Mason Student Experience Redesign, 2015-2019

Goal:
Through deliberate actions to achieve the vision of the George Mason University 10-year plan, by 2019 we will modernize the student experience in order to better enable student success. Success will be defined as generating a long-lasting sense of belonging and pride among our students as well as improving core enrollment metrics such as retention and four/six-year graduation rates.

First, we will design a contemporary, modern, and effectual student experience that instills a sense of belonging and promotes educational success. We will do this through a design thinking exercise engaging our Mason students/faculty/staff, a thoughtful review of all available research, and studying best practices at other institutions.

Next, we will articulate the existing student experience through the development of student lifecycle maps and identify how students interact with Mason over the course of their education. Particular attention will be paid to the technical infrastructure in place, current staffing models, and an assessment of the continued relevance of long-standing business practices.

Finally, we will conduct a gap analysis to pinpoint opportunities for improved processes, coordination, and support. This analysis will allow us to understand new curricular support structures needed to ensure student progression, evaluate the availability of co-curricular opportunities in supporting student success, and assess the use of technology and other student self service opportunities to ensure that students successfully progress at Mason.

This activity will result in the automation of current manual processes, improved responsiveness to student service expectations, and heightened technical capabilities that will allow us to achieve the stated university objectives of improving retention and graduation.

Objectives:
1. Enhance the student experience from a potential student's initial contact with the institution through his/her interaction with the university as alumnus.
2. Increase the number of students participating in elements of the student experience deemed to be essential activities of earning a George Mason University degree.
3. Reduce the number of challenges students face throughout the entire educational process.
4. Close gaps in student-facing processes.
5. Enhance the effectiveness in serving Mason students and their families.

Why we are doing this
This project is an important part of the fourth goal identified within the Mason strategic plan, produce 100,000 Career-Ready Graduates by 2023. Individual elements of that goal include increasing the enrollment of high-potential students who contribute to our diversity, increase graduation rates, including raising the six-year graduation rate to 78 percent, and improving retention while reducing the time it takes to attain a degree.

As we consider the Mason student, the first critical step is to acknowledge that there is no longer a stereotypical "college co-ed"—especially at Mason where a diverse student body is at the core of our strength and success as a university. More students carry full or part-time jobs while attending college, more of them are first-generation, more arrive with physical/mental challenges, and more come from outside of the United States. Regardless of student background, however, we must modernize our service to meet the myriad needs, preferences, and expectations of the 21st-century university student.

There are legitimate, consumer-oriented expectations that are changing as other sectors change service delivery standards and the higher education landscape becomes more competitive. These expectations include:
- High-tech service, even when delivered face-to-face.
- Streamlined processes and the student perspective considered above back-end, procedural needs.
- Round the clock administrative support to match varying student schedules.
- Online/mobile service delivery.

Why we want to use a partner
For this to be a successful endeavor we need an integrated vision, to build consensus among all of the Mason stakeholders, develop an executable roadmap and a fulfill a defined implementation plan. We have a great deal of subject matter expertise but will need assistance in the creation of specific deliverables using project management know-how not found in any one location here at Mason.

A partner will bring such expertise to bear in the following ways:
- A thoughtful process designed to consider all aspects of such an undertaking.
- Knowledge of a design thinking approach.
- Experienced people dedicated to Mason with few commitments to conducting core Mason business.
- Objectivity.
- External perspective and knowledge (what are other universities doing.)

The governance structure, specifically the Steering Committee, will:
- Participate in workshops
- Contribute content for the partner to create the deliverables.
- Assess the validity outcomes/deliverables.
- Help develop priorities and roadmaps/action plans.
- Execute on implementation plan.

Year One:
1. Form the needed governance structure to lead complex changes to the student experience. This will include a steering committee, project management team, and senior leadership group.
2. Document the ideal student experience map for George Mason University students unique to student type (first-time freshmen, new transfer, and new graduate student.)
3. Document the existing student experience through service blueprints and baseline student satisfaction research.
4. After a thorough gap analysis, develop a multi-year action plan to address priority changes not addressed in the existing student experience. This analysis will create benchmarks, needed financial resources, and quantify the staff effort needed to construct positive change in the student experience.
5. Identify needed student life-cycle communication, web-based, and technical tools for implementing changes to the student experience. Select ideally suited internal and/or external solutions.
6. Individual unit leaders submit short-term action items to the steering committee for immediate implementation.

Year Two:
1. Create cross-functional teams for implementation on changes to the student experience identified by the steering committee.
2. Implement first-phase technical solutions focusing on web-based delivery of student services.
3. Implement first-phase technical solutions focused on student communication.
4. Assess student satisfaction with student experience; create individual unit/college goals for second-year improvements.

Year Three:
1. Individual unit/college leaders submit long-term action items for implementation.
2. Implement second-phase technical solutions focusing on student communication and web-based delivery of student services.
3. Assess student satisfaction with student experience