TRUE LIFE 2015 SCRIPT
Directed by: Taylor Boothby & Christin Essin

SETTING: A room both inside and outside Vanderbilt University, a welcoming place where students share their stories for an audience of friends. It is a hopeful place where people believe that words matter, where personal stories are a gift that help people build supportive relationships and their own self-confidence. It probably looks like Langford Auditorium, but it exists inside a bubble that repels judgment and cynicism. The people inside are all of us on our best day.

(The stage is set with thirteen chairs in a semi-circle.)

CHARACTERS: All are Vanderbilt students; each has struggled in their transition to college life, but each has also overcome various difficulties and emerged as stronger, more confident individuals.

PRANJAL GUPTA
KELLY PERRY
JAD EL HARAKE
SAMMIE SCHMIDT
ANDREW BRODSKY
JACQUELINE SCOTT
LEXI BANKS
RANI BANJARIAN
JACKSON VAUGHT
JAMI COX
AARON CHASAN
ARULTIA GUPTA
NIKISHA SISODIYA
LOGAN KELLER
GUSTAVO LIMA
CHELSEA YIP

(House lights dim to half. TAYLOR walks to center stage. House fades out.)

TAYLOR: College is a time that presents opportunities for discovery, growth, and building amazing communities. However, these opportunities come hand in hand with significant academic and social challenges. Life at Vanderbilt can be difficult. Life in college can be difficult. We’re not going to deny that. We’re not going to hide it or ignore it. We’re going to talk to you about it. VUceptors believe in the importance of honest and open discussion about stereotyping, binge-drinking, stress, depression, drugs, sex, and all of the other topics that can make people uncomfortable.
Tonight, we’re telling the truth. Tonight, we’ll share stories based on circumstances and situations that real Vanderbilt students have faced; and the echoes you hear are quotations from students who will soon be your peers. Our hope is that these stories and messages will provide vital information at the start of your life at Vanderbilt, as well as spark powerful and lasting discussion. At moments, the material can be hard to hear. If you feel uncomfortable, there are people in the back of the auditorium you can talk to. For this conversation to work, we need you. We need you to participate tonight – to embrace our stories, and open your mind. Turn off your cell phones...no really, turn them off (pause)... and prepare to focus. Together, you – the Class of 2019, and we – your VUceptors (signals to actors off-stage left and right) – have a responsibility to actively engage these issues, to strengthen the Vanderbilt community, and to care for one another enough to help each other make the right decisions.

(TAYLOR sits in the first chair arranged in a semi-circle center stage, as the other VUceptors enter the stage and take seats around her. PRANJAL walks in last and move to the center of the stage. He and the other characters tell their story for an audience of friends.)

BUSTED PARTY

PRANJAL:
Coming to Vanderbilt was the best decision I’d ever made, and my first year was fantastic. I loved being part of The Commons community—making friends on my hall, attending House events. I wanted to continue that by mentoring first-year students during their transition to college, especially those who might be struggling to find their place. I wanted to help them out however I could, you know, just be there for them. So I became an RA. Sometimes people think of RAs as being “out to get you” but it’s really not like that. Yes, I have to enforce the rules and provide structure, but I’m also there to be supportive. Sometimes it’s really hard to balance being friends with residents and doing what’s best for them.

(ROB/ANDREW stands up in the semi-circle. Some other students stand and gather, striking up a friendly conversation, which we can’t hear. ROB is obviously the life of the party.)

From day one I knew that Rob (they acknowledge each other with a wave) would be an awesome resident. He always came to our floor programs and House events, and everyone liked him. We were quickly becoming friends. Rob had announced that he would be running for House president and the hall was helping him brainstorm ideas for his campaign. He was a great candidate, and I was excited to see him getting involved on campus.

(Two more people join the semi-circle and the party grows.)

One Friday night, I came back to my hall after dinner and heard loud music coming from one of the rooms – Rob’s room. I saw a couple people come in and out, and I could hear lots of voices. I didn’t know for sure that there was a party, but I had reason to suspect a policy violation such
as underage drinking (*Rob and his friends all drink shots*), so I had to check it out. It’s my duty as an RA.

When I knocked on the door, the music turned off and the room went silent. I could hear people scrambling to right the room with hushed whispers. (*The students all sit back down. ROB/ANDREW turns toward PRANJAL.*)

Rob finally opened the door, and I asked him what was going on. Behind him I could see some red solo cups and beer cans piled in the trash and a group of students who looked like they had been drinking. Rob admitted that there was a party going on, but he looked worried. I told everyone that I had to fill out an incident report. I didn’t want them to get into trouble, but having and consuming alcohol while under the age of 21 is a violation of university policy.

I called another RA on duty and we filled out the report. We gathered information from everyone, asked for their Commodore Cards, and most importantly made sure that everyone was okay. Rob looked really down.

ROB/ANDREW: Hey man, I feel really bad about breaking the rules.

PRANJAL: Thanks, Rob. Listen, it’s just my job. No judgment here. But you really put me in a difficult situation. You know that you’re responsible for everything that happens in your room, and as host of the party, you’ll be held accountable. You’re going to have a follow up meeting tomorrow with our area coordinator to discuss the violation, and you’ll get an email from the Office of Student Accountability to schedule an appointment. You could be placed on probation.

(*To audience*) Students on probation cannot join a fraternity or sorority, study abroad, or serve in most leadership positions, including House president. It also stays on their record for seven years after graduation.

ROB/ANDREW: (*To audience*) I was really shaken up. I never imagined I’d start off at Vanderbilt on such a bad note, and to top it off, I got my friends in trouble, too.

PRANJAL: (to ROB) It will be okay. We all make mistakes. If you work to promote community among the hall and focus on making smarter decisions in the future, the other guys on the floor will follow along.

(ROB/ANDREW nods and rejoins circle)

(*to audience*) Reporting violations can lead to some residents being upset with me, but university policies ensure that everyone stays safe. My role as an RA is to promote safety,
wellness, and community among the members of my hall, individually and collectively. All of us, like Rob, are accountable for our actions in college and the consequences can be serious. As an RA, it’s important to me that my residents know I am here to help them, not out to get them.

ECHOES:
(LAUREN C.) “I have realized how important it is not only for myself, but my family, my friends, and my future to not let the college drinking scene take control over who I become.”

(During the echo, PRANJAL takes his seat in the circle, while CHELSEA and JAD move to the center of the circle.)

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE/FINANCIAL STRUGGLES
*bolded lines are spoken together

CHELSEA: Coming to Vanderbilt has been the greatest opportunity of my life.

JAD: Coming to college in the United States has always been a dream of mine.

BOTH: I worked so hard to get here.

ECHOES:
(MARK) “My family and I are [sacrificing] a lot for me to be here.”
(LAUREN M.) “Trying to balance a part-time job with my course load has proven to be beyond my ability to cope.”

CHELSEA: I’m from rural Oklahoma, and I have four younger brothers and sisters. Both of my parents work full-time, but money has always been tight. I always knew that if I wanted to go to college, I would have to get good enough grades to get a scholarship. When I was offered financial aid through Opportunity Vanderbilt, it was such a relief. To be able to attend such a prestigious school without having to worry about being buried in student loan debt? I was so lucky. But I never thought I’d feel like such an outsider.

ECHOES:
(LAUREN C.) “I am alone here in the US. I have no family here [supporting me].”
(AADITI) “A lot of cultural differences aren’t taken into consideration when I interact with my friends.”

JAD: As an international student, I was thrilled to be accepted to Vanderbilt. When I arrived for international student orientation, I was so excited! It was really fun to meet so many people from all over the world, and to start adjusting to life in America together. Move-In Day, when the American students arrived, everybody was so friendly and excited—always asking where I
was from and what I was studying. At first, we were all in the same boat. No one knew anyone else, so we banded together. It seemed like I had made some new friends, especially the guys on my hall. But later, after the initial excitement, I realized I was struggling to connect with the American students. (to CHELSEA) I, too, felt like an outsider.

CHELSEA: Exactly! After the initial enthusiasm faded, I realized that fitting in at Vandy was going to be difficult with limited financial resources. I loved hanging out with the girls on my hall, but I couldn’t afford to go out with them all the time.

MEGAN/JACQUELINE: Hey, we are headed to Maggiano’s and then downtown, wanna come?

CHELSEA: Sure, sounds fun!! Wait...is that on the Commodore Card?

MEGAN/JACQUELINE: Umm...I don’t think so. Well, we’re leaving in 5 if you want to join...

CHELSEA: Of course I wanted to, but I couldn’t. (pause) They were also always talking about how excited they were to join Greek life. It’s a big part of the social scene here, and although I might have liked to go through recruitment with them, there was no way I could afford to pay sorority dues. I wasn’t ashamed of where I came from, but I didn’t feel comfortable talking to my friends about my lack of money. I didn’t want them to change their plans or feel sorry for me. So, when they invited me, I usually said I had other plans.

JAD: Where I come from is so different from here, but it was hard to explain to people how confusing American culture could be since they had grown up with it. **I felt like such an outsider.** It was so hard to not get the jokes, to not understand references to American movies and sports teams.

(AARON stands in the circle)

AARON: ...so it was the fourth quarter and the QB threw a hail Mary, but BOOM! Interception, and my man Thomas takes it home. It was awesome, man!

JAD: Asking for clarification can be really awkward, and I didn’t want to look dumb. My hallmates who I’d hoped to be friends with soon went their separate ways, and I found myself spending a lot of time alone, watching as everyone around me got more and more involved. Even though I had gone to the student organization fair, it was so overwhelming that I didn’t know where to begin, and now it seemed that I had missed my opportunity. Classes were difficult too. I didn’t always understand my professors’ questions, and even if I did, I wasn’t used to the kind of debate and one-on-one discussion that American universities encourage. Back home, it would be unheard of to speak up in class, or go to office hours and admit to a professor that I was struggling with the material. I didn’t know if I could get used to it.
CHELSEA: Getting used to my new schedule was really hard, especially when I started working 15 hours each week for my Work Study job. Between that and my classes, I hardly had any time to join student organizations or hang out with friends. I was stressed out all the time and started to think that coming to Vanderbilt was the wrong choice for me.

JAD: I was starting to question my decision to come to the United States for college. After a month, my homesickness really set in - just in time for Family Weekend when everyone else’s families arrived. Everything just started to hit me—my lack of friends, struggles in classes, that nagging feeling that I didn’t belong. It would be so much easier back home.

But that weekend, my hallmate, John, asked if I wanted to go to the football game with him since his parents couldn’t make it either. I’d never been to a football game, but it was a lot of fun! John explained the rules, and I began to get the hang of it. It also turned out that he and I both love everything Harry Potter. Later that night, we stayed up talking and watching the first few movies.

JOHN/RANI: Have you been to Harry Potter World? It expanded last year, and I’ve heard it’s so cool!

JAD: What’s Harry Potter World?

I must have looked embarrassed because he said it was no big deal and explained the theme park to me. He was so cool about it that I confessed that I often didn’t know what people were talking about here.

JOHN/RANI: I never really thought about that. American culture is so normal to me, but it must seem strange to someone who didn’t grow up here. If you don’t understand something, just ask me.

JAD: Although it was a small gesture, it really broke the ice for us. We started hanging out more, going to dinner or club meetings. I started feeling more comfortable. Any time someone would share a joke or make a comment that I didn’t understand, I knew I could just look to John and he would explain it to me. Our friendship renewed my confidence in the American college experience and I started putting myself out there and making new friends.

CHELSEA: Things changed for me when I finally opened up to my roommate, Megan. She confronted me one day about avoiding hanging out with her and the other girls on my hall, and I decided to tell her the truth. (To MEGAN/JACQUELINE) I really can’t afford to go out with you guys all the time. I’m here on financial aid.
MEGAN/JACQUELINE: Oh, that makes so much more sense! I wish you would have just told me. It’s no big deal. Look, tonight, I’ll ask everyone if they want to go get sushi instead. It’s on the card. Please?

CHELSEA: Suddenly I felt silly for being embarrassed to talk to Megan before. She’s always been great, and it was so sweet of her to work to include me in their plans. Although my financial situation isn’t something I want to broadcast, it’s a relief to be able to talk about it to someone. Megan and I have become a lot closer, and I’ve made some friends through my campus job, too. At the end of the day, I remind myself that I’ve been given the chance to get a great education, and that learning to spend wisely is a part of growing up.

JAD: College here is different because being a community living and learning together is part of the experience. It has taken me a while to adjust and to learn who is just being polite and who is genuinely interested in how I’m doing, but I’m catching on. I’ve found some student orgs I’m really passionate about and I push myself to go to office hours regularly. I have close friends who explain things I don’t understand and want to learn from me and my background, too. Some of them went with me to see a movie from my home country that was part of the iLens series hosted by International Student and Scholar Services. One of my friends even invited me to his house for Thanksgiving! It was so great to meet an American family and learn about their holiday - rather than staying at school and feeling lonely. We all learn from each other and those that reached out to me completely turned around my American college experience.

CHELSEA: It can be hard to feel like an outsider...

JAD: but when we learn to appreciate our differences and care for one another, we can create a more inclusive Vanderbilt for everyone.

(CHELSEA and JAD retake their seats in the circle, as SAMMIE moves center)

POWER-BASED PERSONAL VIOLENCE

SAMMIE: Since the day we met, my roommate, Ali and I have been friends. She’s so funny and has a great attitude. In the beginning, we did everything together – getting dinner, going to the movies, hanging out on the weekends; we even took some of the same classes. Then, a few weeks into school, Ali met Jake...

JAKE/JACKSON: (from the circle) What’s up?

SAMMIE: She was really into him, and they started hooking up. We were spending less time together, which I accepted since there was this new guy in her life. They were inseparable for a few weeks, but something about it seemed off to me. Jake always insisted that they spend
their time alone, usually in his room. And Ali got really weird about hanging out with me and our other friends, like she thought she needed to get permission. Whenever I tried to make plans with her...

ALI/KELLY (from the circle): Sounds like fun…but I’ll need to check with Jake first.

SAMMIE: I was disappointed at not getting to spend as much time with Ali, but more importantly, I was worried about her. She used to be so confident and positive, but she had become quiet and unsure of herself. Whenever I tried to talk to her about it, she got defensive and shut me down.

ALI/KELLY: People can change!

SAMMIE: I wanted to help her, but I didn’t want to risk losing her as a friend. [Pause.] But then, everything changed. It seemed like Ali had cut ties with Jake. She was spending most of her time in our room, and though she still didn’t seem to want to talk about things, I was glad to have her back. But after about a week, I had to ask her what happened between them. Ali confessed that Jake had started off being really sweet to her, but had become very controlling.

ALI/KELLY: He would get angry at me over the littlest things. It was like he didn’t know how to control it. He’d just blow up at me, say awful things about me...sometimes he’d get violent. It wasn’t right. I was so afraid to break things off with him, but I knew I had to do it.

SAMMIE: The break-up hadn’t gone so well. She’d never seen him so angry, and she was afraid of what he might do. She’d been hiding out in the room to avoid him. I promised her we would handle this together. Slowly, Ali and I worked on getting back to the way we used to be – going to dinner every night, hanging out outside of class. I really wanted to be there for her, to make sure she knew that she wasn’t alone. But Jake wouldn’t leave her alone.

JAKE/JACKSON: (Stands with a cellphone; each line is a new text): Ali, I’m sorry. Ali, I need you. Ali, I don’t want to live without you.

ALI/KELLY: (stands, with SAMMIE by her side, supporting her): Jake, stop. We’re over. Stop texting me. I don’t want to see you.

SAMMIE: But he didn’t. Sometimes he’d call her in the middle of the night. She ignored him, but he was persistent. He even threatened to post a picture she’d sent him one night in a GroupMe of all of his friends, figuring she’d do anything to keep it from getting out. Neither of us knew what to do, and things continued to get worse. She’d get out of class and Jake would be there, standing right outside the door. We’d be getting dinner at Commons, and he’d show
up, sitting alone on the other side of the dining hall, watching. It was like he always knew where to find her.

ALI/KELLY: No matter where I was, I didn’t feel safe. One night, he showed up at our door. I found him sitting in the hallway when I went to the bathroom. He didn’t try to come in; he just sat there, like he was waiting for me. It really freaked me out.

SAMMIE: I called the RA on duty, and he got Jake to leave the building, then came back to talk. We told him about everything Ali was going through, and he suggested that she call the Project Safe Center’s 24-hour hotline right away. He also explained his obligation to report what she was experiencing to his housing supervisors. When Ali called Project Safe, a victim resource specialist set up a meeting for Ali the next day, and I agreed to go with her. The specialist listened to Ali and gave her several options about handling the situation, but emphasized that she should make whatever decision was best for her. Ali was also informed that Project Safe reports all incidents to the University’s Title IX Coordinator, and that Ali would be contacted by Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Disability Services or EAD, which is the Title IX Office, as well. In addition to offering interim measures to assist her, Ali could also file a complaint with EAD. Ali didn’t want to get VUPD involved, so instead, the specialist worked with her to create plans to keep her safe during regular daily activities. She even helped Ali get a no-contact order, which would stop all communication between her and Jake.

I’m glad that Ali went to the Project Safe Center - it’s been such a great resource for her, helping her work through the negative impact that Jake had on her life. She’s really starting to get back to her old self. Through this whole experience Ali and I learned how important it is to realize that some problems are too big to handle alone. We have to work together to take care of each other so that everyone can feel safe at Vanderbilt.

ECHOES:
(AADITI) “I would never have gotten to [a place of acceptance] without the guidance of my counselor. We are not meant to handle life’s disappointments alone, and it is never a weakness to ask for help.”

(During the echo, SAMMIE returns to her seat, and ANDREW moves center)

AN LGBTQI PERSPECTIVE

ANDREW: I came to Vanderbilt with high expectations. I couldn’t wait to meet my classmates and professors and really establish myself on campus. I knew this would be done by choosing friends, maybe joining a fraternity, or getting involved in other organizations, but for me it felt more complicated. I’m gay, and although I hadn’t come out yet to my friends or family at home,
I knew that college might provide the opportunity for me to embrace this aspect of my identity. Little did I know that some of my peers would make it so difficult.

I was walking through Rand one day during the busy lunchtime when I first heard it...

MARK (yelled from the house): Hey man, you look good today....no homo!

ANDREW: Seriously? I thought this kind of language would end with high school. I knew the students here were smart, talented, and passionate, just like me, and I never expected them to use this type of language in such a casual way without a care for who it might hurt. But I kept hearing the words - fag, gay, homo – not from everyone, but from enough people to feel uncomfortable expressing my identity.

The guys on my hall were the hardest to handle. We all got along, but sometimes the jokes just went too far and their words were so offensive...I wanted to say something, but I didn’t want them to know I was gay. I just wasn’t ready.

(Two people in the circle hold up a rainbow flag; one person approaches ANDREW with a flyer.)

Later in the fall, I noticed many rainbow flags around campus to advertise events hosted by the Office of LGBTQI Life. They were celebrating National Coming Out Week and people were handing out rainbow buttons and flyers all over campus. I had heard about the office during CommonVU, but didn’t really know how or why to approach the office. I was scared. Scared someone might see me; scared they’d tell me what to do; scared that I’d say something wrong.

But I knew that my growing frustration and feelings of isolation were getting out of hand. One of the flyers I grabbed was from Lambda, the university’s gender and sexuality alliance. They were hosting a meeting later that week, so I decided to give it a try.

(ANDREW turns to the circle, and everyone who was sitting now stands and greets him, welcoming him to a meeting and inviting him to members. JAD portrays CHRIS.)

In the meeting I felt an immediate sense of community. They welcomed everyone, went through the week’s campus events, and several people reached out to me afterwards because I was new. They didn’t press me as to why I came, but one guy introduced me to Chris who works for the Office of LGBTQI Life. He was so nice just making small talk and suggested that I come by the office next week to talk more. I finally felt some relief. Maybe Chris could help me understand my frustrations about the campus environment and my identity.

I told Chris about my encounters with gay slurs on campus. It was such a relief to finally talk about it. I wasn’t ready to come out to everyone, but he was so understanding. Chris explained
that if I felt like I was being harassed, I should visit the EAD and talk with someone there. The EAD also handles complaints of discrimination and harassment. He has since helped me navigate my identity. (CHRIS rejoins the circle) Going to Lambda and the Office of LGBTQI Life really turned around my first year experience; the fellowship I found helped me realize that I’m not alone in my confusion and frustration with the lack of sensitivity and acceptance among some students. Language is so important, whether it’s about race, gender or sexuality. Vanderbilt is progressive in so many ways and, gay or straight, we can all play a part in making inclusive language a priority. Now I feel I can join a fraternity, or lead any club, and just be myself. My whole self.

ECHOES:
(Mark) “After coming out, I feel like I can be myself and not have to hide who I am anymore.”

(ANDREW returns to his seat; during the next few echoes, JACQUELINE and LEXI walk to the center and begin circling each other.)

MICROAGGRESSIONS
ECHOES:
(LAUREN C.) “There is an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality on this campus. It’s not a violent one, not very charged, [but it’s there.]”
(AADITI) “I feel like people are projecting their values and expectations of my ethnicity on me.”
(LAUREN M.) “Only talking to people of similar background kind of defeats the purpose of attending an elite institution.”

(Both move to their sides of the circle.)

JACQUELINE: Courtney and I met on Move-In Day, and I knew immediately that we’d be friends. She was so cool, and we laughed forever about our addiction to Grey’s Anatomy and Scandal. We continued to hang out socially and even joined the same service organization. But then one day we were chatting on Commons, and things got…awkward. It was such a simple question, I thought…. (Looking at COURTNEY/LEXI) So, how do you like your classes this semester?

COURTNEY/LEXI: I answered honestly. I was loving my classes, especially my African American studies class. I told her about the captivating professor; how on fire I was about the topic. (To JACQUELINE) It’s so interesting, and I’ve learned so much about my history that wasn’t taught to me before.

JACQUELINE: Your history? Really? Cool, I guess…I didn’t know you were into that type of stuff...

COURTNEY/LEXI: (confused) Huh...What do you mean?
JACQUELINE: *(Suddenly uncomfortable)* It’s just that, you know, you’re not really Black. I mean, like Black Black. You’re probably the whitest Black person I know...

(COURTNEY/LEXI steps back and is obviously perturbed.)

COURTNEY/LEXI: Excuse me?!

(JACQUELINE turns and faces the audience while COURTNEY/LEXI stays frozen in place.)

JACQUELINE: Oh man. This is bad. I didn’t mean to offend Courtney. She’s so cool. She just isn’t like other Black people I know. She’s different. I mean, we have so much in common, and I just wanted to make her feel accepted. I thought I was giving her a compliment. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt her feelings. I guess I just haven’t spent much time around people who aren’t white and I really don’t know how to talk about these types of things. I wish I could take it back.

(JACQUELINE lowers her head while COURTNEY/LEXI turns to face the audience.)

COURTNEY/LEXI: I can’t believe she just said that! Is this really happening? At Vanderbilt?! Coming to college was supposed to be better. There’s supposed to be diversity here, you know, acceptance and celebration of different cultures. And I really liked Katie. But she just doesn’t get it. Sometimes it feels like nobody does, and I feel so alone. It feels like I’m either totally invisible to people or they have one picture of what I should be like, and I constantly have to perform the way I’m expected to or I get shut out. It’s so hard to feel like I can just be me.

(COURTNEY/LEXI freezes while JACQUELINE turns to face the audience and speaks with a sense of anger and frustration in her tone.)

JACQUELINE: I swear you can’t talk about anything these days! I mean race is basically off limits but so is religion, and class, and politics, and ability. I mean practically everything you say is bound to upset someone. You say one thing and it’s like there’s this invisible line that you’ve crossed and the whole thing blows up in your face. I don’t understand why people have to take everything so personally. I was just trying to have a conversation about classes! It’s not my fault that I’m white and privileged. Sometimes it feels like people are just waiting for me to slip up and say the wrong thing so they can be angry. I try so hard to ignore the things that make us different, but I’m realizing now that not everyone seems to think that’s a good thing. How am I supposed to learn how to talk about differences if whatever I say could offend the other person?

(JACQUELINE freezes while COURTNEY/LEXI turns to face the audience and speaks with empowerment.)
COURTNEY/LEXI: I know she probably didn’t intend to hurt my feelings, but she did and she insulted me. Doesn’t she know by saying she didn’t really see me as Black, she insinuated that all Black people are the same? That we talk a certain way, dress a certain way, or think a certain way. Newsflash: we don’t! I don’t want to come across as angry, but right now I feel hurt and I don’t think I should have to make excuses for her behavior or apologize for feeling this way!

Sometimes I feel like “diversity” and “celebrating differences” are just words people throw around to give others the impression that they’re open to breaking down the walls between us when they really don’t want to talk about what makes us different at all. We’re taking steps in the right direction with multicultural and interfaith programming and I know that I have resources and support in the EAD and the Dean of Students Office, and the HiddenDores movement is a student organization that is involved in addressing these issues. In order for a culture shift to happen, we have to all commit. I don’t want to be defined by stereotypes, and I’m tired of people acting like they don’t see the color of my skin because they don’t want to acknowledge that they could actually like me for me, as an individual; that my culture and heritage are a part of who I am, but not the whole picture. If we truly want to make Vanderbilt an inclusive community, we have to talk about our differences and be willing to step outside of our comfort zones. We can’t let isolating and excluding statements like this be okay anymore.

JACQUELINE: We need to talk to each other, even if it’s painful.

COURTNEY/LEXI: We have to work together to make sure Vanderbilt is a place where everyone feels welcome.

JACQUELINE: Where everyone feels respected.

COURTNEY/LEXI: Where everyone feels like they have a voice.

(LEXI and JACQUELINE return to their seats; RANI takes center stage)

ALCOHOL ABUSE/GRADUATED SANCTIONS
ECHOES:
(LAUREN M.) “I let alcohol take control over me and my better judgment, and I have continued to pay the price for it...Believe me, it is not easy to have to explain to someone why my transcript includes ‘suspended for disciplinary reasons.’”
(MARK) “It’s taken over my life, but I just love it so much.”

RANI: College was the first time in my life that I had total freedom. When I first got here, I felt like I didn’t have to be accountable to anyone, like the only expectations I had to live up to were my own. At home, there was a lot of pressure to excel. I went to a competitive prep school and my parents were insistent that I graduate in the top of my class and get into a great
college. Done. What’s up, Vanderbilt! I had finally made it, and it was time to have fun. Sure, I still wanted to be successful, I just wanted to do it my way.

As you’ve probably already seen, there are more opportunities to drink in college, and I didn’t hesitate to dive in. From night one on Commons, it seemed like the best way to make friends. Total independence was such a new and exciting experience. I just wanted to recreate myself and have a good time. Before long, I had surrounded myself with friends who encouraged my behavior.

(AADITI steps out onstage as a police officer, pulls out a notepad, and starts writing.)

Like many first-year students, I was unsure of how to handle all my newfound freedom responsibly. One night, as I was stumbling home from a party with my friends, we were stopped by a Vanderbilt police officer. He made sure we got home okay, but he gave us all referrals to the Office of Student Accountability. (Police officer hands off the ticket and exits.)

After my Student Accountability meeting, I had to complete an educational alcohol assessment through the Student Care and Community Support Office. Throughout the process, administrators and staff assured me that if I worked to make smarter choices in the future, I could turn this experience into a positive one. I wish I had taken them a little more seriously, but I was mostly just frustrated that we had gotten caught and planned to not let it happen again.

As classes picked up, going out every weekend became more important. It was the only way I knew to blow off steam after a difficult week, and it didn’t seem like a big deal because everyone else, or at least all my friends, seemed to be doing the same thing.

PRANJAL: Come on man, everyone knows that chem test is going to be impossible anyway. Forget studying, let’s go downtown.

CHELSEA: *(flirty)* Besides, who am I going to do shots with if you don’t come?

RANI: It was so easy to get caught up in the fun parts of college. Certainly easier than facing the fact that Vanderbilt was harder than I’d thought it would be. My grades were slipping, and when I got a midterm deficiency report, I knew I was in trouble. My parents were furious, everything was starting to pile up, and it seemed impossible to bring my chemistry and biology grades back up by the end of the semester. I had dug myself into a hole, and I didn’t want to face it. As I became more overwhelmed, I started drinking more and more. Before long, I was going out almost every night. I rushed through assignments, and sometimes skipped them entirely, just so I could party and forget about everything. Blacking out on the weekends had become the rule instead of the exception. Looking back now, I can see that on some level, I was reliant on alcohol just to get me through the week. Instead of confronting my mistakes, talking to someone about what I could do to fix them, doing SOMETHING proactive, I just avoided my problems by getting drunk.

The weekend before finals, everything finally caught up with me. I was pregaming with my friends, and I knew I was drinking way too much, but I just couldn’t stop. From what I’ve heard,
I was really out of it. I guess I left and fell down the stairs outside the dorm on my way to a party. My night ended when a security guard found me passed out on the patio behind the dorm, alone. I ended up having to have my stomach pumped for severe intoxication, and I got a concussion from hitting my head on the concrete. Even so, I was lucky. I remember hearing about a similar incident at another university where a girl died from falling down the stairs at a party. That could have been me.

I was placed on disciplinary probation for the rest of the year, and I missed out on a lot because of it. I couldn’t join the fraternity that I’d been rushing all semester, or run for any leadership positions in student organizations. I also had mandatory meetings with an Alcohol and Other Drug counselor at the PCC to ensure that I was making progress. Through my counselor’s suggestion, I recently started attending Vanderbilt Recovery Support meetings, a resource for students who are struggling with substance abuse. With this support system, I’ve realized that I’m far from the first Vanderbilt student to get myself into a bad situation after drinking too much. It’s easy to lose sight of your priorities – I hadn’t realized that in trying to have as much fun as possible, I was hurting myself. My first semester was a blur of crazy nights out, but I hadn’t made any lasting connections. My “friends” never thought it was a problem that I couldn’t stop drinking, and my habits kept me from making the most of my first semester.

I was also referred to the EAD to talk about reasonable accommodations. Most people don’t understand that alcoholism could be considered a disability. The staff at EAD were great about talking to me about housing and classroom accommodations...things I hadn’t really thought about.

I’m working now to surround myself with people who care about me, and help me to work and play smarter. It’s so important to strike a balance and to help each other make responsible decisions. After all, we’re all here for the same reason.

(RANI returns to his seat; JACKSON takes center stage.)

MENTAL HEALTH/DEPRESSION

ECHOES:

(LAUREN C.) “A lot of people lose sight of who they are. Unless you’re outside looking in, you don’t even notice.”

(LAUREN M.) “It’s such a high-stress environment that I found myself shutting down, not talking to people, forgetting how to be myself.”

(AADITI) “Mental health and college life are inextricably linked – the first time people leave home and have to deal with academic difficulties plus new stresses like lack of sleep and poor diet and exercise habits all happen at a time when a lot of psychological conditions just start to show themselves.”

JACKSON: I’ve always been known for being a calm, put-together, friendly person. I was excited to make friends and get involved at Vanderbilt, yet, like anybody else, my adjustment wasn’t
totally easy. I was a junior in high school when I was diagnosed with depression. I had been feeling tired and down, didn’t have interest in hanging out with my friends or family, and no longer enjoyed doing the things I loved like running and reading. High school was a struggle but I made it through by talking to a counselor. Although I knew therapy was helping me cope, I didn’t want that to define my life at college. The first few weeks at Vanderbilt were so exciting I didn’t feel like I needed to seek out another counselor. I really felt happy. I thought I could leave my depression behind when I came to college.

I put myself under a lot of pressure to get good grades and stay busy with new activities, but as the weeks went by, I felt like I just couldn’t keep up. I was always tired, even after hours of sleep, and didn’t have much of an appetite. I couldn’t even enjoy talking at dinner with the guys on my hall. Sometimes I couldn’t fall asleep even though I was exhausted. I suppose I realized on some level that this might be my depression, but I just didn’t want to believe it. One day when I was lying in bed, I started thinking about how much easier it would be to just not be at Vanderbilt right now. Then, for the first time, I thought to myself how much easier it would be to just not be here at all; to not be alive. I’d always been so in control but now I was scared. Was I actually thinking about suicide? I didn’t know what to do except push the thought out of my head and try to sleep.

A week later, Rachel, my Student VUceptor, called me.

RACHEL/SAMMIE (from the circle): Hey, you want to grab lunch or a coffee? I haven’t seen you in our Visions meetings for a few weeks now. I want to know how you’re doing.

JACKSON: I agreed and it was good to talk to someone just about normal stuff. Rachel could tell that I was struggling, and I was surprised when she told me about some of her adjustment struggles during her first year. She’d had family problems and had a hard time with grades.

RACHEL/SAMMIE (from the circle): I felt like a total outsider.

JACKSON: She told me that she decided to go to the PCC and they really helped her manage her stress and it turned around her Vanderbilt experience.

RACHEL/SAMMIE (from the circle): I’ll walk there with you tomorrow, if you’re interested. I think talking to someone could really help you feel better.

JACKSON: It felt good to know that Rachel was there for me. When I met with the first counselor, I was still reluctant to tell him that I was questioning my purpose in life and that more recently I had even started thinking about suicide. But after talking about school and social stuff for a while, it came out and honestly it was such a relief. I learned that there are all sorts of services that can help students who are struggling - individual counseling, group
counseling, medication, workshops, and self-help options. My counselor arranged for me to meet with one of the medical providers and we figured out a treatment plan that worked for me. I’m learning how to identify things that stress me out, how to cope with anxiety and academic stress, and am beginning to enjoy some of my favorite things again.

It was so important that I went to the PCC. It’s scary to think about where I might be if I hadn’t taken that step to come in. The PCC can help connect students to the resources they need for their all-around health here at Vandy, like the EAD, which could help me with academic, housing, and other accommodations. I’ve started attending a weekly group therapy meeting that has helped me realize I’m not alone in my depression. I’ve even opened up about my struggles with friends who have shared about their stresses adjusting to college, and we all try to support each other. It’s a constant journey, but I’m beginning a healthy life at Vandy... mentally, physically, and socially.

(JACKSON returns to his seat; JAMI takes center stage)

EATING DISORDER/DISORDERED EATING

ECHOES:
(MARK) “In a group it’s really easy to get obsessive about pushing yourself harder. Sometimes it’s more than just wanting to be your best.”
(LAUREN M.) “A few healthy choices spiraled into a painful battle with anorexia nervosa. During my first year at Vanderbilt, I fought the hardest battle of my life.”

JAMI: I started struggling with body image issues in high school. My mom always emphasized the importance of eating well, exercising regularly, and maintaining a healthy weight. Because I ran track, I had always been fairly thin and athletic. As I grew up I started filling out, which is completely normal, but it really freaked me out. That’s when my desire to be healthy became an obsession with being thin. I began to diet like crazy, and was convinced my success and happiness were dependent on staying thin. Losing weight made me feel better about myself for a while, but it was never enough. I never liked what I saw in the mirror. It was the start of a vicious cycle, but with my parents watching over me, my weight loss didn’t get out of hand.

Then, I came to Vanderbilt. It didn’t take me long to realize that I had total freedom here. There was no one around to notice if I skipped meals. And now that I didn’t have track practice every day, I was terrified that I’d start putting on weight. I was determined not to let that happen. Everywhere I looked I saw successful and attractive people, and I just had to keep up.

(AARON emerges from the circle, welcomed by JAMI)
AARON: As for me, I hadn’t given much thought to exercise or my eating habits before coming to Vanderbilt. I began to feel out of place shortly after Move-In Day. Seeing so many guys my age who were so athletic and fit made me think for the first time that maybe I wasn’t living up to my potential. I became friends with a group of guys on my hall who made a habit of lifting weights together at the Rec Center. I decided to tag along even though they gave me crap about it at first.

HERCULES 1/LOGAN: Come on, man, you’ve seriously got to work on your game. You’re never going to get any action all scrawny like that.

HERCULES 2/JAD: Naw, leave him alone. Little guys make good wing-men!

AARON: It was friendly joking, but under the surface there was something very competitive to it. I began to take it to heart. I wasn’t seeing much progress from our afternoon routine, so I started getting up early to go to the Rec before classes, too. I figured that if I shed some fat, I’d start to see the muscle I was building, so I cut back on calories and upped my protein. It seemed normal enough; all my friends had bonded over lifting and I wanted to look good, too.

JAMI: Within a few weeks, I was hardly eating anything. At first, it was about feeling better about how I looked, but it didn’t take long for things to get out of hand. As classes got harder and my schedule filled up (pause) – let’s just say it can get really stressful here. I guess I felt that my body was the one thing I had the power to control. It seemed like I was always thinking about ways to burn more calories and lose another pound. By Thanksgiving break, I had lost a lot of weight, and my mom noticed:

MOM/LEXI: Sweetie, those clothes we just bought for school are hanging off of you, and you always seem tired. What’s going on?

JAMI: Mom, I’m fine.

MOM/LEXI: Are you eating enough? The Commons has so many options…

JAMI: I said I’m fine. Seriously. Everyone changes in college. Stop worrying so much!

And she let it go. I should have listened, but I resented her for interfering.

AARON: After a month, I noticed a drastic difference. I could keep up with my friends on the weight bench, and I started to see real physical effects.

HERCULES 2/JAD: Alright, my man!
HERCULES 1/LOGAN: Looking good!

AARON: But I was spending so much time on my work outs that they were starting to get in the way of my school work. It was so important to me to be a part of the group, to fit in, and this was what it took to get there. Then, I got a midterm deficiency report. I had to meet with the dean to talk about why I was doing so poorly, and I finally realized that my priorities might be off.

I was torn. I wanted to stay friends with these guys, but this obsession with fitness left no time or energy for anything else. I missed being able to eat what I wanted without feeling guilty, and although I knew some exercise would have been good for me, my frequent workouts left me exhausted.

JAMI: For me, finals week was when things started going really wrong. I was running in the Commons gym when I started feeling really weak. With all the stress, I was eating next to nothing, and it had finally caught up with me. I tried to push through it and keep running, but my body had had enough. I collapsed on the floor of the gym and was rushed to the emergency room. When I woke up, the doctors told me that my body was malnourished, and fainting was its way of conserving energy. I was really underweight, and they suspected that I was struggling with an eating disorder. They said the first thing I needed to do was concentrate on stabilizing my physical condition. They connected me with a doctor at Student Health who would help me start the physical healing process.

My doctor at Student Health explained that losing weight so quickly could kill me if I didn’t get help. I was really scared. I continued to meet with her regularly, and on her suggestion, I met with a counselor at the PCC, and I started to attend a support group they run for students struggling with eating disorders. She also suggested that I meet with the EAD to talk about accommodations for things like housing, classes, and dining. It’s been really helpful to know that I’m not alone in this. My counselor also suggested that I include my family in the healing process. She sat with me while I called my mom and explained to her what I was going through. My mom ended up coming to stay in Nashville for a few weeks to meet with my support team, and has been very supportive and encouraging throughout the whole process. A few months ago, I reached a healthy weight range for the first time since coming to Vanderbilt. It has been a long, difficult struggle to deal with this illness, and it’s not over yet. There are still days when it’s really hard to be happy with myself, and others when I feel like I’ve lost control, but I’m working to stay healthy, both mentally and physically. (returns to her chair)

AARON: I finally decided to meet with a nutritionist at Student Health to confront my problems. He said he had seen a lot of this type of behavior at Vanderbilt – he called it disordered eating. It’s different from an eating disorder because it’s about wanting to look good, not about control, but it can still get in the way of everyday activities and can lead to serious health
problems. The nutritionist helped me develop healthier eating habits and recommended that I talk with my primary care physician about physical education; he mentioned that the PCC could help me with managing my stress and peer pressure. He also suggested that I check out Stronger University, a student organization that focuses on fitness education rather than competition. I still hang out with the same group of guys from my hall from time to time, but I make a point of not getting caught up in their competitiveness. With the support of some new friends I've made through Stronger U, I'm working to maintain a healthy lifestyle that doesn't interfere with my studies.

(AARON returns to his chair; ARULITA takes center stage.)

DRUG OVERDOSE

ECHOES:
(LAUREN C.) “It’s hard to stay on top of everything. When you finally catch up in one class, you’re behind in another.”
(AADITI) “Everyone else seems to be handling it fine. Everyone else seems to have it all together.”
(MARK) “Sometimes I wonder if it’s worth it...I just feel like I’m on the go all the time and I’m missing out on [the college experience].”
(LAUREN M.) “Everyone here is so stressed all the time that it’s contagious.”

MARY/ARULITA: Coming to Vanderbilt was exactly what I wanted, but I never expected life here to be so difficult. After my first few weeks, I realized that my course load was way more demanding than high school. And everyone around me seemed to be making so many friends and getting involved in so many extracurriculars. Where did they find the time?

A few of my high school friends occasionally took ADD medications to help them get all of their work done in busy weeks. We knew people who had been diagnosed with ADD, so the medication was never hard to come by. I had never tried it, but when I found out that Lisa, my new roommate at Vandy, had also been diagnosed, it seemed like it wouldn’t be a big deal to use it occasionally. I mean, I saw lots of people using Adderall to get, you know, that extra bit of concentration, and I just wanted to keep up. There were all of these new expectations and pressures at Vanderbilt. The workload was so much bigger, and it seemed like all of my classes always had big assignments due on the same day. I never thought twice about the consequences.

(LISA/KELLY stands from the circle.)

KELLY: When Mary asked me if I would share my Adderall, I felt so pressured to say yes. I rarely needed my whole prescription, and even though I knew it was against the law, I really
wanted her to like me. I mean, we were going to have to live together for the whole year, and she seemed really cool when she wasn’t stressing about getting everything done. So despite my better judgment, I went along with it.

ARULITA: Before long, I was using Adderall on a regular basis to get everything done, often late at night. My sleep schedule got really messed up, and after a few weeks, I began to feel light-headed. Sometimes my heart would race and I would start shaking. But in my mind, taking Adderall seemed like the only way to get my work done and still have time for everything else. I even began to take it before I went out on the weekend to keep from feeling so exhausted, and, honestly, to feel that extra buzz.

Then the week every college student dreads hit me: three tests and a paper due within four days. Lisa needed her whole prescription since she had a crazy week too, and I was running really low on pills. I was starting to get nervous: how would I get all the work done? After two days I was out of Adderall...I was tired, depressed, and I couldn’t sleep.

KELLY: I noticed that Mary was in really bad shape, and I was scared. I didn’t want to get either of us in trouble, but I knew I had to talk to our RA, Jessica, before things got out of hand. (pause). Later that night, Jessica knocked on our door and told us she had seen this type of change in mood before in a friend who had abruptly stopped taking Adderall.

ARULITA: Jessica could tell I was scared and offered to go to the PCC with me the next day. After meeting with a counselor, it became obvious that I was feeling so awful because I was going through withdrawal from overusing Adderall. I hadn’t realized how much I had been taking and that it had become so dangerous. I had gotten so caught up in trying to do it all and do it quickly that I was hurting myself. The counselor arranged for me to meet with a medical provider at the PCC and at the Student Health Center to answer my questions about the symptoms I was having. That was a huge relief. I’m lucky; it could have ended much worse.

There can be a lot of pressure to excel at Vanderbilt, especially when you first get here and realize how amazing and talented everyone is. But there are resources that can help smooth the transition, like the study skills and time management workshop my counselor encouraged me to attend. Through the program, I’m learning to use my time more effectively to succeed academically. The counselor also suggested that I work with the EAD. I knew that they helped students with ADD, but it turns out that they could also help me with reasonable accommodations.

KELLY: Most importantly, I’ve learned that it’s our responsibility to look out for one another. We’re a community, and we get to choose what to make of that. By supporting and caring for one another, we can help each other build healthier habits and make smarter decisions.
SEXUAL ASSAULT

ASHLEY/NIKISHA: It was a Saturday night, and I was going out with some friends. I’d met this really cute guy named Mark a couple weeks earlier in class – he seemed really cool, he was a junior, and we started hanging out. We studied together a couple times, and then he invited me and my friends to a pregame at his dorm. I was really excited for a chance to get to know him a little better.

(LOGAN stands from the circle, at first talking to ASHLEY, then turning to the audience.)

LOGAN: I remember that Saturday night. My roommate Mark and I were throwing a pretty big pregame. It was right after midterms, we were all looking to blow off a little steam. Mark was talking about this girl he invited from one of his classes – apparently he was kind of interested in her. I didn’t pay much attention – he’s always going on about girls – but he was definitely excited. About an hour or so into the pregame, I saw Mark greet some girls that arrived – he immediately brought them all drinks, and he pulled one of them away to do shots.

ASHLEY/NIKISHA: That girl was me. Mark focused all of his attention on me, which felt great. I was definitely drinking more than usual, but I was just trying to keep up with everyone else. Mark kept handing me drinks and, well, I wanted to have a good time. I remember leaving the pregame with Mark and some other people, but that’s when the night started getting a little hazy. I don’t remember how we got downtown, but I remember going to a bar and starting to dance with Mark after he brought me another drink.

LOGAN: Even after a few drinks myself, I could tell that Ashley was in bad shape. She was stumbling, slurring her words together; she’d obviously had more than enough to drink, but Mark kept giving her more. Couldn’t he see that she was drunk? After she fell down a time or two, I pulled Mark aside and told him to take her home. I mean, I didn’t want her to get into trouble with the police or anything. Mark agreed, but I saw him buy her another drink before they left. I was surprised, but I didn’t do anything. I just let it go.

ASHLEY/NIKISHA: The next thing I remember, we were back in Mark’s room, alone. We started making out and even in my drunken state, I could tell Mark wanted more. I wanted to slow things down, and I told him so. But he wasn’t listening... and I was in no position to fight back. I couldn’t seem to do anything to stop him. I just went numb. The next morning, I couldn’t believe what had happened. I knew I hadn’t wanted to have sex, and that Mark had kept pushing, but somehow I couldn’t stop blaming myself. I was a mess. One of my friends who had been at the bar called to check on me later that day; she had seen me leave early with Mark. I told her what I thought had happened, and she said I should call the Project Safe Center’s 24-hour hotline so I could figure out what to do.
I met with a victim resource specialist, and she helped me realize that what happened wasn’t my fault. Even though I had been drinking a lot, I didn’t ask for sex. I wasn’t coherent enough to make that decision, and Mark knew that. Through the Project Safe Center, I learned that the responsibility of clarifying consent is on the person that wants to have sex whenever there’s any uncertainty, and my level of intoxication made me incapable of giving effective consent. Mark took advantage of my vulnerable position to get what he wanted, and he violated the law, University policy, and me. Even after I was able to stop blaming myself, things were still rough. It was hard to concentrate in class; I had trouble sleeping; and I felt so alone. The victim resource specialist I worked with helped me get connected with someone at the PCC I could talk to. She also let me know that she had to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator at the EAD, and that the EAD would reach out to offer help and to see if I wanted to make a complaint.

LOGAN: Mark kept bragging about making it with Ashley, and I felt so guilty. It was hard for me to stay friends with him. I should have done something to stop it—I should have taken Ashley home myself. But I didn’t, and now I have to live with knowing that I could have stopped Mark from raping her. That’s why I checked out Green Dot, a campus program that promotes bystander intervention. Mark’s behavior that night was indicative of a “red dot” situation, one where coercion or force is used to gain power and control over someone else. Through Green Dot, I learned to identify how and when I should step in on someone’s behalf. I know now that if something doesn’t feel right, I need to do everything I can to stop it.

As for Mark, Ashley decided to file a complaint, and now he is under University investigation, possibly facing suspension or expulsion. I’m glad that Ashley doesn’t want to hide what happened (he turns toward her) and I told her that if she needs me to speak up about what I saw that night, I will (ASHLEY/NIKISHA smiles at him, nods her head slightly, and joins the circle). As a community, we are all responsible for looking out for and protecting each other. I’ll never forget that.

CHOOSING NOT TO DRINK

GUSTAVO: I was always very involved in high school. In addition to a tough class schedule, I spent time organizing service projects and playing varsity soccer. Beyond that I had an awesome group of friends. We always found something fun to do whether it was a movie night, concert, or just hanging out at someone’s house. As a group, none of us drank. I didn’t have anything against drinking, I just didn’t feel like I needed to, especially with all of my other activities.

ECHO: (AADITI) “When I first got here, it seemed like the social scene revolved around going out and drinking.”
When I arrived at Vanderbilt, I had to make a decision about whether I would drink or not. Of course, I knew that people drank in college, but I wasn’t expecting the pressure to be there right away. At first, it seemed that going to parties and drinking with my hall mates was the easiest way to meet people. I’d been feeling isolated so I decided I would join in. I never went crazy or blacked out like I saw some of the other guys do, but I would drink a beer or two. This way, I was included in whatever they were doing for the weekend. I didn’t really know if I liked it, but I didn’t want to be left out.

I was conflicted. I’d been hanging out with this group of guys for a while, but something was still missing. Yeah we all got along, but I didn’t feel like I had anything in common with them besides hanging out at parties. I’d been so preoccupied with making friends quickly and keeping up with schoolwork that I hadn’t really looked for people who shared my interests. Drinking also became really expensive. I’m financially independent of my parents and paying for alcohol for everyone when it was my turn became a drain.

ECHO:
(MARK) “After a while, I realized there are lots of other things to do and plenty of people with interests that go beyond going out and drinking.”

In October, my RA put up a flyer for “Alternative Spring Break,” an organization that sends small, student-led groups around the country to do service over Spring Break. When I asked him about it, he said that ASB has been his best experience at Vanderbilt and encouraged me to apply. At the interest meeting, I learned that ASB participants pride themselves on not drinking during their service trip, and instead, taking the opportunity to become close with a small group of people. It was a great interview, and I was so excited to be selected. I got to know my group during our planning meetings, and participating in that week of service completely changed my outlook on fitting in at Vandy. It was through ASB that I found friends with a common interest in service and having a positive impact on the campus community and those we served. Occasionally, I still go out with that group of guys from my floor, and the pressure to drink is always there, but I have also built a circle of friends who understand drinking isn’t central to good friendship. They help me feel like I have a place at Vandy, too.

PRANJAL: We all make mistakes.

JAD: It can be hard to feel like an outsider...

CHELSEA: but when we learn to appreciate our differences and care for one another, we can create a more inclusive Vanderbilt for everyone.
SAMMIE: We have to work together and take care of each other so that everyone can feel safe at Vanderbilt.

ANDREW: Now I can just be myself. My whole self. // We can all play a part in making inclusive language a priority.

JACQUELINE and COURTNEY/LEXI: We need to talk to each other, even if it’s painful. We have to work together to make sure Vanderbilt is a place where everyone feels welcome, respected, and that they have a voice.

RANI: It’s so important to strike a balance, learn to work and play smart, and to help each other make responsible decisions.

JACKSON: I’m not alone – we all have our own hurdles to overcome.

JAMI: Some days are still a struggle, but I’m working to stay healthy, both mentally and physically.

AARON: Instead of competing with others, I’m working to be a better and healthier me.

ARULITA: There can be a lot of pressure to excel at Vanderbilt, but we’re a community

KELLY:...and we can help each other build healthier habits and make smarter decisions.

ASHLEY/NIKISHA: I’m not going to hide what happened.

LOGAN: We all have a responsibility to look out for and protect each other. I’ll never forget that.

GUSTAVO: My friends help me feel like I have a place at Vandy, too.

TAYLOR: Together, we have a responsibility to actively engage these issues, to strengthen the Vanderbilt community, and to look out for and care for one another. How will you play your part?

(All grab hands and bow.)