

*Remarks to the Board of Trust by Terrie Spetalnick, President of University Staff Advisory Council, 29 April 2000.*

Thank you, Mrs. Ingram. Members of the Board, Chancellor Wyatt and distinguished guests, it is my pleasure to speak with you this morning on behalf of the University Staff Advisory Council.

We are 67 elected representatives variously employed by Vanderbilt as accountants, engineers, analysts, librarians, program coordinators, police officers, early childhood teachers, trainers, clerks, and specialists in computers, marketing and media relations. We have among us a graphic designer, an art curator, a soccer coach and administrators of all sorts.

We represent nearly 3,000 staff members in University Central. Collectively, we and our constituents provide indispensable services ranging from plant operations to information technology, from media relations to environmental health and safety, from fundraising to accounting, from police and security to publications and design, from financial aid, to student health, to campus recreation.

Collectively, we manage 18,000 computer network ports and Vanderbilt's connections to the Internet, and keep we e-mail, web servers, Prometheus course software and the rest of the technical infrastructure running. We process 31,000 paychecks a month, handle 70,000 pieces of mail a day, maintain more than 4,000 student residences, manage 34,000 kilowatts of electrical load, produce 30% of that electricity, supply 22,000 phone lines, coach and promote our 13 varsity teams and coordinate, at last count, 18 major construction projects.

Last year, staff circulated 345,000 library materials, added 75,000 items to collections and answered 92,000 reference questions. We served 2.4 million meals and snacks. From admissions through career placement, we helped shepherd students through their time at Vanderbilt, staffing services from registrar to student life. Staff in academic departments spent thousands upon thousands of hours supporting faculty in ways too numerous to list.

As staff members, each of us plays a vital, if sometimes unglamorous or even unnoticed, role in advancing research and learning at Vanderbilt. I've observed that staff take great pride in doing their jobs well and in being part of the Vanderbilt family.

In return, we hope that -- in addition to providing us our livelihood -- Vanderbilt as our employer will afford us appreciation and respect. One important evidence of that appreciation and respect is the fact that this advisory council exists, is active, and is looked to for input on matters that affect staff.

The university's human resource programs, policies and practices also furnish evidence of how Vanderbilt values its staff. In recent years increasing attention has been paid to matters uniquely affecting staff, such as the need for short term disability coverage. That one has proved a thorny problem to solve, but the efforts are very much appreciated.

Council members generally feel that we have the opportunity to provide advice and that our opinions are valued. In several important instances we have seen our suggestions translated into better employee benefits, most notably the revised retirement program. Three short years ago, our president told you that we'd made the radical suggestion, radical for Vanderbilt at least, that contributions to our 403(b) plan be mandatory. Today, that is the reality.

Like the Faculty Senate, we have an opinion survey underway. We're not nearly as far along as the senate, but look forward to sharing those results with you in the future. Even before the survey, there are two main areas, in addition to benefits issues, where we believe change is due, and we look forward to working with administration to make improvements. These areas are work-life issues, and career and professional opportunities.

By work-life issues, I refer to programs, policies and practices that enable us to combine employment with our responsibilities outside of work. Judging from both the scholarly and popular press, helping employees achieve this balance is the biggest human resource challenge faced by U.S. employers today.

For many staff, the single most helpful program is on-site child care. Vanderbilt was on the vanguard of employer-provided child care in Nashville, opening its first center nearly two decades ago and from the beginning serving the families of students, faculty and staff with equal preference. The programs have continuously met the standards for national accreditation, and provide an invaluable service -- and peace of mind -- for those of us fortunate enough to have our children in their care. However, the combined waiting lists for Vanderbilt child care centers number in the hundreds. Proposals for expanding two of the facilities are under consideration, and we hope to see those plans come to fruition.

Other examples of existing and emerging work-life issues include more flexible scheduling, support for telecommuting, time off to perform volunteer activities, paid leave for new parents, and assistance with elder care for family members. With the exception of elder care support, these issues are unique to the staff population, because our policies for paid time off differ from those covering faculty. We look forward to helping the administration establish priorities and come up with solutions to support work-life balance for staff.

We also look forward to finding ways to improve opportunities for career progression and professional development. We would like to see career ladders developed for all job families and more seamless support of internal job transfers, so that staff can advance without feeling like they have to leave Vanderbilt for better opportunities. We would appreciate a greater commitment to in-house training and professional development programs. We also advocate more generous tuition assistance for job-related courses, bringing the benefit closer in line with other local employers and our peer universities. With these changes, more Vanderbilt staff would enjoy professional fulfillment in addition to the other rewards of being part of the Vanderbilt family.

I remark in closing, as you're probably aware, that Vanderbilt is the largest private employer in Middle Tennessee, and I recently heard in the entire state of Tennessee. I submit to you that Vanderbilt has a committed staff dedicated to providing the highest quality of service, and I ask that you consider the needs of the staff who contribute to the University's success as you make decisions about Vanderbilt's future.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.