

**ENHANCING GRADUATE EDUCATION (E-G-E) AT VANDERBILT:  
CALL FOR PRE-PROPOSALS, 2006**

This document announces the second cycle of competition for awards under the Program to Enhance Graduate Education (the E-G-E Program). The Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs invites faculty<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 the Provost's domain (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 2006 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 E-G-E Program will provide selected faculty-led groups with seed support for up to three years to initiate efforts that will be sustained thereafter from another source, to implement a promising approach on a trial basis, or to cover a one-time, nonrecurring cost. It is expected that funding for new awards will begin as soon as possible after July 1, 2007.

**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. degree in 1879 (in Chemistry), only four years after its founding and only 18 years after Yale awarded the United States' first Ph.D. Today, standing at the very beginning of the 21st century, the 2006/2007 Graduate School catalog lists 45 Ph.D. programs that over time have awarded nearly 18,000 Ph.D.s, an accomplishment of which Vanderbilt can justifiably be proud.

That said, it is widely understood that Vanderbilt aspires to strengthen its doctoral programs in order 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.

The progress we've made as a Ph.D.-granting institution in the last few years against two key challenges has been impressive. The first is numerical. Taken as a whole, the number of Ph.D.s Vanderbilt graduates each year amounts to around 0.5% of the approximately 40,000 Ph.D. degrees produced by all U.S. universities in a typical year.<sup>3</sup> The top-20 (mostly private) institutions that appear on *US News & World Report's* undergraduate ranking of national universities graduate annually an average of some 275 Ph.D.s per institution (290 if we exclude Dartmouth, predominately an undergraduate institution, from the list). But whereas Vanderbilt's faculty graduated 176 Ph.D.s in 2003, they graduated 194 in 2005 and an astonishing 230 in 2006. Further, whereas in 2003 only 12 of Vanderbilt's Ph.D. programs graduated more than 5 Ph.D.s and only 2 programs graduated 10 or more for an annual average of  $176/44 = 4$  Ph.D. graduates/program/year, in 2006 there were 16 that graduated more than 5 and 8 that graduated 10 or more Ph.D.s for an average of  $230/45$  that exceeds 5 Ph.D. graduates/program/year. If this

level can be maintained or even increased a bit, then Vanderbilt will have reached a level of activity that is consistent with its aspirations.

The second reality centers on accomplishment, both actual and perceived. During the current academic year, the National Research Council (NRC) is collecting data for a new assessment of U.S. doctoral programs. The previous such NRC study, published in 1995, is now out of date. In that earlier survey, 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 performance in the new NRC study will show noticeable improvement, fueled by our successes recruiting/retaining key faculty, an increasing graduate-student application pool, the investments made under our Academic Venture Capital Fund, and the university's head-turning success winning extramural funding for research. Indeed, we can take some encouragement that in 2006, Vanderbilt skyrocketed to #53 in the *Times of London* ranking of the world's top 200 universities, climbing 61 spots from 2005's #114.

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 limited resources available for such investments.

Recognizing that Vanderbilt is a relatively small university with small Ph.D. programs, all but a few of which have been modestly ranked to date, this Call 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 continue 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, research, conference travel, organizing conferences, recruiting and/or starting-up faculty, 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 E-G-E 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 E-G-E 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 at least a great many, 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 an 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 would have to be particularly compelling in order for an award to be made.

Information about the 6 awards made at the end of the first cycle of the E-G-E competition can be found in a PowerPoint presentation posted under "[Internal Grant Competitions & Information](#)" on the Division of Sponsored Research website at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/dsr>.

**Applying for Funds** The E-G-E 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 E-G-E 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 **February 1, 2007**.

**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 E-G-E-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 intended 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. Comparing 2003 and 2006, Ph.D. degrees awarded by Vanderbilt broke down this way:

<i>Programs in</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2006</i>
Arts & Science	60	72
Biomedical Science	41	56
Engineering	23	36
Interdisciplinary	13	12
Management	2	2
Nursing	2	1
Peabody	29	37
Religion	7	13
<i>Total</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>230</i>

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.