



## Reflections on How Adventist Higher Education Has Changed in the Past Nine Years. . .

This column is a sequel to the December/January issue of the JOURNAL, where I focused on changes in K-12 distributed education since the first AVLN meeting in Orlando, Florida, in January 1999. The visionaries gathered there (mostly faculty from traditional North American Division [NAD] colleges and universities) adopted as their unofficial motto: “together we stand, divided we fall.” They also committed themselves to the idea that “every light should be kept burning.”<sup>1</sup> Many colleges were instituting online courses, and the AVLN founders wondered how the World Wide Web would affect Adventist higher education.

Looking back after eight years, were those who organized AVLN just visionaries, or did their vision inspire practical action? Some specific actions since that 1999 meeting include:

- ADEC – The Adventist Digital Education Consortium was formed. This is a collaborative effort in higher education for the NAD Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities.<sup>2</sup>
- AVLN – The Adventist Virtual Learning Network developed and offered eight online courses multiple times. More than 650 educators have taken these courses, earning credit from Pacific Union College and La Sierra, Andrews, and Griggs universities.<sup>3</sup>
- Desire to Learn (D2L) – A distance-learning management system was selected and is being used by the majority of the NAD colleges and universities.
- Enrollment managers from all NAD tertiary institutions began to collaborate and agreed to market Adventist higher education with a single Web page.<sup>4</sup>
- AVLN held annual conferences—some face-to-face and some online—which involved more than 500 educators.<sup>5</sup>
- In early 2008, four NAD tertiary institutions agreed to participate in a pilot program that allows students to take a course online and have it included in their financial package.<sup>6</sup>
- The Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities (AACU) was formed to facilitate collaboration and conversation among NAD college and university presidents.
- The deans and chairpersons of the NAD college and university schools/departments of education organized in the fall of 2007 to encourage greater collaboration.
- Dissertations by Pam Cress and Susan Smith found that mid-level administrators tended to support distance education in the

North American Division.<sup>7</sup>

• An external grant made it possible for 125 educators in Mexico, Philippines, Bermuda, Australia, Trinidad, South Africa, Taiwan, and Thailand to register for AVLN courses and conferences.

Since 1999, a number of inter-institutional collaborations have been established in the public sector. Bob Paulson (AVLN president) is currently writing a dissertation on the readiness of NAD colleges and universities to collaborate.<sup>8</sup> His literature review has revealed the characteristics of these collaborations and the parameters necessary for their success:

- Communication at all levels;
- Trust and respect;
- Common purpose and goals;
- Clear roles and responsibilities;
- Adequate human resources—an organizational structure to facilitate the collaboration;
- Commitment to the collaboration, especially at the upper levels; and
- Beneficial outcomes.

Adventist higher education has reached a critical time of its history. Dick Osborn’s paper “Facing Our Challenges” is a “must-read” for anyone interested in the future of Adventist education.<sup>9</sup> I believe the challenge for Adventist education for the next 10 years is to learn “co-opetition”! This is a concept whereby schools combine cooperation and competition to achieve their mission.<sup>10</sup>

So far, this column has looked mostly at Adventist education. It may be helpful to see what we can learn from the ways some large public universities are utilizing the World Wide Web.

In 1999 (the same year as the first AVLN meeting), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) faculty developed the idea of OpenCourseWare. They decided to share all of their syllabi online in keeping with the institution’s mission “to advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship to best serve the world.” Currently, they have more than one million hits a month, virtually all of their courses are online, and they are developing materials for secondary education.<sup>11</sup> Educators, students, and self-learners are using their materials for a wide range of purposes.<sup>12</sup>

What does this mean for Adventist educators? We have a unique niche—the integration of faith in our courses! What would happen if we shared syllabi, activities, and experiences on the World Wide Web?

Recently, Berkeley’s Leadership Develop-

ment Program team’s survey of incoming freshman revealed that 72.5 percent “would like to be able to download a greater number of class lectures in the form of podcasts or webcasts.”<sup>13</sup> Adam Hochman, project manager for Berkeley’s Education Technology Services department recently said, “Since we launched the [podcasting] offering in 2006, we saw 2 million downloads of our podcasts in the first year alone from our iTunes U channel. We have had 650,000 views in the first two weeks of our YouTube channel launch. Interest in our content has exploded.”<sup>14</sup>

What does this mean for Adventist educators? Can we discover who is interested in our content? Are we interested in what others in our system are doing?

Clearly, it is going to take some bold moves for us to continue to reach Adventist “digital natives.”<sup>15</sup> Loma Linda University is currently building The Centennial Complex with three goals: growth, innovation and globalization. “Growth—an expected growth of 25% from the current 4,000 students to 5,000 students by 2010. Innovation—advanced communication technology incorporated into teaching and learning spaces. Globalization—providing a virtual presence to support international outreach.”<sup>16</sup>

We’re just getting started! Where do we go from here? ☞

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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