



Janine Monica Lim

As Adventist educators, we all have a heart and passion for providing access to Christian education to as many students as possible. We see the value of the faith-saturated learning environment where students experience religious values moment by moment. We long to see more students receiving an Adventist education—and often we even sacrifice personally to ensure that students can attend Adventist schools. Hence, online education captures our imagination and interest. Could online education

• **Access that provides flexibility.** Adult learners, with families and jobs, much prefer to acquire their education online.¹ I think often of our K-12 teachers who have traditionally enrolled at the nearby Adventist college or university to take classes in the summer. They work so hard during the school year that it is often difficult to also study during the summer and give up family time. Online education allows for access from anywhere with a high-speed Internet connection, and this opens up possibilities for meeting the students' needs for flexibility and work/life/school balance.

• **Access on-demand.** Have you noticed that it's much less common than in the past for anyone to watch the news, or television shows, at a specific time? Now viewers can watch the show episodes on-demand through online services. News can be acquired on-demand through online newspapers, YouTube, and videos on Facebook news feeds. Similarly, students want their learning "on-demand." Providing flexible learning opportunities enables us to reach students and families who need more options to fit learning into their busy lives.

• **Access that's affordable.** Sometimes online education is offered via a method that allows for reduction of cost. Students enrolling in online courses

often do not have to pay transportation costs, fees for use of campus facilities such as libraries, cafeterias, or residential housing, or other amenities. As it is increasingly challenging for families to pay for Adventist education, online education provides another option. For families preferring to keep their teenagers at home but who have no day academy nearby, online education provides access to Adventist education. For too long we have shunned families who choose public education. But why not, instead, offer families additional choices for Adventist education? We can provide courses and degrees that increase student choices beyond the public or

Adventist Distance Education:

A Bridge to Access

expand access to Adventist education? The contributors to this issue would answer this question with a resounding YES! Here are four essential reasons why:

• **Access that bridges major distances.** Access is a significant reason for providing online, hybrid, and distance-education opportunities in addition to our brick-and-mortar offerings. Online education allows us to extend our reach to remote areas, to areas without Adventist schools. Distance education also provides the opportunity to offer courses and programs that might not be available to students at the Adventist school nearest to them.

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other private institutions they are attending.

Our educational system's primary reason for existence is to further the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by using education as evangelism for growing faith in our students. Online education provides a wider audience with access to not only a quality education, but also access to the mission and faith-building experiences of Adventist education.

However, as we continue to explore ways and means for offering online education, we cannot be content with just figuring out how to post courses online. The experience of Adventist education encompasses much more than the course content.

"True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."²

We must continue to experiment with and develop ways to prepare students for "the joy of service in this world," even within the realm of online education. As online teachers, we need to ensure we keep in mind the "harmonious development" of the whole person. We must think of our online students as real people, interacting with them and building relationships with strategies such as those shared by Adam Fenner, whose article on building relationships for ministry with online students appears in this issue.

So, in this special issue of *THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION*, which focuses on online education, we have taken a deliberate approach to the topic. Within the church, we have vibrant and growing online programs internationally, and we wanted to feature the faculty and views from a perspective broader than only North American institutions. We hope you will enjoy the variety of authors and viewpoints shared from our international schools involved in online learning.

In addition, we took a very practical, teacher-focused approach. You'll read about approaches to equipping and supporting online faculty (La Ronda Forsey), strategies for ensuring a faith presence in online courses and developing creative devotionals (Leni T. Casimiro), initiatives to support retention of at-risk students (Anthony Williams, Maria Northcote, Peter Kilgour, and Ben Stewart), and effective ways of building relationships for ministry to online students (Adam Fenner).

The April-May 2018 issue will feature four articles that discuss strategies for mentoring students (Lorena Neria de Girarte), creating authentic assessments (Evelyn Almocera), assessing language skills online (Arceli Rosario, Irene Rivera, and Sheri Joy Namanya), and electronic journaling (Prema Gaikwad). Together, this collection of concrete strategies will provide resources to schools, colleges, and universities offering blended and online learning in Adventist education.

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As coordinator of this issue, Dr. Lim assisted in all aspects of its development, from identifying topics, authors, and reviewers to providing input on manuscripts and answering questions. The Editorial Staff of the *JOURNAL* express heartfelt appreciation for her assistance throughout the planning and production of this issue.

Recommended citation:

Janine Monica Lim, "Adventist Distance Education: A Bridge to Access," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 80:1 (January-March 2018): 3, 47.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Adult learners prefer the flexibility offered by online course environment, which allows them to better manage their time. For more, see *Online College Students 2016: Comprehensive Data on Demands and Preferences*: <http://www.learninghouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/OCS-2016-Report.pdf>.

2. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 13.