

**BOARD OF VISITORS  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Full Board Meeting  
Tuesday, April 1, 2025  
Merten Hall, Hazel Conference Room (1201), Fairfax Campus**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Rector Cully Stimson, Vice Rector Mike Meese, Secretary Armand Alacbay, Visitors Horace Blackman, Reginald Brown, Lindsey Burke, Anjan Chimaladinne, Charles Cooper (virtual), William Hansen, Dolly Oberoi, Bob Pence, Jon Peterson, and Nancy Prowitt.

**ABSENT:** Visitors Maureen Ohlhausen and Jeff Rosen.

**ALSO, PRESENT:** Solon Simmons, Faculty Representative; Maria Cuesta, Undergraduate Student Representative; Rachel Spence, Staff Liaison; Gregory Washington, President; Anne Gentry, University Counsel; Deb Dickenson, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration; David Burge, Vice President for Enrollment Management; Rose Pascarell, Vice President for University Life; Marvin Lewis, Assistant Vice President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics; and Scott Nichols, Interim Secretary pro tem.

**I. Call to Order**

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

Rector Stimson informed the Board that Visitor Cooper requested to participate remotely due to his principal residence being more than 60 miles from the meeting location.

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

Rector Stimson then welcomed Visitor Bill Hansen who was appointed by Governor Youngkin in February and was attending his first meeting of this board. He noted that Visitor Hansen was the Deputy Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush, and is also a graduate of Mason.

**II. Closed Session**

- A.** Gifts, Bequests, and Fundraising Activities (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.9)
- B.** Discussion or consideration of honorary degrees or special awards. (Code of VA: §2.2-3711.A.11)
- 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.9 for discussion on gifts, bequests, and fundraising activities to discuss a philanthropic naming opportunity; Section 2.2-3711.A.11 for discussion or consideration of honorary degrees or special awards; Section 2.2-3711.A.8 for Consultation with Legal Counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice concerning the aforementioned and subsequent items and pending investigations; and Section 2.2-3711.A.1 for a Personnel Matter, to discuss the performance of specific university personnel. The motion was **SECONDED** by Secretary Alacbay. **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 Chimaladinne, Ohlhausen, and Rosen.

Rector Stimson then **MOVED** that the board approve the awarding of honorary degrees at a future date to the individuals discussed in closed session for that purpose. The motion was **SECONDED** by Vice Rector Meese. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 10

Absent: Visitors Chimaladinne, Oberoi, Ohlhausen, Pence and Rosen.

Rector Stimson then **MOVED** that the board approve the awarding of the Mason Medal at a future date to the individual discussed in closed session for that purpose. The motion was **SECONDED** by Vice Rector Meese. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 12

Absent: Visitors Ohlhausen, Pence and Rosen.

Rector Stimson then **MOVED** that the board adopt the resolution (**ATTACHMENT 1**) to rename the University's School of Computing to the Long Nguyen and Kimmy Duong School of Computing in recognition of their past and present support. The motion was **SECONDED** by Vice Rector Meese. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 13

Absent: Visitors Ohlhausen and Rosen.

Vice Rector Meese then **MOVED** that the board approve the Personnel Matter as discussed in closed session and authorize the President to execute such documents necessary or desirable to carry out the purposes and intent of this resolution consistent with the terms discussed in closed session. The motion was **SECONDED** by Secretary Alacbay. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 12

Abstain: Rector Stimson

Absent: Visitors Ohlhausen and Rosen.

Rector Stimson then **MOVED** that the board approve handling the Investigatory Matter as discussed in closed session and authorize the President to promulgate such documents necessary or desirable to carry out the purposes and intent of this resolution consistent with the discussion in closed session. The motion was **SECONDED** by Visitor Prowitt. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE.**

Yes: 12

Abstain: Visitor Brown

Absent: Visitors Ohlhausen and Rosen.

### **III. FY 2026 Tuition and Mandatory Fees Presentation**

Rector Stimson recognized Executive Vice President (EVP) Deb Dickenson, to provide the FY 2026 tuition and mandatory fees presentation. Along with David Burge, Vice President for Enrollment Management; Rose Pascarell, Vice President for University Life; and Marvin Lewis, Assistant Vice President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics, EVP Dickenson reported the following:

- George Mason University Achievements:
  - Rankings & Value:
    - GMU ranks #1 in Virginia for value, upward mobility, and internships.
    - Emphasis on innovation, affordability, and career outcomes strengthens the value of a GMU degree.
  - Mason Career Plans Survey reported that the Class of 2024 had an 85% positive career outcome rate with a median salary of \$70,000. Many graduates remain in the D.C. area, benefiting local and state economies.
- Budget and Financial Challenges
  - George Mason is underfunded compared to peer institutions in the Commonwealth:
    - Mason's majority revenue source is tuition and the second largest is from state appropriations; however, appropriations per student are the lowest among peer institutions. FY2025 in-state tuition remains competitive despite a \$6,000-per-student funding gap compared to peer institutions when state and tuition funding are combined. Top Mason leadership continue their advocacy in Richmond to close the gap.
    - SCHEV identified a \$22 million funding disparity for Mason's faculty salaries. Mason leaders are advocating for a performance-based funding model to address the issue.
    - Challenges persist in maintaining quality services, upgrading tech and infrastructure, and supporting staff due to budget constraints.
  - Financial Aid and Affordability (David Burge)
    - Federal, commonwealth, and outside scholarships contribute positively to the University's revenue.
    - Financial aid comes from federal, commonwealth, GMU, and outside scholarships. GMU institutional aid often involves tuition discounting for need-based students.
    - According to the JLARC report of net price from 2014-2023, the net price, which is the total cost minus the average amount of federal, state/local, or institutional aid, for full-time, in-state students has decreased 15% since 2014 due to increased aid. Mason serves 10% more needy students than any other institution in the commonwealth. Pell grant recipients increased 15% in the past year with the federal government's change of methodology.
- Operational Efficiency (EVP Deb Dickenson)
  - GMU is among the most efficient universities, with lean staffing and operations. Mason has fewer employees per student compared to its peers, partly due to investments in efficiency and process improvement; however, this level of leanness is unsustainable. Investments must be made in people and infrastructure in order to retain staff and improve efficiency.
  - GMU faces funding challenges not seen by other Virginia institutions like UVA and Virginia Tech. These schools benefit from higher state funding and operate in lower-cost regions, depending less on tuition funding and allowing them to expand more aggressively. Mason is also seeing increased competition by UVA and Virginia Tech in Northern Virginia.
- Commonwealth Budget:
  - The final state budget is under negotiation between the legislative conference budget and the governor's amendments with final passage anticipated in early spring or possibly into June. Mason's FY26 funding allocation is favorable but below amounts requested.
- Discussion ensued:
  - Visitor Brown asked about the delta between the legislative and the governor's budget proposals. EVP Dickenson responded that for operational funding it is about \$1.2 million. VMSDEP is \$4 million. The governor's budget is higher but it is one-time funding. On deferred maintenance the governor's budget is \$8 million lower.
  - Rector Stimson asked if other Virginia schools with a Northern Virginia operation pay a cost-of-living adjustment to their faculty. EVP Dickenson replied that she did not believe they pay a

COLA, but they are paying a substantially higher compensation base and have flexibility in location so faculty can work remotely and live in lower-cost areas.

- EVP Dickenson continued her presentation, advocating for the following tuition recommendation in order to invest in faculty, staff, and systems:
  - 2.5% tuition increase for in-state undergraduate students in FY26, excluding JD law tuition. Flat dollar increases recommended for out-of-state tuition.
  - For context, the Virginia Tech board approved a 2.9% tuition increase and increased fees. Their proposal includes an amendment that it is contingent upon the final Commonwealth budget.
    - Visitor Peterson asked about how much Virginia Tech's fees increased. EVP Dickenson replied that the fees increased between 0.4 -2.7%, with the supplemental athletic fee at the higher end of the range.
- Tuition dollars at work
  - 84% of tuition goes toward instructional categories; other categories are institutional support, operations and maintenance, and student services.
  - Student Fee Recommendation (Rose Pascarell)
    - Vice President Pascarell advocated the Mandatory Student Fee (MSF) increase by \$96 per student (2.5% increase) for in-state and out-of-state students. The comprehensive fee covers services and programs all students can access, including infrastructure and overhead.
    - A student representative is part of the MSF Committee to increase transparency in how fees are used. Students recommended that Mason's consultant look into the mandatory student fee and additional course fees. The undergraduate representatives also asked to look into cohort pricing similar to William and Mary.
    - Current fees expanded support for Green Machine, University Life services, staffing for the new student activities building, and eSports funding. There are planned investments in athletics and technology improvements for FY26.
  - Athletics (Marvin Lewis):
    - Mason's athletics have had a historic year. The men's soccer program won its first Atlantic 10 regular season championship, the women's track program won its first A-10 championship since 2014, the men's basketball program won the A-10 regular-season championship and advanced to the NIT, and the women's basketball program won their first A-10 championship and advanced to the NCAA tournament.
    - Athletics are underfunded if the University is to keep pace with the expenses of a competitive program with 22 varsity sports and 500 student athletes with an annual budget around \$30 million. Mason Athletics has the second lowest student fee in the Commonwealth, which has grown about 3% annually over the last 10 years, compared to many peer institutions, whose athletics fees have grown 6% annually over the past 10 years. While Mason's athletics budget is around the median for the A-10, Mason has 3 to 4 more sports than peers, along with supporting 150 more student athletes.
    - Discussion ensued about alumni giving:
      - Visitor Brown asked how much money for athletics is raised from alumni versus outside groups compared to peer schools. Vice President Lewis responded that other schools bring in more ticket sales and media rights because of their recent successes. Visitor Brown requested Mason focus on alumni and outside fundraising so that alumni and not current students are sharing the responsibility of revenue generation. Vice President Lewis added that they have hired two development specialists to maximize the University's fundraising capacity. In order to support those programs, they will better leverage support of the basketball program but additional revenue streams will be needed to support the other 21 athletic programs.

- President Washington added that the University's fundraising is on par with peer schools that are a similar age. The issue is that alumni are not financially at a place in life where they can give. Visitor Blackman commented that infrastructure investments would lead to higher levels of giving and attract greater talent. He also noted the additional cost from the *House v. NCAA* settlement. EVP Dickenson added that UVA and Virginia Tech are able to support athletics with a lower student fee due to a large endowment and revenue-generating real estate gifts, as well as higher tuition, appropriations, and more selective student base. Visitor Prowitt asked that Vice President Lewis reshare his presentation from the February 27 board meeting.
- Visitor Peterson highlighted that no other school can claim as many A-10 championships as Mason has this year. Vice President Lewis responded to an earlier question, noting that Virginia Tech recently raised their student fees by \$300 to offset the increase in athletics.
- Vice President Lewis continued his presentation. Football and non-football average athletic fees have had an annual growth of 6% annually, whereas Mason's athletic fees have only increased by 3% annually.
  - Vice Rector Meese confirmed that 23% of the student fees go to athletics.
- Most athletic facilities were built in the 1980s and are used by varsity, intermural, club, recreation, and community sports and remain in constant use.
- A major priority is increased student engagement with athletics through spirit activities to build pride and tradition, through subsidy of student tickets, employing student workers, and signature events.
- Athletics serves as the front porch and heart of the community, and Mason needs a strong athletic department.
- Further discussion ensued:
  - Rector Stimson asked about expanding Mason's residency requirements, increasing the requirement to two years, and the benefits to the University student experience. Vice President Lewis noted the goal of focusing on housing across all campuses, and that increased student housing on campus would only strengthen the Athletics' relationship with Housing and University Life.
  - Visitor Peterson asked about the competition from schools with upgraded academics and athletics that can offer the full college experience and its impact on our admissions. Vice President Lewis replied that more vibrant athletic departments attract students, which is why he recommends we enhance our athletics department, enhance visibility, and create the community students want.
- EVP Dickenson continued her presentation, noting the current status of the University's budget process. Room and board rates were approved at the February 27 board meeting, a student town hall discussion was held on March 20, and that the full budget presentation to include the tuition and fees proposal will be presented at the Finance & Land Use committee meeting on April 10.
  - Visitor Burke asked if there was an overall "dollar at work" infographic. EVP Dickenson said they could look at adding one to the April 10 meeting materials.

Rector Stimson thanked EVP Dickenson for her presentation.

#### IV. Public Comments

There were 3 registrations for oral public comment and 28 written comment submissions (**ATTACHMENT 2**).

Following the oral comments outlined in Attachment 2, Rector Stimson thanked the registrants for their input and stated that board members read and value their comments. He then recognized Visitor Brown, who made remarks about the board taking proactive and not activist stances on major issues, fulfilling their fiduciary duty by anticipating future challenges and acting decisively. He stated that internal disagreements were the “Mason Way,” but there is a commitment to finding unified solutions.

Visitor Brown continued by saying that Mason’s diversity is its strength. Mason is not diverse specifically because of DEI policies, but rather because of affordable tuition, workforce-aligned academic offerings, and a welcoming culture. Mason is inclusive because of its insistence on tolerance and opposition to hate. He emphasized that the board’s intent was to clearly reject all forms of hate, including antisemitism and discrimination against LGBTQ students. The intent of the antisemitism resolution was in opposition to hate.

Mason promotes equity through access and affordability to the middle class, not by “putting a thumb on the scale.” He referenced his opposition to tuition increases as a symbolic stance for maintaining accessibility and called for increased alumni and business engagement to help fund student support and institutional goals. Visitor Brown urged a focus on system-wide challenges, not individual DEI programs. Mason is a place for diverse voices, both politically and culturally.

Rector Stimson thanked Visitor Brown for his comments and recessed the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

#### **V. Lunch Recess**

#### **VI. Board Continuing Education**

Pursuant to Code of Virginia § 23.1-1304

**PRESENT:** Rector Cully Stimson, Vice Rector Mike Meese, Secretary Armand Alacbay, Visitors Horace Blackman, Lindsey Burke, Charles Cooper (virtual), William Hansen, and Jon Peterson.

**ABSENT:** Visitors Reg Brown, Anjan Chimaladinne, Dolly Oberoi, Maureen Ohlhausen, Bob Pence, Nancy Prowitt, and Jeff Rosen.

**ALSO, PRESENT:** Solon Simmons, Faculty Representative; Maria Cuesta, Undergraduate Student Representative; Gregory Washington, President; Anne Gentry, University Counsel; William Troutt, Association of Governing Boards Consultant.

Rector Stimson reconvened the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Rector Stimson informed the board that the purpose of the session is to provide an additional opportunity to meet the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia’s (SCHEV) continuing education requirement under § 23.1-1304. The continuing education session was specifically designed for this Board with the assistance of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), and in consultation with SCHEV.

Rector Stimson then recognized Dr. William E. Troutt, a consultant from the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), and former president of Belmont University and Rhodes College to lead the discussion. Dr. Troutt also chaired the American Council on Education as well as the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education.

Dr. Troutt began the discussion by describing U.S. higher education is in widespread distress with an environment marked by rapid and ongoing change. Despite challenges, Mason continues to advance in key areas: enrollment growth, student satisfaction, graduate employability, research output and rankings, and

regional economic impact. He praised Mason's president and board for its innovative spirit and how it is "fighting above its weight class."

Dr. Troutt reviewed the roles and responsibilities of a governing board, noting that effective board governance means asking the right strategic questions, as universities grow in the direction of those questions. He presented the following:

**Three Key Roles for Board Members:**

**1. Fiduciary Leadership:**

- Duties of care (act in good faith), loyalty (act in university's interest), and obedience (ensure alignment with mission and in compliance of laws and regulations).
- Asking good oversight and insightful questions:
  - 1. Oversight Questions: Are we compliant? Is the budget sound?
  - 2. Inquiry Questions: What can we learn? What is the mission impact?
  - 3. Insightful Questions: Will this program help advance the university's mission?
- Assuring compliance and minimizing enterprise risk.
- Delegating operational administrative duties and respecting the differences between the Board's role and administrative responsibilities. It is important to distinguish between administrative and governance roles, with a clear understanding about who decides what: some decisions are delegated solely to the president, others require board approval or collaborative input, some decisions rest solely with the board.
- Protecting the future from the present.
- Discussion on these topics included:
  - 1. Secretary Alacbay praised the presentation, noting that it was in alignment with Virginia Code § 23.1-1304. He noted that in Virginia board members' statutory duty is to the citizens of the Commonwealth, not solely to the university. This public obligation sometimes requires decisions that conflict with institutional interests, such as the Board's vote on tuition may benefit the institution financially but negatively impact students or construction projects might serve the university's growth but must be evaluated in light of broader community interests. Secretary Alacbay then asked Dr. Troutt how to reconcile those conflicting responsibilities. Dr. Troutt responded that there are very important nuances but ultimately a board member is to be loyal to this university.
  - 2. Vice Rector Meese asked how to balance a board wanting to make changes to the strategic plan that is revised every 3-5 years and the board changing every year by 25% or more? Dr. Troutt suggested looking at how the board engages its new members, focusing on principle and not particulars.

**2. Ambassadorial Role:**

- Board members represent the university positively and help foster external relationships. They advocate and promote the university's mission and value.
- Every board member should engage in active investment in the university and encourage others to engage and contribute as well.

**3. Strategic Leadership:**

- Focus on big-picture issues and long-term planning. Boards bring broader perspectives, contributing value that complements on-campus viewpoints. Campus conversations are vital, but boards provide "40,000-foot" strategic vision.
- Key Strategic Questions for the Board:
  - 1. What are the highest aspirations for George Mason University?
  - 2. What constraints need to be addressed or mitigated?

3. How can the board structure its time to collaborate with the president on major strategic issues?
  1. Discussion ensued:
    1. The Rector and Dr. Troutt discussed the frequency of full board and committee meetings, with six full board meetings and potential stand-alone committee meetings between full board meetings. Dr. Troutt recalled Vice Rector Meese's question about board action continuity and added that committees are where the most important work is done and can be the solution to turnover of board members.
    2. Secretary Alacbay asked if big picture discussions are typically plenary session full board or a distinct committee. Dr. Troutt replied that the Rector could call an ad hoc committee on the future of the university, with a cross section of committee and board members or it could be done as a full board.
    3. Rector Stimson noted that a significant constraint in public boards is the requirement that if more than two board members discuss a business matter, it must be a public meeting. Dr. Troutt agreed that this is a disadvantage, making it difficult to have more broad-range conversations.
  - Nurture a good board culture, based on mutual respect, openness, and trust. Seeing each other outside of board duties will build those relationships.
    1. Dr. Solon Simmons asked about how the board can best work with the talent and insight of the non-voting faculty, student, and staff representatives. Dr. Troutt replied that it is important to have two-way, candid dialogue with faculty, student, and staff representatives so that there is healthy communication between the board and the university family.
    2. Visitor Blackman commented that board culture matters tremendously. A presidential search required the board to heavily rely on student, faculty, and staff representatives because they had a perspective that no one else had.
    3. Vice Rector Meese added that the representatives he has worked with do not hesitate to share their thoughts. He also praised President Washington for inviting the board to the basketball games and other events to facilitate relationships outside the board structure.
    4. Visitor Jon Peterson praised Dr. Simmons for bringing multiple faculty perspectives to the meetings.

### **Enterprise Risk Management in Higher Education**

Dr. Troutt continued:

- Risk planning is largely handled by administration.
- Risk oversight is a shared responsibility between the board and the president.
- Ideally, a risk governance partnership should be in place. Effective governance is more than task delegation—it involves a fusion of strategic thinking.

Dr. Troutt recognized President Washington about the state of Risk Management at George Mason. President Washington outlined the following:

- The University has a direct approach to managing risk. The president meets on a weekly basis with a dedicated team to discuss the top 10 risk list. Risks are ranked in two broad categories: **impact** – potential damage to the institution and **likelihood** – the probability of occurrence. Special attention is given to risks categorized as **high impact and high likelihood**. This focused approach allows efficient use of limited resources and supports proactive risk mitigation.



- Current Top Risks:
  1. Funding & resources
  2. Competition
  3. Cybersecurity
  4. Governance risk
  5. Campus safety and security
- Organizational Approach:
  - The institution uses a risk management model aligned with Fortune 500 companies.
  - Cross-functional collaboration is encouraged to avoid siloed risk responses.
- Discussion ensued:
  - Visitor Blackman added that clarifying governance (board oversight) and management (administrative execution) roles in risk processes avoids confusion and inefficiency. Effective risk management requires: de-siloed communication, clear incident command and control structures, established executive responsibilities, and resource availability across scenarios. Dr. Troutt agreed that boards avoid micromanagement during crises and not engage in direct incident response.
  - Secretary Alacbay praised the University's chief auditor and noted that the Audit, Risk, and Compliance Committee recently added "Risk" to its name and function. He asked about opinions about the function of that committee in regards to governance.
  - Visitor Blackman emphasized the critical importance of maintaining independence of the audit committee and the auditor's reporting directly through the committee to the board.
  - Visitor Meese pointed out that the Chief Risk Officer reports directly to President Washington. President Washington added that he shares the responsibility with the chief auditor. Visitor Blackman highlighted that Mason was the first university in the Commonwealth to have a Chief Risk Officer.
  - Visitor Peterson praised the quality of lawyers serving as board members, and asked when it comes to the University's legal issues, how do they manage their involvement in what's best for the university. Dr. Troutt responded that the board should use its best judgement, informed by the president's perspective. Ultimately, it comes back to duty, loyalty, and care. Rector Stimson added that as a lawyer, they have to "stay in their lane" as they are not university counsel.

Dr. Troutt thanked Dr. Washington for his feedback and provided a more generalized list of risks facing higher education institutions, referencing a Deloitte Insights article, "Significant risks facing higher education: Getting to the roots of risk" (**ATTACHMENT 3**):

- Increased Competition
- Faculty and Staff Attrition
- Declining State Support
- Uncertainty Regarding Federal Support
- Student Activism
- Student Mental Health Issues
- Cyber Security Threats
- Natural Disasters
- Evolving Academic Program Demand
- Institutional Agility

Discussion ensued:

- Dr. Washington and Dr. Troutt discussed the competition George Mason faces. Dr. Washington noted that there are 23 institutions whose core operations are within 50 miles of campus, with a total of 121 institutions represented when including satellite operations. It is the most competitive educational region in the country. Low lease rates make operating in the region cost effective. As a result, Mason must compete with other institutions for students and faculty.
- Secretary Alabay asked Dr. Washington how the University works with SCHEV to avoid overlap from competitors. Dr. Washington replied that SCHEV oversees public institutions but not private ones, despite some private institutions receiving state funding via VTAG funds, resulting in private schools receiving more funding per student than public schools, without equivalent oversight.
- Visitor Blackman added that with Amazon's HQ2 deal, the state allocated \$175 million to three public universities (including UVA and Virginia Tech) to set up in Northern Virginia, creating internal competition among state-funded institutions. Institutions now must rely heavily on branding and differentiation to compete. GMU is facing aggressive recruitment competition from UVA and Virginia Tech, with top faculty being targeted.
- Dr. Washington described state support as increasing, but continues to be 10-15 years behind. The University runs a \$1.5 billion budget with state appropriations of close to \$400 million. Recently, Mason was averaging \$200 million in state support for a \$1.3 billion budget. Visitor Blackman commented that the state supported 82% of Mason's budget when he was a Mason student in 1988 and the support as gone as low as 20%.
- Visitor Hansen commented on the federal funding situation. He does not expect major financial cuts to Pell Grants or major student aid programs like Title I or Special Education; however, structural changes in aid delivery are anticipated, potentially shifting federal subsidies away from middle and upper-income students toward disadvantaged and non-traditional students, including less-than-half-time enrollees. He expects that focus may shift away from loan forgiveness and more toward reforming how subsidies are distributed. He expected the greatest risk for funding cuts or restructuring is in federal research grants. Research funding continues to be "the bread and butter" for many higher ed institutions and is seen as vulnerable under current trends.
- Vice Rector Meese added that tuition from international students, who tend to pay full price, is impacted with international students having more difficulties getting visas, impacting international student enrollment.
- Rector Stimson added historical context on student activism, noting that current events are serious and should not be excused, particularly after October 7; however, labeling them "unprecedented" is historically inaccurate. Today's activism is far less intense than in the 1960s, which saw widespread violence. Understanding the scale and intensity of past movements can better inform current responses. Visitor Blackman separated activism from bad behavior, and the need to protect students and infrastructure.
- Dr. Simmons asked about a scenario where an activist's actions draw federal attention, followed by disparate disciplinary responses, triggering faculty reaction, national media attention, campus unrest or panic, especially among senior faculty. Visitor Blackman emphasized the importance of protecting freedom of expression, even controversial opinions (e.g., DEI, political comments) with so much fear in the system. There is fear that immigration status or freedom may be affected by speaking up. Vice Rector Meese replied that it is a judgement call for University leadership (e.g., president, campus police) to make, balancing expression with the safety of 40,000+ community members. Rector Stimson praised the judgement of President Washington during a past security situation involving students and federal concerns, noting that he stood behind the president's decision. Dr. Simmons reiterated his concern that a federal action could be unpredictable and disruptive, regardless of board's preparations. Rector Stimson reiterated Visitor Brown's remarks on the board's proactive approach and how board members care deeply about the university, its reputation, and its fiscal health.
- Ms. Cuesta added that it is difficult for her, as an international student, to know her rights of expression. Secretary Alabay added that as part of the board's governance role, that he is concerned that University policies are clear, unambiguous, and consistently enforced. Policies related to speech are content-neutral

and designed to protect freedom of expression. Action becomes disciplinary or "actionable" when speech is combined with conduct that can be categorized as harmful or disruptive. Vice Rector Meese stated he is sensitive to Ms. Cuesta's situation and despite limits on influence over federal decisions, by enacting measured, preemptive steps, George Mason has likely reduced federal scrutiny, lessening the chance that student speech or actions (particularly by international students) would invite severe consequences.

- Visitor Blackman remarked that student mental health issues are mirrored in the armed forces and veterans and asked Ms. Cuesta what she has seen. Ms. Cuesta responded that the political climate, economic instability, and general life circumstances are having a significant impact on students' mental health, and these challenges are often outside the university's control. The university is actively working to provide mental health support, doing its best under current circumstances and that funding mental health programs needs to continue.
- Secretary Alacbay asked about the University's situation regarding substance abuse. Dr. Washington responded that Mason's students tend to be older and a little more mature so while there are issues, it is not to the same extent as other institutions. Substance abuse is treated like other mental health issues, with expanded staff and virtual support which works very well.
- Visitor Peterson asked about the risk about the reclassification of student athletes. Rector Stimson praised Dr. Washington's governing board membership and for keeping the board up to speed on the NCAA settlement and NIL's impact on the University. Dr. Washington provided specifics that these settlements will cost \$7-9 million dollars more per year.
- On the topic of cybersecurity, Visitor Blackman commented that universities are vulnerable to cybersecurity issues due to their openness. Doxing (publishing personal information online with malicious intent) is becoming a common threat, affecting students, faculty, and board members. The motive behind attacks has expanded from simple financial gain to social and political harassment. The university must pivot from only protecting servers and networks to safeguarding individuals: protecting personal data, promoting cyber hygiene, and educating the entire campus community on defensive practices. He noted that the CIO and auditing team do an excellent job and are attentive for potential attacks.
- Vice Rector Meese praised the University for its institutional agility with adding or subtracting programs, with SCHEV being the only constraint. The youth of the University keep programs from becoming entrenched.
- Rector Stimson added another important risk is the University's Korean campus and the cultural and legal differences that complicate global operations. Dr. Troutt supported the concern and added that hiring good people would mitigate that risk.

### **Providing Leadership in Times of Transition**

Dr. Troutt continued:

#### **Board Leadership Transition**

- Dr. Troutt asked about term lengths and systems to provide continuity during board leadership transition. Rector Stimson noted that a rector's term is for two years and former rectors routinely talk to one another.
- Visitor Blackman highlighted the critical role of the Vice Rector in ensuring smooth board operations with shared leadership, open communication, and joint action on major initiatives. This leadership model was cited as a key contributor to board stability over the past eight years.

#### **Administrative Transition**

- Dr. Troutt mentioned that a change in a president is a significant challenge to institutions. He asked how the process is done at George Mason.
- Visitor Blackman spoke to the stakeholders in a presidential search: the board, students, faculty, staff, the trustees, and the community. The most recent search committee was co-chaired by the faculty senate chair and vice rector, and included student, faculty, and staff representatives and board members. He noted the challenges experienced between the faculty and relating to the faculty handbook and the University's charter and how that impacted the dynamic surrounding an open search or closed search, with the faculty preferring an open search. Dr. Simmons agreed and added that a compromise was reached with the help of his students to respect the confidentiality of the candidates but members of the faculty senate could vet and meet the candidates. This approach was supported by the Faculty Senate and the board.
- Rector Stimson noted that this topic by no means represents an impending change, but emphasized it was one of the few topics approved by SCHEV for discussion.
- Visitor Blackman asked about succession planning and if there is a model that universities could adopt to prevent the disruption of a presidential search. Dr. Washington noted that after the departure of the last president there was a 50% turnover in senior leadership. Other institutions actively recruit senior leaders as soon as the announcement of a presidential departure is announced. Visitor Blackman added that the University made efforts to retain leaders during the last transition. Dr. Troutt did not have good examples of how other institutions have successful solutions to this problem. Rector Stimson inquired if higher education institutions could adopt key man life insurance policies, as private corporations do. Dr. Troutt had not heard of such a policy in higher education. Vice Rector Meese added that with a strategic plan, the board could keep operating during a transition, and welcome new members or leaders with supportive onboarding. Visitor Blackman responded that picking the interim president is also a significant decision, as that person could be in the role for about a year.

Dr. Troutt concluded that when boards are at their best, there is strong collaboration between board members and the chief executive. He commended the board on its governance and its choice of the university president, encouraging them to continue supporting the president in all possible ways.

Rector Stimson thanked Dr. Troutt for his presentation and engagement and adjourned the meeting at 3:15 p.m.

Prepared by:

Bridget Higgins  
Secretary pro tem

Attachment 1: College of Engineering and Computing, Renaming of School of Computing Resolution

Attachment 2: Public Comments (20 pages)

Attachment 3: Deloitte Insights article, "Significant risks facing higher education: Getting to the roots of risk"

**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF VISITORS OF  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Long Nguyen and Ms. Kimmy Duong, renowned entrepreneurs, have been generous benefactors of George Mason University and its College of Engineering and Computing; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Nguyen and Ms. Duong have been active community members who have provided philanthropic support of engineering, information technology, and computing in the National Capital Region; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Nguyen is a past member of George Mason's Board of Visitors and the Board of Trustees of the Academy for Government Accountability; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Nguyen and Ms. Duong each received the university's highest honor, the Mason Medal, in 2016 and 2023, respectively, for their sustained support of the University; and

**WHEREAS**, the Engineering Building on the Fairfax Campus was named Long and Kimmy Nguyen Engineering Building in recognition of Dr. Nguyen and Ms. Duong's gift of \$5 million in 2009; and

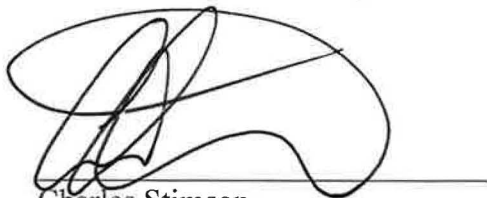
**WHEREAS**, since 2018, the Kimmy Duong Foundation has awarded scholarships to more than 140 George Mason University students; and

**WHEREAS**, the Kimmy Duong Foundation pledged a \$20 million donation to the George Mason University Foundation that will have a \$36 million impact to George Mason University to support the School of Computing and Virginia's Tech Talent Investment Program; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Nguyen and Ms. Duong are known in the National Capital Region as the founder, and former Chief Financial Officer of Pragmatics, an internationally renowned Software Development and Consulting Services company; now

**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT** the University's School of Computing be renamed the Long Nguyen and Kimmy Duong School of Computing in recognition of their past and present support.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** this resolution be entered into the minutes of the George Mason University Board of Visitors this day, April 1, 2025.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles Stimson', is written over a horizontal line.

Charles Stimson  
Rector  
Board of Visitors  
George Mason University

# Oral & Written Public Comments

April 1 Board of Visitors Meeting

## Oral Comments provided on Tuesday, April 1:

Tim Gibson, Faculty

Thank you. My name is Tim Gibson. I am a faculty member at Mason and President of the Virginia Conference of the American Association of University Professors. I am speaking today to urge the board of visitors to renew their commitment to building a university free from discrimination, exclusion and inequality. I'm calling on the board to recommit to Mason's fundamental belief in the value of diversity, equity and inclusion. I am calling on the board to refuse the destructive path of your colleagues at UVA, Virginia Tech, and VCU. Let's be honest, by limiting their campus DEI office, the governing boards at UVA, Virginia Tech and VCU are sending a clear message. They want to send Virginia back to a time where discrimination and mistreatment based on race, gender, and sexuality went unremarked and unchallenged. It seems that these governing boards pine for the days where hiring committees were not encouraged to recruit a diverse pool of qualified applicants. Complaints about sexual or gender-based harassment were met with hostility and indifference. This is shameful. We are standing today in the Commonwealth of Virginia, a state with the scourge of racial segregation and gender-based exclusion in education remains in the living memory of many Virginians. We need to be clear about this. To rollback diversity and inclusion programs and policies in Virginia today is to capitulate to the very same social and political movements who put up massive resistance to school desegregation in 1960's and 70's. The opponents of equality and racial justice are still here. They want the Confederate statues to go back up. They want Toni Morrison books out of schools and they want the police body cameras turned off. It seems these boards across the Commonwealth apparently want us to go backward as well but we are not going back. Not without a fight. One final point. You can say that racial and gender-based discrimination is a thing of the past or that systemic racism and sexism do not exist and that racism is about individual preferences in such a way that it makes sense to talk about reverse racism about white Virginians. You can say that but you would be living in a fantasy world. You would be a science-denier, much like those who deny climate science or the science of vaccines. The stubborn persistence of racism, misogyny, and homophobia in American life in the domains of education, housing, employment, and medicine continues to be one of the most consistent findings in social science research year after year, study after study. Please do not be a denier. Please do not join with or reproduce ideologies that distort the continuing material reality of systemic racism and gender-based harassment in America's higher education. Please take a stand for principles and values of openness, diversity, equity and inclusion and join us so that we can all get to the important work of building a better Mason for all students, no matter who they are, where they came from or what they believe. Thank you.

Darbyshire Burge, Student

I know the primary topic of today's meeting is around issues surrounding tuition, fees, and funding. But I would like to emphasize that these are not just about the rates that students pay. We need students to show up in the first place and not just show up but continuing to return semester after semester. As a member of various communities across campus, whose services would fall under the ambiguous category of diversity, equity, and inclusion, I want to make it clear to this board the importance of serving the diverse body of Mason students and the financial health of this institution. George Mason's commitment to diversity of voice, identity, and perspective is why I sought my education here and why I continue to return semester after semester. I chose Mason because I felt that it chose me back. Support services like the LGBTQ+ Resource Center, Disability Services, and the newly renamed office of Access, Compliance, and Community have provided me the space to thrive as a student and become a leader in my community. Without them I would not have shown up in the first place. In the words of Dr. Gregory Washington, with a 90% acceptance rate our diverse student body is a portion of those who seek us out, not those who enroll under exclusive rules of admissions. Inclusivity means including all students and all programs and services for all students even when they are focused on particular populations. This approach has worked. We are the most diverse public University of Virginia. We have 48% ethnic minority enrollment. We are a top-ranking university on the campus pride index. If the current threats against DEI initiatives at universities across the country including VCU, UVA, and Virginia Tech, if they take hold at Mason, what will happen to the student population? If we are to maintain the student body, thus maintaining the \$518 million dollars in revenue from tuition and fees the University gained in 2024, we need to maintain the services that make people like me seek out Mason year after year. If Mason bows to the politicized whims of the same state that has denied us adequate funding time and time again, almost half of what is allocated to our peers per in-state student, why

do we think cutting vital services to the very students who make up an estimated 35% of this University's 2025 revenue would put us in any better financial standing? Even if we cut these programs, sacrificing the core tenants of what George Mason University stands for, will that truly close the gap between our funding and the state average? Will that save enough money to offset the decline in the student body when people like me to move on to a university that will stand up for its diverse population? It does not make sense to sacrifice the needs of our diverse student body in the name of a bottom-line that has long been held up by these exact communities. As a university that has spent time and resources branding itself as altogether different, I implore you to prove your students their tuition, whatever the cost, is going toward programs that respect and recognize them as they are. Thank you.

- Bethany Letiecq, Faculty

Good morning. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Bethany Letiecq, the current president of the GMU Chapter of the American Association of University Professors. I'm here to express my deep concern about the political interference and erosion of academic freedom we are witnessing at Mason. This interference now includes the forced inclusion of the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism into our nondiscrimination policy, UP 1201, and we can only assume a forthcoming resolution following UVA, Virginia Tech, etc., to the dismantling of the diversity, equity, and inclusion infrastructure here seemingly at the behest of Governor Youngkin. Before any action is taken, I am pleased to be able to provide perspective regarding DEI, what it really is and why it is under attack across the Commonwealth. Last month I was in the company of Kimberly Crenshaw, a pioneering legal scholar of civil rights, critical race theory, and racism and the law. During our meeting she reflected on how historical legal milestones such as the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education Supreme Court decision and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 laid the foundation for today's DEI initiatives. Looking back, one can see how the DEI infrastructure was erected in response to histories of segregation and exclusion based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. DEI is deeply rooted in the historical experience and present-day discrimination endured by black people in America. Crenshaw is clear, anti-DEI efforts must be understood within the framework of anti-black racism. Take for example anti-DEI euphemisms, like focusing on merit while discounting that structural racism exists. Scholars fear these euphemisms are being used by people who seek to undo 70 years of racial progress and that these euphemisms are really signals used to convey support for old-school racism and racialized segregation without even mentioning race. Victor Ray, a sociology professor, recently shared couching bigotry and concern about qualifications, which only seemed to apply to nonwhite people, is just a socially acceptable way to launder racist disdain. He argues further that attacks on DEI in his opinion, are not only racist but segregationist and dismantling DEI will likely widen the racialized gaps in education and the workplace. DEI is not just about infrastructure. It is also an idea. It is a way to understand the world we live in and explore or even imagine a different world where we work toward a stronger, more connected multiracial democracy. Threatening to cut DEI root and branch out of not just the institution but out of our minds is an affront to the Mason way which espouses the freedom to teach, learn, and conduct research unburdened by the dictates of the powerful. Today I urge you to stand up for us, stand with us, stand for DEI, and commit to the free exchange of ideas and upholding the economic freedom rights of all who come to Mason to make the world a better place. Thank you.

## Written Comments received during the period of March 17 – April 1, 2025:

Full Name:	Mason Affiliation	Registration Type	Phonetic	Accommodations?	Written Comment
Autumn Krist	Student	Provide written comment only.			<p>The wave of universities dismantling DEIA programs across Virginia is concerning and GMU should absolutely not follow suit. Now is the time to stand up and protect our commitment and work to protect diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. Most of the critiques against DEI are rooted in racism and a want to return to segregation era policies. The critiques are a disgusting show of racism and bigotry that we need to fight against however possible. GMU has a rich culture full of diverse perspectives and people and consistently boasts about it: High rates of first gen students, almost a third of our population being people of color, high amounts of immigrants. Students, faculty, and staff are proud of this diversity and we need to preserve it, especially as GMU continues to boast its diverse population.</p> <p>Do what you can to protect Office of Access, Compliance, and Community and DEI on GMU's campuses. This is a priority for students on campus. Please find a way to maintain our commitment to DEI and protect the students of color on campus.</p>
Kristin Samuelian	Faculty	Provide written comment only.			<p>Dismantling DEIA at Mason is not only short-sighted; it is fiscally irresponsible. Mason is one of the key economic drivers of the region, and it is so because our policies of diversity, accessibility, and inclusive excellence have for decades allowed students from Fairfax County and beyond to receive a high-quality education and enter the workforce. It is incomprehensible to me why any business leader would want to put a stop to this when it is working so well. I am nearing retirement age, and I do not work in a unit that will be directly impacted by the dismantling of DEI--at least not as directly as many other units at the University. But I live in Fairfax County, and I have an interest in the healthy economy and infrastructure of this region. Dismantling DEI at Mason will ultimately be disastrous to both. I urge the BOV not to take this foolish and short-sighted step.</p>
Tim Gibson	Faculty	Register to make oral comments.		No	<p>Drawing on a recent GMU-AAUP letter, I am writing to urge the Board to retain GMU's commitment to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Put bluntly, the current Anti-DEI movement must be understood within the history of anti-Black racism in America. Shamefully, anti-DEI euphemisms (e.g., "DEI hire") are deployed by those who seek to undue 70 years of racial progress. The transformation of diversity, equity, and inclusion into "DEI" code words allows opponents of racial justice to signal their support for old-school racism and racialized segregation without even mentioning the word race. Victor Ray, a sociology professor, agrees: "Couching bigotry in concern about 'qualifications' (which only seems to apply to non-White people) is just the socially acceptable way to launder racist disdain." Recent research confirms this argument. According to Folberg and colleagues (2024), while some argue that the anti-DEI backlash is motivated by race-neutral concerns, such as merit and fairness, their research involving over 1,000 people suggests that critiques of DEI are best explained by anti-Black racism. Ray (2025) argues further that attacks on DEI are not only racist, but segregationist, as dismantling DEI will widen the racialized gaps in education and the workplace by further excluding people of color. Please step back from the brink and preserve Mason's commitment to making education accessible and inclusive for all.</p>



G. Chesler	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	The tenants of diversity, equality, and inclusion support all students while ensuring a safe and equitable workplace for faculty and staff. To remove any affiliated programs, research, and educational efforts is a project of disinformation, white supremacy, and ableist bias that harms the future path of all GMU students whom we promised to educate well. It also denies the expertise of educators and undoes faculty self governance—the bedrock principle of this University.
Vincent Ba Nguyen	Student	Provide written comment only.	At the time of writing, March 25th, George Mason's About page reads that the University is "fueled by differences" and that it "strives to create an inclusive environment that celebrates everyone for who they are." Hearing statements echoing these sentiments during orientation, and now seeing the university wants to eliminate their recently renamed Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (now named the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community per an email from the Office of the President) alongside moving to restrict professor's messages--removing the entire reason college is currently distinct from high school, that freedom of staff speech--should alarm all who want the university to retain what prestige it still has, alarm all who pour money into an institution supposed to raise them. Please, do not bring this university back into the 20th century---do not betray the students who see you as the way to the world, who have paid for a chance at a better life with their time only to be sent away now.
Laura Buckwald	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	As a GMU graduate and faculty member, I strongly object to the BOV's proposal to dissolve GMU's Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Community Partnerships. What makes Mason special is the diversity of its student body and faculty. A proper college education includes the widening of one's perspective on the world through the experience of engaging with people from different places and backgrounds. Eliminating this office will tell non-white students that they are not welcome at GMU and will degrade the value of a Mason degree. Also, whether research is "permissible" needs to be determined by the expert faculty, not the BOV.
Courtney Wooten	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	Mason is a campus built around diversity, which is one of the strengths of our institution. Removing any DEI support on campus will jeopardize Mason's ability to recruit and retain diverse faculty, staff, and students and diminish the positive impact it has had on Virginia's economy and its status as a strong and growing R1. Do not threaten the institution's bedrock mission by removing DEI from our campus.
James H. Finkelstein	Professor Emeritus	Provide written comment only.	<p>These are some of the most challenging times for our nation's universities. Never before has a President of the United States actively sought to undermine the foundation of American higher education—especially one who is himself a graduate of an Ivy League institution, as are three of his five children. As the President of the University of Pennsylvania recently stated, “The American higher education system is one of America's greatest strengths. A social contract has long enabled U. S. colleges and universities to serve individuals, communities, and government for the good of all. This contract has been a cornerstone of innovation and opportunity in our society.”</p> <p>Yet, despite this legacy, the Trump administration's decision to freeze \$175 million in funding to his alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, suggests that “familiarity breeds contempt.” This same disdain appears to be echoed by certain members of George Mason University's Board of Visitors (BOV)—eight of whom are Mason alumni—who seem determined to orchestrate a hostile takeover of the institution. Their actions include</p>

pressuring the administration to amend the university's non-discrimination policy, ignoring established policies and state statutes to pass a resolution on antisemitism, and likely joining other Commonwealth institutions in dismantling all remnants of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

My greatest fear is that this BOV will yield to anticipatory compliance, bending to the Trump administration's intimidation and implicit threats of withholding federal research funding. Instead of acting as true fiduciaries for the university, many on the Board seem set to readily enforce Executive Orders, even as they are contested in the courts. This capitulation would not only compromise the university's autonomy but also undermine its core mission of fostering critical inquiry and inclusive excellence.

Ironically, these actions are silencing the very free speech that many of these individuals claim to defend. By stifling diverse perspectives and constraining academic freedom, they risk dragging us back to the mid- 1960 s—a time when universities routinely suppressed free expression, academic inquiry, and student rights. Those restrictions gave rise to the Free Speech Movement, a powerful response to censorship and institutional overreach.

If history has taught us anything, it is that efforts to suppress academic freedom and silence dissent inevitably fuel movements that demand justice and reform. George Mason University's legacy—and its future—depend on the courage to resist this backslide and protect the foundational principles of free inquiry, diversity, and inclusion that define American higher education.

James H. Finkelstein  
Professor Emeritus of Public Policy

Darbyshire Burge	Student	Register to make oral comments.	Dar-buh-shy-er	No	<p>I know that the primary topic of today's meeting centers issues surrounding tuition, fees, and funding, but I would like to emphasize these concerns are not just in the rate that students pay. We need students to be showing up in the first place. And not just showing up, but continuing to return semester after semester. As a member of various communities across campus whose services would fall under the ambiguous category of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion", I want to make it clear to this board the importance of serving the diverse body of Mason students in the financial health of this institution.</p> <p>George Mason University's commitment to diversity of voice, identity, and perspective is why I sought out my education here and why I continue to return semester after semester. I chose Mason because I felt that it chose me back. Support services like the LGBTQ+ Resource Center, Disability Services, and the newly renamed Office of Access, Compliance, and Community have provided me the space to thrive as a student and become a leader in my community. Without them, I wouldn't have shown up in the first place. In the words of Dr. Gregory Washington: "With a 90 percent acceptance rate, our diverse student body is a portrait of those who seek us out, not those whom we enroll under exclusive rules of admissions. Inclusivity to us means including all students, and opening all programs and services to all students, even when they are focused on particular populations."</p> <p>And this approach has worked. We are the most diverse public university in Virginia. We have 48% ethnic minority enrollment. We are a top-ranking university on the Campus Pride Index. If the current threats against DEI initiatives seen in universities across</p>
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					<p>the country take hold at Mason, what do you think happens to our student population? If we are to maintain our student body, thus maintaining the \$518 million dollars in revenue from tuition and fees this university gained in 2024, we need to maintain the services that make people like me seek Mason out year after year. If Mason bows to the politicized whims of the same state that has denied us adequate funding time and time again, almost half of what is allocated to our peers per in-state student, why do we think cutting vital services to the very students who make up an estimated 35% of this university's 2025 revenue would put us in any better financial standing? And even if we do cut these programs- sacrificing the core tenets of what George Mason University stands for- will that truly close the gap between our funding and the state average? Will that truly save enough money to offset the subsequent decline in our student body when people like me move on to a university that will stand up for it's diverse populations? It doesn't make financial sense to sacrifice the needs of our diverse student body in the name of a bottom line that has long been held up by these exact communities. As a university that has spent ample time and resources branding itself as being "all together different", I implore you to prove to your students their tuition -whatever the cost- is going towards programs that respect and recognize them as they are.</p>
Autumn Krist	Student	Provide written comment only.			<p>George Mason University has the broadest range of backgrounds represented on campus of all Virginia public colleges. It facilitates the growth of students through merit based opportunities that teaches us personal responsibility and supports our wellness. It is the most efficient infrastructure we have to facilitate the opportunities of our talented students. Without it, GMU will be less effective at meeting the needs of all people who are working hard to earn their degrees. The Office of Access, Compliance, and Community facilitates the wellness and responsibility of all students. To ensure the equal opportunity of all, we need to ensure the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community is supported as best as possible.</p>
Matthew Kelley	Faculty	Provide written comment only.			<p>Say no to uniformity, inequity, and exclusion! Say yes to diversity, equity, and inclusion!</p> <p>Anti-diversity politicians and their operatives on university boards argue that the anti-DEI backlash is motivated by race-neutral concerns like merit and fairness, but it is nothing more than anti-Black racism. Attacks on DEI are segregationist. Mason was founded as a public university after desegregation, and I condemn in the strongest possible terms any attempts made to drag Mason back into a history that it was fortunate to miss the first time around.</p>
Bethany Letiecq	Faculty	Register to make oral comments.	LaTeek	No	<p>I will share my comments in-person at the meeting. Thank you.</p>
Evelyn Jacob	Community Member	Provide written comment only.			<p>I oppose dismantling DEI, especially in the name of neutrality. The anti-DEI resolutions passed sometimes in secret and always without democratic process at Virginia's universities will ruin what were once outstanding centers of learning accessible to all. Protect Mason; protect DEI.</p>
Shelley D. Wong	Faculty	Provide written comment only.			<p>As a faculty of education emerita associate professor, who has worked to prepare teachers for PreK-12+adult education, I am opposed to efforts to dismantle Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. My lifelong mission has been to develop inclusive learning communities of students of all abilities who can respect each other and problem-solve. My specialization is Teaching English to</p>

Speakers of Other Languages and Bilingual and World Language Education. We need to value the home languages of our students and to take an additive perspective as we teach English which values multilingual and transnational communication awareness. We need bilingual personnel in every field and yet the anti DEI ideology, an assimilationist approach, seeks to stamp out the home languages and cultures of our students and to replace them with English. Although many try to claim that DEI is a form of "reverse-racism" nothing could be further from the truth. Anti-DEI backlash is best understood as anti-Black racism and anti-immigrant xenophobia. It is clearly an anti-women as well as anti-LGBTQ ideology. How can you be against equity? We need more critical perspectives and more empathy, more diversity and more inclusion --not one upmanship, bullying and exclusion.

Courtney Brkic	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	I have taught at George Mason for more than two decades. In that time, it has been my privilege to work with hundreds of students. George Mason's diversity has always been one of its superpowers, setting our university apart from many other institutions. It has made us better, not just in a moral sense, but in an academic, creative and research one. As such, we have provided educations to brilliant out-of-the-box thinkers, gifted students from groups that have been severely underrepresented in higher education and innovators of tomorrow who see things just a little differently. The Mason Way has historically meant to embrace them all and to create thoughtful space in which they and all other students can flourish. I urge the Board of Visitors with all my heart not to dismantle DEI.
Claudia Cabello	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	<p>GMU students directly benefit from diversity initiatives on campus. They get academic and community support, connect with role models and mentors, and go on to improve the lives of Virginians. Inclusion benefits everyone and creates a more peaceful and just society.</p> <p>I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University's core values instead of a political agenda motivated by a desire to punish and exclude.</p>
Julia Holcomb	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	<p>I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University's core values instead of a political agenda motivated by a desire to punish and exclude.</p> <p>I have been proud to be a Mason Patriot since 1998. Patriots all deserve a university which prizes and protects diversity, equity, and inclusion.</p>
Peter Pollak, P. E.	Community member and former GMU Adjunct Faculty membership M	Provide written comment only.	<p>Statement for George Mason University Board of Visitors Meeting, 4/1/25</p> <p>A GMU Nikola Tesla Center for Innovative Technology (NTC4IT) is needed to develop ideas Nikola Tesla had more than 100 years ago. The world is being re-electrified to meet twin challenges of energy and environment.</p> <p>The "Age of Aluminum" that Nikola Tesla foresaw is now upon us, and his predictions about aluminum superseding copper as the 'Material of Electrification' is creating a tsunami of new</p>

opportunities for innovation to meet these global challenges.

Peter Pollak, P. E.  
(703) 376-1611  
Retired GMU Adjunct Faculty Member  
(ECE 590, Energy, Environment & Smart Grids)  
Former GMU Consultant for DOE Funded "Vids for Grids" Project

Amy Zhang	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	The anti-DEI resolutions passed sometimes in secret and always without democratic process at Virginia's universities will ruin what were once outstanding centers of learning accessible to all. Protect Mason; protect DEI
Angela Barajas	Student	Provide written comment only.	I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University's core values instead of a political agenda motivated by a desire to punish and exclude.
Carlos Chism	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	I condemn the recent move by BOVs throughout Virginia to dismantle DEIA, and I am writing to urge Mason's BOV not to visit the same destruction on our university. Anti-DEIA must be understood within the framework of anti-Black racism. The dismantling of DEIA offices and programs is nothing more than an attempt to disguise a White supremacist agenda by stealing and twisting the language of civil rights. As Victor Ray, a sociology professor, has stated: "Couching bigotry in concern about 'qualifications' (which only seems to apply to non-White people) is just the socially acceptable way to launder racist disdain." Attempts to dismantle DEIA do not help our diverse student body; instead, these attempts only hurt students and their ability to learn. Dismantling DEIA at Mason would have a chilling effect on faculty research and student learning; if the Board actually values the mission of the university and believes our students come first, you will break with the BOVs at other VA universities like VT and UVA.
Beverly D Shaklee	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	<p>The current trend among BOVs throughout Virginia to dismantle DEI programs, offices, curricula, and initiatives is at best woefully misguided and at worst against the will of faculty, staff, and students. Trying to disguise their actions as a form of "neutrality" or simply doing what is best for Mason, they have proven over and over that they neither respect nor are even interested in what the wider Mason community has to say. The BOV does not have Mason's best interests in mind when they suppress speech and learning. Dismantling DEI programs literally tells our students, faculty and community they are NOT welcome at Mason; there is no place to celebrate the diversity of our community. The BOV will stand in shame if they move forward with the effort to dismantle DEI.</p> <p>I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University's core values instead of a political agenda motivated by a desire to punish and exclude.</p>
Alok Yadav	Faculty	Provide written comment only.	Those on the BOV who are inclined to suppress DEI programs and initiatives need to show where and how encouraging equity (for example) has harmed someone at George Mason--and, further,

that such harm cannot be remedied by modifying the specific program or initiative at issue. Any move simply to ban or prohibit DEI strikes one as the imposition of a regressive political agenda--something that has no place in a public university in the 21st century (and carries echoes of the resistance to diversity, equity, and inclusion in public education during the segregationist agitations against the civil rights movement in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s). Operating by fiat and diktat, by force majeure, rather than by reasoned argument and evidence, is how tyrannies operate (even if it is the tyranny of a majority on a politically-appointed board!): I would hope that the BOV has enough self-respect and enough respect for the integrity of institution to act in accordance with due deliberation and sufficient reason and not with the juvenile brazenness of persons who wish to impose their political prejudices on others and think the trust that has been given to them is there for them to abuse.

virginia hoy

Provide  
written  
comment only.

I have taught at Mason for almost 18 years and have been proud of our very diverse campus and the climate of tolerance we have worked to provide for our students. As I have written the Board in the past, our diversity is our strength as we prepare students to participate in a diverse world. I would hope that the Board recognizes that DEI initiatives at Mason and elsewhere affirm a commitment to appreciate and treat fairly all individuals, regardless of religion, race, or gender, allowing all to achieve their full potential.

Denise Albanese

Faculty

I am not surprised at the efforts by the Board of Visitors to overstep its mandate; it's not the first time, nor will it be the last. But before it takes a step, I beg its members to provide direct, empirical, and objective evidence of the harms done by DEIA policies, and to whom, in what form, and with what effects, as a basis for their actions. Without such evidence, they have nothing but a reactive and ideological basis for their proposed actions--the very thing they accuse universities of. Universities are bound to more rigorous standards of proof and evidence than can be found in popular discourse and right-wing agit-prop. As custodians of a public good, the members of the BOV ought to be honor-bound to act on disinterested and well-founded evidence rather than sentiment or belief. I also note that "Ability" is part of of DEIA: does the BOV also propose to violate the Americans With Disabilities Act? What of case law on protected classes?

Keith Clark

Faculty

Having been a faculty member for over thirty years, I write to express my grave concern regarding the Board of Visitors' attempts to snuff out efforts to make George Mason University a more inclusive university, efforts that reflect our state's--and nation's--rich heterogeneity. The University's policies and goals to make our institution more equitable in terms of faculty, staff, and student body have been measured and prudent, not hastily implemented or unfairly beneficial to any single group; such measures have scrupulously avoided bias. If anything, one might argue that these policies have been a bit excessive in their caution and deliberation. GMU has been intentional and committed to maintaining standards of fairness and excellence which have seldom if ever been practiced historically, despite professions of "merit" and "fairness."

GMU, reflective of the DMV locally and our country's multicultural history, is a vibrant tapestry of hues, colors, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and perspectives. However, in our current political climate, forces antithetical to difference have been empowered in their attempts to re-homogenize our institution, under the fallacious pursuit of "anti-divisiveness" and "neutrality." Indeed, the breathtaking, deliberate speed with

which anti-difference forces are moving to undo and reverse gains that made our University the “state’s most diverse” is singularly shocking and deplorable.

It is grotesquely ironic that, 35 years after the Old Dominion elected the nation’s first African American governor, GMU is now the epicenter of a calculated and pernicious crusade against difference. My courses in African American literature have been enriched by the presence of a rainbow of students and their unique, divergent perspectives, attesting to the inestimable value of diversity. To invoke the title of preeminent American author Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel Invisible Man, the forced “dismantling” is nothing more than an attempt not simply to make underrepresented communities invisible; it is, ultimately, an attempt to erase blackness, brownness, and anyone else considered unfit and underserving. In keeping with GMU’s proud history, I hope that the Board will act in accordance with the University’s principled commitment to inclusive excellence.

Dr. Keith Clark  
Distinguished University Professor  
March 31 2025

Colleen Vesely      Faculty

I condemn the recent move by BOVs throughout Virginia to dismantle DEI, and I am writing to urge Mason’s BOV not to visit the same destruction on our university.

The current trend among BOVs throughout Virginia to dismantle DEI programs, offices, curricula, and initiatives is at best woefully misguided and at worst an installation of White supremacy against the will of faculty, staff, and students. Mason’s current BOV has made clear their goal to suppress research, teaching, learning, and administrative programs that are at odds with the political agenda of Governor Youngkin and his appointees. While they may try to disguise their actions as a form of “neutrality” or simply doing what is best for Mason, they have proven over and over that they neither respect nor are even interested in what the wider Mason community has to say. The BOV does not have Mason’s best interests in mind when they suppress speech and learning.

I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University’s core values instead of a political agenda motivated by a desire to punish and exclude.

I support DEI and am asking the BOV to stand up for the Mason Way.

James F. Sanford      Faculty

As part of the celebration of my 35th year of teaching at Mason in 2009, I was asked to identify way or ways that Mason had changed over the years. In response, I went to my first two years’ grade books and identified the four most frequent surnames on my rosters. They were Adams, Brown, Miller and a less common name of a set of twins in my classes. In 2009, the most common surname at Mason by far was Lee, primarily because of a large number of Korean and Korean American students. In those 35 years, Mason became a far better university in part because of the increase in diversity of its students. Any attempt to limit or decrease diversity is a step toward returning to the homogeneous student body of 60 years ago. Please overcome (a very apt verb) your political inclinations and support maintaining and increasing



a diverse student body and work place. Future Mason students will be the better for it. Thank you!

BOV at other Virginia universities, including UVA and Virginia, have dismantled Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices. If similar actions are taken at George Mason to remove DEI programs on campus, how will George Mason ensure that all its students and faculty can be successful? The BOV passed a resolution at the end of February that contains instructions for the ODEI successor office, highlighting the importance of having such an office.

Good morning, esteemed members of the Board of Visitors, President Washington, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and guests.

My name is Aniya Coffey, currently a freshman here at Mason. Today I am here to address an essential matter that not only shapes our university’s future but also speaks directly to the very heart of our mission as a minority-serving institution—our dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

George Mason University proudly stands as an institution committed to providing access and opportunity to all. Our mission statement explicitly emphasizes fostering a diverse, inclusive, and innovative learning environment. As a minority-serving institution, this commitment is not simply a statement of values but a guiding principle—one that underpins every facet of our community.

Recently, changes have been made to our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices on campus—changes that impact how these crucial areas of support and advocacy function. As we navigate these shifts, it is critical that we acknowledge both the concerns and the opportunities that come with them.

DEI offices are more than administrative units; they are the backbone of our efforts to create an environment where all students, regardless of their background, can thrive. These offices empower our students, advocate for equitable policies, and facilitate cultural understanding. They create safe spaces, foster collaboration, and build networks of support essential for our diverse student population.

As a young Black woman, an aspiring leader, and an Ambassador for the Black Student Alliance, I have experienced firsthand the importance of having institutional structures that champion inclusivity. For me, the Black Student Alliance is more than just an organization—it’s a community, a source of empowerment, and a vital support system. It is a place where I feel seen, valued, and understood. It provides the opportunity to celebrate my identity while connecting with others who share similar experiences.

Having this space has been instrumental in helping me find my voice and navigate my journey here at Mason. It has allowed me to contribute positively to this university, knowing that I belong. It’s what motivates me to encourage other students to find their own sense of community and pride within this institution.

Yet, as these changes unfold, I cannot help but feel a deep concern shared by many of my peers. When shifts are made to the structure of DEI offices, it creates a chilling question: Will our registered organizations for affinity groups be next?

These organizations—whether they are cultural, religious, LGBTQ+, or other affinity-based groups—play an irreplaceable

Jenna Krall	Faculty
Aniya Coffey	Student



role in enhancing student life, providing much-needed support systems, and allowing students to celebrate their identities freely and safely. The prospect of their functions being diminished, restricted, or restructured is a terrifying possibility for many.

It is not just about preserving tradition; it is about ensuring that George Mason University continues to be a place where diversity is celebrated and empowered and Included. If we are to fulfill our mission as a minority-serving institution, our commitment to DEI must be unwavering. Change is inevitable, but it must always be guided by the principle of progress.

But DEI offices do not only support students of color. They empower all students by nurturing cultural competency, promoting empathy, and providing educational resources that enrich our entire campus. In a world that is increasingly interconnected, George Mason University's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is our competitive edge.

If we are to fulfill our mission as a minority-serving institution, our commitment to DEI must be unwavering. Change is inevitable, but it must always be guided by the principle of progress. As we refine our DEI structures, we must ensure that their presence remains impactful, their resources accessible, and their

Karen Grace	Faculty	I condemn the recent move by BOVs throughout Virginia to dismantle DEI, and I am writing to urge Mason's BOV not to visit the same destruction on our university. Anti-DEI must be understood within the framework of anti-Black racism. The dismantling of DEI offices and programs is nothing more than an attempt to disguise a White supremacist agenda by stealing and twisting the language of civil rights. The BOV does not have Mason's best interests in mind when they suppress speech and learning.
Jessica Scarlata	Faculty	<p>The current trend among BOVs in the state of Virginia to dismantle DEI programs, offices, curricula, and initiatives is shameful. At best, it is woefully misguided and at worst a politically motivated attempt to stall and reverse any hard-fought progress made towards making universities more equitable within Virginia. Mason's current BOV has made clear their goal to suppress research, teaching, learning, and administrative programs that are at odds with a narrow and exclusionary political agenda. While they may try to disguise their actions as a form of "neutrality" or simply doing what is best for Mason, they have proven over and over that they do not respect the students, faculty, and staff at the university; they are not interested in our expertise; they do not care when we speak from a position of knowledge and research. In short, the BOV does not have Mason's best interests in mind when they suppress speech and learning.</p> <p>Anti-diversity politicians and their operatives argue that their hostility towards diversity, equity, and inclusion is motivated not by racism, but by race-neutral concerns like merit and fairness. However, research suggests that critiques of DEI are best explained as a form of anti-Black racism. Attacks on DEI are segregationist. Mason was founded as a public university after desegregation.</p> <p>I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to stand up for the Mason Way and to set an example of</p>

what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University’s core values instead of a political agenda motivated by a desire to punish, erase, and exclude.

Isabella  
Majorowitz

Faculty

Hello members of the Board of Visitors. Today I am submitting a comment regarding the recommendations for tuition increases in FY2026 and FY2027. While I am grateful that GMU continues to prioritize access and affordability when it comes to tuition despite ever-increasing budgetary constraints, I believe that more could be done to make out-of-state tuition more affordable. As an out-of-state undergraduate student, my tuition is almost \$25,000 more than the tuition for an in-state student. I know that tuition for out-of-state students tends to be higher because more students come from in-state, but this university has also attracted a good number of international students. I am lucky enough to have received a sizable scholarship that helps lower this cost, but I have other friends who are out-of-state students that still struggle to pay for their education even with financial aid. Just like me, they came to GMU because of the academic opportunities, especially my friend who came all the way from New Mexico for GMU's forensic science program. I understand that these proposed tuition increases are minimal at 2.5% and would go towards critical infrastructure investments, but I think there's a way to fund the critical infrastructure, programming, and services of this university while also reducing the cost for out-of-state students. One way would be to reduce or end investments in defense manufacturers such as Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics. None of these companies are in danger of going bankrupt without an investment or partnership from GMU, so divesting from them could allow for the reallocation of funds towards the various expenditures highlighted in the presentation, from academic support to faculty wages to facilities/buildings. As GMU contends with continuous underfunding from state and federal policymakers and budgets, divestment represents an opportunity to redirect funding away from death-dealing companies and towards life-affirming and student-supporting activities and services. Thank you for your time!

Hiram Mbulu

Student

Ladies and gentlemen of the Board of Visitors,

My name is Hiram Mbulu. I am the president of Collegiate Black Men and a peer mentor of the Black Male Success Initiative (BMSI). I stand before you with a clear message: choose wisely. I ask you: do you choose to submit to the threats sent by the Dear Colleague letter? Or do you choose the voices of those you are entrusted to serve—faculty and students, whose dedication and investment form the very foundation of our institution?

Consider the words of Winston Churchill: "The price of greatness is responsibility." What is your responsibility? As the appointed individuals before me, is your responsibility to make decisions based on personal beliefs or to pass blame for the decisions you make to those in higher positions? According to your bylaws, "The George Mason University Board of Visitors ('Board') shall generally direct the affairs of the University in accord with the powers and duties assigned by law." So I ask: Who are our main and direct stakeholders? They are the students, the faculty, and the alumni who fuel our legacy. When their needs go unmet, the consequences are profound: our brightest faculty may seek tenure and opportunity elsewhere, our current students may decide to withhold alumni donations—funding crucial to our future. Do current alumni lose interest in supporting a school that does not align with their interests? I urge you to weigh these factors carefully.

As an African-American student here and representing 150+ African-American students in the student organization I lead, we've benefited immensely from the DEI initiatives set up to support historically underperforming students. DEI initiatives you agreed on as the Mason Way—programs meant to support student needs—how is that exclusionary? It isn't. I call upon you to defend the student support initiatives. Challenge, don't submit.

Thank you.

Sarah Fischer	Faculty	I am writing in support of our campus DEI efforts. Mason has an incredibly diverse student body in every sense of the word. I've taught students who were born in other countries, served in the military, were working parents, transferred from community colleges, came straight from high school, of all ages and ethnicities, all in the same classroom. I appreciate our campus efforts to be inclusive of students who have veteran status and have disabilities. I appreciate our campus efforts to be a welcoming institution for students who have a diverse range of sexual orientation and gender identity. And, I appreciate the work that our administrative colleagues do to address discrimination. The campus is stronger and has a rich educational environment because of these efforts. I urge the board to stand up for Mason and stand up for DEI.
Tehama Lopez Bunyasi	Faculty	I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to emulate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA (my alma mater) and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a respectable BOV might look like: a guardian of excellence and a body accountable to its own University's core values. The anti-DEI resolutions passed sometimes in secret and always without democratic process at other Virginia universities will ruin what were once outstanding centers of learning accessible to all. Protect Mason; protect DEI; protect freedom of speech; protect academic freedom. We are a democracy!
Janet D.	Faculty	Opposing DEI is nothing new: Anti-Black racism has a long history in Virginia. Stop these racist moves now and uphold your commitments to all students at Mason, especially those most marginalized by a politics of segregation and hate.
Concerned Citizen	Community Member	I unequivocally reject any attempts by this BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University's core values instead of a political agenda motivated by a desire to punish and exclude.
Lauren Cattaneo	Faculty	<p>I write to express my strong objection to the current trend among BOVs throughout Virginia to dismantle DEI programs, offices, curricula, and initiatives, and to call out the Mason BOV for repeatedly overriding the values of the institution and the will of faculty, students and staff in favor of a nakedly political agenda. While the BOV may try to disguise their actions as a form of "neutrality" or simply doing what is best for Mason, they have proven over and over that they neither respect nor are even interested in what the wider Mason community has to say. The BOV does not have Mason's best interests in mind when they suppress speech and learning.</p> <p>I unequivocally reject any attempts by the Mason BOV to imitate the suppression of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access that</p>

their peers have installed at UVA and Virginia Tech. Instead, I urge them to set an example of what a courageous BOV might look like, by holding themselves accountable to the University's core values instead of a political agenda.

Shree Deepkumar     Student

To The Board of Visitors,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the issues that matter most to the GMU community. I have spent 4 years in one of GMU's undergraduate programs, and have played an active part in the GMU community, including running an on campus RSO for 3 years.

First, I want to express my concerns over the impact a further tuition hike would have. George Mason's reputation for excellent education offered at competitive costs draws students from in and out of state. However, the validity of this reputation in recent years becomes questionable in comparison with similar Virginian universities. VCU and JMU are two colleges that are close to GMU in a ranking of Virginia's colleges published by widely-read news outlet US News. The cost of college for an in-state, on campus undergraduate student is \$30,988 at VCU and \$33,276 at JMU. From information available on GMU's own website, the projected cost of attendance for a similar student is \$35,250. A further tuition hike will tarnish GMU's reputation for cost-effectiveness and will drive future students away,.

Second, Mason has a reputation for being welcoming to all students, far beyond many other Virginian colleges. This reputation is harmed by the recent rebranding of Mason's DEI focused offices. It is my fear that this rebrand will culminate in the complete removal of the DEI programs and initiatives that draw many students from marginalized communities to enroll at Mason. The rebranding of Mason's DEI focused offices sends a clear message to prospective students: We welcome everyone, until it stops being convenient.

Please take action to ensure that GMU remains the top choice for future students, both in and out of state. It is my sincere hope for the Mason community to continue to grow, both in number and diversity.

Sincerely,  
Shree Deepkumar  
Mason Student and Community Member

Andrey                     Student  
Arcidiacono

In 1972, the Board of Visitors of George Mason University declared it their duty to “establish policies that will encourage the participation of students in shaping the character and quality of the institution.” Two years later in 1974 the BOV adopted its bylaws which read:

“The Board may extend authority to the student body of the University providing for the establishment of a Student Government.”

For fifty years these words have remained the same and it has been the role of the student body of this University to decide their student representatives and how those representatives are chosen. In Nevada this long held principle is so sacred that it is protected by state law. While numerous states also protect students' ability to form student governments in their state law, in Virginia and at George Mason, all governing authority is vested by law in the Board of Visitors.

The Board of Visitors often chooses to delegate its authority to

various collegial officers and employees such as the President, or to collegial bodies, such as the Faculty Senate or the Honor Committee. The BOV has likewise delegated its authority to establish a student government to the student body. But more than just allowing for the student government's establishment it has directly empowered it. Whereas Virginia law requires that governing boards of state universities appoint at least one student on the board as a non-voting advisory member, this Board has taken a step further, and has chosen to trust the decision of picking two student representatives directly to the student body through their student government elections. Instead of this board appointing students directly, as it had done in the past, it chose to empower students who are accessible and accountable to the student body by being elected to student governments. Placing this much trust in the student body is unique among Virginia universities and it makes Mason special.

I am writing to you today because I believe it is that same trust between the student body and this university which is at stake. The division of University Life has initiated a project to establish a new undergraduate student government and has made it clear that it will only support student government elections that are held under this new structure. The division of University Life believes that a decline in students engaging with student government has made it necessary for them to intervene and impose new structural changes that they believe will improve student government. There was a similar proposal made by students in 2020 which was considered by and ultimately decided against by students. Despite these proposals being brought up and considered in 2020, University life claims in their listening sessions that the structure has not been evaluated since 2007. Immediately after this student-led effort to amend the structure was decided against by the 41st Student Senate in 2020. Dean of Students Juliet Blank Godlove sponsored a research project in the fall of 2022 with the research question "Why are most students at Mason not engaging with Student Government?" After this research project concluded the division of University life formed a working group of 8 students from student government to amend the structure. Administrators have granted the student government and the student body a limited role in deciding the new structure of this student government. At the meetings of the working group, certain demands by University life were communicated to be "non-negotiable." I am a member of this working group and as we were told on the first meeting "The question is in the details." It has been made clear that it is not our place to question the "bones" of the structure. Students have not been allowed to decide whether or not academic seats will increase engagement. Or whether making the organisation a single body will make it more cohesive and efficient. Continued in p2

Continued from part 1:

Students have not been allowed to decide whether or not academic seats will increase engagement. Or whether making the organisation a single body will make the organisation more cohesive and efficient. Student government loses all meaning if it cannot be viewed as the legitimate voice of the students. This student government doesn't make decisions about enforcing the code of student conduct, or allocating tens of thousands of dollars to student organizations. It's only meaningful power is its ability to represent the student voice. Will the Board of Visitors accept a student government which values institutional priorities over students needs? Students won't engage with token systems of representation where important decisions can be overruled by

Andrey  
Arcidiacono

Student

administrators and are beholden to them rather than their peers. Student government can speak best for students when it is governed by them.

The University needs to clearly define and delineate the roles and responsibilities that students and student government should have in the campus governance system. We're shaping a student government whose purpose is to include students in decisions made at this University and I think we are killing the very spirit that this institution proclaims it instills by taking the decision to form a student government away from the students.

How can we possibly encourage students to get involved in student government when they are not being involved in the decision to shape that same student government?

I ask that this BOV enforce their bylaws and maintain that the student body alone has the authority to establish or amend its student government. The Board of Visitors, which delegated the authority to establish a student government to the student body, must direct the division of University Life to allow students to decide the whole structure of their student government and not limit students to deciding parts of the structure that are not in conflict with their demands.

Very Respectfully,  
Andrey Arcidiacono  
Senator of, 42nd, 43rd, and 45th Student Senate of George Mason University

In 1994 the associate Vice President and Dean of Student Services Kenneth Bumgarner, the Chair of the Student Governance Advisory Committee reported to President George W. Johnson in a memo: "Students, administrators and faculty often have very different opinions on what is broken and how to fix it. Some administrators and faculty still subscribe to the notion that students should play no role in decisionmaking at the University. Some students have exaggerated notions as to the power students should wield in university governance. The Committee believes that the solution lies between these two poles. Some time and experimentation may be necessary before the most suitable means for obtaining greater student participation are found. But if all sides display flexibility and willingness to compromise, I expects that a workable system can be developed which will increase the sense of community and common purpose among the diverse individuals which make up George Mason University"

I write to express my dismay at the Board of Visitors' recent attempts to purge the concept of "diversity" from Mason's curriculum. This move strikes me as not only wrong and regressive, but as counter to what the University is designed to do. Among the governing board's many offenses against enhancing the University's quality of life, its worst offense, in my opinion, are its efforts to do away with a "liberal" or "humanistic" education." To be clear, I am not referring to a political ideology, as some might mistakenly assume. By liberal education, I mean the space which provides for the free exchange of ideas—and most importantly, the space for students to freely develop informed perspectives on both humanity and our material world. At the heart of a liberal education is diversity; without "diversity" in the curriculum, establishing a broadened outlook is difficult (and perhaps, impossible). In my mind, education does its best work when it is able to cultivate in students a two-pronged appreciation for a multitude of perspectives: in one way,

Stefan Michael Wheelock	Faculty	
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education introduces them to the rich mosaic of opinions on race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, ability and disability, science and religion. In another way, a humanistic (or liberal) education emphasizes the value diversity plays in lifting up competing opinions, ideas, outlooks, and thought which, taken together, strengthen students' commitment to advancing the cause of human dignity.

Education is at its worst when it caves to soundbites that accuse universities of either "propagandizing students" or indoctrinating them in "leftwing" causes. This misses what classroom engagement does. As a professor in Africana studies and English literature, my job is not to proselytize to students but to introduce them to a fact-based history. Often with students, this history is compelling enough to speak for itself. From here, students can decide, on their own what to do (and how to act). At the heart of any effort to pursue a more just vision for society (and equity) is standing up for a historical sense which is truthful and right. In an era where misinformation and soundbites prevail, the decision to embrace a historically sanitized and narrowly ideological approach to the past (and present) encourages the kind of social regression that harms mutual human understanding and potentially hamstring democracy's advance.

The lives our students lead is shaped by what they learn. Our students represent a diversity of subject positions and understandably wish to see the concerns which directly affect them reflected in the University's curriculum. In short, students better engage the academic side of college life when they can clearly see the stakes for their own wellbeing. If Mason is about the education of the entire person, then it should foster a curriculum which more comprehensively engages the span of the human experience. The goal is to imagine a pluralistic society, not a provincial and chauvinistic one. As a school situated in one of the most diverse regions in Virginia, Mason shines when it shows its appreciation for cultural diversity in its classrooms.

SW

Kerry Smith

Student

DEI initiatives in places of higher education like here at Mason have protected students and faculty, making our campus a productive, inclusive, and safe place to learn. I strongly oppose any resolutions by this BOV to dismantle DEI. I ask you this: are you here as political appointees that enact your ideological beliefs or are you representative of the entire Mason community? Who do you represent? Whose interests are you advocating for? If those questions fail to inspire reflection, I then ask: how do you want to be remembered? Political positions and ideological stances derive from personal experience and systems of belief. Have you never benefited from diversity? Has equity challenged your social position? Has inclusion made you angry or vengeful? Why? Why do the notions of diversity, equity, and inclusion challenge you and your belief system? As many of you associate with the heritage foundation, I can even make a religious claim. Is the Jesus and religion you associate with side with the oppressor or the oppressed? As a student and someone who cares about this university, I'm at a loss. I don't know what or who could convince you. In a world where empathy is rare, equity will feel like an attack on those most privileged by the marginalization of others. Standing up for others and defending those who are marginalized is hard when your own power is on the line. I hope each of you can see beyond your own circumstances and positions and look to truly hear and learn what the people of Mason are saying when it comes to DEI.



Natalia Acevedo	Student	Maintaining the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community is crucial for George Mason University to uphold its commitment to supporting all students. This office upholds the principle that all students from a broad range of backgrounds have earned their place at GMU through merit-based admissions. Dissolving the ACC would be fiscally irresponsible as it would compromise the university's infrastructure and negatively impact its established business model, while contradicting its core values. I urge the Board of Visitors to acknowledge the value of this office and maintain its operations.
Kelby Gibson	Graduate student and instructor of record	I urge the board to stand up for DEI at Mason. Board members offer plenty of lip service about their role being to do what's best for Mason and yet time and time again over the last few years the board members have shown they are more interested in playing politics to gain favor with their far right buddies rather than actually listen to the Mason community and trust the experts. A few months ago, vice rector Meese attended a GAPSA meeting and claimed that he trusts the experts— The actions of Meese and other visitors show that is simply not true. At the following board meeting Meese and many other visitors voted yes on a resolution that the Mason community, including experts from different fields covering a variety of aspects of the resolution, by and large asked them to vote no on. This board has a chance to do what's right, so do it. We should be protecting DEI at Mason. Since you all seem to have a warped understanding of that term, I suggest you defer to the experts on the topic. They would agree it's worth protecting.
Jecenia Cordova	Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Fairness, accessibility, and equal opportunity are guaranteed for all students, professors, and staff by the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community (ACC)</li> <li>-Maintaining DEI is a leadership choice that stands for honesty and dedication to Mason's basic principles</li> <li>-ensuring equitable opportunities for everyone is a fundamental responsibility</li> <li>-if we Weaken DEI initiatives it would would harm Mason's reputation as a leader in access and excellence</li> <li>-if we take back DEI efforts that sends a message that Mason is moving backward instead of forward</li> <li>-GMU needs to think about it's students and faculty, because their rights and opportunities matter</li> </ul>
	Student	Please keep tuition affordable. With all of the government overhaul, no doubt many families are thrust into financial uncertainty. Keep George Mason accessible financially.
Antonio Sandoval Duarte	Student	What will happen to DEI programs?
	Student	Please Board of Visitors, listen to students about the concerns we've had because sooner or later, these attacks in DEI will only get more aggressive. You need to side with the students because we make the university what it is and our complaints are valid as we have evidence to back it up.
Max LaBoy	Student	Don't get rid of DEI. :(
Evelyn Tomaszewski	SOCW 659 Students	<p>April 1, 2025</p> <p>Dear Members of the Board of Visitors,</p> <p>Thank you for this opportunity to present public comments. The following is written by students in SOCW 659 and submitted on their behalf.</p> <p>From the start, as students, we hear terms like "Mason Nation"</p>



and “Mason Community”, and that we “Thrive Together”. While started as marketing slogans – these are truly taken in by students and faculty and staff (and alumni) as an opportunity to connect and forge relationships.

As students in a Mason master’s level social work class, we discussed “why diversity, equity, and inclusion”, and here are some of the answers: It ensures we hear different voices, increase access to education for everyone, that ensuring inclusive resources helps to ensure that all have equal access to university services and programs, enables different learning styles, reduces barriers, promotes empathy, and shifts perspective. And promotes innovation.

To reduce or eliminate a visible and necessary offices or programs or commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion will diminish the commitment made by students, faculty, staff, and alumni to build a stronger Mason and Grow and Thrive Together. It will negatively impact the high ranking of Mason, and specifically, the programs within the College of Public Health such as social work. And as an R1 university, lack of DEI will result in loss of faculty and students and funding.

The GMU Board of Visitors must vote YES in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion through affirming policy, administration and staffing, and fully resourced programming. This will support, build, and sustain our well-earned and respected space as the most diverse university in Virginia.

Thank you,

Arielle Gradney (student)  
Catherine Van Wert (student)  
Evelyn Tomaszewski, MSW (Instructor)

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*From campus protests to cyberthreats, higher education leaders should employ a robust enterprise risk management system to safeguard the institution from a broad range of risks*

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American higher education institutions are increasingly vulnerable to a variety of risks that require robust protective measures. Some of the key challenges currently faced by these institutions include the potential reclassification of student-athletes as employees, declining enrollment numbers, escalating student mental health concerns, high faculty and staff turnover, more frequent and severe natural disasters, heightened student activism, cybersecurity threats, and more. All these factors collectively strain resources and jeopardize institutional stability.

Once limited to the commercial and government sectors, US colleges and universities are increasingly adopting enterprise risk management (ERM). ERM instills a broad approach to risks, replacing siloed practices with integrated ones. As a result, senior leaders, risk management professionals, and boards of trustees gain a panoramic view of risks and their interrelatedness, and they can develop more integrated and effective approaches to identifying, mitigating, and managing risk.

This report focuses on the significant risks—and drivers of those risks—facing American colleges and universities over the next one to three years. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every possible risk and risk driver. Rather, the risks covered here are those that most institutions should at least consider or address more vigorously.

## Background

This report discusses our perspective on the most significant risks and risk drivers that we believe stakeholders in institutions of higher education should consider. Our perspective is informed by a variety of stakeholders whose viewpoints range from operational to strategic, as it is critical to gather insights across the entire spectrum (figure 1).

Figure 1

### Spectrum of stakeholders that informs our perspective on the most significant risks facing higher education



Source: Deloitte analysis.

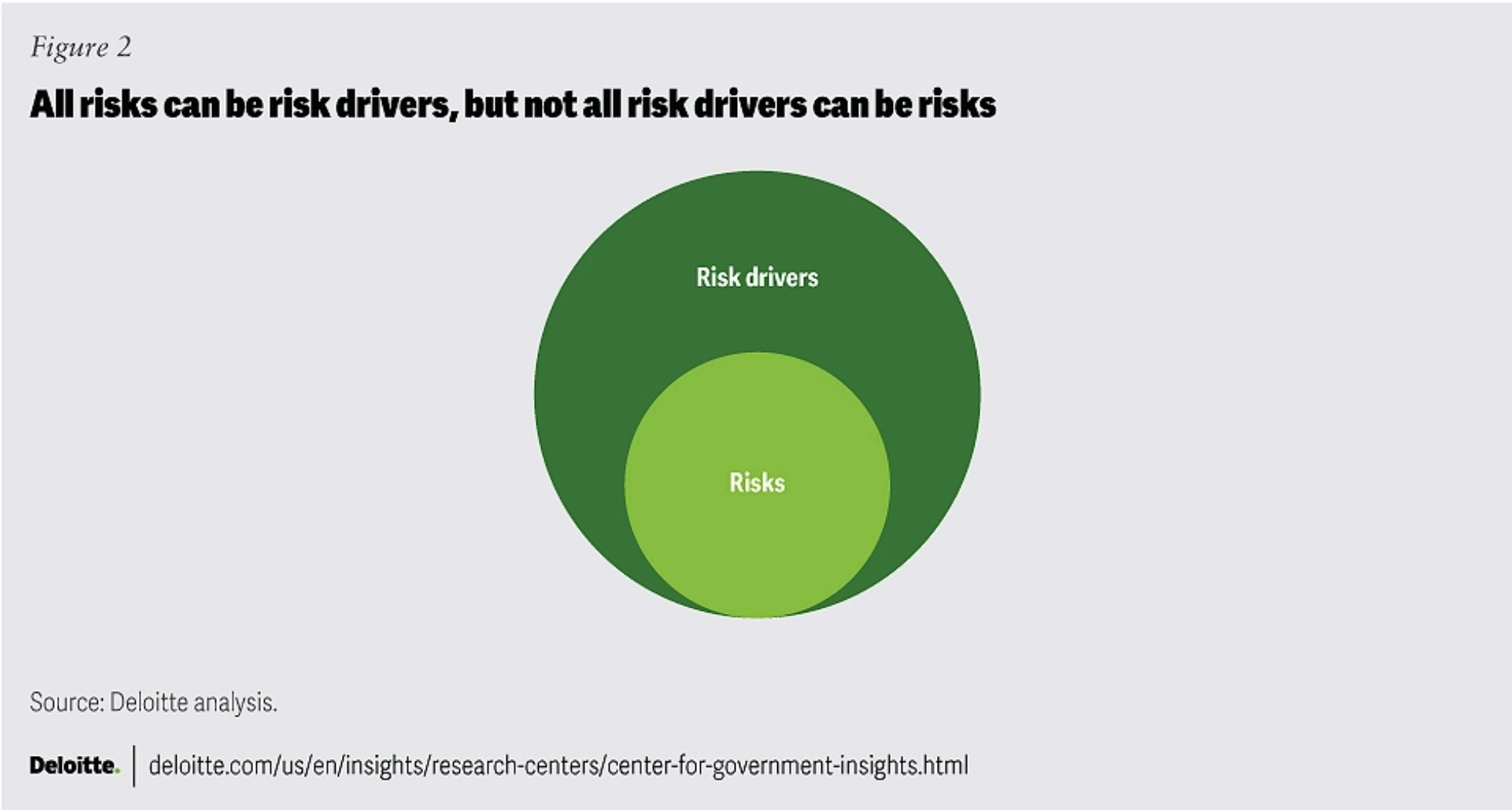
Before we dive into the discussion around the significant risks and risk drivers, it is critical that you, the reader, understand how we have defined them. As we will discuss, clarity on definitions is not only important for reading this report but is also a critical foundational element of effective risk management.

## Risks and risk drivers

“Risk” is a term that is often defined inconsistently. Given this, we utilize the following definitions for “risk” and “risk driver” to frame our perspective.

- **Risk** is defined as a state of uncertainty where the answer to “Did the risk occur?” can be a binary yes or no, with some possibilities being undesirable outcomes.
- **Risk drivers** can either be:
  - Continuous factors, often referred to as “trends,” that influence the likelihood or impact of a risk
  - A risk that could influence another risk’s likelihood or impact

We recognize that definitions of risks and risk drivers are not distinct, which may make this complex and challenging to comprehend from the outset. While all risks can be risk drivers, not all risk drivers are actual risks (figure 2).



Risks can have both risk drivers and secondary risks. A primary risk can have direct risk drivers—risk driver 1 and risk driver 2 (figure 3). Additionally, it can have a secondary risk, which itself has direct risk drivers—risk driver 3 and risk driver 4.

Figure 3

## Risks can have both risk drivers and secondary risks



Source: Deloitte analysis.

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We present these definitions not only to contextualize our perspective but also because we contend that consistency in defining risk is critical for an ERM program, as it is a core enabler for leadership to effectively prioritize resources for response efforts. More specifically, when an ERM program defines risk and the level of granularity consistently, an analysis of risk can be performed to identify the risk drivers influencing an institution's total risk exposure, thus leading to optimized allocation of resources to response efforts.

The following discussion regarding significant risks and risk drivers utilizes the definitions outlined above, which is important to note because some risks and drivers may be framed or classified differently than is commonplace today.

## Part 1. Significant risks facing higher education institutions

As mentioned earlier, this is not a compendium of all risks posed to institutions. It is a group of significant risks that are likely over the next one to three years, many of which are traceable to or exacerbated by the risk drivers discussed in Part 2.

### Risk of cyber breaches

Digitalization of transactions, processes, records, and even relationships has caused institutions (and most other organizations) to rely heavily on information technology systems. This reliance has generated benefits such as improved efficiency, better communication, and enhanced data management. However, it has also introduced significant risks to data privacy and security.

The problem is serious and getting worse. From March 2022 to March 2023, the average cost of a cybersecurity breach reached US\$3.7 million.<sup>1</sup> Ransomware attacks—in which cybercriminals encrypt an institution's data and demand a ransom for the decryption key—have targeted organizations across sectors and have surged.<sup>2</sup> According to the “2024 state of ransomware in education” report by Malwarebytes, ransomware attacks against higher education institutions rose from 68 in 2022 to 116 in 2023, a 70% increase.<sup>3</sup>

Unsurprisingly, cybersecurity is ranked first on the annual EDUCAUSE Top 10 list of issues facing colleges and universities.<sup>4</sup> In response, institutions are focusing on more robust identity and access management, considering zero trust security frameworks, and turning to virtual chief information security officers, among other tactics.

### Common cyber risk drivers:

**Inadequate security practices:** Weak or outdated password policies, lack of multi-factor authentication, poor security configurations, and other issues leave systems vulnerable to hackers.

**Bifurcation of academic versus administrative IT practices:** Research and academic IT practices differ from administrative IT practices. These policies and practices can sometimes be bifurcated across academic and administrative factions, resulting in vulnerabilities.

**Unintentional errors and lack of training:** Insufficient awareness may lead to an employee accidentally sending confidential information to the wrong recipient or revealing sensitive or confidential information on social media. Faculty and staff need training on everything from passwords to

multi-factor authentication and beyond.

**Insider threats:** Disgruntled, terminated, or opportunistic employees can harm the institution or exploit access to the school’s data or funds for personal gain.

**Vulnerable systems:** Several factors are increasing the vulnerability of systems, including a large number of legacy, on-premise IT systems combined with the lack of vulnerability management systems and the prevalence of “bring your own devices,” all contributing to increasing vulnerabilities on campus.

**Third-party risks:** Partners, vendors, or others can take advantage of access or vulnerabilities due to insufficient due diligence and vetting of their employees or failure to exercise the institution’s right to audit.

**Scams:** Phishing and social engineering can trick people into revealing personal information about themselves, senior leaders, or trustees or into sharing intellectual property or sensitive organizational information.

## ***Common strategies to help mitigate cyber risk***

**Mandating user-level tools:** Establish policies and procedures regarding strong passwords and multi-factor authentication.

**Educating employees:** Regularly train employees on leading cybersecurity practices and how to recognize phishing attempts, scams, impersonations, and other tactics aimed at obtaining access to systems.

**Encrypting sensitive data:** Encrypt data at rest and in transit to protect it from unauthorized access. Use encrypted communications for the most sensitive and valuable data.

**Updating software:** Keep software up to date with the latest security patches and use accurate software inventories to keep abreast of updates and phaseouts.

**Developing disaster recovery, incident response, and data-backup plans:** Create and regularly update disaster recovery, incident response, and data backup plans to address and mitigate breaches and reduce the number of false notifications.

## **Faculty and staff attrition**

Faculty and staff attrition, whether voluntary or involuntary, exposes institutions to loss of expertise and institutional knowledge, which can create knowledge gaps and undermine quality and efficiency. High attrition increases recruitment and training costs and diverts resources from other priorities. It can result in discontinuity of education and mentorship, impacting student satisfaction and learning outcomes. High turnover tends to diminish morale and engagement among remaining faculty and staff, who may feel overburdened and insecure in their jobs. Persistent attrition can damage the institution’s reputation and make it less attractive to prospective faculty, staff, and students.<sup>5</sup> It can also be a symptom of other, perhaps deeper, problems.

The percentage of full-time, exempt staff members who left their jobs nearly doubled over two years—from 7.9% during the academic year of 2020 to 2021 to 14.3% during the academic year of 2022 to 2023.<sup>6</sup> A survey of 4,782 employees conducted in September 2023 by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources found that key reasons for employees leaving included better pay and benefits (45%), lack of career advancement opportunities (30%), and dissatisfaction with institutional leadership (25%).<sup>7</sup> Job satisfaction was the strongest predictor of retention, with higher satisfaction associated with a lower likelihood of employees seeking other employment.<sup>8</sup>

## ***Risk of attrition drivers***

**Inadequate remote work opportunities:** Lack of remote work options can lead to turnover as faculty and staff seek more flexibility and enhanced work/life balance.

**Lack of career advancement opportunities:** Lack of promotion and other career advancement and enhancement opportunities generate dissatisfaction and prompt employees to leave for positions with clearer pathways to professional growth.

**Uncompetitive pay and benefits:** Inadequate compensation and benefits have been frequently cited as primary reasons for faculty and staff leaving their positions.

## ***Strategies to help mitigate the risk of attrition***

**Promoting work/life balance:** Implement flexible work arrangements, including remote work options and flexible scheduling, and provide support, such as child care, for working parents.

**Enhancing compensation and benefits:** Explore enhanced salary and benefits to confirm that they remain competitive by benchmarking against peers as well as adjacent industries. Offer comprehensive benefits packages that meet the diverse needs of employees.



**Fostering professional development:** Provide clear pathways for career advancement and professional growth while investing in programs to enhance knowledge and skills.

**Improving workplace culture:** Create a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture where employees feel valued and recognized.

## **Student activism risks**

Student activism primarily refers to assemblies by students, faculty, or other stakeholders to advocate for social, political, or environmental change. Assemblies include protests, sit-ins, and other gatherings aimed at influencing university policies, raising awareness of specific issues, or advocating for broader societal changes. Activists can also demand the resignation of leaders or faculty members, “canceling” speakers, or divestiture of endowment funds in a certain company or country. Handled poorly, activism can lead to disruption of student life and campus operations, safety and security hazards, legal and compliance issues, and reputational risk.

The spring of 2024 saw an increase in student activism across the country.<sup>9</sup> The news media headlines were riddled with examples of students setting up tent encampments to protest and counterprotest foreign conflict. Election cycles also heighten political awareness among students and faculty, generating further advocacy around issues such as voter rights, policy changes, and candidate support.

Colleges and universities anticipate more demonstrations during the 2024 to 2025 academic year; in response, administrators are revising rules on free speech and demonstrations. Many of the revised rules include time, place, and manner restrictions on assemblies. For example, the University of South Florida requires approval for tents, canopies, banners, signs, and amplifiers and bans activity after 5 p.m. and during the last two weeks of a semester.<sup>10</sup> Many others have set similar policies.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Student activism risk drivers***

**Lack of communication:** Failure to affirm the institution’s commitment to education and order on the one hand and to free expression on the other can create a void that enables activists to control the conversation.

**Lack of enforcement of clear policies:** While many colleges and universities have announced policies and rules around student activism, some may not have made them clear. University leaders have the right and responsibility to prohibit aggressive, destructive, or unlawful behavior that disrupts learning or threatens safety. To that end, policies should specify potential consequences for such conduct.

**Mission and campus culture:** Colleges and universities serve to foster learning through the exploration of ideas with a diversity of thought and active debate. In this setting, colleges and universities may struggle with managing the fine line between appropriate and instructive self-expression, with potentially harmful and nonproductive behaviors.

### ***Strategies to help mitigate the risks posed by student activism***

**Navigate free speech issues carefully:** Public colleges and universities are legally required to uphold First Amendment freedoms (including the right to speech and assembly) on their campuses. Private universities are not, although many have promised students to support free speech. Policies that enable leaders, students, and other stakeholders to navigate this landscape can help to mitigate the risks.<sup>12</sup>

**Guard institutional reputation:** Leaders need to balance the interests of multiple stakeholders while guarding the institution’s reputation when addressing risk events arising from activism. Prospective and current students value their freedom of expression, while parents, alumni, donors, and the public may more highly value campus order and safety. Tracking stakeholder sentiment by listening to stakeholders and monitoring social media will enable leaders to gauge the effect of various policies and contemplated responses.

**Manage potential backlash:** Failure to manage backlash contributed to administrators at top schools having to resign in the aftermath of campus demonstrations. In addition to adroit management of student activism, leaders should establish and maintain ongoing, trust-building communication with all stakeholders. Student activists generally constitute a relatively small percentage of the student population and an even smaller percentage of all stakeholders. So, cultivating the support of those larger percentages—including student government—can cushion the institution and its leaders and reputation from backlash.

## **Natural disaster risks**

Natural disaster risks encompass the effects of events like floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, and other major disasters. Climate change may heighten these risks by causing more frequent and severe weather events that threaten campus infrastructure and the safety of students, faculty, and staff. These risks can affect the operations, infrastructure, and financial stability of institutions. Potential impacts involve damage to campus buildings, requiring costly repair and recovery efforts, and disruptions to academic schedules.

Statistics indicate that natural disasters are becoming more frequent and serious in magnitude.<sup>13</sup> For example, severe storms have resulted in the largest number of billion-dollar climate disasters in the last decade, with 99 total events.<sup>14</sup> Weather patterns, including El Niño, La Niña, North Atlantic Oscillation, and Pacific Decadal Oscillation,<sup>15</sup> can increase natural disaster risks on campuses by intensifying weather events such as

rainfall, flooding, and storms. The development of expensive infrastructure in or near vulnerable areas also increases the risk of loss from natural disasters.

## ***Natural disaster risk drivers***

**Failure to gauge potential impacts:** An institution’s location impacts the likelihood and significance of this risk. Many colleges and universities in the United States are close to the coast, rendering them vulnerable to tropical storms, rising sea levels, and flooding.<sup>16</sup> Institutions in California and the Midwest may see an increase in the number and duration of wildfires.<sup>17</sup>

**Unprepared campus and local infrastructure:** Inadequate or poorly maintained campus-level or state or local infrastructure can amplify risks associated with natural disasters by compromising emergency response capabilities, thus increasing vulnerability to hazards and hindering effective communication and evacuation efforts.

**Deferred maintenance:** As colleges and universities fall behind on deferred maintenance of their campus infrastructure, the rising frequency and severity of natural disasters could lead to less resilient infrastructure and increased financial loss.<sup>18</sup>

## ***Strategies to help mitigate natural disaster risks***

**Review resources and standards:** Resources such as [Ready.gov for Campus](#), US [Department of Education’s natural disaster resources](#), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s [Higher Education Program](#) can enable risk-related and operational functions to prepare the institution and stakeholders for extreme weather events. At the more local level, institutions need to review available resources, the roles of first responders, evacuation plans, and lessons learned from responses to past natural disasters.

**Evaluate the financial impact:** The case for comprehensive preparedness can be clarified by evaluating the potential financial impact on the institution. While disaster preparedness can be costly, natural disasters have inflicted billions of dollars in damages on facilities. Impacts include the cost of repairs and rebuilding, lost tuition revenue, and increased operational costs due to prolonged closures and recovery efforts. Higher education institutions should use scenario analysis and tabletop exercises to understand potential impacts and craft optimal responses.

**Inform stakeholders:** A detailed communication plan is crucial in any crisis. It should define roles and responsibilities, establish primary and backup communication channels, consider all stakeholders including students, faculty, and staff, and cover communications before, during, and after a natural disaster.

**Lend a hand:** As an important part of the community, the college or university can build goodwill and trust by, at minimum, having plans that will reduce or not add to burdens placed on local response resources. If possible—and only within proper legal, safety, and commonsense boundaries—staff, faculty, and leadership should assist the community in appropriate ways, such as offering transportation or temporary housing to disaster victims.

## ***Classification of student-athletes as employees***

On July 12, 2024, the Third Circuit Court in *Johnson v. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)* ruled that student-athletes are not barred from being considered employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act. As a result, colleges and universities may be required to classify student-athletes as employees. Significant legal, financial, and operational implications may emerge for institutions, athletic programs, and student-athletes. This classification creates the need to develop an onboarding infrastructure to reduce the administrative burden on campus human resources departments and to address the legal, compliance, financial, and tax implications for the institution.

The *House v. NCAA* class action lawsuit challenges the NCAA’s restrictions on student-athlete compensation. The outcome of ongoing settlement negotiations will likely impact student-athletes’ employment status.<sup>19</sup> The settlement estimates a US\$135,000 annual salary for football and men’s basketball student-athletes.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, increased unionization efforts among some segments of student-athletes, primarily in football and men’s and women’s basketball, could occur.<sup>21</sup>

## ***Student-athlete reclassification risk drivers***

**Scope and legal rules regarding an athletic program:** Specific risks to the institution will depend upon the status and finances of their athletic programs and the applicability of legal developments and emerging rules driven by case law, settlements, and legislative changes, including:

- NCAA rule changes allowing student-athletes to profit from their name, image, and likeness<sup>22</sup>
- National Labor Relations Board’s stance on classifying student-athletes as employees under the National Labor Relations Act<sup>23</sup>
- Court rulings challenging the traditional amateurism model (*NCAA v. Alston* and *NCAA v. House*)<sup>24</sup>
- Legislative proposals introduced to redefine the relationship between student-athletes and their institution and to reclassify them as employees<sup>25</sup>

**Stakeholder and public sentiment:** Increased media focus on the financial issues surrounding student-athletes has amplified support for their reclassification as employees and moved public sentiment toward institutions treating student-athletes more equitably. That generally means recognizing the academic and athletic demands placed on student-athletes and financially rewarding their contribution to their schools.

## ***Strategies to mitigate student-athlete reclassification risks***

**Clarifying the impacts:** Engage legal experts, such as the institution’s Office of General Counsel and outside counsel, to clarify the applicability and implications of employment law and labor relations to position the institution to respond fairly and judiciously.

**Reviewing policies:** Thoroughly review existing human resources policies and processes to identify gaps where updates are needed for student-athletes classified as employees.

**Collaborating internally:** Partner with the athletics administration, HR leadership, and the Office of General Counsel to understand potential impacts and develop a strategic response, with a focus on financial matters and institutional mission.

**Evolving related programs:** Develop practical and ethical supportive programs such as recruiting, onboarding, and policy training for coaches, training staff, athletics administrators, and student-athletes.

As previously noted, we are not attempting to present a comprehensive review of all risks, as they are too many, varied, and unique to each institution to be fully covered here. Rather, we are presenting considerations to approach risks and risk management by identifying each risk to the institution along with the context in which it is occurring, institutional-level drivers, and potential steps to take in response.

Part 2 takes a similar approach to risk drivers. These factors pervade the environment, potentially driving risks that impact every college and university. It can be helpful to consider risks to the institution as those that are unique to that institution, while risk drivers span the entire sector.

## **Part 2. Significant risk drivers to higher education institutions**

Thinking and working at the level of risk drivers enables college and university leaders and risk managers to effectively address risks. It helps them to identify the factors contributing to an increase or decrease in risk, such as increased politicization of higher education leading to a change in regulatory priorities.

Understanding risk drivers also enables risk managers to develop a panoramic view of the risk landscape. This allows them to clearly see the interrelatedness of risks and strategically allocate resources to manage them. All of this supports ERM, resulting in improved efficiency and effective risk management.

Managing risks at institutions has become far more critical and complex than in the past. The nature and number of risk drivers reflect the increased complexity of the ecosystem, characterized by heightened economic pressures, diminished trust in institutions, rapid climate change, proliferating technology, evolving regulatory and compliance demands, and a more diverse applicant pool and student body.

## **Evolution in Department of Education regulation**

In June 2024, the US Supreme Court overturned “Chevron deference,” named for the landmark *Chevron USA Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council* (1984) case. The 2024 decision may reduce the interpretative deference of the courts to federal agencies by obligating courts to determine whether an agency’s actions are consistent with the words of the statute and the intent of Congress.<sup>26</sup> By the same token, the “Chevron doctrine” in effect directed courts to reject agencies’ interpretation of statutes unless there’s clear authorization from Congress to accept them.<sup>27</sup> While the impact on higher education remains to be seen, the decision may limit federal agencies, including the US Department of Education (ED), authority to issue and enforce broad regulations.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, in June 2023, the Supreme Court ruled against using race in college admissions decisions, leading many colleges and universities to reevaluate their affirmative action, legacy admissions, and athletic recruiting policies and practices.<sup>29</sup> Also, the ED published three updates on its expectations under its extensive October 2023 [Financial Value Transparency and Gainful Employment regulations](#). These regulations, slated to take effect on July 1, 2024, apply to institutions participating in Title IV Federal Student Aid programs.<sup>30</sup> Collectively, these two regulations strive to require colleges and universities to provide student and financial information to ED to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. Given that most colleges and universities participate in the Title IV program, adherence to these regulations will be compulsory for institutions going forward.

Taken together, these rulings from the Supreme Court will alter how ED regulates higher education, which may place long-standing practices in higher education at odds with new or revised regulations. This will require colleges and universities to quickly pivot their processes and operations. Though the full impact of these rulings on higher education is still unclear, they will influence how the Department of Education regulates the sector. Colleges and universities will need to maintain a flexible relationship with the department to adapt to probable changes in the future.

## ***Risks linked to evolving ED regulation***



**New legislation:** Given the potential change in the enforceability of ED guidance, legislators may look to codify standards in legislation. Federal legislation could differ from the current guidance issued by ED.

**Loss of Title IV funding:** Reduced clarity in ED requirements for receiving Title IV funds may lead to legal action, potentially affecting other areas as well.

## ***Strategies to navigate the evolution of ED oversight***

**Legal guidance:** Evaluate more often the necessity and timing of the institution’s need to obtain guidance from attorneys and legal experts in its decision-making and policymaking processes.

**Legal monitoring team:** Establish a dedicated team or individual to monitor and respond to legal and regulatory developments.

**Strengthen compliance programs:** Implement robust compliance programs to enhance adherence to regulatory requirements.

**Regular compliance training:** Conduct periodic training sessions for faculty and staff on regulatory changes and compliance obligations.

**Proactive communication strategy:** Develop a proactive communication strategy to manage public perception and maintain stakeholder trust in the institution’s leaders and decision-making, while seeking ways to reach underrepresented applicant populations.

**Data-reporting processes:** Confirm processes are in place to collect data and report to ED in a timely manner to comply with Financial Value Transparency regulations.

## **Decline in US population growth**

The United States has seen a reduction in the growth rate of the demographic inclined to pursue higher education. This can strongly impact enrollment rates, financial resources, and strategic planning. Economic instability and job insecurity, which render people less confident about their financial futures and tend to lower birth rates, are fueling this.<sup>31</sup> There are also changes in social norms, with more people delaying marriage and childbirth to focus on careers and personal goals. The high cost of living, child care, and education itself further discourages parenthood.<sup>32</sup>

The anticipated “enrollment cliff” in 2025 largely relates to a steady decline in the national birth rate over the past 17 years, with births falling by 23% from 2007 to 2022.<sup>33</sup>

Population in large and moderate-sized US counties grew, while that of small counties declined over the last few years.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, from 2022 to 2023, the population in counties with over 100,000 people averaged a growth of 0.76%. In fact, the population in counties with fewer than 10,000 people decreased by 0.27% on average, compared with a 0.35% decrease the previous year.<sup>35</sup>

## ***Risks commonly linked to population decline***

**Enrollment decline:** With fewer students enrolling, colleges and universities face decreased tuition income, affecting their financial stability and necessitating budget cuts. This can impact faculty, staff, and resources available for students and potentially lead to merger and acquisition activity.

**Recruitment challenges:** As college enrollment declines, the pool of students available for employers to recruit also decreases. Consequently, companies may need to adjust their recruitment strategies and invest more in training and development to bridge the skills gap. Moreover, institutions may have to work harder to protect their educational missions and reputations.

**Reduced role in the local economy:** Institutions play a crucial role in their local and regional economies. Declining enrollment can lead to reduced economic activity—and employment—in the college or university and the surrounding community, affecting local businesses and services.

## ***Strategies to help navigate the decline in population***

**International recruitment:** Develop strategies to attract international students and build global partnerships.

**Study-abroad initiatives:** Create and promote study-abroad programs and international exchanges.

**Industry collaboration:** Collaborate with local industries and major employers to gauge what expertise and skills they are seeking and how the college or university might help them address their training and development needs.

**Adult education:** Engage nontraditional audiences by creating flexible pathways for adult learners to complete their education and adapting academic offerings to support populations beyond the 18- to 24-year-old demographic.

## **Overdependence on tuition for revenue**

Tuition dependence is defined as the ratio of net tuition revenue to total revenue. High tuition dependency—defined as 60% or greater reliance on tuition and student fees for core revenues—puts an institution’s finances at risk, given even small downturns in enrollment and retention.<sup>36</sup> The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated this issue, yet pandemic-related aid may have masked longer-term financial issues, with closures of private colleges becoming commonplace as a result.<sup>37</sup>

Data from the 2022 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System reveals that about 25% of institutions are tuition-dependent.<sup>38</sup> Tuition dependency is rising among public and private institutions, with a higher percentage of core revenues being derived from student tuition and fees. Moreover, non-tuition sources of revenue are also under pressure. [Giving to colleges and universities is declining](#), with the most recently available data showing inflation-adjusted giving down 5% in 2023.<sup>39</sup> Even amid reduced federal stimulus funding, state support for higher education was up 10% in fiscal 2024,<sup>40</sup> but that is expected [to decline](#) in the future.<sup>41</sup>

## ***Risks commonly linked to tuition dependency***

**Budget shortfalls:** During even small downturns in student enrollment and retainment, budget shortfalls are typically the first sign of overdependence on tuition and fees. Unless that overdependence is addressed, it can lead to deficits that must be funded.

**Insolvency:** An increase in the time needed to pay operating expenses—or a default on debt—generally indicates even more pressing financial problems.

**Layoffs and program closures:** Unless they are well-rationalized, layoffs of faculty or staff, as well as partial or complete closing of programs (or a school within a university), indicate financial problems that can lead to bankruptcy or the closing of the whole institution.

## ***Strategies to help navigate tuition dependency***

**Boost fundraising efforts:** Step up fundraising activities, particularly planned giving among active alumni and major or repeat donors.

**Grant acquisition:** Apply for research and other grants and actively recruit faculty and researchers with a proven record of successful grant applications and grant-funded research.

**Tuition reset:** Consider a properly implemented tuition reset, which means reducing the “sticker price” for tuition. Several regional institutions have used resets with good results, particularly when they emphasize their brand and value rather than the reduced tuition.<sup>42</sup>

**Expense reduction:** Reduce operating expenses, particularly by automating all that can be automated, consolidating or eliminating redundant processes and activities, or making the difficult decision to discontinue academically valuable but unprofitable programs or activities.

**Asset utilization:** Maximize revenues from the institution’s existing asset base, for example, by renting out facilities when possible.

## **Declining student mental health**

Concerns over student mental health have intensified since the pandemic, with increasing numbers of students experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and similar challenges. Often exacerbated by academic pressures and financial strain, mental health issues can impair academic performance and engagement in campus life.<sup>43</sup> In severe cases, students could harm themselves or others.<sup>44</sup>

[More than 60% of college students meet the criteria for at least one mental health problem](#), which is a nearly 50% increase since 2013.<sup>45</sup> A recent survey of more than 3,600 students found that 70% of respondents have struggled with mental health since starting college.<sup>46</sup> Only half that number (37%) sought mental health resources at their colleges. The reasons? Negative past experiences or concerns about the effectiveness of care, social stigma, cost, and uncertainty about how to access those resources.<sup>47</sup>

The “Student mental health landscape” report by Wiley, which surveyed more than 2,500 students, found that more than 80% are facing some level of emotional difficulty, with more than 25% citing significant struggles.<sup>48</sup> Challenges included balancing school with work or family (59%), paying for tuition (50%) and living expenses (49%), and uncertainty about how to prepare for a career (41%).<sup>49</sup>

## ***Risks commonly linked to student mental health***

**Student transfer and dropout:** Declining mental health can result in students dropping out or transferring to another school, which can impact an institution’s enrollment, ranking, and reputation.

**Declining student success:** Declining mental health can negatively impact grades and graduation rates, which could diminish the institution’s rankings and reputation and generate additional financial strain and emotional suffering for students.

**Student safety and security:** Declining mental health can potentially increase instances of safety events, including violence toward oneself or others.

## ***Strategies to navigate declining student mental health***

**Counseling services expansion:** Expand the availability of on-campus and telehealth counseling services, for example, by partnering with local providers to address rising demand when needed.

**Peer-mentoring initiatives:** Develop peer-mentoring and support programs and formally work to increase students’ engagement with one another, with faculty, and with the institution.

**Mental health awareness:** Deploy mental health literacy and awareness campaigns to reduce any stigma associated with anxiety, depression, and other conditions.

**Faculty-training programs:** Train faculty and staff to recognize mental health warning signs and symptoms and the next steps to take. (Nearly half of students in the Wiley survey noted that extra support from their instructors had a positive impact on their mental and emotional health.)<sup>50</sup>

**Early-detection systems:** Use early detection systems, including mental health screening tools and predictive analytics. These tools can detect potential mental health challenges based on academic performance, visits to the infirmary, and other indicators.

**Wellness programs:** Promote wellness programs and support in areas such as nutrition, exercise, relationship management, and stress reduction.

## **Evolving demand for program offerings**

Demand for program offerings changes due to shifts in student interest and sentiment toward certain degrees, certificates, majors, minors, and specializations influenced by marketplace needs for skills and expertise. Institutions need to understand and prioritize students’ preferences to retain high enrollment, student satisfaction, and national or regional reputation and rank.

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as business and occupational courses, are now widely sought after due to their higher labor market returns despite potentially higher short-term psychic costs (a type of social cost that reflects the stress or reduction in quality of life) for students. Education, social sciences, and humanities have experienced the largest losses in bachelor’s degrees, while business and health professions have increased the most.<sup>51</sup>

Institutions are modifying programs and majors to attract prospective students and to meet local, regional, and national employment needs. Schools are also adopting course-sharing models to expand their academic offerings and create new programs to better meet student needs while saving money.<sup>52</sup> Some institutions have achieved higher rates of enrollment and retention by offering microcredentials—short-term, skills-focused training that enables students to demonstrate competency in a focused area.<sup>53</sup>

To remain relevant, most colleges and universities must evolve and adjust program offerings to fit current market needs.<sup>54</sup> That applies to course delivery as well. Demand for online course offerings has increased immensely as students have prioritized flexibility to help manage their family or work responsibilities.<sup>55</sup>

## ***Risks commonly linked to evolving demand for program offerings***

**Reduction in public financial support:** Institutions may face potential challenges in securing funding if they do not adapt their program offerings to align with evolving student interests and market needs.

**Postgraduate employment:** Students may encounter limited career opportunities if their academic programs do not adjust to provide the skills and knowledge required by the labor market.<sup>56</sup>

**Program closure:** If colleges and universities misalign their courses with student preferences, they may experience under-enrollment and suboptimal use of resources, such as faculty time and classroom space.

**Student transfer and dropout:** Institutions may see a decrease in positive student sentiment and educational experiences if they fail to keep pace with changes in demand.

## ***Strategies to help navigate the evolving demand for program offerings***

**Labor market analysis:** Monitor and analyze labor market data to identify emerging fields and skills in current, near-term, and future demand.

**Pipeline preparation:** Prepare a pipeline of offerings and identify resources needed to support new programs and courses geared to emerging academic interests and career paths.

**Interdisciplinary programs:** Promote and develop interdisciplinary programs that combine multiple fields of study to foster innovation and well-rounded education.

**Faculty development:** Offer continuous professional development opportunities to enable faculty to stay current in their fields and deliver relevant course material.



**Collaborative partnerships:** Establish partnerships with other educational institutions, industry, and community organizations to expand program offerings and provide students with additional learning opportunities.

## **Lack of institutional agility in decision-making**

Institutional agility refers to an institution’s ability to adapt and respond to internal and external change. Colleges and universities benefit from agility in various dimensions, including curriculum adaptability, operational flexibility, technology adoption and integration, financial resilience, strategic responsiveness, and stakeholder engagement. Institutions that exhibit low levels of agility find it hard to navigate challenges and seize opportunities, thus increasing their exposure to negative developments.

Inside Higher Ed’s “2024 Survey of College and University Presidents” found that the primary challenge for presidents today (25% of respondents) relates to financial constraints on their university.<sup>57</sup> While a limited budget can work against agility, updating management methods and decision-making processes costs relatively little out of pocket. In addition, lack of agility itself increases financial vulnerability.

For example, agility can be undermined by high staff turnover, which in turn can be minimized through better management, working conditions, and career pathing (as well as improved pay and benefits). Employee engagement provider Culture Amp suggests that, across sectors, 18% of North American employees are looking to move into new roles in 2024,<sup>58</sup> so monitoring employee sentiment may be valuable.

Artificial intelligence promises to impact higher education. Inside Higher Ed’s survey also found that 50% of presidents are optimistic about AI’s impact on higher education, but only 18% say their institution has adopted or published policies governing the use of AI.<sup>59</sup>

## ***Risks commonly linked to a lack of agility***

**Vote of no confidence:** Institutional leaders are more likely to experience a vote of no confidence if their organizations fail to keep abreast of the times due to bureaucracy, lack of vision, or failure to execute change management effectively.

**Faculty and staff attrition:** Similarly, faculty and staff are more likely to leave an environment in which getting things done becomes unnecessarily challenging.

**Board executive action:** If the institution falls behind its peers and its brand suffers due to sclerotic management, the board becomes more likely to take executive action that supersedes the institution’s administration.

**Reduction in alumni and donor financial support:** Alumni and donors become more likely to reduce financial support when they see that rigid and unresponsive leaders have failed to navigate change amid disruption.

## ***Strategies to help navigate the lack of agility***

**Agile budgeting model:** Institutions need to use a flexible budget model that enables shifts during the budget cycle and builds agility in planning and budgeting.

**Change management skills:** Leaders often need to improve their change management skills, particularly in today’s environment of rapid evolution and diminished trust in institutions.

**Frequent leadership assessments:** Increasing the frequency of leaders’ external, internal, and self-assessments to identify areas requiring improvement, mitigate biases in decision-making, and determine necessary adjustments.

**Higher education disruptors:** Institutions need to identify the forces most likely to disrupt the higher education environment—such as AI, demographic change, and diminishing views of its value—and respond accordingly.

**Mission-driven communication:** Leaders should communicate with stakeholders about their commitment to the institutional mission while recognizing the need to adjust strategy to fulfill that mission in today’s environment.

## **Deferred maintenance**

Deferred maintenance is defined as the backlog of activities to perform if facilities and equipment (including IT systems) are to reach or extend their anticipated useful life and market value. This causal factor is often overlooked due to its perceived mundanity and misguided attempts to save money. Moody’s states that as of 2024, higher education institutions face a total of US\$950 billion in deferred maintenance costs for facilities over the next 10 years.<sup>60</sup> In 2020, the backlog of deferred maintenance was estimated at up to US\$100 per square foot.<sup>61</sup>

Decisions made decades ago about facilities are producing a sharp uptick in the need for reinvestment. Life-cycle investments to address the needs of facilities built in the 1970 and 2005 waves of construction will place high pressure on institutions. [Those two construction surges are generating equipment and system life cycles that will overlap in about 10 years.](#)<sup>62</sup>

Due to their low visibility and slow-motion impact, it is relatively easy to give maintenance of existing facilities lower financial priority than building new facilities. However, maintenance cannot be deferred over the long term without incurring serious risks. Moreover, space is growing, but space utilization is declining.<sup>63</sup> Institutions are building new facilities and expanding their footprint rather than reinvesting in current facilities, which can be a recipe for trouble.

## ***Risks commonly linked to deferred maintenance***

**Injury or health risks:** Exposure to toxic, dangerous, or fatigued materials, poor ventilation, lack of sufficient heating or cooling, off-gassing of volatile organic chemicals, or equipment malfunction can jeopardize the safety of students, faculty, and staff.

**Disruption of classes or operations:** The preceding conditions can lead to disruptions in classrooms, labs, or housing or the closure of facilities.

**Cyber breach:** Frequent software patching, neglecting to update it, or failing to maintain a proper software asset management program can increase the risk of cyber breaches.

**Financial losses:** Deferred maintenance may lead to higher insurance premiums or legal actions due to accidents, incidents, or inspections involving facilities and equipment. Moreover, poorly maintained facilities and equipment may lead to higher operating expenses due to reduced productivity and energy efficiency.

## ***Strategies to navigate the risks of deferred maintenance***

**Asset inventory evaluation:** Inventory all physical assets of the institution (including IT systems and software) and evaluate and prioritize the assets worth investing in based on their age, condition, value, expected lifespan, cost to maintain, and strategic value to the institution.

**Maintenance and succession planning:** Create a maintenance plan and a succession plan for facilities and equipment based on the foregoing considerations and on a cost-benefit analysis.

**Footprint reduction strategy:** Consider reducing the institution’s physical footprint, potentially by selling or leasing assets to other organizations, a step that may yield financial benefits.

**Tech-enhanced maintenance:** Adopt technologies to improve the efficiency of maintenance and repairs, such as diagnostic devices and embedded monitoring and notification tools that flag when maintenance or replacement is or will be needed.

## **Politicization of higher education**

The politicization of higher education refers to the increasing influence of political ideologies, agendas, and conflicts on academic institutions. Politicization can impact an institution’s governance, curriculum, research, and learning environment, as well as student life, enrollment, and retention. The allocation of research grants and funding can be influenced by political considerations, which may skew the focus of academic research.

Politicization can affect institutions in many ways. Special-purpose funding through student financial aid is a crucial source of revenue, but it can extend the federal government’s influence over colleges and universities beyond research. It entails compliance with a variety of federal reporting requirements on issues such as teacher preparation and gender equity in athletics.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, political pressures can lead to changes in the curriculum, where certain subjects may be emphasized or de-emphasized based on ideological leanings.<sup>65</sup>

As seen in campus protest policies, allowing for free speech while maintaining an inclusive environment can become difficult and characterized by debates over what constitutes hate speech versus protected speech.<sup>66</sup> In addition, issues related to race, gender, and other dimensions of identity can become highly politicized, influencing campus policies and the learning experience.<sup>67</sup>

## ***Risks commonly linked to politicization***

**Uncertainty around public funding:** The influence exerted by government bodies through policymaking and appointments can create uncertainty around public funding.<sup>68</sup>

**Student activism:** Polarization and conflict on campus generated by political forces and student activism can disrupt campus life and lead to calls for disinvestment, “canceling” speakers, or changes to the curriculum.

**Decline in applications:** Applicant, parental, or student sentiment resulting from news reports, educational experiences, social media, or word of mouth shaped by the political climate or a school’s reputation may lead to decreased applications or enrollment.

**Faculty or staff attrition:** Politicization at an institution and its resulting reputation regarding ideological beliefs and priorities can lead to turnover of the institution’s leaders<sup>69</sup> and attrition in faculty and staff.<sup>70</sup>

## ***Strategies to help navigate the risks of politicization***

**Building trust:** Engaging with student and community groups and the full range of stakeholders to build trust and promote civil discussion while emphasizing that education remains the fundamental purpose and mission of the institution.

**Active dialogue:** Leaders should use protests as educational opportunities and consider dialogue with protesters, even those violating policies.<sup>71</sup>

**Consistent policy enforcement:** Once clearly defined and well communicated, institutions should ensure that policies are applied consistently and fairly without discrimination based on personal viewpoints.

**Collaborative response strategies:** Colleges and universities should develop viable strategies in collaboration with student government, faculty, and other key stakeholders to respond to politicization, including pressures to divest endowment funds in certain countries or companies.

## Getting to the roots of risk

Each section above includes considerations for responding to the identified risk or causal factor. This should be considered a broad yet practical template for actions that will go deeper than populating a risk register and rating risks. Those are necessary and useful steps, but they cannot address the driver or cause of a risk and cannot enable the most efficient risk management methods and allocation of resources.

Addressing institutional risk drivers can enable higher education institutions to address the risk and its financial, operational, legal, compliance, reputational, and other impacts across the institution.

The following steps can help legal, compliance, and risk managers to better support the leadership in executing their risk-related roles and responsibilities:

- Identify and assess not only specific risks and risk drivers but also how they could impact all functions, facilities, and stakeholders.
- Develop and evaluate a range of responses to risks based on their financial, operational, legal, reputational, and other impacts, and provide steps to take to address the causes of those risks.
- Monitor how shifts in the political environment could impact the risk environment given the potential for regulatory and legislative change, as well as in the overall risk landscape.
- Consider the following elements of risk management in light of your institution’s risks, risk drivers, risk profile, and current approaches to managing risk:
  - **Risk methodologies:** Periodically refresh your approaches to identifying and assessing risk and risk drivers; for example, internal surveys supplemented by interviews and external research can deliver more robust assessments than any single method.
  - **Risk management tools:** Technological tools for monitoring and assessing risks, such as data analytics and risk sensing, have improved significantly in recent years. Governance, risk, and compliance systems have also improved and assisted in integrating the various aspects of the system, such as business continuity, controls, and vendor and document management, among others.
  - **Techniques:** Certain techniques can improve both efficiency and effectiveness of risk management. These include segmenting risks and risk drivers and accelerating prioritization of risks by focusing on those that have intensified or diminished the most, or those on which stakeholders in surveys and interviews exhibited the most divergent views.
- Migrate toward true ERM. Colleges and universities should consider adopting or improving their ERM capabilities in the near term. Today’s risks and risk drivers demand in-depth approaches. Risk cannot be managed in silos nor by the risk management functions alone. They are too widespread and interrelated for those approaches to work. ERM enables leaders and risk managers to integrate risk management across the organization, instill risk awareness and procedures into everyone in the organization, and get to the roots of risk.

## Navigating the heightened risk landscape

It is no exaggeration to say that the risks that colleges and universities now face have never been more numerous or potentially damaging. Demographics, economics, politics, regulations, technologies, and other factors have created a risk landscape that challenges even the most well-funded and seemingly secure institutions. Even these institutions are experiencing challenges, while those at the opposite end of the spectrum are struggling to survive.

Legal, compliance, and risk managers and the leaders and boards they support will likely see little if any, diminishment in risk. The risk drivers are too numerous and deeply rooted for that to occur. This means that those charged with managing risk and supporting the leadership will need to exercise constant vigilance, sound judgment, and deep commitment to their students, faculty, staff, community, and all other stakeholders in the educational mission.

# Continue the conversation

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