College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Strategic Plan: 2014 — 2024

May 2014

Deborah A. Boehm-Davis, Dean
Teach. Connect. Transform.

Students and faculty in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences confront essential questions about our lives and our world. We bring the human perspective to the mission of George Mason University, by grounding discovery in the subtle fabric of individual and cultural life that shapes our values, experiences and sources of well-being. Whether by exploring the teachings of history and culture, the social challenges of our nation and world, the processing power of the human brain, or the best ways to communicate advances of all kinds, we strive to see and understand how people see and understand themselves and their world. The ancient Greek advice to “know thyself” remains true for us today. Successful solutions to contemporary challenges require, in concert with scientific and technological advances, this human perspective.

Consider one of the most significant problems of our age, climate change. The science of climate change is well established. Possible engineering and technological solutions are available. But these solutions will not be implemented effectively without public support on a global scale. For this reason, many of the greatest challenges of climate change are social and cultural. Social scientists and humanists draw on a variety of perspectives to better understand how people in different cultures think about nature and technology; how social inequalities connect to environmental questions; or how exploding planetary urbanization poses obstacles and opportunities for necessary action. They grapple with the philosophical and political issues involved in formulating policies for greenhouse gas reduction, and with the challenges implied by their transnational scope. And they study how to communicate about climate change in a way that engages the public and facilitates the difficult decisions that voters and policymakers will need to confront. Thus the most effective approaches to climate change will require the collaboration of scientists and engineers with humanists and social scientists.

The college’s human perspective similarly prepares our students for careers that feed our commonwealth and regional economies—now and in the future. In recent years, conversation about college students and career preparation has emphasized training students for specific jobs. We understand the relationship between education and careers to be more powerful—and more profound. Students with degrees in the humanities and social sciences acquire fundamental skills required for businesses and organizations to flourish. They solve problems creatively, perceive new angles, adapt to new situations, understand people and their needs, function cross-culturally, write well, and communicate effectively, often in multiple languages and in new, digital modes. Moreover, as technology becomes more advanced, so too will demand for individuals
who have these skills—skills that cannot be automated—and who will collaborate with scientists and engineers to advance the effective human use of technology.¹

Through this human perspective the college will serve the university’s stakeholders by

- Applying age-old wisdom and the latest social science to the problems of our day
- Preparing our students to achieve fulfillment and success in their working, civic and personal lives
- Preserving the past and studying the present in order to enrich and inform the lives and future of people in the commonwealth and the world
- Serving as a global resource and crossroads for an ever more interconnected world

OUR GOALS

For Students
Superior Learning
Global Experiences
Careers and Lifelong Learning

For the Community
Increased Graduation Rates
Educational Hub
Alumni Engagement

Teach. Connect. Transform.
The College of Humanities and Social Sciences

For the World
Top-Ranked Programs
Research of Consequence
Digital Humanities

For Faculty and Staff
Exceptional Faculty and Graduate students
Diversity
Well-Being

Superior teaching is central to the college’s mission. Because education in the humanities and social sciences frequently occurs through instructor-guided discussion, our courses develop the curiosity, creativity, communication skills, cross-cultural understanding and teamwork that the university seeks to foster in the Mason graduate. Notably, the college offers the lion’s share of the university’s general education program, the Mason Core. Thus, nearly all Mason undergraduates take one or more of their classes in the college—classes that lay essential groundwork for future academic success at Mason, in whatever field students pursue.

While teaching in the college is strong, we have identified several areas for improvement. First, we believe that full-time faculty are best able to implement long-term curricular goals and develop on-going relationships with students—the kind of mentoring that can change students’ lives. Thus we would like to increase the percentage of full-time faculty teaching in the college.

Second, Mason students come to the university with increasingly strong academic profiles. The college seeks to ensure that we offer them engaging, challenging, and innovative learning experiences. Opportunities to conduct research, capstone experiences and cross-disciplinary courses advance our students as creative and critical, independent learners.

Third, the college’s liberal arts curriculum attracts a growing population of students committed to addressing urgent social and environmental challenges. New Century College (NCC), an integrative, interdisciplinary college housed within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, is well positioned to provide leadership in the creation of bold educational initiatives responsive to this demand. Characterized by collaborative, competency-based and experiential learning models, NCC integrates knowledge across disciplines and contexts. In the next five years, NCC will sharpen its mission to educate students who are especially motivated by the desire to solve
pressing social and global problems. A Visioning Lab in summer 2014 that brings together students, alumni, outside thinkers, foundations, and faculty will serve as a first step toward that goal.

The remarkably diverse student body at George Mason University is one example of the power of globalization. If many of the problems in our globalized world—such as climate change—no longer respect national borders, our ability to solve those problems likewise comes from communities that transcend these boundaries. The acquisition of cultural knowledge and the development of cross-cultural thinking and exchange have always been key values in the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, almost all the courses in the Mason Core category “Global Understanding” reside in the college, as does foreign language instruction, including rapidly growing programs in languages such as Chinese, Korean and Arabic. To help develop communities of global thinkers, the college will capitalize on its many subjects—Modern and Classical Languages, Global Affairs and Anthropology, among others—that advance global understanding.

Our interdisciplinary global research and connections with global researchers are central to the college’s emphasis on global education. Students and faculty engage in research that is not only about the world, but also global in its collaborations. We will build on investments in centers such as The Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies and on degree programs shared with international institutions such as the Higher School of Economics in Moscow.

While continuing to require that all students in college BA programs take a non-western studies course and achieve at least intermediate-level proficiency in a foreign language, the college will increase the number of courses it offers that have a global component.

**Goal 2: Global Experiences**

Provide every Mason student the opportunity for a global experience in order to prepare our students for global problem-solving

**Initiatives**

- Offer every Mason student courses that provide global perspectives
- Supplement coursework at Mason with relevant speakers, activities, and study-abroad programs
- Invest in interdisciplinary global research and connections with global researchers
and foreground its variety of minors in global studies. We will provide opportunities for global learning outside the classroom through relevant speakers, activities that highlight global connections, and our many faculty who offer study-abroad courses. To ensure that our students can take advantage of these courses, we will expand our student scholarships for study abroad and at the Mason Songdo campus.

Goal 3: Careers and Lifelong Learning

Prepare students for careers, connection to their communities and lifelong learning

With escalating college expenses and higher rates of unemployment, our students are increasingly concerned with achieving career success. The investments in the university made by these students—and their parents and the community—obligate George Mason to do everything possible to help them achieve that success.

The good news for our students is that degrees in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences provide a strong foundation for career success. Our students’ abilities in creativity and critical thinking, effective writing and speaking, teamwork and communication, and holistic and imaginative problem-solving make them consistently sought after by major companies in the area. At the same time, with their creativity and wide range of skills, students in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences are prepared for the jobs of the future—jobs that may not yet even exist.

Although commonwealth projections for job growth suggest that the largest percentage increases will occur in STEM-H fields, the areas with the largest growth in terms of raw numbers are much more diverse—indeed, of the top five, only one is a STEM-H field.²

² Between 2010 and 2020 jobs in the categories Healthcare Support and Computer and Mathematical are expected to grow 36.1% and 34.1% respectively. However, in raw numbers the top five growth categories are Office
Moreover, these projections are statewide. In the thriving knowledge economy of Mason’s regional community, the skills gained through a liberal arts education in the college are in even more demand. Our region requires researchers and policy analysts, information specialists, marketing and public relations experts, social media and digital content providers, lawyers, educators, speakers of foreign languages, and more.

Hence the college has a great opportunity to serve both our students and the employment needs of our region. We will ensure that our students understand how to communicate to potential employers the abilities that they developed in their education. And our students will learn to understand for themselves how they can translate disciplinary skills into career readiness.

The College of Humanities and Social Science will play a pivotal role in the development of George Mason University into one of the nation’s top-ranked research universities. To do that, we will leverage the college’s long tradition of academic excellence and innovation, the advantages of proximity to the nation’s capitol, and Mason’s location within a thriving regional economy to become the prime destination nationwide for at least five of our degree or certificate programs. The talented students we attract to these programs will be among the nation’s top educators, scholars, writers, business leaders, social entrepreneurs and innovators.

Goal 4: Top-ranked Programs
Become the destination nationwide for at least five of our degree or certificate programs

Initiatives
- Designate programs for increased focus and resources
- Attract additional faculty and top students to these programs, develop community partnerships for them, and ensure that faculty and student achievement in these programs is visible to the community
- Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that communicates these programs’ value and reputation

While maintaining its baseline high performance in all its departments and programs, the college will identify programs that provide particular leadership and visibility for the college, and focus extra resources to build those programs. These programs will not only contribute to the developing reputation of Mason as a whole, but will also boost the recognition of our college and its mission of using social and cultural knowledge to improve human life. That recognition will garner support for the college that will, in turn, help maintain excellence in all college departments and programs.

Students and faculty in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences engage in research, analysis and creative work that address essential questions about our lives and our world. The college’s range is wide, from traditional humanities such as English and philosophy to interdisciplinary social sciences such as bio-archeology and neuroscience. Particularly strong in interdisciplinary scholarship, the college addresses fundamental questions about human life and value in order to provide cutting-edge solutions to pressing social problems. Faculty share this scholarship not only through academic publication but also through writing for more general audiences in media such as newspapers, magazines and blogs.

Despite a difficult funding environment, the college has demonstrated its ability to garner significant public and private support for its research activities. The college will continue its drive to expand its R&D expenditures and increase doctoral conferrals as part of the university's effort to become a top-tier research university. In addition, the faculty in the college will collaborate on cross-disciplinary and cross-unit research programs to help Mason achieve its goal of creating research of consequence. In this enterprise, they will

Goal 5: Research of Consequence
Advance Mason’s reputation for high-quality research and emphasize the importance of translational research in the humanities and social sciences

Initiatives
• Increase sponsored research in the college
• Develop partnerships for interdisciplinary research within and across units to focus on trans-disciplinary problem solving and the symbiotic relationship between college disciplines and those of other units
• Provide our stakeholders examples of translational research in the social sciences and humanities
especially emphasize the role and relevance of translational research in the humanities and social sciences. To that end, the college has created a number of research centers around key issues such as immigration, climate change, crime prevention and global Islamic studies.

The enormous advances in science and technology might suggest that STEM-H should be a priority investment for research resources. Moreover, the products of this research, a new vaccine or a more fuel-efficient car, are often immediately visible and tangible in the way an idea or a social scientific study are not. However, if the vaccine is expensive or if segments of the public believe it harmful and choose not to get vaccinated, then the vaccine will not reach its full potential to prevent disease. That potential depends as well on thoughtful social policy and effective health communication.

In other words, there is danger in the narrow view that science and technology alone can solve the major challenges we face. Scientific and technological advancement will not live up to its full potential—and may present significant dangers—without corollary advances in the ethical thought and social analysis that are required to shape and effectively employ new science and technology. The college will continue to communicate the need to conduct strong humanities and social science teaching and scholarship alongside strong scientific and engineering research.

Digital technology has changed the nature of information and made it accessible on an unprecedented scale, offering at the same time new means of analyzing and communicating ideas about a vast body of knowledge. Along with these advances, online instruction, with its promise of expanded educational access, has become increasingly common and in many cases is transforming how our students learn. With the college’s internationally recognized Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media and strong digital rhetoric and media programs across several departments, the college is well positioned to create cutting-edge models for online and technology-enhanced instruction in the humanities, an area that presents special challenges to and opportunities for such instruction.

Goal 6: Digital Humanities
Become a leader in online and technology-enhanced education in the humanities
This effort will take three related directions. First will be research, which employs software and computational methods that offer new ways of gathering and analyzing cultural materials. Additionally, this research takes advantage of information technologies to disseminate its findings much more widely—worldwide at the click of a link—than conventionally possible. Moreover, because this work is typically open source, it is highly accessible.

The second direction is online learning. We see tremendous possibility in the distinctive and enriched learning experiences technologically-enhanced instruction in the humanities can offer. For example, technology can bring highly specialized expertise in one part of the commonwealth—or the world—to students in another, and allow students to make connections, via video or social media, across those same distances. It can combine text with sound or image. It can make available rich stores of online cultural and historical material, and afford students the opportunity not just to engage with those stores, but to add to them.

Third, the college will have a strong commitment to teaching students to be not only intelligent consumers of digital content, but also producers of it. Tools that hardly existed five years ago are now primary methods of public communication. Particularly with the proliferation of mobile technologies it is an increasingly common expectation that professionals across a range of career paths be accomplished in social media production and composition, in and digital story-telling. Thus, our students will need to be skilled communicators in social and digital media, as well as in writing and speaking.

### Goal 7: Increased Graduation Rates

**Initiatives**
- Draw on expertise throughout the college to create rich online courses and technology-enhanced face-to-face instruction
- Partner with regional cultural institutions such as the Smithsonian to combine instruction with the creation of new web content in the humanities
- Expand college instruction in digital literacy

**Goal 7: Increased Graduation Rates**

Increase student enrollment and student graduation rates

Achievement of a college or postgraduate degree contributes to the dynamism and productivity of our economy, boosts career earnings, and provides a basis for an educated citizenship that will have to confront and solve serious challenges in the years
ahead. For these reasons, the Commonwealth of Virginia has called for increasing by 100,000 the number of degrees awarded by 2020. The Mason Vision responds to this call by promising to educate 100,000 career-ready graduates by 2024.

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences will contribute to this goal by increasing by 16% the yearly number of graduates from the college, from around 2800 to 3260. While national, commonwealth and university-level policy has emphasized the growth of degrees in STEM-H fields, we believe that this focus is too narrow. A healthy economy and a thriving community will educate a balanced number of students across a range of disciplines. Although STEM-H fields are projected in the commonwealth to have the highest growth rates, they will not have the highest growth, because STEM-H jobs are a smaller percentage of the economy.³

Moreover, our nation and our world require the skills, knowledge and perspectives gained in the social sciences and humanities. Students educated in these areas develop the deeply reflective, flexible, and imaginative thought we need for strong democratic citizenship in a rapidly changing world. These same qualities prepare them for careers that require a workforce educated not just for the jobs of today, but for jobs that may not yet exist—jobs they themselves may help to create. In addition, because the humanities and social sciences frequently require cross-cultural perspective, our students are particularly well suited to help address challenges that are global in scope. Finally, we note that real-world problems do not fall into neat disciplinary boundaries. Many of our greatest challenges will require people trained in the social sciences and humanities working in tandem with people trained in science, engineering and business.⁴

³ See above, page 6. Moreover, no industry can absorb a one-sided increase in degrees, as bubbles in law and business degrees have made clear.

Improving student retention will be especially important for the college’s aim to increase its number of graduates. In order to be good stewards of commonwealth resources and the resources of individual students, we seek to increase our number of graduates by first maximizing the success of enrolled students. Though we also anticipate new first-year or transfer enrollment, the college can meet its goal of increasing the number of graduates by 16% simply by achieving its goals for improved rates of retention.

While the college’s performance on retention and four and six-year graduation rates has kept pace with the university’s, the college recognizes that a greater focus on quality student service and advising is necessary to guarantee continued success on these quantitative outcomes, and to maintain and expand the college’s enrollments. The loci of student outreach and advising activities will remain within the academic units; however, the college will continue to expand the support it offers to faculty and staff advisors through its Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

Goal 8: Educational Hub
Create professional education and enrichment programs in each college discipline

The college has significant expertise across its departments and programs that can support the goals of area businesses, organizations and K-12 schools. We seek to share that expertise both through the education of students and through direct and flexible instruction offered to the community. This instruction might be provided in a variety of formats: from non-credit, half-day workshops to full-semester, for-credit courses offered onsite.

For area businesses and organizations, the college can offer courses on workplace analytics, organization, productivity, environment, creativity, well-being, writing and communication, and ethics, among other topics. These courses support the regional economy—which is, to a great extent, an economy driven by ideas and the organization and communication of knowledge.
For area K-12 schools, the college can offer courses that support teaching in important subject areas such as economics, history or religious studies. In addition, it can expand its already productive collaboration with area school systems in programs such as the Northern Virginia Writing Project, which helps improve writing instruction in local secondary schools.

The Mason Vision calls for the university to support lifelong learning in our community. We very much agree with this vision and think we can contribute to the appetite for continual learning—an appetite especially strong among the highly educated population of the Northern Virginia and DC metropolitan areas—by offering high quality enrichment courses in areas such as economics, history, religious studies, philosophy and creative writing.

These professional and enrichment programs will not only expand the reach of the college’s educational function, but also help support our other goals by adding to the college’s sources of revenue.

**Goal 9: Alumni Engagement**

Develop a sense of pride and a culture of service and philanthropy within the Mason alumni community

A strong College of Humanities and Social Sciences will require the strong support of our friends and alumni. The college thrives when it is attuned to the interests of the community it serves, and when that community invests in the programs and projects of the college. The majority of Mason alumni are college alumni; thus a motivated and involved college alumni base will enhance and strengthen the entire university.

Alumni and friends will be critical partners in our growth and future; their activity and support will help us achieve virtually all of our goals outlined here. We actively seek partners in all our endeavors who can provide philanthropic donations for research and faculty, scholarships and fellowships, and programmatic support. Combining this giving
from a variety of sources and partners with increased university support will allow us to turn our college vision into reality.

Through powerful, meaningful connections with friends and alumni, we share our pride in the development of a great university. Although we hope that financial gifts will be one manifestation of that pride, we do not see alumni engagement as simply about philanthropic giving. Rather, we connect successfully with friends and alumni when we partner with them in activities that contribute to the community and current students, or activities that support their own goals of lifelong learning and cultural enrichment. As leaders in their communities, nationwide and internationally, alumni connect college faculty and students to global experiences and professional opportunities, and act as ambassadors for those considering undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies at Mason and in our college.

Initiatives

- Increase the size of our alumni community through the development of active alumni societies in each CHSS department and program
- Increase alumni involvement in and support of college research programs and student career preparation and activities; collaborate with alumni in business and social enterprise.
- Increase percentage of alumni annual giving to at least 10%

Goal 10: Exceptional Faculty and Graduate Students

Attract, develop and retain nationally and internationally recognized faculty and high potential graduate students

A strong faculty is at the heart of the college’s missions. Capitalizing on Mason’s location, the college has been able to hire extraordinary faculty talent that has included two Nobel Prize winners, eight Guggenheim winners, a MacArthur grant winner, all six university members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a Stockholm Prize winner. As a result of this extraordinary faculty, some of the highest-ranked departments and programs in the university reside within the college in areas such as creative writing, criminology, economics, digital history, and psychology.

These and other programs, have, in turn, been able to attract top graduate students—students who will go on to become distinguished educators, scholars, writers, business leaders, social entrepreneurs and innovators. Their work at Mason adds to the strength
of our teaching and research. When they leave Mason, they carry with them the university’s values and enhance our reputation.

While the strength of our faculty and graduate students is the college’s greatest resource, it is also creates a challenge for the college: the growth in that quality is increasingly outstripping the college’s ability to hire new faculty of similar quality and our ability to retain the faculty it has. Graduate support likewise no longer matches the quality of students we can and should recruit. And while the prime location of Mason has in many ways helped the college recruit top faculty and graduate students, the high cost of living in the area combined with the lag in salaries and graduate support is becoming an increasingly significant barrier to faculty and graduate student recruitment.

The college—which already well run—can strive further to improve the quality of life for its faculty and graduate students as one means of attracting and retaining talented teachers and researchers. In addition, philanthropy and an increase in online, professional and enrichment courses will help the college reduce the gap between its goals and its current revenues. However, neither improvements in quality of life nor alternative sources of revenue will be sufficient to address the college’s substantial pay gap—a gap driven by structural flaws in university budgeting. As part of the Mason Idea that we thrive together, the university will need to work with the college to resolve budget inequities that chronically and unsustainably underfund the college with respect to other units of the university.

### Initiatives

- Bring college faculty salaries to at least the medians for the university’s peer group and provide increased compensation to attract top staff for faculty and program support
- Bring graduate stipends up to competitive levels compared to aspirational schools and guarantee them for 4 or more years
- Increase research support for faculty and graduate students

### Goal 11: Diversity

Increase the diversity of faculty, graduate students and staff

A hallmark of George Mason University—and one of its great strengths—lies in the diversity of its student body. Recent research suggests that teams are more successful
when they are diverse.\textsuperscript{5} Thus, our diversity helps us to achieve our goals of educational access and becoming a resource for the world. However, as the Mason Vision observes, the diversity of our faculty and staff does not match the diversity of our students.

A similar observation holds true for the college. The diversity of our faculty, staff and graduate student body lags that of our undergraduates. In addition to losing the benefits of distinct perspectives and experiences that diversity brings, the lack of diversity in our faculty may affect our student retention rates, as studies show that a diverse instructional faculty increases student retention.

In concert with the university, we are committed to increasing faculty, staff and graduate student diversity through proactive hiring, competitive salaries and stipends, and effective support and mentorship. Moreover, a number of departments and programs in the college—such as Global Affairs, Modern and Classical Languages, and African and African American Studies—put diversity at the heart of their intellectual mission, and thus attract diverse faculty and staff. For this reason, the college can play a key role in supporting the Mason Vision in this area.

The successful achievement of this college goal dovetails with its overall goal of attracting and retaining top students and faculty. However, this college goal will require active university support. A chronically underfunded unit of the university will not be able to support the Mason Vision’s commitment to faculty and staff diversity to its full potential.

\begin{itemize}
\item Focus on diversity of faculty and staff hires across the college to reflect more fully the diversity of our student body
\item Bring college faculty salaries and graduate student stipends to at least the medians for the university’s peer group
\item Improve retention of diverse faculty and staff by focusing on mentoring
\end{itemize}

George Mason University has already been identified as a great place to work by *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Washingtonian Magazine* and AARP. Many employees of the university choose to work here because of the excellent workplace environment.

The college can support faculty and staff productivity and be more likely to continue to attract and retain top faculty and staff by continuing to improve its already excellent workplace environment. A community that promotes dialogue, the organization of activities that create intra and inter-unit friendships, support for faculty and staff innovation, and thoughtful leadership and mentorship can all contribute to faculty and staff well-being. So too does participating in university and college programs that help to promote employee health and well-being. Additionally, the college can draw on the leadership from Mason’s Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, which is housed within the college.

Structural issues will also need to be addressed. Growth in faculty and staff must be concomitant with growth in our student population. And raising faculty and staff salaries to competitive levels will need to be part of this mix and must be a top priority for the college and the university.

### Goal 12: Well-Being

**Promote faculty and staff well-being**

**Initiatives**

- Bring faculty and staff compensation to competitive levels
- Review procedures to ensure that they promote clear communication; develop superior leadership within the college
- Design college activities that bring together faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends