



GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

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BRET: ASPIRE Retention

Problem

In the biomedical sciences, only 20-25% of the graduate population will go on to pursue a tenure track position in academia, according to the National Institutes of Health's Biomedical Research Workforce Working Group Report. This leaves 75-80% pursuing "alternative careers". Vanderbilt found a way to help incorporate this alternative-career development into biomedical training. Vanderbilt was one of ten universities to receive the initial NIH Director's Biomedical Research Workforce Innovation Award: Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BEST). Currently, Vanderbilt is one of only 17 universities to have this \$1.2 million, 5-year grant that serves graduate and post-doctoral fellows in the biomedical sciences. With this award, Vanderbilt implemented the Augmenting Scholar Preparation and Integration with Research-Related Endeavors (ASPIRE) Program, a comprehensive strategy to best prepare graduate and post-doctoral trainees for a range of future careers. This programming has been highlighted as an "organic success story in developing strategies for alternative career outcomes" in the Vanderbilt Graduate Education Study Group report.

With this funding the Office of Career Development in Biomedical Research Education and Training (BRET) hosted drop-in clinic hours for CV/Resumes, hosted 10 module courses, launched two new business courses, hosted 10 speakers for the annual career symposium, executed 47 events, and connected with 90 employers to promote internships/partnerships just within the 2015-2016 academic year.

This non-refundable BEST grant is ending in 2018.

In the absence of this funding, not only will this unique and beneficial program disappear, so will the five years of networking, outreach, and career development provided to Vanderbilt and with the local community.

Furthermore, the Graduate Education Study Group calls for "the incorporation of the BRET Office into the Graduate School and the expansion of its staffing and role to serve all graduate students" in their recent report. Without funding, the BRET office cannot expand to serve this role. Additionally, without additional faculty and staff, the current benefits of this program will be lost.

Solution

The Graduate Education Study Group released their “New Vision for Graduate Education at Vanderbilt” report that outlines elements of success and areas that need improvement. The report states that,

“One of the best examples of our success can be found in the (BRET) office, which has been structured to enhance graduate and postdoctoral training within the biomedical disciplines. This office has created an exceptional environment for the training of the graduate students under its umbrella. [...] These training elements have provided a competitive advantage for many of our trainees and these types of programs should be expanded to the full Vanderbilt academic community.”

More students are choosing to take “non-traditional” career paths and for Vanderbilt to continue to produce leaders in all fields, career and professional development must be adapted to address topics ranging from presentation skills, interviewing, entrepreneurial exposure, budgeting, personnel management, mentoring, networking. Maintain and expand the ASPIRE programing by continuing to fund the faculty, interdisciplinary modular classes, symposia, internships, and events that foster exposure to professionals and alum in the different fields. The current program is functioning at the top of their capacity with respect to the faculty to student programing ratio, in order to provide increased benefits to more students across campus, more staff and faculty will need to be hired to keep the momentum in a forward direction.

IMPACT

- “The ASPIRE program are in perfect concordance with the broader institutional goals for career development for our graduate students which are to: 1) empower and prepare our students to make well-informed career decisions, 2) broaden the skill sets of students to enable them to transition efficiently to careers in both academic and non academic venues 3) better integrate career and professional development into PhD and Master’s training programs.”- GSEG Report
- The ASPIRE program is incredibly unique and already sets Vanderbilt apart from other universities.
- The opportunities afforded to students are a huge attraction when recruiting graduate students.
- Allows students to learn about and seek traditional and alternative careers.
- Provides opportunities for internships, maintains networking and collaborations with local professionals.
- Offers courses that would otherwise not be available to graduate students in the biomedical sciences.
- Provides resources for the majority of biomedical science students who will not stay in academia
- Allows students to prepare for and enhance their career planning.

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- “Retaining the best students and helping those students stay the best throughout their graduate career.”- GSEG Report

GOALS

1. Maintain current programming, symposia, internships, externships, and career development for the biomedical science graduate and post-doctoral trainees.
2. Hire more full time faculty dedicated to career development and incorporating alternative career development for graduate students to allow the expansion of current programming after the BRET office is incorporated into the Graduate School.

IMPLEMENTATION

Continue to fund the current infrastructure and set aside funds for BRET office expansion after it is incorporated into the Graduate School. Maintain the programs already in place and continually reevaluate and enhance the program to meet the needs of current graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

ESTIMATED COST

Annual recurring cost would be a minimum of \$550,000. The fourth year of this current BEST support was \$583,902 with \$210,422 of that for indirect costs. Right now this covers full or partial salaries for three of the BRET faculty members. This also covers cost of speakers, and course materials, as well as other programming needs. To expand this beyond the biomedical students would require additional faculty and additional funds. While the BRET office or the new career and professional development center will continue to apply for extramural funding, it will be imperative to establish bridge funding to maintain the current programing and allow for immediate expansion to the entire university.