

## **GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC PLAN, 2009-2014**

In 2008, George Mason University developed and adopted an overall Strategic Plan for 2014. The present Academic Plan derives from this larger statement, as well as from academic planning advanced for the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia from strategic goals set by the Board of Visitors and from some developments and issues that have arisen since the formulation of the larger Strategic Plan. A set of major goals for maintaining and enhancing the University's strengths are translated into 6 key categories: student body, teaching and learning, research, distributed campuses, globalization, and academic productivity.

### **Academic Goals**

The University's Academic Plan focuses on balance among competing emphases. Most basically, the Plan recognizes the University's achievement of a number of important objectives, which must be preserved and nurtured, while also committing to ambitious new goals. The University has attained national and international recognition in several areas of research and teaching, with the distinguished faculty to match; it has an elaborate record of regional standing and service; it has attracted a diverse and talented student body, serving the needs of a significant numbers of students with first-in-the-family college experience; it has achieved a significant global reputation; it has established an ethos of flexibility and entrepreneurial initiative. These strengths must be fostered even as additional directions are pursued.

The Academic Plan also recognizes the need to combine enhanced research commitments with parallel innovations in teaching and educational delivery. Pursuit of highly-qualified students and faculty will be blended with additional strides in the area of diversity, and with attention to changing demographics. Strong regional activities will be balanced with additional global outreach.

The Academic Plan commits George Mason University to:

- Significant growth in research and creative activity, with several new areas added to the list of nationally and internationally recognized programs and the development of a larger research strategy.
- Productive teaching and learning, with assessments and program reviews that keep track of results. Modest expansion in student numbers will be combined with improvements in quality and diversity but also with imaginative recruitment efforts that will acknowledge changes in student demographics. The University will strive to remain accessible to students of limited means.
- Expanding its service to the region, through active engagement with area educational, cultural, political, and health institutions and through programs designed to serve labor force needs.
- Enhancing its position as a global institution, through partnerships and educational programs alike.

Through these major academic initiatives, George Mason University will expand its effectiveness in both education and research, building its reputation as a premier public university and a source of innovation regionally, nationally and internationally alike.

### **Student Body**

George Mason University will expand its student body by 1-2% per year over the next five years. This expansion will involve modest growth in incoming freshmen, transfer students, graduate students, and non-degree students with proportions of each remaining roughly stable. While there will be an increase in Virginia students, efforts to recruit out of state and particularly international students will be accelerated.

Modest growth will be compatible with improving student profiles, including continued improvements in high school GPA. At the same time, other criteria, including diversity and socioeconomic background, will also define recruitment. Through private donations and other means, scholarship assistance will be improved to facilitate access. University life and academic services will expand programs to serve historically underrepresented student populations, and a new Access year will be designed to facilitate transitions for certain categories of international students. Campus housing expansion will parallel student recruitment and retention goals, and will continue to involve innovative ways to enhance the learning environment.

Building the student body will increasingly involve participation in new or expanded programs to tap different segments of the population. Programs such as Pathways, with Northern Virginia Community College, and the new degree in Applied Sciences will facilitate new kinds of transfer students, while the new Governor's School at Prince William and other initiatives will reach directly into the high schools. Options beyond current individualized studies programs will attract older students, and a commitment to lifelong learning will generate additional opportunities for retirees.

Enrollment in certain programs, particularly but not exclusively at the Master's level, will depend also on expanding distance learning opportunities and facilities, another project already underway.

The commitment to student diversity can be sustained only by redoubled efforts at diversifying faculty and staff. Recruitment strategies toward this goal will be enhanced.

### **Teaching and Learning**

Serving and retaining undergraduates will continue to depend on a wide range of offerings and a strong commitment to the interdisciplinary goals of a liberal education. Continued evolution in the general education, including its relationship to the degree programs, and sustained commitment to other successful projects like writing across the curriculum and critical thinking will remain essential to these goals. The University remains dedicated to preparing students with the probing habits of mind essential for informed citizenship and for potentially varied and changing careers over a lifetime, as well as providing a solid basis for initial entry into the labor force.

Several new undergraduate programs will emerge to take advantage of new research strengths and employment opportunities, as in the areas of biomedical technology, sustainability and environmental science, and additional facets of public health.

The new Honors College will explore additional ways to identify and enrich qualified students, not only on entry but through opportunities for existing students who have displayed strong capabilities. The commitment to significantly expanding undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity will be a crucial enhancement move as well, solidified through the Quality Enhancement Plan around this theme.

Mason will expand Masters level programs particularly in areas of regional labor force opportunity, as in various facets of public health and several aspects of medical education, continuing a current trajectory. Growing attention to accelerated undergraduate and Masters combinations will add opportunities for student development and enrollment alike.

Expansion in the number of PhD programs will slow, though there will be a few additions. To the extent possible, emphasis will go to moving fellowship opportunities to competitive levels. Overall size and visibility of the PhD programs will parallel larger patterns of research growth.

In response to new capabilities and labor force opportunities, the total number of programs will continue to expand modestly. At the same time, regular and rigorous review will identify programs whose strength and/or market viability have become inadequate.

Mason's educational climate will include continued attention to co-curricular activities, the redefinition of library functions and facilities, the vitality of campus on weekends, and an enhanced effort to provide on-campus job options for greater numbers of students.

Through appropriate selection, advising, effective teaching, and co-curricular support, the University's graduation rate will improve.

The University will retain its strong commitment to identifying and rewarding successful teaching and will continue to support experiments in improved pedagogy. Assessment of learning outcomes and program strengths will be further consolidated as part of the University's educational delivery. Informal and formal assessment of the work-readiness of graduates will add to the more fundamental assessment targets.

### **Research and Reputation**

George Mason is committed to expanding its research and creative output, its funded research, and the number of research and related doctoral/professional programs recognized as nationally or internationally excellent. Attention to relevant infrastructure is a vital precondition for these goals. While research in all fields will be encouraged, special attention will be devoted to several particular areas, for the most part interdisciplinary efforts. The link between faculty research and the invigorated classroom at all levels will be increasingly emphasized.

Extramural funding levels for research will rise by at least 7.5% annually (that is, will double in about 7 years), and the University will explore strategies to accelerate these levels still further. Research collaborations with other institutions, both domestic and international, will expand. Efforts at Technology Transfer will be intensified, with the goal of improving earnings as well as facilitating further faculty and student research applications.

In expanding research and related programming, special attention will be devoted to maintaining existing centers of excellence and developing a finite number of additional areas. Sustaining current areas includes attention to public policy and law, several facets of information technology, biomedical research, and conflict analysis, as well as several more specialized programs (see Appendix A). Areas to be moved toward greater excellence and visibility include music, biomedical technology and neuroscience, globalization research, and public health – currently identified as the next generation of “spires of excellence” – plus environmental sciences broadly construed and international management. Further exploration is essential to define larger research clusters as a means of expanding the funding base.

### **Distributed Campuses**

The University will continue its commitment to offering complete academic programs and, usually, distinctive research emphases at its major distributed sites. More selective educational programming will also expand at Belmont Bay (Potomac Science Center); Point of View; Conservation Research Center; possibly Loudoun; and possibly other sites. Improvements in technology links will be sought to take greater advantage of distinctive distributed sites and develop greater coordination. Overall, each campus will combine special emphases and sensitivity to community needs with appropriate overall integration into the larger University and its administrative structures.

Arlington will continue to emphasize Public Policy, Law and Conflict Analysis. Additional programs like Arts Management and segments of Administration of Justice will be added in, as well as components of public administration, managements and education. During the day, new programming in accelerated Masters courses for qualified undergraduates will enhance use of faculty and facilities alike. The Office of Continuing and Professional Education will expand its efforts in Arlington.

Existing programs at Prince William will largely persist. Additional programs in medical education and science education, including the Governor’s School, will take shape. Continued planning will target additional Prince William campus foci in such areas as “healthy living” and the environment, the arts, and ongoing attention to special community needs. At Prince William and also possibly Loudoun, coordination with degree completion needs of two-year college graduates, including the Bachelor of Applied Sciences program, should also guide the offerings available. (See Appendix B)

### **Global Goals**

George Mason will continue to expand the cluster of activities essential to serving as a leading global university. This includes: broadening of the range of study abroad activities and improving coordination with local academic programs; expanding the recruitment of international students, both in numbers (by

at least 20%) and in places of origin; maintaining appropriate curricular offerings dealing with global issues, at all curricular levels from general education to the PhD. By 2014 these educational efforts will be capped by more formal assessment of global competence.

In its global education and research, the University will foster a variety of projects, but overall emphasis will rest on the process of globalization and its effects and ensuing reactions (positive and negative) and on comparative issues, with appropriate but not primary anchoring in regional studies. The globalization focus will embrace collaborations among disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, public policy, management, education, environmental science and policy, civil engineering and information technology, the arts, and public health.

The University will expand educational and research collaborations with institutions abroad, including a number of joint degree programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Existing programs with Chinese institutions and with Moscow State University will be further nurtured. George Mason will actively explore programming at the American collaborative in the Incheon Free Economic Zone (South Korea). Consultancy partnerships will expand. The University will continue to monitor the geographical range of its activities, with growing interest in selective possibilities in Latin America and Africa.

Increasing attention to educational programs as well as campus activities in sustainability, including the new academic programs currently unfolding, will be a vital part of the overall commitment as a global University.

### **Academic Productivity**

Effective implementation of the Academic Plan involves a variety of factors detailed in the larger Strategic Plan. Adequate infrastructure and resources are crucial. The Academic Plan depends on moving faculty compensation up to more competitive levels with relevant peer institutions, particularly those in the Greater Washington region. It depends as well on significant improvements in scholarships and fellowships for undergraduates, professional students, and graduate students alike.

Several academic commitments are essential components as well. First, academic administration must commit to regular and careful evaluation of faculty productivity, as a core academic contribution to the institution's economic viability and accessibility to students. This includes appropriate targets for course loads and numbers of students served, and appropriate differentiations among different kinds of faculty in terms of measurable research and educational contributions.

Second, academic administration and key units must be increasingly imaginative in the generation of funding, not only through sponsored research, but also through active engagement with development efforts and through mission-appropriate programs with earning potential. Opportunities to develop additional professional programs, premium price programs, special summer activities, and special recruitment channels, with funding to contribute to central as well as unit budgets, will be an important part of the academic mission in the foreseeable future.

## **Academic Organization**

No dramatic changes are proposed in the area of academic organization. The need for coordination among the academic units will undoubtedly increase, and new cross-unit educational as well as research programs are likely to emerge, requiring greater administrative flexibility. By 2014 Mason will be nearing the point at which a new College of Public Health will emerge. Some reorganization may develop in the coordination of various outreach, continuing education and special programs.

## **Conclusion**

The Academic Plan links, finally, to a general commitment to evaluate and measure progress toward planning goals, with appropriate metrics in terms of learning assessments but also research, global, productivity and other results, developed by the Strategic Implementation Committee.

The four basic goals of the Academic Plan provide directions for the University for the next five years and perhaps beyond. Planning within key categories, like the Student Body, is consistent with the goals but obviously involves strategies that must be regularly reviewed and adjusted as conditions evolve and as the University encounters unexpected problems or opportunities.

Overall, the Plan commits George Mason to a combination of goals, none in itself unusual but distinctive in combination: moving more clearly into a first-tier research status, maintaining the strong commitment to productive and innovative teaching, enhancing a talented and unusually diverse student body, and combining regional service with global orientation. Balancing but also dynamically linking the goals, while pursuing each with vigor, is a key to the University's next phase.

## Appendix A

### SPIRES OF EXCELLENCE

As of 2009 George Mason University can point to established centers of excellence in a number of areas, along with several emerging spires of excellence. For this purpose, a center of excellence represents an established program of national and/or international significance that is particularly distinctive for one or more of the following characteristics: renowned faculty, innovative and meaningful research, student achievement, external funding, or other markers of excellence. A spire of excellence represents an emerging focal point of innovation and/or a significant synthesis of inherent strengths that justifies a concentrated level of support to further its progress. In the life cycle of program development, a successful spire of excellence will mature into a stable center of excellence for the long term.

#### I. Existing Centers of Excellence

##### a. Policy Studies and Law

The School of Law is highly ranked nationally, routinely scores well in scholarly reputation and student bar exam success, and leads in programs like law and economics. The School of Public Policy and the program in Public Administration in CHSS cover a variety of educational programs and research areas, ranking high nationally in research funding and visibility of faculty. The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution is a Commonwealth Center of Excellence and enjoys international leadership for research, service and doctoral training. The Department of Economics has renowned faculty, including two emeriti Nobelists, and a nationally ranked doctoral program.

##### b. Information Technology and Engineering

Programs in this area contribute greatly both to cutting edge research and to labor force training, with high national rankings in specific fields like computer science and great visibility in the area of information security. A related program in information technology management adds to this spire.

##### c. Biomedical Research

Mason faculty has gained international visibility for interdisciplinary research on disease diagnosis and treatment, with important applications in areas like proteomics. Establishment of the new biocontainment research laboratory both reflects and furthers strength in the biomedical area.

##### d. Dance.

National renown for performance, training and placement of graduates.

##### e. Psychology.

Particularly industrial psychology with high national rankings and research funding.

##### f. History and New Media.

The leading international center in this growing area, with substantial external funding.

##### g. Computational Social Sciences (social complexity).

Pioneering doctoral programs, international reputation and funding.

##### h. Special Education.

High national visibility for doctoral training, research, and outreach.

i. Writing and Creative Writing.

Top-five national rankings for writing across the curriculum, high national rankings and faculty visibility in creative writing.

j. Geosciences and Sustainability.

With particular international visibility in climate dynamics and broad interdisciplinary training on sustainability.

## II. Emerging Spires

a. Public Health

Five year goal: competitive programs of research in three key areas. Formal research partnerships. Integrated research activities in the life sciences.

Ten year goal: Transdisciplinary centers of excellence. Sustained competitive research \$25 million/year.

b. Globalization Research and Education.

Includes a growing program in international management; goal is to become a nationally ranked and recognized Center for Global Excellence in Teaching and Research

c. Biomedical Technology and Neuroscience

In five years, achieve world-class ranking as the preeminent center for neuroscience and bioengineering; in ten years, achieve ranking in the top ten

d. Music.

Particular strength in music education and promising new doctoral programs; objective is to increase enrollment (headcount) from 345 to 450 by 2011; and to become one of the top 100 programs in the country by 2015.

e. Undergraduate research and creative activity.

In combination with the Quality Enhancement Plan, this Spire will lead to innovations in undergraduate teaching and learning based on more robust faculty/student collaborations and the involvement of graduate students in mentoring roles.

## Appendix B

### DISTRIBUTED CAMPUS ACADEMIC PLAN

Based on Mason's experience thus far, campuses work best when they:

- Offer complete academic programs
- Provide a comprehensive suite of academic and administrative support services to faculty, staff, and students
- Connect to the other campuses of the institution through a strong and secure network and a flexible enterprise resource system
- Develop active partnerships with the public and private sector and with the surrounding community.

All of the plans below should be read in the context of these principles.

Planning for the distributed campuses must be done with certain caveats. First is that Mason will always respond to opportunities as they arise and any plan has to be flexible enough to adapt. Second, who and at what level decisions are made and how initiatives are vetted and coordinated needs to be determined before any plan will have an impact on the growth of the campuses. Third, the plan needs to be viewed in relation to other university resources, such as housing, and the costs and benefits of opportunities need to be carefully considered. Finally the recent and probable future budget cuts may slow adding or expanding programs.

#### **Arlington:**

The current focus on professional and graduate training in law, public policy and conflict resolution will continue on the Arlington campus.

During the spring 2009 semester, the Provost's office and the Facilities office collaborated on an RFP process to ascertain interest in opportunities in Arlington created by the addition of Founders Hall. As a result of that process space has been assigned to allow for the expansion of current activities in the three areas indicated above, with some additions to programming.

#### **Founders Hall Space**

The School of Public Policy, currently split between Arlington and Fairfax, will be consolidated in Arlington. As a result, SPP which currently occupies approximately 13,000 SF in the Original Building, will occupy approximately 42,000 SF in Founders Hall. The Law School will also occupy space in Founders Hall. Administrative support programs will be consolidated in Founders Hall. The additional space that has been allocated for these student service and university service offices will offer much needed growth space for these units, better facilities for students, and coincides with square foot (SF) needs identified in the Paulien report. Founders Hall also replaces a multipurpose room from the Original Building and adds a new auditorium that will be used for both university and community events.

## **Truland Building Space**

The backfill plan for Truland is still being reviewed, but should be finalized by late summer/early fall. However, the proposed backfill plan includes an additional 5,700 SF for the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution which will remain in Truland.

In addition to the expansion of current programs, CVPA will move its graduate Arts Management program from the Fairfax campus to Arlington. The Truland building will also support programming for the MPA, the MBA, IET's graduate program, and the graduate Administration of Justice programs. These programs are consistent with the graduate focus of the campus and the central themes of law, public policy, and conflict analysis, although clearly they expand out from these. The easy access to Arlington from the District of Columbia also benefits these programs.

OCPE will have two dedicated classrooms in Truland and additional office space that will allow it to expand its continuing education offerings and take advantage of the easy access to both the District of Columbia and Alexandria.

Future possibilities:

The focus on graduate programs means that during the day the classrooms are underutilized. The expansion of student services could support more daytime activity also. Expansion opportunities that take advantage of the proximity to the District of Columbia should be favored. As noted above, providing complete academic programs at the campus is preferable than just a few courses or a part of a program where the student has to travel to another campus to complete his/her degree.

Possible ways to develop more daytime activity are:

- As graduate support increases, develop fulltime graduate student cohorts in existing programs that would support daytime classes. A recent study indicates strong interest in graduate housing Arlington. If housing were available it would support the fulltime graduate student possibilities.
- Have limited undergraduate offerings, specifically linked to possible accelerated masters programs with the existing Arlington masters programs. We could offer a select group of general education offerings and then the needed major courses.
- As noted above, there will already be an expansion of continuing education programs in Arlington based on the dedicated classrooms in the Truland building, but if additional classrooms could be dedicated to continuing education activities during the daytime, we could work to expand these offerings further.

## **Prince William:**

Currently the main programs in Prince William are the BSIT, Recreation, Health and Tourism, Administration of Justice (undergraduate), Bioinformatics, and Forensics, with some offering by CHHS and CEHD. An expansion into medical education and also the addition of a Governor's School is expected.

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A planning retreat for the Prince William campus was held in December 2009. The vision for the Prince William campus that emerged from the retreat was to develop the campus as a sustainable and “healthy living” campus with a seamless connection to the town center and strong city/county interactions with the intent of developing special and unique programs for the community. This emphasis is compatible with most of the current programs, and the anticipated expansion in medical education on the campus. Also the close proximity to Belmont Bay with its emphasis on environmental science further supports the concept. Finally the addition of the performing arts center and its commitment to community education and service adds another dimension to the “healthy lifestyles” concept. The overall goal would be to turn the Prince William campus into a “destination campus”, that responds to emerging careers and emerging technologies.

The emphasis of the Prince William campus will continue to be on upper level undergraduate and graduate courses with some general education offerings.

Future possibilities and challenges:

- Much of the development of the campus is linked to the possible development of the town center. Ideally the area would have a “small college town” atmosphere. The original hope was that the town center would provide housing for upper level and graduate students and faculty. The vision was that campus would be connected to the town center with run/bike paths, and a town square where university/community activities could take place. Unfortunately the current economy is stalling that development.
- Fulltime tenure line faculties generally do not want to be housed at Prince William if it separates them from their home department. (This will also be a challenge for Loudoun). It will be necessary to have a structure or incentives that mitigate perceived and real disadvantages of split departments.
- Our experience to date has shown the difficulty of supporting general education courses for a small group of majors given the needs on the Fairfax campus, and the difficulties of splitting an academic program over more than one campus. Distance education options and videoconferencing may be able to alleviate some of the difficulties in the long run.
- Eventually we may need to duplicate programs at more than one campus, but this will exacerbate the faculty issue noted above.
- In the near term, the expansion of medical education and related biological sciences along with the proposed Governors’ School will occupy most of the available space in Prince William.
- In the longer term, the increase in population along the Route 29 corridor suggests that future programming should take into account the educational needs of that area. It would be worthwhile to start exploring what those needs are likely to be with the relevant communities.

#### **Loudoun:**

The future of a potential Loudoun campus will largely depend on where the campus is located and on funding.

Internally, plans for the Loudoun campus envision select upper level and graduate programs, including transportation planning, technology, education, health, and possibly a branch of the Krasnow Institute.

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These plans will be developed in conjunction with the ongoing consideration of potential campus opportunities, a close relationship with NVCC, and a strong continuing education presence.

### Target Population

The Loudoun Campus will target a slightly older demographic than the campus in Fairfax. Three primary groups will be targeted, each of which may overlap with the others:

- Transfer students from Northern Virginia Community College and the VCCS system
- Degree completers and career switchers – adults living and working in the region, both those with academic credit and those new to higher education
- Graduate students in targeted fields.

### Academic Programs

As suggested in several studies (Eduventures, 2008; Stamats, 2004; Collegeboard, 1997) academic programs will be developed that meet the needs of the regional economy and the local student population.

Suggested fields of study include:

- Transportation
- Real Estate, Land Use, and Community Development
- Education
- Health Care
- Information Technology
- Business
- Bioengineering
- Computer visualization and Cellular Imaging – with Howard Hughes
- Film and Video Studies
- Continuing Education (non academic credit programs)

In addition, we should consider a program designed for students with technical degrees, allowing them to complete their baccalaureate degree in a reasonable period of time.

Likely academic programs will include:

- Bachelor of Applied Sciences (in development)
- Bachelor of Individualized Studies
- Minor in technology and in business
- Management
- Education Career Switcher Program
- RSN to BSN completer program
- BSIT

This academic model would provide an array of upper level and a very limited number of lower level General Education courses.

### **Possible Services and Amenities**

Developed to be accessible to both students and community members, and designed as potential third stream revenue sources for the enterprise:

- Courses available all day –great potential for full time students
- Recreation/Exercise facilities
- Retail
- Commercial food services (serving late hours)
- “Art house” movie theater – usable for the film studies program and a regional draw, possibly movie draffhouse model.
- Nightlife establishments
- Child Care center and activities
- Parking access – likely to include some valet parking, carpool/rideboard system

Designed for students, unlikely to have community access aspects:

- Housing
- Library (open late hours)
- Student health and counseling offices
- International and multicultural student offices
- Transfer Center (include financial advising program beyond financial aid: mortgages, employment etc).
- One stop shop for student and fiscal services
- Computer labs