

UNIVERSITY LIFE

Revolutionizing the Student Experience
2020-2024



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Letter from the Vice President



Dear Patriots,

As the higher-education landscape continues to change, student affairs professionals must be prepared to evolve and provide support and service in creative and innovative ways; this includes responding to the diverse needs of various emerging and growing student populations and responding to the social, global, and economic conditions that our students are facing. It is in that context that I asked the UL Strategic Planning Committee to be bold and forward thinking in the development of our next four-year plan - they have done just that.

Our vision is clear – Every Student Succeeds. We will continue to work toward the goal of supporting every student as they create their futures at Mason. Our mission is clear – creating communities that embody the principles of inclusive well-being, lifelong learning, and ethical leadership. And we remain committed to a strong return on investment for all our students, i.e. graduating students at higher rates who are seeking greater prosperity for themselves and their families, and who are engaged and passionate about the work and the world that is waiting for them to make their mark. The four thematic areas embedded in this plan - Inclusive Thriving Communities, Engage All Students, Holistic Student Support Services, and Organizational Excellence - are cornerstones that build a solid foundation for our work over the next four years.

As we prepare to finalize the plan, we are working to welcome back a student body that is feeling the effects of the worldwide global pandemic that is the coronavirus. We are also hearing from a student body that has both witnessed and participated in the mass protests that have occurred around the globe demanding racial and social justice. While the next few months could have an enormous financial impact on our ability to move our work forward, it will also present opportunities for us to reimagine our work in ways that we hadn't previously thought possible. And as so many higher education professionals have managed a quick shift into areas previously thought to be unworkable, we are living in the possibilities of serving our students in new ways while feeling an urgency to create just and equitable communities in which they can thrive. We strongly believe that the goals and strategies outlined in this plan will position us well to address these and other challenges ahead.

I am deeply appreciative of everyone that participated in the development of this plan, and all those who provided feedback to strengthen our work with students. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Creston Lynch, Kirk Vandebrooke, and Jana Hurley for leading our efforts. Various strategic planning committees spent countless hours discussing current trends in higher education, the needs and interests of our students, and our responsibility to assist students in their pursuit of higher education so they could find their passions, reach their goals, and become ethical leaders and citizens. The plan is the culmination of their work and our commitment to our students' futures.

Rose B. Pascarell
Vice President, University Life

Introduction and Background

Supporting Student Growth, Development, and Learning: A Sense of Urgency

American higher education institutions are increasingly more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse. Questions of affordability and access, equitable completion rates, post-graduation success and overall well-being are plentiful. Student activism thrives on college campuses as do calls for social and racial justice and free speech. Within this context, the urgency to equip college students with the skills, tools, resources, support, and self-care strategies necessary for their academic and overall life success in today's complex world is vital.

The Challenges

As universities respond to calls to dramatically increase the number of students with degrees¹, enduring inequities in completion rates by race and economic status remain a challenge we must embrace. As a result of the continued disinvestment in public higher education by state government, today's college students graduate with greater debt despite the increasing need for greater affordability. As we work to forge greater global connections, current political, national, and international uncertainties and disruptions have resulted in decreasing numbers of international students attending U.S. universities and U.S. students studying abroad.

As the final version of this plan is being edited, the corona virus pandemic has further disrupted the lives and our enrollments of students of all demographics – sending an alarm throughout higher education. Within a short period of time, enrollment forecasts for Mason shifted from an annual surge in enrollment to a state of uncertainty. The pandemic has brought significant short and long-term fiscal impacts to our institution which will challenge us to reevaluate how we invest resources to best serve students.

Additionally, higher education is compelled to act in response to growing unrest due to anti-blackness, racism, and other forms of social injustice which have reached a tipping-point. We must leverage our position as leaders toward dismantling systems of inequity on our campus and beyond.

Even though universities are focusing more directly on student health and well-being, data continues to show an unprecedented mental health crisis among college students. As universities strengthen efforts to develop a depth of competencies in their students, employers continue to report college graduates are not well-equipped with the critical skills necessary for success. While a college degree still produces more overall lifetime earnings, public trust in the value of a college degree wanes.

Changing Demographics

National data indicates the overall number of high school graduates will plateau for most of the next decade. Of those graduating, larger numbers of Hispanic, Black, and Asian traditional age students will pursue higher education. Along with this rapidly shifting demographic, increasing numbers of first-generation students are attending colleges and universities. Greater numbers of contemporary students² are in pursuit of their degrees, including adult returners with some earned credit, online learners, veterans, new immigrants, and student parents, among others. Our ability to assist students with a complexity of needs depends on our ability to transform the ways we serve, support, and engage students.

The Mason Effect — Capitalizing on Our Strengths

Mason is Virginia's largest and most diverse public research university³. Our student body represents more than 130 countries. More than 6,000 students live on campus. Mason offers 200+ degree programs and our graduates are students who are engaged citizens, well-rounded scholars, and prepared to solve some of the most complex local, regional, and global challenges.

Mason has continued to see expanding enrollments over the last several years. As a result and in an effort to better support our institution's enrollment growth and the quality of the campus experience, we are engaged in an institution-wide, collaborative Student Experience Redesign effort. We are currently in year three of this project. The overall goal of the redesign is to scale our services to meet growing enrollment, provide both high touch and high-tech solutions, and remove obstacles to success.

In addition to enrolling more than 5,000 new students over the last 6 years, Mason is the recipient of the most transfer students from the community college system, in the Commonwealth, enrolling more than 4,000 each year. With the development of NOVA-MASON ADVANCE, an innovative pathways partnership program between Mason and Northern Virginia Community College, our transfer student population will continue to increase. Mason graduation rates are above the national average for public four-year institutions, and student completion rates only show slight variance in graduation rates regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status⁴.

Annual career plan surveys demonstrate that Mason graduates obtain some of the highest starting salaries of any Virginia public. With the arrival of Amazon's HQ2 in northern Virginia, more than 25,000 additional jobs will come to the Washington metropolitan area in the next ten years. This projected increase in employment demand is already spawning new academic programs and related plans for the institution. In addition, Mason is engaged in the development of partnerships for an Arlington Innovation District, which will further strengthen Mason's position in the region.

Furthermore, students at Mason have the opportunity to experience rich undergraduate research opportunities, numerous options for civic engagement, including participation in signature programs that are part of Mason Impact and the Patriot Experience. As a well-being university, Mason is also home to the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, one of the first such centers in the country, whose mission is to catalyze human well-being by promoting the science and practices that lead to a life of vitality, purpose, resilience, and engagement.

¹ By 2025, America will face a shortfall of 11 million skilled workers

² Also known as non-traditional and new traditional students

³ Research: Mason is one of 131 top tier research universities in the country, as identified by Carnegie classification. Diversity: the depth and breadth of Mason's student diversity extends beyond race and ethnicity. About 40% of our incoming students identify as first-generation college students. More than 2,000 students identify as having a learning or physical different ability. One-third of our students are Pell grant recipients. Mason is home to the largest number of undocumented students of any 4-year public in the Commonwealth. There is rich diversity among students with different religious and spiritual practices. Mason was one of the first universities in the country to include transgendered students in their LGBT student organizations. And Mason's college preparatory program, targeted toward first generation, low income students, occurs in partnership with seven local school divisions in Virginia.

⁴ National average overall is 59%; Mason average is 70.6



**University Life
Strategic Plan
2020-2024**

Context for the Plan



Stemming from our vision, the strategic plan addresses internal and external environmental opportunities and constraints which impact the Mason student experience (see “Introduction”). We chart a bold path forward; addressing some of the most important and contemporary questions facing higher education. Using this as a guide, we endeavor to revolutionize the way we function. We chart our course to adapt and change alongside our students to meet their ever-developing needs in a fast-paced, digitally transforming world.

The plan navigates these fundamental University Life (UL) objectives:

- ... Develop systems and infrastructures that support students’ persistence, completion, and overall success.
- ... Contribute to and measure student learning.
- ... Support student overall mental health and well-being.
- ... Actively engage and give voice to our growing and evolving student population.
- ... Prepare students for better jobs, happier lives, and higher incomes.

University Life Student Learning Outcomes

The UL strategic plan is structured to realize our vision by declaring our mission, values, and then defining our major strategies to meet the desired outcomes. In the spirit of Mason Strategic Goal #1, all division programs, initiatives, and action steps are developed and delivered with student learning in mind. With a focus on comprehensive student development, we promote and assess student learning through six learning domains. They are:





VISION
MISSION
VALUES

University Life Vision, Mission, & Values

1

Vision

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS

2

Mission

University Life cares for the whole student by promoting inclusive well-being and fostering lifelong learning to prepare ethical leaders for the world.

3

Values

TOGETHER, we achieve our mission through an unwavering commitment to our values:

- **Inclusion and Equity**

We are committed to cultivating an environment of engagement, connection, and belonging that is respectful and fair for everyone.

- **Leadership for Positive Change**

We are committed to cultivating leaders who critically examine and understand the potential impact of their decisions and act ethically.

- **Well-Being**

We are committed to cultivating an environment of understanding and fulfillment of both individual and community well-being that promotes purpose, vitality, engagement, and resilience.

- **Collaborative Community**

We are committed to cultivating a supportive network of colleagues that shares ideas, learns and creates together, and develops authentic connections.

- **Strategic Transformation**

We are committed to dynamic action in creating meaningful solutions to anticipate and meet the needs of an ever-changing community.



University Life Strategic Goals

University Life Strategic Goals

Our four strategic goals and accompanying strategies serve as guideposts for all UL professional staff and well over 1,000 undergraduate and graduate student assistants over the next four years in delivering an exceptional student experience for all Mason students.

Today's traditional age college students grew up in the digital age. Digital transformation — especially in 2020 — irrevocably changes how students relate to others, how they learn, and how they exercise their civic engagement. Now more than ever, we utilize technology daily to not only casually communicate, but to coordinate, teach, learn, and to connect through all realms of our lives.

Moving forward, Gen Z students will continue to expand and define their role as active citizens. Those of us in higher education need to reexamine our place in preparing citizens for participation both within our democratic society and on the larger world stage. In short, in these ever-changing and challenging times, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to serve our students equitably as societal norms and practices continue to evolve.



I — Inclusive Thriving Communities

Statement:

We will cultivate a thriving community where students actively engage across difference and make meaningful connections through shared humanity.

Context:

University Life recognizes its pivotal role in creating and sustaining an inclusive community that supports measurable and sustainable institutional change with regard to expanding diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are committed to developing and enhancing strategic institutional and community-wide partnerships that significantly improve our campus climate, support students from diverse populations, and educate the entire Mason community. In doing so, we will dismantle institutionalized norms that have systemically disadvantaged categories of people based on race, ethnicity, customs, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, and socioeconomic or citizenship status. Our goal is to prepare our students to make positive contributions to our increasingly diverse local, national, and global societies.

Desired Outcome One:

Build an infrastructure across the division that supports the development, engagement, and success of historically marginalized populations, by identifying and reducing systemic barriers to access.

Strategies:

- Develop a comprehensive lifecycle/eco-system analysis for first-generation students from matriculation through graduation and beyond.
- Implement campus climate assessment, leveraging data to center the experiences of historically marginalized groups and support an inclusive campus environment.
- Increase faculty and staff competency through an integrated professional development series related to anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Desired Outcome Two:

Build an integrated sequence of learning experiences — in person and virtually — that contribute to identity development, dialogue across differences, racial justice, and community transformation for students at varying levels of engagement.

Strategies:

- Identify, audit, and connect programs and initiatives that address topics of social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Develop basic, intermediate, and advanced diversity education programs that address learning outcomes at different levels of exposure to subject matter.
- Leverage technology to expand diversity training and education workshop delivery to asynchronous, virtual, and hybrid modalities.

Desired Outcome Three:

Create an integrated and interdisciplinary, co-curricular approach to racial justice, institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion through enhanced collaborations with university and community partners.

Strategies:

- Increase University Life and faculty collaborations to diversify the curriculum as well as co-curricular learning experiences.
- Establish and articulate an institutional-wide framework and strategy for diversity, equity, and inclusion.



II — Engage All Students

Statement:

We intentionally engage all students by providing transformative learning experiences and diverse leadership development opportunities.

Context:

In adapting to our changing internal and external environments, University Life is committed to transforming the Mason student experience to improve sense of belonging, access, persistence, and completion. Through collaborative partnerships with campus and community stakeholders, we will develop an integrated co-curricular, and interdisciplinary student experience that prepares students for leadership, active civic engagement, and a rapidly changing workforce.

Desired Outcome One:

Elevate student participation, voice, and leadership through a modernized Mason engagement experience.

Strategies:

- Increase interactions between students and faculty through expansion of the UL Faculty Fellow initiative.
- Promote career preparation through intentional connections between academic and career partners.
- Foster a co-curricular learning environment through the Residential Curriculum.

Desired Outcome Two:

Transform the student co-curricular experience through innovative academic partnerships.

Strategies:

- Identify and enhance gateways to student engagement across the division.
- Develop a comprehensive student leadership philosophy that informs student leadership, education, training, and development.
- Enhance student civic engagement opportunities in preparation for lifelong community involvement.

Desired Outcome Three:

Reimagine access, engagement, and belonging among contemporary student populations in an increasingly technological learning environment.

Strategies:

- Enhance sense of belonging among transfer, off-campus, and online students through intentional engagement strategies and interventions. Leverage technology to increase engagement among student organizations and other groups.

III — Holistic Student Support Services

Statement:

University Life will reimagine and implement comprehensive service delivery models for students to support their well-being, safety, and success.

Context:

Through strategic collaborations with students and stakeholders, University Life will provide intentional, innovative, inclusive services that support overall student success and well-being, self-efficacy, resilience, civility, and interpersonal connection from matriculation to graduation and beyond.

Desired Outcome One:

Create exceptional student experiences, capitalizing on virtual service delivery, technology, peer-led support and emerging methodology and practices.

Strategies:

- Assess and improve effectiveness of current service delivery models for different contemporary student populations.
- Identify evidence-based service solutions and engage vendors that leverage technology to expand access to and capacity for student services.
- Develop peer support programs to expand the reach of service units and identify resources to implement programs.

Desired Outcome Two:

Redesign our roles as student support experts and create partnerships that infuse excellent services across the student experience.

Strategies:

- Exceed all relevant compliance, accreditation, and industry standards affecting service delivery units.
- Implement new and emerging opportunities for virtual student engagement.
- Identify new and emerging opportunities for support targeted at most vulnerable successful populations.
- Deliver training for faculty, staff, and students for responsive and preventative lay interventions.

Desired Outcome Three:

Increase face-to-face and virtual accessibility of support services through scaling and delivering increasingly customized services for all student populations.

Strategy:

- Support the physical and mental well-being of low-income, first-generation, and distance learners through identifying specific needs and interventions grounded in research and best practices

IV — Organizational Excellence

Statement:

We will optimize our organizational health and position ourselves as change leaders by prioritizing resources with a specific focus on continuing digital transformation to support the success of 21st century students.

Context:

The landscape of higher education is rapidly evolving. Therefore, we must appropriately position ourselves organizationally, financially, and professionally. We must also be responsive to a growing and diverse Mason student population. This includes developing competencies, maximizing resources, and building ways to efficiently and effectively work together to leverage collaborative partnerships and reduce silos and redundancies. In doing so, we promote policies and structures that guide us to make informed decisions, which address the most pressing needs of our students and staff. We pursue organizational excellence by building a vibrant, dynamic, and appropriately resourced divisional team; one that is positioned to serve the students who need us most.

Desired Outcome One:

Cultivate positive staff experiences and develop professional and technological competencies to better support evolving student growth, development, and success need.

Strategies:

- Increase employee supervision satisfaction.
- Reduce position time to hire and improve persistence and retention through reviewing organizational structures, human resource policies and practices, and staff title designations and compensation.
- Build out a professional development framework, ripe with opportunities for training and development, that aligns professional competencies including leadership; social justice and inclusion; and technology as they relate to roles and evaluation processes.

Desired Outcome Two:

Build a culture of innovation through intentional communication, change management and resource prioritization plans that increase transparency, enhance efficiencies, and eliminate silos to adapt to the evolving landscape of higher education.

Strategies:

- Assess and modify divisional protocol, policies, and procedures ensuring they promote a culture of equity and inclusion among University Life Staff.
- Promote equity and transparency through the implementation of a division-wide resource prioritization and allocation plan.
- Develop and implement a division-wide shared service model that reduces redundancies and expands unit bandwidth for delivery of services.
- Develop and implement a division-wide communication plan that communicates divisional impact on student success.

Desired Outcome Three:

Enhance a data-informed culture of evidence which informs continual process improvement and sound assessment principles and planning.

Strategies:

- Continuously improve programs and services through consistent assessment and planning through a student learning and success outcomes lens.
- Review and align organizational structure, roles and responsibilities of staff.
- Create recognition programs and/or incentives for units that excel in their implementation of a best practice culture.
- Create division-wide standardization and protocol for technology practices.





Appendix

Developing the Plan

In February of 2019, Vice President for University Life, Rose Pascarell, convened a working group to develop a strategic planning process for the division. To inform the process, the working group conducted several listening sessions with University Life staff. Incorporating feedback from the listening sessions, a larger University Life Strategic Planning Team was convened with broad representation from multiple University Life units, and from every level of the organization. These team members were appointed to lead a smaller sub-committee or serve as a member-at-large providing general support and contribution to the process.

To begin, the Strategic Planning Team read and discussed literature regarding strategic planning in student affairs. Additionally, the team analyzed 20 strategic plans from student affairs divisions from other institutions. For a more inclusive and collaborative process, the Assessment and Data Analysis subcommittee led the planning team in the development and distribution of surveys to University Life staff and students. In total, over 500 surveys were collected.

Subcommittees were formed around the following areas:

- Mission, Vision, and Values
- Marketing and Communications
- Assessment and Data Analysis
- Four Existing Goal Areas
 - Engaged students
 - Inclusive Thriving Community
 - Strategic Support Services
 - Efficient Operations

The Mission, Vision, and Values subcommittee led efforts to create a new Mission, Vision and Values statement for the division. The committee led a division-wide workshop on mission and vision statements to receive input from staff on the makeup of the next division mission and vision. The committee extracted themes from the statements that were generated at the workshop to create the new mission and vision for the division. The values were created from the remaining themes that were not added to the new mission and vision.

The Marketing and Communications subcommittee led efforts to create a brand and campaign, complete production, and inform stakeholders regarding the ongoing processes. The Data Analysis and Assessment subcommittee led the distribution, collection, and analysis of data to support the goal area subcommittees in the further development of strategic goals, strategies, and action steps.

Goal area subcommittees analyzed and discussed survey and listening forum data, as well as data from previously administered surveys to redefine goals, and develop strategies and action steps. A draft of the strategic plan was submitted to the Vice President's Cabinet for further review and enhancement.

University Life Strategic Planning Team and Subcommittee Membership

UNIVERSITY LIFE STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM

Co-chairs:

Dr. Creston Lynch, Kirk Vandebrooke and Jana Hurley

Members:

Dr. Van Bailey, Jennifer de la Rosa, Juliet Blank Godlove, Rick Gray, Dr. Chris Holland, Alissa Karton, LuLu Géza Keleman, Dr. Julie Cho Kim, Elysia Lash, Phil McDaniel, Atossa Shafaie, Amy Snyder, Lisa Snyder, Melissa Thierry, Dr. Adrienne Thompson, Dr. Rachel Warnicke

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Data Collection and Analysis

Co-chairs: Elysia Lash and Phil McDaniel

Members: Emilie Dubert, Kenia Torres Jewell, LuLu Géza Kelemen, Stephanie Lampron, Telli Morris

Marketing and Communications

Co-chairs: Jennifer de la Rosa and Atossa Shafaie

Members: Asia Jordan, LuLu Géza Kelemen, Michael Galvin, and Dominique Vines

Mission Vision Values

Co-chairs: Amy Snyder and Dr. Adrienne White

Members: Dr. Kaitlin Cicchetti, Julio Diaz, Lewis Forrest, Samantha Horton, Dr. Julie Choe Kim, Josh Kinchen, Alexandra Minieri, Casey Smith, Michael Stephenson, and Christian Suero

Organizational Excellence

Co-chairs: Rick Gray and Dr. Chris Holland

Members: Dr. Lashonda Anthony, David Corwin, Khaseem Davis, Birgit Debeerst, Dr. Brent Ericson, Carol Filak, Michael Gavin, Kristen Leonato, Lauren Long, Ric McClendon, Hope Miller, Krisztina Order, Phil Rippa, Judith vanBever-Green

Inclusive Thriving Community

Co-Chairs: Dr. Van Bailey and Lisa Snyder

Members: Cordelia Bristol, Ben Endres, Sydney Glass, Dr. Angie Hattery, Kheia Hilton, Wai Ling Fong, Dr. Milagros Rivera, Casey Smith, Rebecca Stauffacher, and Melissa Thierry.

The Engaged Student

Co-chairs: Juliet Blank Godlove and LuLu Géza Keleman

Members: Michelle Allen, Jamilah Anderson, Sarah Crossen, Meghan Davis, Austin Deray, Angie Estay, Dawn Hicks, Devon Janes, Aya Leonhardt, Brandon Quiles, Kylie Stamm, Julianna Stanley, Adrienne Teague, Julie Marie Trkula and Wesley Ward

Comprehensive Student Support

Services Chair: Dr. Rachel Wernicke

Members: Dr. John Cicchetti, David Gaskins, Lora Learmont, Lisa Park, Dr. Lori Scher, and Judith vanBever-Green

