

Report of the International Strategy Working Group

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Full Report to Be Issued Fall 2017

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Provost Wenthe charged the [International Strategy Working Group](#) (ISWG) with developing a plan to strengthen Vanderbilt's international research, scholarship, and creative expression while raising the global profile of Vanderbilt as a research institution. The Provost identified four guiding principles for executing the charge: the strategy should build on a grassroots foundation; it should support One Vanderbilt trans-institutional approaches; it should enhance scholarship through strategic and aligned investment; and it should identify ways to better communicate Vanderbilt research to a global audience.

Over this academic year, the ISWG assiduously gathered input from faculty and administrators in all of Vanderbilt's colleges and schools. That input consistently focused on several key principles. There was a consensus that the strategy should be faculty-driven and flexible in offering support to outstanding research and scholarship at Vanderbilt, including but not limited to trans-institutional projects. Faculty also widely agreed that the strategy should reduce administrative barriers to global research and lead to greater administrative support for global engagement. Faculty and Deans across campus further emphasized the importance of building Vanderbilt's international reputation to be commensurate with our national prominence, and of enhancing Vanderbilt's global competitiveness in the marketplaces for ideas and for faculty and graduate student talent. Finally, the Vanderbilt community called for more international engagement as a way to promote diverse cultural and academic perspectives.

Based on the charge and guiding principles as well as the wide range of faculty input from across the university, the ISWG has developed a four-point strategy that builds on Vanderbilt's strengths and that supports the University's Academic Strategic Plan and its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Each of the four points has specific and broad support in feedback from faculty and administrators. ISWG's research also shows that each is consistent with best practices at peer institutions. Implemented together and adequately funded with new resources, the elements of this strategy can propel Vanderbilt's international engagement and bring the global recognition our great University merits.

International Strategy Working Group Members

- Ted Fischer, co-chair, professor of anthropology, professor of medicine, health and society, director of the Center for Latin American Studies, College of Arts and Science;
- Ingrid Wuerth, co-chair, Helen Strong Curry Professor of International Law, Law School;
- Joy Calico, professor of musicology, Blair School of Music;
- Roger Colbran, interim chair and professor of molecular physiology and biophysics, School of Medicine
- Xiu Cravens, associate dean for international affairs, Peabody College;
- Steven Goodbred, professor of Earth and environmental sciences, College of Arts and Science;
- Carolyn Heinrich, professor of public policy and education, Peabody College;
- Debra Jeter, professor of accounting, Owen Graduate School of Management
- David Kosson, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Engineering, School of Engineering;
- José Medina, professor of philosophy, College of Arts and Science;
- Moses Ochonou, professor of history, College of Arts and Science;
- Leong Seow, Distinguished Professor of Hebrew Bible and Vanderbilt, Buffington, Cupples Professor of Divinity, Divinity School; and
- Muktar Aliyu, associate professor of health policy, School of Medicine.

First: bring more international visitors and graduate students to campus, in part through a targeted “Global Fellows” (or similar) program, including providing on-campus housing for international visitors.

Second: develop and implement a comprehensive, university-wide international media and outreach strategy.

Third: adapt administrative structures to better support and foster international research across the university.

Fourth: create an institute specifically tasked with spearheading these efforts (an “Institute for Global Engagement” or similar).

After considering a wide range of models, we are convinced that implementing these four strategic initiatives in lockstep is the best, most resource-effective way to enhance Vanderbilt’s international research and its global profile. They will enrich our intellectual community by better integrating a globally diverse set of ideas, creative practices, and research methodologies in the work that we do. They will enrich our work in the humanities and arts. Together they will enhance our ability to address substantial global problems -- whether social, political, economic, medical or technological -- by providing our faculty with more of the tools necessary to do internationally relevant work and by helping ensure that the new knowledge generated is accessible to a global audience.

I. Basis for Recommendations

Our goal was to give Vanderbilt faculty members across all schools at least two opportunities to interact with the working group. The response was impressive, reflecting substantial passion and energy among faculty for this topic. We conducted a faculty-wide survey from which we received 571 responses, including over 60 pages of written comments. We conducted town hall meetings in Peabody, A&S, Engineering, and the Medical School. Additionally, we hosted brainstorming lunches that included invited representatives of all schools. We met with all the deans and the relevant associate deans from all of Vanderbilt’s schools, the University librarian, Vice Provosts Padma Raghavan and Cynthia Cyrus, Vice Chancellors George Hill and Beth Fortune, and we met with many department and program heads. We met with the University Research Council, and have constructed this strategy with their input in mind.

The ISWG reviewed previous international strategy documents and relevant committee reports from recent years, and our recommendations build on those efforts. We also surveyed international strategies at peer institutions, including an in-depth examination of the five schools we considered most comparable and exemplary: Washington University, Duke University, University of Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins University, and Princeton University. We also spoke with two consultancies specializing in issues of internationalization and global stature for higher education.

II. The Strategic Plan and Specific Recommendations

The strategy we propose has four interrelated and mutually reinforcing parts. Each is designed to promote Vanderbilt’s international scholarship and reputation in ways that will directly benefit faculty research and the university’s global prominence. The structure is designed to serve all schools and all faculty while promoting trans-institutional connections. Our strong recommendation is that these initiatives be implemented in unison and with adequate funding to succeed.

A. Global Fellows Program

To enhance the quality and visibility of our research around the world, we need to bring more international scholars and graduate students to Vanderbilt. We have an impressive faculty, a very strong student body, and a beautiful campus. When we bring international visitors to Vanderbilt, they usually become our ambassadors abroad. We accordingly propose a visiting international scholars program ("Global Fellows," or something similar) as a long-term investment in our research mission. We also propose efforts to attract more international graduate students to Vanderbilt in section B below.

A Global Fellows program would invite scholars at different levels to Vanderbilt, ranging from post-doctoral fellows to world-renowned leaders and scholars. We envision most Global Fellows staying at Vanderbilt for a period ranging from a week to a semester--enough time to seriously engage with colleagues and students. Global Fellows would contribute to Vanderbilt's research mission in a variety of ways. They could be part of a graduate seminar, participate in performances, provide professional training, deliver a major lecture, contribute to a specific medical or engineering research project, lay the groundwork for broader institutional collaborations, or provide research advice or master classes to advanced students. In such ways, they could simultaneously advance faculty research collaborations, enrich the student experience, and promote the university's strategic objectives. The program should be flexible in serving the core objective of improving research and scholarship at Vanderbilt through the international exchange of ideas and the enhancement of our global visibility.

The program would solicit campus-wide proposals. Proposals would be evaluated based on their potential to enhance research, creative endeavors, and scholarship for a broad range of faculty and graduate students both within programs and across the institution. For the program to have a major impact, it would need to have the resources to host a critical mass of visiting scholars each year.

Housing for international visitors would be a crucial part of a visiting scholars program and would also help attract other international visitors to Vanderbilt. We propose that new plans for graduate and professional student housing should consider space for international students and visitors. A successful Global Fellows program would also support a comprehensive media strategy designed to highlight Vanderbilt's commitment to international research and global problem-solving.

B. International Media and Outreach Strategy

Vanderbilt must develop a media and outreach strategy to align our international stature with our domestic prominence. The strategy should involve media, development and alumni relations, and graduate student recruitment.

The office of the Vice Chancellor for Communications should develop an international strategy for all forms of media. We should aim to have more discussion of our faculty's research in outlets with global impact, such as the Financial Times, The Economist, O Globo, Le Monde, Der Spiegel, and so on. Further, we need a clear, university-wide international strategy for our digital presentation, such as web-pages and social media. Some media strategy decisions are best made at the College or even program level. The university-wide media strategy must strike the appropriate balance between decentralized decision-making and forging an effective overall strategy.

The media strategy must include a close evaluation of our international rankings and a carefully considered decision about how to approach them. We lag significantly behind our U.S. peers in international rankings. Vanderbilt does best on the U.S. News Global (# 63) and the Shanghai Index (# 60). The Shanghai relies heavily on objective criteria (publications, citations, international awards). The U.S. News ranking heavily weighs “regional reputation” (North America for Vanderbilt). We do not do as well in the Times Global (# 108) and the QS (# 203), both of which rely largely on global reputational surveys. The positive news is that we do much better on rankings that rely on objective measures; where we fall behind is in reputation. This hurts us in terms of student recruiting and will hinder us in terms of faculty retention. Vanderbilt needs to coordinate responses to data requests from international rankings groups, and to consider hiring a consultancy to improve rankings in the short-term.

A targeted outreach strategy should reach alumni, including those who work at international universities, organizations, and foundations. Many faculty call on Vanderbilt to more actively cultivate its impressive global alumni. Our Ph.D. alumni, for example, could serve as our ambassadors in foreign universities, thereby improving our reputation and helping attract graduate students to Vanderbilt. Other alumni could serve as a network for students and as a future source of funding for international programs.

Similarly, the Graduate School should develop a strategy for helping departments and programs better recruit students internationally. Many colleagues, especially those in the sciences, engineering, and medicine, emphasize the importance of attracting the world’s best graduate students through greater visibility and targeted assistance. The diversity benchmarks, upon which graduate programs are partially evaluated, should be expanded to include foreign graduate students who add racial, ethnic, religious, or intellectual diversity at Vanderbilt.

C. Supporting and Fostering International Research across the University

Vanderbilt should actively promote a culture of global engagement and of international aspiration in every administrative unit. International work often poses unique challenges, and the university should adapt administrative practices to better meet those challenges while also promoting international research. All academic Deans, Vice-Chancellors, Vice-Provosts, and units such as Contract and Grant Accounting and the Office of General Counsel should have the goal of fostering international activity as part of their annual reports and evaluations.

Support for international research should come from all corners of the University, including the communications and development offices as described in Section B, but also from other administrative units. Vanderbilt must orient its backroom operations to clearly serve the University’s research missions. International work involves particular risks and Vanderbilt must manage these risks responsibly. The academic and strategic upsides should also be given appropriate consideration in cost/benefit analyses involving visas, international taxes, export compliance, risk management, and international contracts, among others. In surveying colleagues and administrators at peer institutions, it appears that Vanderbilt has some administrative processes that are especially cumbersome for international work. Externally, we risk looking provincial. Internally, we risk deterring innovative global work.

D. Institute for Global Engagement

A successful international strategy needs a coordinating entity and a high-level point person. We recommend creating an academic institute focused on global engagement (the “Institute”). The director

of this Institute should report to the Provost and serve as the university's primary point person for international research activities. The director would be advised by an International Advisory Council, with members representing each school. The Institute would run the Global Fellows program, work with the relevant offices to develop an international media and outreach strategy, and work with all of the Colleges and administrative units to support and reward international research across the University.

The Institute must work with the Vice Provost for Research to formulate and institute a strategy for international grants and national grants with a global focus. There is significant research funding available in China, India, the European Union, Brazil, and elsewhere abroad, as well as from internationally focused domestic foundations. At the same time, U.S. federal funding is under siege, and so alternative sources of funding will only become more important.

In addition to overseeing and executing the other three strategic objectives, the Institute should have funding to make additional strategic investments in international research and scholarship. For example, the Institute should sponsor small, targeted international conferences that would have significant global impact and visibility, such as with CERN or WHO. Such opportunities might be identified by individual researchers, department heads, or deans, and be vetted by the Institute for impact aligned with Vanderbilt's strategy and strengths. The Institute should also have funding available for seed grants and to rapidly invest in strategic, time-sensitive opportunities that are not conducive to funding through the annual call for TIPS proposals, including important work that is not trans-institutional.

The Institute must, however, act as more than just a funding source – it should also serve as an incubator for innovative approaches, helping projects get started, connecting them to the larger strategic plan, offering guidance and oversight in implementation; looking for opportunities, putting people in contact with one another, and taking proposals, but also being proactive in encouraging ideas of strategic importance. The institute should draw together faculty expertise from different departments and schools and it should support communities of interest (geographic and thematic). For example, there are already academic relationships with China, Bangladesh, Central America and South America, Europe, Israel, and Mozambique across campus. Coordinating and cultivating an intellectual community around these and other areas could improve the quality and impact of our research.

III. Conclusion

This is a propitious moment for Vanderbilt to make a bold advance in its international engagement and research. We build from a solid base, with many Vanderbilt faculty engaged in vibrant international research. Our geography and Academic Strategic Plan provide a singular opportunity to support and promote multidimensional and trans-institutional understandings of the still emergent twenty-first century global order.

Vanderbilt must have a robust and dynamic global profile in order to keep pace with our national competitors. More importantly, however, we must be globally engaged in order to fulfill our core mission of creating and disseminating knowledge. Knowledge has no national boundaries and neither should our scholarly discourse and engagement. And as a national university located in the South, we have an historic opportunity to provide intellectual diversity and engagement that can serve as model for our region, nation, and world.

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