

Vanderbilt University Quality Enhancement Plan

Building a Bridge to The Commons: Vanderbilt Visions and Student Learning at a Research University

Vanderbilt Visions is a core program aimed at acculturating first-year students to a research university. The program creates small groups of first-year students, faculty facilitators, and student facilitators, whose purpose is to introduce incoming students to the goals and values of a research university through discussion and collaborative experiences. Vanderbilt Visions will soon be integrated into the Commons—a first-year campus and living-learning community of students, faculty, and educational professionals that will be launched in the fall of 2008. The Commons will intensify the acculturative learning processes underway in Vanderbilt Visions, thus serving an integral part in the university's strategic plan to develop a broader learning environment.

Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons seek to increase the engagement of first-year students in educationally purposive activities – those that form the academic, cognitive, social, and attitudinal attributes of successful citizens of today's global society. Of central importance to the success of this endeavor is the formation of durable student-to-student and student-to-faculty networks. In turn, these interactions will help to maximize students' academic potential during their undergraduate years. We expect permanent changes in the roles of both students and faculty, wherein the former will become intentional learners and the latter will become more active facilitators in the learning process.

The programming and structure of Vanderbilt Visions and The Commons were developed with student–faculty communication in mind. Additionally, they promise to enhance the quality and frequency of student learning experiences, foster increased formation of students' social learning relationships, and instill the basic values of civic engagement, scholarship and leadership.

In testing the success of these programs, we will collect data within four specific domains: 1) Academic Acculturation, 2) Cognitive Acculturation, 3) Social Acculturation, and 4) Values Acculturation. Data will be obtained from face-to-face interviews, surveys, and non-self-report institutional data. The research design is a multi-method time-lag analysis of the 2007 and 2008 cohorts of first-year students and participating faculty over a five-year period.

For information on the development and implementation of Vanderbilt's QEP, please contact:

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