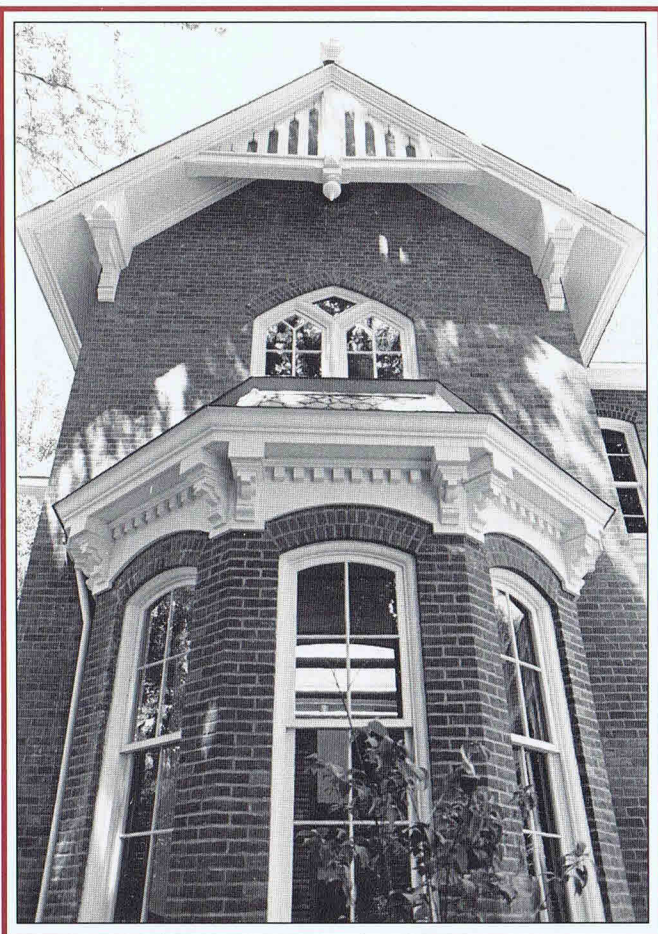


VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY



*Robert Penn Warren  
Center for the Humanities*





THE Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Because cooperative study in higher education is crucial to the modern university and the society it influences, the Center is designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary discussion of academic, social, and cultural issues. Members of the Vanderbilt community representing a wide variety of specializations take part in the Center's programs. The work of the Center strengthens the place of the humanities not only at Vanderbilt University but also in all areas of our society in which Vanderbilt graduates and faculty play a role.

The Center began its programs in January 1988 under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science. The Center quickly became an intellectual center of activity, providing opportunities for faculty members in different disciplines and with related research and teaching interests to learn and study with each other. Shortly after the Center's inception, the University chose to name the program in honor of one of its most prominent graduates in the arts and humanities, Robert Penn Warren. In 1989, the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities was awarded a \$480,000 Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to assist in establishing a permanent endowment for the program. This award signifies the nationally-recognized achievements of the Center and, at the same time, helps to ensure its long-term future.



## FELLOWS PROGRAM

One of the central features of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities is its Fellows Program. The annual theme for the Fellows Program arises from the strengths and interests of members of faculty as well as from important social, political, and cultural events. It is chosen also for its bearing on teaching and research by members of the College faculty. Once the theme has been chosen, eight Fellows from a number of departments are selected for participation in the program. They meet weekly to give seminar presentations, develop common areas of investigation, and devise special programs. Each Fellow also occupies a study in the Vaughn Home. This arrangement allows informal conversation to take place among the Fellows, an important supplement to the more formal exchanges which occur in the seminar meetings.

To date, Fellows Programs have examined such themes as "Eastern European Literature and Political Change," "Transatlantic Encounters: The Discovery of the 'New' World and the Old," "The Return of Rhetoric," and "The South as an American Problem." Beyond the obvious benefits for the teaching and research of the individual participants, the year-long programs have resulted in newly-offered courses for undergraduate and graduate students, university-wide lecture series, international conferences, alumni and community educational programs, and the publication of books and articles. Because Fellows are members of the Vanderbilt faculty, the intellectual bonds formed during their appointments to the Center will continue to have a significant influence on the study and teaching of the humanities in the College for years to come.

## SEMINARS

In addition to the Fellows Program, the Center sponsors a wide variety of seminars that involve students and members of the faculty. One type of seminar consists of eight to ten scholars who meet regularly throughout the academic year to pursue a common interest

*"When members of our faculty can engage in an exciting exchange of ideas, our students benefit significantly from their professors' new insights, enthusiasm, and renewed vigor for teaching in an interdisciplinary context."*

CHANCELLOR JOE B. WYATT



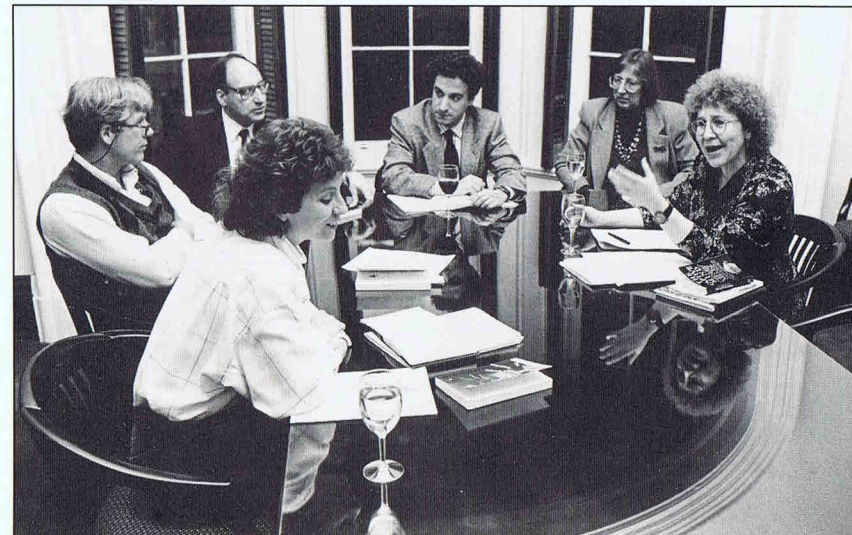
The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities is located in the Vaughn Home, which was constructed as a faculty residence before Vanderbilt opened in October 1875. In 1987, the house was restored through the generous gifts of Houghton D. Vaughn and William S. Vaughn, grandsons of Dr. and Mrs. William J. Vaughn, who were residents of the house from 1884 until 1912.



or theme. Another type consists of more broadly-conceived topics aimed at the nonspecialist. A third type of seminar focuses on a specific paper, book, or current event.

The range of the Center's seminars is a reflection of the broad intellectual interests of Vanderbilt's faculty members and students. A small sampling of seminar topics includes: "Art and Politics," "Interpretive Issues in Comparative Literature," "Great Works Series," "Gender Studies," "Biography as a Way of Understanding Institutions and Society," "Southern History and Literature" and "Chaos Theory in the Sciences and the Humanities." Following his participation in a Center seminar, one faculty member wrote:

... In fact, it seems that no Humanities Center seminar ever really ends, but reappears in a half-dozen new forms. The Center is an unparalleled program that enables its participants to learn from one another. But I suspect that this is far from being the sole explanation for its popularity among faculty. The collective enthusiasm of one's colleagues generates an interest just as powerful as the force of their collective wisdom.



Fellows meet weekly in the Center's conference room to investigate and discuss the annual theme.

*"I believe that your Center is doing extremely important work, especially in times like these when the national agenda, with its emphasis on economic competitiveness, seems to encourage students to evaluate their educations solely in terms of future earning power."*

THOMAS H. SCHULMAN, B.A. VANDERBILT 1972  
ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING SCREENWRITER

## SPECIAL PROGRAMS

When appropriate, the Center works with faculty members and students to coordinate special programs or conferences. For example, the Center worked closely with the Law School to present a two-day conference on the intersection of legal and literary theory. In conjunction with the Faculty Senate, the Center organized a working conference on "Ethics and the University." Similarly, the Center has initiated special programs on such topics as the breakup of the Soviet Union and the implications of the Clarence Thomas hearings.

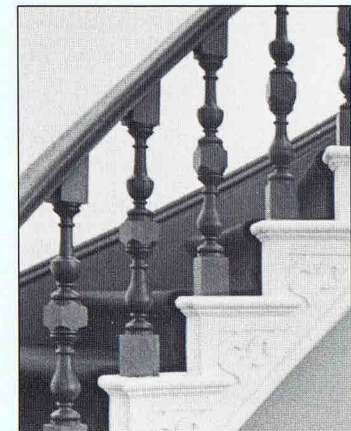
In the summer months, the Center often hosts seminars for secondary school teachers and college teachers from throughout the nation. The seminars are taught by Vanderbilt faculty members. The goal of these summer programs is to strengthen the teaching and understanding of the humanities in high schools and regional colleges. In addition, the Center has been home to a number of May session courses on various topics for Vanderbilt graduate students.

Since the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities began operating in the spring of 1988, more than 350 faculty members have taken part in the Center's programs. Participants have come from all departments of the College of Arts and Science as well as the schools of divinity; education and human development; engineering; law; medicine; music; and nursing.



*“We wish to honor and recall by the Center’s new name one of our most creative graduates, to give a named place that not only remembers his work but foresees the kind of future for education that we envision for this university. We can be presumptuous with titles, and we wish to remind ourselves with this one that the knowledge, discipline, and creativity held by Warren’s work are at least part of the Center’s dream as it occasions seminars and study groups for faculty and students. In our work at the Center we hope that our best heritage will be active and directed out to the education that we provide. It isn’t an idle name—the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities. It is closer to a promise that we have found in our past. And we hope that his spirit haunts us.”*

CHARLES E. SCOTT, DIRECTOR, ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER  
FOR THE HUMANITIES AND PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY, ON THE  
COMMEMORATION OF THE RENAMING OF THE CENTER



Vanderbilt University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action university.

Photographs by Gerald Holly

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