The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities

In 1989, Vanderbilt’s Robert Penn Warren (RPW) Center for the Humanities was awarded a $480,000 Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to help establish a permanent endowment for the center. The grant had to be matched 4:1 with funds from the private sector, which helped leverage an additional $1.9 million. This award signifies the nationally recognized achievements of the center and helps ensure its long-term future. The RPW Center facilitates interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences by hosting annual faculty fellows and convening faculty and graduate students to find both short- and long-term ways to support and promote the humanities at Vanderbilt and beyond. The RPW Center supports and promotes the humanities in three main areas: career diversity and development for graduate and undergraduate students, humanities-led solutions to real-world problems, and community partnerships. In FY 2020, the RPW Center:

- Hosted The Humanities Think Tank: Applying the Humanities to Real World Problems, an event for undergraduates which spotlighted the issue of climate change.
- Partnered with Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Vanderbilt after learning of class cancellations due to COVID-19 restrictions. By offering educational opportunities for older adults, OLLI supports the intellectual and social needs of senior citizens, a high-risk population especially impacted by COVID-19. The RPW Center developed an online course entitled, “Rethinking Pandemics: A Cultural History from Antiquity to Now.” The class explored the history of pandemics as read from first-hand accounts, including essays, letters, personal journals, and legal documents, as well as through literature, art, and music. The more than 60 participants were encouraged to keep their own journals to document life in a pandemic and to submit them to the Vanderbilt University library for archival purposes.

- Launched the Community Voices Podcast which featured interviews with members of the local community to document both the everyday lives and the extraordinary experiences of Nashvillians.

NEH Connection Grants

During the fall 2019 semester, the RPW Center was awarded an NEH Humanities Connections Implementation Grant entitled “‘Humanities in Place’: An Immersive, Place-Based Curriculum for Historic Preservation and Humanities-Centered Land Use at Vanderbilt University.” The grant for $99,932 will be used for classes and programming in the 2020-2022 academic years. This innovative curricular initiative uses Vanderbilt University’s historic Vaughn Home (built in 1875) as a hands-on lab where students can develop skills relevant to non-academic careers in the humanities, such as archival and archaeological research, historic preservation, museum curation, land use and human-centered design, digital humanities, news, and public affairs.
A separate NEH Humanities Connections Planning Grant for $33,375 was awarded to the College of Arts and Science for significant revisions to the university's Communication of Science and Technology program. The CST program responds to a growing interest among STEM majors to earn a second major or a minor that teaches them how to communicate their research to a variety of audiences, including nonscientists. The goal for the revised program is to provide students the instruction they need to more closely integrate scientific issues and humanistic perspectives.

Making history more accessible

Vanderbilt faculty and staff have been awarded NEH fellowships to support their efforts to make history more accessible to the public.

- A professor of history will use the fellowship to complete a book project about the effects of economic pressures on religious principles. The book will examine the impact of global economic exchanges, such as the discovery of oil deposits and the resultant world trade in Saudi Arabia, on Salafism, a religious movement dedicated to reviving the doctrines and practices of the first Muslims. The goal of the book is to analyze the ways that Salafists have tried to reconcile moral and material pursuits in the context of economic globalization.

- Through an NEH digital humanities fellowship program, Vanderbilt University Press will be publishing an electronic open-access version of an outstanding humanities book, thereby making it available to a wide audience. The book, *The Rise of Euroskepticism: Europe & Its Critics in Spanish Culture*, is about the role that artists and intellectuals have played regarding projects of European integration and will be free for download and distribution.

Vanderbilt slavery archive to reach wider audience through data hub

A digital archive of the oldest records for Africans in the Americas, directed by a Vanderbilt history professor and hosted at the Vanderbilt Jean & Alexander Heard Libraries, will join a new online data hub. This will enable researchers and the public to access and analyze millions of pieces of data from collections across eight institutions, including Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt’s Slave Societies Digital Archive, supported in part by NEH, is the largest digital collection of records for Africans in the Atlantic World, approaching 700,000 digitized images from the U.S., the Caribbean region, and Latin America. These records date from the 16th to the 20th centuries and document the history of between six and eight million individuals. The collection is the most extensive serial record of the history of Africans in the Atlantic World and also includes valuable information on the indigenous, European, and Asian populations who lived alongside them.

Students studying architectural heritage use the historic Vaughn Home as a case study for documenting and analyzing the physical and historical components of a building. (Vanderbilt University)