In 2001, students worked with Biology Professor Nanette Nascone ’90 to learn about heart defects through the study of heart development in frog embryos.

In April 2008, the first Eckerd College Student Research Symposium featured Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science, Marine Science and Environmental Studies presentations based on 24 abstracts submitted by students and their sponsoring professors.

A Coach and Student-Athlete Integrate College Sports Together

When Harry Singletary ’68 arrived at Florida Presbyterian College in 1965, it was the first time he had been in a classroom with white students. He had grown up in Tarpon Springs, Florida, where he had attended segregated public schools, and he spent his freshman year playing basketball at all-black Kentucky State University.

After dropping out of Kentucky State and returning home, Singletary wanted to continue his education, but the basketball coach at all-black Gibbs Junior College told him he had too many credits for junior college. Instead, the Gibbs coach introduced Singletary to Coach Jim Harley at FPC.

Singletary still remembers that first meeting: “Coach Harley was striking. He had a crewcut. And in 1965, people with crewcuts were beating blacks in Selma, Alabama.” But Coach Harley’s appearance belied his progressive attitude. He welcomed the six-foot-three athlete. Singletary would be Coach Harley’s first black player, and FPC’s Basketball team would be Singletary’s first experience playing with whites. The two men were about to make history. They just didn’t know it yet.

Coach Harley remembers, “We integrated the gymnasium at Washington and Lee in the heart of the confederacy. They had never had black students come and play. People were hanging off the windows outside to see that game.”
“I couldn’t have survived without Coach Harley and the players on the team who accepted me,” says Singletary. “It was the right place, the right time, the right coach and the right kids.”

“He had never even seen me play a game until after I was admitted,” says Singletary. “I have always been thankful that he recruited me sight unseen. Coach Harley was interested in me not just as a ballplayer but also as a student-athlete. He was interested in me finishing college. He didn’t see color. He saw a kid who needed an opportunity to get an education.”

It was a bold move for Southern college athletics. “Every place we played that first season, I was the only black on the court,” Singletary remembers. In fact, he was the first black player ever to compete in those gymnasiums. He endured racist slurs, and Harley endured the wrath of other coaches. But Harley coached Singletary in patience and decorum as well. “I couldn’t be fighting on the floor,” says Singletary. “Coach Harley knew the pressure I was under. He reminded me that if we were successful, others would follow us. As things unfolded, I understood the stakes—and the opportunity.”

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Singletary and Harley received hate mail. Singletary pasted the weekly letters to his dormitory door, and students would stop by to read the latest posting. “Singletary handled it so much better than I did,” says Harley. “His answer was, ‘They’re ignorant.’”

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The next season, Harley recruited a second black student-athlete, Marvin Clemons ’69. Several colleges dropped FPC from their schedules, but by Singletary’s senior year, many of the Southern colleges had signed their own black players. “So we had an impact,” says Singletary. “Coach Harley had a vision. And the other schools realized it was time. Today, when I see these teams, I think we had a small part to play in bringing equity to college sports.”

The three seasons Singletary played for the Tritons were winning seasons, and Coach Harley made sure Singletary also finished his education. When Singletary’s grades dipped, Harley reduced his game minutes until Singletary got back on track. He invited Singletay to his home and talked to him about career options. Coach Harley regularly visited Singletary’s parents and even filmed the games to show Singletary’s father, who was too ill to leave the house.

Harry K. Singletary, Jr. was Florida Presbyterian College’s first black graduate. He majored in Sociology and earned a master’s degree in Social Work at the University of Chicago. He went on to become Secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections. He attributes some of his leadership and management skills to what he learned from Coach Jim Harley.

Now, 40 years later, Singletary and Harley still communicate once or twice a month. Says Singletary, “I tell people that it was Christ, Mom and Dad, and Coach Harley who had an impact on my life.”