



# University Life

## 2010 Plan

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
2010 Plan – Executive Summary .....	3
Overview .....	4
Overview .....	4
Introduction .....	4
Themes and Process .....	4
Community Life .....	5
Co-Curricular Learning .....	8
Academic and Career Success .....	8
Specific populations .....	9
Assessment and Professional Development .....	9

## **2010 Plan – Executive Summary**

Trends in enrollment growth and diversity at George Mason University necessitate that the Office of University Life develop and implement an ambitious plan to meet the evolving needs, interests, and challenges of future Mason students. University Life's Plan for 2010 summarizes the wide-range of initiatives necessary to ensure that University Life continues to provide powerful living and learning experiences outside of the classroom that enhance students' academic, career and personal development.

To meet the needs of Mason students, University Life will cultivate and develop partnerships and programs that draw upon the unique resources of the Mason community and the greater Washington D.C. area. University Life led initiatives will develop and implement objectives and strategies focusing on five essential areas:

- Community life
- Co-curricular learning
- Academic and career success
- Specific population needs
- Assessment and professional development

Through the collaborative ventures inspired by the Plan for 2010, University Life will develop innovative programs and services in these five essential areas that will increase student learning opportunities, student satisfaction, community development, and retention. It is our goal that a measurable increase in student satisfaction related to students' sense of community will be realized by 2010, as indicated by the results of institutional assessments. We will coordinate our annual review process with the Office of Institutional Assessment.

In addition to meeting the needs of our students, it is also critical to address issues related to the "quality of work life" of Mason's faculty and staff. A committee consisting of faculty and staff has been established to gather information and monitor the climatic issues that impact faculty and staff.

## **Overview**

### **Introduction**

Growth in enrollment at George Mason University will be realized through a concerted effort by Admissions to increase traditional aged and residential students. To accommodate this increase, additional and enhanced University Life co-curricular programs, services, personnel and facilities are needed to meet the needs and interests of these future students. In collaboration with academic programs and other campus units, it is University Life's goal to provide Mason students with powerful living and learning experiences outside of the classroom that enhance their academic, career and personal development – experiences that are innovative and draw upon the unique resources of the Mason community and the greater Washington DC area.

University Life's 2010 plan details several important themes related to enrollment growth, which are summarized below. It is essential to monitor trends and address the differing needs of specific populations as they continue to grow, such as; residential, international, commuter, adult, transfer, graduate students and students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Keeping pulse on these dynamic student trends is critical to shaping the future of Mason's University Life.

### **Themes and Process**

University Life will cultivate and develop partnerships and programs across the university that focus on international education, academic and career success, student leadership development, health and wellness, multicultural/diversity education, and civic responsibility/engagement. In addition to increased learning opportunities, these collaborative partnerships will increase student satisfaction, sense of belonging, and retention. Throughout the 2005 spring semester, University Life will be working in action groups to formulate objectives and strategies focusing on these six areas. In addition to University Life staff, action groups will consist of faculty, students and staff from other divisions.

Action groups are charged with the following responsibilities:

- Examine current and future trends in university life, student affairs, higher education, and student/adult developmental theory.
- Determine “Best Practices” in higher education and student affairs in the US and international arenas
- Evaluate assessment data related to University Life current programs and services
- Incorporate CAS standards as they relate to the division as whole and individual units.
- Explore “untapped” opportunities for collaboration with the academic program to enhance students' academic and co-curricular experiences
- Explore experiential learning/service learning opportunities currently available and recommend additional opportunities

- Focus on meeting the needs of specific student populations including freshmen, transfer, graduate, commuting, first-year – senior year, international, residential, and adult students.
- Fully integrate faculty, staff and students in the planning process and professional development opportunities
- Develop linkages to the new higher education graduate program

## **Community Life**

Community life that is characterized by civility, diversity, and activity is of the utmost importance in meeting the demands of our growing and changing population. Several areas that are key to achieving a healthy campus climate are highlighted below.

### **Civic Engagement**

Our goal is to develop policies, practices and experiences that help students accept responsibility for their learning, personal behavior, wellness and future success. This theme will serve as a critical learning outcome for every activity, program and service sponsored by University Life. We plan to work with faculty to develop an educational programming and promotional campaign to promote civility and responsible citizenship across all areas of the university. In addition we will work with the Center for Service and Leadership to broaden service learning/community service opportunities and other types of programs related to social responsibility, including international activities. In collaboration with faculty, we strive to expand the service learning program to incorporate experiential activities in more academic classes.

### **Community Partnerships**

A greater emphasis will be placed on building powerful partnerships with neighboring communities to promote civic engagement and mutually beneficial services and programs. Opportunities include inviting community members to serve on relevant committees, co-sponsoring events that benefit both communities, and developing a feedback mechanism to address community concerns and needs. Fundraising has emerged as a priority in University Life. The Early Identification Program has been very successful in developing community partners to assist in raising funds for their program. Several departments such as Orientation and Family Programs and Student Activities are now developing sponsorship plans and packages to promote further fundraising opportunities. Another untapped opportunity for fundraising is the University Life Advisory Board. Our plan is to increase the Board in number as well as activity. Greater connections with the community serve to support us in substantial ways.

### **International and Multicultural Education**

Mason is proud of being named the most diverse university in the country by the *Princeton Review*. Our international and multicultural diversity is a strength and serves as a focal point for all University Life programs, policies and services. As George Mason

continues to grow in its diverse student populations, University Life will develop a coordinated inter/cross-cultural dialogue program to increase opportunities for successful and necessary cross-cultural interactions (with a greater emphasis on residential students), expand the Human Relations and Prejudice Reduction training program to reach greater numbers of students through the development of a student peer education program, and develop global service/experiential learning programs to be offered in partnership with academic programs (i.e., Global Education, Women’s Studies, Sociology, African American Studies, New Century College). Based on recent experiences shared by faculty, a summer training institute for faculty and teaching assistants will also be offered on “managing controversial topics in the classroom in the midst of changing student demographics and characteristics.”

Specifically related to the international community at Mason, University Life will:

- Develop an international communications training coalition to address the diverse needs and issues affecting international students’ learning;
- Enhance programming, support and advocacy for international students;
- Improve coordination of international services provided by various offices and academic units throughout the university;
- Develop a mechanism to monitor trends and solicit feedback from international students regarding their Mason experience; and
- Examine all units within University Life to determine ways to infuse international education into all programs and services.

## **Health and Wellness**

A growing residential population requires a substantial expansion in health and wellness programs and services. This includes the need for 24/7 health services along with increased counseling support, disability services, and educational programming. Research indicates that the number of students entering college with serious emotional, substance abuse, learning and/or physical disability and health needs is increasing annually. Additional personnel, programming and facility support will be needed to address these growing trends.

Related to health and wellness services, areas of focus include enhanced services of the Women’s Health Clinic related to education, clinical service and collaborative efforts with other campus departments; expanded educational programming and outreach related to alcohol and substance abuse, sexual assault, and other areas as determined; and a comprehensive assessment of current programs utilizing the assessment model, “Leadership for a Healthy Campus: An Ecological Approach for Student Success.”

The demands on the counseling center continue to grow as enrollment increases and student needs intensify. Counseling Services aims to gain accreditation by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS), thus permitting them to develop a doctoral internship program. If successful in this endeavor we will become a teaching institution and be able to hire qualified graduate students as counselors.

## **Socio-Academic Programming**

A vibrant, active and safe campus life characterized by student involvement and leadership is our ultimate goal. A central focus will be on meeting the needs of our growing residential population including students, families, faculty, staff and retirees. Collaboration in this endeavor between academic departments, other campus units such as housing and residential life, food service, intercollegiate athletics, provost's office, college of performing and visual arts, and student government and senate, is critical since so many different groups facilitate programming. Through a coordinated structure we will:

- Develop a broad range of programs to promote student involvement on weekends and evenings (i.e., expansion of First Fridays to every Friday, increase movie showings in cinema);
- Work with housing and residential life to develop initiatives to reduce alcohol and other drug abuse;
- Continue to foster old and new traditions under the leadership of the Campus Traditions Committee;
- Develop a faculty fellow program in collaboration with academic units to enhance classroom learning through opportunities for faculty-student interaction and educational/experiential programs;
- Initiate an inter/cross-cultural dialogue program within the residential community to increase opportunities for successful and necessary interactions;
- Determine appropriate levels and methods of service to meet the increased off-hours demand; and
- Continually assess crisis intervention plans and structures to ensure adequate response mechanisms are in place.

## **Distributed Campus Community**

We have made significant strides this year in improving service delivery and communication with the Prince William and Arlington campuses. Continuing this trend to further expand programs and services is a top priority. New University Life staff at Prince William have allowed us to mirror some of the major student activities occurring at the Fairfax campus. Short-term plans call for an increase in counseling, sexual assault, career, disability and health services. On a longer range timeline we will institute other University Life programs and services at the two campuses that respond to community and student needs.

## **Campus Climate – Faculty and Staff**

In addition to meeting the needs of our students, it is also critical to address issues related to the “quality of work life” of Mason’s faculty and staff. A committee consisting of faculty and staff has been established to gather information and monitor the climatic

issues that impact faculty and staff. The committee will also continue to administer the quality of life survey on a three-year cycle (next administration will be in spring 2006). The data gathered as well as recommendations will be made available to the community. Appropriate steps will then be taken in an effort to respond to identified concerns.

## **Co-Curricular Learning**

The second major theme in our 2010 plan is developing strategic partnerships with the academic arena to enhance and create innovative co-curricular learning opportunities outside of the classroom that enhance student learning and personal development.

## **Leadership Development**

A notable record of co-curricular involvement is essential in today's competitive market for students to enter the job world and succeed in their chosen field. Becoming involved in leadership opportunities provides students with hands-on experience to learn about leadership and its important components; assess their personal interests and abilities; develop critical skills such as interpersonal communication, ethical decision making and facilitation; and foster integral relationships with faculty, staff, students and community members.

In this regard University Life will increase student governance, service learning, peer programming, student organizations and leadership development opportunities in order to enhance the overall student experience and prepare students to thrive in an increasingly competitive and multicultural world.

A proposed initiative includes the development of the George Mason University Leadership Institute. Through collaborative ventures with academic departments, other Mason programs and regional organizations, the Institute will deliver a unique blend of leadership initiatives. Conferences, seminars, and community service projects focused on leadership development, civic engagement, and responsible citizenship will be offered through the Institute.

Other areas of focus include the Faculty Fellow Program, an innovative and collaborative program with faculty to enhance classroom learning through opportunities for faculty-student interaction and educational/experiential programs; development of a co-curricular transcript program; and comprehensive competency-based leadership training programs for student organizations, student governance groups, peer educators and other campus leaders.

## **Academic and Career Success**

Academic support programs are a major component and emphasis of University Life. Successful interventions can have a significant effect in fostering academic success, thereby increasing retention and graduation rates. Several new initiatives in this area include the development of a comprehensive Supplemental Instruction program – a content-based academic skills program focusing on courses identified as having a higher percentage of students experiencing difficulty. Expanded enrollment in the Early Identification Program with a new recruitment effort in Prince William County and

Manassas City and attention to transition issues with a concerted effort to address the academic, service and developmental needs of new students throughout their first year are other priorities.

Plans to expand and improve Orientation and Family Programs are underway. These programs are critical in fostering a smooth transition into the Mason community for new students and family members. The Orientation staff has worked hard to create a consistent communication flow with parents and family members. This year an E-newsletter and listserv were launched. Future plans call for the development of a Mason University Parent Association with regional chapters to assist with recruitment and transition activities.

Career Services continues to be a national leader in terms of innovative services and delivery. To remain on the cutting-edge, the department will develop new initiatives with academic units. Several of those areas include collaborative efforts with ITE to grow the Employer Partnership program with the addition of individualized and value-added services, expansion of coop and internship opportunities, and new initiatives to engage alumni in the Career Network Online program.

### ***Computer-based Programs and Services***

On-line programs are necessary as more students commute and work. In this regard University Life is exploring implementation of a virtual new student transfer orientation, supplemental online orientation and academic advising and other services identified as conducive to this mode of learning. In collaboration with academic units, Career Services hopes to design computer-based learning and personal development programs, as a supplement to the advising program. Learning modules such as this provide tools to identify student learning outcomes and competencies for each class year related to students' academic major and co-curricular experiences.

### **Specific populations**

As previously noted, George Mason enjoys a diverse student population. In addition to fostering a climate of civility and appreciation, it is important to address the needs of target population groups such as international students and students with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Similarly transfer, commuting, adult, first-year – senior year, residential, and graduate students pose specific challenges of their own. University Life will develop mechanisms to monitor trends and solicit feedback from these groups regarding their college experience. University Life will also create a team of “experts” for each group utilizing best practices, national and campus trends, and relevant research to develop progressive programming and service models.

### **Assessment and Professional Development**

Continual assessment and staff training are essential factors in achieving high levels of staff and student satisfaction, developing competitive and cutting-edge programs and services, and increasing student and staff retention. The foundation of the University Life plan is based on the development and tracking of student learning outcomes for every program and service. We hope to expand our efforts to include collecting and

analyzing data on variables that influence retention, researching models for retention and academic achievement, developing methods to promote academic success, and educating faculty and staff on important factors that influence retention and the diverse learning needs of Mason students.

University Life has instituted a Professional Development Action Group to provide on-going training to ensure that all University Life educators are continuously assessing and improving their efforts in enhancing the learning process. The group is currently exploring best practices, current research, staff needs and interests to develop an innovative professional development program.