


Distance Education:

The Role of Home Study International in the SDA Church

By George P. Babcock



Originally conceived as a substitute form of education, instruction by mail has developed into a preferred alternative for millions of people who seek education and training. How has home study—also known as correspondence instruction or distance education—come to deserve a place in the educational world?

**Home Study Formally
Recognized in the U.S.
Since 1883**

Correspondence education has a rich and fascinating history of achievements, beginning at a time

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when educational opportunity was a rare commodity. The earliest evidence of home-study instruction appears in an advertisement in the *Boston Gazette*, dated March 20, 1728. (See Figure 1.)

rans elected to use their educational benefits for a home-study program.

The U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare formally recognized the Accrediting Com-

mission of the National Home Study Council in 1959 as a national accrediting agency. In 1985 the NHSC Accrediting Commission's scope of recognition was expanded to include academic degree pro-

THE BOSTON GAZETTE

March 20, 1728

Caleb Philipps, Teacher of the New Method of Short Hand, is remov'd opposite to the north door of the Town House in King-street. As this way of Joyning 3, 4, 5 &c. words in one in every Sentence by the Moods, Tenses, Persons, and Verb, do's not in the least spoil the Long Hand, so it is not anything like the Marks for Sentences in the Printed Character Books being all wrote according to the Letter, and a few Plain and Easy Rules.

N.B. Any Persons in the Country desirous to Learn this Art, may by having the several Lessons sent Weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston.

Courtesy of Rex Ballenberg, American School

Figure 1. This early American advertisement advised readers to "note well" (N.B.) that shorthand could be perfectly instructed by home study.

Formal recognition of correspondence study in America began in 1883 when the state of New York authorized Chatauqua Institute to award degrees via home study. At one time William Rainey Harper's courses for Chatauquans enrolled 60,000 students from as many as 10,000 communities. Harper became president of the University of Chicago in 1898, bringing with him what William Lighty called, "his long distance teaching system" to the university.¹

By the turn of the century, various state-chartered institutions and land grant universities had launched correspondence study departments. Today the single largest provider of correspondence instruction is the U.S. Government; its military and nonmilitary home-study institutes enroll more than two million students annually.

Following World War II, home-study institutions were included in the new GI bill of rights. Under the Vietnam-era bill, more than 1.1 million (or 20 percent of the total) vete-

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grams by home study from the associate through the master's degree levels.

Today, home study serves as a major source of accredited and other correspondence programs for a wide variety of educational endeavors. These include all grades of elementary school, high school diploma programs, and college degrees. Also included are many vocational entry or upgrading programs, avocational programs, governmental and military training, license preparation programs, and many other areas of training and education.

A Popular and Effective Alternative

The popularity of home study has been repeatedly demonstrated. In the past 100 years, enrollments in the United States have grown from a few hundred per year to well over four million annually, according to the National Home Study Council.

Since 1900, more than 70 million American have studied by mail, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Walter P. Chrysler, Walter Cronkite, Barry Goldwater, Charles Schultz, and many other distinguished Americans. Notable Seventh-day Adventists once enrolled with Home Study International include well-known individuals such as R. R. Figuhr, C. O. Franz, Robert Pierson, Ralph Watts, Roger Coon, R. A. Delafield, Calvin Rock, and C. Mervyn Maxwell.

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What about the effectiveness of home study? A multitude of individual testimonies have been offered over the years attesting to its benefits. Whenever home study has been examined for effectiveness, it has passed the test. All of the research published since 1920 has indicated that correspondence students perform just as well as, and in some cases better than, their classroom counterparts.²

Elementary School by Home Study

In the past 10 years, unaccredited elementary correspondence schools have sprung up like dandelions after a rain. These schools must budget large amounts of money each year to assist parents with legal battles. Home Study International, operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is the only correspondence school accredited by the National Home Study Council for elementary-level work. HSI's excellent academic program and accreditation have spared it from the legal problems faced by unaccredited institutions.

High School by Home Study

Correspondence instruction has successfully provided high school course work for many years. A variety of institutions have offered these subjects. Among NHSC member schools, International Correspondence Schools and American School offer complete high school diploma programs. High school programs and course work are also offered by major colleges and universities, as well as some state governments through their departments of education. Home

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son to teach programming.

You can even use this approach to ingrain concepts of logic and theology. Supposing you assign students to program a computer to give a Bible study that produces texts to back up theological points if the end user enters the "wrong" multiple-guess answers. When the burden to teach the computer falls on the student, he now has a reason to look up the texts, do the research, verify the information—in a word, immerse himself in whatever topic he is attempting to teach the computer.

The byproduct of all this computer teaching is a wealth of useful (we hope!) programs to inflict on younger students not yet versed in computer programming for learning or teaching. Synergy at work!

So now your task is twofold: (1) learn (and teach) enough about programming to equip your students with the raw tools to teach computers a thing or two; and (2) think up some creative assignments for your students to empower your computer to teach. To begin, you might assign your budding programmers to have the computer teach other students the language BASIC or LOGO, and branch out from there.

Instead of your trying to get something through the proverbial "thick skulls" of your students, you'll get to share their joy of discovery. Let them try to get the same things through the thicker skulls of computers. If nothing else, students may gain greater insight into the difficulties you face in teaching them. And who knows? You might even learn a little more about computers and programming in the process.—Dave Ruskjer. □

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Study International offers a high school diploma program that includes religious courses along with the standard secondary subjects.

Religious Home Study Schools

Each year, hundreds of thousands of home study course enrollments are recorded worldwide by religious schools that are accredited members of the National Home Study Council. The oldest, Home Study International (founded by SDAs in 1909), offers course work for kindergarten, elementary grades, junior high, high school, college, and adult education. The largest, International Correspondence Institute (founded in 1967 by the Assemblies of God), offers degree and nondegree courses in Bible studies, evangelism, and theological studies. Newest on the scene is Catholic Home Study Institute (founded in 1983), which offers course work in Roman Catholic doctrine, history, and a variety of religious topics. Burgeoning activity by these religiously based schools attests to the fact that a number of religions recognize correspondence instruction as an important part of their mission.

Home Study Degree Programs

Over the past century, complete degree programs offered by correspondence instruction and other external modes have become commonplace. Sullivan's *Guide to External Degree Programs in the United States* revealed that in 1983 100 accredited institutions offered degrees in 103 major fields of study.³

These institutions are accredited by one of six regional accrediting associations or by NHSC. A total of 61 of these institutions have degree programs with no requirement for on-campus attendance. The remaining programs require from two days to four weeks of on-

campus attendance for students earning a degree.

Three SDA colleges currently offer external degrees—Southwestern Adventist College, Columbia Union College, and Atlantic Union College. Although these schools require short on-campus stays each year, students complete most of their work off-campus.

External Degrees Through HSI

From the church's world divisions come a steady stream of requests for college and graduate degrees. Especially in the developing nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America we have an enormous need to train pastors, teachers, and other workers. The people

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of these nations are tremendously eager for education; however, they have few Adventist colleges to serve them. The large number of baptisms in many world fields makes it unlikely that we can build enough colleges to meet the growing demand for Adventist education.

Furthermore, in many developing nations the church would be unwise to divert the enormous sums necessary to build many large colleges and universities. Yet these countries have many Adventists who desperately need Christ-centered educational opportunities.

Because of the high cost of traditional education, the only hope for an Adventist education in these countries lies in the creation of cost-efficient and fully accredited distance education programs.

To meet this need, Home Study International is making plans to offer both bachelor's and master's degrees on a totally external basis for Adventists outside North America. This will probably be accomplished through an affiliation

with one of our universities.

SDA leaders from several of the Eastern European countries have requested HSI to prepare degree programs for ministers, since their socialist governments will allow us to operate a distance education program but not a regular college.

Vocational Education and Training by Correspondence

Each year millions of people, worldwide, elect home study to train for a new career or to upgrade themselves in their professions. Today, more than 200 of the Fortune 500 American businesses use correspondence course work to train employees. Home study course work is accepted by state licensing boards in preparation for

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certification in the fields of accounting, real estate, insurance, surveying, and engineering—among others.

In order to promote sound educational procedures and ethical business practices within the distance education community, National Home Study Council was founded in 1926. It is a voluntary professional association, listed by the U.S. Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency. The NHSC's accrediting commission is a member of the Postsecondary Council on Accreditation. Schools who belong to NHSC must meet the high standards that the accrediting commission has established.

Home Study Education—Again a Pioneer

Distance education today is emerging as a new and separate

Distance Education Around the World

Distance education is recognized and well accepted in many countries. Whether it's elementary education in Canada or doctoral-level programs in the Soviet Union, distance education has found niches at various levels in diverse fields around the world. Home study is a regular part of state educational systems in various places.

Home study, as a private enterprise in England, continues to prosper. It began in the 19th century when Isaac Pitman offered shorthand by "penny post" in 1840. The Pitman Correspondence College still operates in Wimbledon, England.

As early as 1858, the University of London provided for external degrees. This method was also adopted in South Africa in 1873 when the University of the Cape of Good Hope was established as an examining body for other institutions. In 1946, this became the University of South Africa, a distance teaching university.

The British Open University, which began in 1969, now serves more than 100,000 adult learners annually, with the primary medium of instruction being study guide and correspondence assignments. Similar institutions have been set up in Spain, Israel, West Germany, Canada, Pakistan, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Thailand, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Japan, India, and Australia. Home study flourishes in Sweden, with adult education monitored by the Ministry of Education for 300,000 students annually.

movement. A great deal of enthusiasm and excitement has been generated by new, independent distance learning schemes, due in large part to the application of modern technology and methodology. As the price of technology falls, these methods will be adapted to home study and will further enrich the learning experience for students who study at home.

The most prominent methods include telephonic teaching and

China's program of higher correspondence education includes more than 300,000 undergraduate students.⁴

In the Soviet Union, there is widespread home study activity at all levels, according to Marshall:

Of the approximately three million students involved in higher education in the Soviet Union, one and one-half million—approximately 50 percent—are correspondence students taught by the same teachers as resident students and who enjoy strong government subsidy of their educational programs. In the Soviet Union, the student may go as far as a Doctoral Degree via correspondence, as a result of the formal incorporation of correspondence study into higher education by legislative enactment.⁵

Canadian elementary-level distance education began in Alberta in 1923 and in 1926 was extended by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Today, nine provincial-secondary schools administer courses to "adults of all ages," most of whom are working toward secondary diplomas. The Independent Learning Centre of Ontario is the largest of the provincial schools, having a current enrollment of more than 80,000 students.⁶

The breadth of worldwide distance education is clearly illustrated by the international nature of the International Council for Distance Education, which has institutional members from more than 50 nations, with every continent except Antarctica represented. Like the National Home Study Council in the United States, ICDE is continually involved in research activities, information sharing, and other activities aimed at advancing distance education.⁷

testing, educational television, video cassette, and computer-based training. All of this methodology is in place today in industry, in colleges, and to a lesser extent in individual home study courses. High-tech application to home study will broaden as the public equips itself with hardware and software essential to receive the new forms of independent learning. Millions of dollars are being invested each year by private com-

panies, colleges and universities, and governments around the world to finance new methods of instruction.

Home study instruction strives to be as up to date and effective as any method of teaching today. It allows students to work at their own rate of speed, increases student/school communication, and endeavors to present the most vivid and meaningful lessons possible by any method. In recent years, however, the task has been made easier by the recognition and acceptance that accredited home study has achieved. In fact, entire nations are relying heavily on home study in educating their citizens.

The Role of Home Study International

As an integral part of the SDA educational system, Home Study International supplements the church's worldwide school program by providing alternative and specialized services.

With its 80 years of experience in teaching, Home Study International offers accredited study from kindergarten through college.⁸ HSI is the only correspondence school in the U.S. with an accredited elementary program. Students enjoy the flexible scheduling and home based instruction, which has no geographical limits.

For new Adventists in the North American Division, Home Study International meets a pressing need. In conjunction with Loma Linda University and the North American Church Ministries Department, HSI has developed "Welcome to the Family," a seven-session course designed to introduce new church members to their church family. One pastor enthusiastically reported, "I just finished going through the course with eight new members. They learned more about Adventists in seven weeks than they would have learned in a couple of years. They enjoyed it. This course is long overdue."

Around the world people desire accredited classes in a variety of subjects, including study of the English language. In fact, HSI is developing a communicative En-

glish course for Arabic-speaking peoples (CECAP). As a result of field testing CECAP in Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, one Saudi university is exploring the possibility of enrolling its 8,000 students in the English course.

APLE Program

Another innovative home-study venture is called APLE (Alternative Program for Learning Enrichment). It targets the growing number of secondary students who cannot attend boarding academy. To give parents an alternative to public school for their children, a number of junior and senior academies

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have sought to supplement or strengthen their existing programs by using HSI courses. APLE provides correspondence education in a classroom setting with supervision by qualified personnel. Under certain circumstances stu-

dents can earn a recognized HSI diploma.

APLE is a cooperative effort directly involving the school, local conference superintendent, the union office of education, the North American Division Office of Education and Home Study International. Each school program is specially tailored to blend local staff talent with HSI offerings to produce a coherent and effective educational program.

APLE may be used by (1) an elementary school to extend its program to include the ninth grade, (2) a nine-grade junior academy to include grade 10, (3) a 10-grade school to extend its program to include grades 11 and 12, or (4) a junior or senior academy that wishes to utilize APLE to enrich its curriculum.

APLE is designed to fill needs not currently met by established Adventist schools. It provides quality classwork that is carefully monitored and approved.

With its approximately 6,000 students, HSI is one of the largest schools in the Seventh-day Adventist school system. It is continuing to grow. In a time of rising educational costs, HSI can become an even more effective tool for the church. □

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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³ Eugene J. Sullivan, *Guide to External Degree Programs in the United States* (New York: American Council on Education and Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983).

⁴ *Brevsholentrednigen* (Stockholm: n.p., 1971), cited in Renee F. Erdos, "Teaching by Correspondence" (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1967).

⁵ *Educational Encyclopedia* (Moscow: Academy of Science, U.S.S.R., 1970), vol. 2, pp. 78, 79, as quoted by Marshall, "The Effectiveness of Home Study."

⁶ *Independent Learning Centre, Give Yourself Credit* (Edmonton: Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.), Report No. 84, p. 305.

⁷ *International Council for Distance Education Bulletin* (Manchester, England: Open University, North West Region, 1986), vol. II, p.

HSI is affiliated with Columbia Union College in granting credit for college work.