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THE ANDREWS UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

SPRING 2009

FOCUS



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Vol 45 No 2



Niels-Erik Andreassen
President



The best advice I ever received while in graduate school was offered by a seasoned visiting professor from the University of Chicago. “Do not focus so much on the degree you are about to receive,” he intoned. “Focus instead on becoming a lifelong learner.” It came as a shock to all of

us who were striving hard to complete our dissertations and earn our degrees. He went on to explain that our minds are a bit like our muscles: if we do not keep using them, we will lose them—and very quickly too!

Ellen G. White understood that remarkable truth well and so she introduced the last chapter in her book *Education* (p. 301) with this strange sentence: “Heaven is a school.” Some of my former students were not so happy about that, but it is unmistakable in its clarity: If we desire heaven, we will never stop learning. But how do we put that advice into practice here at Andrews, namely to focus on learning and not just getting a degree?

One of the ways we do it is featured in this issue of FOCUS, reporting on a recent research symposium on campus. It was a first for Andrews and it highlighted new discoveries made by both teachers and students, undergraduate and graduate, in many cases working closely together on joint research projects. Some have thought of research as a luxury for very rich and big universities, and not for a small Christian institution like Andrews. But in fact, as the symposium demonstrated, research at Andrews is an effective way of placing a premium on learning, and not merely by professors and doctoral students. Even undergraduates are invited to participate with their teachers in research projects.

One common caricature of a college professor portrays an elderly, slightly absentminded gentleman who lectures from yellowed notes. That does not apply to a university engaged in research. Here, professors join their students in learning new things. Here, professors come to class with new reports about the latest findings and fresh discoveries in their fields. Students are engaged in the excitement of discovery, learning side-by-side with their teachers, a practice we hope to instill in them for the rest of their lives.

Here are some examples of faculty/student research activities:

1. Gordon Atkins, professor of biology, supported by the National Science Foundation, has involved Andrews students in learning how neurons control behavior.
2. Shandelle Henson and James Hayward, professors of mathematics and biology respectively, also supported by the National Science Foundation, have involved many students in developing mathematical models to study conditions that influence animal behavior.
3. Curtis VanderWaal and Duane McBride, professors of social work and sociology, supported by the National Institute of Justice, and with many participating students have studied substance abuse addiction and the effectiveness of youth ministry in solving social problems.
4. Øystein LaBianca, professor of anthropology and archaeology, supported by Andrews University and an international research team, has engaged students in understanding the dramatic changes to societies, cultures and civilizations over many centuries.

Students who team up with their teachers in these research areas not only discover new information but get a chance to present their discoveries with their teachers at professional meetings and conventions. This is the kind of learning that goes beyond just getting a degree, important as that is, and it is the kind of learning we will experience, in the words of Ellen G. White, during “the life to come.” It is a privilege to study in a Christian university where teachers and students learn together. We have an expression for it...learning that transforms lives.

FOCUS

The Andrews University Magazine

Editor

Patricia Spangler (BS '04)
focus@andrews.edu

Contributing Editors

Tami Condon (BS '91)
Brent Geraty (MA '91)
Keri Suarez (BA '01)

Designer

Matt Hamel (AT '05)

Writers

Andre Weston (BA '08)
Kathleen Allen (current staff)
Becky De Oliveira (current faculty)

Photographers

Bradley Austin
Becky De Oliveira (current faculty)
Rebekah Helsius
Anthony James
Martin Lee (current staff)
Sarah Lee (BT '02)
L. Monique Pittman (BA '91)

Andrews University

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Stephen Payne

FOCUS (ISSN 1077-9345) is published quarterly, free of charge, for alumni and friends of Andrews University, an institution owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The magazine's address is FOCUS, Office of Integrated Marketing & Communication, Andrews University, Berrien Springs MI 49104-1000. Copyright © 2009 by Andrews University. Reproduction in whole or part without permission is prohibited. Printed by The Hamblin Company, Tecumseh MI. Periodicals postage paid at Berrien Springs MI, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to FOCUS, Office of Alumni Services, Andrews University, Berrien Springs MI 49104-0950.

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