

Spotlight on the Honors College

BY MARY ELLEN COLLINS

Stu Silverman's office is crammed with Honors students' projects.

Every inch of wall space and every shelf holds drawings, paintings, photographs, book illustrations, architectural models and sculptures...all of which he shows off as proudly as if each work had been crafted by one of his own children.

As Interim Dean of the newly renamed Honors College (formerly known as the Honors Program), Silverman is passionate about working with students he describes as "people who will contribute to the creation of knowledge."

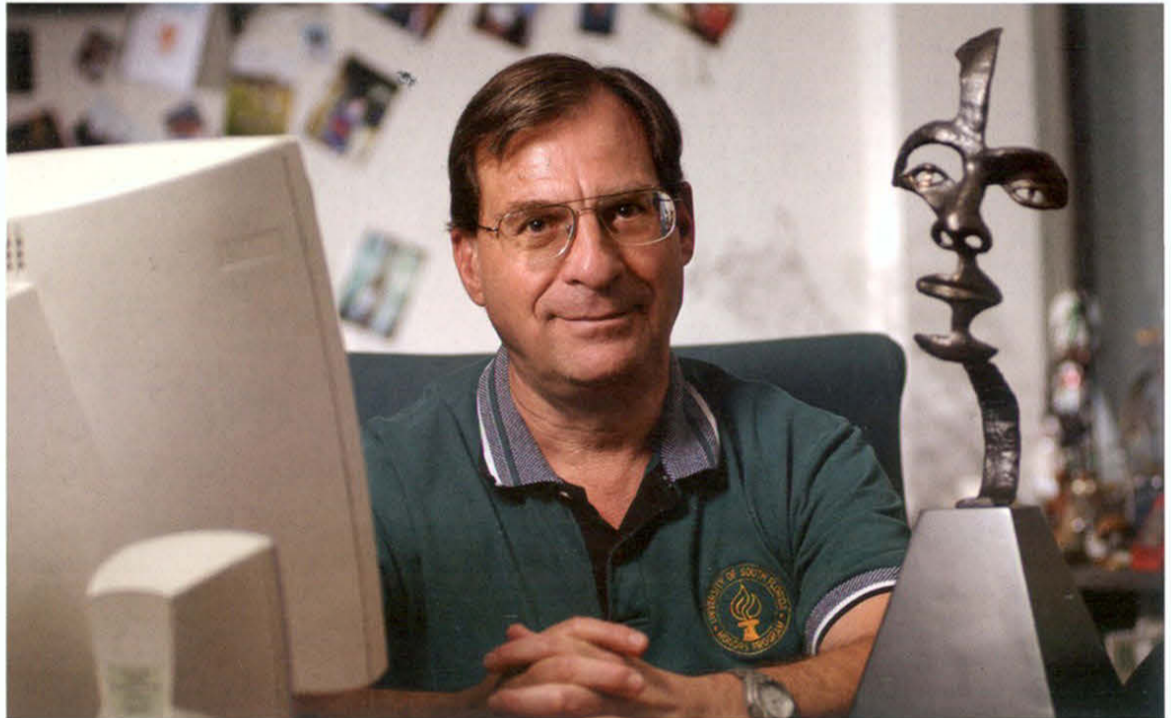
When Silverman arrived at USF in 1970 to teach Educational Psychology and Adolescent Development, he admits that he knew nothing about the Honors Program, which had begun in 1983 with an initial class of 20 freshmen. After the program's director resigned in 1986, Silverman took the reins. His strategy for growing the program came directly from his professional background as a psychologist.

"My goal as Director of the Honors Program was 'to take care of the kids' – but not just academically. I thought we should be there to answer *any* questions and help to solve *any* problems. I uncovered a network of staff at this institution who would drop anything and do anything to help a student – people who work magic, whether the issue is a late payment or a personal problem. **I figured that if we made kids' lives better, retention would be better. And if these kids were happy, they'd spread the word and more kids would come.**"

It sounds logical, and it worked. This year there are 400 new students in the program – an impressive increase in just twenty years of existence. Silverman says this rate of growth is not typical of honors programs, and attributes it in part to the fact that Florida is a growth state. But beyond that, personal attention and outreach are priorities for the entire Honors College staff, whether it be participating in Admissions events, talking personally with hundreds of prospective students, or simply "solving problems."

"We all work unbelievably hard to make kids happy, and those kids sell the program to other kids. We have 50-55 siblings of honors students who followed them into the program, as well as hundreds of cousins of current and former students. When kids are happy with something, they tell people."

Maureen Todaro, a single mother of two who graduated in August and has just begun USF's Master of Accountancy program, says, "The most significant part of my Honors experience continues to be Dr. Silverman's mentorship. His door has always been open to me, and he's been available to provide advice on everything from classes and careers to divorce and dating! But more important, he cares about all of the Honors students, and he has a big stake in each one of us."



Stu Silverman

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JASON MARSH, USF PHOTOGRAPHY

The Honors College offers academically superior students, regardless of major, the opportunity to experience alternative approaches to education, with a strong emphasis on research. They take advantage of small classes, personal advising, and the chance to present papers at academic conferences and study overseas. All students work on research projects and must complete a thesis in order to graduate.

"Research is our hallmark," says Silverman, **"Our students are not just taking a series of honors classes. Particularly accomplished students receive an invitation to be USF Research Scholars – a program that allows a cadre of really bright freshmen to work with senior faculty on research projects in a way that no other college does."**

Out of 410 new students this year, 35 have accepted the invitation to be Research Scholars.

There are several changes in store for the new Honors College, which Silverman is quick to point out is more than just a 'name change.' Beginning next year, a small group of honors students will have the chance to earn an "Honors Research Degree" in addition to a Bachelor's Degree in their chosen discipline. Each student will spend an intensive year-and-a-half working with a senior faculty mentor in a relationship similar to that of

Ph.D. students working on their dissertations. "These kids will go out into the world with resumés that rival anyone, from any school."

With the elevation in stature from program to College, it is also time to address the space challenges that inevitably accompany success and growth. Currently operating in just 4,000 square feet of space on the second floor of the Faculty Office Building – the Honors College faculty, staff, and students do not have access to the kind of space that facilitates meeting, studying, socializing, and learning with each other.

The University plans to raise \$5 million for a 42,000 square foot Honors College complex. The facility will include conference-style and standard classrooms, along with an electronic classroom and seminar/small group study rooms; a computer lab; a 300-seat lecture hall/performance area; a social function/exhibit hall; a language lab; and administrative offices. **The complex will be a stand-alone, technologically enhanced home in which a true academic community of scholars can flourish.**

The fact that Silverman arrives at his office at 6:30 a.m. every day is evidence of his enthusiasm for what he does. Some might describe his work environment as cluttered, but to anyone who listens to him talk about his students, it stands as a testament to their creativity and intelligence, and to the passion of the man who mentors and teaches them.

"I'm working with the people who are going to be inventors and artists, the physicians who find cures for diseases, the best civil rights lawyers, the next Wal-Mart magnates, the finest teachers any child could have. How could you not want to be a part of providing the best education in this country for the people who are going to make life better for all of us?"

