Opportunity Vanderbilt

In 2008, Vanderbilt launched Opportunity Vanderbilt, a no-loan program that gives grants instead of need-based loans to undergraduate students. Vanderbilt's financial aid program includes three very distinct commitments to our undergraduate students:

1. Since talent and promise recognize no social, economic or, geographic boundaries, our admissions process is need-blind.
2. Vanderbilt will meet 100 percent of a family’s demonstrated financial need.
3. Financial aid awards do not include loans.

Vanderbilt has seen a tremendous drop in total student debt upon graduation since the program’s implementation. Compared with 2008–09 borrowing figures before the program, our students’ total amount borrowed has decreased by 66 percent. Additionally, the number of need-based borrowers has decreased by 71 percent over the same time period.

Average debt of graduates (2019–20)  
(Source: TICAS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Average Debt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vanderbilt</td>
<td>$22,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT-KNOXVILLE</td>
<td>$26,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTSU</td>
<td>$25,145</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIV. OF MEMPHIS</td>
<td>$24,739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL TN GRADUATES***</td>
<td>$26,852</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Opportunity Vanderbilt was launched in 2008.
**Aid includes institutional, federal, state and private gift assistance.
College Access and Success

Vanderbilt University has a long-standing tradition of actively and aggressively recruiting students from a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds. From our pioneering commitment to diversity outreach as the original POSSE Foundation partner university, to award-winning access recruitment programs and one of the most generous access, completion and attainment-oriented financial aid policies in the nation, Vanderbilt has led the way in low-income student outreach and recruitment.

In 2016, Vanderbilt became one of the original 30 colleges and universities participating in the American Talent Initiative, which seeks to substantially expand the number of talented low- and moderate-income students at America's top-performing undergraduate institutions with the highest graduation rates. Together, the members of ATI, now numbering more than 100, have vowed to enroll and graduate 50,000 more low- and moderate-income students by 2025. Over three years, participating institutions have already increased their enrollment of students eligible for federal Pell grants by nearly 12,800—and that number is set to grow in the years ahead.

Vanderbilt currently recruits in more than 45 U.S. states and territories and emphasizes visits to a variety of high schools, including many low-resourced, magnet, charter, or other types of high schools that serve low-income and first-generation students and families. Vanderbilt also features a generous travel assistance program that defrays some of the financial costs of visiting campus for low-income students.

Vanderbilt is energetically engaging potential Pell-eligible students and is among the less than 1 percent of American private universities that communicate with these students as early as eighth grade. Using a multitude of sources, Vanderbilt specifically targets low-income and first-generation students and families with a robust communication strategy that includes fee-waiver information and assistance in navigating the college application process.

Vanderbilt is at the forefront of partnering with local and national community-based organizations to broaden access to thousands of students. Vanderbilt is now a national partner with the KIPP schools, QuestBridge, YES Prep Academies, Chicago Scholars, the Center for Student Opportunity, Say Yes to Education, Venture Scholars, and more than 100 other organizations and foundations worldwide. In 2014, Vanderbilt launched a unique campus visit program called ACCESS Vanderbilt that hosts leaders of community-based organizations from across the country with the goal of deepening partnerships to benefit students.

First-generation students at Vanderbilt receiving Opportunity Vanderbilt support

Being the first in her family to attend college in the U.S., Serena Musungu, Class of 2023, had to navigate graduating her public high school as an English learner all on her own, with very few of the classes she took in the Congo transferring. To Serena, being a first-generation student at Vanderbilt always meant working twice as hard. The other first-generation students at Vanderbilt, as well as organizations like QuestBridge and the African Student Union, were there to help Serena early on to navigate school resources and make the most out of each opportunity because they had

As both a first-generation student and a low-income student, Stanley Zhao, Class of 2024, felt out of place in his school prior to coming to Vanderbilt, given his socioeconomic status. Navigating the financial aid process, the Common App, and university essays was also very foreign to him, given that no one within his immediate vicinity had any experience with them. Despite the challenges of being a first-generation, low-income student, getting involved with campus organizations like QuestBridge and FirstVU allowed him to meet people who shared a similar background as well as advocate for more resources for future generations of first-generation, low-income students.

For more information, please contact Vanderbilt’s Office of Federal Relations: Christina West 202-216-4370 · Heather Bloemhard 202-216-4368 · federalrelations@vanderbilt.edu

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