



Team Arlington gathered outside Founders Hall before Mason's annual Happy Heart Walk. Photo courtesy of Sarah Parshall.

# End of Year Newsletter

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

HUMAN RESOURCES & PAYROLL

DECEMBER 2014

## Coming to the End of 2014 A Reflection on Gratitude

Welcome to the Human Resources & Payroll annual End of the Year Newsletter.

It is hard to believe that we are almost at the end of 2014 and the end of the fall semester. As I look back on the year I am reminded of just how much I appreciate the hard work and gracious culture that surround me at Mason.

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.”  
-John Fitzgerald Kennedy

I am grateful for so many aspects of working at this wonderful, caring community of engaged colleagues at George Mason University.

I am grateful for:

- ❖ Leadership - even while changing- work hard to continue communicating with us.
- ❖ Colleagues who share their expertise and support with us.
- ❖ Diversity of Mason people- who bring their special differences, experiences and skills to our thriving community of faculty and staff.

- ❖ My HR & Payroll and CDC colleagues for all they do every day to support our Mason community.
- ❖ The chance to update you on so many of the wonderful programs and opportunities available to you at Mason.
- ❖ For two weeks off at winter break this year.

I encourage you to use this year-end holiday break to catch up on changing rules, update your Mason information, start saving more for your retirement, pay attention to upcoming deadlines and go electronic for your W-2!

If you have any questions, please remember we are just a phone call (703-993-2600), email ([hr@gmu.edu](mailto:hr@gmu.edu)), or website ([hr.gmu.edu](http://hr.gmu.edu)) away! And you are also always welcome to come by our office in Suite 4100 of Merten Hall.

From all of us here in HR & Payroll, we wish you a very happy, healthy holiday season and a joyful 2015.

*Linda H. Harber*

Vice President of Human Resources & Payroll and Faculty/Staff Life



### Financial Well-Being in 2015

To bring awareness to Financial Well-Being seminars offered to faculty and staff on campus, Mason Needleworkers dressed George in hand-knitted Mason gear. To ensure your financial well-being in 2015, be sure to check out:

- **BENEFITS & PAYROLL** Pg 2-3
- **POLICY & REPORTING** Pg 4
- **LIFE WORK CONNECTIONS** Pg 5



### Mason in the News

Secretary of Administration Nancy Rodrigues presented Bridget Peabody and Janet Walker with certificates of appreciation for their “meaningful contributions to the employees of the Commonwealth of Virginia” in the areas of healthy living, workplace effectiveness and longevity.

# Benefits & Payroll Updates and Reminders

The Benefits and Payroll teams are here to help support your financial well-being. If you have questions about your paycheck or time sheet, please email [payroll@gmu.edu](mailto:payroll@gmu.edu). For questions regarding your benefits, leave or retirement, please contact [benefits@gmu.edu](mailto:benefits@gmu.edu).

## Your Benefits To-Do List:

- ✓ **Check your beneficiaries:**  
Circumstances change – marriage, birth of a child, divorce, etc. Please check with your retirement and life insurance vendors on a regular basis to ensure your beneficiary wishes are current.
- ✓ **Open a Supplemental Retirement Account if you haven't:** All Mason employees are eligible to participate in both a 403(b) Tax-Deferred Annuity (TDA) account through TIAA-CREF or Fidelity Investments and a Commonwealth of Virginia 457 Deferred Compensation Plan. Additional information is available on the [Benefits website](#).
- ✓ **Check your supplemental retirement savings levels:** The IRS has made cost-of-living adjustments for pension plans and other retirement-related items for the 2015 tax year.
  - Participants under age 50 can contribute up to \$18,000 into both the Supplemental Retirement Plan (403(b)) program and the Virginia Deferred Compensation Plan (DCP) (457(b)).
  - Participants age 50 and over can contribute \$24,000 in each plan.
  - For details on how to make any changes, please see the [Benefits page](#) or email [benefits@gmu.edu](mailto:benefits@gmu.edu).

## Virginia College Savings Plan

A 529 College Savings Plan allows you to put aside money for future higher education expenses. Money invested in an Internal Revenue Code Section 529 plan grows tax-free and may be withdrawn tax-free if used for qualified higher education expenses. For more information, please visit the [financial page](#) of the Life/Work Connections website. For details and enrollment materials please visit the [Virginia 529 PrePAID site](#) and review the [program overview](#) which describes the Virginia 529 PrePAID program and the other 529 savings programs.

Note: Open enrollment dates for the Virginia 529 PrePAID program run from 12/1/14 through 3/31/15.

## Qualifying Events

If you are having a baby or planning to adopt, getting married or divorced, or if your child is becoming self-supporting, you may be able to make mid-year changes to your health insurance and flexible spending accounts. Certain qualifying mid-year events allow you to make specific election changes with supporting documentation. Your enrollment or election change request must be submitted within 60 calendar days of the qualifying mid-year event, and must be consistent with the event.

## W-4 Federal Tax Filing Status

If you claimed exempt from federal withholding on your W-4 for 2014, your exemption expires on *February 16, 2015*. Please be sure to complete a new W-4 for 2015 by visiting the [Payroll website](#) (links to the 2015 tax forms will be posted once they have been released by the IRS). After 1/5/15 you will be able to certify your claim of exemption online, via the Tax Forms page of [Patriot Web](#).

## W-2s Available January 2015

We are on track to have 2014 W-2 forms available on-line in mid-January. Please check your email and the [HR & Payroll homepage](#) after break for the latest information and access your electronic W-2 when they're available.

Accessing your W-2 electronically means you can receive your W-2 earlier than the paper copy, it helps reduce costs for the University, and it's much more sustainable, particularly if you combine it with electronic filing. Thank you for helping us to continue to promote a paperless work environment!

Please note: W-2's will be mailed by January 30, 2015 to employees not electing to retrieve W-2's online via PatriotWeb. If you are a foreign national employee and receiving a tax treaty benefit, your tax documents may include a W-2, a 1042, or both. If you have any questions, please contact International Tax at [inttax@gmu.edu](mailto:inttax@gmu.edu).

## Reminder: 9-Month Faculty Paid Over 9 months

Additional deductions will be taken from your pay starting with the first paycheck in March 2015 to continue health insurance and other benefits premiums for the summer months.

## ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES

**FINANCIAL WELL-BEING SEMINARS**  
[http://hr.gmu.edu/benefits/retire/online\\_resources.php](http://hr.gmu.edu/benefits/retire/online_resources.php)

### TIAA-CREF

- ✓ General Information: [www1.tiaa-cref.org/tcm/gmu](http://www1.tiaa-cref.org/tcm/gmu)
- ✓ 2015 Retirement Account Checklist: <http://hr.gmu.edu/benefits/retire/documents/TIAA-CREF2015NewYearChecklist.pdf>

### FIDELITY

[plan.fidelity.com/5509](http://plan.fidelity.com/5509)

### ICMA-RC

[www.icmarc.org](http://www.icmarc.org)

### VIRGINIA RETIREMENT SYSTEM

[www.varetire.org](http://www.varetire.org)

## Insurance Premium Changes

If you are a UNUM or Minnesota Life Insurance participant, you may see a premium increase for coverage beginning 1/1/15 due to any age band increase or salary changes that may have occurred in 2014.

## Update Your Personal Information

Since getting paid and staying "in the know" are important to your financial well-being, make sure all your information is correct and up-to-date in [Patriot Web](#) and [People Finder](#).

- Permanent Address and Phone Number
- Cellular Phone Number
- Emergency Contact Information
- Veteran Status
- Ethnicity and Race Info
- Name, Department, Title etc.

## Expecting or Adopting?

If you are planning to have a baby or adopt a child in 2015, please call the Benefits team. We would like to share a "New Parent Packet" with you providing helpful parenting resources, a hand-made Mason baby hat (custom made by "Mason Needleworks") and information on how Mason can lend a hand at this special time. Let us help with the details while you enjoy this wonderful new chapter in your life.

Note: Interested in joining Mason Needleworks? Email [hr@gmu.edu](mailto:hr@gmu.edu).

## Winter Break Pay

Although Human Resources & Payroll will be closed over winter break, there are some pay dates during the break:

- *Semimonthly pay date on Wednesday, December 31*
- *Bi-weekly pay date on Friday, January 2*

The first bi-weekly payroll of 2015 (for hours worked between 12/14/14 and 12/27/14) will be processed during the winter break, in order for faculty and staff to receive paychecks on Friday, January 2nd.

Please be sure to submit time sheets for this payroll before the 6pm deadline on Sunday, December 28th, as late submissions will not be processed until the following bi-weekly pay period.

Need some Winter Break timesheet guidance? The Payroll team has developed information to ensure you complete your timesheet correctly. Visit [Winter Break Timesheet Guidance](#) for details. If you have any questions, please email [payroll@gmu.edu](mailto:payroll@gmu.edu).

Please note: Direct deposit of pay is a condition of employment (University Policy 2201). If you are not already on direct deposit, you'll need to sign up by 5:00pm on Monday, December 15, for your pay to be sent electronically to your bank during winter break. If you don't sign up by this deadline, paper pay checks can be picked up after the winter break, beginning on Monday, January 5, 2015 in HR & Payroll.

## Holiday Schedule

The [2015 Holiday Schedule](#) is now available! This should give you plenty of time to plan your vacation for next year.

## Giving Back: Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (CVC)

The 2014 Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (CVC) is under way. Online giving is available for both payroll deduction as well as one-time credit card donations at <http://eDirect.virginia.gov>. Contact Helga Yunker at [hyunker@gmu.edu](mailto:hyunker@gmu.edu) for pledge cards or additional information. A list of charities can be viewed at: <http://www.cvc.virginia.gov/directorylist.html>

## Inclement Weather

Given the recent rain and sleet, this is a great time to review the Inclement Weather/Emergency Closing Policy at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/inclement-weatheremergency-closure/>.

University closings, late openings, or other weather related changes in the University's schedule will be announced on Mason's switchboard 703.993.1000, Mason Alert, GMU-TV, the [university's homepage](#), and local media outlets.

Perhaps this is also a good time to consider the benefits of having a formal telework agreement on file? Arrangements can be made in advance to have remote access to Mason through a Virtual Private Network (VPN) if needed. Teleworkers (if it is their scheduled telework day) and remote workers continue to work even if the University is closed or on a modified schedule unless the weather or emergency impacts the alternate location of the flexible worker (e.g. a regional power outage). Having telework agreements and technology in place in advance can come in handy if Mason experiences an extended weather event or other emergency. Details are available on the [Flexible Work site](#).

## Extended Absences

If an employee will be out for an extended period due to a serious or chronic medical condition or he/she needs to take care of an immediate family member (child, spouse, parent) with such a condition, there are resources available for benefits eligible employees. These resources vary depending upon your start date, employment classification, and the choices you have made on voluntary benefits. Employees may use appropriate leave to bring their hours up to their regular work week. For example, if available, Annual and VSDP Family/Personal leave may always be used. If the employee has a medical condition, then either Traditional Sick Leave or VSDP Sick Leave may be used until exhausted. If the employee is taking care of a family member, up to 1/3 of the employee's Traditional Sick Leave or VSDP Sick Leave balance may be used for this purpose while the employee is on an official FMLA leave.

The Benefits team is happy to help you navigate the procedures and rules for the use of FMLA and VSDP. Contact us at 3.2600 or email [benefits@gmu.edu](mailto:benefits@gmu.edu).

## Leave Turnover

Since the leave year for classified staff rolls on January 9 (for 12-month faculty, it rolls on June 24), below are a few things to keep in mind about leave. If you have any questions, please contact the HR & Payroll Customer Service Center at 3.2600.

### Classified Staff

- The leave year for classified staff runs each year from January 10 – January 9.
- New VSDP Sick and Family/Personal Leave will be allotted on January 10, 2015.
- There are limits to the amount of Annual leave that can be carried over from year-to-year. If your Annual leave balance exceeds the maximum as of January 9, 2015, you will lose that portion that exceeds the limit. The limits as defined by the state Department of Human Resource Management can be found at <http://hr.gmu.edu/benefits/leave/annual.php>

### 12-month Faculty

- The 12-month faculty leave year ends each year on June 24<sup>th</sup>
- Full time 12-month faculty may carry over 21 days of Annual leave.

### Leave Donation

- Any unused Annual leave may be donated in 8-hour increments.
- Please complete a [leave donor form](#) and submit your form to HR & Payroll at MS-3C3.

## Military Family & Medical Leave Act

The National Defense Authorization Act amends the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) to permit a "spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin" to take up to 26 workweeks of leave to care for a "member of the Armed Forces, including a member of the National Guard or Reserves, who is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy, is otherwise in outpatient status, or is otherwise on the temporary disability retired list, for a serious injury or illness." The NDAA also permits an employee to take FMLA leave for "any qualifying exigency (as the Secretary [of Labor] shall, by regulation, determine) arising out of the fact that the spouse, or a son, daughter, or parent of the employee is on active duty (or has been notified of an impending call or order to active duty) in the Armed Forces in support of a contingency operation." For more information on FMLA, please see [University Administrative Policy No. 2215](#), Family Medical Leave Policy.

*NOTE: Information on how leave, benefits, and pay are affected by military service is available on the [military leave page](#) of the Benefits website.*



# Policy and Reporting Updates

## Acceptable Use of State Electronic Resources

A friendly year-end reminder that state electronic equipment (desktops, laptops, tablets, smart phones, etc.) is for conducting professional business, despite the fact that they "travel everywhere" with us. All users have a responsibility to ensure they use these resources appropriately. Mason's Policy 1301, [Responsible Use of Computing Policy](#), and DHRM Policy 1.75, Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media both provide some guidance on this matter.

## Reporting Fraud, Waste, and Abuse

The State Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline provides the opportunity for citizens and state employees to anonymously report suspected incidents of fraud, waste, or abuse that may have occurred in any state executive agency or university. State employees are encouraged to first report fraud, waste, and abuse to their agency's management, however, the Hotline provides an alternative way of reporting concerns. The Office of the State Inspector General administers the Hotline. Governor Robert F. McDonnell signed Executive Order Number 52 (2012), expanding the Hotline program, which was first implemented in October 1992. The new Hotline program is now also open to the citizens of the Commonwealth. For detailed information explaining the complete Hotline process, please visit our [Employee Relations website](#).

## Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

While everyone should be concerned about child abuse and neglect, certain individuals are required by law to report suspected instances. In 2012, the Virginia General Assembly (SB 239) added "any person employed by a public or private institution of higher education" to the list of "mandated reporters" set out in §63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia. Mandated reporters, including all Mason employees, are those persons who, in their professional or official capacity, are required to report instances of suspected child abuse and neglect to the local Social Services Department or to the Department of Social Services (DSS) toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline at 1.800.552.7096. For more information, visit [http://hr.gmu.edu/emp\\_relations/reporting\\_neglect.php](http://hr.gmu.edu/emp_relations/reporting_neglect.php).

## Drug and Alcohol Policy

The abuse of drugs and alcohol by employees is incompatible with the goals of George Mason University. The illicit use of drugs and alcohol could create a serious threat to the safety and welfare of the university community, as well as undermine the productivity of the workforce. Those in need of assistance in dealing with drug and alcohol related problems are encouraged to seek the confidential help of the Human Resources & Payroll Employee Relations team. Employees with Mason health care may also utilize the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Contact information is available on the [Employee Relations website](#). The complete policy is available at [Employee Drug and Alcohol Policy](#).

## Workplace Coaching

We all face difficult situations at work. Taking the time to find ways to effectively address those situations makes work more fulfilling, reduces stress, and makes us all more productive. Employee Relations offers a number of resources to faculty and staff which can help you find the answers you seek. Workplace coaching is a service in which a trained peer from within the Mason community helps a faculty or staff member address a workplace issue they are facing. Coaching can help you to clearly identify the issue, clarify perceptions, identify potential solutions and develop a way to implement them. For more information or to sign up with a coach, please visit [http://hr.gmu.edu/emp\\_relations/coaching.php](http://hr.gmu.edu/emp_relations/coaching.php)

## Preventing Workplace Violence

George Mason University strives to provide faculty, staff, students, and visitors a safe place in which to work, study and live. As such, George Mason University takes a zero-tolerance approach to workplace violence. While violence in the workplace is rare, it can take many forms; some are obvious, while others are more subtle. All faculty and staff are expected to report suspicious or threatening behavior to the Police or Human Resources & Payroll. Please also watch the Workplace Violence video on the [Employee Relations website](#).

## Experiencing a Challenging Situation?

### *Don't forget about your EAP.*

Part of the Mason benefits package for benefits-eligible employees includes an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is linked to your health insurance provider; with one for Kaiser Permanente, one for COVA Care and COVA HDHP, and one for COVA HealthAware.

The EAP is a wonderful resource if you are working through a challenging situation. Your EAP can assist you with confidential counseling, education, and referrals on a range of issues including legal services, financial stability, mental health, and more.

### **Your EAP is available 24/7.**

The Employee Relations Team also has resources available for non-benefited employees. For questions about the Employee Assistance Program or other resources, please contact your Employee Relations Team at 3.3878.

## Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under any education program or activity receiving federal financial aid. Sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, sexual exploitation and stalking are forms of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX. George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment free from discrimination. Any gender-based discrimination committed by George Mason students, staff or faculty will not be tolerated. This applies to academic, educational, athletic, residential and other University operated programs. George Mason encourages individuals who believe they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct by a Mason student or employee to seek assistance through the office of Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics (CDE). For more information, visit the [CDE webpage](#) for Title IX or call 3-8730.

# Create Positive Life/Work Connections in 2015

## Financial Well-Being Seminars

Join us as we continue our focus on financial well-being for the 2014-15 academic year. The spring semester includes new in-person sessions on topics such as *Managing Income and Debt*, *How Virginia 529s Work* (college savings), *Preparing to be a First Time Homebuyer*, *Foundations of Investing* and much more. We're also bringing back favorite sessions such as *Getting the Most Out of Your Mason Benefits Package* and the *Parenting Options* panel. In addition, many sessions are also available online anytime.

For a full list of topics and access to online offerings, please visit [Financial Well-Being](#).

## Save Money, Have Fun!

Visit the [work/life discount page](#) for special deals just for you!

## Employee of the Month

Do you know a superstar? Make sure they get the recognition they deserve by nominating them for Mason's Employee of the Month. Additional information can be found on the [Reward and Recognition page](#).

## Don't Forget to Say "THANKS"!

Mason is committed to recognizing its outstanding faculty and staff. If someone has gone above and beyond, contact the Reward & Recognition team today. To see the different ways you can say "Thanks", go to <http://hr.gmu.edu/awards/recognition.php>.

## Child Development Center Cookbooks Now Available

The Child Development Center has produced a delightful cookbook full of terrific recipes shared from across the CDC, Mason, and beyond. Literally everything from soup to nuts; all for \$15. To order, please visit <http://hr.gmu.edu/cdc/fundraisers.php> or head directly to the order form at <http://hr.gmu.edu/cdc/docs/CookBook.pdf>.

## Celebrate Homecoming Weekend

Faculty and staff are invited to enjoy Mason's Homecoming February 9-14. For a \$10 discount, enter GOMASON [when registering](#) for Alumni Association events. For more information on how to get involved see [homecoming.gmu.edu/faculty-and-staff/](http://homecoming.gmu.edu/faculty-and-staff/).

## Share Your Thoughts!

Your feedback is important to Mason! There are two upcoming opportunities for you to share your thoughts and suggestions:

### Mini-Survey on Childcare

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/masonchild>

The Quality of Work Life Task Force is conducting a "mini-survey" in collaboration with the Sittercity Working Group and HR & Payroll. This short survey will be live from December 12 – January 30<sup>th</sup>. Results will be posted by Spring 2015 via the Quality of Work Life website ([qwl.gmu.edu](http://qwl.gmu.edu)).

### 2015 Quality of Work Life Survey

This survey, conducted every three years since 2000, is coming in April 2015.

## Caregiving Support

Sittercity's Corporate Program is now known as Bright Horizons Care Advantage. Faculty, staff, and graduate students have a complimentary subscription to

Sittercity's comprehensive database of in-home caregivers for child care, pet care, home care and tutoring *plus* Years Ahead, a senior care resource that can assist you in developing a plan to care for an aging loved one. You can register at

<http://www.selectplus.com/georgemasonu>.

*Important note: Mason does not own, sponsor, or endorse Bright Horizons Care Advantage. It is your responsibility to carefully screen and check the references of any caregivers, before you retain their services.*

## New Patriot Lift Program

The New Patriot Lift program provides transportation between classes, meetings, and events to faculty, staff, students, and visitors with short- and long-term mobility impairments via a wheelchair-equipped golf cart. Patrons must be approved by Student Health Services, Disability Services, Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics, or Parking and Transportation (only for those with a DMV disabled placard). For more information call 703-993-2828 or visit [transportation.gmu.edu/patlift](http://transportation.gmu.edu/patlift).

## Leading to Well-Being Conference

Registration is open for the Leading to Well-Being Conference scheduled for March 26-27, 2015 at the Fairview Park Marriott in Falls Church. Early-bird rates are in effect before February 6 and a limited number of Mason faculty/staff tickets are available.

<http://wellbeing.onmason.com/>.

## Who's Walking Wednesday?

Sign-up to lead a lunchtime campus walk in Arlington, Fairfax, or Prince William at <http://hr.gmu.edu/worklife/lunch>.

## Get the Most Out of Your Professional Development!

### New Year, New Name

In order to better reflect their mission, Learning and Professional Development has changed its name to Training and Organizational Development. Did you know they offer customized organizational development consulting and facilitation sessions to help Mason units navigate changes? Contact Lori Ann Roth at 3-2621 for more information.

### Certificate Programs On Campus

Take charge of your professional development and make a plan for growth in 2015. Mason offers several certificate programs designed to enhance your job skills and competencies. You are invited to learn more at an orientation session for the program of your choice in January and February:

- [Administrative Professionals Certificate Program Orientation](#)
- [Customer Service Certificate Program: Subject Matter Expert](#) (for those who have completed the first 2 CSCP levels)
- [HR Liaisons Certificate Program Orientation](#)
- [New SUPERvisor Series: Kickoff](#)

For more information on these programs and to register for a session, please visit <http://hr.gmu.edu/learning>.

## Hike to Ike's January 30<sup>th</sup>

Save the date! On Friday, January 30, 2015 faculty and staff are invited to "Hike to Ike's" to enjoy a fresh, all-you-care-to-eat lunch for only \$8 (savings of \$3.25)! More information coming in the new year.

## Maintain Positive Life/Work Connections Year-Round

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WorkingatMason for the most up-to-date opportunities!



Friend us on [Facebook](#)



Follow us on [Twitter](#)

All faculty and staff who follow us on both Facebook and Twitter by January 9, 2015 will be entered in a random drawing to win a fun Mason prize.