

History of the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry

Established in 1937, the major in chemistry was offered within the Department of Physical Chemistry & Mathematics at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC). The study of chemistry was organized as a separate department in the 1939-1940 school year, and had its first three graduates in 1940.

With Dr. Herwarth F. Halenz, a biochemist, as its first chairman, the focus of the major was in preparing students to enter the health professions. The department remained under his leadership until 1963. In 1961 with EMC in the process of transition to Andrews University, Dr. Douglas Brown was asked to be the new chair. However, he stayed only one year and Dr. Halenz re-assumed the chair until Dr. Dwain Ford (his nephew, and a chemistry teacher at Wisconsin Academy for nine years) returned from Clark University where he had completed his doctorate.

Late in 1962, Dr. Halenz assisted Dr. Ford in the transition to chair of the department, which he assumed in January 1963. Dr. Ford was given the mandate to seek American Chemical Society (ACS) accreditation of the department's BS degree. To accomplish this, the department needed much better facilities and a larger faculty, which quickly rose to five members. In his last year as chair, 1971, Dr. Ford in conjunction with local authorities established the Berrien County Drug Identification Center which was housed in the department with Lloyd Kuhn as its first analyst. We continue to host the Berrien County Forensic Laboratory with John Rorabeck now the chief analyst also teaching an upper division forensic course.

In 1971 Dr. Robert Wilkins became chair and in 1972 the department was the first to move into one wing of the new Science Complex. The department received ACS approval of its BS degree in 1976. This immediately led to an increase in the percentage of graduates electing chemistry as a profession. With the help of Dr. G. William Mutch, Dr. Wilkins encouraged many chemistry students to have an internship experience in laboratories at Whirlpool, Leco, Dow, Argonne, and Garrett Labs.

In 1979, a major in biochemistry was added. In 1980 a Symposium in Chromatography was offered to local scientists and taught by Harold Moll of Dow Chemical. In a summer session a Workshop in Chemical Demonstrations was given for high school chemistry teachers.

In 1988 Dr. Mutch became the new chair, and during his tenure, the amount of modern instrumentation greatly increased. In 2000 Dr. David Alonso secured a grant from the National Science Foundation for a liquid nitrogen cooled 400 MHz NMR which facilitated high quality spectra. The grant called for collaboration in use of the instrument with two other area institutions of learning. Dr. Alonso created a system whereby the NMR spectra could be run at Andrews and transmitted to Lake Michigan and Southwestern Michigan Colleges.

In 2005 Dr. Desmond Murray established the BEST Early program to encourage high school students to do organic chemistry research at Andrews. The new millennium also saw an increase in faculty research and publication. During this time the department name was changed to the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, and the faculty increased to six.

In 2008 Dr. David Nowack became the new chair of the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry. In the last five years we have replaced and updated nearly all of our instrument suite as well as modernizing the stockroom and the hood and ventilation system in the building.