

college

centered on

the newly established

Center for College Faith

faith

by Ethan Jones

Dorm worships every evening. Tuesday morning chapel. Friday evening vespers. Church. BSCF. Religion classes. Community outreach programs. Independent prayer groups. Personal devotions. Discussions with friends. Everywhere, from classrooms to dorm rooms and on the sidewalks in between, the Andrews undergraduate encounters a variety of faith-based events every day.

These encounters constitute a vital part of the Andrews University college experience, and the connection between faith and learning is one of the most important reasons why students choose Andrews. It is to better understand this connection between faith and learning that has led to the development of the Center for College Faith, an interdisciplinary academic enterprise on the campus of Andrews University.

“One of the primary goals is to get a better understanding, to acquire information on how the college experience impacts the faith of students,” says Tom Goodwin, professor of biology and co-director of the Center for College Faith. Co-director and one of the original founders of the program, Oystein LaBianca explains that the Center was born in 1998 originally out of an attempt to better understand what the stakeholders—the students, parents, church and faculty—wanted from the college experience.

The impression received was that the commitment that people have to Andrews University is not the same as to state or other private colleges. Education here becomes more than just job preparation: It is enhanced by encouraging students to develop a personal relationship with God. “Young people take hold of the past vision and carry it home,” says LaBianca. “This puts a different focus on what should be done in the classroom.”

Today, the Center for College Faith is composed of a board of executive directors, a board of community advisors, and about 60 faculty members. Run on “soft

money” from board members and volunteers, the Center has helped members attend conferences and professional meetings which address relevant issues facing Christian education.

Goodwin wishes to make clear that the purpose of the Center for College Faith is not to compete with the religion department or campus ministries; instead, it is designed to study the process of mature faith development during college, and to facilitate conversation among the faculty about how best to contribute to the transmission of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian worldview.

Special emphasis is placed on the interdisciplinary nature of the organization. “The single most important concept that we as an interdisciplinary faculty need to examine is the post-Enlightenment worldview, which is the presiding view in academia. This is a secular view which posits positivism and secularism as a foundation for learning. We need to see how this has shaped our various disciplines,” explains LaBianca.

“Our vision is for us as a faculty to become aware of how this post-Enlightenment view has permeated the world we live in, and how we as Seventh-day Adventist teachers can demonstrate to our students why

we are Christians.”

Goodwin adds, “Knowledge does not come value-neutral. Any time you transmit knowledge, it comes within a paradigm, a framework.” The Center for College Faith will help faculty encourage their students to explore the framework in which they are currently acquiring knowledge and to bring their Seventh-day Adventist Christian mission commitment into all aspects of the curriculum.

To better understand the connection between faith and learning has led to developing the Center for College Faith, an interdisciplinary academic enterprise at Andrews.

Ethan Jones graduated in August with majors in English and Spanish. He is currently studying philosophy in Belgium.