



# It Has Been an Honor

By Elizabeth Engasser, Class of 2015



**Stuart Silverman, Ph.D., helps an Honors College student in the photo dated from the late 80s.**

**T**he summer between high school and college, Mikel Jorgenson, Communication '04, still hadn't selected a university to attend for the upcoming semester. At a USF Honors College open house, he met the college's dean, Stuart Silverman.

"I didn't really know what I was looking for other than a big name," Jorgenson said. "I asked Dr. Silverman, 'If I go to this school, will I be able to go to law school at Yale?'"

His immediate answer was 'Yes.' That was kind of my first experience with him, and he didn't get offended by a question like that."

When it came time to make a decision of where to attend college, Jorgenson said Silverman was a big influence on his choice to attend USF.

"I waited until the last second and I met Dr. Silverman, and just that moment where he went 'You'll be all right here,' ... was enough for me," he said, echoing the sentiments of decades of students before him.

Stuart Silverman, dean of the Honors College,

has been at USF since 1970, after earning his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology at Yeshiva University. He will retire in May, after 44 years of guiding USF's best and brightest students toward their academic and career goals.

The Honors program had just finished its third year when Silverman became its second director in 1987. His goal was to grow it into a larger program that provided high-achieving students

with an education that was more personal.

"Beyond that, I wanted students to have a good time," Silverman said. "I wanted kids to have a fantastic time and to leave college saying 'Hey, at least parts of my college experience were great.'"

The Honors program became its own college in

2002, and Silverman was named the dean of the college later that year. Honors College students can pursue any degree USF offers using the specialized Honors curriculum, which includes a senior thesis. Throughout his time in the Honors College, Silverman worked to create a program

*"There are few people in this world that I hold in higher regard than Dr. Silverman. He's an amazing person; in my mind he and the university are synonymous. I credit his program as a life transforming experience. He built a lifelong interest in education for me."*  
— Brian Fender, Philosophy '96

that nurtured its students both academically and personally.

A self-proclaimed frustrated musician, Silverman recognized that many Honors students were talented musicians, and he wanted to provide them with a place to continue performing even though they weren't all pursuing Music degrees.

"I noticed very quickly that an awful lot of our students played in our wind ensembles in high school, sang in chorus, played in the marching band, played in the orchestra," he said. "When they came here ... the horn stays in the closet. The fiddle stays in the closet. So I started this little group. First meeting, there were three kids who showed up. One with an electric bass, one with an acoustic guitar, one with a clarinet – and then there was me."

Over time, the groups evolved into the Honors College Orchestra, which averages about 35 students a semester. There also are about 15 students in Honors Jazz Band, and another 20 in Honors Choir.

It was important to Silverman that Honors students experience other cultures, so he started a travel abroad program, with trips taking place over spring breaks, winter breaks and summer terms. This semester, about 150 Honors students will travel to places like Bolivia, Germany, India, Argentina and Japan.

In addition to the enriching education they

*"Dr. Silverman really took an interest in all of us. He was very influential and part of the reason I stayed at USF beyond the first year. Just to have him read my name at graduation was really great, and he even pronounced it right."*

*— Lisa Provenzano-Heugel, '93, '96, '07 and a USF Alumni Association Board Member*

received, Honors College alumni have fond memories of Silverman's genuine personality and contagious enthusiasm.

"You felt like you were special in the Honors College," said Lisa Provenzano-Heugel, a USF Alumni Association board member who holds three degrees from USF. "Even when we were in classes with

300 or so students, we knew we always had a place to go back to."

Silverman said that he in turn has learned a lot from the students who have come and gone through the Honors College. He said his time as dean of the college has taught him how to become more accepting of others' points of view.


"That has been such a huge lesson," he said.

"I would like to say that it's because of my mentors, but it's because of students – who in that sense are my mentors."

In return, Silverman refuses to be deterred from helping students achieve their goals.

"When a student comes in and says, 'I have a problem and here it is,' I want to help, and when a student on the other hand says 'I want to be able to do research,' or 'I want to be able to go to a conference,' I'm so happy to hear a student who is interested in learning or doing that, and I'll do anything to try and make that happen."

With his final semester at USF coming to a close in May, Silverman said he hopes the students who have been in the Honors College have appreciated the opportunities and learning experiences the program has provided them.

"What I'd like to leave behind is that the students who came through will feel they had a better education, had a better experience and will like what they did more because the people I hired and I – we cared about them," Silverman said. 

Writer Elizabeth Engasser is in the Honors College Provost Scholars Program.



**For the last time, Dean Stuart Silverman will read each graduate's name during spring commencement, for a total of 26 years and an estimated 80,000 names.**

*"He treated my brain like a grown up before my body was a grown up. That made me feel like I was there to contribute rather than just learn."*

*— Mikel Jorgenson, Communication '04*

*"I just remember Dr. Silverman always being available to honors students. You could walk into his office at any time, and he was always approachable."*

*— April Slack Temple, Gerontology '04*



**Silverman with John Gaglione of the University of Briton in the early years of the Honors College Study Abroad program.**