



## Office of Media Relations

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# Enrollment Strategy

## ***Mason's Enrollment Plan Sees Results***

Not long ago, George Mason University was relatively unfamiliar to much of the country. But enrollment trends show that within a short time period Mason has begun to position itself right under—or at least close to—the spotlight.

Mason has long strived to shake its reputation as a suburban commuter school for that of a first-rate institution. Thanks in large part to impressive new housing developments, a lively campus atmosphere and innovative marketing efforts, Mason has seen a continual rise in interest not only among students in Virginia, but also among out-of-state college prospects.

"We've seen improved numbers and a dramatic rise in out-of-state applications over the last few years," says Dean of Admissions Andrew Flagel. "This was on the rise even before our recent successes in athletics."

### **Increased Retention**

Though the final figures for the upcoming school year aren't in yet, Mason is poised to take in a total enrollment of just more than 30,000 students. Enrollment will be up, but not because of a larger freshmen class. In fact, Mason was forced to accept fewer first-time freshmen due to its continually increasing retention numbers.

"Each year for the past six years, we have seen an increase in the percentage of students who simply fall in love with the atmosphere at Mason and decide to stay to continue their schooling," Flagel says.

In 2006, a record 86 percent of freshmen returned from the previous year. Also last year, the number of Mason students who graduated within six years of starting their education increased to 55.5 percent—the highest in the school's history.

School officials say these numbers are not the result of a dramatic new strategy, but rather a steady enhancement of reputation and attention to marketing.

Those marketing efforts anchor to a new campaign started last fall. The year-long advertising campaign—"Think. Learn. Succeed."—has appeared multiple times in major news and business weeklies. The ads depict Mason students with their faculty mentors and display the tagline, "Teamwork at Mason—A Habit of Excellence."

Public reaction to the campaign has been so overwhelmingly positive that the Office of University Relations team decided to launch a similar one in the coming months—this time focusing on Mason alumni successes.

### **Commitment to University Life**

One perk that immediately catches the eyes of many prospective Mason students, and one that keeps them coming back, is the effortless task of finding living accommodations. For each of the last five years, incoming freshmen have been guaranteed housing for all four years of their education.

"As long as their housing applications are in on time, they won't have to worry about where they'll live," says Eddie Tallent, executive director of undergraduate admissions. "We've never left [an incoming freshman] without housing, and with the new [housing] developments on campus, finding a place to live will be even easier."

Students are also attracted to the opportunity to be a part of Mason's Living Learning Communities (LLC). The LLCs were developed to expand learning beyond the classroom by allowing students to live on the same floor as their classmates. Students living in LLCs have shown more community

involvement and increased academic success. They've also adjusted more rapidly to the academic and social demands of living at a large university.

But finding good housing is just one of the many perks of attending Mason. With more than \$75 million invested in new developments, students will soon enjoy an exhibition-style dining facility and a wood-fired pizza and pasta restaurant. An additional fitness center, indoor basketball court, coffee house and convenience store are also under construction.

### **Meticulous Recruiting**

Because of continually increasing retention rates and a growing pool of freshman applicants, the Admissions Office has decided to raise the bar of credentials for new Mason students.

Provost Peter Stearns says Mason has been on an "upward trajectory for a number of years" in terms of student quality. He attributes this to the diverse student body and an enhanced recruiting approach.

For years now, Mason has worked to establish relations not only with high schools within Virginia, but also with multiple out-of-state contacts in states such as Florida, California and Texas. The goal is to establish and maintain a strong number of so-called "feeder" schools.

"We're working hard to get to a point with these feeder schools so that each year a certain number of students say, 'Well, of course I'm applying to George Mason because last year's seniors did so,'" Stearns says.

The Mason administration does not believe in excluding any student who has shown great potential throughout their high school career. This year, for the first time, Mason allowed students to apply without submitting SAT scores, as long as they hold an impressive GPA and class rank. Mason is not the first university to use this strategy, but it is among the largest.

"This is meant to encourage those students who are actually quite bright but who test poorly to see Mason as a realistic option," Stearns explains. "We're hopeful this strategy will give us the power to attract students who might otherwise be discouraged, and whose actual potential for success at the collegiate level is quite high."

Stearns notes that the great thing about Mason is that there isn't just one specific type of student they target. One of the most dominant and exciting aspects of Mason's enrollment strategy is a strong commitment to student diversity.

"There's no single profile we look for in potential students," Stearns says. "But a highly intelligent, accomplished and diverse student body will always be Mason's hallmark."