

GMU Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

Date and Time: December 3, 2025, 3:01 – 4:30 PM

Location: Zoom call

Opening Remarks:

- Solon Simmons called the meeting to order at 3:01 PM.
- The November 12 minutes were approved as submitted.
- Solon Simmons welcomed attendees and shared updates regarding the Provost's departure. He emphasized the importance of faculty participation in the upcoming search process.
- He highlighted Mason's commitment to evidence informed institutional culture, referencing insights from the Coach and Gallup surveys.

Resolution Debate

Substitute Amendment Discussion:

- Senators raised concerns that the substitute amendment decontextualizes the current moment and does not directly address the Compact.
- Senators emphasized the importance of focusing on outcomes rather than only process.
- Senators highlighted the need to uphold shared governance principles.
- Senators stressed the importance of broad faculty involvement in any decision making related to agreements.
- A senator questioned the timing of the resolution and whether the Compact for Excellence in Higher Education remains active, noting a November deadline for universities to join.

Original Resolution:

- A senator proposed voting on the original resolution with the addition of shared governance language from the substitute amendment.
- The original resolution focused on rejecting the Compact and any settlement agreements similar to UVA.

Voting Outcomes:

- The motion to substitute the original resolution with the new amendment was defeated (22 no, 17 yes).

- The original resolution was amended to include shared governance language from the substitute amendment and passed (27 yes, 12 no).

Committee Reports

Faculty Roles and Rewards:

- Mohan Venigalla, Kathleen Wage, and Kelly Schrum presented updates on faculty roles and rewards initiatives.
- They focused on inclusive frameworks for faculty work and updates to promotion and tenure guidelines.

Faculty Handbook Committee:

- Lisa Billingham presented revisions to Section 2.1.3 regarding term faculty transitions to tenure track positions.
- The revised language clarifies tenure consideration and early tenure opportunities.
- The amendment was approved.

Organizations and Operations Committee:

- Zachary Schrag reported that the transition of bylaws and standing rules has been completed.
- Feedback from the first reading was incorporated.
- The bylaw changes were approved.

Academic Policies:

- Doug Eyman reported that the Graduate Council is working on transfer of credit revisions, and active student definitions are expected in January.

Budget and Resources:

- Delton Daigle shared that the Board of Visitors has finance and land use items posted on their webpage for the upcoming meeting.
- University finances are in a good position.
- A budget update is expected in January.

Faculty Matters:

- No updates.

Nominations:

- No updates.

Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Action Items

1. **Academic Policies Committee / Graduate Council**
 - Continue work on transfer of credit revisions and active student definitions
 - Update is expected in January
2. **Budget and Resources Committee**
 - Provide a budget update following the upcoming BOV meeting in January
3. **Provost Search Process**
 - Ensure faculty participation and engagement in the upcoming Provost search process

Context on the Substitute Resolution and the Finalized Amended Resolution

- The initial resolution, titled *Resolution Opposing the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education*, was first introduced and discussed at the November 12, 2025, Faculty Senate meeting. The resolution was tabled at that meeting to allow for further discussion.
- A substitute amendment was proposed by the Executive Committee afterwards.
- At the December 3, 2025, meeting, the motion was brought back from the table for consideration. A motion to adopt the substitute amendment was brought forward but did not pass. A subsequent motion was made to amend the original resolution. Two “Be It Resolved” clauses from the substitute amendment were incorporated into the original resolution. The amended original resolution was then approved by the Faculty Senate. Attached in this minute are both the original and the amended resolution.

Initial Resolution

Resolution Opposing the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education and Any Settlement of OCR or DOJ Investigations That Compromises Institutional Autonomy

WHEREAS the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education” offers colleges and universities preferential consideration for federal funding in exchange for significant concessions in academic freedom, institutional integrity, and autonomous governance, thereby subordinating core academic values to federal oversight; and

WHEREAS the Compact’s promise of “excellence” masks a fundamental shift of authority from university faculty and governing boards to federal agencies, effectively transforming voluntary compliance into a binding regime of external supervision that undermines institutional independence; and

WHEREAS the U.S. Department of Justice’s “standstill” agreement with the University of Virginia, together with similar Office for Civil Rights (OCR) settlements at Columbia, Brown, and UCLA, demonstrate the dangers of such arrangements: negotiated in secrecy, without faculty consultation, they impose years of federal monitoring and mandatory reporting that chill free inquiry, constrain legitimate academic debate, and erode shared governance; and

WHEREAS these agreements, while claiming to preserve academic freedom, in fact invite the federal government to sit in judgment of university speech, curricula, and research, creating a precedent in which administrative convenience takes precedence over the faculty’s constitutional and professional responsibility to govern the academic enterprise; and

WHEREAS the Compact and similar settlements blur the constitutional distinction between voluntary funding conditions and compelled oversight, transforming what were once collaborative relationships between universities and the federal government into supervisory arrangements inconsistent with both the Higher Education Act and the principles of institutional autonomy; and

WHEREAS genuine “excellence” in higher education arises not from compliance with government-imposed standards but from the faculty’s independent pursuit of truth, the open exchange of ideas, and the self-governance essential to intellectual innovation and democratic society; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the **George Mason University Faculty Senate** calls upon the **President of George Mason University** and the **Board of Visitors** to **decline to sign** the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education” or any similar agreement that conditions federal funding on the surrender of institutional autonomy or faculty governance; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate urges the administration **not to enter into any settlement** with the Department of Justice or the Office for Civil Rights that mirrors the University of Virginia’s “standstill” agreement or other such arrangements that place the university under continuing federal supervision; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate affirms its commitment to the core principles of academic freedom, shared governance, and institutional independence as essential to both the mission of George Mason University and the preservation of higher education as a public good.

Amended Resolution

Resolution Opposing the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education and Any Settlement of OCR or DOJ Investigations That Compromises Institutional Autonomy

WHEREAS, the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education” offers colleges and universities preferential consideration for federal funding in exchange for significant concessions in academic freedom, institutional integrity, and autonomous governance, thereby subordinating core academic values to federal oversight; and

WHEREAS, the Compact’s promise of “excellence” masks a fundamental shift of authority from university faculty and governing boards to federal agencies, effectively transforming voluntary compliance into a binding regime of external supervision that undermines institutional independence; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Justice’s “standstill” agreement with the University of Virginia, together with similar Office for Civil Rights (OCR) settlements at Columbia, Brown, and UCLA, demonstrate the dangers of such arrangements: negotiated in secrecy, without faculty consultation, they impose years of federal monitoring and mandatory reporting that chill free inquiry, constrain legitimate academic debate, and erode shared governance; and

WHEREAS, these agreements, while claiming to preserve academic freedom, in fact invite the federal government to sit in judgment of university speech, curricula, and research, creating a precedent in which administrative convenience takes precedence over the faculty’s constitutional and professional responsibility to govern the academic enterprise; and

WHEREAS, the Compact and similar settlements blur the constitutional distinction between voluntary funding conditions and compelled oversight, transforming what were once collaborative relationships between universities and the federal government into supervisory arrangements inconsistent with both the Higher Education Act and the principles of institutional autonomy; and

WHEREAS, genuine “excellence” in higher education arises not from compliance with government-imposed standards but from the faculty’s independent pursuit of truth, the open exchange of ideas, and the self-governance essential to intellectual innovation and democratic society; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the George Mason University Faculty Senate calls upon the President of George Mason University and the Board of Visitors to decline to sign the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education” or any similar agreement that conditions federal funding on the surrender of institutional autonomy or faculty governance; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate urges the administration not to enter into any settlement with the Department of Justice or the Office for Civil Rights that mirrors the University of Virginia’s “standstill” agreement or other such arrangements that place the university under continuing federal supervision; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the George Mason University Faculty Senate affirms that any substantial compact, agreement, or memorandum of understanding with governmental or private entities that would materially affect the university's curriculum, research priorities, academic standards, financial obligations, institutional mission, or data governance must be subject to transparent deliberation and meaningful faculty consultation through GMU's established shared governance processes before execution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate affirms that any negotiation or execution of substantial agreements affecting curriculum development, research priorities, faculty governance, or the allocation of university resources requires a properly appointed and duly confirmed Board of Visitors for George Mason University, as recognized by the Virginia General Assembly, operating through transparent processes and in accordance with GMU's established shared governance model; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate affirms its commitment to the core principles of academic freedom, shared governance, and institutional independence as essential to both the mission of George Mason University and the preservation of higher education as a public good.

Adopted by the Faculty Senate
George Mason University, December 3, 2025
Solon Simmons President, Faculty Senate

Attendees

Faculty Senators

| | | |
|-----------|-------------|---|
| Christine | Barthold | CEHD |
| Alok | Berry | CEC |
| Lisa | Billingham | CVPA |
| Lee | Black | |
| Michelle | Boardman | Scalia Law |
| Johanna | Bockman | CHSS, Global Affairs Program |
| Amanda | Caswell | CEHD |
| Jamie | Clark | |
| Richard | Craig | CHSS/Communication |
| Delton | Daigle | Schar School |
| John | Dale | CHSS |
| Kevin | Dunayer | CVPA & CEHD |
| Kelly | Dunne | CHSS / SIS |
| Alireza | Ermagun | Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Geoinformation Science |
| Douglas | Eyman | CHSS |
| Tim | Gibson | CHSS |
| Thalia | Goldstein | CHSS- Psychology |
| Victoria | Grady | CCB |
| Seth | Hudson | CVPA |
| Jessica | Hurley | |
| Aditya | Johri | |
| Eugene | Kontorovich | Law School |
| Kerri | LaCharite | CPH |
| Bethany | Letiecq | CEHD |

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| Siona | Listokin | Schar |
| Tamara | Maddox | CEC |
| Alexandra | Masterson | COS |
| Shora | Moteabbed | Costello college of Business |
| Robert | Osgood | CEC - ECE |
| Anna | Pollack | CPH |
| Pierre | Rodgers | CEHD |
| Jennifer | Salerno | ESP |
| Catherine | Sausville | COS |
| Zachary | Schrag | CHSS |
| Solon | Simmons | Carter School |
| Cristiana | Stan | COS/AOES |
| Don | Starr | CVPA/School of Art |
| Caroline | Sutter | CPH |
| Burak | Tanyu | CEC |
| Benoit | Van Aken | COS |
| Mohan | Venigalla | CEC |
| Abbas | Zaidi | CEC |

Community Members/Guests

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| Wayne | Adams | College of Public Health |
| Paul | Allvin | Administrative Faculty |
| Tom | Bluestein | OACC |
| Noel | Dickover | Office of the Provost, AP Faculty |
| Kim | Eby | Office of the Provost, Faculty Affairs & Development |
| Kimberly | Ford | Office of the Provost |

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| Pallavi | Gullo | Provost Office |
| Yusaf | Ibrahimi | Office of University Audit |
| Laura | Poms | Mason Core Office, Undergraduate Education |
| Anan | Shahriar | Faculty Senate Clerk and Administrative Coordinator |
| Eleanor | Weis | Staff |
| Niklas | Hultin | Global Affairs Program/CHSS |

Faculty Members (not Faculty Senate member)

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|-----------|------------------|---|
| Elizabeth | Alman | School of Theater - College of Visual and Performing Arts |
| Anu | Aneja | Women and Gender Studies |
| Dominique | Banville | CEHD |
| Iccha | Basnyat | GLOA & COMM |
| Melissa | Broeckelman-Post | Communication & Provost's Office |
| Shannon | Davis | Sociology & Anthropology |
| Kimberly | Foecke | |
| Charlotte | Gill | CHSS/CLS |
| Roger | Graham | Office of the Provost |
| Cameron | Harris | Costello College of Business |
| Tamara | Harvey | English department |
| Nancy | Holincheck | CEHD |
| Emily | Ihara | CPH |
| Rachel | Kirsch | GMU |
| Amy | Lebrecht | OIEP |
| Ilona | Moore | GLOA |
| Rachel | Pepin | GMU Admin Faculty |

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| Thomas | Polk | Director, Writing Across the Curriculum |
| Shelley | Reid | Stearns Center |
| Keith | Renshaw | Senior Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education |
| Colleen | Reynolds | English |
| Lori | Rottenberg | INTO Mason/Honors College |
| Kelly | Schrum | CHSS |
| Katherine | Steadwell | Facilities |
| Rebecca | Sutter | CPH |
| Joel | Thurston | ORIEI |
| Cathy | Tompkins | CPH |
| Kathleen | Wage | College of Engineering and Computing (CEC), Electrical & Computer Engineering |
| Liz | White | CS, CEC |
| Courtney | Wooten | English |
| Andrea | Zach | GLOA & MCL |

Faculty Senate ex officio

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| Ann | Ardis | |
| Kimberly | Davidson | GMU University Ombudsperson |
| Rick | Davis | Dean, CVPA |
| Melissa | Perry | College of Public Health |