ANNUAL REPORT
UNIVERSITY STANDING RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY (GM) FACULTY SENATE 2025-2026

June 19, 2026

1. Required Composition of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC)

Seven tenure-line faculty members (at least one of whom is a Faculty Senator) elected by the Faculty Senate. These faculty members should represent a minimum of five different colleges/schools, with at least two faculty members at the level of Professor and at least two faculty members at the level of Associate Professor. These seven elected members will serve staggered 3-year terms. Finally, the RAC will include one ex-officio member who is one of the two faculty representatives to the Board of Visitors (BOV) Research Committee.

2. Committee Members:

The membership of RAC is being tracked by the Faculty Senate's Organization and Operations (O&O) and Nominations committees. This year, RAC operated with full membership representing 6 different colleges (including the ex-officio member). The ex-officio member has actively attended all committee meetings. Below presents the names and roles of each faculty who served in RAC.

College of Public Health (CPH)

- Michael S. Bloom (2025–2028), Member
  Tenured Professor, Fairfax Campus

- Denise Hines (2025–2028), Member
  Tenured Endowed Professor, Fairfax Campus

College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS)

- Johanna Bockman (2025–2028), Member and Faculty Senator
  Tenured Associate Professor, Fairfax Campus

- John Dale (2023–2026), Committee Co-Chair and Faculty Senator
  Tenured Associate Professor, Fairfax and FUSE Campuses

College of Education and Human Development (CEHD)

- Joel Martin (2023–2026), Member
  Tenure-Track Associate Professor, Science and Technology Campus

College of Engineering and Computing (CEC)

- Burak Tanyu (2025–2028), Committee Co-Chair and Faculty Senator
  Tenured Professor, Fairfax Campus

Costello College of Business (CCB)

- Sarah Wittman (2025–2028), Member
  Tenured Assistant Professor, FUSE Campus

College of Science (COS)

- Igor Mazin (2023–2026), Ex-officio member and Faculty Rep. to BOV Research Committee
  Research Professor, Fairfax Campus

3. Charge of the Committee:
To support the research enterprise at George Mason through supportive engagement with the Office of Research and its subsidiary offices (e.g., Office of Research, Integrity and Assurance, Office of Sponsored Programs), as well as the Vice President for Research, Innovation, and Economic Impact (VP-Research) in shaping the research initiatives and policies of the university. RAC will serve in an advisory capacity to the VP-Research, the Associate Vice President for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and associated offices.

In this role, RAC is expected to meet at least twice per semester with the VP-Research, and as needed with other individuals and offices. The Committee will provide a report on its activities to the Faculty Senate at least annually.

4. Committee Activities:
Table 1 presents the committee meeting dates and the overall purpose of these meetings.

Table 1. Committee Meetings in 2025-2026 Academic Year

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Dates</th><th>VP – Research Attendance</th><th>Purpose</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Fall 25</td><td>Sept. 3, 2025</td><td></td><td>Intro and electing co-chairs</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sept. 24, 2025</td><td>Yes</td><td>Hearing the needs from VP - Research</td></tr>
<tr><td>Oct. 8, 2025</td><td></td><td rowspan="3">Worked on the requested charge</td></tr>
<tr><td>Oct. 29, 2025</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Nov. 12, 2025</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Dec. 12, 2025</td><td>Yes</td><td>Shared findings with VP - Research</td></tr>
<tr><td>Winter Break</td><td>Jan. 9, 2026</td><td></td><td>Met with Associate VP for
Research Integrity and Assurance (RIA)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="8">Spring 26</td><td>Jan. 28, 2026</td><td></td><td>Worked on Assoc. VP for RIA request</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feb. 3, 2026</td><td>Yes</td><td>Met with Associate Vice Presidents for:
• Research
• Research and Innovation
• Research Integrity and Assurance
• Research for Defense and Security Initiatives</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feb. 4, 2026</td><td></td><td>Completed work on Assoc. VP RIA request</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feb. 18, 2026</td><td></td><td>Limited members met with Assoc. VP for Research</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feb. 26, 2026</td><td></td><td>Limited members met with Assoc. VP for Research</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mar. 4, 2026</td><td></td><td>Initiated efforts to draft annual report</td></tr>
<tr><td>Apr. 17, 2026</td><td></td><td>Co-chairs of RAC met to work on the edits of the annual report</td></tr>
<tr><td>May 1, 2026</td><td>Yes</td><td>Co-chairs of RAC met with VP – Research</td></tr>
</table>

This year the committee had 13 meetings as a group and one meeting among co-chairs. VP- Research, Dr. Andre Marshall, has attended four of these meetings (two meetings per semester). Additionally, the committee met with Associate Vice Presidents for Research, Research and Innovation, Research Integrity and Assurance, and Research Security.

The following describes the content of this year's committee activities.

4.1 ***Intro and Elections for the Committee***

Five faculty members started their 3-year terms this year. Based on the nominations and previous experience, the group decided to have co-chairs, rather than one chair. Dr. Burak Tanyu and Dr. John Dale were unanimously elected to serve as co-chairs during this year. The first order of business was to reach out to Dr. Marshall to initiate the first meeting of the year.

4.2 ***Charge from VP-Research***

During the first meeting of the year with VP-Research Dr. Marshall, he stated his genuine interest in continuing to work closely with RAC. He also explained his views and the difference between the respective goals of the University Research Council and RAC.

- University Research Council meetings are led by Dr. Marshall to address all research related issues for the University and consist primarily of members of the administration (e.g., Associate Vice Presidents, Associate Deans of Research from different colleges, Directors of GM Institutes, support staff, etc.). This committee meets once a month.
- RAC consists of faculty members and plays an important role in the University representing the faculty's perspectives on issues that are important for the VP-Research to be aware of.

Based on these perspectives, Dr. Marshall requested that RAC spend time during the Fall semester to identify important concerns that affect faculty research and then present these topics to him at the end of the semester. This became the charge of the committee for this year.

Dr. Marshall also asked RAC to actively participate in the University Research Council meetings. He requested RAC limit the number of attendees to two members at a time for each meeting. Noting the request, and to provide opportunity for each member to get acclimated to the topics covered in University Research Council meetings, RAC decided to rotate its own members attending the meetings (while also considering their availability). The dates of the University Research Council meetings and representatives of RAC who attended each University Research Council meeting are listed in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Committee Attendance at Research Council Meetings

Dates	RAC Members Attended
Sep. 18, 2025	Burak & Sarah
Oct. 16, 2025	Sarah & John
Nov. 20, 2025	Igor & Burak
Jan. 15, 2026	Denise & Burak
Feb. 19, 2026	Johanna & Igor
Mar. 26, 2026	Michael & Denise
Apr. 16, 2026	Sarah & Johanna
May 21, 2026	Joel & Sarah

4.3 ***Implementation of the Charge from VP-Research***

The RAC met several times to discuss the pressing topics that affect the research activities at GM. The members also communicated among faculty within their reach to obtain feedback. As a result of these efforts, RAC decided to work on information gathering on three topics:

- Financial transparency
- Barriers to successful grant submission
- Challenges with GM conflict of commitment policy 4021

RAC worked on these activities in the Fall semester. Details of the activities associated with each topic are presented in **Appendices A, B, and C**.

RAC reported the topics to Dr. Marshall on Dec. 12, 2025. As a follow-up to this meeting, Dr. Marshall invited his team to meet with RAC on Feb. 3, 2026, that composed of four different associate vice presidents as listed in **Table 1**. The meeting was very productive, and Dr. Marshall charged his team to work on these topics to investigate the concerns presented by RAC. Dr. Marshall requested to have a follow-up meeting between RAC and his team at the end of the Spring semester, which was initially scheduled for May 5, 2026. On May 1, 2026 (**Table 1**) Dr. Marshall met with RAC co-chairs and the group agreed that Dr. Marshall's team will be submitting a report to RAC instead of the May 5, 2026 meeting.

4.4 ***Additional Requests from the Committee to Contribute to George Mason Community***

4.4.1 Review of University Policy # 4007

The Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) via Joel Thurston and Christopher DiTeresi reached out to RAC and invited the committee to review the University Policy 4007 on Misconduct in Research and Scholarship. The committee spent time on this request during the winter break and provided a written response on February 5th. A month later, the RAC received responses from the Office of RIA. The details of these correspondences are provided in **Appendix D**.

While the RAC was not satisfied with these responses, it was made clear that the disputed clauses in University Policy 4007 were retained "as is" to comply with federal regulations. The RAC stated to Joel Thurston and Christopher DiTeresi that the committee would be happy to meet with them again in the next academic year (2026-2027) to discuss what can be done to strengthen education and support for faculty and students, and to promote greater awareness of the research misconduct policy and process. Subsequently, the RAC Co-Chairs have been in discussion with, and now also serve on, the Policy Management Group, where we hope to raise some of these issues.

4.4.2 Contributing to the Research Security Advisory Board (RSAB)

The Office of Research Integrity and Assurance via Melissa Perez reached out to RAC and invited a member of the RAC to serve on the newly formed Research Security Advisory Board (RSAB). The RSAB will support international collaborations and protect members of the university community who engage in them. RAC nominated Dr. Bloom to represent the committee for this purpose.

4.4.3 Contributing to the University Policy Management Group

The Policy Management Group (PMG) via Dr. Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs, reached out to RCA and invited a member of the RAC to serve on the PMG. The purpose of the PMG as described to RAC is to review monthly existing university policies and make recommendations to continue with the existing policy or make revisions. This invitation allows the research community to be part of a group working to clarify the policy approval process at GM. The PMG's goal is to provide greater clarity and transparency with regard to the policy process, and to ensure that there is appropriately broad input on policies (in the hope of both reducing unintended consequences and enhancing understanding of the impact of such policies on other policies and units). Furthermore, the PMG seeks to improve communication about policy updates so that our campus community is aware when changes are made. Dr. Dale and Dr. Tanyu from RAC volunteered to represent the RAC within the University Policy Management Group.

4.5 ***Update from Board of Visitors (BOV) Research Committee***

By invitation of the BOV, two faculty members serve on each of the four BOV Committees: (1) Finance and Land Use, (2) Academic Affairs, (3) Research, and (4) Development. One of the two faculty members who serve on the BOV Research Committee also serves as the ex-officio member of the RAC. Faculty members are not allowed to vote on matters before the BOV. This arrangement, nevertheless, allows faculty to contribute to BOV deliberations and enhances communication between the faculty and the BOV.

The following is an update from the ex-officio member of RAC for this year:

Last year, Dr. Michael Meese served as the Rector for the BOV but overall, the BOV did not have a quorum. Next year, Mr. Tom Davis will be the head of the BOV Research Committee, who previously served as a Visitor in 2013-2021, including 6 years as Rector as well as an adjunct professor.

5. Highlights from This Year:

The Committee has had a very productive year. Following are highlights:

- Prior to 2023, there had been relatively little communication between the Office of the VP-Research and RAC. In each subsequent year, Dr. Marshall has met regularly with RAC and has shown genuine interest working with the committee and addressing faculty concerns. This year, with his charge, the committee identified three topics (as mentioned above) of faculty concerns and was able to present these topics to the Associate Vice Presidents who serve as part of Dr. Marshall's team. A copy of the report that is submitted by Dr. Marshall's team (Office of Research, Innovation, and Economic Impact - ORIEI) to RAC to address these topics is added to this committee report as an **Appendix E**.
- The invitation from Dr. Marshall for the RAC members to attend the University's Research Council opened up the opportunity for the faculty to be represented in these primarily administrative meetings. This opportunity helps the RAC to understand GM's research community both from the faculty and administrative perspectives. It also provides the faculty representation during discussions of new initiatives and University topics that have an impact on GM's research and its faculty.
- This year RAC has been invited to have representation on the Research Security Advisory Board and University Policy Management Group. These positions provide RAC with a voice in important policymaking decisions affecting research throughout the University.

6. Proposed Committee Action Items for 2026-27

The following are the recommendations to the next year's RAC members:

- The terms of Drs. Dale and Martin will end this summer. The committee strongly encourages the remaining members to solicit for these openings and fill these positions in accordance with the faculty senate's required composition.
- In the past, RAC had actively involved two ex-officio members, even though the required composition only requires one ex-officio member to attend RAC meetings. The existing term for the Dr. Mazin, the active ex-officio member representing the committee at the GM BOV Research Committee, is ending. The committee strongly encourages to fill this ex-officio position and recommend both newly elected faculty to actively be part of the next year's RAC.
- It is important for next year's committee to continue meetings with VP -Research and attend his monthly Research Council meetings.
- The RAC strongly encourages next year's committee to work closely with Dr. Marshall to explore opportunities to support the Research Committee in their role to provide visibility into the research enterprise for board oversight. Details of this will be coordinated worked out with Dr. Marshall.
- This year's RAC suggests the following action items for consideration for the next year's committee to look into:
    - Examine differences in faculty workload models across different colleges. These reflect issues of faculty governance, and workload factors serve as faculty motivators and inhibitors for specific activities that have important implications for the university Research Enterprise (e.g., extramural funding, cross-disciplinary research, etc.).
    - Examine the existing structure within GM for research administration across different colleges and how these groups collaborate with the Office of Sponsored Programs in terms of supporting faculty with proposal submissions and meeting the University goals for attaining external sponsorship. We believe that the RAC's university-level strategic perspective and voice in these matters is particularly important given GM's pivoting of its Research Enterprise around the cross-college Grand Challenge Initiative and the growth of interdisciplinary research requirements in funding solicitations.
- Time permitting, the following meetings/activities are also recommended:
    - Arrange meetings with Associate Deans for Research (ADR) from different colleges to establish communications between the RAC members and ADRs to present activities within RAC to help bridge the faculty perspectives and administration in colleges.
    - In January 2026, a GM working group charged by Dr. Marshall drafted a report on Advancing the Ecosystem for Research Translation at GM. Arrange a meeting with the co-chairs of this workgroup to follow up on the outcomes of their recommendations and determine how RAC may contribute to providing support to this workgroup.
    - GM has three research institutes: (i) Sustainable Earth, (ii) Biohealth Innovation, and (iii) Digital Innovation. Arrange meetings with the executive directors of these institutes to learn about their activities.

7. Closing

All members of the RAC contributed to writing and reviewing this annual report. The report was also reviewed by Dr. Marshall.

Appendix A
Financial Transparency

For this topic, we focused on improving financial transparency and budget management for sponsored projects. At the Research Advisory Council meeting on December 12, 2025, we presented this issue to the Vice President for Research as one of three priority topics requiring attention. The discussion emphasized that principal investigators often lack timely, accurate, and accessible financial information needed to effectively manage sponsored awards. Collectively, these issues create inefficiencies that delay project activity, complicate budget reconciliation, increase administrative burden on investigators and staff, and elevate financial and compliance risk. Our goal in presenting this topic was to advocate for clearer, more accessible, and more timely financial information so that principal investigators can manage sponsored projects more effectively. In response, a follow-up meeting was requested for the beginning of the spring 2026 semester so these concerns could be reviewed in greater detail with the appropriate Office of Sponsored Programs personnel.

That follow-up meeting took place on February 3, 2026, with Dr. Marshall and members of his team, including Mike Laskofski, Chris DiTeresi, Rebekah Hersch, and Sarah Campbell. During that meeting, we outlined the major concerns related to financial transparency and research budget oversight. The meeting was positive and productive, and associate vice presidents who attended the meeting were receptive to the feedback and concerns that were raised. Dr. Marshall then asked his team to work directly with the presenters to better understand the issues, develop a roadmap for improvement, and report back on steps that could be taken to address them.

A subsequent meeting on February 26, 2026, with Mike Laskofski allowed for a more detailed discussion of the topic. We highlighted several recurring problems that affect research operations, including delays in the creation of grant org numbers, limited PI access to financial systems such as MicroStrategy, lack of PI authority in approving grant-funded travel, and slow administrative processes for hiring, onboarding, and space allocation. We also discussed inconsistent invoicing practices, the absence of clear notification when sponsor payments are received, and monthly expenditure reports that do not align with sponsor-approved budget categories. This meeting was also constructive, with openness to hearing examples and considering ways to improve processes.

Appendix B
Barriers to Successful Extramural Research Grant Application Submissions

For this topic, we highlighted key obstacles that can hinder successful grant proposal submissions, even in the context of strong and valued support from the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP). This issue is of particular importance to faculty and to the University in the current environment of reduced external funding opportunities and increased competition around the opportunities that do exist. A primary challenge arises from grant deadlines that fall shortly after winter break, requiring investigators to submit final proposal materials to OSP by early December. This timeline often compresses proposal development into just a few weeks during periods of high teaching demands, while also limiting investigators' ability to incorporate late-arriving guidance from funders. As a result, some proposals are rushed or not submitted at all, reducing proposal quality and causing the university to miss potential funding opportunities. We proposed exploring workarounds for proposals due in early January to ensure faculty have adequate time and support.

A second major barrier involves limited submission opportunities, where institutional policies require internal competitions to select a single proposal for submission. These processes can take several weeks, require the preparation of mini-proposals that may not align well with final application requirements, and delay full proposal development. Variability in review timelines, reviewer expertise, and transparency can further constrain investigators, particularly when deadlines occur close to winter break. We proposed improvements such as earlier and more frequent notification of limited submissions, streamlined and better-aligned mini-proposals, faster internal review timelines, greater transparency in reviewer selection, and standing review structures to better support faculty competitiveness and institutional research success.

Appendix C
Challenges with GM Conflict of Commitment Policy 4021

GM has the following university policy regulating conflicts of commitment:
University Policy #4021 reads: "A faculty member's primary professional commitment is to their teaching, research, service, and administrative responsibilities at the University. Outside Professional Activities that interfere with a faculty member's, or an Investigator's, professional obligations to the University represent a conflict of commitment."

Available at https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/outside-professional-activities-and-conflict-of-committment/

The following summarizes excerpts from this policy:

- A **conflict of commitment** is a situation in which an individual accepts or incurs conflicting obligations between or among the University and other entities.
- Any Outside Professional Activity (OPA) that a faculty member performs, or commits to perform, at or for an entity other than the University has the potential to create a conflict of commitment.
- The potential for conflict of commitment depends both upon a faculty member's obligations to the University, and upon the nature and extent of the faculty member's obligations to other entities.
- Conflicts of commitment also can intersect with regulatory requirements pertaining to externally sponsored research.

Key Principles:

- **Primary Commitment:** Faculty/staff primary commitment is to GM duties (teaching, research, service).
- **Encouraged Activities:** GM supports external activities that enhance expertise and university mission, but they must not conflict.
- **Resource Restriction:** University resources (labs, staff, supplies) generally cannot support outside work.
- **Prior Approval:** Supervisors must approve outside employment for staff; faculty may need approval for significant OPAs.

Examples of Conflicts of Commitment:

  - A faculty member dedicating more than the permitted one day per week on personal consulting with a company or companies.
  - A faculty member accepting an unpaid position on a company's Scientific Board of Advisors and having access to and/or divulging confidential information when the company is sponsoring the faculty member's research.

- A faculty member uses institutional resources, including office or laboratory space and secretarial services in support of his or her personal consulting.

What these policies require of faculty:

- Faculty members must report to their Department Chair (or Local Unit Administrator) any activity that is likely to create a conflict of commitment as set forth in this policy. This requirement applies regardless of whether any compensation is received for the outside activity or commitment.
- For Investigators on sponsored research projects, Outside Activities must be disclosed as required by federal regulations.

Challenges associated with Policy 4021:

Faculty and Department Chairs have expressed concern that this policy remains unclear about what outside professional activities need to be disclosed. There has been little clarity provided to Department Chairs or Local Unit Administrators.

The primary concern is that many outside professional activities encouraged by the University – for example, serving on the editorial boards of international journals; or working as a scientific advisor (as opposed to a PI) with an international team of researchers on a grant originating from another country; or as the President of a Professional Association – sometimes do require filling out detailed disclosure forms. It is not clear where this information is ultimately going.

"Malicious Compliance":

- Faculty are starting to complain that it is not worth engaging in these outside professional activities if for each one they must fill out a disclosure (to err on the safe side).
- In other words, the easiest way to comply under conditions of uncertainty is to quit engaging altogether in OPAs, or else vastly reduce the number of OPAs in which one engages.

This is detrimental to both GM and the faculty.

Recommendation:

Provide a more robust set of examples of OPAs that need not be disclosed. The list could be generated from the many unnecessary disclosures faculty make each year. [Presumably, someone is reviewing these submissions.]

Currently, the policy operates in practice as a dragnet for reporting all outside professional activities (and associated relations).

Justification for Recommendation:

GM supports external activities that enhance expertise and the University's mission. But this message is lost in translation.

Policy 4021 focuses on conditions in which the activities may conflict, but it does not explicitly speak to the need to balance these twin concerns.

To avoid malicious compliance and reduce the number of irrelevant disclosures received by the University, the policy should clarify (perhaps in a mandatory training video every two years) what activities do and do not constitute a conflict.

Appendix D
Review of Policy 4007 for Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA)

The following presents the correspondence between RAC and the ORIA. RAC's review outcomes are presented as numbers and the Office of RIA's responses are written below in italics.

1. **We have concerns about the revised definition of "research misconduct."** On p. 5 of the original policy, "Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism [https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/misconduct-in-research-and-scholarship/]] in proposing, performing, or reviewing research or scholarship, or in reporting research results. Fabrication or falsification of credentials on funding applications and manuscripts can be considered research misconduct. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion."
2. In the revision, the sentence on fabricating or falsifying credentials was removed. Was this deliberate?

Yes, the reference to fabricating or falsifying credentials was deliberately removed. ORI has issued guidance reminding institutions to ensure that their revised policies align with the regulatory definitions, and "fabrication or falsification of credentials" is not (and never was) explicitly mentioned in the regulatory definition of research misconduct.

Another reason to remove it – one we are happy to discuss further if anyone is interested – is that the previous sentence already includes fabrication and falsification "in proposing…research or scholarship, or in reporting research results."

3. In addition, we suggest deleting the last sentence in both versions ("Research misconduct does not include honest error or difference of opinion") because there is no reason to specify what research misconduct is not when we have already defined above what research misconduct is

Here, too, we are concerned to align with the regulatory definition, which includes the sentence regarding honest error and difference of opinion. While not necessary from a logical point of view, this sentence serves several pragmatic uses. The first and perhaps most important use is that, by separating out honest error, it facilitates flagging known errors or unreliable findings in the literature prior to, and independently of, a finding of research misconduct. A second use worth mentioning is that this sentence is also useful in shielding faculty against weaponization of the research misconduct process by political and intellectual opponents, because it highlights that neither being wrong nor taking a position at odds with one's own suffices to warrant a misconduct investigation.

4. **We have concerns about the new language on PHS regulations**. On p. 25, the revised document introduces a section explaining that PHS (Public Health System) regulations will prevail: "These policies and procedures...do not replace the PHS regulation, and in case of any conflict between this document and PHS regulation, the PHS regulation will prevail. They are intended to enable the University to comply with the requirements of the PHS regulation."
5. We discussed whether this should be the case in all circumstances. Obviously, sponsors set the regulatory conditions under which they are willing to fund research. But what are the researchers' responsibilities under conditions in which they have already started their research and the funder changes their rules and regulations (e.g., as we have seen recently in the case of

federal funding)? Maybe the PHS regulations that were in place when the research commenced will prevail? How does this policy apply to PHS contract mechanisms (e.g., legal deliverables) vs. grant mechanisms (e.g., no deliverables)?

42 CFR 93 applies not only to grant mechanisms and not only to research projects, but to all PHS-supported biomedical or behavioral research, research training programs, and activities related to research (such as operation of tissue banks). Now that we are past the effective date of January 1, 2026, all allegations received that involve PHS-support must be handled in accordance with the current regulations (i.e., the PHS Final Rule released in 2024), regardless of whether that research was initiated prior to the new Final Rule's effective date.

If there remain concerns this response has not addressed, please let us know.

6. **We discussed the responsibility of PIs.** Undergraduate and graduate researchers also should undergo responsible conduct of research training. "Responsible conduct of research training" should be extended to all undergraduate and graduate researchers. In other words, we should be taking steps to foster and facilitate compliance not only among faculty PIs but also students.

We're gratified to see your commitment to fostering a comprehensive culture of ethical and responsible research at George Mason to include student and staff, not just faculty PIs.

As the funding agencies that specify RCR training (e.g., PHS, NSF, USDA NIFA) currently limit their training requirements to key personnel and/or those individuals who are directly supported by research funds, this has been the primary focus of ORIA's training and compliance programs.

However, we're in agreement that we should be taking steps to educate the entire research community and would like to engage you in further conversation about what this type of "RCR for all" program would entail.

7. In the scenario where a student is found out of compliance – how can this impact the PI – are they accountable too? And then would those above the PI (Deans, Provosts, and so on) take responsibility?

The PI is responsible for the integrity of all work on the project. Research trainees are not autonomous investigators. Faculty supervisors are responsible for ensuring the quality and integrity of all research conducted by their trainees on George Mason research projects. In fact, it is explicitly possible for a PI to be found to have committed research misconduct through recklessness in supervising the work of a trainee who fabricated, falsified, or plagiarized.

Responsibility "above the PI" is indirect. Individuals such as Deans or Provosts would not be found to have committed research misconduct through recklessness. However, the institution is required by the regulations to foster a culture of research integrity, and to the extent that the institution failed to provide training on the responsible conduct of research (RCR), PHS might well decide the institution is out of compliance with the regulations. If that happened, it could jeopardize George Mason's assurance with ORI, which would mean we would no longer be eligible to receive PHS funding.

8. There is language at the start of the document regarding violations of students being governed by academic standards EXCEPT for sponsored research. There doesn't seem to be language regarding a student violates conduct policy on sponsored projects and how could that impact the PI.

4007 applies to George Mason research, there are no special considerations for students conducting George Mason research.

As noted above, a trainee is not an independent investigator and it is the responsibility of the PI on the project to ensure that a trainee's conduct is supervised and monitored to ensure the integrity of the research – hence the possibility that a PI might found to have committed research misconduct through recklessness in supervision.

However, this does not absolve the trainee of individual responsibility. Typically, in a situation in which a PI was found to have recklessly committed research misconduct, the trainee who did the actual falsifying, fabricating, or plagiarizing would be found to have knowingly or intentionally committed research misconduct.

9. **We have deep concerns about the restrictions on advisors to respondents.** On p. 3 of the revised document, the section "Respondent's Right to Advisor" states: "Although these proceedings are considered an internal personnel matter, the respondent may consult with legal counsel or a non-lawyer personal advisor (who is not a principal or witness in the case) to seek advice and may bring the counsel or personal advisor to interviews or meetings on the case. The counsel or personal advisor may only advise the respondent and does not have a right to interview the complainant, witnesses, committee members, or university officials."
10. We recommend removing the last sentence.

Unfortunately, that last sentence is non-negotiable. The restrictions on advisors to respondents exist because the research misconduct proceeding is designed and stewarded to be an internal peer review process and categorically not a legal proceeding. Respondents may be advised by counsel, but counsel can neither represent them nor act on their behalf in the proceeding.

As for interviews, the regulations require that all interviews related to the proceeding be conducted by the institution. The regulations also prohibit the respondent from being present when complainants and witnesses are interviewed.

We recognize that this response is unlikely to allay your concerns. While we cannot accept your specific recommendation, we would like to further discuss this with you to better understand your concerns.

11. **We voiced concerns over the role of University Counsel.** Concerns were raised about the University Counsel (not) supporting faculty who are alleged to have engaged in research misconduct during the stage of the process prior to any decision. University counsels are there to protect the university. I think faculty need to realize that. Perhaps add a sentence that advises faculty to get their own liability insurance.

University Counsel has no role in the proceedings beyond accompanying the VPR to the first meeting of the investigation committee and being available to advise the committee during investigation. It is true *that the UC's role is not to advise faculty. Arguably, it is not even to "protect" the university, as the UC is more directly a representative of the COV as an Assistant Attorney General.*

If a respondent hires counsel, then communication between the respondent's counsel and the university occurs through University Counsel. But this communication is outside of the proceeding itself, within which the respondent's counsel is restricted to an advisory capacity.

Advice to faculty regarding liability insurance, however prudent it may be, does not belong in this policy. And we do not know whether liability insurance would protect against allegations of research misconduct. We would be happy to further discuss with you what we might do to raise awareness among the faculty about the process for handling allegations of misconduct, as well as what specific information you believe is most important to share, both in general and when we are onboarding committee members or briefing participants in the proceeding (complainants, respondents, and witnesses).

12. **We believe that the accused should have the right to reject committee members**. While we agree that the accused should not know who is on the inquiry and investigation committees, we do believe that the accused should have the right to provide in advance a list of persons whom they think should not serve in that capacity (along with a written rationale).

The respondent does have the right to know and to challenge committee membership, which they can do in accordance with the process described in the policy's accompanying procedures.

Both the notification of inquiry and the notification of investigation are required to list the proposed committee members, which the respondent may challenge in writing. This challenge is reviewed by the RIO at the inquiry stage and by the VPR at the investigation stage. The procedures explicitly indicate that the respondent may challenge replacement committee members in the same way.

13. **We see a need for further clarity about roles.** Where the document states that the Provost will serve as the Deciding Official, it should read "the Provost or Interim Provost." This also raises the question of who serves in the role of University Counsel (mentioned throughout the document) under conditions (such as the present) when the University is temporarily without appointed University Counsel.

This is a question for the Policy Management Group, insofar as it is a general concern for any university policy about designated roles in cases of vacancy or interim appointment.

Appendix E
ORIEI Responses to RAC

<u>Mike Laskofski, Associate Vice President, Research Services</u>

Response to Appendix A: Financial Transparency

It was very helpful and informative to hear directly from the Research Advisory Council (RAC), and I look forward to ongoing collaboration. We discussed a variety of topics related to systems, variability of local support, multiple central offices and communication. As AVP, Research Services I am committed to doing all I can to facilitate research for our faculty, reduce administrative burden and ensure GMU can meet award commitments. As research activity increases and the regulatory environment changes it is critical that we have open communication channels and respond accordingly.

Regarding financial transparency the goals of the RAC are consistent with mine. The goal is to make information available in a transparent and easy to access manner to all stakeholders across the university. Over the past 5 years since we started the Research Administration Management Portal (RAMP) project we have also worked with the ITS Business Intelligence team on a Research Reporting project to develop reports that are easily accessible to all stakeholders. Throughout this process we have solicited input on gaps or needs in the reporting process and these inputs have defined our priorities. As a result, we have reports that have allowed for more visibility on multi-unit collaborations and visibility into faculty contributions regardless of project role. Beyond this recent work, PIs have always had access to PI Reports which provides a financial summary for all of their projects including receiving a financial summary via email each month. This monthly summary allows PIs to access a financial summary even if they do not log in directly to microstrategy. During the past year OSP became aware of situations where some PIs were not receiving the monthly email because of a step in the security/access process that required PI login to microstrategy one time before receiving the automated emails. Since some faculty were not completing this step, OSP worked with ITS to eliminate this requirement. One takeaway from the discussion with the RAC was the fact that many faculty were not aware of this access and the information available. As a result, we will continue to look for opportunities to improve communication and outreach, including working with Academic Units to better understand what support structures are in place locally. It is important to balance information sharing without overburdening faculty with unnecessary or confusing communications regarding administrative processes. This is something that I am sensitive to and look forward to working with the RAC on how best to manage going forward.

Some additional reporting observations are that there are perceived inconsistencies with the financial reports available as they relate to project budgets. While there are some cases where project budgets and expenses charged may not be perfectly aligned based on varying sponsor requirements, there appears we may have an opportunity to improve this situation by making sure that correct reports are used and shared with faculty when reviewing project activity.

Having specific examples of problems helps to inform us how OSP should work with the broader GMU community on training and report development and this was the case in the follow-up meetings I had with the RAC members. There are some improvements in the near term that can be made. Longer term this is an area that could be improved significantly if GMU pursues enhancements to the ERP system. In recent months, there has been a review of Banner and evaluation of needs. This issue has been highlighted and recorded with the team leading the review (Finance, ITS and outside consultants) as a need in the future whether there are enhancements to Banner or a new system is implemented.
Award negotiation and award setup is a core responsibility of OSP. Establishing grants and funds in the financial system to allow project work and spending to get started quickly is of highest priority. Depending on the type of award there are often compliance requirements that require action from the PI or other compliance offices. From a systems and workflow standpoint there have been several updates that have created efficiencies and allow for information sharing about status. This is an area that is reviewed often with continuous improvement as the goal. As the RAC learns about specific issues, sharing specifics will help to identify the issue and cause of delays to determine if there are process improvements that can be made. OSP is also in the process of working with Huron for an update to our nightly data feed that will allow for better data capture regarding award negotiation and award setup timing that will allow development of management reports for tracking timing of award negotiation and account set-up.
Billing and collections are also a core responsibility of OSP. For the nearly 1000 active awards most are billed monthly on a cost reimbursable basis. There are internal controls in place to monitor invoices and payments to ensure proper accounting and where necessary escalate collections as needed when payments are delayed. Fixed price agreements, which make up a small percentage of our overall portfolio, have resulted in some challenges in recent years due to a variety of factors such as disputes regarding performance and deliverable acceptance, capturing of timing of invoices tied to deliverable completion and financial stability of sponsors. This area is one that the OSP is focused on and has taken steps to ensure that tracking, monitoring and communication with PIs and College Administrators is accurate and timely.
More was discussed in our meetings and there are other initiatives in progress to make things easier for faculty. I look forward to ongoing discussions and collaboration.

Response to Appendix B: Barriers to Successful Extramural Research Grant Application Submissions

OSP has worked closely with Academic Units over the past several years to support the proposal preparation and submission process ensuring sufficient time to meet sponsor and university requirements while maintaining flexibility for opportunities with short turnaround times. In August 2020 a communication was sent to the GMU research community from the Interim VPR and signed by every Dean regarding GMU's internal proposal deadline policy (see email attachment). As a result of this direction, OSP has worked with Academic Units (Associate Deans for Research and Chief Business Officers) to establish procedures that meet the university policy while also allowing for some flexibility based on College specific requirements. This collaborative approach has also been applied during the past several years over the winter break when GMU, including all administrative offices, are closed. During 2025 in the months leading up to the winter break various communications went out to the research community and OSP worked with colleges on several proposals with extenuating circumstances to allow for additional time to meet internal deadlines within the College and to OSP. The established process which encouraged early completion where possible, allowed Colleges and OSP to redirect resources to help support approved exceptions. By working closely with ADRs and CBOs, it allows for more accurate resource management.

During discussions with RAC members, it was clear that there is an opportunity for better communication to faculty to ensure there is a shared understanding of established processes and more consistency across the university leading up to the winter break.   In the examples mentioned it did not appear that a request for exception had been communicated or if it had it did not seem like OSP was part of the discussion. OSP is committed to maximizing the number of submissions and doing so in a compliant and responsive manner to ensure that all proposals meet solicitation requirements. With that said, resources need to align with workload during busy times. The period before and after the winter break is the busiest time of the year for proposal submissions. For reference, in December 2025 (3 business weeks prior to the break) GMU submitted 103 proposals and in January 2026 (also a shortened month) GMU submitted 114 proposals.

<u>Rebekah Hersch, Associate Vice President, Research and Innovation Initiatives</u>

Response to Appendix B: Barriers to Successful Extramural Research Grant
Limited Submissions

First, I would like to thank the RAC for the thoughtful review and case study presentation of the issues and concerns and the recommendations. The following provides responses to the issues raised with the understanding that continued discussions and adjustments need to be considered.

1. Provide Early Notifications

- Announce limited submission opportunities as soon as possible after RFP release (e.g., using automated alerts).

RESPONSE

The Research Development Services (RDS) office does use SPIN automated daily alerts, which catches the majority, though not all, of the posted limited submission opportunities. The lag time between NOFO release and SPIN automated alert is approximately 48 hours. While RDS receives daily alerts, it would be impractical to disseminate the opportunities daily as it takes time to review the full solicitation and verify both the eligibility for George Mason to apply and the specific submission limits. Once those elements are verified, the opportunity is then set up in Mason internal proposal platform as either "First Come" if there is not sufficient time for an internal review or as an internal competition. The internal competition opportunities also require clear aligned proposal submission instructions and review criteria.

There have been initial discussions with the RDS team, and we will strongly consider a weekly as opposed to bi-weekly distribution of opportunities.

2. Reduce Duplication of Effort

- Align mini-proposal requirements more closely with the final proposal format (e.g., similar sub-headings)
- Shorten to one page

RESPONSE

We continue to strive for balance between creating internal proposal requirements that are relatively consistent across funding opportunities (so faculty are familiar with the submission), which is a standard practice across other universities and not asking faculty to submit text that cannot be used in the external proposals as we recognize that duplicating effort is a burden. We will review our procedures to create a better balance so that the internal proposal requirements can more closely match the external proposal requirements.

Our RDS Team have reviewed best practices across R1 institutions that are members of the National Organization for Research Development Professionals (NORDP). George Mason's internal proposal requirements (i.e., 3-page project narrative; 2-page biosketch) is common practice and we believe provides sufficient space for a more complete presentation of the proposals for an internal competition. That said, recognizing the thoughtful analysis that served as the basis for the RAC recommendation, we will strongly consider reducing the requirement to two pages.

3. Streamline Internal Review Timelines

- Reduce the time between mini-proposal submission and decision making, e.g., less than a week.
- When appropriate, give priority to applications from current grantees seeking a renewal or competing continuation, provided they have demonstrated strong stewardship of their existing award.

RESPONSE

Unfortunately, while we strive to reduce the time for review to as short as possible, reducing the time to less than a week is not feasible. Even if we are able to create pool of reviewers (see below), asking reviewers to submit their reviews and having the RDS staff summarize the review ratings and comments to make the approval determination is less than a week is not possible.

We will discuss the possibility of giving priority to renewals or competing continuations with the VPRIEI. Please note that the status of the applicant at the time of the internal competition review (that is, whether they are a competitive continuation or a previous awardee) is considered by the reviewers at the time of the review presuming that the applicant has included that information in their internal application.

Increase Transparency

- Clearly communicate reviewer selection criteria and expertise.
- Establish a 5-6 member committee composed of researchers with proven funding records (i.e., experience in dealing with funding agencies) and representing different areas.
- Establish a large pool of grant-funded faculty reviewers with a range of subject matter expertise and familiarity with a range of funding agencies, so review teams can be quickly matched to each opportunity.

RESPONSE

For clarity, all applications are reviewed by three reviewers. Reviewers are selected from George Mason University faculty and administrators who have subject matter expertise, expertise if at all possible with the funding agency (that is, they have received awards from the funding agency) and do not have a conflict with one or more of the applicants (are in the same college or department unless all of the applicants are from the same college).

We welcome the opportunity to establish a large pool of faculty with varying expertise and experience with funding agencies. We would need to work with the Associate Deans for Research in each of the colleges as well as the RAC to recruit the pool. Ideally, as is true at other universities, the faculty would receive service credit for serving as a reviewer and would very likely not be required to review more than three times per year. As reviewers, they would need to commit to reviewing when requested and return their reviewers in a specified period of time (with such a pool, we may be able to require return of review in no more than 10 days). Faculty could serve for one-two years with the possibility of renewal if they were willing. We would be delighted to work with the RAC on establishing such a pool of reviewers.

Chris DiTeresi, Associate Vice President, Research Integrity and Assurance

As AVP, Research Integrity and Assurance, I greatly appreciate the RAC's increased engagement with ORIA and I look forward to our continued collaboration. Over the past year, multiple ORIA initiatives have benefited from intersection with activities of the committee. These intersections have taken different forms, which I hope is indicative of flourishing coordination and partnership between the RAC and ORIA. This response is intended to supplement and update the information provided in the annual report and its appendices.

Response to Appendix C: Challenges with GM Conflict of Commitment Policy 4021

This appendix is related to committee activity 4.3 *Implementation of the Charge from VP-Research,* and addresses the third of three topics that were identified by the committee in the fall and discussed with ORIEI AVPs at the February 3 meeting. The committee identified a cluster of related concerns expressed by faculty and department chairs about the lack of clarity in what needs to be disclosed, and the potential for that uncertainty and the administrative

burden of many additional disclosures to have a chilling effect on engaging in outside professional activities. As I acknowledged at the February meeting, these are significant concerns that I share, and on which I welcome feedback on how best to manage them. To some degree, these concerns are a function of the uncertainty and increased scrutiny of outside activities in the US regulatory environment. Policy 4021 was designed and implemented with that challenging environment in mind, but the development of stable guidance has been hindered by successive shifts in research security requirements and definitions regarding international engagements.
Update: since the Feb 3 meeting

- Completed the outreach road show to department meetings that was the main communication thrust of this AY. This road show focused on clarifying Prior Approval Request requirements, which are crucial for safeguarding international engagements
- Presented and received feedback on a guidance document for chairs to help them with reviewing disclosures and communicating with faculty about support for outside activities
- Reframed how we articulate shared ownership of the policy during our department meetings based on conversations with the RAC
- Consolidating our COI and COC websites into a single site to facilitate clearer guidance and to reduce confusion about where to go for it

We look forward to continuing the conversation with the committee in the fall, particularly around what counts as an *outside* professional activity and the committee's recommendations as to what sorts of common faculty activities might not need to be disclosed.

Response to Appendix D: Review of Policy 4007 for ORIA
The substantial update to Policy 4007, necessitated by an update to the corresponding federal regulation, was a major ORIA initiative for AY 2025-26. ORIA invited the committee to comment on the proposed revision. I am grateful to the committee for the thorough review they provided, and for identifying key points in the policy about which further communication and education to faculty and students would be helpful. Joel Thurston and I look forward to meeting with the committee in the fall both to address those remaining concerns to which our response was not satisfactory, and to discuss plans to promote greater awareness of the research misconduct policy and process, including the expansion of training in responsible conduct of research to encompass more students/research trainees.
We have begun preparing for the new outreach effort by developing a one-page summary of the changes to Policy 4007 that can be distributed to faculty and students. Additionally, we are in the process of updating the portion of the ORIA website dedicated to Policy 4007 as an additional resource for the George Mason community to better understand the research misconduct policy and assist in navigating its associated procedure.

Subsequent to the correspondence in Appendix D, the proposed revision to 4007 was reviewed by the Policy Management Group, during which several minor changes were made, and was approved in late April.

ORIA (and ORIEI generally) remains interested in engaging the RAC for input and comments regarding proposed revisions to research-related policies. As the Research Council representative on the PMG, I would like to meet with the RAC representative to discuss how best to engage/include the RAC in research policy revisions going forward.

Note regarding committee activity 4.4.2 Contributing to the Research Security Advisory Board (RSAB)

I would like to extend a special thanks to committee member Michael Bloom for his contributions to ORIA's initiative to establish our Research Security Program. In addition to serving as the RAC representative to the RSAB, Dr. Bloom also volunteered to participate in a pilot review by the research security team of a small sample of faculty with international engagements. The purpose of that review was to develop an SOP for screening using the Strider research analytics tool, and we completed it just prior to the recent push by several federal agencies to require screening of all international co-authors of personnel listed on grant proposals. The RAC, and Dr. Bloom in particular, have been excellent partners to the Research Security Program and Melissa Perez and I look forward to our ongoing collaboration.