

CORNERSTONE

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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WELL-BEING

Balancing Strengths and Perspectives



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Truly at the “Center” of the University’s Well-Being Energy

By Penny Gilchrist, MFA Creative Writing '08, Director of Communications, Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, and Communication Officer, University Life

Mason’s definition of well-being: “building a life of vitality, purpose, resilience, and engagement.”

When George Mason University President Ángel Cabrera included a well-being university goal in his 2014–24 Strategic Plan, he asked Nance Lucas, executive director of George Mason’s Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, to lead the charge in helping the university achieve that goal. Lucas, a New Century College professor and former associate dean whose areas of expertise include positive psychology, leadership, and ethics, readily accepted the challenge on behalf of the center, which is housed in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The resulting Well-Being University Initiative is a collaborative, university-wide effort to help Mason’s students, faculty, and staff thrive together.

Goal 7 in the university’s Strategic Plan: To become a model well-being university that allows all its members to thrive. It is a commitment to the idea that at Mason, “we thrive together” to create and foster a healthy, supportive, and productive community for our faculty, staff, and students.

“The well-being initiatives we have begun in earnest this academic year are to make sure our students, faculty, and staff are prepared to lead not only satisfying careers, but also satisfying lives,” Cabrera says. “We strive to be the model of a well-being university, a model that other uni-

versities can emulate. Our Center for the Advancement of Well-Being is at the forefront of these efforts.”

The center was created in 2009 through a gift from the de Laski Family Foundation. In addition to its work spearheading the Well-Being University Initiative, the center’s programming includes supporting academic courses and a minor in consciousness and transformation, research activities, well-being and leadership coaching, certification programs, a Mindful Living and Learning Community residence hall program for students, an annual Leading to Well-Being Conference sponsored by MasonLeads, and Spring into Well-Being, an awareness campaign highlighting the many programs at the university that promote well-being.

MASON STRENGTHS ACADEMY

In fall 2014, Mason became the first university to offer students, faculty, and staff Gallup’s StrengthsFinder assessment free of charge. Those who participated learned their top five strengths and received suggestions on ways to apply those strengths to their daily lives.

The Strengths Academy project, facilitated by the center, includes customized workshops to help those who have taken the assessment to harness their unique strengths for maximum personal and workplace well-being. Currently, more than 15 students, faculty, and staff have completed Gallup’s Strengths Certification program, equipping them to lead workshops and additional strengths coaching activities.

Lucas is especially excited about Strengths Academy’s potential to positively affect students. “Exposing students to what they do best and providing opportunities to apply their strengths in making choices about academic majors and careers gives them greater agency and self-confidence,” she says. “Too often, they receive messages about how to fix their weaknesses. Our strengths approach shines a light on what’s right about people and organizations, providing strategies for managing non-strengths.”