

**Student Life Committee
Vanderbilt University Senate
Report for Academic Year 2013-2014
Chair: Joseph Wehby, Peabody**

Committee members:

Joseph Wehby, Peabody, Chair
Adam Anderson, Engineering
Jo-Anne Bachorowski, A&S
Susan Berk-Seligson, A&S
Celeste Hemingway, Medicine
Alyssa Hasty, Medicine
Rolanda Johnson, Nursing [Executive Committee Liaison]
Mark Schoenfield, A&S
Michael Slayton, Blair
Edward Wright-Ross, A&S
Mark Bandas, Dean of Students (ex officio)

Initial Charges for 2013-14:

1. Review of First Year Experience (Commons and Visions)
 - a. Follow up on the questions generated by the committee and stay in contact with the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education regarding any upcoming review.
 - b. What is the effect of the Commons on the following aspects of undergraduate life: admissions, one-year retention rates, Greek life, mental health, the time it takes to declare a major?
 - c. The number of students involved in extracurricular activities, on academic or disciplinary probation, pursuing study abroad, and applying to professional schools?
 - d. Relationships between faculty and students, and the demands on faculty for extra service related to the Commons?
 - e. How effective is Visions for faculty and students? Are these results consistent with administrators' original intent?
2. Mental Health Services Follow-up
3. Communication of Student Awards
4. Honor Council Follow-up
5. Monitor Greek Life Task Force

Work Done

At our first meeting, we decided that given the scope of the task that the committee would primarily focus on a review of the first year experience via the Commons and the Vanderbilt Visions

program and to coordinate monitor the work of the Greek Life Task Force at it related to /overlapped with the work of the Student Life Committee.

1. Review of First Year Experience (Commons and Visions)

For this charge, we engaged in some fact find activities to better understand how the first year experience has been evaluated thus far and to determine other sources of data that might be used in an evaluation. Our first activity involved inviting the Dean of the Ingram Commons, Frank Wcislo, and Nina Warnke, Assistant Dean of the Ingram Commons and Executive Director of the Visions Program. At this meeting, discussion centered on an historical overview of the Commons, a review of the type of evaluation data collected, a review of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for Vanderbilt Visions, and personnel perspectives from the Dean and Assistant Dean of the Ingram Commons was provided. In general, the consensus from the Deans' was that the first year experience was overall a positive one that resulted in modest improvement in some areas of students' life during their first year at Vanderbilt. Issues included:

- a. Currently the evaluation is bound by the data from the Quality Enhancement Plan; there are ongoing discussions with VIRG about adding additional questions.
- b. Committee was interested in the feasibility of measuring quality of faculty-student interactions earlier in the academic year and more often over the course of fall and spring semesters.
- c. There seems to be an increased demand for change/opportunity from students that is greater than the university can provide at this time.
- d. There was general consensus that faculty needed to catch up with transition toward a residential college model although concerns about faculty time constraints were also discussed.
- e. The impact of Greek Life on the Commons experience was discussed. Questions were raised about how this impact should be measured.

Following meeting with Deans Wcislo and Warnke, the committee developed an interview instrument to be completed by the Faculty Heads of Houses at the Commons. The interview form was emailed to each Faculty Head and members of this committee followed up in person or via phone/email. The purpose of the instrument was to get the perspectives of the faculty who are involved in the day-to-day lives of first year students. The question on the instrument included the following:

- 1) *Based on your personal knowledge, elaborate on the degree to which Vanderbilt Visions and the Commons has influenced first-year students' acculturation-- academically, socially, and cognitively.***
- 2) *Communal living on a university campus is designed to transform the entire college experience. To your knowledge, has communal living impacted students' life at VU beyond the first year?***
- 3) *What do you perceive as being the role of faculty engagement in communal living?***

- 4) *Other than residential faculty, how are other faculty engaged in this process? Could this notion of communal living and acculturation occur with more limited faculty interactions?*
- 5) *What are your thoughts on the relationship between the Commons Experience and*
 - a. *Greek Life?*
 - b. *Athletes*
 - c. *band members*
 - d. *Other student organizations*
- 6) *An initial evaluation of a cohort of students from their first to junior years of education revealed that Vanderbilt Visions and Commons was associated with a small effect on academic achievement. Elaborate on the possible reasons this occurred and what can be done differently?*
- 7) *As Vanderbilt now embarks on the opening of the Warren and Moore Colleges, what do you think could be done differently as we move forward with residential colleges (i.e. lessons learned)?*

Although the responses are still being evaluated, there is some apparent consistency in the responses from Faculty Heads. Issues that were raised through this process include the ability to measure the long-term impact (past the first year) of the first year experience, the overall effectiveness of the curriculum (some parts work better than others, e.g., how the Commons Reading is used), the impact of Greek Life on the Commons experience, and the difficulty of incorporating some groups (e.g. athletes, some scholarship students) in the Commons Experience.

Finally, we also received an update on the College Halls project from Dr. Cynthia Cyrus, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education and Digital Learning. Given that one purpose for reviewing the first year experience was to determine lessons learned so that the start of the College Halls experience would benefit from this information.

Recommendations for next year:

1. **Continue with review and evaluation of the first year experience including the use of additional data from student leaders and involved faculty (e.g. VUceptors) so as to have a comprehensive understanding to the Commons and Visions experiences as they relate to the overall goals of the program.**
2. **Coordinate with College Halls personnel to determine the best ways to measure ongoing impact of the first year program.**
3. **Recommend adding faculty from Commons and College Halls programs to be ad hoc members of the Student Life Committee.**
4. **Continue working with Greek Life Task force to determine the impact of Greek Life on first year experiences.**
5. **As the residential colleges expand, continue monitoring subgroups of students to assess their level of involvement in their residences.**
6. **Invite Dean Wcislo to provide an update to the Full Senate on the Commons program.**