

Nomination: 8903

Vanderbilt Voyage - Redefining Onboarding for the 21st Century

Page: General Information

Provide information about the company to be considered for the award. If you will be nominating an individual, specify the nominee's employer.

Name of Organization/Company

Vanderbilt University

[REDACTED]

Additional Contacts

I would also like to have others receive emails about the disposition of our entries.

Page: Entry Information

Entry Title

Vanderbilt Voyage - Redefining Onboarding for the 21st Century

Category

B01 - B67 Achievement > B29 - Achievement in New Employee Onboarding

Achievement Submission Format

Written Answers

a. Briefly describe the nominated organization: its history and past performance (up to 200 words). Required

Vanderbilt University, founded in 1873, is a prestigious private research institution located in Nashville, Tennessee. With a storied history of academic excellence and innovative thought leadership, Vanderbilt has long been committed to cultivating a vibrant campus community. However, the university's traditional onboarding program had become outdated and disconnected, failing to fully engage new employees or align them with the institution's core values.

In 2023, Vanderbilt's People Experience team recognized the need for a transformative onboarding solution. Driven by a vision to redefine the new hire experience, they crafted the "Vanderbilt Voyage" - an innovative, human-centric onboarding program that unfolds over the course of a full year. The Vanderbilt Voyage program is structured around three key phases, each designed to support new hires at critical junctures in their integration and development within the university community.

b. Outline the team's or organization's achievements since the beginning of 2023 that you wish to bring to the judges' attention (up to 250 words). Required

Since its launch on May 13, 2024, the Vanderbilt Voyage program has onboarded over 1,000 staff members through its new exceptional onboarding experiences. By reimagining the traditional orientation model, the People Experience team has created a transformative journey that fosters collaboration, builds meaningful relationships, and aligns new hires with the university's core values.

The Vanderbilt Voyage program features a meticulously designed curriculum, blending interactive learning sessions, personalized mentorship, and immersive campus tours. Through these, new employees are empowered to navigate the institution's resources, connect with fellow colleagues, and develop a deep understanding of Vanderbilt's history and future.

In the first year since its implementation, Vanderbilt has observed a marked improvement in 12-month retention rates among new hires seeing first year turnover go from 55% in FY24 to 24% YTD in FY25, along with a significant boost in their sense of belonging and organizational commitment. The current survey results indicate customer satisfaction (CSAT) went from 60% with the old orientation model to 93% with the new model and net promoter (NPS) going from 26.3% to 87.4%.

The Vanderbilt Voyage's transformative impact has earned widespread recognition and acclaim, even beyond the field of higher education. The program's leaders, Joanna Echols and Chance Ryon, have been selected to present the Vanderbilt Voyage model at prestigious national conferences, including the SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) conference and the CUPA-HR (College and University Professional Association for Human Resources) conference. Additionally, the Vanderbilt Voyage team was honored with a Vanderbilt Staff Innovation award in 2024.

c. Explain why the achievements you have highlighted are unique or significant. If possible compare the achievements to the performance of other players in your industry and/or to the team's or organization's past performance (up to 250 words). Required

The Vanderbilt Voyage program stands out as a shining example of innovative onboarding practices in higher education, setting a new benchmark for the industry. While many universities continue to rely on standard orientation sessions that fail to foster meaningful connections or long-term employee engagement, Vanderbilt has taken a bold leap forward, redefining the onboarding experience through a human-centric, experience-driven approach.

By comparison, the university's previous onboarding program struggled to achieve the same level of impact, often leaving new hires feeling disconnected and unsupported. In contrast, the Vanderbilt Voyage has produced tangible results, including a marked increase in 12-month retention rates, a testament to the program's ability to cultivate a sense of belonging and organizational commitment among new employees.

Moreover, the Vanderbilt Voyage's emphasis on collaboration, mentorship, and values-alignment sets it apart from industry peers. While other institutions may focus primarily on operational training and policy overviews, Vanderbilt has prioritized the holistic development of its new hires, empowering them to become active contributors to the university's mission and culture.

The Vanderbilt Voyage's transformative impact and industry-leading outcomes make it a truly unique and significant achievement worthy of recognition through the Stevie Awards' "Achievement in New Employee Onboarding" category.

d. Reference any attachments of supporting materials throughout this nomination and how they provide evidence of the claims you have made in this nomination (up to 250 words). Optional

Vanderbilt Voyage webpage – provides an overview of the Vanderbilt Voyage program for new employees

MyVU news article about Vanderbilt Voyage launch, published May 6, 2024. This internally-published article announced the launch of the new onboarding program.

Data Dashboards - these are reports from our data tracking and visualization tool, providing our team ongoing real-time data monitoring capabilities of Net Promoter Scores and Customer Satisfaction Scores.

Screenshots from SHRM and CUPA-HR 2025 conference agendas, showing evidence of Vanderbilt Voyage scheduled presentations. Of note, the SHRM conference reported receiving over 1,300 presenter applications and selected 250 presenters (20%).

Webpage Link

[REDACTED FOR PUBLICATION]

[REDACTED]

Would you like to add an additional supporting document?

No

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