

# **George Mason University**

## **2017 Legislative and Budget Priorities**

### **Financial Aid**

George Mason University will work with other universities to secure additional student financial aid. Nearly 60% of Mason students receive some form of financial assistance and 25% of first year students receive Pell Grants. The proportion of financial need met for Mason's full-time, in-state undergraduate students decreased from 67.9% to 50% over the past five years. For full-time, in-state freshmen, the proportion of need met decreased from 76.1% to 57.5% during the same five year period. George Mason University is seeking to preserve and further enhance the funding currently in the budget for the second year of the biennium. This additional funding is critically important for these students from working families in Virginia to succeed in their academic goals and enable them to complete their degrees in a timely manner.

### **Compensation**

Increased compensation for faculty and staff continues to be a top priority. Competitive salaries and benefits for faculty and staff are essential to retain and recruit high-quality personnel. Historical turnover at Mason has increased from 9.5% in FY 09 to 13% in FY 15. During that period, employees citing compensation as the reason for separation in exit interviews increased from 20.3% to 33.6%. Mason's salaries continue to lag behind the majority of public research institutions in the Commonwealth and peer institutions nationwide which is amplified with the high cost of living in Northern Virginia. Mason's personnel challenge is more daunting when competing against the university-rich adjoining jurisdictions of Washington, D.C. and Maryland. Mason will continue to work with the Administration and the General Assembly to ensure competitive benefits. The Commonwealth's general fund share of a one percent salary increase for faculty and staff at Mason is approximately \$1.9M.

### **Enrollment Growth**

George Mason has been committed to the Commonwealth's higher education goals in terms of enrollment growth, two-year college transfers, and academic program development to support economic growth for the state economy. Information provided by SCHEV shows that:

- Mason accounts for more than 16% of all enrollment among the 15 public four-year institutions, and 14% of undergraduate enrollment.
- Mason has been a major contributor to the Commonwealth's growth of in-state enrollment over the last decade with undergraduate enrollment growing from 15,963 in Fall 2005 to 19,797 in Fall 2015, a 24.0% increase (3,834 students).

However, state resources to support Mason's efforts to meet these growth initiatives have not kept pace with actual costs, creating an unsustainable financial outlook and a negative incentive to grow. If we were to view this change from a General Fund per in-state student FTE perspective, Mason's per student allocation is only 74% of the average allocations available to the other public research universities.

Mason remains committed to serving the Commonwealth by providing educational opportunities for its citizens as outlined in both the TJ21 and its Student Success Plan, yet Mason can no longer increase in-state enrollments without remuneration. To do so would compound the current funding disparities and continue an unsustainable financial outlook.

## **Research**

George Mason University continues to be committed to research with more than \$100 million annually from external sources. In January 2016, Mason achieved a major research goal – designation as a Carnegie Research I University. There are 115 universities nationwide with this designation, including the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech and Virginia Commonwealth University. This recognition acknowledges the significant research being conducted and provides additional credibility with competitive research grant opportunities.

In an effort to advance the economic prosperity of the Commonwealth through research and related spin-off companies, Mason entered into a partnership with INOVA Health System in December 2015. In addition, Mason is actively involved with the Commonwealth's recently established Virginia Research Investment Committee which supports the academic research enterprise in Virginia.

Last year, Mason committed to establishing institutes designed to encourage research collaboration, including the Institute for Biomedical Innovation (IBI). During the 2016 legislative session, Mason was appropriated access and affordability funds, from which Mason dedicated \$1.3 million in start-up funding to IBI. Mason will work with the Governor and General Assembly to secure the additional \$2.7 million needed for IBI and identify other sources of revenue to support our research enterprise.

## **Community College Partnership**

The relationship between Mason and Northern Virginia Community College is already nationally recognized as a successful transfer model. Yet there are still too many students taking more community college courses than necessary and taking courses that do not count for credit at four year institutions. We propose the design and launch of a truly seamless relationship between NOVA and Mason that will result in an increase in the number of Mason graduates that begin their college journey at NOVA, reduce the time and cost of attaining a bachelor's degree and produce more graduates in high-demand degrees that meet the needs of the Northern Virginia economy. This next generation collaboration involves more personalized student support, a seamless enrollment and financial aid experience, and eliminate extra coursework not needed for

graduation. In addition, both institutions will jointly design new academic programs that are aligned with employer demand. Programs will be available in both online and in-person. Student services for students will be co-located, physically and virtually, leveraging the resources of both institutions for efficient and effective delivery. Mason will work with Northern Virginia Community College to seek an additional funding to enhance the current transfer services.

### **Veteran Initiatives**

The Metropolitan D.C. and Northern Virginia region is home to one of the largest veteran populations in the nation – men and women striving to live productive lives following their service, to provide for their families, and many seeking a college education to achieve their goals. Currently, more than 3,200 individuals, nearly 10% of George Mason University's student body, are veterans, active duty members or dependents. Mason has been repeatedly recognized as one of the most veteran friendly universities in the nation. As such, Mason has a distinct opportunity to further serve our nation's veterans. Mason will seek opportunities to secure funding to enhance our academic programming and career service support of our veterans.

### **Capital Outlay**

George Mason University continues to grow with the student population reaching 35,000 for the 2016-17 academic year. The need for modernized academic space and replacement of aging infrastructure continues to be a priority. Planning funds for Robinson Hall were approved in 2015. Construction funding for Robinson Hall and Utility Infrastructure replacement was approved in 2016. Mason will continue to work with decision-makers to ensure that allocation of those funds stays consistent with our proposed construction timeline.

In the next phase of critically needed improvements is a university wide Telecom Network Infrastructure project. This project has been authorized for planning funds. It replaces and expands the university's information network infrastructure, including fiber optic pathways, telecommunications rooms, wifi equipment and data network equipment. The project represents the first phase of a ten-year plan that will increase network survivability. The first phase will remove critical single point failure nodes throughout the network and correct deficiencies in equipment rooms across campus. Inaction at this time will leave the university's information network at the risk of failure which in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century would leave Mason unable to meet its academic mission.