





# Meet the Provost

*Recently settled into their home on the Mount Vernon Campus, Provost Steven Lerman and his wife, Lori, bring experience, a passion for learning, and pancakes to GW.*

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BY JAMIE L. FREEDMAN

You can almost smell the pancakes frying as you approach the front door of the Mount Vernon Alumnae House on W Street, just across the road from GW's Mount Vernon Campus. The stately brick residence is now home to the university's new provost, Steven Lerman, and his wife, Lori, who joined the university July 1.

No strangers to campus life, the Lermans spent the past nine years as housemasters of a graduate residence hall at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where they were famous for hosting monthly pancake breakfasts for their students. "Mostly, I was in charge of cooking the pancakes and Lori prepared the side dishes," says Dr. Lerman, whose specialties included chocolate pancakes for Valentine's Day, cherry for President's Day, pumpkin for Halloween, and a multitude of other varieties symbolizing the various holidays and seasons. "It was a great way to connect with students outside the classroom."

They plan to continue the popular breakfast tradition—as well as launch many new traditions—at GW. "We're so excited to be here," says Dr. Lerman, who spent the past four decades as a leader and scholar at MIT, earning his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in engineering at the prestigious research university before rising through the ranks to vice chancellor and dean for graduate education.

Along the way, he served as founding director of Project Athena from 1983 to 1988, a high-profile research and development project to develop the first fully-integrated, campus-wide distributed computing environment at MIT, and twice served as chair of the MIT faculty. An award-winning professor of civil and environmental engineering, Dr. Lerman also directed the university's Center for Educational Computing Initiatives, a research center focusing on innovative educational uses of computer technology.

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Over the years, Dr. Lerman has received many honors and awards, including the Adviser of the Year Award from the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students and the Maseeh Teaching Award for best departmental teacher. A prolific writer, he has published extensively on multimedia educational software, computer applications in engineering, and transportation systems analysis, and is the author of two books, including a computer methods textbook published by Prentice Hall.

“What really set Steve Lerman apart from the many distinguished candidates we interviewed was the combination of his extensive experience at a first-rate research university with his deep thoughtfulness about higher education and the student experience,” says GW President Steven Knapp, who was deeply involved in the recruitment of the new provost, personally interviewing each of the 22 top candidates during the rigorous, nationwide search.

Dr. Lerman, who was selected from a pool of more than 200 applicants, was a standout candidate from round one of the interview process. “We were looking for someone with a first-rate scholarly reputation and the understanding, creativity, energy, and diplomatic skills to be a transformative leader,” says Professor of Political Science Forrest Maltzman, who led the search committee. “Steven Lerman is clearly such a

person. Throughout the interview process, he asked questions that challenged why we’re doing what we were doing. The committee unanimously felt Steve would be a great addition to the GW family.”

As GW’s provost, executive vice president for academic affairs, and A. James Clark Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Dr. Lerman’s portfolio is vast and wide-ranging: he serves as chief academic officer for GW’s nine colleges, oversees all student life-related programs and offices on campus, and serves as second-in-command to President Knapp.

“This is the opportunity of a lifetime,” Dr. Lerman says. “I am honored and excited to be a part of this wonderful community of faculty, staff, and students at The George Washington University. GW is just an extraordinary place, with an incredible history of academic accomplishment and service to the nation and the world.”

Dr. Lerman says he was “taken” with GW from the first interview, and the more he saw of the university, the more excited he was to come on board. “The combination of GW’s outstanding faculty, staff, and students, talented leadership, and its location in the nation’s capital makes this one of the most exciting educational institutions in the world, and I truly believe the best is yet to come,” he says. “Steve Knapp has

an exciting and engaging vision for the university and I look forward to helping him marshal GW's considerable resources and energies toward achieving our collective goals."

Widely praised at MIT for his ability to build bridges between the university's many constituencies, Dr. Lerman says he is looking forward to "helping realize the aspirations of both students and faculty" at GW.

"Steve Lerman has a strong record of engaging students and working collaboratively and effectively with colleagues," Dr. Knapp says. "Those skills will help us build an even stronger faculty, raise the university's stature, and continue to enhance the academic experience of our students."

"One of the many exciting things about Steve is his commitment to ensuring that students are at the core of everything we do," Dr. Maltzman adds. "He not only wants to build a university where great research is being conducted; he wants students involved in the research enterprise."

Dr. Lerman's student-centric approach is shared by his wife, Lori. A team in every sense of the word, Steve and Lori Lerman met as kids in Long Island, New York, and have been a part of each other's lives ever since. "We were fellow clarinetists in our junior high school band," Mrs. Lerman says. "My mother insists that I came home the first day of junior high and said I met the boy I'm going to marry."

After graduating from high school, they both moved to Boston—she to attend Tufts University and he MIT—and married soon after. Now approaching their fortieth wedding anniversary, the Lermans are the proud parents of two married daughters—Deborah, 34, who works for Scholastic Inc. in New York City, and Amy, 32, an assistant professor of political science at Princeton University; and son David, 28, who works for a San Francisco-based start-up company that he and his friends launched as students at Yale. They are also the doting grandparents of one-year-old Noah, who "just happens to be the cutest little boy that's ever been born," Mrs. Lerman says.

After their youngest child left for college, the couple sold their house in the Boston suburbs, trading their empty nest to serve as housemasters of a new graduate residence hall at MIT. "It was a perfect opportunity for us to do something



*The Lermans plan to continue their tradition of hosting pancake breakfasts in their home on Mount Vernon Campus.*

together professionally," says Mrs. Lerman, a registered nurse and musician. "Although we had grown up together and had a wonderful life and marriage, our working lives had never intersected. This was the first opportunity that came along to do something jointly and share our working lives a little. And that just sounded like a nice thing to do next."

The warm and engaging couple forged close links with the 120 first-year graduate students living in the dorm, hosting a plethora of events—from barbecues on the roof deck to jazz brunches, speaker series, and the famous pancake breakfasts. "It was a great nine years," Mrs. Lerman says. "The residence hall was a wonderful, tight community where we knew every student by sight."

The Lermans enjoyed introducing their students, many of whom hailed from overseas, to new foods and traditions. "Many of them had never had pancakes, maple syrup, or matzo brei, and loved sampling them at our monthly breakfasts," Dr. Lerman says. They introduced the students to Easter egg decorating in the spring and helped them weather Boston's harsh winters by simulating the tropics with pineapple, banana and coconut pancakes.

*Dr. Lerman takes the stage at the Graduate Student Welcome Ceremony at the start of the semester.*



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“Students have an enormous thirst to get to know faculty outside the classroom and really appreciated the weekly social events, which helped to offset the intensity of their graduate work,” says Dr. Lerman, who keeps in touch with a number of MIT alumni who lived in his residence hall over the years. “It’s incredibly exhilarating to live among students, and Lori and I look forward to being actively engaged with the students on the Mount Vernon Campus. We plan to participate fully in the intellectual and social life of the community.”

Dr. Lerman joins President Knapp in living within GW’s borders—marking the first time that the university’s top two leaders both live on George Washington campuses. Dr. Knapp and his wife, Diane, reside in the historic F Street House in Foggy Bottom, across the street from Thurston—the largest freshman residence hall.

“I think it’s great that Steve and Lori will be living on the Mount Vernon Campus, just as Diane and I have been privileged to live on the campus in Foggy Bottom,” Dr. Knapp says. “It’s a compelling sign of their commitment to students, which they demonstrated so clearly at MIT.”

As he settles into life at GW, Dr. Lerman is hard at work mastering the processes at George Washington. “I’m still on a very steep learning curve,” he says. “There’s a tremendous amount to learn this first year. Universities are incredibly complex places, and processes differ tremendously across various institutions when it comes to how decisions are made, how to conduct reviews, how to work with trustees, and many other things.”

There are vast differences between science and engineering-focused MIT and GW, he notes, which adds to the excitement for him. “GW is more of a full-spectrum university, with far greater depth and breadth than MIT in the arts, humanities, social sciences, international affairs, and politics; broad and deep programs within its professional schools, and an extraordinary tradition of public service to

the United States and the larger world,” Dr. Lerman says. “It is exhilarating to work in an environment where these are such important parts of the intellectual stew. MIT is, of course, MIT—cutting edge, but not changing a whole lot in fundamental ways. GW is not only exciting because of what it is; it’s exciting because of what it’s becoming and what it can become. And that’s different and novel and fun.”

He is quick to state that there are far more commonalities than differences between the two institutions. “All great universities such as GW and MIT have a mission that rests on three clear pillars:

education of the next generation, the advancement of human knowledge, and service to the larger community,” Dr. Lerman says. “As provost, I will help the faculty, staff, and students at GW realize their aspirations in these three key areas within the broad vision set forth by President Knapp.”

Emphasizing that “it is GW’s faculty, staff, and students, not the university’s senior leadership, that does the great teaching, the groundbreaking research, and the desperately needed service to our country and our entire world,” Dr. Lerman says he will focus on helping the GW community “build upon existing strengths” and “best use the university’s monetary, human, and physical resources to achieve our collective mission.”

“We need to attract the best faculty, staff, and students, to create world class facilities for them to work in; to help every member of the faculty become as effective an educator and mentor as possible; to give our students the resources they need to learn from each other; to create a climate of inclusion so that the absolute best people in the world aspire to come here; and to ensure that each individual in the community is valued for the work they do and the potential they have for great advancement,” he says.

“The leadership up until now has done a great job of advancing the university and positioning it to move into the ranks of the great research universities of the country,” Dr. Lerman continues. “In the coming years, our goal is to enhance our leadership position in all the fields of scholarship that this university expands.”

In a broad brush, Dr. Lerman’s top priorities are to “advance excellence in all dimensions at George Washington University, expand its footprint and influence through a larger and deeper research program, grow the base of support at the university financially and otherwise, increase the number of scholarships and financial aid for undergraduate and graduate study, and further leverage GW’s geographic location in the heart of Washington.”

# Meet Lori Lerman

It's nearly impossible to write about GW's new provost, Steven Lerman, without devoting some magazine space to his wife, Lori, who is quickly becoming part of the GW community.

A graduate of Tufts University, she launched her career as an elementary school teacher and subsequently worked as a registered nurse for more than a decade. Mrs. Lerman is also a professional singer and piano accompanist, who ran a popular music program at MIT, where she served as co-housemaster of a first year graduate residence hall with her husband for the past nine years.

"I taught beginning piano and voice to more than 300 MIT graduate students," she says, explaining that the program was tailored for "exceptionally busy" students interested in music as a recreational outlet. "My goal was to provide the tools with which students, who don't have large quantities of practice time, could quickly learn to create and enjoy music as an enjoyable and relaxing avocation," she says. "I am hoping to bring the program to GW in some way to serve students interested in enhancing their lives through music."

Mrs. Lerman also hopes to draw upon her years of experience as a parent educator and certified lactation consultant. "A couple highlights of my career were working as a lactation consultant at a Boston hospital and teaching childbirth preparation classes and pediatric first aid," she says. "I would love to bring that into my work here in some way if there's a need for it at GW. I look forward to contributing to the GW community in any ways that are helpful."

She said this was a perfect time to leave their longtime home of Boston for the nation's capital. "Our children had all left the area and we were looking for something interesting to do next," she says. "I was invited to tour GW while Steve was interviewing, and it was such an engaging, friendly and exciting place that I tried very hard not to become overly enthusiastic about the prospect of coming here. Everyone I met was so excited about GW. By the time I left, I was really hoping he'd get the job because this is such a wonderful place."

Washington has "gradually started to feel like home," she says. "For awhile, I felt like we were on an extended vacation and that

any day we were going to go home to Boston," Mrs. Lerman explains. "The turning point came a few weeks ago, when we were flying home from Florida and went to check the flight departure board, and I immediately went to the end of the alphabet instead of the beginning. It's an adjustment process, but I'm very happy to be here, and hope that people will not hesitate to let me know what I can do to be helpful. Whatever the GW community most needs, I will try my best to make it happen."

WILLIAM ATKINS



The provost also hopes to fuel the growth of stronger identities for GW's Mount Vernon and Virginia Science and Technology campuses. "Over the next decade, we will be working to expand and best utilize these tremendous physical assets," he says. "With the opening of the spectacular new West Hall (See page 20), a significant cohort of students have chosen to live on the Mount Vernon Campus for the first time, which is very exciting. We need to continue to work to make the Mount Vernon experience special through signature programs like the Women's Leadership Program."

The Virginia Science and Technology Campus has "unbridled opportunities for growth," he continues. "Our

nursing school will be based there, and there are many other academic and research activities we can build on there in the coming years to maximize its potential."

Dr. Lerman says he is thrilled to be a part of GW's senior leadership team at this pivotal time. "We have a fairly large cohort of new deans—three who just arrived, plus a new law school dean will be chosen in the next few months, as well as a new vice president of development who is almost as new as I am," he says. "I'm privileged to be a part of GW's future. While this university has done great things throughout its illustrious history, I believe that the future holds even greater promise." **GW**