

# Constant Connectivity, Maximum Mobility, Instant Interactivity

## *Adventist Distance Education in the 21st Century*

**B**ob Andringa, president of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, recently wrote a paper entitled “Ten Challenges for Christian Higher Education in 2002.”<sup>1</sup> I would like to focus on five of his 10 points, starting with the last one:

- Point No. 10—Champion collaboration
- Point No. 5—Embrace distance learning
- Point No. 3—Integrate new technology
- Point No. 2—Emphasize quality scholarship
- Point No. 1—Stay Christ-centered

Adventist colleges and universities in North America are taking definite steps to apply these principles in connection with distance education.

I want to discuss three key concepts that will have an impact on how we deliver distance education. They are: (1) integration of technology in instruction; (2) collaboration; and (3) Christ-centered curriculum.

### **Distance Education: Definitions**

First, let’s clarify our terminology. Broadly defined, distance education/distance learning is any kind of educational activity in which students are separated from their teacher(s) and peers—in time and space. A narrow definition limits the term to the application of electronic technology to teaching and learning or to delivering education.

Because electronic technology—the Internet and the World Wide Web—provides access to materials 24/7, time is no longer a limitation for learning. As a result, on-campus instruction and distance education are converging. This technology-mediated education, commonly referred to as “distributed learning,” will be the dominant paradigm for higher education in coming years.<sup>2</sup>

In the most extreme form of distance education, there are no barriers. It is completely open—open

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**By Joseph E. Gurubatham**

entry and open exit. Any time, any place, any path, any pace. It is actually distance-less and totally asynchronous.

### Integration of Technology in Instruction

In 2001, more than one billion people used the Internet, and the number continues to grow. More than 87 percent of them use it to get information and to send E-mail. In 1995, there were 300 online courses. Six years later, in 2001, there were more than 25,000.<sup>3</sup> If one adds all the non-academic training courses offered online by corporate universities and other alternate providers, the Council for Higher Education for Accreditation estimates there are as many as one million online courses.

Advances in technology will continue to transform Adventist higher education and change the way we teach, learn, deliver education, and interact with our

students. All of us must continue to strive for constant connectivity, maximum mobility, and instant interactivity.

We are dealing with the first generation of students who have never known life without computers or the Internet. Most students are younger than the microcomputer.

J. Frand identifies the major attributes of today's student behavior. For the younger generation, computers are no longer technology; reality is no longer real; doing is more important than knowing; trial and error (or instant experimentation) is preferable to theory; staying connected is essential; and there is zero tolerance for delay.<sup>4</sup>

Speed is king, and wireless technology has made us more mobile and connected. Cell phones and personal digital assistants are flooding the market. In January 2002, *USA Today* estimated that by 2006, there will be more wireless devices than mosquitoes.<sup>5</sup>

What does all of this mean for us as educators?

- Electronic technology helps the student to interact with



the message and the messenger—a change in paradigm greater than that caused by the printing press.

- Teachers are no longer information providers. They are information brokers<sup>6</sup> who must help students choose between treasure and trash, good and evil, right and wrong.

Since basic information can be obtained from other sources, the teacher becomes someone who is truly interested in the student's personal development. This has enormous implications for us as Christian teachers who are committed to making a difference in our students' lives and in bringing them to the Master Teacher.

### Collaboration

Jason D. Baker, author of *Trends in Christian Distance Education*, observes that university consortia, institutional collaboration, ministry collaboration, church-based partnerships, and publisher collaboration are becoming common among Christian colleges.<sup>7</sup>

*Any Time*

*Any Place*

*Any One*

*Any Pace*



Sundaesan Ram, a professor of marketing, notes that we live in a borderless society. We need to be thinking globally and developing strategic alliances. “Whoever ignores the global perspective in distance learning will be *extinct* by the year 2020.”<sup>8</sup>

Richard Tedlow, a professor of management at the Harvard School of Business, explored why some businessmen were extraordinarily successful while others failed. He found three shared traits: (1) They had the ability to create or adopt new technology faster and better than their peers; (2) they embraced change; and (3) they built strategic partnerships.<sup>9</sup>

Partnerships are essential because they allow organizations to share risk and leverage other people’s expertise. They help us avoid duplication of effort.

What are Adventists doing?

Thirteen colleges and universities in North America have become charter members of the Adventist Distance Education Consortium (ADEC). Each institution will retain its own unique characteristics. The members are seeking unity and uniformity of standards as they develop and deliver faith-based distance education.

### Christ-Centered Distance Education

While organizing the Adventist Distance Education Consortium, we repeatedly emphasized that it was not worth the effort if we failed to actively promote integration of faith and learning in our courses. Our courses must be Christ-centered and truly Bible-based. Through them, we must encourage our students to accept Christ as their personal Saviour.

ADEC voted to officially adopt the Adventist Virtual Learning Network (AVLN)<sup>10</sup> Online Course Development Standards,

which state in part that courses developed shall:

- Be Christ-centered;
- Be faith-driven and mission-oriented;
- Promote integration of biblical principles;
- Focus on joyful service to God and others;
- Incorporate values and moral development; as well as
- Focus on balance and wholeness as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Only our focus on Christ and His Word will set us apart from everybody else. We cannot compete with such schools as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which is spending countless millions on developing online courses and plans to offer them free, or with numerous online universities that have governmental funding and support.

When I feel disheartened about our limited financial resources, I remember Deuteronomy 4:6-7 and Moses’ admonition to the children of Israel when they were preparing to enter Canaan: “Keep therefore and do them [God’s commandments]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?”<sup>11</sup>



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