



# GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

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## Vanderbilt “DID” Dual and Interdisciplinary Degree Programs

### OVERVIEW

#### Problem

Graduate students at Vanderbilt have access to some of the world’s greatest minds in a wide variety of disciplines. This diversity is one of the things that attracts many students to Vanderbilt but it can be challenging to fully integrate the interdisciplinary nature of the University into dissertation specific research. The nature of the University leads to unique and creative courses but there is no structure or program in place to allow a graduate student to be fully creative with their degree. By allowing graduate students that are interested in intersectional, and multidisciplinary research the freedom to design their degree across different schools and departments, Vanderbilt will create one of a kind students who are competitive in a wide variety of markets.

#### Solution

We need diverse, interdisciplinary degree programs that extend to every department and/or school that Vanderbilt offers. I propose that endowment funding be reserved to fund unique and creative degree programs that challenge the traditional understanding of graduate education. This program would be called the “Vanderbilt DID (Dual and Interdisciplinary) Program”. Students wishing to create an interdisciplinary degree must develop a logical program with approval and acceptance across the department or School’s they wish to work through. The Vanderbilt DID Program would also fund courses

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for students who wish to take courses (up to 9 hours) outside of their department but who do not want to obtain a dual graduate degree.

Dual Degree Examples:

A student in environmental engineering who is deeply interested in the socio-political implications of their research would be able to design a dual degree program that allows them to explore their research in a way that would otherwise not be addressed through the School of Engineering - PhD in Engineering with a MS in Political Science or a JD through the Law School

A student in nursing who is also interested in education would be able design a dual degree program that looks at public health and education through the Nursing School and Peabody.

A graduate student in chemical engineering who is interested in patent law would be able to design a degree that allows them to get a MS or PhD and a JD through the Law School

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## **IMPACT**

The real question here is why would Vanderbilt want to pay for unique graduate degrees? There is no school in the country has a fully funded interdisciplinary degree program that allows graduate students to be creative with their research interests. Many of the brightest minds would be attracted to Vanderbilt because of the flexibility and freedom they have by designing their own dual or interdisciplinary degree. This sort of program would allow for more collaborative research across departments and schools thereby establishing connections that may not have been made otherwise. This program also gives Vanderbilt a leg up in recruiting diverse and unique faculty.

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## **GOALS**

List specific goals of this proposal

1. Create a branch within the Graduate School that will allow for collaboration with the Law, Business, Divinity, Nursing, Peabody, and Medical Schools
2. Establish a scholarship for students wishing to pursue dual degree's
3. Foster a more diverse and collaborative research environment at Vanderbilt
4. Set Vanderbilt apart from other leading Universities to attract creative faculty and students
5. Produce the unique and competitive graduate students that can work in a variety fields and sectors across the globe

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## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Create a branch within the graduate school that will manage the Vanderbilt DID Program. For students wishing to pursue interdisciplinary degree's, approval must be given by the primary department head. The student is responsible for developing the dual degree structure and must ensure that requirements are met in the individual school and/or department that the student wishes to work in. The Graduate School will create an application process for students to (a) take courses outside of their school and (b) to design a dual graduate degree. The program will fully fund tuition (or a portion of tuition for expensive degree's like Law and Business) as well as provide a competitive stipend for dual degree students. Implementation will vary for PhD students who are covered by their departments.

Requirements: Student must be accepted into the Graduate School to apply for a DID Fellowship. Student must develop a feasible course and funding structure that fulfills the requirements of each school or department. Student must get approval from perspective departments and must get accepted into the School they wish to get a dual degree in. Students MUST complete the graduate degree first to get funding for an additional degree.

## **ESTIMATED COST**

The estimate cost is difficult to predict due to the wide variety of funding and financial circumstances for students. I will provide a few examples and estimate how much Vanderbilt would fund if 20 students were in the DID program each year.

Student A: PhD in Engineering that is funded on a RA or TA who wishes to get a JD. The Graduate School Endowment would cover the cost of the JD pending completion of the PhD up to \$70,000 per year (three years total)

Student B: PhD in Education that is funded through a TA who wishes to get an MBA. The Graduate School Endowment would cover the cost of the MBA pending completion of the PhD up to \$70,000 per year (two years total)

If Vanderbilt accepts 20 students and the Endowment covers the additional degree up to \$70,000 per year, the estimated cost would be about \$1,400,000 per year. Since this estimate is based on the most expensive degrees offered at Vanderbilt, the cost is anticipated to be much lower.