

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE FACULTY SENATE MEETING

September 25, 2024, 3:00-4:15 p.m. | Online Meeting

Number of attendees: 127 ([List of Names](#))

Call to order: Senate President Solon Simmons called the meeting to order at 3:05 pm.

Approval of the Minutes of August 28, 2024: Approved as posted.

GMU Provost James Antony expressed his enthusiasm for joining an institution that balances elite achievements with broad access and high success rates. He highlights the institution's rapid rise, the ambitious faculty, and the exciting research and creative work being done. Antony appreciates the institution's ability to maintain excellence while being inclusive.

He mentions the successful orientation of over 6,000 students and the record-breaking incoming undergraduate class of over 4,600 students, noted for their academic talent. Antony announces the appointment of Joshua Park as the new dean for Mason Korea and the ongoing search for a new dean for the College of Science.

Antony scheduled 2- to 4-hour sessions to meet with faculty of all schools and colleges so that he has an opportunity to hear what's on their mind: What are they concerned about? What do they want me to know? He said, "I've been engaged in learning as much as I can, talking to as many people as possible, and I hope for those of you that have been able to demonstrate that I am curious. I wanna listen. I wanna learn. And I wanna try and identify themes."

Antony has been actively engaging with deans, senior leaders, and faculty to understand their operations, goals, and challenges. He emphasizes the importance of transparent hiring practices and is keen on fostering open communication and collaboration within the institution.

James Antony discussed the following as his key priorities

- 1. Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs:**

- Deans are interested in discussing the future of graduate education and postdoctoral affairs at George Mason.
- Emphasis on revisiting and enhancing current efforts to align with future goals.

2. **Communication Strategy:**

- Importance of refining communication between the Provost team and the campus.
- Introduction of a more focused and impactful Provost Newsletter.
- Direct communication with Deans to ensure timely and consistent information sharing.

3. **Academic Program Reviews:**

- Need to evaluate and improve academic program reviews.
- Encouragement to define what works best for the institution.

4. **Budget Model:**

- Commitment to developing a new budget model by the end of the year.
- Transparency and adaptability in the budget model process.
- Review and refresh of the indirect cost recovery (IDC) model.

5. **Collaboration with the Senate:**

- Interest in supporting faculty career advancement, especially for associate professors.
- Addressing issues faced by term faculty.
- Improving the process and quality of annual feedback for faculty.

James Antony concludes by expressing his willingness to work collaboratively on these initiatives and invited the senators to ask questions and engage in further discussion.

Q/A and Discussion with Provost Antony:

Senate President **Solon Simmons** started by appreciating the discussion and mentioned that there will be time for questions. **Delton Daigle** then asked James Antony about the budget model redesign and how faculty will be engaged in the process. Antony explains that there is a schematic being worked on to ensure academic input from both deans and faculty, and he commits to making sure this input is included.

Tim Gibson raised a question about the "Just Society's" requirement, noting that it has been paused for a year. He expressed concern that this pause undermines the extensive work done by faculty over many years. Antony responded by explaining that the pause was communicated by his predecessor and that it is in place to assess the learning outcomes of the courses. Antony emphasized the importance of faculty input and

assures that the conversation will continue based on the assessment results. Gibson followed up, stressing the importance of faculty leading the curriculum development process. Antony agreed and acknowledged the faculty's role in generating curricular ideas and reiterating his commitment to an intellectual and assessment-based approach to the discussion.

Alexander Monea raised concerns to Provost James Antony about the adoption of a new university policy and the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of anti-Semitism. Monea questioned whether the policy change is a major or minor revision and expressed worries that it might stifle criticism of Israel and Zionism, potentially impacting academic freedom.

Provost Antony responded by stating that the administration views the policy change as a minor revision. He emphasizes his commitment to academic freedom and encourages ongoing discussions to clarify the policy's implications. Antony also deferred to the university president's communications on the matter.

Solon Simmons added that the issue has been referred to Faculty Matters to ensure a thorough understanding of the policy change process and its impact on academic freedom.

Mohan Venigalla (chair of Faculty Matters Committee) Discussed having a conversation with Solon about faculty matters looking into the University Policy mentioned by Monea. Venigalla mentioned that the faculty has not yet met to address these issues but will prioritize the issue. Venigalla then raised concerns about perceived preferential treatment for the law school in terms of budget, especially in light of recent negative press by referring to an article just published by Propublica that involved law school invitations to Judge Aileen Cannon. He questioned if there is an inequitable treatment among different colleges, highlighting that the College of Engineering and Computing is performing well but still faces budget cuts, whereas the law school doesn't.

Provost Antony responded to Venigalla by emphasizing that his duty is to first ensure the financial stability of all schools and colleges. He acknowledged the law school's ongoing financial issues and the university's efforts to address them. He stressed that any school facing financial instability would receive similar attention to ensure future stability. He also highlighted the importance of asking questions about the law school's situation but reiterated the administration's commitment to financial stability for all units.

Liam Keen, the student government representative, raised a concern about how faculty are prepared to assist students with various issues, such as housing and accessing

university resources. He shared a personal experience from his freshman year when a professor helped him find housing resources.

Provost Antony, responded by acknowledging the challenges faced by both students and faculty. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that faculty and staff are aware of the resources available to support students. Antony also highlighted the need to consider the mental health and well-being of faculty who often deal with students in distress. He invited suggestions on how to better prepare faculty to handle such situations and support students effectively.

Eugene Kontorovich (law school) raised concerns about the financial deficits of the law school and asked how it compares it to other units within the university and other public law schools nationally. Provost James Antony responded by acknowledging the financial challenges faced by law schools in general, including competition for faculty and the broader issues within the legal profession. He confirmed that the law school has the largest financial challenges compared to other academic units at George Mason University, which are generally doing well. Antony emphasized the chronic underfunding of the university and the collective strategy to secure better funding from the Commonwealth to address these issues. The discussion concluded with appreciation for the open dialogue and the importance of asking hard questions.

Solon Simmons introduced the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) **Deb Dickenson**. the Dickenson made a slide presentation with the following key discussion points:

1. **Off-Cycle Meeting:** A recent off-cycle meeting on February 17th had some unexpected issues but all action items were completed. Future meetings will be accessible via Zoom.
2. **Commonwealth Engagement:** The university is actively engaging with the Commonwealth for funding and support. There are ongoing efforts to highlight the university's efficiency and underfunding issues.
3. **Upcoming Reports and Studies:**
 - Higher Education Institutional Viability Report.
 - Higher Education Spending and Student Cost Survey.
 - Virginia Military Survivors Education Program.
 - Technology report from Virginia Information Technology Agency
 - Tier 3 Financial Autonomy Management Report Review.
4. **Funding Needs:** The university is significantly underfunded compared to peers. An \$18 million supplemental funding request has been approved, but more is needed to close the funding gap, especially for faculty and staff compensation and infrastructure needs.
5. **Future Budget Adjustments:** There is hope for funding adjustments in FY 26 and beyond to address these needs.

6. **Budget Update:**

- The team has worked hard to close the budget gap through spending reductions and targeted expense reduction plans.
- Despite some remaining cuts for FY 2025, the overall budget shows a surplus, a significant improvement from FY 2023's shortfall.

7. **Challenges and Strategies:**

- Challenges persist in the education and general space, including academic units and certain facilities and IT teams.
- Strategic use of reserves and auxiliary margins, typically used for infrastructure or strategic initiatives, are being redirected to balance the budget.
- Specific cuts, such as \$1.1 million in the Executive Vice President, Finance and Administration area, are still being addressed.

8. **Capital Investments:**

- Continued investment in capital and addressing deferred maintenance issues.
- Efforts to secure more funding from the Commonwealth to support university infrastructure and investment.

During the Q/A session, **Delton Daigle** asked CFO Dickenson for an update on the early retirement program's impact and future plans. Dickenson responded that five faculty members retired as of last June, with 34 currently signed up. Savings from the program will be realized over time. No new similar plan is planned for this year. **Tim Gibson** inquired if all units, including the law school, are participating in budget cuts to close the deficit. Provost Antony clarified that all academic units have active plans to meet the cuts, but the law school did not face the same cuts due to a structural deficit.

Solon Simmons requested a motion to extend the meeting, which was approved to continue until 4:30 PM.

Simmons briefly mentioned a Town Hall hosted by President Washington in response to a Gallup survey on faculty and staff engagement. The meeting had high attendance both in-person and online. Simmons mentioned that Gallup was impressed by the energy and engagement shown. He highlighted the importance of increasing engagement within units, referencing 12 key items, including the contentious question about having a best friend at work. He encouraged discussions around these items to improve job satisfaction and performance. Simmons also offered support from himself

and the HR team for these conversations. Finally, he briefly mentioned a summer working group aimed at supporting targeted faculty.

Kim Eby mentioned her appointment by interim Provost Walsh to chair a working group with the goal to support faculty targeted due to their scholarship, which is a growing national issue. The WG developed an online support resource for targeted faculty, linked on the Faculty Senate and Provost's websites. The resource includes guidance for faculty, department heads, deans, and principal investigators. Recommendations include maintaining the resource, seeking feedback, and communicating with stakeholders. Eby emphasized the importance of addressing faculty wellbeing and staying updated on national trends and promising practices. **Mohan Venigalla** added that the faculty matter committee is aware of the resource and is looking into it.

Eugene Kontorovich asked for examples of targeting behaviors. Eby provided examples, including extreme cases involving threats to faculty safety and reputational risks due to controversial research topics. She highlighted the importance of physical safety and mental wellbeing for affected faculty.

Committee Updates:

Richard Craig (nominations) presented committee nominations for four committees:

Academic Standards Committee (need 6 total, including 1 senator)

Alexandria Zylstra (COB)

Courtney Wooten (CHSS)

James Demarco (Nursing)

Eric Auld (CHSS)

Michael Hurley (CHSS)

Valerie Olmo (COS)

Faculty Equity Inclusion Committee (need 1 senator)

Anthony Terrell (CEHD)

Faculty Handbook Committee (need 1 term)

Regina Biggs (CEHD)

Research Advisory Committee (need 1 member)

Allison Lansberg (CHSS)

The nominees were unanimously elected by acclamation.

Solon Simmons emphasized the importance of committee work being recognized and impactful within the larger ecosystem. He suggested considering the consolidation or better coordination of some committees to improve efficiency. He then moved on to committee reports, highlighting the critical issues discussed by the Executive Committee over the summer and early semester.

Douglas Eyman (Academic Policies) reported minimal updates from the Academic Policies Committee, noting ongoing coordination with the new VP of AI on developing AI policies and reviewing the committee's charge. He also mentioned the Graduate Council's work on admission requirements for students with three-year undergraduate degrees, updating embargo policies on dissertations and theses, revising graduate hiring rules, and promoting a travel research incentive program for graduate students.

Delton Daigle (Budget and Resources) had no updates on budget resources but mentioned an upcoming update on technology policy.

Mohan Venigalla (Faculty Matters) provided updates from the Faculty Matters Committee, including discussions on faculty roles and rewards, reforming P&T processes, and supporting associate professors. He also mentioned new issues related to discrimination policies (UP 1201) that the committee would prioritize.

Other Business:

Solon Simmons discussed the ongoing efforts to support term faculty and associate professors, emphasizing the importance of annual reviews and feedback.

Richard T. Craig mentioned the need for nominations and encouraged responses to nomination emails.

Melissa Broeckelman-Post (O&O) outlined the committee's plans, including revising committee charges, changing election timelines, increasing Senate size, and updating rules and bylaws. She invited feedback on these ideas.

Mohan Venigalla noted the need to replace a departing senator from CEC.

Delton Daigle reported on the technology committee's discussion about using Discord for faculty communication, despite it not being part of the official university system. He encouraged faculty to prepare use cases for reconsideration.

Meeting adjourned 4:25 PM

September 25, 2024

LIST OF ATTENDEES

127 Total Attendees (Senators and Visitors)

44 Senators Present: Supriya Baily , Lee Black, Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Jamie Clark, Richard Craig , Tim Curby, Delton Daigle, John Dale, Doris Davis, Sebahattin Demirkan, Kevin Dunayer, Kelly Dunne, Douglas Eyman, Daniel Garrison, Tim Gibson, Victoria Grady, Seth Hudson, Jessica Hurley, Aditya Johri, Melanie Knapp, Eugene Kontorovich, Kerri LaCharite, Siona Listokin, Tamara Maddox, Alexandra Masterson , Laurie Miller, Alexander Monea, Valerie Olmo, Robert Osgood, Anna Pollack, Greg Robinson, Pierre Rodgers, Ellen Rowe, Catherine Sausville, Zachary Schrag, Solon Simmons, Cristiana Stan, Debra Stroiney, Caroline Sutter, Anthony Terrell, Mohan Venigalla, David Wong, Syed Abbas Zaidi, Jie Zhang

6 Senators Absent: Ioannis Bellos, Alok Berry, Jehanzeb Cheema, Ed Gero, Thalia Goldstein, Benoit Van Aken

83 Visitors Present: Wayne Adams, Elizabeth Alman, Jatin Ambegaonkar, Jamilah Anderson, LaShonda Anthony, James Antony, Jennifer Beck-Wilson, Lisa Breglia, Alecia Bryan, Crystal Buckley, Marissa Burkland, Tom Butler, Alan Byrd, Xiaomei Cai, Martha Cardoza, Carlos Chism, Jenny Chism, Kimberly Davidson, Shannon Davis, Deb Dickenson, Noel Dickover, Kim Dight, Kim Eby, Kimberly Ford, Ingrid Guerra-Lopez, Renate Guilford, Pallavi Gullo, Tamara Harvey, David Heilbrun, Jessica Holtzman, Ginny Hoy, Emily Ihara, Kaithlyn Kayer, Liam Keen, Matt Kelly, Maoria Kirker, Vin Lacovara, Andrew Lane, Bethany Letiecq, Michelle Lim, Christopher Lowder, Charmaine Madison, Karen Manley, Jenna McGwin, Doug McKenna, Erin McSherry, Kimberly Meltzer Weisman, Katherine Miscavige, Janette Muir, Clifton Murray, Bobbi Nelson, Whitney Owen, Cindy Parker, Sarah Parnell, Melissa Perry, Thomas Polk, Laura Poms, Shelley Reid, Andrea Reinkemeyer, Keith Renshaw, Lauren Reuscher, Marguerite Rippy, Mohammad Salama, Michele Schwietz, Kylie Sertic, Sarah Silberman, Pat Simpson, Jacquelyn Sims, Charlie Spann, Rebecca Sutter, Burak Tanyu, Cathy Tompkins, Amanda Torres, Jacelyn Tyson, Girum Urgessa, Ken Walsh, Preston Williams, Tricia Wilson, Elizabeth Woodley, Courtney Wooten, Andrea Zach, Julie Zobel, Girum