

**GRADUATE STUDENT AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION  
AT GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

April 30, 2024

***An Open Letter to Address Doctoral Hooding Procedures at Commencement and Degree Celebrations***

To Whom It May Concern,

We, as representatives of the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA), are writing to bring to your attention a matter concerning doctoral students at Mason. GAPSA was notified of a change to the traditional doctoral hooding ceremony by doctoral students planning to graduate this May 2024. Per the current process, the 2024 doctoral graduates will be hooded off-stage before being called by name to walk across the stage. This is a move away from what we consider to be a widely accepted practice of hooding doctoral graduates on stage. Additionally, we understand from verbiage on the website that college or school Degree Celebrations are not permitted to conduct a doctoral hooding ceremony of their own, but rather that doctoral students must attend Commencement for this component of graduation.

In addition to the significant financial cost of buying or renting the required regalia, doctoral students are unhappy as the new format downplays the significance of obtaining the highest degree in one's discipline. These changes are of particular concern as they have resulted in the depersonalization of the ceremony with diminished emphasis on the achievement towards Mason's highest degree.

We are unsure of the reasoning behind the decision to alter the hooding procedure, which was not effectively communicated to our doctoral student community. Further, alterations were implemented without doctoral student consultation or proactive notification regarding these changes. There is clearly a breakdown in understanding what doctoral students expect the graduation ceremony to be. GAPSA is the representative and advocacy body for graduate and professional students at Mason, comprising members from degree programs across colleges, schools, and campuses, but we were similarly uninformed of the aforementioned alterations. Again, GAPSA was only notified of these changes by affected participants, not any entities making the change.

We, signatories on this letter, represent the GAPSA Executive Board and the 6th General Assembly, an organized group advocating on behalf of graduate and professional degree students across our campuses. We ask that:

1. those responsible for the graduation ceremony reconsider the implemented changes and return the practice of hooding doctoral graduates on stage;
2. communication concerning significant changes affecting the culminating experiences of graduate and professional students be conveyed effectively, in a timely manner, and in good faith, whether directly to all graduate students or through entities such as GAPSA; and
3. doctoral students' perspectives on this matter be actively solicited and considered before the planning of graduation and degree celebrations in the future.

We request attention to this matter because these changes have frustrated and negatively affected our doctoral students just as they are getting ready to celebrate the crowning achievement of their academic

careers. It is important to remember that the doctoral hooding ceremony is a public commemoration of the years of work our graduate students have put towards contributing to the academic, research, and civic missions of the University, a moment that marks their transition to becoming Mason alumni. It is a moment Mason should want to get right.

Sincerely,

**Ashish Hingle**, GAPSA Executive Vice President (PhD Student in Information Technology)

**Vikas Velagapudi**, GAPSA President (MS Student in Computer Science)

**SUPPORT FROM GAPSA AND THE 6TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY:**

- **Barbara Montgomery**, Political Science MA Representative (MA Student in Political Science)
- **Carolyn Faith Hoffman**, Health Services Research PhD Representative (PhD Student in Health Services Research)
- **Douglas Nedza**, Climate Dynamics PhD Representative (PhD Candidate in Climate Dynamics)
- **Emily Sharer**, Psychology PhD Representative (PhD Student in Human Factors and Applied Cognition Psychology)
- **Emma Vetter**, Sociology PhD Representative (PhD Candidate in Sociology)
- **Gretchen Baas**, Criminology, Law, and Society, PhD Representative (PhD Student in Criminology, Law, and Society)
- **Jonathan Nichols**, English MA Representative (MA Student in English)
- **Kelby Gibson**, Writing and Rhetoric PhD Representative (PhD Student in Writing and Rhetoric)
- **Kristina Podesta**, Public Policy PhD Representative (PhD Student in Public Policy)
- **Madeleine A. Becker**, Biosciences PhD Representative (PhD Candidate in Biosciences)
- **Matthew Willis**, Information Technology PhD Representative (PhD Student in Information Technology)
- **Parth Dalal**, GAPSA Vice President of Science and Technology Campus (MS Student in Data Analytics)
- **Sahar Timory Wahidi**, Education PhD Representative (PhD Candidate in Education)
- **Sarah Sylvester**, Economics PhD Representative (PhD Student in Economics)
- **Shelby L Morrow**, Master of Health Systems Management MHA Representative (Master's Student in Health Administration)
- **Shel'Daun Reynolds**, Criminal Justice Master's & PhD Representative (Master's Student in Criminal Justice)
- **Sherry Shan**, GAPSA Vice President of Fairfax Campus Program (PhD Student in Civil Environmental Infrastructure Engineering)
- **Shreya Guha**, Civil, Environmental, and Infrastructural Engineering PhD Representative (PhD Student in Civil, Environmental and Infrastructural Engineering)
- **Soojung Paek**, GAPSA Director of Communications (MA Student in Arts Management)
- **Zachary Adams**, GAPSA Vice President of Mason Square (Master's Student in International Security)