



It has been well established that the majority of Seventh-day Adventist high school-age students in the North American Division (NAD) (United States, Canada, and Bermuda) attend public schools, and up to 75 percent of Adventist young people enrolled in tertiary institutions attend public colleges and universities.¹ Recognizing this, excellent ministries are operating on many public university campuses, such as the Adventist Christian Fellowship.² But research also clearly demonstrates that Adventist colleges and universities, as a whole, have not been effective in contacting church members attending public schools, in order to give them an opportunity to consider Adventist institutions in their college search process.³

PROVIDING OUR YOUTH WITH ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND ADVENTIST COLLEGES

Of the Adventists who graduated from public high schools in North America and planned to enroll in college for the 2005-2006 school year, 77.4 percent received no recruiting contact from any of the Adventist colleges and universities in the North American Division. In addition, Adventist students in public high schools were generally unaware of most of the church's colleges in North America. In focus groups, NAD families with children in public schools expressed a desire for contact with the church's colleges and universities; many couldn't understand why they hadn't been contacted. "Don't Adventist colleges want our young people?" they asked.⁴

This raises the possibility that many Adventist young people in North America are not attending denominational colleges and universities due to lack of awareness and lack of contact by the schools. In church and school meetings, the reasons why Adventist young people are not attending church schools are usually alleged to be the following: (1) Most Adventist family incomes are low, so they cannot afford a private education; (2) Adventists don't believe their church's schools offer excellent academics; (3) there is a lack of commitment and lack of support for denominational

schools; and/or (4) Adventists today are unwilling to sacrifice and save for a private education at an Adventist college or university.⁵ While these factors may certainly have an impact, the research described in this article challenges these assumptions.

This article will report on research that details how Adventist families and young people describe their feelings about Adventist colleges as well as what they want and expect. The findings should be widely applicable to any Adventist school, K-16, in the North American Division, and also relevant to the church's schools elsewhere. The article will also describe the steps taken by the NAD colleges and universities as a result of the research study.

Background for the Research

In 2003, the senior executive teams of the accredited Adventist colleges and universities in North America, in order to collaborate more closely, established a consortium called the Association for Adventist Colleges and Universities (AACU). Although most NAD institutions are owned and operated by union conferences (several are directly governed by the General Conference), it was decided that collaboration would surely benefit the constituents served by the institutions. The group recognized that 60 percent of the approximately 25,000 young people who at-

tend the NAD colleges are Adventist,⁶ but that the majority of college-age Adventists attend public colleges or universities. The AACU administrators were united by a shared mission—to effectively reach every Adventist young person, no matter what type of high school they attended. They desired to offer each young Adventist in North America equal access and opportunity to attend a denominational college, if he or she so desired.

As a result of AACU's initiatives, a coalition of the marketing and enrollment professionals from all the NAD campuses emerged under the auspices of the Adventist Enrollment Association. They launched a research project whose goal was to understand and communicate more effectively with Adventists attending public high schools in the United States.⁷ The group focused on Adventist students attending public high schools because the colleges had collectively identified this population as being very difficult to target and reach.

With a few exceptions, the church's colleges in NAD have traditionally devoted the majority of their recruitment resources to Adventist students in the more than 100 academies in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. Adventist academy students are relatively easy to

BY VINITA SAUDER



Andrews University

recruit; they are already acclimated to an Adventist educational environment and generally value the academic, social, and spiritual benefits of an Adventist school. College recruiters visit these academy campuses multiple times a year, interviewing juniors and seniors, speaking in classes, and sometimes conducting weeks of prayer. The union-operated colleges hold an annual College Days event, which academy students in their union are required to attend. The Adventist Enrollment Association also sponsors an annual college fair circuit (begun in 1999) on all academy campuses in North America, allowing the 13 colleges a venue to simultaneously showcase the entire accredited Adventist higher education community at each academy.

However, while the total aggregate enrollment of the North American Division colleges has increased steadily over the past 20 years, the enrollment in NAD academies has not followed the same trend. Since 1990, academy enrollments have decreased significantly, and several academies have closed or merged.⁸ No longer can Adventist colleges depend solely on academy students to meet their enrollment goals;

thus, the focus on providing access and opportunity to Adventist youth attending public schools has become a critical strategic initiative, not only for Adventist young people, but also for the future success of the colleges and universities.

Shifting Demographics

Demographics are shifting in the North American Adventist Church, which affects school marketing and recruitment. There are fewer Adventist youth in NAD now than 20 years ago. In a recent report titled “Seventh-day Adventists in North America: A Demographic Profile,” by Monte Sahlin and Paul Richardson, out of 1.2 million Adventists in North America, 141,604 are young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Due to the “graying of Adventism” (the median age for Seventh-day Adventists in North America is 51, compared to a median age of 36 in the United States and 35 in Canada), only one NAD family in five has school-age children in its household; this represents a 25 percent decline since 1990.⁹

With a shrinking base of young people, how do the NAD educational institutions find individual students, particularly if they are attending public schools? Although the Adventist Church maintains a centralized database of members,

primarily for membership records and address lists for a select group of church publications, no church department has created a comprehensive list of youth for schools to use in recruiting. Each school must conjecture where the young people are through word of mouth, the good will of local pastors and church clerks, and requests from parents and students who are actively seeking information. This lack of an accurate, systematic method to identify and locate church youth complicates the ability of schools to provide access and opportunity to every young member.

Shifting demographics are evident in the ethnic makeup of the church as well. The percentage of Caucasian Adventists in North America has declined over the past 20 years to only half the membership. By 2030, Caucasians will no longer constitute a majority of the NAD membership, but neither will any of the four largest ethnic segments; rather, there will be a “majority minority” of African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and other ethnicities who in combination outnumber Caucasians. It is important to note that in Adventist households with children, the “majority minority” already exists: 43 percent



La Sierra University

of NAD households with children are Caucasian; 57 percent are from other ethnic backgrounds.¹⁰ Therefore, enrollment demographics for North American Division schools are changing rapidly, and marketing and communication methods must adapt to these changes as well.

The good news demographically is that Seventh-day Adventists in North America are a well-educated people. The percentage of members with a college degree (61 percent) is more than

double that of the general population in the United States.¹¹ What is unknown is whether college attendance among current and future generations of Adventist youth will continue at that high rate. Multiplying the number of college-age young people in the church by the average U.S. rate of college attendance suggests an optimistic projection of available youth to populate the NAD colleges and universities, if access and opportunity are provided.

Against this changing demographic

A A C U

The 13 accredited colleges and universities in the North American Division that are part of the Association for Adventist Colleges and Universities enroll, collectively, nearly 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year throughout the United States and Canada.

- Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan)
- Canadian University College (Lacombe, Alberta, Canada)
- Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences (Orlando, Florida)
- Kettering College (Kettering, Ohio)
- La Sierra University (Riverside, California)
- Loma Linda University (Loma Linda, California)
- Oakwood University (Huntsville, Alabama)
- Pacific Union College (Angwin, California)
- Southern Adventist University (Collegedale, Tennessee)
- Southwestern Adventist University (Keene, Texas)
- Union College (Lincoln, Nebraska)
- Walla Walla University (College Place, Washington)
- Washington Adventist University (Takoma Park, Maryland)

backdrop and the uncertainty about the motivations of today's college-bound Adventists, the research study commissioned by AACU asked the following questions: *What do Adventist youth think about the church's colleges? How aware are they of NAD Adventist colleges? How can the colleges find and target Adventist young people attending public high schools, and what messages will resonate with them?*

Additionally, the study sought to ascertain whether there were differences in perception and attitudes between Adventists who attend denominational academies and those who attend public high schools, are home schooled, or attend other private high schools. Has the traditionally high perception of the value of an Adventist education diminished?

The Research Study: Three Groups of Students

The study was constructed to occur during a very specific time of the year—in the summer after high school graduation but prior to college enrollment in the fall. The study grouped Adventist students by the type of high school they attended, so that information regarding the students attending public high schools could be obtained.

Three college-bound groups were identified and compared throughout the study:

(1) Academy/Adventist College (students who graduated from an Adventist academy and were headed toward an Adventist college);

(2) Non-Academy/Adventist College (students who graduated from a public school, private non-Adventist school, or attended home school, and were headed to an Adventist college); and

(3) Non-Academy/Other College (students who graduated from a public school, private non-Adventist school, or home school, and were headed toward a non-Adventist college).

A “mixed methods” approach was selected for the research methodology, applying both qualitative and quantitative techniques in a sequential two-phase design. The first phase of the research, an explorative study using focus groups, was conducted in professional facilities

in Los Angeles, California, and Nashville, Tennessee. Focus-group participants were Adventist students and parents from the three groups listed above. A professional moderator guided the focus groups, while enrollment managers from the Adventist colleges observed from behind two-way mirrors.

The insights gained from the focus groups shaped the building of a survey instrument for use in a nationwide telephone survey, which comprised the second phase of the study. In-depth phone interviews (lasting an average of 18 minutes each) were conducted by a professional firm using computer-assisted software connected to a database of purchased and provided names. All the students in the database were self-reported Seventh-day Adventists, having indicated their denominational preference on college entrance examinations and in other surveys used to compile the database.

Findings and Recommendations¹²

About two-thirds of the youth contacted by telephone (64.8 percent) were non-academy students; slightly more than one-third (35.2 percent) were academy students. Of the non-academy students, 82.3 percent attended public high school, 12.2 percent attended a non-Adventist private school, and 5.5 percent were home schooled.

The findings indicated that where a student goes to college was clearly related to the type of high school he or she attended. Students who attended an academy were more likely to attend an Adventist college. An interesting finding was that Adventist students who attended a *private* non-Adventist high school were also more likely to attend an Adventist college, whereas students who attended a public high school were more likely to attend a public college or a private, non-Adventist college.¹³

The study also revealed that, compared to all other ethnicities, African-American Adventists attended public high schools at a significantly higher rate and also attended non-Adventist colleges at a significantly higher rate



(over 70 percent). Following behind the African-Americans were Hispanics, also attending public high schools and public colleges in high percentages (more than 60 percent). NAD Caucasians who attended Adventist academies enrolled at Adventist colleges at a significantly higher percentage than other ethnicities.¹⁴

These findings mirror what authors Ramirez-Johnson and Hernandez uncovered in a previous study called *Avance*, a project conducted by the Hispanic Education Advisory Committee of the NAD among Hispanic adults and youth. They found that of the 20 percent of the Hispanics sampled who were attending college, the majority were enrolled in public colleges and universities.¹⁵ Adventist minority students were, for the most part, not attending Adventist academies, nor were they enrolled in Adventist colleges.

Are Public School Students Connected to the Church?

School and conference administrators often wonder about the connectedness to the church of students who do not attend Adventist academies or colleges. In other words, if a student doesn't attend an Adventist secondary or tertiary institution, there is a perception that the student or family must be poorly connected to or grounded in the

church. The AACU study challenges this myth, as it found no significant difference between the three research groups in regard to church attendance or Sabbath observance. Committed Adventists appeared in equal percentages in all groups.¹⁶

Awareness Levels

The students in both the Nashville and Los Angeles focus groups showed a surprising lack of awareness of Adventist colleges. This was especially the case for the non-academy groups. While talking to the Los Angeles group of non-academy students headed to public colleges, the moderator said, "None of you selected a religious school. Were you considering one?" There was silence, then "No" came from around the room. The moderator began to read off the names of the Adventist colleges, then added: "Tell me if you've ever heard of them." After a few college names were read, one student asked, "Are these in, like, California?" "No, they are all over the country," the moderator replied.

The telephone survey also revealed that most non-academy respondents were unaware of Adventist colleges. Academy graduates recognized the names of the church's colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada at twice the rate of public school graduates. Un-



Pacific Union College

aided, non-academy graduates could name only three of the 15 NAD colleges that existed at the time of the survey.¹⁷

Focus groups of parents conducted in Nashville and Los Angeles produced similar results—they were also unaware that the Adventist Church supported more than a dozen colleges. The parents reacted strongly, seeming annoyed that the church or their pastor had not communicated this information to them. This lack of awareness suggests that Adventist pastors should familiarize themselves with all of the Adventist colleges and universities and inform their church members about the offerings available. It should be noted that in the Lutheran denomination, which operates 40 colleges in the U.S. and Canada, posters and informational kits are made available to each church, listing all 40 Lutheran colleges. In addition, Lutheran churches publish a Web link (<http://www.lutherancolleges.org>) that showcases all the colleges. NAD Adventist colleges are similarly showcased at <http://www.adventistcolleges.org>. This Web link should be shared with every church member.

Parents in Los Angeles asked why multiple non-Adventist colleges were recruiting their children, but none of the Adventist colleges had contacted them or their child. One parent said, “I noticed that other colleges were asking for

Abby. I would like the Adventist colleges to ask for the children that are in the church. None of these colleges contacted us or sent a letter. They should be saying, ‘Why don’t you join our college, why don’t you come over here; this is what we offer.’ There was none of that.”¹⁸

The telephone survey also revealed significant differences between the groups in terms of being contacted or experiencing any form of recruitment or communication from an Adventist college. Seventy-one percent of the Academy/Adventist College group were recruited by an Adventist college or university, in contrast to only 44.8 percent in the Non-Academy/Adventist College group and 22.6 percent in the Non-Academy/Other College group.¹⁹ Unless Adventist colleges approach youth in the non-academy groups, these young people will not have access and opportunity to attend their institutions, and additional enrollment from these groups cannot be expected.

The findings regarding lack of awareness and lack of intentional communication or contact by NAD higher education institutions again mirrors the *Avance* study, which cited several reasons for Hispanic youth not attending Adventist colleges. The most commonly cited reason, according to

authors Ramirez-Johnson and Hernandez, was the lack of awareness of the colleges and what they offer. They suggest that colleges be more aggressive in their recruitment of Hispanic Adventists: “Assume that Hispanics are unaware that your institution exists. Not only are church institutions missing an entire population of potential students, but Hispanic Adventist youth are being denied the opportunity for the Christian higher education that can be so valuable both to their temporal and their spiritual well-being. Adventist higher education needs to make the Hispanic community an integral part of its constituency.”²⁰

College Choice Motivators: Different Yet the Same

At the beginning of the survey, students were asked to list the college factors that motivated them. An initial pattern of differences clearly emerged between students headed toward Adventist colleges and those headed to public colleges or other private colleges. Students planning to enroll in Adventist colleges consistently placed importance on the spiritual environment, on friends, and on students sharing the same beliefs and values. These groups already valued the environment that Adventist colleges offer.

On the other hand, the students who



Southern Adventist University

did not attend Adventist academies and who were not headed toward Adventist colleges valued factors such as location or price, which confirmed findings from a study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, which reported that in general, students enrolling in public institutions are more likely to choose location or price as their main reasons for choosing a public college. Their peers enrolling at private colleges pick other factors as most important. These results were mirrored by the majority of Adventist students in this study.²¹

But in spite of the initial choices on the survey form, which indicated that the non-academy group was most interested in the location of a college or its price, it was interesting to note what happened by the end of the focus groups and phone interviews. When read a list of 10 statements that defined college attributes, the non-academy group picked the statement, “Adventist colleges can offer you spiritual growth and spiritual opportunities that you simply can’t find elsewhere” as making them more interested in attending an Adventist college. In fact, this group rated this statement at a higher aggregate percentage than the other two groups; it was by far the most motivat-

ing of the statements for the non-academy students.²² Why did this group not value or mention the spiritual environment factor in earlier questions and then rate this statement highly toward the end of the survey? The focus group responses suggested an answer.

Within the focus groups, a sort of transformation took place among the students headed toward non-Adventist colleges. As the topics progressed, and the moderator began mentioning the college attributes of a spiritual environment and being able to associate with friends of like beliefs, it was interesting to see these concepts sink in. Clearly, the Adventist students attending public high schools had never thought about these concepts much before. The moderator, a Christian research professional, almost found himself in an evangelistic position concerning the benefits and offerings of an Adventist college, due to the audience reaction. As the students slowly absorbed the attributes commonly associated with Adventist colleges during the focus group, they began to actively dialogue with the moderator about the value of a spiritual environment. The same phenomenon occurred in the parent groups.²³

The college enrollment personnel behind the two-way mirrors at the focus

groups were fascinated by this shift in attitude among the non-academy participants in regard to the value of a spiritual college environment. The shift points out the complete lack of familiarity and awareness of these young people and their parents with Adventist school environments. Their interest in the dialogue about a spiritual environment points out the value of communication and conversation regarding the values and distinctiveness of Adventist colleges. Church groups, pastors, and leaders should discuss these benefits with parents and families on a regular basis, and provide proper opportunities for college choice by including the colleges and universities operated by the church in conversations. This research demonstrates that these kinds of discussions make a big difference in perception and knowledge regarding the benefits of Adventist colleges and universities.

A Myth: Academic Quality Not Valued

Educators sometimes postulate that the reason the non-academy students do not choose Adventist colleges is because they perceive the schools as academically inferior. This study appears



Southwestern Adventist University

to have soundly repudiated that myth. All groups of prospective students (those who were not aware of any of the Adventist colleges were not included in these results) gave high ratings to the Adventist colleges in the area of academic excellence.²⁴

The study showed that while academic excellence is a foundational attribute for college choice, it was not a marketing differentiator among the Adventist groups. This came out clearly in both the focus groups and the phone interviews. Students were not choosing Adventist colleges for their excellent academic programs (which they rank as important and perceive the colleges to have); instead, they were choosing Adventist colleges over public universities because of the differences in spiritual-growth opportunities, personal attention from caring faculty, and the potential to form lifelong friendships with students holding similar beliefs and values. Therefore, these are the differentiators that Adventist colleges must market. The differentiators, however, function only as long as academic excellence is maintained as a foundation, and the schools offer strong academic programs that interest students.

Thus, this study does not suggest that Adventist schools can neglect academic excellence; rather, it must be the bedrock of each institution, and fostered and

communicated as the strong base upon which the differentiators are supported. When shopping for colleges, students typically first check out the majors and programs offered, and then they and their families consider the differentiators. It should be noted that it is possible to highlight excellent academics through an attribute all groups find important—personal attention from faculty. Marketers and recruiters can highlight faculty connectedness, a hallmark of teaching excellence, to emphasize the quality learning environment with engaged faculty and students at Adventist colleges.

College Choice Barriers: Lack of Awareness, Cost

The study conclusively showed that the largest barrier to attending an NAD Adventist college was lack of awareness, followed by lack of knowledge of the benefits of attending a church-sponsored college, and the lack of recruitment among the non-academy group. The lack of awareness was the most significant finding of the AACU study. It is critical that the Adventist Church and its North American colleges and universities create higher awareness levels in the Adventist population. A foundational principle in marketing,

including educational marketing, is to create awareness of a brand; without it, consumers will not know about the benefits of purchasing the product.²⁵

Although not as significant as the lack of awareness, secondary barriers to attending an Adventist college uncovered in the study were cost, distance from the student's home, lifestyle restrictions (mandatory worships, conservative dress code rules, diet restrictions), the perception of a strict or judgmental environment on campus, the lack of a sports program, and a desire to attend a big-name school.

While the survey found no significant difference between the three groups with regard to household income, cost surfaced as a factor of concern in the Los Angeles focus group and was rated by a large percentage of the non-academy group as a key concern.²⁶ Because of this concern, affordability and the availability of financial aid need to be prominent in communicating with this group. According to Lewison and Hawes, marketing approaches should emphasize value and benefits in contacting prospective students and not focus on the negative aspects of price and cost.²⁷ Obstacles to college attendance should be seen through the lens of value, focusing on the brand experience and the value they receive from the product.²⁸ It is especially important to emphasize educational value and benefits first, particularly among the non-academy group, as well as to offer a financial planning approach that makes a private college education affordable. Low-income students with good grades can often obtain generous financial aid that enables them to attend college.

A positive financial planning approach includes providing examples of how other families in similar circumstances were able to achieve their educational goals. Testimonies about scholarships, work opportunities, and sponsorships give families practical information about affordability. The good news is that students headed toward Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in the survey reported receiving more financial aid than the students headed toward public colleges

and universities, irrespective of household income.²⁹

A few students mentioned barriers to attending Adventist colleges being lifestyle restrictions, required worships, and judgmental environments, which mirrors the Maguire Associates study in 2001 among 70 Christian colleges in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.³⁰ Barriers to attendance in that study included concerns about “closed-mindedness” and strict rules, so Adventist students are no different than students in other denominations regarding concerns about strictness and rules on a Christian campus.

It is important to note that colleges which provide a spiritual environment and are connected to particular denominations often require chapel attendance and maintain rules considered “strict” in order to highlight their distinctiveness and to foster a different environment than the ones found on public college campuses. George Marsden in *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*,³¹ James Burtchaeall in *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities From Their Christian Churches*,³² and Robert Benne in *Quality With Soul: How Six Premiere Colleges and Universities Keep Faith With Their Religious Traditions*³³ have demonstrated collectively that it is in the best interest of a denominational college to retain the distinctiveness of chapels, worships, and lifestyle requirements. Without them, Christian colleges become like public institutions and over time, lose their faith-based distinctiveness.

Marketing Communication: What Makes Students More Interested?

Statements describing various college attributes were tested in the focus groups and telephone surveys. Among all groups, including the students who had attended high school and were headed to a non-Adventist college, the top three messages that were most motivating and the most likely to increase interest were these:

1. Adventist colleges can offer spiritual growth and spiritual opportunities



that you simply can't find elsewhere;

2. At Adventist colleges, you have easy access to professors who understand the value of providing personal attention to each student; and

3. At Adventist colleges, you can develop lifelong friendships and relationships with students who share similar beliefs and spiritual values.³⁴

These three top messages also appear in prior research regarding Adventist enrollment. D. W. Hunt's 1996 study identified top factors that families consider most important when sending students to Adventist boarding academies: a spiritual environment, concerned and caring teachers, and school climate.³⁵ Philip Mainda's 2001

research addressed the factors influencing school choice among the Adventist population in Michigan. He discovered that for grades K to 12, there was a significant relationship between school choice and parental perceptions of spiritual values-based education.³⁶ Could these school choice factors be timeless differentiators for Adventist families regardless of the level, whether elementary, academy, or college? The importance of the spiritual environment, personal attention, and close contact with caring, believing teachers cannot be underestimated as a differentiating and motivating factor for Adventist school choice.

Link to AdventistColleges.org

Help spread the word about Adventist colleges and universities by linking both your school and your church Webpage to AdventistColleges.org. Linking to the site keeps search engine rankings high, which helps youth looking for information about Adventist colleges. The site can provide valuable information to families making decisions about college, and includes information about the nearly 500 different programs of study available, the admissions requirements, links to each college, and access to a common online application.

Suggestions for sites to link to AdventistColleges.org include:

- Church Websites
- Conference and union Websites, including education sections
- K-12 Website



Washington Adventist University

Recommendations for Action

A fundamental recommendation as a result of this study was that Adventist colleges and universities, in partnership with the NAD Office of Education, create a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated marketing plan to reach all Adventist youth, particularly those not attending denominational academies. The colleges should cooperate to create a common branding strategy under the auspices of AACU. With the NAD's changing demographics, colleges need to work together and collaborate closely in order to ensure access and opportunity for each Adventist young person. Gone should be the days when individual colleges battle for name recognition and worry about stealing students from each other's territories. The goal should be to find the best college for each Adventist young person. The low awareness levels by students and parents are simply unacceptable for a denomination that values education so highly and has spent so much to keep it viable.

Like other denominational college consortia that have already gone down this road (the Lutheran, Catholic, and Churches of Christ college associations), Adventists will be more successful at influencing non-academy students to enroll in denominational colleges if they

collaborate to market and brand themselves as a coordinated system of colleges with a set of educational benefits and strengths common to all.

Strategic Steps

As a result of this research, and the subsequent release of the full study in 2008, the Adventist Enrollment Association and AACU have made significant progress on collaboration to market to and communicate systematically with NAD youth who are not enrolled in Adventist academies. Success is more likely through working collectively to reach this particular market. AACU has created a Joint Marketing Committee, which launched the following joint projects: mailings to Adventists attending public high schools, community/church-based college fairs, calling campaigns, publicity, and advertising. An online application on a shared Website (<http://www.adventistcolleges.org>) went live in 2007. The mailings employ a consortium branding approach, with all NAD colleges listed, and use the top three marketing messages revealed by the research to create interest among all groups surveyed. The resulting "leads" and contact information for interested students generated by these joint marketing projects are regularly sent to all of the colleges for follow-up.

In 2009, AACU voted to hire a mar-

keting director to work on behalf of all the NAD colleges and to expand the work of offering access and opportunity to Adventists attending public schools. Funding for the position came from the NAD colleges and the union conferences, along with the support of a visionary donor who believes in the value of Adventist higher education to transform lives. Rob Weaver, a former chair of the Joint Marketing Committee and a former vice president for enrollment at Union College, stepped into the role and continues to expand and strengthen the collaborative marketing strategies. In 2010, under Weaver's guidance, AACU intensified its communication strategy, launching the "Adventist Choice" campaign, implementing more focused mailings and e-mails to Adventist youth, and establishing a parent e-newsletter. Because of the common application that is now available, student applications have increased significantly at many of the colleges and universities, and enrollments from the Adventist Choice strategy are aggressively tracked.³⁷ So far, the strategy is showing success, although much work is yet to be done, and greater collaboration is needed with unions, conferences, pastors, and local churches to build awareness and ensure ongoing conversation regarding the benefits of

Adventist education at all of the colleges and universities.

AACU and the Joint Marketing Committee continue to emphasize research and a data-driven approach to shaping future marketing strategies. Another research study currently underway seeks to evaluate student outcomes based on the college attended, whether Adventist or public or private. In addition, a study similar to the one described in this article is being considered, so that the results of the institutions' recent collaboration can be evaluated. Are students in public schools more aware of NAD colleges now than they were five years ago?

As N. Clifford Sorensen wrote in 2002 in this journal, regarding the NAD colleges collaborating together on various projects, "We can surely praise what occurred serendipitously . . . with respect to joint endeavors. However, today's environment requires a more comprehensive and coordinated approach." Sorensen showed great foresight in calling for the commitment of appropriate human and monetary resources to the collaborative process in order to ensure success: "Given our long history of vigorous and competitive individuality, successful cooperation will require both a carefully crafted strategy and the identification of mutual benefits within partnership agreements. We must define outcomes and expectations and commit the necessary human and monetary resources to this process, which cannot be viewed as a short-term or one-time quick-fix operation. In summary, many factors will impede or stall consortium efforts. Most if not all can be overcome by dedicated and unrelenting effort."³⁸

The North American Division and its colleges and universities have embraced the concept of collaborating systemwide on marketing and enrollment management strategies to provide every Adventist with an opportunity to learn about the college choices available in the NAD. While an Adventist education may not be the right fit for every family or all students, every Adventist family deserves to be informed about the church's education

MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT LESSONS FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The practical lessons learned from the AACU research and the collaborative work among the NAD tertiary institutions provide a road map for elementary schools and academies, as well.

- **Collaboration:** The North American Division colleges and universities have discovered that working together on marketing and enrollment ensures a professional focus on the art and science of communication and enrollment management. By joining forces, more can be accomplished through shared budgeting, shared projects, and shared learning. This approach can be used by elementary and secondary schools to build common working manuals, templates, and workshops that incorporate best practices in marketing and enrollment techniques. A conference, or several schools, might consider collaborating on mailings, advertising, information sessions, and/or calling campaigns.
- **Church focus:** The students and families who attend public schools can be reached through local churches. Make sure pastors and youth leaders visit your facility and are familiar with your program. Find ways to engage your pastors and churches in ensuring access and opportunity for every youth.
- **Lavish and sustained communication:** Just because the salient facts about your school are obvious to your leadership team doesn't mean that they are common knowledge among your constituents. Make sure to maintain a constant flow of positive messages about school events and the successes achieved by your students. Effective ways to do this include mailings to church members in your area and regular church bulletin inserts. Your conference or union may be able to provide you with a mailing list by requesting the E-Adventist database.
- **Resources:** In light of the economy and the bombardment of messages from competing schools, a skilled and dedicated person who is trained in marketing should be in charge of your school's marketing and enrollment efforts.
- **Messaging:** The research and literature show that Adventist families choose church-sponsored education for these differentiating factors: the spiritual environment, the personal contact and mentoring of excellent teachers, and the opportunity to learn in a community of like-minded believers. These messages make a difference when academic excellence is a core value of the school and families can perceive quality and value from the combination of superior academics and a strong spiritual environment.
- **Financial planning:** Printed materials and messages should focus on affordability, detailing clearly the variety of ways that families can finance a private education.
- **Follow-up:** Track inquiries and quickly follow up with families who express interest. Offer and promote school tours on a regular basis, and regularly schedule information sessions at your school and local churches.
- **Evaluation and assessment:** Ask a professional to evaluate your materials, your messaging, and your school tour. Pay attention to the small details that make a difference.
- **Benchmarking and Best Practices:** Our NAD college professionals learned quite a bit from looking at what the Lutheran colleges had done in terms of collaborative research and marketing. If there is a successful private school in your area, no matter what the affiliation, see what they are doing in the areas of communication, marketing, and recruiting. You could pick up some valuable tips.
- **Mission:** Your goal should be access and opportunity for every Adventist youth to enroll in a Seventh-day Adventist school.

system and to know how to investigate its options for their young person.

The church as a whole is called to this task by the 2005 GC Commission on Higher Education: "The church looks to Seventh-day Adventist higher education for its next generation of leaders,"³⁹ and "The church needs to take a serious look at . . . how to best reverse the trend of large numbers of church youth choosing non-Adventist institutions for their higher education needs as opposed to our own institutions."⁴⁰

With this encouragement, work should continue, not only by AACU, but also by all pastors and by all church leaders and educators, on communicating the advantages and benefits of an Adventist higher education to all church constituents. In addition to providing fair access and equal opportunity to each college-bound Adventist in the NAD, this systematic strategy will ensure that a healthy base of Adventist young people continues to be available for each institution into the future.⁴¹ ☞

This article has been peer reviewed.



Vinita Sauder, Ph.D., M.B.A., is Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. From 1998 to 2011, she served as Southern's Vice President for Marketing and Enrollment Services and helped grow the university by more than 1,000 students. She founded the original Joint Marketing Committee for the Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities (AACU) and is a past president of the Adventist Enrollment Association (AEA). Her doctoral study, "Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers," is available at <http://www.southern.edu/~sauder>. Dr. Sauder has also served as a business professor, institutional research and planning director, and associate dean of academic administration.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. General Conference Commission on Higher Education, *Global Report and Recommendations*, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, Md.: September 2003).
2. The General Conference publishes *College and University Dialogue* in four languages for students on secular campuses: <http://dialogue.adventist.org>.
3. Vinita Sauder, *Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2008.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 145.
5. Larry Blackmer, "NAD SWOT Analysis." PowerPoint presented at the 2011 GC Education Advisory Council meeting, Silver Spring, Md., March 29, 2011.
6. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives and Statistics, annual statistical reports 1988-2010. Retrieved December 23, 2011, from <http://www.adventistarchives.org>.
7. Adventist Enrollment Association Annual Meeting Minutes, June 2004.
8. GC Archives and Statistics, annual statistical reports 1988-2010. Retrieved December 23, 2011.
9. Monte Sahlin and Paul Richardson, *Seventh-day Adventists in North America: A Demographic Profile* (Milton-Freewater, Ore.: Center for Creative Ministry, 2008).
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
12. The differences among the three groups of students were compared using crosstabulations and Chi-square, showing frequencies, percentages, standard residuals, degrees of freedom, and *p* values. An absolute standard residual value of 2.0 or greater, combined with an alpha *p* value of less than .05, was used to indicate statistical significance, or a significant difference, between the groups. Perceptual maps were also constructed to visually track the scores from the three groups using college choice criteria and college performance scales.
13. Sauder, *Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers*, op cit.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
15. J. Ramirez-Johnson and Edward I. Hernandez, *Avance: A Vision for a New Mañana* (Loma Linda, Calif.: Loma Linda University Press, 2003).
16. Sauder, *Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers*, op cit.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 145.
20. Ramirez-Johnson and Hernandez, *Avance: A Vision for a New Mañana*, op cit., pp. 115, 116.
21. A. F. Cunningham, *The Policy of Choice: Expanding Student Options in Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2002).
22. Sauder, *Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers*, op cit.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
25. Philip Kotler, "A Generic Concept of Marketing," *Journal of Marketing* 36 (April 1972):46-54.
26. Sauder, *Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers*, op cit.
27. D. M. Lewison and J. M. Hawes, "Student Target Marketing Strategies for Universities," *Journal of College Admissions* 196 (Summer 2007):14-19.
28. T. J. Hayes, "Image and the University," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 4 (1/2) (1993):423-425.
29. Sauder, *Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers*, op cit.
30. Maguire Associates, "Attitudinal Study of Prospects, Inquirers, Parents of Inquirers, Non-Matriculants, and Matriculants": http://www.ccu.org/projects/marketresearch/channel_reports/default.asp. Retrieved March 4, 2006.
31. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
32. James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities From Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).
33. Robert Benne, *Quality With Soul: How Six Premiere Colleges and Universities Keep Faith With Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001).
34. Sauder, *Marketing Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education: College-Choice Motivators and Barriers*, op cit.
35. D. W. Hunt, *The Factors That Impact Marketing and Enrollment in Seventh-day Adventist Boarding Schools*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1996.
36. P. O. Mainda, *A Study on Selected Factors Influencing School Choice Among the Seventh-day Adventist Populations in Southwest Michigan*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2001.
37. Association for Adventist Colleges and Universities, *Adventist College Strategy* (September 2011), received via e-mail.
38. N. C. Sorensen, "Forming Partnerships Within Adventist Higher Education," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 65:2 (December 2002/January 2003):48-50.
39. GC Commission on Higher Education, *Global Report and Recommendations*, vol. 1, op cit.
40. _____, *Final Report of the General Conference Commission on Higher Education* (Silver Spring, Md.: October 2005).
41. The author wishes to thank her colleagues Drs. Loretta Johns, Jimmy Kijai, and Doug Jones for their wisdom and guidance during the development and analysis of this study and the completion of her doctoral education.