Adventist Online Learning Conference at Andrews

Provides valuable education and collaboration for educators and professionals

Some of the attendees at the Adventist Online Learning Conference held on the Andrews University campus in early October.(Photo by Janine Lim, associate dean, online higher ed, SDEIP)

By: Brandon Shin, IMC student writer

On Tuesday, Oct. 10, 2017, Andrews University seemed to pulse as the sounds of new voices and bustling people flowed throughout its campus. Hosted by the Andrews University School of Distance Education & International Partnerships, Griggs International Academy and Montemorelos University, the Adventist Online Learning Conference began.

According to Janine Lim, associate dean for online higher education at Andrews University, this international conference was "the first with this name," although it was not the first conference on online learning organized for Adventists. The conference, whose forerunners included the Adventist Virtual Learning Network conferences (1999–2006), followed the October General Conference meetings. The objective of this conference was to create a space to explore and discuss current trends and best practices in online education. Participants shared ideas and projects that enable the best use of the online environment, aligning technology to needs of the Adventist church in its mission and defining ways to collaborate and share effective practices.

Education leaders and teachers from all levels gathered from around the world to grow their knowledge and expand their skillset in the realm of online education and learning.

Each morning of the conference began with a provided breakfast and brief worship. Afterward there were keynote presentations by individuals such as Larry Blackmer, vice president for education for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Darcy Hardy, associate vice president for Enterprise Consulting at Blackboard Inc., and Ismael Castillo, a professor at Universidad de Montemorelos. These presentations addressed a variety of topics, ranging from the philosophy of Adventist education to particular online courses of interest, such as pastoral recertification or ministry outreach. Some of these keynotes were presented in both English and Spanish, and even streamed on Facebook in order to reach a broader audience across the globe.

Keynotes were followed by breakout sessions, which fostered communication and exchange of ideas regarding the topics presented. Networking breakfasts and dinners were also provided to build on this goal of sharing resources and exploring areas of opportunity for fulfilling the mission of online education in the context of the Adventist church.

Following the conference, individuals expressed a series of positive viewpoints regarding their newfound skillsets. Daryl Gungadoo, a keynote speaker at the conference and broadcast engineer at Adventist World Radio, stated that the conference was "an awesome place to exchange ideas on innovation in education!" Heather Fletcher, a nursing educator at Northern Caribbean University who tuned in via the Facebook streamed keynotes, stated that it was "great to be watching and learning of the many online ALC resources."

According to Lim, "Technology provides opportunities for extending the reach of Adventist education in a variety of ways. Educators networking and learning from each other is what the conference is all about." The Adventist Online Learning Conference website (http://adventistlearn.online/) proclaimed that, "online education makes it possible to expand the reach of the Adventist educational system into the homes and workplaces of Adventists unable to attend a residential campus," and with its diverse cast of keynote speakers, breakout sessions and presentations from a variety of qualified individuals, this conference succeeded in doing just that.

For those of us who could not attend this conference, there are still ways to get involved and learn and support the growth of the church and education in the online sphere. For instance, some of the keynote presentations have been posted on the Adventist Online Learning Conference Facebook page for public viewing. Many of the conference proceedings are also available, including a detailed program and handouts.

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