

# **GAPSA General Assembly**

## **April 13, 2021**

### **Meeting Notes**

- Vote on [Time to Degree Completion Resolution](#)
  - Friendly amendment: Change the final statement to “two-year time-to-degree extension”
  - Final Vote: 20 Yes, 0 No, 2 Abstain
- Guest: Kristen Wright, Director of Civic Engagement; QEP Discussion ([website here](#))
  - Slides will be [made available here](#). The goal is “Transformative Education through Anti-Racist Community Engagement.”
    - This summer, we will be writing a draft of the plan for how to achieve this goal
  - Q&A
    - Are you considering having faculty trainings focused on any micro-aggressions targeted towards international graduate students?
      - Yes, very important to us
      - Julie: This is incredibly important, given how much time and commitment is involved for international students in PhD programs
    - Also, there can sometimes be inappropriate statements or behaviors from faculty due to cultural differences. It would be great to do a survey to get feedback from international students to point out things like this.
      - Great suggestion! We do plan on soliciting and incorporating the voice of students. Right now, we are in development; once we reach implementation phase, we will definitely get feedback from others.
    - How do you balance anti-racism initiatives with free speech and academic freedom considerations?
      - Yes, we are very committed to ensuring that we fall within guidelines of free speech. Our goal is to make well-rounded scholars who are able to think critically.
  - Feel free to reach out if you have more questions!
- Guests: Rose Pascarell (VP of University Life) and Carol Kissal (SVP of Admin & Finance); Potential Tuition & Fees Increase, Financial Transparency
  - We recognize it’s been a very tough semester, trying to balance both student needs with keeping staff jobs, plus ensuring safety and providing virtual and in-person services for students who needed them

- We noted that Arlington and SciTech services, such as CAPS, have been used more frequently this past year
- We think the pandemic has allowed us to leverage technology in ways that benefit our students. In the coming years, we will continue making major investments to help our students in terms of technology, lab space, new building in Arlington, etc.
- In order to fund these areas of investment, this has led to some small increases in graduate tuition (about \$18 per credit hour) and undergrad/grad student fees (about \$4 per credit hour) coming next year
- Q&A
  - What's the ROI going to be on these capital investments? And compared to other investments that we could be making?
    - The state contributes a lot of funds for some of these projects; thus, we want to strategically invest in areas where we can get state funding that matches or heavily supports any money we spend.
    - Other investments, such as improved WiFi, are harder to calculate exact ROI, but the idea is the breadth of impact: graduate students need WiFi for research, personal life, and so much more. We see this as good "ROV" (return on value).
  - Are uniform increases in tuition/fees fair? Or should it be targeted to students who will benefit from these investments?
    - It would be logistically quite tough to do price discrimination, even though this is a good idea, but a vast majority of tuition/fees go towards investments that benefit all students
  - Have you received feedback from students who are in fully or majority online programs about tuition increases?
    - We haven't.
  - Is it possible that they don't know about it?
    - Possibly, we will definitely look into this!
  - What impact has COVID had on Mason's bottom line, and how are those impacts forecasted to change, or increase, in the future?
    - We were initially estimating a \$125 million deficit. We put a plan in place to cover it, and now, towards the end of the fiscal year, we've managed to avoid dipping into any reserves by focusing on reducing any expenditures that did not directly benefit students. We also got about \$30 million from the government to spend on COVID-related relief, much of it goes directly to student financial aid.
  - Why are we raising graduate tuition and not undergraduate tuition?

- Our graduate school applications increased this year, so there was a little bit more demand; thus, we are trying to be a little bit more competitively priced compared to our peer institutions.
  - Also, last year our BOV affirmed a commitment not to raise undergraduate tuition.
  - We also plan on using the increases to improve graduate stipends and in supporting student mental health.
- Last year, we asked for more fee transparency on where graduate student fees are going, and if it directly benefits grad students. We haven't heard back yet.
  - We are working on putting out more transparency with percentages on where fees go. We are more than happy to share this data.
- Before the pandemic, I recall talk about Mason starting a medical school, and I am curious what happened to that.
  - This took a bit of a back seat with COVID, but we are still pursuing it and just met with some partners last week about it.
- Guests: Master Planning Team
  - Our team has been working to put together a strategic program direction for our Arlington, Fairfax, and SciTech campuses.
    - Arlington: We are focusing on enhancing our current partnerships with major organizations (e.g., HQ2) in the area.
    - SciTech: We are focusing on ecologically rich research opportunities, partnerships with industries in the area, and creating a health innovation graduate campus identity.
    - Fairfax: We are focusing on the north-south “spine” in the center of campus that allows for core collaboration for both undergrad and grad.
  - Q&A
    - As some local businesses are unfortunately closing due to the pandemic, how does that affect these plans?
      - These plans are all long-term plans, but yes we do want to take into consideration short-term effects
      - Perhaps encouraging more activity in that area would also help with local businesses in that area
    - What are some of the “competitors” we are comparing to?
      - Georgetown, University of Maryland, Virginia Tech (the latter two are building campuses in Arlington)
      - We note that they are both peers and competitors
    - What are strategies for incorporating transportation to/from SciTech?
      - Definitely a major consideration, we have an entire team looking at transportation and weighing several options (busses, rails, etc.)

- Also residence halls, dining, etc. on SciTech?
  - Yes, we want to bring all of that together: research/teaching, residence, dining, transportation, etc.
  - Also, we are planning on partnering with neighboring innovation center and an university village that can help with all of this (goal is that it will be like the Fairfax Mosaic district)
- With discussion regarding a Graduate School, and the conversation about the Arlington and SciTech campuses, are we looking at moving additional graduate programs to those campuses?
  - This is not suggesting a major move of all graduate programs. We are going to look for specific programs that would make sense to enhance at certain programs (e.g., science programs at SciTech, policy programs at Arlington).
  - It's also still very early, these are long-term ideas and plans
- A few undergrad programs are expanding on the Arlington campus. Are there conversations to have on-campus housing for either undergrad/grad at Arlington?
  - We are limited on land, but we are exploring public-private partnerships to get discounted housing and other amenities for students. These will be harder to negotiate affordable pricing of course, but we are very committed to making it happen.
- Is there a plan to build more Fairfax housing and/or a pathway between Fairfax campus and downtown Fairfax?
  - Yes on housing! Not immediately, but we are looking towards that.
  - It's a great idea to better connect with downtown Fairfax, and there is a plan to connect Fairfax campus all the way to Vienna via [Capitol Bikeshares](#) and similar mechanisms
- Got more questions? Feel free to contact us. You can also fill out the feedback form at our website here:
  - <https://construction.gmu.edu/university-master-plan/get-involved>