

**Committee on Academic External Relations (CEAR) 2022 Annual Report to the Faculty Senate
George Mason University
Faculty Senate Chair, Melissa Broeckelman-Post**

Introduction

This report summarizes CEAR's work during 2022-2023 Academic Year (AY) at George Mason University. In particular, it highlights specific accomplishments of the committee while pointing out opportunities for improvements that the next team can use as point of reference. While still somewhat limited by the Covid-19 pandemic, the committee did what it could under such circumstances to carry out its charge. The committee's charge and composition as revised and approved by the Faculty Senate - November 18, 2009, is provided below.

Composition

Six members who are elected for two-year terms. Three members of the Committee should be senators, two others are elected from the faculty at-large, and one ex-officio member is the Provost's designee. At the beginning of each academic year the Committee must meet to select the representatives to the Virginia Faculty Senate from among its members, excluding the ex-officio member. At least one of these representatives must be a senator. In case of vacancies, the Nominations Committee nominates the new members, and the Committee internally evaluates and possibly reallocates the assigned responsibilities.

Charge

- A. Represent GMU faculty at Virginia higher education faculty governance organizations, including the Faculty Senate of Virginia. The seats allocated to GMU at the Faculty Senate of Virginia are to be filled by members of CEAR.
- B. Report to the GMU faculty senate on the proceedings of the Virginia Faculty Senate and voice back to this organization issues of relevance to GMU.
- C. Gather information on key matters about higher education in state legislation, state committees, and local venues, and report back to the GMU Senate.
- D. Provide forums and avenues for the exchange of ideas with representatives of SCHEV, state legislators representing Northern Virginia, and community groups related to higher education in Northern Virginia.

AY2021-2022 Committee Meetings

- **9/16/2022** – On Friday September 16 (from 1-2:00 PM ET) CEAR leadership met to discuss the representation and activities for 2022-2023, and reached the following consensus:
 - 1. Isaac Gang and Phil Yang will serve as co-chairs as well as Faculty Senate of Virginia (FSVA) Representatives.

2. Kerri Lacharite will serve as Virginia Faculty Senate representative, joining Gang, Yang, Jatin Ambegaonkar (from CEAR), and Melissa Broeckelman-Post (Faculty Senate Chair) to complete GMU's quota of 5 representatives.
3. CEAR resolved to continue its activities in the AY2022-2023 as followed:
 - a. Communicate with Mason Rep to Richmond for information exchange
 - b. Reach out to local and regional offices of state and national senators/members of congress to promote issues that are in GMU's interest
 - c. Increase awareness of State's low funding level for Mason students and faculty considering the living expense, etc.
 - d. Bring Mason voice to Virginia Faculty Senate, and take back state wide concerns to Mason Faculty Senate

Communicate with Faculty Senate and our home school/college about information or issues of concern.

1/20/2023 – The CEAR committee members on Friday January 20, 2023, met to set the Spring agenda. This was done successfully and committee agreed on the meeting timetable for the rest of the semester. The committee further assessed the committee's progress and what it should prioritize within the committee's remaining tenure. The committee identified several opportunities that included research initiatives that Mason might be able to benefit from and tracking several legislative proposals which may have impacted Mason either directly or indirectly.

3/31/2022 – The CEAR committee members on Friday March 31, 2023, met and deliberated on a potential report the faculty senate in its upcoming meeting. The committee also discussed the logistics of the final report and agreed that Isaac Gang will draft it and share within for suggestions. The committee and appreciated the work of each member and adjourned the meeting.

Reports

During the AY2022-2023, CEAR committee members wrote several reports and the Co-Chairs made several presentations on these reports to the faculty senate. In total, there were two reports/presentations which are summarized below:

Report 1:

November 7, 2022

Committee on Academic External Relations (CEAR) Report/Updates

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 - g. Increase awareness of State's low funding level for Mason students and faculty considering the living expense, etc.
 - h. Bring Mason voice to Virginia Faculty Senate, and take back state wide concerns to Mason Faculty Senate
 - i. Communicate with Faculty Senate and our home school/college about information or issues of concern.
- On Saturday October 22, 2022, CEAR's representative, Kerri Lacharite, attended the Faculty Senate of Virginia (FSVA) Fall meeting that discussed this year's agenda. In this meeting, several items of interest came up:
- **Budget Update**
 - Dues are past due from several universities and colleges.
 - The FSVA account is up to about \$32,000. This is in part because of the pandemic. In-person meeting costs have gone down, although that will change.
 - **American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Report**
 - Governor Youngkin have asked several things of Virginia universities
 - To address Academic Freedom of Speech. He wants something similar to the University of Chicago statement. Here is a link to an article about it- <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2016/01/30/hard-to-say>
 - Defining antisemitism to refrain criticism of Israel. This includes within faculty members' research.
 - For universities to report political parties of candidates in the hiring process. William & Mary and other institutions have replied this is illegal.
 - **Virginia Higher Education Advocacy Day**
 - January 12, 2023
 - Bills on providing high speed internet would be a good one for the group to advocate for.
 - **Discussion of faculty representation on Board of Visitors amongst the different universities.**

- This was a lengthy discussion on whether faculty representation is mandated and if those individuals are 1) Faculty Senate Chairs or the previous Faculty Senate Chair (and therefore elected); 2) Elected by the faculty; or 3) appointed by administration.
- The later was not preferred.
- It was decided not to advance this as a group as it could backfire and mandate appointments instead of elections.
- Identification of Post-election agenda including the issue of tuition waiver for employee dependents
- FSVA proposed a subcommittee to work on legislative agenda (Mason is represented by 2 or three volunteers)
- FSVA resolved to increase its visibility by reaching more faculty members (this can be done by "harvesting" faculty emails and improving the current FSVA database)
- FSVA resolved to advocate for high-speed Internet access in Virginia.
- FSVA shared how our respective Senate leaders interact with and are/aren't represented on our institution's BOV (or equivalent body)

Isaac Gang & Chaowei (Pill) Yang, Co-Chairs
Committee on External Academic Relations (CEAR)

Report 2:

January 17, 2023

Committee on Academic External Relations (CEAR) Report/Updates

- On Thursday January 12, Isaac Gang, CEAR's Co-Chair, attended the 2023 Virginia Higher Education Advocacy Day (VHEAD) at the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond. The event was jointly organized and sponsored by Faculty Senate of Virginia (FSVA) and American Association of University Professors (AAUP). This visit will form the basis for this brief report:

FSVA/AAUP's main focus was on academic freedom and higher education funding. They defined academic freedom as "a freedom of a teacher or researcher in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in his or her academic field, and to teach or publish findings without interference from political figures, board of trustees, donors, or other entities." "Academic freedom also protects the right of a faculty member to speak freely when participating in institutional governance, as well as to speak freely as a citizen. Academic freedom serves the public good by allowing for the pursuit of truth, constrained by professional standards" (FSVA/AAUP).

To that end, the FSVA/AAUP identified (and provided contexts) the following bills as potential threats to this freedom in the Commonwealth if passed. CEAR, as per its charge, supports this view.

7. **SB 1098** – would require approval from the House Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Education and Health for new programs of instruction or implementation of a new curriculum for an existing program. This would lead to a stunning level of political interference in determining what is taught, and not taught, in the Commonwealth’s institutions of higher learning.
8. **HB 1810** – would contradict current state law by removing protection from employer punishment for state employees who speak on their own behalf in public committee meetings or general meetings of the General Assembly.
9. **HB 1606 & SB 1252** – which has the laudable and important intent to combat antisemitism, but overreach by codifying a definition of antisemitism that would chill academic inquiry and criticism of the policies or actions of the state of Israel.
10. **SB 1193** – would prohibits public higher education employees from participating in Chinese funded grants and require reporting of all foreign government funding received. As written, this bill would chill academic collaboration internationally, especially as “foreign government” is not defined in the section of the Code of Virginia referenced by the bill.

FY2024 Budget & Amendments Update

- Virginia spending on higher education increased by 28.1% from FY2017-2021 (9th highest increase in the county). It increased by 6.3% from FY2021-2022 (16th)
- Funding to cover tuitions and fees has improved as well and currently stands at 54% for FY2022-2023
- Gov. Youngkin’s budget amendment to the biennial budget (FY2023 & 2024) provides no new funding for higher education above what was funded last year.
- Sen. McClellan (D) and Delegate Morefield (R) filed budget amendments to add \$94 million in FY2023 and \$194 million in FY2024 to fund 100% of the cost of the salary and benefits increases proposed in the budget in order to limit the need to increase tuition. This received bipartisan support and we should support similar amendments.

Isaac Gang & Chaowei (Pill) Yang, Co-Chairs
Committee on External Academic Relations (CEAR)

Conclusion

The CEAR committee members have embarked on a mission to improve Mason’s interaction with outside entities, particularly those responsible for making laws at the state and national

level. Though our work mostly focused on the VA General Assembly, we really wanted to expand to include the US congress and engage CHEV AND BOV more. Since Covid-19 made things difficult, and the last few goals were not met, it is our hope that the next group picks up here and continue on this small progress that we have made.

We would like to thank GMU Faculty Senate President, Melissa Broeckelman-Post for all her support during our tenure.

Signed:

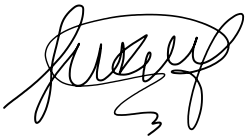
CEAR Committee Members



Isaac K. Gang, Co-Chair, CEC



Choawei Yang, Co-Chair, COS



Maria Nykyforovych, School of Business



Jatin Ambegaonkar, CEHD



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