

George Mason University

2019 Legislative and Budget Priorities

University Priorities

Financial Aid: Provide Affordable Access for All Students

The Governor and the General Assembly were very supportive of additional financial aid for Mason students during the 2018 legislative session. Even with the recent increase, Mason lags in the necessary funding to address the unmet need goals of the Commonwealth for our students. The challenge is made more difficult when considering that as Mason's enrollments have increased the number of students applying and qualifying for financial aid have increased. Six years ago, Mason had 12,785 students apply for undergraduate financial aid. In 2017-18 that number jumped to 17,653. Because more than 30% of our students are eligible for need-based Pell Grants and 40% are the first in their family to attend college, additional financial aid funding is required to meet the unmet need goal of the Commonwealth. Among the doctoral institutions, Mason receives the least amount of graduate financial aid per student. During the 2019 legislative session, Mason will seek \$1M for undergraduate financial aid.

Compensation: Support Salary Compensation Increases

George Mason University is grateful for the support of the Governor and the General Assembly for additional compensation appropriated for faculty and staff in FY20. Regular salary increases and competitive compensation are critical for Mason to retain and recruit talented faculty and staff. The university continues to address the challenges of being located in one of the highest cost of living regions in the United States. Mason also must continually contend with the large number of nationally ranked universities and private sector research organizations in Maryland and Washington, D.C. who are hiring away our faculty and staff. Mason will work with the Administration and the General Assembly to seek an overall increase of 4% for the FY20 compensation adjustment. An increase of 1% has a \$2.3M impact on the general fund (for faculty and staff). Mason's matching share for every 1% of teaching faculty increase equals \$1.2 million.

Enrollment Growth: Equitable Resources for Past Enrollment Growth

The university has been and continues to be committed to the Commonwealth's higher education goals for enrollment growth, two-year transfers and educational program development to support economic growth. Over the past decade, Mason has been a major contributor to the Commonwealth's growth of in-state enrollment, with undergraduate enrollment growing an additional 32.5% or by 5,260 students. During this period, Mason has shown that growth is compatible with improvements in quality with increases in average SAT scores (1121 to 1218) and high school GPAs (3.48 to 3.70). In addition, Mason continues to welcome the largest transfer student body, from two-year institutions numbering more than 3,000 students per year – representing more than 25% of the total transfer population for the Commonwealth each year. Last year the Governor and General Assembly provided an investment of additional operating funds for Mason to address the enrollment growth funding shortfall. Mason will be seeking an additional \$12M during the 2019 legislative session to bring the per student general fund appropriation more in line with the other doctoral institutions.

Research: Promote Innovation and Job Creation

In 2016, George Mason University was recognized by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as one of the top research universities in the United States producing quality research with broad impact. With significant growth in STEM-intensive research and education programs, our 2014-2024 Strategic Plan describes three STEM-intensive initiatives that promise to drive economic growth and enhance the quality of life for the Virginians we serve. These initiatives include the 2016 launch of the Institute of Biohealth Innovation, now a strategic partner in the Commonwealth-wide Genomics and Bioinformatics Research Institute and an incubator of promising Virginia start-ups like Ceres Nanosciences. In the coming months, the university will launch its Institute for Digital Innovation to continue to drive research and innovation in computing and related fields (including, but by no means limited to, cybersecurity). In the last 15 months alone, Mason faculty working on digital innovation opportunities have won research contracts in excess of \$150 million, with more to come. Additional state funding is required to build on this momentum, enhancing grant competitiveness, the creation of new start-ups, and the transfer of Mason technologies to industries in the Commonwealth. The request will be \$4.75M general fund and \$3.25M non-general fund in the second year. This funding will promote innovation and job creation in Virginia's innovation economy.

Capital Outlay: Improve Telecommunications Network Infrastructure

The 2017 General Assembly authorized planning funds for phase I of the improvement of the telecommunications network infrastructure. George Mason University is at a crossroads as it relates to technology. The need to replace the aging IT infrastructure is critical. Mason also needs to expand the bandwidth available to accommodate the increase of more than 5,000 students in recent years and a projected increase of 7,000 over the next five years – nearly all of whom possess more than one wireless communication device. Inaction at this time will leave the university's information network at risk of failure, which in the 21st century would leave Mason unable to meet its academic mission. Phase I will require \$11.4M.

Partnership Priorities

ADVANCE: Mason and Northern Virginia Community College Partnership

George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) announced a groundbreaking partnership, ADVANCE, that will assist students as they transfer from a two-year program to earn a Bachelor's degree. ADVANCE accepted its first students in the fall of 2018. ADVANCE is a forward-thinking partnership that guides NOVA students through program pathways to degree completion at Mason. The initiative will increase graduation rates and smooth the path to a degree while saving students time and money. It will also work in collaboration with Northern Virginia employers to adapt and create workforce programs to fill the region's critical high-demand positions. The program creates a single point of contact in admissions and financial aid with a dedicated advisor. It creates a seamless alignment of curricula to ensure that students do not lose credits when they transfer. ADVANCE currently offers more than 20 degrees for high demand jobs with a goal to add five academic programs to the partnership every year. The annual state appropriation needed by Mason to support ADVANCE will be approximately \$600,000 in general funds.