This past year, I had the privilege to participate as a fellow in the Cal Turner Program for Moral Leadership. The experience allowed me to work with an eclectic array of Vanderbilt graduate students as we took an interdisciplinary approach to tackling social issues around the Nashville metropolitan area.

The program began with a weekend retreat to Pennyrile State Park, in Kentucky. Even before we arrived to the park, the other fellows in the program impressed me with their diverse backgrounds and career aspirations, which all seemed to be rooted in helping others. Further discussion led us towards defining our professions and dispelling common misconceptions surrounding our work. While I appreciated hearing about each profession, I found our philosophical discussion about business to be the most compelling because of the seemingly absent barriers in regards to entering the profession. The shared insight into each profession helped foster a greater appreciation for the particular skill set that each fellow brought to their respective project.

The project that I worked on was called New Transitions and it focused on supporting young adults who had aged out of the foster care system with housing and assistance. Our group began by meeting with Josh Connor, who is the founder of New Transitions, and asking him questions about what he believed the residents could benefit from in terms of assistance from graduate students at Vanderbilt University. Through conversations with Mr. Connor and a focus group of New Transitions residents, our group decided that educational workshops would be the best way Vanderbilt students could positively impact the residents. The residents who participat-
ed in the focus group expressed a desire to learn more about health and reproductive issues, legal issues, and business matters.

As the only fellow from the school of nursing, I knew that the community health course that is required of Vanderbilt nursing students would fit seamlessly into the program design of New Transitions. I contacted Professor Cole Powers who was looking for a new clinical location for her community health students and gave her a detailed description of New Transitions. Upon making a site visit and meeting with Mr. Connor, Professor Powers decided to take on New Transitions as a clinical site, which means that Vanderbilt nursing students will be interviewing the residents to assess their health education needs and then creating tailor made interventions to address the residents’ needs.

In addition to the nursing students’ interventions, other Cal Turner fellows, Valisa Berber-Thayer and Courtnee Reid, orchestrated the implementation of Street Law workshops, which provided free education about legal issues that are particularly relevant to young adults. Subsequent workshops focused on reflection through journal writing and personal finance. While few residents have attended the initial workshops, Mr. Connor and his staff are working to restructure the residents’ lease agreements to include a clause that will decrease the monthly rent with each workshop that the residents attend in hopes to gain greater participation.

The connections created between New Transitions and several graduate programs at Vanderbilt University are mutually beneficial and have the potential to be sustained for years to come. Throughout the process of creating these connections and implementing the workshops, I believe our group faced basic problems of communication with New Transitions, which can be expected out of any new organization. While our group was able to overcome the minor issues that arose while working on this project, I found it particularly interesting to see how the two law
school fellows handled problem solving in comparison to my own train of thought. I believe that our interdisciplinary team allowed for a greater level of excogitation, which will hopefully serve present and future New Transition residents accordingly.

I thoroughly enjoyed having the opportunity to meet Mr. Cal Turner himself at the beginning of the year and hear his message about the importance of always giving back to others who are less fortunate. Everyone involved in the program, from the fellows to the faculty members, seemed to emulate Mr. Turner’s message and it was a true honor to be able to participate in the program. My time as a Cal Turner fellow will undoubtedly serve as the highlight of my education at Vanderbilt University.