

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**  
**AGENDA FOR THE FACULTY SENATE MEETING**  
**FEBRUARY 5, 2014**  
**Robinson Hall B113, 3:00 - 4:15 p.m.**

- I. Call to Order**
- II. Approval of the Minutes of December 4, 2013**
- III. Announcements**
  - Provost Peter Stearns
  - SLOAN Funding Retirement Program Attachment A
- IV. Unfinished Business**
  - Resolution from the General Education Committee – Janette Muir, Chair Attachments B & C
- V. New Business - Committee Reports**
  - A. Senate Standing Committees**
    - Executive Committee*
    - Academic Policies*
    - Budget & Resources*
    - Faculty Matters*
    - Nominations*
      - Daniel Houser (CHSS) is nominated to fill a vacancy on the University Space Committee
      - Tamara Maddox (VSE) is nominated to fill a vacancy on the Mason Core Committee
    - Organization & Operations*
  - B. Other Committees/Faculty Representatives**
    - Technology Policy Committee* – Stanley Zoltek, Chair
    - Task Force on Textbook Affordability*– Kim Eby and Sharon Pitt Attachment D
    - Faculty Handbook Committee* - Suzanne Slayden, Chair Attachment E
- V. Other New Business**
- VI. Remarks for the Good of the General Faculty**
- VII. Adjournment**

**Within 5 years of retirement?  
9 or 12-month faculty?**



## **FACULTY RETIREMENT COACHING**

*Let us assist you in developing personal goals  
for life in retirement and design your own  
transition plan.*

**Includes:**

- **Online retirement readiness assessment**
- **Two individual coaching sessions with a certified retirement coach**
- **Two informative seminars (one 1/2 day and one full day)**

*Your spouse/partner is welcome to attend  
the seminars.*

For questions and to register, please contact Kathy Haldeman at [khaldem1@gmu.edu](mailto:khaldem1@gmu.edu) or 3.2040.

Pilot program funded by the ACE/Sloan Retirement Transitions Award.

## **ATTACHMENT B**

### **The Mason Core: Capstone Experience**

#### **Rationale and Description**

Over the past year, members of the Mason Core committee have extensively discussed the synthesis requirement and what might be a better way to provide a culminating experience for students that is more connected to their degree path. As a result, the full committee unanimously recommended that the Synthesis Requirement be changed to a Capstone Experience.

Each major or program will designate a capstone experience (3-credit minimum) as the final element of the Mason Core. The capstone experience cannot serve other MC requirements. While it should engage the Mason Vision, its primary development and assessment reside with each local academic unit. The capstone experience should encourage students to apply their knowledge and problem-solving skills to pressing intellectual and social problems as ethical inquiry-based citizens, and self-reflective learners. Collaborative partnerships for interdisciplinary courses may be acceptable for this category.

#### **Requirements for the Capstone Experience**

Students must have earned a minimum of 85 hours before taking the Capstone Experience course.

As a culminating experience in a major or program, it is expected that the maximum enrollment in a capstone course not exceed 35 students.

Each capstone experience must include a creative or scholarly product that can be reviewed by external audiences. These products may be used for the institutional assessment of critical thinking or to highlight the value of the Mason experience.

#### **Capstone Experience – Learning Outcomes**

The learning outcomes of the capstone experience will be created by each unit. Outcomes should demonstrate how students have developed the capacities to act as engaged, ethical citizens and well-rounded scholars who are prepared to act in the world.

Examples of possible capstone experiences include, but are not limited to, a final undergraduate thesis or other research project, a public performance, an exhibition of work, an internship, or an experiential learning project. A Capstone Experience can be constructed from a former synthesis course, either within the unit or in other departments.

## **Implementation**

Once this change in requirements is passed by the Faculty Senate, implementation would be reflected in catalog changes for the 2015-2016 academic year. Additionally, departments would have a phase-in period to assess the best choices for their majors. We expect that students will not be able to avail themselves of this new requirement until Fall 2016.

## **Overall Advantages**

- Shifts synthesis to a requirement that is nationally viewed as a “high impact” practice.
- Potentially reduces the number of required credits a student has to take.
- Places the responsibility for a student’s culminating experience with the local academic unit.
- Allows flexibility in terms of best options for student learning.
- Clarifies the assessment process for this Mason Core category.

(See also power-point presentation “[Mason’s General Education Program](#)”)

## **ATTACHMENT C**

### **Resolution from the General Education Committee**

**The general education committee recommends replacing the “Synthesis” requirement with a “Capstone Experience” associated with the major.**

#### **Description:**

The Mason Core: Capstone Experience

Each major or program will offer a capstone experience as the final element of the Mason Core. While it should engage the Mason Vision, its primary development and assessment reside with the originating degree or program.

#### **Background:**

The original intent of the synthesis requirement was to provide a culminating gen ed experience for students. In practice, however, the synthesis requirement has been challenging due to the following:

1. Course taking patterns for students vary, thus synthesis is taken at different times rather than following other gen ed requirements;
2. Many students transfer to Mason with most of their lower level gen ed waived due to general articulation agreements;
3. Many departments currently use a capstone experience to fulfill the synthesis requirement;

4. Assessment results are uneven due to the variety of courses that have been included in this category.

Most importantly,

Shifting to a “capstone experience” located in a student’s major will put the locus of control on a culminating degree experience within the local unit. Therefore, each department can determine, with some modest direction, what learning outcomes work best for their students. This focus also responds to national conversations around the kinds of courses that work best for students as they complete their college degrees.

Some possible examples of capstone experiences:

- ✓ Courses that are already required within the major, but can be mapped to learning outcomes for the Mason Core.
- ✓ A research based course
- ✓ A student practicum or internship
- ✓ A current set of synthesis courses already located in a department

## **ATTACHMENT D**

### **Task Force on Textbook Affordability Report and Recommendations**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Provost charged the Task Force on Textbook Affordability in February 2013 to develop a set of recommendations to make textbooks more affordable for Mason students.

Members of the task force were:

- Diane Smith (Chair), Associate University Librarian, Research & Educational Services
- Kimberly Eby, Associate Provost for Faculty Development; Director, Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence
- Rajesh Ganesan, Associate Professor, Systems Engineering and Operations Research
- Star Muir, Associate Professor; Hiring and Scheduling Director, Communication
- Mark Kraner, Executive Director, Campus Retail Operations, Auxiliary Enterprises
- Steve Nodine, Manager of Instructional Design
- Sharon Pitt, Interim Deputy CIO
- Larry Rockwood, Professor of Environmental Science and Policy; Director, Undergraduate Biology Program
- Cliff Shore, Director, Purchasing and Accounts Payable
- Korey Singleton, Manager, Assistive Technology Services
- Jennifer Suh, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Education

The task force reviewed the literature to identify trends and discussed possible actions. It is clear that the “problem” exists throughout higher education and that all are looking for the “silver bullet.” The crux of the issue is simple: the person choosing the textbook to be used in a class is not the person who has to pay for the book. The textbook decision is made in a publishing environment of planned obsolescence, in which publishers must continually issue new editions or add additional “learning components” to their products in order to guarantee their revenue stream and grow their businesses. At Mason there is the added economic

dilemma that the University receives a revenue stream from the bookstore and reducing costs for students can reduce monies that are funneled back into the academic programs.

Given our research and analysis, the recommendations of the task force are:

- George Mason University should appoint a group focused on developing an awareness program to educate faculty on actions they can take to reduce textbook costs for students.
- George Mason University should develop a parallel marketing effort to inform students of steps that they may take to lower costs.
- George Mason University should incentivize faculty to create and share e-textbooks via an open educational resource (OER) repository.
- George Mason University should encourage experimentation and research with e-textbooks to help faculty transition from print to e-textbook format.
- George Mason University should investigate, join, and actively participate in open educational resource (OER) repositories seeking to understand the number of resources that are valuable to the Mason academic community, the quality of the repository's content, the value to our learning community, and the beneficial and sustainable impact on textbook affordability for students.
- The Office of Financial Aid should investigate the feasibility of allowing students to allocate a portion of their financial aid to purchase books at the bookstore.
- The University Libraries should develop programs to support the textbook affordability initiative through a textbook reserve project; build a more robust electronic reserve capability; and develop OER expertise within the staff.
- The course textbook information sheet currently used by the bookstore to gather textbook titles should be augmented to include information on how and if the faculty member will support the use of an e-textbook version throughout the class.
- The State Council of Higher Education of Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia may play a role in the encouragement of the use of open educational resources, as well as the creation of policy and legislation that encourages publishers to provide affordable access to textbooks, whether printed or electronic. George Mason should work with these groups as appropriate to further the cause and development of open educational resources.

**The full report of the Task Force on Textbook Affordability is posted on the Faculty Senate website at [http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/MINUTES\\_FS\\_2013-14/13-Task%20Force%20Report%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/MINUTES_FS_2013-14/13-Task%20Force%20Report%20FINAL.pdf) .**

**ATTACHMENT E**  
**Agenda item from the Faculty Handbook Revision Committee**  
**Faculty Senate meeting, Feb. 5, 2014**

**Proposed Revisions to the Faculty Handbook**

The proposed revisions are those that the Faculty Handbook Revision Committee has been considering at its regular meetings during the 2013-2014 academic year.

At this meeting of the Faculty Senate, the Committee will present the revisions and ask for brief discussion. Afterwards, the Committee will amend the revisions if necessary. At the March 5, 2014 Faculty Senate meeting, the Committee will ask that the proposed revisions be voted on without further change.

The Committee welcomes comments and suggestions before and after the Faculty Senate meeting.

**The revisions may be viewed by clicking the link below, or going to the Faculty Senate website <http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/FacultyHandbook/fac-hndbk-rev.htm>**

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