found many ready to embrace its use.

"We're evolving (as a university and a society) and our practices are evolving," he said. "We are looking at different ways of doing things that have the potential for greater impact. It says that we are willing to try to do our business in an exciting new way."

"We are looking at different ways of doing things that have the potential for greater impact. It says that we are willing to try to do our business in an exciting new way."

Spiritual Development

Supporting students' well-being

Experts say faith can be the intersection of mental health, well-being and student success. The social support network offered by involvement with a faith community can be a bedrock in a time of change and adjustment, and it is a sign of a balanced lifestyle.

Mason has developed a university-wide culture that promotes access to mental health tools and counseling services, in addition to an awareness of how overall well-being affects people of all walks of life and how the responses differ from person to person.

A sense of belonging is critical to mental health and well-being, and we're trying to provide that without barriers."

A major component, which University Life supports and hopes to expand, is the ability for students to have faith at the forefront of their lives, a facet that has been shown to improve student mental health without regard to what an individual's religious experience may look like.

It's not exactly a secret that college students are experiencing mental health struggles at an historic rate.

They've lived through a pandemic that, in many cases, delayed their academic growth.

They face a sometimes-toxic world in social media, where peers, strangers or bots can be relentless and cause unnecessary pain, anxiety or frustration.

And a litany of other issues – isolation, depression or relationship struggles among them – can be constantly present and impact their development.

Broadly, Mason leaders have worked to adapt a proactive model that offers students, faculty and staff preventative measures and intervention methods that respond to an immediate concern or cause of distress.

"We want these important conversations to happen on campus, but we recognize that not everybody feels comfortable doing this in therapy or counseling," said Dr. Rachel Wernicke, University Life Associate Dean and Chief Mental Health Officer. "Our goal is to support students and be there for them where they are, whether that's in a classroom, in a community where they are comfortable or with mental health professionals.

"A sense of belonging is critical to mental health and well-being, and we're trying to provide that without barriers."

The issue can't be understated: Data from the national Healthy Minds Study reveals 1 in 3 students meet the criteria for a clinically significant mental health problem, translating to nearly 7 million students nationwide – or roughly 13,200 of Mason's 40,000 student population.

The research shows those problems affect academic performance, increase the potential for dropping out and have additional negative consequences. The same report states action steps, which include: reducing stigmas around mental health; pursuing partnerships toward care and prevention; and investing and tailoring those services to a diverse population offer benefits to students.

Rabbi Daniel Novick and Pastor Drew Ensز have seen first-hand the positive impacts faith can have on student mental health and well-being.

Novick, who leads Hillel at Mason and serves as the chair of Mason's Campus Ministry Association (CMA), and Ensز, the head of Arise Campus Ministry, say personal beliefs and their shared association with others can be a source of comfort and healing.

The importance, they say, isn't what, how or where students practice their religion, only that they have

the opportunity to do so and to have the ability for organic exploration.

"Mason's a big place and students want to feel they have a space because they yearn for connection," said Novick. "The stability that religion can offer people, in a time that is not always stable in one's life, gives students a sense of positivity and a good feeling that they belong."

The 20 religious organizations that make up the [Campus Ministry Association](#), with roughly 4,000 students engaged in faith groups, work in harmony to promote the spirit of good mental health and well-being.

The association, which currently operates out of the Johnson Center, is a resource that seeks to help students find what they are looking for, Novick and Ensz say. Mason's goal is to offer a larger, dedicated spiritual center on campus to expand the services the university can offer.

"We always put students' needs first," said Ensz, who has been at Arise at Mason for nine years and is the former chair of CMA. "No matter your faith or religious tradition, there's a group we can connect you with at Mason, and we're happy to do that because it's to the student's benefit."

"Our communities are about being welcoming and affirming to all students."

Anecdotal stories from students who reach out to CMA or directly to Arise, even when they're seeking something else and find what they are looking for, happen "all the time," Ensz says.

"It's about finding a place of community where students can be healthy, and we're committed to that," he said.

Individuals who engage in religious or spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer, or attending religious services often exhibit lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, research shows.

A faith foundation is a coping mechanism that helps navigate the ups and downs of life. It's a framework for dealing with personal experiences and adversity while also fostering compassion and understanding. All told, paying

attention to the importance of faith is key to building an inclusive and supportive community.

In these turbulent times college students are living in, a belief system is a backdrop that can help tune out the noise, Novick said. Students often learn more about what they believe and what others believe, forming a sense of understanding amid the differences.

"Part of our role is to expand their views and allow them to access them on their own terms," Novick said. "They have ownership of what they believe, and Mason and University Life support that growth."

"That doesn't happen everywhere."

University Life's identification of mental health and well-being as a strategic investment in students illustrates the institution's dedication to its people.

"It's a reminder that students can connect around their common humanity and basic compassion," Wernicke said. "Engaging with them is part of our mission and we've found that an effective way to provide support is to help them find community with each other."

1 in 3



students meet the criteria for a clinically significant mental health problem



STUDENT Activities & Engagement BUILDING

NEW FAIRFAX CAMPUS SPACE

In the last 10 years, Mason's Green Machine pep band has performed twice at White House events, played multiple times with major recording artists at arena events and outdoor festivals and also earned the distinction as "The #1 Pep Band in College Basketball" from the NCAA.

And they've done it all without a permanent home to practice, meet and build its unique student-centered culture.

That is all changing with the ongoing construction and the expected 2025 completion of University Life's new Student Activities and Engagement Building on the Fairfax Campus.

The \$11 million, 25,000-square-foot structure, which will be available to Mason's 500+ student organizations and the campus at-large, is stationed behind the Recreation Athletic Complex, an ideal setting that engages students in an active part of Mason's grounds.

With basketball-sized courts and multiple meeting spaces, the facility fills a void that previously limited student groups and the university in general. Hoar

Construction in partnership with Powers Brown Architecture and civil engineer IMEG Corp. are leading the building effort.

Dr. Pam Patterson, the Associate Vice President for University Life, said the buzz for the possibilities this new space offers is growing among students, administrators and others. She envisions a home for university-wide events, including concerts, esports tournaments, career fairs, orientation activities and more.

"The building was designed with all of these things in mind," Patterson said. "Right now, everybody's jockeying for space, and we've been plugging holes the best we can with our current facilities. It's been a grab-it-when-you-can-get-it experience, and there was never a dedicated home for the Green Machine and more.

"The creation of this new facility presents a terrific opportunity to put students first, allowing us to build a greater community together. There will be more moments for students to gather socially and recreationally."



(L to R) **Dr. Michael Nickens** (Doc Nix), Director, Green Machine Ensembles; **Dr. Sheldon Tate**, Executive Director for Mason Recreation; **Dr. Pam Patterson**, Associate Vice President for University Life; **Rose Pascarell**, Vice President for University Life; **Lauren Long**, Executive Director for Student Involvement; **Lewis Forrest**, Associate Dean for University Life; **President Gregory Washington**

Administrators said the building project is a result of listening to students, who have consistently said that they need more space to be together. The availability of the Student Activities and Engagement Building is expected to support desired goals for increasing student success and retention.

"The creation of this new facility presents a terrific opportunity to put students first, allowing us to build a greater community together."

At a June ground-breaking ceremony, President Gregory Washington highlighted the larger good, noting what this new facility means to the Green Machine and beyond.

"If anything personifies our students, our diversity, our rich heritage, our innovation, our spirit, it actually is the Green Machine," Washington said. "So having

that entity have a focal point, a centerpiece, a gathering point, a rallying point, is probably one of the most important things we can do."

Meanwhile, Dr. Michael "Doc Nix" Nickens, associate professor of music and Green Machine Ensembles director, fought back tears during his brief remarks at the ceremony, saying he is thrilled that his student performers will now have a space they can call home. The UL recognized ensemble has shuffled between outdoor practices, ballrooms and other sites that don't necessarily fit its needs.

"If you think we have delivered so far, you wait till we move into this spot," Nickens said, motioning to the construction site.

Patterson believes there's a sense of relief among student organizations. A growing campus and student body that is clamoring for space for activities is a good problem to have, she said.

"We've been putting the pieces of a puzzle together, and it's not just University Life," she said. "It happens across campus, and we've collaborated to come up with a well-rounded solution that serves everyone."

STUDENT PROFILE

Eduardo Vazquez, Alexandria, VA
Civil Engineering
2024 Mason graduate



Eduardo Vazquez tells a good joke when he's talking about his first professional job, even if it takes a second for some to get it.

"It's nice being on campus when I don't have any homework," he deadpans before a prolonged pause and continuing his thought. "It's a bit of a different experience, for sure, and one that I think is really cool and really unique."

Vazquez, who was born in Mexico and was a first-generation college student, has a long history with Mason, one that starts in middle school with his involvement in University Life's Early Identification Program, extends to his years at the Fairfax Campus and now continues as a project engineer for the new Student Activities and Engagement Building, a solution to Mason's space crunch for student organizations.

Vazquez was introduced to the HOAR construction firm during a career fair on Mason's campus. He

parlayed that moment into an interview, an internship, and after showing his ability, a job.

It just so happened that his first assignment is a project on Mason's campus that will increase student engagement by providing more space for students to gather. It's a need Vazquez can understand from his student days that included being a part of the American Society of Engineers, the Hispanic Student Association and Undocu@Mason.

"My time at Mason was amazing," Vazquez said. "It was very personal with incredible faculty who helped me all along the way. Mason is such a great school, and I've met so many people who are going to be a part of my life forever."

"I had a great experience that I know will stay with me for a lifetime, from my friends and professors to the alumni and beyond. I couldn't have asked for anything more out of a college experience."



(Left) Doc Nix, Green Machine Ensembles Director, performing at the 10th Celebration in Sondgo.

(Right) Mihee Cho, Assistant Manager, Student Involvement and Leadership Development, poses for selfie camera at the event.

(Lower) Dr. Lori Cohen Scher, Senior Assistant Dean for University Life celebrating with Mason Korea Student Ambassadors in Fairfax.

6,900 MILES FROM FAIRFAX:

Mason Korea

Celebrating 10 years of University Life

The success story of [Mason Korea](#), after a series of 2024 events that celebrated the Incheon campus's first 10 years, could easily be told by numbers such as:

More than **400** graduates

Nearly **200** unique classes, many with multiple sections, taught by over **40** faculty members

6 undergraduate and **2** graduate programs

Student enrollment that has grown from 40 to **900+**

But the real evidence of the impact of two nations becoming one Mason is felt in another way – the depth and breadth of options for students who engaged in a global experiential learning environment and were activated and engaged in campus culture through University Life, including:

✓ The Career Development Center with workshops, seminars, career fairs, internships, service opportunities and more.

✓ Student Involvement that provides Registered Student Organizations, leadership training, a scholarship fund and promotes wellness and healthy lifestyle choices.

✓ International Student Services, a team focusing on integrating international students to Korean culture, assisting Korean students transitioning to Fairfax and easing Fairfax students' adjustment in Korea.

✓ Housing and Residential Life, where students get the full dormitory-life treatment from community building events and experiential leadership roles.

✓ Student Support and Counseling Services, which hosts many services and resources to help students succeed.

"Everything we do is focused on giving students the best and most opportunities that create a sense of belonging."

"The goal is to mirror the experience that students would have in Fairfax," said Angela Kang, Associate Dean for University Life Mason Korea. "Everything we do is focused on giving students the best and most opportunities that create a sense of belonging."

That's been the goal for Mason Korea since it opened for students in 2014 following more than two years of internal planning and working with partners that included the Korean government and other academic institutions. The strategy and implementation stretched across all departments and offices at Mason.

The vision behind launching Mason Korea was as vast as the questions that loomed large in the minds of University Life leaders working to scale up Mason's international campus, recalls Pat Carretta, who is now retired from her position as UL's Assistant Vice President. Her structure for Mason Korea carefully considered the services students needed, the resources it would take to offer them and

how to bridge multiple cultures on foreign soil, more than 6,900 miles away from Fairfax.

"It was a unique challenge and a unique opportunity for all of us to create a student life (experience) in addition to the curriculum," Carretta said. "Academics was obviously important but so was supporting the students so that they would be successful and have those chances of co-curricular events and activities, as well as robust support.

"It took a lot of collaboration and figuring it out to the best of our ability, but there was always going to be a learn-as-you-go component."

She recalls one conversation when the Mason Korea team was working with representatives of the architectural firm designing the campus. Carretta asked where students would have space to congregate, whether that be common areas inside or outside on grassy areas.

The idea that students would do more than to go to class was a Western higher education cultural norm that would have been overlooked without guidance, she said.

Dr. Lori Cohen Scher, Senior Assistant Dean for University Life, who learned under Carretta and is now the lead University Life consultant and liaison for Mason Korea, said the integration has always been a two-way street.

"Over the years, in addition to working to replicate the Mason Fairfax student experience, we've also been highly sensitive to adapting, honoring and respecting Korean culture" Scher said. "It's a partnership that constantly examines how to communicate needs across campuses, cultures and environments."

Kang, who has been in her position for two years and who routinely connects with Scher, believes the more input UL at Mason Korea receives from students, the better it can fulfill its mission and values of promoting inclusive well-being and fostering lifelong learning.

"We've laid a really good foundation, and now is the time to continue building up," she said. "We are growing and maturing, and we're determined to give students the best of the best."

Mihee Cho, Assistant Manager, Student Involvement and Leadership Development, and a member of Kang's team, offers a birds-eye view of how far they have come. She joined UL Mason Korea a year after the campus opened and has helped shepherd key initiatives that



Angela Kang, Associate Dean for University Life Mason Korea poses with the number 10 at the celebration.

ONE
MASON

10

TWO
NATIONS

provide students with a dynamic experience.

"There's been a lot of change, (all about) trying to fill the needs of students, and it's getting better and better every year," said Cho, who advises student involvement groups, assists students with skill development and helps evaluate potential department expansion. "We (look at) what is the purpose and what is the benefit. How does it help each student grow?"

As the adage 'the proof is in the pudding' goes, student testimonials perhaps can offer the best insight into the UL's performance and impact to learners at Mason Korea.

Ambrose (Do Hyun) Lee, who graduated in 2022 with a business degree with a concentration in accounting, summed up his experience by noting his use of Mason Korea's Career Development Center, a career consultant and a career fair at the Incheon Global Campus.

"I cannot stress enough how much Mason Korea has molded me to become a multi-faceted student ready for a career in the United States," he said.

"I cannot stress enough how much Mason Korea has molded me to become a multi-faceted student ready for a career in the US."

Meanwhile, Ha Eun Choi, a Global Affairs graduate with a minor in International Security, listed her opportunities as an intern in the Career Development Center, her service as a Global Student Ambassador and her experience as a staff writer for the school newspaper.

"Take advantage of every resource and jump into your field of choice with confidence," Choi advised Mason Korea students.

The future is bright for these students and for Mason's growing global education hub.

STUDENT PROFILE

Se Na Julsdorf, Busan, South Korea
2024 Mason Korea graduate
Conflict Analysis and Resolution with a
concentration in Political and Social Action



Se Na Julsdorf has experienced the uncertainty, the fear and the anxiety of being a Mason Korea student staring down her year of studies at the Fairfax campus.

Her advice: Embrace it and grow from it.

"It was hard, but I had the mindset to take advantage of every second, every opportunity and every resource that is on campus," Julsdorf said. "The classes involve more discussion (than is typical in Korean classrooms), and you learn different perspectives by listening to your professors and your peers.

"Mason is a really special place and the people there help take you to places you didn't even know you could reach."

Julsdorf, meanwhile, was intent on carving out her own mark in Fairfax and at the Incheon campus. Stateside, she was a Carter School Ambassador, served as a University Life Leadership Consultant

office and joined a Korean Calligraphy Club.

She also earned a grant from Mason's Undergraduate Research Scholars Program to study the perception of multi-culturalism in Korea, a project that is close to her personal development as the daughter of a Korean mother and a Danish father.

Julsdorf extended her leadership education experience when she returned to South Korea with the goal of bringing the campus communities closer. She led workshops and was actively engaged in service projects, including planning and coordinating a volunteer effort at an Incheon animal shelter. The UL office and Mason Korea students cared for dogs and seized the opportunity to give back to the community.

"Everything that happens at Mason is opening your eyes to what you can accomplish and how to make a difference," Julsdorf said. "It's been extremely exciting to develop my skills with the help of everyone around me."

HIGHLIGHTING OUR STAFF

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Masters of Education, *George Mason University*
**Associate Director for Assignments,
Housing and Residence Life, 24 years**



Master's Degree, College Student Personnel,
Western Illinois University
Bachelor's Degree, Business Administration,
The Ohio State University
**Assistant Director of Residence Life,
Housing & Residence Life, 10 years**

Q: Describe your job in 50 words or less.

Myra: I supervise two professional staff members in managing Housing & Residence Life for 6,200 students. We work to maximize on-campus housing occupancy and oversee student room changes. I also oversee our department's billing processes, strategic planning, data analysis and coordination with campus partners.

Leotie: I oversee the Rappahannock Neighborhood, which encompasses six residential communities, and supervise six full-time Community Directors. I assist and support in the implementation of our residential curriculum, ensure facilities and maintenance issues are resolved, and partner with the many areas in Housing to create a welcoming environment for our residents.

Q: How does your work impact the Mason student experience?

Myra: My work is focused on ensuring that students have a smooth and supportive living environment. I strive to help create a stable, responsive housing system that meets students' needs and contributes to their overall satisfaction and success.

Leotie: Housing is a fundamental part of the college experience – having a safe and engaging place to spend time outside of the classroom is crucial to a student's ability to learn and develop.

Q: How has campus-life changed since the Covid pandemic?

Myra: Student engagement on campus has shifted. Students are learning to navigate in-person connections and discussions. I have witnessed a heightened emphasis on mental health support and community building as students actively seek meaningful connections in a post-pandemic environment.

Leotie: We see residents connecting a lot more via social media and digital platforms. As we are living in a digital world, our ability to connect with them in this

way has been crucial to our continued engagement with residential students.

Q: How does collaboration with campus partners impact the students you serve?

Myra: Some of my primary collaborators include Student Athletics, Mason Korea, China 1-2-1, Mason LIFE, and INTO Mason. Working across these departments leads to more innovative and impactful living experiences by combining diverse expertise and perspectives. These partnerships allow us to streamline processes, share resources, and create cohesive strategies that enhance student experiences. Our integrated approach ensures that programs effectively address student needs and foster a supportive campus environment.

Leotie: We partner frequently with many offices across campus including the Student Support and Advocacy Center, Student Involvement, and Student Conduct. Our partnerships help us to connect our residential students to resources and opportunities on campus in a more meaningful way.

Q: What do you hope to see for Mason students of the future?

Myra: If resources were not a factor, students at George Mason would have access to cutting-edge research facilities, comprehensive academic support services, hands-on experiential learning opportunities, active community involvement programs, and robust environmental sustainability initiatives. This holistic approach would play a vital role in crafting a vibrant, inclusive, and well-rounded educational experience that would prepare Mason students to go out and make a positive impact on the larger community.

Leotie: Outside of the classroom, all students should have the time and resources to connect with organizations and clubs on campus – the ability to connect with peers and staff outside of the classroom can make the college experience that much better and allow students to gain invaluable leadership and social skills.

How Mason's **GOWNS** for **GRADS** PROGRAM is Empowering Students

Ensuring Access

The Gowns for Grads (G4G) regalia lending program at George Mason University began when an academic advisor discovered that low-income students were unable to purchase the required regalia, preventing them from participating in the commencement ceremony. This grass-roots effort relied on help from students, alumni, and University Life to gather gowns to lend to graduates at no cost to those graduates.

As the program grew, it was formalized, and regalia donations were solicited throughout the year. Now housed in Contemporary Student Services, [the program](#) is led by Caroline Simpson, a George Mason alum and professional staff member, who has witnessed an unprecedented rise in applications. G4G not only supports graduates but also aligns with Mason's sustainability efforts.

Bridging the Gap and Fostering Inclusion

Buying regalia can be a significant financial burden on students. The cost of regalia ranges from \$84 for a bachelors kit to \$973 for doctoral students. Students who have limited or no discretionary funds often cannot justify spending that amount on something that has limited use. Yet, missing a pinnacle celebration and right-of-passage event like commencement can profoundly impact students; there is a sense that no matter how hard they have worked, that they haven't earned the celebration of commencement and wearing the regalia unless they can actually afford it.

By Dr. Joisanne Rodgers, Director for Contemporary Student Services

2024 Mason graduates





Receiving a cap and gown provides a sense of pride and accomplishment and makes the graduation experience more memorable and meaningful. It's an important part of the commencement ceremony, and without it, the experience feels incomplete."

- G4G Recipient

Meeting a Growing Demand

In recent years, the demand for gowns has outpaced the on-hand supply, leading the program to collaborate with stakeholders across the university to solicit donations and purchase missing pieces of regalia, such as tassels and masters hoods. Active partnerships within University Life, including with the Patriot Experience, as well as with academic departments (most notably the College of Engineering and Computing) ensure that each graduate has the proper academic regalia, complete with the distinctive "velvet" of their degree or discipline.

- G4G expanded its reach from serving 3.8% of Mason graduates in 2022-2023 to 4.9% of graduates in 2023-2024, representing a 29% increase in the number of students served.
- With approximately 29% of GMU students qualifying for federal Pell Grants, use of the program is expected to continue on an upward trajectory.

Supporting G4G

If you are a recent Mason graduate and want to donate your cap and gown to the program, you can drop it off on the Fairfax campus in Student Union Building 1, Suite 4211 or mail it to:

University Life
c/o Gowns for Grads
4400 University Drive, MSN 2A4
Fairfax, VA 22030



Monetary gifts to the Student Success Initiatives Fund support the Gowns for Grads program. Donate today!



MASON NOW

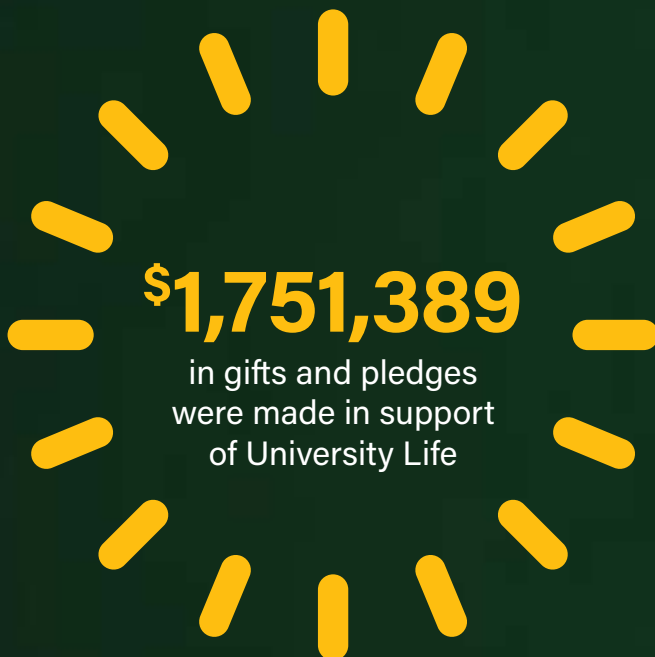
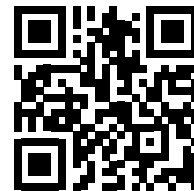
POWER THE POSSIBLE

As we pursue the most ambitious fundraising campaign in university history, University Life is guided by our clear and bold vision – **Every Student Succeeds**.

We are here for one reason—our students. Their success is our commitment, their well-being is our focus, and their growth as caring, respectful, engaged members of an inclusive, diverse society is our passion.

Learn how you can be a part of shaping Mason's future through the Campaign for George Mason University by visiting gmu.edu/masonnow or contact Kaitlin Cicchetti, PhD, Director of Advancement for University Life at koyler@gmu.edu for more information.

If you share our focus, commitment, and passion, [join us](#).



50 University Life initiatives
received gifts

GIVING BY AREA OF IMPACT:



**Programmatic
Support**
\$1,433,820



**Scholarship
Support**
\$317,569

Totals represent gifts and pledges made in fiscal year 2024 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)



639 DONORS

Percentages represent the number of donors from each constituency

DONOR PARTICIPATION

40% Alumni

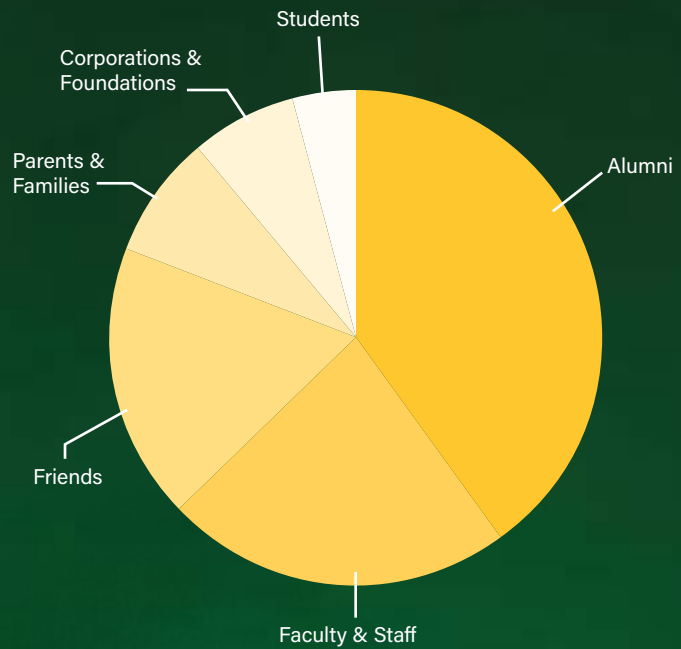
23% Faculty & Staff

18% Friends

8% Parents & Families

7% Corporations & Foundations

4% Students



EARLY IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM Expands Reach

Doubling impact with increasing enrollment

According to [U.S. News & World Report](#), George Mason ranks as the top university for social mobility in Virginia and no program underscores that fact more than University Life's Early Identification Program (EIP). "EIP literally changes the trajectory of students and their families, specifically in the areas of social and economic mobility," affirmed Dr. Khaseem Davis, Director of the program.

Through a rigorous multi-faceted, holistic approach, more than 800 first-generation students in grades 8-12 from more than 60 schools in area cities and counties have access to social, cultural, and educational opportunities at George Mason to help them and their families successfully navigate the post-secondary education environment.

Created in 1987, EIP has graduated 2,100 plus students, with approximately one-third enrolling at George Mason, one-third enrolling at NOVA and the

final third enrolling at another institution of higher education, annually. EIP is so successful and sought-after that every year there is a wait list to enroll.

Challenge accepted

The challenge for any successful program is maintaining—and even increasing—its momentum and building on its foundation to ensure continued success.

For Davis, EIP director since 2015, that means [establishing new ways](#) to engage the program's scholars and their families, deepening their exposure to a variety of facets in the George Mason ecosystem, securing additional funding to expand the number of scholars the program serves, and beefing up EIP's infrastructure to better serve an increased number of scholars.



"My focus is to facilitate student growth but also to help strengthen and reinforce the program's infrastructure to make sure we can accommodate this growth," Davis explained. "President Gregory Washington's goal is to double the size of the program over the next five years so now we need the resources to make that happen," he asserted.

Because of EIP's longstanding success and reputation, stakeholders both inside and outside the George Mason ecosystem are joining together to make the expansion possible.

The university already has committed funds from its \$1 billion comprehensive campaign—[Mason Now: Power the Possible](#)—to grow the program. Philanthropist Al Dwoskin, a longtime friend of George Mason, donated \$500,000 on Mason Vision Day, the first private donation for EIP's expansion. Dwoskin's gift was "a really great way to kick off," the expansion era of the program, Davis noted.

Additionally, EIP was awarded a \$2 million grant to support the expansion via the State Council for Higher Education for Virginia.

Public schools push

The expansion of EIP is not just a one-sided effort. The public-school systems that partner with the program also are involved in securing funding to permit as many participants as possible.

Dr. Anaid Shaver, supervisor of College and Career Services for Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS), reported that earlier this year, SPARK, the education foundation of PWCS, secured a \$55,000

grant from the Tides Foundation to fund additional EIP scholars from the county.

"We have had at least 30 students in EIP for the past 30 years," confirmed Shaver. Because of this longstanding partnership, they were able to use outcome data to help make the case for additional funding.

Since its creation,
EIP has graduated

2,100+
students

"EIP has been critical in redirecting the generational trajectory of high-achieving students with need," Shaver said. EIP's "lived college experience provides invaluable cultural and community experience" for the scholars. By the time they graduate from high school, EIP scholars "already know what is involved in the transition to college life," she continued.

EIP scholars apply for the program in seventh grade and Shaver said that they strive to have students from all 20 of PWCS middle schools complete applications. At one point, there were 90 students who applied for the 30 spots available for PWCS.

"One of the things I'm charged with," confirmed

con't next page

Scholarship support boosts student success

Late last summer, the Women's Club of Great Falls Scholarship Fund (WCGFSF) donated more than \$38,000 to the Women's Club of Great Fall Scholarship Fund Early Identification Program Scholarship, which they established in 2022 with a \$10,000 inaugural gift. The initial gift was awarded to two EIP alumnae attending George Mason—Crystal Forson and Hilary Moya. A portion of the second gift continues to fund their education for three more years while the remainder will fund two new recipients for one year with plans to continue funding them in the future.

"Our organization has grown and has looked for ways to make a larger impact—not just with the number of scholarship recipients and amounts awarded, but also the length of time we are supporting them," explained Lindsay Harper, president of WCGFSF. "We have been interested in expanding our reach beyond college and graduate students and found EIP identifies candidates at a much younger stage in life. We strongly believe if we can provide financial support, then these individuals can focus more on their academics."



EIP Alumnae at George Mason
Photo by Hannah Ratcliff

Davis, “is having conversations with our school partners and figuring out ways we can improve that partnership and ultimately involve more students in EIP.” For instance, last year funding from the Alexandria City Fund for Human Services enabled an increase in the number of EIP scholars from the city of Alexandria, Davis said.

Bridging a gap

In 2022, EIP implemented a creative solution to meet growing student demand. The Institute for Excellence (IFE) is a summer bridge program for high school juniors and seniors “who may have learned about EIP super late, weren’t nominated for the program, or just didn’t know about EIP,” explained Davis.

IFE is open to students who aren’t formally enrolled in EIP and offers participants the ability to explore local industries and earn college credits.

“IFE was made possible by a gift from Dominion Energy and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities through their Hispanic Talent Initiative partnership,” reported Davis. IFE enrolled 30 students in 2022 and 146 students in 2023.

Further funding

This past summer, additional funding from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation was used to maintain the increased enrollment in IFE.

“I was really impressed with the IFE program,” affirmed Gina Osorio Wallace, senior program manager, grants and community relations at the Cooke Foundation. “Not only are students earning college credits on diverse subject matter tracks, but they are also being exposed to a college campus and are starting to explore potential career choices,” she continued.

The one-year \$100,000 grant covered students’ course

textbooks and supplies. It also enabled an increase in instructors and peer mentors which reduced class sizes and offered more one-on-one interaction.

The grant also provided IFE rising seniors the opportunity to participate in off-site job shadow experiences at local companies. Funds supported transporting students from George Mason’s Fairfax campus to corporate locations around northern Virginia.

The mission of the Cooke Foundation is “to advance the education of exceptionally promising students who have financial need,” explained Osorio Wallace. “The students in the IFE program are enrolled in college credit-level courses, so that certainly is indicative of exceptional promise. Coupled with their high academic achievement is the fact that more than 80 percent are first-generation college students who have financial need. Our mission and the mission of EIP in general and IFE specifically go hand in hand,” Osorio Wallace noted.

Building out and up

Strong community partnerships, as well as the promise of additional commitments, indicate that EIP’s growth is a reality.

Davis realizes that to accommodate the growth, he will need to “strengthen and reinforce the program’s infrastructure” to meet the demands of a larger, more comprehensive program. Currently, the office has five to six staff members and Davis hopes to double that as funding allows. They also typically hire 64 certified schoolteachers and 50 to 60 mentors.

Davis hasn’t only set his sights on an expansion in the number of EIP scholars, staff, and programs. “The ultimate goal is to make EIP the premiere college access program in the region and the nation,” Davis exclaimed, sending the program and consequently George Mason to new heights.

For more information about EIP, visit eip.gmu.edu.

By Amanda Milewski



UL AWARDS & ACCOLADES HIGHLIGHTING STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS

2023-2024 George Mason University Awards

- **Exceptional Support Award**
Rachel Lindsey, University Career Services
- **Goldie and Diane Hattery Award for Excellence**
Jose Sanchez Ochoa, Housing and Residence Life
- **Patriot Pathbreakers Team Outstanding Achievement Award Recipients**
FamilyU Cohort
 - *Joisanne Rodgers*, Contemporary Student Services
 - *Shyama Kuver*, Contemporary Student Services
 - *Caroline Simpson*, New Student and Family Programs
 - *Matthew McLaughlin*, Contemporary Student Services
 - *Valeria Fernandez*, Generation Hope's FamilyU
 Team WRITe: Waste Redesign and Implementation
 - *John Rogers*, Housing and Residence Life
- **Jack Wood Award for Town-Gown Relations**
Matthew McLaughlin, Contemporary Student Services
- **George Mason University Employee of the Month, July 2024**
Sophie Donora, UL Regional Campuses



[Contemporary Student Services](#) was recognized with a **NASPA Excellence Award**, earning a Bronze Award in the "Commuter, Off-Campus, Military-Connected, Non-traditional, and related" category.



[LGBTQ friendly campus](#)
Best Colleges: #1 in Virginia; Campus Pride: 5-star rating; Forbes Advisor – online

2023-2024 University Life Staff Awards

- **Outstanding Service**
Ebony Amiss, International Programs and Services
Adam Anthony, UL Marketing and Communications

- Austin Deray*, Graduate Student Life
- Kara Haslbeck*, International Programs and Services
- Lee Ann Houston*, Mason Recreation
- Lu Géza Kelemen*, LGBTQ+ Resources
- Shyama Kuver*, Contemporary Student Services
- Sang Jin Lee*, International Programs and Services
- Sheetal Lee*, International Programs and Services
- Aya Leonhardt*, Student Involvement
- Shannon Osbourne*, Student Support and Advocacy Center
- TJ Pegg*, Student Success Coaching
- Amy Snyder*, UL Staff Experience
- **UL Positive Impact Award**
Mary O'Connor, UL Mason Square
Jessikah Pyett, Housing and Residence Life
Megan Symanwitz, Student Health Services
- **UL Partnership Award**
Rachel Cleaver, Admissions
Pam Promisel, University Business Consulting
Steve Bennett, Police and Public Safety

National & Regional Acknowledgment

- Erin Dunleavy*, International Programs and Services, *Inductee into NAFSA Trainer Corps of International Educators*
- Jonathan Carmona*, International Programs and Services, NAFSA (Association of International Educators) *RISE Fellowship Recipient for 2024-2025*
- Morgan Strimel*, Disability Services, *Outstanding Research on Autism in Higher Education*
- Philip Linwood Wilkerson III*, University Career Services, *Area Director of the Year for 2022-2023, District 29 Toastmasters*
- Ana Lobaton*, University Career Services, *Eastern Association of Colleges and Employers, Rising Star Award*



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