

Final Report

Committee on Student Life for Academic Year 2003-2004

Sub-Committees on Residential Colleges & Graduate Student Life May 3, 2004

Sub-committee Members: Robert Innes (Chair), Larry Swift, Edward Saff

The bulk of the work of the student life committee during the 2003-04 academic year was carried out by the sub-committee on Intercollegiate Athletics. That report will be filed separately. In addition to the Sub-committee on Intercollegiate Athletics, the Committee on Student Life had sub-committees on The Residential College and Graduate Student Life.

Residential College

A representative from the subcommittee met with Susan Barge on a monthly basis to receive updates on the progress of the project. For most of the year it was unclear when the first step of the process would begin. When authorization was given to hire an architect to design the dormitories for the Freshman Commons, the chairperson of the Student Life Committee (Robert Innes) served on the selection committee. We would recommend that next year's committee monitor the progress of the program and represent the faculty on the design and implementation of the Freshman Commons and future residential college facilities.

Graduate Student Life

The subcommittee explored the issue of graduate student professional development. This issue was raised by graduate students and support staff in the university. The chair of the subcommittee met with the President of Graduate Student Association, an unscientific sample of other graduate students, the Director and staff members of the Center for Teaching, and Steve Smart and Richard Hoover from the Provost's Office. For purposes of discussion, the chair prepared the attached proposal to test for possible consensus on this issue. Although graduate students generally reacted positively, our overall impression was that faculty did not have a unified opinion on this issue. Despite the fact that the proposal did not receive sufficient support to justify taking it forward to the full committee, it may be of interest to next year's committee.

Two factors may bring this issue to the forefront during the next academic year:

- (1) An exit interview and survey was conducted with students completing their graduate degrees. When the results of this survey are released, faculty may be alerted to the level of discontent among graduate students.
- (2) Provost's Zeppos' report and follow-up memo on the future of graduate education indicated that Dennis Hall would be chairing a Graduate Strategy and Investment Committee to deal with issues such as funding for professional development of graduate students. We recommend that a representative of the Faculty Senate's Student Life Committee join this committee or sit in on its deliberations.

Proposed Faculty Senate Recommendation to the Central Administration on the Professional Development of Graduate Students.

The work of the Graduate Education Task Force summarized in its report of February 2003, *Our best minds and efforts: Graduate education at Vanderbilt* and Vice Chancellor Zeppo's memorandum of October 23, 2003 on *The Future of Graduate Education at Vanderbilt* provided a strong foundation for improving the quality and standing of our graduate education programs. In the area of professional development of graduate students, however, these documents restrict themselves to the area of faculty mentoring. We believe this important aspect of professional development should be supplemented with a comprehensive professional development system that includes centralized support services. We believe that a well-orchestrated effort to enhance the professional development of graduate students could benefit the university in several ways:

- enhance the recruitment of high quality graduate students
- improve the career success of Vanderbilt graduates
- improve the standing of our graduates programs
- provide graduate students with skills that will make them for effective instructors and teaching assistants.

We propose that the university commit itself to the development of an effective support system to enhance the professional development of graduate students. This commitment should be reflected by substantial increases in funding for centralized resources to support departmental efforts to organize professional development programs. Departments should be held accountable for developing and implementing comprehensive professional development plans. Specific steps in implementing this policy should include:

- a. Providing funding for a support system to help departments develop comprehensive professional development programs for graduate students that are geared to their academic disciplines.
- b. Increasing support and staffing for the Center for Teaching and The English Language Center and creating other centralized support mechanisms (e.g., a writing center) to help departments develop and maintain a plan to maximize the professional development of their students.
- c. Create a mechanism to coordinate the efforts of individual units inside and outside departments to ensure that professional development efforts will be coordinated and effective.
- d. Provide expanded support services to help graduate students develop effective teaching skills (including skills such as grading, developing rubrics, maintaining standards) that will increase the value as instructors and teaching assistants to professors.
- e. Maintain an ongoing, centrally controlled and financed evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of professional development systems.

f. Require that departments submit proposals that include specific measurable objectives for professional development.