



“Far More Than Bed and Bath”

In the April/May column, we explored a number of ways to enhance the experience of task force assistant deans serving at boarding academies. Improving the structure for hiring, training, and supervising has become a critical need. I believe the time has come for the various stakeholders (supervising deans, principals, task force workers, parents, and students) to find ways to ensure satisfactory outcomes or consider alternative service opportunities.

Ideally, the task force program should provide opportunities for participating students to learn new skills, grow in spiritual and emotional maturity, and create a record of quality service that enhances his or her résumé, and opens doors to graduate schools, job possibilities, and becoming a better person. It should also enrich the school program and minister to the academy students.

These goals have been achieved in some cases, but the reports from academies and from students who return to Adventist colleges/universities still indicate some disillusionment and dissatisfaction. Very few task force deans have become professional residence hall deans. I believe that this is an important question to explore. What would need to happen to create greater enthusiasm for the profession of deaning?

In this column, I want to unpack some of the obligations of a boarding school to its task force deans. I believe that properly screened and trained task force deans can be a vital force for good on a campus and a real help to the supervising deans. To unleash that

potential, the following needs to occur:

1. The campus ministries office at Adventist colleges/universities should provide a structure for promoting the task force program and advertising the various job openings. It should also screen potential task force workers and ensure that they receive appropriate training. Some schools require all task force candidates to enroll in a for-credit class, while others provide two- to three-day seminars. The campus residence-hall deans and pastors should team together, however the training is configured. Having a standard screening, hiring, and pre-service training protocol will provide more consistent long-term results. A helpful

pre-service training event is the annual Residence Hall Deans Workshop held each summer at either Andrews University or La Sierra University. Travel and registration expenses could be shared by the hiring institution and the student.

The book, *Called to a Ministry of Caring*,* was written with the mentoring and training of deans (including task force deans) in mind.

2. Each school should pay a regular, agreed-upon stipend. Offering a substantial stipend will attract a better quality of applicants.

3. Cafeteria meals and housing should be supplied at no extra cost to the task force dean.



4. Agreed-upon expenses for traveling to the school or to home should be reimbursed in a timely manner.

5. The academy must provide liability and medical insurance for each task force worker. If these young people are transporting students as part of their job description, even if they have complete auto insurance coverage, they are advised to use school vehicles.

6. Each task force dean should have a clearly defined job description, along with the needed authority to complete the designated tasks. The delegated responsibilities should be both meaningful and significant.

7. The task force deans should be respected and supported by administrators, teachers, staff, and students. In turn, they should respect the school program, academy employees, and students.

8. The academy should ensure that each task force dean has a mentoring relationship with the supervising dean and the principal. Task force deans are far more likely to have a positive experience if they are intentionally mentored.

9. Each task force dean should have scheduled off-duty time. Efforts must be made to respect the schedule, while allowing flexibility for emergencies or unusual circumstances.

10. Task force deans should be invited to all faculty/staff social events and given an appropriate farewell gift at the end of their term of service.

These 10 “obligations” may seem like basic common sense. When they have been implemented, task force deans generally report having had a successful experience. For too many, however, the experience has not been so positive.

I remember a social work major, new on the job as task force dean, who was asked to contact the parents of a child who had just attempted suicide. She then had to drive the student hundreds of miles to reunite with the parents. The young dean reacted amazingly well. However, she should not have been asked to assume this serious responsibility by herself.

Other students have told me that they were not invited to faculty social occasions and never received official words of appreciation or a gift at the end of the year.

Still other task force deans have reported that their workload compromised their health. I think of one former Andrews University student who each morning taught three classes (with three different preparations), each afternoon supervised the library, and after supper was on-duty in the residence hall because the principal had given the girls’ dean evenings off due to family issues. The task force dean worked until midnight or later in the residence hall and then returned to the room she shared with another task force worker to prepare for her classes. At Christmas break, she resigned, exhausted, and returned to Andrews University feeling like a failure. In my opinion, that was abuse.

As of this writing, many academies are advertising task force positions for the 2007-2008 school year, with at least one school offering eight positions. Why do schools rely so heavily on short-term college students who are essentially volunteers? Shouldn’t a standard be set for how task force workers are used and how many positions are appropriate for any school?

At its best, the task force program provides college/university students with opportunities for significant service and a safe place to field test the skills they have acquired during their educational journey. Ideally, during their term, they will learn additional skills and become more invested in the ministry of the church. To make a lasting impact on the life of an adolescent is a rare privilege. Many task force workers have discovered this truth. However, we must face the reality that others look back on their service with mixed or even negative feelings. I urge the formation of a committee to do a careful analysis of the task force program, and then make specific recommendations that will benefit everyone involved in the program. ✍

Often referred to as the “dean of deans,” Donald W. Murray retired in June 2006 after serving as a residence hall dean for 42 years. He writes from St. Joseph, Michigan.

*Donald W. Murray, *Called to a Ministry of Caring* (Lincoln, Neb.: Advent Source, 2005). Available by calling 1-800-328-0525 or at <http://www.adventsource.org>. Catalog No. 625005. \$14.95, plus shipping and handling.

Editorial

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than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”³

As Adventist educators discuss what educated people in the 21st century need to know, we must also grapple with how best to prepare them for a life of service here and in the hereafter.—B.J.R.

REFERENCES

1. Quotes in the first four paragraphs are taken from Jeremy Caplan, “As Harvard Goes. . .” *Time* 169:10 (March 5, 2007), pp. 62, 63.
2. Scripture texts credited to NIV are from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*, copyright © 1973, 1978, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.
3. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), p. 17.