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Message from the Dean

Dean Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm

On campus, we're preparing for graduation ceremonies, with a limited number of students attending in person (with masks, and outdoors), and some attending virtually. It's also "award season" in academia, and I couldn't be prouder of our team in the College of Science.

Recently, Thomas Lovejoy became the first Mason College of Science faculty inducted into the National Academy of Sciences recognizing his numerous and significant contributions to conservation biology. A University Professor in the Department of Environmental Science and Policy and a United Nations Foundation Senior Fellow, Lovejoy has conducted environmental research in the Brazilian Amazon for more than fifty years, and is among the world's foremost experts on biodiversity, coining the

term in 1980. As a recent member on the Scientific Advisory Group, Lovejoy helped craft the United Nations Environmental Programs' "Making Peace with Nature" report that envisions a sustainable economy driven by renewable energy and nature-based solutions as a way to combat global warming.

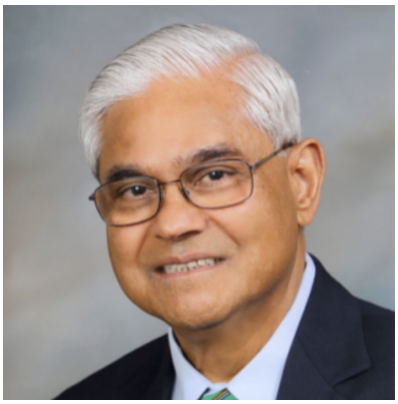
As if that wasn't exciting enough, then I learned three of the five presidential medal recipients at Mason this year will be College of Science faculty, honored for their impactful career of work. Congratulations to Jagadish Shukla, Padhu Seshaiyer, and Gerald Weatherspoon.

Weatherspoon, our chemistry and biochemistry department chair, and the college's Chief Diversity Officer – Faculty, will receive the United Bank Presidential Medal for Faculty Excellence in Diversity & Inclusion. This is a valuable and well-deserved recognition for his leadership and his contributions towards inclusive excellence within the College, at Mason, and much beyond.

Director of the Climate Dynamics program in the Department of Atmospheric, Oceanic and Earth Sciences and Managing Director of the Center for Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Studies (COLA), Shukla will receive the Beck Family Presidential Medal for Faculty Excellence in Research & Scholarship for his pioneering work in climate science, his efforts and his contributions to the science enterprise at Mason and around the world.

Seshaiyer, a mathematical sciences professor and the college's Associate Dean of Academic Innovations and Partnerships, will receive the Earle Williams Presidential Medal for Faculty Excellence in Social Impact for his tireless and extensive work in academic innovations, forging countless STEM partnerships across the college and Mason, at the state, national, and international levels.

Dr. Gerald Weatherspoon



Dr. Jagadish Shukla

Dr. Padhu Seshaiyer

And there's still more--a number of our faculty recently were honored with the OSCAR 2021 virtual Celebration of Student Scholarship awards. Check out these video acceptance speeches from Mason Scientists like Amy Fowler, Hamdi

Kavak, Jennifer Sklarew, who each were recognized for their efforts to mentor students, and to David Luther who was recognized by OSCAR for sustaining excellence.

Yet, my pride lies not just in such visible examples. There is also so much work going on behind the scenes by our staff and faculty. For example, there are hundreds who helped compose our Inclusive Excellence Plan, work hard each day to set up our labs and equipment, facilitate and administer COVID-19 vaccines, or even those who are working round the clock to pull off what will be my first in-person degree celebration and graduation as Dean of our College.

What makes these accomplishments so remarkable is, let's face it, this was no normal year. Our faculty and staff had to persevere through the COVID-19 pandemic, reimagining many a syllabus and shifting curriculum delivery, implementing changes to standard processes, all while making huge adjustments to day-to-day life. During this graduation, when we celebrate the Class of 2021 next week, those individuals actually symbolize our true reward -- we were able to keep our students' dreams on track. In a world where not all things were certain, we were able to keep our systems and processes flexible. These heroic actions across the board make me proud of our team and I can't wait to celebrate next week and beyond.

And thank YOU for your continued support and interest in our College of Science. I hope to celebrate with you personally in the coming year!

Thomas Lovejoy Elected to National Academy of Sciences

George Mason University's Thomas Lovejoy a University Professor of Environmental Science and Policy within the College of Science, was elected to the National

Academy of Sciences this week, joining an elite group of 120 scholars recognized this year for their contributions to science and research.

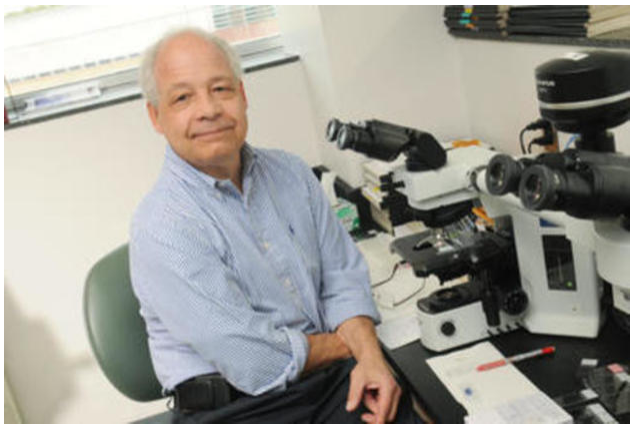
Read the Abstract

Mason Scientists Receive $1.2M Grant

Congratulations to Atmospheric, Oceanic and Earth Sciences Professor Julia Nord, Director of Educational and Career Pathways Kerin Hilker-Balkissoon, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Mathematical Sciences Professor Padhu Seshaiyer, and Biology Assistant Professor Tina Bell on receiving a $1.2M Noyce Grant from the National Science Foundation.

Read the Abstract

Liotta Conducting Virologic Analysis of SARS-CoV-2



Lance Liotta, Co-Director, Center for Applied Proteomics and Molecular Medicine (CAPMM), is conducting virologic analyses of SARS-CoV-2 on non-infectious/pre-inactivated clinical samples using FDA-cleared (Emergency Use Authorized) commercial PCR platforms.

Full Story

Mason astronomer involved in measuring fastest-spinning brown dwarf

Department of Physics and Astronomy Professor Peter Plavchan was a part of a recently published study called "Weather on Other Worlds. V. The Three Most Rapidly Rotating Ultra-Cool Dwarfs." Published by the Astronomical Journal and picked up by SciTechDaily, scientists were able to locate the most rapidly rotating brown dwarfs known.

Full Story

Mason Science in the News

Researchers test Mason wastewater to catch potential COVID-19 outbreaks early

Each week, samples of wastewater are taken from sewers across George Mason's campus. This wastewater is tested for COVID-19 RNA. Testing wastewater is an efficient way to catch COVID-19 outbreaks early. This research is led by Chemistry and Biochemistry Associate Professor Benoit Van Aken, Environmental Science and Policy Assistant Professor Jennifer Salerno, and Biology Professor and Associate Dean of Research Pat Gillevet. It is funded by GMU COVID surveillance program (Diann Stedman, Mason Biosafety Manager) Visit the Potomac Environmental Research and Education Center for more details.

Watch the Video

Doing our part to keep the Mason community safe

Mason President Gregory Washington (center) and Susan G. Riel (right), president and CEO of Eagle Bancorp and EagleBank, tour the COVID-19 vaccination clinic held at EagleBank Arena. Wednesday was the second day of vaccinations for Mason faculty and staff. Mason is also partnering with neighboring health departments to vaccinate eligible community members.

Learn More

Giving Day demonstrates that 'Together, We Are Mason'

More than 2,300 donors—including more than 400 faculty and staff members—contributed a record total surpassing $544,000 on Mason's fifth annual Giving Day, held virtually on April 8.

Learn More

Mason research influences courtroom setup during COVID-19

The N*ew York Times* recently reported how courtrooms are making changes to their spaces based, in part, by Physics and Astronomy Professor Rainald Löhner's study of courtroom air currents. Changes include Plexiglas booths for witnesses, a HEPA filter, and handsets that allow defendants and lawyers to speak confidentially while maintaining a safe distance.

Full Story

Student Highlight

Environmental Science and Policy student's academic excellence, conservation research led to Goldwater Scholarship

Jackie Luu, a junior Environmental Science and Policy major from Glen Allen, Virginia, is Mason's first-ever Barry M. Goldwater Scholar from the Department of Environmental Science and Policy within the College of Science.

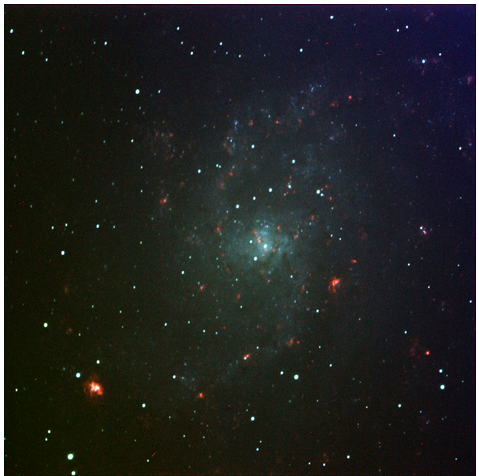
Learn More

Events & Announcements

Mathematics and Artificial Intelligence Friday Series

The Center for Mathematics and Artificial Intelligence (CMAI) virtually meets on Fridays to discuss a variety of academic issues. The Center focuses on artificial intelligence, big data, control, optimization, anomalous (nonlocal) diffusion, nonlinear partial differential equations, with a broad range of applications.

Future Topics



Evenings Under the Stars

The GMU Observatory is proud to host free public tours on alternating Monday evenings during the academic year, each beginning shortly after sunset.

Unless otherwise noted, expect the scientific talks to last 30 minutes and their content to be

appropriate for ages 5+. An approximate hour-long guided telescope tour* of that night's sky will follow the scientific talk. To learn more about how to join Observatory Events please visit the GMU Observatory website.

To stay up-to-date on our events, you can follow our **calendar here**.

E-mail us for more information.

If you have a question you'd like us to answer in a future newsletter, please write to us!

Follow us on social media:

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