A message from the Vice Chancellor

Resilience is needed today more than ever. Believe it! Advocacy is also critical. This is the beginning of Black History Month, when we honor the black individuals who have contributed to our country in many ways and have made it the great nation in which we live.

Our marginalized brothers and sisters strive to make our country stronger and are persistent in their advocacy to create a welcoming community and experience. This is something we must accomplish together. It is also important to note that this resilience is not limited to a single race or ethnicity. There are many who we must honor who have demonstrated the resilience of their ancestors — the Native American surviving no matter what was done to them, the Hispanic working in the fields doing work many of us would not even consider in order to raise a family. And, there are those who come and are dedicated to making a new home in our country.

It can sometimes be difficult for some to appreciate where this resilience comes from, and how engrained it is within their character. We must honor the individual who has demonstrated the resilience of ancestors; the individual who has been challenged because of sexual orientation; the individual who follows a different faith. Envision the experience of the black man or woman who survived the middle passage, slavery and abuse in order to birth an African American future. Try to bend your back for 12 hours a day working in the fields. Think about a Muslim worshipping in a mosque that has been bombed or a Jew in a synagogue that has been attacked.

I believe that we sometimes fail to recognize the determination that some ancestors experienced in order for their offspring to now be walking among us, studying with us, pursuing goals among us and advocating for change. We must appreciate that and recognize that resilience and determination are part of their DNA. Their courage and commitment will not allow them to turn around.

Their roots and their resilience, in spite of the hurdles placed in front of them, should be lauded and recognized. Nothing will deter them from reaching their goals and that perseverance must be rewarded and not impeded. That resilience and determination will make our institution – Vanderbilt University - stronger, more inclusive and more complete. Believe it, and thank you for working with us to achieve it!

George C. Hill is distinguished professor of molecular physiology and biophysics, vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion and chief diversity officer.

Vanderbilt University commemorates MLK weekend

The Office of the University Chaplain and Religious Life and the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center had the honor of organizing the annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration, which took place January 13-16. Along with other campus partners, we launched the campus into the national holiday, which took shape through service to the community, led by the Office of Active Citizenship and Service; a kickoff lecture and reception at the Divinity School; the opening of an art exhibit at the BCC; and several events hosted by the Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the law school.

Our theme, “Justice and Democracy? Revolutionizing Our American Myths,” held that our nation’s commitment to a free, equitable and inclusive democracy is not a finished project. The myths we still pursue—our higher values of justice, freedom, mercy, kindness and MLK’s “beloved community”—are not false beliefs so much as compelling stories and worthy ideals describing our sojourn toward a more perfect union that still eludes our grasp.

We began the MLK holiday with our chancellor, provost, vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion and several hundred Vanderbilt students joining hands with citizens of Nashville in its annual MLK Day March down Jefferson Street, concluding at Tennessee State University. This was followed by six different teach-ins that furthered our skills as change agents by embracing topics focused on criminal justice, troubling rhetoric and activism via social media.
Graduate School engages students in unconscious bias dialogue

by Renuka Christoph

Graduate School Dean Mark Wallace is passionate about global connectivity and recognizes that great universities such as Vanderbilt embrace diversity in all its forms. The graduate school is home to nearly 2,200 students from across the university and seeks to create a single point of contact on campus for the graduate community.

Wallace, who is committed to facilitating open and honest discussion, gave copies of the best-seller *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, by Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman to all incoming graduate students. The book addresses unconscious bias and explores how people use two systems to drive their thinking. System 1 is fast, intuitive and emotional; system 2 is slower, deliberative and logical.

“We have had great participation from every school, and we have had students with very different backgrounds and perspectives in the discussions. It’s been a delight to moderate these fascinating conversations,” Wallace said.
Supporting a campus-wide initiative to combat unconscious bias, Vanderbilt’s Office for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion has launched a new webpage and series of workshops focused on how to recognize and learn to stop making these automatic and unfair judgments.

An excellent collaborative effort is underway led by Provost and Vice Chancellor Susan R. Wente, Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion George Hill, and Vice Chancellor for Administration Eric Kopstain to develop unconscious bias educational opportunities for faculty, staff and students.

The new EDI webpage features definitions and examples of unconscious bias, a video interview with Assistant Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Sandra Barnes and a listing of events and workshops – both past and upcoming – to help the university community develop strategies to work past these often quick judgments and prejudices and appreciate people for who they are. It also includes links to additional reading, courses and resources.

Barnes has led on organizing the new webpage and the EDI Office resources, as well as coordinating several committees working on the planning for unconscious bias training and now, providing with others, leadership in training. “Because unconscious bias is typically an automatic response, many people don’t have the checks and balances typically used in decision making,” Barnes said. “This kind of thought process tends to occur quickly without people often noticing. It usually manifests itself through long-held perceptions and stereotypes.”

“Another dynamic is the tendency for unconscious bias to be exhibited toward vulnerable groups,” she added. “We all have biases, but unconscious bias tends to be meted out on racial and ethnic minorities, or based on factors such as class, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, able-bodiedness and other diverse traits.”

“It is clear from conversations with students, faculty and staff that attention to unconscious bias is a very high priority. We must come together collaboratively to meet the challenges we face and continue to make progress. Programs, videos and workshops are being developed to specifically provide guidance and training,” noted Hill.

The provost’s office, the division of administration and the EDI office worked together to assess what unconscious bias programming was already in place on campus, identify gaps and create programming.

For example, within Academic Affairs, Wente and Dean of Students Mark Bandas launched spring sessions for faculty, staff and students on cultural competence and difficult conversations. The sessions are hosted and organized by the Dean of Students’ Office of Inclusion Initiatives and Cultural Competence.

Last fall the provost’s office also held workshops for faculty led by Efren Perez, an associate professor of political science and one of the country’s leading experts on implicit bias.

EDI has had listening sessions with students, faculty and staff over the past year and the Chancellor’s Diversity, Inclusion, and Community report noted the need for unconscious bias training. EDI’s series of eight workshops, titled Inclusive Excellence, covers unconscious bias, communication and collaboration, relationship building, ethnic dynamics, and sexuality and gender dynamics. Campus groups can request the presentations by using this form.

Owen Graduate School of Management hosts MLK discussion

Dean M. Eric Johnson invited faculty, staff and students to join him on the annual MLK march. He then hosted a luncheon and discussion. Johnson, who was joined by 70 students, sees the annual commemoration as an invaluable experience because it offers participants an inside look at the Nashville community and its rich history. “The overarching story for Owen is to engage with students in an experiential way on various topics,” Johnson said.
Asian New Year Festival: An evening of food, music and dance

by Renuka Christoph

The highly anticipated Asian New Year Festival (ANYF) celebration will take place Sat., Feb. 25, from 7:30 – 10 p.m. at the Langford auditorium. The festival will consist of dinner with dishes from China, Thailand and Korea and more than 300 undergraduate students in 14 performances. The performances will include the Buchae-chum (Korean), Chinese Ribbon and Fan dance (Chinese), Chinese Song Choir (Chinese), Hip Hop and Hula (Hawaiian, Tahitian), K-pop (Korean), Malaysian Fusion (Malaysian), Martial Arts (Pan-Asian), Praise Movement, Sayaw sa Bangko (Philippine), Singkil + Tinikling (Philippine), Soran Bushi (Japanese), Watersleeves (Chinese) and a senior dance.

“The organizational mission of Vanderbilt AASA (Asian American Student Association) is to promote and provide cultural and political awareness of Asian and Asian-American customs and diversity within the university and local community. To fulfill this mission, AASA organizes a number of cultural events ranging from GBMs (General Body Meetings), to discussion panels, to the ANYF showcase,” states Edward Jun, cultural co-chair, co-VP of ANYF ‘17.

This year’s theme will center around the Eastern phoenix (known as fenghuang in China). The immortal phoenix represents justice, peace, prosperity and faith which are manifested in human beings. Sightings of the fenghuang are said to be rare, as the bird hides during times of trouble. An appearance of the phoenix symbolizes the dawn of a new age of prosperity and a mandate from heaven.

“This is an especially exciting year for ANYF. In celebrating AASA’s 30th year on campus, as well as ANYF’s first full circle around the Zodiac Calendar (12 years), we have been working our best to make this year’s the best showcase yet. Some things you can look forward to seeing in addition to all of the dances originating from different parts of Asia are a Lion Dance by the Chinese Arts Alliance of Nashville,” shares Crystal Kim, cultural assistant.

Last year, more than 1100 attended the event.

“My favorite part in watching ANYF was how it was able to give me such a holistic look into a culture I didn’t know much. Seeing my fellow classmates radiate such honest passion, joy and community on stage inspired me to step out of my comfort zone and become a part of the ANFY family this year as a dancer. I couldn't be more excited,” says Nicolette Granata, a sophomore majoring in child development.

Reserve tickets at Sarratt Box Office beginning Feb. 20 or on Rand Wall from Feb. 20–24.

by Alex Valnoski

Humanities students often get asked what they plan to do with their degrees. The answer turns out to be “anything and everything.” Vanderbilt humanities graduates work in finance, lead nonprofits, and run their own companies.

Lucy Mensah, who graduated with a Ph.D. in English in 2016, is one of the students drawing on her humanities training and taking a path less traveled. Mensah started graduate school in 2011 with the goal of becoming a professor of African American literature. She didn't expect doctoral studies in English to open doors to internships and professional experiences at some of the most prestigious art museums in the country.

With guidance from adviser Vera Kutzinski, the Martha Rivers Ingram Professor of English and professor of comparative literature, Mensah developed a dissertation project focusing on the literary and visual representations of black masculinity. Mensah's passion for studying these representations led her to stints at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

"I realized that in a museum setting, I could integrate my scholarly interests with my interest in handling art objects," Mensah explained. "And during my final year of dissertation writing, I realized that I like to do a little bit of everything: write, handle art objects, put together exhibitions, talk to potential donors, and educate museum-goers."

Now in a prestigious one-year fellowship at the Met in the modern and contemporary department, Mensah is one of 65 fellows from all over the globe working with assigned curators who also serve as mentors and advisers.

"I have had the opportunity to learn in depth about museums as an institutional structure," she said. "It requires a lot of different people to work together in varying capacities to make what it does possible."

After completing her fellowship with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mensah will take the next step in her career at the Detroit Institute of Art, where she has accepted a permanent position as assistant curator of post-1950 contemporary art, helping with exhibitions, interpretation and acquisitions.
Alum showcases the black experience at Vanderbilt

Roosevelt Noble is a change agent not just for the campus, but also for the community. Noble, BS '97, PhD '03, is a senior lecturer in sociology, as well as the curator of the Legacy Lounge in the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center. The lounge, opened in October 2015, houses Noble's Lost in the Ivy project, which details the history and experience of black students at Vanderbilt. The name stems from a history book on the university titled Gone with the Ivy, in which the black experience is seemingly overlooked.

“During my time as a student, ‘the house’ was a hangout spot for the black students. Everything happened here … this was the central mecca of black life on campus,” Noble said. “If you wanted to see anybody you just went to ‘the house.’ ” By tapping into his own college experience, Noble was inspired to recapture the magic of the house through a commemoration of black students and their historical achievements.

Being at Vanderbilt for more than 20 years and conducting more than 400 interviews with black alumni, Noble has witnessed the unique bond created by the experiences and stories of black students across the decades. One of the primary objectives of the Legacy Lounge is to celebrate this bond through the preservation and illustration of the rich history of black students at Vanderbilt. The name of the lounge was inspired by a document called Thoughts on the Idea of Legacy by Rev. Walter R. Murray, BA ’70, MMgt ’74. (Murray House on the Martha Rivers Ingram Commons is named for him.)

The BCC gallery showcases the accomplishments and memories of black students. One wall offers a timeline which documents the history of black students at Vanderbilt, another spotlights alumni and a third wall identifies black graduates from the university. Noble also built an interactive display. The intent of the displays is to celebrate alumni legacies, inspire future generations and challenge current students to think about what their legacies will be.

In addition to the historical focus, a “What's Happening Now” section features photographs taken by current students assisting Noble on the Lost in the Ivy project. Since 2006, students have worked with Noble in developing a digital archive of photographs and video footage from various Vanderbilt programs and events.

“I believe that studying the overall experience of African Americans at Vanderbilt offers tremendous insights for university programming and planning, alumni engagement and for admissions and recruiting. I’m excited and extremely grateful for the opportunity to tell this unique story and preserve an important aspect of the university’s history,” Noble said.

For more on The Lost in the Ivy project, [click here](#).

-Julianne Humphrey Davis, M.Ed. Candidate Community Development & Action, contributed to this article.

Sean Seymore appointed to the National Institute of General Medical Sciences’ Advisory Council

Professor Sean Seymore, professor of law and professor of chemistry, has been appointed to the Advisory Council for the National Institutes of General Medical Sciences by U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Sylvia M. Burwell. Professor Seymore will serve a four-year term ending December 31, 2020. He is one of 12 Advisory Council members.

NIGMS, which is part of the National Institutes of Health, supports research that increases our understanding of life processes and lays the foundation for advances in disease diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Its Advisory Council, which meets three times per year, is composed of leaders in the biological and medical sciences, education, health care, and public affairs.

[Click here to read more](#)

Baroud receives inaugural Littlejohn Dean Faculty Fellowship

A civil engineering professor who develops tools that improve infrastructure systems’ reliability and recovery from disasters like hurricanes and floods has received the inaugural Littlejohn Dean Faculty Fellowship.

VU Engineering School Dean Philippe Fauchet announced Jan. 13 that Hiba Baroud, assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering, has received the new endowed fellowship for junior faculty members.

“This fellowship enables us to recognize our bright young engineering faculty members at the assistant professor level, something impossible for us to do in such an impactful way until today. We are grateful to the Littlejohn family for their support in helping us create opportunities like this for our faculty,” Fauchet said at a reception for Baroud.

[Click here to read more](#)
The Religion in the Arts and Contemporary Culture program at Vanderbilt Divinity School will host "Invictus: Twenty Works Celebrating African Americans’ Pursuit of Freedom and Will to Survive" Feb. 2–24 at the Divinity School, Room G-20.

The exhibition will open with a free public reception from 3 to 7 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 2, and continue through Friday, Feb. 24. The exhibition’s closing reception will take place from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 22, at the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center on the Vanderbilt campus.

For daily gallery hours, visit www.vanderbilt.edu/religion-andarts.

"Invictus" was curated by Yollette T. Jones, associate dean of the College of Arts and Science, and organized by Maya T. King, a junior in the College of Arts and Science. Inspired by her coursework in African American history, King envisioned a visual art exhibition that would put “positive and uplifting images of African Americans in the public view.”

The exhibition examines artists’ portrayals of African American struggle and survival in the United States beginning with the documentation of the death of Crispus Attucks at the Boston Massacre in 1770. On display are notable works by John Biggers, Elizabeth Catlett, John Wilson, Charles White and more. Collectively, these images tell the story of black resolve in the face of social and economic difficulties.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Religion in the Arts and Contemporary Culture program of Vanderbilt Divinity School and co-sponsored by the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center, the Office of the Dean of Students, the College of Arts and Science, and the Office for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

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Harambee celebrates African heritage with food, dance and more

by Jason Antwi

Vanderbilt’s African Student Union will exhibit its premier showcase, Harambee, on Feb. 11. Vanderbilt students from across campus will come together to celebrate the rich diversity and heritage of the African continent through dancing, acting, modeling and spoken word.

The mission of Harambee, a Swahili word for “all pull together,” is to educate, entertain and inform Vanderbilt students and the greater Nashville community about African cultures and contemporary issues that impact various countries on the continent. Over the past few years, Harambee has grown in both the scope of talent and in attendance. Four years ago, about 200 people attended, while last year it sold out with more than 400 in attendance.

Dinner, which will be served from 5 to 7 p.m. in the Student Life Center, will include dishes such as jollof rice, a one-pot rice dish, and mandazi, a coconut donut. The performance, which runs from 7 to 9 p.m. in Langford Auditorium, will feature six choreographed dances, including hip-hop/ fusion and gumboot, a dance where performers wear Wellington boots.

Tickets are $12 for the show and $15 for the show and dinner and can be purchased at the Sarratt Box Office.
MLK lecturer sees teamwork as crucial to health care diversity

Kathy Whitney

David Gordon, M.D., dean of the University of Akron College of Health Professions, gave the 2017 Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Lecture on Monday at Vanderbilt, touching on the theme of teamwork as it relates to health care diversity.

Gordon was born in Atlanta but grew up in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sweden due to his father’s job. “Having lived in all of these areas as a kid I learned that even though we do have a lot of cultural and language differences around the world, from a human nature point of view, things are a lot more similar than they are different,” he said.

Gordon received his B.A. in chemistry from Amherst College in 1973 and his M.D. from Harvard Medical School in 1979. In 1991 he joined the University of Michigan as an associate professor of Pathology. In 1997 he left academia to work for Pfizer Inc., in their cardiovascular therapeutics pre-clinical division.

“Corporations, and that particular corporation, taught me about teamwork. You realize in that setting you are not going to get a drug to market without involving all kinds of professionals — toxicologists, chemists, clinical researchers, pharmacologists and FDA regulators. That’s where I learned the most practical information about teamwork,” he said.

Gordon was recruited back to the University of Michigan Medical School in 2001, where he was named associate dean for Diversity and Career Development.

“As a self-described ‘practical idealist’ he said it’s important to pursue and embrace the triple aims of health care: providing excellent health care for all populations, improving health status and decreasing costs to make health care more accessible.’

“I typically add a fourth aim. We need to do the best we can to promote self-sustainability of our patients,” he said. “Working with diversity and teamwork in accomplishing these goals is what we should be about.”

His current focus is on promoting inter-professional education among the health professions, as well as on health improvement for underserved and disadvantaged populations.

“One thing I try to stress with our incoming students as well as our graduates - and this is dealing with all sorts of populations and I think it’s a good guiding point - our patients, by and large, care about two things 1) do you know your stuff? 2) do you care about them as individuals?”

“That outweighs everything else. Those are the things to focus on. You need to understand how you resonate with people, and this is where cultural competency comes in,” he said.

During the event, William Cooper, M.D., Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Pediatrics and vice chair for Faculty Affairs, Department of Pediatrics, and Odessa Settles, MSN, R.N., who works in the neonatology follow-up program at Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt, were honored as the 2017 Martin Luther King Jr. Award recipients. Each year the award is presented to a faculty or staff member who emulates Dr. King’s principles through his or her work.

The annual event is presented by Vanderbilt University’s School of Nursing and School of Medicine.

The health disparities of the LGBTI Communities

by Del Ray Zimmerman

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are at greater risk for certain diseases and conditions, including cancer, HIV/AIDS, depression, anxiety and mood disorders as well as alcohol and substance abuse. Many times, particularly around mental health and substance abuse issues, health risk factors are linked to how LGBTI people cope with negative attitudes toward their inherent identities.

In addition, studies show that LGBTI patients are more likely to receive negative treatment in a health care setting. According to a 2010 report by Lambda Legal, more than half of LGBTI patients were refused care, faced the brunt of abusive language or were blamed for their health status. Transgender patients consistently noted the highest incidents of prejudice. These health disparities greatly influenced Vanderbilt University Medical Center leaders to create the Program for LGBTI Health. The program is focused on training staff in LGBTI cultural competency to create the most welcoming environment possible.

To learn more about the Vanderbilt Program for LGBTI Health, call 615-936-3879, email lgbti.health@vanderbilt.edu or visit https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/lgbti/patient-resources.

Trans Buddy is a volunteer-led initiative of the program that works to increase access to care and improve outcomes for transgender patients by providing emotional support during health care visits. Patients can call the Trans Buddy phone line from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. every day to ask a volunteer for assistance.

To learn more about or volunteer with the Trans Buddy, call 615-326-5185, email transbuddy@vanderbilt.edu or visit https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/lgbti/trans-buddy-program.

Del Ray Zimmerman is program coordinator LGBTI Health
The Office for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is responsible for advocating for institutional change, working with university stakeholders to set goals and institutionalize accountability, and ensuring that equity, diversity and inclusion efforts are coordinated throughout the university.