

Work Life Connections at George Mason University
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Abstract

To celebrate both the beginning and the end of employees' work lives at George Mason University, two programs have been established.

Recognizing that moving into a large, complicated, metropolitan area can be complex and overwhelming and can impact how the new faculty or staff member feels about the job, the Mason Relocation Package is a welcome to our community with materials and publications to introduce the University and surrounding communities to the newcomer.

In an effort to formally acknowledge the service of those retiring from the University in a consistent, stylized manner, a retiree recognition program, The Retiree Connection, was established. The components of this program also strive to keep retirees connected to the University family.

Introduction of the Organization

George Mason University is recognized internationally for its innovative, diverse, and

entrepreneurial spirit. Mason offers a wide array of academic programs, enterprising scholars and teachers, and a student body representing 135 countries and all 50 states. Located in Virginia only minutes from Washington, D.C., Mason provides unparalleled opportunities in research, internships, and work experiences through strong alliances with business, the community, and government. Enrollment now tops 28,000 with students studying in 144 degree programs at campuses in Arlington, Fairfax and Prince William counties.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

Between the fall of 2002 and the fall of 2003, faculty and staff increased by 350. The Human Resources Department saw a need to welcome new faculty and staff with information that

could be helpful in their new role at Mason, particularly for those faculty and staff who had relocated to the metropolitan DC area from other parts of the U.S. or from abroad. The Relocation Package addressed this need.

Further, with some 5,000 employees, retirement is part of the life cycle process. To formally thank retirees for their service and to maintain a connection between them and the University, the “Retiree Connection” was established. Before this program was established, there was no consistent, formal recognition of retirees.

Both of these programs enhance the Mason quality of work life and morale.

Design

Each Relocation Package contains information about the University and the surrounding metro area. Publications showcasing the University’s faculty, staff and student achievements as well

as the cultural events on campus are included. Maps, information on housing and transportation, publications from the local Chambers of Commerce, "*New Homes Guide*," "*Apartment Showcase*," and the publication entitled "*Newcomer's Handbook for Moving to Washington, D.C*" are part of the package. Also, there is a listing of numerous web sites dealing with relocation issues such as schools, child care, restaurants, buying a home, museums, etc. This package is sent to requesting departments for distribution to their new faculty and staff members relocating from outside the metro DC area. In just over four months, over 360 Relocation Packages have been sent.

The components of the Retiree Connection program, which strives to keep retirees connected to the University family, consist of contributions from campus departments such as the Center for the Arts, Athletics, Parking Services, and two University Fitness Centers. Their donation of complimentary tickets, parking decals, and passes are evidence of the tremendous support given to this program. Personalized congratulatory letters from the University President and the Staff Senate as well as publications related to retirement and the University's opportunities for learning in retirement are included. The retiree is encouraged to obtain a "Retiree ID" with no expiration date that will afford the same privileges and discounts the retiree enjoyed while an active employee. The person's retirement coding in the information system also allows the retiree access to the libraries' databases for further research. Names of all retirees are added to a master list for invitations to events and workshops. Since its inception in January 2004, 65 retirement packages have been sent and retirees have been invited to three campus events.

Implementation

The successful implementation of these two initiatives depends upon:

- research of process and content
- knowledge of the community
- support of involved departments
- availability of updated material
- communication of initiatives to campus community

- system configurations

Relocation Package

The Relocation Package's materials have to be consistently updated and expanded to include current information about all three University campuses as well as informational web sites to give an accurate and complete picture of the University and the communities it serves to assist in the relocation process. This initiative was widely advertised to the campus community on the departmental web site, the daily, electronic *Mason Gazette*, in "Instant HR," a periodic, online announcement vehicle sent to HR departmental liaisons on all three campuses, and in *Mason e-files* which is a weekly electronic newspaper for all faculty and staff.

In just over four months, over 360 relocation packages have been distributed.

The Retirement Connection

Initially, to allow retirees access to the library's databases for further research and to allow them to obtain their "Retiree ID," system problems had to be identified and discussed, modifications tested and solutions put into place. To make this retirement program as timely as possible to coincide with the person's retirement date, the person's final pay and leave payouts must be completed by Human Resources. The retiree can then obtain the Retiree ID which affords them the privileges they enjoyed while a current employee. The retiree is then added to the master list for future events and invitations.

The formal package is then mailed to the retiree. To date, 65 retiree packages have been mailed and invitations to three campus events have been sent. This program was widely advertised on the departmental web site, in the daily, electronic *Mason Gazette*, in "Instant

HR,” a periodic online announcement vehicle sent to HR departmental liaisons on all three campuses, and in *Mason e-files* which is a weekly electronic newspaper for all faculty and staff.

Benefits

The Relocation Package and the Retiree Connection have proven to be tremendously beneficial to and appreciated by the George Mason community.

The Relocation Package is a formalized welcome to a new employee of George Mason. It gives a snapshot of the University and its culture as well as ideas and hints in relocating to the Washington metro area. It provides a warm welcome to new faculty and staff to encourage

a better fit with the University and to promote retention.

The Retiree Connection is the first formal retiree recognition program at the University. Previously, this recognition was the responsibility of the employee's department. Now, with this program in place, a consistent, stylized and formal recognition package is part of the University culture and is a lovely tribute to the retiree's service to the University. It also keeps the retiree connected to the University with invitations to events and workshops of interest.

A sampling of the feedback about these two initiatives:

From a newly-retired faculty member:

“What a great idea! It (the retirement package) made me feel appreciated. Thank you for a terrific idea which makes for a more gracious withdrawal from the campus community. I was delighted to get my new ID card and to get the library privileges ... You should be congratulated for beginning this program.”

Another newly-retired faculty member states:

“I felt truly honored to receive this retirement package. It was so beautifully done and made me feel very appreciated.”

A staff member writes:

“Thank you so much for the relocation packages you sent me. They are truly awesome!”

A new faculty member in the Office of the Provost states:

“Thank you for sending the package of materials to me. They are a great source of information about the University and the area and will be a wonderful help to me in relocating and working at the University.”

Both of these centralized programs ensure that each employee is treated in a consistent manner when they begin and end their work life at George Mason University. They are innovative and creative additions to the culture of recognition which is so highly valued by the University.