March 31, 2006

To: Faculty Council
From: Committee on Academic Standards & Procedures, George Becker, chair, Robert Barsky, Emanuelle Di Benedetto, Kathy Gaca, Jose Medina, members, Kate Daniels ex officio

CASP supports the following recommendation recently forwarded to us by the AXLE Implementation Committee, regarding the future status of Vanderbilt Visions (VV), and asks Faculty Council to review the recommendation for presentation to the CAS faculty.

**Recommendation:**

CASP recommends that the implementation of the VV component of AXLE, scheduled to begin in fall 2006 (documentation attached), be placed in abeyance until it can be reconsidered for implementation within the context of The Commons, and with the input of the Dean of Commons. We further recommend that the AXLE Implementation Committee be instructed to review the status of Vanderbilt Visions and report back to the faculty before the Implementation Committee disbands, prior to the 2009-2010 academic year.

This recommendation results from communication and consultation with the AXLE Implementation committee, the Vanderbilt Visions Committee, and Dean McCarty. Other factors relevant to our recommendation include: analysis of the new first year orientation program scheduled for 2006-07 AY that has been developing over the past several months (documentation attached), and the significant constraints (described below) that this new four-school program is expected to impose on VV.

**Background:**

**Fall 2005:** Vanderbilt Visions Committee (Kate Daniels, chair, Jo-anne Bachorowski, Greg Barz, Monica Casper, David Furbish, and Virginia Scott, committee members) developed a plan for Vanderbilt Visions, according to AXLE. This was a mandatory, pass-fail course carrying two credits that was to be taken by all first year students during the freshman year. The plan required 45 faculty mentors, four to six guest faculty speakers/presenters, one faculty VV Director, and website support. The funds for VV were to be obtained from the general operating budget of the College of Arts and Science.

**Academic Year 2005-06:** After a series of traumatic events on campus in the fall, Chancellor Gee convened a four-school safety task force, that ultimately evolved into four working committees, charged with revising our current approach to freshman orientation. (See attached documentation.)
Spring 2006:

Dean McCarty was appointed co-chair of the committee primarily charged with conceptualizing the new orientation program. He alerted the VV Committee as soon as it became obvious that the evolving orientation plan was likely to compromise CAS’ ability to resource VV, along with the new freshman orientation program.

Throughout the spring, the VV and AXLE Implementation committees communicated regularly with Dean McCarty and his committee as the orientation plan quickly developed, regarding the specifics of the plan, and the possible overlaps, duplication of effort, and the human and financial resource issues that would emanate from the initiation of both programs for the upcoming year.

Ultimately, the VV Committee forwarded the following recommendation to the AXLE Implementation Committee:

Date: Tue, 28 Mar 2006 15:25:59 -0600
From: "Daniels, Katherine A" <kate.daniels@vanderbilt.edu>

In light of the impending changes in first year orientation for students in all four undergraduate schools (administered by the "Orientation to Vanderbilt Norms and Values" working committee chaired by Dean McCarty and Mark Bandas), the Vanderbilt Visions Committee of the College of Arts and Science recommends to the AXLE Implementation Committee that the component of AXLE known as "Vanderbilt Visions" be excised from the curricular requirements for graduation from CAS, and presented to the faculty for approval.

We have reached this conclusion after seven months of committee work that resulted in a VV program that was intellectually exciting, appropriately challenging for our students, and highly innovative in its dynamic pedagogical structures, pairing students and faculty in self-directed experiential learning communities. Thus, this recommendation is made with regret, but with a pragmatic acceptance of the constraints that the recently-proposed four-school orientation program imposes on the originally-proposed VV.

While the two proposals are distinct and quite different from each other, they encompass significant overlap, as well, and would necessitate duplication of effort and extra expenditure of funds to implement. In addition, it appears impossible to staff both programs concurrently, a task that would require 60 CAS faculty members for the new orientation program, 60 pre major advisors, along with the 45 faculty members proposed for Vanderbilt Visions.

In the spirit of four-college/one school collegiality, the Vanderbilt Visions committee would also like to recommend that we relinquish our claims on the excellent name, Vanderbilt Visions, and invite the committee on "Orientation to Vanderbilt Norms and Values" to designate the new orientation program in this way if that is desirable.

Sincerely yours, Kate Daniels, chair, Jo-anne Bachorowski, Greg Barz, Monica Casper, David Furbish, and Virginia Scott, committee members.
**Rationale:**

CASP recognizes, along with the AXLE Implementation Committee, that there is a need for a new approach to first year orientation that responds to and enfranchises students, faculty, and staff in all four colleges. We support these efforts, and applaud the administration’s prompt response to the disturbing events of the fall semester.

The new orientation program as it is taking shape (documentation attached) addresses the entire freshman class as an entity, and proposes a two semester orientation program that utilizes 80 faculty members (60 of them from CAS) as facilitators for small study groups, pairing students, faculty, and VUCeptors. The enormous financial cost of this new approach to first year orientation is being borne by the Provost’s office.

This new approach to orientation makes demands on each of the four undergraduate schools, and calls for new ways of imagining and administering both ongoing and new programs. Our situation in CAS is made somewhat more complex by the structure and demands of our intensive premajor advising program that is staffed by faculty.

In the new orientation plan that is being proposed, CAS will be responsible for providing 60 faculty members to serve as orientation study group facilitators. In addition, an equal number is required in-house for premajor advising. Adding VV to this mix would necessitate another 45 faculty members to facilitate each of the learning communities, and at least one additional faculty member to serve as director of VV. Thus, the sponsorship of all three programs would require CAS to recruit from 146 (maximum) to 126 (minimum possible if orientation and PMA functions are combined) CAS faculty members to fill the total staffing needs.

It is clear to us that neither the financial nor human resources are available at the current time to support the implementation of both VV and the new orientation program for the upcoming academic year.

However, while we are supportive of the need to not implement VV in the fall of 2006, we do not advocate the permanent excision of VV from the AXLE curriculum. Mindful of the faculty’s overwhelming support for the AXLE curriculum, and for the extreme interest in developing a distinctive, pedagogically-innovative, and intellectually challenging, credit-bearing program for all of our entering CAS freshmen that AXLE stipulates, the Implementation Committee hopes that the faculty will agree to delaying the development of VV until it can be administered within the still-unknown contexts and parameters of residential life in The Commons.

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From the CRWG Report:

Description of Vanderbilt Visions.

Vanderbilt Visions provides a shared academic experience and offers a venue in which each entering class will assemble on a regular basis during the first year. It is intended to promote a sense of community among faculty and first year students, and to encourage students to explore and to identify intellectually with the particular communities that comprise a major research university. Vanderbilt Visions engages students in the many intellectual and artistic opportunities available to them at Vanderbilt. It complements the First Year Writing Seminar program by introducing first year students to the wider range of interdisciplinary intellectual inquiry at Vanderbilt University. The invited lectures and presentations associated with Vanderbilt Visions also engage faculty from the other undergraduate colleges and the professional schools in the College of Arts and Science curriculum. All first year students enroll in Vanderbilt Visions during both semesters of the first year. This course is 1 unit each semester, graded P/F.

All first year students must complete the two semester Vanderbilt Visions series. As opposed to being yet another classroom experience, Vanderbilt Visions complements the First Year Writing Seminar experience and is intended as a broad venue that will introduce first year students to the wide range of interdisciplinary intellectual inquiry inherent to a great university. Vanderbilt Visions will provide a venue in which each entering class of students will assemble on a regular basis during their first year, thus promoting a greater sense of academic community among the students. The invited lectures and presentations associated with Vanderbilt Visions will provide an opportunity to engage faculty from the other undergraduate colleges and the professional schools in the College of Arts and Science curriculum. Longer term, the CRWG foresees the integration of the Vanderbilt Visions program with the other undergraduate colleges and Residential Colleges, and possible integration between Vanderbilt Visions and community involvement on the part of College of Arts and Science students through programs such as the Alternative Spring Break. Vanderbilt Visions would be presented regularly during the academic year, with students receiving 1 unit pass/fail credit each semester. Grading would be attendance-based, with attendance at most of the lectures required to receive a passing grade. The CRWG recommends that the 120 credits currently required for graduation be increased to 122 credits so that the nominal two credits associated with Vanderbilt Visions would not interfere with other graduation requirements. It is envisioned that Vanderbilt Visions will be structured into the new class scheduling system that is being developed, so that all students would attend the lectures simultaneously. This addition would necessitate an arrangement to allow the use of Langford Auditorium in the School of Medicine, the only venue sufficiently large to simultaneously accommodate all College of Arts and Science first year students.

Management of Vanderbilt Visions

Decisions regarding the annual content and format of the Vanderbilt Visions program shall be vested with the faculty assigned to Vanderbilt Visions. The Dean of the College
of Arts and Science shall appoint annually these faculty members to plan the Vanderbilt Visions program; the group shall have representatives from the arts and humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. The planning of Vanderbilt Visions is anticipated to involve a substantial time commitment and it is recommended that this assignment be reflected in a reduced teaching load for these faculty members. Faculty shall be appointed to the Vanderbilt Visions Program for staggered terms of three years so as to maintain academic continuity in the Program. The responsibilities of these faculty members will be twofold: to administer the current year’s program and to plan the next year’s schedule.

Vanderbilt Visions provides a venue for the faculty to introduce students to the rich diversity of the University’s intellectual enterprises and its role in the world today. It is intended to be the marquee program of the College of Arts and Science, responsible for offering first year students outstanding, high-impact, intellectually provocative presentations and performances. It is recognized that this may be accomplished using multiple mechanisms, and that the specific content of Vanderbilt Visions may vary considerably from one year to the next. The Vanderbilt Visions faculty may wish to focus the program on some coherent theme that extends throughout the year, or it may prefer to organize a series of diverse topics and ideas. Required summer reading to incoming first year students might be assigned by the faculty, to tie in with Vanderbilt Visions presentations at the beginning of the Fall semester. (Although the program is designed to showcase Vanderbilt’s intellectual vitality through presentations by current faculty, the faculty in charge shall have the discretion to invite prominent alumni and friends of the University, who have achieved significant recognition in their fields of endeavor.)

The wealth of research being undertaken at Vanderbilt University offers many possibilities for intellectually stimulating faculty presentations: technology and ethics in fetal surgery; video and on-line gaming as literary "texts;" funerary cannibalism among indigenous people in Brazil; the gentrification of white nationalism; debates in reproductive cloning; archaeological excavations in Guatemala; "passing" strategies of gay men in straight society; solo or in-the-round arts performances; the dynamics of human facial and vocal communications of emotion; a cost-benefit analysis of the death penalty; etc. Faculty invited to participate will be challenged to create presentations that will engage first year students in a brief session, large-audience format, enhanced by audio visual or dramatic aids.