

# Vanderbilt University QEP

(Revised August 2007)

## **Building a Bridge to The Commons: Vanderbilt Visions and Student Learning at a Research University**

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## FOREWORD

*“What is needed now is a new model of undergraduate education at research universities that makes the baccalaureate experience an inseparable part of an integrated whole. Universities need to take advantage of the immense resources of their graduate and research programs to strengthen the quality of undergraduate education, rather than striving to replicate the special environment of the liberal arts colleges. There needs to be a symbiotic relationship between all the participants in university learning that will provide a new kind of undergraduate experience available only at research institutions. Moreover, productive research faculties might find new stimulation and new creativity in contact with bright, imaginative, and eager baccalaureate students, and graduate students would benefit from integrating their research and teaching experience.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“The LEAP National Leadership Council recommends, in sum, an education that intentionally fosters, across multiple fields of study, wide-ranging knowledge of science, cultures, and society; high-level intellectual and practical skills; an active commitment to personal and social responsibility; and the demonstrated ability to apply learning to complex problems and challenges.*

*The council further calls on educators to help students become ‘intentional learners’ who focus, across ascending levels of study and diverse academic programs, on achieving the essential learning outcomes. But to help students do this, educational communities will also have to become far more intentional themselves---both about the kinds of learning students need, and about effective educational practices that help students learn to integrate and apply their learning.*

*...We propose that each campus create its own version of a ‘Teaching and Learning Commons’ where faculty, administrators, and student life professionals can come together – across disciplinary lines – to create a culture of shared purposes, to audit the extent to which the educational environment is successfully advancing the expected learning for all groups of students, and to benefit from existing and new efforts to foster engagement and high achievement.”<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University. 1998. p. 7, 8

<sup>2</sup> American Association of Colleges & Universities. 2007. p.4, 43

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Vanderbilt Visions is a core program aimed at acculturating first-year students to a research university. The program creates small groups of first-year students, faculty facilitators, and student facilitators, whose purpose is to introduce incoming students to the goals and values of a research university through discussion and collaborative experiences. Vanderbilt Visions will soon be integrated into the Commons—a first-year campus and living-learning community of students, faculty, and educational professionals that will be launched in the fall of 2008. The Commons will intensify the acculturative learning processes underway in Vanderbilt Visions, thus serving an integral part in the university's strategic plan to develop a broader learning environment.

Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons seek to increase the engagement of first-year students in educationally purposive activities – those that form the academic, cognitive, social, and attitudinal attributes of successful citizens of today's global society. Of central importance to the success of this endeavor is the formation of durable student-to-student and student-to-faculty networks. In turn, these interactions will help to maximize students' academic potential during their undergraduate years. We expect permanent changes in the roles of both students and faculty, wherein the former will become intentional learners and the latter will become more active facilitators in the learning process.

The programming and structure of Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons were developed with student-faculty communication in mind. Additionally, they promise to enhance the quality and frequency of student learning experiences, foster increased formation of students' social learning relationships, and instill the basic values of civic engagement, scholarship and leadership.

In testing the success of these programs, we will collect data within four specific domains: 1) Academic Acculturation, 2) Cognitive Acculturation, 3) Social Acculturation, and 4) Values Acculturation. Data will be obtained from face-to-face interviews, surveys, and non-self-report institutional data. The research design is a multi-method time-lag analysis of the 2007 and 2008 cohorts of first-year students and participating faculty over a five-year period.

## TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING<sup>3</sup>

### *Vanderbilt Visions and Learning about Learning at a Research University*

As its QEP, Vanderbilt University has decided to revise and further develop Vanderbilt Visions, an experimental university program established in the 2006-7 academic year. Intended at its inception as a two-semester orientation program introducing Vanderbilt norms and values, the program evolved in its first, experimental year. Specifically, Vanderbilt's QEP became a core program that addresses the social and academic acculturation of first-year undergraduates, an issue increasingly relevant for all research universities, but especially germane at Vanderbilt which, in August 2008, will open The Commons—the most ambitious capital project dedicated to the undergraduate experience in the history of the university. The Commons will be a living and learning community of faculty and first-year students that values scholarship and leadership, nurtures an academic culture of balance and collegiality, facilitates productive interactions between its members, and enhances student learning both inside and beyond the classroom.

To accomplish this goal, the Vanderbilt QEP will use assessment and curricular revision of Vanderbilt Visions to create a foundation for The Commons, whose primary goals will target four forms of student acculturation:

- (1) **academic acculturation**, which fosters meaningful and peer-reinforced ways for students' networks to be perceived as intrinsic to the academic life of the institution;
- (2) **cognitive acculturation**, which fosters an appreciation and emulation of the methodologies of research and the ways of thinking that accompany them;
- (3) **social acculturation**, which fosters in student life the intellectual values and objectives of the research university;

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<sup>3</sup> We wish to acknowledge the research assistance, model development, and writing of Brian L. Heuser, M.T.S., Ed.D., Lecturer and Research Associate, Department of Leadership, Policy and Organizations, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University.

(4) **values acculturation**, which fosters in individuals the norms, values, attitudes and ethics necessary for constructing healthy civil societies and democratic political systems.

Vanderbilt Visions, which began as an orientation program for first-year students and in 2008 will become a university core program structuring social and intellectual life in its Houses, is our bridge to the Commons.

The Visions curriculum commences during the week before the start of classes, wherein students are organized into small, collaborative groups comprised of seventeen first-year students and a faculty and student VUceptor. The faculty VUceptors are drawn from the entire university and the student VUceptors represent the four undergraduate schools. Groups meet weekly for 50 minutes to discuss topics outlined by the curriculum, which is set by the Dean of The Commons, the Executive Administrator of Vanderbilt Visions, and the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee (see Appendix IV & XIV).

### *The Dynamics of the Vanderbilt Visions Learning Process*

Students do not arrive at Vanderbilt (or any institution of higher education) as blank slates, “*tabulae rasae*”. Instead, they come from a variety of social contexts, each with differing aptitudes for particular academic subjects and varying social and cultural norms. Their acculturation to Vanderbilt, then, is one that must meet them precisely at their level of social-academic development. Doing so requires invoking processes that challenge students to discover the ways in which they fit into the different learning communities of the University. By utilizing the Vanderbilt Vision’s curriculum to introduce students to these new concepts and in this new context, participants will learn to engage with one another in ways that foster both collaboration and critical thinking.

Vanderbilt Visions seeks to develop students into effective thinkers and intentional learners through active teaching and modeling, ‘learning about learning’. It is well established that “effective *thinking* is the ultimate goal of instruction in all disciplines and fields and may be achieved at the same time that students learn content and learning skills.”<sup>4</sup> To those ends, “effective *teaching* actively involves students in a process of considering information, posing tentative hypotheses and answers, and then subjecting those propositions to analysis and evaluation.”<sup>5</sup> Effective thinking is precisely the skill that is necessary to assess the status quo, challenge ideological fundamentalism and assert the continued efficacy of values that serve the common good. It enables students to engage in higher order learning processes, thus ensuring that they (1) are capable of a broad range of critical thinking, and (2) become able to integrate their cumulative knowledge. To this end, the Visions program focuses its efforts on engaging students in “processes requiring more sophisticated levels of understanding.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, student and faculty VUceptors create innovative group dialog regarding the learning process at Vanderbilt.

The process of creating intentional learners has been described by Joan Starke and Lisa Latuucca as one whereby, “intentional learning develops the learners’ conscious understanding of the learning process”.<sup>7</sup> Models of “*learning about learning*” are

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<sup>4</sup> Stark, J.S.; Lattuca, L.R. 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Nordvall, R.C.; Braxton, J.M. 1996. pp. 483-497

<sup>7</sup> Stark, J.S.; Lattuca, L.R., 1997. p. 208

becoming increasingly embraced as a way to empower students in higher education to become successful, adaptive members of a workforce and life-long learners. Vanderbilt Visions seeks to develop incoming students into individuals who will learn “with self-directed purpose,” thus equipping them to seek out fields of study and realms of inquiry based on their personal evolution as individual thinkers.<sup>8</sup> This kind of learning/learner typically embodies the following five attributes (hierarchically arranged):

1. **Questioning:** Facts, theories, experiences; wanting to learn; asking independent questions about what is to be known.
2. **Organizing:** Ideas, meaning, knowledge; developing understanding of what is learned.
3. **Connecting:** New knowledge with old; integrating what is learned into a broader pattern of understanding.
4. **Reflecting:** On what, how and why one is learning; understanding one’s learning needs and strategies.
5. **Adapting:** To new situations and needs; using what is learned in a changing world or profession.<sup>9</sup>

Since students are introduced to this program at varying levels of cognitive and moral development, the faculty VUceptors are directly involved in the learning processes of their students. Vanderbilt Visions students, through their exchanges with faculty members and their peers, come to master and understand the ways in which they progress intellectually. In this way, faculty actively participate with their students by exploring educational foundations. In these exchanges, the intrinsic value of various types of knowledge is not assumed; rather, students are invited to the task of discovering their value. Because this kind of learning process requires mutual trust and respect, acculturation is formed through these exchanges, wherein the communication is predicated on a mutual search for understanding. Brookfield has distilled the necessary role of the professor in such learning situations down to that of a transformative leader who guides students in the tasks of “appropriate risk-taking behavior, analysis of assumptions, and open discussion of thinking processes”.<sup>10</sup> At their core, these dynamics represent a form of communication that is fundamentally important to the Vanderbilt

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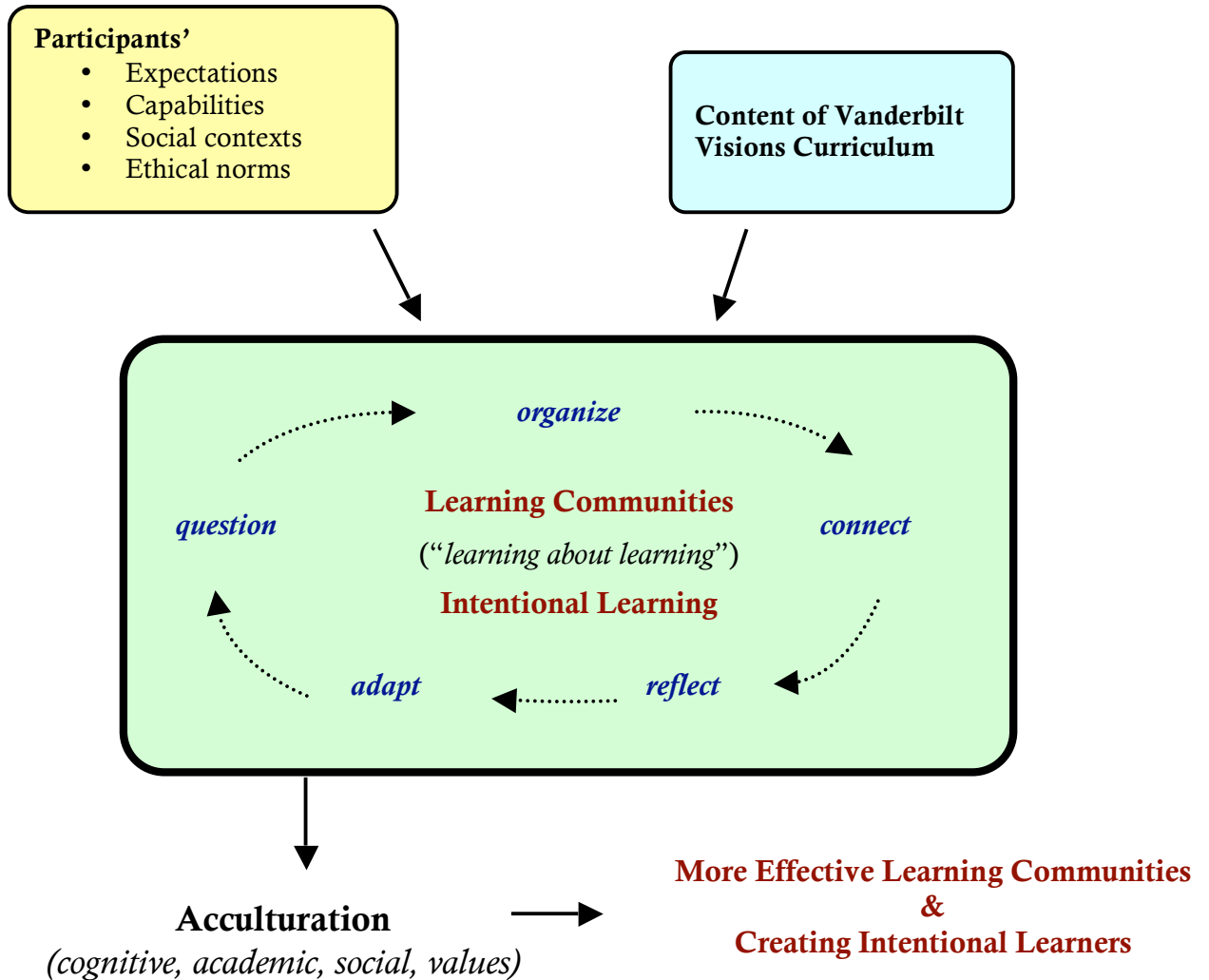
<sup>8</sup> Francis, M.C. Mulder, T.; Stark, J.S. 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Stark, J.S.; Lattuca, L.R., 1997. p. 209

<sup>10</sup> Stark, J.S.; Lattuca, L.R. 1997. p. 243

Visions process, because it creates acculturation by fostering durable intellectual relationships among students and between students and faculty. A visual model of the learning process and outcomes expected of the Vanderbilt Visions project is presented below in Figure 1.

**Fig. 1: Vanderbilt Visions – Learning Process and Outcomes**



### ***Student Learning at Research Universities: The Challenge of Acculturation***

Research universities are uniquely poised to offer an undergraduate student learning experience that is an ‘integrated whole’—an experience that uses the resources and strengths of their graduate and research programs.<sup>11</sup> In this setting, acculturation is best viewed as a multi-dimensional process, through which students’ efforts are joined with the ongoing pursuits of the university’s various academic communities. Group interaction, however, does not usually occur organically, which is why the university intentionally fosters collaboration. Such a model operates under the assumption that the full outcomes of post-secondary education can only be realized when the interactions among students, professors, administrators, academic departments, and the overall climate of the research university itself are designed as a framework for cooperation. In this paradigm, the activities of teaching, learning, research, study and service are all instrumental tools for developing life-long capacities in students and faculty alike. The central challenge for any institution lies in creating an environment that actually accomplishes the task of student achievement across these categories in real and measurable ways.

Ten years ago, the notable scholar Burton R. Clark noted that the most fundamental contemporary issue in higher education is the relationship between research and learning. In so doing, he traced the history of research universities to the present day and made the argument that the research foundations of these schools had become largely compartmentalized at graduate and faculty departmental levels. He also described colleges and universities in the United States increasingly seeking to reconcile purposes that prevailing thinking still took to be in conflict and at times incompatible. Clark articulated the necessity of a new and distinct construct – both scholastic and residential – necessary to accomplish what he called “a complete blending of research activities, teaching activities and studying activities, an intermingling so thorough that it is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins.” “In this form of education,” Clark continued, “research activity is the glue that holds together teaching and learning. Through research,

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<sup>11</sup> Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University. 1998.

the professor teaches. Simultaneously, through research, the student studies and learns. Research integrates teaching and learning.”<sup>12</sup>

At a research university, where research discovers knowledge and is thus a driving force within the institution, students and faculty are challenged both to acquire material knowledge that will serve as the objects for inquiry and to cultivate the cognitive domains that represent the foundations of inquiry itself. A living and learning community, such as the Commons, that brings faculty and students engaged in such processes together in more interactive, less formalized, and more experiential settings has the potential to enhance the quality and incidence of the learning experiences that research institutions can provide their students. Such a place can become the instrument of, and the framework for, student acculturation.

Recent research in the field of higher education increasingly serves to reinforce such thinking (see also Appendix I). Comparisons of the effects of student residence in living and learning communities to conventional dormitories indicate that students in the academically-focused residential units are more likely to achieve academic success in their undergraduate careers.<sup>13</sup> Of particular importance are, as the evidence suggests, the formal and informal group norms that such communities generate in order to reinforce a serious and focused study environment.<sup>14</sup> There is considerable evidence to suggest that residential faculty play a key role. When student-faculty interactions extend beyond the formal classroom setting, both the impact on students of faculty norms, values, and attitudes, and their general role-modeling of adult behavior, are enhanced.<sup>15</sup>

Recent research also distinguishes between different forms of student acculturation relative to community, and these can be used to develop goals, policies, and programming. At Vanderbilt, our overarching interest in residential learning communities, and current institutional direction, is predicated on this significant body of evidence - that such environments have powerful and wide-ranging influence on both specific student outcomes and the overall college experience. Though residential learning paradigms differ greatly between institutions – from programmatically focused ones to

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<sup>12</sup> Clark, B.R. 1997. p. 244.

<sup>13</sup> Pascarella, E.T.; Terenzini, P.T. 1991.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Pascarella, E.T. 1980. pp. 545-595

fully developed residential colleges – positive effects are consistently found when students are involved in such models of education:

Participating in learning communities is uniformly and positively linked with student academic performance, engagement in educationally fruitful activities (such as academic integration, active and collaborative learning, and interaction with faculty members), gains associated with college attendance, and overall satisfaction with the college experience.<sup>16</sup>

The residential college model, set in a world-class research university, affords students far greater opportunities to incorporate the values of the institution as their own. Student acculturation represents the processes, whereby the individual comes to know and internalize institutional norms. In this way, it involves a cycle that requires constant communication – both affirmative and authoritative – between faculty and administrators, and students. This process however, is dependant upon the degree to which those who are *of the institution* communicate a cogent, cohesive, and consistent message about the institution itself. In turn, when students live in close proximity to faculty and administrators who embody the purpose of the institution, students are compelled to embody like goals and ambitions. Where students witness integrity upheld by their peers, they are far more likely to uphold it as well.<sup>17</sup> And if the climate of an institution is imbued with social norms that are reinforced in meaningful and consistent ways, then student motivations for participation in the learning communities are sure to be directed toward the common good of the entire academic community. Our expectations as an institution are embodied in Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons. The QEP will serve as the mechanism to ensure the level and quality of academic social cohesion in four domains of student acculturation.

First, academic acculturation is comprehensively enhanced by living/learning communities. Participation in a collaborative or shared learning group enables students to develop networks of peers that can engage them in more meaningful and peer-reinforced ways in the academic life of the institution.<sup>18</sup> Multi-institutional appraisals provide robust empirical backing as well for the effect of academic acculturation on both

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<sup>16</sup> Zhao, C-M; Kuh, G.D. 2004. p.124

<sup>17</sup> McCabe, D.L.; Trevino, L.K. 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Tinto, V. 1997. pp. 599-623

subsequent institutional commitment and student retention.<sup>19</sup> Significant evidence exists to show a direct relationship between the quality of student effort and the extent of student learning.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, there are consistent, positive relationships between living in a residential learning community and increases in, “(1) student academic achievement, (2) engagement in a broad array of educationally purposive activities, and (3) student learning outcomes.”<sup>21</sup>

Second, cognitive acculturation, i.e., ‘learning about learning’, is best cultivated in a context where research processes are at the epicenter of the learning. Largely as a function of proximity to professors and graduate scholars who are engaged in research and scholarship, students will come to embrace their opportunities. Through frequent and intentional dialogue with those same mentors, students will learn to appreciate (and even emulate) both the methodologies of research and the ways of thinking that accompany them. Of central importance to this dynamic are the ways in which the university structures those interactions and the messages it communicates in the process of doing so. Whether as direct or indirect product of the increased interaction, research shows that students who reside in learning communities have higher tendencies to enroll in classes “that emphasize higher order thinking skills”.<sup>22</sup> As both a set of skills to be applied and a general disposition, the value of cognitive adaptability is foremost among those attributes we seek to cultivate as an integral element of the Commons.

Third, social acculturation and the ideals and objectives it embodies, can be a key accomplishment of living/learning communities. Their interconnected social systems, comprised of faculty, students, administrators, and numerous other constituents<sup>23</sup>, offer a variety of possible ways in which members can create meaningful solidarity. The more students are involved in shared learning experiences with their peers, both academically and socially, the more likely they are to become personally involved in their own learning and to embrace the values of inquiry and criticism that guide research.<sup>24</sup> This change in students’ trust of, and belief in, the norms, values, and objectives of the institution

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<sup>19</sup> Braxton, J.M.; Lien, L.A. 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Pace, C.R. 1982.

<sup>21</sup> Zhao, C-M; Kuh, G.D, 2004, p. 132

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p. 124

<sup>23</sup> Dey, E.L.; Hurtado, S. 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Tinto, V. 1997.

strengthens the community as a whole; while the effect is far reaching, the cause may initially be the product of proximity. In this way, proximity of students to faculty increases the aggregate level of student trust in, and belonging to, the university community.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, interactive learning—such as that which can occur in living and learning communities—becomes a tool “for achieving understanding and gaining meaning in relation to one’s environment,” and thereby enhances the critical reflection valued by the research university as the intellectual modality necessary to the discovery of knowledge.<sup>26</sup> The evidence of these claims is confirmed in research showing that first-year students in learning communities demonstrated significantly higher levels of personal development as compared with those who resided in traditional residence halls.<sup>27</sup>

Fourth, values acculturation, i.e., acquiring the norms, values, attitudes, and ethics necessary for constructing healthy civil societies and democratic political systems, can be intensified even further in living/learning communities than is the case in the traditional university milieu. The evidence is both abundant and consistent, suggesting that personal change toward greater altruism, humanitarianism, civic responsibility, and a social conscience, occur during the college years.<sup>28</sup> Instilling democratic values and cultural norms within a living and learning community can influence these students who, as shown, are making value and ethics transitions.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, research suggests that involvement in larger local, national, and global communities through student service and volunteerism can increase a student’s sense of empowerment in society in post-graduate years and shape both their cognitive and affective capacities as citizens.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, residential college paradigms significantly contribute to greater openness to diversity and challenge among first-year students.<sup>31</sup>

Abundant research data, including multiple meta-analytic studies, demonstrate a “significant influence in the social climate of residential colleges on students and a

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<sup>25</sup> Ghosh, A.K.; Whipple, T.W.; Bryan, G.A. 2001. pp. 322-340

<sup>26</sup> Stark, J.S.; Lattuca, L.R. 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Pascarella, E.T.; Terenzini, P.T. 1981.

<sup>28</sup> Pascarella, E.T.; Terenzini, P.T., 1991, p. 277

<sup>29</sup> The World Bank Group. 2002. p.23, 31

<sup>30</sup> Astin, A.W.; Sax, L.J.; Tables, J.A. 1999. p. 187-202

<sup>31</sup> Pascarella, E.T.; Edison, M.; Nora, A.; Hagedorn, L.A.; Terenzini, P.T. 1996. pp. 174-195

significant likelihood that this gain will occur as a result of a residential program.”<sup>32</sup> We firmly believe that issues of academic, cognitive, social, and values acculturation within the context of a research university can be addressed successfully and creatively through living and learning communities.

Specific to Vanderbilt, they can address the unique needs of high-achieving students seeking to learn what it means to be a successful student, individual, and citizen at a type of university whose core values are the discovery of knowledge and the acquisition of the modalities of critical inquiry that enable it. Vanderbilt Visions not only fosters this kind of learning environment, but also provides a test case for researchers. Because the assessment of the program is ongoing, Vanderbilt’s QEP will allow the university to assess the impact of living and learning communities after the opening of The Commons in 2008. It will thus enable Vanderbilt to contribute its own knowledge and research in a national discussion about the roles and structure of 21<sup>st</sup>-century research universities.

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<sup>32</sup> Alexander, F.K.; Robertson, D.E., Eds. 1998.

## **QEP ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### ***What Will the QEP Accomplish?***

Vanderbilt Visions is a first-year experience aimed at acculturating incoming students to a highly selective research university and to The Commons, a new living and learning community of faculty, students, and educational professionals. In this context, acculturation is best understood as the ongoing process through which students are integrated into the university community and thereby come to embrace its appropriate norms. Of central importance to the success of this experience is the formation of durable student-to-student and student-to-faculty networks that empower individual students to maximize their academic potential during their undergraduate years. In this way, we expect students to become intentional learners, and faculty and VUceptors to become more engaged facilitators of a greater learning community.

Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons seek to increase the engagement of first-year students in educationally purposive activities – those which form the academic, cognitive, social, and attitudinal attributes of successful global citizens. The programming and structure of this experience were developed to facilitate productive interaction between students and faculty, enhance the quality and incidence of student learning experiences, foster increased formation of students' social learning relationships, and instill the basic values of civic engagement, scholarship and leadership. Student acculturation to this highly selective research institution will be measured across four specific domains: 1) Academic Acculturation, 2) Cognitive Acculturation, 3) Social Acculturation, and 4) Values Acculturation.

### ***Assessment Design***

The QEP Sub-committee on Evaluation has designed and will implement a multi-method, time-lag study to measure the effect of Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons. Specifically, we will be evaluating the Vanderbilt Visions programming and The Commons environment and its effects upon the 2007 and 2008 freshmen classes and VUceptor facilitators (both faculty and students). A time-lag design was chosen because all incoming students participate in the same six-month Vanderbilt Visions programming

and, as such, no comparable control group within Vanderbilt was available. We have elected to utilize several data collection methods to triangulate our findings: a series of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, web and in-class surveys, and extensive, historical, non-self-reported institutional data. In terms of analysis, we will be applying a variety of statistical methodologies to test our hypotheses and research questions (listed below). By the time our collection is complete, there will be five years of aggregated data used for this longitudinal study. Reports will be made available each academic term and on an annual basis to the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee, the QEP Executive Committee, and the Dean of the Commons administrative staff. The Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan is included in Appendix X.

We have four general hypotheses regarding the *forms of acculturation* that will be tested at the conclusion of each year for the next five years and at the end of the five-year cycle: 1) We expect to see increases in the rate and extent of adoption of acculturation domains in the 2007 cohort and even greater increases for the 2008 cohort compared to pre-Visions cohorts; 2) We expect that levels of acculturation will be significantly higher for the seniors of the 2007 and 2008 freshmen cohorts than the seniors who graduated in 2007; 3) We expect that those who had higher levels of engagement with Vanderbilt Visions programming will have higher rates of acculturation than those less engaged; 4) We expect that Vanderbilt Visions faculty and student VUceptors will increasingly engage students in the greater learning community, i.e., outside the classroom as well as within their courses. Overall, we anticipate finding particular gains in each acculturation domain. Thus, we have developed research questions specific to those domains. It is important to note that the forms of acculturation are not mutually exclusive, thus our indices and measures overlap across acculturation domains. Three data collection strategies (interviews, surveys, and institutional records) will be utilized to statistically analyze changes in the measures over time for all four areas of acculturation.

For academic acculturation, the following research question guides our inquiry: *Does participation in Vanderbilt Visions increase the frequency and intensity of academic integration, participation and appropriate norms?* If academic acculturation occurs, we expect to observe Vanderbilt Visions participants establishing academically-oriented networks earlier and more intensely than before; additionally, we expect a

decrease in negative academic activities. Specifically, we intend to measure these variables: a) engagement in a broad array of educationally purposive activities, b) frequency of academic collaboration among peers outside of Vanderbilt Visions, c) attendance in Vanderbilt Visions programming, d) frequency of grade and absence deficiencies, and e) frequency of academic integrity violations. To investigate the extent to which Vanderbilt Visions has changed faculty and student VUceptors' interactions with students, we will evaluate: f) levels of involvement in mentoring students during and after Vanderbilt Visions.

For cognitive acculturation, the following research question guides our inquiry: *Does participation in Vanderbilt Visions increase students' exposure to and learning about the research processes inside and outside the classroom?* Specifically, we intend to measure these variables: a) frequency and depth of research participation, and b) the number of students who can identify one or more scholars (e.g., faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, staff, visiting speakers) who have had impact on their critical thinking, intellectual curiosity or world view. To investigate the extent to which Vanderbilt Visions has changed faculty and student VUceptors' interactions with students, we will evaluate: c) participation in role modeling and learning about learning, and d) the number of undergraduate research projects supervised (faculty data only).

For social acculturation, the following research question guides our inquiry: *Does participation in Vanderbilt Visions increase the frequency and intensity of social learning relationships?* Specifically, we intend to measure these variables: a) levels of formal and informal learning collaboration, b) participation in social relationship building activities, c) the number, diversity and complexity of social relationships among students, and d) frequency of day-to-day interactions between students and faculty outside of the classroom. To investigate the extent to which Vanderbilt Visions has changed faculty and student VUceptors' interactions with students, we will evaluate: e) use of specific strategies to foster collaborative learning, f) awareness of campus and student life issues and use of that awareness in class discussions (in Vanderbilt Visions and beyond), and g) frequency of faculty VUceptors engaging students outside the classroom.

For values acculturation, the following research questions guide our inquiry: *Does participation in Vanderbilt Visions increase the frequency and breadth of involvement in*

*civic and altruistic activities? Does participation in Vanderbilt Visions increase the acquisition of open-minded, tolerant attitudes and awareness of social issues?* Specifically, we intend to measure the following variables in order to study the extent to which student Visions participants are acculturating in a research-centric university that values diversity, civic involvement, and open, tolerant attitudes: a) rates of student-service and volunteerism, b) levels of openness to diversity and challenge, and c) dispositions toward altruism, social conscience and civic responsibility. To investigate the extent to which Vanderbilt Visions has changed faculty and student VUceptors' interactions with students, we will evaluate: d) participation in advising students on community outreach and service, e) involvement in service learning, and f) use of specific strategies to foster respect and dialogue within diverse groups.

### ***Methodology***

Over time, we will statistically analyze interview, survey, and non-self-reported historical institutional data for three student sub-groups: pre-Visions, Visions-only, and Visions/Commons. In so doing, we will be analyzing changes in acculturation over time, as specified in particular behaviors and attitudes listed above. Typical descriptive statistics will be used to analyze trends and differences that will inform Vanderbilt Visions program planning and improvement strategies. We will also analyze changes in faculty and student VUceptors using interview, survey, and institutional data. Our data sources will include a) student and VUceptor face-to-face interviews, b) student academic and course records, c) student and VUceptor activity records, and d) self-reported student and VUceptor survey data.

We will conduct Visions-focused, face-to-face interviews with a random sample of Visions-only and Visions/Commons students. Annual interviews with the same students will be conducted for the three following years as they continue on in their undergraduate career at Vanderbilt. Progressively, we will inquire about their expectations, experiences, and reflections on Vanderbilt Visions. For the 2008 cohort we will also ask about The Commons experience.

In March 2008, the first interviews will be conducted with 225 Visions-only freshmen. In 2009, we will then interview 225 Visions/Commons freshmen as well as

conduct follow-up interviews with the 2007 interviewees. In 2010, we will administer our third round of interviews with the 2007 interviewees and a second round with the 2008 interviewees. In 2011, we will conduct final interviews with the 2007 cohort and follow-up interviews with the 2008 cohort. Our final interview with the 2008 interviewees will be completed in 2012. At the conclusion of the five-year study, we will have followed the 2007 and 2008 cohorts for four years each.

Faculty and student VUceptors will be invited to participate in face-to-face Visions-focused interviews at the conclusion of the Vanderbilt Visions programming; this will be followed by a second interview the following year. For the purposes of this study, we expect to interview 50% of the VUceptors who participated in 2007 and 2008 programming years. All interviews (faculty and student VUceptors and Visions students) will follow a set of structured questions, customized to Vanderbilt Visions status (i.e., student participant, student VUceptor, or faculty VUceptor). Answers will be scored on a coded rubric and entered into an interview dataset for statistical analysis. All issues raised will be recorded; however, those that are not part of the rubric will be noted in an open comments section and transcribed into a dataset for further analysis.

We will use survey and institutional records in order to assess student attitudes, networks, extra-curricular participation, and research course-taking behavior in pre-Visions cohorts, Visions-only cohorts, and Visions/Commons cohorts. Additionally, we will analyze these same attitudes and behaviors over time within the Visions-only cohorts and Visions/Commons cohorts.

One important source of student survey data will be the CIRP Freshman Survey. This is a study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute and UCLA and is completed by virtually every incoming first-time freshmen at Vanderbilt. Specific to the assessment of the QEP, several composite variables exist for which we have multiple years of data, including student activities, research behaviors, open-mindedness, and contact with high school teachers outside of class. The 2007 version includes a new question section on active research and classroom activities. Responses to key questions on the CIRP will be used as an indicator of expected outcomes and thus, a limited control in our analyses. We will ask the same questions on the Spring Survey to assess any gain in these measures after completing Vanderbilt Visions.

During the middle of Vanderbilt Visions programming, an annual fall benchmark survey is distributed in class to students. The short survey questions ask students about their Vanderbilt Visions experiences, their VUceptors, and particular programming items. These comments regarding programming items assist the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee as they prepare for winter programming and the next year's syllabus. Several examples of its use in the past year are included in Appendix VII, VIII and IX.

Beginning in the fall of 2007, a new Vanderbilt Visions faculty VUceptor survey will be administered at the same time as the fall benchmark survey. A brief selection of items from the HERI faculty survey will be administered to all faculty VUceptors. We will compare responses over time. Over 70% of faculty VUceptors are participating as a VUceptor for the second year. We expect to continue to have high retention among this group; therefore, one of our hypotheses is that those faculty VUceptors who participate more often will have significantly different responses to the survey items than those who participate less often. Student VUceptors are invited to participate in the Spring Survey and the Graduating Student Survey (discussed below). We will analyze their responses to these two surveys and compare them to the non-student VUceptor responses.

In 2006, the Spring Survey, which is administered annually to every rising class, was amended to administer Visions-specific questions to the 2006 freshmen class (the first Visions class). We will continue to use this survey to ask each freshmen class the same Visions-specific questions. For sophomore and junior Vanderbilt Visions students (as they continue on at Vanderbilt) we will amend the wording of the Visions-specific questions and ask them to consider the impact of their Vanderbilt Visions experiences on their upper class years. At the end of their senior year, we will amend the Graduating Senior Survey to include Visions-specific questions that will ask them to reflect upon their Vanderbilt Visions experiences for their entire career at Vanderbilt. After graduating, we will follow-up with Vanderbilt Visions questions on our Post-Graduate Survey, which is administered six months and two years following graduation. The post-graduate analyses will not be included as part of the QEP process, but will continue to inform Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons programming in the future.

Annual reports will focus on each area of acculturation, addressing the research questions asked above and in totality testing the general hypothesis of the QEP itself.

Each fall term, there will be a report from the fall benchmark survey that will be used to examine the current Vanderbilt Visions programming. The fall term report will be made available to those with oversight responsibilities for Vanderbilt Visions programming. As was done with the reports in the 2006-07 experimental year, we expect the fall term report to be used to make adjustments to the up-coming year's syllabus, activity programming, and VUceptor training. The 2006-07 data findings and discussion are included in Appendices VII, VIII, and IX.

***Implementation: Leadership, Resource Allocation, Timelines, and Assessment Schedule***

The QEP of Vanderbilt University is a university-wide institutional initiative that marshals faculty, student, and administrative resources to construct a program whose learning outcomes are the four domains of acculturation of first-year students to a research university.

The first experimental year of Vanderbilt Visions began in fall 2006. Details of that year and planning for the QEP are included in Appendix II and III. Leadership of the Vanderbilt Visions program resides in the Dean of The Commons, the Executive Administrator of Vanderbilt Visions, and the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee. These parties decide on curriculum, activity programming, and other programming issues. Oversight of Vanderbilt Visions as the QEP rests with the Office of the Provost and Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and is implemented through the Offices of the Dean of Commons, the Dean of Students, and the Associate Provost for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions. Members from these units, as well as the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group and our SACS liaison, comprise the QEP Executive Committee. The QEP Sub-committee on Evaluation, led by the Executive Administrator of Vanderbilt Visions and the Director of the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group, and reporting to the QEP Executive Committee, currently includes additional representatives from the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group, Dean of Students, Dean of The Commons, and Center for Teaching. It also includes a faculty member and two student representatives (see Appendix V, VI, XI, XII, and XIII).

Budgetary resources for Vanderbilt Visions programming and The Commons residential system exist within the Dean of The Commons and the Dean of Students offices. The Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan will be implemented with the support of centralized budgetary resources housed within the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group of the Office of the Associate Provost for Enrollment and the Dean of Admissions. In-kind resources for the assessment plan are being provided by the following offices: Dean of the Commons, Dean of Students, Associate Provost for Enrollment and the Dean of Admissions, Center for Teaching, and the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group. All of the offices with budgetary responsibility for the QEP report to the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

The Vanderbilt QEP will extend from academic year 2007-8 through the first four years of The Commons project (2008-09 to 2011-12). The Vanderbilt Visions program and The Commons residential system will continue long after the QEP final reports are concluded. Studies and assessments of acculturation within and beyond these two entities will also continue well into the future.

The Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan includes details about the data administration, collection, and dissemination (see Appendix X). A synopsis of the annual QEP learning outcomes assessment schedule is as follows:

<b>QEP Assessment Schedule</b>	
<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Administration, Collection and Reports</b>
Start of fall term – February	Attendance in Vanderbilt Visions collected.
September	CIRP survey administered to all incoming freshmen.
December	Faculty survey administered. Vanderbilt Visions student fall survey administered.
March	VUceptor and student Visions-Focused Interviews conducted.
April	Spring Survey administered to all rising classes. Vanderbilt Visions fall survey report compiled and provided to QEP Sub-Committee on Evaluation, QEP Executive Committee, and the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee.
May	Institutional data collected on faculty and students.
July-August	Annual Reports compiled by the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group and reviewed by QEP Sub-Committee on Evaluation.

August— September	Reports provided to QEP Executive Committee, Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee, and the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.
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**Appendix I**  
**Representative Literature Review:**  
**Challenges of Acculturation at a Research University**

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## **Appendix II**

### **Development of the Vanderbilt QEP: Engagement of Campus Constituencies and the Emergence of the Vanderbilt Visions Experiment**

#### *QEP Selection Process*

In his role as Vanderbilt's SACS Accreditation Liaison, Associate Provost McNamara appointed, with the assistance of the deans from all 10 schools and colleges, a committee of faculty, staff, and students to be responsible for selecting Vanderbilt's QEP in October 2005. This QEP Selection Committee was charged to solicit and review QEP ideas submitted by the Vanderbilt community at large, select from this large group of proposals those that carried substantial community support or value, solicit more detailed proposals from their authors, and nominate a small number for review and selection by Vanderbilt's Chancellor.

On February 1, 2006, the Chancellor sent a general e-mail to the entire Vanderbilt community (students, faculty, staff, administrators, and Trustees) inviting all interested parties to submit QEP suggestions to a website designed for that purpose. Over the next three weeks, faculty, students, administrators, and staff forwarded more than 80 ideas for possible QEP topics. The QEP Selection Committee carefully considered all suggestions. In those instances, when similar ideas were submitted independently by individuals, the committee sought to group those proposals together in hopes of encouraging further collaboration in this effort. The committee identified four proposals that were especially promising and requested their authors to submit more detailed and complete proposals for further consideration.

These four groups submitted detailed proposals, the topics of which were: developing undergraduate information literacy and research skills; intellectual discovery through undergraduate research; student learning and community service; education for responsible citizenship. The committee carefully evaluated each of these proposals according to criteria used by SACS to assess the QEP. In particular, the committee reviewed the proposal's capacity to: (a) articulate clear goals directly related to student learning; (b) produce measurable outcomes on student learning; and (c) influence a broad cross section of the student body. This review process narrowed the list to two: information literacy and undergraduate research.

At this juncture in the late spring 2006, the University was fully engaged in an examination of student life and campus culture in the wake of fall 2005's increase in alcohol abuse, sexual violence, and criminal episodes on campus. In response, Chancellor Gee had appointed a Task Force on Safety and Security, consisting of faculty, student leaders, administrators, and senior staff, to study campus safety. Among its recommendations, the Task Force advocated an expanded and enhanced orientation program. By late fall, a new Committee on Orientation to Vanderbilt Norms and Values, co-chaired by Richard McCarty (Dean of the College of Arts and Science) and Mark Bandas (Dean of Students), was charged to develop a plan that effectively conveyed "the norms, values, and expectations for Vanderbilt citizens."

This committee began meeting weekly during the spring 2006 semester; at approximately the same time, preparations to solicit QEP proposals were occurring. Orientation Committee members consulted with constituencies across campus to discuss its plans and elicit suggestions. These groups included the faculties of the Blair School of Music, the College of Arts and Science, and the School of Engineering; the faculty council of the Peabody College of Education and Human Development; the Student Government Association; Interhall (the student government association of residence halls); the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate; and the four undergraduate school registrars, including the Office of the University Registrar staff. Its most important meeting was with the undergraduate organization *VUcept*, which had organized, staffed, and led the existing orientation program and activities for first-year students during the long weekend prior to the start of fall classes. Its student leaders approved and promised a wholesale redirection of their organization's goals and practices.

These consultations allowed the committee to reach a consensus on a new orientation program, Vanderbilt Visions, which would take place over the course of two semesters in order to continually orient first-year students to Vanderbilt norms and values. The basis of these values was taken to be the Vanderbilt Community Creed, a document offered to students at orientation by the Office of the Dean of Students at the beginning of each academic year. The values included: scholarship, honesty, civility, accountability, caring, discovery, and celebration. The committee also proposed a

structure of 80 small groups of approximately 20 students each, balanced to the greatest extent possible based on ethnicity, gender, undergraduate school, home state, and public versus private high school. Each small group was to be co-facilitated by a faculty member and an undergraduate representing the VUcept organization. Given the speed with which this experimental program was being assembled, any attempt to gain approval for degree credit from the four different undergraduate faculties proved impossible. In the end, Vanderbilt Visions would not carry grades or academic credit, but would be required of all first-year students. Additionally, faculty and student VUceptors would receive compensation for their work in the Vanderbilt Visions program.

Thus, Vanderbilt Visions was developed in the late Spring, 2006, as the QEP Selection Committee was still completing its work. Because the Committee viewed its primary goal to be selecting the best possible QEP for the Chancellor's consideration, Vanderbilt Visions became a compelling option. The more the Committee learned about Vanderbilt Visions and the broad campus consultation that had produced it, the more attractive the program became; this was true even though it was not a topic solicited or detailed through the original selection mechanism. To this end, Associate Provost McNamara invited Dean Richard McCarty to present Vanderbilt Visions to the QEP Selection Committee. Following this presentation, the committee engaged in a lively, vigorous, but collegial discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Vanderbilt Visions as a QEP proposal, in comparison to the other two QEP finalists.

As strengths, members noted the linkages between Vanderbilt Visions and the university's strategic commitment to undergraduate student learning as represented by The Commons – especially, the ability of Vanderbilt Visions to assist in the articulation of learning outcomes that could be applied to the living and learning community of the Commons. Members also noted the experimental nature of a program that, as of April, still had not yet fully developed a program syllabus for the fall semester, and thus, although giving the impression of being more advanced than many traditional QEPs the Committee had reviewed, in fact it was at a very early stage of development. As a result of this presentation and the subsequent discussion, Vanderbilt Visions was added as a third candidate for the QEP. Following, it was ranked as a first choice by a majority of the committee members and then formally recommended to the Chancellor for

consideration. It was approved in the summer of 2006 and was presented to the SACS accreditation process in the spring of 2007.

*The Institutional Context of Vanderbilt Visions, 2006-7*

In June 2006, Frank Wcislo, the newly appointed Dean of The Commons, convened a Vanderbilt Visions Design Group to develop the program syllabus for Vanderbilt Visions 2006-7. Represented were the Dean of Students, senior members of his staff, the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, the Assistant Dean of the Blair School of Music, faculty members from the College of Arts and Science, School of Engineering, the Peabody College of Education and Human Development, the assistant director of the Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, and undergraduate students. The Design Group was charged to produce a program syllabus that sought to: establish a statement of purpose for 2006-7, based on discussions in the previous spring semester among student, administrative, and faculty constituencies; recognize 2006-7 as the first stage of a three-year process building toward the a transitioning of this program to The Commons in fall 2008; and provide sufficient structure for a common experience shared by all groups but allow each group to shape their members' introduction to the learning community of the university. Over weekly meetings between June and early August, the Design Group finalized the Fall Program.

During the summer, the four undergraduate school registrars and the Office of the University Registrar, in conjunction with the Office of the Dean of Students, established mechanisms for organizing and scheduling Vanderbilt Visions sections. Once all Class of 2010 academic schedules were finalized, the registrars assigned all entering freshmen to one of 80 Vanderbilt Visions sections. Course schedules, athletic practice schedules, marching band practice schedules, and other time constraints were considered. All sections were scheduled on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, primarily in the late afternoon and early evening. A system for handling requests for section changes within the first ten days of the start of the semester was established.

A first, experimental two-day Vanderbilt Visions training workshop was organized under the auspices of the Center for Teaching for the period 14-15 August, prior to the beginning of the fall semester 2006. Led by its director Dr. Allison Pingree,

this orientation aimed to ensure that faculty and student co-facilitators would be prepared for their new roles. All 160 co-facilitators were divided into eight groups of 20 individuals (ten co-facilitator teams). Each group was led by a faculty or senior staff member and a VUcept Executive Board member. These eight groups remained intact for much of the training workshop and continue to meet during the academic year to discuss the program's development and to share information among the co-facilitators. An online evaluation allowed undergraduate and faculty workshop participants to comment on the orientation sessions as well as provide the first evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Administrative structures were established for the program. In August, Professor Nina Warnke became the Executive Administrator for Vanderbilt Visions. Previously a tenure-track faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin, Professor Warnke now reports to Dean of Commons Frank Wcislo and coordinates the Vanderbilt Visions program. Her duties include scheduling and facilitating meetings for the eight co-facilitator groups, coordinating special events, developing online resources to support the program, tracking student attendance, faculty recruitment, and participating in program development and training. In early September, the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee convened under the chairmanship of Dean Wcislo. This committee is the chief administrative supervisory committee of Vanderbilt Visions. It is comprised of faculty and student co-facilitators from each of the four undergraduate schools and staff professionals from the Office of the Dean of Students. A Dean of one of the four undergraduate schools (Richard McCarty, A&S, AY 2006-7), the Dean of Students, and the President of the VUcept Executive Board serve as *ex officio* members of the Executive Committee. The Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee solicited and reviewed assessment materials from all 1588 students participating in Vanderbilt Visions, as well as its student and faculty co-facilitators. It appointed a standing Evaluation Subcommittee to review and organize assessment strategies and data analysis. In AY 2006-7, that sub-committee included the Executive Administrator of Vanderbilt Visions, Dr. Nina Warnke; the Associate Director of the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group, Dr. Richard Iannelli; Professor of Psychology & Human Development and Associate Dean for Research in Peabody College, Leonard Bickman; Dr. Patricia Armstrong, Assistant

Director of the Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching; and Audrey Flak, an undergraduate Biological Sciences major.

*Institutional Investments*

Vanderbilt University has committed significant personnel and financial resources to assure the long-term viability of Vanderbilt Visions. When it convened at the beginning of the fall semester, Vanderbilt Visions drew its 80 faculty and 80 student VUceptors from all four undergraduate schools, and included as well the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, the Dean of The Commons, and the Provost and Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Budgeted funding for academic year 2006-7 exceeded \$700,000 to support faculty and student VUceptor stipends and programming expenditures. These funds did not include expenditures in support of the program by other important institutional partners across the university, which included: Office of the University Registrar; Office of the Dean of Students; Office of Religious Life; Office of Active Citizenship and Service; Department of Communication Studies and Theatre; Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching; Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group.

### **Appendix III**

#### **The Creation of The Commons**

Since the idea was first presented in 1998, thousands of students, faculty, alumni, and administrators have researched and debated the benefits of creating a residential college system at Vanderbilt. In March of that year, the Committee on Liberal Undergraduate Education (CLUE) of the College of Arts and Science proposed to then-Dean of the College of Arts and Science Ettore Infante that reform of the core curriculum of the College must be linked to this larger question. Beginning in 1999, an extensive study by a special university-level committee of faculty, administrators and students, led by then Associate Provost Nicholas Zeppos, produced the “Report on Residential Colleges at Vanderbilt University: Creating a Learning Community for Students and Faculty.” It was first presented to Chancellor Gordon Gee, the Vanderbilt Board of Trust, and the entire university community in the fall of 2000. This report recommends that the University create a four-year residential college system as an “environment for intellectual exchange, learning, inquiry and discovery by students and faculty.”

In the five years that followed, numerous university focus groups, committees, and student forums worked to define and develop policies to create at Vanderbilt dynamic and supportive learning communities extending beyond the classroom. Initially, planning targeted a combination of new construction and renovation of existing facilities to create seven residential colleges for upperclassmen. First-year students, while living separately, would be involved in various programs sponsored by the colleges. Over time, however, attention came to focus on the first-year experience as the logical starting point from which to develop campus learning communities that could be microcosms of the university as a whole and provide students mentored by faculty-in-residence meaningful opportunities for leadership development and intellectual engagement beyond the classroom.

By early 2004, with support from the administration, faculty, students, and trustees, the decision was made to focus planning and resources on the first-year experience. Vanderbilt would establish the Freshman Commons, a one-year living and learning community for all first-year students. Although the long-term objective of a four-year residential college system (known as College Halls at Vanderbilt) was retained,

approval was given by the Vanderbilt Board of Trust in 2005 to create The Commons, a project whose \$154 million cost would be funded by a combination of philanthropy and debt financing, consistent with Board policies. Extensive renovation of five existing facilities and new construction is now underway to provide a total of ten residence halls which, upon completion, will be called Houses; each will contain an apartment for its Faculty Head of House, as well as classrooms and public gathering space. In addition, The Commons campus, grouped into three quads with outdoor space designed to augment social interaction, will also have a Dean's Residence - a home with significant public gathering space for the Dean of The Commons, and a Commons Center - the main dining and community center of the campus. The Commons seeks as well to leverage significant university strategic investment in the recruitment and retention of faculty by appealing to those research scholars who are interested in teaching and mentoring excellent undergraduates.

In fall 2007, Frank Weislo, a professor of History and Dean of The Commons, will chair an innovative leadership team in residence consisting of Faculty Heads, senior student affairs professionals and resident advisors to carry out this mission. A \$10 million programming endowment will help fund activities in the Houses, the content and direction of which will be developed and implemented by the students, consistent with the goals of The Commons. It will welcome its first class of students in the fall of 2008.

## **Appendix IV**

### **Schedule for *Vanderbilt Visions* Fall 2006**

*Vanderbilt Visions* empowers its 1600 first-year undergraduates and 160 facilitators to discover the intellectual, cultural, and social niches open to every member of the learning community that is Vanderbilt University. Together, students and faculty will teach and learn from one another about the complex possibilities to be found in this 21st-century university. Each *Vanderbilt Visions* Seminar melds the talents of the future engineer, cellist, special education teacher, physician, professor, artist, and business leader in order to mark the common ground of proactive, creative learning we all share. Scholars and students will collaborate to create a learning community that will energize the university.

**Please note:** All shared texts are accessible via hyperlinks provided in the syllabus and are to be read prior to the session in which they will be discussed.

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#### **Saturday, August 19**

##### **Move-In Day and Founder's Walk: Vanderbilt Visions Introductions**

First meeting of Vanderbilt Visions small groups and Founder's Walk

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#### **Tuesday, August 22**

##### **The University and Community, Class of 2010: Community Service Activities for the Class of 2010 and Honor Pledge Signing Ceremony**

The Class of 2010 will be the first in the history of Vanderbilt University to begin life in the university community by reaching beyond it to discover and serve the communities of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County. You will conclude this day of community building by pledging your honor and integrity to our university.

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#### **Wednesday, August 23**

##### **First Day of Fall 2006 Term for Undergraduates**

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#### **Week of August 28**

##### **Commodores in the Community: Active Citizenship**

*Shared Texts:*

- Participation in community service activities on August 22
- Office of the Chancellor, "Five Years, Five Goals. Vanderbilt University's Leap Strategy"

*Propelling Questions:* What do you make of your participation in the community service activities on August 22? What purpose(s) did this participation serve? What is a university community? What communities surround it? What are, and what ought to be, the relationships between the university and that larger world? As members of the university, what are our responsibilities to serve not only outwardly toward these communities but inwardly toward one another as well?

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* How do the actions and decisions of first-year students contribute to building a university community? What kind of community do you envision it to be?

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## **Week of September 4**

### **"Changing the Culture: Preventing Sexual Violence" by Don McPherson**

Sunday, September 3 from 7:00-8:30 PM and Monday, September 4 from 6:30-8:00 PM & 8:45-10:15 PM in the Student Life Center Ballroom.

Each first-year student will attend one of the three presentations. The streaming video of Don McPherson's presentation is available to all Vanderbilt Visioneers at VV Grand Central Station on OAK (Online Access to Knowledge). [Click here](#) to take you to the OAK Login Page.

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## **Week of September 11**

### **Human Dignity and Humane Behavior - Discussion of Don McPherson's "Changing the Culture: Preventing Sexual Violence"**

#### *Shared Texts:*

- September 4 presentation by Don McPherson
- Alina Satterfield (VU Sophomore), "Reflection on Campus Sexual Assaults," *VU Hustler* 21 Sept. 2005
- Christopher Kilmartin (Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Gender Studies [Klagenfurt, Austria, 2006-07] and Professor of Psychology, University of Mary Washington, "Men's Violence against Women."

*Propelling Questions:* How do our traditional concepts of masculinity influence violence against women? What role can men and women play in preventing sexual violence? What can you as a new student do to challenge victim-blaming in our community?

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* The Vanderbilt Community Creed holds that **CARING** is concern for the well-being and dignity of others. In what ways are you, as a Vanderbilt student, responsible to care not only for yourself but for others in the Vanderbilt community?

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## **Week of September 18**

### **Relationships**

#### *Shared Text:*

- Frye Gaillard (VU BA '68), "Perry Wallace. The Long Road Home," *Vanderbilt Magazine* 85.3 (Fall 2004): 45-51

*Propelling Questions:* When we talk about relationships in our society today, often we focus on the important issues of sexuality, sexual identity, and the sexual experiences of men and women. What about the full range of human relationships: friendships, acquaintance with peers, relationships with persons in authority, relationships that are dysfunctional or rest on disdain, even hate?

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* The Vanderbilt Community Creed holds that **DISCOVERY** is the exploration of the wonders of self in relation to a larger world. How do we create an environment where all members of the university community can explore fully the variety of relationships and friendships that are the building blocks of community?

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## **Week of September 25**

### **Academic Honor and Integrity**

*Shared text:*

- Deborah R. Gerhardt, "The Rules of Attribution," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 26 May 2006: B20

*Propelling Questions:* What is plagiarism? What does it mean to have an Honor Code that is student administered? How did the fact that Vanderbilt has an Honor Code influence your decision to become a part of the Vanderbilt community? The Vanderbilt Community Creed holds that **SCHOLARSHIP** is the pursuit of knowledge in an environment of academic freedom that encourages and protects the creation and exploration of ideas, and that **HONESTY** is a commitment to refrain from lying, cheating, and stealing. If you knew that someone had plagiarized, would you, as the Honor Code insists, report that individual to the Honor Council? Why or why not?

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* How does honor and integrity extend beyond the classroom? Are you ethically responsible for what happens in the Vanderbilt community?

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## **Week of October 2**

### **Vanderbilt University Theater (VUT), *The Shape of Things* by Neal LaBute**

"An art student makes it her mission to transform a nerdy, insecure, overweight undergraduate into her confident, stylish, good-looking lover. Although the transformation seems beneficial at first, unpleasant consequences soon ensue."

No scheduled meeting of *Vanderbilt Visions* seminars; all first-year students will attend the VUT play, with performances on September 28, 29, 30 at 8:00 PM; October 1 at 2:00 PM; October 5, 6, 7 at 8:00 PM; October 8 at 2:00 PM; October 11, 12 at 8:00 PM

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## **Week of October 9**

### **Personal Accountability in the Vanderbilt Community: The History of Memorial Hall**

*Shared text:*

- Michael Kreyling (VU Professor of English), "A War of Words," *Nashville Scene* 12 Dec. 2002

*Propelling Questions:* **ACCOUNTABILITY** is taking responsibility for our actions and their consequences on the lives of others. **CIVILITY** is genuine respect for the right of others to disagree constructively with our opinions. What is our responsibility when we are confronted with objectionable public behavior or speech? Are we accountable to act

and speak publicly in a civil way? How does civility play itself out in our 21st-century university community?

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* How can a community uphold public civility and genuinely protect the right of others to disagree constructively when the issue is highly controversial? Have you experienced at Vanderbilt or elsewhere the "tyranny of the majority"?

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## **October 16-17**

### **Fall Break**

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## **Week of October 23**

### **Discussion of *The Shape of Things***

(Background information on the play will be posted to OAK)

*Propelling Questions:* Is there unethical behavior in this play? If so, at what point in her mission to transform Adam do you think that Evelyn crosses the line and becomes unethical in her behavior? At what point during his transformation does Adam become unethical? Is Adam a victim or does he consciously make his own choices?

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* Are artists truly free of moral responsibility? In their efforts to depict their world, what lines should they not cross? Does LaBute paint an accurate picture of our society - one that is obsessed with outward appearances and surface values?

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## **Week of October 30**

### **Public Life and Political Discourse: Involved, Indignant, or Indifferent?**

Shared text:

- ABC NEWS 20/20, "A Country Divided. Examining the State of Our Union," web text accompanying the June 30, 2006 installment of ABC NEWS 20/20, video streamed on OAK (VV Grand Central Station).

*Propelling Questions:* "We the people" is the first phrase of The Constitution of The United States of America. Who are "we"? Do we, as members of a private university community, have an obligation to be involved in the public life and political discourse of the United States? What forms might that involvement take? How much should we attend to issues of civility and respect when discussing politics with other members of the Vanderbilt community? How open a mind should we keep when hearing from others in that community about their political views?

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* We have discussed many faces of a Vanderbilt first-year student: volunteer, responsible individual, scholar, human being, honorable student, community member. What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States? Of the world? Does one role conflict with the other?

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## **October 30 - November 10**

## **Spring Registration - Course Request Period for University Undergraduates**

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### **Weeks of November 6 and November 13**

#### **Conclusion of First Semester: Celebration and Reflection Meal in Common and a Final Discussion (schedule TBA)**

During this two-week period, the members of each *Vanderbilt Visions* seminar will share a meal together at a local neighborhood restaurant. This meal celebrates our new friends and acquaintances, strengthens the bonds of community created this semester, rewards our hard work, and gives us all a moment to relax and talk informally about the past semester.

*Summary, Synthesis, and Transition:* Last year at this time you were stressing about application essays and deadlines and dreaming about the future. What was your greatest hope for university that Vanderbilt has fulfilled so far? What has been your greatest disappointment, if any? What would you now tell a high school senior about college that you never could have known about at this time last year?

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### **November 18-26**

#### **Thanksgiving Holidays**

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### **Thursday, December 7**

#### **Classes End in Undergraduate Schools**

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### **December 8-16**

#### **Reading Day and Final Examinations in Undergraduate Schools**

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### **Week of January 15, 2007**

#### **Meetings of *Vanderbilt Visions* Seminars Resume**

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#### **Attendance Policy**

All first-year students are expected to attend all regularly scheduled Vanderbilt Visions seminars and activities. Any student failing to do so will be subject to appropriate disciplinary measures.

## **Appendix V**

### **Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee, 2006-07**

#### **Chair:**

- Francis W. Wcislo (Dean of the Commons; Associate Professor of History, College of Arts and Science)

#### **Faculty:**

- Brian A. Griffith (Assistant Clinical Professor, Human and Organizational Development, Peabody College)
- Douglas H. Fisher (Associate Professor, Computer Science & Computer Engineering Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, School of Engineering) (Fall 2006)
- Christopher J. Rowe (Senior Lecturer in Engineering Science, Director of First Year Programs, School of Engineering) (Spring 2007)
- Virginia M. Scott (Chair, French & Italian Department, Associate Professor in French, College of Arts and Science)
- Jennifer M. Gunderman (Senior Lecturer, Blair School of Music)

#### **VUceptors:**

- Jason J. McGill (Junior, School of Engineering)
- John Joseph Williams (Junior, College of Arts and Science)
- Kyle G. Southern (Senior, College of Arts and Science)
- Kerri J. Glennon (Junior, Blair School of Music) (Fall 2006)
- Elizabeth R. Burgard (Senior, Peabody College) (Spring 2007)

#### **Ex officio:**

- Mark D. Bandas (Associate Provost and Dean of Students)
- Richard C. McCarty (Dean, College of Arts and Science)
- Nina Warnke (Executive Administrator of Vanderbilt Visions)
- Dwayne V. Elliott (Director, New Student and First Year Programs)
- Angela Cottrell (Assistant Director, New Student and First Year Programs)
- Patricia Armstrong (Assistant Director, Center for Teaching)
- Gay H. Welch (Director of Religious Life, Office of Religious Life & Affiliated Ministries)
- Sydney A. Larson (Senior, College of Arts and Science, VUcept President) (Fall 2006)
- Stuart C. Hill (Junior, Blair School of Music, VUcept President, Spring 2007)
- Ananya Majumder (Senior, School of Engineering, VUcept Board Member, Fall 2006; VUcept Vice President, Spring 2007)

**Appendix VI**  
**Vanderbilt Visions Faculty and Student VUceptors, 2006-7**

<b>Faculty Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Vuceptor Name</b>	<b>School</b>
Doug Schmidt	Engineering	David Clay	Arts & Science
Patricia Van Eys	Peabody	Ravi Patel	Arts & Science
Paul Speer	Peabody	Barbara Snowden	Arts & Science
Ann Neely	Peabody	Chinmayee Tambe	Arts & Science
Howard Sandler	Peabody	Alexis Bashinski	Arts & Science
Jen Gunderman	Blair	Kyle Southern	Arts & Science
Ron Schrimpf	Engineering	Whitney Gower	Arts & Science
Leslie Shor	Engineering	Adam Norris	Arts & Science
Nathalie Dieu-Porter	Arts & Science	Bryson Peters	Engineering
James Ray	Arts & Science	Kayla Winston	Peabody
Mark Woelfle	Arts & Science	Jimica Mack	Peabody
Bill Hutchinson	Arts & Science	Christine Reuss	Peabody
Doug Fisher	Engineering	Kelly Madigan	Arts & Science
Brendan Bream	Arts & Science	Anita Jivani	Peabody
Alex Sargent	Arts & Science	Michael Putman	Arts & Science
Gieri Simonett	Arts & Science	Mallory Mitchell	Arts & Science
John Rafter	Arts & Science	Rachel Kaplan	Peabody
Rosevelt Noble	Arts & Science	Sarah Reinhold	Peabody
John Lachs	Arts & Science	Melissa Shearer	Peabody
Michael Aurbach	Arts & Science	Corinne Cookson	Arts & Science
Frank Robinson	Arts & Science	Brianna Primozić	Peabody
David Schlundt	Arts & Science	Lauren Page Black	Arts & Science
Julia Fesmire	Arts & Science	James Cespedes	Arts & Science
Richard McCarty	Arts & Science	Elizabeth Bennett	Peabody
William Fowler	Arts & Science	Jing Chen	Arts & Science
Robert Driskill	Arts & Science	Ekta Kumar	Arts & Science
Roger Moore	Arts & Science	Kate McSpadden	Arts & Science
Leslie Smith	Arts & Science	Meredith Sellers	Arts & Science
Virginia Scott	Arts & Science	Emily Burrows	Peabody
William Damon	Arts & Science	Katie Hogan	Peabody
John English	Arts & Science	Mary Wu	Arts & Science
Lori Catanzaro	Arts & Science	Kasey Chaszczewski	Arts & Science
Frank Wcislo	Arts & Science	Natalie Roebuck	Arts & Science
Chalene Helmuth	Arts & Science	Michael Hamburg	Arts & Science
Jo Ann Staples	Arts & Science	Ben Haltenhof	Arts & Science
Katherine Carroll	Arts & Science	Graham Gipson	Engineering
Chris Janetopoulos	Arts & Science	Erin Nusbaum	Arts & Science
Shawn Phillips	Arts & Science	Sarah Osei	Arts & Science
Joe Wehby	Peabody	Emma Cofer	Arts & Science
Larry Dowdy	Engineering	Gretchen Faraci	Arts & Science

Dayle Savage	Peabody	Sarah Hoff	Arts & Science
Sharon Shields	Peabody	Julie Willig	Arts & Science
Ken Pence	Engineering	Mallory O'Connor	Peabody
Amy Palmeri	Peabody	Paul Greenfield	Arts & Science
Janet Eyer	Peabody	Joseph Williams	Arts & Science
Brian Griffith	Peabody	Allison Federoff	Arts & Science
Konstantin Kustanovich	Arts & Science	Amanda Shield	Arts & Science
Ben Jordan	Engineering	Brennan McMahon	Arts & Science
Vicki Harris	Peabody	Mark Mason	Arts & Science
Mary Beth Raycraft	Arts & Science	Austin Dirks	Engineering
Lucius Outlaw	Arts & Science	Melody Bishara	Peabody
Nick Zeppos	Law School	Lauren Turner	Peabody
David Weintraub	Arts & Science	Sarah Fowler	Arts & Science
Jo Anne Bachorowski	Arts & Science	James Porter	Engineering
Carole Kenner	Arts & Science	Grant Lyons	Arts & Science
Phillip Franck	Arts & Science	Quin Woodward Pu	Arts & Science
Gay Welch	University Chaplain	Jay Salato	Arts & Science
MaryAlanti Karpos	Arts & Science	Erik Schneibel	Arts & Science
Richard Haglund	Arts & Science	Katie Bluhm	Arts & Science
Peter Lorge	Arts & Science	Ellie Burgard	Blair
Terryl Hallquist	Arts & Science	Sarish Kasat	Arts & Science
Emelyne Bingham	Blair	Andrew Wilson	Arts & Science
Terrie Spetalnick	Arts & Science	Jason McGill	Engineering
Cherrie Clark	Arts & Science	Aaron Hadley	Engineering
Clint Carter	Arts & Science	Kristin Hoewel	Arts & Science
Vivien Fryd	Arts & Science	Erin Taylor	Arts & Science
Michael Stone	Arts & Science	Amy O'Gorman	Peabody
Leona Schauble	Peabody	Kristen Tsaklis	Arts & Science
Andres Zamora	Arts & Science	Kerri Glennon	Blair
Kassian Kovalcheck	Arts & Science	Andrea Severin	Arts & Science
Cynthia Wasick	Arts & Science	Jacob Schaff	Arts & Science
Patricia Armstrong	Center for Teaching	Stuart Hill	Blair
Bridget Rogers	Engineering	Ashley Beaufort	Peabody
Denise Due-Goodwin	Arts & Science	Cara Bilotta	Arts & Science
Douglas Perkins	Peabody	Usa Kopsombut	Arts & Science
Craig Smith	Peabody	Caroline Fabacher	Arts & Science
Gail Zika	Peabody	Jamis Gouge	Arts & Science
Bob Innes	Peabody	Tina Wu	Arts & Science
Gina Frieden	Peabody	Holland Ward	Arts & Science
Chris Rowe	Engineering	Anju Mammen	Arts & Science

## **Appendix VII**

### **Assessment Planning and Data-Gathering in Fall 2006**

Assessment planning and implementation was under the supervision of the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee, assisted by the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group (VIRG) and the Center for Teaching (CFT). At the end of September 2006 a sub-committee of the Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee (Nina Warnke, Executive Administrator of Vanderbilt Visions; Patricia Armstrong, Assistant Director, Center for Teaching; Gregory Perfetto, Associate Provost, VIRG; Richard Iannelli, Associate Director, VIRG; Len Bickman, Director, Center for Evaluation and Program Improvement, Peabody; Audrey Flak, VUcept Executive Board) was formed and charged to begin developing an overall assessment strategy and specific survey instruments for students and facilitators. Multiple assessment layers and targeted objectives in four areas were identified: a) Faculty Facilitator/VUceptor evaluation; b) Programmatic/curricular evaluation; c) Individual learning outcomes; d) Environmental influence/change evaluation.

During fall 2006 quantitative and qualitative data were collected at regular intervals through a combination of surveys given to facilitators and students, focus groups of first-year students, and interview sessions with facilitators. All of these were organized by the Evaluations Sub-Committee unless otherwise specified and included:

- Quantitative and qualitative data from an online survey organized by The Center for Teaching and given to participants following the August orientation training workshops for faculty and student co-facilitators;
- Qualitative data from interview sessions with co-facilitator during September;
- Qualitative data from an online survey of co-facilitators in October;
- Qualitative data from a second round of interview sessions with co-facilitators in November and December;
- Qualitative data from two focus groups of first-year students organized by the Office of New Students and First-Year Programs in the Office of the Dean of Students during November (see Appendix VIII);
- Quantitative and qualitative data from a paper-based first-year student survey in November, whose results are summarized as an example of the data available for the assessment of Vanderbilt Visions (see Appendix IX).

Assessment data gathered in fall 2006 in the first instance challenged the previously defined goals of Vanderbilt Visions. Delineated well in advance of the

program in spring 2006 by the Committee on Orientation to Vanderbilt Norms and Values and built around the principles of the Vanderbilt Community Creed, the original goals of the program were framed in an opening paragraph of the fall 2006 syllabus:

Vanderbilt Visions empowers its 1600 first-year undergraduates and 160 facilitators to discover the intellectual, cultural, and social niches open to every member of the learning community that is Vanderbilt University. Together, students and faculty will teach and learn from one another about the complex possibilities to be found in this 21st-century university. Each Vanderbilt Visions Seminar melds the talents of the future engineer, cellist, special education teacher, physician, professor, artist, and business leader in order to mark the common ground of proactive, creative learning we all share. Scholars and students will collaborate to create a learning community that will energize the university.

This formulation came under question repeatedly from faculty and student co-facilitators working in the program. Continuing facilitator demand for clarification of the stated goals led to a survey which asked co-facilitators to state the goals for Vanderbilt Visions based on their experience in the classroom. The key goals that emerged from these data were: supporting the transition to college; mentoring first-year students; building relationships and community within each group; and strengthening the campus community. Most respondents considered their goal to be facilitating a student's successful transition to college life and defined that transition in terms of a student's social, emotional, and academic acculturation. Helping first-year students to gain an understanding of Vanderbilt University was regarded as an essential step to strengthening the Vanderbilt community. Many faculty facilitators defined acculturation primarily as a social and emotional process with limited academic content. A smaller minority cited the aim of introducing students to the life of the mind or producing informed, active citizens. Data gathered from both first-year students and faculty/student co-facilitators raised significant criticism of the curricular content of a Vanderbilt Visions program built around the norms and values of the Vanderbilt Community Creed and a centrally designed program of readings and topics. The Fall Program (see Appendix IV) began on the day before the beginning of classes when all eighty groups performed an afternoon of community service activities in Nashville and metropolitan Davidson County. The program also included the following sessions: a discussion of community service that

emphasized active citizenship and the individual student's place within the university, local, regional, and even national communities; a two-week module on sexual violence and masculinity; a discussion of personal and human relationships; a consideration of academic integrity and the Vanderbilt Honor Code; a performance and subsequent group discussion of the Vanderbilt University Theater's production of *The Shape of Things*; a consideration of race and community at Vanderbilt; a discussion of public life and political conflict preceding the mid-term congressional elections of November 2006; and a free meal in neighborhood restaurants as an act of celebration and conclusion of the fall semester.

Most faculty and student facilitators agreed that some substantive learning had occurred during their sessions, but often despite the established program. Their commentaries emphasized that discussions were most successful when they emanated from the experience of individual groups or plans specifically tailored to the group, when discussion topics were controversial or grounded in student experience, and when adequate trust had been established within a group to allow frank discussions. Most facilitators, however, emphasized that these group environments were more often the product of their own actions and were accomplished in spite of a centralized program that otherwise would have inhibited such discussion. Criticism was especially directed at a tendency of the first iteration of Vanderbilt Visions to attempt discussion of sensitive personal and social issues—sexual violence, personal relationships, race and community, academic integrity—before groups were sufficiently bonded and individual first-year students sufficiently acclimated to their new environment to allow open and worthwhile discussion of such sensitive topics. Many facilitators also questioned the relevance of the first semester's suggested reading texts in helping them build relevance and structure for students. First-year students echoed these sentiments and especially emphasized the near irrelevance of Vanderbilt Visions to their intellectual or academic acculturation to university life.

Faculty and student VUceptors and first-year students alike identified the greatest strengths of the program to be the peer networks that were created within Vanderbilt Vision groups, the close mentoring relationship that emerged between VUceptors and first-year students, and the mentoring relationship, although typically not as effusively

praised, effected by many faculty members vis-à-vis their Vanderbilt Visions groups. Data emphasized that building a community through peer relations as well as affective relationships with upperclassmen and faculty members within each group was a foundation for the success of the program. A majority of first-year students cited a positive atmosphere of general respect for the opinions of others that was conducive to open and honest voicing of differing viewpoints. Both first-year students and co-facilitators strongly insisted that bonding within the group and with each of the facilitators was inhibited by groups that numbered twenty students each and urged the reduction of group size to a maximum of fifteen student members. Decisions have already been set in motion to reduce the number of first-year students in each group to 15-16 in 2007-8, and to increase the number of faculty and student VUceptors to 100 each.

Finally, the first round of assessment data also suggested that the model of faculty/student peer mentor co-facilitation created challenges for both partners but also welcomed opportunities for mutual learning and was viewed by co-facilitators as a cornerstone to the success of the program. Both faculty and student facilitators frequently described their role toward the first-year students as one of mentorship. Some two-thirds of first-year students felt comfortable approaching both the faculty and student VUceptor with an academic problem. Almost half of the students said the same about approaching a student VUceptor with a personal problem while one-third felt comfortable approaching a faculty VUceptor. Although the percentage for faculty VUceptor was considerably lower, it was still significant given the general reluctance of first-year students to develop meaningful relationships with faculty. Students often made positive remarks about their VUceptors even as they were critical of the program. Faculty and student co-facilitation and mentoring will remain at the heart of the program for 2007/8.

The aggregate quantitative and qualitative data from these surveys provided grounds for the formulation of the Vanderbilt QEP. Substantively, early assessments of the first experimental year of Vanderbilt Visions focused attention on the tasks of individual socialization to living at Vanderbilt and the academic acculturation necessary to be a successful undergraduate at Vanderbilt. Data suggested that first-year students welcomed the efforts made in the Vanderbilt Visions program to socially acculturate

them to living in the university community. However, they also pointed to the program's under-emphasis of the intellectual and cognitive dimensions of learning. Based on these findings from the pilot year, we revised the overall learning goals and curriculum for Vanderbilt Visions 2007/8. The assessment information obtained in fall 2006 led to the redirection of a program that facilitated social acculturation through a focus on norms and values to a program that, in 2007/8, will emphasize the values, social, academic and cognitive acculturation of students to a highly selective university.

**Appendix VIII**  
**First Year Focus Group Responses and Recommendations**



To: Frank Wcislo, Dean of Commons

From: Angie Cottrell, New Student and First Year Programs

Cc: Mark Bandas, Dean of Students

Date: November 30, 2006

Re: First Year Focus Group Responses and Recommendations

Attached you will find responses from members of the Class of 2010 which were gathered as a result of two focus group meetings held on November 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Focus group participants were part of a group of approximately 280 students who had indicated interest in becoming more involved in New Student and First Year Programs on an online survey which was distributed in October 2006.

Based upon the assessment of responses provided by the focus group participants, I have outlined below some common themes and recommendations as we continue to venture towards The Commons.

**TOP MOMENTS OF YOUR FIRST YEAR AT VANDERBILT TO DATE**

**COMMON THEMES:**

There were two common themes that arose from this question. First, students articulated that they enjoyed the various orientation programs. Students mentioned Nashville at Night activities, challenge course activities at DoreWays, Commodores in the Community, and many more. Students saw orientation activities as a way to adjust to the college environment and meet other students.

Second, students conveyed a strong satisfaction with the First Year Seminar coordinated by the College of Arts and Science. Many students stated that the small classroom size and relaxed environment not only increased the student-to-student connection, but allowed for students to foster a stronger bond with their professor.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Decrease the size of Vanderbilt Visions groups from 20 to 15. This will allow for smaller, more intimate groups similar to First Year Seminars and potentially increase the interaction amongst students and faculty.

2. Relocate Vanderbilt Visions sections to an area on campus that creates a relaxed environment rather than a classroom setting. One possibility for this is to schedule sections to meet during dinner at the new dining hall. Another possibility is to create a list of areas on campus that allow for smaller group meetings, rather than static classroom environments.

## CHALLENGING MOMENTS OF YOUR FIRST YEAR AT VANDERBILT TO DATE

### COMMON THEMES:

Focus group participants had a number of various responses to this question, but the two main themes discovered were dissatisfaction with academic advising and class selection as well as dissatisfaction with the curriculum topics this semester in Vanderbilt Visions. The majority of students portrayed strong, negative, and emotional responses when discussing relationships with academic advisors. In addition, transitional issues, such as sleeping habits, academic workload, and joining student organizations, were also presented as challenging moments in the lives of first year students.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There is a strong need to reevaluate academic advising and class selection processes for first year students, particularly in the College of Arts and Science. Students felt faculty advisers were not competent to articulate the curriculum in other colleges/schools, or even in other departments. This is a theme that will continue throughout the assessment of survey responses.

## SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

### COMMON THEMES:

The predominant majority of students stated that their social support network was developed through their residence halls. Students felt a convenience and comfort to meet other students and create a support network when surrounded by those on the same floor, hall, or building. One student referred to this network as her “home base.”

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Vanderbilt Visions sections would be best grouped by residence hall. Diversity on many levels could still exist within the sections, but all students would have a common “home base” and would provide an environment to continue discussions outside of the section. The registrars would need to add housing assignments into the increasingly difficult process of assigning students to various sections. Logistically, this would be a very hard task to accomplish for 2007, but hypothetically first year students could be assigned housing much earlier for 2008 as almost all students will live in double rooms in The Commons. Grouping

providing additional support for programming, increased upperclass presence in The Commons, and an additional resource for student support.

2. Although only one student articulated this notion, particular attention needs to be paid to students of color. As we start to assign housing to students in The Commons, we need to take proper steps to ensure that students of color are located near other students of color, rather than a gunshot approach.

## CHANGES TO THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

### COMMON THEMES:

Only two themes were presented when first year students were posed this question: dissatisfaction and frustration with academic advising and class selection, as well as dissatisfaction with Vanderbilt Visions. Students expressed a lack of support, attention, and useful academic resources in regards to academic advising and class selection. Many students stated that they understood the purpose behind the Vanderbilt Visions experience, but acknowledged that major changes should be made to the curriculum.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Again, there is a strong need to reevaluate academic advising and class selection processes for first year students, particularly in the College of Arts and Science. Students want an opportunity to talk to advisers about their academic and career development and receive accurate, efficient information. First year students are seeking an audience to help them discover their academic path for the next four years. Students want to feel supported and are instead being challenged by the lack of academic resources and advice. There needs to exist a harmonious balance between the challenge of discovering their own academic path and providing the support necessary to help first year students on their journey of discovery.
2. Although there was dissatisfaction with Vanderbilt Visions, students found value in this concept and supported continuing the program in future years. Curriculum changes must be made to Vanderbilt Visions to increase satisfaction and the impact on the development of first year students.

## TYPES OF INDIVIDUALS FOR WHOM ADVICE WAS SOUGHT (OTHER THAN UNDERGRADS)

### COMMON THEMES:

Students struggled to answer this question. In the end, most came back to the fact that most of the advice sought comes from other undergraduates. Participants mentioned faculty, staff, graduate students, pastors/ministers, and high school relationships as the main types of individuals for whom advice was sought.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase the involvement of other individuals outside undergraduates in the lives of first year students. Having faculty, staff, and graduate students living in The Commons will allow students to recognize other types of individuals for whom they can seek advice, and potentially allow students to receive more diverse types of advice from members of the Vanderbilt community who have the experience of succeeding through the first year of college and beyond.

## CHANGES TO VANDERBILT VISIONS/TOPICS TO COVER IN SECTIONS

### COMMON THEMES:

Students had a plethora of suggestions to change Vanderbilt Visions and the topics covered in the sections. First, students were strongly supportive of moving some of the “heavy” topics to later in the semester. Second, students want more “real world” and adjustment topics and sessions. Students considered these topics as being practical, and that “adjustment is the one thing we all have alike.” Time management, Greek Life, and alcohol education were some of the main topics discussed in regards to adjustment and “real world” issues in the lives of first year students.

Third, students articulated a need for academic credit for Vanderbilt Visions similar to an incentive based benefit analysis: “If you’re putting something in, you’re going to want something in return.” At the same time though, students want Vanderbilt Visions to be fun and interactive. Fourth, students provided a number of various ideas for increasing group activities, incorporating various forms of media or field trips in order to make Vanderbilt Visions more interactive for future years.

Finally, students saw the importance of the co-facilitating relationship, but tended to define the professor as the “adult” in the room or being the “elderly figure.” Students also stated that their relationships with facilitators have carried beyond the sections and into social settings or individual meetings.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Although there is a desire to move “heavy” topics later in the semester, there is also an obligation and duty to inform students of safety and wellness issues as early as possible. Creating an extended orientation experience would allow for students to continue to form bonds with other students, but also provide enough time for first year students to be properly educated on topics such as alcohol, sexual violence, and campus safety. Follow up conversations on such topics could continue in Vanderbilt Visions later in the semester.

2. The majority of participants would like to receive academic credit for Vanderbilt Visions. Vanderbilt Visions can hold a strong focus on transitional and adjustment issues early in the semester and still maintain an academic framework. Student learning is occurring in Vanderbilt Visions, and it would be fair to assume that those students who are not attending Vanderbilt Visions are the students for whom the institution needs to reach out to the most. If academic credit will guarantee that all first year students have a common experience and are exposed to transitional and adjustment issues, it is worth proposing to the colleges and schools.
3. Incorporating more group activities into the curriculum of Vanderbilt Visions is essential for its success in the future. Students highlighted the Don McPherson lecture, *The Shape of Things*, and articulated a need to branch out beyond the classroom environment. Sections should also utilize various forms of media, such as movies, music, and current news topics to articulate the overall section topic and increase the way in which we engage first year students in discussion. The Vanderbilt Visions Executive Committee should investigate and record various activities for use in future sections.
4. Although there is a strong satisfaction with facilitators, the role of facilitators must be more clearly defined, especially for faculty members. There is a current crossroads for facilitators regarding what the level of engagement is ideal with their first year students. At the same time, it is also fair to assume that there is a direct correlation between facilitators who have reached out the most and have taken additional steps to building a relationship with their first year students and first year student overall student satisfaction with Vanderbilt Visions.

#### SUFFICIENT RESOURCES PROVIDED BY UNIVERSITY

##### COMMON THEMES:

For the most part, students stated there were a number of resources offered by the institution, but a disconnect occurs between relaying those resources to first year students in an efficient manner. When asked this question, students again expressed a lack of resources regarding academic advising and class registration, stating they felt lost and that the process of selecting classes was stressful.

##### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Vanderbilt Visions section meetings early on in the semester should focus on the various resources provided by the institution, such as Career Services, Women's Center, Writing Studio, Chaplain's Office, and beyond. Providing students an opportunity to dialogue about these resources with facilitators will increase the first year student knowledge base about the services provided by the institution.
2. Student responses to this question focused on academic advising concerns mainly during the Summer Academic Orientation Program (SAOP). New Student and First

Year Programs should further emphasize that Summer Academic Orientation Leaders are additional resources and can help students build class schedules and offer advice on class selection. SAOP academic advisers should also be more readily available if students have further questions outside of their scheduled group or individual advising time.

## DISTINCTION BETWEEN SCHOLARS AND WELL-ROUNDED STUDENTS

### COMMON THEMES:

Students had varied opinions about whether there is a distinction between being a scholar and being well-rounded. For the most part, students stated that there are definite connotations associated with each word, but after discussing this question for a bit amongst themselves, students started to provide comments that these words were not mutually exclusive. However, students tended to say that a well-rounded individual can also be a scholar, but did not state that relationship reversely.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The mission of the Office of the Dean of Students states, “The Office of the Dean of Students at Vanderbilt contributes to the University’s mission of teaching and learning by building a community in which students have ample opportunity to develop not only as scholars, but also as well-rounded individuals.” The Office of the Dean of Students should further assess this mission statement and whether there should be a distinction between “scholars” and “well-rounded” individuals.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

### COMMON THEMES:

At the conclusion of the focus group session, most students focused on three topics. First, participants articulated a satisfaction with their experience thus far at Vanderbilt, and that they were excited to go back to their hometowns and share that excitement with fellow friends and family members.

Second, participants stated that, although Vanderbilt Visions has faults, they see value in continuing the program. Students also stated that Vanderbilt Visions has exposed first year students to topics and concepts they had not explored previously.

Finally, students stated that they are energized to become more involved in organizations on campus. Students also shared that they are eager to help shape the experience of the next class of first year students.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The overall assessment of the focus groups provided new ideas, concepts, and also reaffirmed some thoughts that are currently being explored by various entities on campus. There is a definite need and value for the first year student voice to be included in the planning process for Vanderbilt Visions in the future, as well as in the development of The Commons.

**Appendix IX**  
**Vanderbilt Visions Fall 2006 Course Evaluations**

<b>Vanderbilt Visions Fall 2006 Course Evaluation: Favorably and Unfavorable Item Ratings</b>	
<i>Percent Rating the Item Favorably (i.e., Agrees or Strongly Agrees with the Item) n = 1,188</i>	
<b>Table 1: Item</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers I live with	82.5%
Students in my Vanderbilt Visions group are respectful of each other	81.2%
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers I have met socially	79.9%
I am satisfied with my overall first-semester experience at Vanderbilt	76.2%
I feel comfortable approaching my VUceptor with an academic concern	68.4%
I feel comfortable voicing my opinion in my Vanderbilt Visions group	66.8%
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers in my classes	64.5%
My Vanderbilt Visions group fosters open and honest discussions	64.4%
I feel comfortable approaching my faculty facilitator with an academic concern	61.5%
the "Commodores in the Community" experience was meaningful to me	55.3%
I believe my section compares favorably to other Vanderbilt visions sections	54.5%
My group has bonded well	51.3%
I feel comfortable approaching my VUceptor with a personal concern	48.3%
I participate actively in Vanderbilt Visions	46.8%
Most members of my Vanderbilt visions group participate actively	40.9%
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers in my Vanderbilt Visions group	40.5%
The Don McPherson lecture increased my awareness of sexual violence issues and gender attitudes	39.5%
Attending the performance of The Shape of Things was meaningful to me	37.4%
I am satisfied with my Vanderbilt Visions experience	35.0%
Vanderbilt visions has helped me to adjust to Vanderbilt socially	31.0%
I feel comfortable approaching my faculty facilitator with a personal problem	30.5%
I consistently complete my Vanderbilt Visions readings	30.1%
Because of Vanderbilt Visions I have gained more respect for the opinions of others	28.5%
I enjoy attending Vanderbilt Visions	26.3%
I discussed Vanderbilt Visions topics outside of the group meetings	25.3%
The topics we discuss are relevant to my experience as a new member of the Vanderbilt community	22.6%
I rely on individual members of my Vanderbilt Visions section for support	19.9%
Discussions in my Vanderbilt visions group have led me to rethink my positions on the topics addressed	17.6%
Vanderbilt Visions has promoted my intellectual growth	15.1%
Vanderbilt visions has helped me adjust to Vanderbilt academically	15.0%

<b>Table 2: Item</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Vanderbilt visions has helped me adjust to Vanderbilt academically	52.4%
Vanderbilt Visions has promoted my intellectual growth	51.1%
I discussed Vanderbilt Visions topics outside of the group meetings	50.6%
I rely on individual members of my Vanderbilt Visions section for support	49.9%
I consistently complete my Vanderbilt Visions readings	49.5%
Discussions in my Vanderbilt visions group have led me to rethink my positions on the topics addressed	46.5%
The topics we discuss are relevant to my experience as a new member of the Vanderbilt community	41.5%
I enjoy attending Vanderbilt Visions	38.0%
Vanderbilt visions has helped me to adjust to Vanderbilt socially	37.0%
I feel comfortable approaching my faculty facilitator with a personal problem	36.1%
I am satisfied with my Vanderbilt Visions experience	34.1%
The Don McPherson lecture increased my awareness of sexual violence issues and gender attitudes	33.7%
Attending the performance of The Shape of Things was meaningful to me	32.1%
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers in my Vanderbilt Visions group	29.1%
Most members of my Vanderbilt visions group participate actively	28.3%
Because of Vanderbilt Visions I have gained more respect for the opinions of others	27.2%
I feel comfortable approaching my Vuceptor with a personal concern	22.6%
I participate actively in Vanderbilt Visions	21.8%
the "Commodores in the Community" experience was meaningful to me	19.2%
My group has bonded well	17.2%
I feel comfortable approaching my faculty facilitator with an academic concern	15.0%
I believe my section compares favorably to other Vanderbilt visions sections	13.0%
I feel comfortable voicing my opinion in my Vanderbilt Visions group	11.1%
My Vanderbilt Visions group fosters open and honest discussions	10.3%
I feel comfortable approaching my Vuceptor with an academic concern	10.1%
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers in my classes	9.3%
I am satisfied with my overall first-semester experience at Vanderbilt	6.8%
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers I live with	6.2%
Students in my Vanderbilt Visions group are respectful of each other	5.0%
Since arriving at Vanderbilt I have developed close friendships with peers I have met socially	4.8%