Mason Engineering
Message Guide
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Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The aim of this message guide is simple: to strengthen the image of our school and to bring a new level of impact to our communications. And the key to doing that is consistency: speaking with one voice and using our every opportunity for outreach to send the same set of key messages.

This is particularly true when we are making a first impression and introducing Mason Engineering as a whole—the focus of this guide. On the other hand, when you are communicating with a particular audience and know their specific concerns (whether it’s enrolling in a master’s program or funding a research project), you should feel free to adapt the message to the context.

As we work to build awareness of the excellence of engineering at Mason, we will face challenges, from the fact that the word “Volgenau” can be tough to pronounce to the fact that reputation and recognition inevitably take time to build. As with any communication project, we must also recognize the reality that we live in a world over-crowded with messages of every kind. We must compete to command attention.

However, the rewards of committing ourselves to communicating consistently are well worth the effort. Expanding the universe of people who know and think highly of our school will fuel enrollment and inspire greater philanthropic investment. Doing so will also strengthen our self-image—the bonds of pride and shared identity that unite and energize this community. In short, telling our story more effectively can be a powerful step to fulfilling our mission more effectively as well.
Positioning Our School

The message map presents the point at the heart of our story, displaying and connecting some of the most important ideas we want to express.

The Volgenau School of Engineering at George Mason University

The Future of Engineering Is Here.

innovations in technology
- big data
- cybersecurity
- sustainability
- global connections
- health care technologies
- robotics and autonomous systems
- signals and communications
- and more...

innovations in teaching and learning
- a school with distinctive roots, and a fresh, forward-looking perspective

at this moment—the future is now.
within the global technology corridor of Northern Virginia
at Mason, in this exceptional school of engineering
5 Key Messages
OUR MOST IMPORTANT POINTS OF STRENGTH AND DIFFERENCE

There are many answers to the question “What sets Mason engineering apart?” The following set of closely related messages, however, stand out as those with the clearest appeal to the diverse audiences we need to reach.

1) We are a force for innovation.
- Our school is young and forward-looking, always ready to invent and evolve.
- With our earliest roots in the digital world, we apply exceptional strength in computing and modeling to challenges in every field of engineering.
- We offer many first-of-their-kind programs created to meet pressing industry needs.
- We are always seeking imaginative new ways to educate future engineers more effectively

2) We are a place of powerful connections.
- Strong relationships between our students and faculty make for a personal, interactive learning experience.
- We have a wonderful habit of breaking down the barriers between disciplines to frame problems in new ways and collaborate on solutions.

3) We offer remarkable advantages by virtue of our location.
- Our students and faculty team up with industry and government on real-world projects.
- Corporate leaders know and respect Volgenau and join with us as industry partners.
- Students have access to an unsurpassed range of internships and research opportunities.
- Faculty—including adjuncts currently working in industry—bring real-world experience into the classroom.
- The proximity of Washington, D.C. means unique opportunities related to government agencies and national security.
- We are the only school of engineering headquartered in the heart of Northern Virginia’s technology corridor.
- Campus locations in Fairfax, Arlington, and Manassas put a Mason engineering degree within reach for people across the region.
- One of the world’s great cities, Washington offers a wealth of cultural and entertainment options.
4) **We achieve exceptional outcomes.**

- Employers are hungry to hire Mason Engineering graduates.
- Starting salaries for our graduates consistently rank above those of our peer schools’ graduates.
- Our alumni go on to impressive careers—from climbing the corporate ranks to launching new enterprises.

5) **We are moving forward with impressive momentum.**

- Our enrollment growth sets us apart as a leader among other schools at Mason and engineering schools across the country.
- We regularly introduce new programs anticipating emerging industry needs.
- Our externally funded research keeps growing.
- We are expanding our physical infrastructure to support our curricular growth.
- Now, we are building a reputation to match the strength and stature of the school.
5 Supporting Messages

PRESENTING ADDED ADVANTAGES

1) We are remarkably diverse.
At George Mason and within the engineering school, students encounter the whole world on one campus—people representing virtually every background imaginable. They prepare for life and work in a 21st century multicultural world in an educational setting just as vibrant and diverse.

2) We are proudly accessible.
Our goal is to provide the opportunity of an outstanding engineering education to every student willing to put in the work it takes. Furthermore, whenever possible, we admit students directly into their programs of choice rather than raising barriers to entry. We measure our success by the number of future engineers we educate, not the number we turn away or weed out.

3) We focus on student success.
Through robust support programs, one-on-one guidance from individual faculty members, and a school-wide commitment to the mission of teaching, we are determined to help our students achieve success. If they commit to meeting the challenges of a rigorous engineering program, we will work with them to see them through to graduation.

4) We bring together outstanding faculty.
Mason engineering faculty measure up impressively by all the standard criteria—as well educated experts in their fields and productive researchers. They also stand apart in important ways: as educators dedicated to their students and to teaching, and as experienced professionals, many of whom bring directly relevant real-world experience into the classroom.

5) We conduct research of consequence.
As part of an R-1 research university, Mason Engineering is committed not only to sharing state-of-the-art knowledge but also to creating it. In recent years, the school has conducted more than $21 million in externally funded work. From biomedical explorations of innovative prosthetics to strategies for optimizing traffic flow through airports, these projects have a direct impact in solving real-world problems.
Useful Tools

ELEMENTS OF THE MESSAGING PROGRAM

Our Tagline

The Future of Engineering Is Here.

The tagline is our marketing motto, announcing Mason Engineering to the world. To build recognition, we should use it prominently and consistently, especially while it’s still new. The tagline can run as a headline on an ad, poster, or web page or, when the situation calls for a different sort of headline, the tagline can be part of the “sign-off” supporting the name of the school:

Our Positioning Line

A Force for Innovation in the Heart of Northern Virginia’s Global Technology Corridor

The positioning line offers us the chance to tell the world something additional about our school—something informative and impressive to complement the tagline. In some cases, there may not be room to fit the positioning line, and that’s fine. Where space permits, though—at the bottom of the page, on the back cover of a brochure, or in the last line of a radio spot—it’s an effective addition.

Volgenau School of Engineering

The Future of Engineering Is Here.
Proof Points

The messages outlined in this guide provide the structure of our communications program—the skeleton—but the muscle is the evidence we cite to support these messages. This evidence can come in the form of facts, statistics, or examples (of projects, programs or achievements). For instance, here are a few of the factual points we can make to back up key messages:

• Mason Engineering developed the first cybersecurity engineering program in the nation. (evidence of innovation)

• On average, our graduates earn the highest starting salaries in Virginia. (evidence of outcomes)

• More than 170 technology companies have headquarters or locations in Northern Virginia. (evidence of the advantages of our location)

• Our school’s enrollment has grown more than 40 percent over the past four years. (evidence of momentum)

Because facts and stats change, it’s not possible to pin down a definitive set on the pages of this guide. Supplying up-to-date proof points is part of the ongoing work of bringing the brand to life. As we do so, it can be useful to draw on the school’s website, on communications such as the school’s annual report, and also on personal experience. In your communications, facts and anecdotes from your own experience can be the most compelling evidence of all.
Engineering at Mason
ON THE NAME OF THE SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY

The official name of our school is “the Volgenau School of Engineering,” and that name should be included in our official communications. However, because the name of our university enjoys broader recognition than the name of our school, it can be advantageous for us to use another form of reference—our official nickname:

Mason Engineering

This phrase work well in headlines, for example:

Providing a Young Violinist with the Power to Play—That’s Mason Engineering.

It can also weave well into running copy:

At Mason Engineering, we believe the best way to learn about technology is to apply technology….

In either case, we also need to include the official name “Volgenau School of Engineering.” In any official communication including the university logo, this is accomplished by displaying the school name along with the logo:

Or, in an article or essay where the logo does not appear, the full name of the school can be used in one reference (typically the first or last in the document), with all other mentions taking the form “Mason Engineering,” for instance:

Students at George Mason’s Volgenau School of Engineering have scored another impressive win in regional systems engineering competitions. For the third time in as many years, Mason Engineering placed….

In contexts like this, it is also fine to use “the school” or “engineering at Mason” on repeated references. These forms are preferable to using the word “Volgenau” alone to stand in for the name of the school.
The following guidelines provide a starting point for telling the Mason Engineering story well.

Be Friendly and Direct—One of the best ways we can communicate what an open and welcoming community ours is and what a positive energy it has is through the language we use. This language should speak directly to our audience as “you” (and refer to the school as “we”). It should be inviting and encouraging. And it should aim to make complex subject matter as easy to understand as possible. How? Try to make the tone of your written and official communications match the warm, straightforward way you speak in face-to-face conversations. Try to use combinations of short sentences instead of long, complex ones. And try to draw on metaphors to explain complex technical ideas.

Tell Stories—Whether the topic is inspiring faculty, hands-on learning experiences, or career success, our messages become meaningful when we illustrate them with real examples. Each person who knows Mason Engineering well will have his or her own stories to tell about what makes the school special, and that’s perfect. A category of stories that is especially powerful in Volgenau’s case are those focusing on senior projects. These offer some of the best ways to give people a flavor for what the field of engineering and Mason are all about, and to show just how impressive our students can be.

Connect People and Technology—The best stories about Mason Engineering involve interesting engineering solutions and interesting people—the people behind the projects or those who benefit. Adding a personal dimension gets at the heart of Volgenau’s educational mission, offers points of connection for readers and listeners, and can make abstract concepts more relatable. This can be a good approach for telling stories visually as well; a photo framed to capture a cool device and the bright young people who built it nearly always outshines a shot of either alone.

Be Brief—In nearly every form of communication aimed at a broad audience, brevity adds impact. Yes, we need to deliver enough detail to make the message meaningful and support our claims, but the question we should always be asking is not “what else could we add here?” but “what can we possibly subtract?” Focus on the point you want your audience to take away and remove all that is non-essential to that point. When you are presenting a story (of a research project for instance), a helpful hint is not to start at the beginning. (Doing so can lock you in to telling the whole story.) Instead, begin with a clever hook to get people’s attention or a bold statement of the point you want to make, add just enough explanation to avoid confusion, then wrap up.
Typically, press releases wrap up with a standard one-paragraph description of the school. This can also be of use for submissions to educational directories. The following paragraph provides key facts in a short form. It can be tweaked or expanded depending on the context.

The Volgenau School of Engineering at George Mason University is a fast-growing force for innovation in technology and education. The school enrolls 6,700 students in 34 undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral degree programs, including several first-in-the-nation offerings. As part of a nationally ranked research university, it conducts more than $21 million in sponsored research annually. Located in the heart of Northern Virginia’s technology corridor, Mason Engineering stands out for its focus on emerging areas including big data, cybersecurity, healthcare technology, robotics, signals and communication, and sustainable infrastructure.