

REPORT OF THE VANDERBILT FACULTY SENATE TO THE BOARD OF TRUST

November 13, 2003

Presented by Professor Matthew Ramsey, Chair of the Faculty Senate

It has been the custom at the fall meeting of the Board of Trust for the chair of the Faculty Senate to present a very detailed account of the Senate's agenda for the coming year. I would like to depart from that tradition. We have as ambitious an agenda this year as any Senate has had, with topics ranging from the policy on conflicts of interest and commitment, and the disclosure form we use to implement it, to new mechanisms to involve faculty in the design of benefit options and a proposal for creating the position of faculty ombudsperson. I would prefer, however, to focus on two changes in the way the Senate does business and three key issues we will be considering this year: cross-school initiatives; residential colleges; and classified research. Together they illustrate the ways in which the role of the Senate is both changing and expanding. Although we continue to address issues that concern faculty members as employees, the principal preoccupation of Senates past, we are increasingly concerned with issues relating to academic programs and student life, which engage the faculty as researchers and teachers.

1. Changes in how the Senate does business

One key change in the way in which the Senate conducts business was dictated by an amendment to the Faculty Constitution approved at the faculty assembly held at the end of August. This new legislation directs the Faculty Senate to hold at least one special executive session a year, for elected faculty members only. The Senate, as you know, also has non-elected members with voting rights – the deans of the nine schools and colleges – as well as ex officio members, mainly senior officials of the University, who do not have voting rights. This arrangement, which is relatively unusual among faculty senates, is one of our great strengths, and an important element in the partnership we are building with the University administration. But the Senate is really a hybrid institution. It is in a sense a university senate, bringing administration and faculty together to advance the interests of the institution. But the 48 elected members also represent their faculty colleagues in the nine schools and colleges. The new arrangement enables the Senate to discharge its dual responsibilities more effectively. The faculty caucus, meeting in special executive session, can address constituents' specific concerns, particularly those that relate to their status as employees. The regular Senate meetings can concentrate more fully on the common goal of advancing the interests of the University. The meeting required by the amendment took place in October. Another special executive session will be held in January.

The second innovation in the way we do business takes advantage of an existing but hitherto little noticed provision of the Faculty Constitution, which empowers the Senate Executive Committee to appoint non-senators to Senate committees and subcommittees - allowing us to draw on the full range of talents and expertise among the Vanderbilt faculty to deal with the most challenging issues before the Senate. Using this power we have set up four

special task forces, including both Senators and non-Senators. Each task force reports to a Senate standing committee. Two are under the aegis of the Committee on Academic Policies and Services. The first deals with classified research and training programs, the second with cross-school initiatives. I will have more to say about both issues in a moment. A third task force, under the Committee on Professional Ethics and Academic Freedom, is studying the conflicts policy. The fourth, which reports to the Student Life Committee, deals with intercollegiate athletics. Its initial focus is on developing the relationship with other SEC institutions and with the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics, established last year under the leadership of my predecessor as chair, Ginny Shepherd.

2. Residential Colleges

Turning now to the first of our three major issues, residential colleges, I should perhaps begin with a disclaimer: I am far from neutral on this subject, having enjoyed a very positive experience myself in a residential college when I was an undergraduate, and having been involved in the Vanderbilt initiative since its inception. The Faculty Senate first became engaged in a major way last year, when the Student Affairs Committee (as the Student Life Committee was then called) was charged with making recommendations on faculty involvement in the planned college system. That effort continues this year; we have been working with Associate Provost Susan Barge to develop what we call a “bridge program” to promote faculty involvement during the period before we know what will be built where and can assign faculty members to a particular college. The Senate has been consistently concerned with a fundamental question in our thinking about a possible system of residential colleges: if we are to make this costly and demanding commitment to Vanderbilt’s future, how can we build something that will be distinctively Vanderbilt and will fit well with the best of our own traditions, rather than simply emulate existing programs and practices at other institutions? We have emphasized that our college system can coexist with a flourishing Greek system - a goal few if any of our peer institutions have attained. We have discussed making education for leadership and citizenship a theme of the colleges and inviting our students to learn through involvement in collegiate self-governance, community outreach programs, and other activities. But beyond that, we have an opportunity to take advantage of Vanderbilt’s special characteristics as a university uniting distinguished professional, graduate and undergraduate schools on a compact campus in a mid-sized city. The Vanderbilt residential college model can be integrated horizontally, drawing its faculty and graduate and professional student associates from all nine schools and colleges, not just the four that enroll undergraduates. It can reach outside the University to leaders in the Nashville community; one can imagine Mayor Purcell as an honorary associate of one college, and Maestro Schermerhorn as an associate of another. A Vanderbilt residential college system can be integrated vertically in a multigenerational academic community, embracing students at all levels, faculty and professional staff, administrators, and - why not - members of the Board of Trust as honorary associates. You will hear later this afternoon about a proposal for a freshman year college, which would allow us to retain the best features of the current freshman experience in a residential college setting; a crucial part of the proposal is that freshman would also be members of a regular residential college, with the chance to interact there with somewhat older students and the full range of college affiliates.

If we do it right, we can find ways to avoid some of the pitfalls encountered by other institutions well known for their residential college systems. We can design the colleges so that they will serve graduate and professional students, rather than exploit them as typically happens at Harvard and Yale. The initiative to improve graduate education and the residential colleges initiative not only need not work at cross purposes; they can be mutually reinforcing. At a minimum the colleges can provide a sense of community that is often lacking now for our graduate students, and opportunities for contact with both faculty and students outside their immediate field. We also need to recognize and reward faculty involvement in the colleges, which is a form of teaching and not just service and should be acknowledged as such.

3. Cross-school initiatives

One of the Senate's four task forces is charged with studying and assessing recent strategic planning at Vanderbilt for interschool, multischool, and transinstitutional initiatives; studying and assessing the operation of the Academic Venture Capital Fund, which is now in a pause mode; and making recommendations for the planning and funding of future cross-school initiatives. (The charge does not include an evaluation of the performance of the eleven individual centers and institutes that are now funded by the AVCF; most have not been in operation long enough to justify an assessment at this point.) Among the many questions the task force plans to consider are whether we need alternative models to accommodate initiatives in areas in which opportunities for external funding are limited, and whether we should do more to provide seed money or modest start-up funds to a wider range of initiatives. We do not have to choose between spreading our resources evenly among a multitude of projects, an approach no one favors, and putting 100 per cent into a very limited number of major initiatives.

The issues on which this Senate task force is concentrating raise a series of broader questions about the future of a university in which the traditional boundaries between disciplines and departments and schools matter less than they once did. Beyond the eleven centers and institutes currently funded by the AVCF there are a growing number of initiatives and projects that cross borders in this way. They include the initiative on the professions, one of whose components is a program, now well under way, to recruit faculty from the professional schools to teach our undergraduates. These changes in the work that we do, and the way that our work is organized, make this a particularly exciting time to be at Vanderbilt. In the interest of full disclosure I should add once again that I am hardly a neutral party, as the director of a new center for Medicine, Health, & Society, which involves some 130 faculty members from all nine schools of the University who share an interest in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of health and health care. We now have an undergraduate program and are planning a graduate program and collaborate research initiatives. The key challenge for my center and for all these cross-school endeavors is how to transform an ETOB environment into one in which innovative initiatives that cross the usual boundaries can flourish. We are part way there, which is why you will sometimes hear our organizational and funding model described as ETOB lite. But we need to give careful thought to how we will involve both undergraduate and graduate and professional students in our path-breaking enterprises, when they will be heading out into a world that has not

yet caught up. And there are key questions about the role of faculty in our new centers and institutes. How can faculty time be freed for participation in cross-school and interdisciplinary programs, on a short-term or long-term basis? How can faculty be rewarded for their participation? Should faculty have permanent appointments and tenure entirely or partly in cross-school or interdepartmental units?

4. Classified research

Our final issue for today, classified research, has come to the fore less because of our own strategic planning than in response to changing external circumstances - the great increase in the federal classified budget, and growing concerns about terrorism. Bioterrorism research in particular is a flourishing field, with funding coming from the new Department of Homeland Security as well as the Department of Defense. The policy on classified research now in effect at Vanderbilt was adopted during the Vietnam War era. It allows individual faculty members to engage in classified research, but they may not do so in Vanderbilt facilities, and the projects may not be sponsored by the University. A practical implication of that second proviso is that Vanderbilt cannot receive indirect cost funds for these projects. Some faculty members believe strongly that the current policy is obsolete and needs to be modified. Others believe just as strongly that the restrictions should be retained and perhaps even tightened further. The Board will ultimately have to decide this difficult question. The Senate's goal is to have a free, open, and constructive discussion of this potentially very controversial issue and to make a recommendation to the Chancellor that is based on the fullest available information and that respects the core missions of the University.

5. Conclusion: building the faculty-administration partnership

By way of conclusion, I would like to underscore two things: the development of a new partnership between faculty and administration, embodied in the Faculty Senate, which both the Chancellor and the Senate leadership hope can serve as a national model for other institutions; and the mutually reinforcing initiatives, either begun or accelerated under the current administration, that link together the different parts of the University. These two things are connected in obvious ways. The Faculty Senate is itself one of the oldest continuously existing transinstitutional entities at Vanderbilt, whose purview includes issues that transcend a single school or college. Its importance for academic programs and student life - and for faculty life I might add - will continue to rise as the walls that have separated the various parts of the University come down.