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# Andrews Changes the World through Media

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Christa McConnell

Students work with communications professor Debbie Michel (left) as they prep for a filming of "AU News" in the Andrews University production studio.

## Andrews changes the world through media

As the flagship institution of higher education in the Adventist Church, Andrews University has set the standard in many areas, including quality teaching, diversity, online education and more. Rachel Williams-Smith, chair of the Department of Communication, has a vision for Andrews to become the flagship school when it comes to cultivating young people who can produce media content that will revolutionize Adventist media.

"I believe the time has come for Adventist media to begin to appeal to young people as opposed to just the 40 and above crowd," Williams-Smith says. "The only way to get young people to watch Adventist television is to have young people producing it, communicating to and for other young people."

Andrews is well on its way to making this vision a reality. In 2013, two journalism classes partnered with Andrews University Student Association-run AUTV to begin producing "AU News," a broadcast featuring student anchors and reporters who, in conjunction with a faculty mentor,

choose the stories they wish to cover in each episode. AUTV debuted additional programs such as "The Profile," highlighting individuals on campus; "Moods," a series of silent short films; and "Devotion," a series created in partnership with students from the Seminary featuring devotional thoughts created specifically for those in the Andrews community.

"Part of our tagline at Andrews is 'Change the World,'" says Williams-Smith. "One of the best ways we can reach the world is through media."

The current broadcast studio at the University provides adequate space for the productions, but there are many challenges with the outdated space. For example, the lighting grid is very old, and the space is not sound-proof — voices from neighboring offices, a flushing toilet or even rain can cancel or delay production. The studio also still produces analog programs rather than high-definition (HD). Though they have HD cameras, they do not have the necessary switchers.

"I'm excited because the University is interested in and poised to renovate the existing studio space we have here on campus," says Williams-Smith. "The

next step will be to launch a fundraising campaign for the purpose of equipping and furnishing it properly and to the highest level."

The Hope Channel has donated its former set at a value of around \$25,000. Rather than the \$3 million they could spend building a new studio, this donation allows the University to plan for renovations at an expense of around \$200,000.

"We're not waiting for something better to come along," says Williams-Smith. "We're using what we have to make happen what we believe should happen, doing so to the best of our abilities. We're stepping down into the 'Jordan River,' believing that it will part."

Debbie Michel, professor of communications and award-winning former producer from NBC News' "Dateline," has worked with students on AUTV news broadcasts.

"I'm really excited about the prospects for a professional studio and the opportunity to help students hone their media production skills," she says.

Michel also has mentored students working on the department's magazine, *Envision*, which already has won several awards.

"Having Debbie on a faculty that already features excellent communication researchers and scholars brings a great deal of possibility for our department and the studio we work from," says Williams-Smith. "We will maximize what we have; and if God wants to give us more, we'll gratefully accept."

Becky St. Clair, media communications manager, Division of Integrated Marketing & Communication



Christa McConnell

Students and supervisors do behind-the-scenes work during an "AU News" segment filming.