

# Immersion Committee End of Year Report

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Fall 2014 – Spring 2015

## Why Immersion Vanderbilt

- Vanderbilt students have an intense curiosity, substantial leadership skills, and the deep desire to leverage all opportunities available to them.
- They need outlets to pursue passions through rigorous, compelling, and unique projects that offer them a chance to leave a mark on the world.
- They need to be enabled to go beyond being consumers of knowledge to become producers of knowledge.
- Given our gifted student body, Vanderbilt should offer every student the opportunity to have an immersive experience defined as a creative independent project that provides an opportunity to engage, to question, and to forge change.
- This experience should be a centerpiece of the student's experience at Vanderbilt.
- Vanderbilt currently offers many types of immersion experiences that form a solid foundation upon which to build.

## Defining Immersion Vanderbilt

- *Immersion Vanderbilt* will be a truly **memorable** experience that will shape our students' worldview and provide a sense of accomplishment that will serve as a springboard to a life of learning and engagement. Together, this experience will better prepare all our students to make a difference in the world after graduation.
- Immersion experiences are designed in such a way to allow students to:
  - 1.) **Pursue a passion:** Immersion Vanderbilt offers undergraduates a chance to tackle a topic that they care deeply about. The experience, as a result, will foster *engagement*. By personalizing these opportunities to advance discovery and learning, these experiences should be transformative, defining students' time at Vanderbilt and ensuring that the university is not only educating the whole person but also inspiring lifelong learning.
  - 2.) **Hone skills:** To make an immersion experience a success, Vanderbilt must give students the skills needed to have successful immersion experiences. Our students must develop the *ability* to question and to probe, so they can develop creative answers to the important questions that fascinate them. Faculty engagement is critical in teaching and mentoring for these experiences.
  - 3.) **Make a difference:** By tackling a topic of interest and by doing so with appropriate skills, Vanderbilt students will be able to forge positive change; thus, ensuring that learning advances discovery and discovery, in turn, advances learning.

- To accomplish these goals, the immersion project must be academically **rigorous**, extend **beyond the classroom**, be guided by a **faculty** member or academically based organization (e.g. Study Abroad), and must yield a tangible, measurable **product**.
- These experiences, as a result, are designed to provide our students a competitive edge in pursuing exciting and satisfying careers following graduation.

## Immersion Experiences at Vanderbilt Today

Today the university has a solid foundation of programs, which are part of *Immersion Vanderbilt* – each encompassing student-driven research, scholarship, and/or creative expression.

### Examples include:

- The School of Engineering, for example, requires most of its majors to do a senior capstone project with all the makings of an immersion experience.
- All students in Peabody’s largest major, Human and Organizational Development, choose between six cities for an intensive internship in their senior year. The internship is tied to coursework and is overseen by faculty to ensure the experience is truly meaningful.
- Blair requires a “Senior Recital” of most of its majors, which brings together all they have learned over the previous three and half years of music study.
- In the College of Arts and Science, there are numerous great models of “immersion” opportunities. The Littlejohn Family Undergraduate Research program, for instance, provides financial support to about ten faculty members and their students in the College of Arts and Sciences for the students’ research projects. In addition, some majors, such as Neuroscience, require all majors to engage in a major research project.
- Fifty students from across the four undergraduate schools, have opportunities to engage in faculty research projects through the Vanderbilt Undergraduate Summer Research Program (VUSR). Many of them use this program to explore research in areas outside of their home major under the guidance of an expert faculty member.
- The Ingram Scholarship program supports students interested in service-oriented immersion experiences. Ingram Scholars volunteer for community service and design and implement a community-impact project.
- According to a survey of students last year, 44 percent of graduating seniors participated in a study abroad program. Abroad experiences can help students develop language skills or serve as an opportunity for in-depth learning about the culture, music, literature, history, and/or politics.

## Challenges/Rollout Considerations

### Rollout

- Faculty at the February retreat identified Fall of 2017 as a target date for full implementation of Immersion Vanderbilt. A strategy or timeline action plan needs to be developed.
- Roll out should be thought of as unfolding in three stages:
  1. Opportunity
  2. Expectation
  3. Requirement

This will allow for a gradual transition in the culture among students and faculty. As is the case now, many students have the *opportunity* to have an immersive experience. As resources are expanded and implementation details worked out more students will choose to have an immersion experience. As they share their experiences with peers it will become an *expectation* among the highest-achieving students first. As a goal, by the time immersion Vanderbilt becomes a *requirement*, it will already be top-of-mind and of interest to most, if not all, students.

### Immersion Distinct from the Major

- Vanderbilt's commitment to a liberal education is grounded in the philosophy that problems are best solved when approached from multiple perspectives. An appreciation for broader social, historical and political contexts will prepare our students to be productive and successful citizens.
- A student majoring in psychology may, for instance, have an interest in the behavior of consumers and would like to pursue an immersion experience in entrepreneurship and product development through the Owen School. This intentional de-coupling of the immersion from the major allows the student to 1) test concepts learned in psychology outside of the classroom, 2) develop skills not traditionally taught in psychology, 3) have an experience that will be attractive to future employers, and 4) help make One Vanderbilt a reality as all faculty can be part of this process, not just those with formal ties to one of the undergraduate colleges.
- Students often try to balance pursuing "practical" aspects of their education with their "passion." Immersion Vanderbilt gives them an opportunity, along with their major, to pursue both. It should not be either or. Rather what Vanderbilt can do is to allow that student to be a Economics major (their "practical") as they pursue an Immersion experience (their "passion") that might allow them to write a senior thesis on how income inequality affects the stability of new democracies in Latin America.

### Implementation Considerations

- A process will be needed for introducing the concept to students as well as a process for connecting students to resources and faculty mentors. The programmatic structure needs to be developed and it needs to start in the

freshman year. In fact, recruitment of students to attend Vanderbilt will require the admissions office to discuss Immersion Vanderbilt, so our students not only know of the amazing opportunities that await them, but understand the Vanderbilt culture. That will ensure we lure students who not only make the most of Immersion Vanderbilt, but who will want to be part of it.

- We will need to develop approaches for faculty to handle how working with students on these projects will count as part of their work load.
- Immersion VU will require making key strategic investments in faculty, endowed chairs, research resources and administrative support.
- Mentoring of students will have to become an even more important part of evaluating faculty.
- Decoupling immersion from the major gives us the chance to open the leadership to faculty of all ten schools, reflecting our one-Vanderbilt strategy.
- To make the most of Immersion Vanderbilt, we need faculty from all colleges to be part of this experience. By bringing in faculty from Law, for example, we will further enrich the opportunities of all our students. Our small compact campus makes this inclusive approach possible.