



Focus on Vanderbilt University

Vanderbilt University, in Nashville, Tennessee, has always had a reputation for excellence in its undergraduate as well as graduate programs, but the characteristics of the 6,800 undergraduate students have undergone some dramatic changes in recent years.

Over the past decade, the number of applicants for the freshman class, which has remained constant at 1,600 students, has soared from approximately 10,000 in 2003 to over 31,000 in 2013. While the school still has a Southern flavor, presently only 35% of the students hail from the South (in contrast to 60% ten years ago), and almost 30% of the undergraduates in this year's class self-identify as members of minority groups within the U.S. Financially strong, the university has a need-blind admissions policy and meets 100% of demonstrated need, as can be assessed using the net price calculator on its website.

The campus, sprawling and beautifully landscaped, has both new and old buildings, but the interiors of the older ones have all been renovated recently, and everything is impeccably maintained.

Students are required to live on campus all four years and adhere to an Honor Code. Freshmen are housed in ten dorms around their own green, where they enjoy all sorts of inter-house competitions designed to foster community. The admissions office advises prospective students to check out the Honor Code on their website before applying because commitment to this common set of seven values is credited with engendering both the cohesiveness and inclusiveness of the Vanderbilt student community.

Vanderbilt is proud to call itself a liberal arts university although its undergraduate divisions include schools of engineering and education and a music conservatory. Students in those divisions are required to complete the same core requirements as those in Arts and Sciences. Applicants may apply to more than one division, ranking their order of preference.

The College of Arts and Sciences is the largest. It offers 47 majors (in addition to which students may design their own major) as well as 11 five year combined B.A./M.A. degree programs. It also has a unique "May-mester," that allows students to earn course credit by studying either on or off campus for four weeks in May. Research opportunities are abundant for students in this division as elsewhere in the university due to the three research institutes and the medical school on campus.

The School of Engineering, although it has only 900 students and nine majors, is consistently ranked among the top 35 in the nation. Students here have an opportunity to select three different modules they will explore during their first year before they must commit to a major. Bio-medical engineering is the most popular major here, where the program is among the oldest of its kind.

The Peabody College of Education and Human Development has been ranked by *U.S. News and World Report* as the #1 graduate school of education, and my tour guide was eager to tell me that she is being taught by the same outstanding faculty who teach the graduate students. Her major in Human and Organizational Development is one of the school's more unusual ones, combining as it does studies in both education and business.

The Blair School of Music, with approximately one hundred students, has an additional component to the application process. Applicants must submit a pre-audition recording, and then if they are invited, must audition on campus before the faculty.

Admissions to Vanderbilt University are based on assessments of the applicants in five major spheres. First and foremost is academic achievement, with much importance given to the rigor of the high school curriculum. Second are super-scored SATs or the highest composite ACT. Third is the personal essay. Fourth are the recommendations from the school counselor and two teachers, and fifth is the extra-curricular record.

SAT Subject tests, AP scores, and IB scores may be considered if submitted but are not required. Demonstrated interest is not considered except for waitlisted students, and alumni interviews are informational rather than evaluative.

However, tremendous emphasis is placed on leadership, which is looked at in 6 spheres. Of the class admitted in 2013, two-thirds were academic leaders (for example, Debate Team captains), one-third were athletic leaders, 21% were leaders in Fine Arts (band drum major, lead role in the school play, etc.) 50% were service organization leaders, 14 % were student government leaders, and 38% received top honors or awards in some other sphere (for example, the Bausch and Lomb Award). Most of the admitted students held top positions in two, three or four of these vectors, and 98% held the highest possible position in one of them.

Given the selection process, it's not surprising that the students who end up at Vanderbilt engage actively in a multitude of activities, both more and less traditional. They enjoy Division 1 sports teams and some Greek life, with thirty-five percent of men in fraternities and fifty percent of women in sororities. Pledging does not begin until the second semester, though, to allow students time to acclimate academically and socially beforehand.

For the Vanderbilt class of 2018, the median GPA was 4.4 with 90% ranking in the top decile of their high school class. Median critical reading and math SAT's were 1400 to 1560, and median ACT's were 32 to 34. Application options include 11/1 for Early Decision 1 and 1/3 for Early Decision 2 and Regular Decision.