

**ENHANCING GRADUATE EDUCATION (EGE) AT VANDERBILT:  
CALL FOR PREPROPOSALS, 2004-2005**

In his memo to the faculty dated October 29, 2003, Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Nicholas S. Zeppos outlined Vanderbilt's intent to renew its emphasis on graduate education. One element of that renewal is the establishment of the EGE program described herein. The Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs invites faculty in University Central<sup>1</sup> to suggest forward-looking ideas for new efforts to advance the state of graduate education on the Vanderbilt campus. Such suggestions can be institutional or programmatic in scope, as described herein, and are to be submitted by, or on behalf of, appropriate groups of faculty. Full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty members in University Central, as well as those holding equivalent ranks in the Blair School of Music<sup>2</sup>, are eligible to apply for funds. Responses to the 2004-2005 call will focus on graduate education at the Ph.D. level and will be submitted in two stages, this general call for pre-proposals followed by individual invitations to submit full proposals, as described herein. The EGE Program will provide selected faculty-led groups with support for up to three years to initiate an effort that will be sustained from another source, to implement a promising approach on a trial basis, or to cover a one-time, nonrecurring cost. The first awards are expected to be announced prior to July 1, 2005.

**Introduction** One of the great privileges of being a faculty member in a major university is that of teaching and supervising the research or scholarship of students who aspire to earn the Ph.D. Vanderbilt faculty have been enjoying that privilege for more than a century – VU awarded its first Ph.D. in 1879 (in Chemistry), only four years after its founding and only 18 years after the United States awarded its first Ph.D. (at Yale). Today, standing at the very beginning of the 21st century, the Graduate School catalog lists 44 Ph.D. programs that together graduate approximately 176 Ph.D.s per year, an annual accomplishment of which Vanderbilt can justifiably be proud.

That said, it is widely understood that Vanderbilt will need to strengthen its doctoral programs considerably to reach its full potential as a major institution of higher education. To a substantial degree, this strengthening will require steady attention to the all-important matter of hiring and retaining the best faculty, on which front we continue to make excellent progress. In addition, this strengthening will require steady attention to improving the content and impact of Vanderbilt's Ph.D. programs.

Our history as a Ph.D.-granting institution presents us with two realities that offer challenges. The first reality is numerical. Taken as a whole, the number of Ph.D.s Vanderbilt graduates each year amounts to less than 0.5% of the approximately 40,000 Ph.D. degrees produced by all U.S. universities in a typical year.<sup>3</sup> Even if we fix our gaze on the top-20 (overwhelmingly private) institutions that appear on *US News & World Report's* 2004 undergraduate ranking of national universities, we find that those 20 universities graduate annually an average of 276 Ph.D.s per institution (289 if we exclude Dartmouth – predominately an undergraduate institution – from the list). Taken individually, Vanderbilt's Ph.D. programs tend to be small. In 2003, for example, only eleven of Vanderbilt's Ph.D. programs graduated more than five Ph.D.s and only one program graduated 10 or more Ph.D.s – the annual average Ph.D. production is typically  $176/44 = 4$  Ph.D. graduates/program/year. Measured at either the

institutional level or the program level, Vanderbilt awards only a modest number of Ph.D. degrees each year.

The second reality centers on accomplishment, both actual and perceived. In the most recent National Research Council (NRC) ranking of U.S. doctoral programs, published in 1995, only six of Vanderbilt's Ph.D. programs scored in the top quartile.<sup>4</sup> Only Pharmacology, ranked 6th out of 127 programs (5<sup>th</sup> percentile), and Religion, ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of 38 programs, received either a top-10% or a top-10 ranking. Vanderbilt's average percentile NRC rankings, purely an illustrative measure, in five canonical categories were as follows: Arts & Humanities – 32<sup>nd</sup> percentile; Biological/Biomedical Sciences – 24<sup>th</sup> percentile; Engineering – 58<sup>th</sup> percentile; Physical Sciences & Mathematics – 55<sup>th</sup> percentile; Social Sciences – 46<sup>th</sup> percentile. Only in one of those five areas, Biological/Biomedical Sciences, was Vanderbilt ranked in the top-quartile.<sup>5</sup> Hope and expectations run high that even though reputational changes tend to happen slowly, the University's rankings will show improvement in a few years when the NRC publishes new results. Nevertheless, the 1995 survey makes it clear that much work remains yet to be done.

Vanderbilt and all U.S. universities face the challenge that education at the Ph.D. level does not, in and of itself, generate a great deal of tuition revenue, certainly nothing on the scale of that associated with undergraduate education at a private university. For this reason, investments in graduate education must be made with the greatest care in order to gain the most benefit from the resources available for such investments.

Recognizing that Vanderbilt is a relatively small university with small Ph.D. programs, all but a few of which are modestly ranked, this Call for Proposals invites faculty to participate in an active and substantive way in the great conversation to determine how best to invest resources, both time and money, to advance the state of Ph.D.-level graduate education at Vanderbilt. Unlike undergraduate education, graduate education tends to be discipline-centered or program-centered. Even interdisciplinary Ph.D. programs tend to be forged among just a few allied disciplines. Because it tends to be program-centered, graduate education is multicultural in that it is carried out differently from program to program within a context established more by the national community of similar programs than by the collection of diverse programs on the same campus. And so it is that we turn to the faculty, with their deep understanding of the cultures of their respective Ph.D. programs, for serious proposals about how to move graduate education at Vanderbilt forward.

**Categories of Submissions** This Call invites *pre-proposals* that step beyond the normal course of operations in a school or college. Requests for funds to support routine course development, recruiting and/or starting-up faculty, research, conference travel, organizing conferences and similar items will not be considered. Nor will requests to form new academic departments or degree programs be considered (both involve approval processes well outside the boundaries of an internal-grant competition). Those interested in developing proposals are encouraged to think of the EGE program as complementing efforts and investments already underway under the auspices of the Academic Venture Capital Fund, Discovery Grant and Research Scholar Grant programs, as well as investments being made centrally and by the schools and colleges in faculty recruiting and retention. The question to be asked is what additional investment(s) focused specifically on graduate education and graduate students can be made that will accelerate Vanderbilt's progress toward its strategic goals.

**Pre-proposals** are solicited that summarize proposed efforts in two broad categories, Institutional Infrastructure Proposals and Program Development Proposals, both described below. Awards are expected to be competitive and in all cases are subject to the availability of funds. The EGE Program seeks the very best ideas that show genuine promise for making substantive improvements in graduate education at Vanderbilt. The support available for a given initiative is expected to be in the range of \$10,000-to-\$100,000 per year for at most three years.

1. Institutional Infrastructure Proposals. Proposals in this category should address issues or needs that are common to all, or nearly all, Ph.D. programs on the campus. Examples of recent efforts, now already in place, that would have qualified for consideration in this category include the establishment of a university-wide on-line application system to support the graduate-admissions process and the addition of a staff member to extend the enrollment-management and institutional-research functions to the graduate level. Those considering proposals in this category should include any necessary central offices in their planning process.

2. Program Development Proposals. Proposals in this category should address issues or needs connected with the content or delivery of graduate instruction, the recruitment or mentoring of graduate students, or other items that bear directly on the quality of Ph.D. programs. Proposals that offer an approach to a problem or opportunity that is common to several Ph.D. programs are especially encouraged. For instance, several programs or departments might propose a coordinated approach to recruiting more high-caliber graduate students. Proposals focused on enhancing individual existing Ph.D. programs will be considered, but such a case must be particularly compelling in order for an award to be made.

**Applying for Funds** The EGE application process will proceed in two stages. The first stage, required for *all* applications, is a pre-proposal stage. After an internal review process, the authors of selected pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals. The submission of full proposals will be by invitation only.

**Guidelines for Pre-Proposals** Those who wish to propose an EGE initiative should prepare a short description in the form of a letter not to exceed three pages in length. Include in the letter the title of the proposed effort, a clear statement of the problem or opportunity to be addressed, the expected benefit(s) of pursuing it, a summary of what will be done and who will do it, a list of which Ph.D. program(s) stands to benefit from what is proposed, and a list of the faculty who will lead the effort if it is funded. Include a preliminary estimate of the costs that are likely to be involved. Send one electronic copy (Microsoft Word) *and* one hard-copy of each pre-proposal letter to: Dennis G. Hall (dennis.g.hall@vanderbilt.edu), Associate Provost for Research and Graduate Education, 401 Kirkland Hall, no later than **December 1, 2004**.

**Guidelines for Full Proposals (to be submitted only by invitation following the pre-proposal stage)** Additional instructions of a specific nature, including the submission date, will be sent to those selected for invitation to submit full proposals. A description of the general content of the full proposal follows, for future reference.

**A. Full Proposal Narrative** (no more than 15 pages, single-spaced; type no smaller than 12-point Times)

The narrative should describe the proposed initiative in as much detail as possible, explaining the problem(s) or opportunity(-ies) being targeted, the approach(es) being proposed, the measures of success and the benefits of that success. It will be important to communicate the ways in which what is being proposed represents a genuine improvement over the *status quo*, with the potential to make a significant advancement in graduate education at the Ph.D. level. Proposals should situate the proposed effort within the appropriate context and include enough background and general information to make it understandable to faculty reviewers from a broad range of backgrounds. Those preparing proposals should keep in mind that each proposal will be read by Vanderbilt faculty drawn from the arts and humanities, the social sciences, engineering, the natural sciences and the professions. At minimum, the narrative should address the following questions:

- What is being proposed and what are its goals?
- Which faculty, departments, schools/colleges or university offices will be involved in the proposed initiative?
- How does the proposed initiative present Vanderbilt with an important opportunity?
- How distinctive is this proposal? If it parallels activities underway or being considered on other campuses, what are the arguments for pursuing the proposed effort at Vanderbilt?
- How will the proposed initiative operate, if funded?
- Which criteria should be used to measure the initiative's progress, both yearly and in the long term, if funded?

**B. Full Proposal Budget**

In general, each budget must: (1) present a financial plan showing no more than three years of support from EGE-program funds; (2) include the full set of true costs to implement what is proposed; (3) identify and explain/justify each major expenditure category and each major expenditure; (4) identify and explain the arrangements made *prior* to submitting a proposal for any space needed to accommodate what is being proposed.

**C. Submission of Full Proposal**

In response to an invitation, three hard copies and one electronic copy (Microsoft Word or pdf) of each proposal should be submitted to Dennis G. Hall, Associate Provost for Research and Graduate Education, 401 Kirkland Hall, dennis.g.hall@vanderbilt.edu. The submission deadline will be included in the invitation.

**Notes and References**

1. Faculty members with primary appointments in the School of Medicine or in the School of Nursing are eligible to participate in efforts led by University Central faculty and focused on (a)

Ph.D. programs concentrated within University Central or (b) university-wide, interdisciplinary Ph.D. programs.

2. There are no Ph.D. programs centered in the Blair School of Music, but members of the Blair faculty are eligible to participate in efforts aimed at enhancing graduate programs in areas of interest.

3. In 2003, Vanderbilt awarded 176 Ph.D. degrees, of which 60 were in Arts & Science programs, 41 were in Biomedical Sciences programs, 23 were in Engineering programs, 29 were in Peabody programs, 7 were in Religion, 2 were in Management, 1 was in Nursing and 13 were in various interdisciplinary programs.

4. Not all of Vanderbilt's Ph.D. programs were included in the survey. The NRC used the following criteria for selecting Ph.D. programs for inclusion in the study that led to its 1995 *Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States*: "... the committee then decided to invite to participate in the study any institution within a field that produced at least three Ph.D.s between 1988 and 1990 and one Ph.D. in 1991 or that had a rating of 2.0 or better in that field in the 1982 study (in the event the institution did not produce one Ph.D. in 1991)."

5. Seven Vanderbilt Ph.D. programs were included in the Biological/Biomedical Sciences category. Of those seven, four were ranked individually in the top quartiles of their respective fields in the 1995 NRC survey.