GAPSA General Assembly Meeting Minutes

Minutes prepared September 26, 2026 by Hadeel Elyazori, Executive Vice President

Meeting: Ninth General Assembly — first meeting of 2026–2027
Date: Friday, September 25, 2026
Time: 12:00 – 1:30 PM
Format: Online, via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Executive Officers

- Nilima Hakim Mow (President)
- Hadeel Elyazori (Executive Vice President)
- Morolake Okanlawon (Director of Communications)
- Sara Nadeem (Vice President, Mason Square)
- Jeyasri Sathyamoorthy (Vice President, SciTech)
- Absent: Sumaya Binte Zilani Choya (Vice President, Fairfax)

Graduate Student Life (Advisors)

- Dr. Julie Choe Kim (Director, Graduate Student Life; Advisor to GAPSA)
- Garrett Shreve (Graduate Professional Assistant, Graduate Student Leadership and Advising)
- Morolake Okanlawon (Graduate Professional Assistant, Graduate Student Engagement)

Guests

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

Program Representatives Present (53, including 2 proxies)

Program	Representative
Art History, MA	Melissa Garcia Corona
Arts Management, MA	Stephanie Concepcion
Athletic Training, MS	Kinsley Lewis
Biodefense, PhD	Aishwarya Sriraman
Bioinformatics and Computational Biology, PhD	Emily Larson
Business, PhD	Bryan Timothy Sullivan
Climate Dynamics, PhD	Po Ju Chen
Climate Science, MS	Tehreem Qureshi
Communication, PhD	Narges Ghafary
Computer Science, PhD	Dhiman Goswami
Conflict Analysis and Resolution, MS	Caleb John Glon
Conflict Analysis and Resolution, PhD	Dayla Ramsey
Counseling, MEd	Sarah Schultheis
Creative Writing, MFA	Kale Beaton Connerty
Criminal Justice, MS	Bhargavaram Mikkilineni
Criminology, Law, and Society, PhD	Hailey Khatchatourian
Cultural Studies, PhD	Maya Danielle Ruffin
Cybersecurity Engineering, MS	Nanditha Harish Bhat
Cybersecurity Engineering, PhD	Sai Gayatri Annamreddy
Digital Forensics, MS	Matteen Mahfooz
Economics, PhD	Daniel Kelly
Education, PhD	Anjusha Kasetty Ramesh Kumar
Educational Psychology, MS	Zhicun (Jack) Liu
Electrical and Computer Engineering, PhD	Fardifa Fathmiul Alam

Program	Representative
Environmental Science and Policy, MS	Alexander Jarvis
Environmental Science and Public Policy, PhD	Anna Makedonska
Global Affairs, MA	Justice Roney
Health Services Research, PhD	Dharmi Kalpesh Desai
History, PhD	Chapman Hall (proxy for Savannah Scott)
Information Systems, MS	Rayquan Williams
Information Technology, PhD	Md Rashedur Rahman
Interdisciplinary Program in Neuroscience, PhD	Harmain Rafi
Interdisciplinary Studies, MAIS	Fatima Nadeem (proxy for Kristin Metzger)
International Security, MA	Nathan Stolzenfeld
Juris Doctor, JD	Chase Masters
Juris Master, JM	Thu Thi Thy (Kimmy) Le
Learning Design and Technology, MS	Elizabeth Glass Kim
Linguistics, PhD	Giulia Masella Soldati
Management, MS	Cody Salenga
Mathematics, PhD	Nathaniel Fink-Humes
Psychology, MA	Aisun Abedinzadeh
Psychology, PhD	Christina Wheeler
Public Administration, MPA	Phoebe Martenson
Public Health, MPH	Kamila Yahya
Public Health, PhD	G. Thomas Wilson
Real Estate Development, MS	Gary Hawald
Secondary Education, MEd	Klara Smith
Social Work, MS	Marco Bovo

Program	Representative
Sociology, MA	Paris Schell
Sociology, PhD	Yang Hai
Statistical Science, PhD	Amandeep Singh
Systems Engineering, MA	Suchita Liv Shakya
Writing and Rhetoric, PhD	Isaac Newton Nyatuame

Representatives Absent

- Political Science, MA: Kenneth Mack Blankenship (no proxy; notified by email)
- Robotics, PhD: Mykola Signayevskyy (no proxy; notified by email)
- Computer Science, MS: Tejnath Tummala (no proxy)

Agenda

Times are approximate, taken from when the breakout rooms opened and closed in the meeting log.

Time	Item
12:00 – 12:05 PM	I. Welcome and housekeeping
12:05 – 12:15 PM	II. Introducing GAPSA
12:15 – 12:30 PM	III. GAPSA goals for 2026–2027
12:30 – 12:40 PM	IV. GA representative introductions (breakout rooms)
12:40 – 1:10 PM	V. Orientation for GA representatives; VI. Pre-survey results
1:12 – 1:25 PM	VI (continued). Priorities discussion (breakout rooms)
1:25 – 1:32 PM	VII. Updates and adjournment

I. Welcome and Housekeeping

The President called the meeting to order at 12:00 PM and welcomed representatives to the first General Assembly of 2026–2027.

- Participants were asked to keep their video on where possible.

- Proxy attendance was reviewed.

II. Introducing GAPSA

GAPSA is the principal body advocating for the needs of Mason graduate and professional students within the University and government bodies (GAPSA Constitution).

Purpose

- **Forum & Community**: a space for graduate and professional students to address issues, advocate, grow professionally and socialize.
- **Advocacy**: the principal voice of graduate and professional students to the University and government bodies (the Commonwealth of Virginia Assembly and Congress).
- **Student Government**: the official student government for graduate and professional students.
- **Enrich & Elevate**: enrich graduate academic and social life to boost recruitment, retention and Mason's overall prestige.

Structure

GAPSA has three bodies, with advisory support and departmental oversight from the Graduate Student Life office:

- **General Membership**: open to all students in graduate or professional degree-seeking programs at Mason.
- **Executive Board**: the governing body of elected officers.
- **General Assembly**: representatives from each graduate and professional degree program.

Roles of Executive Officers

Role	Responsibilities	Average time
President	Oversees all aspects of GAPSA; convenes and chairs the Executive Board and the GA; represents GAPSA and the graduate and professional student body to University leadership.	10 hrs/week
Executive Vice President	Maintains GAPSA records; assists the President in administration; serves as parliamentarian and	7 hrs/week

Role	Responsibilities	Average time
	secretary of the Executive Board and GA; works on programming and advocacy.	
Vice Presidents of Regional Campuses	Represent students at their campus; hold events to understand and address campus needs; liaise with University Life, administration and academic units.	5 hrs/week
Director of Communications	Creates and manages GAPSA marketing and communication; contributes to the Weekly Grad Student Newsletter; promotes events and initiatives.	5 hrs/week

Officers also attend biweekly Executive Board meetings, monthly GA meetings, weekly or biweekly one-on-ones with advisors, and three planning and leadership retreats.

Graduate Student Life

- **Primary GAPSA Advising Team**
  - Julie Choe Kim, PhD, Director
  - Garrett Shreve, GPA, Graduate Student Leadership and Advising; MEd student, Counseling
- Additional GSL Staff:
  - Austin A. Deray, Assistant Director; PhD candidate, Cultural Studies
  - Morolake Okanlawon, GPA, Graduate Student Engagement; PhD student, Bioinformatics and Computational Biology

III. GAPSA Goals for 2026–2027

Vision: Strengthen GAPSA's position as a visible, trusted and influential voice for graduate and professional students across George Mason University, so that students are informed, connected, represented, protected and empowered to succeed.

Organization-wide goals

- Increase visibility and engagement.
- Strengthen student representation and advocacy.

- Increase awareness of campus resources.
- Promote mental well-being and a healthy academic environment.

President: Nilima Hakim Mow (PhD candidate, Linguistics)

- Increase GAPSA awareness and visibility.
- Promote student well-being.
- Strengthen student–advisor relationships and mentorship.
- Enhance international student support.
- Advocate for student-parents.
- Amplify student voice and representation.

Executive Vice President: Hadeel Elyazori (PhD candidate, Information Sciences and Technology)

- Strengthen student–advisor communication by developing clear expectations, resources and support for graduate students.
- Strengthen GAPSA–student communication by improving representative engagement, feedback channels and information sharing.
- Advocate for a meaningful PhD hooding tradition by gathering feedback and exploring sustainable university-supported options.

Director of Communications: Morolake Okanlawon (PhD student, Bioinformatics and Computational Biology)

- Increase the visibility of GAPSA representatives.
- Keep the graduate and professional student community informed about GAPSA's work.
- Grow student participation in GAPSA events.

Vice President, Mason Square: Sara Nadeem (MA student, Interdisciplinary Studies)

- Improve access to campus resources.
- Strengthen graduate student community and representation at Mason Square.
- Promote interdisciplinary dialogue among graduate students.

Vice President, Fairfax: Sumaya Binte Zilani Choya (PhD student, Information Sciences and Technology)

- Increase meaningful student engagement.
- Strengthen communication channels between GAPSA and the broader student body.
- Normalize mental health conversations and provide consistent wellness resources through GAPSA events.

Vice President, SciTech: Jeyasri Sathyamoorthy (PhD student, Biosciences)

- **Build a stronger SciTech community**: connect students across departments through monthly mixers, study meetups and social events.
- **Establish department representation**: ensure each department has a GAPSA student representative.
- **Increase resource awareness and access**: compile a resource guide and highlight academic, career and wellness services in regular GAPSA communications.

IV. GA Representative Introductions (Breakout Rooms)

Representatives met in four breakout rooms from about 12:30 to 12:40 PM, facilitated by Morolake Okanlawon (Room 1), Sara Nadeem with Garrett Shreve (Room 2), Jeyasri Sathyamoorthy (Room 3) and Hadeel Elyazori (Room 4).

Each representative shared:

- Name and the degree program they represent.
- Whether they are a new or returning representative.
- One fun fact about themselves.
- **Returning representatives:** one thing every new representative should know to be effective in the role.
- **New representatives:** what they hope to learn, contribute or accomplish as a GAPSA representative this year.

V. Orientation for GA Representatives

Graduate and professional students at Mason (Fall 2025 Census Data, Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning)

- 10,151 graduate students and 646 law students, about 27% of the Mason student population.
- Graduate students only: 58% female, 41% male; 35.8% U.S. racial/ethnic minority; 18.8% international.

University governance

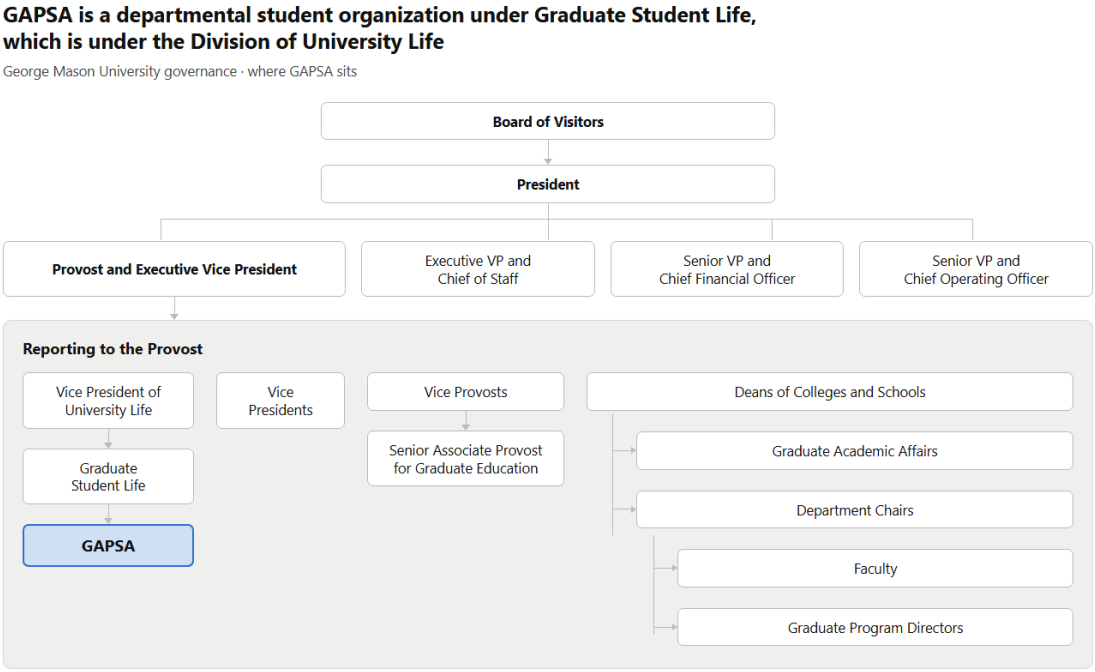


Figure 1. GAPSA's place in George Mason University governance.

GA representative roles and responsibilities (GAPSA Bylaws)

- Must be currently enrolled in the degree program they represent.
- Chosen by the active GRSO or the department/program head.
- Qualifies as an active GAPSA member, eligible for an additional $50 of Graduate Student Travel Funding if in good standing.
- To stay in good standing, a representative may miss no more than one meeting per semester without a proxy.
- Votes in run-off elections for Executive Officers when no candidate wins a majority, and in special elections to fill a vacancy.

Expectations of representatives

- Attend monthly and special GA meetings, or arrange a proxy enrolled in the same degree program.
- Email the President and Executive Vice President the proxy's name and email at least 48 hours in advance.
- Review agendas before meetings and review meeting notes afterward.
- Communicate regularly with students in their program about GA meetings, GAPSA priorities, events, and their needs and concerns.
- Share program concerns with GAPSA Executive Officers and/or the General Assembly.

- Work with their Regional Vice President on events, initiatives and advocacy.
- Participate in GAPSA events and committees where requested.

A Spring 2026 ad hoc committee discussed how to formalize these expectations, which may lead to bylaw changes this fall.

Frequently asked topics

- Understanding the GA representative role.
- Communicating with your program: department or program emails and newsletters, Canvas, the department's graduate student organization, text and WhatsApp.
- Working with your graduate program director or coordinator.
- Bringing constituent concerns back to GAPSA officers and the GA.
- Getting more involved with GAPSA.
- Communication between officers and representatives through the Teams channel.

GAPSA General Assembly on Microsoft Teams

All GA representatives have been added to the GAPSA 2026-27-GRP team, which has two channels: General and General Assembly. Representatives were asked to turn on notifications for the General Assembly channel (three dots next to the channel → Channel notifications → All new posts: Banner and feed, include replies; Channel mentions: Banner and feed).

VI. Graduate Student Concerns and Priorities

GA representative pre-survey: 24 representatives responded (18 new, 6 returning) and ranked graduate student concerns. Stipends and benefits came first, followed by career preparation and assistantship availability.

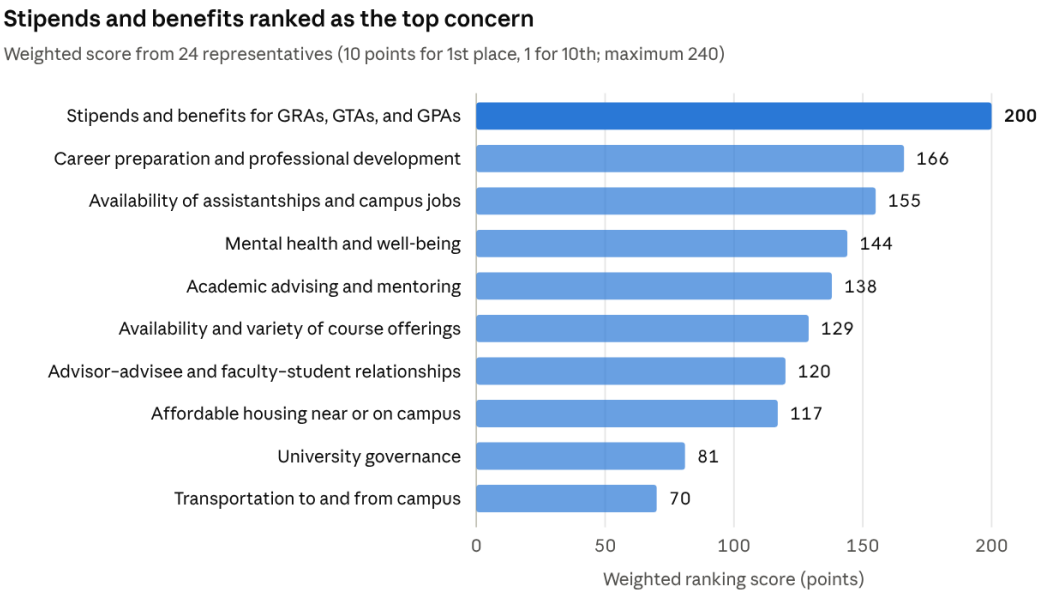


Figure 2. GA representative pre-survey results, 24 respondents.

Concern	Weighted score
Stipends and benefits for GRAs, GTAs, and GPAs	200
Career preparation and professional development	166
Availability of assistantships and campus jobs	155
Mental health and well-being	144
Academic advising and mentoring	138
Availability and variety of course offerings	129
Advisor–advisee and faculty–student relationships	120
Affordable housing near or on campus	117
University governance	81
Transportation to and from campus	70

Additional concerns raised in the survey

Concern	Closest ranked category or new theme
Childcare accommodations and support for student parents	New theme: student-parent support
Graduate tuition and required fee increases	New theme
Tuition spending and planned Mason Square changes	University governance
Courses being added or removed	Availability and variety of course offerings
Community at Mason Square and access to program events	New theme: graduate community and event access
Graduate student office space	New theme: study and work space
Dissertation rules and academic probation	Academic advising and mentoring
Grants, conference travel and research funding	Stipends and benefits; career preparation
Resolving graduate assistant contract concerns	Stipends and benefits; faculty–student relationships
Faculty consistency, availability and timely grading	Faculty–student relationships
Affordable tutoring	Academic advising and mentoring
Practicums, internships, networking and career guidance	Career preparation and professional development
Graduate student advocacy on and off campus	University governance

Breakout room discussion: priorities for 2026–2027

Representatives returned to their rooms from about 1:12 to 1:25 PM to discuss:

1. Which concern from the survey GAPSA should prioritize this semester, and why.
2. What specific action GAPSA could take, and what meaningful progress would look like.
3. Practical solutions they would propose.

Breakout Room 1 (Morolake Okanlawon)

- Issues/topics:

    - Funding and financial support
        - Stipends do not go far enough, especially for students with children.
        - Scholarship amounts are too small, and funding for travel and academic activities is limited.
        - Students often do not know which grants and research opportunities exist.
        - Funding application windows open too late for students to plan around them.
    - Housing and transportation
        - Affordable housing near campus is hard to find, especially for new students.
        - Parking is limited on the Fairfax campus, including at Shenandoah.
        - Getting around is difficult when shuttles are not running.
    - Benefits
        - Students lack clear information about their health insurance benefits.
    - Community
        - It is hard to meet and connect with others in the same program.
- Information or action needed:
    - Offer subsidized childcare.
    - Increase scholarship and travel funding, and offer more useful events and resources.
    - Create more research funding opportunities and publicize them better.
    - Open funding applications earlier.
    - Make graduate housing more affordable.
    - Run shuttles to Arlington on weekends.
    - No action was proposed for parking.
    - Communicate more clearly about insurance coverage and benefits.
    - Create more opportunities for students to connect, such as program mixers or networking events.

Breakout Room 2 (Sara Nadeem, Garrett Shreve)

- Issues/topics:
    - Mental health and well-being: students are experiencing a mental health crisis and need better access to support.
    - Stipend levels and benefits for GRAs, GTAs and GPAs: graduate assistant stipends have not increased since the pandemic, while the cost of living has risen.
    - Networking opportunities for online graduate students: online master's students have limited opportunities to connect, network and engage with other graduate students.

    - Lack of awareness of available resources: many students do not know what resources and support services are available to them.
- Information or action needed:
    - Connect students with mental health resources such as CAPS, and refer them to Student Health Services where additional support or a formal diagnosis is needed.
    - Review graduate assistant stipend levels, and consider directing a portion of mandatory student fees toward increasing stipends and improving benefits for GRAs, GTAs and GPAs.
    - Create a dedicated Teams channel where online students can connect, introduce themselves, share updates and learn about events and opportunities.
    - Use Graduate Success Fellows as a connection point to help students learn about and access university resources.
    - Give GA representatives T-shirts to make them more visible, so students know they can approach their program representative for resources and support.

Breakout Room 3 (Jeyasri Sathyamoorthy)

- Issues/topics:
    - Stipends do not cover living costs, and funding constraints are keeping stipends low.
    - Workload and expectations for GTA, GRA and GPA positions are unclear.
    - Dissertation requirements are excessive and hard to manage alongside other duties.
    - Funding pressures are leaving PhD students overwhelmed, delaying their research and pushing back graduation.
- Information or action needed:
    - Publish clear guidelines on workload and expectations for GTA, GRA and GPA positions.
    - No specific actions were proposed for the other concerns raised.

Breakout Room 4 (Hadeel Elyazori)

- Issues/topics:
    - Affordable housing.
    - More parking availability.
    - Paid leave for students who have kids either through birth or adoption.
    - Transportation issues.
- Information or action needed:
    - For parking, one student suggested off-campus parking options with shuttles to campus.
    - For transportation

- Someone suggested creating more stops for the shuttles going between Fairfax and Arlington.
- Another person suggested increasing the frequency of shuttles, instead of every hour in the case of Fairfax–Arlington.

VII. Updates and Adjournment

Graduate Student Experience Survey

A follow-up to the 2024 survey is planned to launch this October.

Upcoming events

Event	Date and time	Location	Details
Donuts and Details with GAPSA	Thursday, October 8, 2:30–4:00 PM	Johnson Center, Kiosk E (Fairfax)	Meet the GAPSA VP for Fairfax, grab a free donut and learn how GAPSA can support you. RSVP on Mason360.
Mason Square Resource Pop-Up: GAPSA and Student Deals	Friday, October 9, 12:00–1:00 PM	Mason Square Plaza	With University Life Mason Square and partners: a showcase of food and beverage discounts graduate students get with their Mason ID. Register for the Mason Square Resource Pop-Up

Follow GAPSA on social media

- LinkedIn: Mason GAPSA on LinkedIn
- Instagram: @mason_gapsa

Representatives were asked to follow GAPSA's pages and share them with their programs.

Adjournment

The President thanked everyone for attending, and the meeting adjourned at about 1:32 PM.

Questions can go to GAPSA at gapsa@gmu.edu or to Dr. Julie Choe Kim, Advisor to GAPSA, at ychoekim@gmu.edu.