

# HOW RESEARCH CAN ENHANCE YOUR TEACHING

## *A Look at Current Research in SDA Colleges and Universities*

BY DAVID EKKENS

**M**ost Seventh-day Adventist college professors think of themselves first as teachers and only secondarily as researchers. Perhaps that's the way it should be. God has called us to educate students and we should be first and foremost good teachers. But in the past few years, SDA colleges and universities have placed greater emphasis on research. What are current attitudes in these institutions toward research? If teachers were to do more research, what benefits would result?

### **Why Teachers Do Research**

First, why do some teachers do research? Sharon Pittman, a social work researcher and professor at Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan) pursues research because her Ph.D. program (University of Illinois) ingrained into her that the survival of her profession depended on continued contributions from scholars. David Alonso, a chemist at Andrews University, says he does research so "undergraduate students can have the opportunity to participate in research, to help me be a better instructor, and because I love research." Bill Hayes, of Southern College (Collegedale, Tennessee) says he does it mainly for fun. "What else requires such a broad range of activities—including background reading, creative planning, problem solving, data collection, data analysis, artwork, and writing? It's so exciting to answer a question that has never been examined before that I can't help but continue research."

Joe Galusha, a biologist at Walla Walla College (College Place, Washington) echoes this excitement: "I do research because I love it. I am curious about how biological systems work. Social behavior is so complex, and yet we are

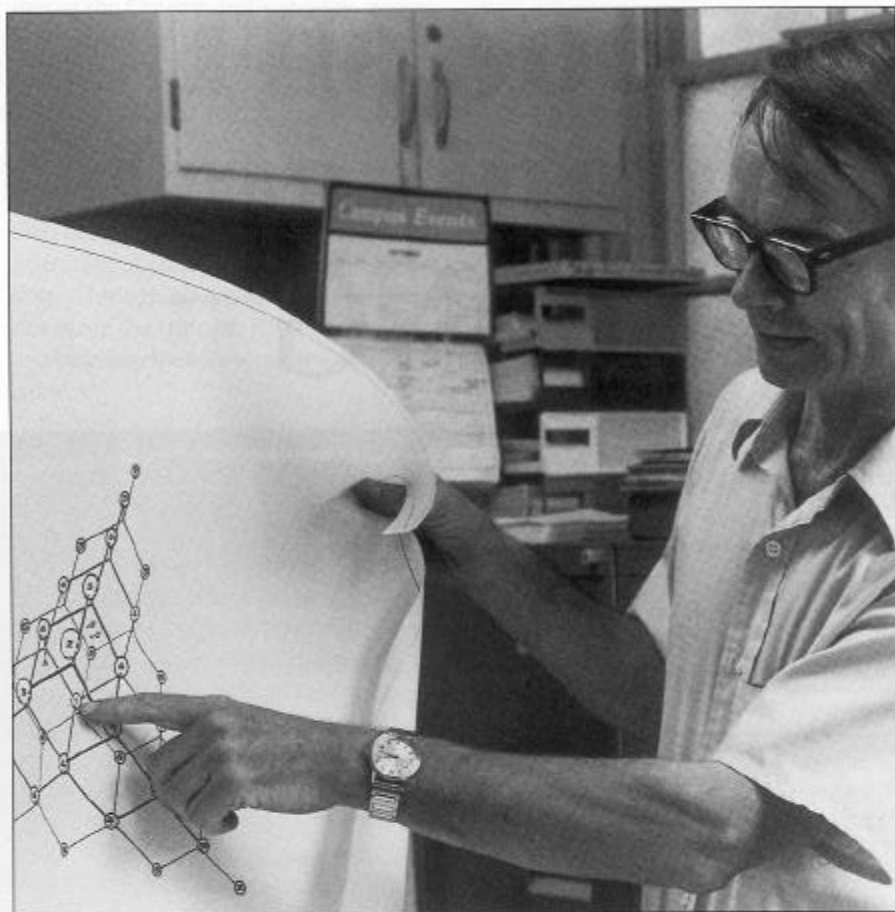


Larry G. Herr, Professor of Religious Studies at Canadian Union College (College Heights, Alberta), is Director of the Madaba Plains Project (Jordan) for excavations at Tell al-'Umayri. He holds part of a storage jar dating to about 1200 B.C.

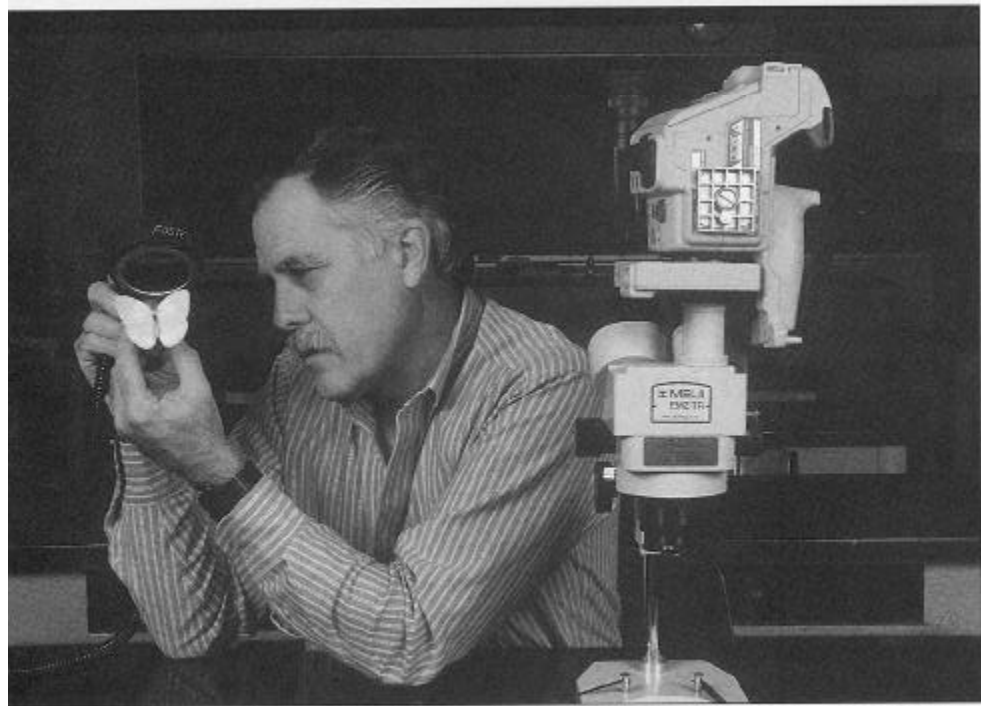
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*What are current attitudes in SDA colleges and universities toward research?*

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Ray Hefferlin and his colleagues and students at Southern College (Collegedale, Tennessee) have published more than 20 papers in the rapidly growing field of periodic charts of molecules with two or more atoms.



Dale Clayton, Professor of Biology at Southwestern Adventist College (Keene, Texas), studies behavioral and genetic differences between populations of butterflies.

finding patterns of behavior through many families and groups. It is intellectually invigorating. Furthermore, I like working with graduate students. They are like junior colleagues who catch the scientific spirit when they participate in research investigations. It's exciting to see them grow." Ben McArthur, chair of the history department at Southern College, feels that doing research helps to keep a teacher's skills sharp and prevents burnout.

### Finding Time

But how can college teachers find time for research? Typically, in Adventist schools, teaching loads are so heavy that most teachers do well to just survive. However, at most colleges, summer is a relatively relaxed time when many teachers could fit in research projects.

Probably the best thing that small colleges on limited budgets can do to encourage research is to arrange to give teachers summers off for research.

Walla Walla College has an option that allows a teacher to be on nine-month salary, thus leaving the summer free for research. That is the option Galusha has chosen, and he loves it.

Many deans find that encouraging a teacher to do research in the summer is the best way to give him or her a new start in the classroom. Some teachers discover that the few weeks spent in the summer to get a project going can generate research that will carry through subsequent semesters. During the school year, Øystein LaBianca, of Andrews University, schedules his classes in the afternoon. He stays home in the morning and works on his research.

### Other Ways to Encourage Research

How else are colleges and universities encouraging research? David Steen at Andrews University says that teaching loads have been reduced somewhat. Most teachers who want to do so can get a quarter off each year to do research.

Several SDA colleges have a faculty research fund. Teachers from all disciplines are encouraged to apply for grants from this fund—usually from

\$500 to \$2,000 per staff member. Obviously, such a small grant is not going to pay for major equipment purchases or complicated surveys. But many types of research do not require large budgets. A few dollars for animal food or photocopying, and gas money to get to a large university library are all some teachers need to get started on a project. Even when budgets are tight, alumni can often be encouraged to donate money to support research.

For larger projects, many SDA researchers have been successful in attracting outside funding from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Mental Health, and other federal agencies. One way teachers can tell whether their research is good is if they are able to attract major money. Pat Jones, of the Loma Linda University School of Nursing (Loma Linda, California), was recently awarded a \$350,000 grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research to study Asian-American women. She is interested in seeing how these women combine careers and families while still acting as caregivers for aging parents.<sup>1</sup>

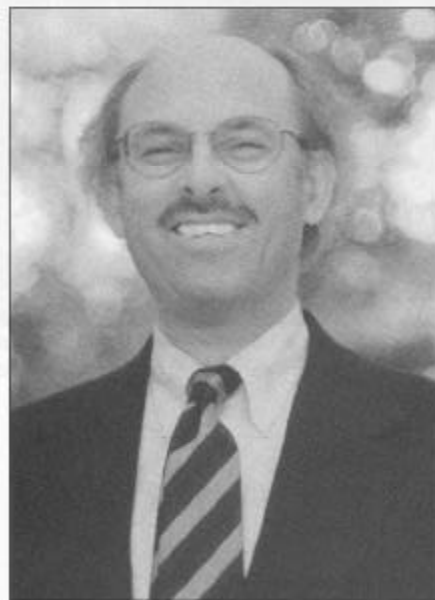
Southern College has set up a small fund for faculty honoraria. When scholarly works are published or presented at professional meetings, the author is given a small honoraria of \$100 or \$150. This carries a message of support from the administration.

Southern College also holds a monthly dean's luncheon during the school year, with various faculty giving presentations. Not all are on research, but some are. These luncheons enable those doing active research to share their work with their colleagues, who would otherwise be ignorant of good projects going on close to home.

### A Look at the Variety of Research Topics

What types of research are being done? When I asked that question, it became obvious that research by SDA teachers covers a very wide range of fields. Peter Wong (Andrews University) is working to develop a molecular chemical sensor that can be attached to

## How can college teachers find time for research?



Joe Galusha, Professor of Biology at Walla Walla College (College Place, Washington) studies gull behavior in a nesting colony on Puget Sound.

the end of a fiber-optic cable. Bill Hayes studies venom transfer in snakes as well as genetic changes in endangered iguanas. Joe Galusha investigates gull behavior in a nesting colony on Puget Sound. Ben McArthur studies the American theater and the social role of actors. Mark Peach, also in Southern's history department, investigates



Bill Hayes of Southern College (Collegedale, Tennessee) studies how the endangered rock iguana population changes over time.



Chemistry Professor Richard Bleil of Kettering College of Medical Arts (Kettering, Ohio) talks to students about his research on theoretical modeling of macromolecular systems.

the ideology of modern architecture (primarily German), middle-class reform efforts (1900-1950), and the history of art/architecture criticism in pre-World War II Germany.

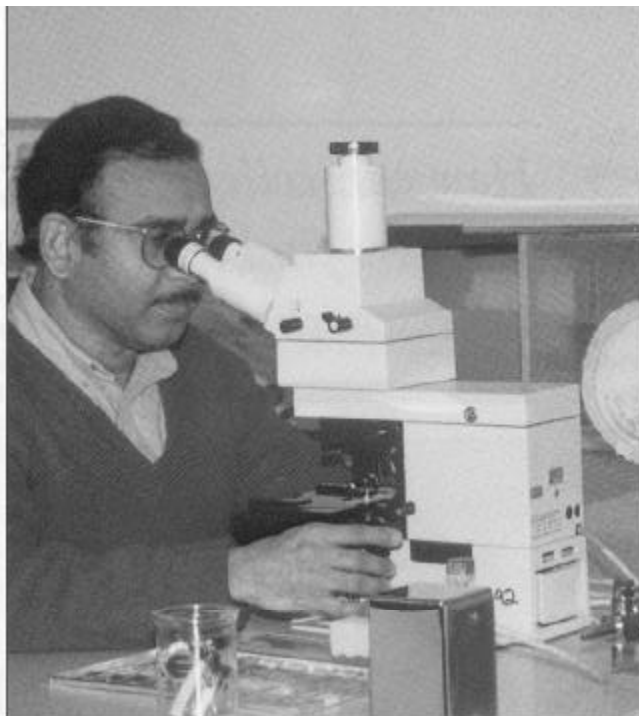
Edwin Hernandez (Andrews University) studies the sociology of religion and theological education among the Latino population in various denominations throughout the U.S. Ralph Scorpio, an Andrews University chemist, is studying a substance that inhibits fatty acid production. (Production of the inhibitory substance increases as a result of exercise). Øystein LaBianca, also at Andrews University, runs the Madaba Plains Project in Jordan and investigates long-term changes in settlement and social organization in ancient Jordan. Desmond Murray, a chemist at Andrews University, is interested in the development of environmentally benign organic compounds. He also is looking for new bioactive compounds and novel materials from Caribbean natural products, which he says involves organic chemistry, botany, and anthropology.

### The Quality of SDA Research

I asked several researchers how good the research is at SDA colleges and how they can tell. Bill Hayes says that comments made by others at scientific meetings are fairly honest and often brutal. He has appreciated some very positive comments as well as critical remarks from reviewers of grants and manuscripts. One's ability to attract graduate students is often a reflection of how interesting and successful the faculty member's research is.

Joe Galusha does not think of his research as world-class or big-time, but he says it is interesting to other colleagues doing similar work, and satisfying to him personally. He gets papers published regularly, which are cited by other scientists.

As a result of his research and subsequent publishing, Ben McArthur was



Shown with his microscope and a cage of mosquitoes, Paul S. Ramalingam, Professor of Biology at Canadian Union College, studies biological control of these insects using flatworms that prey upon mosquito larva.

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## How are colleges and universities encouraging research?

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asked to contribute three articles to reference works—*Reader's Companion to American History*, *Young Reader's Companion to American History*, and *American National Biography*.

The Madaba Plains Project (in which SDA teachers from several institutions cooperate) has been on the cutting edge of biblical archaeology for the past two decades. William Dever (University of Arizona) says this about the project: "I am full of admiration for this very progressive and productive project. . . . Unless other American institutions . . . learn a lesson from Seventh Day [sic] Adventists about seriousness of intent and necessity of support, the effect of their success will be lost on the rest of us."<sup>22</sup>

What role can SDA teachers have in their respective professional fields?

Peter Wong feels we can let others know that Christian professors are just as interested in an active pursuit of knowledge in their scholarly disciplines as are other scholars. Sharon Pittman, who is developing a research center to study the roles of churches in addressing social justice, stresses that "we can role model excellence in the balance between research and teaching." Marilyn McArthur, at Union College (Lincoln, Nebraska), feels that research by teachers adds credibility to our institutions. She teaches a course in nursing research and uses her research in the class. She also collaborates with another professor at the

University of Nebraska who is doing similar research on the grief responses of widows. This collaboration gives her the opportunity to interact with other professionals outside her college.

Several SDA researchers have been (and are currently) editors of scholarly journals, including Bill Chobotar (Andrews University), one of the editors of *Parasitology Research*, and Bill Hayes, who is editor of *Iguana Times*, a publication of the International Iguana Society.

Joe Galusha believes that SDA scientists have the same privileges and responsibilities as other scientists—to investigate, to study, and to research basic ideas in science. However, SDA professors have the added responsibility of doing so in the context of our Christian experience and knowledge of Scripture. The better we do our science, the more likely we are to influence other scientists regarding spiritual matters.

### Research Benefits—Institutions

Are there benefits to the college or university when teachers are actively involved with research? Ben McArthur feels that research adds to teachers' credibility with students and adds authenticity to the students' education. Research also makes SDA colleges and



Lawrence Geraty, president of La Sierra University (Riverside, California), leads an archaeological team in Jordan.



Until his recent retirement from Southern College of SDA, Duane Houck studied plants such as *Bryophyllum* (shown here) to determine the factors controlling the growth of foliar buds in notches of leaves.

## *Research makes SDA colleges and professors known to teachers at other institutions.*

professors known to teachers at other institutions.

Research benefits the school because it helps make teachers more self-confident and in better contact with their fields. Increasing the visibility of the school is something most administrators welcome. In response to the news of Dr. Jones' nursing grant mentioned above, Helen King (dean of the Loma Linda University School of Nursing) remarked, "It is wonderful to see the research of our faculty being recognized not only by their peers, but also by an external agency."

In short, having teachers actively involved with research encourages others to get something started and gets our schools recognized by secular institutions. It also inspires other teachers to do research and to keep up to date in their fields.

So, whatever your field, get a project going. You'll be glad you did. ☺

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### REFERENCES

1. *Loma Linda University Today* 8:14 (September 27, 1995), pp. 1, 2.
2. William G. Dever, "The Death of a Discipline," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21:5 (September/October 1995), pp. 50-55.
3. *LLU Today*, op. cit.