



Making Caring Common

Niels-Erik Andreasen
President

This summer I will leave my post as college president after serving 26 years in two institutions. It is bittersweet to realize that all things, even good things, come to a conclusion. So I could perhaps be forgiven for using column inches here to enumerate what has been accomplished. However, I much prefer to think of what lies ahead and what we can still do for our students here at Andrews.

So what can we really do to serve our students better? That question drew my attention to a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, called “Making Caring Common” (MCC). Professor Richard Weissbourd is the director. Its purpose is to support moral and social development in children and students, at home and in school. Perhaps it might be objected that a university as wealthy as Harvard, filled with privileged students, can have little to say about child development in ordinary families. Or perhaps it would have a lot to say, precisely because it enrolls mostly privileged students!

One initiative in this ongoing project involves an evaluation of admissions practices to our best colleges. It is entitled “Turning the Tide: Inspiring Concern for Others, and the Common Good through College Admission.” Here college admission officers are asking what helps young adults to succeed in college and in life following graduation. Is it a high GPA, super ACT/SAT (college admission) scores, support by mentors and tutors, lots of AP (Advanced Placement) courses, travel abroad and cultural enrichment—all the good things wealthy families can provide for their children before sending them off to college?

The answer of the study is remarkable and quite close to the educational ideals of Adventists. Instead of asking applicants to demonstrate simply how smart they are, applicants could also be asked to show how mature, how good and how caring they have become, and they could do that even if they are underprivileged or coming from a poor family. They could demonstrate community spirit by caring for elderly neighbors or being taskforce volunteers. They could help their own families at home, by looking after younger siblings while their mother is working. They could do all that without trying to overachieve in grades or scores, and still maintain good health, balance in life and high personal standards.

But would such applicants succeed in college and prosper after graduation? The answer more often than not is yes. Good health, a balanced life, caring for others, strong moral principles and kindness is the stuff of which college success is made, and it is achievable by rich and poor alike, high classes or low, new Americans or established families, of any ethnic or national origin. “Making Caring Common”—demonstrating kindness, upholding ethical standards, service to others and willingness to help—make for success in college and beyond. We could ask students to prepare for and then demonstrate these traits in their college application, give them preference in admission, and offer them good scholarships. They will most likely become our star students and make us proud. By making these characteristics central in our admission processes, we will also affirm everything that is best about Christian education.

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Editor

Patricia Spangler (BS '04)
focus@andrews.edu | 269-471-3315

Contributing Editors

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Rebecca May (BA '77)
Becky St. Clair

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