

Taking Mission to Market

*Revisioning Adventist Business Curricula
in the New Millennium*

The business program at a Seventh-day Adventist college or university must find creative ways of linking its mission with that of the institution of which it is a part, as well as its parent denomination. It must respond effectively to the needs of students and their prospective employers—and, indeed, God's whole creation. A transformed curriculum could help it fulfill its multiple missions effectively. With their wholistic vision of the gospel to which health and education have always been central, Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities should be places where a commitment to positive social change is consistently evident. That commitment should be apparent not only in religion, social work, or political science programs, but also in schools and departments of business.

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By Gary Chartier and John Thomas

1. Identifying Core Values

Adventist business programs should seek to foster God's *shalom*—wholeness, fulfillment, and flourishing in community—in the context of economic

life. They must give students an array of crucial business tools to enable them to mirror God's creativity in the economic arena. And they must challenge them to use those tools to empower people in need. They must be guided by a vision of global service that is rooted in their Seventh-day Adventist Christian convictions and expressed in their commitment to celebrating and participating in God's work of creation and liberation. They should draw inspiration from several key convictions:



La Sierra University business students and faculty engage in meaningful discussion on the role of business in the world.

Reflecting as it does the effects of both God's loving intentions and ongoing providential activity, and suffused as it is with the presence and glory of God, the entire world is—in principle and at root—good, and is thus an appropriate focus for our activity and concern.

Our understanding, insight, and capacity for action, and our relationships with one another, with other creatures, and with the rest of the world are gifts of divine grace that call for gratitude and challenge us to exhibit a respectful and sensitive responsibility for God's creation.

- Each of God's creatures is uniquely valuable and precious and deserves attentive, nurturant care.
- God is constantly active in the world—fostering novelty, beauty, or-

der, joy, and community; seeking to meet the material, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic needs of created beings; and working to heal personal and social brokenness and bring liberation from injustice, lack of resources and influence, meaninglessness, and alienation.

- God's liberating work focuses especially on the needs, claims, and rights of those without social, cultural, or economic power—not because they are more deserving of love than others but because decisive action on their behalf is more crucial in fostering their well-being.
- God's declaring creation "good" points to the worth of the material world and to the value of developing and transforming it.
- The symbol and experience of

Sabbath rest highlights the goodness of creation and the importance of seeing work of all kinds as important but not ultimate.

- We exercise our responsibilities as God's image-bearers in the world to the extent that we join God in the ongoing work of creation and liberation.
- God's ongoing work in the world, which accompanies, guides, and sustains our own, along with the prospect of life beyond death in communion with Deity, gives us reason for hope that our efforts on behalf of development and liberation matter and that they will bear fruit.

These convictions give rise to a distinctive conception of economic life as *stewardship*—acknowledging our gifts and accepting our corre-

sponding tasks in God's world. This conception centers on *ethics*, *spirituality*, and *social entrepreneurship*. It is this conception that Adventist business programs should seek to impart to their students and the members of their various publics.

2. Enriching the Curriculum

Obviously, every business program must offer its students a solid grounding in key business skill areas, including *accounting*, *finance*, *economics*, and *management*. Despite moral concerns about the manipulative character of some advertising, there is still widespread support for including marketing on the list. And in an increasingly dynamic economy, the flexibility, creativity, and openness to risk associated with *entrepreneurship* make it a crucial focus of study as well. But we need to do more.

An Adventist business program can enable students to *create value* by equipping them to make effective use of the tools provided by the core business disciplines. But it can also inspire, motivate, and equip students to use these skills to *make a difference* by engaging in social entrepreneurship, demonstrating a commitment to personal and social ethics, and exploring and nurturing spiritual life in the workplace. A program focused on encouraging students to make a difference while creating value would likely have several distinctive features. It would include special courses focused on values-related issues. Ordinary business courses would feature values-focused modules. And fieldwork would supplement and reinforce in-class experiences designed to help students catch a Christian vision of business.

A. Special Coursework

Special coursework in a Seventh-day Adventist business program might productively focus on three topics: ethics, social entrepreneurship, and workplace spirituality.

1. *Ethics*. Many graduate and undergraduate business programs—es-

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The "Sky High" project created by La Sierra Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) taught high school students about ethics and social responsibility through the airline business. Here, a student makes a paper airplane for his team.

pecially those located on Christian campuses—require coursework in ethics. And the scandals that have recently rocked the business world will undoubtedly lead to increased calls for attention to ethics in business curricula. The study of personal and social ethics, from an unequivocally Christian perspective, needs to be the bedrock of a values-driven Adventist business curriculum. Adventist business professors can and should be enthusiastic about sharing a gospel-informed vision of justice, compassion, and integrity with their students. Business and political leaders who call for enhanced ethics education in business schools hope for training that will help tomorrow's business leaders become better people. However, many secular business programs seem to think they've done enough if they expose their students to a range of alternative approaches to moral decision making and teach them to apply

competing moral theories. But on a campus that takes the gospel seriously, that is committed to a positive vision of Christian service, business students should acquire a passionate devotion to owning and implementing a distinctively Christian understanding of the ethics of economic life.

A course in Christian business ethics might explore the groundwork

of Christian ethics; examine some general themes relevant to Christian thinking about business; and offer students religious perspectives on important ethical issues they will likely face on the job. Taught with passion and conviction, such a course can help students realize how attractive and demanding Christian business ethics can be. But a single class in ethics isn't enough. An Adventist business curriculum should also include required courses in two other areas currently receiving considerable attention from business leaders and scholars: *social entrepreneurship* and *workplace spirituality*.

2. *Social Entrepreneurship*. An ethics course will help business students see what goals to pursue and why these goals matter; a social entrepreneurship course, by contrast, helps them see how they can create businesses that make a difference.¹ Social entrepreneurship occurs in a variety

of settings.² There are for-profit businesses begun with the deliberate goal of making the world a better place. There are not-for-profit organizations supported, not by donations but by the income generated by associated for-profit activities.³ Some social entrepreneurs simply use entrepreneurial management techniques to plan and organize the activities of not-for-profit ventures.⁴ “Venture philanthropy” uses techniques and strategies derived from the experience of venture capitalists to support innovative work in the social sector.⁵ “Corporate social innovation” happens when a company replaces traditional, hands-off philanthropy with direct community involvement to improve its bottom line while empowering hurting people.⁶ Some social entrepreneurs—who might be labeled “intrapreneurs”—act as “moles” within larger, more conventional for-profit organizations, nudging them to look beyond the bottom line and improve the lives of their communities.

But while there are innumerable ways of being a social entrepreneur, all of them have one thing in common: They use business skills and creativity to transform the world.

Students can already take courses in social entrepreneurship—usually focused on the not-for-profit sector—at major business schools, but such courses are not mandatory. A core course in social entrepreneurship puts Christian service on center stage in the Adventist business curriculum. It symbolizes the fact that being a Christian business leader involves more than avoiding obvious wrongdoing—false advertising, say, or embezzlement. It will make clear that, on an Adventist campus, learning to be a business leader means using one’s gifts and opportunities to make the world a better place. At the same time, it will provide budding Adventist business leaders with the tools they need to become effective social entrepreneurs. It will examine the distinctive challenges social entrepre-

neurs confront as they seek to finance their ventures, satisfy investors, design governance structures, interact with diverse communities, address legal concerns, and, most importantly, generate the creative ideas needed to initiate and sustain social change-oriented business ventures. If it incorporates a practical element, such a class can also help students hone their entrepreneurial skills while learning more about the world’s many needs.

3. *Workplace Spirituality*. Work consumes an exceptional amount of human time and energy in today’s economy.⁷ Often, before we realize it, it becomes the center of our lives. At the same time, as we work more, we find that, in a global economy in which every decision seems to have wide-ranging and unpredictable effects, we may find ourselves faced with almost overwhelming responsibilities. So it is hardly surprising that today’s business leaders are devoting increased attention to *workplace spirituality*. This means keeping one’s re-



The La Sierra SIFE team started a shampoo business at the International Children’s Care Orphanage in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to help pay for students’ tuition and to upgrade facilities.

lationship with God lively while facing the demands of the workplace. It means seeking God's presence when one feels unsure of where to go or what to do. It means understanding how to forgive others (and oneself) for failure—or worse. It means seeking wisdom from God at difficult times. It means understanding the meaning of Sabbath rest in a work world in which achievement is seen as the principal measure of personal value. It may mean seeking a vocation—a task that is distinctively one's own.

A relatively small number of business schools offers courses in workplace spirituality. None includes such a course in its core curriculum. For a Seventh-day Adventist Christian business program, however, concern with spiritual growth isn't optional. It should be included in the core curriculum. Spiritual formation must be a key component of effective business education. Students attend Adventist colleges and universities because they expect distinctive opportunities for spiritual growth. An unequivocal focus on preparing business leaders for the spiritual challenges and opportunities of the workplace is a vital means of fulfilling that expectation.

B. Curricular Integration

Specialized, focused courses that address the three related topics of personal and social ethics, social entrepreneurship, and workplace spirituality are crucial to ensure that key issues receive adequate attention. These relate to an Adventist business program's distinctive vision and should expose students to important ideas in concentrated fashion. But while these kinds of courses can play a vital role in helping students catch a Christian vision of business, they address issues that need to be addressed in every course in the business curriculum.

Integrating faith and learning isn't

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needs are genuine.

- Finance classes can explore moral constraints on investment decisions and examine normative questions related to the structure and function of markets.

- Accounting classes can discuss how people make judgments regarding cost allocation, what counts as a cost, and how financial information is represented and reported.



Farmers in Kalaala, Ethiopia, are eager to learn about business concepts brought to them by La Sierra SIFE students. The students set up three small businesses in their village last September.

easy anywhere.. But it's worth the effort, and with some creativity, each business teacher can find opportunities to address concerns relating to the core of Christian faith⁸:

- In management classes, it will be easy to address issues related to ethics, social entrepreneurship, and workplace spirituality.

- Normative questions about the goals of business decision-making and public policy, as well as assumptions about the way human beings reason and make decisions, fit naturally into the economics curriculum.

- Marketing courses can examine not only the meaning of truth and falsity in advertising, but also the role of marketing in creating and sustaining desire for particular products⁹—exploring questions related to personal autonomy and asking what sorts of

- All classes can discuss career choice and the temptation to link personal value to performance. Teachers can help students to see social entrepreneurship as a normal, expected career path by using social entrepreneurial examples.

There is, obviously, no single formula for successful integration. It is best accomplished through the use of wide-ranging conversations among faculty members in particular subject areas and between those faculty members and others—including both business colleagues and persons from other disciplines (education, religion, and philosophy come to mind) who have devoted serious attention to the challenge of integrating faith and learning. Individual faculty members and subject-area groups should constantly re-evaluate strategies for link-

ing faith and learning.

It's also important for business program administrators and faculties to make integration a priority by indicating that all faculty members are expected to think creatively about ways their courses can address issues related to faith. A dean or department chair shouldn't become Big Brother, scrutinizing teaching materials and lectures for evidence of theological correctness; but each faculty member needs to know that his or her colleagues expect to see a good-faith commitment to dealing with issues of faith in each class.

Students must, of course, acquire business skills in the core areas of management, marketing, finance, accounting, economics, technology, and entrepreneurship. Due to time limitations, discussions about spirituality, ethics, and social entrepreneurship need to be carefully woven into the curricula; they obviously can't be allowed to dominate classes in business subject areas.¹⁰ Similarly, each of the core courses in values might be worth only two quarter units at the graduate level; the three required undergraduate values-related courses might be worth between two and four units each.

C. Practica

In addition to this relatively limited in-class exposure to key ethical issues, students need opportunities to practice what they have learned. A practicum can challenge them to synthesize the curricula from special values-linked courses and classes in core business skill areas. It can supplement and reinforce their understanding of moral norms, social entrepreneurial techniques, and spiritual dynamics. Practica can help students become aware both of the crushing poverty that leads to stunted lives for so many people around the globe—two-thirds of the world's people live on one dollar per day or less—and of the creative ways in which business skills can be and are being used to address economic injustices. Field experiences

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confront students with the need to make real-world decisions that pose powerful, complex moral challenges. And they force students to discover the power of faith and tap previously

4. Meeting Market Needs

A commitment to making a difference fits naturally into Adventism's dedication to global service. The good news is that it's also a popular theme among business leaders and business educators. Fulfilling our mission can help us succeed in today's business school marketplace.

Adventist business programs will be effective only if they ground students solidly in accounting, finance,



La Sierra SIFE students partnered with the International Medical Aid Association to help children attending the Kalaala Primary School in Ethiopia learn about business.

ignored spiritual resources as they face unexpected crises.

Practica are required by a number of business schools today, but Adventist business programs should be distinctive in offering fieldwork opportunities that reinforce their basic, values-driven message. Adventism's commitment to global mission means that church entities like Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) International are already involved in social entrepreneurial ventures students can observe and in which they can participate. Business professors and program administrators will likely find willing partners if they propose new and creative pilot programs in tandem with church-based development activities.

economics, management, marketing, information systems, and entrepreneurship. But equipping students with skills in these basic areas is not enough to distinguish Adventist business programs from countless others. Our programs should prepare business, church, labor, and community leaders dedicated to exhibiting integrity, compassion, and social justice in the world of work and business.

A Market Niche

Teaching students to create value in order to make a difference will allow Adventist business programs to fill a distinctive market niche. Concern about values has become a growing emphasis within the business community. A recent *Fortune* cover

story highlights the existence of a “spiritual revival in the workplace,” an increasing number of people “who want to bridge the traditional divide between spirituality and work” who “are getting organized and going public to agitate for change.”¹¹ Numerous recent books address linkages between spirituality and work. And though this is not the reason Adventist business programs should foster the integration of work and spirituality, “Spirituality is in convergence with all the cutting-edge thinking in management and organizational behavior” and “creates a higher-performing organization.”¹²

A distinguished professor of management at the University of Santa Clara now offers regular seminars in workplace spirituality for M.B.A. students and executives.¹³ *Beyond Grey Pinstripes*, a report co-sponsored by an initiative of the prestigious Aspen Institute, documents the business world’s increased emphasis on incorporating concern about positive social change into the mission statements of business schools and corporations. It also stresses the need for businesses to develop “products and services that solve environmental and social problems *while creating business value*” and emphasizes the importance of “integrating social concerns into the very charter, operations, and sources of revenue for business.”¹⁴ A focus on values would thus give Adventist business programs a distinctive, mission-linked way to tap into an important contemporary trend.

Business leaders and scholars are seeing the value of business skills and business creativity in addressing pressing social problems. This sensitivity to the contribution business can make to changing the world doubtless has its roots in a combination of idealism and realism—both an altruistic desire for social improvement and a recognition that businesses can learn from successful social entrepreneurial ventures (as Rosabeth Moss Kanter has argued) and benefit from promoting social stability and productivity.

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Thus, for a variety of reasons, the value of social entrepreneurship is being trumpeted by everyone from management theorist Peter Drucker to students at top business schools. Student enthusiasm for social entrepreneurial courses and the growth of organizations like Net Impact suggest that in the minds and hearts of many thoughtful and conscientious businesspersons and students, the era of Ivan Boesky and Gordon Gekko is over. At the same time, the scandals associated with corporate entities like Enron, WorldCom, and Adelphia suggest that learning key lessons about fairness, integrity, and compassion is more vital than ever for today’s business leaders.

Getting Serious About Service

The spring 1999 issue of *Newsline*, published by what is now the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, notes that business schools may be uniquely positioned to help residents of inner-city communities resolve significant social and economic challenges and create measurable, long-term economic change. Apart from the charitable work done by their students, business schools have been minimally involved in service ventures. Seriousness about service, and the experience and contacts provided by activities like Students In Free Enterprise teams (these organizations, committed to business education and community service, are in-

creasingly common on Adventist campuses) mean they can and should take a leading role in changing this pattern. Doing so could help them attract students and the support of corporate and not-for-profit sponsors.

Widespread enthusiasm for “faith-based” private programs as engines of positive social change speaks, and will likely help to feed, a desire to draw on the skills of social entrepreneurs to foster economic empowerment. One need not view social entrepreneurship as a panacea for social ills to see that a climate hospitable to public-private partnerships will encourage people to explore social entrepreneurship as way to express their compassion and idealism, and thus to seek educational qualifications that will help them to do so.

Distinctive Programs?

A focus on social entrepreneurship makes sense for Adventist business programs in particular because of the educational environment in which they function. They compete for students with other Christian colleges and universities and with a variety of other higher educational institutions. Though Adventist colleges and universities have long sought to emphasize their distinctiveness, their business programs look remarkably like those offered at non-Adventist and non-Christian institutions across the United States. Offering genuinely distinctive business programs will help Adventist colleges and universities move beyond fuzzy rhetoric about “integrating faith and learning.”

Putting social entrepreneurship, personal and social ethics, and workplace spirituality front and center can play a valuable role in highlighting the spiritual vitality of Adventist colleges and universities. Initiating a vibrantly Christian program that emphasizes spiritually relevant concerns—without sacrificing a commitment to rigorous coursework in basic skill areas—will help them assure students, parents, and prospective

donors that they remain committed participants in the enterprise of Adventist global service.

Whatever actually happens in their classrooms, even confidently Christian institutions like Hope, Wheaton, Goshen, and Westmont colleges devote little or no attention in their catalogues to explaining how their business programs reflect Christian convictions and advance religious goals. Prospective undergraduate and graduate students have little reason to think that studying business at these institutions will focus in more than cursory ways on preparing them to embody Christian ideals in the business world. A focus on personal and social ethics, workplace spirituality, and social entrepreneurship—expressed in special coursework, infused into every class, and emphasized through meaningful opportunities for practical training—could help Adventist business programs win the attention of non-Adventist students attracted to Christian higher educational programs capable of helping them learn how to make a difference using business skills and creativity.

Vigorously implementing a new mission also makes sense if Adventist business programs want to strengthen their financial base. Defining a mission that distinguishes Adventist business programs from their competitors will give donors a reason to support them. Businesspersons of conviction, whether Adventist or not, may find an authentic commitment to service appealing—and worth supporting.

5. Conclusion

Adventist business programs confront an exciting opportunity to diversify and grow while giving renewed emphasis to a gospel-motivated commitment to global service. Developing new curricula that place increased emphasis on personal and social ethics, social entrepreneurship, and workplace spirituality; that feature the course-by-course integration of Christian faith with the business disciplines; and that involve students

in transformative fieldwork experiences can help Adventist business programs build positive relationships with students, faculty members, employers, and donors. This will enable them to take advantage of their distinctive strengths and meet the challenges they face in the new millennium. ▮



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