



## Higher education: troublemaker or change agent?

Niels-Erik Andreasen  
President

American higher education is delivered by 4,000–6,000 (depending on how one counts) diverse, expensive and at times unruly institutions! Adventist higher education is provided by 114 institutions, 14 of them in North America. They are more “orderly,” but even so from time to time both church members and leaders raise their eyebrows at our colleges. What has become of our traditional, family-style campuses of yesteryear, and why do our sweet Sabbath School children grow up and go to college, they wonder!

Well perhaps it is precisely those diverse, inefficient and at times unruly institutions that make college education so dynamic and effective. Think of the recent student demonstrations in the universities of Missouri, Yale and elsewhere—a bit messy perhaps, but they received national attention and things are changing. I admit some of this campus activity can be disconcerting and is not a really effective way of running a university, but it does draw attention to critical issues, raise important questions, propose solutions, and help make education a change agent in our society and also in our church. What would we have done without it?

Think of the thousands of Adventist-educated leaders who guided the church expansion from one million members mostly in the north to 19 million primarily in the south, during the past 60 years, while holding on to church unity. Every one of them attended one or more of our colleges and universities.

Consider the growing awareness of gender, ethnic and national diversity in our world church. It was first articulated in our educational institutions and has relied upon specialists in theology, ethics and the social sciences for its elucidation and eventual resolution.

Marvel at the highly technical and sophisticated communication technology deployed in our evangelism and witnessing, all of it by university educated specialists. Hardly a spot on this globe is left untouched by the Adventist witness, thanks to the ingenuity of our (mostly) recent college graduates.

Remember the plea by our church to live healthy and secure lives. It is based in science and research and led by highly professional Christian service personnel—all of them college graduates. Several institutions, including Andrews, have implemented health and wellness programs as the most promising response yet to a public call for action in this area of human need.

Addressing these pressing agendas in our time cannot simply be stage managed by leadership in our church organizations and institutions. It happens as a result of the spirited and creative energies released by committed faculty and students in responsible, yet free and open institutions of higher education. Yes, at times our educational programs may seem a bit unruly and inefficient, but they release enormous energy and sponsor initiatives that make our schools and their graduates change agents in the world and in the church.

The potential impact of a good Christian education is enormous and its influence for good is immeasurable. I always remain grateful to our church for sponsoring this kind of education.

# FOCUS

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