



General Assembly Meeting

October 24, 2025

12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Zoom meeting

GAPSA Executive Officers

Nilima Mow (President)

Xiaorong (Sherry) Shan (Executive Vice President)

Aishwarya Bhondge (Vice President of Fairfax)

Zayd Hamid (Vice President of Mason Square)

Asritha Lakshmi Bontu (Vice President of Science and Technology)

Aparna Shastri (Director of Communications)

GAPSA Advisors

Dr. Julie Choe Kim (GAPSA Advisor and Director, Graduate Student Life)

Program Representatives

Applied Industrial and Organizational Psychology, MPS	Nora Bassa
Art History, MA	Lee Wilson
Arts Management, MA	Stephanie Concepcion
Bioengineering, MS	Bao Yen
Bioengineering, PhD	Likitha Raja
Bioinformatics and Computational Biology, PhD	Emily Larson
Business, PhD	Bryan Timothy Sullivan
Climate Dynamics, PhD	Austin Reed
Computer Science, PhD	Dhiman Goswami
Criminology, Law and Society, PhD	Hailey Khatchatourian

Cultural Studies, PhD	Luma Mousa
Earth Systems and Geoinformation Sciences, PhD	Alimurtaza Husain Kothawala
Economics, MA	Eelma Ahamed
Economics, PhD	Daniel Kelly
Education, PhD	Anjusha Kasetty Ramesh Kumar
English, MA	Ruth Nesbitt
Environmental Science & Public Policy, PhD	Nicole Firing
Global Affairs, MA	Justice Roney
Global Commerce and Policy, MA	Marcus Lewis
Health Informatics, MS	Shreeyukti Rana
Higher Education and Student Development, MA	Payton Creamer (proxy for Maureen Ashbrock)
History, PhD	Savannah Scott
Information Technology, PhD	Hadeel Elyazori
Interdisciplinary Studies, MA	Kristin Metzger
International Security, MA	Jacob Boggs
Linguistics, PhD	Saeed Alqarni (proxy for Joy Elizabeth Liebl)
Management, MS	Gabriela Nazario
Mathematics, PhD	Nathanial Fink-Humes
Neuroscience, PhD	Natalie Erickson
Nursing, DNP	Christine James
Physics and Astronomy, PhD	Anna Engelhardt
Psychology, MA	Racquel Ritchie
Psychology, PhD	Christina Wheeler
Public Administration Program, MPA	Phoebe Martenson
Public Health, PhD	Julia Mandeville
Public Policy, MPP	Ballaion Cadet Joram
Social Work, MSW	Arielle Gradney
Sociology, PhD	Jeba Humayra
Statistical Science, PhD	Yang Long
Visual and Performing Arts, MFA	Steven Luu
Writing and Rhetoric, PhD	Kelby Gibson

Guests

Juliet Blank-Godlove (Assistant Vice President of University Life and Dean of Students)

Dr. Laurence Bray (Senior Associate Provost for Graduate Education)

Tejnath Tummala (MS student, Computer Science)

Brandon Speed (PhD student, Chemistry)

Agenda

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>
12:00pm - 12:15pm	Recap: GAPSA Overview and GA Introduction
12:15pm - 1:00pm	Graduate Student Experience Survey Report: Dr. Julie Choe Kim and Dr. Laurence Bray
1:00pm - 1:30pm	GA Concerns & Updates
1:30pm – 2:00pm	Communication Strategies or Outreach Ideas (optional session)

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Part I: GAPSA Overview

GAPSA: Official governing and advocacy body for GMU graduate and professional students.

Purpose: Build community, represent student voices, and enhance graduate life.

Goals:

- Strengthen student representation
- Promote resource awareness
- Connect alumni and current students

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Part II: Graduate Student Experience Survey Report (2024)

Prepared by:

Dr. Laurence Bray, Senior Associate Provost of Graduate Education
Dr. Julie Choe Kim, Director of Graduate Student Life

1. Overview

- Conducted Feb–Mar 2024; ~1,900 responses (21.6%).
- Sponsored by Graduate Division & Graduate Student Life.
- Represented all colleges; law students excluded.

2. Respondent Snapshot

- 67% Master's, 30% Doctoral, 3% Certificate.
- 63% Female; 33% International.
- Doctoral & international students had higher response rates.

3. Main Findings

- **Satisfaction:** 83% positive overall; students feel belonging in programs but less connection to Mason as a whole.
- **Academics:** ~70% satisfied; doctoral workload often too heavy.
- **Advising & Mentoring:** ~79% have advisors; only 47% have mentors — most master's lack one.
- **Career Development:** Students value degree for career success; seek training in grant writing & data skills; prefer industry roles.
- **Funding:** Mixed satisfaction (~43%); concerns about tuition costs & loans.
- **Well-Being:** Only 35% rate mental health as good/excellent; many unaware of TimelyCare and support resources.
- **Resources & Communication:** Most use Handshake & Libraries; want more graduate spaces; prefer Blackboard & Mason360 for info.
- **Housing/Family:** Few live on campus; many want university-run housing options; about 20% are caregivers.

4. Actions & Next Steps

- Launch Graduate Success Fellows initiative.
- Expand grant writing and quantitative training.
- Boost TimelyCare and well-being awareness.
- Build stronger career and alumni networks.

5. Example (Schar School)

- Addressed funding concerns (stipend increase \$22.5k → \$27k).
- Strengthened industry connections and career skills training.

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Graduate Division Updates from Dr. Bray — Condensed Summary (2025–2026)

1. Stipends & Benefits

- Minimum stipend up **93% since 2018** (\$10,388 → \$20,079 for 9-month GA).
- Introduced **multi-year and 12-month contracts** for stability.
- Next step: **increase stipends further and improve summer funding.**

2. Assistantships

- **+29% GA/GL positions** since 2018; steady rise in GRA and GTA roles.
- Ongoing issue: overuse of **Graduate Lecturers (GL)**.
- Recommendation: prioritize **GTA appointments** and ensure **pay equity**.

3. Advising & Mentoring

- Launched **Graduate Success Fellows (12 fellows)** and **Patriot Connect** advising system.
- Created directory of Graduate Program Directors and Coordinators.
- Next: strengthen **faculty mentoring training** and **structured mentor-mentee programs**.

4. Career & Professional Development

- Added **Teaching Academy, SkillCraft Workshops, Microcredentials, Communication Academy, and 3MT competitions**.
- Expanding **Individualized Development Plans (IDPs)** and **industry-oriented training**.

5. Affordable Housing

- Limited graduate housing: 150 beds (SciTech) + ~50 (Fairfax).
- Barriers: high Fairfax rent, no family housing, costly commutes.
- Recommendations: **expand Fairfax housing, create family options, consider subsidies**.

6. Mental Health & Well-Being

- Students report high stress and low awareness of services.
- Actions: **early counseling, stress prevention, wellness visibility, and orientation integration**.

7. Institutional Priorities

- New **Travel Fund** and **GA hiring system** launching soon.
- Ongoing reviews of **teaching pay** and **Graduate Student Center** advocacy.
- GMU to host **CSGS 2027** conference.

8. Communication & Awareness

- Current tools: newsletters, websites, GAPSA & University Life emails.
- Issue: students miss info; prefer text/app alerts.
- Plans: **SMS updates, Canvas hub, and semesterly town halls**.

9. Financial Aid & Funding Challenges

- **68% PhDs** depend on GA funding; many master's self-fund.
- Financial stress widespread.
- Priorities: **raise pay, ensure stability, and support international students**.

10. Communication Strategy Enhancement

- Suggestions: **text opt-ins**, **Canvas integration**, **clearer event updates**, and promote that **all grads are GAPSA members**.
- University Life exploring centralized announcement systems.

Contacts:

- Dr. Julie Choe Kim – Director of Graduate Student Life | ychoekim@gmu.edu
- Dr. Laurence Bray – Senior Associate Provost of Graduate Education | lbray2@gmu.edu

Part III: GA Concerns & Priority Themes

1. GAPSA Survey Results

- **Participation:** 91% (34 of 37 GA reps).
- **Top Student Priorities (2025–26):**
 1. Career preparation & professional development
 2. Affordable housing & cost of living
 3. Advising & mentorship quality

2. Key Actions Since September GA Meeting

- **Freedom of Speech:** Raised to university leadership; plan for formal support structure and statement affirming academic freedom.
- **Poster Printing:** Free printing service pilot to launch Spring 2026.
- **Childcare:** Exploring on-campus childcare and a grant-supported babysitter network.
- **Travel Fund:** Faster reimbursement system under testing (Mason Finance Gateway).
- **Transportation:** Evening parking and shuttle inconsistencies flagged; Sherry following up with Parking & Transportation.

3. Recurring Policy Themes

- Freedom of speech & academic freedom
- Career development resources
- Advising/mentoring quality and workload clarity
- Funding transparency & fair pay
- Housing affordability & transport
- Mental-health and stress support
- Student-parent and family-friendly initiatives

4. Community Engagement

- Fall events: snacks meet-ups, resource pop-ups, Fairfax town hall, CHSS coffee break — aimed to strengthen grad community connection.

5. Communication & Coordination

- All GA reps added to **MS Teams**; encourage full notification settings.
- Social media: LinkedIn, Instagram (@mason_gapsa), Facebook — promote cross-sharing for visibility.

6. Next Steps & Recommendations

- Invite key offices (Graduate Division, University Life, etc.) to GA briefings.
- Track progress on childcare and poster-printing pilots.
- Formalize advocacy around **career, housing, and mentorship**.
- Expand communication via Teams & Canvas.
- Provide **bi-semester progress reports** to GA representatives.

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Part IV: Communication Strategies and Outreach Ideas

1. Building Connections

- Stay in touch with your **graduate director, coordinator, and faculty**.
- Engage with your **Graduate RSO** (if available).
- Collaborate with **other GA reps** and **associate deans** within your school or campus.

2. Communication Plan

- **Two-way communication:** share GAPSA updates and gather feedback from peers.
- **Visibility:** introduce yourself clearly as the GA representative (poster template provided).
- **Channels:** decide frequency and platforms (email, Teams, WhatsApp, etc.); hold office hours or short surveys.
- **Cross-campus collaboration:** coordinate with campus VPs — Fairfax (Aishwarya), Mason Square (Zayd), SciTech (Asritha).

3. Effective Planning

- **Know your audience:** identify where students are active (labs, Canvas, social media).
- **Be strategic:** choose high-impact, manageable initiatives.
- **Leverage teamwork:** co-sponsor events with other GA reps and share ideas through the GAPSA Teams channel.