

OUT ON A LIM WITH EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Collaborate@AVLN

By Shirley Ann Freed and Janine Lim

The Adventist Virtual Learning Network (AVLN) is a group of professionals who work together to share a vision for greater collaboration among Seventh-day Adventists. Previously known as the AVLL (Adventist Virtual Learning Laboratory), the group of volunteers recently organized as a non-profit organization.

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AVLN's Mission

To promote global online collaboration for life-long learning among Seventh-day Adventists and other faith-based organizations.

AVLN's Purposes

- To support the educational ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church;
- To support an international association of professionals who use or wish to use technology for distance learning;
- To facilitate collaboration among faith-based organizations;
- To develop expertise in distance learning to serve the professional needs of practitioners; and
- To maintain a global perspective as a world organization, supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in distance learning.

Why Collaborate?

Webster's Dictionary provides several definitions of the word *collaborate*, including the following: (1) to work jointly, especially with one or a limited number of others in a project involving composition or research to be jointly accredited; or (2) to cooperate, usually willingly, with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected, often in some political or economic effort. Running through these definitions is the theme of willing cooperation between people who might not collaborate under normal circumstances.

From AVLN's inception, its members envisioned many potential benefits from greater cooperation among our church members. Adventist education is a global system with a shared vision to educate for eternity. In AVLN meetings, members often talk about the need for every light (school) to be kept burning. But church membership is increasing at a much faster rate than the growth and

enrollment of Adventist schools.

It seems clear that all of our schools, kindergarten through graduate level, can be strengthened through collaborating and sharing resources. This will require re-thinking some of our traditional methods of delivering instruction. Here are some possibilities:

- Small day academies could share online classrooms, just as AE21¹ shares classes via videoconferencing.
- Online classes might make Adventist higher education more affordable by allowing students to study at home for some or all of their education.
- Schools (especially those with diminishing enrollments) could provide classes for home schoolers and parents who are reluctant to send their young teenagers away to boarding academies.
- Collaboration by schools in different parts of the world would provide enrichment opportunities for students to interact with individuals from many cultures.

AVLN already has an international scope. Attendees at the 2001 AVLN conference included representatives from four world divisions, and two AVLN board members come from outside of North America. AVLN's Web page (<http://www.avln.org/>) features English, Portuguese, and Spanish versions, and in the future will include information in

other languages as well.²

How to Collaborate?

Collaboration can occur at different levels:

1. *A portal system or Adventist shopping mall for online courses.* With an agreement to accept credits taken online from other institutions, Adventist (K-20) students would have access to many more options.
2. *Collaboration on course development.* This requires a deeper level of collaboration than the first option. Faculty members with expertise in specific areas could work together to develop exemplary online courses. Access might be limited to the students of the course developers or could be broadened to include students in other schools, as negotiated by the developers. Various types of credit could be offered, ranging from continuing education units to full college credit through participating institutions.
3. *Collaboration on development and delivery.* In this model, faculty members work together to develop exemplary online courses. Such courses could be delivered in a team teaching format or by a single faculty member to students from multiple institutions. Students could receive credit from the institution of their choice.
4. *Open access to course material.* A process

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can be developed by which online courses/modules are given, bartered, or sold to other institutions. This could be similar to Adventist World Radio's Americas region where "any station within reach of the satellite signal is free to use as much of the program material as they need in order to supplement whatever they are doing at the local level."³

These are only a few of the ways our schools can collaborate. AVLN members will be exploring new approaches and methods as the organization reaches out proactively to make cooperation a reality. Already, AVLN members have developed a number of "faithware" courses, a term coined by them to describe course material that they wish to share—and that they hope will be used to God's honor and glory.

"Active Online Teaching" is one such course, which gives the learner (junior high to college-level teachers) experience in how to deliver an online class. This course was recently taught by Don Roy, educational superintendent from Australia, Dave Jeffrey from Crawford Academy in Canada, and Carole Kilcher from Nebraska Wesleyan University.

What AVLN Members Say About the Organization and the Conference

At the 2001 Distance Learning Conference, we asked for comments from attendees. This sampling provides a glimpse of the vision and support provided by AVLN (formerly known as AVLL).

• "AVLL is a group charting the course for a successful learning environment for the future."—Bob Paulson, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

• "AVLL has been the best thing for Adventist education that has happened because it gives us the opportunity to link different institutions, different researchers and practitioners, in order to help them. It gives us the opportunity to share knowledge and research that we have been doing in different countries and states in the United States."—Rafael Molina, Director of Virtual Education, Hawaii Conference.

• "AVLL to me is a real God-send in that it provides a support mechanism for me to think about, to reflect, to share my thoughts with others, to daydream, brainstorm, a whole range of possibilities. The bottom line is to find ways and means of reaching people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to engage in a very meaningful way with us toward the glory of God."—Don Roy, Associate National System Director (Curriculum), Australian Union Conference.

• "What I've really enjoyed here this week is how all the different distance education institutions are all getting together and working under one umbrella."—Lloyd Robinson, Associate Director, British Columbia Conference, Canada.

• "Each session has been unique, vital and challenging, and I can't wait to go back home and share what I've learned here."—Lalen Simeon, Pacific Adventist University, Papua New Guinea.

• "I particularly enjoyed the chat room activity. It showed me how to do an activity that I do in class, but do it online. So I'm going to be working on that concept when I design my first fully online course."—Gail Rice, Professor, Loma Linda University, California.

Membership in AVLN

Since its inception, more than three years ago, AVLN has consisted of a loosely organized group of interested professionals. Meetings are open to interested individuals, although mainly K-20 educators and administrators attend. Early on, conversations centered around "if" and "how" to collaborate. But with the formation of the Adventist Distance Education Consortium (Higher Ed) (ADEC) and the Adventist Consortium for Distance Education K-12 (ACDE), AVLN's emphasis shifted. With the support of newly gained administrative structures, members felt it was time to "start doing something" together. AVLN's early projects include a "user-friendly" Web site where educators can share information, as well as conferences that provide training and collaboration opportunities.

AVLN also maintains a listserv (collaborate@avln.org) where participants can dialogue about current issues in Adventist education. Here, teachers and administrators can grapple with ways to collaborate, share their experiences with online education, and discuss possibilities for future collaboration.

Thus far, AVLN's activities have primarily centered around teachers helping teachers. We are working on ways to share resources and open our online classrooms to others, which has often been a challenge!

AVLN is for you—if:

- you want to collaborate;

- you are already collaborating and want to share your experiences;
- you are seeking ideas on how to share resources and ideas;
- you want to talk with other professionals who have formed successful collaborations.

This sounds like just about everybody! So why not join AVLN today? Go to their Web site at <http://www.AVLN.org/> for instructions and member benefits.

Plan Now for the 2002 Conference

Obviously, people can't collaborate if they don't know one another! AVLN conferences provide opportunities for you to meet other Adventist professionals and to discuss a variety of distance initiatives. Building trust in face-to-face environments is critical. The next conference will be held at Southern Adventist University (Collegedale, Tennessee) June 23-28, 2002, in conjunction with the Missions and Computing Conference.⁴ Featured speakers this year are Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt, authors of *Lessons From the Cyberspace Classroom: The Realities of Online Teaching* (2001) and *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace: Effective Strategies for the Online Classroom* (1999). Sessions will include hands-on how-to workshops, show-and-tell sessions, and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. Visit the AVLN Web site (<http://www.AVLN.org/>) for session descriptions, registration, and more.⁵ ✍

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Shirley Ann Freed, Ph.D., has been active in AVLN since its inception and has recently accepted greater leadership responsibilities in the organization, while continuing her work as a Professor of Education at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Janine Lim is an Instructional Technology Consultant at the Berrien County Intermediate School District in Berrien Springs, Michigan. She works with Adventist schools as well as other private and public schools.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. <http://www.ae21.org/>.
2. Volunteers who would like to help with translations should send an E-mail to webmaster@avln.org/.
3. *Adventist Review* (November 8, 2001), p. 27.
4. Computing and Missions Conference Web site: <http://www.computingandmissions.net/>.
5. For summaries of the 1999 and 2000 AVLL conferences, visit the AVLN Web site conference section.