

Operation Dare

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The thesis of this article is that unless a better solution can be found for the problem of spiraling tuition costs that now force too many Adventist students to attend non-Adventist colleges and that threaten to price Adventist higher education out of business, the 1970 General Conference session must originate powerful central planning and rechannel part or all of the union conference educational funds to the North American Division Commission on Higher Education.

The problem arises because of the absence of central planning. Each Adventist college or university, striving to be everything to everybody, develops a growth pattern that is too often based on local pride and that too often includes unnecessary tuition-raising and quality-lowering duplications in certain specialized areas. Unfortunately, while the increasingly knotty fiscal problems associated with Adventist higher education have produced widespread discussion about federal aid, far less emphasis has been given to the pertinent issue of central planning.

Business administrators, academic deans, and others have long advocated central planning; yet few fully realize its immense economic advantages. In "Whither Adventist Higher Education?" in the Winter 1969 SPECTRUM, Charles B. Hirsch discussed the problem and the needed change in general terms, but stopped short of offering specific and feasible proposals for introducing that change. One such proposal is attempted here.

Adventist colleges and universities in North America receive \$11 million annually from the church — roughly the equivalent of a \$200 million endowment fund.¹ Most of this subsidy comes from the eight union conferences, each supporting the institution(s) within its area, with relatively little interference from other union conferences or control by the General Conference. In short, the union conferences are practically autonomous, so

that within the North American Division, the church operates eight separate subsidy programs to support thirteen colleges and universities. The existing North American Division Commission on Higher Education has virtually no power to enforce its recommendations for coordination and efficiency; it operates like a squad of handcuffed policemen.

During the 1960's, the increase in tuition rates at Adventist colleges was approximately nine times as fast as the consumer-price index. This trend threatens a financial crisis that will turn many students to public institutions and that will become worse than ever if tuition rates are increased still further.² At this point Adventist institutions must either accept additional kinds of federal aid (thus possibly jeopardizing their status as religious institutions) or submit to serious and sound central planning while the situation is still reparable. The world waits for a smog disaster before doing something serious about smog. Must Adventists do likewise in regard to the tuition spiral?

The proposal offered here, though not new, is drastic enough to justify the name OPERATION DARE. The time and place to begin a system of sound central curriculum planning — with “teeth” — is the summer of 1970 at the General Conference session in Atlantic City, New Jersey. With the authority to apportion a significant percentage or all of the church's funds for higher education, the North American Division Commission would have the necessary bargaining power. The Commission, of course, should properly represent all the institutions involved, with a minimum of power in the hands of any individual. The financial structure of Adventist higher education in North America would then resemble that of the University of California, which in many ways makes much more financial sense than the present collection of practically autonomous Adventist units.

For example, while a variety of subjects is taught at most University of California campuses, the vice president for planning and development, working together with the campus architects, allows only the Davis and Riverside campuses to strive for world preeminence in agriculture; there is no fight to build, staff, and maintain many agricultural programs with a budget that can afford only a couple of superb ones. If, on the other hand, UC's central planning were as minimal as that among Adventist colleges, many local campus administrators would no doubt soon start pointing with pride to their own progress in agriculture — while in reality the thinning out of the university's resources was sending the overall quality of agricultural education and research into a nosedive.

If with all its wealth the University of California needs central planning,

certainly Adventist higher education needs it. Even if all opposition to federal aid to Adventist colleges were removed, the financial squeeze would by no means be ended, and some form of central planning would still be desirable.

It is hardly to be expected that any of the Adventist colleges and universities will voluntarily institute the reforms envisioned in connection with central planning. Only a program enforced by financial considerations could be effective. No amount of urging or persuasion can overcome the basic motivations of individual colleges — motivations that may sometimes be couched in financial terms but that in reality are typically based on a drive for status. Each institution is busy trying to keep up with all the others; therefore each one is trying to expand in all directions. If College X adopts a new program, do the others each say, "It will be most economical to let X carry this program alone, since splitting two or more ways would make both operations a financial loss"? Not likely. The usual response is, "If X can do it, we can do it. We must not fall behind. We must do everything X does, even if we all lose money doing it." If the appropriate question were asked, "Would this new program do better at College X or Y or Z?" it is unlikely that any of the colleges would agree; only a central planning commission could properly answer that question.

On the surface, it may seem totally undesirable to have restrictions forced on various institutions; but to reduce the capacity of the colleges to hurt themselves, central planning with enforcement power is called for — as the following examples illustrate.

EXAMPLE ONE. A new pipe organ was recently acquired and installed on the La Sierra campus of Loma Linda University at a cost exceeding \$100,000. Certain other colleges also have expensive organs. Must *every* Adventist college duplicate this kind of facility? All colleges need reasonably strong music departments, but very few students need a \$100,000 organ. Money might be saved and an even better educational program might be achieved by sending the most promising organ students to one or two campuses especially equipped to serve them. But the practice of sprinkling \$100,000 bundles of tuition and subsidy funds here, there, and everywhere for small groups of students is well established and difficult to change. A lack of strong central planning in the past is to blame. Yet many stories of unnecessary duplication still belong to the future if Adventist higher education continues its present course.

EXAMPLE TWO. Industrial education is typically a small program in any single college, and it is an expensive one because of the equipment required

and the time involved in supervising long laboratory periods. We scatter our resources by building medium- or low-quality trade schools in the form of additional courses and programs with no concerted objective. Some classes are so small that there is no healthy competition. Heavy equipment for wood and metal work and automechanics is found on campuses only a few hundred miles apart. Central planning could probably create one or two excellent trade schools of concentrated technical training. If established on existing college campuses, these trade schools would provide their students the many advantages of an Adventist educational environment without duplicating the nontechnical programs. A few courses in vocational skills could meet the applied arts requirements of students at the other colleges.

EXAMPLE THREE. For many years Walla Walla College has offered a program in engineering — a most expensive endeavor even for those institutions whose spending capacity dwarfs that of Adventist colleges. Instead of attempting to inaugurate another engineering program elsewhere at a time when traveling distance is becoming less important, the church might achieve maximum quality at minimum cost to all by encouraging Adventist engineering students to go to Walla Walla College and subsidizing their travel expenses. If an unbiased study by a central planning commission revealed such an arrangement to be not merely feasible but definitely advantageous, the commission should have the power to withhold funds from any college that insisted on duplicating expensive facilities.

EXAMPLE FOUR. Graduate programs have many hidden and undesirable consequences. In cost, for example, the normal ratio of lower-division, upper division, and graduate education is approximately 1 to 3 to 8, and in small colleges the relative cost of graduate studies may be even greater because of even smaller classes.³ Yet there is constant pressure for more graduate courses: participating departments generally want to do more, and those not participating often become jealous and want to get started.

The fragmented expansion of graduate programs with little overall central planning at many Adventist institutions is bleeding the undergraduate students in two ways: financially, through increased tuition rates required by the small sizes of graduate classes; and, in some cases, qualitatively, when teachers spend disproportionately more time on their graduate courses than on their undergraduate courses. Even so, the graduate programs generally remain relatively weak in terms of facilities and equipment when compared with programs in larger private and public institutions. In the past, certain Adventist colleges have ended some years with six-figure op-

erating deficits caused in part by graduate programs. Accrediting bodies have on occasion criticized some of these institutions for attempting to run graduate programs without adequate resources. And our central planning is still practically nil.

IN SUMMARY: central planning is not only a means of using dollars more effectively but also a way to better education. It may be the only road to survival. But its initiation obviously depends on the willingness of the union conferences — and in particular on their presidents, with their considerable influence — to allocate educational funds to the central agency. This change will not happen without constructive dialogue and widespread support for the concept of effective central planning in Adventist higher education.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- 1 Charles B. Hirsch, Relevant Teaching for Revolutionary Times, *Review and Herald* 145, 4 (November 21, 1968).
- 2 United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Consumer Price Index* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office). Issued annually. Also, individual bulletins of Seventh-day Adventist colleges.
- 3 Dexter M. Keezer (ed.), *Financing Higher Education, 1960-70; the McGraw-Hill Book Company 50th Anniversary Study of the Economics of Higher Education in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959), p. 97.