

Remarks by William Corbin
Vanderbilt University Staff Council President
to the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust
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President Hall, Chancellor Wyatt, members of the Board, other members of the University community, I bring greetings from the University Staff Advisory Council.

As President of the Council, I represent more than 3,000 staff members in University Central. Many of us are long-term employees who believe that Vanderbilt is a good employer and a good citizen. We are committed to this university and to the surrounding community. Our service on the Staff Council is voluntary, and we do volunteer work in our neighborhoods. It is our desire to do more and we are working with the university administration to explore new avenues of service.

Why do we have a Staff Advisory Council? The mission of the Council is quite simple and yet very complex. Our bylaws state that we are to act as an advisory group to both administration and staff on problems that affect the university and the people it serves. We are pledged to establish and maintain communication between the staff and the administration. To facilitate communication, we invite representatives from the university and from outside organizations to make presentations at our meetings. This year we have heard from Health 1-2-3, the Benefits Office, the Opportunity Development Center, the Student Recreation Center, the Office of Traffic and Parking, and the Employee Assistance Program. We look forward to remarks from Chancellor Wyatt at our May meeting.

We utilize several avenues of communication with our constituents. These include the distribution of detailed minutes through campus mail, electronic mail, publication in the Register, and, most recently, on our new [WWW site](#). In addition to these print and electronic formats, we rely heavily on direct contact between representatives and the members of their groups.

We also employ several means to communicate the concerns of our constituents to the University Administration. For example, we have membership on advisory committees appointed by the Chancellor and other university administrators. In addition, the council appoints Ad Hoc committees to study various issues and make recommendations to the administration.

Although the employees whom I represent are concerned with virtually every aspect of life at Vanderbilt, two areas have surfaced as focal points in recent years. They are parking and benefits. Both the Executive Committee and the entire Council have

heard presentations from representatives of the Office of Traffic and Parking this year. We applaud the efforts of Vice Chancellor Carr and his staff to establish a parking system at Vanderbilt that is both adequate and equitable. I believe that communication with Mr. Carr's office has been very open and that staff needs are being heard. However, we remain concerned by the significant increases in the cost of parking permits, especially for those staff members whose compensation falls in the lower range. When I came to Vanderbilt, parking permits were \$5.00 a year. Parking was a benefit provided to employees. Today, almost all parking expenses are born by permit holders. That change in policy has caused permit fees to rise from \$5.00 to the current \$90.00. The addition of another structured parking facility is expected to add \$50.00 to that figure. I urge you to give consideration to the financial impact that such increases have upon staff members.

Last fall, I appointed an Ad Hoc committee to study the benefits package at Vanderbilt and to compare it with other institutions with whom we compete for employees or with whom we often compare ourselves. That committee created a survey instrument that they and the University Benefits Office administered and analyzed. The committee and Jane Bruce of the Benefits Office did an excellent job in evaluating the current situation. As expected, Vanderbilt compares very favorably in some areas and does not fare very well in others.

I would remind you of an old expression: "You hire with salary, but you retain with benefits." My experience as an administrator at Vanderbilt leads me to conclude that you have to have both salary and benefits to hire and retain good workers. We realize that Vanderbilt University must take reasonable steps to contain the cost of benefit programs. However, we urge you to consider the impact that reductions in programs and increases in premiums have upon our ability to attract and to retain top notch staff members.

I would call to your attention two areas of special concern. Although we applaud the offering of both Health Management and Preferred Provider health plans, many employees are concerned that staggering increases in Blue Cross/Blue Shield premiums will force all of us into an HMO. Blue Cross/Blue Shield premiums for \$200 deductible family coverage have almost doubled in two years and we have been told that the increase for 1997 will likely be 50% or more. As a Health 1-2-3 representative told our group last October, "Not everyone belongs in an HMO." I encourage you to support the continuation of an affordable and viable alternative to HMOs.

Another area of special concern was the recent reinstatement of a five-year waiting period for Flexible Reimbursement Account benefits. This change affects all new

employees and virtually eliminates the FRA as an aid in recruiting new staff. My limited time allotment prevents me from outlining other benefits issues.

My executive committee has asked me to share one more thing with you -- their belief that staff morale at Vanderbilt is deteriorating. Morale is a very precious commodity and a very difficult one to measure. However, the fact that annual attrition (turn over) rates for University Central staff have risen from 19.7% to 27.7% since 1991 should be considered a warning sign. I realize that your primary concern this weekend is the athletic program. When one of our teams wins or loses an important game, it is big news. Unfortunately, when I lose over one fourth of my staff each year to other employers, it isn't reported by the newspapers or television stations. However, I can assure you that it has serious impact on this university.

I can summarize my remarks in one request: I urge you to keep the needs and contributions of staff in mind as you make the difficult decisions that face Vanderbilt University. Thank you.