
A School With a Mission Discovering a Vision for the Future

BY HEDLEY J. EAGER

Recently the president of an Adventist college was asked, "What change, if any, has developed over the past few years that requires you and your faculty to take another look at the program of your college?"

His answer was both disturbing and encouraging. Disturbing, because he

Hedley J. Eager is Academic Dean of Pakistan Adventist Seminary, Farooqabad Mandi, Sheikhpura District, Pakistan. He is currently on study leave at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he is pursuing doctoral studies.

and his faculty recognized that over a period of years a slow change had occurred. In recent years, many young people were arriving at his college with confused values and a lack of commitment to a life of caring service. A growing number were looking for answers. However, because of the impact of the secular world, its materialism, distracting social influences, and the fracture of many homes, the Christian influences had not been sufficient to lead the students to make a personal commitment to Christ before they arrived at college. The focus of a growing number of young people had been diverted away from Christ.

The answer was *encouraging* be-

cause the faculty and administrators recognized the trend and were ready to look at what could be done to meet the changing needs of their students.

The president and faculty of this institution now saw the aim of the college as twofold: (1) to lead the young people to Christ, and (2) to provide a holistic training program for a life of committed Christian professional and community service.

Because the mission of an institution requires a long-term focus, the problem identified by the president and his faculty did not alter the mission of the college. But it was a real contributing factor, requiring them to reconsider the basic aim of the school. It required

that they address the needs of their students so that the long-term purpose and mission of the college could be fulfilled successfully. Show me an institution with vision and I will show you an institution with a mission.

How to Develop a Mission Statement

In order to provide focus and direction, every school should have a statement of mission. To help focus a mission statement, note Christ's own statement of mission. It was precise, clear, and succinct. Luke recorded it this way, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). This statement of mission has three major components:

1. The initiator and controller of the program—Christ.
2. The purpose and direction—"to seek and to save."
3. The community to be served—"that which was lost."

When Christ called His disciples and followers, He enrolled them in His "school" where they were to be trained for a life of committed service. They would search out "the lost" and lead them to salvation through Christ. Thus the mission of Christ and that of His students became one.

To fulfill this mission, Christ led these men through a practical training that included knowledge and skills. This training provided insight, instruction, example, and consistent growth that would prepare them for a life of stable, loyal, committed service.

The focus of mission must look beyond the institution to the larger community it serves. In that way its students and graduates catch the vision for service. Their dedication and commitment grow as the meaning of the vision deepens, and their enthusiasm for it increases.

The aim of the institution focuses on what must be accomplished in the lives of its students. Their college experiences should help them recognize the needs of the wider society, inspiring them to reach out and serve, thereby helping to fulfill the mission of their school.

In the early years of Adventist colleges, the purpose of the institutions was to provide denominational workers for both the homeland and for mission service overseas. Today's SDA institutions still include this goal, but with a

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broadened application for service. The concept of mission for most Adventist institutions now includes the commitment of their graduates to serve as Seventh-day Adventist professionals wherever they are employed, whether in church or secular institutions.

The discussion that follows will focus on important considerations for developing a statement of mission and aim for an Adventist institution. Because an institution's mission and aim cannot be entirely separated from its philosophy, goals, and objectives, the model described below helps clarify the relationships between these goals.

Below are two examples of statements of mission or purpose taken from 1985-1986 college bulletins. They are provided for the purpose of comparison and illustration.

Example 1:

Mission: _____ is an open-admission, comprehensive community college which provides low-cost, quality educational opportunities to residents of the _____ County area.

The statement then lists the courses the institution offers.

Example 2:

The purpose of _____ is to provide an education of the highest quality within a committed Christian environment, to encourage its students to relate all that they learn to the Christian faith, and to provide the resources that will facilitate the continued growth of their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This does not take place automatically even with a Christian faculty and staff. It can, however, be achieved as the result of a clear strategy in which the entire college is involved.

A mission statement for any college must identify the following items:

1. The name of the institution (as

initiator and controller of the educational program.)

2. The long-range purpose and direction of the educational program.

3. The name or description of the community to be served by the faculty, students, and graduates.

A glance at the two examples above will verify that the purpose in each is quite limited and short-sighted. Of course, this may be the way these institutions view their purpose. But an Adventist college must look beyond the immediate surroundings of the school and recognize the extended community that the institution, through its faculty, students, and graduates, will and does serve.

A college's purpose statement must not be limited to merely describing the education it will give to a select group of students. It must look beyond to the society they will serve or it will fail to inspire its students to the goal of service to others. Without this broader focus, it will tend to only feed the egocentricity of its students—"What can I get from this college program?" Their sights will not be lifted to see the needs of others. An Adventist graduate should be able to focus on the needs of the community and the world beyond himself and his own family.

In each of the two statements of mission or purpose given above, the focus does not extend beyond the institution. Neither gives a clear statement of purpose or mission of the institution. Both statements tell what subjects are offered rather than describing a long-term focus of purpose that students can adopt as a life commitment.

Neither of these institutions is an Adventist college. But the second example does focus on very Christian principles and beliefs. Clearly a definite Christian philosophy of education is foundational to the program of this college.

The ideas presented in the second statement show high expectations of both staff and students. The bulletin proceeds, beyond what is quoted above, to outline strategies that are intended to provide the means for fulfilling its limited purpose. There is every indication that Christian principles would permeate the entire training program. But if a long-range expressed vision was added within a focus of mission,

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the students would then be able to sense that they were part of the institution's total program. Such a vision would establish in them a resolve that would reach beyond graduation into a total commitment to unselfish service throughout their lives.

Within the limits of this brief article, we cannot develop a statement of philosophy and then demonstrate in depth the interrelationships that must exist between it and (1) the mission statement; (2) the long-term aim of an institution for its students; and (3) the short-term objectives that focus on goal fulfillment.

The model described below will help show interrelationships among these structural planning units.

The Model of Institutional Theoretical Structure presents graphically the relationship of a clear statement of mission to the other important components of an institution's theoretical structure. The aim, goals, and objectives are all subcomponents that focus on mission fulfillment. Together they provide the framework for a school to meet the needs of the community or constituency it serves.

The base of the model represents the community or extended community being served. Thus any statement of mission, aim, goals, and objectives must address the needs of that community. The largest segment of clientele from that community is the student body, which receives the greatest proportion of the staff's time and attention. In addition, the faculty will have business contacts with whom ongoing relationships must be maintained in order to enhance the overall mission of the institution.

Directly above the model base is a prism representing the philosophy of the institution. It has a prime position as foundation to the institution's own theoretical structure, yet close to the community. This recognizes the importance of the community's needs, par-

ticularly the segment that can identify with the school's philosophy. The broken line indicates that the mission, aim, goals, and objectives are both individually and collectively integrated with the institution's philosophy. Thus a clearly defined philosophy of education is vital to provide a basis of beliefs, values, and principles that are both meaningful and directive for the whole school—board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and parents.

Defining Mission, Aim, Goals

To clarify the relationships between the remaining components, we would define the *mission* as the purpose that the board of directors sees the institution fulfilling for the community it serves. The *aim* is a long-term focus on what the institution plans to achieve for its clientele to aid in the fulfillment of its mission. *Goals* provide, on a mid-term basis, opportunities and direction to meet the aim through the services the school provides. The *objectives* are the short-term specifics aimed to fulfill each goal.

Putting all this into perspective, we can see first of all that a mission and aim must be in harmony with the philos-

ophy of the institution. In looking at a statement of mission and aim for an Adventist college (see box below), please refer to your own institution's statement of educational philosophy for its basic framework. In the appropriate blanks you can insert the name of the institution and the courses offered.

In order for the aim and mission statement to fit the special needs of your institution, you should study your school's situation. With the help of the complete staff, review your statement of mission and aim. Then consider the specific goals and objectives that will help your institution fulfill them.

Remember that your mission statement should include (1) the name of your institution, (b) the purpose and direction of the program, and (3) the community or extended community to be served.

Our institutions have been ordained of God, for a sacred mission. Our faculties have a divinely appointed task to prepare the youth for the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. However, the professional training becomes the vehicle for carrying out Christ's mission, *to seek and save the lost*. □

Example of Mission Statement

The mission of _____ is to provide trained professionals who are committed Seventh-day Adventist Christians, both within their profession, and as church and community leaders. These professionals will choose training within the fields of _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ and will serve either in denominational employ, or in other business or professional capacities, or as independent workers and lay representatives of Christ and His church. This institution primarily trains workers to serve within the _____ Union Conference (or Division) and secondarily, for service in areas beyond this boundary, including positions of responsibility in foreign lands.

Statement of Aim

The aim of _____ is to provide an educational environment that will:

1. Encourage its students to relate all that they learn to the beliefs, principles, and values of the Seventh-day Adventist faith, and
2. Provide the resources that will facilitate the continued growth of the students'
 - a. personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - b. professional development.
 - c. commitment to a healthful life-style for physical development.
 - d. social graces and relationships, and a commitment to social practices based on a philosophy of Christian beliefs and values.
 - e. continued commitment to a life of service for God and humanity within their total life opportunities and chosen career.