

**Institute for Christian Teaching  
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists**

**INTEGRATING CHRISTIAN FAITH AND BELIEFS  
AT A DISTANCE EDUCATION SITE**

**By Liane Hewitt, MPH, OTR**

**Program Director, Occupational Therapy Assistant  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Occupational Therapy  
Loma Linda University  
Loma Linda, California**

**292-97 Institute for Christian Teaching  
12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA**

**Prepared for the  
20<sup>th</sup> International Faith and Learning Seminar  
held at Loma Linda University  
Loma Linda, California  
June 16-27, 1997**

**INTRODUCTION:**

It goes without saying that we live in a rapidly changing world. Technology promises to change not only how we do activities but also the activities themselves. Change can be seen in the way higher education is delivered and managed especially for the 40-50% of college students who are working adults. (1) More students can attend on a part time basis and can have the opportunity for lifelong learning. Nontraditional education is identified with distance learning and is defined as education taking place beyond the traditional campus site. The development of computer networks has made distance learning even more effective and efficient.(2)

Distance education enhances the role of the teacher and student. The teacher becomes a mood setter, coordinator, mentor and moderator. The student becomes more self-directed, dedicated and an active participant in learning.

Loma Linda University has made a commitment to lifelong learning through various media including distance education technology. The challenge is to provide quality academic education while serving as an avenue for spiritual growth in students who are several miles from the University campus.

The Occupational Therapy Department at Loma Linda University has initiated a distance learning collaboration in central California and will be used as a model in the development of this paper.

**OVERVIEW OF DISTANCE EDUCATION:**

**Three components define distance education:**

- a) There is a separation between the instructor and learner in time and space and/or both,**
- b) Media is used to link the instructor with the learners and,**
- c) The organization supports the content and assures quality. (3)**

**When considering implementation of a distance education program, Tucker lists ten attributes for a successful project:**

- a) Do adequate market research**
- b) Experience various distance learning products**
- c) Study the competition**
- d) Define the target market and develop a marketing plan**
- e) Compare costs and develop a budget**
- f) Ensure convenient access**
- g) Stay close to home in the first venture**
- h) Build institutional support**
- i) Develop an operations plan**
- j) Build process and outcomes assessment into the program. (4)**

Continuous communication is stressed along with good planning, instruction, organization and management. These cannot be over-emphasized.

Distance learning has impacted education in three primary ways. It has increased marketing to the outlying areas, has provided more student choices and has produced a paradigm shift. The paradigm has shifted from teacher centered to student centered, from passive listener to an active, lifelong learner, from transmission of information to distance delivery options and from competition to collaboration.

The challenges and opportunities are numerous. Challenges such as distance, time, equipment function and/or malfunction, environmental factors such as inclement weather, limited lab and classroom space and faculty knowledge in the use of distance learning technology are just a few. Student advising and counseling may be limited as well as availability of resources for coursework completion. Opportunities include allowing the student to obtain a college degree without leaving their geographic region. This alone has significant social and financial implications. Educators and students will be able to use the latest technology for information transmission and faculty will take more opportunity to assess and modify presentation methods and materials as well as networking with other community resources. As one article stated "Take risks....Innovate - Distance learning potential is limited only by the creativity of the faculty." (6)

Many studies have been done evaluating the effectiveness of teaching via distance learning technology. One study noted that off campus students tend to ask less questions

and were less likely to identify with peers and instructors. Other studies of nursing related coursework noted that there was no significant differences between learning outcomes of the students on and off campus. (7) Student satisfaction and motivation were found to be critical factors in the success of any distance education program. Continuous qualitative and quantitative evaluations are needed as more educational institutions utilize technology for instruction.

#### **TECHNOLOGY UTILIZED FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION:**

There are several forms of technology utilized in distance education: (8)

- a) **One-Way Video Classroom** - Audio and video images are transmitted by cable, satellite, microwave or other means. This approach extends the traditional lecture model.
- b) **Two-Way Video Classroom** - This approach is similar to the one-way video except that students are linked with one or more classrooms. Students can interact with the instructor and possibly, with the students in parallel classrooms.
- c) **Two-Way Audio Classroom** - Instruction is done via two way audio communication. A proxy carries out tasks requested by the instructor and most new technology does allow for two way conversations.
- d) **Desktop Groupware Conferencing** - Groupware links an instructor with students at various sites, through their personal computer. Phone lines or

the Internet is used for access.

- e) Desktop Video Conferencing - This method is similar to desktop groupware conferencing, with the addition of simultaneous video.

#### **DISTANCE EDUCATION - LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY:**

The School of Allied Health Professions (SAHP), at Loma Linda University, was formed in 1967 when several existing allied health programs were brought together into one school. The school currently has 25 programs in eight departments and is the largest private school of allied health professions. Several schools within the University are conducting distance education campus programs. These programs are primarily in the School of Public Health and in the Graduate School. The SAHP has two extended campus programs initiated in 1987 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, offering an AS degree in cardiopulmonary sciences and in 1995 in Glendale, California offering a BS degree in health information management. Both programs are taught by instructors holding faculty appointments from LLU.

The Occupational Therapy Assistant program, in collaboration with Fresno City College, will be offering an AA degree via distance education technology, beginning September 1997. The benefits of this project include the opportunity of offering a technical program that complements Fresno City College's well established general education curriculum, Loma Linda University will be able to reach a larger SDA population in the central California conference, and the central California region is

experiencing tremendous economic and agricultural growth which will result in an increase in health care needs. One of the frequent concerns also noted during the preplanning phase was that many of the students who left the Fresno region to pursue a degree did not return. This was a major recruitment concern.

#### ADVENTIST EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY:

Six principles form the philosophy of Adventist education: a) God is recognized as the ultimate source of existence and truth, (b) each person has characteristics similar to those of the Creator, (c) education should emphasize character development, (d) each person is created in God's image, (e) unselfish service is a basic principle of life and (f) education is a collaborative effort. (9)

The philosophy of Loma Linda University adds that man's fullest potential occurs as he continues developing his relationship with God and this relationship promotes wholeness. It is believed that Christian values and faith can be integrated into academic study although it has been noted that we live in a society that separates religion and treats it as peripheral or even irrelevant to life and thought. (10) The goals of the Occupational Therapy Assistant program are to train ethical, competent and compassionate Occupational Therapy Assistants and to encourage the continuous development of their relationship with God, who is the Creator and Sustainer of all life.

**DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:**

- I. FACULTY: Creating a Christian learning environment at a distance education site begins with the faculty, who are the most important resources. Four factors, as described by Dr. Mary Ann Bowen of Western Michigan University, motivate instructors to distance education. These are improved student learning, the availability of technology in the classroom, advantages over the traditional educational delivery system and increased student motivation. Other factors include ease of equipment use, adequate practice time, and funding available for continued program development and training.**
- Eliciting faculty support for distance education programs can be done by defining the scope of distance education, establishing training programs, developing a marketing plan that showcases the faculty and supporting faculty involvement in continuous education.**
- (11)**
- Each faculty must have an understanding and commitment to the mission and philosophy of the sponsoring institution. Ellen G. White, in her book, “Fundamentals of Christian Education,” states that every teacher should be a daily learner in the school of Christ.**
- (12) No one is fitted to teach who will be satisfied with a low standard. (13) She goes on to state that the teacher who has a right**

understanding of the work of true education, will not think it sufficient now and then to make casual reference to Christ.(14)

What good teachers have always known is that real learning does not happen until students are brought into a relationship with the teacher, with each other and with the subject. (15) The teacher's task is not to fill the student with facts but to evoke the "truth" that each student has within. (16)

Onsite faculty should be available for students. The distance learning project with FCC includes a full time program coordinator who will coordinate the academic and fieldwork curriculum, advise students, and be the liaison with the LLU campus faculty. The program coordinator will also be responsible for promoting a positive learning environment and for developing relationships with Christian resources, in the community, who are willing to assist students in their personal growth. These community resources can provide the faculty with insight into behaviors that may interfere with performance in academic and clinical coursework.

Communication will be essential. The philosophy and mission of LLU must be projected during every formal and informal interaction with the student.

**II. STUDENTS:** Students who participate in a distance learning program must also have a good understanding of the mission and philosophy of the sponsoring institution. The LLU motto has been shared through discussion, video presentation, and written documents. It is also important to have an understanding of each student's beliefs, values and worldview. This can be initiated during the pre-admission interview by discussing topics such as an applicant's participation in community service activities, important role models and what attributes these role model's possess, and why a student has chosen a given profession and their responses to the required volunteer hours. Students can be asked to complete questionnaires such as McNamara and St. George's "Measures of Religiosity and the Quality of Life." (17) This questionnaire examines religious commitment and its correlation to an individual's quality of life. In addition, the DIT (Defining Issues Test) can be used to assess how a student feels toward various social issues (moral development). The student is asked to read several short stories and then record their responses. The interview and assessments can be repeated at the end of the year and can provide valuable information on program

effectiveness, learning, and the integration of ethics, culture and beliefs in the provision of health care services.

Throughout the year students, onsite and offsite, should be encouraged to communicate with the faculty and staff. They should know that the faculty is available to provide assistance and support during the course of each quarter. At least one visit to the sponsoring institution's campus is recommended. This will give students, onsite and offsite, the opportunity to interact, share experiences, and develop a comraderie as they go through a program.

III. CURRICULUM: To explore student values and beliefs, interactive-activity based teaching methodology is more effective. Students must be encouraged to take active roles in the learning process. The O.T.A. curriculum design is based on the Spatiotemporal Adaptation Theory developed by Gilfoyle and Grady. The design is a spiral, building on basic foundations with which the student arrives, acknowledging that each student comes from different cultural, economic, and familial background. The curriculum is sequenced first to enable the student to learn through lecture and classroom activities, then practice

his/her achievements in a safe laboratory/classroom environment and then move into a supervised clinical environment for practical application. As a profession, Occupational Therapy sees man as a complex being, who is in continuous adaptation. This adaptation is influenced by internal (motivation) and external (environmental) factors. Several courses within the O.T.A. program lend themselves to the integration of beliefs and faith and a better understanding of LLU's motto "To Make Man Whole."

- a) **Patient Management - This foundational course trains the student in patient management techniques commonly used within the clinic. Students discuss topics such as patient rights, cultural beliefs and how these impact patient responses to health care. The importance of listening and respect is stressed throughout the class as well as throughout the year. Students learn the value of acceptance of all patients as human beings, made in the image of God. They discuss how being judgmental and rigid in thinking acts as a detriment to effective patient care delivery. Students work with each other in assuming a diagnosis and learn how to work with that client.**

- b) **Group Dynamics and Psychosocial:** It is often very difficult for students to discuss mental health issues. Many students come into the program with a history of domestic violence and substance abuse. Discussing these issues in the classroom becomes painful for some and the faculty often find themselves interacting with individual students on very sensitive issues. How “self” is used as a therapeutic tool is stressed and how what we believe and value impacts our approach and acceptance of patients with mental health issues.
- c) **Aging -** Students deal with issues affecting the geriatric population. Many verbalize a fear of aging. Assignments include the writing of a personal obituary, diagramming how they envision themselves at age eighty and interviewing someone who is over the age of 65. I recall an incident where a student chose to interview his grandmother. How thankful he was for this assignment because shortly after the interview, his grandmother passed away. The students deal with issues of death and dying, elder abuse and societal perceptions of the aged.
- d) **Religion - Christian Ethics and God and Human Suffering**

provide opportunity for discussion, evaluation of personal beliefs and values, and how these may facilitate/interfere with effective patient care. The classes tend to be informal to allow for open discussion on a variety of issues. Life and death issues, why people make certain choices and why suffering is so extensive in today's world are openly discussed.

- e) **Community Service Projects - Throughout the year, the student is required to do several hours of community service in non-OT related programs. The journaling of their experiences has been very insightful to the faculty and the student. Reading how their perceptions change from the first contact to the year's end, how rewarding "giving of self" is, and the realization of the extent of pain and suffering that is all around them and that they can have a positive impact on someone's life.**

Case studies are commonly used in each course. An example is the forty year old male, with a long history of diabetes and related complications, who suffered a stroke. On evaluation, he exhibited right sided weakness, visual impairment, limited mobility and depression. He was homebound, watched TV

all day. Class discussion includes:

- a. What factors limit the client's recovery?
- b. What are the social implications - spouse, children, friends, work?
- c. How do you (student) feel this client perceives himself?
- d. What role do you (student) feel faith and hope play in this client's recovery?
- e. How would you as a health care practitioner approach this client?

The student must be able to evaluate his/her beliefs and values to be an effective health care deliverer. Case studies and video presentations allow students the opportunity to self evaluate, hear differing opinions and modify/change perspectives.

IV. ENVIRONMENT: The environment created has a profound impact on student learning. As Palmer states, to sit in a class where the teacher stuffs minds with information, organizes it with finality, insists on having the answers while being utterly uninterested in student views and forces grim competition for grades is to lack space for learning, To study with a teacher who not only

speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions, and welcomes insight, who provides information and theory that does not close doors but opens new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn to truly a blessing. (18) The distance education environment must provide acceptance, support and an opportunity for growth. A faculty member who is perceived as “close minded,” a classroom that is overcrowded, or students who are disruptive hinder learning. For many adult students, education is an additional stressor in their already busy lives. An environment that allows personal and professional growth and challenge, enhances satisfaction and motivation for continued learning.

#### EVALUATION:

Outcome evaluation is critical for program success. Students at the distance education site should have the same expectations as those of the sponsoring institution. Evaluation tools that will be utilized for the Occupational Therapy Assistant program include, but is not limited to: end of the year interview, fieldwork performance evaluations and national board certification results. Evaluation must be ongoing and changes made in a timely manner. Maintaining

open communication, again, cannot be overstated.

#### CONCLUSION:

As Adventist educators we have a tremendous opportunity to share our beliefs and values through distance education technology. It takes commitment from administration, faculty, and students to make any educational project a success.

Coursework structure and the learning environment play key roles in the discussion and development of beliefs. Students who graduate from Adventist educational institutions are recognized for their compassion and integrity.

Ellen G. White states that educators have a tremendous responsibility...a responsibility to prepare the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come. (19)

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