

Jeff Loudon remarks to the Board of Trust  
April 16, 2020

Thank you all for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the University Staff Advisory Council. My name is Jeff Loudon and I have been president of USAC for the last 27 years, or at least it feels that way. It is hard to believe that less than one year ago, I received a call from Bruce Evans asking if I would serve as a member of the Chancellor Search Advisory Committee. Of my 10 years serving Vanderbilt University, this year has been, by far, the most memorable, the most challenging, and the most rewarding.

In gathering feedback from staff for the Search Advisory Committee's report, the overwhelming themes were maintaining the University's current trajectory and fostering an even greater sense of community through equity, diversity, and inclusion. One person wrote, "Vanderbilt is an amazing university and I am proud to be a 30 year employee." That sense of pride was another theme. Vanderbilt staff are proud of our shared accomplishments and optimistic for the future. Programs such as Opportunity Vanderbilt and FutureVU are as ambitious as they are inspiring and staff continue to work hard every day because we believe in the Vanderbilt mission.

We've had an exceptionally busy year, but nothing could have prepared us for March. To say March was a tough month for Nashville and Vanderbilt staff would be an understatement. In the very early morning of March 3<sup>rd</sup>, a tornado touched down in Nashville, devastating significant parts of our community. Damage to the homes of some of our staff, and schools where many staff send their children created unique challenges for many as they continued with their work for Vanderbilt. In some ways, the University was very fortunate that morning. Thankfully, the tornado avoided Vanderbilt's campus, with most of the damage occurring to the north and east. Additionally, the majority of students were away on spring break, allowing the University to focus its attention on the faculty and staff affected by the storm. However, within days of the Vanderbilt community, and Nashville as a whole, coming together to start healing and rebuilding, another even larger challenge affecting all of us emerged.

The tornado is not the reason we are all meeting on Zoom today. On the evening of March 9<sup>th</sup>, less than 14 hours before the start of our next scheduled Staff Council meeting, Interim Chancellor and Provost, Susan Wente, announced the immediate suspension of all "university-sponsored non-Athletics events and gatherings" in an effort "to protect the health and safety of our community from the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19."

As you can imagine, there were many concerns and questions from staff that week as the University, along with the rest of the world, entered uncharted waters, responding to the emerging threats of a growing pandemic. Then, on Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, Vanderbilt instituted an initial remote work period lasting through Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup>. With that period now extended through the end of April, we are all adjusting to a new normal of working from home as we enable the educators and researchers we collaborate with, who are themselves finding new ways to do their jobs, to continue our shared mission.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue working remotely and are making the best of a difficult situation while doing everything we can to assure the continued success of the University we are proud to work for. As a Principal Relationship Manager for Vanderbilt IT, I have been involved in getting the University prepared for online learning and working while supporting efforts to increase the security of applications that were, until recently, accessed most commonly from our campus network. There are a

plethora of opportunities to develop new skills and strategies presented daily, even hourly. All across the University, staff and faculty are stepping up to new challenges and I am proud of all we have accomplished.

It has been said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. It's hard to think of a time when Vanderbilt has gone through more change than right now, and staff still, now more than ever, appreciate our sense of community and rely heavily on open and honest communication from the University's leaders. Vanderbilt staff, faculty, and students have accomplished so much together since the beginning of March and as soon as we are all able to return to our beautiful campus together, there will be no better time to celebrate those achievements while also reflecting, as a community, on the valuable lessons learned.

Interim Chancellor Wente, thank you for your leadership during this incredibly challenging time. You have handled each and every obstacle facing our University and community this year with equal parts strength and integrity. The Vanderbilt staff look forward to continuing to work with you as Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Incoming Chancellor Diermeier, while my time as President of the University Staff Advisory Council will be coming to an end as you begin your tenure as our 9<sup>th</sup> Chancellor, we are all excited for what the future holds with you leading the way. I know you will find Caroline Johnston, our President-elect, to be an exceptional strategic partner for matters concerning staff. Welcome, once again, to Vanderbilt University.

On behalf of the over 4,000 University staff members, thank you all for your support, especially during these unprecedented times. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. It's a bit strange speaking into a computer screen instead of addressing you all in person, but I appreciate your time and welcome any questions if you have them.