

Board of Trust Address
Thursday, April 16, 2015

Members of the Board of Trust, Vanderbilt Leaders, and distinguished guests, I am honored to have the opportunity to address you today on behalf of the University Staff Advisory Council. My name is Michelle Kovash and I am the current council president. I work in International Student & Scholar Services as an immigration adviser.

As perhaps you know, the Staff Advisory Council represents all employees outside of the medical center who are in non-faculty, non-union positions. We are made up of more than 90 elected individuals, chosen by 23 campus groups. Our members include hourly employees to professionals, administrators, and technical specialists. More than 3,000 staff are represented.

The primary motivation of the council is to strengthen the experience of staff at Vanderbilt and our activities all aim to support this charge. We do this by serving as a sounding board, supporting communication efforts between staff and administration, and by creating opportunities to engage in service to the greater Vanderbilt community.

I would like to share with you a few highlights from this council year.

As I mentioned, service is a large part of our organizational objectives and this year we have had many successes with our outreach. We held multiple opportunities for staff to join members of Staff Council at Second Harvest to volunteer their time, we again held our Share the Love food drive across both the University and Medical Center bringing in hundreds of cans of food in the month of February. We held a Red Cross Blood Drive where about 40 people gave blood and for those who were not able to give the opportunity to donate canned goods was available as an option.

One of our biggest achievements in our drive to serve the Vanderbilt community was the increase in our Kroger card program that benefits the Employee Hardship Fund which supports staff who are facing a financial need. This year, the program changed to simply linking your Kroger Plus card to Vanderbilt as your preferred organization. With this change, we increased our amount received by over 46% in just the first two quarters. At the end of the second quarter Vanderbilt was recognized as one of the top 3 organizations in the region for Kroger Community Rewards. We are very proud of the success of this program and hope to see its continued growth.

In addition to our service, our Council has an established practice of polling university staff twice a year to determine if there are new issues of interest or concern. This year our staff life committee made a goal to either have an event, a recommendation, a resolution, or a general response to all concerns brought forward.

From this practice, we had another very successful CARE committee event in March of this year with over 100 people in attendance. This committee is made up of members of USAC, MCSAC, Faculty Senate, and HR who work together to pick topics of concern we hear most about from staff. CARE stands for Civility, Appreciation, and Respectful Environments. This year the presentation was about

Building Trust in the Workplace and featured speakers Provost Susan Wentz, Dr. Meg Rush Chief of Staff from the Children's Hospital, and Captain Kraverath a professor of Naval Science with the ROTC.

One of our largest undertakings so far this year was our All Gender Restroom Recommendation which mirrored that of the Vanderbilt Student Government passed not long ago. Our recommendation was to fully support the needs of all individuals of all gender identities and expressions on campus in regards to restroom access. We recommended that all men's and women's designated single-use restrooms be converted to All Gender restrooms by replacing the signage. We were pleased to have this passed within the council and have it welcomed with great support and enthusiasm by senior administration.

In the spirit of inclusion Staff Council worked hard to ensure all our language within our official documentation and bylaws are now gender inclusive. By majority vote of the council the new language was passed. We also heard from LGBTQI Life on what staff can do to ensure all members of the Vanderbilt community are treated equally through a one hour Straight Facts program. This presentation was very well received and helpful for many staff members who have never had the opportunity to consider how they can be an ally and promote acceptance within our community.

Staff Council has had a wonderful year. Our speakers have ranged from HR presentations on benefits and retirement to the Director of the new Project Safe Center informing staff of what it means to be a private resource vs. a confidential source to our students and colleagues. I believe our diverse speakers have given us the knowledge to help us grow as an organization as well as staff members of Vanderbilt.

We are looking ahead to more success within our council in the coming months with more great speakers, more service, more recommendations, and more exciting events. We also strongly hope that the upcoming split of the medical center and the university will be an opportunity for organizational changes that could increase morale among employees. Vanderbilt is a great place to work and we look forward to more opportunities to make it even better!

Thank you for your time.