

THE GEORGE MASON CAREER ECOSYSTEM



UNIVERSITY CAREER SERVICES STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2029
CONNECTING LEARNING, EXPERIENCE, AND OPPORTUNITY



University Life

UNIVERSITY CAREER SERVICES

George Mason University®

University Career Services (UCS), a unit within the Post-Graduate Success Student Journey team in the Division of University Life (UL), serves as the centralized career center for George Mason University (George Mason), supporting approximately 40,000 undergraduate and graduate students. UCS is dedicated to helping students find success in a perpetually evolving and complex world.

In partnership with a robust network of faculty, employers and alumni, UCS works to remove barriers and expand access to meaningful career opportunities. We empower students to realize their full potential—advancing not only their own socioeconomic mobility but also contributing to the well-being of their families and communities.

UCS offers a comprehensive portfolio of services and programs, including individualized career advising, career exploration resources, industry-focused programming, career fairs, on-campus interviewing, work-based learning opportunities, and graduate and professional school preparation.

To sustain and deepen the progress achieved over the past three years, we have intentionally embedded key priorities and successful practices from our previous strategic plan into the core of our operations:

- New platform to streamline referral process to UCS appointments
- Year-round programming and communications to make the on-campus job search more transparent for students
- On-Campus Internship Program to increase access to paid internships for students limited to working on-campus
- Career Connection Lab to teach students social capital creation via a scaffolded, cohort-based program
- Custom programs for grad students pursuing non-academic careers
- Mentoring events to leverage alumni in the DC area
- Deep partnerships with academic units/faculty and UL offices/colleagues

The 2026-2029 strategic plan was developed through a collaborative process and is grounded in the insights and recommendations generated through a comprehensive internal and external review. It aligns with the new strategic direction of the University Life Student Journey Team framework, strengthening our connection to Graduate Student Life and the Office of International Programs and Services.

At the same time, it reflects a deep awareness of the current realities of the job market, the significant shifts shaping the future of work, and emerging trends across higher education and the career services landscape.

Drawing on these diverse inputs, the plan intentionally balances bold, aspirational goals with targeted, infrastructure-focused priorities, ensuring meaningful impact in the near term and a strong, sustainable foundation for the future.

GOAL I: PROMOTE CAREER EVERYWHERE ECOSYSTEM

2026-2029

To prepare all students for post-graduate success, UCS will serve as a strategic thought-leader to facilitate a *Career Everywhere* ecosystem that integrates career education into the curriculum, co-curriculum, and broader university infrastructure. This goal focuses on strengthening partnerships, equipping campus stakeholders and aligning systems to make career readiness an integral part of the George Mason student experience.



Strategic Action 1.1: Advocate for career integration into university systems to achieve culture shift.

ACTION 1.1 KEY OUTCOMES

- Career Everywhere governance structure fully established and engaged
- Increase in number of students completing an internship
- NACE competencies embedded into Mason Core

YEAR 1:

- Establish communication channels to provide thought leadership and promote career integration to the Executive Cabinet.
- Identify stakeholders and establish a senior leadership governance structure to guide Career Everywhere implementation across the university.
- Define university-wide career milestones and learning objectives.

YEAR 2:

- Set governance priorities, establish a regular meeting cadence and align resources to scale career support.
- Assess enterprise platforms such as Handshake, Patriot Connect, Mason Leaps and Stellic for their ability to monitor, track, and report on student career milestone attainment.
- Review university policies and procedures to identify opportunities to institutionalize career integration.

YEAR 3:

- Continue governance and resource alignment to support implementation of Career Everywhere.
- Measure Career Everywhere efforts both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- Use initial findings to strengthen the value proposition for continued commitment to career integration across university systems.

Strategic Action 1.2: Partner with academics to make career education unavoidable.

2026-2029

ACTION 1.2 KEY OUTCOMES

- Wide-scale dissemination of student milestone guidance
- Growth in number of Canvas modules utilized each year
- Increased enrollment in courses with embedded experiential and work-based learning

YEAR 1:

- Develop scalable Canvas modules for faculty to embed in courses (e.g., reflection on career readiness skill development).
- Define institutional standards and student milestones for experiential learning informed by academic goals and employer expectations.
- Incentivize faculty to integrate career education and experiential learning through grants, support, and professional development.

YEAR 2:

- Pilot Canvas modules with a small group of faculty.
- Promote the modules through appropriate academic channels.
- Integrate experiential learning definitions and milestones into faculty and advisor training and reference materials.
- Develop and maintain a prioritized portfolio of experiential learning opportunities based on employer input.
- Provide faculty and advisors with guidance on when students should engage in different types of experiential learning for major/career exploration and post-graduate readiness.

YEAR 3:

- Refine existing modules and develop new ones based on feedback from pilot.
- Expand faculty adoption of the modules across courses and programs.
- Advocate for departmental curricular enhancements, including experiential learning best practices and requirements, where appropriate.

Strategic Action 1.3: Integrate career across University Life (UL).

ACTION 1.3 KEY OUTCOMES

- 100% of UL Units have a Career Champion with advanced training
- Establishment of shared programming calendar for career events across UL

YEAR 1:

- Establish shared language and messaging around key career topics for UL staff.
- Identify a working group to map key points in the co-curriculum for career readiness development and design appropriate interventions.
- Co-create a scaffolded career programming calendar within the Post-graduate Success Student Journey Team with shared responsibility for marketing.
- Deliver foundational Career Influencer Network trainings adapted for UL units.

YEAR 2:

- Begin to implement career interventions through major divisional engagement initiatives.
- Expand the shared career programming calendar to include additional UL programming units.
- Continue foundational Career Influencer Network trainings across UL.
- Launch an advanced train-the-trainer model to prepare at least one staff member from each UL office to earn Career Champion designation.

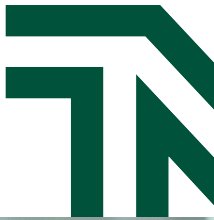
YEAR 3:

- Deepen collaboration with UL units to embed career into divisional staff training, programming and student support to scale reach.
- Recognize Career Champions in each UL office.
- Sustain and refine the Career Champion model to strengthen career integration across UL.

GOAL II: ACHIEVE ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

2026-2029

To lead a strong career ecosystem, UCS will strengthen its role as the university’s specialist in career development by delivering high-quality services through effective, efficient, and sustainable operations. This goal focuses on standardizing processes, proactively managing risk, leveraging technology, and investing in staff development. These efforts will ensure all staff are subject matter experts and position UCS as a top-tier career center.



Strategic Action 2.1: Deliver specialized career advising.

ACTION 2.1 KEY OUTCOMES

- Increased participation of unique graduate students each year
- Increase in percentage of graduate and international students engaging with UCS

YEAR 1:

- Strengthen service delivery model providing specialized career advising by both industry and student identity, with particular attention to international and graduate students.
- Assess current advising and programming to ensure services are tailored to today’s George Mason students and responsive to evolving job market and employer expectations.
- Build on advising best practices to align staff tools and rubrics to support consistency in career education programming.

- Use existing engagement and advising data to identify students at key decision points in the career development process.
- Pilot intervention triggers and follow-up workflows for students requiring additional career support.

YEAR 2:

- Assess and refine programming tools and facilitation rubrics.
- Improve student targeting and segmentation using data-informed approaches.
- Review, refine and expand intervention models for students requiring additional career support.

YEAR 3:

- Demonstrate the impact of tailored advising and responsive programming on student experience and outcomes.
- Implement a more proactive and predictive model for identifying and supporting students at key decision points.
- Fully coordinate intervention strategies through university-wide relationships and systems to support students with elevated career needs.

Strategic Action 2.2: Strengthen operational risk and process management.

2026-2029

ACTION 2.2 KEY OUTCOMES

- Ongoing risk assessment process established and executed
- Increased understanding of and confidence in handling ethical and risk-related situations, as indicated in staff survey

YEAR 1:

- Conduct a risk assessment across UCS operations.
- Develop a plan to address findings from the risk assessment.
- Review ethical standards for career services to identify relevant training needs and resource gaps.
- Begin developing procedures, documentation and transparent communication practices across functional areas, including student and employer feedback, budgeting and financial health, as well as compliance.

YEAR 2:

- Implement mitigation strategies identified in the risk assessment plan.
- Develop and deliver ethics training and related resources for staff.
- Operationalize and refine procedures, documentation and transparent communication practices across functional areas.

YEAR 3:

- Establish an ongoing risk assessment and review process for UCS operations.
- Maintain current operational documentation across functional areas.

Strategic Action 2.3: Optimize staffing structure and role clarity.

ACTION 2.3 KEY OUTCOMES

- Staff show improvement in role clarity, confidence in supervising, and professionally supported, as indicated in staff survey
- 100% of full-time staff will have completed all mandatory trainings

YEAR 1:

- Clarify functional roles and staffing responsibilities using professional competency frameworks such as NACE and CAS.
- Develop a more robust onboarding and training process for new staff.
- Establish expectations and planning guidelines for supervisor development.
- Explore peer leadership and succession planning models.
- Develop and launch a targeted professional development plan aligned with team and operational needs.

YEAR 2:

- Roll out enhanced onboarding and training for new staff.
- Engage staff at all levels in supervisor development training.
- Integrate professional competencies into job descriptions and annual goal-setting processes.
- Provide access to targeted professional development aligned with operational goals.

YEAR 3:

- Reassess staffing structure, role clarity, and staff expectations using NACE and CAS standards and identify remaining gaps.

Strategic Action 2.4: Advance AI and technology enablement across operation.

2026-2029

ACTION 2.4 KEY OUTCOMES

- New tools rolled out and fully adopted/integrated by relevant staff
- UCS staff have presented on AI-related topics at 2 or more career-focused conferences/meetings

YEAR 1:

- Research AI tools that can support on-demand career advising and greater operational efficiency.
- Identify strategic use cases based on greatest business need.
- Test and pilot selected tool(s) for implementation.
- Provide staff with scaffolded training and guidance to use selected AI tool(s) effectively and ethically.
- Ensure ongoing alignment with university AI initiatives, including the AI Visioning Task Force and CAIO efforts.

YEAR 2:

- Integrate effective AI and other tech solutions across UCS functional areas.
- Deliver ongoing professional development for staff on AI tools and applications.

YEAR 3:

- Share UCS's AI integration approach as a best practice model for university career centers.
- Continue monitoring emerging tools and updating UCS practices as AI evolves.



GOAL III: FULLY LEVERAGE EMPLOYERS & ALUMNI
IN THE CAREER ECOSYSTEM

2026-2029



This goal focuses on strengthening employer and alumni engagement to expand opportunities for students, deepen industry alignment, and ensure career education remains responsive to workforce trends. Through more intentional partnerships, UCS will connect students to internships, jobs, professional networks, and emerging insights that enhance post-graduation success.



Strategic Action 3.1: Develop a proactive, industry-aligned employer engagement strategy.

ACTION 3.1 KEY OUTCOMES

- Growth in employer engagement from priority areas, as measured by participation in events and/or Handshake job postings
- Diversity of employers engaged reflects the career interests of students

YEAR 1:

- Assess alumni employment patterns, student enrollment/ career interest trends, and job market demand beyond Northern Virginia.
- Identify and prioritize 3–5 geographic regions based on students’ hometowns and concentrations of George Mason alumni.
- Target employers in priority regions, with a focus on internship opportunities.
- Create employer-facing materials highlighting relevant academic programs, student demographics, and partnership success stories.

YEAR 2:

- Expand employer development efforts and build relationships with chambers of commerce and employer networks across Virginia and other priority regions.
- Launch a virtual employer engagement series focused on identified geographic regions.
- Develop a digital Employer Success campaign to attract new employer partners.

YEAR 3:

- Execute targeted in-person industry roadshows in geographic regions with high concentrations of alumni.
- Organize student site visits in priority regions.
- Evaluate regional outreach efforts and identify opportunities for continued expansion.



Strategic Action 3.2: Strengthen alumni engagement to support recruitment of George Mason talent.

2026-2029

ACTION 3.2 KEY OUTCOMES

- Increased alumni participation in career-related activities
- Positive alumni satisfaction ratings related to engagement experiences

YEAR 1:

- Build an Alumni Engagement Guide and interest repository to identify alumni available for classroom presentations, career panels, networking events, projects, and related activities.
- Develop a structure for engaging alumni as subject matter experts in partnership with academic and campus units.

YEAR 2:

- Establish an Alumni Recruiter Council to advise UCS on recruiting trends, workplace changes, and employer needs.
- Engage council members as ambassadors to strengthen alumni and employer engagement in priority sectors.

YEAR 3:

- Expand alumni engagement opportunities that connect students with alumni for career learning, networking, and recruitment.
- Assess the effectiveness of the Alumni Recruiter Council and refine the model for long-term sustainability.

Strategic Action 3.3: Leverage alumni and employers to educate students on AI's influence on the job market and workplace.

ACTION 3.3 KEY OUTCOMES

- AI coaching program pilot launched
- Students' increased awareness of impact of AI within their target industry

YEAR 1:

- Launch a bi-monthly AI in the Workplace webinar series featuring alumni and employers.
- Invite employer partners to lead student skill-building sessions on industry-specific AI tools.
- Facilitate connections between faculty and AI leaders in industry.
- Launch an AI Careers Week featuring key employer partners.
- Promote student and alumni participation in self-paced AI learning opportunities.

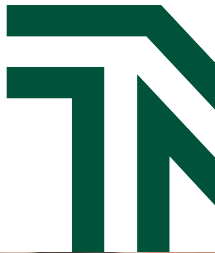
YEAR 2:

- Update webinar and skill-building sessions to reflect current AI trends and employer expectations.
- Pilot an AI coaching program connecting alumni with student groups.
- Continue building faculty-employer connections to support AI-related learning and curriculum development.
- Explore partnership opportunities with the George Mason AI Summit.

YEAR 3:

- Review the AI coaching model and assess potential for expansion.
- Continue AI-focused webinars, workshops, and skill-building events.

This goal focuses on increasing awareness, clarity, and engagement with UCS through stronger marketing operations, a more defined brand identity, and coordinated communication strategies that promote a “career everywhere” mindset. Enhancing how UCS communicates its value and key messages across campus will strengthen visibility among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other key stakeholders, positioning career development as an integrated and ever-present part of the university experience.



Strategic Action 4.1: Strengthen marketing operations and infrastructure.

- ACTION 4.1 KEY OUTCOMES
- Key marketing metrics updated, with targets, and tracking and reporting system identified
- Consistent adherence to the established UL MarCom SOPs

YEAR 1:

- Benchmark marketing and engagement metrics against peer career centers using a Career Everywhere framework.
- Reimagine collaboration processes with University Life Marketing and Communications (UL MarCom) and establish new operating procedures.
- Evaluate job descriptions for marketing-related roles.
- Establish marketing metrics and related data collection processes beyond event attendance.

- Develop a marketing budget aligned with strategic goals.
- Assess current marketing technologies for efficiency and effectiveness.
- Research, evaluate, and select affordable marketing technology that allows for easy tracking of engagement data.

YEAR 2:

- Refine collaboration processes and operating procedures with University Life Marketing and Communications based on first-year data.

- Integrate marketing performance data into strategic decision-making.
- Increase website accessibility and visibility through main university channels.
- Collect and analyze data identified as critical marketing metrics.

YEAR 3:

- Evaluate marketing budget and staffing levels to support future priorities and planning.

Strategic Action 4.2: Enhance branding and campus visibility.

2026-2029

ACTION 4.2 KEY OUTCOMES

- Increased alignment between brand perception and brand identity in year 3
- Growth across key marketing metrics, as determined in Action 4.1

YEAR 1:

- Conduct a brand analysis.
- Redefine the UCS core brand identity, including value proposition, tone, and key messages.
- Develop core messaging pillars for major content areas such as services, industry trends, and internship access.
- Launch a coordinated multi-channel visibility campaign for current students.
- Begin standardizing branding across physical and print materials.

YEAR 2:

- Build a photography library that showcases UCS services, programs, and events.
- Launch a coordinated visibility campaign for additional audiences, including faculty, staff, and prospective students.
- Continue standardizing branding across physical and print materials.

YEAR 3:

- Integrate communication efforts across university websites and departments.
- Expand and sustain high-performing visibility efforts across campus.
- Reassess brand perception.
- Develop a long-term sustainability plan for branding and visibility efforts, including budget, staffing, and ownership.

Strategic Action 4.3: Create coordinated audience messaging across the student journey.

ACTION 4.3 KEY OUTCOMES

- Establish a regular reporting process to monitor student behavior within Handshake and implement targeted responses
- Increased student use of Handshake, based on logins

YEAR 1:

- Align University Life staff with updated UCS messaging and language.
- Reallocate marketing capacity to support both brand visibility and event promotion.
- Identify optimal minimum and maximum email frequency for current students.
- Identify ways to determine where students are in the career journey based on Handshake engagement data.
- Select early intervention points and define recommended communication prompts.

YEAR 2:

- Develop email campaigns based on students' stage in the career journey.
- Identify optimal email frequency and content topics for alumni based on performance data, and adjust campaigns accordingly.
- Evaluate first-year efforts and use data to refine student messaging frequency, content, and channel strategy, including physical placements and digital engagement tools such as QR codes and analytics.

YEAR 3:

- Continue audience messaging based on intervention points and student journey progress to maintain a coordinated, year-round communication system.
- Ensure consistency of messaging across audiences and platforms.
- Demonstrate measurable impact by tracking key metrics and communicating results.

University Career Services Strategic Plan Goals				
UL Post-Graduate Success Student Journey Team Goals	Promote Career Everywhere Ecosystem	Achieve Organizational Excellence	Fully Leverage Employers and Alumni in the Career Ecosystem	Raise Visibility of University Career Services
Career Everywhere	GM			GM
Career Guidance		GM	GM	GM
Enhanced Skill Development			GM	
Graduate Student Experience & Retention		GM		GM
International Student Experience & Retention		GM		GM
Thriving Team		GM		

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Nora Bassa, Graduate Assistant
- Nina Cox, Career Advisor
- Stephanie Lampron, Assistant Director, Trends and Assessment
- Elizabeth Loun, University Internship Programs Manager
- Rachel Lindsey, Assistant Director, Career Education
- Phil Wilkerson, Employer Engagement Consultant

IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

- Senior Leader: Saskia Campbell, Executive Director
- Goal I Lead: Elena Chiru, Director, Career Advising
- Goal II Lead: Stephanie Lampron, Assistant Director, Trends and Assessment
- Goal III Lead: Matt Myers, Associate Director, Employer and Alumni Engagement
- Goal IV Lead: Kristin Leonato, Associate Director, Programs and Outreach

*Every UCS staff member is assigned a strategic action to support realization of the plan goals.



MISSION: WE PREPARE AND CONNECT CAREER READY STUDENTS FOR POSTGRADUATE SUCCESS

VISION: ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

METHOD: CULTIVATING AN INCLUSIVE, COMMUNITY APPROACH TO CAREER PREPARATION SO THAT EVERY MASON STUDENT GRADUATES CAREER READY