

A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

by Meredith Jones Gray

A bustle of last-minute nerves, final adjustments of power points and papers, and people finding their way to the right session fills the halls and classrooms of the Science Complex. It is a Friday afternoon in late April 2007. The Fifth Annual Thesis Symposium of the John Nevins Andrews Honors Program is about to begin.

Concurrent sessions and abstracts, presenters and interested scholars—it is a full-blown interdisciplinary conference. Thirty-seven Andrews Scholars will impart hard-won knowledge, lay out new ideas, suggest hypotheses, and offer conclusions. Their project topics range across the academic map:

“Hellenization, Romanization and Culture Change in Central Transjordan”

“Neuromodulation of Phonotactic Behavior in Female *Acheta domestica*: Possible Involvement of Biogenic Amines”

“College Students’ Consideration for Hybrid Vehicles: Andrews University’s Views on an Emerging Market”

“Effect of Season of Birth on Herd Retention and Production through Two Lactations in Holstein Dairy Cattle”

“Re-inventing the Mousetrap: Improved Synthesis of Cyanostilbenes”

“Father Knows Best: Renaissance Masculinity Modeled on Stage in William Shakespeare’s *I Henry IV*”¹

Physics and music, behavioral science and education. The students represent student research from departments across campus. Their presentations are the last step in their journey toward graduation with honors from Andrews University. The Thesis Symposium lies within a long



Twenty-two students received the bachelor degree with honors in June 1972. Seated, left to right, are Jennifer Lindquist, Sandra Lenz, Ruth Ann Plue, Connie Beehler, Joyce Gershon, Nancy Anderson, Deborah Hartson, and Sue Hawkins. Standing, left to right, are David Smith, Lindsay Paden, Calvin Hill, Mary Colvin Roth, Merlene Ogden, Gary Russell, Leonard McMillan, Edward Griffin.

tradition of honors at Andrews—a tradition whose seeds were sown over 40 years ago.

Paul E. Hamel, chair of the Andrews University music department, was attending a conference on higher education in Chicago when he noticed in the program a session on honors programs. It piqued his interest. He attended and returned to campus full of ideas for what could happen at Andrews.²

The ideas did not stop there. President Richard L. Hammill appointed a committee to study the possibilities and present a proposal to the faculty. On March 4, 1964, the *Student Movement* reported: “Faculty to Evaluate New Honors Program.” Hamel, as chair of the committee, and his colleagues—Daniel Augsburger (Modern Languages), Asa Thoresen (Biology), Elaine Giddings (Speech), Donald Snyder (Physics), and Leif Tobiassen (History)—had a large vision for honors at Andrews; “engagement” and “liberation” would be its bywords. According to Hamel:

‘Engagement’ means giving the gifted student every opportunity to move ahead as rapidly as possible in the field of his particular interest. ‘Liberation’ would mean allowing the

gifted student to free himself from the traditional and limiting regulations of individual courses and curricula.³

Despite some who voiced concerns about creating what might become an elitist organization,⁴ the faculty approved the proposed honors program and a description first appeared in the *Bulletin* of 1966–67. Hamel, as first director of honors, announced: “Andrews University will implement a new concept in Seventh-day Adventist higher education for the superior student when the new honors program begins in September [1967].”⁵ President Hammill would later say that the support he gave to the honors initiative was “one of the things I did at Andrews University of which I am the most proud.”⁶

When Hamel was pressed into other university commitments, the President designated a new director, a professor of English named Merlene A. Ogden. It was an historic appointment. Ogden guided and inspired honors students for the next 24 years. Donovan Moon remembers her persuasive powers as she urged him to take a “special” honors English class. Like so many others, he also remembers the works and authors enthusiastically studied and discussed with Ogden, including the *Song of Roland* and Willa Cather.⁷

Honors students could, as early as 1968–69, take advantage of challenging honors courses in at least eleven academic areas such as anthropology, mechanical engineering design, music and zoology. They could also pursue independent study and research, enjoy some flexibility in fulfilling requirements, and work toward graduation with honors.⁸

The honors committee believed from the beginning that student research should be a cornerstone of the Andrews honors experience: “The honors student will be required to enroll in an interdisciplinary senior honors seminar,” which would



Top: Ashley Wynn discusses her honors project with Merrie Jones Gray. **Bottom:** Lisa Renk explains her honors thesis poster to President Andreasen.

include “presentations by the students of their research and independent study reports.”⁹

In December of 1969 senior home economics major Maryellen Hutchinson presented the “first seminar report to come out of the independent-study honors program.” Her primary research included a survey of 122 undergraduate women at Andrews,¹⁰ and her paper was entitled “A Study of the Relationship between General Personal Values and Clothing Attitudes Within a Specific Sub-Cultural Group.” The spring of that school year Hutchinson and twenty other students received their diplomas with honors, the first group of graduates to complete the requirements devised by the honors committee.

Under Ogden’s direction the honors program grew academically, socially and spiritually. The Society of Andrews Scholars, the student arm of the program, worked with the honors faculty to expand the life of the honors community. The school year of 1970–71 featured a symposium on twentieth-century art, with presentations on theology and art, T.S. Eliot’s “Wasteland,” a commentary on visual artists of the century, and “The Sounds of a New Era,” including selections from composers

such as Stravinsky, Penderecki, and Rachmaninoff.¹¹ The Andrews Scholars sponsored a field trip to Chicago to visit museums and attend a concert by the Rose-Isstomen-Stern Trio. They organized the first annual honors banquet. They also held a Sabbath retreat of special services, lunch, an afternoon discussion and vespers.¹²

Over the years, Ogden brought the Andrews program to regional and national recognition. It became a member of the Upper Midwest Honors Council, the Michigan Honors Association, and the National Collegiate Honors Council.

Today’s honors program still bears a strong resemblance to that early vision. This school year of 2007–2008, under the new direction of L. Monique Pittman, Andrews Scholars attended the Chicago Symphony and visited the Art Institute in Chicago. At the now annual Friday evening Agape Feast and vespers, the officers and sponsors served well over a hundred student and faculty guests. The Scholars are a thriving cultural, social and spiritual community.

On the academic side of life as Andrews Scholars, students pursue a core of stimulating honors classes to complete their general-education requirements. And the senior honors-research experience is still the capstone experience for a student graduating with honors, just as the first honors committee envisioned it. New levels of professionalism have been added: Junior Research Pro-Seminar to prepare the students for their senior projects, and a proposal defense with the Honors Council to help ensure sound research.

One of the more recent innovations has been a poster session held spring semester in which the students who plan to graduate with honors display a visual presentation of their honors topics: a poster explaining their theses, methodologies, and background information. This March some forty scholars put on an impressive exhibit in the Chan Shun Hall lobby—a dazzling array of charts and graphs, concise outlines and careful definitions, illustrations and professional layouts.

Each project is a story of hard work and new academic maturity. Ashley Wynn, senior English major, tells a representative story. She refers to her honors research as “a bit of a journey” and says, “As a freshman

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I feared this part of the program... When I attended my first Symposium in April of my freshman year I saw how much work actually went into an honors project.” She remembers feeling “intimidated” and also confesses being a little bit bored by the presentation about Virginia Woolf she attended. Four years later she is preparing, under the direction of English professor and Honors Council member Beverly Matiko, to present her own paper on Virginia Woolf, an analysis of modernism and postmodernism in Woolf’s *The Waves*. Now, she says:

Overall I’m proud of my research and really enjoy all the time I spend working on my paper. I think that studying Virginia Woolf in this way has given me a better appreciation of her. I am also learning and reading a lot of fascinating things about postmodernism and postmodern texts. I hope, however, that my presentation doesn’t bore any freshmen who decide to attend, though it probably will.¹³

In April the John Nevins Andrews Honors Program will come full circle again to its annual grand finale. For almost forty years, senior Andrews Scholars have presented their research during the months leading up to graduation. Six years ago the Honors Council decided to gather those presentations together into a half-day event. April 2008 will bring the Sixth Annual Thesis Symposium, still fulfilling the ideals of engagement and liberation, the tradition of excellence, commitment, and service, and the dreams of the pioneers and leaders who dedicated themselves to honors at Andrews.

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1. All of the information is taken from the conference bulletin. The authors of these papers are, respectively, Darrell J. Rohl, Rebecca Lee, Allison Hurlow, Rachel Knott, David Carbonell, and Bonnie McLean. 2. Paul Hamel, personal interview, 10 March 2008. 3. P. 1. 4. Hamel interview. 5. “The Andrews Scholar Program to Begin in September,” *Focus*, July–August 1967. 6. *Pilgrimage* 121. 7. Telephone conversation, February 2008. 8. *Andrews University Bulletin*, 99–101. 9. *Andrews University Bulletin*, 1966–67, 41. 10. “Report Shows AU Women Don’t Look the Way They Feel,” *SM*, 11 Dec 1969, 11. 11. Tom Alexander, “AU Scholars Hold Art Symposium,” *SM*, 12 Feb 1970, 6. 12. “Scholars to Retreat May 16 & 17,” *SM*, 30 April 1970, 8. 13. E-mail message, March 2008.