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A Commitment to excellence

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A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

by Meredith Jones Gray

A bustle of last-minute nerves, final adjustments of power points and papers, and people finding their way to the right session fills the halls and classrooms of the Science Complex. It is a Friday afternoon in late April 2007. The Fifth Annual Thesis Symposium of the John Nevins Andrews Honors Program is about to begin.

Concurrent sessions and abstracts, presenters and interested scholars—it is a full-blown interdisciplinary conference. Thirty-seven Andrews Scholars will impart hard-won knowledge, lay out new ideas, suggest hypotheses, and offer conclusions. Their project topics range across the academic map:

“Hellenization, Romanization and Culture Change in Central Transjordan”

“Neuromodulation of Phonotactic Behavior in Female *Acheta domestica*: Possible Involvement of Biogenic Amines”

“College Students’ Consideration for Hybrid Vehicles: Andrews University’s Views on an Emerging Market”

“Effect of Season of Birth on Herd Retention and Production through Two Lactations in Holstein Dairy Cattle”

“Re-inventing the Mousetrap: Improved Synthesis of Cyanostilbenes”

“Father Knows Best: Renaissance Masculinity Modeled on Stage in William Shakespeare’s *I Henry IV*”¹

Physics and music, behavioral science and education. The students represent student research from departments across campus. Their presentations are the last step in their journey toward graduation with honors from Andrews University. The Thesis Symposium lies within a long



Twenty-two students received the bachelor degree with honors in June 1972. Seated, left to right, are Jennifer Lindquist, Sandra Lenz, Ruth Ann Plue, Connie Beehler, Joyce Gershon, Nancy Anderson, Deborah Hartson, and Sue Hawkins. Standing, left to right, are David Smith, Lindsay Paden, Calvin Hill, Mary Colvin Roth, Merlene Ogden, Gary Russell, Leonard McMillan, Edward Griffin.

tradition of honors at Andrews—a tradition whose seeds were sown over 40 years ago.

Paul E. Hamel, chair of the Andrews University music department, was attending a conference on higher education in Chicago when he noticed in the program a session on honors programs. It piqued his interest. He attended and returned to campus full of ideas for what could happen at Andrews.²

The ideas did not stop there. President Richard L. Hammill appointed a committee to study the possibilities and present a proposal to the faculty. On March 4, 1964, the *Student Movement* reported: “Faculty to Evaluate New Honors Program.” Hamel, as chair of the committee, and his colleagues—Daniel Augsburger (Modern Languages), Asa Thoresen (Biology), Elaine Giddings (Speech), Donald Snyder (Physics), and Leif Tobiassen (History)—had a large vision for honors at Andrews; “engagement” and “liberation” would be its bywords. According to Hamel:

‘Engagement’ means giving the gifted student every opportunity to move ahead as rapidly as possible in the field of his particular interest. ‘Liberation’ would mean allowing the

gifted student to free himself from the traditional and limiting regulations of individual courses and curricula.³

Despite some who voiced concerns about creating what might become an elitist organization,⁴ the faculty approved the proposed honors program and a description first appeared in the *Bulletin* of 1966–67. Hamel, as first director of honors, announced: “Andrews University will implement a new concept in Seventh-day Adventist higher education for the superior student when the new honors program begins in September [1967].”⁵ President Hammill would later say that the support he gave to the honors initiative was “one of the things I did at Andrews University of which I am the most proud.”⁶

When Hamel was pressed into other university commitments, the President designated a new director, a professor of English named Merlene A. Ogden. It was an historic appointment. Ogden guided and inspired honors students for the next 24 years. Donovan Moon remembers her persuasive powers as she urged him to take a “special” honors English class. Like so many others, he also remembers the works and authors enthusiastically studied and discussed with Ogden, including the *Song of Roland* and Willa Cather.⁷

Honors students could, as early as 1968–69, take advantage of challenging honors courses in at least eleven academic areas such as anthropology, mechanical engineering design, music and zoology. They could also pursue independent study and research, enjoy some flexibility in fulfilling requirements, and work toward graduation with honors.⁸

The honors committee believed from the beginning that student research should be a cornerstone of the Andrews honors experience: “The honors student will be required to enroll in an interdisciplinary senior honors seminar,” which would