

**Media Contact:** Dave Andrews  
(703) 993-4722  
Dandrew5@gmu.edu

## **Former Mascot Teaches Children to ‘Go Green’**

### *Interactive Curriculum Focuses on Renewable Energy Sources*

FAIRFAX, Va., October 30, 2009 ó Administrators at George Mason University believe it's never too early to teach people to become more environmentally friendly. But teaching these principles to a younger demographic requires a unique approach.

George Mason University, in partnership with the National Energy Education Development (NEED) Project, created an interactive environmental education program for elementary school children grades K-3. “Go Green with Gunston” combines education and entertainment into a distinctive curriculum specifically aimed at teaching young children the benefits of sustainability and focusing on renewable energy sources.

Gunston—formerly Mason's furry green athletics mascot—was given a makeover and a new job title as the university's community ambassador.

“We wanted to develop a way to connect with this particular age group to get them excited about science and sustainability. Gunston was the ideal character for the job,” says Traci Claar, director of community relations at Mason. “Educators want to see an increase in science majors. Our hope is that teaching these kids fun lessons about the Earth and energy conservation will spark their interests, and may lead them to pursue an education in science and perhaps even a career in a related field.”

Gunston travels with his co-worker and friend, “Mason,” an actor/educator, to visit students who participate in the School Age Child Care (SACC) program in Fairfax County. The two engage the children in songs, stories and games about “going green” and using the Earth's resources wisely.

Before Gunston visits each SACC center, the children participate in two pre-visit lessons following a curriculum developed through the Mason/NEED partnership. The first is designed to

give students a basic understanding of how energy is used and how it can be saved. The second introduces students to renewable and non-renewable energy sources. The children can then visit the Go Green with Gunston Web site ([gogreenwithgunston.gmu.edu](http://gogreenwithgunston.gmu.edu)) which reinforces the lessons taught in the program.

“This is a great initiative, and I am looking forward to the wonderful and creative things that our teachers and Gunston will be coming up with,” says Terry Johnson, childcare specialist and regional supervisor for SACC. “This is a topic that our educators will continue to teach the students long after Gunston and Mason leave the classroom.”

The Mason-funded program began in October and now has three successful visits already in the books. Gunston and Mason will be out visiting a different SACC center in Fairfax County every Monday from now until late June.

### **About George Mason University**

Named the #1 national university to watch in the 2009 rankings of U.S. News & World Report, George Mason University is an innovative, entrepreneurial institution with global distinction in a range of academic fields. Located in Northern Virginia near Washington, D.C., Mason provides students access to diverse cultural experiences and the most sought-after internships and employers in the country. Mason offers strong undergraduate and graduate degree programs in engineering and information technology, organizational psychology, health care and visual and performing arts. With Mason professors conducting groundbreaking research in areas such as climate change, public policy and the biosciences, George Mason University is a leading example of the modern, public university.

###