

To: The Provost

From: The Committee on Enhancing Faculty Voices in the Public Sphere: Ganesh Sitaraman (chair), Ken Catania, Steve Ertel, Sarah Igo, Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, Holly Tucker.

Re: Faculty Public Engagement

Date: April 13, 2018

Summary

The Committee on Enhancing Faculty Voices in the Public Sphere (“the Committee”) is charged with finding ways to assist Vanderbilt University faculty who seek to further the impact of their achievements by communicating their research to a broader audience. The Committee’s work coincides with the elevation and restructuring of the university’s Division of Communications. The Committee recommends creating a Chancellor’s Public Voices Fellowship and enhancing the Division of Communications’ capacity to amplify faculty scholarship.

Committee Charge and Purpose

Vanderbilt’s faculty conducts cutting-edge research across a wide range of disciplines, and our faculty have had considerable success in influencing academic debates through scholarly publications and conferences. But so much of this research has relevance beyond the academy: this work helps us understand the natural world, it elucidates issues of considerable public importance, it informs the human experience – and as a result, it is essential that this work reaches an audience beyond our fellow academics. Public and private research funders already understand this and are increasingly including communications activities and metrics in funding proposals. In addition, the general public is increasingly thirsty for reliable, informed, and thoughtful information from trusted institutions and experts. The goal of the Committee is to identify ways to assist Vanderbilt University faculty who seek to further the impact of their achievements by communicating their research to a broader audience.

Committee Membership, Process, and Input

The Committee consists of faculty and staff from a variety of departments.

- Ganesh Sitaraman, professor of law (chair)
- Ken Catania, Stevenson professor of biological sciences
- Steve Ertel, vice chancellor for communications
- Sarah Igo, associate professor of history, law, political science, and American studies
- Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt distinguished professor of humanities
- Holly Tucker, professor of French and Italian

The Committee also had a number of faculty liaisons from throughout the University. The faculty liaisons included:

- Terrah Akard, associate professor of nursing, School of Nursing
- Bruce Barry, Brownlee O. Currey, Jr. Professor of Management, Owen Graduate School of Management
- Kitt Carpenter, professor of economics
- Carolyn Heinrich, Patricia and Rodes Hart Professor, professor of public policy and education, Peabody College
- Rebecca Ihrie, assistant professor of cell and developmental biology, assistant professor of neurological surgery, School of Medicine
- Paul Lim, associate professor of the history of Christianity, Divinity School
- Josh McGuire, senior lecturer in aural skills, Blair School of Music
- Jonathan Metzl, Frederick B. Rentschler II Professor of Sociology and Medicine, Health and Society, professor of history
- Shelagh Mulvaney, associate professor of nursing (clinical psychology), School of Nursing
- Erin Charles Perez, lecturer in the teaching of music, Blair School of Music
- Phillis Sheppard, associate professor of religion, psychology and culture, Divinity School
- Barb Stengel, professor of the practice of education, Peabody College
- Alan Wiseman, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor, professor of political science,
- Dan Work, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering, associate professor of computer science, School of Engineering
- Karl Zelik, assistant professor of mechanical engineering, assistant professor of biomedical engineering, School of Engineering

In producing this report, the Committee engaged faculty throughout the University in a variety of ways, in order to give the faculty ample opportunities to give input and ensure a diverse set of opinions.

1. Members of the Committee provided input themselves and engaged with their colleagues and represented their views to the Committee.
2. The Faculty Liaisons were asked to (a) provide their own views on the Committee's charge, and (b) consult with their colleagues and present their views to the Committee. Faculty Liaisons provided input through two in-person meetings, and some also provided input directly to the Committee Chair.
3. The Chancellor hosted a town hall meeting featuring the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor Ertel and the Committee Chair, in order to discuss these issues. That meeting was held on February 20, 2018.
4. Faculty from around the University were invited to provide input to Committee members, including the Chair, and members from different parts of the University did so.

Findings

Based on these consultations, the Committee made a number of findings:

1. The Committee found that many faculty who are interested in communicating to a broader public do not have the training or skills needed to do so. For example, many faculty do not know how to write an opinion editorial (oped) or participate effectively in a radio interview.

2. The Committee found that many faculty do not know how to access the different publicity and distribution channels that are available to them (e.g. how to place an oped, use social media, get booked for a TV or radio interview), and that many faculty focus only on marquee media outlets (like the *New York Times*) instead of engaging with a broad range of public audiences.
3. The Committee found that many faculty do not have the resources they need to present their work to the broader public.
 - a. The Committee found that science and engineering faculty in particular rely heavily on graphics, images, animations, and video in order to communicate their work. Faculty reported that they have to pay for these features out of pocket in some cases because their research budgets and grants do not cover it. They also reported that the use of such media is very beneficial when seeking to publish journals, persuade grantors, and reach the media.
 - b. The Committee found that many faculty have and pay for their own personal websites because they find that the department-provided faculty website does not meet their needs.
4. The Committee found that many faculty do not have the time to promote major works like book projects, because of their other University obligations.
5. The Committee found that many faculty recognize that women and minorities are not proportionately represented in public commentary.
6. The Committee found that many faculty are concerned that pre-tenure faculty may be detrimentally impacted if they engage in the public sphere too much or in ways that faculty at other schools (i.e. likely tenure writers) might find inappropriate for pre-tenure scholars.
7. The Committee found that students, including undergraduate students, sometimes work with faculty or work independently with faculty and that faculty were interested in ensuring that students can get credit publicly for their work.
8. The Committee found that while some faculty might be willing to respond to press inquiries on broad topics within their fields of study, many faculty are wary to do so, especially on a short timeframe, unless the inquiry is in a narrow area in which the faculty member has deep expertise.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

(1) Create a Chancellor's Public Voices Fellowship

Many Vanderbilt faculty write books and articles or make extraordinary discoveries that have the potential to impact society. But too often, they do not have the time, resources, or knowledge to ensure that their work reaches a broader audience outside of academia. We therefore recommend the creation of a Chancellor's Public Voices Fellowship program to enhance the reach of faculty scholarship. Each semester, the Chancellor's Public Voices Fellowship program will provide extensive support and mentoring for a small-group of faculty to ensure that their high-impact projects gain the attention they deserve on the public stage. In addition, former fellows will be able

to informally assist faculty in their departments with public engagement activities, and they will participate in university-wide faculty trainings.

Program Overview and Purpose

- Each semester, on a competitive basis, the Provost's office will award up to three (3) selected faculty members the title of Chancellor's Public Voice Fellow
- All full-time VU-employed faculty are eligible
- For 9-month faculty, the designation will include funding to go toward one course buyout for one semester, in addition to up to \$2500 for travel. For 12-month faculty, the designation will include a fixed sum of funding to go toward grant support, in addition to up to \$2500 for travel.
- The funds are designed to further the scholar's ability to gain attention for their research beyond academia, into the public sphere, for a specific research project
- The program will be administered by the Provost's Office in partnership with the Division of Communications

Program Requirements

- Fellows will be required to participate in professional development programming offered through the Division of Communications that is designed to enhance and further the public impact of the fellow's work. Programming will include creating a strategic publicity plan; training in particular skills (e.g. giving interviews); assistance with developing companion products (e.g. opeds, videos, graphics, TED-style power points); and assistance with using distribution channels (web, social media, traditional media, organizations, etc.)
- After completion of the fellowship semester, fellows will be required to participate in one professional development program (i.e. on a panel, as a trainer, or as a mentor) per semester for the following two semesters that is open to the faculty at-large [see recommendations below], and will be expected to participate occasionally in programming for future fellowship classes.

Selection Process

- Selection Criteria. Fellows shall be selected based on the following criteria:
 - (1) whether the project (book, article, composition, etc.) will be published or otherwise come to completion during the fellowship window, or for faculty in fields for which their research does not allow for that level of advanced notice, whether the faculty member has a compelling interest in and reason to be trained in greater public engagement (e.g. a bench scientist who hopes to write a popular-science book),
 - (2) the degree to which the project is likely to find a broader public audience and have an impact in society at large,
 - (3) the value-added of the fellowship for the faculty member to be able to reach that broader public audience, in terms of either time, skills, or supplementary enhancements like videos.
- Selection Timeline. A call for nominations will be issued biannually to departments and schools. Each school or department can nominate no more than two candidates per year.

- Fall semester awards: Nominations will be due at the end of November, awards announced at the end of January. The fellowship will run from July 1 to December 31.
- Spring semester awards: Nominations will be due at the end of May, awards announced at the end of July. The Fellowship will run from January 1 to July 30.
- Selection Committee. The Provost (or designee) and the Vice Chancellor for Communications will convene a selection committee to identify candidates for the program. After the first year of the fellowship, at least one former Public Voices Fellow should serve on the selection committee each semester.
- Re-nominations. Unsuccessful candidates may be re-nominated. Successful candidates may not be re-nominated until three full academic years have passed.

Additional Funding Guidelines

- Course Buyout Funding
 - Course buyout costs will be capped at a given amount, negotiated each year between each dean and the provost's office prior to the awarding of the fellowship
 - These funds cannot be used to supplement existing contracted salary
 - Allowable use of funds must follow the awarded faculty member's specific school or college guidelines
- Travel Funding
 - Travel funds shall be spent on activities and events determined in conjunction with the fellow's strategic publicity plan.
 - Travel funds must be spent during the fellowship period and cannot carry forward.

(2) Enhance the Division of Communications' Capacity for Amplifying Faculty Scholarship

Many Vanderbilt faculty not only conduct important research on many of society's most pressing questions but also have considerable expertise on these questions and problems. But too often, faculty do not know how exactly to inform public debates or do not have the skills, tools, and training necessary to do so effectively and with a wide reach. In order to ensure that training and opportunities are available to a great number of faculty, across the University, we recommend additional resources be invested in the Division of Communications to enhance its programs and capacity for amplifying faculty scholarship, so that all faculty have a greater opportunity to engage in public dialogue.

(2a) Recurring "How To" Series of Events and Trainings

- The Division of Communications will create a series of panels and trainings, open to all faculty and designed to help faculty learn about how to gain wider reach for their work and develop the necessary skills to reach that wider audience. To start, these sessions will take place within schools and departments to make participation as convenient as possible for faculty.
- Sessions topics might include: how to write an oped and get it placed, how to get a book contract, how to do an interview, and how to use social media to amplify your scholarship.
- Sessions would take place each month and ideally unite one staff member from the Division of Communications and at least one faculty member.

(2b) “Office Hours”

- The Division of Communications will offer weekly “office hours,” in which faculty can make 30-minute or 1-hour appointments and get advice and guidance from staff at the office on amplifying their scholarship. Advice could range from helping develop a strategic plan for reaching more audiences with a specific project to skills training to general advice on how to have a bigger public voice.
- All faculty would be able to make an appointment, though the number of slots would be limited each week.

(2c) Capacity Development

- The Division of Communications should have greater funding available in order to expand its capacity to assist faculty with:
 - Video creation (especially creative video content like animations, explainers, etc.)
 - Graphics
 - Website design and development
 - Editing for public outlets
 - Social media

(2d) Proactive and Reactive Press Engagement

- The Division of Communications will update and upgrade its existing database of faculty who are willing to field press inquiries, including topic areas on which those faculty are willing to engage.
- Based on its connections to faculty (through weekly “how to’s,” office hours, and the fellows program), the Division of Communications will expand its existing efforts to proactively find opportunities for faculty to engage with the general public.
- The Division of Communications will expand its promotion of the work of Vanderbilt students, including undergraduates, working on important research projects under the supervision of faculty.

(2e) Additional Recommendations

- 1-The Division of Communications will regularly visit each department or school, in order to ensure that faculty are aware of its offerings and services.
- 2- The Division of Communications should promote including a diversity of voices in its efforts to facilitate faculty engagement in the public sphere.
- 3-The Division of Communications, which currently provides design and development support for all college and school web sites, will work with the colleges and schools to identify desired new website features and functionality related to amplification of faculty research.
- 4- The Division of Communications should engage alumni who work in the public sphere, and, as possible, incorporate them into the University’s communications efforts.

(3) Create a Pilot Voucher Program for Graphics

Many faculty do not have the funding to pay for graphics and video explainers and supplements so their research can be explained better to a broader audience. The Division of Communications has some existing capacity to help faculty in this area, but their resources are limited and, as a result, they cannot support all projects. Even with expanded funding (see recommendation 2c above), the Division will likely not be able to support sufficient meritorious projects. At the same time, it has been difficult for the Committee to accurately gauge the demand for graphics support. The Committee therefore recommends that the University start a pilot project, to make 10 graphics vouchers per semester, each worth up to \$2000, competitively available.

Faculty from around the University would apply for these vouchers if the Division of Communications is unable to accommodate their needs. A Committee consisting of two faculty members, including at least one scientist, and the Vice Chancellor for Communications (or designee) will pick the winners of the vouchers. The vouchers can be used with University approved vendors for graphics, video, animations, or other similar needs.

This pilot program should operate for two semesters, at which point the pilot selection committee should recommend to the Provost and Chancellor, based on the number of applicants, whether the number and value of the vouchers should be expanded, contracted, or whether the program should be eliminated or modified more significantly.