

Remarks by Brent Tener
Vanderbilt University Staff Council President
to the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust
April 1997

President Hall, Chancellor Wyatt, members of the Board and other members of the University community, I bring greetings from the University Staff Advisory Council.

As President of the Council, I represent nearly 70 elected individuals, who in turn represent more than 3,000 staff members of University Central. Our service on the Staff Council is voluntary, and the mission of the Council is to act as an advisory group to both administration and staff on problems that affect the university and the people it serves. We are charged with establishing and maintaining effective communication between staff and the administration. To facilitate this communication, we invite representatives from within the university and from outside organizations to make presentations at our meetings. Representatives from Police and Security, Health PLUS, the Office of Traffic and Parking, and the Employee Assistance program have addressed the Council during this past year. We also have entertained visits from Vice Chancellor Schoenfeld and Athletic Director Todd Turner. We look forward to remarks from Chancellor Wyatt at our May meeting, and Associate Vice-Chancellor Darlene Lewis at our June gathering.

One of the most beneficial meetings for me, as President, was a brainstorming session we conducted at our January meeting. Members of the Council discussed likes, dislikes and what we would like to see happen at Vanderbilt within five subject areas. The areas discussed were Health Insurance, Holidays and leave time, Retirement, Compensation and opinions about Vanderbilt University, in general. The constraints of time limits a more detailed account of what was offered at this meeting, but I would like to highlight those of the opinions expressed about Vanderbilt University, as I hope they will give to you some insight into the views and opinions of those people whom I represent. Some of the concerns mentioned regarding Vanderbilt include traffic and parking, mostly the cost associated with yearly registration fees. Biased coverage of the University in local publications is also a concern, in that the mass media seemingly gives more coverage to negative occurrences at Vanderbilt rather than the positive occurrences that transpire on a regular basis. Certainly, this media phenomena is not unique to Vanderbilt, but the individual morale of employees suffer when quote "Vanderbilt" is faced with negative scrutiny.

The positive things said about Vanderbilt include that in general, Vanderbilt is a very friendly place. Other positive items mentioned were the Child Care Center, HealthPLUS, discounts to performances, the Vanderbilt Intercollegiate Athletic program, the dependent tuition discount program, the Sarratt film program, and that the campus itself is beautiful. Another item mentioned, and one that is sometimes forgotten, is the academic reputation of

Vanderbilt to those outside of the University. I am proud to represent a school with standards and that has genuine pride in the educational process. Everyone wants to be associated with a winner, and Vanderbilt is certainly known throughout the country as a top twenty-five institution.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect in the brainstorming session included the discussion regarding what improvements the Council would like to see regarding Vanderbilt. One item mentioned was the hope that the people Nashville and the surrounding area could learn to appreciate Vanderbilt to a greater degree. Another opinion included that every employee of the University should consider himself or herself as an ambassador for the University. In closing, let me mention a few positive changes that have occurred this past year and emphasize areas that I see as opportunities for improvement. The positive changes include the commitment to build a new parking structure which will alleviate parking space deficiencies in the central core of the campus. Even though no one is ecstatic about paying more for parking, most of the campus community will directly benefit from the addition of this parking structure. Also, changes in health care benefits, such as the ability to option out of Vanderbilt health insurance have been favorably received. Recently, the decision was made to add additional staff for the Employee Assistance Program. This has been an area that has been under-staffed for many years and we applaud the administration for making this commitment to the Staff at Vanderbilt.

As you may recall, last year, Staff Council President Bill Corbin appointed a committee to compare benefits at Vanderbilt with other employers. There were a series of recommendations made, but let me highlight the ones deemed most critical by the Council. The first is the need for a short-term disability insurance plan. The lack of such a plan is a tremendous financial exposure for many of our employees. Secondly, there is a need for improved educational benefits for staff professional development. Better benefits in this area would support employee retention and provide a more-educated and productive workforce. Thirdly, that more should be done to encourage staff to participate in retirement plans. Some of the more radical discussions include the suggestion that participation in a retirement program be mandatory. Also, it was recommended that retirees be extended similar privileges received while employed, such as medical benefits at an appropriate rate, discounts to Vanderbilt athletic and cultural events, and library access. With the rapid turnover being experienced by many different employers, the Vanderbilt employees who stay through to retirement should be championed and rewarded.

Thank you for your time, and best wishes for a successful spring meeting.