Report of the University Academic Initiatives Committee
Spring 2018
Membership: Mark Addleson, Timothy Leslie (chair), Nirup Menon, Christy Pichichero, Danielle Rudes, David Straus

The committee met throughout the year as a group and in sub-groups. We took our initial guidance based upon the President’s annual goals published in the summer of 2017. These efforts were broad, and there is substantive room for additional faculty engagement if membership of the committee was increased. We were supported largely by Associate Provost Muir, with smaller touch points across the University administration.

1 – Online (Distance) Education
Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 5a. Bring at least 5 new online programs to market and established new partnership for online degree completion
Basic background information on the evolution of distance (online) education at Mason is included in the 2016 Faculty Senate Academic Initiatives Committee report under ‘Online Education at Mason’

Online education at Mason has evolved from an ad hoc activity, where individual instructors in different departments offered online versions of their own courses, typically designing their online material themselves, to a fully-fledged effort focused on providing complete graduate and undergraduate programs.

Administration of online education programs
The university administration’s policy is to add online degree programs incrementally. A decision to create and offer a new online program results from initiatives by both the administration and colleges wishing to realize the perceived benefits of taking degree programs online. For the latter, under the new budget model, increased enrollment means an increase in revenue directly to the local unit.

From an administrative standpoint, there are two branches of online education at Mason. In one, a limited number of graduate programs fall under a contract with Wiley Education Services (https://tinyurl.com/ybpf3bke). The graduate programs offered under this contract have two characteristics in common: there is a perceived high demand and courses can scale to serve a large number of students. In the other branch, the Office of Digital Learning, now housed in the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning handles the graduate courses as well as undergraduate programs.
Graduate Programs
Mason Online (masononline.gmu.edu) lists a range of online graduate offerings from complete degree programs, such as the MS in Applied Information Technology: Cyber Security Concentration and the MEd in Curriculum and Instruction, Blended and Online Learning in Schools Concentration, to offered graduate certificates, to various Masters degrees in 'hybrid' form, with some online and some in-class courses, such as the MS in Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Undergraduate Programs
Graduate courses and programs were the main focus of online education until recently. Mason now offers bachelor’s degree programs, undergraduate certificates and minors, and consortia programs that can be completed online. The list is available on Mason Online and is expanding each semester. Four additional fully online undergraduate degrees become available in fall 2018: a BS in Management, a Sports Management concentration in the BS in Health, Fitness and Recreation Resources, a BS in Psychology and a BFA in Computer Game Design.

Data on Online Education at Mason
The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness has detailed data on distance education at Mason. In summary, for Spring 2018, distance education compares with total university courses as follows;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of courses</th>
<th># of sections</th>
<th>Course FTE</th>
<th>Credit hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total University</td>
<td>3,033</td>
<td>6,713</td>
<td>26,725</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Online</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>563</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional Online</td>
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<td>530</td>
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<td>Contract Online</td>
<td>37</td>
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* This represents a 16% increase over the 2017 figure
Notes: Online education includes classes with more than 50 percent of class provided remotely; most courses listed are 100% online. Cross-listed courses are counted as one course. Course FTE uses the course level (UG, GR)

Assisting faculty with online teaching
A notable aspect of the increased attention to online education at Mason is a substantial effort toward assisting faculty involved in creating and delivering online courses. This effort takes a variety of forms. An important part of the assistance faculty receive concerns working with professional instructional designers on improving both the content and presentation of online material. The ‘Course Redesign Academy’ under the auspices of Shelley Reid, Director for Teaching Excellence in the Stearns Center aims to help faculty rethink how they teach their courses online, to encourage faculty to engage one another across courses and to bring faculty together to talk about their teaching.
This precedes a six-week Online Course Redesign Academy led by the instructional designers, which turns instructors’ focus to the online setting for their course and leads them through the first course design elements. For faculty using Blackboard, online support is available from ITS at https://coursessupport.gmu.edu/Faculty/. Faculty developing online course are eligible for stipends provided by the Office of Digital Learning and the faculty member’s college. Exact amounts vary by college.

**Issues for consideration by the Faculty Senate**

Especially now that entire degree programs are online, faculty should be paying attention to:

- The quality and effectiveness of the online education in the context of what a ‘university education’ means in terms of teaching and learning. A significant element, here, is individualization versus standardization of both teaching and learning.
- The role of professors and deans in assessing and evaluating online instruction and the tools for doing these evaluations/assessments.
- Regarding the administration of online programs by departments and deans, faculty turnover effects on the content and teaching of online programs. Is the aim to create standardized course material (akin to textbook supplementary material) delivered by whoever teaches the course? They also have a bearing on compensation to faculty for developing online courses. When a new instructor takes on an existing online course is s/he compensated for course development in the same way that the originator was?
- Considerations like these are shaped by and influence university resources, from budgets to staffing (e.g. in instructional design)

As more programs get developed for online delivery, the university also needs to keep in mind the limitations for international students and veterans in this modality. International students have visa restrictions and veterans have limitations based on their military benefits.

Along with the entire Faculty Senate, we note, with sadness, the passing of Stanley Zoltec, Director of Online Education in the College of Science

2 – *Student Experience Redesign*

**Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 1c. Complete design of Constituent Relationship Management system to support Student Experience Redesign.**

The Student Experience Redesign (SER) is a multi-year project designed to improve student services at Mason, particularly with regard to paperwork. Six work streams have produced recommendations that will be formally shared in early May 2018. This
unveiling will include an implementation strategy, assigning leadership talent and resources to the approved projects.

**Considerations for faculty**
The recommendations from SER will include a commitment to a student lifecycle CRM. Faculty may want a voice in the process of identifying a product and may wish to shape the implementation strategy of such a product. The adoption of a CRM is reflected in annual goals of the president and provost. Some of the recommendations may overlap with critical instructional and advising functions. Faculty voice and insights will ensure the path forward is consistent with our core mission.

**3 – Mason Korea**
Mason Korea is a continual source of news and change. In Fall 2017, the Mason Korea President and CFO made a substantive presentation to the MASON Board of Visitors. 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.

Starting in Spring 2017 and working through the 2017-18 academic year, Mason Korea began work on a Faculty Handbook. There was a lack of clarity whether the Mason Korea faculty should have their own handbook, or base the procedures on those at use elsewhere at Mason. The committee approved and sent to the Faculty Senate the motion “The Faculty Senate endorses the usage of the George Mason University Faculty Handbook for all faculty hired or assigned to work at GMU Korea. Where differences are required by local law or arises from specific local circumstance, those differences should be detailed in an addendum and rationale provided. The Faculty Senate reserves the right to verify the addendum modifications are necessary and appropriate.” The motion passed unanimously at the April 5, 2018 Faculty Senate meeting.

We also sought information on the Mason Korea faculty workload policy and received a draft. The implementation of Faculty Handbook modifications and completion of the workload policy will be important elements for the committee to oversee in AY2018-19. The persistence of issues surrounding faculty could be mediated somewhat by having a US-based GMU Faculty member on the Mason Korea LLC board of directors.

We do not have firm numbers for faculty instructional dynamics for AY2017-18, however we have no reason to believe the campus does not continue to rely on term faculty with a few visiting tenure-stream faculty from Virginia campuses.
We provide below the most recent numbers provided to us on enrollment at Mason Korea. While recruiting appears to be relatively steady at 85-90 matriculating students per semester, retention challenges have resulted in much more modest growth numbers. In addition to the student counts here, approximately 120 students are on Leaves of Absence, mostly due to military conscription requirements of Korean citizens.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 14</th>
<th>Fall 14</th>
<th>Spring 15</th>
<th>Fall 15</th>
<th>Spring 16</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>183</td>
<td>230</td>
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<td>316</td>
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4 – Academic Integrity
The Office of Academic Integrity currently employs a full time Director, Associate Director, and a Graduate Programming Assistant. During the 2016-2017 academic year, 663 students received referrals in 479 cases. Of those 663 students, 17 were referred more than once. Approximately 23% of the students referred during the 2016-2017 year were international students, the same referral rate as the previous year. Numbers for the 2017-18AY are not currently available. Some units have established recommended (or required sanctions) for their faculty to use, while other units have no guidelines. These differences can result in uneven sanctions warrant a synthesizing University effort.

5 – Academic Advising
Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 1d. Increase retention and completion rates: first year retention to 88% and six year graduation rates to 70% for first time freshmen; first year retention to 82% and four year graduation rate to 70% for transfer students.
Mason as an institution focused more intently over the past year on the quality of academic advising within units, partially because of the emphasis on retention and four-
year graduation rates. First-time freshmen who see their academic advisor seven or more times have a higher 4-year graduation rate (66%) and 6-year graduation rate (96%) than the university average. In 2018-19, the committee looks forward to seeing more formal information on best practices and their implementation within units at Mason, as well as disaggregated advising metrics. One success metric for advising has been the growth in use of the Student Success Collaborative (SSC) and faculty/advisors are strongly encouraged to use in the future.

6 – Study Abroad
Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 1b. Launch signature short and semester-long options in Korea or other strategic destinations, and increase study abroad participation by 15%

Committee members met with the Global Education Office (GEO) and their new initiatives. Director Gibson was effusive about GEO’s new initiatives, and is aggressive in working to increase the number of students studying abroad. Mason’s study abroad programs are particularly focused on faculty-led experiences, which is relatively unusual for large state institutions.

GEO is currently developing three new initiatives:

- Global Discovery – This is a set of grants designed to encourage study abroad experiences embedded in existing courses.
- Global Alliance – These are new institution partnerships where faculty champions at each institution develop a cohort program for students from both institutions. In collaboration with the Free University of Amsterdam, one developed program exists.
- Global Gateway - A second semester first year program. Students will enroll in a UNIV 108 Transition course in their initial fall semester followed by spring semester at one of five Global Gateway Universities -Mason Korea, University of the Andes, Chile, University of Cape Town, South Africa, University Carlos III of Madrid, Spain; Curtin University, Australia.

GEO is actively hiring staff to run these programs, and the committee will continue conversations about these initiatives in 2018-2019.

7 – Internationalization
Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 5c. Complete campus internationalization plan.
This initiative is a synthesis project by central administration to pull together the various proposals from groups over the past three years. While we intend to follow up on the details and communications element of the plan, this initiative had relatively little content for the committee during the current year.
8 – Mason Impact
Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 1a. Create Mason Impact curricular and co-curricular options in the areas of undergraduate research, entrepreneurship, global learning, and civic engagement.
As part of a continuation of an on-going effort at Mason to build an undergraduate culture of research, the Mason IMPACT (now MPact) seeks to develop and grow opportunities for undergraduate students to engage with and produce research. MPact falls in line with prior initiatives such as the QEP and Students as Scholars programs and has student scholarship as one of its core goals.

The Mason MPAct builds on the academic foundation established by the Mason Core to prepare Mason graduates as engaged citizens and well-rounded scholars prepared to act with distinction in their work, home and civic lives. The intention is to be a scaffolded module of courses culminating in a MPact Experience, with introduction to the Mason Impact culture and activities when students first arrive at Mason, opportunities to learn skills and knowledge in their courses, and projects that build on their education and they take on leadership roles. In implementation, the MPact Experience will be in one focus area: Undergraduate Research and Creative Projects, Civic Engagement, and Entrepreneurship are the three currently in place.

The Mason IMPACT initiative remains a work-in-progress. Their work will continue into the 2018-19 Academic Year and beyond. We recommend (and find warrant for) continued participation in the Mason IMPACT leadership council by members of the Academics Initiative committee.

9 - Diversity and Cultural Competency
Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 3a. Increase the percentage of underrepresented groups at interview stage by 5% of A/P and I/R faculty and 3% for classified staff
We continued work with the Diversity and Minorities Issues University Standing Committee and the offices of Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics as well as Faculty Affairs and Development in order to discuss furthering faculty diversity and cultural competency with regard to Mason’s diverse student body. In this vein, and with the goal of a faculty-led effort to address Presidential Goal 3a for AY 2017-2108, these bodies came together to present a motion to the faculty senate to require the inclusion of a diversity statement in the application dossier of potential faculty hires. This motion was presented to the Faculty Senate on March 28th and following an inconclusive discussion, will be brought back to the Senate in fall 2019.
Relevant 2017-18 President’s Goal: 5b. Execute ADVANCE partnership with NOVA include at least 5 new connected pathways

This partnership between the Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC or NOVA) and Mason is intended to streamline the process of completing a bachelor’s degree for the thousands of students who transfer from NOVA to Mason. The focus of the program is split between intensive advising and curricular alignment. ADVANCE 1.0 is set to launch in April 2018 with 20 curricular pathways. Two success coaches have been hired, and three more will be hired to be the initial point of contact for all ADAVANCE students. Students must meet progression standards and are encouraged to consult with their major advisors at Mason. Students also will have access to some student services at Mason while still enrolled at NOVA. These students are expected to be more efficient in making degree progress in terms of both time and money.

Considerations for faculty
The GPA threshold for ADVANCE is 2.5 (with some higher standards for key courses in some pathways). Faculty seek evidence that the students in these programs are prepared for success when they get to Mason. We support creating a careful assessment model that allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of ADVANCE.

The number of formal curricular pathways will continue to expand, with a stated goal of a pathway structure existing for each undergraduate degree offering at Mason. Academic programs interested in being a part of ADVANCE should contact Associate Provost Muir. The process involves thoughtful engagement with our NOVA counterparts to ensure the content in prerequisite courses prepares NOVA transfer students for success at Mason and to ensure the course sequencing leads to both the Associate’s degree at NOVA and a bachelor's degree at Mason.