

Dear incoming transfer students,

I am so excited to be sending you this message—my first communication with you directly, and the first of what I hope will be many conversations that we have together. As dean of Residential Colleges and Residential Education, one of the most important parts of my job is to connect with all of you and to help you have a meaningful, fulfilling, and yes, challenging, first year at Vanderbilt.

In addition to my role as dean, I am also a professor in the department of Teaching and Learning. I study how people learn and develop identities in relation to different school subjects, and how those identities can change based on the organization of classrooms and other learning environments. This makes my job in Residential Colleges particularly interesting, as I am constantly attending to how we can design programs, activities, and experiences that help students to learn about and make sense of who they are. This is important, because identity-building is a core activity in college, as you have new experiences and meet new people that help you to learn more about the world and the role you want to play in it.

Transferring to a new college brings new challenges. On the one hand, you have already started your college journey; you have started to learn what works for you, and what doesn't. That self-knowledge is undoubtedly what prompted you to look for a different experience, and led you to Vanderbilt. On the other hand, you are beginning yet another transition, in a space where almost everything is new—the people, the place, the food, sometimes even the weather! For some people, novelty is exhilarating, while for others, it is frightening. Regardless of where you sit on that continuum, this novelty creates an opportunity to look around and ask: “Who am I, and who do I want to be?” For that reason, we have chosen a book to read together for the Campus Reading that is centrally about transition, change, identity, and agency. *Now is Not the Time to Panic*, by Kevin Wilson, follows two teenagers as they struggle to find their space in the world, in their families, and in themselves. What starts as an act of expression becomes something much more, something that defines, or defies, the people they want to be. At its core, *Now is Not the Time to Panic* is a story of the search for belonging, and through its complex turns, it invites us to wonder where that sense of belonging comes from, and what it means to each of us.

This book is the first of many opportunities for us to develop a common language that we can use to get to know one another and to explore the world around us. We will be discussing this book during Transfer Student Orientation, both in large and small groups. **With that goal in mind, we ask that each new student submit a reflective essay on the Campus Reading, due August 11.** Instructions about the content of the essay, and how to upload your essay in Brightspace, are attached.

In order to form a community and connect with each other, let's start to share our stories. I am really looking forward to hearing yours.

Until August,



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