

# All About the Church's New Commission On Higher Education

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River Plate Adventist University, Entre Rios, Argentina.

**O**n October 1, 2000, the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee voted to appoint a Commission on Higher Education (CHE) with six terms of reference. Their mandate was as follows:\*

1. "Develop, in conjunction with the GC [strategic] planning process, a global plan for Adventist higher education, in response to the current and projected needs of the Church in fulfilling its mission.
2. "Conduct research, surveys, and evaluations regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges at each Adventist college, seminary, and university.
3. "Identify areas of duplication in institutions and programs of higher education within each division.
4. "Outline conditions necessary to establish new institutions of higher learning and to launch new educational programs.
5. "Develop strategies to strengthen the unity, integrity, and financial viability of the Adventist system of higher education.
6. "Develop lines of administrative authority designed to apply appropriate means of compliance to the recommendations made."

By C. Garland Dulan

## • Who are the members of the Commission on Higher Education?

The CHE is composed of approximately 30 people assigned from various areas of the General Conference—Secretariat, Education, and Treasury, plus the GC world division directors of

\* October 1, 2000, GCC Annual Council action, 325-OOG Commission on Higher Education Appointment.

education. Its chair is the GC vice president assigned to education.

• **What has transpired since this Commission was appointed?**

The Commission met for the first time in March 2001. At that time, it considered a series of issues that needed to be addressed in order to satisfy the terms of reference. For instance, the Commission developed a grid for each specific term of reference to discuss (1) what the central questions should be, (2) the essential information needed, (3) the processes to follow, (4) the outcomes to be expected, and (5) the necessary policies and administrative actions to meet each of the six terms of reference.

**T**hen the Commission debated about what levels of the church it needed to contact for information—higher education institutions? Unions of churches? Divisions? The General Conference? The Commission decided to gather information from all these levels.

At this point, the Commission had to develop questionnaires for all the levels of church organization listed above and request that these forms be completed and returned in a timely manner. The questionnaire development process alone took several

months to complete. Several specific queries arose out of the Commission's deliberations in the areas of academic program concerns, financial issues, and strategic planning issues. Below are some examples:

**Academic Program Issues**

1. What higher-education degree programs are needed by the church in order to prepare qualified persons who will help the church achieve its mission in various territories?
2. What criteria should be used to decide whether or not to launch a new degree program (faculty, students, finances, etc.)?
3. What criteria should be used to decide which current academic programs at colleges/universities should be discontinued? Who should make those decisions?

**Financial Management Issues**

1. Are the current financial resources of each higher-education institution adequate to ensure its viability and to support its current degree programs?
2. What percentage of each school's operating budget is provided by tuition income, denominational/government subsidy, and donations/endowment income?
3. Is the financial support provided by the sponsoring organization satisfactory?

Happy students at Friedensau University, Germany.

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### Strategic Planning Issues

1. Are two or more Adventist institutions within a division offering similar degree programs, thereby creating an unhealthy competition for faculty and students, as well as depleting church resources?

2. Are there redundant Adventist institutions within a division or region?

3. What should be the role of the institutional board and the division administration in dealing with these duplications?

4. What criteria should be established to determine which, if any, new degree programs and/or institutions should be planned for the next five to 10 years within a division territory or an inter-division region in order to support the church in its mission?

5. What criteria and conditions need to be satisfied before a new institution or a new degree program is launched?

6. What administrative procedures and disincentives are re-

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Administration Building, Campus Auditorium and Music Building at Helderberg College, South Africa.

quired to deal with organizations that fail to comply with these criteria and conditions?

7. What administrative mechanisms should be in place at the General Conference and division levels in order to optimize the use of human/financial resources, strengthen international unity and cooperation, foster educational quality, and ensure compliance with the decisions made by appropriate administrative bodies?

#### • Has the Commission requested specific information from higher-education institutions around the world?

All higher-education institutions, worldwide, were asked to provide the Commission with the following information about their respective institution:

1. A list of degree programs offered at each level (baccalaureate, master's, and doctorate).

2. An analysis identifying the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats/challenges (SWOT) to institutional survival/vitality.

3. Five-year statistics, trends, and projections about the institution.

4. A Five-Year Strategic Plan.

5. A Quantitative Rating Survey based on the "Characteristics of a Successful Adventist College/Seminary/University."

#### • What challenges has the Commission faced in the process of doing its work?

A significant challenge has arisen because of misconceptions regarding the real purpose of the Commission, what its "driving work" is, and how the General Conference Education Department is involved in the process.

First, an overview of the primary reason for establishing the commission: The Seventh-day Adventist Church's worldwide educational system has grown tremendously in recent years. In fact, the system has expanded so quickly that it has been difficult at any given time to determine its current status, scope, and size, as well as the challenges faced by its schools and their employees. For example, between 2000 and 2001, the Seventh-day

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Library, Southwestern Adventist University, Keene, Texas.

Administration building and women's dormitory, Sagunto Adventist College, Valencia, Spain.

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Canadian University College, Alberta, Canada.

Adventist Church's educational system increased by 120,000 students, with most of the growth occurring at the primary and secondary level. Higher-education enrollment increased by 9,200 students. (See chart below.) This rapid expansion has triggered concerns about how to ensure that the growth aligns with the church's mission and that the system grows in a unified way.

Because of its working knowledge of and close cooperation with the church's higher-education institutions, the General Conference Education Department was given the task of spearheading the process of data collection required by the Commission in order to carry out its work.

The Commission has faced other challenges, which include such issues as (1) non-receipt of forms mailed to various entities; (2) the reluctance of some institutions and conferences to complete a SWOT analysis, (3) resistance to completing forms; (4) the lack of clarity or applicability of certain questions to particular institutions; (5) the loss of electronically mailed documents in cyberspace or because of unreadable/undecipherable

machine language; (6) failure of some entities to return information within the scheduled timeframe; (7) language barriers, which make it difficult for institutions in certain parts of the world to understand the forms; and (8) lack of funds and personnel to translate the questionnaire into various languages.

**• How is the Commission dealing with its challenges?**

Follow-up letters have been mailed, faxed, or E-mailed to entities that have either not responded or have returned incomplete forms to the Commission. Where necessary, there has been follow-up communication from the GC administration, division presidents, and division education directors in the form of letters and phone calls. The challenge of the language barrier still remains. Questionnaires have been translated into Spanish for some parts of the world, but there continues to be difficulty communicating with other language groups. Gradually and sometimes painstakingly, the information is being collected and sent to the Commission.

**• What is the Commission's schedule for completing its work?**

The original schedule follows:

*March 2001:* At the Commission's first meeting, the group is to establish basic agreement about its plans, procedures, forms, schedule, and assignments.

*June 2001:* The Commission meets to agree on the forms to be developed.

*July 2001:* Forms are mailed to the institutions, unions, divisions, and GC.

*September 2001:* The Commission consults with the five GC higher-education institution presidents (Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies; Oakwood College; and Andrews, Griggs, and Loma Linda universities).

*February 2002:* Deadline for receipt of data from questionnaires sent to higher-education institutions. (Deadlines for other entities are staggered, according to the Commission's consultation schedule.)

*April/May 2002:* The Commission meets with college/university presidents, division presidents, and representatives at

<b>Seventh-day Adventist Educational System Enrollment Statistics</b>			
<i>Year 2000</i>	<i>Total Students</i>	<i>Year 2001</i>	<i>Total Students</i>
College/University	<b>65,589</b>	College/University	<b>74,833</b>
Worker Training	8,868	Worker Training	5,262
Secondary	257,937	Secondary	314,799
Elementary/Primary	732,698	Elementary/Primary	792,124
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,065,092</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,187,018</b>

mid-year meetings of six world divisions.

*November/December 2002:* The Commission meets with college/university presidents, division presidents, and representatives at year-end meetings of the remaining six divisions.

*January-March 2003:* The Commission drafts its report and recommendations.

*March/April 2003:* The Commission meets to review its report and makes a preliminary presentation of its rough draft to the GC Spring Meeting.

*June 2003:* The General Conference Administrative Committee reviews the Commission's report.

*October 2003:* The General Conference and division officers review the Commission's report and then submit it to the Annual Council for a vote.

**• Is the Commission on schedule?**

The Commission is basically on schedule, with a few adjustments. The General Conference Executive Committee, dur-

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Main building, Bogenhofen Seminary, Austria.

ing its Spring Meeting in 2002, voted to create a new division in Africa, thereby bringing the total number of world divisions to 13. This additional division makes necessary the modification of two existing division territories, having the overall effect of creating three new division territories. The Commission has, therefore, postponed its consultations in the areas affected until the spring of 2003. The Commission hopes to concurrently consult with the new and modified divisions while completing the data analysis from the other 10 divisions, so that it can complete its work on schedule.

**• What are the anticipated outcomes of the Commission's work?**

The Commission anticipates that by the conclusion of the current study, the church will: (1) have a greater understanding of the current issues and costs associated with higher education and thereby be able to develop a strategic plan for its future; (2) possess the information essential to improve the quality and environment for learning in higher-education institutions, and (3) be able to provide a clearer direction as to how the witness of the church worldwide can be enhanced through its higher-education system.

The Commission appreciates the cooperation from the many church entities that have helped it to carry out the action of the Annual Council thus far and looks forward to a successful conclusion to its work. ☞

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Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.