

# The Education of Adventist Administrators

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One of the most valuable resources of the Seventh-day Adventist church is the managerial ability of the administrators in conferences and institutions. Skill in solving basic economic problems through efficient personnel relations and management of capital has played an important role in the success and growth of the church. The dynamic nature of our world requires that today's church leaders be better educated than their predecessors were. The purpose of this study is to explore the educational backgrounds of key administrators in the Seventh-day Adventist church and to see how the education of future administrators can be improved.

## I

To gather information, we mailed a questionnaire to 208 administrators of the church. The list of these, chosen from the 1970 edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, included officers of the General Conference, the overseas divisions, and the North American union conferences. Also included were presidents and treasurers of North American local conferences having more than 10,000 members, and presidents of conferences having 5,000 or more members. Administrators and board chairmen were included for all colleges with 500 or more students; university presidents and vice presidents; and administrators for all hospitals with a bed capacity of 150 or more, publishing houses, food factories, and other major organizations.

Slightly over 50 percent responded to the questionnaire; 105 of the 208 administrators returned the requested information. The category with the

highest proportion of response was that of presidents and vice presidents of general, division, and union conferences.

The results of the returned questionnaires were both expected and unexpected. For example, the proportion of Adventist administrators who have had college education is slightly higher than that of administrators in the largest business corporations in America. Eighty-six percent of Adventist administrators were graduated from college (TABLE 1), whereas major business corporations report that 80 percent of their board chairmen, 85 percent of their presidents, and 86 percent of their vice presidents are college graduates.

TABLE 1. Undergraduate Education

POSITION	NO COLLEGE	SOME DEGREE	COLLEGE DEGREE	TOTAL
General, division, and union conference officers	0	7	36	43
Local conference officers	0	2	21	23
Educational administrators	0	0	14	14
Institutional administrators	1	5	19	25
Total	1	14	90	105

TABLE 2. Highest Degree Earned

DEGREE	GC, D, U ADMIN L ADMIN E ADMIN I ADMIN				TOTAL
	U ADMIN	L ADMIN	E ADMIN	I ADMIN	
Doctor of Philosophy	1	0	8	1	10
Doctor of Education	1	0	2	0	3
Doctor of Medicine	0	0	1	1	2
Bachelor of Laws	1	0	0	0	1
Master of Arts	8	6	3	4	21
Master of Science	0	0	0	2	2
Master of Hospital Administration	0	0	0	2	2
Master of Business Administration	1	0	0	1	2
Bachelor of Arts	19	9	0	4	32
Bachelor of Science	3	2	0	4	9
Bachelor of Theology	2	4	0	0	6
None	7	2	0	6	15
Total	43	23	14	25	105

LEGEND: GC — General Conference  
D — Division Conference  
U — Union Conference

L — Local Conference  
E — Educational Administration  
I — Institutional Administration

Forty percent of the administrators responded that they hold graduate degrees (TABLE 2). If educational administrators (all of whom hold graduate degrees) are eliminated from the calculation, 31 percent reported having completed graduate programs. Of the hospital administrators, 70 percent attained the master's level or higher.

Findings on undergraduate majors indicated that religion was the most common subject major, with 50 church administrators (48 percent) indicating this category. At least 1 person from each category indicated that he had majored in business or accounting, and a total of 26 administrators (25 percent) had studied business as a major for the baccalaureate degree. Other majors reported were: history 8, the sciences 5, English 3, education 2, speech and modern languages 1 each. Some who did not complete the bachelor's degree indicated a major area of study for the two or three years they had attended college.

Five men who had studied business as a major had not remained treasurers or institutional administrators, whereas 10 who majored in religion had become treasurers or institutional administrators. The most popular subject area for a second major or minor was history; 39 indicated this subject. Other frequent second areas were: religion 18, education 14, and business 7.

Respondents indicated that graduate study was not heavily oriented toward religion. Four areas of study were almost equally represented: 12 each in religion, business, and education, and 11 in history. The two other subjects with significant representation were hospital administration 5 and church history 4. Predictably, presidents tended to choose religion and church history; treasurers chose business subjects; and educational administrators studied education and history. Secretaries of the various units, for the most part, divided their graduate degrees among religion, business, and history.

The administrators surveyed included representatives from every Adventist college in North America and a number of Adventist schools overseas (TABLE 3). Older colleges, as can be expected, have a larger representation, Union College contributing the greatest number, 16.

Thirty-six of the 105 did not answer the question about what subject had contributed most to their effectiveness in their present positions. Of those who did answer this question, 34, the largest number, indicated business and economics as the most helpful. Of these, 19 were not in treasurer's work. Of the business subjects, accounting was indicated by 22 as the largest contributor. Nineteen named religion courses as primarily contributing to

TABLE 3. Colleges Attended

COLLEGE	GC, D,				TOTAL
	U ADMIN	L ADMIN	E ADMIN	I ADMIN	
Union College	6	5	1	4	16
Non-Adventist College	3	4	0	4	11
Andrews University	5	4	1	0	10
Columbia Union College	8	2	0	0	10
Pacific Union College	4	1	0	4	9
Walla Walla College	3	2	2	1	8
Loma Linda University	2	1	1	2	6
Atlantic Union College	3	0	0	1	4
Avondale College	2	0	0	1	3
Canadian Union College	0	0	0	2	2
River Plate College	1	0	1	0	2
Southern Missionary College	1	0	1	0	2
Helderberg College	0	0	0	1	1
Marienhoehe Seminary	1	0	0	0	1
Madison College	1	0	0	0	1
Newbold College	0	0	0	1	1
Oakwood College	0	1	0	0	1
Southwestern Union College	1	0	0	0	1
Not Named	2	3	7*	4	16

\* It was difficult to determine the undergraduate schools of educational administrators, since they had attended several colleges and universities at both graduate and undergraduate levels.

their present effectiveness, and 6 gave credit to the behavioral sciences. Many disciplines were indicated by 1 or 2 administrators, but the only other subject with more than 2 was speech, which was mentioned by 4.

Even more difficult to answer was what subject had contributed least to effectiveness in the respondent's position. Here, 46 percent failed to respond. Many apparently thought that all their courses had made a contribution; others thought that some subjects could have been given less emphasis in the undergraduate program. Among the subjects most often indicated were science, history, languages (including Greek and Hebrew), applied arts, and statistics. History, the most chosen second major or minor, was taken by 37 percent, and also figured prominently in graduate work; but it was also a close second to science as the subject that contributed least to the respondent's present position (20 percent of 54 percent response).

For the most part, the administrative persons were at least 15 years beyond the baccalaureate degree (TABLE 4). Only 2 of the 105 respondents were less than 35 years of age, and 65 was the effective retirement age. TABLE 4 provides a distribution of the present ages of the group surveyed.

TABLE 4. Age Distribution

AGE	GC, D,				TOTAL
	U ADMIN	L ADMIN	E ADMIN	I ADMIN	
Under 35	1	0	0	1	2
36 to 40	0	2	2	4	8
41 to 45	1	7	4	4	16
46 to 50	7	2	4	2	15
51 to 55	12	6	1	3	22
56 to 60	11	3	2	9	25
61 to 65	7	2	1	2	12
Over 65	3	1	0	0	4
No response	1	0	0	0	1

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## II

Each administrator was asked, on the basis of past educational experience and the professional demands of his position in church administration, what suggestions he could offer for the improvement of college and university curriculums for future Adventist administrators. Although there were some sharply conflicting opinions, there were also some opinions held in common.

The respondents generally agreed that the selection and training of church executives has been too much on a trial-and-error basis and that more specific programs should be designed for future administrators. Many thought that such programs should be reserved for those who have been especially selected. A division secretary expressed these ideas:

There is a need to develop a curriculum specifically designed to train leaders and administrators for the church — a curriculum with a more definite focus. There seems to be emphasis on general technical skills, but I wonder if some study should not be given to the conceptual and human relations skills. It appears also there should be some method of selecting persons of talent and aptitude for leadership, and a plan for encouraging enrollment in the course. A type of internship plan might help to solve some of the trial-and-error methods of present leadership.

According to the president of an overseas union conference, "church administrators attain their dizzy heights by accident rather than design. This should not be so. Courses in administration are needed. I hope they will be provided on many levels."

A local conference president also supported this view: "Up to this point, for the most part, the church has depended on raw natural talent and practical experience. However, it is becoming obvious that this method alone

will no longer keep up with the growth of the church and its institutions. We need to start recognizing [young] administrative talent and directing people into both formal and practical learning positions.”

The idea of an administrative training program was widely supported by church leaders. A General Conference officer suggested that a new approach be structured: “If some program for inservice training could be structured, future administrators would be greatly helped. Perhaps our system of appointing men as administrators, especially presidents, without specialized training has weaknesses.”

Some respondents suggested that the education of future administrators should be adapted to a specific type of administration. A union conference treasurer thought that the term “Adventist administrator” is too broad, and that the training “should be considered on the basis of the type of administration the student might be looking forward to in church work. A curriculum should be designed to fit him adequately for that aim.”

An associate secretary of the General Conference commented that church administration “means many things — and makes different demands, depending on what area one is in. Hospital administration, publishing house administration, and school administration are technical fields, and each one needs men especially prepared for it. Administration of a conference makes a different demand. Here one must not only administer in the usual sense of the word but must also act as spiritual adviser, counselor, public speaker, and, in effect, pastor to the organization he represents.”

Many respondents made specific suggestions about the content of curriculums for future administrators. A vice president of the General Conference recommended courses in public relations (or communications), management, finance, statistics, and business law. “When I attended college,” he said, “there was really nothing offered to prepare one to work in administration. Things have improved, but there needs to be strengthening of courses that would help qualify those who will be in church administration.” A local conference president recommended basic courses in business administration, personnel management, and counseling. One administrator suggested training in how to get along with people and how to preside over a committee or a board.

Many conference presidents thought that they should have taken more business courses. For example, one said, “I believe we should put more emphasis on business subjects. This may mean less of science, languages, and history. Fortunately, before my college days I had a business background which has been beneficial in my work.”

"It would be very helpful," said a university official, "if future Adventist administrators could have greater exposure to the thinking of persons who have been successful in modern management, methods of problem solving, data processing and information systems, personnel training and management, etc. Of equal importance is a knowledge of communications, in both a technical and a social sense. To all this, of course, should be added significant exposure to the humanities, so that administrators and managers may be worthwhile human beings first of all."

Many expressed concern for inclusion of a course specifically aimed at providing better understanding of the organization, policies, and practices of the church. A union conference secretary-treasurer said that here is one of the worst deficiencies of the present educational program.

What is called for, it appears, is a blend of the courses now offered in religion, behavioral sciences, and business administration. A church leader in Europe expressed it this way: "Even theology majors need greater emphasis on practical subjects such as business. The ability to cope with finance successfully is essential to every administrator, particularly in European conferences and institutions. However, an equal necessity is a firm understanding of practical religion if the conferences and institutions administered are to do their part in church progress."

An associate secretary of the General Conference stated that a basic course in accounting should be more widely required. A university administrator said, "Behavioral sciences are becoming more and more important." Administrators educated in theology sensed their need for a better understanding of theology. A conference treasurer suggested that "all prospective Adventist administrators should be urged to take some work in religion and homiletics."

A minority disagreed with the idea of a specialized curriculum for administration. One conference president said, "The conference administration is so varied and so changing that book learning and theoretical planning are totally inadequate." A hospital administrator, anxious that the church not attempt to provide graduate study in administration, said, "I do not believe that we have the resources to compete with professionals in the large universities, and I fear it would tend to develop inbreeding."

### III

One opinion to which we, along with many of the respondents, take exception is that training for future administrators should differ according to the type of administrative position the trainee is looking forward to. We

hold that there is a universality to administration; that the principles of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling are the same in any enterprise; and that spiritual leadership is necessary in any branch of the church if the units are to move forward in their mission.

It appears that in practice the Adventist church has subscribed to the idea of the universality of management proposed by management scholars since the time of Henri Fayol and Frederick Taylor. The careers of many Adventist administrators trace a pattern through a number of so-called types of administration. It is not unusual, for example, for a conference administrator to become the leader of an educational institution, or for a treasurer to become a president. Hospital administration can serve as a background for conference administration. In each case, the reverse is also true.

The essential ingredient for effective leadership is that an administrator understand and apply principles that will move people toward goals, focus their attention on defined objectives, and secure their cooperation in achieving these. A thorough understanding of church objectives and of skills in the methods of influencing people should be the key elements in any training program for church administrators.

In summary: Adventist church leaders are of the general opinion that an administrative curriculum should be developed. Many believe that a procedure should be devised to select those who show leadership traits. There is a division of opinion as to whether the training program should be offered on the graduate level or the undergraduate level. It is widely accepted that the administrative curriculum should be followed by an internship program. Suggestions for curriculum content are varied, but the emphasis is on religion, business administration, communication skills, and the behavioral sciences.