



Cornelius Vanderbilt

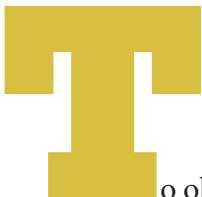


George Peabody

# A MATCH MADE IN ACADEMIC HEAVEN

*The Vanderbilt-Peabody merger 25 years later*

*By RAY WADDLE, MA'81*



To old-timers on the scene, it's still an unusual sight: Since 2002 a footbridge has spanned 21st Avenue South at the Edgehill intersection, connecting the Vanderbilt and Peabody campuses. This sturdy overpass structure does more than convey book-toting University students across a busy street.

It carries some heavy symbolism, too.

Today the bridge is the most physical, public declaration of the official merger of the two institutions. It happened in 1979—a decision that startled alumni on both sides, outraged many, and caused a Nashville sensation.

For nearly a century the very idea of a bridge linking the two institutions had been unthinkable. Twenty-first Avenue served as a necessary divide, a political frontier separating two worlds that defied each other—Vanderbilt University and George Peabody College for Teachers. Both were proudly private institutions with national reputations, but their missions, styles of learning and institutional loyalties were never quite in sync.

When they finally overcame their mutual reluctance, the merger launched the University, along with the new Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, on a new adventure in national identity and ambition.

The merger of Vanderbilt University and Peabody (actually, Peabody was annexed into Vanderbilt) was ambitious, contentious and risky. Some said it was inevitable and long overdue; others complained it was a hostile takeover by Vanderbilt made possible by Peabody's poor and declining financial health. Either way, it posed a culture clash—the ancient tensions between liberal arts and education—that still lingers today.

Some veterans of the merger still find it too emotional to talk about on the record: "We at Peabody struggled to be accepted," says a former Peabody student who now teaches at Vanderbilt, speaking anonymously. "Peabody always rejected elitism, and still does. Twenty-first Avenue is still a big gulf."

Nevertheless, a quarter century later, by common consent the merger has strengthened both institutions remarkably. Vanderbilt saved Peabody from financial doom. Peabody gave Vanderbilt an added dimension of public service and renown—Peabody's passion for improving public education and solving problems of human development and community life. Each institution has enhanced the prestige of the other.

The vast merger project began amid anxieties and hard feelings, especially on the Peabody side. The positions of some 40 Peabody professors (a third of the faculty) were eliminated. Some well regarded Peabody departments were shut down to avoid duplication with Vanderbilt's. And Peabody students ultimately had to pay Vanderbilt's higher tuition costs.

Eventually, though, a changing world took the new relationship in surprising directions. By the 1980s, education had become a national priority again, and Vanderbilt-Peabody was positioned to join the national conversation and lead it. The turbulent first years of merger soon yielded to a clearer focus and division of labor. Vanderbilt administrators and opinion-makers—on both sides of the street—now call Peabody, with its top-ranking programs in education and its research-driven faculty, a crown jewel of the University.

"Its value to Vanderbilt is immeasurable—the quality of the faculty, the quality of students, the national visibility it gives to us, the leadership it gives to issues of public education," says Chancellor Gordon Gee. "Peabody is at the center of our life."

**I**n 1979 few dared to hope this much for Peabody's new relationship with Vanderbilt. It wasn't clear at the time of merger that Vanderbilt-Peabody was a match made in academic heaven. But circumstances pushed the two suitors into marriage, ready or not.

For decades their destinies had been very different. Vanderbilt, much the larger and richer, was a preeminent Southern enclave of liberal arts and conservative instincts, aiming to join the elite universities of the nation. Peabody, meanwhile, as Nashville's oldest educational institution, had had a spectacularly complex history of transformations going back to 1785. Since 1914, when the College moved from its original downtown site

"At the time of the merger, we weren't for it," says Peabody alumna Melody Engle, BS, who graduated in 1980. For 25 years she has been a special education teacher, now working in the Wilson County, Tenn., school system. "Vanderbilt students tended to snub their noses at Peabody students. It was painful. So we did little things to protest. We boycotted the Vanderbilt yearbook, for instance. But we knew the merger was the only way to save Peabody. Vanderbilt has tried really hard to make the merger a success. And Peabody still has its good name."

Why did Peabody and Vanderbilt merge? What's the verdict 25 years later?

Last fall the ironic twists and turns of merger were rehashed by a panel of Peabody

## Strong emotions among older alumni still flare: Did Peabody and Vanderbilt have to merge at all? Alliance had been rumored for nearly a hundred years. Events in 1979 made it a matter of urgency.

and reopened at its current location, it had solidified an identity of community service, earning national acclaim for its commitment to public school teaching, social betterment, pragmatic education philosophies, improving the lives of people with mental disabilities—an egalitarian spirit of collegiality and mutual support housed in its orderly, dramatically pillared quad.

If Vanderbilt was classical and traditional in its philosophy, looking back to European models of rigorous learning, Peabody was entrepreneurial, empirical, people-oriented, service-minded and "applied," springing from pragmatic, reformist American thinkers like John Dewey.

When it finally and suddenly happened, the Vanderbilt-Peabody merger was an exercise in mutual discovery, an institutional gamble, a kind of cultural exchange, a bold lunge into the future. For years after, both parties worked hard on the necessary details of consolidation. They also eyed each other warily. The past's emotional baggage weighed heavily.

faculty who witnessed the tumult of '79. Two emotions rang clear as they spoke to a roomful of Peabody alums: pride in Peabody's post-merger achievements, and relief that Peabody managed to keep an identity intact through the last 25 years of quickened evolution.

"People were afraid we'd become 'just like Vanderbilt,'" says Robert Innes, Peabody associate professor of psychology, who was a Peabody teacher at the time of merger and stayed on to become one of the shapers of the new Peabody. "We've benefited enormously from Vanderbilt. Yet somehow we maintained our character. It's a real feat to have moved Peabody to its current intellectual level and dramatically change the intellectual climate, and still keep the soul of the place."

Others recalled the dread and grief of the time—also the disdain of Vanderbilt loyalists who perceived a school of education's curricula to be less rigorous than other academic disciplines.

Peabody protesters of the merger draped black crepe paper across their beloved build-

ings. Forty tombstones were planted on the Peabody lawn to honor the faculty who lost their jobs (23 had tenure). Bitterness was palpable; Vanderbilt, after all, suffered no job losses in the bargain.

"I remember the merger vividly," says Janet Eyler, Peabody professor of the practice of education. She was teaching at Peabody but survived the merger. "When they start putting little numbers on the furniture, it's time to dust off the résumé."

Peabodians mourned. Their school could claim a unique heritage as the nation's only private, independent college devoted to teaching. Now, they feared, it would be swallowed up and vanish.

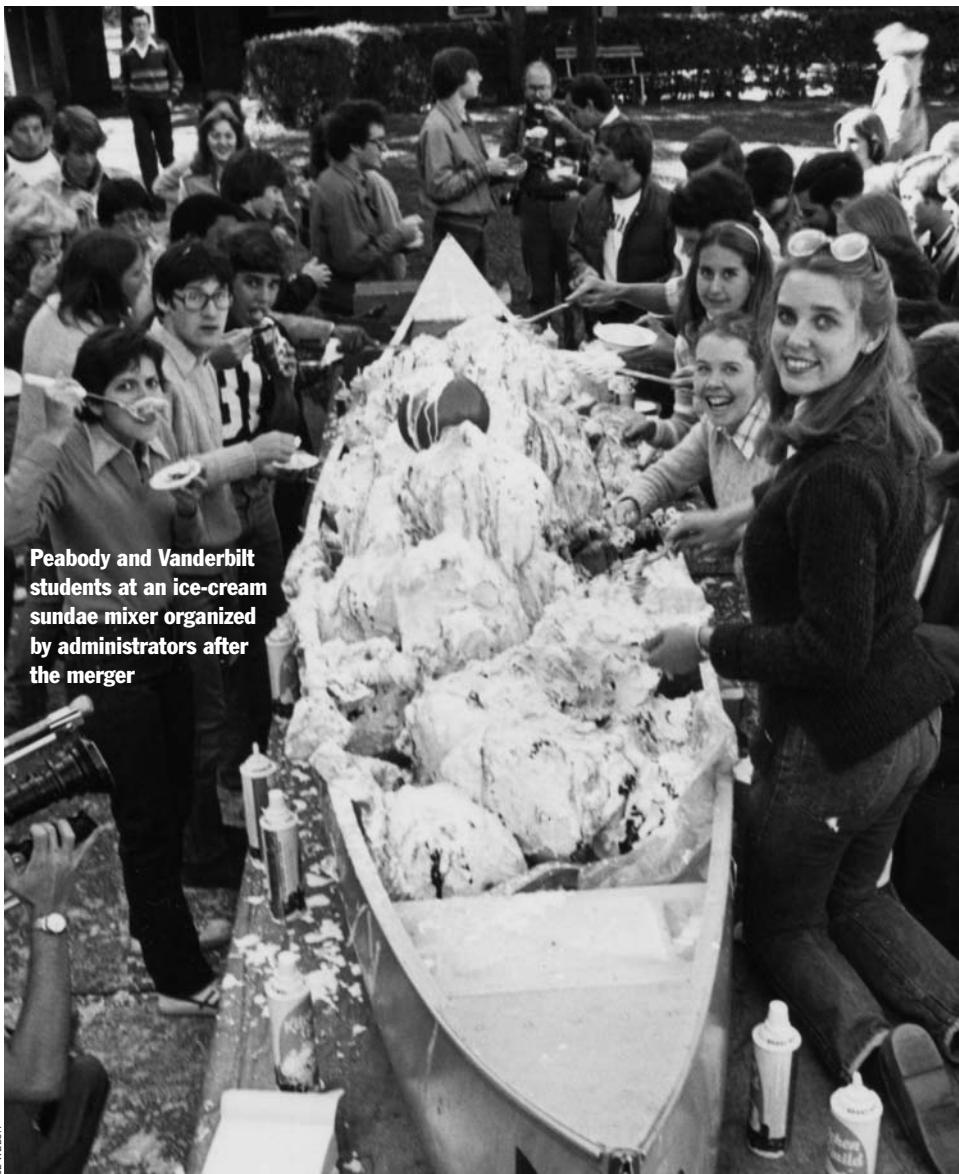
"There was an assumption that Peabody would become a small institution like VIPPS [the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies]," Eyler recalls, "and the rest of the buildings would be taken over by Vanderbilt."

Merger came, but such doomsday scenarios did not arrive with it. Peabody dipped into its own legacy of adaptability and changed with the times. Coordinating with Kirkland Hall, Peabody did a handful of things that won it a place as a glittering equal among the nine other colleges and schools of Vanderbilt University.

As a new college of an ambitious University aiming for world-class distinction, Peabody was mandated to maintain prestige in education instruction, attract new students, be intellectually rigorous, and operate in the black. For the first decade after merger, Vanderbilt committed \$750,000 annually to Peabody to help shore up the college and pursue these aims.

Under a new dean, Willis Hawley, Peabody aggressively recruited a more research-oriented faculty. It made tough decisions to delete departments that were not bringing in sufficient revenue—for instance, the small but prestigious library science program, an action in the 1980s that outraged many alumni. But the College received sympathetic nurture from pro-Peabody leaders at Vanderbilt early on, notably Chancellor Joe B. Wyatt.

A few years later the second dean, cognitive psychologist James Pellegrino, perceived the importance of using technology to enhance education in the classroom. Through his work and that of other colleagues with national funding, the College's Learning Technology



**Peabody and Vanderbilt students at an ice-cream sundae mixer organized by administrators after the merger**

Center came to national prominence as a place to find innovative ideas designed to use applied technology for public education.

Not least, Peabody created an undergraduate degree program that became a huge success—the human and organizational development (HOD) program, which generated needed tuition income and resurrected a Peabody spirit of hands-on, community-oriented study and focus.

Peabody had found momentum.

"A lot of colleagues went through distressing life changes, as I almost did," says Elizabeth Goldman, whose mathematics education position at Peabody was reduced to half-time tenure after merger. She eventually returned to full-time teaching and administration, retiring in 1999.

"It was a difficult balance," she explains.

"Those of us who stayed were very much committed to Peabody and wanted it to thrive, but most felt Vanderbilt was acting from expediency. We very much wanted Vanderbilt to understand what a treasure they had—beyond the real estate. And we needed to work hard to make that happen. Schools of education sometimes have a reputation as fluff, no substance. But Vanderbilt has always valued teaching. Once they understood that there's truly an academic dimension to teaching, the relationship improved. We made a lot of progress on the 'them-versus-us' issue."

Today Peabody has Vanderbilt's highest-rated programs in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* magazine evaluation of America's graduate schools: Peabody ranks fifth overall among the nation's 249 doctorate-granting education schools (Harvard is first,

UCLA is second, Stanford is third, and Teacher's College at Columbia is fourth). Peabody's special education program is ranked first in the nation.

Peabody is now home to high-profile scholars whose research attracted some \$17 million in grants in fiscal 2004. The College carries on deeply rooted community work in Nashville and beyond through the transinstitutional Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on

nations, starting in pre-statehood 1785, when Davidson Academy was established in Nashville by the North Carolina legislature. Conkin's earlier history of Vanderbilt, *Gone with the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University* (University of Tennessee Press, 1984), includes much of Peabody's story as well.

It's plausible to say the merger of 1979 was set in motion some 80 years before, when Vanderbilt Chancellor James Kirkland started

Avenue. That normal school unit was renamed Peabody Normal College in 1888.

By the turn of the century, trustees of the Peabody Education Fund, with a fresh infusion of Peabody money, were eager to start a full-fledged George Peabody College for Teachers to replace Peabody Normal. After much debate, the trustees voted in 1909 to build it near Vanderbilt. Kirkland had hoped for this; his lobbying had paid off, it seems. The decision was mutually beneficial. Peabody could save money by drawing on some of Vanderbilt's liberal arts departments, and Vanderbilt could draw on Peabody's education emphasis. Nevertheless, this created no official connection with Vanderbilt. Peabody stressed its own independence. When it opened in 1914 on its present-day site, with 1,108 students and 78 teachers, it was in no mood to merge. It was a private college on its own. It had a mission to raise public education in the South.

Peabody's first president, Bruce Payne, enacted this autonomy in all sorts of ways. Peabody even looked different. The new Peabody campus' Greek and Roman-inspired architecture paid homage to Payne's beloved University of Virginia, not Vanderbilt University. More crucially, Payne brought an enthusiasm for the procedures of education philosopher John Dewey, his former teacher. It caused strains with Kirkland.

"Payne's education philosophy, his concern for mass education and new teaching techniques, placed him at an opposite pole from the classical educational elitism of Kirkland," Conkin writes in *Gone with the Ivy*. "Payne's more egalitarian social outlook also contrasted with Kirkland's staunch advocacy of law and order and of highly nuanced southern racial and class relationships. Payne proved to be as much an educational entrepreneur as Kirkland, and for a time he seemed even more successful. ... Payne very much wanted to be his own man and Peabody to be a distinct and separate institution."

Vanderbilt-Peabody relations eventually thawed, and cooperatives emerged, involving course sharing, student exchanges and sports teams. By 1936 Peabody and Vanderbilt (along with Scarritt College) created the Joint University Libraries (JUL). In 1952 Vanderbilt and Peabody jointly created

## **Peabody protesters draped black crepe paper across buildings. Tombstones were planted on the lawn to honor faculty who lost jobs. Bitterness was palpable: Vanderbilt suffered no job losses in the bargain.**

Human Development and the Learning Sciences Institute, and through the Susan Gray School, the Leadership Development Center, the National Research and Development Center on School Choice, and other entities. "We now have six academic programs with top-10 status and strong indicators from several others that are right on the verge of breaking through," Peabody Dean Camilla Benbow declared in the *Peabody Reflector* alumni magazine last summer.

**D**id Peabody and Vanderbilt have to merge at all? Strong emotions among older alumni still flare. At the time, the merger picture was clouded by public speculation, misconceptions, secret initiatives, mutual coyness and frustration. Murmured rumors of alliance had been part of the landscape, part of the Vanderbilt-Peabody ecology, for nearly a hundred years. Events in 1979 conspired to make it a matter of urgency once and for all.

The whole unfolding drama—at least one authoritative version of it, told with narrative verve and candor—is found in Paul Conkin's 2002 book, *Peabody College: From a Frontier Academy to the Frontiers of Teaching and Learning* (Vanderbilt University Press). Conkin, Vanderbilt Distinguished Professor of History, emeritus, chronicles Peabody's successive incar-

lobbying hard to get a new Peabody College built near Vanderbilt.

Kirkland wanted to create a great university center in a South still stricken by defeat in the Civil War. He saw Peabody's commitment to public education as a vital component of that redemptive vision. As early as 1898, Kirkland was dreaming of somehow affiliating Vanderbilt with Peabody, Conkin reports. Vanderbilt was only two decades old, but Kirkland had ambitions to strengthen its work, broaden its influence, and attract support from national foundations. Drawing Peabody into the fold would help.

His model of affiliation was the Teacher's College at Columbia University. But this would be no easy feat. A new Peabody was already on the drawing board, poised to replace its forerunners to become a high-profile college in its own right, with its own dreams.

Peabody's antecedents had started a century before—first as Davidson Academy, which became Cumberland College in 1806, then the University of Nashville in 1826. George Peabody, the Massachusetts-born financier, entered the picture in 1867, transforming the story. He made a \$1 million gift to improve education in the postwar South. As a result, in 1875 a State Normal College to train teachers was added to the University of Nashville, located downtown on Second

a master's-degree program in teaching, though it only lasted three years as a joint entity.

In 1961 the idea of greater cooperation surfaced again, with more discussion of a formal affiliation but still short of merger. However, talks eventually collapsed. The only result, Conkin notes, included a combined Vanderbilt-Peabody band and continued sharing of course work.

The 1970s changed everything. Peabody's enrollment started falling—and so did its fortunes, as Peabody's finances were tied heavily to tuition. The decade was a low ebb for schools of education nationally, says Conkin. The baby boom had ended; the number of children entering grade school was declining. The nation suddenly had a teacher surplus. Prospects and morale were dismal. "Teaching jobs were scarce, particularly in secondary schools, so fewer young people chose teaching as a career," Conkin writes in *Peabody College*. "This meant that education schools lost favor, often ran deficits, and were a financial burden in most of their

host universities. The image of professional educators was never lower."

Following a lackluster fund-raising campaign, the Peabody board decided in 1978 to take the big dreaded step: Seek a merger with Vanderbilt. Secret talks ensued between Peabody President John Dunworth and Vanderbilt officials, notably Chancellor Alexander Heard and President Emmett Fields. But negotiations faltered by early 1979.

"It all came up at a very poor time," recalls Fields, who retired as Vanderbilt president in 1982. "We were in a period when we were trying to cut down on expenditures—it was a time of high inflation." Under the circumstances, Vanderbilt balked at Peabody's faltering financial profile. "The board of trustees decided to stop talking [about merger prospects]," Fields says.

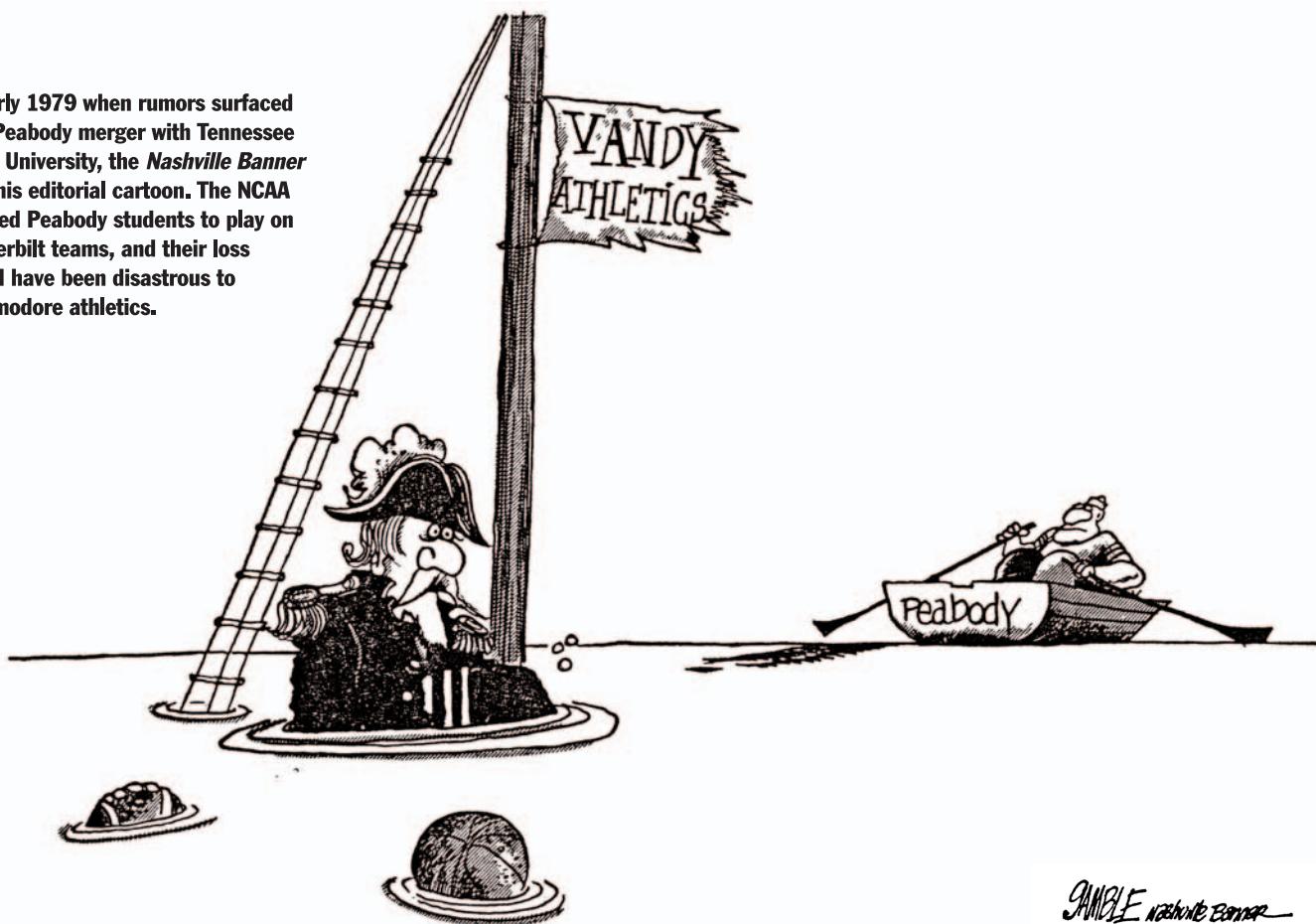
Peabody started looking elsewhere. It had to move fast. Its reputation was large, but its deficits were growing and its endowment evaporating, along with its bargaining position. The school explored possible relationships with both Duke and George Washington

universities, to no avail.

Then came electrifying news. Tennessee State University, the traditionally African-American public university based in Nashville, was interested in merging with Peabody. TSU hoped to start doctoral programs in education, and Peabody reportedly was willing to oblige. A merger agreement was quickly and secretly outlined. But secrets ended when the story broke in the *Tennessean* newspaper on Feb. 13, 1979. The news distracted the whole campus and Nashville, too. The secrecy of the plan alienated Peabody faculty, but one poll nevertheless showed Peabody professors strongly favoring a merger with TSU if faculty could keep their jobs.

Influential Vanderbilt supporters were alarmed. Race likely played a role in the reactions of many, but Conkin says a more emotional issue took the fore: football. Since the early 1970s the NCAA had allowed Peabody students to play on Vanderbilt's football team and other athletic squads. A TSU merger with Peabody would likely kill Vanderbilt's athletic cooperation with Peabody. Some 50

**In early 1979 when rumors surfaced of a Peabody merger with Tennessee State University, the *Nashville Banner* ran this editorial cartoon. The NCAA allowed Peabody students to play on Vanderbilt teams, and their loss would have been disastrous to Commodore athletics.**



Peabody students played on the football team in 1979. They would no longer be allowed if a TSU-Peabody merger carried the day. The immediate result would be disaster at Dudley Field:

"Vanderbilt might have difficulty fielding football and basketball teams in the fall of 1979, for most of the Peabody athletes could not meet Vanderbilt's admission requirements, were majoring in subjects not taught at Vanderbilt (primarily physical education), and cost Vanderbilt \$1,000 less than if they were Vanderbilt students," Conkin writes. "If any prospect stunned the local Vanderbilt board members, this was it." Fields disputes this assessment about the urgency of athletics. "I never heard even one board member mention the subject," Fields says.

Nevertheless, the TSU wrinkle did galvanize Vanderbilt and "get us to look at the merger possibilities again," he says. "I can't say it made the difference. We decided we'd better swallow the financial numbers and do it. It was a risky thing to do, but I think it was mandated by history. ... I always thought fate was written into the land assignment of Peabody settling near Vanderbilt."

Vanderbilt officials now made new entreaties to Peabody. The sudden prospect of losing Peabody altogether threatened other existing, durable Vanderbilt-Peabody arrangements—the JUL library agreement, Vanderbilt's rental use of two Peabody dorms, the enrollment of hundreds of Vanderbilt students in Peabody courses, and scores of joint scholarly projects.

By April a firm offer from Vanderbilt was on the table. Peabody would be a professional school at Vanderbilt comparable with others at the University. A number of Peabody trustees would join the Vanderbilt board. Peabody would keep its endowment for support of the College. Vanderbilt would get the 50-plus-acre campus.

The TSU proposal was left behind. In any case, would a TSU-Peabody merger actually have been accomplished? Not likely in 1979, Conkin speculates. The state legislature would have had to approve it, and opposition was already mounting, especially from Murfreesboro, home of rival Middle Tennessee State University. It faced resistance on the Peabody board as well.

So the Vanderbilt-Peabody marriage was

done by July 1, 1979: George Peabody College for Teachers became the Peabody College of Education and Human Development of Vanderbilt University.

There was excitement and giddiness, but also pain and anger—the loss of beloved professors (severance packages for the older ones), the nixing of entire departments (art, liberal arts and music), and the annexation of the College to Vanderbilt after nearly two centuries of tradition as an independent institution. "We hoped there could be another way," recalls Elizabeth Goldman. "But Vanderbilt made things possible that Peabody didn't have. To survive, any institution must evolve."

Looking back on the event in a 1999 interview, Chancellor Alexander Heard, who was deeply involved in the negotiations, said he was grateful it succeeded. "A great many people over there understood the potential for all this," he recalled. "They loved Peabody and were trying to save it for its own sake, but also the functions of Peabody, the education functions. They thought they would be enormously

entrepreneurial. We keep redefining ourselves to fit the time, and we've survived. That's very Peabody, and it's been the key to our success."

One of the most visible signs of this entrepreneurial success is the human and organizational development curriculum (the HOD degree program), which currently enrolls some 700 undergraduates—one in nine Vanderbilt students. (It's the most popular undergraduate major on campus. Next is biomedical engineering, with 392 students; then economics, with 346 students; and mechanical engineering, with 238.)

HOD is not always easy to describe, as some of its own supporters admit. It's been called an applied social-sciences degree, an applied liberal-arts program. Its aim is to help students understand human behavior in groups and organizations, teaching them how to solve problems (managerial or interpersonal) in a business or nonprofit setting. Students encounter ideas and experiences through a battery of methods—seminars, role playing, case studies, group projects, field expe-

## Merger came, but doomsday scenarios did not arrive with it. Peabody dipped into its own legacy of adaptability and won a place as a glittering equal among the colleges and schools of Vanderbilt.

enhanced, and they thought they would improve Vanderbilt in the course of it. A lot of us shared that. I think there were a lot of common feelings, common beliefs, common attitudes and values, on both sides of campus.

"Not everybody was happy, but there was enough bedrock view to make the thing. I didn't even think it was a risk. There were inevitable problems, and frankly there were fewer than I was prepared to say that we should address."

Current Peabody Dean Camilla Benbow says a knack for adaptation is a Peabody quality that has been pivotal to the school's survival. "Peabody has always been here to help humankind and build human capital," she says. "And those values are still here. But we're entre-

preneurial and interaction with professionals. It requires a semester-long internship in the corporate or nonprofit world. HOD values experiential learning, hoping to ready students for real-world problems, workplace dynamics, and interaction with co-workers, bosses and employees.

HOD has been a source of criticism and misunderstanding from the start. It was accused of having a lack of theoretical rigor and too much jargon. In the early post-merger days, HOD was known to some as the football degree because it attracted various University athletes. (It still does. In fall 2004, for example, 37 students on the 94-man Vanderbilt football roster were HOD majors). But administrators stress HOD's standards

## A Snapshot of Today's Peabody College

A quarter century after the stormy events of '79, Vanderbilt administrators can check off a long list of Peabody accomplishments and initiatives:

- Peabody now has its largest post-merger faculty ever—about 130.
- Peabody ranks No. 5 among the nation's 249 graduate schools of education by *U.S. News & World Report*, just behind Harvard, UCLA, Stanford and Teachers College—Columbia. Peabody's program in special education ranks No. 1.
- Enrollment is about 1,200 undergraduates; in 1979 it was 600. In graduate studies, 459 are pursuing master's and professional degrees; another 200 are enrolled in Ph.D. work.
- The fall 2004 freshman class at Peabody had mean SAT scores exceeding 1300 for the first time. Mean GRE scores for graduate students currently rank third highest among the nation's graduate schools of education.
- The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development, involving many Peabody faculty researchers and still housed on the Peabody campus, thrives now as a transinstitutional entity with University-wide support. It is one of 14 national research centers devoted to understanding mental retardation and human development, preventing or solving developmental problems, and helping individuals with developmental disabilities lead fuller lives.
- The Learning Sciences Institute, another transinstitutional Vanderbilt unit involving Peabody, focuses on new K-12 teaching methods, curriculum development, assessment and other learning tools.
- The Leadership Development Center is a Peabody-led partnership with Metro Nashville Public Schools, the State of Tennessee and other agencies that aims to better prepare school leaders in areas of learning theory, leadership skills, organizational development, and the political context of public school life.
- Peabody's Susan Gray School for Children carries on its long-standing education program for young children (those with and without disabilities). The School's mission is to provide services to children and their families; train students who want to be teachers, health-care providers, therapists and researchers; demonstrate education practices; and assist in education research.
- Peabody researchers working with 36 preschool classrooms in seven Tennessee school districts are part of a landmark national study that, for the first time, will help determine which preschool programs work best for which children.
- A \$10 million federal grant was awarded recently to Professor Kenneth Wong in Peabody's Department of Leadership, Policy and Organizations to establish the National Research and Development Center on School Choice.
- A \$5 million grant from the Institute for Education Science was awarded recently to Professor David Cordray in Peabody's Department of Psychology and Human Development to fund pre-doctoral training for a new cadre of education scientists charged with determining which kinds of K-12 programs work and which ones don't.

have been beefed up considerably under Dean Benbow, who arrived in 1998.

One undergraduate says the criticism is unfair. "It's different from other degrees, but that doesn't make it less valuable," says Brittany Oakes of Ohio. "It's practical. It's teaching you how to work with people in a business setting. You can't say HOD is an easy major. We have to take Arts and Science courses to be in HOD. But the culture here [at Peabody] is more relaxed, more welcoming, less stressful."

**B**y now, Peabodians are accustomed to going against the current in the name of public service—and accustomed to scrutiny and misapprehensions. And Vanderbilt officials say the lingering emotions of the merger are overshadowed by a larger and more important drama, the forward trajectory of Vanderbilt-Peabody into an anx-

ious world that needs education, compassion, and humane solutions to its problems.

"The world in which we live is recognizing with increasing urgency that education is central to political, economic and social success," says Vanderbilt Provost Nicholas Zeppos. "The integration of Peabody into Vanderbilt, and Vanderbilt into Peabody, has been a tremendous success. Peabody certainly has made Vanderbilt greater, and Vanderbilt, I believe, has made Peabody greater."

The two erstwhile rivals are now knitting an even closer connection. The Peabody campus will be the site for phase one of Vanderbilt's historic new residential colleges concept for undergraduate life—"Freshman Commons"—where the entire freshman class will live together, starting in 2008. The goal is to promote a strong intellectual and social experience and sense of community among

Vanderbilt's newcomers. A massive construction project accompanies the plan, and groundbreaking is proposed for this year.

These plans call for a practical detail that deepens the symbolic link: A second bridge will be built one day across 21st Avenue South, probably south of the current bridge, to carry freshmen back and forth across this one University called Vanderbilt.

"Imagine 1,500 kids walking across the bridge to Blair, to physics, to English, and walking back to Peabody," Zeppos says. "In that traffic pattern there's no greater symbol and witness to the fusing of the University." ▼

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