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▲ The globe at the Andrews University entrance

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THIS PAST SUMMER, ANDREWS UNIVERSITY RECEIVED A GRANT OF \$449,643 FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN CONTINUATION OF AN INITIAL GRANT AWARDED TO THE UNIVERSITY IN 2020.

Padma Tadi Uppala, associate dean for research & creative scholarship in the College of Health & Human Services, led the initial pursuit of this grant along with a team of Andrews University faculty members. They were awarded a Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant of \$2.25 million on Sept. 28, 2020. The goals of the grant proposal were to improve the enrollment, retention and graduation rates of at-risk and Native American students and to establish a centralized technological system that will assist faculty and students for student success.

Title III designation from the U.S. Department of Education aims to address difficulties that at-risk students experience as well as equip eligible universities with training and tools to target those needs. Andrews' Title III status holds a special focus on the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi in Dowagiac, Michigan, as well as other Native American students and minorities. Through grant activities, more than 30 Native American students, most of whom were Seventh-day Adventists, were identified and targeted for success at Andrews.

The continuation grant was given based on the initial grant's progress reports for the past three years. The highlights of the program include (1) establishment of the committees that oversee each section of the goals of the project, (2) remodeling and establishment of a Career Center, (3) purchase of a suite of tools from the Anthology company to track student progress, (4) establishment of collaborative relationships with members of the Pokagon Band, and (5) establishment of the BrainHealth project in collaboration with Matías Soto, director, Office of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, and Daniel Gonzalez-Socoloske, professor of biology, U.S. Fulbright scholar and National Geographic Explorer, at the Andrews University Museum of Nature & Science.

There was a 2% increase in graduation rate from 2019–2020 to 2020–2021 for four-year graduation. The Title III grant also had a favorable impact on student persistence and retention rates, particularly pertaining to student retention. During the reporting period (Oct. 1, 2020–Sept. 30, 2021), full-time first-time student retention was 86.72% and part-time first-time student retention was 54.55%. Full-time transfer student retention was 65%, and part-time transfer student retention was 52.94%.

Several other initiatives to further students' career planning and support have been constructed using the grant, as well. The college readiness "Andrews Bridge to Success Program" has been strengthened. Social media tools have also been used to monitor how students can be reached online along with analyzing their viewing and engagement data.

Uppala plans to continue the development of the programs made possible with the Title III grant throughout the next two years. "Acknowledgements are due to team members," she says, thanking Criston Arthur, Emmanuel Rudatsikira, Yasmina Herinirina, Guru Uppala, Lynelle Weldon, Laura Carroll, Alayne Thorpe, Gary Burdick, the Pokagon Higher Education team members and the Andrews University Office of Information Technology Services. ■



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