

In September, George Mason University (Mason) announced its [inaugural VP and Chief AI Officer, Professor Amarda Shehu](#), a first for Virginia and among the very few in-the-nation in institutes of higher education. Through this appointment, Mason asserted both its ambition and leadership in the AI space.



Leading in Foundational AI Research: Mason's research on AI is recognized nationally. A key benchmark, [CSrankings](#), informs on this: For the past several years, Mason has been the top Virginia university in CSRankings. Unforgiving benchmarks consistently place Mason in the upper 30s in the nation, besting both UVA and VTech. This is due to Mason faculty leading the development of foundational AI technologies, evidenced by publications in the top venues in AI, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, Natural Language Processing, Big Data, Computer Vision, Autonomy and Robotics, Bioinformatics and Biotechnology, Human-Computer Interaction, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Digital Twinning, Optimization, Supply Chain, Neuromorphic Computing, etc.

33 ▶ George Mason University  	42 ▶ University of Illinois at Chicago  
34 ▶ Texas A&M University  	45 ▶ Arizona State University  
34 ▶ Univ. of California - Santa Cruz  	45 ▶ University at Buffalo  
36 ▶ North Carolina State University  	45 ▶ University of North Carolina  
37 ▶ Ohio State University  	48 ▶ Oregon State University  
37 ▶ University of Virginia  	48 ▶ Rice University  
37 ▶ Yale University  	48 ▶ University of Colorado Boulder  
40 ▶ Boston University  	48 ▶ University of Minnesota  
41 ▶ Univ. of California - Davis  	52 ▶ Indiana University  
42 ▶ Brown University  	52 ▶ Johns Hopkins University  
42 ▶ Harvard University  	52 ▶ Virginia Tech  



Leading in Use-inspired and Translational AI Research: Only at Mason does AI research bridge all the colleges and advances all scientific disciplines. [Mason's AI Innovation Symposium in February 2023](#) brought together more than 150 faculty across its ten colleges and schools to chart and advance shared problem spaces and AI solutions. AI For Health, AI For Society, AI for Education, AI for Climate and Sustainability, Sustainability for AI, Responsible AI, and more were concrete outcomes of this symposium that positioned Mason as a leader in these signature areas of AI Research, Education, and Workforce Development.

Leading in Responsible AI: Mason has been an early leader in Responsible AI (and its facets of safety, security, and trustworthiness). Key indicators of this leadership include: (i) [Mason is the only university in Virginia to be a member of the NIST AI Safety Consortium](#).

As an academic partner in the Consortium, represented by our VP and Chief AI Officer, Professor Shehu, Mason is advancing the formulation of Generative AI risk profiles, AI standards, as well as mechanisms and protocols for evaluating GenAI capabilities and risks. (ii) Mason is the only university in Virginia (and few in the nation) to open up AI education to all undergraduates on campus through its [Ethics and AI undergraduate minor](#). The minor is an exemplar of Mason's collaborative approach to AI and the result of a university-wide working group led by Professor Shehu. (iii) Led by Professor Missy Cummings, Mason launched its



[Responsible AI Graduate Certificate](#), a first in the nation. The Certificate is additionally operationalized in various forms for government executives, leaders, and other professionals in our region that are key to advancing Responsible AI in our local, state, and federal government agencies, as well as our public sector technology providers and other industries.

Leading in AI Education: The Ethics and AI undergraduate program, the Responsible AI Graduate Certificate program are but two examples of a rich educational curriculum around AI across the colleges that includes concentrations in Machine Learning, concentrations in Applied AI, and more. Mason is the only university in Virginia charting forward an ambitious educational agenda of BS and MS degrees in AI to directly support the Governor's calls for an AI-ready skilled workforce in the Executive Order 30 and Executive Directive 5. As an exemplar of Mason's leadership with an ambitious agenda, in December, Mason's CAIO submitted an MS in AI degree proposal to SCHEV that is currently under review.

Hitting it out of the Park in [Tech Talent Investment Program \(TTIP\)](#): Mason's growing impact in the Commonwealth's economic development has been recognized. In 2019, Mason and VTech were the only two universities in Virginia to be allocated funding from the Commonwealth to support the TTIP. Mason is currently the only university in the Commonwealth to achieve all the ambitious tech graduation targets. This success is due to Mason's leadership, creativity, and expertise in educational programs and curricula, as well as key strategic investments in tech talent innovation pipelines. Unlike other universities in Virginia, Mason has approached tech talent innovation by bringing the colleges together through thematic faculty hires that serve as the connective tissue between AI and scientific disciplines. Joint hires between the School of Computing and the College for Humanities and Social Sciences, between the School of Computing and the Schar School of Policy and Government, are just two examples of thematic cross-college faculty hires that advance Mason's leadership at the intersection of AI, ethics, society, and policy.



Virginia has committed \$235 million in TTIP funding to Mason to increase the number of BS and MS graduates in the key fields of computer science, applied computer science, computer engineering, and software engineering.

Virginia's Tech Talent Investment Program (TTIP) is a state-wide program to invest in expanding state computer science, computer engineering, and software engineering degrees over a 20-year period. The Commonwealth of Virginia, donors, and corporate partners are coming together to invest over \$2 billion in Virginia's tech talent pipeline, from childhood education through to degrees and internships.



Fuse at Mason Square: An exemplar of TTIP-supporting investments is the [Fuse](#) building in Mason Square which is poised to transform the innovation landscape in Northern Virginia by bringing together industry, government, and academic research, providing to students a unique opportunity to participate in an immersive atmosphere of ideation and innovation. Fuse is where great ideas collide and spark shared problems and solutions. With several research and education laboratories in Robotics, Data Visualization, Digital Arts, AR/VR, and more, Fuse directly supports Mason's lead in AI. Standing at 345,000 + square feet, Fuse is designed for innovation programming, partnerships, and community engagement.



Leading in AI Education and Development for K-12s and Community Colleges: Mason has been an active participant in the [Governor's Executive Order 30 SCHEV AI Taskforce](#). Our CAIO led the engagement on the Mason side. As part of the taskforce, Mason collaborated with SCHEV on outlining risk profiles and standards for AI in Education. The culminating outcome of this taskforce was a recognition of Mason to assist SCHEV and lead in implementation of AI Education Across Virginia, kicking off with a Mason-led and organized Summit on AI in Education on May 20-21, 2025. Mason's

leadership in this space is supported by a long-standing partnership with Virginia Community Colleges and K-12s, as evidenced by two Data Labs awarded to Mason in 2024, such as the [GMU-Shenandoah Valley Rural Regional College Partnership Laboratory School](#).

A Rich AI Ecosystem across Transdisciplinary Institutes and Centers: AI leadership at Mason is supported by many transdisciplinary institutes and centers. The [Institute for Digital Innovation](#), the [Center for Advancing Human-Machine Partnerships](#), the [Mason Autonomy Research Center](#), and the [Center for Resilient and Sustainable Communities](#) are just some exemplars of infrastructure that brings faculty, students, and partners together to lead in AI and AI-adjacent research and education.



Leading in AI Partnerships and Community Engagement: Mason deeply supports many partners in Virginia and the nation on AI, AI-enabled IT modernization, and autonomy. Examples include the [Center for Excellence in Government Cybersecurity Risk Management and Resilience](#), the Nation’s first [Center for Small Business AI Innovation](#), the [U.S. Air Force and George Mason University Partnership](#), the [US Department of the Army for Chief Digital and AI Office \(CDAIO\)](#) and [George Mason University Partnership](#), and international partnerships, such as the [Mason-India Partnership on AI for Agriculture](#). Mason also leads the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative (CCI) Northern Virginia node, whose activities, with leadership from Mason, now include advancing research at the intersection of AI and cybersecurity.

Leading in AI-Skilled Workforce Readiness: As the largest public university in Virginia, with more than 80% of its graduates remaining in the Commonwealth, and its status as a Minority Serving Institution, and its leadership in innovation and social mobility, Mason is uniquely positioned to both provide broad and equitable access to AI education and workforce development, as well as lead among universities in Virginia in fueling AI innovation and economic development for Virginia. As a leader in AI, Mason is central to the Commonwealth’s ability to “meet the challenges and opportunities of this transformative technology and remain competitive and innovative in the years to come.” Gov. ED #5

