Next Steps at Vanderbilt

Promoting excellence in scholarship, in education, and in inclusion and equity
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Executive Summary

Next Steps at Vanderbilt is a nationally recognized inclusive higher education program of Vanderbilt University. The four-year program supports college students (ages 18-26) with intellectual disability to participate in the breadth of learning and living activities that comprise a typical undergraduate experience—coursework, extracurricular activities, service projects, recreation endeavors, internships and employment, and, eventually, residential experiences. Launched in 2010, we have 34 alumni and currently enroll 29 students (see History of Next Steps at Vanderbilt). We have since developed into one of the leading programs in the country and the very first at a top-20 university. Our students are thriving on campus and graduating to a future of flourishing in the workplace and in their communities.

The development of an exemplary program—one that defines and reflects best practices in inclusive higher education—provides us with a context for carrying out compelling scholarship, leadership, and training that can lead this new field forward. Our program builds upon and extends a long legacy of scholarship at Peabody College focused on the intersection of disability and inclusive practices. The early leadership and research of Nicholas Hobbs, Susan Gray, and other Vanderbilt researchers dramatically changed the ways in which preschoolers and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities were viewed and educated all across the country. That legacy of high expectations and inclusive practices that began 50 years ago at the Peabody Experimental School has now made its way into higher education. We are invested in supporting the success of Next Steps at Vanderbilt and ensuring it furthers Vanderbilt’s mission as a “center for scholarly research, informed and creative teaching, and service to the community and society at large.”

In this report, we illustrate the numerous ways in which Next Steps at Vanderbilt is promoting (a) excellence in scholarship, (b) excellence in education, and (c) excellence in inclusion and equity. We offer a brief summary of each of these areas below.

“Going to college made me a better person. I used to rely on my parents a lot, but now I do a lot more on my own. I make my own decisions and make my own choices.”

Edward Nesbitt, Next Steps Graduate Class of 2011
EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP

• The Next Steps at Vanderbilt program provides a context for cutting-edge scholarship addressing the design, delivery, and impact of inclusive college experiences for students with intellectual disability.

• Present and planned studies are addressing the impact of this program on students with intellectual disability, on other Vanderbilt undergraduates who serve as peer mentors (i.e., Ambassadores), on faculty who teach those inclusive classes audited by the students, on the employers with whom the students work, and on the families of students.

• Collaborative studies that cross multiple departments and several universities are engaging multiple faculty in research addressing different aspects of the program.

• The reach of the program provides numerous opportunities for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to undertake theses, dissertations, and specialty projects addressing practices and policies related to inclusive higher education.

• Our research and program innovations are disseminated widely at state and national conferences, as well through consultation with numerous other programs around the country.

• With multiple studies already published, in process, or planned, we are now well positioned to pursue additional external funding to support additional research endeavors.

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

• Hundreds of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students have already served as Ambassadores (i.e., peer mentors) to students enrolled through Next Steps at Vanderbilt. These sustained relationships are shaping their views of diversity, their commitment to inclusion, their attitudes toward disability, and their professional pathways.

• Many other Vanderbilt students adopt formal support roles within the courses that students from Next Steps audit or within on- or off-campus internship sites.

• A growing number of departments and programs across campus offer practicum experiences or course activities that connect their students to Next Steps at Vanderbilt, such as Engineering, Nursing, Special Education, Theatre, and the Vanderbilt Consortium LEND.

• Engagement with the Next Steps at Vanderbilt program and its students primes Vanderbilt students to be future leaders and change makers who see people with disabilities as indispensable and valued members of their workplaces and communities.

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSION AND EQUITY

• The Next Steps at Vanderbilt program embodies Vanderbilt’s commitment to equity and inclusion and affirms our recognition of disability as a key dimension of diversity.

• The program places Vanderbilt at the forefront of the inclusive higher education movement nationally and solidifies our leadership among top-ranked universities in this area.

• Staff and students from Next Steps at Vanderbilt have been an integral part of accessibility and diversity-related conversations on campus, including the Advisory Accessibility Task Force, the Presidents’ Roundtable, and many others.
• Likewise, Next Steps at Vanderbilt is helping build capacity and commitment among individual faculty, departments, and campus programs to better support the presence and participation of an increasingly diverse student body.

• The influence of the program has been recognized through numerous awards, including the Perry Wallace Courage Award, the Arc Tennessee Inclusive Employer Award, the VALE Best Diversity & Inclusion Program Award, and induction into the National Disability Mentoring Coalition Hall of Fame.

ABOUT NEXT STEPS AT VANDERBILT

Next Steps at Vanderbilt holds the distinction of being a federally approved Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP). The following elements comprise this innovative program:

- **Academic Coursework**: Students audit Vanderbilt courses rather than taking them for credit. Each student takes 1-2 courses per semester and has an individualized learning agreement that addresses how their involvement is supported. Over 100 faculty have had students from Next Steps at Vanderbilt participate in their classes.

- **Supplemental Seminars**: Students take up to three Next Steps at Vanderbilt seminars each semester that are taught by program staff and graduate students. These seminars address topics such as independent living, self-determination, health and wellness, and career technology.

- **Career Development**: Our career-related programming is driven by each student’s interests, future career plans, and identified learning needs. Throughout every semester of their program, students participate in job shadowing experiences, internships, or on- and off-campus jobs designed to prepare them for an enviable job after graduation.

- **Campus Life**: Students participate in any of the wide range of student organizations, service groups, and campus activities available to any Vanderbilt student. In addition, they are involved in orientation activities and Vanderbilt Visions during their freshman year.

- **Residential Living**: Although most students presently live with family at home, some current and former students live with roommates in off-campus apartments and housing. Future plans include establishing additional housing options for students who come from out-of-state or who want to live more independently.

- **Advising and Planning**: All students receive weekly advising and participate in annual “person-centered planning” meetings. Through these meetings, students set short- and long-term individualized goals that inform their selection of courses, internships, work experiences, campus activities, social connections, seminars, and other experiences.

- **Graduation**: At the end of the four-year program, students receive a certificate of completion instead of a regular diploma. Work is underway to establish a nationally-recognized credential for CTP programs like Next Steps at Vanderbilt.

There are now more than 270 college programs for students with intellectual disability across the country, including five in Tennessee. Such programs were affirmed by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, which established a new model demonstration program and coordinating center for college students with intellectual disability.
Excellence in Scholarship

As a leading center for scholarly research, Vanderbilt is already making substantive contributions within the young field of inclusive higher education. The exponential growth in the number of colleges and universities launching postsecondary programs like Next Steps at Vanderbilt highlights the importance of developing a strong knowledge base to guide this growth and inform both policy and practice. Vanderbilt is uniquely positioned to lead this pursuit of new knowledge. Next Steps at Vanderbilt is housed in the top-ranked special education department within Peabody College and involves considerable collaboration with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and its University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. The range of scholars and students available to contribute to this program of research is quite remarkable. Our existing partnerships with four other Tennessee programs, our leadership of the Tennessee Inclusive Higher Education Alliance, our involvement in the Southeastern Postsecondary Education Alliance, and our involvement with the national Think College Coordinating Center provides us with unique opportunities to examine questions about policy and practice across multiple campuses. However, it is through our development of an especially innovative and highly effective program that is providing the richest opportunity for us to carry out studies that will most advance the field.

Since receiving our grant, we have already published 8 peer-reviewed journal articles and 2 other publications addressing the development, implementation, and impact of our program. Another 7 articles are in preparation. Much of this research is being led by Dr. Erik Carter, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Special Education, who is a leading scholar in the field of special education and transition. But we envision much broader involvement of faculty at Vanderbilt University and VUMC. For example, Robert Hodapp (Special Education), Elise McMillan (Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences), Stacy Clifford Simplican (Women’s and Gender Studies), Julie Lounds Taylor (Special Education, Pediatrics), Dianne Killebrew (Center for Programs in Allied Health), and Sharon Shields (Human and Organizational Development) have already contributed to the design or publication of studies. Given the multiple components of our program, we see additional opportunities to involve faculty with interests in fields like higher education policy, human and organizational development, and business. We also provide a context for graduate and professional students to complete theses and dissertations addressing aspects of the program that align with their field of study.

Our program and its leadership team are already recognized nationally as leaders and innovators in this field. We have made scores of presentations at state and national conferences like the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD), TASH, the Council for Exceptional
Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition, the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), The Arc US, and the Think College Capacity Building Institute. Presentation proposals for these events are all peer-reviewed and are often attended by other scholars doing work in this area.

In the remainder of this section, we offer examples of research studies that already have been completed, are presently underway, or are planned for the near future. A list of citations is included at the end of this report.

**PEER MENTOR EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT**

We are leading a multi-site, longitudinal study examining the experiences and outcomes of college students serving as peer mentors to their fellow students with intellectual disability. At Vanderbilt, these peer mentors are called Ambassadores and provide varied support (2-4 hours/week) to assist students with disabilities to access all aspects of campus life. We are already collecting data from nearly 500 peer mentors (including many from Vanderbilt) at the beginning and end of their involvement, as well as planning follow-up studies addressing their career trajectories after graduation. These studies will provide much-needed insights into the impact of inclusive experiences on college students without disabilities. In addition, we are designing a series of qualitative studies addressing the motivations, involvement, and recommendations of these peer mentors to understand how their involvement shapes their professional training and the value of diverse learning and living communities.

**ACADEMIC INCLUSION, SUPPORTS, AND ADAPTATIONS**

Accessing relevant and rigorous courses is central to the college experience. Every student in Next Steps at Vanderbilt takes 1-2 Vanderbilt courses per semester throughout their four-year program. We are launching a line of research to establish best practices in supports and accommodations for college students with intellectual disability. Building upon our prior research addressing peer-mediated and self-directed supports in inclusive high school classrooms, we completed a study evaluating the use of self-management strategies to support students’ learning and active participation. Future studies will address the feasibility and impact of peer-mediated support models, academic tutoring, self-directed learning strategies, and emerging technologies.

**FACULTY EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We are planning a series of mixed-method studies addressing the experiences of university faculty.

“Having a student from Next Steps in my class capitalized on building empathy, engaging in thoughtful conversations with students in the Vanderbilt community that they would maybe not have otherwise, and building awareness about Next Steps and the impact (the student) and others are having on the community.”

– Kristen Tomkins, Lecturer, Department of Human and Organizational Development
who enroll students with intellectual disability in their courses. Since our launch, over 100 different Vanderbilt faculty have instructed students from Next Steps at Vanderbilt. These studies will address their motivations for involvement, their preparation to support students with disabilities in their classes, their experiences teaching inclusive courses, their views on the impact of inclusion on themselves and all of their students, and their recommendations for strengthening the quality of the experience. As with our peer mentor studies, we expect this research to take place across multiple campuses in our state. A pilot study is now being launched through our colleagues at the University of Memphis.

VANDERBILT VISIONS
This qualitative study is examining the freshman Visions orientation experiences of first-year students enrolled in Next Steps at Vanderbilt, along with their student and faculty VUCeptors—all of whom participated in one of six integrated orientation groups last fall. Our study is examining the experiences of students and their leaders, addressing the impact of inclusion on personal growth and understandings of diversity, and soliciting recommendations for enhancing the quality of these formative experiences. As we continue this research, our findings will provide insights into how views about diversity are shaped among undergraduate students when early introductions to Vanderbilt life take place alongside fellow students with disabilities.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND BELONGING
The friendships college students form during their time on campus can shape their learning, well-being, and future trajectories. We are particularly interested in understanding the social experiences of college students with intellectual disability, including the ways in which and with whom their friendships develop. In our first study, we examined the social networks of current students and alumni of Next Steps at Vanderbilt. What do the social networks of college students and alumni with intellectual disability look like? How do they view their friendships, its importance, and its impact on them? This study will provide guidance for programs committed to fostering the development of friendships among students with intellectual disability and their peers without disabilities on campus.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING AND SERVICE
Although community service is a widespread practice in most higher education institutions, few studies of inclusive community service experiences have appeared in the literature. In this qualitative study, Vanderbilt students with and without intellectual

“Next Steps has become such a huge part of my life. I was excited to volunteer in the first place, but it’s amazing how much it changed me. It is much more than just helping out our peers. These students really enhanced my Vanderbilt experience and have become my friends. All along I thought I’d be making a difference in their lives when in reality, they’re making a difference in mine.”
– Rebecca Moody, Undergraduate Student
disability worked together to jointly plan a community service project, carry it out, and reflect upon their experiences. Interviews with and observations of participating students and staff focused on their perceptions of the shared experience, the nature of students’ interactions, and their suggestions for the design of additional inclusive service opportunities. This study provides the first insights into how structured, inclusive service experiences could be incorporated more fully into the collegiate experience for students with intellectual disability. In future years, our focus will shift toward how the involvement of students with disabilities within existing campus service opportunities shapes their implementation and impact.

**RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES**

The residential aspects of the university experience are among the most formative for college students. Vanderbilt students who have intellectual disability can also be greatly impacted by well-supported opportunities to live independently of family and in community with other students. When residential options are launched, we will start a series of intervention studies examining how best to teach and support the development of daily living, transportation, financial literacy, and other independent living skills. In addition, we will launch a follow-along study focused on how our alumni navigate independent living after graduation. Because all of the residential options we are designing will be inclusive (i.e., students with and without intellectual disability living in community together), our focus will also be on the ways these residential experiences shape the attitudes, expectations, relationships, and professional pathways of participating undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

The career preparation that students with intellectual disability receive at Vanderbilt is a showcase of our program. The broader disability field has struggled to support integrated, community employment in widespread ways. In contrast, our graduates have a 90% employment rate (compared to 19% employment rate for individuals with IDD nationally). We will continue studying the efficacy of strategies for supporting the career preparation and employment skills of our students. In addition, we will be developing new approaches for assessing the employment-related strengths and needs of students, as well as identifying new avenues for workplace supports.

**PROGRAM IMPACT ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

We are toward the end of a four-year longitudinal study addressing the adaptive behavior, executive
functioning, and self-determination of students with intellectual disability enrolled in Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Data were collected from students and parents at entry into the program, and at the end of their first and second years. Analyses examine change over time for students in the program. In addition, we collect outcome data for our students and have already documented impressive post-graduation employment outcomes.

**FAMILY PERSPECTIVES**

We have partnered with doctoral students at Lipscomb University to launch a study addressing the experiences and expectations of parents whose daughters and sons with intellectual disability are enrolled in inclusive higher education programs in Tennessee. The study is focused on how these families made the decision to support college participation, how they conceptualize a “successful” college experience, and their views on how their daughter or son has benefitted from their enrollment. Family involvement has been a critical component of our program and we anticipate designing future studies that address some of the tensions and opportunities related to parent involvement and student independence.

**COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ON INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION**

In addition to strengthening our program, we are also committed to spurring the growth of new programs across the state and around the country. We partnered to help build all five other programs in Tennessee. We examined “community conversations” (Carter & Bumble, 2018) as an avenue for exploring how key stakeholders envisioned the inclusion of students with intellectual disability on their local college campus and the supports needed to successfully launch new postsecondary programs. Three communities held gatherings involving a cross-section of diverse campus and community stakeholders. Conceptualizations of inclusion extended beyond the experiences (e.g., classes, student organizations, residential, campus life) students might have and addressed skill development, necessary training and supports, campus and community attitudes, and potential partnerships. Likewise, these stakeholders identified a constellation of people and resources needed to support successful college experiences. This research is helping us determine how best to catalyze the launch of new programs and is identifying “community conversations” as a promising approach for informing the initial movements of local planning teams.

These studies reflect just a sampling of the current plans and possibilities for scholarship related to inclusive higher education. We will continue to pursue external funding in order to enhance the rigor and expand the reach of our research.

“The most significant changes in my daughter’s functioning, well-being, and independence occurred during her years at Next Steps.”

– Bill, Parent
Excellence in Education

In addition to being a world-class research university, Vanderbilt University is firmly focused on equipping its students to become active citizens and leaders who promote positive change within an increasingly diverse world. Next Steps at Vanderbilt provides an array of opportunities for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to participate in immersive experiences that can enhance their understandings of and commitments to inclusion, equity, and diversity. Each academic year, hundreds of students from all across Vanderbilt participate in formal and informal experiences in which they learn with, about, and from students with intellectual disability. These are not merely resume-building experiences; instead, they provide powerful contexts for professional development and growth in which students can connect their fields of study to the world of disability. As future leaders in organizations, businesses, institutions, and communities across the country and around the world, Vanderbilt students will be in positions to influence policies and practices that impact people with disabilities. This particular context for education and training distinguishes Vanderbilt from all other top-20 universities—none of which yet offers a program like Next Steps at Vanderbilt.

In the remainder of this section, we describe the avenues through which Vanderbilt undergraduate, graduate, and professional students are engaging with students and staff at Next Steps at Vanderbilt. In brackets [ ], we indicate how many students have been involved to date and many students we anticipate will be involved moving forward.

PEER MENTORS (AMBASSADORES)
Each year, we involve over 100 undergraduate students as peer mentors to their fellow college students with intellectual disability. These year-long experiences (about 2 hours/week) focus on shared activities in one or more areas: academic support, daily planning, exercise partners, campus life involvement, and social activities. Peer mentors have come from three schools (i.e., Arts & Sciences, Engineering, and Peabody) and more than half are from outside of Peabody. Early findings from our longitudinal study indicate peer mentors report substantive benefits related to their own professional growth, career clarity, attitudinal change, appreciation of diversity, self-perceptions, and enjoyment of college. As a student organization, the Ambassadores have already been recognized with two campus awards: the VALE Best Diversity & Inclusion Program Award in 2018 and the Magnolia Award for Most Meaningful Service in 2016. In addition, they were nationally recognized by their induction into the National Disability Mentoring Coalition Hall of Fame in 2017. [More than 350 students to date; 150 per year moving forward]
ACADEMIC COURSE SUPPORTS
Undergraduate students serving in this role meet with students from Next Steps at Vanderbilt before or after the Vanderbilt class they share in common. They review or preview class content and talk about how to maximize learning in class. These undergraduates are modeling learning strategies that may make their own studying more effective, as well as developing personal skills for communicating more clearly, logically, and creatively. [15 students to date; 10 per year moving forward]

TEACHING ASSISTANTS
Career and Community Studies (CCS) courses are designed to help students enrolled in Next Steps at Vanderbilt develop knowledge and skills in areas such as career development, self-awareness, and independent living skills. Undergraduate students assist in these courses for approximately one hour each week. These volunteers are exposed to different teaching and learning styles by helping to provide testing accommodations, reviewing content, answering questions, and sharing related experiences in class. [32 students to date; 6 per year moving forward]

VANDERBILT VISIONS
First-year students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt participate in Vanderbilt Visions each fall semester. In the spring, our staff leads an informational session with undergraduate students and faculty serving as VUCeptors. Through this training, VUCeptors and faculty members become more knowledgeable about supporting the presence, participation, and meaningful contributions of students with disabilities. Other Vanderbilt freshman in the groups see inclusion in action and come to see their community as one that is diverse in multiple ways beyond race/ethnicity, gender, and class to include the dimension of disability. [18 student VUCeptors to date; 5 per year moving forward; 300 undergraduate students involved in inclusive Visions groups to date; 85 per year moving forward]

INGRAM SCHOLARS
Past Ingram Scholars have participated in multiple aspects of the administration of Next Steps at Vanderbilt, including policy development, event planning, organization of campus life participation, and academic programming. Both their Ingram projects and future professional careers are informed by the opportunity to interact, problem-solve, and partner with our students, faculty, and staff. As they prepare for professional roles aimed at tackling pressing societal problems, they are becoming fluent in how people with disabilities are directly impacted by these issues. [3 students to date; 2 per year moving forward]

ENGINEERING STUDENTS
Teams of undergraduate students in the “How to Make (Almost) Anything” engineering course (ME 3890) work each year to develop accessibility solutions for individuals with disabilities in Next Steps. These students gain insights into accessibility barriers, learn about universal design, and come to see the relevance of their work to the 19% of Americans with disabilities. [25 students to date; 25 per year moving forward]

THEATER/COSTUME DESIGN STUDENTS
In the spring semester of 2017, a student enrolled through Next Steps at Vanderbilt and another Vanderbilt student in “Elements of Basic Design: Costuming and Make-up” (THTR 3741) conceptualized a fashion design company for designing and creating clothes for people with
special needs. From that experience, the instructor created the “Designing for Disability: Fashioning a More Inclusive World” project, in which students are working together to design accessible backpacks for people with physical and other disabilities, specifically 5 students enrolled in Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Some other students in the class are writing papers and completing research projects for other courses based on their experience in this project. All students and faculty involved are experiencing the personal, individual, and time-consuming teamwork involved in solving fashion and accessory issues for people with disabilities. [16 students to date; 20 per year moving forward]

SPECIAL EDUCATION MASTER’S STUDENTS

Students in “Advanced Procedures in Transition to Adult Life” (SPEDS 7300) met with juniors enrolled through Next Steps at Vanderbilt to develop semester-long independent study plans. Through this partnership, students learned about goal development, lesson planning, experiential instruction, and student-centered planning, as well as received an introduction to inclusive postsecondary education. [16 students to date; 20 per year moving forward]

BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS STUDENTS

We established an academic tutoring lab that provides students in Peabody’s applied behavior analysis program on-campus opportunities to support students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt for approximately 2 hours per week. These master’s students are implementing academic interventions, practicing data-based decision making, and adapting instructional interventions for use in postsecondary educational contexts. Such experiences are helping students develop their core competencies as behavior analysts and gain internship hours that are necessary for their certification. [25 students to date; 10 per year moving forward]

NURSING STUDENTS

We partner with students in the Nursing School to address any medical or health-related needs for students with intellectual disability participating in our week-long, residential Next Steps Summer Institute each summer. Through their support of and interactions with our students, these nursing students are building their capacity to serve a more diverse group of patients and gaining insights into the health-related challenges experienced by some people with disabilities. [12 students to date; 2 per year moving forward]

“Having a Next Steps student in our class made it engaging and meaningful for all of the students and gave our class a richer experience. Experiencing a traditional student partnering with our Next Steps student in class this semester makes me eager to recommend this situation for classroom inclusivity going forward.”

– Alexandra Sargent, MFA, Senior Lecturer of Theater; Costume Designer and Costume Shop Manager
DIETETIC INTERNS
Students in the Dietetic Internship Program spend approximately 9 hours per semester meeting with our students in groups and individually to encourage high-quality nutrition and healthy lifestyles. They assist with food preparation, eat with students, and engage them in nutrition-related discussions, preparing themselves for careers working with people with disabilities who have varying degrees of understanding related to healthy eating and living. [80 students to date; 16 per year moving forward]

VANDERBILT CONSORTIUM LEND TRAINEES
The Vanderbilt LEND program prepares graduate-level health professionals in 15 disciplines to assume leadership roles to serve children with neurodevelopmental and related disabilities. Some of the LEND trainees work with students and families involved in Next Steps at Vanderbilt to increase access to culturally competent, interdisciplinary services (about 30 hours/semester). They are developing interprofessional team skills and research competence by leading our Next Chapter Book Clubs (i.e., leading five students in a weekly book discussion) as well as contributing to research studies related to students with intellectual disability. [16 students to date; 4 per year moving forward]

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS
Graduate assistants (GAs) are vital to nearly every aspect of Next Steps at Vanderbilt, including recruitment, marketing, research, legislative/policy work, event planning, fundraising, communications, and program implementation. These GAs are drawn from special education, higher education, and other disciplines and work 20 hours per week. They learn to balance time spent at their desks with time spent with students; they also provide many hours of guidance to our students in the areas of academics, campus navigation, community service, independent living training, and social skills acquisition. The GAs learn about all aspects of managing an inclusive higher education program and come to see how their own discipline connects to the topic of disability. [10 students to date; 10 per year moving forward]

WORK STUDY STUDENTS
Like graduate assistants, undergraduate work study students have opportunities to participate in program administration and regular student interactions. These students often assist with academic progress updates for students and families, as well as newsletters sent to alumni, friends, and possible...
financial supporters. For some past students, the experience has led to changes in career pathways as a result of exposure to the world of disability. [4 students to date; 1 per year moving forward]

**JOB COACHES**

Graduate, professional, and undergraduate students in this role serve approximately 6 hours per week as liaisons between students with intellectual disability, their work supervisors, and the Career Development Director for Next Steps at Vanderbilt. They attend internships (i.e., student work placements on- and off-campus, ranging from 2 to 20 hours per week) with students, supporting them in learning a new job and promoting their independence. By helping students with disabilities explore and learn transferable job skills and employability skills, they develop their own abilities in the areas of communication, employment, and mentorship. [110 students to date; 80 per year moving forward]

**JOB SHADOWING GUIDES**

These undergraduates support students with intellectual disability for 3 hours each week to visit job sites on campus and reflect on their experiences. They guide students in determining whether they want to pursue certain areas of employment and developing the skills required to do so. By leading students in thinking critically about their talents, areas of improvement, and goals related to employment, job shadowing guides inform their own future employment and interactions with persons (and possible employees) with disabilities. [5 students to date; 5 per year moving forward]

**UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND SOCIAL WORK TRAINEES**

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities provides trainees who work with Next Steps at Vanderbilt. The VKC UCEDD Social Work trainees organize and participate in community service projects with our students. They also provide instruction in some of our CCS courses, grade assignments, lead book clubs, and provide social skills instruction. By gaining approximately four hours of work experience with students with disabilities each week, they are becoming better equipped to serve people with disabilities as part of their future professional practice. [20 students to date; 2 per year moving forward]

“Working with the Next Steps program has inspired me to think about the different ways of teaching and communicating with individuals from a variety of backgrounds and abilities. I have loved watching and working alongside the students as they challenge themselves to learn new things and participate in various activities. It has been a wonderful work experience- I am very glad to be part of the journey!”

– Cassandra Hall, Graduate Assistant
NOTETAKERS
Notetakers take and share class notes each week through a portal provided by Vanderbilt’s Student Access Services office. This is unique in that it is the only Next Steps at Vanderbilt support role that does not involve face-to-face contact with students with disabilities. Though the time commitment is minimal, notetakers benefit greatly by considering more deeply the learning styles and needs of other students and providing students a way to review class content at a later date and slower pace. [130 students to date; 50 per year moving forward]

STUDENT ORGANIZATION SUPPORTS
Students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt participate in over 20 student organizations on campus. Other undergraduate students in these organizations volunteer approximately one hour each week to support students in various ways. For example, students in the Vanderbilt Chabad Jewish Student Group created a detailed plan of support for including a student in all activities. VUTheater Student Organization students worked with a student to learn how to operate lighting for several recent plays. And Vanderbilt Students Volunteer for Science (VSVS) members currently lead science lessons for local middle school students alongside students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt. [6 to date; 10 per year moving forward]

“Being an Ambassadore has been so much more than a weekly act of community service. I’ve gained a friend who’s always there to tell me a story, cheer me up, and remind me that my upcoming paper really isn’t as important as it seems. When the academic stress of Vanderbilt overwhelms me, my Next Steps student is there as a friend and as a respite.”
– Taylor Dickinson, Undergraduate Student
Vanderbilt University is firmly committed to creating an inclusive environment that embraces diversity. *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* is already involved in a variety of diversity, inclusion, and community engagement efforts aimed at creating a campus community in which every single person feels welcomed and supported. As students with intellectual disability from *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* audit university courses, they further the commitment and capacity of hundreds of faculty, staff, graduate students, professional students, and undergraduate students to support inclusion and increase access. Outside of the classroom, our *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* team has been an integral part of diversity-related conversations on campus, including the Advisory Accessibility Task Force, the Presidents’ Roundtable, and many others. In addition, the students were honored with the Perry Wallace Courage Award in 2016 for breaking down barriers against inclusion and persevering against obstacles. Truly, *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* is an invaluable part of all that makes the Vanderbilt campus an “inclusive environment that embraces diversity.”

Below are additional examples of the ways in which our presence and participation helps the Vanderbilt community live out its commitment to equity and diversity.

**VANDERBILT FACULTY SUPPORT**

Vanderbilt students enrolled through *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* participate in university classes with an Independent Learning Agreement, developed by our Academic Director with approval from the course professor. The Academic Director meets individually with each interested professor to answer questions and provide resources about disability and is available for consultation throughout the semester. In addition, each faculty member is provided a faculty guide (Appendix A) for reference. Over 100 faculty members have had students from *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* in their classes in the past seven years, and according to our surveys, 94% state they would welcome students from *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* into their classes again in the future. As students gain exposure to new ideas and information as well as a sense of belonging, Vanderbilt faculty members are trained and prepared for building classrooms not only of excellence but also inclusion. [102 to date: 40-80 per year moving forward]

**ADVISORY ACCESSIBILITY TASK FORCE**

The aim of the Advisory Accessibility Task Force—comprised of faculty, staff, students, and community members—is to promote accessibility and inclusion throughout the comprehensive campus environment. Our Director of Residential Supports serves on this committee as a voice for students in *Next Steps at Vanderbilt* and a consultant about how short- and
long-term planning for campus land use must include accessibility and inclusivity. [30 members]

**PRESIDENTS’ ROUNDTABLE**

Each year, our staff provides awareness about Next Steps at Vanderbilt and the inclusion of people with disabilities to participating presidents of student organizations. These campus leaders certainly influence policies and guidelines for their student organizations. But they also take these lessons and commitments into the future communities they will lead long after graduation. A knowledge of and interest in inclusion is essential for these student organizations to embody inclusion. [70 to date; 75-100 per year moving forward]

**OFFICE FOR INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE**

In September 2018, our Academic Director organized “A Look Into an Inclusive Classroom,” a panel discussion in which professors and key Vanderbilt leaders from three different schools shared lessons learned from their own experiences interacting and supporting students enrolled in Next Steps at Vanderbilt. [20 to date]

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**CENTER FOR TEACHING**

We participated in the Center for Teaching’s Teaching, Difference, and Power: Disability and Learning meeting in March of 2018, a university-wide effort to ensure educators develop the knowledge and skills of teaching inclusively to diverse audiences. Our Academic Director was one of several faculty members facilitating this discussion on inclusion and education. [25 to date]

**STUDENT COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN**

Two of our students participated in a meeting of the Student Council for Exceptional Children during the Spring 2018 semester as a way to provide undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with opportunities to enhance professional development in the Vanderbilt community and beyond. These students shared about their experience in Next Steps at Vanderbilt and led a discussion on inclusive higher education. [40 to date]

**IMMERSION iSEMINARS**

A first-year Vanderbilt student enrolled in Next Steps at Vanderbilt recently participated in the inaugural iSeminar courses (Spring 2017). This student enrolled in the “Deep Dive into the Literary Arts” course and was interviewed by National Public Radio as part of the course. Her unique viewpoint certainly enhanced the Immersion program’s goal of supporting students to imagine ways to make a difference in the world by introducing them to new ideas from a variety of perspectives. [11 students to date]

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“Hardin is enthusiastic, energetic, and has been an excellent addition to the staff at The Parthenon. He learns quickly and uncovered facts I didn’t even know. Guests love listening to him. He has a future in a museum as an interpreter. I would highly recommend him for a job.”

– DeeGee Lester, Director of Education, The Parthenon
WOND’RY EVENT LEADERSHIP
Through his internship at the Wond’ry in the Spring 2017 semester, one second-year student in Next Steps at Vanderbilt created a project to challenge the perceptions of Vanderbilt students, faculty and staff; build their empathy; and break down social barriers. He planned a meal for guests, led a discussion on Next Steps at Vanderbilt, and guided them in experiencing visual impairment. Experiences like this are at the heart of the Wond’ry’s mission to bring the Vanderbilt community together and foster a spirit of collaboration and empathy.

[25 to date]

VU DINING SERVICES
Several students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt have had internships in VU Dining (i.e., Munchie Marts, coffee stations, dining halls) in the past several years. Our team provides them with an internship resource guide and includes them in several informational and training meetings throughout each semester. In addition, we are in close communication with VU Dining regarding any dietary needs of our students. Recently, one of our staff people nominated VU Dining Services for the ARC TN Inclusive Employer award. While they did not win, we are very grateful for our continued relationship with VU Dining. [50 to date; 25 per year moving forward]

INTERNSHIP SUPERVISORS
Internship supervisors across campus interact with students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt on a daily basis. These supervisors have an initial meeting with our Employment Director as well as multiple meetings throughout the semester. While guiding our students to refine career goals, develop transferable job skills, and gain employability skills, these supervisors are also leading the way for Vanderbilt to become an inclusive employer. [60 to date; 20 per year moving forward]

“Chris worked with me this semester in the Wond’ry Makerspace. He was always on time and a very creative individual. He was always drawing creative ideas trying to connect Wond’ry and Innovation. I would recommend him for future employment. He has a great personality and has a lot of wild ideas that he likes to share and would add a lot to the culture.”

– Kevin C. Galloway, Ph.D., Research Assistant Professor and Director of Making – Vanderbilt University Wond’ry Makerspace
History of Next Steps at Vanderbilt

As individuals with disabilities, families, and educators saw inclusive higher education programs developing in other areas of the county, a small Task Force began meeting to develop inclusive higher education in Tennessee in 2005. The Vanderbilt Kennedy University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) was in a leadership position with the Task Force. A number of other leading agencies and institutions in Tennessee—including the Higher Education Commission, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, and other major Tennessee agencies serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families—were also members of the Task Force.

At about the same time, Mrs. Linda Brooks and her family, through her LDB Foundation, gave Vanderbilt University a gift of $150,000 for program development. Mrs. Brooks, whose daughter Wendy had been one of the earliest students in what is now the Susan Gray School, wanted to provide opportunities for other student and families that had not been available for her daughter.

In 2008, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities offered a grant to all Tennessee colleges and universities for development of an inclusive higher education program. Vanderbilt University was the only Tennessee college or university to apply through the VKC. At this same time, UCEDDs were leading the way in inclusive higher education development in other parts of the country including the Tarjan Center at UCLA and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The proposal was submitted with strong support of then Provost Richard McCarty and Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos.

The three-year grant provided funding for one planning year and two operational years. The first class of six students was admitted January 2010. From the beginning, we worked with a Steering Committee made up of key campus advisors including the Provost Office, Student Affairs, Registrar’s Office and Office of Financial Aid. The support for the program has been outstanding and we know that not all programs find this kind of reception on their campuses. Our Steering Committee is comprised of five Vanderbilt faculty and staff members and top-level Administration. It is charged with providing guidance in the development of Next Steps at Vanderbilt’s policies and procedures.

Our Advisory Committee is comprised of 22 people, including a Next Steps alumnus, family members, Vanderbilt faculty and staff, and community members. It is charged with providing guidance and effort in the development and sustainability of Next Steps at Vanderbilt.
Next Steps at Vanderbilt reported regularly to Associates Deans of the four undergraduate colleges through Vice Provost Cynthia Cyrus since it was originally housed in the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. As the program was established, we worked closely with the Office of Financial Aid to establish the Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) and Title IV eligibility. We were committed from day one to make the program as affordable as possible for students and families. To build support, we worked closely with the VU Office of State and Federal Relations, The Arc Tennessee and the Tennessee Disability Coalition to pass the Step Up legislation.

As the division of VU and VUMC neared, the decision was made for the program to move to Peabody College and stay with Vanderbilt University. As one of the leading colleges of education in the country, Peabody provides a strong home for the program. Erik Carter, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Special Education, provides faculty leadership for the program. The day-to-day operations are directed by Tammy Day, M.Ed. The UCEDD continues to play a role in leadership of the state’s Inclusive Higher Education Alliance.

Throughout its development, Next Steps at Vanderbilt has provided leadership on the Vanderbilt University Campus and at institutions of higher education in Tennessee and across the nation.

“From late night conversations about family to football tailgates, some of my favorite memories of college were times spent with Next Steps students. I watched how the program not only transformed my own views, but how it transformed Vanderbilt into a community filled with acceptance, support, tolerance, and compassion.”

– Alyssa Greenstein, Undergraduate Student
Hardin Manhein, class of 2015

“I have a voice, and I have learned how to use it through Next Steps.”

Disseminating New Knowledge Locally and Nationally

PUBLISHED ARTICLES


OTHER PUBLICATIONS


ARTICLES IN PREPARATION OR IN REVIEW


EXAMPLE PRESENTATIONS


Shields, S. (2017, June). The importance of guidance from university administrators. Presentation at the 3rd Annual Southeastern Postsecondary Education and Capacity Building Institute, Nashville, TN.

Cayton, J. (2017, June). Orientation: Starting each semester off right. Presentation presented at the 3rd Annual Southeastern Postsecondary Education and Capacity Building Institute, Nashville, TN.


McMillan, E., & Raines, S. (2017, June). Ensuring higher education is affordable for all. Presentation at the 3rd Annual Southeastern Postsecondary Education and Capacity Building Institute, Nashville, TN.


