

UNIVERSITY LIFE IN REVIEW

SUCCEEDED

UL's Support Network
Casts a Wide Net to
**Build
Community**

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ESports &
Club Sports
**Engaging
Students**

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Mason Provides
Students with
**Financial
Tools**

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50 A MILESTONE YEAR

1972-2022



Friends of the Mason Community,

This milestone year—Mason's 50th Anniversary—is a fitting time to celebrate the commitment, talent, grit and resiliency of Mason Nation. These qualities describe our students, no doubt; but they are equally appropriate ways of describing all of the Mason community—faculty, staff, families, alumni. In this third issue of Succeed, you'll read some of the stories that describe the Mason community and its many strengths—strengths that lead to student achievement and success and that also create the University's growth, achievement, and creative ways of meeting challenges in the past year.

The whole world—Mason, too—continues to move out of the pandemic and grapple with the challenges and changes it left behind. But this kind of sudden traumatic event also allows strong organizations

“**Much has been achieved in the past 50 years.**”

to step up and step forward with courage and creativity. That is what we have done at Mason. Our students have continued to progress toward their academic, professional and personal goals.

Our faculty have developed innovative teaching strategies and research agendas that befit a world-class university. Our staff have reached out with strength and commitment to meet the needs of our students in new and creative ways.

Spend some time perusing the rich and uplifting content you'll find here. Celebrate with us the awesome achievements of our students and the sustained commitment of our staff. We know you'll appreciate more than ever how special Mason is, how much has been achieved in the past fifty years, and the potential for our work in the next fifty years to change and better the world over and over again.

With gratitude,

Rose Pascarell,
Vice President for University Life

This issue of Succeed highlights our work in the following areas:

- ✓ Holistic student support, including the Black male student initiative, LGBTQ+ outreach, and support for students who are also parents;
- ✓ Examples of programs that have served students in traditional (in-person) and new (virtual) ways;
- ✓ An innovative strategy to address the current campus mental health crisis, representing a collaboration between Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services;
- ✓ Our work to provide students with tools for life to help them become financially literate;
- ✓ Innovating programs for both fun and learning, including Mason Day and the trip to Spain sponsored by Leadership Education and Development (LEAD);
- ✓ Showcasing staff accomplishments and highlighting the campus experiences of our most engaged and involved students;
- ✓ The critical role of our donors in enabling us to move forward with the resources to address campus needs innovatively and effectively.



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In the 2021-2022 Academic Year...

UNIVERSITY LIFE WAS COMPRISED OF OVER:

450 professional staff and **1000** student employees,
providing service across four campuses and two instructional sites:



**MASON SQUARE
CAMPUS**
(FORMERLY ARLINGTON)



**FAIRFAX
CAMPUS**



**SCIENCE &
TECHNOLOGY
CAMPUS**



**MASON KOREA
CAMPUS**



**MASON IN
LOUDOUN**



**SMITHSONIAN-
MASON SCHOOL OF
CONSERVATION**

UNIVERSITY CAREER SERVICES WAS RECOGNIZED BY:



The Eastern Association of Colleges and Employers
with the Innovation in Diversity and Inclusion award.

*Philip Wilkerson III, Industry Advisor, was awarded with
the Outstanding Member Award.*

UNIVERSITY LIFE WAS RECOGNIZED WITH THE FOLLOWING
EDUCATION DIGITAL MARKETING (EDM) AWARDS:



Gold Award for Brave, Bold, and Back!



Silver Award for Juneteenth Roundtable



Silver Award for Celebrating FirstGen Week at Mason



**MASON AND THE LGBTQ+
RESOURCES CENTER
WERE RECOGNIZED WITH
5 OUT OF 5 STARS BY:**

Campus Pride Index,
speaking to Mason's institutional
commitment
to LGBTQ+-inclusive policy,
program, and practice.



**DISABILITY SERVICES WAS
RECOGNIZED BY:**

**AHEAD (Association on Higher
Education And Disability)**,
awarding Naomi Martinez-Jones,
Director, and Morgan Strimel,
special projects, with the AHEAD
Professional Recognition Award.



**MASON AND
CONTEMPORARY STUDENT
SERVICES** were selected as part
of the inaugural **FamilyU Cohort
of Generation Hope**, focused on
a two-year plan of university-
wide collaborative work to build
and refine institutional
competencies and capacity to
support the success of students
who are pregnant or parenting.

Students

In Need:

UL's support network casts a wide net to build community

The Mason student body, at 39,000 strong, represents a wide swath of the country and world.

From first-year and first-generation learners to graduate students, international scholars and those with special interests or circumstances, there is no uniform, linear path that students follow. University Life and its offices are driven to help all students succeed by enhancing academic success, fostering social growth, tending to students' health and well-being and developing cultural and community engagement and understanding.

It's a task that requires a breadth of programs and services that cut across all demographics and intersect with students where they are and when they are in need. It involves 400+ registered student organizations, learning centers and communities, entertainment opportunities, career preparation skills and outlets for direct student support and advocacy.

That vast network touches students and provides resources to groups large – those in need





of financial education and others supporting diverse populations – and small, including aiding under a dozen Ukrainian students who are away from their war-torn home. The goal is to create an atmosphere that fosters community, builds bridges and advances knowledge and acceptance.

Here are just three examples of University Life assisting students' academic and social integration:



Black Male Success Initiative Helps Minority Students Feel at Home

As a teenager who grew up in a middle-class, predominantly Black community, Christopher Bell was accustomed to interacting with peers who looked like him and adults who illustrated what he could achieve.

When Bell arrived at Mason, that wasn't initially the case.

"When I transitioned to being on campus, there weren't many students like me, and I didn't really know where to go or how to feel at home," said Bell, who is now a graduate student in the School of Integrative Studies and has been part of the Social Action & Integrative Learning (SAIL) team that focuses on experiential learning that drives social change and equity.

"I wanted to feel like a part of Mason and that Mason reflected who I was so that others didn't have the same experience as I did. We're working to make that happen."

Mason's Black Male Student Success Initiative – which formally launched in 2020 when it was identified by

President Gregory Washington as a key university priority – is designed as the catalyst for action. The intentionally built community serves as a bedrock to increase retention and graduation rates while addressing the needs and challenges facing black males.

Although Mason's student population is only about 11 percent African-American (4,000+), the University has been recognized as a leader in Black student enrollment and graduation by Eduventures Research. The 2021 report showed Mason's Black graduation rate matched or surpassed the institutional average for seven years during the 2011 to 2019 survey period, a feat matched by only three other schools in the U.S.

T. Garey Davis, Assistant Director of Coalition Building and Diversity Education in the [Center for Culture, Equity and Empowerment](#), said the idea centers on creating an environment where Black males can thrive through academic progress, development of social and life skills and becoming career-ready. The interdisciplinary approach draws and leverages faculty, alumni and at-large community members to support students and form an atmosphere of success.

Mason's Black graduation rate matched or surpassed the institutional average for seven years... a feat matched by only three other schools in the U.S.

Students involved in the initiative benefit from study halls, mentoring, success coaching, workshops and excursions that are tailored to their experience. First-year students are guided through their transition to college, added academic requirements, while second-year students are exposed to extended learning opportunities including internships, study abroad program and fellowships. Upper-level students are coached on leadership, professional development and career services.

Less formal “barbershop series” chats provide students the opportunity to have conversations beyond the classroom and about their day-to-day issues, Davis said. The relaxed spaces further engagement and depth of interaction.

“We’re leveling the playing field so that students are pushing each other to be the absolute best in class that they can be,” Davis said. “At the end

of their Mason careers, our graduates will be prepared to step out and make a difference in the world around them.

“The beauty of this is that everybody supports everybody and is working toward the same goal.”

Bell echoed that sentiment.

“I’ve been motivated and moved,” he said of his time at Mason. “I really appreciate all the work being done at every level of this institution.”



Mason Remains a Vanguard of Inclusivity, Led By the LGBTQ+ Resources Center

When Mason earned national attention for its commitment to LGBTQ-inclusive policies, programs and practices, Josh Kinchen, Director of [Mason's LGBTQ+ Resources Center](#), had two reactions:

The first was to honor the



Will Barker, 18, They/He
Hometown: Military Child
Bachelors in Public Administration / May 2025



LGBTQ+ student leader on Mason’s inclusive culture: ‘It’s amazing to see’

As an 18-year-old “military kid” who has lived in Europe for three years and in multiple cities in the U.S., Will Barker wanted a college experience that in many respects mimicked their youth.

Barker, a second-year student studying public administration, found exactly that at Mason.

“The main goal for me when choosing a college was that it was very inclusive and gave me the chance to continue to meet different people and have different opportunities,” Barker said. “Mason, as a large public university, has an environment where anyone can become who they want and thrive in a variety of ways.

“There are resources and a structure that creates a supportive and welcoming campus life.”

Barker developed a community in their first semester on campus by joining [University Life’s LGBTQ+ Resources Center](#), where they served as a student coordinator and

later was selected to chair the Queer Student Leadership Council for the 2022-23 academic calendar.

The center allows students access to safe spaces, programs, services and events while also being the centerpiece of an educational component for the larger campus community. As a student leader, Barker wants to work with others to continue those efforts. They plan to listen to others to find out what people need and how they can assist in both personal and campus-wide development and understanding.

“It’s amazing to see the strides that have been made over the years, and I want to dig down and see how far we can go to make Mason an even better place for everyone,” Barker said. “There’s such great potential here, and I’m excited to be a part of future improvement and evolution by helping people during their college careers.”

STUDENT SUPPORT

groundwork that has been laid since Mason opened its center 20 years ago as a vanguard of inclusivity at a major public university.

The second is the excitement that he and others feel for what can be achieved in the future.

Mason is flying in rare air with the recent honors of being named a “five-star premier campus” by Campus Pride Index and earning a perfect 100 on the Athletic Equity Index, which examines how NCAA Division I institutions support LGBTQ+ student-athletes.

Mason’s five-star ranking is one of only 29 bestowed out of 454 institutions evaluated; it is one of only three in the South and the only one in Virginia. Mason is only one of four schools in the country to achieve a perfect score on both indexes.

“We are defining ourselves in the current age as a school known for centering on DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) work,” Kinchen said. “That is special, important and not at all accidental. Being in the LGBTQ+ community and being able to feel safe and show up as your authentic self is part of the fabric of the Mason community.”

“(The rankings) show there is a vibrant culture here now, but they also show and tell us that we have to continue to be accountable to make sure our campus sets the course and the stage for how we engage students and deliver what they want and what they need.”

“Those conversations, in a time that sexuality and gender identity and expression have become lightning rods for political and societal divisions, are happening across Mason’s campuses and at all levels of administration, faculty, staff and students,” Kinchen said. The LGBTQ+ Resources Center works with and develops the LGBTQ+ and ally communities to create a welcoming environment that cultivates the success and well-being of

queer, trans, non-binary, and questioning people.

“We’re here to make sure Mason is a respectful, affirming ecosystem,” Kinchen said. “There is no arguing that everybody deserves respect, and everybody deserves to be safe and to be themselves. It’s our job to take the guesswork out of relationships by spreading knowledge and information so that we can be in a community together.”

“There is no question that LGBTQ+ identity is intersectional with every demographic on earth and our work is rooted in partnerships, collaboration and cooperation. We’re inviting people in because we have all the pieces necessary to make Mason unique, special and innovative.”

LuLu Géza Kelemen has seen that work evolve from two perspectives since coming to Mason as an undergraduate student in 2007. Now serving as the center’s Assistant Director, Géza Kelemen, who uses they/them pronouns, has been active in forming the supportive network that exist for queer, trans, non-binary, and questioning students at Mason. While they pointed to the legacy of partnership in the work and how that has facilitated growth of the LGBTQ+ Resources Center’s reach, particularly with Housing and Residence Life’s LGBTQ+ Learning Community and University Studies’ UNIV 108-003: Gender & Identity Exploration, they also noted that we can and should always be striving to better serve the university’s diverse population.

“We want to be fully engaged with how every student’s experience is different,” Géza Kelemen said. “We are investing in our students and providing them with the tools and the ability to have conversations, to take a risk to learn more about how they feel or to try to understand people that have differences.”





Student-parent success requires resources; Mason answers the call

The barriers to college success can be substantial at any point in a student's life, but when studying must be balanced with parenting, working and other hurdles, earning a degree can seem even more daunting.

Consider that national statistics show student-parents, who account for approximately 20 percent of college students, battle these odds:

- Higher non-tuition costs and student debt.
- Rates of food and housing insecurity exceed the norm.
- 69% of student-parents work while enrolled and a new report from the Education Trust and Generation Hope shows parents would have to work 52 hours a week at

minimum wage in order to break even on their childcare and tuition expenses.

- 62% of student-parents live with incomes 200% below the poverty line.
- Only 18% of student-parents earn a degree in 6 years or less.
- 56% of student-parents are first-generation enrollees and 60% are 30 or older.

[Contemporary Student Services](#) makes a point of serving the population from a holistic standpoint. The office works with faculty, staff and outside groups to offer services and resources that go beyond what a traditional student may require.

Parenting and expecting students can tap into Mason connections for social support, academic assistance and well-being help.

Advocates are set to make even more gains now that a student-parent working group has transitioned into a Student-Parent Taskforce, said Shyama Kuver, the



Angelo Collington, 31, He/Him
Hometown: Hyattsville, MD
Bachelors in Psychology / May 2023, seeking
Master's in Educational Psychology / May 2024



People behind the scenes help Mason psychology student balance three worlds

Angelo Collington is a man of many talents; depending on the moment in time that observers check in with him, they may see a different version of the 31-year-old.

There's the Mason student aiming to complete his undergraduate psychology degree in Spring 2023 and his accelerated master's degree in educational psychology a year later.

Another look might show Collington working from home in his full-time role as an information technology business systems analyst for CACI.

And then there's Collington's most important role: Being a husband, and father to 4-year-old Maya and 1-year-old Kennedy.

"It's a challenge, no doubt, but it's a rewarding challenge," Collington says of balancing the three wildly different roles and responsibilities. "I've had to become very detail-oriented, a lot of checklists and calendars to stay on top of things."

Collington credits his successful navigation to taking advantage of the support and resources offered by the Student Success Coaching unit, the Mason ADVANCE program, and [Contemporary Student Services \(CSS\)](#). Each of these areas are set up to help non-traditional learners integrate into the campus community. His Success Coach checks in multiple times a semester to gauge if he needs any academic assistance or guidance. The peer support opportunities and the social events that CSS offers help connect him to the campus community

"There are a lot of people behind the scenes at Mason who are in my corner and have been helping along the way," said Collington, who is a student advisory board member for CSS. "I'm so thankful for them and what they've done for me."

"When you're a student at Mason, there's someone there for everything you encounter. They make sure you're a part of the environment."

STUDENT SUPPORT

Associate Director of Contemporary Student Services. The change will allow more direct and intentional support for parenting students, including seeking grants for specific resources, and additional data collection for a more exact picture of who student-parents are at Mason.

"It's important for us to be able to have student-parents know that we have support systems for them and that we can help them navigate the challenges," Kuver said. "There are competing priorities for their time, their financial resources and their other responsibilities. The more we can do to provide stability, the better."

Mason's attentiveness to student parents began with a work group formation in 2003. The staff and students have continually created partnerships and established a long-term vision for improving access to services.

The group, which was taken under University Life's wing in 2016, opened discussions about challenges

student-parents face and created change by setting up lactation spaces on campus, recognizing necessary academic accommodations and building awareness of childcare complications that directly impact success.

Heather Aleknavage, a 20-year Mason employee who recently earned her master's degree with a higher education focus, has been a longtime participant of the working group. She said the progression of working group to taskforce, highlights Mason's efforts to address student-parents' issues.

"Many student-parents feel disconnected, and it takes a concerted effort to engage them," she said. "It starts in the classroom and extends beyond that to their daily lives, which look different than the typical student.

"It's critical that we make student-parents feel seen, valued and included."



Do Hyun Lee, 27, He/Him
Hometown: Seoul, South Korea
Bachelors in Public Accounting / December 2022



Mason Korea's 'symbiotic experience' achieves student's career goal and educates others

South Korean native Do Hyun Lee, who uses the name Ambrose among American colleagues, had dreamed of working in the United States since he was a child, but he didn't know how that would ever happen while he was employed as a life science consultant in his hometown of Seoul.

Enter Mason Korea and an opportunity that has opened doors for Ambrose's career aspirations and given stateside Mason students a window into life overseas.

While maintaining his job, Ambrose returned to higher education at Mason Korea to pursue an accounting degree with the awareness that he would be able to spend his final year studying in the U.S. at Mason's Fairfax campus.

"Mason Korea gave me the chance to realize my goals," Ambrose said. "At the same time, I was able to give back to the Mason community as a student ambassador on the Fairfax campus by helping students in knowing what to expect.

"It was very much a symbiotic experience where I learned so much from others and others learned from me."

Ambrose admits he had a degree of anxiety before traveling to the U.S., but what he discovered at Mason

quickly put him at ease. Class sizes remained small, he built a personal rapport with professors, and he was befriended by others in the accounting program even though he was an older, contemporary student.

"My professors were more like mentors, and I was able to integrate very quickly (with University Life's Ambassador program)," he said.

88% of 2021 graduates had a positive career outcome within six month of completing their degree.

Ambrose also credits the Career Development Center (CDC), based out of Mason Korea's University Life office, for supporting his transition to the states. "They provided me with valuable insights regarding the U.S. employment process, which is predictably very different from Korea's process."

When Ambrose graduates in December, he'll stay in the D.C. metro area, where he landed a job as an auditor with Deloitte, the world's largest accounting firm.

"It's very exciting, and Mason is how it all happened," he said.

FINDING COMMUNITY

on a Virtual Campus

Aliah M. Showkatian is a senior studying English with honors in the major, a concentration in literature, and a Spanish minor. Born in Northern Virginia, she is Cuban-Iranian-American and served as Succeed Magazine's 3rd edition content manager, editor, and writer.

Over the past two years, the substitution of technology over physical human interaction became commonplace, particularly for students whose academic and professional careers switched to virtual overnight. Learning to cope with new societal structures was a challenge for all, and while our old, pre-pandemic habits are resurfacing with the return of in-person classes, George Mason's multiple campuses have been forever changed.

Transferring to Mason in fall 2020 as a 17-year-old sophomore was a whirlwind, and attempting to acclimate myself with unfamiliar departments at the beginning of an online semester was overwhelming. I knew nobody on this virtual campus, and although there were thousands of students who could relate to the feeling of lethargic loneliness, I didn't think there was much to be done about it until in-person classes resumed, at some point in the distant future.

Just a week into the semester, I was invited by a classmate to join a Discord server meant to function as a class group chat. A bond was quickly formed between seven or eight of us from the course, and I was inspired to create similar servers for my other classes. The group chats helped us feign in-person banter during class time and fostered a sense of comradery where I had previously believed there was none.

Motivated by my newfound social circle, I reached out to club leaders and advisors, trying to find a way to become involved with Mason's many programs from my solitary

desk. It was in this way that I was offered the position as the 2020-21 co-Editor-in-Chief of the Hispanic Culture Review—a bilingual journal published by GMU's Student Media Department—and how I continued being involved in campus life as an office assistant, the business lead of Formula-SAE, an ambassador for the Caribbean Student

"I am grateful... I have the chance to witness and support the merging of the old and the new, the traditional and the virtual."

Association, and content manager of Succeed Magazine.

As students are filling our campus classrooms once more, we have not completely abandoned the digital traditions we created and diffused over the past two years. Discord servers are still widely used for classes and clubs, there is almost always a Zoom alternative to meetings, and professors have virtual office hours. I know that I never got the chance to experience Mason's pre-pandemic vibrant campus, but I am grateful that as I begin my senior year, I have the chance to witness and support the merging of the old and the new, the traditional and the virtual. Our community is finding balance between the familiar, physical human interaction and a nascent, digital world to create a new societal structure.

MASON
DAY

MASON

2019

2015

2014

2013

2012

2011

1967

1977



MASON DAY

WHERE CELEBRATION IS TRADITION

Mason Day has been a long-standing, **57-year, on-campus tradition**. Over the past decade, the [Student Involvement](#) office has grown the event to offer an exciting day of live musical performances, carnival rides and delicious food for thousands within our Mason community. After a two year hiatus, it was back in full force in 2022 with over **7300 attendees**, the largest number in the history of the event. Students, faculty, staff, and guests celebrated together as they danced, rode rides, decorated frisbees, ate cotton candy, played video games, and created memories with friends that will last a lifetime.

2022



ESPORTS AND CLUB SPORTS

ENGAGING STUDENTS,
FOSTERING COMMUNITY
AND DEVELOPING
LEADERSHIP VIRTUALLY
AND IRL (IN REAL LIFE)

Look beyond the dugouts, benches and sidelines of Mason's 20 NCAA Division I teams and there are other playing fields – both traditional and technological – that reach more than 1,000 students who might not receive the same fanfare but are learning the same lessons.

The [Student Involvement](#) office is engaging students with opportunities for athletes to compete in the rapidly growing Esports landscape, which captures

the attention of players with both virtual settings and in-person events. Concurrently, [Mason Recreation](#) is providing students with comparable engagement experiences with the management of 34 club sport squads.

Both of these settings are like a learning laboratory that require players to commit not only to improving their individual abilities, but also to developing their



Hussain Zainal, He/Him
Hometown: Kuwait City, Kuwait
Bachelors of Science, Computer Engineering / Spring 2023



Mason Esports gamer praises growth opportunities

Hussain Zainal knows the stereotype.

He's a computer engineering student. He's a gamer who loves playing Overwatch and Smash Brothers. In his final year at Mason, he's earned a role as the president of GMU Esports, a group that operates under the [Student Involvement](#) office.

He's built a wide and diverse set of friends who met sharing the common interest of gaming but have expanded the relationships and learned more about others on campus.

"People are genuinely surprised to find out how many social opportunities come from playing Esports at Mason," said Zainal, who will graduate after the Spring 2023 semester. "I can honestly say I've grown so much because of playing Esports and having the community aspect of being on teams together. Even people who don't play anymore, I see them at the gym, or at a restaurant and we can talk and catch up.

"It's been such an experience because I've learned about being a leader and using real-life skills such as team building, conflict resolution, marketing the games and how to respect people who might be a little different than you. All of these things will come in handy when I'm out working in my career."

Zainal said Mason's embrace of Esports expands the ability of students to feel they have a place on any of the university's campuses. Working with other Student Involvement leaders, the reach of Esports has spread rapidly, he said.

"We're building something here," Zainal said. "I go out in my Esports jersey and people come up and start talking about how they love to play. It gives me a chance to invite them out to one of our weekly Smash tournaments. It doesn't have to be about being competitive all the time. We know people play for entertainment, and if we can help them get better or make connections, we've done our job."



ESPORTS & CLUB SPORTS



capabilities to function as a team, accepting different roles to achieve success, and mentoring others. Esports and Club Sports offer rich hands-on experiences that show students how to handle almost any situation they'll encounter in their professional fields.

"There's something special about being a part of a team of people and representing your university in something you're passionate about, but even more than that, these athletes build a sense of community," said Lauren Long, Executive Director of Student Involvement. "They learn lessons and leadership that go beyond the playing field, and they get exposure to personal growth and development that will serve them for the rest of their lives."

Long points to the emerging Esports, which are competitive video games that also draw large online viewership, as the latest attempt for Mason to match students' interests and stir wider participation at the multiple university campuses.

There's no doubt that gaming has moved into the mainstream, including a college experience that

incorporates nearly 700 schools fielding varsity teams that engage more than 13,000 students.

Mason is tapping into that vein and the excitement surrounding Esports. It is one of 170 universities that have joined a national association that organizes varsity programs pursuing championships.

Student Involvement counts hundreds of students who are actively involved in playing and watching Esports competitions in the five major sports of Rocket League, Overwatch, League of Legends, Valorant and Super Smash Brothers. There are more than 2,400 members of the Mason Discord app that allows players and viewers to communicate.

"We're young, only 2 years in, and the activity is growing and strengthening in the Mason community," Long said. "It's not just about playing a video game. It is about developing students' career readiness skills in problem solving, teamwork, communication, and leadership development.

"And for many, it is about helping them gain hands on

FROM CREW TO QUIDDITCH, CLUB SPORTS STILL HAVE CLOUT

Each year roughly 800 Mason students take part in the university's club sports organizations, which are backed by the Mason Recreation department and rely on student leaders to manage and direct the teams, according to Chris Sabo, Assistant Director of Business Services for Mason Recreation.

Mason supports eight club sports for both men and women, and there are 18 co-recreational teams, ranging from the typical basketball, hockey and lacrosse to the less common teams for log rolling, quidditch and trap and skeet shooting.

"There's a lot of variety because students have a wide range of talents and interests," said Sabo.

"The teams give them a chance to continue something they love playing or to try something new. In either scenario, students find a sense of place and belonging."

Budgeting, fundraising, scheduling, problem-solving, and more all fall upon the students who achieve officer roles for their sports. Sabo compared the positions and support functions of student leadership to operating a small business.

"They have to make it work," he said, "and it takes a lot of work."

"What these athletes experience while on club teams helps form who they are for the rest of their lives. It's an opportunity for them to grow as leaders while also having fun."





experience that connects to their major. We are offering internships and working with the Sports Management department on developing a minor in Esports. This is just the beginning."

The Esports program now has a dedicated home in the Student Involvement hub with high-tech computer gaming setups and other gaming devices as well as broadcasting equipment. "We are continuing to build this out," said Long. The teams and their contests are broadcasted and produced by students. There are social media channels that track and publicize the teams' results.

Mason's Esports involvement extends to the Mason Korea campus, where computer game design is a popular major and members of the student organization, G-nonymous, are engaging in Esports leagues along with preparing their portfolios in areas of gaming, art, and music.

"These are portfolio pieces students can show within their respective majors," Long said of the experience, noting that there is also open gaming time for students who aren't on competitive teams. "There are career skills and interpersonal relationships that prepare students to be successful in whatever their future holds."



Lily Plizga, 23, She/Her
Hometown: Virginia Beach, VA
Bachelors Government & International Politics,
Political Science Minor / May 2022



How club sports changed a graduate's future career path

When Lily Plizga joined Mason Recreation's club field hockey team in her first year on the Fairfax campus, she had modest goals of making friends and having an outlet for her competitive spirit in a sport she'd played since middle school.

"As soon as I started, I knew I was going to get so much more," said Plizga, 23, who became a part of the squad's leadership team and eventually took over as its President. "As a club officer, it gave me the chance to do things I'd never done before and to learn the skills that will translate into anything I want to do with my future."

In addition to raising the profile of the club team on campus, Plizga and other officers helped drive a larger impact at Mason and in the community. The team started a "Field Hockey Fights Hunger" event that collected food for Mason's Patriot Pantry, which helps students experiencing food insecurity. They started an instructional camp for area youth. The members launched a fundraising campaign for new uniforms and

to have a more robust travel schedule.

"We were able to connect with the internal and external communities and help people along the way," said Plizga, who also served as the club's social media director and created the team's Instagram account.

A 2022 graduate of the Schar School of Policy and Government, Plizga said her work with the club's social media channels changed the course of her future. She is currently working as a photographer for the Norfolk Tides, the AAA affiliate of the Baltimore Orioles.

"It helped me figure out something I'm really passionate about and started the journey of getting into pro sports," Plizga said. "That happened by being involved in club sports."

"I made my best friends – lifelong friends – in the club sports community, so I'd tell everyone, even if they've never played a sport but they want to try, to do it. It will make a difference in your life and the lives of the people you meet."



TAKING
ACTION

**Mason
prioritizes
students’
PRIMARY CARE
AND MENTAL
HEALTH**

The acronyms might not mean much to Mason students, but when Chris Rzegota talks about a healthcare delivery model that involves the Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and Collaborative Care (CC), or S/CC for short, it becomes clear that there’s a lot at stake.

Mason [Student Health Services](#) debuted the Integrated Behavioral Health Program (IBHP) care method, which blends primary care with mental health services in 2017 and later formalized and expanded its use in 2019. In addition to support available through [Counseling & Psychological Services](#) (CAPS), SBIRT expands available options for students.

“This is the pro-active, evidence-based intervention tool that addresses students’ physical and mental health needs,” said Rzegota, Mason’s Associate Director of Behavioral Health services. “We are comprehensively and preventively addressing what is affecting our students’ well-being.”

“So often in mental health care, we’re not in a position to help until someone is dealing with severe consequences. The IBHP care method gives us the ability to potentially identify an issue before it becomes a problem that affects their social or academic success.”

In the course of a given year, Mason’s Student Health Services provides primary and acute care to about



86%
lowered their potential
for risky alcohol use

60%
went from at-risk of
risky drug use to no risk

69%
of students who screened
at least at moderate risk
of depression experienced
a significant reduction in
scores in a follow-up visit.

15 percent of the student body. It serves as a key touchpoint and has the ability to have wide-ranging impact on overall physical and mental health.

Mason’s research shows that of students who took part in the SBIRT screening and care, 86 percent lowered their potential for risky alcohol use and 60 percent went from at-risk of risky drug use to no risk. Meanwhile 69 percent of students who screened at least at moderate risk of depression experienced a significant reduction in scores in a follow-up visit.

Rzengota explains that during a student’s visit for primary care, they take a short survey that provides a universal screening for depression and risk related to alcohol, drugs and tobacco use. If the potential risky substance use exists or if the student expresses a desire for mental health assistance, they can immediately talk to a licensed counselor.

“There’s a warm handoff that brings a student directly to our office, there’s no wait, no scheduling another appointment, no stigma attached to it,” he said. “The amount of trust that transitions (from a primary care provider to a mental health professional) is powerful.”

“Students feel comfortable because they’re in a collaborative, non-

judgmental environment.”

The interaction and support services provide students with a guide and strategies to address points of concern, or if there is a need for more help, a referral for additional care can be made. The medical and the therapy sides partner closely to support students, Rzengota said.

“With this model in place, we do not need to wait until students are asking for help to offer services, address potential risks, and promote well-being. Meeting students where they are and providing the help they need makes a difference,” Rzengota said.

The SBIRT program was permanently funded (versus grant funded) in Fall 2021, with support from Mason’s Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force. Rzengota is now hiring new clinicians and initiating a training program in collaboration with Mason’s counseling department within the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) to expand mental health services for student patients, while supporting counselor workforce development needs. A win-win for Mason and the surrounding community.

“It’s important for Mason’s students that we are at our absolute best for them.”

LESSONS FROM MEDIEVAL SPAIN

Polarization is increasingly acknowledged as a significant and dangerous problem in the United States and around the world. In an age of filter bubbles and echo chambers, what can we do to move towards a more pluralistic society where there is a greater focus on mutual understanding, respect, and the common good? The history of medieval Spain provides some helpful clues.

In May 2022, Dr. Nick Lennon, Director of the [Leadership Education and Development](#) (LEAD) Office, in collaboration with the School of Integrative Studies

(SIS), took a group of 20 Mason students to Spain as part of a program called: "Leadership Across Difference: Lessons from Medieval Spain."

Lennon shared about the group's visit to Toledo, Cordoba, Seville, Granda and Madrid, "Students learned how to be more effective, ethical leaders through an examination of historical examples of conflict, cooperation, and collaboration across differences," Lennon said. "There was a specific focus on what we can all learn about ethics and leadership that can unite us across our differences today."





The group investigated how, during the medieval era, part of what is now Spain was ruled by an Islamic civilization called Al-Andalus. During this time, Muslims, Christians and Jews reportedly collaborated and lived together relatively peacefully for hundreds of years. However, this history is also contested.



Mason provides students
with financial tools to

TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR FUTURE



The costs of higher education have been a growing point of concern for students, parents, and university administrators across the country. President Biden brought this into focus over the summer when he announced the cancellation of \$10,000 in debt for millions of Americans, and up to \$20,000 for low-income families, in order to relieve the financial burdens on students paying back loans. The assistance is expected to help address racial disparities in the economy as well.

Mason has been pro-active in trying to balance students' finances through the creation of programs that lower the cost of education (like The Mason Virginia Promise Program and the Mason-NOVA ADVANCE Transfer program); by extending more than \$1.6 million in emergency aid to students in the 2021-22 academic year through the StayMason Student Support Fund; and by making it a priority to educate students about a wide range of financial matters.

Shannon Osborne, the Assistant Director for Financial Well-Being in the [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#) (SSAC), has seen the look of concern from students when confronted with the complex and confusing

Wells Fargo Funds Financial Well-Being Peer Mentor Pilot

In August 2022, **University Life** was awarded **\$25,000** from Wells Fargo to pilot a financial well-being peer mentor program with the 750+ students in grades 8-12 enrolled in the [Early Identification Program](#) (EIP). Financial well-being staff from the Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) will hire and train the peer mentors who will provide student-led programming and year-round one-on-one coaching. By diving deep into topics such as budgeting, managing credit, student loan repayment, scholarships, and banking basics, the goal is to enhance the financial knowledge and skills of EIP students and empower them to see their personal financial management as a catalyst toward upward mobility.



world of finances that impacts learners as they pay for college and prepare for their professional lives.

That's why Osborne and the SSAC team developed a multi-faceted education series that taps into the intricacies of financial well-being. The structure addresses students' current financial situations, connecting them with resources when in need and developing a framework for success after graduation.

"We want to make financial well-being a part of people's everyday lives."

Osborne and SSAC Director Maggie Olszewska said that students tend to shy away from conversations about money matters, generally out of a lack of understanding and sometimes a fear of what's ahead. The Financial Well-Being team looks to normalize those talks.

"We want to make financial well-being a part of people's everyday lives," said Osborne. "We owe it to students to start at the ground level by responding to their needs now and preparing them for the future by giving them the confidence that finances

The topics and services that students can access include:



Paying for the soaring costs of higher education.



Understanding student loan debt-to-income ratios.



Establishing credit, sticking to a budget and creating an emergency fund.



Navigating salary negotiations.



Emphasizing the importance of saving, goal-setting and investing.



Digesting how record-high inflation affects financial stability.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

are manageable and don't have to be a source of distress."

"Financial well-being affects everyone, and we need to be the part of the equation that answers questions and helps students take control of their future."

University Life has expanded the resources to financial well-being information by establishing one-on-one consultations that are available in-person, virtually and by phone. Group presentations and workshops can be scheduled for student organizations. SSAC has also created a monthly "Money Talks" video series that addresses specific topics, and it has organized an annual "Money Smart Day" that has wide-ranging breakout sessions that students from the Fairfax, Mason Square, SciTech, and Mason Korea campuses can attend.

"We're just scratching the surface of what we can do, and it's all for the students' benefit," Osborne said.



Emely Melendez, 24, She/Her
Hometown: Woodbridge, VA
Masters in Public Health

Student who once needed financial guidance now helps educate others

Emely Melendez, a NOVA ADVANCE student, entered Mason with her associate's degree already completed and enough academic merit aid and savings to pay for her community health bachelor's degree.

When she decided to enter graduate school, the Woodbridge native entered the complex world of financial aid and federal student loans for the first time. It was daunting for a first-generation college student, Melendez said.

"I had no knowledge and had to learn everything," Melendez said.

Fortunately for Melendez, she had secured a position as a graduate assistant for the Student Support and Advocacy Center's Financial Well-Being team.

"They walked me through everything and shared their experience," Melendez said. "I would have had a lot more anxiety without them."

Now, as part of the office, Melendez shares the role

of helping educate others about money matters that include everything from creating a budget, managing credit, navigating health insurance, salary negotiations and more.

The team uses social media extensively to engage students, and Melendez introduced Financial Well-Being Wednesdays using Instagram stories. The interactive series focuses on a different topic every other week and invites students to learn more.

Melendez said she uses her community health background to approach financial health from a societal health perspective, meaning where you live, work and play affect what people already know and their long-term economic stability.

"This is such an important part of people's lives and a much-needed support for so many students," Melendez said. "The resources Mason offers can help change the trajectory of students' lives."

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Etlin Flores (She/Her)

BA, Sociology, State University of New York College at Buffalo, 2017
MA, Higher Education Administration, Stony Brook University, 2019

Community Director for Northern Neck
Hall, Housing and Residence Life (HRL)

LuLu Géza Kelemen (They/Them)

BA, Integrative Studies, George Mason University 2011
MA, Sociology, George Mason University, 2015

Assistant Director, LGBTQ+ Resources Center

Q: What is your favorite spot on campus?

Etlin: My office in Northern Neck Hall. I love being in my office as it allows me to see and engage with residents as often as possible. I try to make my office as welcoming as I can by having music playing, keeping snacks in my office, and just having the door open for conversation.

LuLu: I particularly enjoy my office with a window in SUB I, but I discovered one of my favorite places on campus when I first arrived at Mason as an undergraduate in 2007 – the clock on Wilkins Plaza (formerly North Plaza) – especially on a quiet morning.

Q: Describe your job in 50 words or less.

Etlin: Essential. A little undervalued in the field. Extremely rewarding! I get to serve residents in and outside of the residence halls. I'm on the front lines to assist with their needs while living with HRL, and I get to make an impact on their lives.

LuLu: To support and encourage queer, trans, non-binary, and questioning students AND educate and coach the Mason community to better serve and welcome queer, trans, non-binary, and questioning people. I work with students, faculty, and staff on programs like the LGBTQ+ Learning Community and the Safe Zone+ Program.

Q: What aspects of your job make you get out of bed each morning?

Etlin: My student staff make this work extremely enjoyable. I love supervising and having the opportunity to develop, inspire and learn from young adults. It makes me happiest!

LuLu: Being in a community with other queer, trans, non-binary, and questioning people, students included. Our communities, identities, and language continue to evolve as we grow as individuals and learn about each other and ourselves. It's amazing to be part of such conversations.

Q: What are your hopes for the future Mason student?

Etlin: My hope is that residents continue to learn and grow with us here in Housing and Residence Life.

LuLu: I hope that future queer, trans, non-binary, and questioning students at Mason find each other (and the LGBTQ+ Resources Center), build affirming support networks, and never stop learning and growing!

ETLIN FLORES



LU LU GÉZA KELEMEN

**GIVING AT
A GLANCE**

ANNUALLY, THE FIRST-GEN+ CENTER
HOSTS A WEEK OF EVENTS TO
AFFIRM AND CELEBRATE MASON'S
FIRST-GENERATION COMMUNITY OF
STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF.



GIVING to UNIVERSITY LIFE

Philanthropy provides University Life the agility to respond to the changing landscape of higher education and to ensure our students have access to key resources that support their success and well-being. Thank you to our donors for their unwavering support of our students.

Gifts can be made in support of University Life and our students at ulife.gmu.edu, or by contacting Kaitlin Cicchetti, Director of Advancement for University Life at koyler@gmu.edu.





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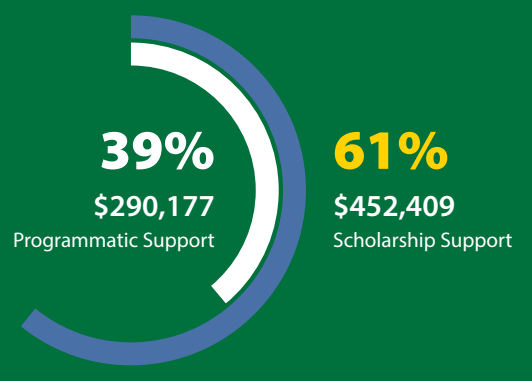
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Scholarship Endowment

HONORS

Student and Kappa Alpha Order

BROTHER

Although he was a George Mason student for a relatively short period of time, Jeremy Lee Starns made the most of his time as a Patriot and left an indelible impact on his fellow classmates and Kappa Alpha Order brothers.

Now, brothers of the Kappa Alpha (KA) fraternity—old and new—are endowing a scholarship in memory of Starns, who passed away from a brain tumor during his sophomore year.

Scott Hughes BS '94, MBA '03, a KA brother and friend of Starns, characterized him as “a young man with a big heart facing impossible odds. He had a relentless spirit and gave all of his energies to the task in front of him and the people he cared for and loved.”

“Jeremy attended every social and fraternity function that he had the energy to attend,” Hughes remembered. “He couldn’t make all of them, but he darn sure tried to.” Jeremy was undeterred and felt a deep responsibility to contribute to the fraternity and to do far more than his fair share. “It may sound strange that I found lifelong inspiration in his actions—you really learn what kind of person someone is when life gets difficult,” remarked Hughes.

KA brothers established the scholarship in his memory soon after his passing in 1994 but were not able to raise enough money, \$10,000 back then, to fully endow it. “Most of us were still in school,” confirmed Hughes. “We were young and were just at the beginnings stages of our career paths,” he continued. “We really didn’t have

enough financial resources then.”

Ed Gagermeier BS '91, a founder of the George Mason KA chapter, was already an alumnus when Starns passed away but had met him at KA events since he still lived in the area. “I only met Jeremy a few times,” he said, “but knowing his life was shorter than most, I wanted to make sure his name would not be forgotten.”

Gagermeier asserted that there was “at least a small effort to raise money most years after Jeremy passed.” KA brothers sent mailings to alumni who knew Jeremy, but the fundraising still wasn’t enough to endow a

“I wanted to make sure his name would not be forgotten.”

scholarship which now costs \$25,000.

“Unfinished business is not something that sits well with anybody. We needed to finish this one,” declared Hughes.

Gagermeier contacted current KA philanthropy chair Benjamin Flett. “Early in the calendar year, he reached out to me to talk about building the scholarship,” Flett recounted. “As he was talking about the scholarship, I could tell there was passion behind his words.” Because of his position as philanthropy chair, Flett “knew I was in the position to make some real progress to the end goal.”

Although KA's suggested philanthropy is the Muscular Dystrophy Association, during their annual "Muscle Week" fundraiser, the brothers chose to earmark the money for the Starns scholarship. Flett noted that two chapter alumni agreed to match every dollar raised through Muscle Week, bringing the grand total of their efforts to \$5,400.

Starns' attitude and determination no doubt continue to inspire his fraternity brothers to make a big push to raise the additional money needed for the scholarship endowment. Once endowed, the scholarship will benefit an active member of a student organization at George Mason. Additionally, applicants will need to submit an essay describing how they faced and overcame an obstacle in their own life, just as Starns did.

The scholarship will ease the financial burden of a Mason student but also will continue the legacy of a fellow Patriot and KA brother who fought hard "to live his short life to the fullest," stated Gagermeier. Through the scholarship, Starns' name and character will forever be associated with George Mason and Kappa Alpha, a well-deserved tribute.

Although his time at Mason was much too short, his impact was great. "I was so impressed with his character," Hughes exclaimed, "I proudly named my oldest son after him."

Anyone interested in learning more about the Jeremy Lee Starns Memorial Scholarship, or contributing to the endowment, can contact Kaitlin Cicchetti, Director of Advancement for University Life, at koyler@gmu.edu.

Written by: Amanda Milewski

JEREMY LEE STARNS, A PATRIOT AND BROTHER OF THE KAPPA ALPHA ORDER, PASSED AWAY FROM A BRAIN TUMOR WHILE ATTENDING GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY IN 1994.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO MAKE YOUR OWN [CONTRIBUTION](#) TO THIS ENDOWMENT:



“ Although his time at Mason was much too short, his impact was great. I was so impressed with his character, I proudly named my oldest son after him.”



Scholarship endowment for EIP graduates honors Mason stalwarts *Paul and Gwen Patton*

The late Paul Patton (USAF Ret. Col.), who died in October, 2021 at the age of 79, made a positive impact on the lives of hundreds of students at Mason through his years of mentorship, and service on the University Life Advisory Board, and in other roles. Patton's wife, Gwen, equally admired for her commitment to community service, passed away in November, shortly after her husband.

After earning an electrical engineering degree and an ROTC commission at the University of Pittsburgh, Patton served for 27 years as an officer in the U.S. Air Force. Following his military retirement, he worked for more than 20 years as a senior vice president at CACI, the defense and technology contractor now headquartered in Reston, Va. He led the company's Secretary of Defense Executive Fellows program for military officers, and guided many diversity and inclusion initiatives.

To honor their legacy, the University Life Advisory Board has established the Paul and Gwen Patton Memorial Scholarship Endowment to provide a scholarship each year for a student who graduates from Mason's Early Identification Program (EIP), which helps prepare first-generation students for success in college. The endowment has been bolstered with a gift of \$25,000 from CACI, supplementing generous gifts from Patton's friends and colleagues.

CACI and Mason have enjoyed a long and productive relationship. The company is a dedicated sponsor of the College of Engineering and Computing, and at least 20 Mason students intern each year at CACI, which also employs hundreds of Mason graduates.

"Paul was fiercely committed to our students. He was also the kind of person you just wanted to be around. Paul simply exuded the sort of kindness and energy that you walked away feeling good about," said Rose Pascarell, vice president for university life at Mason.

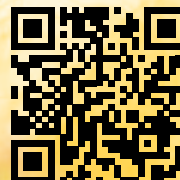
The PAUL & GWEN PATTON
MEMORIAL ENDOWMENT
has been bolstered
with a gift of

\$25,000
from CACI

Written by: Rob Riordan

DR. JOHN PATTON (SON OF PAUL AND GWEN PATTON) AND CACI CEO JOHN MENGUCCI, CELEBRATING THE PAUL AND GWEN PATTON SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT.

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THIS ENDOWMENT:



The Paul and Gwen
Memorial Scholarship



This article was originally published in *The George* in February 2022 and edited for the purposes of publication in *Succeed*.

UNIVERSITY LIFE AWARD & ACCOLADES

2022 University Awards

- **Martha J. Reiner Award for Quality Customer Service Award**
Patricia Sattarzadeh, Medical Data Specialist/ Receptionist, Student Health Services
- **Civility Star Award**
Shayna Marlowe, Assistant Director for Sexual and Interpersonal Violence and Student Support Services, Student Support and Advocacy Center
- **Nancy Murphy Mason Spirit Award**
Whitney Gaston, Associate Director, Student Success Coaching
- **Goldie and Diane Hattery Awards for Excellence**
Carmen Olguin, Housekeeper, Housing and Residence Life
- **Outstanding Achievement Awards**
Allison Castro, University Life Divisional Human Resources Manager, University Life
Sabrey Stewart, ADVANCE Academic Coach, Academic Affairs
- **Exceptional Support Awards**
John F Rogers, Associate Director of Housekeeping, Housing and Residence Life
Bernie Scheiner, Locksmith, Housing and Residence Life

2021-2022 University Life Staff Awards

- **UL Outstanding Service Award**
Mollie DelVecchio, Registered Nurse, Student Health Services
Jonathan Carmona, Assistant Director, International Programs and Services.
Paul Bazzano, Assistant Director of Competitive Sports & Athletic Training, Mason Recreation
Steve Wintermeyer, Physician & Interim Director, Student Health Services
Phil McDaniel, Associate Director, Student Involvement
Sara Heming, Associate Director, Student Involvement
Lashonda Anthony, Director, Academic Integrity
Hortense Rascoe, Associate Director, Student Conduct
Matt Carlos, Assistant Director for Student Support and Community Outreach, Student Support and Advocacy Center
John Rogers, Associate Director for Housekeeping & Special Projects, Housing and Residence Life
Janae Haaland, Associate Director of Technology Services, UL Technology Services
Joseph Deluna, Assistant Director of Orientation and New Student Programs, New Student and Family Programs
- **UL Positive Impact Award:**
Erin Dunleavy, International Advisor, International Programs and Services
Ethan Carter, Associate Director of Well-being, Programs, and Assessment, Mason Recreation
Becky Demus, Assistant Director of Fitness, Mason Recreation
Melissa Thierry, Director of Regional Campuses, University Life
Satoko Odagawa, Industry Advisor, Career Services
- **University Life Partnership Award**
Beth Baroody, Faculty/Staff Engagement Consultant, Human Resources/Payroll
Liz Krein, Assistant Controller for George Mason University Foundation, George Mason University Foundation



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