

VALUE-ADDED

EDUCATION

by Keri Suarez

“One thing we hope to say about each of our Undergraduate Leadership Program graduates is they are able to recognize what ought to be different in the world around them and feel a real sense of responsibility to do something about it,” says David Ferguson, director of the Undergraduate Leadership Program. It was during the summer of 2009 when David Ferguson arrived at Andrews as the first-ever director of the Undergraduate Leadership Program. It was a new academic offering that was years in the making, starting about 12 years ago with leadership seminars in the residence halls. While individually beneficial to the residents, those lacked integration with the University as a whole and were ultimately discontinued in 2004. But the desire to more fully focus upon leadership development still existed and was frequently discussed in committees and President’s Cabinet. In 2008, all the pieces began to fall into place and the following year, Ferguson arrived, rolled up his sleeves and got to work. The program has been steadily growing ever since.

Each semester the course Fundamentals of Leadership is offered, it fills up quickly. According to Ferguson, there are approximately 45 different majors represented, including a large, growing contingent from the Department of Physical Therapy. “I think this is indicative that so many PT students are having a great experience with the program, they are telling their friends and classmates about it. Word is spreading.”

The entry way to the certificate program is simply taking LEAD101: Fundamentals of Leadership. Any undergraduate student, regardless of major, is eligible to take LEAD101.

“It’s a great introduction to the purpose and function of leadership and, if nothing else, a good option for a single game-changing elective,” says Ferguson. After completing LEAD101, students can then decide whether or not they want to pursue the Undergraduate Leadership Certificate. If they decide to continue, students are required to complete 11–12 academic credits, which includes a Change Project. The Change Project is a self-initiated venture into leadership and transformational learning with a church, community, campus or academic discipline-based partner. Essentially, the student identifies an area in which they’d like to effect change and then they make it happen. The end result is receiving the Undergraduate Leadership Certificate, having a personal portfolio of leadership experience and real-world examples that give students an edge when seeking employment post-graduation.

Christine Lairson (see *Andrews Life*, page 12) says, “I knew the director, David K. Ferguson, from my academy and had participated in the leadership program he started there...It seemed natural to apply for the certificate program at Andrews, there was never any question in my

mind whether or not I was going to participate in the program.”

Her Change Project involves working with Infinite Gymnastics, a program run by the Andrews University Gymnastics. Her goal is to increase the integrity, productivity and sustainability of the program. It doesn’t directly relate to her major, but she pursued the project because of her involvement with the Gymnastics. She has been a member of the team for the past three years and strongly believes in its ministry.

On April 18, 2012, the first two students to receive their Undergraduate Leadership Certificate were honored at special event. At this inaugural celebration, both students presented their Change Project.

“It’s amazing how with just these first two graduates, they demonstrate the breadth of application of this program,” says Ferguson.

The two graduates, Jonathon Cobb and Michael Swenson, both came from the Department of Religion & Biblical Languages, yet each had vastly different experiences in the leadership certificate program.

Ferguson says Cobb’s leadership style is action-oriented. His Change Project addressed a struggling worship system in the residence halls. During his time living in the men’s residence hall, the deans asked Cobb to take ownership of the worship programming. Cobb focused on the aspect of relationships to build a team of dedicated individuals to give their time to revitalizing the worship experience. The result was a dramatic turn-around in residence hall worship attendance. During the first year of Cobb’s leadership, worship attendance increased 15 percent. During the second year, it increased to 68 percent from where it started. For Cobb, this was simply a beginning exercise in growing ministry that he hopes to build upon in the future as he pursues ministry. He is beginning studies at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.

Swenson is a leader by way of thought. He utilized his skills in a Change Project focused on providing an Internet-based conversation



where young contributors can carry on a theological dialog that might engage those on the fringes. Swenson had built online forums in the past and found how powerful they can be. He was interested in applying this successful conversation medium to ministry. After evaluating the current Adventist resources available, he set out to create something relevant, accessible, realistic and accepting. From this came www.ReFaith.org, an online blog/magazine. He hopes to see ReFaith.org continue to grow as he pursues graduate school with goals of being a systematic theologian.

“Michael comes from a more intellectual angle with his leadership focused on academia and research while Jonathan wants to be where the action is. He wants to roll up his sleeves and get to work,” says Ferguson. “The beauty is that it’s not one or the other. It’s where you come alive that the Undergraduate Leadership Program is able to help with your development.”

“The Leadership Program offers a side of education that is not visible anywhere else on the campus of Andrews University, and at only two higher education institutions in the Adventist system,” says Cobb. “How often do we hear that we must focus on our strengths? Most of the time we try to pinpoint where we are weakest. The ironic result is we actually end up hurting ourselves more than helping. As we position ourselves to do what we are good at, we then enjoy and develop our teams beyond what anyone thought could be accomplished.”

Ferguson says, “There is a great deal of research around the question, ‘What is it that is important to get done in an undergraduate time period



Left: Jonathon Cobb's Change Project resulted in a dramatic turn-around in residence hall worship attendance. Opposite: Michael Swenson created an online forum for theological dialog, www.ReFaith.org

and what is it that employers or graduate school admissions councils will be looking for?’ It’s clear that, generally, there is a certain level of trust that if you have completed an undergraduate degree you can master technical information. But leadership can give you an edge.”

Ferguson says employers are starving for employees who have leadership qualities. “I have talked to former students who sought an interview or an internship, and where they had the word “leadership” involved as a heading on their resume, it got them completely different questions; for some, it even got them the interview in the first place.”

This year, two students received the Undergraduate Leadership Certificate.

Ferguson estimates that number will be closer to 30 at the 2012–13 Commencement.

“We know the majority of students who arrive on our campus this fall will come for some reason other than the Leadership Program, but yet they should know about it and be involved. By the time they hear about it, they’ll want to be involved,” says Ferguson. “Yet, we are getting more and more students who are choosing Andrews University simply because of the Leadership Program.” ■

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LEADERSHIP MEDALLION

Christopher (left) and Jason Randall (right) were presented with a framed medallion by David Ferguson. It was named in honor of their parents, Chuck and Barbara Randall, two Andrews alums who have been strong advocates of the value of a leadership program and financially supportive of the Andrews University Undergraduate Leadership Program. The bronze medallion features four images, each one a visual representation of the qualities of a leader: a lion and lamb, a spyglass, an oak tree and shaking hands.



LION AND LAMB

Spiritual Leadership
Courage
Servanthood

SPYGLASS

Intentionality
Vision
Leadership Capacities

SHAKING HANDS

Relationships
Teamwork

OAK TREE

Continual Growth
Character
Legacy

