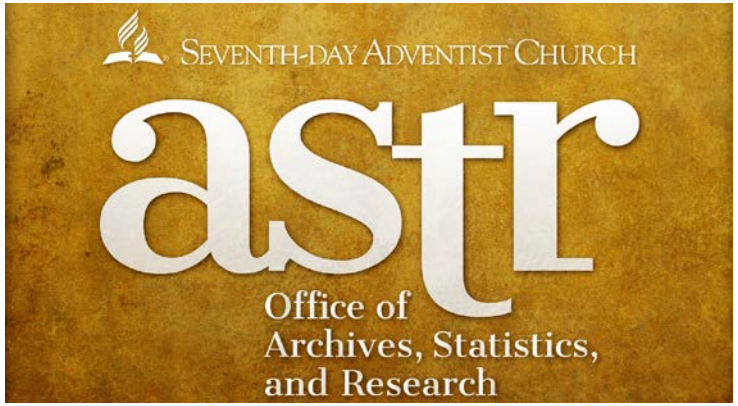
The General Conference Research Agenda



AU Faculty Institute-2014
Galina Stele

Background

The GC officers have identified a need for rigorous research into the operations of the organizations and agencies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, so that it may more effectively achieve its mission to bring the gospel to the world as well as minister to, disciple and meet the needs of its members. Responsibility for initiating, coordinating and funding research has been assigned to the GC Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR).

GC Research Projects

The GC Office of ASTR conducted many different research projects during 2011-2013, which resulted in over 41,000 interviews or completed questionnaires from all around the world. Studies connected to the strategic-planning process included:

- Survey of Church Member's Beliefs, Attitudes and Spiritual Life-Practices (conducted in 9 divisions, over 26,000 church members participated)
- Global Pastoral Study (more than 4,000 pastors from around the world (93% of unions) participated)
- Research on Tithing and Stewardship practices (9,000 church members from 4 continents participated)

- Adventist Connection Study among recent graduates in NAD (almost 1,200 current students/recent graduates—aged 20-30—of SDA universities in NAD)
- Retention study:
  - Survey of Former and Inactive Adventist Church Members (925)
  - Retention Surveys of those members who left the church (415) and those members who left the church but returned to regular worship attendance or church membership (370)

- The research was carried out to inform the global strategic-planning process.
- An overview of some key trends revealed by the data was shared at 2013 Annual Council by David Trim ready to be considered in the process of strategic planning and choosing certain areas as areas of priorities
- Based on this research, and on assessments provided by the world divisions, the 2015–2020 Strategic plan has been drafted and discussed

Some information on these studies was posted at ASTR website *www.adventistarchives.org*

- David Trim's report presented at 2013 Annual Council could be found athttp://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Other/ACRep2013.pdf

The following reports on some studies mentioned above could be found on ASTR website in the Resources on Nurture and Retention

as presented at the

Summit on Nurture & Retention 2013

- Preliminary report on Church-Members' survey in three African divisions presented by Elizabeth Role

http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-church-members'-survey-in-the-three-african-divisions.pdf

- Report on Church-Members' survey in SSD presented by Jimmy V. Adil and Ray G. Opao

http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-church-%C2%AD-members'-survey-in-the-southern-asia-%C2%AD-pacific-division.pdf

- Report on Church-Members' survey in IAD presented by Jaime Rodriguez and Ekel Collins

http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-church-%C2%ADmembers'-survey-in-the-inter-%C2%AD-american-division.pdf

- Adventist Connection Study among recent graduates in NAD presented by Douglas Jacobs and Mia Lindsey

http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-twenty-%C2%AD-first-century-seventh-%C2%AD-day-adventist-connection-study.pdf

- Research on Tithing and Stewardship practices presented by Robert McIver

http://www.adventistarchives.org/tithing,-commitment-and-retention-of-members.pdf

- Retention study: Survey of Former and Inactive Adventist Church Members presented by Monte Sahlin

http://www.adventistarchives.org/exit-interviews-an-international-survey-of-dropouts-from-the-seventh-day-adventist-church.pdf

- Retention Surveys of those members who left the church and those members who left but returned presented by Athony Kent

http://www.adventistarchives.org/why-did-they-leave.pdf

There were also other research projects conducted and sponsored by ASTR in 2011-2013

Memorandum of Understanding

- ASTR signs Memorandum of Understanding with the SDA Universities
- It is the general purpose of the MOU to outline the structure of agreement to conduct research of common interest

General Purpose

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) seeks partners to undertake quantitative and qualitative research that will enable the Seventh-day Adventist Church to evaluate and improve its outreach to the world, its ministry to members globally, and its internal administration and operations.

What is the purpose of MOU between AU and ASTR?

- This Memorandum of Understanding between the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) and Andrews University (AU) Office of Research and Creative Scholarship in Berrien Springs, Michigan is for the purpose of conducting research of common interest.

- The GC recognizes Andrews University (AU) has resources that enable a strong commitment to qualitative and quantitative research, and has faculty who have a successful track record of engaging in these types of research and who support the core mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

GC Research Objectives

The General Conference's research objectives are to:

- Improve the effectiveness of mission to those outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- Enhance the quality of pastoral ministry and discipling to church members as well as meet their needs.
- Assist denominational organizations and denominationally funded programs to achieve optimal efficiency and value.

- Provide an informed basis for global strategic planning
- Understand current trends, facts, and growth potential

Types of research the GC supports

Primary priorities:

- Analysis of the *quality* of services and resources currently being delivered by GC departments, agencies, and institutions to various parts/constituencies of the World Church.
- Identify *methods* of improving delivery of existing key programs to the World Church
- Identify *needs* for different and/or new programs by the World Church.

Secondary priorities:

- Examine the extent and significance of global variations in SDA mission and ministry
- Examine Adventists' beliefs, perceptions, and practices and global variations of these items (general research, as opposed to focused research for (a) above)
- Analyze the dynamics of denominational outreach to various populations/people groups.

Methodologies:

- Quantitative and qualitative approaches are both equally welcome, and although ASTR is especially interested in rigorous human-source research (such as population surveys or qualitative interviews), it is also willing to fund historical and purely statistical analysis of existing data, where it would help meet the GC's research objectives. Research does not have to be applied, it can be theoretical, although the applied is likely to be given priority over the theoretical.

Mechanisms for GC Support of Research Projects

ASTR will:

- A. Specify research that the GC needs (chiefly applied research, intended to enable rigorous evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of existing denominational programs), and issue Requests for Proposals (RFP) to carry out the specified research.
- B. Support initiatives by existing Andrews University faculty and post-graduate researchers through the AU Faculty Research Grant (FRG) mechanism, where faculty research has the potential to meet the GC's research objectives (see above).

Application for GC funding

- ASTR welcomes applications in response to an RFP or FRG application from all Andrews University researchers whose research has the potential to meet the GC's objectives.
- ASTR encourages interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research networks, as these are especially likely to produce findings that meet the GC's objectives.
- Research teams may include non-Adventists, but in that case the team must be based at Andrews University, led by a churchmember, and a rationale supplied for including non-Adventists.

Application for funding is possible in two tracks:

A. When ASTR issues a RFP, a copy will be sent to the Andrews University Office of Research and Creative Scholarship, which will distribute it to Andrews faculty.

The RFP will specify:

- the subject to be studied,
- research objectives,
- preferred time frame for the completion of the work,
- date the application is due,
- how the outcomes are intended to be used, including any potential limitations on dissemination, and
- when funding decisions will be made.

Proposals in response to an RFP should:

- outline methodology,
- include substantial literature review to place the research in its context,
- overall time frame for key stages and expected completion dates,
- relevant experience and expertise of key personnel,
- budget, timeline for payments, and associated Key Performance Indicators, and
- proposed dissemination venues for the results.

- Grants from ASTR in to a successful RFP response will probably be substantial.

B. Through Andrews University Faculty Research Grant Mechanism

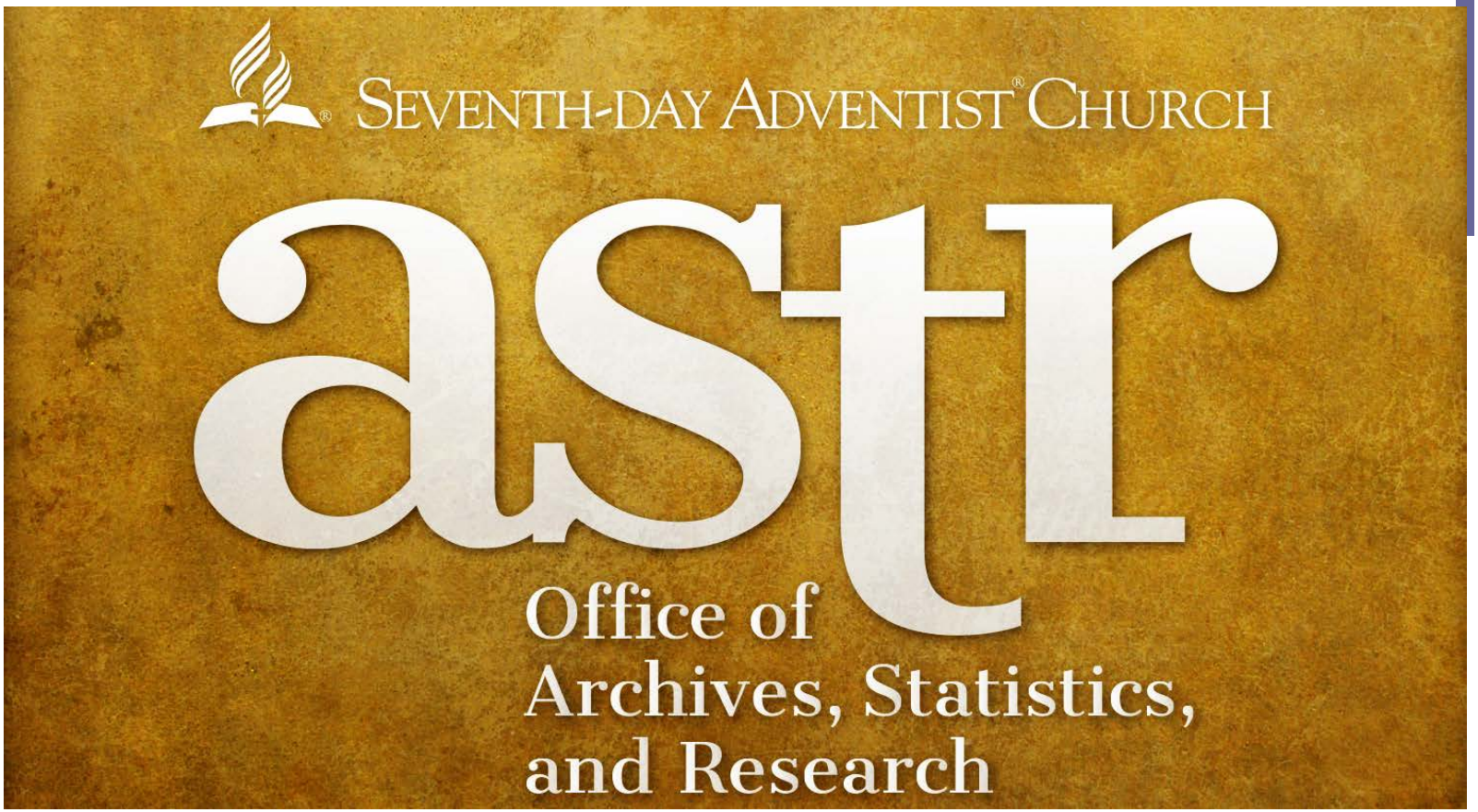
- At AU, applications for Faculty Research Grant funding, if they meet the GC research objectives, can request consideration for funding by ASTR, either by asking for matching funding or making a case for GC funding to exceed institutional funding limits. These awards are likely to be relatively small grants.
- ASTR review will be coordinated with the Andrews Faculty Research Grant application process.

- The ASTR and AU review process will be independent. That is, ASTR and AU will each review applications to determine separate and joint interest.
- While it is expected that there will be projects of joint interests, ASTR may fund Faculty Research Grant Applications that the AU process does not fund, and Andrews University may fund Faculty Research Grants that focus on GC research objectives that ASTR chooses not to fund.
- Funding will be coordinated through the AU Office of Research and Creative Scholarship, which will set up a funded account for handling GC funds and meet GC reporting requirements.

- Response to an ASTR RFP or application for GC funding through Andrews University Faculty Research Grant must be submitted to the Office of Research and Creative Scholarship for coordination and approval.

Research Projects of Graduate Students

- Research projects that meet GC objectives
- Research projects that could be useful for the worldwide church
- Research projects that are dealing with more than one division
- Research projects that are dealing with strategic issues or trends identified by Strategic plan
- Protocol for grant applications
- Quality control in research



www.adventistarchives.org