

# MASON Academic Initiatives Committee Annual Report

## Spring 2017

Mark Addleson, Leslie Dwyer, Timothy Leslie (Chair), Nirup Menon, Christy Pichichero

The committee met throughout the year as a group and in groups. We have focused primarily on online education and internationalization. We were well supported by VP Simmons during his tenure in the administration and, since then, our administrative contacts have been VPs Marks and Burge. AVP Muir has provided necessary context and data upon request. As the committee was not invited to discuss academic initiatives before they were announced to the Mason community, we took on matters of concern at our own initiative. One exception is the invitation by VP Burge to get involved in the committee redesigning the student experience and, subsequently, to participate in the advisory council set up for this purpose..

### I: ONLINE EDUCATION

The Mason administration is developing opportunities for online learning, and the Office of Distance Education is now formally named “The Office of Digital Learning.” Apart from the fact that online learning covers many different activities, Mason is a large and fragmented institution and communication between faculty and the administration remains challenging. Although successful online ventures depend on the commitment of Mason faculty to creating and teaching online courses, it is difficult for faculty to get a sense of what is happening and of whether and in what ways these diverse efforts are proving successful. For these reasons the Academic Initiatives Committee is keeping an eye on online learning on behalf of the Faculty Senate. We seek to provide an update, as well as encourage the administration to be more active in keeping faculty informed of developments.

During the 2016-17 academic year, there have been some notable developments in the area of online learning at Mason, which discussions between members of the Faculty Senate and the administration have helped clarify.

#### **A partnership with Wiley with the aim of offering complete graduate degrees online.**

Michelle Marks, in the recently created position of Vice President for Academic Innovation and New Ventures, is in charge of an important part of the administration’s online learning plans; specifically those related to a contract between Mason and Wiley. At the request of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Michelle provided a detailed account, in the form

of answers to questions submitted by senators, of both the nature of the contract with Wiley and what Mason is doing under this contract. The Q and A document as well as discussions with Michelle have been helpful in gaining some clarity about what was both a complex and opaque set of issues. This document is available through the faculty senate website: [http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/MINUTES\\_FS\\_2016-17/Wiley%20Fact%20Sheet%20March%202017.pdf](http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/MINUTES_FS_2016-17/Wiley%20Fact%20Sheet%20March%202017.pdf) . Notable in this partnership is the following:

- This initiative, including a contract with a third party, marks a shift at Mason from an *ad hoc* approach to online learning, which depended largely on individual faculty taking the initiative in putting their courses online, to a ‘managed’ one, where the administration is instrumental in guiding the effort to build an online Mason program/course presence.
- The initiative is underpinned both by a conviction that online courses and degrees will continue to become a bigger component of higher education and by a desire to generate revenue at a time when the state’s contribution to higher education institutions is shrinking.
- Under this contract, Mason is focused on developing **complete degree programs** to offer online, initially with schools and departments catering to graduate professionals.
- Decisions about which programs to offer online are based on both estimated demand (i.e. the ability to “fill a program”) and the willingness of a school or department to offer its program(s) online.
- The contract with Wiley was signed after investigating the strengths of various potential third-party vendors. Mason believes that Wiley’s resources will enable us to enter the field of online graduate degrees at a level of quality and with a market reach that would not be possible otherwise.
- Mason faculty provide the content. Wiley’s staff surveys the market to determine which Mason programs are likely to be viable (based, in part, on their unique features), does the marketing (‘outreach’) to attract online students, and provides professional assistance with course design and development to achieve satisfactory standards for online content and learning.
- For now, Mason’s efforts to provide online degrees are narrowly targeted. Four degree programs making use of Wiley’s resources are in various stages of development. All are programs with a professional orientation. All have been initiated by their programs/schools in consultation with Michelle and others in the Provost’s office. One example is a Master of Science in Health Informatics under development in the College of Health and Human Services
- Financial arrangements including student fees, shares of revenue that accrue to the program and/or department/school, and the financial incentive offered to faculty for initial course development are worked out on program-by-program basis.

## **Further Digital Learning and online education**

While courses under the Mason-Wiley partnership are now getting off the ground, Steve Nodine, Director of Digital Learning (formerly Distance Education) directs an internal effort aimed at online course development that has been running for some years. Online learning at Mason is growing by double digits each year. There are currently 9,000 students registered for online courses at Mason, 1,500 of whom are exclusively learning online. Mason Online (<https://masononline.Mason.edu/>) consolidates information about all Mason's online courses and programs as well as information about tuition and financial aid and links for registering for online courses. On this site there is also an archive of postings about the evolution of online courses at Mason, describing courses that are offered online, discussing the issue of "quality control," and so on.

### Graduate programs

In years past, prior to the initiation of the Mason-Wiley partnership, various online graduate programs, both degree programs and certificates, were set up under Distance Learning and, for now, these continue under Digital Education. Fully online MS degrees include: Accounting; Applied Information Technology, Cybersecurity Concentration; Biodefense; Bioinformatics and Computational Biology, Systems Engineering and Telecommunications. There is also an M.Ed in Special Education, Applied Behavior Analysis. This department has its own instructional design team to assist faculty in preparing courses for online delivery. The team, formerly housed in IT Services, is now in the Office of Digital Learning, in the Provost's Office.

### Undergraduate programs

Digital Learning has primary responsibility for online undergraduate programs. The list of existing degree programs is at: <https://masononline.Mason.edu/programs-courses/undergraduate-programs/>. Michelle Marks has set a target of 15 new fully online undergraduate degree programs in the next three years, or five programs a year. Beyond this target, according to Steve Nodine, there are four sets of considerations shaping the development of online programs:

- A Mason-Nova partnership was announced in recent weeks, the object of which is to assist students as they transfer from a two-year program and earn a four-year undergraduate degree. This is expected to lead to the development of additional undergraduate online majors.

- An initiative known as the Online Virginia Network is being promoted by Richmond, but with minimal funding from the Commonwealth. The object is for the state universities to serve as a consortium for citizens across Virginia – predominantly adult learners – to take credits online that will enable them to complete degrees. ODU is the institution with the largest catalogue of online courses and Mason is partnering with ODU to develop this initiative.
- A third element in the expansion of online courses is the desire by regular Mason students to take courses online.
- Finally, as Robinson A will be soon demolished, there is also increased pressure to put courses online that can offset institutional space limitations.

### **Some implications for faculty**

Mason’s policy with regard to faculty developing online courses has shifted to developing full programs online. Faculty who develop an online course currently are eligible for a stipend of \$4,000 from the Provost’s Office and there is some discussion with schools and colleges about the possibility of supplementing this amount. For schools and departments, the incentive to create online programs may be some combination of the prospect of generating additional revenue, the ability to hire more faculty, and the desire to strengthen existing programs. Internal money for undergraduate development will prioritize entire degree programs. As resources allow, faculty may be able to develop specific classes, especially if this development supports one of the key concerns to decrease pressure on courses currently offered in Robinson A.

Depending on the pace at which the administration wants to expand online offerings, it remains to be seen whether this approach will result in support from faculty. We are concerned that current norms at Mason, where the faculty member’s research is effectively the primary route to tenure, deter faculty from taking on additional online course development commitments. One of the challenges in building a portfolio of online courses is that preparing each online course involves considerable time and effort upfront. If full-time, tenure-track faculty are not committing to developing online courses in sufficient numbers to satisfy the Mason administration’s goals for such courses and programs, one option is to hire adjunct faculty do this. The result will be a larger ratio of adjunct to full-time faculty.

## **II: INTERNATIONALIZATION**

Mason administration currently has various initiatives to raise the international profile of the institution and to become more active internationally. This committee will continue to focus on academic initiatives related to Mason’s global mission and this year has examined

institutional structures that foster global perspectives and experiences among students and faculty.

### **Internal Efforts**

**Students:** Given the diversity of its student population, evident in their backgrounds, cultures, and countries, we believe all Mason students should be open-minded about this diversity and willing and able to adopt and accept diverse perspectives in the classroom. As diversity and inclusion intersect with the institution's global mission, the committee proposed drafting a statement that could be included in course syllabi to encourage a globally-minded and inclusive stance on the part of students. Both the Provost's Office and University Life were receptive to the idea, and asked that the committee provide the initial draft. We intend to do so and to make it available on the website of the Center for Faculty and Teaching Excellence in the next academic year.

**Faculty:** The committee also discussed faculty engagement with MASON's internationalization efforts. The relative indifference of many faculty to this initiative may be related to the absence of incentives or the lack of a positive feedback system at the institutional level. Associate Provost Eby, agreed that faculty efforts to incorporate global perspectives and to encourage diversity and inclusiveness through teaching, scholarship, and/or service, could be recognized in annual reviews as well as in renewal, tenure, and promotion decisions. Action on this matter is being deferred until the process of appointing a Director of Faculty Diversity Engagement is complete.

This committee also addressed faculty research collaborations related to globalization. There were nascent plans by the Mason Global Office to facilitate cross-institution research. However, at present there is no champion at Mason for a systematic program, so, for now, it is unclear whether and how global initiatives across the institution will be managed.

**Curricula:** For an institution committed to being a "University for the World", it is important for course curricula to address global matters directly. The most direct way of doing this is in the Undergraduate curricula in the Mason Core. "Global Understanding" is identified as a component of the Core curriculum, with 85 courses offering the potential to address global matters. We view this, however, as a rather indirect way of addressing global matters, which is not likely to be particularly effective. In response, we submitted a draft for a Global "Mason Encore" that involves courses across the Mason Core as well as co-curricular activities through the Patriot Experience initiative. With the transition from Janette Muir to Bethany Usher as the Undergraduate Associate Provost, this draft was put on hold while Ass. Provost Usher established priorities for her office. We look forward to deeper engagement with the administration around curricular matters in the 2017-18 AY.

## **Mason Korea**

George Mason maintains its relationship with the Mason Korea campus located in Songdo on the Incheon Peninsula. Mason Korea LLC (hereafter referred to as MK) is fiscally independent of George Mason University, and as required by the Commonwealth, no state funds are utilized by MASON to support MK. Admissions requirements for MK are intended to be identical to those at Mason, irrespective of whether students are admitted to the Fairfax or Korea campus. Frank Neville, the University's Chief of Staff, currently chairs the MK board.

In Fall 2016, the Mason Korea President and CFO made a substantive presentation to the MASON Board of Visitors ([included with this report](#)). In that report, the administration projects growth to just over 1200 students by the Spring 2022 semester. These numbers align with last year's report, in which the Provost's office stated a long-term goal of approximately 1500 students at the Incheon campus. The presentation by the MK President also includes a number of other administrative and admissions-related facts.

More substantively, this report provided a closer look at the MK financials. As of Fall 2016, MASON Korea does not plan to issue any more debt. It is anticipated that the campus will pay off the loan in its entirety within the next few years. The challenging watermark now appears to be FY19, as a half-million dollar deficit is projected at the end of FY19 because Mason must meet its full obligations regarding rent and facility maintenance. Financial disclosures over the 2016-17 AY show that the campus is running a surplus, but a small one. Repayments have begun on the start-up loan to the Korean government. Tuition and fees at the Mason Korea campus are \$20,000(USD) for the 2016-17 academic year.

The AI committee's biggest initiative regarding MK over the past year was faculty rights for those working and teaching at the Incheon campus. We believe that these faculty should be treated in the same way as regular Mason faculty, except where Korean laws preclude this. In Spring 2017, we learned from Dean Crist and Associate Provost Muir that the MASON Faculty Handbook was being used as a foundation document for MK. Contract renewal follows Faculty Handbook timelines, and multi-year contracts are being provided when possible. We requested that the Mason Korea board vote on adopting the Mason Faculty Handbook as the governance document for MK faculty, with exceptions documented and explained in a publicly available document. No vote took place, but the AI committee was requested to identify which portions of the Faculty Handbook should apply to MK faculty. *This effort is ongoing.*

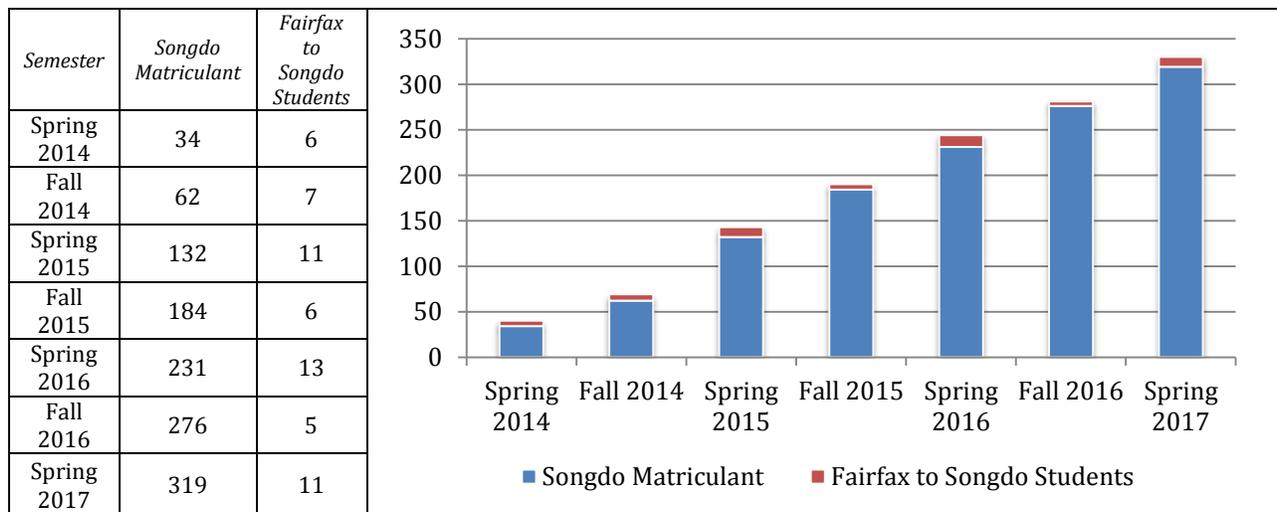
The MK campus, where the average class size this Spring was 18.4, is largely staffed by term faculty. Mason

Korea administration (and the Korean government) seeks a greater involvement of Mason tenure-track faculty. In Fall 2016 only one Fairfax tenure-track

		Lecturers	Term	FFX Tenure-Stream
Fall 2016	Count	5	19	1
	Course Sections	16	58	5
	Enrollment	328	1102	14
Spring 2017	Count	4	20	4
	Course Sections	14	70	9
	Enrollment	326	1261	122

instructor taught in Korea while, in Spring 2017, there were seven faculty members who are, in some way, affiliated with the Fairfax campus. MK officials report higher interest in MK, noting that there are already three faculty interested for Fall 2017 and that they will be hosting a faculty reception soon to develop more faculty interest. Short (two to three week) courses may be an effective way of increasing the delivery of courses at MK by Mason faculty. This would also contribute to the MASON goals of global experiences for Mason students and faculty.

Enrollment at the MK campus is one important marker of success. Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 showed continued growth, although this did not meet projections from the Fall 2016 BoV document. Study abroad enrollment from the Fairfax campus continues to be weak. Spring 2017 also had 21 Songdo students studying at the Fairfax campus. A part of this lag may be that the Ministry of Education has just recently provided final approval for two new programs slated to begin in Fall 17: BA in Conflict Resolution and an MS in Systems Engineering.



There is little discussion or debate about the MK initiative on the Fairfax campus. The AI committee has received a number of requests for information from faculty, most of which suggest a clear lack of information about MK. The bulk of this year's report, beyond information presented to the BoV, comes from direct discussions with Chairman Neville and Associate Provost Muir. While we are grateful for their time, a broader process of information dissemination is desirable.

## **INTO Mason**

INTO Mason is a joint venture between George Mason University and INTO University Partnerships to recruit international students and prepare them to transition into MASON degree programs. INTO Mason is governed by a board of directors that includes four members from INTO's board and four members of Mason senior administration. It does not report directly to the Provost, and there is no faculty representative to the board, resulting in a structure where direct faculty-INTO engagement is difficult. The committee has been challenged in meeting its charge with regards to INTO Mason, partially due to substantive administrative shifts in the Provost's office (notably the establishment of the Academic Initiatives office as well as a new Associate Provost for Institutional Assessment) that are critical to the conversation.

Our focus this year is starting a number of assessment processes internal to Mason that we believe will be necessary for successful long-term collaboration. These are:

- 1) *Faculty Engagement*: We have received a wide variety of reports from faculty regarding the INTO program. However, a deeper, more systematic understanding is necessary for decision-making. INTO Mason is a huge initiative on the institution's behalf, and we have no comprehensive understanding of faculty engagement/morale. We seek data on how faculty see the students (international and otherwise), their current outlook on the INTO program, and where they identify opportunities for positive engagement or needed support.
- 2) *Student Success*: The popularity of Master's programs, rather than primarily undergraduate admissions, has resulted in differing financial rewards paired with heavier advising costs. Many INTO students have the potential to finish up their degrees in AY 17-18, and we seek to ensure that students are not only successful in entering MASON through INTO, but in completing the education they have come to obtain.
- 3) *Administrative Effectiveness*: Anecdotal evidence suggests that admissions requirements are not always communicated clearly by INTO recruiters, student identity and background information is not always communicated clearly to academic units,, and student qualifications are unevenly provided to departmental units. We seek a more formalized flowchart of the information sharing processes,

noting the responsible parties, so that information gaps can be assessed and student progress tracked. Similarly, now that the structural processes are in place, it would be appropriate to systematically evaluate the set of INTO-Mason program entry requirements to ensure that Mason is being equitable with regard to these admissions pathways.

We continue to urge the administration to incorporate faculty into dialogue about the opportunities and challenges of internationalization, including student integration, diversity and academic issues. More work can be done by administration and faculty to articulate the real benefits of having international students in our classrooms and on our campus, and ensuring their diverse perspectives and experiences are recognized and valued.

**GMU Korea: State of the Campus – BOV Report**

**October 13, 2016 is posted on the Faculty Senate website at**

[http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/MINUTES\\_FS\\_2016-17/GMUK%20Fall%20Semester%20BOV%20Report\\_10-13-2016.pdf](http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/MINUTES_FS_2016-17/GMUK%20Fall%20Semester%20BOV%20Report_10-13-2016.pdf)