

# The Future Is Ours to Create

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**A**fter two and a half years of research, reflection, and debate, a prestigious panel established by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges reported that “. . . the difficulties ahead for our institutions are real. They are sobering. They cannot be washed away. Our central conclusion is that the world Americans thought they knew no longer exists.”<sup>1</sup> The panel’s report focused on five issues that it felt will significantly affect every college and university in the United States: growing economic pressures, changing national demographics, increasing racial and cultural tensions, rapidly expanding scientific knowledge, and a crisis in the nation’s values and ethics.

As they looked to the future, the panel members wrote optimistically. However, they argued forcefully that to meet these issues every institution must first re-examine its fundamental mission and values. They saw this as imperative, since educational institutions represent a tremendous resource as Americans “. . . adapt to new realities, adjust to challenge and change, and shape the future they will share in common.”<sup>2</sup>

Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America are facing similar and perhaps even greater challenges than their secular counterparts. We must give deliberate thought and action to the future strategic issues in Adventist higher education. Our colleges and universities are indeed tremendous resources to the church; and, as Fritz Guy states in his article (p. 19), “In one way or another, intentionally or by default, the church *will* decide how much and what kind of higher education it believes in enough to pay for.”

In June 1993 the North American Division Board of Higher Education re-examined its fundamental mission and adopted a mission statement that clearly expresses total commitment to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (See page 4.) This statement identifies elements that facilitate the redemptive work of Adventist higher education. Together with the individual mission statements of each institution, it provides clear direction for developing dynamic strategies and strong initiatives to address the increasing challenges of the future.

There are no simple answers to the complex challenges facing Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America. Some church leaders have suggested a national education summit to ensure the survival of Adventist education. Others believe that the issues have been comprehensively reviewed by Project Affirmation and merely demand implementation and strategic action at local levels. It is certainly clear that local action can do much to assist in rethinking the roles, responsibilities, and structures of SDA colleges and universities in North America. Governing boards and administrators must continue to formulate a comprehensive framework of strategic issues to guide discussions about the future of their institutions.

If we really believe that with God’s help the future is ours to create, if we really believe that our higher education resources need to be “. . . protected, enhanced, and adapted to meet new realities,”<sup>3</sup> then our institutions must have clear goals for the present and vibrant visions for the future. This will occur only when the church at large prayerfully commits itself to action-oriented strategic planning at all levels—planning that concentrates, above everything else, on the fate of the institutions and their missions.

With God’s help we can indeed create the future for our institutions, but this will require decisive, action-oriented strategic planning that is both comprehensive and continuous.—G.M.

*Dr. Gordon Madgwick is Executive Secretary of the Board of Higher Education, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

REFERENCES

1. *Trustees and Troubled Times in Higher Education: Report of the Higher Education Issues Panel* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, September 1992), p. vi.
2. *Ibid.* p. 2.
3. *Ibid.* p. vi.