Thank you to all alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the George Washington University who have named GW a beneficiary of an estate gift.

If you have already named GW as a beneficiary of a planned gift or you are considering this soon, you may be eligible for an immediate cash match to direct to a GW area of interest of your choice (up to $10,000). Please email pgiving1@gwu.edu or call 877-498-7590 to learn if your gift qualifies for a match.

* Visit go.gwu.edu/give1106GWLA1 to learn more.

Focused on Student Success
The Ask Us Desk, located at the entrance to Gelman Library, serves as one of the only places on campus where students can ask any question. Typically staffed by student navigators, it is incredibly busy during the first week of classes — helping new students find their classrooms, figure out how to print, or locate course materials — so the professional staff spend time there helping out.

This year, some of the thousands of students coming through Gelman were surprised to see a familiar face at the Ask Us Desk — Thomas J. LeBlanc, president of the George Washington University. Improving the student experience is one of President LeBlanc’s strategic priorities, and he couldn’t pass up the opportunity to meet and assist students in their first days of class.

photo: William Atkins/the George Washington University
Nothing better illustrates the importance of GWLAI to student success than the experiences of graduate student Jason Vergne, B.A. ’19 (starting on page 8). Seeing the wide range of GWLAI services he relied on to complete his bachelor’s and master’s degrees was astonishing, even to me. It is a powerful example of the impact GWLAI has on student life.

Step into a GWLAI building and you’ll encounter a dynamic community of students and faculty — a culturally and intellectually diverse group engaging in collaborative academic exploration and learning. Our space serves as a hub for the university community, and our services are the scaffolding they need to support intellectual growth.

At GWLAI, we provide students with the tools they need for academic success, both inside and outside of the classroom. The philanthropic investment of our generous donors makes this work possible. Your philanthropy is our bedrock, and your support helps GW students reach their academic goals.

For that, I offer my heartfelt thanks on behalf of the entire GW community.

Geneva Henry
Dean of Libraries and Academic Innovation

**Welcome FROM THE DEAN OF LIBRARIES AND ACADEMIC INNOVATION**

When President LeBlanc set out GW’s strategic initiatives last year, I was so pleased to find enhancing the student experience at the top of the list. At GW Libraries and Academic Innovation (GWLAI), we’re the heart of the academic student experience. Everything we do — from ensuring a modern learning environment with the right technology to providing faculty with tools to become more effective instructors to connecting students with research opportunities — provides vital support at every point in the academic life cycle.

**GWLAI is committed to providing access for every student.**

In this issue, we are highlighting how GWLAI improves and expands the student experience at GW. Whereas the schools are focused on providing specific tools for their own communities, GWLAI is committed to providing access for every student. When a student wants to learn the Python programming language (pages 4 and 5), but doesn’t have room for a full class, they can come to GWLAI for free three, two or one-day hands-on workshops. If a student is interested in physics, but can’t afford the $483 in course materials, they can borrow the books through the Top Textbooks program (page 7). And when an undergraduate wants to progress to graduate study, Academic Commons is there with Let’s GRE Together, a GRE study cohort (page 3).

Bringing Students and Alumni Together to Prepare for Success

Ethan Terrill, M.A. ’18, has taken the Graduate Records Exam (GRE) before, but he didn’t receive the score he’d hoped for. When he heard about the Let’s GRE Together cohort forming in Academic Commons over the summer, he saw it as a second chance for success.

Let’s GRE Together is a self-directed group of GW students and alumni all studying for the GRE, an exam required for entrance to thousands of graduate and business schools. The program was a response to strong feedback from students that they needed affordable resources and assistance to prepare for this next stage in their academic life.

“I appreciate the opportunity to practice problems in a collaborative setting,” Ethan said. “Not only does it provide an extra incentive to keep up with my GRE study routine, but it also provides an avenue to ask further questions, seek additional assistance, and sympathize with fellow test-takers.”

Academic Commons staff members devised a suggested study plan and led specific practice sessions. Sets of practice flashcards, as well as GRE preparation books, are available at the Check Out Desk for students to study with between sessions. Proctored practice exams help participants familiarize themselves with the test and customize their personal study plans.

Some students credit the accountability factor for the program’s success. Carlos A. Miranda, B.A. ’13, says, “the courses provide more structure to my studies and the accountability of other students makes [me] more disciplined.”

Fifty-nine people took part in the inaugural Let’s GRE Together cohort, focused on taking the test in September. Due to overwhelming demand, another cohort was formed to prepare for the November GRE.
Learning to Speak Python

A n undergraduate studying carbon emissions in European cities. A graduate student working with federal data. Faculty members seeking to equip their students with the best methods for financial analysis or epidemiology. A late-career researcher re-tooling his approach to a real-world problem. These are just some of the people GW Libraries and Academic Innovation (GWLAI) has helped get a leg up with one of today’s most versatile tools for computation, data analysis and software development: Python. A programming language, Python has become the lingua franca for working with data across the academy, from genomics to economics, from fluid mechanics to media studies. Researchers turn to it because it is free, relatively easy to learn, and supported by a robust and devoted community. Students flock to Python because it provides a strong foundation for skills like data visualization and machine learning, which are in high demand in today’s job market.

On a Friday afternoon in September, more than 50 people sat at tables in Gelman Library, working together on a basic coding exercise. They were part of Python Camp, a three-day workshop offered by GWLAI and developed in partnership with Professors Lorena Barba and Ryan Watkins. Dr. Barba’s curriculum, devised for first-year engineering students, introduces Python through an immersive, hands-on approach. Students write and run code live in a web browser (using a platform called JupyterHub), following along as instructors step through examples and exercises. There’s even homework, graded by a script written in Python. The goal of the curriculum is simple yet powerful: to prepare students for thinking computationally. Adapting Dr. Barba’s curriculum for a wider audience, Python Camp addresses a real need on campus. Now in its third iteration, Python Camp is part of a growing list of popular workshops on Python and other languages offered by GWLAI. For the latest Software Carpentry offering, which follows a similar curriculum but is specifically geared toward the needs of researchers, registration had to be halted after just 48 hours when 55 people had already signed up. GWLAI offers multiple workshops in varying lengths each semester, and yet demand keeps growing.

In addition, students and faculty make heavy use of one-on-one consultations with librarians and graduate-student consultants. Just as researchers are re-tooling their methods in order to work computationally, GWLAI has re-tooled its approach to research services, recognizing the critical role that languages like Python play in the research process. Working alongside GW’s faculty and students to solve problems — helping them, as one of our Python Camp instructors put it, “to get unstuck” — we’re truly promoting academic innovation. We’re also empowering our community with a literacy that can open doors: to new careers, to new ways of working, to new intellectual and creative pursuits. As one Python Camper wrote about their reasons for attendance, “I am excited to finally become a maker in the digital world.”

“I am excited to finally become a maker in the digital world.”
American students aren’t afraid to ask questions,” Bella Wu, a visiting librarian from China's Northeast Normal University (NENU), replies to a question about the differences between students in the U.S. and China. “Chinese students work with one another to find answers. Our education systems have a lot to learn from one another.”

Since I couldn’t send the entire staff to Beijing, I wanted the chance to share what I was learning at NENU with everyone at GW. Since I couldn’t send the entire staff to China, I invited Bella to come to D.C.”

As a truly global university, GW has long recognized the importance of learning from other cultures and of bringing multiple viewpoints together to discuss and solve problems. GW Libraries and Academic Innovation (GWLA) are in conversation with institutions all over the world, but the most robust is our partnership with NENU, located in Jilin Province of the People’s Republic of China. Although named a “normal” (teaching) university, NENU is a comprehensive public institution with a student body size equivalent to GW.

Chinese and U.S. academic research libraries share many challenges. Both are working to support students as creators, users, and informed consumers of information in all its forms. Chinese libraries have been very successful in using technology to promote information literacy and improve efficiency. American libraries are leaders in promoting and communicating services and efficiencies. American libraries are leaders in promoting and communicating services and efficiencies.

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“The Top Textbooks program allows students to take classes they otherwise couldn’t,” another student wrote in an anonymous survey. “I hope more librarians from both institutions will take advantage of this excellent program,” says Yan He, GW China Documentation Center librarian and an architect of the NENU partnership. “We look forward to sending a GW librarian to China soon to continue this important exchange of knowledge and ideas to improve library services for all of our students."

“I’m very grateful for these textbooks because I cannot afford them and their availability is crucial to my success.”

"I r...
The library computers were a lifesaver!” says Jason Vergne, B.A. ’19. After all of the hard work it took to get into GW, there was still one big thing standing between Jason and his dream of a bachelor’s degree — his laptop. When he got to campus, he found that his existing laptop couldn’t run academic software required for his classes. He couldn’t afford a new computer, but soon learned about Gelman Library’s George W.G. Stoner Learning Commons — full of PC and Mac computers and open 24 hours during the academic year — and spent two years using them almost daily. “Often we make assumptions about the technical savvy and computing resources our students bring to campus,” says Jared Johnson, associate dean of academic technologies. “Technology is an integral part of the student experience, so GWLAI provides the resources to make sure technology isn’t a barrier for any of our students.”

“It’s the simple stuff that really makes GWLAI an amazing resource.”

“The first thing the library helped me with was a computer,” says Jason, “but then I realised the [book] stacks are an amazing resource.” Coming to the library every morning to do his homework, Jason discovered a vast scope of services offered by GW Libraries and Academic Innovation (GWLAI) to help students succeed. When asked, he launches into the long list of ways GWLAI has improved his experience as a student and enhanced his learning.

As a non-traditional student living in a residence hall, Jason faced some unique challenges. He had lived in Army barracks during his three tours in Iraq and four years in Afghanistan, so he thought it would be no problem, but communal living with students several years younger was a hard adjustment. “The library was my retreat,” he says, “a safe, quiet space.”

“GWLAI PROVIDES THE RESOURCES TO MAKE SURE TECHNOLOGY ISN’T A BARRIER FOR ANY OF OUR STUDENTS.”
In addition to a place for study, Jason also found personal connection with the librarians and library staff. “The librarians were often more engaged with me as a person than faculty,” he says, explaining how meaningful those consistently positive experiences were to him during a semester of mostly large introductory classes. He especially valued his interactions with Keturah Solomon, an overnight supervisor at Gelman Library, known by every late-night/early-morning student on campus for her cheerful greetings and genuine interest in their well-being. “We forget how hard it is to be a student, juggling classes and work, and at a large urban school some students can start to feel lost,” says Keturah. “I check in with our students leaving late at night to make sure they’re being safe and just so they know that I care about them. Those short conversations about how their day went or the project they are working on is the best part of my job.”

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As Jason progressed in his anthropology degree, he explored how GWLAI could help him succeed in the classroom. For him, access to academic resources was key. He recounts being amazed to find out that the libraries could provide a copy of almost any book in the world, from anywhere in the world, through interlibrary loan (ILL). He’s used so many ILL books in his time in the Columbian College’s combined B.A./M.A. anthropology program that he has a binder full of the one-page printouts that come with each ILL book. It was his way of creating a bibliography. Until, that is, he heard about RefWorks.

“No one ever told me about RefWorks!” he exclaims. This online reference management software, provided by the GW libraries, saves citations from databases and websites, stores related PDFs or attachments, and quickly builds a bibliography for papers and publications. Jason was astonished that he learned about this time saver from a GWLAI website, but as a teaching assistant, he made sure to teach it to his class as an easy way for students to save time and stay organized.

Although he originally came to GW as an international affairs major, Jason’s interests led him to study anthropology and how deeply the interpretation of events is impacted by one’s culture — something he first observed while teaching counterterrorism to Afghan military and police in Afghanistan. His curiosity about the history of the Middle East and the Arabic language has been fed by using the specialized collections at GWLAI. He talks of visiting the Global Resources Center to check how a word appeared in an Arabic version of the Koran and using maps from the Special Collections Research Center. “I used the library computers to teach myself to type in Arabic,” he explains.

When it came time for Jason to take Biological Anthropology, a required course, he knew that the more than $150 in required course materials would be a strain, but fortunately the GWLAI Top Textbooks program provided the textbook he needed. The Top Textbooks program acquires multiple copies of required textbooks for a select group of undergraduate courses with high enrollment rates that require traditionally expensive textbooks, and places them on course reserve for use by all students. It has saved students $302,812 in textbooks since its pilot program in fall 2017.

“All the staff are a powerful component of making this a great place for students.”
Preparation to apply to doctoral programs. Jason joined the inaugural cohort of Let’s GRE Together. This self-directed group of GW students and alumni are studying for the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), an exam required for entrance to thousands of graduate and business schools. “When I was studying for the GRE, I didn’t have $600 for a Kaplan course, but I wanted the kind of accountability that comes with a weekly class,” says Ty Miranda, program associate for Academic Commons and cohort facilitator. “Participants really appreciate the way Let’s GRE Together brings them into a community of learners to share their struggles and victories.”

Regardless of degree or school affiliation, every student is part of the learning community at GWLAI.

Over 16,000 unique students come through the doors of Gelman, Eckles and the Virginia Science and Technology Campus Library every semester. Each individual student has different needs—one might need a computer and a place for quiet study, while another wants a whiteboard and a place to work with a group. GWLAI is committed to providing all students with the tools they need for academic success, both inside and outside of the classroom. Regardless of degree or school affiliation, every student is part of the learning community at GWLAI. As with Jason, we’re rooting for their success and committed to providing the support they need to achieve their dreams.

As Jason made the transition from undergraduate to graduate classes in his combined B.A./M.A. program, he turned to a research librarian to navigate the different expectations for scholarly research. He also attended a free workshop to learn more about R, a programming language that is popular for data exploration, visualization and statistical analysis. The workshop gave him a foundation to delve deeper into data analysis and usage. For an introduction to SPSS Statistics, a platform for advanced statistical analysis commonly used in graduate-level courses and considered a must-have on Gelman and Eckles library computers, Jason took advantage of the tutorials on Lynda.com (now LinkedIn Learning). He first learned about the availability of Lynda.com in a chance meeting with Kean McDermott, GWLAI instructional technologist for geographic information systems (GIS) and data visualization, at a library event.

“YOU FOLKS DO AMAZING STUFF”

288 WORKSHOP SESSIONS OFFERED

1,584 TOTAL RESEARCH CONSULTATIONS

59 UNIQUE ATTENDEES IN INITIAL LET’S GRE TOGETHER COHORT

2018–19 academic year

937,716 TOTAL STUDENT ENTRIES TO GELMAN LIBRARY

2018–19 academic year

Requests for assistance through Academic Commons:

6,574

2018–19 academic year

photo: Zach Mann, B.F.A. ’18/ the George Washington University

photo: William Atkins/ the George Washington University

photo: Logan Werlinger/ the George Washington University
The main pillars of The Instructional Core are advocacy, research and excellence.

The main pillars of The Instructional Core are advocacy, research and excellence. GWLAI is well positioned to advocate for and support students’ learning from a holistic perspective. That includes making sure they have access to the tools, the skills and the skills they need to succeed. A key set of tools for today’s students involves fluency in digital technologies, including making sure they have access to these tools and the skills they need to succeed and access instruction in a way that makes sense for them.

GW Libraries and Academic Technology (GWLAI) identifies, develops, implements and supports a variety of innovative technology to enrich the academic experience. Whether online or on campus, GW Libraries and Academic Technology (GWLAI) offers a modern learning environment with the right technology to engage students. Supporting over 200 technology-enhanced classrooms and labs, GWLAI identifies, develops, implements and supports a variety of innovative technology to enrich the academic experience.
When GW’s Special Collections Research Center (SCRC), located at Gelman Library, released newly digitized images from the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), they were amazed by the overwhelming response. SCRC’s initial tweet of the photos resulted in over 30,000 engagements in a single day. It generated so much interest that the photos were featured on a local D.C. news broadcast that evening.

The photographs, along with other records donated to GW in 2018, document the history of WMATA and its impact on the D.C. area. They are a great resource for people interested in D.C. history, transportation history and beyond. Browse and download more of these fascinating photos online at go.gwu.edu/metro.