Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

Date: April 22, 2026 (Spillover)
Time: 3:01 PM
Location: Zoom

Meeting Board Book

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:01 PM by Faculty Senate President Solon Simmons, after quorum was confirmed.

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2. Approval of Minutes

The March 25 and April 8 (spillover) minutes were presented for approval. With no corrections or additions, the minutes were approved as submitted.

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3. Opening Remarks & Announcements from the President of the Senate

The Faculty Senate President noted that there was a significant amount of business on the agenda and indicated that a spillover meeting may be necessary to complete all items. This was attributed to the work of active committees, which were both acknowledged and appreciated.

Before moving into other formal business, the President introduced the election of the Faculty Senate President for the upcoming academic year as the first major agenda item. He outlined the election procedures. He then stepped aside, and the President Pro Tempore stepped in to conduct the election.

Election of Faculty Senate President (AY 2026–2027)

- Nominations were opened from the floor.
- Election to be conducted by ballot with a majority vote required.
- If multiple candidates, each would be allowed a brief statement (1-2 minutes)

Nominations

- Solon Simmons was nominated by Lisa Billingham.
- No additional nominations were made.

Candidate Statement – Solon Simmons

- Expressed willingness to serve a third and final term.
- Emphasized shared governance as the central principle moving forward.
- Noted that shared governance involves collaboration among administration, students, board members, faculty, and AP faculty.
- Reflected on experience gained over two years and ongoing learning in the role.
- Highlighted upcoming priorities, including supporting the new provost.
- Acknowledged challenges faced during the past year but reaffirmed commitment to the role.

Voting and Results

- Voting was conducted via ballot.
- Quorum was confirmed with 39 faculty senators present.
- A majority vote was reached.
- Solon Simmons was elected to a third term as Faculty Senate President.

The Faculty Senate President then turned the floor over to President Gregory Washington, noting that he was present and prepared to address the Faculty Senate.

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4. Special Guests & Discussion

A verbatim transcript of President Gregory Washington's remarks is included at the end of the minutes.

President Gregory Washington addressed the Faculty Senate and provided an institutional update, noting that the university is currently in reasonable shape. He emphasized that overall enrollment has slightly increased, student outcomes remain strong, and more programs are advancing than declining. However, he cautioned that there are existential long-term challenges ahead, driven by demographic, fiscal, technological, and political pressures. While the institution is in a strong financial position at present, he stressed that early action is necessary to avoid more disruptive outcomes in the future.

Institutional Challenges

President Washington outlined several key challenges:

- Graduate enrollment is expected to decline by approximately 2,500 students over the next three years, largely due to challenges with international student enrollment.

- He highlighted long-term demographic shifts stemming from the 2008 financial crisis, noting that the college-age population is expected to shrink by approximately 15% over the next five years, with some regions seeing a 25–30% decline in college-going students. He emphasized that this represents the most significant long-term challenge affecting future enrollment.

- Constraints on tuition increases and the anticipated elimination or restructuring of federal loan programs (including Grad PLUS and Parent PLUS) are expected to impact student access and institutional finances.

- Financial aid funding has increased significantly over the past decade (approximately $200 million), with a substantial portion of institutional and state resources directed toward student support.

- Increasing use of artificial intelligence in classrooms and growing cybersecurity risks were identified as key technological challenges facing the institution.

- Broader economic uncertainty, including potential impacts from global conflict and market instability, may negatively affect endowment performance and institutional finances.

President Washington emphasized that these challenges are occurring simultaneously and represent a period of significant external pressure on higher education.

Budget Model and Academic Units

President Washington emphasized that the new budget model directly ties academic decision-making to financial outcomes, noting that:

- Units with flat or declining enrollment will face increasing financial pressure, particularly as costs continue to rise.
- Units that do not experience enrollment growth while facing rising costs will encounter structural budget challenges.
- Academic units are currently developing stabilization plans to adapt to this new model.

He explained that the budget model differs from previous approaches by directly linking decisions to outcomes, introducing both accountability and transparency, and ensuring that declines are no longer financially neutral.

Strategic Initiatives

President Washington outlined several forward-looking initiatives designed to respond proactively to these challenges:

- Creation of “Reimagining Education” task forces within each academic unit, charged with evaluating programs across the full academic spectrum from bachelor’s through doctoral degrees.

- Exploration of alternative program structures, including: 3-year undergraduate degrees, Accelerated BS-to-Master’s pathways and BS-to-PhD programs with shortened timelines.

- Recognition that changes to federal funding may render a portion of master’s programs less viable, prompting the need to rethink graduate education pathways.

- Development of new academic programs aligned with workforce demand, including potential initiatives in civics and critical thinking.

- Expansion of dual enrollment and movement toward a direct admission model to improve access and reduce time to degree.

- Increased use of technology and data systems to improve student retention and graduation rates. He noted that increasing graduation rates from 70% to 80% could significantly offset projected financial pressures.

- Potential central administrative restructuring to improve efficiency, including reducing the number of direct reports at the presidential level.

President Washington emphasized that the institution currently has the benefit of time and a strong financial position, supported by anticipated state funding, which creates an opportunity to make proactive changes rather than reactive cuts.

Approach to Change and Governance

President Washington stressed that these efforts are intended to be faculty-driven and faculty-led, with academic units responsible for shaping and implementing changes. Administration will provide guidance, context, and urgency but will not prescribe specific outcomes.

He emphasized that adjustment now is critical:

- Early action can reduce the need for more disruptive measures later
- Institutions that fail to adapt risk being forced into reactive reductions

Discussion

A senator raised concerns about the long-term demographic impact of the 2008 financial crisis on enrollment trends. President Washington confirmed that this is the most significant long-term challenge, noting that the shrinking college-age population will continue to reduce enrollment opportunities over the coming years.

Another senator expressed concern regarding the proposal for critical thinking major or minor, noting that critical thinking is already embedded across disciplines. President Washington acknowledged this point but suggested that a more structured and focused approach may be necessary. He emphasized the importance of evaluating market demand and remaining competitive with peer institutions, cautioning against falling behind in program innovation.

A senator raised concerns about maintaining shared governance and ensuring that innovation efforts are not imposed from the top down. President Washington clarified that the initiative is intended to be faculty-led, with academic units responsible for determining structure and outcomes, while leadership provides direction, context, and forward-looking analysis.

A follow-up question addressed faculty workload and capacity to engage in program innovation. President Washington acknowledged this concern and noted that these efforts fall within the service component of faculty responsibilities. He recognized that institutions across the country will be facing similar challenges and emphasized the need for adaptation despite workload constraints.

A senator asked for clarification regarding the implications of expanding BS-to-PhD pathways and whether this reflects shifting student demand or funding changes. President Washington clarified that the primary driver is the anticipated loss of federal loan support for master's programs, noting that many students rely on such funding. He indicated that this may reduce the viability and demand for master's degrees over time and could require institutions to consider alternative funding mechanisms. He also noted that expanded doctoral pathways support both student progression and the university's research mission.

Another senator raised concerns about the broader direction of the proposed changes, questioning whether they reflect a market-driven or politically shaped vision of higher education that could conflict with the university's public mission. The senator emphasized the importance of maintaining academic quality, access, and institutional values and noted that such changes may generate faculty resistance. President Washington responded that the challenges facing higher education are driven by multiple factors including fiscal, technological, and political pressures, and emphasized that significant change is occurring nationally across peer institutions. He stated that the institution must adapt to these conditions while working collaboratively with faculty to determine appropriate responses.

A senator noted that faculty are already actively innovating across programs and disciplines and can contribute meaningfully to addressing upcoming changes. President Washington acknowledged this, emphasizing that faculty at Mason are already engaged in many of the areas discussed and that the initiative builds on existing work across academic units. He reiterated that the effort is intended to be faculty-led, with administration serving as a partner, and emphasized the importance of continued dialogue, collaboration, and shared leadership in responding to upcoming challenges.

Additional Announcements and Updates

Faculty Senate President acknowledged Psychology and Religious Studies in the top 10, noting this as impressive, and encouraging others to move ahead as well. He also emphasized the importance of the Gallup survey, noting feedback is critical; survey extended through Friday and members encouraged to increase participation, especially across units.

The president described the Provost Search as a very inclusive, shared governance process. He noted that candidates are ready to come to campus and that participation requires completing a confidentiality form. He added that participants will be able to meet candidates and ask questions, with a deadline to sign up by Monday and the calendar invitations will be sent to those who complete the form.

The president then Transitioned to nominations and election slate review.

5.A Nominations (See Election Slate AY 2026 - 2027)

The Senate considered the slate of nominees for standing committees as presented by the Nominations Committee. It was noted that the number of nominees matched the number of open seats in accordance with Senate bylaws.

A motion was made to approve the nominations for the Academic Policies, Budget and Resources, Faculty Matters, and Organization and Operations committees. Opportunity was provided for additional nominations from the floor; none were received. The motion passed by voice vote.

For the Nominations Committee, nominations were taken from the floor. Lee Black self-nominated. With no additional nominations, the Senate approved the nomination by voice vote.

The Senate also considered a nomination for a faculty representative to the Mason Core Committee. Leslie Dwyer (Carter School) was nominated. No additional nominations were received. The Senate approved the nomination by voice vote.

Additional updates were provided regarding Board of Visitors (BOV) faculty representative nominations, with a call for further submissions.

Closing Remarks (Senate President Solon Simmons)

President Simmons noted that the Senate is entering a new phase of discussion related to reimagining the university and encouraged continued engagement from faculty in this process. He emphasized the importance of participation and ongoing dialogue as the institution considers future directions.

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9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion passed by voice vote. The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:30 p.m.

It was noted that a follow-up (spillover) meeting would be held the following Wednesday at 3:00 p.m.

Action Items / Next Steps

- Senators and interested participants should complete the required sign-up form by Monday to receive calendar invitations for provost candidate presentations and small group sessions.
- Senators are encouraged to self-nominate for Board of Visitors committees, particularly Development and Finance/Land Use, where additional nominations are still needed.

Attendee List

Verbatim Transcript

Gregory Washington: Well, first and foremost, Solon, congratulations.

Solon Simmons: Thank you.

Gregory Washington: On a, third term, we'll try to ensure that it's not as difficult on you.

Solon Simmons: Easier one next time.

Gregory Washington: I'll do my best.

Solon Simmons: Okay.

Gregory Washington: Understanding that I can only control what I can control.

Gregory Washington: That being said, let me pull this up.

Gregory Washington: And,

Gregory Washington: Talk with all of you about where we are.

Gregory Washington: And you all see that?

Solon Simmons: Yeah, we can see it.

Gregory Washington: Outstanding, outstanding.

Gregory Washington: So…

Gregory Washington: This is gonna be somewhat familiar to most of you, or some of you, those of you who, attended the,

Gregory Washington: the general faculty meeting, you know, some of this will be a repeat. We have more up-to-date information now, which I, believe is, indeed, quite helpful. But really.

Gregory Washington: The bottom line up front is that we're in reasonable shape.

Gregory Washington: as an institution, That being said, there are existential challenges ahead, and they're gonna impact

Gregory Washington: Where this institution is.

Gregory Washington: Gonna be positioned for the long term, and…

Gregory Washington: But things right now are looking really, really good.

Gregory Washington: We… I'll talk a little bit about enrollments. We have some challenges there relative to

Gregory Washington: grad school, enrollments. But general enrollment overall is up, actually, and you'll, you'll see that data.

Gregory Washington: We have, relatively good showing and rankings.

Gregory Washington: With, more programs advancing than, declining, we're kind of in that… Framework where…

Gregory Washington: A lot of the major initiatives we put in place to help us

Gregory Washington: In, building the rankings of the institution that take… have run their course, and now we're just in that window where you're gonna see programs oscillate up and down around a medium, because they are…

Gregory Washington: are ranked about where they should be. And so, the next leg up requires significant

Gregory Washington: a change in investment from where we are here, and we'll start to look at what that actually looks like as we progress. I think these challenges that we got coming forward give us an opportunity to actually do that.

Gregory Washington: And so we're going to begin to talk about that as I begin to put the performance plan in place, for the next cycle, you know, basically for the next year.

Gregory Washington: But overall, we're in really good shape. You know, you can take a look at how our students are doing to determine

Gregory Washington: You know, how well we're doing.

Gregory Washington: being the kind of person I am, I kind of… put…

Gregory Washington: things into two categories in terms of what we produce. We actually produce educated and trained people.

Gregory Washington: And we produce new knowledge.

Gregory Washington: That is…

Gregory Washington: Those are the two big rocks in terms of who we are as an academic institution, and…

Gregory Washington: So, I really take this impact seriously. When we ask our students how they're doing.

Gregory Washington: We look at the top industries, where they're employed, we look at who's hiring them.

Gregory Washington: That… that's a big deal for us.

Gregory Washington: And, our numbers, believe it or not, are up, from last year. Now.

Gregory Washington: these are… we're a year in behind, so, you know, we'll see what the upcoming… this upcoming class looks like. I think we're gonna see some challenges there, in which you'll see on the report I give you next year, because the overall job market is indeed significantly challenged right now.

Gregory Washington: But… Going into this cycle, we've been doing exactly as you would have hoped.

Gregory Washington: Graduating large numbers of young people, they're going out into the communities, they're getting high-paying jobs, and they're doing really, really well.

Gregory Washington: And so… I…

Gregory Washington: if we can stay on this track in the upcoming cycle in which we're going to experience, we're going to be in great shape. And so, what is this cycle? What is… what does this look like?

Gregory Washington: Again, we got… Really four simultaneous shocks hitting academia all at once.

Gregory Washington: You got the demographic and enrollment shock, you got the fiscal shock, the political and the technological, they're all hitting us.

Gregory Washington: I gave a lot of detail on those in the…

Gregory Washington: general faculty meeting here. I just want to touch base on what they are, how we look relative to them, and then what solutions I'm asking of you, so that we can kind of quickly enter into some discussion. And so…

Gregory Washington: From the fiscal side of the house, the reality is you know…

Gregory Washington: There are going to be challenges on raising tuition, because there's price sensitivity among our students and among the community, and quite frankly, there should be.

Gregory Washington: The idea is that the graduate programs are going to be challenged. We're gonna have reductions in graduate students. I am predicting a 2,500 student drop.

Gregory Washington: Over the next 3 years?

Gregory Washington: And so, if you think about, using somewhere in the neighborhood of about

Gregory Washington: 10,500 as a start point.

Gregory Washington: You… we're going to wind up about 2,500 students, fewer than that.

Gregory Washington: Provided something doesn't happen to break that trend.

Gregory Washington: It's just the nature of where we are relative to international graduate students, and the challenges with getting them into the country.

Gregory Washington: And so, that's gonna have a corresponding fiscal hit on the campus, and we're gonna have to figure out how to manage through that. There's just no other way around it.

Gregory Washington: From a demographic perspective, we know that there are two… Programs that fund,

Gregory Washington: graduate students to GradPlus and a Parent PLUS loan. Actually, Parent PLUS also funds some undergraduates. Those programs are… are going to be reclassed or eliminated, and as that happens.

Gregory Washington: It's going to affect

Gregory Washington: a couple thousand Mason students, and that effect is also going to be seen on the fiscal side and challenge us.

Gregory Washington: To that effect as well.

Gregory Washington: Now, the good thing is we've kind of gotten in front of some of this stuff.

Gregory Washington: Relative to,

Gregory Washington: the changes we've, you know, made to how we engage students on the undergraduate side, and so that's buffering us. This would be so much worse if we were, one of our access peers.

Gregory Washington: In the Commonwealth, and so we're in a better position than most, but we are still going to be challenged. And then also.

Gregory Washington: As… one thing we don't talk about as much is that the racial and demographic makeup of the country is actually changing

Gregory Washington: Dramatically as well. And as those young people continue to enter, college age at higher and higher numbers, we're gonna have to deal with the fact that the, you know, the pie is going to be more brown, more black.

Gregory Washington: more Asian.

Gregory Washington: Because that's the nature of the graduating, young people in society today. And so, we're gonna have to have mechanisms in place to manage through all of that in…

Gregory Washington: And that's gonna require us operating a little differently than what we've… than what we currently operate.

Gregory Washington: This is what our enrollment picture looks like. You can see there

Gregory Washington: That, a little different from the last time we talked.

Gregory Washington: we were showing a small decline. You know, we didn't have all of the numbers from Mason Korea. That's been one of our huge bright spots in growth in Mason Korea, actually.

Gregory Washington: kicked us from declining to inc… To actually increasing slightly. So we got a .4…

Gregory Washington: percent overall increase in, spring enrollment, which…

Gregory Washington: It's better than a decline.

Gregory Washington: This is what… Our credit hour numbers look like.

Gregory Washington: Over the last 5 years, so from Fall 21 to Fall 2025, and the reason why I wanted to highlight this to you all is so that you get a good idea of

Gregory Washington: those academic units that are growing in credit hour, those that are constant, and those that are declining. And here's the thing. A picture's worth a thousand words, and so what is that thousand word meaning?

Gregory Washington: You can see that you got 4 units that are on the income.

Gregory Washington: Right? And then if you… if you… if you… if your eyes don't deceive you, you look like you see a number of programs that are relatively flat.

Gregory Washington: they may be down, you know, the challenge is the scale here on the plot. You got some really, really big units, like chess, and then you got really, really small units, like, Gregory Washington: like, CPH and CHAR and the like, in those, in those units,

Gregory Washington: tend to bring in fewer credit hours. And so, if there is a decline, it doesn't show up as prominent, but on a percentage-wise, it actually could be.

Gregory Washington: The fact of the matter is…

Gregory Washington: you got some increasing units here, and you got some flat to declining units. Look, the reality is, we know that costs are not flat to declining.

Gregory Washington: So, if you're flat.

Gregory Washington: to declining in an environment where your costs are rising, then you're gonna have some challenges with our budget model process, because…

Gregory Washington: If… if you're… if you're not growing and your costs are growing, you can see where that can be a problem, relative to being able to produce enough resources, to cover all of those costs, okay?

Gregory Washington: And so, if I were to take it, you know, but if you look at the picture, it doesn't look that bad.

Gregory Washington: if I were to take it one step further and look at Enrollments.

Gregory Washington: Remember, credit hours trail enrollment.

Gregory Washington: Credit our trail enrollment.

Gregory Washington: So…

Gregory Washington: Because the kid shows up first before they take a class. And so they get classified first on the enrollment side, and then we classify them on the credit hour side after we see what classes they've taken.

Gregory Washington: And if you look at it, you see here a different picture.

Gregory Washington: You see the entity, That has the largest enrollment is actually starting to decline

Gregory Washington: You see constant, declining in the unit with the highest credit hour.

Gregory Washington: Right? And what that means in the future is…

Gregory Washington: You're going to see stressors on those entities that produce revenue.

Gregory Washington: Okay? The entity, that generates the most…

Gregory Washington: From a revenue perspective, relative to, credit hour is actually…

Gregory Washington: chess. Chess has been in, decline in enrollment for some time, but they've been in growth in credit hour because, believe it or not.

Gregory Washington: students in engineering and students in, Costello take action… a lot of college… take, like, a lot of credits in the Corps.

Gregory Washington: And that's allowed, chess to continue to grow in credit hour. Well, if engineering starts to decline, that means you're gonna see fewer of those young people taking classes,

Gregory Washington: in chess, and what's going to happen there is you're going to eventually see decline in credit hours there as well. And if your unit is… if resources are flowing from those units that are increasing in credit hour to units that are flat to declining in credit hour.

Gregory Washington: and those… the increasing units start to go in decline, then you start to see where the problem persists. So, we have early signs that there could be trouble.

Gregory Washington: And I believe that these are going to accelerate as we move

Gregory Washington: into the future. And that is the source of the challenges that, that I see coming for our academic units.

Gregory Washington: It's interesting, though, if you take a look at the five-year changes by… department.

Gregory Washington: And you start to see some interesting outcomes. This is credit hour.

Gregory Washington: And it doesn't always fit what we would think, for lack of a better way of putting this,

Gregory Washington: Where there are challenges in our…

Gregory Washington: academic profile, or where there are challenges in our academic units, and those that are actually doing quite well. For example, you see those units with the largest increase in credit hour production. Some of them are to be expected, right? Computer science.

Gregory Washington: you know, IT, cybersecurity, and the like. You also see Provost Office because of the, the growth in honors and whatnot. So you see that increase, there, but you also see increase in the School of Art and Religious Studies.

Gregory Washington: in psychology. These are all in the top 10 of

Gregory Washington: increasing units by department. Some of them say, well, that's the core, but some of it's not core. Some of this represents what students are doing relative to taking classes that are in areas of high need or high interest.

Gregory Washington: Right? And so that is a mechanism for some of the solutions… that provides a mechanism for working through some of the challenges that I'm going to highlight here in terms of solutions going forward. If you look at the areas with the largest decrease in credit hour.

Gregory Washington: You see, you can see what's happening there as well, but also.

Gregory Washington: if I'm looking at some of those areas, we can say, you know, there may be changes that we can make to programs, because some of these areas are in areas of high need.

Gregory Washington: So let's… there are areas that we can figure out, hey.

Gregory Washington: You know, if there's a high need for nurses, And we're decreasing And credit hour.

Gregory Washington: there may be an opportunity to reverse that and reverse that really easily. And we should be looking to see what that is, okay?

Gregory Washington: The reality is… We are bringing in Lots of students.

Gregory Washington: These students have a high amount of need.
Gregory Washington: And oftentimes, Mason, the campus, is a significant source of that need. So if you look at this plot here, we go back 10 years.

Gregory Washington: And you see, first of all, a huge increase

Gregory Washington: in financial aid, funding, right? Some $200 million increase over the last 10 years.

Gregory Washington: Which makes sense, given the profile of our students. Not all this money goes to just undergraduates, by the way. Some of it… a portion of it does actually go to graduate students as well. But you see… you see this growth.

Gregory Washington: Here. And you see, also, Mason being a significant source. When people ask the question.

Gregory Washington: where has the resource gone that we've been able to, for lack of a better point, bring in from the Commonwealth, bring in from centralized support.

Gregory Washington: when you ask, where did all that money go, this is a huge portion of it, right? When you subtract the amount of money that has gone into raises and increase of salaries, and you look at what's left, a large chunk of it has actually gone into financial aid.

Gregory Washington: Okay? And… which… You know, this is… these are philosophical discussions, but the reality is…

Gregory Washington: I wouldn't have it any other way, right? You know, if we're bringing in additional resources from the state, I want those resources to be going to the people that work here, and to the students that need it in order to get degrees.

Gregory Washington: And so… and that's what you'll see is the primary use of those… of those funds. The challenge that we have here is… you see that 48% that represents the federal government?

Gregory Washington: There's a move afoot to decrease that amount.

Gregory Washington: And if that amount is decreased, that's also gonna put additional stress on students.

Gregory Washington: Okay, and that will put additional stress on the other categories to increase if we're going to maintain at this level.

Gregory Washington: So… If we look at the technology shocks.

Gregory Washington: We can have a discussion on how well or how not so well we are deploying artificial intelligence in the classroom, but we cannot debate whether students are actually using artificial intelligence or not.

Gregory Washington: You all know this better than I do. you're managing it, and that management is not… is non-trivial.

Gregory Washington: But we also have other technology challenges, right? Our current systems, HR, fiscal, and the like, are not being deployed or not capable of meeting our current technology need, and so we're working on that. One of the things that I…

Gregory Washington: I'm challenged with, and I worry about, is actually cybersecurity, right?

Gregory Washington: you know, I was much more worried about it after my provost clicked the fish, and it was a phishing attempt, and he clicked it, and then it turned off bells and whistles, and so the reality is, if it can fool our…

Gregory Washington: very, very wise provost, it can actually fool some other folk, too. And for my vantage point, it's just a matter of time before we're really going to have to deal with a major cyber threat on the campus. And so we're going to have to figure out how to manage through that.

Gregory Washington: And then we have the area that I'm not going to talk about that much, and that is the political shocks, because we spent a lot of time talking about that as a campus.

Gregory Washington: You know, and that was a big part of the challenges that Solon had, you know, in his administration last year. And so we're hoping that he has a little less of that to deal with. But the reality is, those political shocks are real.

Gregory Washington: They represent change that, has been currently happening, relative to the federal government, but also the state government and the campus.

Gregory Washington: And we will continue to make the proper adjustments in order to keep the campus viable and to keep the campus out of trouble.

Gregory Washington: I, you know, I think we have…

Gregory Washington: For lack of a better way of putting it, we have…

Gregory Washington: Earn our stripes in this regard, and…

Gregory Washington: My hope is that we will continue to keep earning that, and continue to keep the campus position in a way that we don't have the federal government, or the state, for that matter, come in and dramatically disrupt what it is we're trying to do.

Gregory Washington: And there's now additional uncertainty with the Iran war. We have a partnership with JP Morgan Investment Management. We had them run the scenarios for us. They actually manage our endowments, and

Gregory Washington: And they said, look,

Gregory Washington: And our endowments are relatively aggressively invested, because we need that return. A lot of that return is being utilized to not only supply scholarships and needs for our campus, but also for some operating costs as well.

Gregory Washington: And, the reality of our situation is that if this Iran war continues to persist, and it goes beyond 3 to 6 months.

Gregory Washington: We can see significant declines in growth, significant increases in inflation, and then a challenge in equities, which will actually present an additional fiscal challenge to the campus.

Gregory Washington: I don't even want to talk about if it's severely disrupted beyond 6 months, because then all bets are off in terms of a possible recession.

Gregory Washington: But, if it can get resolved in the next 3 to 6 months, the outcomes look favorable.

Gregory Washington: For us. And so, we'll see how well our decision makers do in terms of resolving this.

Gregory Washington: But it's a… the reason this is here is so that you all know that we're paying attention to it, and that you all know it directly correlates

Gregory Washington: To… Your way of life.

Gregory Washington: Because of the fact that we actually have resources that are being used for operations that are tied directly to the markets, and the markets are tied directly to oil, and oil is tied directly to this.

Gregory Washington: Okay?

Gregory Washington: So… The upshot here is that we actually have the benefit of time.

Gregory Washington: The changes to the loan programs, the current policies that are being put into place, they all start in July. We're in great fiscal health now.

Gregory Washington: We should see between $7 and $11 million of,

Gregory Washington: continuous state support, meaning, permanent state support, and upwards of another $35 to $45 million of cash. So you're talking somewhere in the neighborhood of 45, you know, from 40 to

Gregory Washington: $55 or $60 million investment coming from the Commonwealth of Virginia into this campus this year, and so we look really, good in that regard. And so…

Gregory Washington: We got a lot to do, but we got a little bit of time to make adjustments such that we can, we won't be disruptive, we won't be disrupted.

Gregory Washington: My philosophy is a major disruption's coming, we got 3 choices, implement changes now, wait to see if the change is, it's going to be truly disruptive, and then implement change, or just don't change, and then just compress.

Gregory Washington: and reduce ourselves, on the back end, if and when the change occurs. The reality is…

Gregory Washington: I know it's a lot of work.

Gregory Washington: But I believe that making adjustments and changes now, starting that process now.

Gregory Washington: can save us from a significant amount of pain in the future. And so let's talk about what these changes look like. Number one, I've asked every academic unit, and I had this meeting with your deans, to, establish a reimagining education to the doctorate task force.

Gregory Washington: And what this task force is going to look at is what are the significant changes we can make in our programs

Gregory Washington: our educational programs going all the way from the bachelor's degree all the way through the doctorate degree. So this… I know we have a reimagining, doctoral education.

Gregory Washington: task force, this is beyond that, because we're also talking about the master's programs, which I believe the most stress will occur, and we're talking about bachelor's programs, and I'm going to tell you specifically

Gregory Washington: what kinds of things we're looking at. Right now, all of the academic units are dealing with the effects of the budget model.

Gregory Washington: The budget model is not just a model.

Gregory Washington: It actually is a process. And our goal here is for the process to help you make decisions, or to understand that the decisions you make have a fiscal ramification directly on your academic units, right? No model we've had

Gregory Washington: No model we had.

Gregory Washington: I will repeat, no model that we've had in the past has had a direct tie of

Gregory Washington: decisions that you make have an effect on the outcomes. The last model we had, it benefited you going up, but if you went down, there was never a penalty.

Gregory Washington: You got to keep everything you earned, even if you were in decline.

Gregory Washington: That's no way to run a railroad. This model directly correlates the two, so… so all of the people that are asking

Gregory Washington: you know, why did we have to make a switch? You had to make a switch because what you had

Gregory Washington: is not… For lack of a better way of saying it, adequate.

Gregory Washington: Not only for the challenges we're gonna see in the future, it wasn't actually adequate.

Gregory Washington: For the challenges that We were incurring.

Gregory Washington: Currently. And we've known this for quite some time.

Gregory Washington: We've been in this budget model development process for at least 3 years.

Gregory Washington: So we… this is not something that we just dropped on you. We've taken… we've painstakingly gone through the development of this with faculty involvement.

Gregory Washington: Okay? So we've had groups of faculty involved in this from day one, and the outcomes that we have now is part of a process. It will change, and it will modify itself over time, but the ultimate goal is to tie decision-making

Gregory Washington: Tie outcomes directly to decision making.

Gregory Washington: Right? I want our deans to know, if I start this new program and it doesn't work well, here are the outcomes. Or, if I allow my, enrollment to decline, here are the possible outcomes. Or, if I have large numbers of sections with very few students in them, here is the fiscal outcome of that.

Gregory Washington: Right?

Gregory Washington: There was no way of doing that previously. We have a mechanism for doing that now.

Gregory Washington: our academic unit success are going to be tied to this.

Gregory Washington: Most units are developing stabilization plans now, and…

Gregory Washington: And that's great, and we're here to help everyone do that.

Gregory Washington: So, so that's the first one. The task force to look at your… I mean, that's the first two. The task force, to look at reimagining education, and to continue to participate in the budget model process.

Gregory Washington: The next piece begins to start to look at your academic programs. So our… so while you are looking at this reimagining education to the doctorate, here are some things to consider. Sacs now supports 3-year degrees.

Gregory Washington: Again, remember, there's a price sensitivity in the marketplace. That price sensitivity is real. Students want to be in school less.

Gregory Washington: I believe that there are mechanisms in place for us to give them the same quality education in less time.

Gregory Washington: So the best way to reduce cost… you can reduce costs by pulling classes out of the schedule, right? Which I don't think is the direction you go, but you also can reduce costs

Gregory Washington: By having fewer hours of engagement, and taking advantage of technology and other entities to help supplement that other time.

Gregory Washington: That is one of the ways you can do this.

Gregory Washington: Classic example, if you took all of our academic programs and just said, we're just gonna reduce

Gregory Washington: Engagement time by a third.

Gregory Washington: Well, that gets you from 120 to 90 credit hours, just like that.

Gregory Washington: Right? You said we're just gonna take out a third of our time. If you're meeting 3 days a week, you meet 2 days a week.

Gregory Washington: Right? And instead of getting 3 credit hours, they get 2.

Gregory Washington: Right? And, you know, and then say, okay, well, what happens with that extra hour? That's…

Gregory Washington: Where the faculty earned their stripes.

Gregory Washington: Right?

Gregory Washington: what tools do we have at our disposal to ensure that students are still learning what it is they need to learn? How do we take a look at our curricula? How do we take things out that need to get taken out? But the reality is.

Gregory Washington: There are more than 60 universities now that have 3-year degree programs, and that number is going to explode over the next couple of years. This is why SACS put this mechanism in place, and so it's one of the things that's gonna happen.

Gregory Washington: BS to PhD programs with a 7-year max limit on it.

Gregory Washington: We have large R1 institutions that are doing that. Purdue just launched theirs a month ago.

Gregory Washington: bachelor's to PhD in 7 years. The key thing here, why are they… why are institutions doing that? It's because the changes that the federal government are putting in place are gonna affect master's programs.

Gregory Washington: And it's going to put real stress on those programs, and I commit to you that you're probably going to see a third of those master programs become not viable.

Gregory Washington: And that's gonna happen over the next 2 to 3 years. It's gonna happen real quickly.

Gregory Washington: Okay? Also BS to master's programs.

Gregory Washington: The idea is that a five-year max, you should be able to go in with, get a BS, and in 5 years have a master's. You shouldn't have more than a 1-year limit.

Gregory Washington: to any master's degree at the campus.

Gregory Washington: Okay? What am I getting to? I'm… I'm trying to get you to understand the level of change that needs to happen. We need new majors that are in alignment with the challenges that we're dealing with in this time.

Gregory Washington: I think we need a civics initiative that will at least have a strong civics minor. I also believe that critical thinking, entities are major and a minor in critical thinking.

Gregory Washington: Right? And so there are opportunities here for units, some of which who are struggling in the budget model process, to actually add credit hours, possibly even to core.

Gregory Washington: in order to, in a sweat equity way, work themselves, into prosperity, relative to credit hour. So there are real opportunities here. We will have

Gregory Washington: A, we will increase dual enrollment, we'll continue to focus there, because reducing time to degree matters.

Gregory Washington: And we'll be converting to a majority direct admission campus as we move forward.

Gregory Washington: University loan programs.

Gregory Washington: And then the big area you're gonna see us look at centrally is using, the tools that we currently have. We have Canvas, we have a host of tools,

Gregory Washington: That we've made investment in over the last few years, and the idea is, can we use these tools to help us get a handle on engaging students at the earliest sign of trouble?

Gregory Washington: Right? So if we can keep our students in our programs longer.

Gregory Washington: If we can keep them and get them to graduation, instead of graduating 70% of them, or we can graduate 80% of them, we make up for all of the challenges, all the fiscal challenges that I highlighted to you go away.

Gregory Washington: Just by going from 70% to 80%, we mitigate it.

Gregory Washington: Right? These are the kind of things we got to think about. And… and so we're going to be putting mechanisms in place, to help do that.

Gregory Washington: You know, when we talk about combining units centrally, I'm talking about units that report to me. So you're gonna see some… some… some combining happening there. The goal for me is to cut my direct reports

Gregory Washington: by a factor of 2. I currently have 13 direct reports.

Gregory Washington: This is an extraordinarily large number of direct reports for a president.

Gregory Washington: And condensing them to two puts us in a position to save money here centrally. I wouldn't ask you to combine and reduce central, and your academic units if I'm not willing to do it centrally as well, and so we're looking at that.

Gregory Washington: Right? So this is some of the outcomes that I want to be able to put in place. And on that note, I'll stop.

Gregory Washington: And, open it up for discussion.

Solon Simmons: Thanks so much, Greg. I'm sure there's some people who have some questions, a lot there to chew on. Let's go ahead and begin the queue. Go ahead, John.

John Dale: Thank you, President Washington. I heard you refer to the technological and political impacts, and also impacts from the war in Iran. I'm wondering if you've also been able to think about the demographic impacts from the 2008 fiscal crisis. That's one that all universities across the country have been

John Dale: Dealing with, because it's really changed the demographics, moving forward, and we're hitting it right now.

John Dale: Yeah. More permanent than the, the other two.

Gregory Washington: Actually, I talked about that first.

Gregory Washington: That is… and so… so, John, you hit it right on the head. That actually is the biggest challenge.

Gregory Washington: What we're gonna see demographically is the biggest challenge, because it's gonna hit our enrollments. The reality is the pie has shrunk.

Gregory Washington: It has already shrunk and will continue to shrink every year for the next 5 years, because people stopped, reduced the number of children they had, during the pandemic years. I mean, not the pandemic years, but during the,

Gregory Washington: during the years of the Great Recession. And so, we're just…

Gregory Washington: starting to feel the effect of that. Those young people are turning college age now, and that pie is going to be about 15% smaller

Gregory Washington: within the next 5 years than what it is now. And when you couple that with the fact that you have more and more young people feeling like they shouldn't go

Gregory Washington: That they don't have to go to college.

Gregory Washington: that compounds the reduction on top of that. And so, you know, many states are gonna see a 25% to 30%

Gregory Washington: Decline in just the sheer number

Gregory Washington: Of people who even want to consider going to college. And that's gonna have a dramatic effect on enrollments.

Solon Simmons: Hey, Sam, go ahead.

Samuel C Huneke: Yeah, thanks for this, really wonderful presentation. It's really, you know, wonderful to know that our leaders are thinking sort of critically about what's coming down the road. I had a quick question about the idea of a critical thinking major or minor. That was the first I had heard of it. I was sort of shocked because I'm in chess, I'm a historian, but I think I probably speak for almost all of us that I think that

Samuel C Huneke: In every single course we teach, the core thing we are teaching is critical thinking skills, right? To critically sort of engage with new information, to create arguments.

Samuel C Huneke: From that information, and so I'm… I'm just curious to hear you talk a little bit more about what

Samuel C Huneke: that degree might actually look like, and how it's distinct from what all of us are already doing in all of our classes. Thank you.

Gregory Washington: So, I believe that, there… elements of what you're saying is correct, right? The reality is, in taking certain majors in the humanities, you learn, the basic aspects of how to think and how to think critically.

Gregory Washington: This is more focused on not only having much of those aspects.

Gregory Washington: But also understanding the science and the process of thinking critically, and thereby becoming an even more focused in the space.

Gregory Washington: what courses does it look like? I don't know, I'm at… you know, this is where… this is where you guys get to tell me.

Gregory Washington: But the reality is, I can tell you definitively, That what we currently have

Gregory Washington: It's probably not going to be sufficient.

Gregory Washington: For the marketplace that's coming.

Gregory Washington: Right? Once your peers… what we don't want to do is get on the wrong end of the innovation cycle. What do I mean when I say the wrong end of the innovation cycle?

Gregory Washington: We become the sixth or seventh institution in the region to launch a critical thinking program, because we think we already do it, and we shouldn't have to do that.

Gregory Washington: And then, once your peers do it, and corner the marketplace, and have that first mover advantage, and then you realize, oh, there are some things that we could be doing that we're not doing, then you're playing catch-up.

Gregory Washington: And, you know, we need to… we need to be at least thinking about it. It's one thing to say.

Gregory Washington: All right, we've thought about it, and we don't think we should do it, we don't think there's much of a marketplace there, and so we're gonna pass.

Gregory Washington: Right? But we've really given it good thought, and we've really looked across the country, and we've really examined programs, and we just don't think it's there. I get that, I can live with that.

Gregory Washington: It's another thing…

Gregory Washington: To say, will we already do this, not consider it, and then have the marketplace tell you, well, you wasn't looking at it close enough.

Gregory Washington: Right? Because that… That's problematic in this society.

Gregory Washington: Right? Because you got a double winning that we'll be dealing with.

Solon Simmons: Okay, Bethany, go ahead.

Bethany Letiecq: Hi, thanks, President Washington. Appreciate your comments.

Bethany Letiecq: I guess I just wondered, two things. I'm just curious, I haven't heard in a while about any updates with the DOJ investigations and where that… where that resides.

Bethany Letiecq: And I'm also… I guess the conversation today has just… has, has also sparked for me, you know, just commitments around shared governance and academic freedom. And, and I'm wondering if, you know, with all this innovative curricular

Bethany Letiecq: speak, might there be opportunities for some kind of a fairly large faculty-engaged process to think about innovation… think about innovation that is sort of, you know, community up and not just top-down?

Gregory Washington: So, don't take the, for lack of a better way of saying it, me suggesting it.

Gregory Washington: as I'm going to be running it.

Gregory Washington: These are suggestions for the academic units.

Gregory Washington: to take a look as you start to think about how you're going to reimagine your programs. Let me be perfectly clear here.

Gregory Washington: I'm not gonna be the driver of this. You are.

Gregory Washington: Right.

Gregory Washington: And if… but…

Gregory Washington: I have to. I'm a fiduciary. I have a fiduciary responsibility. The board has a fiduciary responsibility.

Gregory Washington: And if we aren't making the right changes that we need to make in order to keep us viable in the marketplace, then we have to make reductions. We have to have outcomes that will be driven centrally, right? And so, what you have… Can I jump in here?

Gregory Washington: Can… can you… am I not being… Can you guys hear me?

Gregory Washington: Hello? Yes? No?

Gregory Washington: -Oh.

Bethany Letiecq: Sorry.

Gregory Washington: You're all, you're all… Sorry, I think my computer, so maybe it's me.

Bethany Letiecq: Gazing up on me.

Gregory Washington: Yeah, it is me. -Oh.

Ajay Vinze: We hear you.

Gregory Washington: Okay.

Georgia A. Williams: We can hear you.

Ajay Vinze: We can hear you.

Gregory Washington: Oh, okay, you could, yeah.

Solon Simmons: Everybody on my… I lost a little bit, too, there.

Gregory Washington: Okay, well, let me say this again. So you did all hear me, right?

Gregory Washington: Thumbs up, thumbs down, okay.

Georgia A. Williams: Yes.

Gregory Washington: Okay, so look, what I'm saying here…

Solon Simmons: I was cut out of here. Did we lose him too, I think?

Jill Manuel: version.

Mohan Venigalla: No, I think the Zoom reset itself.

Mohan Venigalla: For me. Okay.

Gregory Washington: Okay.

Solon Simmons: I think we're back.

Gregory Washington: Well, the other thing we have to do is work on having the best possible technology to be

Gregory Washington: and engage on our campus. But, look, the point that I'm making here is this.

Gregory Washington: this is a faculty-led, faculty-driven process. I'm providing, for lack of a better way of putting it.

Gregory Washington: I'm just providing the,

Gregory Washington: I, I, I guess the clearance?

Gregory Washington: The, the understanding that these issues are coming, some possible solutions?

Gregory Washington: Right? The only thing I'm requiring of everyone is that you have

Gregory Washington: Mechanisms in place to look at the restructuring of your programs.

Gregory Washington: How that mechanisms and what outcomes you come out with.

Gregory Washington: That's gonna be the purview of the Falcony.

Gregory Washington: Right? So, we're prescribing that you do it.

Gregory Washington: We're not prescribing what it looks like. We're prescribing that you take a look at it, we're not prescribing what the outcomes are going to be, because, quite frankly, I'm not qualified to tell you what the best outcomes are, right? And so, you…

Gregory Washington: You all will determine that.

Gregory Washington: This is a…

Gregory Washington: for lack of a better way of putting it, it's about as bottoms-up as you can get in an environment where I'm looking forward

Gregory Washington: to see… in terms of seeing what's coming our way, and and I'm working from the purview that some faculty may not have that level of,

Gregory Washington: vision into it.

Gregory Washington: Because… This is coming.

Gregory Washington: And… We gotta have some solutions.

Gregory Washington: Because if we don't, My challenge is.

Gregory Washington: I don't want to be on the other side of this, not looking as an entity that's looking and not having, not having done anything, right? I wouldn't…

Gregory Washington: I wouldn't be a good leader for you F…

Gregory Washington: I played the wait-and-see game, and just allowed things to happen and not tell you what's coming.

Gregory Washington: Not provide an opportunity and a pathway for you to be, successful and adapt to it, and just say, okay.

Gregory Washington: We'll just deal with it when it comes.

Gregory Washington: Right?

Bethany Letiecq: Just as… just as a… as a little follow-up, what… what I… what I guess I also was thinking about is… is also, like, how do you free up faculty time to engage at a high level to think about this innovation, this work that needs to happen? And I'm wondering if there's some…

Bethany Letiecq: New, sort of, body, or…

Bethany Letiecq: you know, support for faculty to engage in this, rather than just add it to our current workload? Is there a strategic way in which we might be able to engage as a collective in informing this in the future? That maybe is a little bit more about what I… what I wanted to know about.

Gregory Washington: Well, look, I, the reality to that is… I don't really…

Gregory Washington: Know that there is a different mechanism that's different from the structures that you currently have.

Gregory Washington: All of our… As Falcony, We have 3 buckets.

Gregory Washington: That we have in our purview.

Gregory Washington: 3 buckets of… Work that we're responsible for, and that's teaching, research, and service.

Gregory Washington: This fits more in the service category.

Gregory Washington: And…

Gregory Washington: We may have to strategically pull from the other two in order to make that… this particular aspect work.

Gregory Washington: Right? But you got those 3 buckets that have to be managed. Here's the deal.

Gregory Washington: Every institution in the country.

Gregory Washington: It's going to, by hook or crook.

Gregory Washington: have to deal with the issues that I've just highlighted to you.

Gregory Washington: Right? And so, they're all going to be developing mechanisms, by which, to do this.

Gregory Washington: I, you probably are not going to hear as many people talk about it now, because we tend to be on the front end of engaging on these cycles.

Gregory Washington: We were with many of the other issues that came our way.

Gregory Washington: And, and so I'm… I tend to be early.

Gregory Washington: But I tend not to miss either.

Gregory Washington: So if I'm telling you that this is gonna happen, it probably is.

Gregory Washington: And, the more work and the better quality of work we do now.

Gregory Washington: We'll put us in a position to have less strife later.

Gregory Washington: That's what, what, what, what, what the ultimate… Medicine is here.

Gregory Washington: So, Anna, I think you're next.

Anna Pollack: Yeah, thanks so much, President Washington. I have a question about the BS to PhD, and just thinking through,

Anna Pollack: funding?

Anna Pollack: For that, is your understanding that the…

Anna Pollack: master's programs going away is a factor of lack of federal support that's coming down the pike, and then that support may shift to PhD programs, or that

Anna Pollack: the market and student interest will shift to PhD programs.

Gregory Washington: It's not that the interest is going to shift the PhD programs, it's that the master's degree

Gregory Washington: the funding cycles are just not going to be there to support the attainment of master's degrees. And so, that is naturally going to compress the cycle. And what do I mean when I say funding support? A large percentage of the students who get master's degrees do so through loans.

Gregory Washington: Okay? Well, one loan program will be totally eliminated, starting this year.

Gregory Washington: That's the Grad Plus. It's been eliminated. It's gone. Now, you can go to the private market and get loans, but you're getting those loans between 15% and 22%.

Gregory Washington: I mean, those are… that's credit card rates.

Gregory Washington: Right? And so, if there isn't money available for those programs, the reality is they're probably gonna dry up. You saw one of the,

Gregory Washington: components that we will try to put in place to address this is developing university-based loan programs, right, where we actually become the lender. Now, that requires us to get into a business

Gregory Washington: In which we're currently not in, and we currently don't have the expertise by which to do, but…

Gregory Washington: If we need to do that.

Gregory Washington: In order to ensure a stronger pipeline of students.

Gregory Washington: then we kind of have to get into that business, right? Or we have to give up those students. So… so we're going to be looking at that as a… as a… as an outcome, as a mitigating factor, but the reality is that

Gregory Washington: at the high level, there's just going to be less demand for master's degrees. So, if we want students, you know, the propagation of the PhD program helps our young people continue to progress in their studies, but that also helps us.

Gregory Washington: Because in that new knowledge development framework.

Gregory Washington: You all know that you produce the most knowledge in general at the PhD level.

Gregory Washington: So if we're going to continue to produce knowledge at the rate in which we've been producing it.

Gregory Washington: It behooves us.

Gregory Washington: to be able to ensure that we have a pathway to the PhD. So part of this is not about the student, it's actually about our own preservation.

Gregory Washington: Right? And that's why some of our forward-thinking peers are already putting in place these programs, because they know that the marketplace is changing, and you need to have alternatives that allow students to finish quicker.

Gregory Washington: Look, the toughest issue that we have to deal with now

Gregory Washington: The biggest challenge is that our way of operating is changing.

Gregory Washington: There's just no way around it.

Gregory Washington: It… the social contract that the country has had with higher education is going to change, and it's going to change dramatically.

Gregory Washington: And either you're…

Gregory Washington: working and developing mechanisms to deal with that change, or you're just going to be consumed by that change. There really is no middle ground here.

Gregory Washington: Okay? If you don't take away anything else I say, Take that point away.

Gregory Washington: I don't believe we have a choice. I think…

Gregory Washington: We have to get going, and we have to get going quickly, and we don't have time to needlessly debate whether we should do this. We need to get moving so that we're prepared to deal with the waves that are coming. The challenges that we're going to see

Gregory Washington: Are bigger than the challenges that we've defeated.

Gregory Washington: We defeated COVID. We defeated the inflation after COVID.

Gregory Washington: I'm not gonna say we've defeated the federal government.

Gregory Washington: We've managed the issues with the federal government, right? And we are now looking at a new challenge that's coming, and this one's bigger than the other three.

Gregory Washington: And… and all I can say is… Oh, no, I can't.

Gregory Washington: definitively tell you why, because we're not in it yet.

Gregory Washington: The data is very, very clear that it is coming.

Gregory Washington: Tim. And I see Tim is… has his hand up, and I always expect tips in question.

Tim Gibson: This is, I'm gonna keep it short.

Tim Gibson: you're… Greg, you're very fond of saying the reality is.

Tim Gibson: And you've laid out a vision of the future of higher education. That is, in fact, the political vision that is currently

Tim Gibson: The attempt is to absolutely establish that version of higher ed in the future, that one that is completely subordinated to the market, where students are only considered as consumers.

Tim Gibson: And, yeah, let's give them a 3-year degree. What the hell? Let's… I'll double you up. Let's go for two. Let's have a two-year, let's try to do a bachelor's in two years. That… they'll like that even more.

Tim Gibson: So, you know.

Tim Gibson: This vision of higher ed is one that is a political vision that isn't currently being implemented, absolutely. But to capitulate to that vision is the worst kind of,

Tim Gibson: you know, really, honestly, it's the worst kind of thinking. We need to collectively organize to create a vision of higher ed that serves

Tim Gibson: our public mission and our students, rather than capitulate to the vision that's being imposed upon us, and pretend that it's just reality. It's not.

Tim Gibson: So…

Tim Gibson: let's talk about, you know, let's talk about what the mission is. Our mission is to create a public university where

Tim Gibson: anyone from the state of Virginia can come to George Mason University and get an education that is every much the equal of anything they're gonna get in the Ivy League, the University of Michigan, the public Ivies, what have you.

Tim Gibson: And, you know, what you've laid out in terms of your solutions, honestly, is a vision that takes us closer to the University of Phoenix than it does to any of those aspirational universities.

Tim Gibson: It's essentially a violation of our public mission, what the vision that you've laid out.

Tim Gibson: So you should expect a lot of resistance on this, Craig.

Tim Gibson: I'm just warning you, that's… That's the reality you should think about.

Gregory Washington: Okay, so let's, let's have that discussion. Look…

Gregory Washington: This is not… a political… reality.

Gregory Washington: This is a fiscal reality. It's a technological reality.

Gregory Washington: It is a political reality, also.

Gregory Washington: Every single one of those aspects

Gregory Washington: Are pointing in the direction of what

Gregory Washington: I've put in place. In one sense.

Gregory Washington: I am the messenger here, telling you, here are the kinds of things we need to consider and do as a campus in order to move forward.

Gregory Washington: We can choose to not accept that.

Gregory Washington: Okay? And say that our outcomes are to be this other thing here.

Gregory Washington: Here's what I will tell you.

Gregory Washington: Higher education in the country, has…

Gregory Washington: been in a stage of modification and change throughout its existence. It's always changed to meet the needs of a changing society.

Gregory Washington: This is just a part of that continuum.

Gregory Washington: Okay?

Gregory Washington: Yes, there are political aspects to it, but there are actually practical aspects, to this as well.

Gregory Washington: we're not moving in the direction of the University of Phoenix.

Gregory Washington: The reality is, again, there's that word.

Gregory Washington: we're gonna be part of a peer set of institutions nationally. Look, I just left a, global summit

Gregory Washington: With, of institutions all around the world, sponsored by, Bloomberg.

Gregory Washington: And, these are… the most… Prominent and well-known institutions

Gregory Washington: in the country, all of the Ivies were there.

Gregory Washington: You know, MIT was there.

Gregory Washington: Stanford…

Gregory Washington: What you would classify as the greatest institutions in the country, a number of those institutions were there in that meeting.

Gregory Washington: And everybody, Everybody.

Gregory Washington: Was unified on this subject, that dramatic change is coming.

Gregory Washington: Okay? Everybody.

Gregory Washington: There were no dissenting voices that this change isn't coming. The…

Gregory Washington: The discussion was really about how do we handle it, and how do we manage it, and how do we deal with it.

Gregory Washington: That's really what the discussion amongst those university leaders was all about.

Gregory Washington: Okay? And so…

Gregory Washington: I will take it… this step.

Gregory Washington: The change that we're seeing is not… the total… outcome of the federal government's Intervention in higher ed.

Gregory Washington: The data is actually clear that we were seeing a movement

Gregory Washington: And in this direction, we've been seeing this movement for quite some time. It's irrespective of party.

Gregory Washington: It's irrespective of a lot of things. We just happen to have an enhanced condensed…

Gregory Washington: Elevated version of it from the political party that's in place now.

Gregory Washington: But the data is very, very clear.

Gregory Washington: The one… the one thing that Democrats and Republicans nationally agree with

Gregory Washington: is that higher ed needs to change, and it's due for disruption. So… The,

Gregory Washington: for lack of a better way of saying it, the way in which we respond to disruption is exactly how you're responding, Tim. It's…

Gregory Washington: Part of the stages that we must go through to get through the ultimate stage of acceptance.

Gregory Washington: Okay? And… and I think we need to go through that process together.

Gregory Washington: Right?

Gregory Washington: what… I am… Offering you is… an off-ramp.

Gregory Washington: a framework By which we.

Gregory Washington: Can get to this inevitable change quicker than most, so that we can be better positioned to engage our young people and to continue to educate them as we've always have.

Gregory Washington: Okay? Here's the thing, you all… Should have learned about me

Gregory Washington: During this last 6 years that we've had together.

Gregory Washington: And that is… I will always try to do the thing that I think is right.

Gregory Washington: and that I think is best

Gregory Washington: For our community, and clearly for our students.

Gregory Washington: I'm always gonna push in that direction.

Gregory Washington: even…

Gregory Washington: Even when my own job is depending on it.

Gregory Washington: I am going to try to do the right thing.

Gregory Washington: And so, if I am telling you this.

Gregory Washington: Because this is what I see, I am putting forward to you what I think is right. Can I be wrong? Absolutely.

Gregory Washington: I could be totally missing this thing.

Gregory Washington: And we can look up 5 years, from now.

Gregory Washington: And… nothing… none of this could happen, and everything will be like it always has been, and we…

Gregory Washington: Can continue moving as the institution we have always been.

Gregory Washington: Yes.

Gregory Washington: I… so I… so I can be totally missing it, and I…

Gregory Washington: And I can tend to you, you know, Tim, I've been telling my leadership team that sometimes I feel like Noah.

Gregory Washington: Because right now, it's sunny outside, there's no rain.

Gregory Washington: And… I'm telling you, we gotta build an arc.

Gregory Washington: But… I actually believe a really big storm is coming, and we need to build an ark.

Gregory Washington: Right? And, and, and, and ultimately.

Gregory Washington: Our survival as an institution is going to depend on how well we do that and how well we position that arc for our future.

Gregory Washington: Again, I could be wrong. Here's what I'll do, Tim. I will stake my career on it. I will stake my position on it.

Tim Gibson: Right?

Gregory Washington: But the reality of the situation is…

Gregory Washington: I, you know, I believe that this change is coming, and without some major intervention coming from somewhere, we are going to experience it. And let me say this also, I'm not sure that it's a bad thing.

Gregory Washington: I actually think… That we are actually ripe for… disruption.

Gregory Washington: Why should everything else in our society get disrupted and not have higher ed be disrupted also? So there actually could be some real…

Gregory Washington: Significant positive benefits.

Gregory Washington: And rethinking who we are and how we operate.

Gregory Washington: I just don't want us… To be on the wrong end of the innovation cycle.

Gregory Washington: Relative to this.

Gregory Washington: Joanna, I'll let you have the…

Solon Simmons: Last one. Yeah. Last one.

Johanna Bockman (she/her): Heck yeah, sorry, thank you so much. I… I just want to make a point. I don't think it's… I don't think Tim or any of us want to say that we don't want to have change. I mean, that change is coming. I mean, it's… it's actually that we are…

Johanna Bockman (she/her): I think that to believe that the faculty are… we are already changing and innovating quite a bit, and so we have a public sociology PhD program that's a total innovation in the country. We have people working with major corporations, I mean, so… and…

Johanna Bockman (she/her): the faculty are doing this, so just using us, like, we're also working on the cutting edge of these trends that are happening all over Eastern Europe.

Johanna Bockman (she/her): and Asia, where we know what's com… what's coming, too. It's… and we also know the… we've studied the results of that, and we can help, right? So, I think the humanities and social sciences are something important, and to underst… to actually understand the change that is coming, maybe in a different way than

Johanna Bockman (she/her): the people at… Bloomberg.

Johanna Bockman (she/her): So I… but I… I… I very much appreciate this dialogue. Thank you.

Gregory Washington: Well, look, again, I don't…

Gregory Washington: part of the reason why I'm bringing this…

Gregory Washington: to you all is to actually have this discussion. I don't believe

Gregory Washington: I don't believe for one minute that we're not doing anything, that we're sitting and just letting things happen.

Gregory Washington: No, I know for a fact that there… we got some really, really innovative people on the cutting edge of…

Gregory Washington: a lot of what I've highlighted

Gregory Washington: comes directly from people in our academic units at Mason who are already working and involved in many of these areas. You might not know that we have faculty that are working in every single one of the spaces that I've highlighted, but I get to see

Gregory Washington: broader view of the campus than what many of you see, but I can tell you that we actually do.

Gregory Washington: Right? And so…

Gregory Washington: I am not saying we should do this void… devoid of the falcon, and I hope I haven't given you all that impression. I am saying

Gregory Washington: That you all need to take leadership

Gregory Washington: in doing this, and collapse and connect with your colleagues who actually are. My job in all of this is to partner with you

Gregory Washington: to be the help to move you forward. I am… I am not your enemy in this. I actually am the entity that's trying

Gregory Washington: to push us along, because I actually want us to be in front of what's coming, and not…

Gregory Washington: be behind it. And so… Look, I'm here to partner with you.

Gregory Washington: That being said, there is a directional framework

Gregory Washington: That we need to put in place relative to that partnership.

Gregory Washington: And again, we're gonna continue to dialogue, we'll continue to talk, we'll continue to deal with this together.

Gregory Washington: But… And don't take this in a negative light, We've always had difficult conversations

Gregory Washington: early on in the cycles of dealing with things. Remember our early discussions on COVID?

Gregory Washington: And how we should handle and manage that, and remember, you guys… see, I remember those things.

Gregory Washington: I remember the death toll that I was given.

Gregory Washington: that said 80 faculty are gonna die if you implement this program. See, I remember all of that.

Gregory Washington: You know, I had, you know, I keep the emails, right?

Gregory Washington: And… and what did we do?

Gregory Washington: We had a faculty-led, faculty-driven process.

Gregory Washington: That, in the end, positioned us to be…

Gregory Washington: Amongst the most successful institutions in the region.

Gregory Washington: in terms of managing that crisis. And I believe that we'll do the same thing here.

Gregory Washington: But the early discussions are hard ones, and we should have them. Here's the other thing I'll tell you. Having these discussions are actually not just beneficial for you all, but they're immensely beneficial for me.

Gregory Washington: Because they help steer some of the directions in which I'm pushing you.

Gregory Washington: Right? And I think that that's healthy. So, I don't mind it one bit when you all push back.

Gregory Washington: Just as long as you know

Gregory Washington: that I'm gonna continue to push in the other direction, and my hope, ultimately, is that we get to a framework, we get to a medium, we get to a point

Gregory Washington: Where we're continuing to do what we do here at George Mason.

Gregory Washington: Right?

Gregory Washington: We have always been on the edge.

Gregory Washington: We've always been on that cutting edge, and we've always…

Gregory Washington: produce outcomes that, in the end, you all look back, and we say, you know what? I am so glad we started, and we did what we did, because look at where we are, and look at what we didn't have to deal with that others had to.

Gregory Washington: Okay? Do you remember the thousands of people, thousands, at our peer institutions that got sent home because they didn't handle COVID properly? Thousands!

Gregory Washington: Not a couple of hundred kids, thousands!

Gregory Washington: Remember the thousands of people who got sick at other institutions because they didn't manage COVID properly, and we had a much more comprehensive plan in place? Well…

Gregory Washington: You all didn't accept that either, up front.

Gregory Washington: But a group of you did.

Gregory Washington: A group of faculty and staff and leadership came together and put together a program to manage this.

Gregory Washington: That's exactly the process that I'm asking you all to do here.

Gregory Washington: Okay?

Solon Simmons: Well, Greg, thank you so much, and as anticipated, I knew we were going to spend some time here. I knew we had big issues coming. I had a little bit of a foresight into it that you hadn't had, so I'm glad we spent as much time as we did, because we're starting this process, right? This is a dialogue we're going to continue to have, so I really appreciate you spending the time with us, and

Solon Simmons: I'm going to transition us into just a foreshadowing. I knew I was going to have to call a spillover meeting for next Wednesday, so I hate to tell you that that's what we're going to do. So, we got a lot of business we have to get it done before we adjourn for the year, but we're going to adjourn on time today at 4.30, just so you know, we're not going to extend from there, because we… a lot of you have to go teach and other things. I do want to say, Greg, if you want to come, we're going to be at O. George's at 5, so we're going to have a thing to celebrate the end of the year, so you're welcome.

Solon Simmons: I just want to say, but we will… a number of us will be meeting there to celebrate the beginning of the end of the year together at the Senate, so I just wanted to make sure to extend that invitation.

Gregory Washington: So, we are launching our new initiative in, the Innovation District on our SciTech campus today.

Gregory Washington: And, and so, we're… I'll be there with…

Gregory Washington: are… some people from our SciTech campus, but also the community there in Manassas.

Solon Simmons: Well, I understood that you probably had something on your schedule, so I just want to make sure extended.

Gregory Washington: We've moved the Innovation Campus forward, but if I didn't have that, I would be with you.

Gregory Washington: Because, you know, The reality is, we're all partners in this.

Gregory Washington: Thank you. I want nothing more than for all of us to be successful on the back end of this.

Gregory Washington: I think you all know how much I love this campus and our students, and all of you, and how much I appreciate all of you and the hard work that you all do… have done, and you all do every day.

Gregory Washington: And so on that note.

Gregory Washington: I thank you, and I look forward to partnering with you as we move through this next set of challenges and our next adventure together.

George Mason University Faculty Senate Minutes

Meeting Date: April 29, 2026
Location: Zoom

Time: 3:00-4:30 PM

Meeting Agenda

1. **Call to Order**
   President Solon Simmons called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

3. **Opening Remarks:**

He noted that the session was a continuation of a prior meeting and that the body remained in the nominations portion of the agenda. Accordingly, there was no need to approve previous minutes before proceeding.

5.A Nominations

- The Chair of the Nominations Committee reported that voting for Senate Standing Committees had been completed and that ballots for BOV faculty representative positions had been distributed, with voting open until the following Wednesday at 5:00 p.m.
- It was noted that there were no nominees for the Finance and Land Use Committee. This position will be included in an upcoming call for nominations, with a ballot expected in the early fall.
- A senator offered to serve temporarily on the committee if needed due to potential gaps before new terms begin; it was clarified that at least one faculty member currently remains on the committee, and coverage is expected through the summer, pending confirmation.
- The President emphasized that the Finance and Land Use Committee is a critical body, particularly in relation to financial and governance matters, and encouraged participation.
- Another senator volunteered to serve and was advised to submit their name and a brief bio to be added to the ballot. Additional nominations were permitted at this stage.

5.B Organization & Operations – Appendix A, B and C

- The committee presented three items for voting. First, a revision to the Senate's standing rules was proposed to expand a single rule on records into a more detailed provision addressing minutes, recordings, and transcripts. It was clarified that minutes remain the official record, while transcripts serve as supplementary records that individuals may review and request corrections to for accuracy. Discussion highlighted that individuals are responsible for reviewing and correcting their own statements in transcripts due to limitations of automated transcription. It was noted that formal corrections to decisions or motions must be made through the minutes, not the transcript.

Concerns were raised about the process requiring a majority vote to accept transcript corrections, especially if members have not reviewed the transcript or recordings. A suggestion was made to consider voting on transcripts similarly to minutes, though concerns were expressed about the practicality and burden of reviewing full transcripts regularly.

Participants emphasized that not all members are likely to read full transcripts, reinforcing reliance on individuals to verify their own remarks. The discussion acknowledged potential inaccuracies in automated transcription (e.g., accents, proper nouns) as a key reason for the proposed correction mechanism.

Broader concerns were noted about balancing accuracy, accountability, and feasibility, including whether individuals could later seek corrections and how timelines for such corrections should be handled. The motion to amend the standing rules was put to a voice vote and passed.

- Second, the committee proposed dissolving the University Academic Appeals Committee. It was noted that the committee has had very limited activity over many years and that its function has largely been assumed by other bodies (e.g., the Provost's office). It was clarified that the proposal does not eliminate the appeals function, but rather removes the specific committee that is no longer effectively serving that function.

  Discussion clarified that the committee's original purpose of providing a pathway for appeals, has largely been replaced by processes established through the Provost's office. It was noted that the committee's jurisdiction has been reduced over time, particularly for graduate appeals. A more streamlined alternative was proposed, with undergraduate appeals potentially handled through a smaller subcommittee, allowing for more efficient and timely resolution while maintaining an appeals mechanism. The motion to dissolve the committee was passed by voice vote.

- Third, the committee proposed revising its own charge to remove requirements that all Senate business flow through O&O and that the committee set the agenda. These provisions were described as no longer reflective of current practice. The proposed change to the charge was passed by a voice vote.

5.C Academic Policies – Appendix D

- The committee introduced a proposed Open Educational Resources (OER) policy for discussion only, noting that the university currently lacks a policy aligned with Virginia code.
- The policy aims to reduce student costs by encouraging use of low-cost or no-cost materials, while clarifying that faculty are not required to adopt OER and may continue using standard textbooks. It also prohibits receiving payment for adopting course materials.
- Key provisions include greater transparency in textbook listings, identification of low-cost/no-cost courses, and efforts to help students access affordable materials.
- Discussion raised questions about using materials available in multiple formats such as library access versus bookstore orders, and concerns about the digital divide, including unequal student access to appropriate devices.
- Additional concerns focused on bookstore pricing and guidance, particularly whether faculty can direct students to lower-cost alternatives outside the bookstore.
- Feedback was collected for further revision, with no vote taken.

5.D Budget and Resources

- The committee reported ongoing engagement with administration on budget model transparency and faculty salary data access.
- It was noted that the current budget model classifies units as “red” (deficit) and “green” (surplus), with approximately $22 million in deficits and green units contributing to a stabilization fund. Red units are required to develop three-year recovery plans.
- The committee has repeatedly requested unit-level budget data (including deficits, surpluses, and projections), noting that information is currently shared inconsistently across units. The Provost has agreed to survey deans on what data is being shared, with results to inform a baseline for transparency.
- On faculty salary data, efforts are underway to ensure inclusion of administrative and professional faculty salaries, consistent with past practice. The committee is pursuing a cooperative resolution but noted that the data is publicly available if further action is needed.

- Discussion raised concerns about increasing administrative costs and the lack of comprehensive data to evaluate these trends, emphasizing the need for transparency on both academic and administrative expenditures.
- The committee emphasized its goal of ensuring faculty have sufficient budget and salary information to meaningfully participate in university governance.

5.E Faculty Matters

- The committee reported no formal updates, noting that work is ongoing and an update is expected in the coming weeks.
- Discussion raised concerns about term faculty contract changes, particularly cases where long-serving faculty with multi-year contracts have been moved to one-year contracts, with unclear pathways to restoring longer-term appointments.
- It was noted that there is inconsistency across colleges in how term faculty reappointments and contract terms are applied, and the committee is reviewing policies and practices to improve consistency.
- Concerns were also raised about misalignment between Provost guidance and the Faculty Handbook, as well as contract language that prioritizes contract terms over handbook provisions.
- Additional related issues included pay band and salary floor changes for term faculty, with limited transparency and understanding of recent adjustments.
- Coordination with the Term Faculty Committee was suggested to further examine these issues and support follow-up.
- The Senate was informed of a 52% faculty response rate to the Gallup survey, indicating strong engagement, and discussion noted the need for adequate HR support and data access to analyze results effectively.

5.F Faculty Handbook – Appendix E

The committee reported that it met in April and reviewed Section 2.7 of the Faculty Handbook, breaking it into discrete items for consideration. The Chair noted that the proposed changes are forward-looking and intended to inform future revisions, with any approved items not reaching the Board until the next academic year. The purpose of presenting these motions now is to gather feedback and identify areas where early agreement on language may assist Associate Deans and units as they work through upcoming process changes.

Motion 1: Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate approve the change to replace references to "department chairs" with "LAU administrators" in this section and throughout the entire Faculty Handbook.

- Discussion focused on the need for clear definition of LAUs and ensuring alignment with existing handbook language and institutional structures.
- Motion 1 passed by voice vote.

Motion 2: Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate approve the change to language to reflect the use of Interfolio.

- Discussion raised concerns about removing language requiring justification and communication between review levels, as well as transparency in handling external review letters.
- It was determined that the proposal required further clarification and revision, and the motion was withdrawn and not voted on.

Motion 3: Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate approve the change to remove the option to "abstain" in RRPT processes.

- Discussion highlighted concerns about enforceability, faculty autonomy, and clarity of language, as well as differing views on the role of abstentions, including their potential misuse.
- A formal vote was conducted (via ballot). Motion 3 passed with 19 yes and 16 no.

Motion 4: Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate approve the addition of language about recusals to all promotion types.

- Discussion noted the need for clear and possibly more detailed definitions of qualifying relationships for recusal.
- Motion 4 passed by voice vote.

Motion 5: Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate approve the replacement of "insufficient" to "fewer than three" in RRPT processes.

- Minimal discussion; proposal aimed to provide operational clarity and consistency.
- Motion 5 passed by voice vote.

Motion 6: Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate approve the addition of 3rd year renewal procedures.

- Discussion noted variation in current practices across units and clarified that additional review levels depend on local bylaws.
- Motion 6 passed by voice vote.

7.A Grading Process Task Force – Final Report 2026

- The Grading Process Task Force reported completion of its three-year project and presented its final report (included in the Board Book).
- The task force analyzed 1.8 million grade records (2017–2023), conducted a faculty survey with over 580 respondents, reviewed peer institution practices, and examined scholarship on grading policies.
- Key findings included underutilization of the C- grade and significant inconsistency and confusion among faculty regarding its use.
- Recommendations include considering elimination of the C- grade and improving clarity in grade definitions and use.
- The President noted the importance of the report and indicated that it will be brought back for further discussion through Academic Policies.

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion passed by voice vote, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Action Items

- Interested faculty were invited to email their name and brief bio to be added to the current ballot for the Finance and Land Use Committee.
- The Budget and Resources Committee will meet with the CHRO to ensure that administrative and professional faculty salary data are included in the annual release.
- The Faculty Matters Committee is continuing to review term faculty contract and reappointment inconsistencies and will report back after completing its analysis.
- Senators were invited to submit additional feedback to the Faculty Handbook Committee on proposed revisions, particularly regarding RRPT processes.
- The Faculty Handbook Committee will revise and bring back Motion 2 (RRPT/Interfolio-related changes) for further consideration in a future meeting.
- The Grading Process Task Force report will be referred to Academic Policies for further discussion and formal review at a future meeting.

Attendee List