

Rob Whiting

Vanderbilt University

Cross Country

Ingram Scholarship recipient – for students who demonstrate a willingness and ability to combine a successful business or professional career with a lifelong commitment to finding solutions to critical societal problems.

3.7 GPA

Double major: Economics and East Asian Studies

Dean's List

Three year Southeastern Conference Academic Honor Roll

In its third year under Head Coach Steven Keith (VU, '81), the team regularly competes well with other Division I schools, despite not offering athletic scholarships. This year the team finished third in the Belmont-VU Opener and won the Commodore Classic in Nashville, Tenn.

Running is Rob Whiting's first passion, a passion that the Vanderbilt senior has parlayed into a four-year tenure as a varsity athlete in the Southeastern Conference. The Commodore cross country team, however, does not enjoy the glitz and glamour of the Bowl Championship Series or March Madness. Running cross country at Vanderbilt is a labor of love, and an experience that Rob would not trade. The cross country team drew Rob to Vanderbilt, and put him in a position to make a significant difference in the Nashville community.

Training for the team is also one of the few constants in Rob's hectic schedule, with morning and afternoon runs always finding their place in the midst of academic rigors and community outreach. As one of three seniors on the squad, Rob has taken to his new role of team leader both on and off the race course. Head Coach Steve Keith cites Rob as one of the team's most consistent runners, often propelling his teammates to fast finishes with his smart, even races.

Injury prevention is also a key for Rob. He takes extra time each week to keep his body in peak physical condition, working with athletic trainer Kerry Wilbar both before and after training and competition. Count Coach Keith among those that have noticed the extra effort. "Rob's daily schedule is maxed out," Keith notes. "He does so much on his own and really maxes out the time that he trains with the team. As a non-scholarship athlete, you really have to be up for any challenge, and Rob is not afraid to compete with anyone."

Community Service

SPEAR

His first venture in the Vanderbilt community came as a committee chair for SPEAR (Students Promoting Environmental Awareness and Responsibility). Only weeks after his introduction to the organization, Rob initiated the group's first comprehensive waste audit, canvassing the Vanderbilt campus to evaluate the amount of recyclable materials that were being discarded into trash bins. After gathering the necessary data, Rob and SPEAR put together a 30-page proposal that inspired the university to hire a full-time Sustainability Coordinator.

Vanderbilt Students for Students

During his sophomore year, Rob created Vanderbilt Students for Students (VSS). According to its mission statement, the organization "strives to build a bridge connecting the Vanderbilt Community with local, under-resourced high schools in order to expand educational opportunities and build mutual understanding." As a Vanderbilt student and the beneficiary of significant financial aid, Rob realized that college was not always an economic reality for underprivileged high school students. Rob decided to create an organization that would help shorten the gap between low-income students and funding a college education.

In its first year of existence, VSS awarded a \$2,000 scholarship that helped a student from local Pearl-Cohn High School enroll at Tennessee State University. In the summer of 2007, Rob transformed the group into Students for Students, Inc., a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation, which allowed VSS to expand, accept larger donations and apply for various grants. The group's yearly scholarship grew by 50 percent in year two, sending a second Pearl-Cohn student to the University of Memphis with \$3,000 in financial assistance.

On top of VSS's monetary contributions, Rob wanted to ensure that the group made a difference in the way that underprivileged high school students perceived their collegiate opportunities. VSS offers one-on-one mentoring and numerous group workshops on topics ranging from resume creation to the college application process and applying for financial aid through FAFSA. Rob personally mentors athletes at Pearl-Cohn on a weekly basis.

This semester, Rob has been spending an estimated 15 hours per week on mentoring, planning and fundraising through VSS, a number that has decreased slightly each year as Rob encourages more Vanderbilt students to become involved in the program. Another \$3,000 scholarship is scheduled to be awarded in the spring of 2009 as VSS continues to broaden the horizons of students at Nashville's Pearl-Cohn.

VSS hosts the annual Vandy Mile Bonanza, which raised over \$2,000 last April. The organization also hosts numerous bake sales and seeks philanthropic gifts from local businesses and individuals.

China

Rob has spent part of three summers in China. After his freshman year of college, Rob traveled to Beijing where he served as a student teacher at a local university. In 2007, Rob took part in a semester abroad, joining a full-immersion program that helped the rising junior develop his skills in the language. This past summer, Rob served as a volunteer coordinator for a program that teaches English to students in southern China's Yunnan Province, one of the nation's least developed areas. Following his collegiate career, Rob has expressed an interest in eventually returning to the Chinese countryside in order to promote poverty alleviation and social entrepreneurship in a model introduced by Nobel Peace Prize winner and Vanderbilt graduate Muhammad Yunus.