

A Year 'Round College Calendar: Advantages and Impediments

Bill Number:

Hearing Date: March 9, 2004, 9:30 am

Location: SD-430

Witness:

India McKinney

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

Student

Testimony

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is India McKinney, and I am a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences at Vanderbilt University, double majoring in Political Science and Communication Studies. My family is originally from Alabama, though we have lived in several states. In 1996, my family moved to Southern California where I attended and graduated from a Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. For mostly personal reasons, I only considered and applied to small, private colleges in the southeastern part of the United States. I cannot articulate what it was about Vanderbilt that stood out, but I realized before too much longer that Vanderbilt was my top choice for college, though I had never set foot on campus. I applied to Vanderbilt as an "Early Decision" candidate and crossed my fingers. My acceptance letter came in early March, in the same envelope as my financial aid package. I was absolutely thrilled and after reading the first page and glancing at the rest, I handed my mother the envelope so that she could help me with the financial aid part. As my mother looked at the second page, her eyes widened and she told me quietly that if that was the only financial aid Vanderbilt was offering, she didn't see how they could afford to send me there. Devastated, I called the Vanderbilt Financial Aid office and asked about more money, or possible merit scholarships. The woman I talked to suggested that I get a job on campus, but told me that the letter I was holding was Vanderbilt's final aid offer.

Though I had applied Early Decision to Vanderbilt, their acceptance letter was not the first one that I had received, nor was theirs the best offer, financially. So I went to bed that night determined to believe that if I could not attend Vanderbilt, then it must not have been meant to be and that I could be quite happy at another university. So I came home from school the next day resigned to writing a letter politely declining Vanderbilt's offer, but my mother met me at the door. With tears in her eyes, she told me that my father had met with his company's Credit Union and that they had decided to get a second mortgage on our house so that they could send me to Vanderbilt. She told me they agreed that Vanderbilt was the best place for me to be, and they had decided that it was worth spending the money to get the best education and the best college experience possible.

The loan package that I received from Vanderbilt was a Need-Based Grant from the College of Arts and Science (not a Pell Grant), as well as a subsidized Stafford Loan. This most recent school year, I have also taken an unsubsidized Stafford loan. I have also had a job on campus every semester, so that I can pay for all of my personal expenses, including food, without asking my parents to spend more money to send me to college. My freshman year, I worked in the dining hall so that I could get for free the dinner plan that all Vanderbilt Freshmen are required to buy. I have worked for the alumni calling

center, where I called Vanderbilt alumni to ask for donations; I worked for the marching band, where I was a member and vice president, and was pleased to discover that they ended up paying me to do some things I would have done for free. I currently work in the Office of Housing and Residential Education, where my main task is file and sort papers and to run errands on campus.

I have spent every summer at home, where the rent is free, earning money so that I didn't have to work as hard during the rest of the school year when time is more constrained. My first summer, I worked full time as a hostess at TGI Friday's. The second summer, I interned with my local Congresswoman, Jane Harman, and worked at Friday's as a waitress on the weekends. Last summer, I worked as an intern in Southern California Edison's Legislative and Local Governmental Affairs group.

My concern with year round financial aid is that rather than provide the opportunity to allow some students to graduate early, year round aid might result in some colleges forcing students to take summer classes and graduate early because it looks better statistically. I recognize that some students would welcome the chance to graduate early, either to save money or to get a head start in a career, but personally, I would not have preferred that option. Creating the opportunity for some students to take classes in the summer would be beneficial to many students, as long as summer classes remain a choice and not an obligation. Forcing students to take classes during the summer might deny those students the opportunity to get summer jobs, internships, or undergraduate research grants, which would hurt the collegiate system in the long run. I think that college is about personal exploration as much as it is about learning solid facts, and I believe that the space created in the summer is invaluable.

I never took summer classes for two additional reasons. First, I am a liberal arts major, and most of the classes Vanderbilt offers in the summer are designed for science majors either retaking classes or fulfilling their arts requirements. Secondly, I liked my summers in the "real world," where I got to use the theories I was learning at school in "real" life. Though I was often bored at home away from my college friends, I always came back to Nashville in the fall rested, excited to start a new year, and with a new perspective on what my ultimate goal in college should be.

Let me emphasize though: if year round college were to become the norm, I believe it would be both fair and essential that Federal Student Aid be available throughout the year for need based students who either choose or are required to take summer classes.

Though I never visited Vanderbilt or any other college, I know I made the right choice because I could not have had a better four years. I will graduate in about two months, and I know that I will have to start paying off my loans, but Vanderbilt was definitely worth it. I hope that my comments have helped and, I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have. I thank you for this opportunity to testify.

India McKinney

india.r.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu

Current Address: Permanent Address:

Vanderbilt University 28035 Hazelridge

VU Station B #353818 Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275

Nashville, TN 37235-3818 310-377-7609

615-429-5072

EDUCATION Vanderbilt University Nashville, TN

Bachelor of Arts, May 2004

Political Science and Communication Studies majors

GPA: Political Science 3.375/ 4.00, Communication 3.26/ 4.00, Overall 3.23/ 4.00

Palos Verdes Peninsula High School Rolling Hills, CA

June 2000

HONORS Pi Lambda Eta – Communication Studies Honorary Society, December 2003 – present

Sigma Phi Alpha – Political Science Honorary Society, April 2002 - present

Dean's List – Spring 2001

Girl Scout Gold Award – Summer 2000

ACTIVITIES Spirit of Gold Vanderbilt Marching Band – Vice President, Facilitated administrative aspects of band program and planned social events, 2001 – 2003; Tau Beta Sigma Representative, Communicated TBS concerns to band officers, 2001.

Tau Beta Sigma – Alumni Representative, Corresponded TBS Alumni concerns to chapter and created an updated database of all alumni, 2001; Mentor, Coached prospective members of TBS through membership process, 2001 – 2002; Active Member, Assist with running all aspects of band program, 2000 – present.

Vanderbilt Marching Invitational – VMI Executive Committee, Public Relations, Publicize VMI through local media channels on and off campus, 2003; Band Guides Event Day Chair, Coordinated up to 35 competing bands with up to 50 Spirit of Gold members for event day, 2001-2002; Band Guide, Led two bands through competition areas, 2000.

Student Government Association – Organizational Relations Co-Chair, Communicates with student groups on campus and plans Breakfast with Kirkland, present; Special Events Committee Member, Assisted SGA in organizing and staffing events designed to help student body and community, 2002 – 2003.

Vanderbilt Debate – Competition Squad, Researches, prepares and argues positions. Received many team and individual awards, Spring 2002 – present.

Alumni Class Officer – Committee Member, Organize and plan Senior class activities and persuade students to donate to the class fund, present.

EXPERIENCE Southern California Edison

Public Affairs Intern, Summer 2003 Rosemeade, CA

Followed federal legislation to determine the impact on SCE. Discussed strategy and prepared lobbying documents.

Spirit of Gold Nashville, TN

Student Work Study, Fall 2001, 2002, 2003

Assisted in needed tasks.

Congresswoman Jane Harman Redondo Beach, CA

Intern, Summer 2002

Processed constituent cases, forwarded concerns to relevant Congressional Liaison and returned responses to constituents. Assisted Staff members in ongoing projects. Attended meetings for the Congresswoman.

RuffaloCODY Nashville, TN

Student Caller, Spring 2002

Persuaded Vanderbilt Alumni to donate to University.

TGI Friday's Torrance, CA

Host, Summer 2001 Server, Summer 2002

Provided consistently excellent customer service in a fast paced, high stress environment.

GOALS It is my eventual goal to be elected to public office. To this end, I plan to enter law school in the fall of 2006.