

Immersion Committee End of Year Report

Fall 2015 – Spring 2016

Defining the Immersion Timeline

- Pending faculty governance, Immersion Vanderbilt will become a degree requirement for students entering in fall 2018.
- The success of Immersion Vanderbilt is best ensured by a gradual implementation timeline that embraces the existing campus culture towards experiential learning.
- The conceptual timeline for implementation of Immersion Vanderbilt is comprised of three key phases:
 - **Opportunity:** Vanderbilt already provides a robust offering of immersive experiences for its students. Immersive learning is a key tenant of many degree programs at Vanderbilt. Additional study abroad, service learning, and honors thesis options provide students the *opportunity* to engage with immersion.
 - **Expectation:** The opportunity to engage in an immersive experience should become an *expectation* of our students. Campus culture should foster a reciprocal *expectation* between the university to provide immersive opportunities and students to engage in them. Admissions is beginning to recruit freshmen on the basis of immersion being an expectation of the campus culture.
 - **Requirement:** Pending faculty governance, Immersion Vanderbilt will become a formal graduation requirement for the entering class in fall 2018.

Conceptualizing Immersive Experiences

- It is expected that immersive experiences will be as creative and unique as the students completing them. In order to shape and organize the programmatic efforts, immersive experiences will be conceptualized through a four-category structure:
 - **International:** students travel to places around the globe to engage in intense analysis of culture, language, history, or other areas of study;
 - **Civic & Professional:** students take a deep-dive in either the for-profit or non-profit professional world through co-ops, internships, externships, and service work;
 - **Research:** students actively engage in a faculty member's research enterprise through hands-on experience in the production of humanities, social, physical, or life sciences research;

- **Creative Expression:** students engage in the artistic process by developing their own performance, exhibit, or artistic work to showcase to the community.
- Each of Vanderbilt's undergraduate schools and colleges is unique in its requirements and treatment of credit hours. Out of respect for these differences, immersion experiences must consist of *the equivalent of 9 credit hours'* worth of work. The student's transcript may not reflect 9 official hours of credit for the immersion, but the experience and work product should equal the equivalent of that much work.
- The finalized outcomes and basic parameters for Immersion Vanderbilt can be summarized as follows:
 - Creation of an individualized learning plan as a mechanism to keep students accountable throughout their undergraduate career;
 - Engagement outside the classroom in order to develop skills and knowledge;
 - Tangible academic product as a result of the experience;
 - Development of a network of support for student supervising and mentoring.

Immersion on the Commons

- Given the intention for Immersion Vanderbilt to span across the student's full undergraduate experience, Commons programming during the first year is necessary.
- Newly proposed Commons iSeminars will build upon the existing Commons Seminars structure to provide first-year students an introduction to Immersion.
- iSeminars are 1-credit hour courses that are explicitly dedicated to helping students flesh out their plan for an immersive experience. They may highlight opportunities for immersion in specific disciplines or cover immersion more broadly.
- A cohort of 10 faculty from all four undergraduate schools and colleges will meet over the next year to plan the Commons iSeminar program. Inaugural iSeminars will be offered in spring 2017.

Immersion Retreat Conclusions

- Provost Wentz, campus leaders, and faculty members joined together for a half-day retreat to discuss priorities and next steps. Key takeaways included:
 - Faculty governance needs to be completed by the end of the next academic year to sync with Admissions needs and allow time for the school approval process.
 - A detailed operational plan/program guide will help clarify/inform constituents.
 - A centralized model of support should be developed and vetted.
 - A more robust communications plan is necessary, including keeping leadership regularly informed.

- Special student populations should be considered as the program is developed.

Subcommittee Work

- The Laboratory Science Immersion Subcommittee was convened and charged with developing the basic outlines of a laboratory science immersion experience for Vanderbilt undergraduate students. The committee provided an in-depth draft student handbook for laboratory immersions that included pre-requisite suggestions and best practices for successful experiences.
- The Faculty Advisory Council on International Education (FACIE) was charged with developing recommendations concerning the role of international education, with particular emphasis on study abroad, in immersion experiences for Vanderbilt undergraduates. Key recommendations included using an expansive definition of study abroad, not mandating foreign language study or proficiency, and requiring intentional pre-planning and post-study abroad reflection.