Minutes of the Faculty Council
College of Arts and Science

April 6, 1971

The Faculty Council of the College of Arts and Science met in Room 6301 Stevenson Center at 4:15 p.m., with Dean Holladay presiding. Present were Deans Bingham, Lagemann and Miller, and Professors Bloch, Brumbaugh, Bryant, Drews, Elledge, Jones, Kilroy, Pride, Thistlthwaite, Touster, Vance, Voegeli and Walters.

Professor Touster presented the report and recommendations of the Educational Policy Committee on Special Academic Programs. First considered was the Vanderbilt Scholar Program, which discussion centered on three questions: Should distribution requirements be waived in this program? Should the program be tied to an application for outside funding? and Are the seminars proposed therein sufficiently detailed and educationally sound? After extended discussion, the Council approved of the program by a vote of eleven to two.

The Senior Scholar program was then discussed, and again the matter of distribution requirements was raised. By unanimous consent, the Council amended the committee's proposal to award grades of "distinguished, pass or fail" for the senior project, rather than just "pass or fail." This program was then approved by a vote of thirteen to one.
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Professor Touster, for the EPC, made the following motion:

The interdisciplinary course Studies in Communism 150 should be designated as one of those counting towards fulfillment of the distribution requirement in Social Science.

This motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Another proposal of the Educational Policy Committee was then considered.

Contingent on the approval of the proposed new course, Natural Science 101, the Council unanimously agreed to:

endorse the principle underlying the organization and purpose of Natural Science 101 and recommend that the new course be permitted to satisfy one semester of the Natural Science distribution requirement for non-science majors to the extent permitted by departmental decisions as to whether one departmental course may be combined with the new course to satisfy the two semester Natural Science option.

Professor Bryant then moved that effective Fall, 1971, all present ROTC and NROTC courses be removed from the list of courses for which college credit may be given under the six-hour professional credits rule.

His motion, which passed unanimously, is related to revisions of the officer training programs and curriculum changes in that area.

Dean Miller then submitted an extended list of curriculum changes, all of which were finally approved without dissent.

The meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

James Kilroy
Report of the Educational Policy Committee

on

Special Academic Programs

Introduction

In the fall of 1970, EPC recommended that certain proposals in the report of the Committee on Teaching and Learning be referred to a special "Track" committee. The recommendations were, in general, concerned with the needs and interests of specially qualified, highly motivated students. Acting Dean Bingham appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Tracks composed of the following members: Professors Charles E. Scott (Chm.), R. N. Donaldson, E. H. Duncan, and Melvin Joesten. Three students worked with this committee: Mr. Lo Christy, Miss Patricia Ann Kalmans, and Mr. L. G. Reese. The report of this committee was discussed by EPC in the late spring of 1970, but, recognizing that the committee's recommendations would require extensive study, we deferred further consideration until the fall. During the fall and winter of 1970, the Track committee report became the major concern of EPC. Professor Scott participated in many of our meetings and gave generously of his time and knowledge. In the course of its study, EPC did not engage in surveys of opinion at Vanderbilt or elsewhere or attempt to evaluate extensively the experiences of other institutions, since much of this work had been done by the Track Committee. Instead, members of EPC weighed the needs for the several academic programs, examined the requirements and features of each proposal, and studied the vital question of financial support. Substantial revisions were made, after which each revised program was discussed and voted upon separately by EPC.

In writing this report, EPC has made liberal use of sections of the report of the Track Committee. Our report, which represents the overwhelming opinion of the members of EPC, contains two specific proposals for
consideration and describes the action taken on the other two.

II. General Statement

There are many superior institutions in this country which have adopted special programs for gifted students and for those who thrive best in an educational environment in which seminars, interdisciplinary study, and independent work are emphasized. Especially capable and highly motivated students are often attracted to schools which offer academic programs which not only allow, but encourage, interdepartmental work and permit the use of a considerable amount of time for a major creative project. We believe that Vanderbilt should experiment carefully with such programs and evaluate them. EPC is aware that a major problem with curricular experiments is that the programs and the students may founder for lack of supervision. Accordingly, in the programs described below, we have attempted to provide adequate guidance to the students and structure to the programs.

III. The Vanderbilt Scholar Program

A. Rationale:

The Track committee found through interviews with a wide variety of students, faculty members, and administrators that our brightest students sometimes find difficulty in pursuing their academic interests. The degree of this difficulty varies from department to department. Some departments effectively encourage independent research projects; others, at least indirectly, discourage independent study. Moreover, some students and faculty believe that our present curriculum discourages rather than fosters focused, interdisciplinary interests and study. Often, when a student's interests involve two or more disciplines he finds few opportunities to interrelate these disciplines in projects or
papers. If he does find such an opportunity, he usually does so because of his imagination and persistence. According to the Admissions Office, Vanderbilt probably loses some especially good prospective students because some other schools are able to offer more opportunities for greater independence to students with comparatively mature academic interests and abilities.

Although interdisciplinary approaches to learning can result in dilettantism, there are many colleges and universities that have developed strong and viable interdisciplinary programs. Such programs involve a hard-headed knowledge of the relevant disciplines, but are able also to focus on issues and problems that involve a variety of competencies. Issues that lend themselves to an interdisciplinary approach include, for example, science in relation to governmental policy, evaluation of the nature of human health, the possibilities and limitations inherent in the language used to conceive specified projects and disciplines, the relative potentiality for discovery among several disciplines and methods vis-a-vis a problem or set of problems, and the criteria for evaluating aesthetic and practical considerations relating to city growth. The chief aim of such programs is to allow some exceptional students to develop an in-depth, apprentice's knowledge and appreciation of a discipline as well as an awareness of its limits.

To encourage well-guided academic independence as well as sensitivity for the implications and consequences of what man knows, we propose the establishment of the Vanderbilt Scholar Program.

B. Summary of Requirements:

(1) 40-60 semester hours in an area of concentration involving two or three departments, normally to be completed by the beginning of the senior
year. Program of concentration must be approved by the Vanderbilt Scholar Committee, a faculty committee appointed by the College Dean, in consultation with the relevant departments.

(2) Ten hours of Vanderbilt Scholar Seminar with one semester hour per semester during the first three years and two semester hours per semester during the senior year.

(3) A total of at least twelve hours of independent research during the junior and senior years in the area of concentration.

(4) Remaining 45-60 hours to be taken in the areas which the student feels are most beneficial to his program.

(5) Maintenance of a B average (considered at the end of each year).

C. Programs:

The student's entire program must be approved by the Vanderbilt Scholar Committee in consultation with the relevant departments. As a freshman, the scholar will be encouraged to take courses at the 200-level in his area of concentration. When applicable, advanced placement exams will provide guidance as to whether the student has an adequate background for 200-level courses. The senior year will be devoted largely to independent research.

D. Seminar Program:

Vanderbilt Scholars will meet as a group one hour per week during the first three years in a seminar designed to allow for an informal exchange of ideas on selected problems. The long-range goal of the seminar will be to build a cohesive research group capable of using the expertise of the members in an interdisciplinary attack on some significant problem. During the senior year the Vanderbilt Scholars will meet twice a week to organize and complete seminar projects, and to write a final report summarizing the results of their investigation.
These seminars would probably begin as discussions of various ways to solve some academic or social problem. The emphasis would be on informing the students and developing an appreciation on their part concerning the variety of ways in which one problem can be recognized, analyzed, and solved or resolved. A variety of faculty members would lead the discussion during a school year. As the students become more informed and more sensitive to the relevant issues during their first three years, the quality of their work and interest should improve and their effectiveness together should also increase. We envisage that by their senior year they should be ready to carry out a cooperative project centered on some problem for which each student's discipline and training have relevance.

This kind of experience, with its continuity and its interdisciplinary approach, should provide an important occasion for constructive, academically centered interaction, something we found to be missing among our best students. If achieved, such an experience could help significantly to integrate the curricular and conversational content in some of our students' lives, and to give the occasion to appreciate the complexity and difficulty of intelligent, academically oriented problem-solving.

E. Independent Research:

The Vanderbilt Scholar will be expected to conduct an independent research project, supervised and evaluated by a faculty member, and related to his area of concentration. This project will usually be undertaken during his senior year, but may be initiated during his junior year. The Vanderbilt Scholars, by their junior or senior year, will have developed comparatively advanced and specialized knowledge in their respective disciplines, and independent study should be both natural and important in their educational
development. By expecting an independent use of knowledge, the program will help to direct the student towards such independence from the time he becomes a Vanderbilt Scholar.

F. Electives:

The Vanderbilt Scholar will have the option of meeting the requirements for graduation by taking the remaining 45-60 hours in any school at the University.

G. Selection:

Careful selection of both students and their advisors is essential to the success of the Vanderbilt Scholar program. Prospective freshmen may apply for admittance to the Vanderbilt Scholar Program. Representatives of the Admissions Office who visit high schools will interview students who show special promise. Applications will be reviewed by the Director of the Vanderbilt Scholar Program in cooperation with the Admissions Office and the Vanderbilt Scholar Committee.

Probably a total of 15 students in each class with a maximum of 60 for the College would participate in the Vanderbilt Scholar program. Approximately 10 freshmen would be selected each year to become Vanderbilt Scholars. Students already enrolled at Vanderbilt may make application to become Vanderbilt Scholars starting with their sophomore or junior year. (These students would join the appropriate Vanderbilt Scholar seminar for his class).

In addition, students who are Vanderbilt Scholars may drop out of the program at any time up to their senior year. When a student drops out, he will be responsible for fulfilling all normal requirements for a B.A. degree.

Entrance into, or exit from, the program will be initiated by formal petition to the Dean of the College, who will consult the Vanderbilt Scholar Committee. In the case of entrance into the program the credentials of the students will be examined by the Vanderbilt Scholar Committee.
The Vanderbilt Scholar would be carefully advised, and his interests and judgments would be supplemented by the judgments and maturity of an interested faculty member. As a group, the Vanderbilt Scholars of any class would probably represent a wide range of interests, and each scholar’s work should be guided by someone well trained within the individual’s field of interest.

The Committee was encouraged to develop the Vanderbilt Scholar Program in light of the very strong possibility of outside funding for a director. Such a person could give direction and cohesion to the interdisciplinary part of this program, as well as help in the selection of students and other administrative duties.

EPC, by a unanimous vote, endorsed the following proposal:

Proposal: That a Vanderbilt Scholar Program, as defined above, be instituted in the College, provided that complete funding for the program is obtained from an external agency and that no conditions are attached to the grant requiring the continuation of the program beyond the term of the subvention. (Note: At least a five-year grant, with a likelihood of a three-year supplemental grant, would be required to mount the program on a four to five year experimental basis.)

IV. Senior Scholar Program

A. Rationale:

There are usually a few seniors who are ready to spend full-time on a sound and imaginative project. Vanderbilt has some departments in which a well-qualified and interested student can spend a large portion of his senior year on a research project, but, in most instances a senior can spend no more than half-time on such an activity. Moreover, although an
honors program involving 12 hours a semester is frequently adequate for the student's interest, in exceptional cases a student could profitably spend the entire year in a writing and research effort. We propose a plan under which such a student would spend all of his senior year engaged upon a special project of his own devising which would result in some form of finished document that would constitute material evidence that his time has been profitably spent in terms of his intellectual development.

The specifications for the following program are heavily indebted to a recently instituted program at Amherst called "Independent Study" and to the "Scholars of the House Program" at Yale. This program is designed to meet the needs of those few seniors who are ready for total immersion in independent, constructive study. We anticipate an average of no more than six Senior Scholars a year.

B. Specifications:

1. A student desiring admission to the program would be expected to be a junior in good standing and making normal progress toward the degree. Each student would initiate his application by submitting a prospectus of his proposed area of study to the Senior Scholar Committee, a faculty committee appointed by the Dean. The prospectus should include a) a statement regarding the motives which prompt him to undertake the study, b) an outline of the proposed project, and c) a description of the activities which appear to him to be related to his project. These activities could, but need not necessarily, include a) the taking of regular courses in the College or related schools, b) a course of reading, and c) work away from the campus for a more or less extended period of time.

2. The prospectus, with a supporting recommendation by the prospective supervisor, would be presented to and passed upon by the Senior Scholar
Committee, in consultation with the applicant's major department(s), who would examine it to evaluate the worthiness of the proposal and the likelihood of its satisfactory completion. The supervisor of each accepted project would become an ad hoc member of the Senior Scholar Committee. There could be periodic reviews of the student's progress by the full committee, which might call upon the expert advice of other people either on or off campus.

3. Admission into the Senior Scholar Program would waive major and minor requirements for the B.A. degree. The title of the project should be included on his transcript. The project would be graded pass or fail.

4. The scholar would continue to be a member of the regular undergraduate student body even though his study time would be employed in ways different from those of his fellow students. He should be encouraged to participate in the life of the campus.

5. Senior Scholars will, in all probability, choose a broad variety of projects. Among the sixteen projects recommended for honors at Amherst in 1967 were: a motion picture, a novel, a biography, a portfolio of graphic designs; scholarly monographs in the areas of biology (re: the effect of LSD on rats), philosophy, psychology, Greek history, Greek tragedy, Shakespeare; a sociological investigation of a problem in contemporary American culture.

C. Excerpt from the Amherst Report:

We found the following paragraph from the Amherst report helpful in understanding the purpose and nature of this proposed program: "Although any selection procedure inevitably must involve rejections, there have been some unusually bitter disappointments among individuals not chosen for Independent Study. This may stem in part from misunderstanding of the criteria applied by the faculty in its evaluations. We have tried to limit projects to those
which could, in the broadest sense, be considered 'scholarly'. Apart from the intuitive understanding of this term which we all applied in interview, we meant especially to accept only proposals which gave reasonable promise of making an original scholarly contribution to a disciplined inquiry and careful examination and refinement of new ideas. This implies, in turn, that the work would result in a formal expression—be it a thesis, report, film, or other artistic work—which could then be subjected to the critical evaluation both by the scholar's immediate tutors and the wider community. It was assumed, although this was not a prerequisite, that every scholar, as evidence of his own maturity, would seek out the critical reaction of others to his ideas or creations."

EPC, by a vote of 7 to 1, endorsed the following proposal:

Proposal: That a Senior Scholar Program, as defined above, be instituted in the College, and that the program be reviewed at the end of four years.

V. Other Actions of EPC

We considered two other programs developed by the Track Committee. The following actions were taken, for the reasons stated:

A. Freshman-Sophomore Interdisciplinary Seminar

The purpose of this seminar generally seemed desirable, but various questions were raised regarding its administration and priority. Since definite action on such a unique seminar must await formulation of its content and format, EPC voted unanimously to refer the proposal to the Dean for further consideration. He is encouraged to take steps aimed at the activation of this type of seminar as soon as possible.
B. Early Concentration

This very substantial curriculum modification, said to be so successful at Yale, was impressive to EPC, but it would normally require additional faculty. Consequently, it was referred to Dean Holladay for further consideration. Moreover, the Curriculum Committee will have to deal with any departmental "early concentration" course. By a 5 to 1 vote, EPC expressed to the Dean and Curriculum Committee its favorable view of the aims of early concentration.