

A New Vision for Graduate Education at Vanderbilt

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success of many of our graduates is the commitment of our graduate faculty. We have a number of exceptional faculty who are deeply passionate about graduate education and about the training of our graduate students, and it is these faculty who form the core of the Graduate School. Through their efforts within individual programs and through their mentoring activities, these faculty are a large reason for the success of our graduate education endeavors.

It must also be acknowledged that facets of our graduate educational training mission are considered to be thought-leaders and practical leaders in certain realms, although these efforts have typically sat outside of the sphere of influence of the Graduate School. One of the best examples of our successes can be found in the Biomedical Research, Education and Training (BRET) office, which has been structured to enhance graduate and postdoctoral training within

graduate programs should be designed to adequately prepare them for work in instruction-focused colleges as well as a wide variety of so-called "alternative" careers.

- 3) _____ . The Graduate School must play a more active role in supporting our graduate students in all aspects of Graduate Life, including housing, counseling, and graduate fellowships and other financial issues. This office should revamp and maintain an informative and up-to-date Graduate School website.
- 4) _____ . The Graduate School should be the single clearing house for all data related to recruitment, admissions, student performance, student productivity, and program outcome data, including placement data and alumni connections. A major effort (in collaboration with VIRG) should be initiated to create and update a comprehensive data base that covers at a minimum the last 10 years and links into the graduate program systems. This essential tool could support administrative functions (accreditation, for example) and provide faculty support for training grant applications and other large-center grant efforts.
- 5) _____ . In conjunction with the International Student and Scholar Services Office, the Graduate School needs to pay particular attention to the specific needs of our international graduate students. This includes enhancing the name recognition of our graduate programs outside the United States, recruiting, providing international ("research abroad") experiences for our graduate students, and identifying fellowship opportunities.
- 6) _____ . The graduate school should expand programs aimed at increasing the quality, breadth, and diversity of our graduate student population. This includes incentive programs (graduate fellowships) to recruit the best and brightest prospective students to our campus, increasing diversity (ethnic and racial minorities as well as women in certain disciplines), and awarding and recognizing faculty for their roles in graduate education. The Graduate School should play a more integral role in the recognition and reward of the exceptional scholarshi

Career Development,

in both academic and nonacademic venues; and 3) better integrate career and professional development into PhD and Master's training programs.

Though mentorship skills are frequently associated with academia and related careers, its principles and practices are widely applicable to other employment realms. Increasing the availability and quality of mentorship training should therefore be a higher priority for the Graduate School. A more purposeful

Active and publicly given support, by the Graduate School and university administration, of

- Gather data to help departments and schools evaluate faculty quality in terms of mentoring as well as in terms of publications, possibly by adding a mentoring section to TRS that allows faculty to list all the students with whom they are working, not just the students whose committees they are chairing.
- Increase and support programs in present and future cutting edge areas; rewarding departments that encourage and support faculty identifying and anticipating the cutting edge areas, in addition to encouraging and supporting faculty working in traditional areas; make university level investment in cultivating and supporting forward thinking and innovative faculty.
- Reduce structural barriers to graduate student interdisciplinary engagement in addition to rewarding departments for facilitating this interdisciplinary work instead of treating it as a betrayal of one's home discipline/department
- Convene a research team to support and/or work with Ruth Schemmer to map out the careers of the future and delineate what skills will be needed.
- Increase the Graduate School's national visibility and reputation by providing opportunities and incentives for faculty and current graduate students to travel to speak with high achieving undergraduates in key departments at institutions across the country, by organizing summer programs for juniors from universities across the country, and by creating and drawing on regional graduate alumni

Answers to ensure that Vanderbilt attracts and retains students from underrepresented US minority groups:

Those listed above, plus the following:

- Actively and publicly prioritize diversity by the deans of Vanderbilt's school and

about the climate in which they are being required to live and work. The IMSD program is a model in multiple areas, this area among them.

- Departments should be encouraged to integrate consideration of race into the department curriculum.
- The Graduate School should sponsor workshops for faculty members on avoiding micro aggressions in teaching and mentoring relationships
- Study and replicate most successful elements of the IMSD program across the institution, elements include ongoing mentoring, students moving in a month before school starts to acclimate themselves and build working relationships with faculty members, regular publication of newsletters showcasing participants and their research, exploring federal funding possibilities, gathering and showing

Vanderbilt to improve their education experience the administration must zero in on providing an environment that fosters advocacy, consistency, and honesty on the part of faculty and administrators. All students accepted into Vanderbilt are here due to their merit, their intellectual caliber, and their grit and determination. However, the responsibility of the University does not end aft

American, first generation college attendee, a filial provider or parent, it is important to understand and acknowledge that every student does not have the privilege of just being a student. There is a need for a better safety net for students. Most graduate students are from out of town and must acclimate to their new home in Nashville. Without a centralized graduate structure or gatekeeper, many students have additional stressors they deal with that impede their ability to focus solely on academics. It is important that at the start of a student's graduate and professional career more focus is paid to garner a holistic idea of what our students are balancing in their lives.

Facilitation of Interdisciplinary Courses of Study

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to identify and foster novel interdisciplinary interactions (Academic Incubators/Salons) and (2) a mechanism to quantify and map faculty academic interactions across institutional units (Academic Connectomics).

The core concept behind the incubator is the creation of a mechanism to bring together faculty from different colleges in an effort to seed conversations about collaborative possibilities in graduate education and research. We envision such an academic incubator or “salon” to take place over an afternoon to introduce a small number of faculty members and graduate students and to begin the conversation, after which informal discussions over refreshments end the session. The middle part of the program would be reserved for discussion and open conversation, and will involve a facilitator as well as invited guests from both the community and from academic institutions beyond Vanderbilt.

The second concept to further foster trans-institutional and interdisciplinary connections involves the development of a search tool that would identify patterns of connectivity among our faculty. Such tools are becoming increasingly commonplace in today’s arena of “big data,” and the informatics approach could closely resemble tools used in contemporary “connectomics” and social networking algorithms. Although it is envisioned that a sophisticated bibliographic informatics-based platform will be created, the initial search tool could simply “mine” the CVs of our faculty to identify common key words and areas of thematic interest. In this manner we would create a “Vandy Connectome” that identifies areas of potential overlap and shared interests, and thus potential partners for collaboration and intellectual exchange. This tool would allow the mapping and visualization of both existing and as yet unrealized academic connections and to track the dynamic nature of these connections over time. Thus, the Vandy Connectome would: (1) establish a big data visualization tool for academic endeavors and relationships, (2) identify latent unrealized areas of convergence for stimulation and seeding, and (3) evaluate the outcomes of the Strategic Plan and the Transinstitutional Programs that will stem from new investments. This final outcome would represent a key metric for tracking the success of these endeavors as the initial Vandy Connectome evolves over time.

One of the most tangible benefits of these expanded roles for the Graduate School is a greater fostering of the “One Vanderbilt” ideal. Our faculty and students have a thirst for learning and interaction, and the ability to exchange ideas and broaden horizons through these conversations should only further promote the Vanderbilt . Promoting engagement with our community is a core element of the proposed discussions to be achieved through the identification of key community partners, and should serve to further strengthen ties between Vanderbilt and Nashville. Finally, because our increasingly interconnected world is forcing us to think and work outside of traditional disciplinary boundaries, many of the topics chosen are

Graduate students seek learning experiences that will prepare them for a wider

while for others, teaching labs or recitations—or on rarer occasions guest-lecturing for their doctoral advisors—is a mandatory component of their first-year experien

positions at research institutions like Vanderbilt, have been looked upon as the ideal targets of employment with industry jobs, positions in government labs, and teaching positions in liberal arts colleges as close seconds. How are departments reacting to graduate students who aim to pursue career paths that are more teaching-intensive because they are less driven by the desire to publish as research scholars? This issue is germane to many institutions, not just Vanderbilt, but forces associated with departmental rankings continue to value and privilege tenure-

arriving from abroad. Indeed, international students may arrive without even recognizing and

graduate students (including, for example, a bar and game room). Leaders of graduate student groups indicate that they find it nearly impossible to find meeting space for events on campus that does not involve substantial expenditures. A dedicated space (perhaps in Alumni Hall) would greatly alleviate these concerns, although it is unclear whether a single space would fulfill both the need for a more formal meeting/event space and the need for a casual gathering place.

Finally—it may go without saying but, on the other hand, cannot be said often enough—there is no question that the current stipend levels in many departments make it very difficult for them to compete successfully for the best entering students. An analysis should be conducted to compare each of our graduate programs with peer programs to get a better sense of where each stands in the national landscape. The Graduate School should take a central role in the collection and analysis of these data.

Postdoctoral Fellows

Vanderbilt hosts a large cadre of postdoctoral fellows who occupy a transitional position