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A Remembrance and Reflection on Dwain Ford's Teaching Philosophy

by Desmond Hartwell Murray

WHEN DWAIN FORD, PHD, PROFESSOR emeritus of chemistry, first joined the Andrews faculty in 1962, I was a 2-year-old living in Trinidad.

Nineteen years later in September 1981, I arrived at Andrews University as a chemistry major, and among the first classes I took from him was organic chemistry. Ford was returning to the classroom after ten years as dean of the Andrews University College of Arts & Sciences (he chaired the Department of Chemistry before that from 1962–1971).

I was an organic chemistry teaching assistant and grader for Professor Ford in the early 1980s. I did at least two research projects as an undergrad with him, and even today some of my synthetic studies parallel to some degree that research.

After completing a postdoc at Harvard University, I asked him to write a recommendation letter for me as I was looking for a teaching job. I assume he informed William Mutch, then chair of the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, and that began the process for my hire and tenure at Andrews. Ford retired in 1993 but was called back to teach chemistry in the Andrews University Math & Science Center during the 1994–1995 school year. I joined the faculty in 1995 to teach both high school and college. During my first two years back at Andrews, I again worked closely with him, especially for my high school teaching responsibilities.

In 2015, I led the department's year-long effort to celebrate two anniversaries: the 75th "diamond" anniversary of its existence and the 50th "golden" anniversary of our seminar program, the latter of which was started by Dwain Ford and which we then named in his honor. Organizing the departmental seminars was one of the early responsibilities assigned to me that continues to the present.

As I reflect on Dwain Ford's work, I focus on this question: is there value in



Dwain Ford (center) with Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry faculty and staff at a celebration marking its 75th anniversary in 2015. (Photo courtesy of Desmond Murray)

Imagine the global impact if we, the largest Protestant Christian educational system in the world, turned our philosophy into practice, vision into action and words into living flesh.

engaging students—high school and college—in hands-on labs and research?

In his 1992 *Journal of Adventist Education* (JAE) article titled "Practical Ways to Improve Your Science Teaching," Ford offered suggestions and guidance that is still current, relevant and instructive. Here are some of his insights: (a) "Avoid cookbook-type experiments that merely confirm what the students already know. Design discovery labs or labs with some elements of the unknown," (b) "Make research an integral part of the educational process," (c) "Seek ways to experiment and collaborate across disciplines," and (d) "Coordinate your lab experiments with class assignments."

Over the last 25-plus years, I have tried in my own way to follow these instructions, at both the high school

and college levels, using course-based research experiences. In 1998, I began implementing "early research" periods in the spring semester of sophomore organic chemistry. Then in 2006, I began a semester-long research period in grade 12 chemistry, which in collaboration with my biology colleague, Denise Smith, was upgraded to a full academic year of interdisciplinary research in 2015.

Ford's suggestions attest to his philoso-

phy and practice of engaging students in "hands-on, minds-on" labs and research as part of effective teaching and experiential learning. All of us who were fortunate to have him as our teacher can testify to that. His article speaks to us even today in 2022 about what we are doing here and now to make lab work and research—experiential learning—an educational priority across our elementary to university Adventist education system.

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So, what is our answer, in priority and practice, to the question, "Is there value in engaging students in labs and research?"

I know, I hear, and I see Dwain L. Ford's answer, in word and in deed, in faith and in works, in living legacy for all time: yes, yes, yes.

Desmond Murray (BS '85) is an associate professor of chemistry at Andrews University. He shared further thoughts on the work and impact of Dwain Ford during Homecoming Weekend at the Dwain Ford Memorial Symposium.