

AY 2024-2025 UL Faculty Fellow Report

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Overview

George Mason University's University Life (UL) initiated the career faculty fellowship position with the vision that University Career Services (UCS) will establish closer connections with Mason faculty and bridge the gap between curriculum and career for student success. The three inaugural career faculty fellows (Boicu, Moon, and Pentikäinen), each representing different schools and colleges at Mason, worked on individual projects as well as collaborative projects over the past year to analyze the needs, plan strategic initiatives, implement selected tasks, and present their works.

Needs Analysis

I attended the Career Influencers Network workshop and the UL staff meeting to become acquainted with the mission of UL and existing resources of UCS, such as career readiness guide and faculty toolkits. I prioritized hearing from the Assistant Director of Career Education and Executive Director at UCS, who play a pivotal role in helping our students prepare for diverse careers upon graduation and communicating career resources to faculty, about the gaps in their achievements and what career faculty fellows can achieve to fill such gaps. Based on such needs analysis, I sought various ways to integrate career development into the curriculum and engage faculty peers in fostering a culture of career readiness at Mason.

My Why Statement

I came up with the following five compelling reasons why we need to embed career readiness into the curriculum for student success:

1. To inform both students and faculty of what key career skills are needed today as defined by National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) to meet the evolving workforce demands and navigate rapidly evolving industries.
2. To facilitate faculty to design their courses and assignments aligned with both students' learning outcomes and students' career success. In other words, they can visualize how career readiness can be integrated into student learning outcomes and assessments regardless of the content of learning.
3. To inspire faculty to engage their students in research or other real-world problem solving projects that are more meaningful for and relevant to their career paths.
4. To motivate students to engage in their course assignments and projects with purpose when they know that their participation and commitment matter for their career success.
5. To prepare students to market themselves by including and sharing their classroom learning experiences in connection with career skills in their resume and job interviews.

Goals and Strategic Initiatives

Developing Career Education Materials: I reviewed the existing materials to suggest ways to develop or refine educational resources aimed at enhancing students' career readiness and employability skills as follows:

- Tailor the existing resources to meet the specific needs of Mason students and of other campus stakeholders based on the potential needs analysis survey results.
- Enhance the “Career Specific Resources” page by renaming and adding a few industry categories and updating the discipline-relevant resources.
- Develop additional materials catered towards international students including Mason Korea students based on their graduating senior survey results.
- Increase the accessibility of the “Career Readiness Guide.” The current handbook is extremely helpful and educational but can be in a more user-friendly format, so that students access relevant information and work on each individual interactive exercise selectively based on their interests and needs.
- Share the sample course syllabi and assignments on the University Career Services website under “Faculty and Staff” and a newly created tab like “Curriculum-to-Career.”

Engaging Faculty Peers: I explored different ways to promote career awareness among faculty and use of career-related resources and opportunities within the academic community.

- Improved the career tab on department website by including UCS resources to enhance a career awareness culture among faculty and invited all programs to share alumni success stories.
- Suggested ways to enhance the visibility of the Mason Career Influencers to motivate more faculty peers across different divisions to be part of the network, such as creating a space where faculty can interact with academic advisors and other staff relevant to career advising to bridge the gap between academic affairs and student affairs.
- Discussed the possibilities to engage Mason Korea faculty and collaborate with their Career Development Center with the Senior Assistant Dean of UL Career Development Center.
- Communicated with the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning to explore the possibility to collaborate on career readiness workshops for faculty and to incentivize innovation in teaching, research, and service that prepare students for diverse careers.
- Co-organized and hosted “Just for Influencers by Faculty for Faculty: From Curriculum to Career” workshop on Wednesday, March 26.
- Submitted an abstract to co-present at 2025 UL Student Success Symposium and 2025 Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference to showcase our works and gain more faculty traction.

Promoting Integration of UCS Resources: I incorporated career development resources into courses and curricula and piloted embedding career statement in Mason Core syllabi.

- Discussed embedding career connections syllabus statement in Mason Core courses with the Mason Core Director and piloted it Spring 2025 to assess students' reception through pre- and post-surveys.
- Communicated with the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning to explore the possibility to add career readiness resources on their web.
- Integrated career resources into relevant courses, presentations, and workshops throughout the year to gauge the student and faculty reception.
- Demonstrated ways to align the eight career readiness skills proposed by NACE with student learning outcomes and assessments.

Developing an Assessment Strategy and Sustainability Plan: I proposed various ways to continue our endeavors for widespread integration of UCS resources and impact on the academic community.

- Gather input from all major stakeholders (i.e., undergrads, grads, alumni, academic advisors, graduate advisors, undergraduate/graduate directors, faculty, and other staff with career advising roles) on their current experiences with Mason’s career education materials
- Improve the existing “Career Plans Survey,” “Graduating Senior Survey,” and “Patriot Success Survey” items dealing with career development, so that they measure different aspects or stages of students’ career experiences at Mason. Analyze the data regularly to find a meaningful pattern.
- Work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning to include or elaborate on the language relating to career connection in their rubrics for Mason’s Annual Assessment required of all major concentrations as well as the Academic Program Review self-study conducted on a 7-year cycle.
- Collaborate with the Mason Core committee and curriculum committee to find ways to embed career readiness in the curriculum.

Reflections

Being invited to serve as an inaugural career faculty fellow at Mason and attending the MLA MAPS Leadership Institute Workshop on “Imagining a Curriculum for the Future of the Humanities” with emphasis on embedding career education in the higher education curriculum in the Summer of 2024 have become a turning point in my own career as a teaching faculty. Since I started teaching at Mason, my top priority has always been making a meaningful impact on student learning, and student success has been at the heart of everything I do. However, it was through this valuable opportunity to work with Mason’s UL and UCS that I gained deeper insight into the complexities and challenges of our students navigating their career journeys today and the significance of the role of faculty in supporting their career success through careful curriculum planning and course development beyond advising and internship supervision and in connecting them to relevant UCS resources. In fact, faculty members are the ones who spend the greatest amount of time with their students and thus can best assess how they develop core career competencies through diverse assignments and activities. I am grateful for all the support and guidance I have received for this fellowship and the wonderful collaboration with two other faculty fellows. I also had the opportunity to present at a discipline-specific career workshop to share my works with and learn from faculty at other institutions. I will continue to devote myself to integrating career readiness into the academic curriculum at all levels, student learning assessment, program evaluation, and internships and raising career awareness among faculty across disciplines at Mason and beyond.