



GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

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Vanderbilt University Democracy School

OVERVIEW

Problem

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math are the major emphasis of secondary education. While STEM fields are rewarding in their challenges and fruitful in their applications, the Humanities and Social Sciences are crucial for grappling with the challenges of living in complex societies with people from diverse backgrounds. The recent events have demonstrated that as a society, we are unable to have conversations about difficult subject concerning race, religion, nationality, and other facets of identity and culture. While these instances are tragic reminders of the unfulfilled promises of democracy, they also serve as valuable teaching moments for the development of skills in public dialogue, civic engagement, and critical thinking. These are necessary competencies for creating a language that can build bridges across an increasing polarized national community, and confronting the political, social, cultural and historical issues required to participate ethically, responsibly and purposefully in a democracy.

Solution

We propose that Vanderbilt University fund a graduate student led program for Saturday session classes and workshops for high school students geared towards the Humanities and Social Sciences. The program would begin with 60-80 students and 10 graduate student instructors. Expenses for transportation, teaching supplies (including books), meals (breakfast and lunch), and compensation would be included.

IMPACT

This program would serve as a mode of outreach for Vanderbilt to connect with the larger Nashville community, specifically the youth. This would foster a larger culture of critical engagement with the political and historical realities of Nashville, Tennessee, and the United States. Graduate students would have the opportunity to develop courses and workshops based on their own studies and interests.

The courses would emphasize the importance of the humanities and social sciences for living in a democratic society. Students will take the texts, lessons, and discussions from the program and apply to various contexts (local, national, and global) in thinking about how to better participate in multicultural civic institutions. The courses will demonstrate innovative approaches to teaching and assessment, drawing on current and perennial events and controversies as the background for curriculum.

GOALS

1. Connect with high schools and high school students in Nashville,
2. Develop a rich Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum based on graduate student input and interests
3. Produce innovative assessment techniques, including collaborative projects and experiential learning opportunities
4. Explore opportunities for career and intellectual development based on the teaching done by graduate students

IMPLEMENTATION

The program would be run through a collaboration between lead instructors (graduate students) and program administrators. The administrators would focus primarily on contacting the high schools and working with the University to provide resources for supplies and other needs for the Saturday sessions. The lead-instructors would develop a curriculum based on input from the other instructors, and create a track of course for students to follow towards completion of the program.¹

¹ We acknowledge that Vanderbilt currently has a Program for Talented Youth. There are two major differences between our proposal and PYT. First, the Vanderbilt University Democracy School would be run and organized almost entirely by graduate students. The interests and direction of the program would come from the graduate students considerations concerning the necessity of humanistic inquiry toward the challenges of living within a democracy. Second and related, the education offered within our proposal would be geared toward bridging the

The lead instructors reach out to graduate students about participation. This would include explaining the benefits and compensation, as well as the discussing the roles and responsibilities of being an instructor in the program. The program would need some variety in terms of course offerings, so reaching across the humanities and social sciences would be critical.

The program admins would then reach out to the local high schools (probably through guidance counselors) to select students for the program. It would be imperative to stress that the aim of the school is not remediation, and to separately consider whether the program is best aimed solely towards students who excel at their current studies, or whether the target demographic might include a variety of levels of educational caliber.

ESTIMATED YEARLY COST

-Payment for graduate students and program administrators -\$200,000:

100,000- Graduate Student Compensation (5,000 per semester)

60,000- Program administrator compensation (30,000 per administrator)

Lead instructor compensation-negotiable

-Course releases for either graduate student service obligation or for graduate student course work-associated administrative fees- *Vanderbilt administration established fees*

-Books for courses- \$10,000

-Transportation- >\$800

-Collaborative Capstone Activities- \$5,000

-Breakfast and lunch for students, instructors, and participants- *Vanderbilt food vendor established prices*

-Classroom supplies (paper, printing, dry erase/chalk supplies, etc.) -\$300-400

classroom, community, local, and national spaces. Our aim is to produce knowledge that breaks the boundary between academic pursuits and everyday life, and to encourage students to allow the life outside the classroom to inform what they do in the classroom, and vice versa. Neither observation precludes the possibility of collaboration, but the ends and means are distinct.