

illuminate

**EDITOR'S
REFLECTIONS**

**UPCOMING EVENTS &
LAUNCHES**

**GRATITUDE REALLY IS GOOD
FOR YOU. HERE'S WHAT THE
SCIENCE SHOWS.**



VANDERBILT
People, Culture and Belonging

Vol 1.3

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EDITOR'S REFLECTIONS

Recently, I joined VC Story Lee in reading "Stillness is the Key" by Ryan Holiday. I was particularly struck by the story of Awa Kenzo, the archery master whose teachings transcended technical skill to emphasize focus, patience, breathing, persistence, clarity, and the vital ability to let go. These principles align with Vanderbilt's mission to bring out the best in humanity by pushing boundaries and serving diligently. This philosophy inspires us to live purposefully, especially during significant change.

Change is an inherent part of life that challenges us to approach it with an open heart and gratitude. I am profoundly grateful for the dedication you all bring to our community, which fuels our success and supports the future we are building together. In acknowledging the outstretched road of transformation ahead, including the recent changes in the People, Culture and Belonging operating model, it's vital to see how gratitude can ground us. It shifts our view from scarcity to abundance, driving resilience and growth, and fostering a supportive work environment where everyone can thrive.



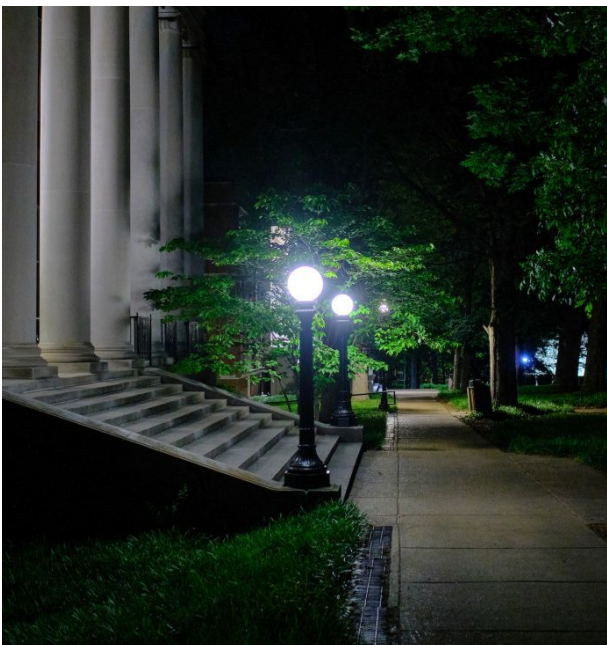
We have five big initiatives on the horizon – We are launching five key initiatives: refining roles and career paths, developing future-ready skills, fostering internal mobility, enhancing feedback systems, and encouraging entrepreneurial thinking. These are designed to support your development and ensure Vanderbilt remains adaptive and forward-thinking in an ever-changing world.

Your innovation and dedication are crucial as we turn challenges into opportunities and work towards our collective goals. As we transition into June, let's remember that light precedes every transition. This is a time to renew our commitment to gratitude, mindfulness and care for ourselves and one another as we strive to serve the greater good. Enhancing employee well-being is a collective journey. Your health, happiness, and fulfillment are vital to our success. We thrive when every individual feels valued, supported, and empowered. Together, we are creating a community that balances productivity with personal well-being, allowing each of us to flourish during these changes.

Thank you for your incredible dedication and spirit. Your hard work and enthusiasm are driving us forward. Let's maintain our focus on gratitude, mindfulness, and care as we build a brighter and more fulfilling future for everyone at Vanderbilt.

It's our moment!

Sydney



TEAM SPOTLIGHT

Total Rewards - Benefits, Empyrean Implementation

Shout out to our Benefits Team for their diligent efforts as the university transitions its benefits administrator.

Starting on July 1, benefits will be moving from WEX (formerly BenefitExpress) to Empyrean. Empyrean brings so many great benefits to VU, a new enrollment platform and the app that provides on-the-go access to our benefits, an enrollment decision tool, new processes, dependent verification, direct billing, and tailored payroll deductions for both weekly and biweekly.

Benefits Team, thank you for your commitment to making our benefits more accessible and user-friendly, and for your hard work and dedication in bringing these improvements to fruition.

Catherine Wood
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Total Rewards

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Benefits Operations
Manager

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MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENES MONTH

Celebrate wellness and commit to caring for your mental health.

Did you know?

Empowerment | Rejuvenate | Community

May is here, and warm days are ahead. It's also Mental Health Awareness Month – a time to focus on wellness and renew your commitment to caring for your personal well-being. Lyra Health is Vanderbilt's mental health provider that provides comprehensive mental health care for you and your family.

Lyra Health can help you with parent and caregiver stress, anger management, anxiety and depression, alcohol use, work stress and burnout, and relationship challenges.

In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, Lyra has compiled tips for mental health resilience.

[Learn how to overcome challenges, practice self-compassion and build healthy habits.](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS & LAUNCHES

DIGITAL LEARNING MARKETPLACE

DATE: JULY 1

The Digital Learning Marketplace is a key component of the Futures Learning Hub within the PCB Division. This innovative platform, fully integrated with Oracle, provides access to over 46,000 curated courses from LinkedIn Learning and OpenSesame.

Tailored to meet your unique educational needs, it offers resources for every industry—from leadership development to data analytics, and even forklift certification.

Elevate your skills, advance your career, and enjoy learning made easy and convenient. Welcome to the future of unlocking your potential at Vanderbilt.

CURIOS BAR - FIND US THROUGHOUT CAMPUS

DATE: MAY

Personalized support and assistance

The Curious Bar has revolutionized the way People, Culture and Belonging provides support and assistance. Whether employees seek guidance on equal access, health and wellness, payroll, employee records, military transition or total rewards, hub staffers can cater to each unique need.

Innovation, collaboration and continuous learning

The Curious Bar provides a welcoming environment that encourages employees to bring forward innovative ideas to improve areas of the university and explore opportunities for personal professional development and career advancement.

Check our [website](#) for times and locations throughout the summer.

Curious Bar visits School of Nursing May 15





STRATEGIC SHIFT TO CENTERS OF EXPERTISE (COE)

Set to Transform Employee Experience

As we transition to a newly structured operating model, we are excited about setting our intention about the benefits this will bring. We are committed to enhancing our operations and employee experience and continuing to serve our valued employees and stakeholders at Vanderbilt University effectively. We are adopting a COE model that focuses on specialized expertise, innovation, and efficiency, significantly improving the employee lifecycle. Here's what's on the horizon:

COE People Experience:

Enhancing daily work experiences to help you perform at your best. A key feature of this change is modernizing recruitment and talent acquisition. As such, we're teaming up with a leading global RPO and talent strategic partner to streamline and upgrade our hiring process end-to-end with the latest technology and expertise.

COE Equity & Engagement:

Strengthening our commitment to accessibility, inclusivity, and safety, we're optimizing processes and adopting best practices for nondiscrimination and equity.

COE Health, Wellbeing, and Belonging:

Focused on boosting wellbeing and fostering belonging, we're aligning with the Surgeon General's Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being.

COE Futures Learning Hub:

Transforming employee learning with a mix of digital and physical resources for comprehensive professional development.

COE Strategy & Operations Innovation:

Enhancing operational efficiency and employee experiences through strategic improvements and user-centric design.

These initiatives are designed to elevate our operations and your experience at Vanderbilt. We look forward to navigating this new phase together, confident in the benefits and growth it will bring.

PROJECT UPDATES

PROJECT POLARIS

In a groundbreaking move set to transform our workplace, Vanderbilt is thrilled to unveil an exciting new partnership with Mercer, the global leaders in Talent and Transformation. Together, we're developing a cutting-edge job architecture that will serve as our guiding North Star.

This innovative framework promises to revolutionize the entire employee lifecycle. Expect personalized development plans, crystal-clear career paths, streamlined succession planning, and equitable compensation and total rewards programs designed for maximum impact.

Stay tuned for more updates as we embark on this thrilling journey to elevate your experience and opportunities at Vanderbilt. Big changes are coming, and we can't wait to share them with you!

PROJECT KAIZEN

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, People, Culture and Belonging (PCB) is not only keeping pace - it is leading the charge towards a brighter future. Through the strategic implementation of Project Kaizen, PCB has entered a transformative phase, marked by the creation of a dedicated Center of Expertise: Strategy & Operations Innovation.

This new COE will serve as the cornerstone of PCB's renewed approach, fine-tuning the division's strategies to not only react to change, but to anticipate it. By fostering an agile and innovative mindset, the COE will empower PCB to shape the future of the division, delivering enhanced outcomes for the entire Vanderbilt community.

The transition into the Discovery phase of Project Kaizen represents a crucial milestone, as PCB delves deep into optimizing operational efficiency and employee experiences through strategic process improvements.

This holistic approach will ensure that the division's products, services and capabilities are aligned with both divisional and university objectives, resulting in a more streamlined and responsive operation.

GRATITUDE REALLY IS GOOD FOR YOU. HERE'S WHAT THE SCIENCE SHOWS.

Christina Caron, *The New York Times*

Two decades ago, a [landmark study](#) led by the psychologist Robert A. Emmons sought to understand how people benefit from gratitude, a question that scientists had rarely explored until then. Dr. Emmons's findings — which suggested that gratitude may improve psychological well-being — inspired a spate of additional research. To date, numerous studies have found that having a grateful outlook, “counting one's blessings” and expressing gratitude to others can have positive effects on our emotional health as well as on interpersonal and romantic relationships.

In addition, some studies, but not all, have shown that gratitude can benefit physical health.

“Gratitude heals, energizes and changes lives,” Dr. Emmons said. “It is the prism through which we view life in terms of gifts, givers, goodness and grace.”

Here's more about why gratitude is so powerful, and how can we incorporate it into our daily lives.

What is gratitude?

Gratitude is a positive emotion that can arise when you acknowledge that you have goodness in your life and that other people — or higher powers, if you believe in them — have helped you achieve that goodness.

In other words, the sources of the good things “lie at least partially outside the self,” Dr. Emmons said. You might feel gratitude when someone is kind to you, for example. But “feeling it is only half the equation,” said Philip Watkins, a professor of psychology at Eastern Washington University and the author of “Gratitude and the Good Life.” Expressing gratitude is equally important to reap the benefits of this emotion, he said.



GRATITUDE REALLY IS GOOD FOR YOU. HERE'S WHAT THE SCIENCE SHOWS.

Christina Caron, The New York Times

How does it benefit you?

Many studies have asked participants to write letters of thanks, or to list the positive things in their lives, and then measured the effects of those acts.

The results suggest that performing these types of activities provides mental health benefits — reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, increasing self-esteem and improving satisfaction with daily life. But some studies have noted that gratitude interventions are not necessarily more effective than other kinds of activities to enhance well-being, like asking people to write about the details of their day. Even so, that doesn't make gratitude activities any less useful, the experts said.

Multiple studies have shown that expressing gratitude to acquaintances, co-workers, friends or romantic partners can offer a relationship “boost” and “helps bind us more closely,” said Sara Algoe, a psychologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who has researched how gratitude aids relationships.



- ✓ Reduces symptoms of depression
- ✓ Reduces symptoms of anxiety
- ✓ Increases self-esteem
- ✓ Improves satisfaction with daily life
- ✓ Facilitates better sleep

What's more, when analyzing people's dispositions, researchers have found that those who are more prone to experience gratitude in their daily lives have lower levels of depression and sleep better. And not only does gratitude improve the well-being of the giver and the recipient, but it may also be good for those who witness it: Watching an act of gratitude between two people can cause an observer to feel more warmth and affinity toward them both.

“What impresses me are the objective, biologically verifiable outcomes that go beyond self-report measures,” Dr. Emmons said. For example, gratitude has also been associated with lower blood pressure, and, in [one pilot study](#), higher levels of heart rate variability, a marker of well-being. “Gratitude seems to be the gift that keeps on giving,” Dr. Algoe said.

GRATITUDE REALLY IS GOOD FOR YOU. HERE'S WHAT THE SCIENCE SHOWS.

Christina Caron, The New York Times

One moment a day is enough

The studies on gratitude don't indicate how often we ought to express gratitude or how best to put it into practice. But many experts believe that a small dose of gratitude, once a day, is ideal.

"I think the benefits of gratitude activities truly unfold through long-term habits," said Joel Wong, a professor of counseling psychology at Indiana University's School of Education, who is studying whether expressing gratitude in a six-week group program can help people with depression. To develop an enduring gratitude habit, try linking your gratitude practice to an already ingrained routine, Dr. Wong said. He chooses to think about what he's grateful for in the morning. "I try to do it when I first turn on the computer at work," he said.

Gretchen Schmelzer, a psychologist in Philadelphia who regularly incorporates gratitude exercises into her work with clients, said it could be especially useful during difficult times. Earlier this year, she fell while hiking and broke both legs, leading her to use a wheelchair for six weeks. To avoid spiraling into negative thoughts while she continues to heal, she tells herself each day to "be thankful for what you can do — and not let yourself focus on what you can't do," she said. "Gratitude allows us to look at what we do have and to feel abundance," she added. Finally, although many studies have shown the value of writing a letter expressing appreciation, it doesn't have to be lengthy or time-consuming. A quick email or text can do the trick.

Be specific

Imagine that your partner is thanking you for cleaning up the kitchen after dinner. Which statement would you rather hear? "Thank you!" Or: "I am grateful that you took the reins and handled all the kitchen duties tonight. I love how we take turns to give one another a break."

Specificity matters "because it deepens our experience of gratitude," Dr. Wong said. "It intensifies our grateful emotions and thoughts." Dr. Wong has created a [list of 100 questions](#) that may serve as useful prompts when thinking about gratitude in a more specific way, whether you are thanking someone else or listing the things in your life that you feel grateful for.

When doing this exercise, Dr. Wong suggests putting pen to paper. "The act of writing slows down our thinking process and allow us to ponder more deliberately," Dr. Wong said. He added, "By writing, we retain a permanent record of our blessings; we can return to our gratitude journaling months or years later to recall what we were grateful for."



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