

**George Mason University Vision  
Summary Report  
March 5, 2013**

**Steering Committee Members**

Sarah Nutter, Chair  
*Presidential Fellow/Professor, School of  
Management*

Kenneth Ball, Member  
*Dean, Volgenau School of Engineering*

Deborah Boehm-Davis, Member  
*Associate Dean, College of Humanities and  
Social Sciences*

Joey Carls, Member  
*Assistant Director, Krasnow Institute for  
Advanced Study/Chair, Staff Senate*

Corey Jackson, Member  
*Vice President, Compliance, Diversity and Ethics*

Michelle Marks, Member  
*Vice Provost, Academic Affairs*

June Tangney, Member  
*University Professor, Psychology, College of  
Humanities and Social Sciences/Chair, Faculty  
Senate*

Alexander Williams, Member  
*Student Body President/Class of 2013*

**Ex-Officio Members**

Ángel Cabrera  
*President*

Peter Stearns,  
*Provost & Executive Vice President, Academic  
Affairs*

**Working Group Chairs**

Deborah Boehm-Davis, Program  
Innovation and Growth  
*Associate Dean, College of Humanities and  
Social Sciences*

Marc Broderick, Funding and Resources  
*Vice President, University Development and  
Alumni Affairs*

Vikas Chandhoke, Research  
*Dean, College of Science*

Roy Hinton, Online and Executive  
Education  
*Associate Dean, Executive Programs, School of  
Management*

Peter Mandeville, Global Strategies  
*Director, Ali Vural Ak Center for Islamic  
Studies/Associate Professor, Public and  
International Affairs, College of Humanities and  
Social Sciences*

Michelle Marks, Regional Strategy  
*Vice Provost, Academic Affairs*

Peter Pober, Mission, Values and the Mason  
Graduate  
*Professor, Communications, College of Humanities  
and Social Sciences/Director, Forensics Team*

Wayne Sigler, Student Value and  
Affordability  
*Vice President, Enrollment Management*

## Executive Summary

Since its birth less than a half-century ago, George Mason University has grown impressively in size, stature and influence. Now a standard-setter among modern public universities, Mason's reach is both deep and broad, extending from Virginia, as the Commonwealth's largest public university; throughout the United States, where its location near Washington, D.C., affords unique types of audiences, resources and opportunities; and around the world, through its groundbreaking research on complex global problems and an expanding international student body.

True to its motto, Mason anchors its work in the two mutually interdependent concepts of "Freedom and Learning," epitomized by the historical contributions of its namesake to modern democracy. To be truly free, we can never stop learning. And to learn and grow, we need to be free to be who we are, to express ourselves, to be exposed to a multitude of ideas. This conviction is at the heart of a Mason education.

From the outset, Mason has not been content to coast or merely follow. Instead, it has crafted a new path; it has embraced new ideas and remained adaptable to the evolving needs of its community. A spirit of innovation and acceptance of wide-ranging viewpoints and cultures are ingrained in our community. In view of today's complex global challenges and mind-boggling pace of change, George Mason University is in a unique position to capitalize on its strengths and make an even greater impact — producing the very kind of leaders, professionals, scholars and solutions that our world needs.

As we chart our future course, we have asked the following question: How can George Mason University become not necessarily the best university *in* the world, but the best university *for* the world? That is, what can Mason do — or do better — to produce the types of graduates, scholarship and service-oriented action that will best serve society? This question has framed six months of initial work on a bold and far-reaching strategic planning process. After extensive community-wide discussion and input from all parts of the Mason family, this initial work has resulted in a new vision to inspire us going forward. Building on our core identity and prior successes, we begin by defining this public, comprehensive, research university established by the Commonwealth of Virginia in the National Capital Region as *an innovative and inclusive academic community committed to creating a more just, free and prosperous world.*

The university's primary responsibility is to advance society through education, research and engagement with others. To accomplish this, we must reaffirm certain core values, several of which are at the heart of American democracy and human rights, and clarify their meaning in a contemporary context. In keeping with these values, Mason must continue to welcome students from all backgrounds, and ensure they leave with the cultural fluency they need to thrive in a globalized society. While Mason graduates will always be encouraged to write their own stories, the distinction that is afforded by a Mason experience means we want all our graduates to share a few key characteristics: we wish them to be *engaged citizens*, *well-rounded scholars*, and *prepared to act*. Finally, to channel our focus, energies and resources in the years ahead, Mason must explore and pursue new directions and ideas — not abandoning but rather building on its past. Seven concrete commitments to action will inform these next steps and are found on the pages that follow.

These past six months of conversation have reinvigorated our community and confirmed our belief that George Mason University's greatest days lie ahead. The details that follow provide a launching pad for propelling us into this bright future.

## 1. Introduction

George Mason University has reached a critical juncture in its history. A convergence of internal and external factors has created a pivotal moment that is ripe with opportunity as well as challenges. We as a university embrace this moment and are committed to pursuing a boldly inspiring yet well-thought-out path for Mason in order to reach the next level of excellence and worldwide impact, as well as preserve its strengths for generations to come.

Recognizing that time is of the essence, on August 17, 2012, the Board of Visitors adopted a resolution charging President Cabrera with the creation of a new strategic vision for George Mason in collaboration with the university community and key internal and external stakeholders. Based on input provided at the president's annual planning conference, and with the Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011 (the "Top Jobs Act") as a point of departure, the president launched an inclusive community-wide process with the goal of bringing a new vision to the Board of Visitors for approval at its March 20, 2013 meeting. The new Mason Vision and the supporting materials developed through this process provide the foundation for our next strategic plan and our new comprehensive capital campaign.

## 2. Process and Summary of Results

Throughout the fall 2012 semester, eight working groups, which included broad representation from the university community, gathered input from a variety of sources, including external and internal reports, and from the Mason community at large. The working groups focused on issues that were identified during a retreat with the Board of Visitors in August of 2012: Mission, Values, and the Mason Graduate; Student Value and Affordability; Research; Program Innovation and Growth; Online and Executive Education; Regional Strategy; Global Strategy; and Funding and Resources.

More than 3,500 individuals have offered their input to this process in some way or another. The working groups translated the input into a thoughtful analysis and proposed a set of "big ideas." A steering committee then integrated all of this input into a set of concepts that seeks to be realistic but aspirational, concrete but inspirational.

Our new vision recognizes Mason's strengths and positions it for the future. We summarize this vision as the Mason Idea, a conception of a university that is innovative, diverse, entrepreneurial and accessible. This university strives to deliver value to our students and our community; is devoted to finding solutions to the world's greatest challenges; and defines its ultimate mission as promoting a more just, free and prosperous world as educators and scholars. In short, the Mason Idea is that we should be a university that does not try to be the best in the world, but the best *for* the world.

In the process of crafting our new vision, we have written a concise mission statement that connects us with our historic motto, "Freedom and Learning," and highlights our shared purpose as an academic institution. We have articulated a set of core values that should serve as guiding principles for all members of our community. We have profiled the attributes we wish all of our graduates to share ("The Mason Graduate"). Lastly, we have laid out a set of overarching commitments to action for the next decade.

And although the work to craft this vision has been real and substantive, we know this is only the beginning. The real work begins now.

### **3. External Factors and Context**

In undertaking such a sweeping endeavor, we recognize the importance of the larger national and global context — aspects of which unavoidably influence, and in some cases drive, our decision making and priority setting.

In recent years, higher education has emerged as a front-burner issue in America. Even as the economy is demanding more college graduates, and the college wage premium is rising, the proportion of young Americans who complete a college degree has leveled off. Because of pressures from a variety of directions, higher education now faces a dramatic crossroads that promises to reshape our landscape for decades to come. George Mason University will take this broader context very seriously as it maps its future.

Increasing costs and declining state support have created intense *financial pressure* on public universities. These pressures have caused tuition to rise at a time when family incomes have stagnated, thus bringing student indebtedness to troubling and unprecedented levels. Fiscal imbalances at the federal level have also resulted in reduced availability of funds for research, thereby forcing universities to explore other research funding avenues. All of these strains have, in turn, caused many Americans to view college as unaffordable — and even question its value.

Simultaneously, revolutionizing *technological and social changes* are presenting an immediate challenge to traditional models of higher education. The options enabled by new technologies have resulted in the emergence of new for-profit and nonprofit models, which offer alternatives to existing universities that have long relied on more traditional learning formats. Technological advances have also resulted in an explosion of free content and courses and have changed the very manner in which knowledge is created and shared. The creation and distribution of content is no longer the exclusive domain of universities, and even the distinction between student and teacher has, in some cases, blurred. These trends are raising new questions about the core capabilities of universities and how those capabilities create value for a new generation of students facing an unprecedented array of options.

Globalization has also reached higher education. American universities are facing increasing competition from universities of growing quality not only in developed countries but in the developing world as well. Among the top 200 research universities in the world according to the Jiao Tong rankings (a group that includes George Mason University), 115 are outside the United States. In the field of business administration, where rankings abound, 51 of the top 100 schools on the 2013 Financial Times ranking are outside the U.S., and for the first time, 12 of them are in Asia (of which 6 are in China).

Yet, amid questions about the value of college and the painful reality of increasing tuition and student debt, the demand for a college-educated workforce has never been greater and the wealth gap between those with and without a college degree is growing, not shrinking. And in spite of the increasing competition of online programs and international universities, we have continued to experience growth in applications from both domestic and international students.

In Virginia, the passage of the Higher Opportunity Act of 2011 (also known as the Top Jobs Act), underlined the role higher education is expected to play as a driver of the Commonwealth's competitiveness. Institutions of higher education are asked to grow the number of graduates—especially in high-demand areas such as STEM-H fields, to focus on the employability of graduates, to leverage new technologies, and to increase resource efficiency, college access and affordability. At the federal level, President Obama has also drawn attention to college access and affordability and has announced measures to increase transparency and affordability.

### George Mason's Advantages and Challenges

Though challenging, the surrounding environment highlights George Mason's institutional strengths and offers exciting possibilities for the future. As a comparatively low-cost, low-tuition, high-value, structurally efficient institution, the university is well positioned to benefit from some of these national trends rather than falling victims to them. And where we do need to shift our methods, style, or focus, Mason's innovative, diverse and entrepreneurial culture will work in its favor. Multidisciplinary collaboration and partnerships with organizations with complementary capabilities are part of our way of life and have proven to be effective sources of innovation.

In terms of value and appeal, George Mason's size and proximity to the nation's capital also give it a significant advantage. Mason has a rich array of resources at its fingertips, from world-class faculty and researchers to expertise from the elite ranks of government and business. Its location also gives it an edge in recruiting out-of-state students and connects our students with professional opportunities in government, business and nonprofit organizations in and around the Washington metropolitan area. Our multiple campuses throughout Northern Virginia allow us to engage with multiple partners and communities, and provide us with sufficient real estate to accommodate future growth.

Although Mason possesses distinct advantages and has been quite successful in weathering change, the university has not been immune to the pressures building in the industry. Financially, the University has a modest endowment; and the impressive development of facilities across its multiple locations has been carried out with minimal private support and has created a significant debt burden. Financial pressures have taken a toll in salary competitiveness for faculty, graduate research assistants and some professional areas. We are thinly staffed in some important areas. Public perception of the University among some constituencies may not match the level of excellence achieved by the University. And, while our location remains a key advantage, it also makes us more sensitive to reductions in federal budgets, given the strong dependency of the region's economy on government contracting.

Overall, we believe our unique characteristics, our location and our culture, position us to turn a challenging and rapidly changing environment into an opportunity to build a new model of excellence in higher education. We are committed to leveraging Mason's institutional youth and innovative culture to lead the way in finding creative solutions to today's higher education challenges. The can-do spirit that has been the source of much of Mason's success to date will continue to be our greatest asset going forward.

#### **4. Motto, Mason Idea, Mission, Values, and the Mason Graduate**

The *Mission, Values, and Mason Graduate* working group was specifically charged with identifying concepts that should be captured by our mission statement, our core values, and the signature characteristics of a Mason Graduate. Together with a university-wide leadership initiative known as MasonLeads, the group gathered input from more than 2,600 members of the Mason community. The work of other working groups also provided input and supportive materials that were used in developing these components of the Mason Vision.

In addition, the input gathered informed the reaffirmation of “Freedom and Learning,” foundational concepts that are incorporated into the Mason seal and are the University’s official motto. The process also reinforced and expanded on ideas that have served us well in the past and will continue to serve us well in the future: the Mason Idea. The Mason Idea is that George Mason University at its core is innovative, diverse, entrepreneurial and accessible. This description of our unique institutional strengths reminds us that we are committed to be a university *for* the world, drawn together to work across cultures, bringing new perspectives and solutions to the world’s most pressing problems and teaching our students to do the same.

##### **4.1 Our Motto**

Our motto, “Freedom and Learning,” connects our mission with the work of George Mason’s namesake, an American patriot and father of the Bill of Rights. Our motto reminds us that freedom and learning are interdependent. One cannot happen without the other. In order to be free — free to be who we are and who we want to become, free to act for positive change — we can never stop learning. In order to learn, we need to be free. As an academic community, we are committed to advancing both.

##### **4.2. Our Idea**

As we pondered how we could best serve our mission, we asked ourselves one basic question — namely, how do we become, not the best university *in* the world, but the best university *for* the world? In other words, what kind of university must we be to best respond to the evolving needs of our students, state, nation and world? What kind of university should we become to provide better education to more people throughout their lives, to help our community thrive, and to help find solutions to the world’s greatest challenges?

In answer to this question, an idea emerged — we call it the Mason Idea.

The Mason Idea rests on a solid foundation and resonates with our past, but it also provides a compelling picture of our future. It represents our unique institutional characteristics — some of the words are ones we have heard before, but their meanings continue to be articulated, reframed, enriched to capture the strength of who we are.

## The Mason Idea

- Innovative** = *We question current thinking and try new ideas. We honor time-tested academic principles while striving to create new forms of education that serve our students better and new paths of research that can uncover solutions to the world's greatest challenges.*
- Diverse** = *We bring together a multitude of people and ideas in everything we do. Our culture of inclusion, multidisciplinary approach and global perspective make us more effective educators and scholars.*
- Entrepreneurial** = *We put ideas into action. We educate students to create as well as carry out jobs; become agents of positive change; and add value through government or business, for-profit or nonprofit organizations, academia or the arts. We pursue discoveries that can make a difference in the world. We help our community thrive socially, economically, environmentally and culturally.*
- Accessible** = *We are an open and welcoming community. We partner with public and private organizations in our region and around the world. We proactively engage with our community. We define our success by how many talented students we serve, not by how many we leave out.*

### 4.3 Our Mission

We wanted a mission statement that tells *who* we are, *what* we do, and *why* we do what we do. Our goal was to produce a concise, memorable and meaningful statement that would describe the type of institution that we are and the purpose of our work. The result was derived from central ideas emanating from the various working groups.

The preamble to the mission statement describes our legal status as a public, comprehensive, research university established by the Commonwealth of Virginia in the National Capital Region. The mission statement then describes the identity we have developed as an academic institution as well as the purpose of our work.

#### Mission

*A public, comprehensive, research university  
established by the Commonwealth of Virginia in the National Capital Region,*

**we are an innovative and inclusive academic community committed to  
creating a more just, free and prosperous world.**

The notions of innovation and inclusion are the strongest ideas that have surfaced throughout this vision process. They are the concepts we use most often to describe the type of academic community that we are, and they are the strongest source of collective pride and shared values in our community.

The concepts of justice, freedom and prosperity link our mission to our motto and capture how our multiple disciplines contribute to making a positive difference in the world. They emphasize our responsibility to advance the society of which we are a part through education, research and service. And they explicitly affirm our commitment to human rights and liberties that are central to American democracy.

#### **4.4. Our Values**

Our core values capture the guiding principles for how we work with each other and how we make decisions when we are at our best. They are the foundation of the type of community we want to build together. These seven values are listed and explained below.

**Our students come first.**

*Our top priority is to provide students with a transformational learning experience that helps them grow as individuals, scholars and professionals.*

**Diversity is our strength.**

*We include and embrace a multitude of people and ideas in everything we do and respect differences.*

**Innovation is our tradition.**

*We strive to find new and better ways to deliver on our mission while honoring time-tested academic values.*

**We honor freedom of thought and expression.**

*We protect the freedom of all members of our community to seek truth and express their views.*

**We are careful stewards.**

*We manage the economic and natural resources entrusted to us responsibly and sustainably.*

**We act with integrity.**

*We hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards as educators, scholars, students and professionals.*

**We thrive together.**

*We nurture a positive and collaborative community that contributes to the well-being and success of every member.*

## 4.5 Our Graduates

The vision work on the signature characteristics of the Mason Graduate built on prior work done during the 2011–2012 academic year by a team of faculty and staff. Using this earlier work as a foundation, the Mission, Values and the Mason Graduate working group gathered information that led to the identification of three characteristics that we hope all our graduates will possess.

### **The Mason Graduate is...**

#### **...an engaged citizen:**

- ethically oriented and committed to democratic ideals
- respectful of individual differences, rights and liberties
- knowledgeable of important issues affecting the world
- focused on the well-being of others, today and tomorrow
- committed to building a just society

#### **...a well-rounded scholar:**

- thinks critically and creatively and demonstrates professional competence
- possesses an inquisitive nature
- appreciates science, humanities and the arts
- skilled as a communicator
- committed to lifelong learning

#### **...prepared to act:**

- innovative, resourceful and entrepreneurial; ready to do or create a job
- interested and practiced in working with individuals from other cultures, backgrounds and perspectives
- equipped to make positive and meaningful changes in society

## 5. Our Commitments

From the work of the eight working groups, consistent themes emerged. These themes have been synthesized into a set of specific commitments — calls to action that inform our next steps and lay the foundation for the important work ahead. These commitments will drive our attention, innovation and investments over the next decade. They identify our strategic intent for advancing the work of our academic units, provide direction and organization for the priorities of our next comprehensive campaign, emphasize investing for a sound future, and highlight both the need and avenues to secure partnerships with public and private organizations. Our new commitments do not abandon our past, but instead build on that strong foundation as we plot our future course.

Our commitments are described in detail below: (1) innovative learning, (2) research of consequence, (3) economic and cultural engine, (4) engagement with the world, (5) sound investment, (6) enriching work environment, and (7) foundation for the future.

## 5.1 Innovative Learning

*We will apply new and emerging learning technologies, environments and methods to improve learning effectiveness and student completion, and to better serve the evolving needs of students, working professionals, and public, private and nonprofit organizations*

Our commitment to innovation as articulated in our mission and values must manifest itself first and foremost in how we deliver on our promise of a transformational learning experience for our students. New learning paradigms and advances in learning technologies and data analytics have the potential to improve learning effectiveness and degree attainment. They also provide new delivery avenues to serve the distinct and changing needs of different student populations and working professionals

To be clear, not all innovations in education must or will be enabled by technology. At Mason, students actively engage in the process of generating, communicating and sharing knowledge or creative works. We are committed to continuing curricular innovations that will boost student participation in and community-wide celebration of original scholarship. As more students take part in this process, they will see the impact of their work locally and globally, obtain vital skills for finding employment in their chosen fields or gaining admission into top graduate programs, and become more personally invested in their individual disciplines and their educations as a whole. These innovations will have a positive impact in retention and attainment for students and will also help recruit and retain faculty members interested in connecting with students in a more integrated, high-impact educational model.

But technology, most notably the Internet, offers exciting possibilities to shape education in ways that were unthinkable a mere decade ago. Most of next year freshmen were born at around the time of the first Web browser. They simply don't know a world without the immediate, personalized, universal access to information afforded by the Internet. They have grown up in the digital age and expect an education that is personalized, flexible, interactive, engaging, and collaborative. Older adults are not far behind. Enrollments in online education have seen explosive growth over the past decade driven to a great extent by working adults whose lives are incompatible with the demands of a traditional, residential college experience. According to a recent survey from Learninghouse<sup>1</sup>, 68% of online students cited the ability to balance work, family and school responsibilities as a reason to enroll in an online program, and 64% cited the ability to study anytime and anywhere. As a modern university committed to serving the evolving needs of our students, we have an obligation to experiment with new models of technology-enabled delivery. Many of these initiatives depend not only on new technologies, but on major advances in learning research and classroom design.

Several emerging technologies, from cloud computing to big data, to open source software and content development, smartphones, or game-based learning are opening new avenues to personalize learning, deliver content, facilitate collaboration and assess outcomes. Both private and public equity markets are fueling innovation via supporting commercial enterprises or even accredited

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.learninghouse.com/resources/whitepapers/research-study>

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, a state authority, has an international trade team with offices in Japan, China, India and Europe that is dedicated to identifying export opportunities for Virginia businesses while attracting new foreign investment in the Commonwealth.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Kirschner. "Innovations in Higher Education? Hah!" Chronicle of Higher Education (April 8, 2012), <http://chronicle.com/article/Innovations-in-Higher/131424>.

<sup>4</sup> The time needed to complete a bachelor's degree has increased by one-third of a year, and the proportion of

providers. And existing and new institutions are deploying new learning models from “flipped classrooms” to competency-based instruction.

George Mason University is well positioned to be a leader in this new scenario. Examples of innovative learning—technology mediated and not—permeate our various colleges and schools and our various support units have developed unique capabilities in educational technology and faculty support. Several of our faculty members have led breakthrough innovations and have been early adopters of various online technologies. We are already well-versed in the changing student demographics and demands, with proven experience serving a large number of nontraditional students, including older learners, students with prior careers, working adults, and transfer, international and commuter students. Finally, our location in the heart of the IT-intense industry in Northern Virginia, provides us with privileged access to many of the entrepreneurs who are contributing to reshaping the education landscape.

Examples of strategic initiatives suggested during the visioning process include the following:

- Develop a competitive portfolio of online undergraduate and graduate degrees in high-demand areas, including new online solutions for degree completion
- Integrate a professional and executive education unit to offer tailored, multidisciplinary programs to companies and government entities
- Develop big-data strategies to support decision-making and improve student retention and degree completion.
- Extend initiatives in undergraduate research
- Develop additional tutorial programs to increase success rates in core classes, while expanding student-faculty interactions outside the classroom

## 5.2 Research of Consequence

*We will expand research as a central element of our mission; we will translate our discoveries into interventions and applications with social, cultural, and economic impact*

Innovations by research universities in knowledge production and use have a significant impact on society-wide advancements and growth. Scholarship produces new insights that can be applied to important and pressing problems that lead to social, cultural and economic improvements. Research helps attract and retain some of the brightest and most able faculty and students, and it contributes directly to high-quality learning, through direct student opportunities for collaboration and the excitement that work on the frontiers of existing knowledge adds to the teaching process.

Programs and research initiatives in a variety of fields are establishing Mason as an educational and industry leader. In the next decade, George Mason has the opportunity to become a top-tier research university, filling an existing void for such an institution in Northern Virginia.

Our current strengths in research position us to achieve that goal. Among our many achievements, George Mason University has produced two Nobel laureates and numerous prestigious faculty awards. The influential Jiao Tong rankings list us as one of the top 200 research universities in the world. We receive about \$100M annually in research grants. Many of our faculty members are regularly quoted by the national and international press and many are advisors to private, public and

international organizations. In addition to our doctoral students, undergraduate students regularly engage in scholarly work with our faculty as well.

We view research as a central component of our mission, of how we create value for society, and we are committed to expanding the amount, the quality and the impact of the research we conduct in line with the expectations of a top-tier research university.

Mason has a strong record in interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and its research programs reflect its diversity and creativity as an institution. These attributes will enable Mason to adapt to and compete in a rapidly changing world, in which significant research areas have become increasingly unpredictable more than a few years out.

Our commitment to growing our research activity applies to all our academic disciplines; yet there is one type of research for which we are particularly well positioned to become a reference, and that is *translational research*. Translational research helps convert basic science into applications that enhance human life whether through new commercial products, public policy, or improved social dynamics. We believe we are uniquely suited to deliver excellence in this type of research because of our existing strengths and our location. We have a proven record in areas ranging from criminology to personalized proteomic medicine, from public health to transnational crime, from humanities to science and engineering. And our proximity to key federal agencies, policy-making and regulatory bodies, businesses, think tanks and nonprofit organizations facilitates the establishment of partnerships that are critical for effective translational research.

In considering its research directions and investments, Mason must remain attuned to external obstacles, particularly related to the changing funding landscape. Fiscal imbalances have reduced the availability of federal funds for research. This situation will most likely force us to explore new funding avenues, including partnerships with the private sector as well as more aggressive efforts to monetize inventions, through business incubation and commercialization of intellectual property. George Mason's own strength in translational research coupled with our location at the intersection of business, government and nonprofit organizations in the National Capital Region gives us some natural advantages in navigating this changing landscape.

Examples of strategic initiatives suggested during the visioning process include the following:

- Develop existing capabilities in technology transfer and intellectual property management
- Leverage location to develop additional research partnerships with federal agencies and government contractors
- Improve support for highly talented graduate students
- Create an ideas laboratory, space for incubating business and social enterprises
- Identify existing and potential centers of excellence that provide interdisciplinary clusters addressing significant social and intellectual issues

### 5.3 Economic and cultural engine

*We will act as a catalyst for the economic and cultural vibrancy of our region, as a growing source of talent in high-demand disciplines, as an incubator of business and social enterprises, as a hub of life-long learning, arts and athletics, and as a research and learning partner for public, private and nonprofit organizations*

Mason has played a key role in making Northern Virginia what it is today. From the outset, key business leaders helped steer the University strategically and provided financial and political support. The University in turn delivered the educated workforce the region demanded, to the point of becoming the largest among public universities in Virginia. Very importantly, the University helped create a vibrant community, through its cultural, life-long learning and athletic programs, and as a convener of important events.

The relationship between George Mason University and its community has been and will continue to be symbiotic. We are committed to creating even more value, by acting as a catalyst to help our region be one of the most vibrant in the Nation—economically as well as culturally—and one of the most livable and sustainable.

We have an opportunity to shape the future of the National Capital Region by acting as a convener, connector and intellectual driver. Helpfully informing and contributing to the aspirations and needs of our local partners will depend on becoming a fully integrated, strategic asset to the region. We must offer our expertise on challenges facing both the public and private sectors and serve as a bridge between those sectors. To accomplish all of this, we will need a targeted strategy that closely aligns our investments for the future with the specific strengths, needs and opportunities of each of the communities we serve.

Our commitment to engaging with and enriching our community is rooted in our understanding of our mission as a public university as well as our assessment of our unique strengths. We are the largest public university in Virginia and one of two large public universities in the National Capital Region. We are the top degree producer and second-largest STEM-degree producer in Virginia. Our multiple campuses across Northern Virginia facilitate our engagement with communities across the region and allow us to build partnerships with institutions as varied as Northern Virginia Community College, the Smithsonian, Georgetown University, K-12 school systems and a myriad of local organizations.

Our most important contribution to the health of our region will continue to be the education of the talented workforce our region needs. Industry leaders predict that the next 20 years will see critical regional labor shortages in science, math, business and management, education, art and entertainment, and healthcare jobs, and we have the ability to grow our programs and produce high-performing graduates in these fields. Virginia's General Assembly has made college attainment a priority and Governor McDonnell has called for the Commonwealth to award 100,000 more degrees over the next 15 years. President Obama, too, has called for a National effort to once again bring America's degree attainment figures to the top of the international charts. Mason is committed to contributing to these important goals for Virginia and the Nation.

Our contributions to the economic vitality of our region will require additional efforts in support of entrepreneurship. Mason has developed significant strength in this area across multiple academic

colleges and fields: from business plan competitions in the School of Management, to various research initiatives in the School of Public Policy, to the services provided by the Mason Enterprise Center's network of incubators and small business development centers across Virginia. And it is also active in the increasingly important field of social entrepreneurship, through a dedicated center that helps identify, inspire and educate future social changemakers. Current shifts in the economic landscape of our region will make entrepreneurship and business creation a top priority. We are committed to becoming a key instrument in helping the National Capital Region become one of the most entrepreneurial hubs in the world.

Mason's large sports and arts facilities bring thousands to the campus annually, contributing to the cultural and social vibrancy of the region. The University's athletic program includes 22 NCAA Division I varsity sports. The programs have provided educational opportunities to hundreds of student athletes over the years and have played a key role in attracting the community's attention and galvanizing their support. The successful run of the Men's basketball team to the 2006 NCAA Final Four still resonates among alumni and friends and helped propel Mason's brand across the nation. We are committed to further increasing the academic and athletic competitiveness of our programs and strengthening their linkages with our community.

The Center for the Arts in Fairfax and the Hylton Center in Prince William have become epicenters of the cultural life of our region. By integrating the professional programming of those facilities with our academic mission and the engagement with our community, our programs have contributed significantly to enriching our community and earning its support. We reaffirm our commitment to playing an even larger role in this regard in the future.

Our life-long learning programs in Fairfax, Arlington, Prince William and Loudoun counties have contributed to enriching the lives of many in our community. And our continuing education programs serve hundreds of professionals every year. As we look forward, we want to become an even more active player; a partner to organizations around us and across the Nation, that can help develop human talent and find innovative solutions through our research capabilities.

Examples of strategic initiatives suggested during the visioning process include the following:

- Focused program growth in fields that serve the region, resulting in more four-year-, graduate- and professional-degree graduates in high-demand occupations
- Serve as a catalyst and key convener to enable regional economic development initiatives and work with local economic development agencies on regional campus strategies
- Establish entrepreneurship as a "top three" mission for the university by creating an "Institute for Entrepreneurship"
- Expand arts outreach to wider community audiences and practitioners
- Create a university-wide unit for executive and professional education
- Establish flexible programs to facilitate lifelong learning both in career fields and in enhancement areas such as the arts and humanities or social entrepreneurship

## 5.4 Engagement with the world

*We will prepare our students to thrive in a global context by infusing global awareness, citizenship values and learning opportunities across all fields; and we will partner with other organizations in solving global problems where our impact will be highest.*

The distinctive features of today's globalized world represent both opportunities and risks for American colleges and universities. The breadth and flexibility of higher education means that universities can take on new roles and have significant impact across a wide range of sectors beyond the traditional core mission of undergraduate education.

With worldwide demand for tertiary and professional education at an all-time high, and the United States still viewed as the gold standard in higher education, there are enormous untapped student markets. But emerging economies such as Brazil, China, India and South Korea have already begun to position themselves as world leaders in science, engineering and technology to meet the new demand. The well-documented phenomenon of outsourcing and its progressive shift from low-skill to high value-add tasks is testament to the fact that the United States and other advanced industrial economies are no longer the sole centers of knowledge-intensive and highly skilled labor, especially in sectors such as biotechnology and software development.

Our students today will be graduating into a world interconnected through commerce, fast travel and immediate communication. All sectors are being affected by this new reality and are increasingly demanding individuals who are not only professionally capable but who can interact productively with other individuals and organizations from different national, political and cultural backgrounds. Having the ability to think and act globally is becoming a must. We must therefore prepare our students to be global citizens who are competitive in increasingly globalized labor markets and to be sensitive to the needs and challenges of communities around the world.

By virtue of its close association with federal government agencies and the national defense industry, the Commonwealth already enjoys a high level of worldwide exposure and interconnectedness. Moreover, Virginia is a major player in the IT and engineering sectors and highly attractive to many global companies. Indeed, governors of Virginia past and present have recognized the power of globalization and worked to make the Commonwealth a worldwide player.<sup>2</sup>

Globalization is bringing about opportunity for millions of people. But it is also creating complex problems that we have not faced before. The same interconnectedness that facilitates commerce and diffusion of innovation also facilitates transnational crime, terrorism and diffusion of infectious diseases. Problems of malnutrition, sanitation, clean water, economic opportunity and climate change are no longer domestic but global. And their solutions will require a global approach.

If Mason aspires to become the best “university for the world,” we must seriously commit to establishing new and strengthening existing partnerships and collaborations that traverse national boundaries. Identifying and implementing an appropriate global strategy will be crucial to our success in this arena. Such a strategy should be comprehensive, offering our best expertise and

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, a state authority, has an international trade team with offices in Japan, China, India and Europe that is dedicated to identifying export opportunities for Virginia businesses while attracting new foreign investment in the Commonwealth.

services to the world while simultaneously working to bring the best of the world to Virginia.

Mason has a strong foundation on which to build. We have a highly diverse, globally engaged student body and extensive global programming already in place. Our faculty, in fields ranging from public health to conflict analysis, routinely engage in research networks and partnerships around the world. Our location is ideal, and has already fostered significant community engagement. International airports, embassies and global organizations are at our doorstep. And we are bold, with a flexible and entrepreneurial culture that allows us to consider opportunities other institutions might pass up.

Examples of strategic initiatives suggested during the visioning process include the following:

- Focus global engagement efforts on emerging nations and global mega-cities
- Expand recruitment of and interaction with international students
- Position ourselves as a preeminent global convener
- Invest in global-problem solving where our likelihood of impact is highest
- Apply clear and consistent criteria in assessing the strategic value of global opportunities
- Develop organizational structures and support services that reflect best practices for enabling global success
- Foster global citizenship values in all our teaching and throughout the Mason community
- Improve opportunities and services for study abroad
- Collaborate with global partners who share our commitment to improved global understanding

## 5.5 Sound investment

*We will be a valuable investment for our students, taxpayers and donors by focusing on outcomes, operational efficiency and affordability. Specifically, we will:*

- *Expand the number of graduates, the career prospects for our graduates, the impact of our research, and the value we provide to our community*
- *Be sensitive to trends in household income in making decisions about tuition and financial aid*

Universities across the nation and Commonwealth are facing expected decreases in federal funding, continued constraints in state funding, restraints on tuition increases, and spreading concern about college affordability. In this era of shifting priorities, institutions of higher education are under increased pressure to teach more and increasingly diverse people, deliver better outcomes and reduce costs. They are also under pressure to demonstrate the benefit they provide to those supporting them, including federal and state entities.

As a public institution, we are committed to delivering value to all who invest in us, namely our students and their families, taxpayers, donors and partners. We will do that by strategically focusing on the outcomes that matter the most to each stakeholder, while remaining efficient and affordable.

The demands on universities could not be higher. Even with the shifts and reductions in state and federal funding, state institutions are being expected to produce more skilled, talented and employable citizens. In Virginia, the Governor's Commission on Higher Education Reform,

Innovation and Investment is calling for 100,000 more degrees, improved retention and graduation rates, and additional graduates in STEM and other high-demand fields. In addition, economic forecasts indicate a looming labor shortage, creating a significant need for highly educated workers to fill new and replacement jobs in our region and nation over the next 20 years.

Once No. 1 in college degrees held by individuals aged 25–34, the United States is now 12th of 36 developed nations.<sup>3</sup> Although enrollment rates are growing, graduation rates have slowed, with students either not completing their degrees or not completing them in a timely manner. Named by President Obama in his 2012 State of the Union Address as the economic issue of our time, college degree completion — once something taken for granted — is now a problem for many U.S. universities and colleges.<sup>4</sup>

Other negative indicators for college graduates are high unemployment rates among recent graduates and large debt levels among college graduates. Not surprisingly, many Americans are questioning the value of a college degree. A recent special issue of *Time* magazine reported that 80 percent of the general U.S. population believes that “at many colleges, the education students receive is not worth what they pay for it.”<sup>5</sup>

Mason has several advantages in meeting these challenges. One of the very best values in Virginia higher education, we are already a low-cost, low-price institution compared with other Virginia universities or similar public and private universities nationally. A 2010 analysis by Virginia’s House Appropriations Committee identified George Mason University among the best performers in the nation in terms of low per-student cost and high production of degrees. And a 2012 survey by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia found that Mason graduates had earnings well above the state average and above the average of peer institutions in all degree categories.

In addition, our interdisciplinary approach to programs and research allows us to connect theory to practice, make valuable real-world impacts, and bridge student experiences on campus with their communities and world. A Mason degree is considered a good value — and thus a worthy investment — by those who have it, based largely on the quality of the educational experience and graduates’ enhanced jobs prospects and higher earnings potential. We are committed to student retention, engagement and success, and will be deliberate in creating programming to support students’ needs as they work toward graduation.

Because these are systemic problems requiring systemic solutions, our culture of collaboration and partnership will be critical going forward. Mason and the Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) have one of the Nation’s closest and most productive relationships between a university

---

<sup>3</sup> Ann Kirschner. “Innovations in Higher Education? Hah!” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 8, 2012), <http://chronicle.com/article/Innovations-in-Higher/131424>.

<sup>4</sup> The time needed to complete a bachelor’s degree has increased by one-third of a year, and the proportion of completers fell from 57.8 percent to 43.6 percent, according to John Bound and Sarah Turner, “Collegiate Attainment: Understanding Degree Completion,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Reporter*, no. 4 (2010), <http://www.nber.org/reporter/2010number4/bound.html>.

<sup>5</sup> The *Time* survey also attempted to identify the major factors in the value of a college degree. The top responses dealt with economic factors — 40 percent said the most important value was “to gain skills and knowledge for a career,” while 17 percent cited increasing one’s earning power. The non-economic factors included “gaining a well-rounded general education” (14 percent), “learning to think critically” (12 percent), “formulating goals and values for life” (11 percent), and becoming “an informed citizen in a global society” (6 percent).

and a community college, and have worked together to create a transfer agreement and a number of successful programs that are accessible, affordable, relevant to the modern workplace, technologically innovative and academically rigorous. Since 1991 some 36,000 NOVA transfer students have attended Mason. The joint Pathway to the Baccalaureate program (which this year engages over 7,500 students) has helped thousands of minority, immigrant, low-income and first-generation college goers in the region attain a college degree. Partnerships like this one will be critical to achieving our goals of degree attainment and affordability in our region.

Despite these advantages, Mason has not been immune to the larger trends and pressures and does have progress to make — or regain. As is the case virtually everywhere, Mason students are graduating with larger amounts of debt than ever before. Fortunately, because Mason students get higher-paying jobs than do their peers from other Virginia institutions, our graduates have lower default rates and a greater financial return on their investment. And while our tuition remains among the Commonwealth's most affordable, tuition has more than doubled over the last decade.

In seeking solutions to this financial squeeze, Mason has limited options due to the fact that it receives less state funding per student than any other doctoral institution in Virginia. Moreover, a modest endowment hinders the university's ability to provide tuition discounts for highly-qualified students. Our commitment to affordability and outcomes is perhaps the most complex of the whole set and will require efforts from all stakeholders.

Examples of strategic initiatives suggested during the visioning process include the following:

- Work with the governor and General Assembly to close the per-student funding gap of more than \$1,600 per year vis-à-vis the doctoral average
- Allocate a portion of any future cost savings toward financial aid to improve accessibility for low- and middle-income students
- Invest in and better use our current infrastructure, including facilities, technology and program innovation
- Develop new programs to facilitate retention and improve four- and six-year graduation rates
- Undertake further collaboration with community colleges to open new paths for degree completion

## **5.6 Enriching work environment**

*We will invest in recruiting, retaining and developing talented and diverse faculty and academic and professional staff. We will prioritize the well-being of our community and create a vibrant campus life in which all members can grow and thrive.*

To remain a world-class research and teaching institution, George Mason must attract and retain talented administrators, faculty and staff. As a just and caring community, we believe that nurturing an environment in which all members can thrive is both a moral imperative and critical for the success of the University.

Achieving our goals will require special attention to the competitiveness of our salaries. Overall faculty salaries are below the median of our peer group and our stipends for graduate research assistants are comparatively low. Closing these and other gaps in our compensation systems will be

a top priority over the next years.

Our commitments, however, go beyond salary metrics. The positive, caring, collaborative culture Mason has developed, and the opportunities that our location affords to our colleagues and their families are just as important. We are committed to civility, respect and inclusion in all we do. Through our collaborative partnerships in research, scholarship, economic development and social action, Mason positively contributes to solving significant local, national and global issues. Our community is diverse, and we learn from and engage in difference with a willingness to advocate personal principles when key values are at stake.

Our location in Northern Virginia and the National Capital Region offers our employees and their families a wealth of opportunities. We are committed to lifelong learning and to fostering career advancement through leadership, personal and professional development programs, as well as free educational opportunities.

Examples of strategic initiatives suggested during the visioning process include the following:

- Increase funding for faculty and staff salaries and support to move ourselves from the 25th percentile to the median among peer institutions
- Increase funding for our graduate research and teaching assistants so it is on par with our peer institutions and adjusted for the cost of living
- Create recruiting and retention plans in all colleges and departments, including an explicit plan to increase faculty and staff diversity
- Continue to invest in a thriving work/life culture to support all faculty and staff

## **5.7 Foundation for the future**

*We will aggressively seek additional sources of funding through higher levels of philanthropy; expanded online, certificate and executive education programs; research grants; and the commercialization of intellectual property.*

*We will also increase our engagement with alumni, strengthen the Mason brand nationally and internationally, and effectively communicate Mason's value to stakeholders throughout Virginia and the National Capital Region.*

Given the reduction of state support and limits on future tuition increases, the university needs to develop a stronger base of philanthropic support and other revenue sources. The current financial pressures present clear risks to Mason's core academic mission if we do not identify and secure new sources of revenue. We are committed to securing new resources both through philanthropy as well as by generating revenue in educational and research activities that are consistent with and can help expand our mission.

We need a strong brand to expand philanthropy, online and executive education programs, and the diversity of our student body. Strengthening and, more importantly, communicating our brand to both internal and external stakeholders is critical to establishing a sustainable future as an institution.

With a modest but growing donor base, Mason is well positioned to increase the level of engagement and philanthropic support among its constituents. Over the past five years, giving to George Mason has increased 17 percent per year, or nine times the national average. Furthermore,

our alumni base is growing in sheer numbers, at the same time that alumni are also becoming more engaged and connected to the university.

In terms of positioning and brand strength, Mason has additional advantages. Because of its location, Mason is key to the region's economic growth and cultural vitality. This allows us to position ourselves as a regional, national and global convener for economic development. Other existing brand strengths that can be leveraged, as identified in a January 2012 examination by the marketing and communications firm Greatest Creative Factor, include: a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship; reputation as a perennial "up-and-coming" university; diversity; career power in a Mason degree; rapid growth; a number of innovative, highly regarded schools, colleges and programs; and the university's critical role in the economic advancement of Fairfax and Prince William counties.

Examples of strategic initiatives suggested during the visioning process include the following:

- Aggressively increase funding for academics, the arts and athletics using volunteer leadership programs to drive giving
- Improve and develop existing relationships with external stakeholders to advance research and general fundraising initiatives by connecting state and federal priorities with local businesses and Mason programs
- Expand executive education offerings and research partnerships to connect with current and future leaders and sources of future gift revenue
- Establish a center for investment and development of start-up companies and research commercialization in the Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., area
- Align campaign priorities with university strategic goals and invest in University Development and Alumni Affairs to expand philanthropic activities

## **6. Looking forward**

From a talented, diverse and inclusive culture to a tradition of innovation to other strategic advantages, there are numerous reasons to believe that Mason's best times are ahead of us. The challenges are real, but our unique assets—top among them, our culture of diversity and innovation—put us in a great position to turn those challenges into opportunities.

George Mason University is already, in many ways, providing the type of education and leadership that the 21st century needs from it — and the university is now on track to continue doing so with ever greater effectiveness, efficiency and ingenuity. And it is this purpose — being the best university *for* the world — upon which we must place our highest priority and measure of success.

The new vision for Mason's future will serve as the basis for the strategic planning process by providing a framework and foundation for future decision-making. In addition to strategic planning, the Vision will inform the Comprehensive Campaign, led by University Development. The vision will be presented to the Board of Visitors at their March 20, 2013 meeting. If adopted, the University will immediately move into strategic planning, with a goal to present a new strategic plan to the Board for consideration and approval prior to June 2014.