

***DRAFT***  
**BOARD OF VISITORS**  
**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Thursday, December 5, 2024**  
**Beacon Hall 1017**  
**Science & Technology Campus**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Rector Cully Stimson, Vice Rector Michael Meese, Secretary Armand Alacbay, and Visitor Bob Pence.

**ABSENT:** Visitor Farnaz Thompson.

**ALSO, PRESENT:** Gregory Washington, President; Anne Gentry, University Counsel; and Scott Nichols, Interim Secretary pro tem.

**I. Call to Order**

Rector Stimson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

**A. Executive Committee Meeting Minutes for September 26, 2024 (ACTION ITEM)**

Rector Stimson called for any corrections to the Executive Committee Meeting Minutes for September 26, 2024, that were provided for review in the board meeting materials. Hearing no corrections, the meeting minutes stood **APPROVED AS WRITTEN**.

**III. Rector's Comments**

Rector Stimson thanked everyone for attending and noted he would reserve his comments for the full board meeting.

**IV. President's Comments**

Rector Stimson recognized President Washington to offer comments. President Washington indicated he would also reserve his comments for the full board meeting.

**V. Closed Session**

- A.** Acquisition of Real Property (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.3)
- B.** Consultation with Legal Counsel pertaining to actual or probable litigation (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.7)
- C.** Consultation with Legal Counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.8)
- D.** Personnel Matter (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.1)

Vice Rector Meese **MOVED** that the committee go into Closed Session under the provisions of Section 2.2-3711.A.3, for discussion on the potential acquisition of certain real property to further the University's mission at the Sci-Tech campus; Section 2.2-3711.A.7 for Consultation with legal counsel pertaining to actual or probable litigation including briefings on:

Akerman v. GMU  
Cerankosky et al. v. Washington, et al.  
Jeong v. GMU  
Morrison v. GMU et al.

Wright v. GMU et al.

Zahabi v. GMU et al.

Section 2.2-3711.A.1 for a Personnel Matter, to discuss the performance of specific university personnel; and Section 2.2-3711.A.8 for Consultation with Legal Counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice concerning the aforementioned items and pending investigations. The motion was **SECONDED** by Secretary Alacbay. **MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.**

Following closed session, Vice Rector Meese **MOVED** that the committee go back into public session and further moved that by roll call vote the committee affirm that only public business matters lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements under the Freedom of Information Act were heard, discussed or considered in the closed meeting, and that only such business matters that were identified in the motion to go into a closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered in the closed meeting. Any member of the committee who believes that there was a departure from the requirements as stated, shall so state prior to taking the roll call, indicating the substance of the departure that, in his or her judgment, has taken place. **ALL PRESENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS RESPONDED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Absent: Visitor Thompson

## **VI. Adjournment**

Rector Stimson called for any additional business to come before the Executive Committee. Hearing none, he adjourned the meeting.

Prepared by:

Scott Nichols

Interim Secretary pro tem

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF VISITORS  
Research Committee Meeting**

**MINUTES  
December 5, 2024**

**Present:** Visitors: Nancy Prowitt, Chair; Horace Blackman, Vice Chair, Lindsey Burke, Student Representatives; Maria Cuesta, Jacqueline Sims. Faculty Staff Representative; Melissa Broeckelman-Post.

**Absent:** Visitors: Reg Brown, Dolly Oberoi, Nina Rees, Jeff Rosen, Marc Short, Farnaz Thompson. Faculty Representatives: Tara Chaplin, Igor Mazin.

**Also Present:** President Gregory Washington; Rector Cully Stimson, Visitors Almand Alacbay, Ken Marcus, Michael Meese, Bob Pence, Jon Peterson.

**The meeting was called to order by Chair Nancy Prowitt at 9:44 a.m.**

**I. Approval of Minutes (ACTION ITEM)**

It was **MOVED** by Visitor Prowitt to approve the minutes from the September 26, 2024 Research Committee Meeting. Approval of the September 26 meeting minutes was approved.

**II. New Business**

**a. Office of Research, Innovation, and Economic Impact Update**

***Dr. Andre Marshall – Vice President for Research, Innovation & Economic Impact*** reported the following highlights:

- Major faculty research gains, details about a new partnership with Naval Sea Systems Command
- Data from the recent, and very successful, *Accelerate Investor Conference*
- Overview of the infrastructure available on the Science and Technology campus and gave an update of the Research Administration Management Portal implementation and the services it provides

**b. Infectious Disease Research: A Look Inside Mason's Regional Biocontainment Laboratory**

***Professor Aarthi Narayanan, College of Science***

- Professor Aarthi Narayanan outlined her efforts on addressing critical knowledge gaps around how viral infections impact human and animal health, and on delivering robust platform technologies that can enable rapid response to current and future challenges.

**c. Science that Solves Crimes: A Look Inside Mason's Forensic Science and Training Laboratory**

***Mary Ellen O'Toole, Director, Forensic Science Program***

- Professor Mary Ellen O'Toole, Forensic Science Program Director described the training and research occurring at Mason's Forensic Science and Training Laboratory which is designed to study human decomposition and identify human remains.

**III. Adjournment**

Chair Prowitt asked if there was any additional business to be discussed. With no further comments or items of discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Shepherd  
Research Committee Secretary Pro Tem

**George Mason University Board of Visitors  
Development Committee Meeting  
December 5, 2024  
10:35 a.m. –11:00 a.m.  
Science and Technology Campus, Beacon Hall, Room 1017**

**MINUTES DRAFT – FOR COMMITTEE REVIEW**

**Attendees:** Chairman Jon Peterson, Visitor Reginald “Reg” Brown, Visitor Robert “Bob” Pence, Visitor Dolly Oberoi (virtual participation)

**Absent:** Vice Chair Anjan Chimaladinne

**Guests:** Rector Charles “Cully” Stimson, Vice Rector Michael J. Meese; Secretary Armand Alacbay; Visitor Horace Blackman; Visitor Lindsey M. Burke; Visitor Kenneth L. Marcus; Visitor Nancy Gibson Prowitt; Anne Gentry, Legal Counsel; President Gregory Washington; Vice President Trishana E. Bowden; Melissa Broeckelman-Post, faculty senate pro-tem; Bijan Jabbari, faculty representative; Jacquelyn Sims, staff liaison; Maria A. Romero Cuesta, student representative; Nicole Pozinsky, secretary pro-tem; and guest speakers Sumeet Shrivastava and Dean Rick Davis.

**I. Call to Order**

Chairman Jon Peterson called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

Chairman Peterson reviewed the meeting procedures for FOIA requirements and then proceeded with the order of business. He noted that the committee was behind schedule and that they would move quickly to catch up.

**IV. Approval of Development Committee Meeting Minutes from September 26, 2024 (ACTION ITEM)**

Chairman Peterson confirmed the committee meeting had reached a quorum. He called for any changes or edits to the September 26, 2024, meeting minutes. There being no corrections, the minutes were **APPROVED AS WRITTEN**.

Peterson called to the podium Sumeet Shrivastava, the Chair of the George Mason University Foundation (Foundation), who delivered an update regarding recent Foundation and Board of Trustees activities.

## **IV. New Business**

### **A. GMUF Chair Update – Sumeet Shrivastava**

#### **Board Operations**

The foundation's fall board cycle concluded on October 25, 2024.

The Advancement and University Priorities Committee highlighted Trustee engagement efforts, including hosting roundtables and gatherings in winter and spring 2025 to support the campaign. Trustees are actively leveraging their networks to help us surpass our Advancement goals.

The Audit Committee presented the fiscal year 2024 Audited Financial Statements, which were approved by the Board. The Foundation was issued a clean opinion with no findings.

The Finance and Real Estate Committee reviewed the fiscal 2024 year-end budget results and reserve balances.

The Investment Committee reported on returns for fiscal year 2024. At June 30, the endowment returned a positive 15.45% for the fiscal year and the market value was \$222 million. This committee met again in early November to review results through the quarter ended September 30, 2024. Shrivastava was happy to report that the endowment returned a positive 6.6% for the quarter and the market value was \$237 million.

The Nominating and Governance Committee reviewed the upcoming nominations process and timeline.

#### **Trustee Engagement**

Shrivastava shared that last spring, George Mason University established the Susanna Ezeanii and Mayfred Jolinda Nall Health Informatics Scholarship Endowment, thanks to Trustee Dr. Tamara Nall and her husband, Mr. Clement Ezeanii. This created a \$10,000 annual scholarship in honor of their mothers to support students pursuing a Masters in Science in Health Informatics, enabling these students to wholeheartedly dedicate themselves to their studies, overcome financial barriers to graduation, and enhance their research and career readiness.

Nall and Ezeanii, were recently invited by the George Mason College of Public Health (CPH) to tour the institution's state-of-the-art facilities and engage with students, faculty, and leadership. This visit marked an exciting opportunity for the couple to connect with the next generation of public health professionals and further their shared commitment to healthcare innovation.

Their visit, hosted by Dean Melissa Perry, included a comprehensive tour of the Nutrition Kitchen, a hands-on experience in the Immersive Technologies and Simulation Lab, and time in the Population Health Center, providing them with firsthand insight into the university's cutting-edge research and public health education.

The visit also allowed the couple to meet Fahim Durani, the first recipient of their Scholarship Endowment. Nall and Ezeanii engaged in a meaningful conversation with George Mason students, sharing their experiences and insights on healthcare leadership, innovation, and philanthropy. This discussion was followed by a roundtable with Dean Perry, and college leadership to discuss future initiatives for the College of Public Health, emphasizing their commitment to supporting the next generation of public health leaders.

Their partnership with George Mason reflects their shared vision of fostering education, innovation, and healthcare equity. Trustee Nall is now initiating conversations to inspire others to establish endowments, scholarships, and awards. She is personally reaching out to individuals with similar stories to share in our vision and support our mission.

Chairman Peterson thanked Shrivastava and opened the floor for questions. There were no questions, Peterson raised some housekeeping matters before moving forward. He reminded those present that per FOIA requirements discussion is limited to members of the board. Additionally, he noted that Visitor Oberoi's requested participation electronically due to personal matters. Chair Peterson moved that the committee approve her electronic participation. The motion was passed.

Chairman Peterson called on Trishana E. Bowden, vice president of the Office of University Advancement and Alumni Relations. Bowden provided an update.

#### B. University Advancement and Alumni Relations – Vice President Trishana E. Bowden

Vice President Bowden began by thanking Rector Stimson and Chairman Peterson in the combined effort of 100% board giving. She expressed gratitude to the board members for their personal support and highlighted a new endowment established by Visitor Blackman and his wife. She emphasized the importance of the board's leadership and support in the Mason Now campaign efforts. She reminded the committee that an official report had been submitted for review in advance of the meeting to ensure that the remainder of the time could be focused on The College of Visual and Performing Arts.

Bowden introduced Rick Davis, Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts and Executive Director of the Hylton Performing Arts Center.

#### C. The College of Visual and Performing Arts Advancement Initiatives – Dean Rick Davis

Dean Davis narrated the following series of PowerPoint slides (11 Slides)

1. College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA) – TITLE SLIDE
2. CVPA- Campaign Goal
3. Center for the Arts- reimagination initiative (update)
4. CFA 21-year usage trend
5. Visual- CFA Reimagined
6. Renderings- Potential Arts District
7. Scholarships - \$5.3M raised to date
8. Hylton Performing Arts Center Endowment
9. Other CVPA Priorities
10. Save the Date- Mason Arts Emerging (2/5/25)
11. Thank You – FINAL SLIDE

Davis began his presentation with a reflection on the core value of the arts in the world, with a “four-word elevator speech”: the arts create community. He noted that the arts bring together people who are strangers in contemplation of a collective experience, seeing stories of other lives, other places, other times.

He then set out CVPA’s campaign goal of \$60 million, noting that CVPA is a “small but mighty college.” He described substantial progress of 56 percent already made toward the goal.

Davis described the reimagination of the Center for the Arts (CFA) as the centerpiece of the campaign goal, at \$25 million. He related that since the center opened in 1990, it has seen more than 6.5 million people walk through its doors and has transformed the life of the campus and the surrounding region.

Davis saluted some of the long-standing supporters of the arts at George Mason, including the Peterson Family Foundation, which has recently committed \$6 million for the center’s reimagination to name the Peterson Family Lobby and Peterson Auditorium. He also mentioned Barry Dewberry and Arlene Evans, who are substantially giving to the campaign, and Davis noted that he and his wife, Sheila Thompson, are naming the loading dock, since they have spent a great deal of time there over the course of their careers at George Mason.

Davis walked the committee members through a graph depicting the 21-year CFA usage trend, which showed the percentage of the center used by internal users (CVPA programs, theater music and dance, university functions like orientations, ceremonies, and receptions) and how that usage has grown significantly. In contrast, he noted that the line depicting the external use trends downward, indicating that the CFA has become more and more an academic asset for the university.

He presented an architect’s rendering of an image of a reimagined CFA designed to serve as a first-class university asset for the next 30 to 40 years. It includes center aisles that are not a current feature of the Concert Hall, and a balcony that is better sized for acoustics and stage visibility from all balcony seats. Davis said that University Professor Patricia Miller, who directs the Vocal Studies Program, does not



allow her students to perform in the Concert Hall, considering it too big, too dry, and without the acoustics that support young voices.

Davis also noted that the plan envisions aesthetic considerations that will bring it into line with the concert facilities on competing campuses. He shared a rendering of a potential Arts District, incorporating classrooms, the Performing Arts Building, the Design Building, and the Harris Theatre, with the CFA residing in the center. He described the creation of a sculpture garden that will draw attention to and complement the performance venues.

He then addressed student scholarships and remarked specifically on the generosity of the Dewberry family and the Peterson family.

Davis discussed the 2010 opening of the Hylton Performing Arts Center on George Mason's Science and Technology Campus, and the university's commitment to fulfilling its original endowment plan of \$15 million because of the lasting business model that the endowment offers. He mentioned the center's Veterans in the Arts and Education Initiatives, which have impacted several thousand people, and said that the best way to guarantee their philanthropic support is through a thriving endowment. He noted that the endowment is just under \$10 million now.

Davis described other CVPA priorities, including space needs for the thriving film program and the computer game design program, both launched in 2008. Their success has garnered attention for George Mason's arts programs and Davis hopes to enlist philanthropic and public support for a building to house them. Davis also wants to support an endowed chair to bolster faculty research.

Finally, Davis welcomed the attendees to the February 5 Mason Arts Emerging event to launch the Give Voice campaign. He invited questions.

Visitor Peterson made a comment that the community is built around the pillars of education, health care, and the performing arts. He emphasized the importance of the arts program and thanked Davis for his work.

Visitor Brown asked if there is a document showing the campaigns that are underway, to gain a sense of an overall strategy. He spoke favorably of naming rights in the arts initiatives and considered how athletics might benefit from a similar strategy.

Trishana Bowden offered that the university's Mason Now case statement highlights all aspects of the campaign: arts, athletics, schools, colleges, and units, and affirmed that they are all part of Mason Now. She offered to share the case statement, along with supplemental pieces, with the Board.

Visitor Brown indicated that he would appreciate the case statement's inclusion in the presentation, and Bowden stated that she was working to have copies of the case statement delivered.

President Washington noted that at George Mason, the arts and athletics are in different leagues, and that if athletics were at the same level as the arts at the university, “we would have multiple regional, national championships in many areas.” He praised the reputation of the arts at George Mason and the quality of the students and graduates.

Visitor Peterson commented that the biggest impact comes from the endowment of scholarships, to attract the best students. These started 10 to 15 years ago had have made a great difference in the quality of students who study at and represent George Mason. Dean Davis agreed that they are impactful for recruitment and retention.

#### **IIIV. Old Business**

Chairman Peterson called for any topics of “Old Business” to be discussed. There were none.

#### **IVV. Adjournment**

There being no further business to discuss, Chairman Peterson adjourned the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**  
**BOARD OF VISITORS**  
**Finance and Land Use Committee Meeting**  
**December 5, 2024**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Pence; Vice Chair Rosen; Visitors: Alabay, Rees, Peterson, Short; Executive Vice President Dickenson; Faculty Representatives: Shutika, Venigalla

**ABSENT:** Visitor Thompson

**ALSO PRESENT:** President Washington; Visitors: Meese, Burke, Prowitt, Brown, Marcus; Faculty Representative Brockelman-Post; Staff Representative Sims; Student Representatives: Cuesta, Hoffman

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Pence called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m. Per the Board's policy for electronic participation in meetings, Chair Pence **MOVED** the committee approve Vice Chair Rosen's electronic participation in the meeting. Motion was **SECONDED**. The **MOTION WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**II. Approval of Minutes for September 17, 2024 (ACTION ITEM)**

Chair Pence called for any corrections to the minutes for the Finance and Land Use Committee Meeting for September 17, 2024, while noting a correction to the Development Committee's September meeting minutes. Hearing no corrections for the Finance and Land Use Committee, the **MINUTES STOOD APPROVED AS WRITTEN**.

**III. Financial Matters**

Chair Pence turned the meeting over to Deb Dickenson, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration, who started by introducing the incoming Vice President for Finance, Dan Stephens.

Ms. Dickenson noted a number of recent reports and studies from a number of Commonwealth entities that illustrate George Mason's strong performance, while showing our continued funding inequity by a variety of measures, including lowest appropriations per student, low equipment trust funding, lowest per student endowment, low maintenance reserve funding, and low tuition revenue. Despite operating with a leaner workforce than most of its peers George Mason produced the most graduates over the last decade and welcomed the largest student body in Commonwealth history this fall. Ms. Dickenson handed off to the outgoing Vice President for Finance, Sharon Heinle, thanking her for her exemplary service.

To begin the FY 2026 budget process, Ms. Heinle presented four scenarios of preliminary planning assumptions focused on key drivers for the education and general operating budget that include:

- Multiple increased and flat tuition and enrollment rate scenarios, which reflect a negative incremental impact ranging from \$11M-\$22M, as all scenarios reflect expenses increases outpacing revenue.
- A 3% compensation increase, half of which will be covered by the Commonwealth.
- Virginia Military Survivors & Dependents Education Program participation will be held constant at 30% in all four scenarios.
- Use of the requested \$18M from the Commonwealth to offset the projected shortfall. This funding had been requested to address market compensation issues, consistent with the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia's recommendation.
- If tuition and enrollment are held flat, it may be necessary to fill the resultant gap through workforce reductions. Given George Mason's already-lean operations, this could potentially impact the student support services and further depress enrollment.

The committee will continue to receive updates on the FY 2026 budget development process with multiple opportunities for feedback and engagement from the Board, students, and employees.

Ms. Dickenson recommended approval of the Basketball and Academic Performance Center, which is an approved project in the Capital Plan. Chair Pence noted the importance of this facility, and the need for continued development of athletic facilities in order to thrive in a shifting athletic landscape and a competitive resource environment.

Chair Pence **MOVED** the Committee to approve the Schematic Design for the Basketball & Academic Performance Center. Visitor Alacbay **SECONDED** the Motion. The **MOTION WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

#### IV. **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chair Pence adjourned the meeting at 11:30 am.

***DRAFT***  
**BOARD OF VISITORS**  
**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Full Board Meeting**  
**Thursday, December 5, 2024**  
**Beacon Hall 1017**  
**Science & Technology Campus**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Rector Cully Stimson, Vice Rector Mike Meese, Secretary Armand Alacbay, Visitors Horace Blackman, Lindsey Burke, Ken Marcus, Dolly Oberoi (virtual), Bob Pence, Jon Peterson, Nancy Prowitt, Nina Rees, Jeff Rosen, and Marc Short.

**ABSENT:** Visitors Reginald Brown, Anjan Chimaladinne, and Farnaz Thompson.

**ALSO, PRESENT:** Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Faculty Senate President pro tempore; Maria Cuesta, Undergraduate Student Representative; Carolyn Faith Hoffman, Graduate Student Representative; Jacquelyn Sims, Staff Liaison; Gregory Washington, President; Ken Walsh, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff; Whitney Owen, Executive Director, University Business Consulting; Jim Antony, Provost and Executive Vice President; Deb Dickenson, Executive Vice President for Administration and Finance; Anne Gentry, University Counsel; David Burge, Vice President for Enrollment Management; and Scott Nichols, Interim Secretary pro tem.

**I. Call to Order**

Rector Stimson called the meeting to order at 1:50 p.m.

Rector Stimson informed the Board that Visitor Oberoi requested to participate remotely due to a personal matter, more specifically for work travel in Orlando, Florida.

Citing the board's Electronic Meeting Participation policy, Rector Stimson **MOVED** to approve Visitor Oberoi's electronic participation in the meeting. The motion was **SECONDED** by Visitor Prowitt. The **MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.**

Rector Stimson further noted that Melissa Broeckelman-Post was joining the meeting in her role as President pro tem of the Faculty Senate while Solon Simmons was out of the country. He then recognized Visitor Blackman to provide a comment. Visitor Blackman informed the board that Blue Star Families had recognized Vice Rector Meese with the Collaborative Leadership Award for 2024 for his work with veterans, caregivers, and military families.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

**A. Full Board Meeting Minutes for September 26, 2024 (ACTION ITEM)**

Rector Stimson called for any corrections to the Full Board Meeting Minutes for September 26, 2024, that were provided for review in the board meeting materials. Hearing no corrections, the meeting minutes stood **APPROVED AS WRITTEN.**

**III. Rector's Report**

**A. View from the Bridge**

Rector Stimson noted several items:

- Thanked President Washington, Sharon Cullen, Scott Nichols, Tim Caldecott, Susan Kehoe, and the GMU-TV team for making the arrangements to hold the meeting at the Science and Technology Campus.

- He had completed his first round of meetings with Mason's deans, which included meetings with Cody Edwards, Ajay Vinzé, Zofia Burr, Anne Osterman, and Alpaslan Özerdem.
- He participated in the annual National Leadership Council retreat hosted by the GMU Foundation Board of Trustees in Middleburg, VA. The retreat included donors, board members, and university leaders, and those attending received a tour of the Body Farm on the Science and Technology Campus. He noted the tour as being one of the reasons for asking Mary O'Toole to present on the subject at the Research Committee meeting.
- He met with the Mason Staff Senate and engaged in a question-and-answer session.
- Along with Vice Rector Meese, he attended the Veterans Day Luncheon hosted by Mason's ROTC and Office of Military Services, where he provided remarks honoring veterans in the Mason community.
- In addition to other members of Mason's board and board members from all other Virginia universities, he participated in the annual BOV orientation hosted by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) in Norfolk.
- At the September BOV meeting, he had tasked the APDUC Committee with exploring the topic and seeking feedback from the Mason community on whether Mason's board should adopt the Kalven Committee principles on institutional neutrality. The Provost and APDUC Chair Burke met with stakeholders and provided updates on that process at their November 19 committee meeting.
- President Washington and Provost Antony would provide an update on the Critical Vacancy Review (CVR) process with the board. He noted that several deans had strongly expressed concerns and challenges with the CVR process. He looked forward to hearing how the president and provost were addressing and incorporating those concerns and modifying the CVR process.
- He expressed his appreciation to Dean Rick Davis for the tour of the Hylton Performing Arts Center that the board received during their lunch break.
- Next academic year, the board will hold a meeting at the Fuse building on the Arlington campus.
- In February, he plans to visit the Mason Korea campus and attend their convocation.
- He noted several reminders for the board members and encouraged attendance where appropriate:
  - December 8 Winter Celebration of Giving.
  - December 13 President's Holiday Reception.
  - December 19 Winter Commencement.
  - January 2025 file annual mandatory financial disclosure through the Virginia Ethics Council.
  - January 2025 completion of the BOV Self Evaluation Survey.

#### **B. Revising and Repealing University Regulations**

Rector Stimson recognized Elizabeth Woodley to present on the proposed changes and repeal of certain university regulations. Ms. Woodley explained that the Governor's Executive Order #19 directs agencies to review regulations with the goal of reducing Virginia's regulatory requirements by at least 25%. She further explained that by Mason revising its space use regulation, it would allow for the repeal of three other redundant regulations, which would reduce Mason's regulations by 50% from the original six. She offered to answer any questions; there were none.

Rector Stimson **MOVED** to approve resolution titled "Revising and Repealing University Regulations" as it was provided in the meeting materials. The motion was **SECONDED** by Vice Rector Meese. Rector Stimson called for any discussion; there was none. The **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

#### **V. Strategic Plan Update**

Due to brief technical difficulties, President Washington adjusted the order of presentations and recognized Whitney Owen, Executive Director of University Business Consulting, to provide the Strategic Plan update in Ken Walsh's stead, prior to commencing the President's Report. Ms. Owen noted the following highlights:

- Reviewed the original process and timeline for developing the Strategic Plan along with its roadmap and overall structure for achieving outcomes.

- Reviewed the five priorities of the plan (Mason Student Experience; Research; Partnerships; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and Faculty and Staff) and their associated strategies. She pointed to 45 individuals across 30 units that are designated as “Action Leads” to direct implementation.
- Briefly spoke to the practices of tracking progress by maintaining communication with units with monthly emails, semesterly meetings, and regular website updates, also allowing for units to submit proposed changes.
- Noted that 80% of actions are categorized as “In Progress”, 6% are “Complete”, and approximately 1/3 of actions are “Somewhat Delayed”. Pointed to the use of a KPI (key performance indicator) dashboard which shows the status of key KPIs. The dashboard can be found on the Strategic Direction webpage.

Visitor Short asked how progress was measured on DEI. Ms. Owen responded that progress is self-reported by units in the form of successes, challenges, and progress to completing the outcomes they are assigned. President Washington added that there are written goals for each priority that can be measured. Visitor Rosen pointed to the strategy under DEI “refine Mason’s governance structure, policies, and accountability measures to ensure diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices”. He asked what tactics and KPIs would be associated with that strategy. Ms. Owen responded that she did not have that information readily available but could check the roadmap and get back to him.

#### **IV. President’s Report**

Rector Stimson recognized President Washington for his report. President Washington noted the following:

- Recognized Visitor Blackman for receiving the Washington Executive Pinnacle Award for “Public Company DoD Executive of the Year”.
- Provided an update on the completion status of his 2024-2025 Presidential Performance Metrics and highlighted the positive progress in key rankings and financial indicators between FY20 and FY24.
- Noted the establishment of Mason’s Chief AI Officer and the AI initiatives that are planned at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Spoke to the ongoing plans to develop Fairfax West Campus, highlighting the critical need for additional student housing, the plan for engaging the community on the topic, and for increased safety at the intersection of Ox Road and Campus Drive, to potentially include a pedestrian bridge over Ox Road.
- Provided an update on the progress of modifications to Mason’s DEI programs and Presidential Goals as a result of previous conversations and directives from the board.
- Noted Mason’s corporate partnerships, highlighting key corporations with whom Mason engages, the efforts of the President’s Innovation Advisory Council (PIAC), and the different methods in which Mason engages with companies.
- Highlighted his extensive engagement with members of the state and local government and economic development leaders in furtherance of Mason’s priorities.
- Provided a brief explanation of the Critical Vacancy Review process, noting that its intent was to decrease the \$64 million budget deficit discovered following the pandemic by slowing the rate of staff growth/hiring. He compared Mason’s budget deficit response to that of other institutions and highlighted that the CVR process has allowed Mason to avoid staff and faculty layoffs, unlike some other institutions. He noted that Mason has so far reduced the deficit by \$50 million, and that Mason would be moving to a new hiring review process beginning the next academic year. He emphasized that to be prudent stewards, there would always be a form of vacancy review at Mason.
- He then opened the floor for questions and discussion:
  - Visitor Blackman pointed to the 17% decrease in Law School enrollment, questioning how that loss of revenue impacted the deficit. President Washington responded that the Law School had increased enrollments for the coming year, and that it should reverse course. Visitor Blackman also expressed concern over “burning out” the Law School, and that perhaps it should be grown. President Washington pointed to the university’s \$20 million investment in the Law School, which should bring it into alignment with other academic units, further noting he is not concerned with its fiscal state. While there is an E&G deficit, the university has an overall surplus when

considering all funding sources. Rector Stimson added that typically law schools at public universities receive support from the main campus and noted the high standard of admission for Mason's law school.

- Carolyn Faith Hoffman asked whether the graduate enrollment declines were primarily masters or doctoral students. President Washington replied that it was primarily master's students. She then expressed concern about graduate stipend amounts and their ability to both attract graduate students and support them in a high cost of living area. President Washington responded that while Mason's stipends were often competitive, it is counteracted by the high cost of living, which is driven primarily by the cost of housing. He noted this as a large reason for consideration of development of additional student housing on Fairfax West Campus. Ms. Hoffman expressed graduate students' desire for dedicated graduate housing on the Fairfax campus, to which President Washington pointed to the proposed development of West Campus as well as ongoing public-private partnerships for additional housing on the Science & Technology Campus.
- Secretary Alabay noted the state policy that aims to fund faculty salaries at the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile of the comparable national peer group, observing that Mason was at 30%. He asked what was being done to close that gap. President Washington pointed to Mason's recent progress on faculty salaries and reiterated that Mason was attempting to catch up with years of neglect, and that recent increases in state funding have gone largely into faculty and staff salaries.

## VI. Committee Reports

To accommodate board members' schedules, Rector Stimson adjusted the order of committee reports, asking Visitor Burke to present the APDUC committee report first.

### E. Academic Programs, Diversity, and University Community Committee

#### i. Program Actions

##### 1. New Degree Programs

a. MEd in Elementary Education (**ACTION ITEM**)

b. MEd in Secondary Education (**ACTION ITEM**)

#### ii. Faculty Actions

##### 1. Conferral of Emeritus/Emerita Status (**ACTION ITEM**)

iii. The Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admissions (David Burge)

iv. Adoption of Kalven Committee Principles on Institutional Neutrality (**ACTION ITEM**)

Visitor Burke reported on the activities of the November 19 APDUC Committee meeting, providing a summary of the presentations given by Provost Antony. Visitor Burke then **MOVED** that the board approve the following action items, en bloc, as they are provided in the meeting materials:

- New Degree Program: MEd in Elementary Education
- New Degree Program: Med in Secondary Education
- Conferral of Emeritus/Emerita Status

The motion was **SECONDED** by Visitor Pence. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 14

Absent: Visitors Chimaladinne and Thompson

Visitor Burke recognized Provost Antony to summarize the process and feedback received on the topic of the Kalven Committee Report on Institutional Neutrality. Provost Antony explained that feedback had been gathered from four groups: students, Faculty Senate leaders, deans, and administrative leaders, who were all provided documents in advance, which included the original Kalven Committee report and Mason's "When the University Speaks" document (**Attachment 2**). He then outlined the pros and cons expressed by those that participated in those sessions:



- Pros:
  - Viewpoint diversity; faculty and students feeling free to speak without fear of contradicting official university positions.
  - Consistency of university communications and messaging; focusing on only most essential items to communicate.
  - Academic freedom: institutional neutrality could bolster academic neutrality.
- Cons:
  - Questions of timing and why anything further is needed when academic freedom and viewpoint diversity are already strong at Mason.
  - Uncertainty about who decides what topics are controversial or political in nature.
  - Neutrality should not mean complete silence on some issues.
  - Uncertainty about to whom a policy of neutrality would apply.
  - Uncertainty about the scope of neutrality and whether it applies to teaching, research, student activities, or investments.
  - The Kalven Report was written for a different time in our nation's history. It may not capture the unique needs of Mason.
  - Concerns about the limits of the president's ability to speak out on issues.

Provost Antony continued that if the board were to vote to adopt a stance of institutional neutrality, the feedback received offered the following suggestions:

- Provide clear definitions of institutional neutrality and to whom it applies.
- Reify and build upon Mason's existing approach. Many believed that Mason's "When the University Speaks" framework (instruct, explain, console, and deescalate) already achieves neutrality without an expectation of complete silence.

Visitor Burke thanked Provost Antony for his work on the matter. Rector Stimson voiced his approval of the process utilized. He then opened the floor for comment from the board.

- Secretary Alabay affirmed his support for the concept of institutional neutrality, pointing to numerous other institutions that had adopted similar policies, while acknowledging that the critiques offered were fair. He expressed that individuals do not like being spoken for by an institution, especially in a diverse setting. He concluded that he saw the Kalven Committee report as a natural extension of the University of Chicago Principles on Free Expression, which Mason adopted in 2018.
- Melissa Broeckelman-Post expressed that Mason has already been exhibiting institutional restraint, and that the Kalven Report would add ambiguity. She asked what problem was trying to be solved and inquired if there are examples of where the current process has been insufficient. Rector Stimson shared he was seeking feedback on whom the policy should apply to.
- Vice Rector Meese expressed support for the "When the University Speaks" document, but noted that it is only a staff-produced document and would not carry the weight of an official university policy. He noted that adopting the Kalven principles could be as they are articulated in the Mason document.
- Visitor Peterson asked what the consequences would be if deviating from an adopted policy. Rector Stimson responded that there is no legal remedy, as it is meant to be a statement of principles, and that institutional neutrality does not necessarily mean institutional silence. Rector Stimson continued by reading a portion of the Faculty Handbook and remarking that principles of institutional neutrality are already in practice, with which the Kalven principles would be consistent. He concluded by noting that these principles are not meant to require institutional silence, but to allow universities to be the sponsors and supporters of free expression by the students and faculty.
- Maria Cuesta shared that students were not comfortable with adopting the Kalven Committee principles. She cited a lack of concrete plan or definitions, and that Mason was different from institutions when the document was published. Secretary Alabay responded that the Kalven document is meant to be a statement of principles, and that operationalizing is meant to be left to the university and its other documents ("When the University Speaks"), and that the board would be formally adopting what the university has already been doing in practice.

- President Washington expressed that when other universities adopt these principles, they cease speaking due to uncertainty about when leadership should speak. He also expressed his support for utilizing the “When the University Speaks” document as the guiding principles.
- Visitor Prowitt asked Vice Rector Meese if the “When the University Speaks” document could be adopted alongside the Kalven principles and serve as the operational guidance. Vice Rector Meese shared his experience at West Point to emphasize that students and faculty would be able to speak and operate without fear of contradiction from the institution because the institution would not be taking a stance on the issue.
- Visitor Rosen expressed that the Kalven principles clearly do not influence research or investments, and that the scope of the principles would not apply to students or faculty but would apply to a small set of people that could be seen as speaking for the university. He reiterated that the principles are intended to facilitate free expression by faculty and students, not to be superseded by the institution.
- Ms. Hoffman expressed disappointment that the graduate student general assembly did not have the opportunity to discuss the matter before a vote was taken and that a wider audience of students should have been educated and solicited on the matter.
- Ms. Cuesta expressed that students and faculty see the president as a leader in what students should discuss, that global issues are Mason issues, and that what constitutes a political issue should be further discussed.

Visitor Prowitt then **MOVED** that official statements on behalf of the University may only be made by the Rector or the President and shall follow the principles of institutional neutrality as outlined in the University of Chicago's 1967 Kalven Committee: *Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action* ("Kalven Report"), and use the George Mason *When the University Speaks* document as the operational guidance for upholding these principles.

Visitor Blackman offered the **amendment** that the words “(or their designees)” be added to the motion so that the full motion would read:

I **MOVE** that official statements on behalf of the University may only be made by the Rector or the President (or their designees) and shall follow the principles of institutional neutrality as outlined in the University of Chicago's 1967 Kalven Committee: *Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action* ("Kalven Report"), and use the George Mason *When the University Speaks* document as the operational guidance for upholding these principles.

Rector Stimson called for any objections to the proposed amendment; there were none.

The motion was **SECONDED** by Visitor Burke. The **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY, AS AMENDED, BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 12

Absent: Visitors Chimaladinne, Thompson, Brown, and Oberoi

With the departure of APDUC Chair Burke, Visitor Prowitt stepped in to recognize David Burge to present on the topic of standardized testing in undergraduate admissions. Mr. Burge presented on the topic, noting the following highlights:

- Mason has been considered an SAT-optional university since 2007 and has a 90% admission rate for incoming freshman. In that time, Mason has increased its market share of applicants, which is tied to the SAT-optional approach. Quality of applicants has also improved, but not because of this practice.
- Fewer students in Virginia are taking the SAT, and other institutions in Virginia are test optional. GPA scores generally coincide with SAT scores, showing that GPA is a predictor of success at Mason.

Visitor Prowitt then recognized Provost Antony to provide an update on events in Korea. Provost Antony advised that following the Korean president's declaration of martial law, the general assembly quickly repealed it, and the president then rescinded the declaration. He noted that Mason Korea students, faculty, and staff are all safe and are maintaining normal operations. As of now, there is nothing concerning to report.

**A. Research Committee**

Visitor Prowitt reported on the Research Committee meeting, providing a summary of the presentations received by Andre Marshall (Vice President for Research, Innovation, and Economic Impact), Aarthi Narayanan (Professor of Biology), and Mary O'Toole (Forensic Science Program Director).

**B. Development Committee**

Visitor Peterson reported on the Development Committee meeting, providing a summary of the presentations received by Sumeet Shrivastava (Chair, GMUF Board of Trustees), Trishana Bowden (Vice President, Advancement & Alumni Relations), and Rick Davis (Dean, College of Visual & Performing Arts).

**C. Finance & Land Use Committee**

Visitor Pence provided a summary of the Finance & Land Use Committee meeting. He then **MOVED** that the board approve Schematic Design for the Basketball and Academic Performance Center as it was provided in the meeting materials. The motion was **SECONDED** by Vice Rector Meese. **THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 11

Absent: Visitors Brown, Burke, Chimaladinne, Oberoi, and Thompson

**D. Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee**

Secretary Alabay reported on the November 19 Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee meeting, providing a summary of the presentations received by the Auditor of Public Accounts, Charmaine Madison (Vice President and CIO), review of the committee charter, and review of contractual conflicts of interest.

**XI. Closed Session**

- A. Acquisition of Real Property (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.3)
- B. Consultation with Legal Counsel pertaining to actual or probable litigation (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.7)
- C. Consultation with Legal Counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.8)
- D. Personnel Matter (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.1)

Vice Rector Meese **MOVED** that the board go into Closed Session under the provisions of Section 2.2-3711.A.3, for discussion on the potential acquisition of certain real property to further the University's mission at the Sci-Tech campus; Section 2.2-3711.A.7 for Consultation with legal counsel pertaining to actual or probable litigation including briefings on:

Akerman v. GMU  
Cerankosky et al. v. Washington, et al.  
Jeong v. GMU  
Morrison v. GMU et al.  
Wright v. GMU et al.  
Zahabi v. GMU et al.

Section 2.2-3711.A.1 for a Personnel Matter, to discuss the performance of specific university personnel; Section 2.2-3711.A.19 for a briefing and discussion to protect public safety regarding campus events; and Section 2.2-3711.A.8 for Consultation with Legal Counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice concerning the aforementioned items and pending investigations. The motion was **SECONDED** by Secretary Alabay. **MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.**

Following closed session, Vice Rector Meese **MOVED** that the board go back into public session and further moved that by roll call vote the board affirm that only public business matters lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements under the Freedom of Information Act were heard, discussed or considered in the closed meeting, and that only such business matters that were identified in the motion to go into a closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered in the closed meeting. Any member of the board who believes that there was a departure from the requirements as stated, shall so state prior to taking the roll call, indicating the substance of the departure that, in his or her judgment, has taken place. **ALL PRESENT BOARD MEMBERS RESPONDED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Absent: Visitors Brown, Burke, Chimaladinne, Oberoi, Pence, Rees, and Thompson.

### **E. Adjournment**

Rector Stimson called for any additional business to come before the board. Hearing none, he adjourned the meeting at 5:35 p.m.

Prepared by:  
Scott Nichols  
Interim Secretary pro tem

#### **Attachments:**

1. Written Public Comments for November 19 and December 5 Meetings
2. "When the University Speaks" Document

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**Name:** Rodrigo Supo

**Mason Affiliation:** Student

**Written Comment:** As a student, I believe that the creation of the Office of Audit and Compliance is a great idea, as it will be acting as a 'proof-reader' for Mason's financial documents by making sure GMU complies with the norm and passes state audits. I also agree with it not having the power to make decisions in order to keep the decision making process as they are, and it being a support entity.

**Name:** Jack Goldstone

**Mason Affiliation:** Faculty

**Written Comment:** I hope the BOV will follow regular procedures to ensure full debate and transparency on agenda items.

**Name:** Heather Toronjo

**Mason Affiliation:** Faculty

**Written Comment:** This is a topic that should be discussed in depth which is why there are rules against adding things to an agenda last minute. As noted by Jamie Kalven in 2018, "The University has used the Kalven Report as a kind of shield and hasn't really engaged as much as it might in these things. To invoke it as this absolute principle is not, I think, what they had in mind. It's important that these be real conversations, and that the University not just reflexively hold up the Kalven Report as the Holy Grail."

The Kalven report does not promote absolute neutrality. It recognizes two exceptions. "From time to time instances will arise in which the society, or segments of it, threaten the very mission of the university and its values of free inquiry. In such a crisis, it becomes the obligation of the university as an institution to oppose such measures and actively to defend its interests and its values." "There is another context in which questions as to the appropriate role of the university may possibly arise, situations involving university ownership of property, its receipt of funds, its awarding of honors, its membership in other organizations. Here, of necessity, the university, however it acts, must act as an institution in its corporate capacity. In the exceptional instance, these corporate activities of the university may appear so incompatible with paramount social values as to require careful assessment of the consequences."

There is an alternative to this which is "institutional restraint" These ideas should be discussed.

**Name:** Todd M. La Porte

**Mason Affiliation:** Faculty

**Written Comment:** Board of Visitors

George Mason University

4400 University Drive

Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Members of the Board of Visitors,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed adoption of the Kalven Report by direct action of the Board of Visitors without adequate public notice or adherence to established procedures.

While I do not oppose the principles outlined in the Kalven Report, I believe the manner in which this policy is being advanced raises serious procedural and ethical concerns that must be addressed to preserve the integrity and shared governance of George Mason University.

The Board's bylaws, as well as Virginia state law, require that public notice of new agenda items be provided at least three days prior to their consideration. This fundamental transparency ensures accountability and allows for meaningful public participation.

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By bypassing this requirement, the Board risks undermining trust in its governance and alienating the very community it seeks to serve. Transparency is not merely a legal obligation but a cornerstone of institutional legitimacy, particularly in matters as significant as adopting a policy on "institutional neutrality."

Additionally, George Mason University's policy UP 1101 establishes a clear and deliberate process for the adoption of new policies. This process emphasizes the importance of consultation with key stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students. Circumventing this established process in favor of unilateral action by the Board is not only procedurally improper but also a direct affront to the collaborative spirit that underpins our university's governance structure.

The Kalven Report itself underscores the importance of institutional neutrality in fostering an environment where diverse viewpoints can flourish. However, imposing this principle on the faculty without meaningful debate or their participation directly contradicts the spirit of neutrality.

Neutrality does not mean imposing decisions from above; rather, it requires creating a space for dialogue and consensus-building. To disregard the faculty's role in this process is to undermine the very principles of shared governance and intellectual freedom that the Kalven Report seeks to uphold.

I urge the Board to take immediate steps to rectify this situation by adhering to its own bylaws and ensuring full compliance with state law regarding public notice. Furthermore, I call on the Board to follow the established process outlined in UP 1101 for adopting new policies. This includes consulting with faculty and other stakeholders to ensure that any policy on institutional neutrality is implemented in a manner consistent with our university's values and governance framework.

By committing to transparency, collaboration, and adherence to established procedures, the Board can strengthen its relationship with the university community and uphold the principles of fairness and shared governance. Anything less risks undermining the trust and integrity that are essential to George Mason University's mission.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust that the Board will take these concerns seriously and act in the best interests of the university and its community.

Sincerely,

Todd M. La Porte

Associate Professor

Schar School of Government and Policy

**Name:** John Earle

**Mason Affiliation:** Faculty

**Written Comment:** I urge the the BOV to abide by their own bylaws (and state law) requiring at least three days of public notice when posting new agenda items. The BOV should follow the established process in UP 1101 for adopting new policies.

**Name:** Griffin Crouch

**Mason Affiliation:** Student

**Written Comment:** I'm concerned about some aspects of the discussions about institutional neutrality and the adoption of the Kalven Principle to the agenda. Outreach to the Mason community has not been comprehensive, provided full context of the proposals, or reached a majority of students, and I'm worried that adopting something that students feel will make them feel less supported by the University administration will harm the campus climate and lead to more student disengagement. In the short term, this could cause more friction, transfers of engaged students out, and lower ROIs for all of Mason's programs if students are less engaged. In the long run, this mean less alumni engagement with the University and less donations - both of which will harm our ability to succeed.

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**Name:** Declan Rees

**Mason Affiliation:** Student

**Written Comment:** The SJP at GMU has been issued a suspension and all activity for the group has been told to halt. Furthermore, two of our officers had their house raided by the FBI and no less than 20 police officers resulting in them being given no tress pass orders as well as their personal devices being confiscated. This escalation is all been pushed under the pretense of a case of graffiti and vandalism. This extreme action by Mason and Fairfax police, involved with the FBI, has made the right that students have to free speech and right to organize under pressure. People all around the campus are in complete disgust over this and demand the reinstatement of the SJP and for the two students to be allowed back to finish their education and for proper due process to deal with their student conduct violations. Where do you stand on this? It is clear that Mason can not be a grounds for safe and free expression when actions like this from administration go unquestioned by the community at large.

**Name:** Ilia Sheikholeslami

**Mason Affiliation:** Student

**Written Comment:** The board's pursuits to essentially stifle the opinion of President Washington is an inherently political and ideology driven decision - despite how much the board wishes to frame it otherwise. The assertion that an institution should not be able to speak out and adopt a position on issues may sound good on paper, but what happens if the ideals of the institution are threatened? This hyper conservative board has sought to undercut and defund George Mason's DEI programs - despite overwhelming outcry and objection from both the student body and faculty - and this move just seems a way to make President Washington complicit in the board's efforts. You cannot legitimately state that this board is not pursuing institutional neutrality for non-political reasons - it is inherently political, no matter how you frame it! The worst part is that the board has failed to engage with the student body effectively in pursuing this policy. The only student group that was consulted was the President's Student Advisory Group - a body that is not representative of the entire student population. There are countless students and student groups alike that dislike this policy, and countless more that aren't even aware this policy exists! This decision is not being made in the interests of the student body or this institution. It is being made to favor conservative interests groups so as to impose their will upon our leadership. What's to stop them from going beyond university leadership? George Mason is simply a testing ground for these groups to play around with after all.

**Name:** Kaiya Williams

**Mason Affiliation:** Student

**Written Comment:** I am against the adoption of this plan as it will be a disruption of the leadership's will to express his or her concerns.

**Name:** Ellie Fox

**Mason Affiliation:** Student

**Written Comment:** The push for Institutional Neutrality is being pushed by those in power who hate higher education. The university has a real potential to be a social good and change society. Yet, it has been molded by politicians and corporations into a machine that funnels people into an economy that turns them into machines. Institutional Neutrality was first established at the University of Chicago when students were protesting the Vietnam War, and has returned as students protest the genocide being perpetuated in Gaza. It is meant to defang our universities and make them uncontroversial to state and corporate interests. In reality, with our connections to the Military Industrial Complex, to union-busting corporations and the prison system, making the university "neutral" is futile. Is it not a contradiction that our university is banning our only

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Palestinian student organization without due process and, at the same time, proposing Institutional Neutrality as a tool to foster academic freedom? The truth is that George Mason University needs to foster critical conversations in order to begin the process of correcting its wrongdoings. Forbidding such communications is not only a slap in the face to students who care about the world around them, but to higher education as a respectable institution.

**Name:** Colin McAulay

**Mason Affiliation:** Student

**Written Comment:** I am Colin McAulay, the Student Body Vice-President. With the adoption of the Kalven principle and institutional neutrality today, I want it to be noted that this board has moved against the student body and has adopted an idea that the student body does not support. No discussion that I have been a part of with students has ended in a conclusion that Mason needs institutional neutrality. The board's discussion today shows that visitors have varying views about what the principles would mean and there is no clear path forward to administer institutional neutrality. I am disappointed with the board's willingness to flesh out the idea and lack of care when it comes to handling a policy that has caused students fear and anxiety. I hope that the board handles the adoption of this policy with care and produces a clear set of principles following the passing of the motion.





## When the university speaks

When should George Mason University deploy its institutional voice, particularly via its president? Outside of pedestrian administrative announcements, there are times when university leaders may be called upon, or feel the need, to speak out on issues impacting the university. At all times, it strives to maintain strict impartiality.

### When to consider a presidential message

Consideration begins with demand signals either from members of the community, or when events or dialogue on campus call for a message of clarification or de-escalation. When a leader – administrative, faculty, staff, or student – alerts the Office of the President, consideration begins, which starts with engaging the Office of University Branding, but usually widens to include representatives from other, relevant offices.

### Four reasons to speak

Throughout the administration of President Gregory Washington, leadership has spoken out when events have arisen that impact the university community enough to merit a presidential voice to:

- Instruct – At times, the university community must act in unison to respond to events in a particular way, such as the many COVID messages that President Washington issued to guide the campus through an uncertain and often frightening unknown. The voice of a leader was instructive in holding the shaken community together. [Here is an example from August 10, 2020.](#)
- Explain – Sense-making from the top leader can help to maintain productivity and a sense of normalcy in times of duress. When the US Supreme Court decision ending Affirmative Action in college admissions was issued, it was important to correct an inaccurate narrative spreading on campus, that the decision would deeply impact George Mason diversity. The inaccurate narrative could have deeply discouraged student applications. This [June 29, 2023 message](#) explained how the landmark decision would (and would not) impact the university.
- Console – The community can come together around events that are devastating, and a message from leadership may be very helpful to move the community along with offers of solace and help for those in crisis. This [January 30, 2023 message](#) acknowledged a string of violent episodes around the nation that were taking a collective toll on the well-being of campus community members, particularly students.
- De-escalate – Volatile social conditions elsewhere may give way to volatile campus conditions that threaten campus safety and the ability to deliver on our mission without disruption. Heading off unrest and even violence was the goal of [this May 1, 2024 message](#) about campus safety measures used, as well as rules of engagement that must be observed, in light of the Israel-Hamas fighting.

In fact, most presidential messages address more than one of these conditions, but any one of them may be present to consider issuing such a message. Vetting of message drafts to determine if and what to issue occurs in collaboration with the Office of University Branding, the Office of the President, and whatever additional offices are relevant to the subject matter being addressed.