Student Voice

Student Voice
Guiding Principle
Embrace Dialogue
Elements
a) Craft a Shared Language
b) Integrate the Student Voice
c) Embrace Channels of Expression

Mason students should have an active and vibrant voice in shaping and contributing to the evolution of the Mason shared experience, its expression, and evolving vision.

To do this requires establishing a shared language and a common practice around engagement where opportunities are created for the student voice to be heard in prioritization and decision-making. This shared language and experience around language and voice will become the hallmark of a Mason graduate and an ongoing tradition that is celebrated for generations to come.

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Embrace Dialogue

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Many students feel they are not being heard and the faculty and staff we met with feel they do not have the resources to effectively listen and engage in dialogue. To address this challenge Mason needs to do the following:

- **Start viewing the entire learning community as a singular practice.** Do everything one can to eliminate "us vs. them" rhetoric, whether it relates to issues between student groups, between departments, or between students and administration. We are all in this together.

- **Establish a shared language.** Language helps establish, maintain and pass on behaviors, beliefs and norms that are part of a culture. Mason needs to craft a language that uniquely supports the ways in which they hope students would participate in the Mason community of practice.

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Student Voice Gaps & Issues (1)

Innovation Debt	Change Fatigue	Expectation Gap	Business Processes
With Mason's growth and rapid innovation, faculty and staff expressed concern that certain populations of students are getting left behind. Including a student voice in the design and implementation of programs, services and technology will amplify the importance the student voice as the Mason innovates and grows.	During our research we found that students (in addition to faculty and staff) were weary of all the changes that were taking place on campus. Elevating the student voice will help students feel a part of the design and stewardship of their own educative experience and reduce the feeling that decisions are being made without them and then forced upon them.	A subset of students expect to be involved in decision-making on a campus and given the proximity of Mason to Washington, DC, this expectation may be heightened. By intentionally incorporating the student voice into different prioritization and advisory activities, Mason can manage student participation expectations to ideally stay ahead of rapidly changing trends that could affect the university's ability to support incoming students. Additionally, it should serve to reinforce the diversity of campus and provide proactive outlets for ideas to be expressed and heard.	During our research we noticed that instances of challenges with students would take a disproportionate amount of time from administrative units at all levels. Finding ways to normalize the process through which students express themselves, and identify ways to proactively and healthily express voice would not only minimize the number of critical 'incidents' but likely reduce the number of faculty and staff who have to become involved.

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Communication Gap	Data (and Trust) Gap	Context Gap	Lifecycle Coherence
Finding ways for faculty and staff to keep their finger on the pulse of the voice of the student will help reduce the communication gap that can arise from the faculty and staff on the frontlines and the higher-level administration.	The Mason Shuffle is often caused because of a lack of sharing of information between different units across campus. By finding ways to elevate the student voice, spotting other areas where data can be more easily shared and accessed will become more apparent.	At present, Mason projects an experience onto its students. By intentionally, appropriately and thoughtfully incorporating the student voice into its actions, the university will be able to better connect its goals and objectives with student needs and expectations to create a shared experience that is partly defined by Mason and its faculty and staff and partly shaped by its students.	The incorporation of students in advisory activities should help Mason to defragment its student experience by formally fielding ideas to streamline practice and providing input regarding process barriers and factors that contribute to the "shuffle."

Craft a Shared Language

Path Element

<div style="background:cyan">**a**</div>

- **Identify the components and competencies for being literate in the Mason language**.[1]

- **Provide opportunities to demonstrate how this language can cultivate inclusion and drive the design of their own educational experiences** from the first moment of contact with a student that continues throughout their student journey.

- As a follow-on to Mason Initiation experience , **intentionally hold a town hall meeting centered around the Mason Language and the value placed on the student voice.** Tie this back to the Welcome Experience theme or current topics/issues. Provide multiple pathways to participate including at-a-distance, online, and in-person.[2]

- **Encourage other opportunities for expressing oneself using and practicing the Mason language** in participatory design, and inclusion-focused programming across campus beyond the "likely suspects" that taps into the background and experiences of Mason students.[3]

[1] Example: We pull from Sanders' Participatory Design literature; the philosophy of Rosenberg's non-violent communication; and Wegner's Communities of Practice, in a way that enables everyone literate in the Mason language to effectively participate in dialogues that: cultivate empathy; express their perspective, privilege, or bias; and drive towards appropriate solutions.

[2] Example: Feature a panel or subject matter expert, model successful debate and discussion methods for talking about hot-button issues, and encourage and model open dialogue.

[3] Examples: Committees for new programs that consist of faculty and students; International dance and theater, events featuring clubs and organizations, faculty research and interest.

Additional References

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Integrate the Student Voice
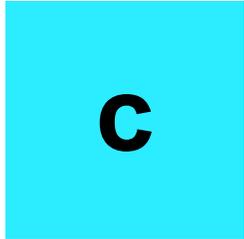
Path Element

b

- **Establish a student advisory group for the ideal student experience initiative**. Because this effort is designed to address the needs of current and future students, students should participate in the process and have, at a minimum, an advisory role.

- **Encourage governing bodies across campus to systematically incorporate student input**. Ideally, the governing bodies that affect the student experience and student life should include a student representative as part of its prioritization and decision-making efforts. Alternatively, these groups should have a defined advisory function that students can play to help shape and inform priorities.

- **Incorporate student input and feedback in the design of new processes and services** for students.

- **Model the inclusion of the student voice** by integrating appropriate student representation within the Innovation Management Practice.

- **Design ways that make it easy to have the ear of administration** without draining a significant amount of resources**.** This could include a triage process that identifies the significance of an issue and quickly assigns a response to the most appropriate faculty/staff member/team.[1]

- **Identify channels and processes for expression**. In the classroom, encourage the practice of expressing voice using the Mason language. As part of co-curricular requirements, encourage different student groups to engage in dialogue with each other. Have student moderators for all town halls and campus dialogues/activities.

[1] Idea: Apply a contemporary petition model. If a petition threshold is met, a town hall is organized around that issue. Model practice on the White House petition approach (https://petitions.whitehouse.gov), cited September 2016.

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Embrace Channels of Expression

Path Element

C

- **Use social media as an expression of the student voice**. Align social media strategy to the Mason Brand. Engage Student Leaders in designing and implementing the social media approach recognizing that it will change from year to year.

- **Identify main social media channels for orientation and integrate accordingly** (hashtags, pages, etc.). Once established, continue interaction to reinforce engagement and respond to student comments, etc.

- **Add social media logos to all printed and digital materials** (signage, websites, brochures, etc.) and encourage adoption by the student body during Welcome Week such as having a Snapchat challenge – one for each day.

[1] Practice example: Quality practice example for orientation (http://socialmedia.umich.edu/blog/orientation/)

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Ideal Implementation

Legend:
- 🟧 One-time action or activity
- 🟩 Ongoing activity or effort
- 🟦 Periodic, scheduled activity or effort
- 🟥 Disbanding of a group

1	5	9	13	17	21	25	29	33	37	41	45	49	53	57	61	Task Description	Key Dependencies
																a) Craft a Shared Language	
🟧	🟧	🟧														Design the Mason language.	Verbiage.
	🟧	🟧	🟧													Test and revise and implement the Mason Language.	
																b) Integrate the Student Voice	
🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Incorporate students into the discovery, design and evaluation components of new engagements. Ongoing.	
🟧	🟧	🟧														Design approaches for better experience around student expressions/protests.	
			🟧	🟧	🟧											Test approaches for better experience around student expression.	
																c) Embrace Channels of Expression	
🟧	🟧															Form Social Media Strategy.	
		🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Design, Test and Implement strategy. Ongoing.	

Start Month (based on 4-month periods, 64 months total)

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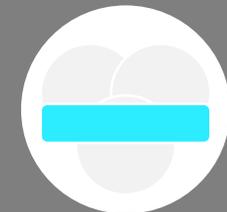
Projected ROI/Value on Investment

- **Reduction in the total human-hours required to address student issues.**

- **Increased level of student involvement and engagement** because they feel their voice matters.

- **Better alignment of university-wide efforts** with the norms, attitudes and experiences of its students.

- **Reduction in the number of student "fires"** because of channels for expression of voice that act as pressure releases.

- A shared language and commitment to allowing students to express their voice can act as an attractor for students to Mason, thus **contributing to enrollment**.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- **Number of students who are competent in facilitating a difficult dialogue.**

- **Number of students who have engaged in a dialogue using the Mason language.**

- **Percentage of students who feel Mason walks the talk** of providing a diverse and inclusive environment.

- **Survey responses** with students responding positively to having a voice.

- **Public and social expression:** Being able to speak to the ideals and practice of diversity and inclusion at Mason.

- **Time and resource allocation:** Amount of time and human resources that are needed to respond to an unexpected event or action.

- **Percentage of new programs and initiatives that incorporate a student advisor/co-design component.**

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Anticipated Key Resource Needs

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- Faculty and staff working group to define the Mason "language."

- Time to pilot and implement new or adjusted programs and services.

- Institutional time and ongoing commitment.

- Reward or recognition mechanism for student participation that is connected with career-ready graduation vision of the university.

High Additional **Resources**

c

b

a

Low **Cultural Shift**

High **Cultural Shift**

Low Additional **Resources**

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