ANDREW DAVIS
THE ART OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Honors was lucky to have had the genial and dynamic Dr. Andrew Davis serving as associate dean during the 2013-14 academic year. Davis was “talent out on loan” from the Moores School of Music, where he has worked since 2003.

During his year with Honors, his task was to coordinate the Honors-led drive to bring a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the nation’s oldest academic honor society, to the University of Houston.

Davis’s assignment in Honors was not just a matter of luck; there was also a little bit of destiny mixed in there. His time as an undergraduate at Penn State was notable not only for a switch of majors from engineering to music, but also for his intellectual formation in their honors program.

“I ended up with this liberal arts education that basically changed my life,” Davis said. “It changed the way I look at education; it changed the way I teach; it still even to this day informs the way I look at music and the arts.”

After graduation, Davis said, he “never stopped being committed to the value of a liberal arts education” — a commitment evident to all of us who worked with him as he took care of myriad details in the months leading up to the Phi Beta Kappa site committee’s visit to Houston last February, which was by all accounts a great success.

Graduate studies saw Davis, now a budding music theorist with a strong interest in Italian opera, earn a Master’s degree at the University of Massachusetts and a Ph.D. at Indiana University’s high-profile music program. It was at Indiana that he had his first taste of the administrative side of academic life, serving as the graduate student representative on the Dean’s Advisory Council. This was an eye-opening experience.

“If you were going to be at a university, then the surest and fastest way to make a difference at the level of the institution was to get into the administration,” Davis said. “You could improve the life, improve the experience, improve the education of the students.”

In 2003, having earned his doctorate, Davis interviewed at four universities for tenure-track positions and quickly decided Houston was the place for him: the combination of an “active and vibrant arts scene ... a dynamic and interesting university ... and a large and complex music school” made for the perfect cultural mix, he said.

Just three years later, Davis was making a difference at the administrative level in the School of Music with his appointment as Director of Graduate Studies. In David Ashley White, the renowned music educator and composer, Davis found one of the two colleagues he credits as being key UH mentors — the other being our own Dean, Bill Monroe — and, as of June 1, Davis succeeds Dr. White as Director of the Moores School of Music. His wife, pianist Corey Davis, also works at the school.

Davis got to know Dean Monroe not through music but during the University’s last campaign to bring Phi Beta Kappa to our campus, as both are actively involved in the Houston Chapter of the PBK Alumni Association. The current campaign, which Davis describes as “a mammoth task,” envisions Honors housing a PBK Chapter on behalf of the entirety of the university — and it has been this interaction with the entire institution that Davis has enjoyed the most over the last year.

“The PBK project (has) required reaching into every unit of the University’s operations — some of which I didn’t know existed! — from athletics to student affairs, from academic affairs to central administration,” Davis said. “That’s been the great benefit of it personally: I think I know everybody on campus.”

Those of us who work and learn in Honors have certainly enjoyed getting to know Davis over the last year. And, though he is returning to his “home school” of music, we can still count him as a Fellow — not to mention friend — of the Honors College. Indeed, Davis sees a great similarity between the Moores School and the Honors College: “People come and they don’t want to leave.”

In that spirit, we are not saying farewell to Dr. Davis, but rather, see you around.

—by Robert Cremins