

A New Vision for Graduate Education at Vanderbilt

“Students today must be ready for a fast-changing, highly fluid, competitive, and demanding professional world, be it in academe, industry, or government.”

The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-First Century

Vanderbilt should provide exceptional education and training to our graduate students in order to prepare them optimally for successful careers in academia, industry, and related fields. In order to achieve this vision, graduate education at Vanderbilt must become as integral to the fabric of the University as undergraduate education and research. There are significant opportunities for growth and improvement of graduate education at Vanderbilt. Elevating graduate education will both enhance other parts of the University and the University’s overall reputation, and further advance both undergraduate education and our research mission.

The Role of the Graduate School

Investing in graduate education will enhance both undergraduate education and our research enterprise. The Graduate School and its Dean must advocate strongly for the resources and attention required in order to elevate our graduate programs to a level commensurate with Vanderbilt’s other achievements and reputation. The Graduate School should strengthen the following focus areas: administration, quality and diversity, career and professional development, interdisciplinary programs, graduate student support services, student tracking and program support, international affairs, and special programs.

Priorities for Graduate Education at Vanderbilt

- 1) **Recruit and Retain:** Our highest priority is to recruit and retain exceptional graduate students who will become leaders in the world. Current students are strong, but there is room for improvement.
Actions:
 - In order to recruit top graduate students, attract and retain an excellent and diverse faculty.
 - Allocate resources so the stipends we offer are competitive with peer institutions.
 - Review retention data and policies for graduate students.
 - Improve the process of allocating topping---up awards.
 - Initiate special programs such as summer research fellowships to enhance diversity.
 - Develop recruitment pipelines and relationships with selected domestic and international institutions.
 - Develop branding of Vanderbilt Graduate School as a world---class institution and report on the success of our Graduate School alumni.
- 2) **Career Development and Education of Graduate Students:** Vanderbilt must strengthen its career development services to meet the growing need for more effective preparation for the next generation of scholars, teachers, scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. We must measure our success and adapt strategies for improvement. Faculty members need to feel that their efforts in supporting graduate education are valued.

Actions:

- Incorporate the career development components of BRET office into a new GREAT office (Graduate Research Education And Training) in the Graduate School and expand its mission and personnel to provide all graduate students with comprehensive career development for a variety of careers.
 - Support Center for Teaching fellows and certificate programs adequately to make selected graduate students competitive in teaching.
 - Track students to assess outcomes and success of programs.
 - Reward faculty for graduate teaching and mentoring
 - Provide training for faculty in best practices for mentoring graduate students.
- 3) Seed Innovation: The new strategic plan accords interdisciplinary research, education, and training key roles in catalyzing academic excellence at Vanderbilt, made manifest by the inauguration of the TIPS council and the Cross---College Teaching Initiative. Additional interventions will seed innovation both within the disciplines and transinstitutionally and will further advance graduate education.

Actions:

- Develop a plan to support transinstitutional and interdisciplinary graduate programs in an independent and sustainable manner.
 - Support graduate lines within the Graduate School to motivate development of fluid and innovative graduate programs.
 - Use technology to develop a university---wide “connectome” to reveal possible new arenas for collaboration.
 - Institute salon---style meetings to seed new transinsitutional programs.
- 4) Promote Equity and Excellence: Vanderbilt must invest in graduate education as it does in undergraduate education.

Actions:

- Vanderbilt should invest in affordable graduate student housing on or close to campus.
 - Vanderbilt and the Graduate School should seek funding to institute a university---wide faculty graduate teaching award.
- 5) Streamline Student Life: To enable graduate students to focus on their studies and to make the most of their educational opportunities, Vanderbilt must streamline and support other aspects of their lives. This is important for students coming from within the US, while the increasing globalization of the markets for graduate students confers on these issues a special significance.

Actions:

- Expand student support systems including those for mental and physical health.
 - Ensure robust support for students concerning other student life issues, such as health insurance, childcare, parking, and housing.
- 6) Support Postdoctoral Fellows: Postdocs occupy a transitional position between graduate student and fully---fledged independent researcher. They make important contributions to supporting graduate and undergraduate research projects.

Action:

- Postdoctoral fellows at Vanderbilt should be brought under one umbrella under the leadership of the Graduate School.