

Institute of Christian Teaching  
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

**MAINTAINING AN ADVENTIST IDENTITY IN  
GOVERNMENT ACCREDITED  
ADVENTIST COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

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Adventist educational institutions are among the essential instruments of the Church for the fulfillment of its mission through teaching ministry. Adventist education seeks to provide God-centered education and develop among the students a Christian worldview with teaching and learning of the highest quality. “Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge, it fosters a balanced development of the whole person” (Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy)<sup>1</sup>. The health of Adventist education depends on its capability to maintain its spiritual identity and its mission. With both elements it will be a dynamic force for the world (Knight, G, 2001)<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, it is imperative to maintain Adventist identity among Adventist educational institutions in order to achieve its objectives.

However, will studying in a contemporary Adventist institution make a difference in the lives of students? Who is educating these students and what is the curriculum followed? An affirmative answer to these questions is possible only if Adventist philosophy, program and identity are maintained.

Currently, over one hundred educational institutions of higher learning are operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Many of these institutions have received or are actively seeking government accreditation. It is possible that slowly and steadily

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<sup>1</sup> International Seminar for Deans and Vice Presidents for Academic Administration, 1998 Washington, USA

<sup>2</sup> Korniejczuk, R, “Integration of Faith and Learning: Fundamentals concepts and mission of Adventist higher education”, unpublished manuscript; presented at the 35<sup>th</sup> International seminar on Integration of Faith and Learning, Hong Kong Adventist College, March 11-22, 2007.

these organizations may drift away from the philosophy and program of the founding fathers. Benn (2001) developed a model based on Hughes and Adrian (1997) that describes a four fold typology of religiously affiliated educational institutions.

Institutions vary in their commitment to religious affiliations on a continuum ranging from orthodox, critical-mass, intentionally pluralistic and accidentally pluralistic. This typology takes into consideration factors such as: vision, public relevance of the vision, public rhetoric, requirement for membership, relevance of the department of theology, religion or theology courses required, attendance to worship services, life-style, support from the church and the government. This typology describes four models of affiliated institutions according to their commitment of the aforesaid factors. Putting it diagrammatically will give the following framework:

	<b>Orthodox</b>	<b>Critical mass</b>	<b>Intentionally pluralistic</b>	<b>Accidentally pluralistic</b>
<b>Vision</b>				
<b>Public relevance of the vision</b>				
<b>Public rhetoric</b>				
<b>Requirement for membership</b>				
<b>Relevance of the department of Theology</b>				
<b>Religion or Theology courses required</b>				
<b>Attendance to worship service</b>				
<b>Lifestyle</b>				
<b>Support from the church</b>				

Religiously affiliated institutions identified as Orthodox maintain its original philosophy in its operations, and activities of the organization. If a deliberate attempt is not made to maintain it, then it may gradually move to the stage of critical-mass and to the stage of intentionally pluralistic and eventually may go to the stage of accidentally pluralistic.

The unique challenges faced by government accredited Adventist institutions of higher learning prompted to study how accreditation is affecting the institutions and possibilities to address the challenges.

### **The Government Accreditation among Adventist Institutions**

Adventist educational institutions are seeking government accreditation primarily to enhance marketability of the degrees offered by the institutions. Such an idea may be laudable and even inevitable. However, accreditation may bring with it the accrediting agency's programs and systems, which may make in-roads into our programs and may result in losing our identity. Government accreditation brings with it prospects and offer of funding from the government that will require implementing the government's educational program and philosophy. Funding could be considered if the following areas are not affected: composition of the Board, curriculum, rights to hire and fire faculty and staff and standard for students.

Presented below are some of the advantages and disadvantages of government accreditation:

#### **Advantages**

- a) Marketability of degrees
- b) Increase in enrollment
- c) Potential for bettering financial health of the organization

#### **Disadvantages**

- a) Strong influence on the program and curriculum
- b) Partial loss of autonomy
- c) Dilution of Christian atmosphere on the campus

d) Eligibility to pursue  
graduate studies

The problems of accreditation vary depending on the type of accreditation received by the college. Broadly, there are two types of accreditation. The first is where the institution receives a charter from the government giving it autonomy to offer its own degree programs and manage the institution with periodical assessment by the government agency. With the receiving of the charter from the government the college turns into a recognized institution or a university; to name a few Avondale College, Helderberg College, Babcock University, Solusi University, and others.

The second type of accreditation is where a college is affiliated to a state or a private university. The affiliated college is governed by the charter and the programme of the university. Many Adventist colleges in India are under this type of affiliation. It is in this type of affiliations most damage could be done to our philosophy and mission.

### **Challenges of Government Accreditation in Adventist Colleges or Universities**

The following are some of the areas of challenge in government accredited institutions:

**The philosophy and mission.** The Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centered, and the mission is to train a competent work force primarily for the Church and other sectors of society through quality holistic education. Accreditation requires provision for freedom of thought, expression and religion on the campuses.

Implementing programs and activities, which are not required by accrediting agencies, could be almost impossible; a typical example is dilution in conducting

‘worship services’ for students. The accrediting agency may negatively influence the Adventist philosophy and world view.

**The program and curriculum.** Christian education emphasizes on holistic and a ‘liberal arts’ approach. To be in line with other accredited institutions, the curriculum may be revised and even be based on a secular world view. The courses and syllabi come from the affiliated university, though chartered institutions may have some leeway. Accrediting agencies impose stringent requirements on the academic programme; it leaves very little scope for conveying Adventist values and beliefs. The freedom to develop and design curriculum in line with Adventist philosophy, and to adapt it to local situation as a way of training workers for the Church could also be lost.

**The students and personnel.** The main population in a college or a university consists of students, faculty, staff and administration. With accreditation non-Adventist populace will find their place in the institution. Non-Adventist students may apply for admission and may be admitted displacing Adventist students, who have to compete with other applicants. In the case of affiliated colleges, examinations are scheduled on Sabbath and Adventist students are affected.

In order to meet the requirements of the accrediting agency, qualified personnel may be drawn from the non-Adventist circles. Non-Adventists may be even appointed to serve in high positions in the institutions.

**Campus environment.** The campus atmosphere extends beyond class room and includes all extracurricular activities, namely, cultural and social programs, athletics, student-faculty relationships and other activities outside the class room that promote the institution. The presence of non-Adventist students and lecturers on campus could change

the face of the campus. One should expect to find aspects of secular worldview in areas such as music, movies, language used, extra-curricular activities and etc. An attitude of caution and mistrust as opposed to care, concern and trust could prevail in the campuses.

**Spiritual activities.** In the area of spiritual activities there could be a big change when accreditation is received. The practice of morning and evening worship services which is an integral part of our philosophy may be made optional. Sabbath worship services may also be made optional.

Lyon and Beaty (1999)<sup>3</sup> offer an evolutionary model for understanding the attitude toward religion in religious and secular schools. Their model describes three stages of a Christian college from the most religious to commitment to secularization. The first stage is the “old time Christian College” that embraces religious schools with curriculum intentionally designated to integrate faith and learning.

The second stage is the “two sphere approach” that encompass Christian schools that when confronted with the modern secular university and its dominance in the realm of higher education decide to “remain loyal to its religious heritage in matters of doctrine while belonging to the academic guild in matters of knowledge deemed legitimate by the academe”<sup>4</sup> (p 41).

The third stage, called full-secularization, includes colleges that emphasize research, training and application in such a way that religion has no place. With accreditation chances are that institutions may gradually drift away intentionally from the first stage to the third stage.

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<sup>3</sup> Benn, R Quality for Soul: How six premier colleges and universities keep faith their religious traditions. Grand Rapids: Baker House 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid page 41.

## **Objectives of Christian Educational Institutions -A framework for Administrators**

Adventist educators should be clear about the mission and objectives of the colleges and universities. The mission states what the organization offers to its customers; the objectives state what the organization achieves as a result of its mission. The mission and philosophy is clear about offering Christ-centered educational services and programs, it is important to clarify the objectives to be pursued. The intended objectives may seriously dilute our philosophy and mission especially with those tempted to pursue financial returns. Such institutions are at the forefront of diluting Adventist identity. If financial objectives are achieved at the cost of Adventist philosophy and mission perhaps it is not worth for such institutions to operate under the Adventist banner. Again, there are institutions that are in existence for decades and even a century, but financially unable to break-even. Such situations too are undesirable.

Educational institutions are considered and classified as Nonprofit Organizations (NPO). The NPOs are *Change agents*, and they *Pursue multiple goals*<sup>5</sup>. NPOs do not offer products or services, but their product is a “changed human being”.<sup>6</sup> A Christian educational institution must act as a change agent and pursue multiple objectives. An Adventist educational institution should consider pursuing the following seven objectives:<sup>7</sup>

**Soul winning.** The institution pursues and commits itself to bring people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Further, it should lead to accepting Him as the Lord and personal saviour of their lives as indicated by their public confession- baptism.

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<sup>5</sup> Drucker, Peter Managing the Non-profit Organization Harper Collins Publilsher 1992 page ii.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid page 4

<sup>7</sup> Injety, V. R. Maturing in Adventism Oriental Watchman Publishing 1998 page 184



**Soul nurturing.** The institution plays the role of ‘feeding the lamb’ through its spiritual programs and activities.

**Standards.** The institution propagates Adventist life style and standards in its dealings, activities and operations. This is done by stating the core values of the organization and specifying aspects of Adventist life style such as vegetarianism, no-smoking and abstinence from alcohol.

**Self-sufficiency.** The institution strives for financial self-sufficiency by making all efforts to meet its expenses through raising sufficient revenues. Revenues should be raised in accordance with our philosophy and stand the test of ethics and corporate governance.

**Service.** The institution plays the role of providing services for the underprivileged in the community by providing education, food, clothing, shelter and other forms of service.

**Societal recognition.** The institution makes all attempts to maintain goodwill and a fine public image in the community in which it operates.

**Surplus generation.** The institution operates its financial resources with highest stewardship such that economy and efficiency are maintained to result in surplus of income over expenses.

### **The Framework for Maintaining Adventist Identity**

Deliberate attempts should be made to maintaining Adventist identity. It has to be undertaken at two levels namely: product level and process level. At product-level means that integration should take place at the teaching-level. It will also include various extra-curricular activities level connected with learning, teaching and administration. A typical

example of this may include beginning a class or an extra-curricular activity with a prayer. Process-level means that integration should also take place at the design – the program, curriculum, mission, philosophy. *Maintaining Adventist identity is not a stroke of a color on the picture but the design of the picture itself.* “Add Jesus and stir it”<sup>8</sup> approach is not integration of faith and learning it is much deeper than that. A Seventh-day Adventist educational institution is characterized by the following attributes:<sup>9</sup>

**Philosophy, mission and objectives.** *“To bring man back into harmony with God, so as to elevate and ennoble his moral nature that he may again reflect the image of the Creator, is the great purpose of all the education and discipline of life”* (CT:49). Every Adventist educational institution should be guided by the philosophy and mission of the Church. The mission statement is jointly crafted by board, administration and faculty and be reflected in all the programs and activities of the institution. The activities such as worship services and work program that reflect our philosophy should be reintroduced if we have to maintain Adventist identity.

**The program and curriculum.** The academic degree programs offered by the institution should be in response to the needs of the constituency, within the bounds of financial and other resources available. The composition of the degree requirements, including the course offerings has to reflect Christian philosophy. Ringenberg (1984, p 211) states that “a Christian college is a community of Christian believers, both teachers and students, who are dedicated to the search for an understanding of the divine Creator, the universe that he has created, and the role that each creature should fulfill in this universe. The title of the specific courses may not differ from those in a secular college.

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<sup>8</sup> Poe, Harry Lee *Christianity in the Academy* Baker Book House Company, 2004 p. 14

<sup>9</sup> *International Seminar for Deans and Vice Presidents for Academic Administrators*, General Conference of SDA, 1998.

What does differ dramatically, however, is the attitude with which Christian scholars approach their areas of investigation. All areas of study will be examined from the perspective of biblical worldview”.

Every degree program will promote academic excellence and will include general requirements with specific objectives to achieve in the area spiritual, mental, social and academic spheres. However, in government accredited educational institutions this may be a big challenge since the affiliated institutions do not have total autonomy. Those institutions which receive charter from the government may have independence to do so but not those colleges which are affiliated to another University. In that case, it is suggested that the institution consider offering a “Diploma in Life Skills” which will be awarded along with the bachelor’s degree. The diploma would consist of courses in computers, religion/ethics, health, environment, research and communication skills. This would cover the general education component. This broader focus on life skills would reinforce the holistic development of the individual in the mental, physical, and spiritual arenas, which is the core of true education.

**Governance, administration and accountability.** The governing board will consist of committed Christians with representation from the local constituency as well as from the church structure. The governing board appoints administrators, key faculty and staff, develops institutional policies, approves budget and advises the leadership.

The administration commits and promotes and implements the philosophy and mission of the organization. Further, it assesses and fulfills the needs and expectations of the constituency. The administration carries out its activities through properly constituted

committees. The governing board should play an active role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the operations.

Only those persons who serve as models of followers of Christ in professional and personal life should be considered for administrative responsibilities. Benn (2001), based upon Huges and Adrian, identifies the more relevant strategies to maintain faith in religious higher education institutions. They are: a) people that believe Christianity is relevant for university life, b) accountability of persons that hold the beliefs, c) selection of administrators, teachers, personnel, and students that are committed to live the beliefs, and d) leadership that sustains practices that favour the development of faith. Among these practices are worship, spiritual formation for students and a clear vision that reaches all the educational enterprise.

**Faculty and staff.** The faculty and staff hold a central place because they offer services. The institution should have a professionally qualified faculty and staff committed to the Seventh-day Adventist mission, message and life style. Faculty and staff should be of Adventist faith and exhibit qualities of discipleship of Jesus Christ and in the education of young men and women. The institution should have Adventist faculty and staff who see their employment as fulfilling the gospel commission. Appointment of non-Adventist faculty as heads of departments and other positions of responsibility is undesirable. The institution should make every effort to employ Adventist adjunct professors if they have to hire adjunct professors. Applicants for lectureship who studied in Adventist institutions should be given preference in employment.

**Students.** The institution exists to serve the educational needs of the constitution and the Adventist student is the primary focus of the educational effort. It must make

deliberate attempts to admit students of the faith to the benefit of the constituency. The ratio of Adventist students should be higher than non-Adventist students. Theology students should be provided moral and other forms of support to play a significant role in maintaining the Adventist culture. The Administration, faculty and staff must recognize this and provide opportunities for them to take up leadership roles and responsibilities in the institution.

**Spiritual.** Arthur Holmes (2001)<sup>10</sup> presents “the care of the soul (moral and spiritual formation) and the “unity of truth” as some of the four recurrent emphases that describe the soul of the Christian academy.

The institution should have a spiritual master plan to assess and promote a strong spiritual atmosphere in the campus. Further, the master plan should have programs and activities for transmission of Biblical beliefs, principles, and values to the students. With the participating of faculty and staff provide opportunities for the institutional family to become involved in devotional life, religious nurture and service to the community.

Every attempt should be made to encourage and implement worship services in the institution. During admission interviews, the institution should be explicit about the institution’s policy about worship services. Further, obtain their consent to willingly attend worship services. Some institutions such as Solusi University, included worship program as a course in the curriculum. Students enroll for the course with zero credits and no payment for the course, but obtain a grade for the course. A week of prayer should be held each semester as a part of the worship program. The institution should consider conducting ‘prayer bands’ and invite all students to attend. Involving students

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<sup>10</sup> Homes, Arthur The idea of a Christian College, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1987, p.17

in religious activities will also serve as a means of getting them to attend the religious programs.

**Financial Resources.** The institution must pursue financial management that is reflective of stewardship and efficient management of resources to enhance the mission of the Church. While the institution's mandate is to offer quality holistic educational programs in our attempt to offer such programs, we should not out price ourselves in the market. The general advice given by Ellen White is that we should put to work the natural resources at the disposal of the institution, establish industries and operate farms. The revenues generated could subsidize tuition fees making it affordable to the constituency.

**Infrastructure, equipment and services.** The institution should have state of the art physical infrastructure, facilities, services that are supportive of the institutional programs and objectives and activities. The campus atmosphere projects a wholesome view of Seventh-day Adventist aesthetics and principles.

**Extracurricular activities.** Extra-curricular activities are a vital part of Adventist programs. Lessons of life are learnt outside the class room. The administration, faculty and staff should take steps to organize programs for the community. These programs should reflect the taste of Adventists. Extracurricular activities such as organized sports, weekly social programs, hobby and talent exhibition programs should be organized by the faculty and staff involving students and such programs be presented for the community. Out side class room activities will help build rapport and relationships with students and will facilitate sharing the gospel and witnessing.

**Communication.** The institution utilizes print, audio-visual, and electronic media to describe its programs, activities, and plans to foster internal information flow; to make the results of faculty and students' research available to a wider community; and to present a positive image of the institution to the community around and to the worldwide Adventist Church.

**Recruitment and follow-up.** A deliberate attempt has to be made to attract eligible students from the constituency through a dynamic recruitment program. As such, the percentage of Adventist population in the institution should be higher than the non-Adventist students. Efforts should be made to connect with the Adventist secondary schools by visiting them, and inviting the outgoing secondary school students for graduation exercises and draw them to our institutions.

**Library resources.** Library is the heart of an educational institution. An Adventist institution should have a good library holding an adequate number of books and subscribe to relevant professional journals. Every Adventist institution should allocate at least 6% of the total budget towards library. In an effort to maintain Adventist culture the library should subscribe magazines published by the Church and must not be seen as a financial burden.

**Campus life.** The institutions must offer degree programs in Theology to have the Adventist campus to exhibit vibrant Adventist lifestyle and ministry.

Most Adventist institutions offer residential programs. All who live in a campus should exhibit qualities of living together like a family. Campus life should nurture a spirit of cooperation, discipline and spiritual atmosphere. A blended emphasis of worship, study, labour and recreation will characterize the total learning environment with careful

attention given to balance. Institutions consider making a budgetary provision to assist faculty and staff and set aside a day wherein students would be assigned to a faculty member's home for a meal once a semester. Faculty members may be assigned as spiritual guardians to newly baptized students through the chaplain's office.

**Evaluation and assessment.** Feedback and assessment of performance is an integral part of our education system. Every Adventist institution should have both internal and external assessment. Assessment establishes whether the institution subscribes to and implements the Adventist philosophy of education. Such evidence is found in curriculum, teaching and learning activity, campus life, spiritual activities, and in the testimony of students, graduates and employees. Assessment should be redemptive in nature and always seek God's high ideal of excellence.

### **Conclusion**

Adventist education is characterized by its philosophy and mission, liberal arts approach, spiritual atmosphere, and pursuing of multiple goals. Complying with fundamentals of Adventist education is not an option but a mandate. Educational administrators should guard the institutions from getting exposed to government accreditation. Government accredited Adventist institutions too must and could run within the main frame of Adventist philosophy and approach. With the help of our heavenly Father we should be able to maintain Adventist identity even in government accredited institutions. When we maintain our spiritual identity and mission, indeed it will be a dynamic force to reckon with.