January 18, 2016

Greetings!

On a day-to-day basis in any job, it is easy to get so tied up in the tasks of the everyday that one often forgets to pause, sit back, and focus on the larger picture and on developing strategies to meet a greater vision. Just this week, I called together a number of innovative thinkers on Vanderbilt's campus including Derek Bruff from the Center for Teaching, Corbette Doyle from the Peabody School of Education, Ole Molvig from the Department of History and the Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning (VIDL), and Toufeeq Ahmen from the Department of Biomedical Informatics. We began by reviewing some of the projects we were each working on (in our individual capacities or in common) as well as new projects in digital learning that I hoped to act on in the future. For the majority of the meeting, however, I told the group that I wanted to take a step away from the project-based work in front of us and, instead, have a conversation about larger scale ideas we would like to complete.

While there is, of course, nothing wrong with working on projects—that's how the work gets done—too often, we find ourselves so locked into the daily completion and implementation of projects, that we find little time to challenge ourselves with new ways of thinking and how we might better serve the mission of the University. While I cannot promise that the outcome of our discussion that day will lead to a revolutionary idea, it was a wonderful moment that allowed me to observe just how dedicated my colleagues are to utilizing digital technologies to advance Vanderbilt's mission.

To get to the main points: our discussion revolved around the best ways to draw upon the strengths of the University as a whole (including human and technological strengths) to craft an integrative system that would serve both as a repository for the creative output of all elements of the Vanderbilt family (undergraduates, graduate students, post-docs, faculty, emeriti, alumni, administration, news and public affairs, community partners) and would allow a space for the reworking of this large base of material for multiple uses by this same group of constituents. We imagined a platform that embraces "universality" and integration, a platform that draws upon each element of Vanderbilt's Strategic Plan—educational technologies, health care solutions, the undergraduate residential experience, and trans-institutional programs—and provides a platform to enhance each through integration.

While I know this column does little to address digital technology directly, it is clear to me that the best ideas and most productive ways of furthering digital learning at Vanderbilt is to focus on the big picture and develop clear visions that play upon strengths across the university and benefit everyone. The more the entire Vanderbilt family is involved on the front end *and* the back end, the more we all work to make this a reality.

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