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What Should an Educated Person Know?

“The easiest way to start an academic brawl is to ask what an educated person should know,” quipped a Time magazine article discussing recent changes in the core curriculum at Harvard University and other American institutions of higher learning. The new guidelines at Harvard are oriented toward active learning and real-life applications. In defending the changes, Interim President Derek Bok says, “Students will be more motivated to learn if they see a connection with the kinds of problems, issues and questions they will encounter in later life.”

“Harvard’s new curriculum establishes eight primary subject areas that all students will have to take. The categories include Societies of the World, encompassing subjects like anthropology and international relations; Ethical Reasoning, a practical approach to philosophy; . . . the United States in the World, which will likely span multiple departments, including sociology and economics”; and Empirical Reasoning, which will cover math, logic, and statistics.

Harvard’s curriculum committee dismisses charges that it is embracing purely practical knowledge: “We do not propose that we teach the headlines, only that the headlines, along with much else in our students’ lives, are among the things that a liberal education can help students make better sense of.” What’s crucial, they say, is that the new approach emphasizes the kind of active learning that gets students thinking and applying knowledge.”

Of particular interest to me was the sharp criticism that ensued when the curriculum committee proposed mandating the study of “reason and faith.” Psychology professor Steven Pinker protested: “The juxtaposition of the two words makes it sound like “faith” and “reason” are parallel and equivalent ways of knowing. But universities are about reason, pure and simple.” (The committee ultimately substituted a “culture and belief” requirement.)

If we were to ask the same question of Adventist educators: “What makes for an educated person?” what would be the answer? Would we talk only about practical applications, “skills for the workplace,” and fulfilling the academic criteria demanded by accrediting associations and professional boards? Would we regard the study of history as optional, as Harvard’s new Core Curriculum does? George Knight’s two recent articles in this journal, the second of which appears in this issue, point out that without an apocalyptic vision and an understanding of God’s guidance in our history, Adventism has no reason to continue to exist, and its school system would offer nothing that students could not obtain from the schools of other Christian denominations.

Some of Harvard’s new guidelines should provide fruitful areas for discussion. Surely, doing a better job of helping our students understand the headlines would be worthwhile. And active learning in the context of encouraging thought and applying knowledge would enhance their preparation for the workplace and for life.

But there are other dimensions vital to a uniquely Adventist education. I hope that our professors and administrators would never assert that Adventist higher education is “about reason, pure and simple.” For, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10, NIV).

As we grapple with these issues, a quote from the opening page of Education, though written more than a hundred years ago, still sums up succinctly what Adventist education should be about:

“True education means more than the pursual of certain course of study. It means more

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Preliminary Remarks

The article that follows is Part II of the keynote address presented at the North American Division’s Teachers’ Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, on August 6, 2006. In Part I (see the April/May 2007 issue), we examined the all-importance of the apocalyptic vision of Revelation 10-14 to the rise of Adventism, its mission consciousness, and the genesis and development of its educational system, concluding that “Adventist education is important only if it is truly Adventist.” Part II begins with the truth that being Adventist is not enough if the denomination’s schools are to fulfill their mission.

3. Apocalyptic Vision Is Not Enough

Having made the point about the importance of apocalyptic vision in Adventist education, I must hasten to add that apocalyptic vision is not enough. Providing young people with the distinctive truths of Adventism falls short of what must be accomplished in Adventist schools. After all, I once met an Adventist who was meaner than the devil. Believe it or not, I even knew a vegan teacher who was meaner than the devil. Her Adventism wasn’t all she needed. It hadn’t made her like Jesus.

That thought brings us back to the 1890s and a second strand of Adventist educational history during that crucial decade in the development of the church’s educational system.

One of the dominating factors for Adventism in the 1890s was the spiritual revival that had been stimulated by A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner at the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis. Those men and Ellen White, recognizing the spiritual needs of the church, emphasized as never before in the denomination’s history the centrality of salvation through faith in Jesus and the importance of acting like Him. That theme would have a major impact on the development and expansion of Adventist education. The turning point among the denomination’s educators took place at Harbor Springs, Michigan, in July and August 1891. The educational con-
[Ellen White’s writings about the Avondale experience], along with the publication of *Christian Education* in 1893 and *Special Testimonies on Education* in 1897, provided guidelines for the Christian development of existing Adventist schools and generated a pervasive atmosphere of awareness among Adventist leaders and members regarding the importance of an education that was informed not only by apocalyptic vision but also by the redemptive role of Adventist schooling.

S
omething held during those weeks was a time of spiritual revival.

Ellen White spoke on such topics as the necessity of a personal relationship with Christ, the need for spiritual renewal, and the centrality of the Christian message to education.¹

He sailed for Australia three months after the close of the Harbor Springs educational institute, taking with her a heightened awareness of the possibilities of Christian education and of the implications of the gospel for education. While in Australia, she would have an unequaled opportunity to influence the development of the Avondale School for Christian Workers along the lines of the principles enunciated at Harbor Springs, this time in an environment free from the conservative educators in the United States who were having a difficult time committing themselves wholeheartedly to the Harbor Springs ideal. Avondale, with its emphasis on the spiritual and its service orientation, would develop into a model school under the direction of its re-forming founders.²

Out of the Avondale experience, which should be viewed as an extension of Minneapolis and Harbor Springs, flowed a constant
stream of letters and articles on Christian education from the pen of Ellen White. Those writings, along with the publication of *Christian Education* in 1893 and *Special Testimonies on Education* in 1897, provided guidelines for the Christian development of existing Adventist schools and generated a pervasive atmosphere of awareness among Adventist leaders and members regarding the importance of an education that was informed not only by apocalyptic vision but also by the redemptive role of Adventist schooling. Those dual emphases fueled a sharply increased demand for an education that was pervasively Christian but distinctively Adventist. Thus, between 1888 and 1900, the Christocentric dynamic added its weight to the growing consciousness of apocalyptic mission to transform the Adventist attitude toward the importance and the very meaning of education. The result was explosive growth.

4. The Ministry of Teaching

Perhaps the most important contribution of the dynamic 1890s to Adventist education was the ideas that flowed from those years into Ellen White’s book *Education*. From its very first paragraph, it frames Adventist education in galactic, Great Controversy terminology. “Our ideas of education,” we read in the volume’s opening paragraph, “take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”

That is an inspiring statement, but Ellen White gets more specific on the book’s second page, when she high-
comprehending [God’s] principles, and in entering into that relation with Christ which will make them a controlling power in the life, should be the teacher’s first effort and his constant aim. The teacher who accepts this aim is in truth a co-worker with Christ, a laborer together with God.”

Most people seem to miss the full import of those words. But in essence, they lift the teacher’s role beyond the humdrum of teaching spelling or math and place it in the line of gospel ministry. I would suggest that the primary function of a Christian teacher is that of an agent of salvation in the great controversy between Christ and Satan—good and evil—that takes place in both the world at large and in the lives of every individual student.

To state it plainly, the function of a Christian teacher is to lead young people into a transforming, saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It is in the context of that relationship that such secondary functions as character development, the formation of a Christian mind, and education for social responsibility and work must of necessity take place. It is crucial to realize that all of those secondary goals can take place in a non-Christian school. Thus, when Christian educators aim only at the goals that fall within the realm of all education, they have failed before they begin. When Christian educators neglect emphasizing the redemptive role of their schools, they make their schools both unimportant and unnecessary.

The Adventist educator has one other unique contribution to make above and beyond that of other Christian educators. That is, everything that takes place in an Adventist school must not only be contextualized or integrated within the framework of sin and salvation, but also within the structure of the apocalyptic vision that climaxes biblical history and has made Adventism a vibrant movement. Without that apocalyptic vision, Adventist education might (or might not) be Christian, but it most certainly isn’t Adventist. And it certainly has no essential reason to exist.

As Adventist educators, we need to renew our vision. We must move beyond Christian education as just another job to the place where we see it as a calling that deals with the most important issues in both an individual’s life and in the history of humanity.

5. Moving Into the Future

As we move into this important convention and through it to the rest of our teaching career, there are three important facts that we need to keep in mind.

The Strategic Importance of Schooling and Teaching

The first is the strategic importance of schooling and teaching. George S. Counts caught the strategic importance of schooling when he wrote that “to shape educational policy is to guard the path that leads from the present to the future... Throughout the centuries since special educational agencies were first established, the strategic position
of the school has been appreciated by kings, emperors, and popes, by rebels, reformers, and prophets. Hence, among those opposing forces found in all complex societies, a struggle for the control of the school is always evident. Every group or sect endeavors to pass on to its own children and to the children of others that culture which it happens to esteem; and every privileged class seeks to perpetuate its favored position by means of education.18

Likewise, observed Counts in discussing the challenges of Soviet education, the failure of revolutions has been a record of their inability to bring education into the service of the revolutionary cause. Revolutionary movements will possess no more permanence than the small bands of idealists who conceived them if the children of the next generation cannot be persuaded to leave the footsteps of their parents. Therefore, as borne out by the history of the Soviets, the National Socialists, and other revolutionaries, to ensure the continuation of the movement, all educational agencies must be brought under the direct control of the state and schools given a central role in building the new society.19

Counts’ insights are equally applicable to religious institutions. Education is a crucial function in any society because all youth must pass through some type of educational experience before they are ready to take over the society’s responsible positions. It is a truism that the future of any social group is determined by its current youth. It is also true that the direction that the youth will carry that society will, to a large extent, be determined by their education.

With those thoughts in mind, I would like to suggest that the health of Adventism is to a significant degree in the hands of its schools and to the philosophy of those who have given their lives to the ministry of Adventist education.

The Need to Keep Our Goals in View

If the first fact that we as teachers need to keep in mind is the strategic importance of schooling and teaching, the second is for us to constantly keep our goals in view. We noted earlier the two non-negotiable goals of a viable Adventist educational system. The first is the problem of sin and the student’s need of a relationship with Jesus Christ. The second is maintaining the apocalyptic vision that has given Adventism its direction, meaning, and dynamic power. It is that apocalyptic vision that has made us a people. In the long run, the apocalyptic vision is the only thing that will keep us a living, dynamic, meaningful church. The greatest threat to Adventism today is the loss of its apocalyptic vision. When the vision is gone, so will be the meaning of Adventism. It will have metamorphosed from being a living movement into a dead monument. And in the process, Adventist education will be a casualty. After all, you can learn what it takes to be a good Christian in the schools of other denominations. Adventist education was born in the matrix of an apocalyptic vision, and when that vision is gone, so will be any genuine need for Adventist education.

Thus, the second thing I want you to remember is the goal and purpose of Adventist education.

Maintaining Courage and Sanity

The third and final thing I would like you to remember as I conclude this message is the importance of maintaining courage and sanity in the day-to-day business of dealing with what often appear to be unresponsive students. Any educator who isn’t threatened with discouragement from time to time doesn’t have his or her head screwed on tight.

Most of us believe in what we are doing. Beyond that, we love children and want the best for them. Yet they often appear to reject our words, our persons, and our sincere and earnest efforts to minister to their needs.

Over the years, I have many times come within a hair’s breadth of quitting the teaching profession and doing “something useful” with my life. But then, I came to grips with myself and realized that it is not the short-term results that count but those of the long term.

Let me illustrate. The illustration comes from my pastoral ministry, but the same dynamics are true for the classroom ministry.

Apparent Failure Does Not Mean Ultimate Failure

My big discovery was that apparent failure and ultimate failure are not the same thing. The occasion was my first evangelistic series. It took place in Corsicanna, Texas, then a town of 26,000 people with an Adventist church of 12 members. And of those 12, nearly all were in their 70s, and only one was male. I was 26 at the time. Now, I have nothing against females. After all, my mother is one. And I have nothing against old people. But I desperately desired to have young Adventists of both sexes in my meetings to serve as contact points for my hoped-for converts.

To my joy, there was a young Adventist man attending the local community college. I visited him in his dormitory room, prayed with him, and pled with him to attend my meetings. He never did. I failed.

In fact, by that time I had managed to fail at quite a few things. The result: I eventually turned in my ministerial credentials and decided to give up Adventism and Christianity.

A couple of years later, I was driving across north-central Texas and detoured off the interstate to buy something for my wife at the grocery store in Keene, the home of
Southwestern Adventist University. As I was going through the front door, I was stopped by a young man.

“Aren’t you George Knight?” he queried.

I admitted to that fact.

“Do you remember me?” he shot back.

Now at that point I usually try to fake it, but I was so discouraged that I just told him the truth.

“You visited me in my dorm room in Corsican,” he responded. “That visit was the turning point in my life. I am now studying to be a Seventh-day Adventist minister.”

I didn’t tell him what I was doing.

You see, I had been successful and didn’t know it. I had planted seeds that had germinated underground where I couldn’t see them.

My problem was (and still is) that I not only wanted to plant, but also to water and harvest those seeds all in a short space of time. I can’t tolerate failure or even delay that appears to be failure. I want immediate success.

Results Seen Only in Eternity

What I had to learn is that even though one may plant, it is others who water, and still others who harvest. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit is quietly working in hearts at each stage of their development. We never know the good that we as teachers have done for many of our students. The true results of the work of a dedicated teacher will only be clearly seen in the future.

One of the most meaningful promises in Ellen White’s writings is on that very topic. Speaking of the resurrection morning, she notes in the book Education that the angel who watched over us in life will then inform us on the “history of divine interposition” in our individual life as we worked for others.

“All the perplexities of life’s experience will then be made plain. Where to us have appeared only confusion and disappointment, broken purposes and thwarted plans, will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony.

“There all who have wrought with unselfish spirit will behold the fruit of their labors. . . . Something of this we see here. But how little of the result of the world’s noblest work is in this life manifest to the doer! How many toil unselfishly and unwearyingly for those who pass beyond their reach and knowledge! Parents and teachers lie down in their last sleep, their lifework seeming to have been wrought in vain; they know not that their faithfulness has unsealed springs of blessing that can never cease to flow; only by faith they see the children they have trained become a benediction and an inspiration to their fellow men, and the influence repeat itself a thousandfold. Many a worker sends out into the world messages of strength and hope and courage, words that carry blessing to hearts in every land; but of the results he, toiling in loneliness and obscurity, knows little. So gifts are bestowed, burdens are borne, labor is done. Men sow the seed from which, above their graves, others reap blessed harvests. They plant trees, that others may eat the fruit. They are content here to know that they have set in motion agencies for good. In the hereafter the action and reaction of all these will be seen.”

What a promise! It’s one that we as teachers need to remember.

Our responsibility is not to worry about ultimate victory but to do our part today. I remember more than 30 years back when I was just beginning as a young professor at Andrews University. As a rosy-eyed young educational philosopher with revolutionary views, it had been my hope to get the whole place reformed and straightened out in short order. But the reformation wasn’t progressing as rapidly as I had hoped. In fact, not much changed since my arrival. I was ready to resign and do “something useful.”

But by that time, I had learned a few things about apparent “failure.” I finally went to God on my knees and committed myself to staying “in the teaching ministry” if He would just let me touch one person a year with His gospel of truth, and love, and hope; with His message of apocalyptic vision.

He has kept His end of the bargain. In fact, in some years I have been able to touch more than one through God’s grace.

Only on resurrection morning will those of us who have been in the ministry of teaching have a full realization of the results of our work. May God keep each of us until that day.

George R. Knight served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 40 years as a pastor, elementary and secondary teacher, school administrator, and Professor of the Philosophy of Education and Adventist History at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He is the author of 30 books and writes from Rogue River, Oregon.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Ibid., pp. 14, 15.

5. Ibid., p. 15.

6. Ibid., pp. 15, 16.


A higher education administrator recently appeared before a meeting of Adventist principals and conference superintendents with a message from her faculty members. She stated emphatically that K-12 educators needed to do a better job of preparing their students for college. Although the administrator hoped for a helpful conversation, the educators felt they were being accused of doing a poor job. There was a high level of anger and misunderstanding within and outside of the meeting.

That reminds us of a story told of grandparents who overhear a conversation between their son and daughter-in-law, who are frustrated because the college teachers say the high school preparation was terrible for their child entering college, and that’s why he’s flunking out. Several years earlier, the parents had heard the high school teachers blaming the junior high teachers, and before that it was

We need to get beyond [the] “finger pointing” to begin a collaborative conversation, K-16, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church about the expectations and standards for each level of education.

**WHAT ADVENTIST COLLEGES ARE LOOKING FOR IN ACADEMY GRADUATES**

**BY RICHARD OSBORN, GORDON BIETZ, AND LAWRENCE GERATY**
the junior high teachers blaming the elementary school teachers. At this point, the grandparents say to the parents, “We told you that you should never have children!”

We need to get beyond this “finger pointing” to begin a collaborative conversation, K-16, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church about the expectations and standards for each level of education.

To help open that conversation, during summer 2006, in preparation for a breakout session at the North American Division K-12 teachers’ convention, the authors of this article, all college/university presidents, polled all faculty members at Pacific Union College (Angwin, California) and Southern Adventist University (Collegedale, Tennessee), as well as key academic leaders at La Sierra University (Riverside, California), to determine the top 10 traits they were looking for in academy graduates. We then identified commonalities in the results for each campus and prepared the following list, which is not presented in order of priority. These traits presume that academy graduates have taken a strong college preparatory curriculum and meet the admissions requirements of the church’s tertiary institutions in North America. The short descriptions following each trait offer a few ideas about how each trait might be defined, and could easily be expanded into a more comprehensive list.

**Ten Essential Traits for College Students**

1. **Three Essential Academic Abilities**

   If students are well prepared in the following three areas, they have the fundamental tools central to all disciplines. This will dramatically increase their ability to complete college coursework successfully.

   a. **Writing**

      The ability to write well, using standard English grammar and style (i.e., good punctuation and spelling, clear presentation of ideas). Students should be able to write both a basic research paper and a standard five-paragraph essay based on their training in secondary-level classes.

   b. **Reading**

      The ability to read, comprehend, and follow a written argument is fundamental for success in all college classes. A background in literature including American, English, and world literature is essential. A love of reading gained in part by reading many books before coming to college will prepare students for the rigorous requirements of higher education.

   c. **Mathematics**

      Proficiency in mathematics through Algebra II and Geometry (and better yet, Trigonometry) will qualify students to enter college-level math classes without having to take remedial work. A strong background in mathematics helps students to think logically and abstractly. Some research indicates that one of the best predictors of success in college and employment in high-growth, high-performance jobs is enrollment in higher-level mathematics courses in high school.¹

2. **Spirituality**

   Academy students who show a commitment to a lifelong spiritual journey by having a faith relationship with Jesus Christ are important for a Christian college campus, as this indicates their desire to begin a long-term conversation between faith and learning. In academy, they have begun to develop the ability to know, read, and interpret the Bible’s teachings and stories, as well as the writings of Ellen White in their historical context, and are learning to apply them to the modern world. They have chosen an intentionally Christian educational environment. However, they need to have confronted enough diversity of thought to not be thrown off balance when they hear diverse perspectives expressed in their college classes.

3. **Intellectual Curiosity**

   Incoming students should demonstrate a willingness to seek knowledge beyond the surface level through intense study. They must be willing to think critically about everything, including religion. They should be willing to listen to new ideas and to challenge assumptions. They must be able to think for themselves regarding conflicting ideas in order to become “thinkers and not mere reflectors.” They should have developed the ability to think, not just memorize, and
If students are well prepared in [writing, reading, and mathematics], they have the fundamental tools central to all disciplines.

should exhibit a passionate curiosity.

4. Self-Motivated Learners

In addition to being intellectually curious, college freshmen need to have the discipline to be self-motivated learners who can fulfill class requirements without relying on external motivators such as grades. They should also have a willingness to seek knowledge beyond the surface level through intense study. They should actively participate in classes, thereby exhibiting the courage to become engaged. They should take responsibility for their own learning and possess a teachable spirit. They should be regular in class attendance. They should be able to work without supervision, but also understand the importance of collaborating with a team and seeking help when necessary.

5. Service

Adventist colleges want students who value work and service for God and their fellow human beings and who show empathy and compassion through involvement in service projects and individual efforts. Such students embrace a global perspective by seeking to learn about their communities and how they can serve. They are eager to discover what it means to be part of a global church and world community and to find solutions to alleviate the suffering of the less fortunate. Learning at least one other language is connected to this, as it demonstrates a commitment to integrating oneself into the global world of service.

6. Moral Integrity

Success in college has more to do with attitudes and personal habits than with the acquiring of academic information. Students need to take the long view, seeking the ultimate good rather than shortcuts to success. They must understand that it never pays to cheat, and commit to honesty in all they do. They should have a strong sense of self-responsibility, self-management, self-efficacy, and altruism. They also need to know how to learn from their mistakes. They should be willing to seek advice and support from others in their academic, psychological, and spiritual challenges.

7. Study Skills

To be successful, students must have the ability to find and evaluate information from print and electronic...
sources. They need to be able to analyze facts and synthesize ideas. They should be able to understand instructions and assigned material, take notes, outline material, and manage long- and short-term assignments. They should have begun to develop research skills.

8. Respect for Others
Desirable students appreciate ethnic, gender, income, and religious diversity and are willing and able to understand people who seem different from them, even those who don’t fit their stereotypes of “the good Adventist,” “the good Christian,” or “the good American.” They show empathy and care for others.

9. Participation in School Activities
Colleges want students who have shown an interest in a wide variety of academy activities as participants and leaders, including music, sports, service, witness opportunities, clubs, student government, and local church activities.

10. Time Management Skills
The rapid pace of life in the higher education setting can be overwhelming for students who lack time-management skills. Incoming students need to know how to lead a balanced life, which means finding time for academics, co-curricular activities, and spiritual, physical, and social development.

This will help to prepare them for busy and fulfilling lives after graduation. They should have acquired and practiced these skills in high school.

After reading the descriptions of these 10 traits, we can hear some of you saying, “Not even the Angel Gabriel could meet these qualifications!” We must recognize that at each stage of life, human beings are a work in progress, with some traits stronger than others. By setting goals that can be developed and strengthened, we set a high standard that will help all of us grow as lifelong learners, even after we get to heaven.

Why Is This Important?
Experts assert that many of the traits needed for success in the freshman year of college are the same as those required for success in the workplace. It is estimated that poor preparation by students in high school results in $17 billion being spent each year in the United States on remedial classes by higher education, businesses, students, and families. According to the same report, professors and employers agree that “four out of 10 graduates are not prepared for college or good jobs.” Since remedial classes do not count toward a degree, they take extra effort and money. Students unprepared for college work can pull down the standards of an entire class if professors are not vigilant. This is not a problem only for Adventist colleges. Even very elite universities with long waiting lists have as many as 50 percent of their entering students enrolled in some kind of remedial education. Students who don’t succeed in college or the workplace don’t feel good about themselves and do not fulfill their potential, which is a drain on our society and church.

At the same time, it’s unrealistic and unfair to expect K-12 schools to fully ameliorate the problems created by inadequate home environments and the broader culture. Teachers can do only so much to overcome the handicaps students bring to the classroom. Some of their challenges include working with first-generation immigrant
children who have limited English skills, and helping children from economically disadvantaged homes who have not experienced the enrichment of travel, books, music lessons, and conversation that most middle-class children enjoy. Often, these children see little of their parents, who are working two or three jobs just to eke out a living. Despite these challenges, teachers must not give up because there are so many examples of successful individuals who have risen above their circumstances because of the dreams educators and families have instilled in their hearts. On the other hand, educators also see examples of privileged children who fail to live up to their potential.

**Broad Implications for Academies and Colleges**

The alignment of K-12 and post-secondary expectations, whether for college or the workplace, must become a priority in our church’s educational program. We must reinforce each other’s efforts to become more effective. As we seek to establish meaningful collaborations between K-12 and higher education, both must be seen as equal partners. The efforts need to be coordinated, division-wide, rather than each teacher trying to determine the expectations for himself or herself.

The North American Division Office of Education already has a “Course of Study” with major objectives for each grade and subject, which is a good beginning. Since the creation of these standards, the North American Division “Journey to Excellence” program, formerly known as AE21, has established 10 major goals and key learnings for each subject.

Unfortunately, tertiary academic specialists were not involved in the preparation of these goals for specific academic areas, except for some college education department personnel who provided their expertise in the area of methodology. A concerted effort to include the input of college professors in specific disciplines and education professors along with K-12 teachers and curriculum specialists will provide the necessary expertise to produce even more excellent standards in the future.

Several national and regional commissions have already focused on the alignments between secondary and

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**A College Enrollment Director’s Dream for Academy Graduates**

- I am looking for students who have done as much as possible, not the least amount to get by.
- I am looking for students who have been involved in extracurricular activities and leadership. I would rather have a student with a 3.5 GPA who is involved in many things than a 4.0 who has been buried in books for four years.
- I am looking for students with a strong concept of self-responsibility, and who are willing to stand for something.
- I am looking for students who can give a meaningful response to the question “Why are you going to college?”
- I am looking for students who will have a positive influence through academics, spirituality, and/or social leadership on my campus.
- I am looking for students who can question things and make decisions for themselves.
- I am looking for students who are genuinely interested in the positive differences that a spiritual campus community provides and who want to help create such a community.
- I am looking for students who recognize what a privilege Seventh-day Adventist education is.
- I am looking for students who either have goals beyond college, or who are actively seeking them.
- I am looking for students I will be proud to recommend to graduate schools and employers.
- I am looking for students (and parents) who not only have their own beliefs and views, but are tolerant of others’ beliefs and views.
- I am looking for students who prefer activism over consumerism.
- I am looking for students who are eager to take advantage of international learning opportunities to broaden their perspective of the world community.
- I am looking for students who seek the advice of faculty and staff as friends and mentors, instead of viewing them as trying to control their lives.
- I am looking for students who want to change the world, not conform to it, and realize they have the ability to do that.
- I am looking for students who view graduation as just the beginning of lifelong education (lifelong learners vs. hoop-jumpers).
higher education. Some of these are professional associations for various disciplines. At the state level, the Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California have outlined “habits of mind” essential for success, which include the following:

- academic literacy and critical thinking
- making the reading/writing connection
- reading competencies
- comprehension and retention
- depth of understanding
- depth of analysis and interaction with the text
- writing competencies
- invention
- arrangement
- style/expression
- listening and speaking competencies in academic settings
- additional listening and speaking competencies expected of students whose home language is not English, and
- technology competencies.

These various commission studies should be combined with the church’s already outstanding work done on K-12 standards to develop college-readiness standards in order to raise Adventist education to an even higher level of performance. Since so much work has already been done, this may not take as long as beginning without anything in place. In the meantime, teachers can use these studies to give focus to their teaching.

Specific Suggestion for Colleges

College departments and schools should take the initiative to meet with their cohorts at the academy level to discuss the issue of appropriate student preparation for their particular discipline.

Specific Implications for Academies

Academies can take some specific steps to better prepare students for college. Currently, a big gap exists between what happens in high school and what students experience when they arrive at college. It’s not enough to tell teenagers that “it’s going to be a lot tougher in college, so be prepared.” Many students over the years have deliberately planned an easy load in their senior year in order to have a fun year, but does this really help them get ready for college?

A Veteran Science Faculty Member’s Dream

I want students who are learning how to think for themselves.
I do not want students who have only memorized information.
I want students who have received an education, rather than students who have been “trained.”
I want students who are motivated to learn and succeed.
I do not want extremely bright students, if they are not motivated.
I want students who can speak for themselves.
I do not want students who, when they come to my office with their parents, the parents do all the talking.
I want students who know and use the “Golden Rule.”
I do not want students who are self-centered and self-serving.
I want students with an inquiring mind, willing to consider concepts that are foreign to them.
I do not want students who have memorized the 28 fundamental beliefs, but do not understand basic Christianity.
I want students with a broad variety of interests, or a desire to pursue this in college.
I do not want “one-dimensional” nerds who are only interested in one thing.

Of course all of the above is part of a maturing process, and very few students will have it all when they enter college. Some of them come from very sheltered and “closed” backgrounds. Some have never had to make a really significant decision because decisions were made for them by someone else. Some have never been encouraged to ask “why” of an authority figure or organization. I believe the best question anyone can ask is “why.”

Colleges want students who are willing to listen to new ideas and challenge assumptions.
We know some high school seniors may be receptive to greater rigor. A bipartisan group called Achieve found that more than half of college students said that high school left them unprepared for the work and study habits expected of them in college. They ranked oral communication, science, and math as the top areas of need. Sixty-five percent of college students and 77 percent of those who are not in college but in the workplace say they would have applied themselves more in high school if they had known what college would be like. Sixty-two percent say they would have taken a harder course of study. About 80 percent of both groups say they would have worked harder if their high schools had been more demanding.

Based on an analysis of statistics from the High School Survey of Student Engagement, Martha McCarthy and George Kuh make the following recommendations to better prepare students for college:

1. Increase study time. (Forty-seven percent of all high school seniors report spending three or fewer hours per week studying outside of school.)

2. Read more books. (Only two percent of seniors reported spending 11 or more hours per week on assigned readings.)

3. Write more papers. (“Only 4 percent of [surveyed seniors] wrote more than 10 papers longer than five pages during the academic year, and just 8 percent wrote more than 10 papers that were three to five pages long.”)

4. Take mathematics classes beyond Algebra II. (“Even though almost four-fifths of the career and vocational students said they intend to enroll in college, less than half of them [49%] took a math course in their senior year.”)

5. Engage in community service. (Fewer than 10 percent of seniors did so.)

6. Identify academic deficiencies before the high school senior year, and have seniors work on those deficiencies. Some academy teachers place part of the blame on Adventist colleges for the problem of unprepared college freshmen. They suggest that since Adventist colleges will accept almost any student, it doesn’t seem to matter if students lack a College Preparatory diploma, have low ACT or SAT scores, or poor grades. Therefore, students know they really don’t have to apply themselves in academy in order to get into college. Some academy teachers also feel pressure from the principal or parents to graduate students who have not really met the academic standards that should be required for a high school diploma. They ask when Adventist colleges are going to toughen up their standards to help them motivate students.

Adventist colleges face some of the same pressures. In a sense, our schools combine the role of a two-year community college and a four-year university. Adventist constituents expect our colleges to allow all students at least a chance at higher education. Given this philosophy, Adventist colleges can slightly tighten requirements but will face the same pressures being experienced by academies. Therefore, we need to make sure that we have strong transition programs at the college level, with staff trained to provide remedial classes, tutors to help struggling students, and counselors available to help students handle stress. With a better alignment of K-12 and postsecondary standards, we can give students with a wide variety of learning needs specific standards to focus upon and provide teachers with tools to assess those standards. As one of our college faculty members wrote, “We just have to realize that the cookie does not arrive fully baked upon entry. But the dough should have certain characteristics.”

Conclusion

We need to find positive solutions without playing the “blame game.” Divisions and unions should make the identification of specific standards with appropriate assessment tools a high priority in order to help improve the transition from academy to college or to the world of work. This will also help improve the learning climate on academy campuses and bring into focus the learning goals of each student.

May our conversations help bring about a better alignment of standards so that Adventist education can become more seamless in its program and better serve its constituents.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid., p. 6.


5. Special appreciation to Gilbert Abella, reference and instruction librarian at Pacific Union College, for conducting the research to find these resources.


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Richard Osborn

Gordon Bietz

Lawrence Geraty
I just can’t deal with him anymore.” “I don’t know what else to try.” “He just doesn’t seem to care about anything.” “We argue all the time.” Do these comments sound familiar? As teachers, we hear these, and similar concerns, from parents. They reek of frustration . . . exhaustion . . . burn-out. As teachers, we empathize with the parents when they sit before us, tears streaming down their faces. What they need is help and suggestions that work. They need a support system to answer their questions and convince them that they are not alone.

At Cross Street Christian School (CSCS), a Seventh-day Adventist junior academy in Anderson, Indiana, the teachers and school board recognized that parents today desire suggestions on how to guide their students’ study habits and how to deal with difficult or rebellious teenagers. Being a parent in the 21st century involves awesome responsibilities, as Ellen White pointed out: “No work entrusted to human beings involves greater or more far-reaching results than does the work of fathers and mothers.” Moms and dads feel this pressure and want the best for their children; they are seeking positive Christian ideas and support.

Piloting Family School

Family School was created to fill this void. It was piloted for the 2004-2005 school year at Cross Street Christian School. Moms, dads, and students all attended two-hour programs on four Sunday evenings during the school year. Each program featured guest speakers whose topics were pertinent to parents and students alike. The meetings were planned to be intense, interactive learning times for attendees. Because of the level of learning during the programs, the Indiana Conference approved the programs to be counted as school days.

Each year that CSCS implemented the program, the school board voted a
committee that was to plan the Family School during the summer. This committee met two or three times to choose topics, presenters, and dates. The group then reported back to the school board with a list of possible speakers, topics, volunteers, and any suggested changes. Each committee member was given a list of responsibilities, including finding specific volunteers and seeing that his or her assigned presenter had housing and any necessary supplies for the meeting.

Supporting Parents

Seventh-day Adventist teachers are concerned with the whole child. They recognize that influences from outside the classroom determine their learning as much as the instruction provided within it. Anything that they can do to support the parents in controlling these influences will enhance their efforts in the classroom. For example, students who spend hours each day playing video games or watching TV during school vacations usually have a harder time getting back into the school routine once they return. Teachers realize this, but (surprisingly) some parents do not. Teachers battle these, and other, influences every day. Winston Ferris, one of our presenters during the 2004-2005 school year, talked about the effects of television and video games on youth. Some of the parents strictly limited their children's video-game time due to the information they learned at Family School.

Students from my classroom listened carefully to the presenter who explained how sugar decreases their brains' ability to learn and retain information, and afterward talked openly about changing their diet.

Topics for Family School presentations have included: hazards of TV viewing, study skills, anger management, health, family time, understanding adolescents, children's coping skills, children's spirituality, and many others. In order to offer these important topics, CSCS has brought guest speakers from as far as three hours' drive away. Doctors, educators, authors, family counselors, and other professionals have presented positive, research-based information to our parents and students.

Volunteers Help With the Programs

In an attempt to provide for every member of our school families, the Family School Committee enlisted volunteers from the nearby Anderson Adventist church to help with various children's programs. During each two-hour Family School program, two children's programs were run; ages 4 through 1st grade watched Bible videos, created color sheets and a craft, and had play time. Grades 4 through 6, however, had presenters who talked to them about health, family time, and their relationship with Christ. Each age group attending Family School had a presentation that was tailored to their specific needs. Grades 7 and higher sat with the adults in the main meeting.

Positive Response

What were the results of this trial program? Through a survey given at the final Family School of the year, the parents provided reassurance that the information was helpful, practical, and effective. The response was so positive that the school board voted to continue the Family School program the next school year. Speakers for the second year (2005-2006) included Larry Burton, an education professor at Cross Street Christian School (CSCS), a Seventh-day Adventist junior academy in Anderson, Indiana, the teachers and school board recognized that parents today desire suggestions on how to guide their students' study habits and how to deal with difficult or rebellious teenagers.
from Andrews University; Donna Habenicht, a retired psychologist and author; Diana Stankewicz, the head of the remedial learning department at Anderson University; and Joanna Smith, a licensed family counselor from Indianapolis. The primary changes in the program the second year were: (1) a third children's program and childcare for infants through age 3, (2) a light dinner just before the program, and (3) special music presented by one of the classrooms at the beginning of each program. (This was a real hit!)

Attendance was good. For the first program in October, we had 85 total attendees, including students and adults; plus 15 volunteers who helped make Family School a reality. The programs couldn’t have happened without the efforts of Archie Moore, education superintendent for the Indiana Conference, CSCS teachers, the school board chairman, a number of volunteers from the Anderson church, and local guest speakers. In October, JoAnna Smith, a licensed family counselor, taught parents and teens how to recognize anger and use appropriate coping techniques. In November, Larry Burton introduced us to a variety of ways to enhance family worship and increase our students’ faith level. Several of our presenters came for the whole weekend and preached on Sabbath, as well.

We assessed the Family School’s effectiveness on an ongoing basis throughout the year. There were problems to solve, and obstacles to overcome. We occasionally had to reschedule our meetings (although it took something very serious to make this necessary!). We had a few parents who didn’t want to include a two-hour program in their schedule, and several who refused to come.

Planning the Future

One improvement that we’re considering for the future is having parents and students complete activities together during part or all of the program. Instead of separating the children from the parents during the presentation on “Family Time,” we will prepare cooperative activities with which the families can experiment, such as worship or family togetherness ideas.

Another element that we have considered for the future is that of small-group, parent-support meetings. The teachers have discussed the concept of providing more quality time for the parents to join together and brainstorm solutions—discussion-style. I haven’t met a parent yet who didn’t have several concerns he or she would like to discuss with supportive peers. This element could include prayer groups or study groups.

The CSCS school board voted in April of 2006 to take a break from Family School for one year. Although the board felt strongly that it had been an effective and useful tool, the program was time-consuming, and it was difficult to solicit volunteers. The school board also voted to discuss later whether to offer Family School every other year.

It is our prayer that our students and families grow closer together and stronger. The Adventist family is an ever-present mission field for our schools. “If the child is not instructed aright here, Satan will educate him through agencies of his choosing. How important, then, is the school in the home!”

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One of the presenters for Family School was Chris Richards, a family physician.

The younger children had crafts, coloring, Bible videos, and other activities while their parents attended the program.

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REFERENCES

2. Ibid.
When asked to remember problems with parents, a teacher in Tennessee related this experience:

One mother stands out. She complained to the principal that I was not being attentive enough to her son. Somewhat of a baby, the boy still threw temper tantrums in second grade. His mother expected me to give him individual help with everything; make sure he had his homework written down and turned in, and so on. She was a very large woman, intimidating, and one day she came to my class and said she needed to talk to me.

I thought uh oh, but I put on a smile and asked what I could do for her. She had quit her job and wanted to volunteer in my classroom. I was dumbstruck but said OK.

After a few weeks we had become chatty. She told me she so admired what I do and had no idea that teaching was so hard! What a blessing came out of that initially bad situation!

Most teachers can recall similar stories, with or without the happy ending.

A cover story in Time magazine in February 2005 docu-

PET PEEVES ABOUT PARENTS: TURNING PROBLEMS INTO PARTNERSHIP

BY PATRICIA A. DUNCAN
mented increased pressure on educators in the United States. Students challenge authority, and parents trust teachers less, validating their child’s view of the classroom over the adult’s. School staff members end up dealing with students and parents more delicately, and with less candor than a few decades ago.

Problems take many shapes: disorganized parents who lose papers, hovering moms and angry dads, and of course absentee parents who never show up for anything. Private schools take even more heat, with high academic goals and expectations that misbehavior “shouldn’t happen in a Christian school.”

Richard Arends, in Learning to Teach, cites two studies indicating that teachers want relationships with parents that “include both concern for the child and support for their instructional program. At the same time, many teachers do not want parents to interfere with their classrooms.” Let’s look at ways we can foster parent-teacher partnership by setting a positive tone and structure to prevent misunderstandings, being prepared to respond to potential confrontations, and showing empathy and patience while processing conflict.

POSITIVE, CLEAR COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS WILL SET THE TONE FOR POSITIVE INTERACTIONS ALL YEAR AND PREVENT MANY PROBLEMS.

Prevent Problems: Proactively Establish Relationships and Structure

As the professional in charge of your classroom, you need to set the tone early in the year for positive interactions with parents. If possible, get a list of students entering your classroom before school ends in June and photocopy the previous teacher’s class pictures to take home. Use these tools for prayer reminders throughout the summer.

Contact families before school begins. Harry and Rosemary Wong, in The First Days of School, encourage preschool and kindergarten teachers to schedule home visits, if appropriate, bringing letters inviting parents to a back-to-school open house and including a list of materials to have ready. Easing the transition means a lot to families.

I send my 5th graders a handwritten postcard inviting them to orientation on the day before classes begin. During the two-hour block, parents bring their children to arrange supplies in desks and cubbies. I use the time to get acquainted with parents and begin to forge connections.

After school begins, our Back-to-School Open House offers another opportunity for a good start with parents. Students do not attend this evening meeting. In a short speech, I introduce myself, mentioning my educational background and teaching experience. After outlining my policies on grading, homework, and discipline, I hand out the class schedule and talk about the curriculum. I point out ways they can support and help their students, and urge them to contact me if they see a problem developing.

When you hold this kind of meeting, let parents know how you’ll keep them informed about what’s happening in your classroom. Perhaps you’ll send a weekly newsletter home with graded papers. If possible, post your newsletter to the school’s Website for easy download, and leave current assignments on a Homework Hotline on the school’s voicemail system. If neither is feasible, print extra copies to send home by “kid mail.” Tell parents how and when to contact you. Will you take calls at home, or do you prefer they leave a message during school hours, letting you know when to call them back?

Also, invite moms and dads to get involved in the classroom in specific ways. Decide how much parent help you want, being aware of your own comfort level with the presence of other adults in the classroom while you’re teaching. In some schools, it’s difficult to recruit helpers, while in others, parents eagerly volunteer. The school where I teach has a mandatory family participation program, so parents often choose to work in classrooms to fill their volunteer hours while supporting their children.

Positive, clear communication with parents will set the tone for positive interactions all year and prevent many problems.

Prepare for Problems: Research, Document, and Plan

In an ideal world, teachers would not have problems with parents, but realistically, in a fallen world, the question is more when than if. Prayer and a personal relationship with the Lord underpin the teacher’s preparation. Take Paul’s advice and “Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:11, 12, NASB).

Next, devise a plan to use when needed. Bill Gallagher, a California teacher and administrator for 40 years, gives these tips:

1. Avoid discussing pressing problems when approached in an informal setting such as bus duty after school or a chance meeting in the grocery store. Set up a formal meeting at these initial contacts.

2. Be prepared with documented information about behavioral problems or answers to questions on why a grade was given.

3. Be positive, and choose your words carefully. If the
parent gets even a hint that you don’t like the child, all is lost.

4. Assure parents you want the best for their child and would love to set up a system between home and school that can lead to solving the problem.

5. When a parent has a history of difficult behavior, hold the conference in the principal’s or vice principal’s office. Make sure the administrator is versed on the problem as expressed by the parent. If possible, the teacher should direct the meeting. Stick to the point of working out a simple and manageable solution to which all parties can commit. Keep the meeting as short as possible without giving the impression that no one cares. If the child is reasonably mature, have him or her present because sometimes parents don’t get the whole picture from their child.

6. Explore the possibility of special testing when appropriate. If indicated, the administrator can encourage parents to authorize it.

7. If parents don’t approach you, use your intuition and careful observation to detect dissatisfaction. Take the initiative and innocently suggest meeting with the parents after school. This opens the door to finding out what’s on the mom’s or dad’s mind and shows a caring attitude.

As the professional in charge of your classroom, you need to set the tone early in the year for positive interactions with parents.

If you’re a new teacher, learn your school culture. Familiarize yourself with school policies about potentially touchy issues like discipline, grades, and the dress code. If your school publishes a parent handbook, study it carefully. Over the 50-year history of our school, the board has clarified policies on many details of school life. It’s invaluable to be able to direct parents to the handbook if they aren’t managing concerns according to policy.

Our parent manual also spells out detailed steps for Conflict Resolution based on Matthew 18:15-17, which states: “Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (NKJV).

Also, if you’re new to a school, ask if there are hot topics parents don’t want discussed with students at all or only in prescribed ways, such as puberty, sexuality, abortion, or drug and alcohol prevention. If these are topics that appear in the recommended curriculum, you may need to discuss with parents the importance of their children being given the facts about sensitive subjects in a Christian context.

Process Problems: Pray for Empathy, Show Patience

My grown children attended the school where I now teach, and I recall unwittingly giving teachers difficulties. One morning, my son’s kindergarten teacher called and said, “I have Brian here with me.” I didn’t understand why she called until she sweetly informed me that it was not a school day! The typical disorganized mom, I had either lost her newsletter, neglected to read it, or simply forgotten about the teacher in-service that day. There were good reasons for my overload, since I was helping manage a busi-
ness and raise three children. Today's families have even more frenetic lives and need our patience.

In addition, I was sometimes over-protective. When I was offended at my children's discipline or felt frustrated, I often talked to other parents instead of going direct to the teacher.

If you're a parent, think back over times you’ve disagreed with your children's teachers, incidents when you felt frustrated, events that pushed you to anger. Let's face it: Parents aren’t objective. They're understandably like mother tigers, preserving their young.

Daniel Goleman, in Emotional Intelligence, says empathy is the root of compassion, and those with a talent for empathizing and connecting with people “can be excellent teachers.” They have good skills for reading the non-verbal signals of facial expression, body language, and tone of voice to infer what another person is feeling. Mirroring those emotions goes a long way toward defusing a tense situation.

“I’m sure if she were my daughter, I’d feel the same way,” you might say to a frustrated father. Expressing understanding lays a foundation for communication. When emotions have subsided, you can present your point of view. You’ll have a better chance of being heard. Usually both of you can gain insights you hadn’t had before and improve your partnership in helping the student.

Working through disagreements requires patience. The process can continue over days or weeks. Nurture yourself. Vent emotions in prayer to the Lord and find a confidante who will listen. Seek advice from your principal or a veteran teacher who can supply wisdom from experience. Humble yourself before the Lord, asking Him to show you if you’ve been wrong. Apologize to the parties involved, if appropriate. Follow the steps of conflict resolution based on Scripture that are outlined above.

When it's over, move forward, forgiving yourself and others, and using the lessons learned to improve your teaching.

Whether you’re dealing with minor irritations or a major emotional blow-up, problems with parents are part of the workplace environment. Prevent as many as you can by establishing positive relationships and structure. Prepare for potential issues by researching your school culture and documenting touchy areas. Process conflicts with empathy, prayer, and patience. Remember, God is at work in our schools.

A few years ago, one of my students deliberately hurt another child at recess. When I didn't contact the parents of the injured child promptly, they felt betrayed. Although not a medical emergency, the situation would have triggered strong feelings if it had been my daughter, I realized later, and I apologized. I learned a valuable lesson as a new teacher, but the parents had lost trust in me.

Over the following few weeks, the two girls continued to have conflicts. I tried to keep the parents informed, but it didn't mend our relationship. On the phone, the dad vented his frustration. I dreaded the parent-teacher conference. My principal had been involved throughout the situation and felt I had made amends for my mistake. She pledged to pray.

When the father sat down at the conference table, to my amazement, he apologized. I was so relieved and thankful to the Lord for intervening. With God’s help, we worked together the rest of the year, partnering as parents and teachers should for the sake of the child.

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**Advice for Administrators**

Structure prevention of parent problems with two key elements:

1. A back-to-school night for parents early in the school year.
2. Sit-down parent-teacher conferences after the first grading period.

“Our district has done this for 40 years now and it pays off richly. As a principal I saw a dramatic drop in unhappy parents after we began these two programs,” says Bill Gallagher, California educator for 40 years.

**Tips for Success:**

Back to School Night

- Schedule during first few weeks of school.
- No students attend.
- Teachers introduce themselves and curriculum.
- Encourage parents to stay in touch, and to raise concerns soon rather than later.

**Parent-Teacher Conferences**

- Requires commitment from entire staff.
- Accommodate scheduling for multi-student families.
- Show positive student progress. Samples of student work help.
- Gives chance for parent-teacher team to shore up weak areas.
- Suggest having students from 4th grade and up to attend, then accent the positive.

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**REFERENCES**

Teaching junior high school students is a daunting task, as these teens morph through their most extreme makeover since infancy—hovering precariously between childhood and young adulthood. Early adolescents experience enormous physical and social changes as they commence a gradual and uneven intellectual transition from concrete to abstract thought. Spiritually, they are making lifelong decisions about their relationship with Christ and the church. Indeed, Valuegenesis: Ten Years Later reported that 58 percent of students in Adventist schools are baptized between the ages of 10-14, in grades 6-8. If students are not baptized during these years, 27 percent will not yet be baptized by the end of their senior year in high school.

Critical-Thinking Skills

Helping early adolescents make spiritual decisions and develop abstract thought challenges Adventist educators as they seek to produce “thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men’s thoughts.” Thinking means more than the acquisition of facts to prepare for a test. It requires the ability to examine information, consider alternatives, distinguish between fact and opinion, and evaluate evidence using sound reasoning. As early adolescents begin thinking deeply about life, teachers can help facilitate purposeful, directed thinking, keeping in mind that students thrive when assisted in...
An interdisciplinary study that simultaneously integrates Bible and science is a practical way for teachers to guide 8th graders through a critical examination of evolution and creation combined with a thoughtful study of Adventist fundamental beliefs.

framing the right questions and encouraged to explore alternatives.

One area of study with considerable potential for cultivating critical-thinking skills is the study of Earth’s origin. The North American Division (NAD) Office of Education recommends an 8th-grade science curriculum that includes a study of creation and evolution. In Bible class, the students study faith, sin, and the history of the weekly Sabbath. An interdisciplinary study that simultaneously integrates Bible and science is a practical way for teachers to guide 8th graders through a critical examination of evolution and creation combined with a thoughtful study of Adventist fundamental beliefs.

Interdisciplinary Instruction

Interdisciplinary instruction is a well-recognized method that approaches a topic from the perspective of two or more disciplines. It thereby helps students make logical connections among disciplines and organize isolated bits of information. It also helps prepare them for the workplace and real life, where subject areas are not artificially separated by clocks or bells. Interdisciplinary instruction is developmentally appropriate for early adolescents, giving them an opportunity to work in cooperative groups, ask questions, explore alternatives, and engage in project-based activities addressing real-world issues.

What follows is an example of an interdisciplinary thematic unit (ITU) for 8th grade that combines science and Bible in a project-based study of Earth’s origin. The unit, called Origins, was developed by two teacher-education students from Pacific Union College (a science major and a religion major) who have now completed their programs and hold both public and Adventist teaching credentials.

This particular ITU was designed to fill 12 90-minute blocks each for science and for Bible; however, it can be adapted for shorter class periods. It can be taught by one teacher in a self-contained classroom who is conversant in both disciplines, or by a science teacher and a Bible teacher working as a team.

In this unit, students investigate evidence for and against five origins theories: Young Earth Creation, Day-Age Theory, Gap Theory, Theistic Evolution, and the Big Bang, along with Naturalistic Evolution. The first four origins theories acknowledge God’s involvement, while the fifth theory is entirely naturalistic. An element that ties the disciplines together is a project requiring each student to investigate an origins-related topic introduced in either science or Bible class. The students demonstrate what they have learned using visual aids in a culminating presentation that they can share with classmates and parents.
Interdisciplinary Unit Example

The religion unit, entitled Does the Bible Say When?, explores the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the Genesis creation account, and the biblical flood, interpreting geologic evidence through a spiritual lens. The science unit, entitled Does the Dirt Say When?, examines geologic evidence and various scientific interpretations of origins.

Because early adolescents do not readily transfer or connect information across disciplines, the Bible and the science teacher should meet regularly to plan explicit references to each other's lessons if the unit is taught by two teachers. If the unit is taught by one teacher, explicit references to each discipline need to be part of daily lesson planning to ensure that students make connections between science and religion. Such deliberate planning will foster relevant, deep, and meaningful learning (note the explicit references to each discipline in the example that follows).

The Origins unit is undergirded by four essentials that students revisit throughout their study:

1. Evidence exists to support several theories of the origin and age of planet Earth and life upon it;
2. Both geologic and theological evidence give clues about when the Earth and its lifeforms originated;
3. The evidence can be interpreted in different ways based on a person's worldview; and
4. It is possible to weigh the geologic and theological evidence to develop a well-reasoned understanding of why Adventists hold a fundamental belief in biblical creation.

The following summary offers short excerpts from the 12 original lessons. The lessons may be adapted according to time and resources, or the complete unit may be obtained by contacting the authors.

Lesson 1

Religion. Students investigate the origin of sin, which is central to a Christian view of creation. They read Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 to explore the reality of Satan and the influence of fallen angels on Earth. Afterward, they complete a group project examining potential problems such as creating beings who can sin.

Science. Students analyze the difference between creationist and naturalistic worldviews and examine evidence both for and against the Big Bang theory. The teacher alerts students that they will study the theological implications of the Big Bang theory in religion class (Lessons 2 and 7), including polonium radiohalos, which are problematic for this theory.

Lesson 2

Religion. Students explore why God created the Earth when Satan was determined to oppose Him. They discuss the presence of the Trinity in Creation and the logical six-day weekly order, using skits and artistic depictions. Students review the Big Bang theory, and then discuss how many Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, view the origin of the Earth based on the biblical creation account.

Science. The teacher introduces four origins theories that acknowledge God's involvement (i.e., Young Earth, Gap, Day-Age, and Theistic Evolution), and students separate into groups to research supporting and contradictory evidence for each theory. The teacher makes connections, referring to a timeline that students will create in religion class (Lesson 9) depicting creationist theories.

Lesson 3

Religion. Students compare Genesis 1 and 2, and attempt to locate the site of the Garden of Eden. The teacher leads out in a discussion of the difference between God’s creation of the universe, an act that is somewhat removed, and His creation of human beings, which is much more intimate. To illustrate the difference, each student creates a man or a woman out of Fimo dough and gives the person a name, skills, personality, and other characteristics.

Science. The teacher introduces the geologic processes of weathering, continental drift, and volcanism. He or she explains how rocks were formed and how the relative ages of rock layers are determined. The teacher compares the theories of uniformitarianism and catastrophic. Afterward, students use peanut butter and jelly sandwich materials to simulate various geologic processes and determine how they influence original horizontality and superposition. Subsequently, the teacher introduces the unit's main research project, which centers on each student's understanding of origins.

Lesson 4

Religion. Students analyze Satan's activities in the Garden of Eden and create skits dramatizing conversations between God, Adam, and Eve. The
students connect their learning to science class by discussing the curses of sin such as the need to till the ground, pain in childbirth, and dietary changes. They answer questions such as these: Was this “evolution”? Were these curses ordained of God for all time, or should humans try to restore things, as closely as possible, to the conditions that existed at Creation?

Science. Students examine how scientists use radioactive isotopes to determine the ages of rocks and fossils, and analyze the assumptions and limitations of this dating method. Using diagrams, graphs, and computer animations, the teacher presents the basics of atomic structure and radioactive decay. Student groups apply what they have learned about polonium 215, previewing future material in religion class (Lesson 7) regarding its role in the formation of radiohalos (evidence for Young Earth Creation).

Lesson 5

Religion. Any discussion of sin is incomplete without an understanding of how the atonement can restore people or groups who are at odds to a positive relationship. Students create and present a skit showing how trust is destroyed between two parties, what the separation means in the eyes of local law or culture, and how the two parties can be brought back into a relationship through some kind of sacrifice by one of them.

Science. Students study the huge amounts of time represented by the naturalistic interpretation of the geologic column that permeates textbooks and the popular press. They study diagrams that show how naturalists divide geologic time into eras, periods, and epochs. The teacher uses a timeline to contrast how adherents of Young Earth Creation view the scope of geologic time. Pairs of students use adding-machine tape and colored pencils to create a naturalistic geologic timeline. Making connections, the teacher instructs students to keep their naturalistic timelines to compare with the creationist timelines they will make in religion class (Lesson 9).

Lesson 6

Religion. Students analyze several views of the atonement (e.g., personal, judicial, totalitarian). They design a collage showing the natural consequences of sin such as leaving the Garden of Eden, the death of plants and animals, and the human awareness of needing to wear clothing.

Science. Students study organisms that supposedly originated (via evolution) in each of the periods of the geologic column. After outlining a naturalistic explanation of the geologic column, the teacher discusses some of the life forms found in each geologic period. Students work in pairs to create a poster that illustrates their research on life forms, environmental conditions, and special events (e.g., ice ages, large-scale extinctions).

Lesson 7

Religion. Students explore the worldwide flood progression that brought the Earth to its present state, according the Creation Evidence Museum (CEM) model. The teacher discusses polonium 215 and radiohalo formation. Students pretend to be polonium radiation trying to escape granite. During the first exercise, the “polonium” students try to escape the slowly solidifying granite, and succeed. The next time, the “polonium” stu-
Students are not able to escape the crystallizing granite because it cools too quickly. The evidence for quick cooling lends support to Young Earth Creation and the Flood. A video, *Fingerprints of Creation*, presents additional information about radioholos, referring back to science class (Lesson 4).

**Science.** Students examine how fossils are formed, along with different interpretations of the fossil record by naturalists and creationists. A lecture covers the various types and groups of fossils, as well as the conditions necessary to produce fossilization. The teacher summarizes the naturalistic interpretation of the fossil record, and makes connections to religion class by discussing a creationist interpretation that incorporates the potential effects of a worldwide flood. After using acid etching to locate fossils on slabs of Rochester Shale, pairs of students create reports detailing the numbers, sizes, and identities of the fossilized organisms they found.

**Lesson 8**

**Religion.** Students discuss the patriarchal genealogies in Genesis 6-11. They assess the claim by many creationists that the long ages proposed by evolutionists would result in a human population that greatly exceeds the number of people currently on Earth. The class also discusses counterarguments that the increase from the eight survivors of the Flood would not equal the current population of the world in the time frame given.

**Science.** Students learn about the naturalistic perspective on the origin of humans, using the fossil record. In the process, they become familiar with several of the most famous human fossil discoveries. Student pairs investigate these issues through a teacher-designed WISE (Web-based Inquiry Science Environment) project complete with video clips, pictures, charts, and animations. The teacher summarizes evolutionary changes (e.g., skeletal, lifestyle, intelligence) according to a naturalistic interpretation, and provides a creationist interpretation for several early human fossils.

**Lesson 9**

**Religion.** Students create a rough timeline of three creationist theories (i.e., Young Earth, Gap, and Day-Age), comparing them with the naturalistic timelines from science class (Lesson 5). The class takes a poll (with students standing in classroom corners) to express their current understandings about one or more origins theories.

**Science.** Students begin work on their unit projects. They choose an origins-related research topic, a presentation format (e.g., PowerPoint, tri-fold display board, informational brochure), and a visual aid (e.g., table, graph, picture).

**Lesson 10**

**Religion.** Students continue to work on their projects, identifying major concepts within their chosen focus, and outlining potential details. Students also begin work on a second visual aid for their final presentations (e.g., poster, model, drawing).

**Science.** Students examine the process of erosion and consider its implications for the age of the Earth. They analyze the potential impact of huge amounts of moving water (such as a large-scale flood) in shaping the face of the Earth. Following a discussion of hydraulic erosion accompanied by a video about Glacial Lake Missoula and the geologic consequences of its sudden drainage, students create small-scale landscapes of different materials at varying gradients. They then run water across the landscapes to explore the relationship between the extent of erosion and volume of flow, rate of flow, landscape composition, and landscape gradient. Connecting to religion class (Lesson 7), the teacher reminds students that they have stud-
ied the Creation Evidence Museum model of causes and effects of a worldwide flood.

Lesson 11

Religion. Students create a timeline for secular theories, including Theistic Evolution and the Big Bang. The class reviews supporting and contradictory evidence for all five theories (creationist and naturalistic) and discusses the spiritual implications of the theories that require death to occur before Adam and Eve’s sin.

Science. Students continue working on their projects, creating a properly formatted bibliography and further developing their presentation.

Lesson 12

Religion. Students continue to work on their projects, completing a third visual aid and submitting their work to a classmate for peer review.

Science. Students take a field trip to a petrified forest (or explore a petrified forest on the Internet). They gain experience with one group of fossils studied in class and describe naturalistic and creationist theories about the geologic processes that led to petrifaction. In the process, they discover that dramatic geologic processes have taken place throughout the world.

As the unit moves toward completion, students present their visual projects during subsequent class periods or at a school open house.

Closing Thoughts

Public schools have long struggled with the role of science and religion in the classroom as ideologically divided school boards and courts debate what should and should not be included in science textbooks, limiting the likelihood that public school students will investigate alternate theories of origins. By contrast, Adventist teachers and students, unlettered by such restrictions, can examine evidence on both sides of the debate and cultivate critical-thinking skills as they come to understand why Adventists believe the biblical creation account.

The example interdisciplinary unit, Origins, addresses the spiritual, intellectual, and social needs of early adolescents, providing multiple ways for them to critically investigate questions, work in cooperative groups, exercise faith, and demonstrate their knowledge through discussions and projects. Careful planning is needed to design the structure and substance of the interdisciplinary unit to include explicit references to what is being taught in the corresponding discipline(s). These purposeful connections are the key to the broad and deep understanding associated with higher-level learning.

The goal of the unit is to ensure that students understand these concepts: (1) Evidence exists to support several theories of the origin and age of planet Earth and life on it; (2) Both geologic and theological evidence offer clues about when the Earth and life on it originated; (3) The same evidence can be interpreted in different ways based on one’s worldview; and (4) Each student can weigh the geologic and theological evidence to develop a well-reasoned understanding of why Adventists believe theories about creation based on the Bible record.

Teachers who help their early adolescent students explore an in-depth investigation of the Earth’s origin within a supportive Adventist environment can stimulate critical thinking skills at a decisive spiritual juncture in their students’ lives. Such adolescents can apply these thinking skills to further lifelong learning in all their academic pursuits.

References

13. WISE: http://www.wise.berkeley.edu/. Free online learning environment designed and supported by the National Science Foundation. WISE includes authoring tools for teachers to prepare Web-based projects for students.

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Activity-based and inquiry-based science instruction offer many learning advantages. The teacher’s challenge is to create a learning environment that is both interactive and safe. The high school chemistry class, with its multiple working groups and materials, is often the most problematic.

Often, students enrolling in a high school chemistry course expect dramatic demonstrations led by an Einsteinesque figure. When I taught at the secondary level, my students (especially adolescent males), often made jocular comments such as “When are we going to get to blow things up?” My quick reply: “I hope never!” or “My goal is to keep things from blowing up!” This friendly banter reveals the underlying tension between the students’ image of chemistry and safe “hands-on” laboratory activities.

Safety is an important issue in any classroom, but in the chemistry classroom and laboratory, it requires careful, coordinated planning.

Safety is an important issue in any classroom, but in the chemistry classroom and laboratory, it requires careful, coordinated planning.

- The local school board must be aware of the need for physical components and special resources;
- The principal must be supportive of the chemistry teacher’s need to limit the number of students enrolled into a class;
- The teacher must consistently consider safety in his or her classroom planning; and
- Students must understand the need to cooperate with safety protocols.

Guidelines and expectations have become more specific as curricular planners and teachers realize the potential hazards involved. It is crucial that the entire education team in a school, including the assessment team that evaluates the school at regular intervals, be aware of current research and recommendations.

Recommendations From the Science Community

The National Research Council, in collaboration with other science associations, has set standards for science education. Teaching Standard D (NRC 43) assigns responsibility...
to the teacher for managing the learning environment—especially time, space, and materials. Thus, ensuring a safe working environment is not just good sense, it is standard professional practice. However, many older schools were not built to meet today’s standards, forcing teachers to cope in a variety of ways. Teachers must be vigilant in implementing appropriate protocols for storage, use, and care of chemicals in order to ensure a safe learning environment.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has made a number of recommendations for schools and chemicals. Suero suggests that Federal and State environmental programs should support schools as they educate students. This also includes educating teachers and students about chemical safety.

Suero notes that chemical storage in many school buildings leaves a lot of room for improvement. For example, it is not uncommon to see unlabeled and undated containers, corrosives stored on metal shelves, flammables on wooden shelves, and chemicals stored alphabetically—an organizational plan that might be suitable for language arts, but is dangerous in chemistry lab, considering the reactive nature of some elements and compounds. Mismanagement can produce both immediate risks as well as long-term health hazards that affect local ground water and air quality. No educator would knowingly cause long- or short-term injury to students or colleagues, but it’s easy to get busy and allow urgent needs to overshadow best practices in regard to safety.

The National Science Teacher’s Association (NSTA) is continually reminding its membership about safety issues.
Ken Roy, chairperson of NSTA’s Science Safety and Advisory Board, writes a monthly column in the middle-school science teachers’ journal Science Scope. His recent columns have included reminders that laboratory activities can be ‘green’ (March 2005), being proactive about laboratory safety training, student contracts, quizzes, and drills; and making sure that the number of students in middle school laboratory class does not exceed 24.³

The Science Teacher helps secondary teachers stay up to date about preferred practices regarding safety requirements. It recently printed information about free publications from the EPA regarding its Schools Chemical Cleanout Campaign.⁴

**Teacher Preparation**

In most school systems, teachers must take a methods course in order to qualify to teach science to grades 7–12. Each middle-school and high school teacher should have completed this course. Science teachers should have been exposed to safety protocols in high school and college science courses, and those precautions should have been reinforced during the methods course. Textbooks for the methods course emphasize safety, sources of information, and rules for implementing safe procedures. An example of a list of rules by King⁵ includes:

1. The proper type of safety goggles must be worn.
2. Chemicals must be secured to prevent unauthorized student use.
3. Chemicals must be correctly labeled.
4. Laboratory experiences must be conducted in the presence of the classroom teacher.
5. Ensuring safe working conditions is the responsibility of the teacher and the school.
6. The availability of appropriate materials is the responsibility of the school. Their storage and use are the responsibility of the teacher.
7. Alcohol burners, which are susceptible to spills, are not recommended.
8. The teacher must show students how to safely use all laboratory materials.
9. Teachers should be able to explain any explosion that takes place.

Each teacher should post a list of rules appropriate to the level of instruction and the maturity of the students in the class.

The motto for the Laboratory Safety Institute is “Teach,
Learn, and Practice Science Safely. Unfortunately, the laboratory accident rate for schools and colleges is higher than in commercial chemical companies. (See http://www.labsafety.org.) This is not so surprising, considering that students are just learning skills and procedures, whereas chemical plant employees are either experienced chemists or under the direct supervision of chemists. With this in mind, science educators must be vigilant about the safety of the students in their care. Common sense and fear of litigation will lead educators to adopt many recommended practices in science classes. However, they need to keep abreast of current knowledge and practice in order to ensure a safe environment for students, staff, and community.

In the Classroom

The teacher's primary responsibility is to manage the interaction between the planned curriculum and the students. In this role, safety is a primary concern. Safe practices include planning and documentation, storage and disposal, fire protocols, and instructing students in the use of the laboratory. The board and the principal must provide time and resources to support the teacher's documentation and instruction in safe science. At times, achieving this may take some persistence on the teacher's part, but it is well worth the effort, and the difference is obvious in a well-run and safe instructional chemistry setting.

Before school starts, and at the end of each term, the science teacher must create and/or update the physical organization and documentation regulating the use of new materials. If the teacher is new to the school, he or she needs to locate existing documentation and begin obtaining the materials for activity-based instruction.

If the documentation is up to date, then the teacher need only maintain the components of the system. There should already be an inventory of chemicals and other supplies such as glassware. If not, then the situation must be corrected quickly. This will require an allocation of time by the supervisory staff, or the provision of temporary volunteer or paid help. Some counties require an inventory of chemicals, without which the school could be shut down until it achieves compliance.

Teachers need to allow time at the beginning of each school year to instruct the students in proper laboratory procedures. This includes the creation of formal, dated lesson plans documenting the instruction given, both to provide a written record and as a reminder of procedures and processes to share with students, parents, and administrators.

Managing the Chemicals

Chemical storage should follow guidelines set up by the Laboratory Safety Institute. Minimally, there must be lockable cupboards and cabinets for elements and compounds, with a separate cabinet for flammable liquids. Acids and bases should be stored at or below knee level, and inorganics should be kept away from organics. Indicators, stains, and food-type items each need their own cabinet. Household chemicals such as bleach, ammonia, white-board cleaner, and insecticides need to be accurately labeled and stored appropriately. Aerosol paint cans should not be stored near the chemicals.

Flinn Scientific has a very helpful computer program (Chemventory) for cataloging chemicals.

After the inventory is complete, the information should be backed up on a CD and stored in the main school office. A hard copy should be printed for the science teachers to use throughout the school year. In the U.S., when science chemicals are ordered, they come with a safety sheet regarding hazards, recommended storage, and other pertinent information. These data sheets should be alphabetized and kept in a binder in a location familiar to the administration. This is a further protection for substitute teachers or in the event of an accident.

Textbook companies provide a lot of information, as well. The lab manual will contain a list of needed chemicals for the year. Often, there will not be enough time to do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Imperatives</th>
<th>Student Imperatives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Model safety practices at all times.</td>
<td>1. Follow directions promptly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Plan and practice exit routes in case of a fire.</td>
<td>2. Wear only natural fibers to school on lab days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Know the location of the master valve to shut off the gas.</td>
<td>3. Wear safety gear at all times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Instruct three or four trusted students how to assist in an emergency.</td>
<td>4. Be cooperative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Maintain the inventory and store all chemicals using standard procedures.</td>
<td>5. Be aware.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
every recommended lab. With careful planning, the list can serve as a guide in planning individual labs rather than as an all-inclusive shopping list.

**Disposing of Chemicals**

The teacher's guide provides recommendations for disposing of the compounds created during laboratory activities, as well as outdated chemicals. These procedures vary depending on the local government regulations, soil types, septic or sewage system, etc. Companies that sell chemicals for schools and industry provide resources to help teachers to stay current about options for disposal and minimizing chemical waste. However, the teacher must ensure that appropriate procedures are followed.

At the end of the year, the teacher should take all labeled hazardous waste to a licensed waste-management site. He or she should not leave potentially dangerous compounds for others to dispose of, or leave them in storage. The principal needs to pay particular attention to the procedures when new staff are hired to ensure that proper procedures are followed. This will ensure that the incoming teacher enters a classroom with established guidelines and does not have to create a new system for managing chemicals.

**Fire Safety**

Another critical concern is the potential for fire. The lab must have a readily accessible master valve so that the teacher can instantly shut off the propane supply in case of emergency. In each classroom or lab, several responsible students must also know the location of the valve and how to operate it correctly.

The fire-blanket is a vital piece of equipment. Fire-blankets are used differently, depending on the fibers in a person’s clothing (manmade fabrics can melt and cause serious burns). Students should be instructed to wear only natural fibers on lab day, and to avoid baggy clothing and loose items like ties and scarves. Long hair should be tied back.

Early in the school year, under the teacher's careful supervision, students should role-play the use of goggles, aprons, the fire-blanket, eye-wash, and the emergency shower. Familiarity and practice are key to minimizing damage in an emergency. The administration needs to allocate time for this instruction.

**Minimum Necessities**

1. Storage and disposal plan
2. Inventory of chemicals
3. Master valve to shut off propane
4. Fire-blanket
5. Eye-wash station
6. Fume hood with exhaust fan

**The Role of Students**

The teacher must make sure that students are aware of and consistently alert to chemical safety issues. It takes con-
stant vigilance and a disciplined mind to ensure the consistent and comprehensive application of policies regarding safety, and to integrate this into the curriculum. The teacher must not only teach safety, but also model it day after day. Students can be taught to keep things organized and tidy, but only if they have a good example to follow!

Students can be encouraged to use all their senses to detect problems. When they smell an unusual odor, for example, they should let the teacher know that something is amiss.

The handling of chemicals is the most dangerous part of a laboratory experience. Students should be taught that all chemicals can be harmful and should not be tasted, smelled, or touched directly. Instructions need to be followed precisely. Any accident or injury must be reported to the teacher immediately. Many textbooks provide a contract for teachers to use as they make the expectations explicit to students. Once parents and students have signed this agreement, the teacher must follow through consistently, with the support of the principal, to implement sanctions for students who do not comply. First, such students need to lose privileges but ultimately lose credit if they don’t live up to reasonable expectations to keep themselves and others safe as part of their chemistry course.

When the teacher takes a leadership role, students will learn investigative and practical skills—and safety—along with the theoretical elements of chemistry, all in a safe and pleasant environment. Although the chemistry lab should be an enjoyable experience, everyone involved must understand the potential for disaster. If proper precautions are taken, the chemistry laboratory can be a great hands-on experience for students.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

Delivering high school, college, or university classes online presents exciting new possibilities for Adventist education. But can this type of course nurture Adventist faith to the same extent as a traditional face-to-face classroom?

Technology and online classes have steadily and dramatically transformed secondary and higher education. Over the past decade, online classes have emerged from a radical innovation to a well-accepted and widely used teaching methodology in many colleges and universities worldwide. Looking ahead to the higher education world of 2020, Witherspoon foresees that computer-enhanced learning will become the core modality of many institutions’ approach to teaching and learning. Lynch observes that the next 50 years will see a learning revolution unlike anything witnessed since the beginning of the printing press. For Lynch, the reality is that students need career and lifelong learning, and they want to learn wherever it is convenient for them, whether that is at 3:00 a.m. or 10:00 p.m.

Delivering high school, college, or university classes online presents exciting new possibilities for Adventist education. Students who cannot easily access an Adventist academy or college campus have found online classes flexible and convenient. But can this type of course nurture Adventist faith to the same extent as a traditional face-to-face classroom?

Many of my colleagues believe that online classes are necessary to accomplish Christ’s commission to “go ye into all the world” and teach the gospel to everyone, not just those who can come to a physical campus. Others argue that the online environment is a poor substitute for the faith-affirming visual, verbal, and non-verbal interactions that occur in a traditional classroom. Without prayer,

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thoughtful devotionals, or the caring face and voice of a Christian teacher, will there still be opportunity to develop and share Adventist faith?

**The Growth in Online Learning**

In 2002, some 1.6 million students (11 percent of U.S. higher education students) took at least one online course. The overall percentage of U.S. colleges identifying online education as a critical long-term strategy grew from 49 percent in 2003 to 56 percent in 2005. Overall U.S. online enrollment increased from 1.98 million in 2003 to 2.35 million in 2004. However, private and church-affiliated institutions in the U.S. have moved into this area at a significantly slower rate than public institutions.

Tonkin notes that Christian colleges have successfully cultivated spiritual and intellectual development in a “high touch,” face-to-face context. Roels suggests that their reluctance to embrace online learning stems from legitimate concerns about whether online classes can actually accommodate the distinct educational mission of Christian colleges. However, she concludes that online classes may be one of the few options working adults have to finish college or obtain an advanced degree at a Christian institution.

I firmly believe that online classes can be taught in ways that will nurture and affirm faith and develop and support authentic Christian community. But my personal experience over the past 10 years, in both teaching and taking online classes, suggests that it will not be easy. Teaching online requires that teachers be intentional about developing a positive class atmosphere and achieving faith-related goals.

**Online Faith Integration**

Integrating faith and learning, and developing “Christian community” have always been the cornerstone of Adventist education. In an article entitled “Nurturing Faith in the Cyber Classroom,” Akers comments that “what we say at this juncture about faith nurture via the Internet is largely theoretical. There are, however, some tried and true premises and procedures that might possibly transfer over from the conventional classroom to this new instructional frontier.” He further asserts that, “it is the task of the Christian teacher to guide and orchestrate the study—whether it be group or individual—to trace all the linkages back to principles and show that all assertions and knowledge at their root have ethical and spiritual implications.” This article examines five major approaches to achieving these goals in an online course.

**The Teacher Is the Key in Integrating Faith Online**

I believe that Christian faith is often more caught than taught. As teachers witness through their lives, their commitment will be contagious. Holmes believes that Christian colleges exist to educate students in a “climate of faith and learning” and that dedicated faculty members are the key to
Teaching online requires that teachers be intentional about developing a positive class atmosphere and achieving faith-related goals.

Perhaps it will be helpful to begin with some widely accepted “best practices” in higher education that apply equally well in online education as in face-to-face instruction. Chickering and Gamson have provided seven basic principles for effective college and university teaching:16

• Encourage genuine and personal contact between students and instructors;
• Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students;
• Encourage active learning;
• Give prompt feedback;
• Emphasize time on task;
• Communicate high academic expectations; and
• Respect the diverse talents which each individual student has and their unique ways of learning.

These tried and true principles can also serve as reliable guides to interactions with online students. Let’s look now at how to apply them in the online class.

Genuine and Personal Contact Affirms and Nurtures Faith

A well-designed online course allows students to actively participate in many different learning activities, including class discussions, small group activities, and student-to-student and student-to-faculty interaction.

Graham et al17 have developed a list of “lessons learned” for online instructors using the Chickering and Gamson principles. They consider it extremely important for instructors to give detailed, prompt, and personal feedback to each student. This is the essence of great online teaching and, I believe, the key to nurturing faith online. From the very first e-mail contact by the instructor, students are making judgments about how compassionate and caring the teacher is, as well as how “user-friendly” the online course will be. It is essential to start with assurances (especially for those who are taking an online class for the first time) that you will help them and always be there for them.

At the beginning of every online class, I write a personal message to each student welcoming him or her to the class with the assurance that I am only an e-mail away. I emphasize that I check e-mails many times per day and that there are no “dumb” questions. I strive to make all communication personal and inviting.

It is impossible to develop a caring Christian relationship without a significant investment of personal time. Graham et al found that neglecting feedback in online courses is common because many faculty members just don’t have—or take—the time to be personal.18 To avoid this problem, they urge online instructors to include in the syllabus clear timelines for responding to e-mail messages, such as, “I will make every effort to respond to e-mail within two days of receiving it” or “I will respond to e-mails on Tuesdays and Fridays between three and five o’clock.” At these times, they can also encourage participants who are not routinely involved in discussions through personal e-mails or telephone calls.

Shelton and Saltzman in their online article “Tips and Tricks for Teaching Online: How to Teach Like a Pro!”19 repeatedly stress that learners are “eager for communication” and urge online instructors to communicate regularly with individuals and the class. They suggest that teachers should use class-wide e-mail announcements, group e-mails, and “chat archives to facilitate accessible, public communication in the online course.”20 They warn that a lack of communica-

Creating that climate and feeling of community. George Knight11 sees every Adventist teacher as an agent of salvation and Christian teaching as a serious ministry.

From their original research on how faith is best integrated with learning, Burton and Nwosu speak of the “pervasive influence” of teachers on students: “Two of the most valued items students perceived as important for helping them integrate their faith and learning were ‘professor’s caring attitude’ and ‘professor’s exemplary life.’”12 They note that courses must be designed to integrate faith with specific content knowledge. Kornieczuk suggests that teachers interested in faith integration must discover in their subject matter “the themes and issues that naturally allow for an explicit connection between the curricular content, on the one hand, and Christian faith, beliefs, and values on the other.”13 Rasi also emphasized this “intentionality” when he wrote that all teaching and learning must be designed to “ensure that students, by the time they leave school, will have freely internalized biblical values and a view of knowledge, life, and destiny that is Bible-based, Christ-centered, service-oriented, and kingdom-directed.”14

Laird emphasizes that the integration of Christian principles must be more intentional in the online setting than in face-to-face classes.15 This is crucial because it is what sets Christian online classes apart from those offered by a public institution. At his private Christian school, all teachers of online courses are required to articulate faith integration strategies for each class assignment, forum exercise, instructor example, online project, and personal learning journal assignment. Because many online students will probably never see each other or their professor, faculty must intentionally transform online exchanges and the online environment into a place where spiritual needs are met and spiritual growth is fostered. But how does a professor integrate faith and learning online?
tion will lead to feelings of isolation and urge the adding of emotion to e-mails using the “emotion expressed in parentheses (*smile*) or to include emoticons, such as :-) for happiness or :-0 for surprise or dismay.”21

Obviously, this level of interaction and communication can occur only when class enrollment is limited to a reasonable number of students. Research indicates that the optimal size of an online class is no more than 20 for undergraduate courses and eight to 14 for graduate courses, unless the teacher has assistants to ensure speedy response to student inquiries and posts, and to aid in grading assignments and tests.22

**Threaded Discussions**

Online courses must be designed to allow for significant and active communication between students and from student to teacher. Accessibility to the teacher is crucial to a student’s ability to successfully complete an online class.

Online courses are most often delivered through learning management systems (LMS) such as Blackboard, WebCT, and Desire2Learn, which organize learning content in a standard way. Every LMS allows for “threaded” online discussion. A threaded discussion is a chronological listing of class members’ comments with the author’s name attached to each posting. Threaded discussion comments can be posted anytime, and allow time for reflection and critical thinking.

The teacher needs to regularly monitor threaded discussion comments to provide guidance and ensure that students are responding appropriately and courteously to one another.

In my current online class, I pose one question per week to which all class members must respond. In addition, they must comment on two other posts by fellow class members. This weekly assignment provides a great opportunity for me to pose questions that allow students to reflect and clarify thoughts about God, individual beliefs, and the use of technology. Again, it is crucial that ethical and moral dilemmas or prominent spiritual themes be highlighted. One of the best ways to nurture faith, as Akers states, is “through gentle probing questions and follow-through dialogue.”23

**Collaborative Projects**

In my online classes, I require a small group of three to four students to complete a final collaborative project. The project should require all levels of Bloom’s taxonomy—application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.24 If planned carefully, the assignment can encourage intercultural understanding, build tolerance, and encourage faith sharing among class members.

During my online class last spring, several student groups worked closely together to complete an assignment. In one group were an Adventist principal from a small school in Indiana and a public school administrator from New York City. They shared their experiences and their faith, and prayed for each other at different times during the class, especially when the husband of one of the women was diagnosed with a serious illness.

**Online Chats**

During each 15-week online class, I schedule one synchronous (at the same time) meeting every fifth week when all class members are required to “meet” online. Several days before the online class, I post a lesson plan for that night. We always have a devotional reading first, and I then pose a main question related to the assigned
As teachers witness through their lives, their commitment will be contagious.

reading. For example, after the first module, I asked this question: Why did Bonhoeffer argue that “if persons claim to be persons of faith, there is no room for taking the easy way out”? Why is this so in life? Can you give some personal examples? This has produced many deep and meaningful dialogues.

Generally, students will share personal issues more readily in the online class than in a face-to-face setting. Because of this, faculty members need to be in tune with and supportive of this interaction. In one of my recent online classes, a non-Adventist doctoral student shared his sorrows associated with his 4-year-old son’s struggle with a brain tumor. This young man, his wife, and their son were the subject of many special prayers by the class members when they learned of his situation in an online chat session.

Developing a Christian Faith Community

How can you ensure that your online class develops a sense of Christian community? Can open dialogue, with its connectedness and feeling of belonging, occur without face-to-face classroom interaction? Palloff and Pratt caution that those who teach online must be purposeful and intentional in creating a feeling of community. They note five approaches that will facilitate community in an online class: (a) active interaction involving both course content and personal communication with each student; (b) collaborative learning as evidenced by comments directed primarily from student to student rather than from student to instructor; (c) socially constructed meaning (developed by and in the online community); (d) sharing of resources among students; and finally (e) expressions of encouragement and support exchanged between students, and a further willingness to evaluate critically the work of fellow students.

Meyer and Wessman have discussed the development of Christian community in their online nursing classes. In summary, they used the Dietrich Bonhoeffer model of Christian community, intentionally trying to create an online milieu with opportunities for “Christ-like love, ministry and confession.” In planning the coursework, they asked themselves: “How could we experience community worship experiences as prelude to work, and how should we craft learning experiences that blended reflection through both dialog and solitude?”

Meyer and Wessman believe several things that must be planned for throughout the online class, including intentional, natural, and pervasive integration of Scripture; letting individuals choose their preferred balance between group engagement and solitude; affirmation of self-disclosure; providing feedback (proof) that a faculty member has been listening (reading) to the asynchronous chat responses; affirming helpful behavior; encouraging risk-taking; individually tailoring approaches to different students’ needs; and encouraging responses to apologies from group members.

Similarly, Strevey in an article entitled “Is Faith-Based E-Learning Possible?” urges that faith integration be based on the specific mission of the Christian college or university that offers the online course. In her experience, “This is accomplished through building positive student self-image and Christian character, integrating faith with learning and living, and integration of spiritual, educational and leadership development.” In her online undergraduate nursing classes, weekly devotionals intentionally relate Scripture to the world of work. An online prayer forum is included in each course, and faculty members intentionally foster student character development through their postings. In short, all faculty are “encouraged and expected to share their faith in the online classroom.” This shows that with careful planning, the online experience can be designed so that Christian community with its gifts of faith, hope, and love can develop and flourish.

Conclusion

I firmly believe that Adventist education, undergraduate and graduate, can be effectively delivered online while integrating faith with learning and creating a faith community of teacher and students. For many desiring a faith-based education, the flexibility of online learning means that this may be our only opportunity to provide them with an Adventist educational experience.

As this article has shown, students and teachers in online classes will face several major challenges. They are learning to use a new and challenging
medium with few models to follow. At first, both students and teachers will experience feelings of isolation and frustration. Students will be forced to become independent, active learners who are self-disciplined and take responsibility for their own learning. They will miss the opportunity for verbal and non-verbal faith-affirming interactions that occur in a typical classroom. But by working together in community, they will be able to find that appropriate balance so a successful online learning experience can occur.

The continuing explosion of information, and information sources, necessitates that online students look to Christian faculty mentors to help make sense of it all. To meet this need, Adventist online teachers must intentionally plan for a high level of faith-affirming interaction. By using the five approaches described in this article—personal, encouraging e-mails; threaded discussions; collaborative projects; online chats; and the intentional development of a faith community, they will be able to find the spiritual needs of each student, teachers will be able to develop a caring, faith-filled online community that demonstrates love, shares trials and struggles, and affirms the worth of each individual. ☺

NOTES AND REFERENCES

3. “Online learning” in this article refers to courses in which students and teachers communicate mainly by computer and seldom, if ever, come together in a traditional classroom setting. This type of education uses Websites, discussion boards, collaborative software, e-mail, blogs, wikis, and course management software.
9. Ibid., p. 5.
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 7.
27. Ibid., p. 17.
29. Ibid.
Shirley Freed: Awhile ago, you completed a collaborative study on distance education in the North American Division [NAD]. What was the purpose of this study?

Pam Cress: Our dissertation titles, while similar, indicate our separate focuses—I was interested in the perceptions of higher education administrators about online education, and Susan was interested in faculty perceptions. The research question guiding both studies was: To what extent do Adventist colleges and universities in NAD demonstrate quality in their online educational programming?

The motivation to do this study for me came from my own learning in non-traditional environments, i.e., distance learning and my interest in collaboration. Having taken several successful online classes myself, I was interested in finding out whether Internet-based education was viable and if it might be the wave of the future. Having a partner to help conduct this research allowed for a broader perspective and description of online education in Adventist higher education that would not have been available had I done this on my own.

Shirley: What kind of a study was this? What kinds of data did you gather?

Susan Smith: Our study used a sequential mixed-methods model.1 We first collected the quantitative data, then obtained qualitative data through interviews with educators identified in the survey part of the study.

The quantitative portion of our study used the 24 summative evaluation benchmarks developed in the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP) study Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-Based Distance Education2 to assess the quality of online education in nine Adventist colleges and universities in North America. These benchmarks came out of best practices and recommendations over the years from institutions actively involved in distance learning, and were developed to evaluate the quality of online education in higher education.

We sent online surveys to 149 NAD higher education faculty (all persons teaching at least one course online in the 2002-2003 academic year) and administrators (presidents, vice-presidents—academic, financial, enrollment—and directors of distance education, information technology, and academic computing). Fifty-two teachers and 35 administrators responded. From the quantitative data, “experts” in online education were identified from each campus, whom we contacted and interviewed for the qualitative portion of the study.

Shirley: Why did you choose these benchmarks, and how did you use them in your study?

Pam: What we liked about IHEP’s 24 benchmarks was that they (1) were specifically about online learning, and (2) could be used by themselves to form the basis for the quantitative tool we needed to answer our research questions. The benchmarks are clustered into seven areas that address institutions’ efforts to support Internet-based education. Four areas are administratively focused (institutionally controlled), and three areas are under faculty control, making this assessment an excellent tool for both focuses of the joint study. Institutionally controlled benchmark clusters included institutional support, faculty support, student support, and evaluation and assessment. Faculty-controlled benchmarks included course development, teaching/learning, and course structure.

Shirley: What were the results of your study? What did you discover?

Susan: First, it is important to note that our study indicated that most schools in the study were operating online classes and programs under what A. W. Bates3 would call “lone ranger” models of online learning. This model is one where individual faculty develop and teach distance-education courses without the support of specialists. In other words, individual teachers on Adventist campuses are the ones initiating and teaching Internet-based courses (and sometimes whole distance-education programs) without focused support from the institution. In some cases, faculty are doing this in addition to regular full-time face-to-face teaching loads.
Pam: For my part of the study, the quantitative results indicate that overall administrator and teacher perceptions of Internet-based education on their campuses met the benchmarks for quality in all areas except for institutional support, and evaluation and assessment benchmarks. After integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings, the implications for administrators became more clear—indicating that there is lack of attention to strategic planning, design, and delivery of online distance education, online program evaluation and assessment, and ongoing support of distance-education faculty. Data showed that Adventist colleges and universities are not being intentional in the planning and delivery of online education.

Curiously, administrator perceptions, on the whole, were favorable to Internet-based education, with the majority indicating plans to increase the offerings within their institutions. The NAD administrators do seem to understand that online education will most likely not go away.

However, as I have already stated, both data sets indicate that higher education administrators are not actively responding to several main institutional components within the larger system of distance education. These components, which were measured in the quantitative portion of the study under the institutional support benchmarks, included strategic planning for technology infrastructure, support of teaching with technology, policy and management structures for online education, and monitoring and evaluation of online programs. Qualitative data also reinforced the need for attention to strategic planning and faculty support.

There are some signs that a few upper-level administrators have initiated system-wide technology and distance-education strategic planning on their campuses. However, the majority of Adventist higher education leaders appear to still view this type of planning with benevolent indifference. This finding should cause some unease because instructional technology and Internet-based education already exist in some form, on most, if not all, Adventist campuses.

Susan: The faculty-controlled benchmarks addressed three subsets: teaching and learning, course structure, and course development. There was strong consensus that interaction and feedback are important in the delivery of online classes. Faculty also spoke about how their pedagogy had changed as they moved their classes online—becoming more student-centered and constructivist in nature. Regarding course objectives and library access, respondents agreed that these features are in place in their institution. The first course development benchmark states: “Guidelines regarding minimum standards are used for course development, design, and delivery...” Faculty agreed that standards are important, but there was ambiguity about which standards should be used and how they should be applied. Also, there was some wonderment about why standards are so important with online classes, but are not applied or used in traditional face-to-face classes.

The issue of faculty workload may be the single most important issue to attend to in order to expand professional development in the use of educational technology and online teaching scholarship. The qualitative findings revealed significant discussion on the issues of remuneration and faculty workload; however, the concern seemed focused on the desire for more time rather than money.

Shirley: What surprised you?

Pam: One of the biggest surprises in this study was the identification of a unique hybrid group of administrators who, in addition to their administrative role, also had online teaching experience. These were, in most cases, mid-level people—deans, chairs, and staff department directors. It was fascinating to compare them with other administrators and faculty. Additionally, we found that six of the nine identified distance-education experts were administrators/teachers. The stories of the mid-level administrators revealed tales of pioneering online education in their institutions despite lack of support and commitment from upper-level administration.

Another unexpected finding: Thirty-one percent of the upper-level administrators surveyed did not identify with the role of visioning for distance education, 41 percent did not identify with the role of strategic planning, while 37 percent did identify with the role of policymaking. This nar-
row vision of administrators’ roles was intriguing to me, as these seem to be core roles for leaders. It could be that this narrow thinking may be attributed to leadership’s preference for focusing on managing details or facts rather than the big picture, or it simply could be the result of administrator delegation of distance-education planning to a specific person or department.

It is interesting to note here that we found that a higher percentage of the administrator/teacher group discussed earlier identified with the roles of visioning, strategic planning, and policy-making for distance education in contrast to upper-level administrators—in all three categories. This finding may have to do with the reality that visionary leaders do not exist only at the top of institutions, but can be found within the core as well.

Susan: Finally, although this study was not gender focused, an unexpected finding was the differences in perceptions about the IHEP benchmarks by men and women. All of the benchmark mean scores were higher for women than men, indicating more favorable responses from women. Statistical significance was found on the basis of gender for the course structure, student support, and evaluation and assessment. The reasons for this finding are unclear and may be complex. For instance, literature supports the idea that the adoption of technology is considered a masculine trait, and some have speculated that the need to compensate for being female in a male-dominated field may be why some women are more open to technology and online teaching. In addition, since online education is new to Adventist institutions, it may be, as Berge suggests, that high affirmation and involvement of women in the early development of technologies is normal. Whatever the reasons, this finding certainly warrants more research.

Shirley: What are some implications of your study for Adventist educators in our colleges and universities?

Pam: Adventist colleges and universities should not ignore distance education and technology infrastructure. Focusing attention on distance-education strategic planning, design and delivery of online distance education, online program evaluation, and assessment will strengthen Adventist institutions as they work with students. Administrators can support faculty by intentional planning that addresses faculty loads and/or compensation for online distance teaching, provide training for faculty in understanding online pedagogical and assessment methods, and assist them in using the appropriate technology for the classes they teach.

Shirley: Is distance education important for the North American Division? Why or why not? What do we need to do next to further distance education in NAD?

Susan: It is our belief that distance education is important for Adventist higher education in North America. Internet-based distance education has already become an integral part of course delivery for our institutions. This type of education is not going to go away, as students who are technologically savvy will begin to demand more of these types of educational experiences. Systematic adoption of institutional and instructional policies and practices for distance education will assist in promoting excellence.

In light of the challenges described above, collaborative ventures or partnerships may well be one of the new paradigms to provide cost-effective technology and educational services to students accessing Adventist universities and colleges. We must collaborate to help one another (1) understand the implications of new technologies on the classroom, (2) manage and set up new technologies, and (3) afford the new technologies. It is my opinion that collaborations on technology costs and management would be important even without distance-education programs.

Some collaborations have already begun within the system. Additional collaborative ventures may help to reduce costs and provide needed support. It might be useful to further explore successful collaborative models between students, classes, and/or institutions to obtain more ideas on how to share the burdens and joys of distance education.

Pamela Cress is the recently appointed Dean of the Wilma Hepker School of Social Work at Walla Walla College [WWC]. Before being appointed Dean, Cress served on the social work faculty at WWC for 10 years as Professor, Field Coordinator, and Assistant Dean. In 2005, she completed her doctorate in leadership from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Her dissertation, “Administrator Perceptions of Internet-Based Distance Education in Adventist Colleges and Universities,” was done as a collaborative project with her colleague, Susan Smith. Susan B. Smith, Ph.D., LICSW, is Professor of Social Work and Sociology and the Director of Distance Learning at Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington. Her dissertation was “Teacher Perceptions of Internet-Based Distance Education in Adventist Colleges and Universities: A Mixed-Methods Study.” Shirley Freed is an AVLN board member and Chair of the Department of Leadership and Educational Administration in the School of Education at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Dr. Freed teaches all of her classes on-line.

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The IHEP study *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-Based Distance Education* (2000) explored benchmarks, guidelines, best practices, and principles as they apply specifically to distance education. The National Education Association, America’s largest faculty professional association, and Blackboard (an extensively used course management system for Web-enhanced and Web-based education), commissioned IHEP to validate the benchmarks that are specifically applicable to Internet-based distance education.

Twenty-four benchmarks emerged from the study as essential to quality distance education. The broad areas of benchmarks include: institutional support, course development, teaching/learning, course structure, student support, faculty support, and evaluation and assessment.

The institutional support benchmarks deal with institutional efforts to maintain an atmosphere favorable to quality Internet-based distance education through infrastructure and policy-making. These benchmarks include: a documented technology plan including a security system; assurances of the reliability of the technology delivery system; and a system that supports and maintains the infrastructure of distance education.

Course development benchmarks focus on the development of courses and courseware and include the availability of standards for course development, design, and delivery; the provisions for the review of course periodicals; and whether course design requires students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate as part of the course requirements.

The teaching/learning category benchmarks involve the vital role of course interactivity; appropriate and timely feedback for students; and the use of effective research/assessment methods in determining the validity of resources.

The four benchmarks course structure relate to how the system’s policies, procedures, and resources support teaching; student advisement on motivation and minimum technology requirements prior to enrollment; provision of course information in written form; the availability of library resources; and teacher/student agreement on the schedule for submission of assignments and faculty response.

Student support benchmarks include not only the usual student services available on campus, but also the training and support for taking an Internet-based course. These benchmarks involve: making students aware of the availability of programs, services, and processes (admissions, tuition, fees, textbooks, technical support, and other support services); hands-on training in using electronic sources; access to technical support throughout the course; and a system of responding to student support needs in an appropriate and timely manner.

Benchmarks for faculty support include: technical assistance in developing online courses; assistance for faculty in the transition to Internet-based instruction, including assessment; faculty training and mentoring throughout the course; and written materials relating to student use of electronic sources.

Evaluation and assessment relates to policies and procedures for the evaluation of distance learning. Three benchmarks were identified in this category: multiple methods of program evaluation based on standards of practice; data collection on educational technology used in evaluating effectiveness; and regularly reviewing leaning outcomes.
In the April/May column, we explored a number of ways to enhance the experience of task force assistant deans serving at boarding academies. Improving the structure for hiring, training, and supervising has become a critical need. I believe the time has come for the various stakeholders (supervising deans, principals, task force workers, parents, and students) to find ways to ensure satisfactory outcomes or consider alternative service opportunities.

Ideally, the task force program should provide opportunities for participating students to learn new skills, grow in spiritual and emotional maturity, and create a record of quality service that enhances his or her résumé, and opens doors to graduate schools, job possibilities, and becoming a better person. It should also enrich the school program and minister to the academy students.

These goals have been achieved in some cases, but the reports from academies and from students who return to Adventist colleges/universities still indicate some disillusionment and dissatisfaction. Very few task force deans have become professional residence hall deans. I believe that this is an important question to explore. What would need to happen to create greater enthusiasm for the profession of deaning?

In this column, I want to unpack some of the obligations of a boarding school to its task force deans. I believe that properly screened and trained task force deans can be a vital force for good on a campus and a real help to the supervising deans. To unleash that potential, the following needs to occur:

1. The campus ministries office at Adventist colleges/universities should provide a structure for promoting the task force program and advertising the various job openings. It should also screen potential task force workers and ensure that they receive appropriate training. Some schools require all task force candidates to enroll in a for-credit class, while others provide two- to three-day seminars. The campus residence-hall deans and pastors should team together, however the training is configured. Having a standard screening, hiring, and pre-service training protocol will provide more consistent long-term results. A helpful pre-service training event is the annual Residence Hall Deans Workshop held each summer at either Andrews University or La Sierra University. Travel and registration expenses could be shared by the hiring institution and the student.

The book, Called to a Ministry of Caring,* was written with the mentoring and training of deans (including task force deans) in mind.

2. Each school should pay a regular, agreed-upon stipend. Offering a substantial stipend will attract a better quality of applicants.

3. Cafeteria meals and housing should be supplied at no extra cost to the task force dean.
4. Agreed-upon expenses for traveling to the school or to home should be reimbursed in a timely manner.

5. The academy must provide liability and medical insurance for each task force worker. If these young people are transporting students as part of their job description, even if they have complete auto insurance coverage, they are advised to use school vehicles.

6. Each task force dean should have a clearly defined job description, along with the needed authority to complete the designated tasks. The delegated responsibilities should be both meaningful and significant.

7. The task force deans should be respected and supported by administrators, teachers, staff, and students. In turn, they should respect the school program, academy employees, and students.

8. The academy should ensure that each task force dean has a mentoring relationship with the supervising dean and the principal. Task force deans are far more likely to have a positive experience if they are intentionally mentored.

9. Each task force dean should have scheduled off-duty time. Efforts must be made to respect the schedule, while allowing flexibility for emergencies or unusual circumstances.

10. Task force deans should be invited to all faculty/staff social events and given an appropriate farewell gift at the end of their term of service.

These 10 “obligations” may seem like basic common sense. When they have been implemented, task force deans generally report having had a successful experience. For too many, however, the experience has not been so positive.

I remember a social work major, new on the job as task force dean, who was asked to contact the parents of a child who had just attempted suicide. She then had to drive the student hundreds of miles to reunite with the parents. The young dean reacted amazingly well. However, she should not have been asked to assume this serious responsibility by herself.

Other students have told me that they were not invited to faculty social occasions and never received official words of appreciation or a gift at the end of the year.

Still, other task force deans have reported that their workload compromised their health. I think of one former Andrews University student who each morning taught three classes (with three different preparations), each afternoon supervised the library, and after supper was on-duty in the residence hall because the principal had given the girls’ dean evenings off due to family issues. The task force dean worked until midnight or later in the residence hall and then returned to the room she shared with another task force worker to prepare for her classes. At Christmas break, she resigned, exhausted, and returned to Andrews University feeling like a failure. In my opinion, that was abuse.

As of this writing, many academies are advertising task force positions for the 2007-2008 school year, with at least one school offering eight positions. Why do schools rely so heavily on short-term college students who are essentially volunteers? Shouldn’t a standard be set for how task force workers are used and how many positions are appropriate for any school? At its best, the task force program provides college/university students with opportunities for significant service and a safe place to field test the skills they have acquired during their educational journey. Ideally, during their term, they will learn additional skills and become more invested in the ministry of the church. To make a lasting impact on the life of an adolescent is a rare privilege. Many task force workers have discovered this truth. However, we must face the reality that others look back on their service with mixed or even negative feelings. I urge the formation of a committee to do a careful analysis of the task force program, and then make specific recommendations that will benefit everyone involved in the program.

Continued from page 3

than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”

As Adventist educators discuss what educated people in the 21st century need to know, we must also grapple with how best to prepare them for a life of service here and in the hereafter.—B.J.R.

REFERENCES

1. Quotes in the first four paragraphs are taken from Jeremy Caplan, “As Harvard Goes…” Time 169:10 (March 5, 2007), pp. 62, 63.


Good news! The steady growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its institutions has created a demand for qualified personnel who can support its worldwide mission with their talents and education.

In response to this need, the General Conference has launched the Adventist Professionals' Network (APN)—an electronic global registry of Adventists who hold a degree in any field and have an email address. APN assists Adventist institutions and agencies in locating candidates for positions in areas such as teaching, ministry, health care, management, administration, and research as well as consultants and personnel for mission service.

Once registered, APN members can find job opportunities in Adventist organizations, join one of many Adventist professional associations, and network with thousands of Adventist professionals around the world. Members are protected from solicitations and unwanted mail.

Enter your professional information directly in the APN secure website, free:

http://apn.adventist.org

Encourage other degreeed Adventists to join APN and enjoy its many benefits.
For questions and comments on APN, contact us through apn@gc.adventist.org