April 3, 2020

Dear Advising Community,

We were not able to host the Academic Advisor of the Year (AAOY) Award ceremony as originally planned due to the cancellation of all campus events for the remainder of the spring term, unfortunately. Although we are very disappointed to not be able to celebrate in person, we are happy to continue to recognize Mason’s excellent advising digitally. The talent of our advising team has really been highlighted by your skilled adaptation to online advising. You are an active and engaged community, and it is impressive to see you advocating for our students and sharing information through digital media.

The award will now be named the V. Ann Lewis Academic Advisor of the Year Award to honor Ann’s dedication to and impact on the advising community over the years. Ann served Mason for 23 years in a variety of advising and administrative roles, and retired this winter. This award was very close to Ann’s heart, and she ensured it would live on after she retired from Mason. Erin McSherry (CHSS), announces the naming of the award:

“When submitting a nomination for this award, students take a moment to show their appreciation for an academic advisor who has supported them, taught them, and advocated for them. They are highlighting an individual who has encouraged connection and prioritized their success, making their time at Mason more valuable. It is only fitting, then, that this award be renamed in honor of Ann Lewis, for the impact she made not only on students but also on the advising community at Mason. Ann advocated for the student perspective and for advisors, and built relationships across campus to improve the experience for both. The V. Ann Lewis Academic Advisor of the Year Award will continue to recognize our colleagues who have built environments in which students can thrive and advising is their key to success.”

I am pleased to announce Malerie Gamblin of the School of Business has been named the V. Ann Lewis Academic Advisor of the Year for 2019-2020! This year, over 100 academic advisors across the entire Mason campus were nominated to receive this honor, with over 700 nominations in total. It was not an easy decision to make due to all of the amazing nominations, but the decision was unanimous amongst the committee. In review of Malerie’s many nominations, it is clear she is a true advocate for our students. Many of the nominations spoke to Malerie’s caring nature, and her willingness to go above and beyond. One of Malerie’s students wrote, “Gamblin is not only the most understanding advisor but really wants her students to succeed in life. Being a first-generation student and undocumented, she knew where I could receive my resources. She didn’t hesitate at all and was very kind. Without her I don’t know where I would be. She deserves the spotlight -like she makes her students feel.”

The Mason community congratulates and thanks Malerie for her dedication to Mason and our students! To show our appreciation, she will receive $500, a plaque, as well as other gifts donated from various campus partners: the bookstore, athletics, CPVA, Parking and Transportation, and Sodexo.
We also want to recognize the top 10 academic advisors. These dedicated advisors will receive a gift card, in addition to our admiration and appreciation. Please see their names below along with a quote from their nominations:

Robert Yi, CVPA - School of Art (Former AAOY winner)
“He’s always so helpful and understanding, and tries his best to connect with his students and help them fix mistakes and improve without judgement. I can tell he really cares, evidenced by how he emailed me over the summer to check up on how my summer class was going. He also makes students feel comfortable and safe. I’ve been to his office crying on one occasion and didn’t feel judged at all.”

Stormi Woltz, CEHD - formerly Kinesiology
“Stormi helped me with getting my academic career on track after going on academic suspension. She listened to what was going on with me personally that led to this and helped me to understand the best way to go about completing my classes and succeeding in school. Every time I’ve had an advising meeting with her, she was extremely welcoming and helpful.”

Kurt Lazaroff, CHSS - Bachelor of Individualized Study
“From day 1, when I had no idea what I was doing coming back to college, Kurt was there to guide me through. He is always ready to help answer all of my questions, point me in the right direction, and listen to everything going on in my life. He really cares about BIS students and is very passionate about the program. He is the best college advisor I have ever had.”

Claudia Borke, VSE - Bioengineering
“Ms Borke is a wonderful advisor, she is super knowledgeable about the bioengineering major. She is also an expert on what to do if a student’s schedule does not go as planned. She is very kind, and helpful to all students. She is always positive and supportive, even when students make mistakes sometimes. I am glad to have Ms. Borke as my advisor, and I believe that she should win this award. She is the only advisor for a very large department that is growing each semester, and she works with every student to ensure that they get their degree and the best learning experience.”

Lisa Nolder, VSE - Civil, Environmental and Infrastructure Engineering
“Ms. Nolder is extremely helpful with anything you need. She helped me with planning my schedule and she even helped me change some of my classes when they wouldn’t fit with my ideal schedule. She has opened my mind about opportunities on campus such as the career fair and multiple other things like joining the civil engineering club. Most importantly her positivity is very much appreciated.”

Michelle Seki, CEHD - Sport, Recreation and Tourism Management (Former AAOY winner)
“She is always helpful. She responds to emails in a timely manner. She is always positive and encouraging. She is willing to work around students' busy schedules and talk to them as long as possible during meetings. She stays poised during meetings and never shows frustration when
asked multiple questions. She sends out multiple emails throughout the week with up-coming events or job/intern opportunities. Overall, she is one of the best advisors I have had the pleasure of knowing.”

Marty Abruzzo, CHSS - School of Integrative Studies
“Marty is an outstanding academic advisor. He provides students with phenomenal feedback and recommendations on how to excel not only in their academic careers but also in their professional careers. He is very personable and welcomes all students with a smile. He is by far the best academic advisor I have consulted with at Mason. I recommend him to every student I encounter looking for assistance from an academic advisor.”

Thomas Winston, VSE - Cyber Security Engineering
“Professor Winston is a charismatic, knowledgeable professor who is always willing to talk and listen to students whether it be about academic affairs or personal projects and goals. He works extremely hard to maintain and improve the quality of his lectures and the Cyber Security Engineering program.”

Krystal Dains, BAS - Information Science and Technology
“She is so dedicated to the students she advises. She responds and really helps you with your questions with school and wants the best for you during your time at GMU. She also advocates for having a well rounded experience at GMU, and keeps you in the know with opportunities and events. She is so nice and I really feel like she cares about my success and making sure I don't overwhelm myself or any students.”

Patricia Granfield, COS - Mathematics
“She went out of her way to connect me with resources when I told her about my study abroad trip, even though it was not a math related trip. She is sweet and helpful and seems genuinely excited for students’ achievements and opportunities.”

Many thanks to the Lewis AAOY committee for their thoughtful consideration of the nominations: Sarah Squire (UGE, chair), Michelle Seki (CEHD, last year’s AAOY winner), Erika Marquina (CHSS, MAAN co-chair), Barbara Snyder (BUS, MAAN co-chair), and Jason King (MCN).

The committee considered the following criteria when reviewing the nominations to make their decision:
- Caring, helpful attitude toward students
- Provides accurate information regarding university academic requirements
- Availability to students, faculty, and staff
- Makes appropriate referrals
- Knowledge of George Mason University regulations, policies, and procedures
- Supports student development through advising
- Total number of nominations
Thank you all for everything you do for our students, and for your patience as we all continue to develop practice and policy for the months ahead.

Sincerely,
Bethany Usher
Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education