

Weimar's Vexing Question: Accreditation?

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“Let us determine that we shall not be tied by so much as a thread to the educational policies of those who do not discern the voice of God...” EGW LLM p. 6

Why is Weimar College not accredited?

The dedicated and visionary founders of Weimar believed that “our first allegiance is to God, so the Scriptures and writings of Ellen White will be our first sources.”

Thus in 1977 Weimar saw no need to “ask worldlings” how to operate this new and spiritually innovative institution. And today, in 2004, the sentiment of both the college faculty and institute board is admirably the same, as evidenced in this grand Ellen White quotation: **“By pen and voice labor to sweep back the false ideas that have taken possession of men’s minds regarding the higher education.”** SMC 448

Well then, I suppose that Weimar has never requested any kind of “worldly permission” to operate our school...right?

Wrong! From almost Day One, Weimar has sought and received State “accreditation,” first with Bible-college status, then later we re-applied after the California Education Reform Act was passed about 1989. At that time we sought licensing (accreditation) as a liberal arts four-year college. That elongated effort helped create the “challenging years” when the State essentially shut down all our majors but Religion and our enrollment plummeted by the late 90’s. It is only in recent years that we have been given permission again by the State to offer degrees in education and health as well as religion.

Wait a minute! I always thought Weimar had nothing to do with all this licensing and State-imposed mandate stuff... What’s going on?

What’s “going on” is simply that Weimar is following all the counsel of the Prophetess, not just out-of-context island quotations. You see, Weimar wants to remain open---and do so without violating our freedom to construct a uniquely Adventist curriculum.

So, where does Weimar get the idea from Ellen White that we ought to be licensed or accredited?

We begin by citing the challenge that faced the Adventist medical work in her day, the very same challenge that Weimar's education and health departments confront in 2004, and that is simply this: *Do we want our students to have a college training that will permit them to work in their field of choice?*

For Ellen White the answer is clear: ***“From the light that the Lord has given me, I know that our training-schools in various parts of the field should be placed in the most favorable position possible for qualifying our youth to meet the tests specified by state laws...”*** FE 490 [emphasis added]

Is Weimar College today in a “most favorable position” to qualify students to be teachers or health workers? Not at all. Be prepared to weep as we review recent history.

For more than 25 years Weimar has been directly under the invasive arm of the State when we could have been accredited by an independent and volunteer agency that would have satisfied the State's licensing demands without Big Brother coming onto our campus with the threat of law.

The volunteer accrediting agency I speak of is WASC, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. If we were a WASC member, literally every graduating student would have a “lunch-ticket” to pervasive opportunities in Adventist Education, to say nothing of countless other opportunities as “tentmakers” outside the church.

Weimar is at a crossroads. But first, let us make ourselves crystal clear: Weimar faculty will continue to enthusiastically uphold those precious non-negotiable essentials that have made us such a special educational center. For sure, the spirit of commitment and innovation that motivated our pioneers is the same spirit that impels us to seek creative answers to our current dilemma.

What dilemma? What problems are we facing? Are they serious?

Let me answer with an Ellen White quotation and then personal comments from both students and myself. *“But let none take license from this [being consecrated to God] to be indolent, to squander time and opportunities, and neglect the training that is essential in order to become efficient.”* CT 510

This fall I have been zealously recruiting for Weimar from “Dan to Beersheba” and the sad truth is that for too many, Weimar College is viewed as guilty of being “indolent”

and neglectful of providing the training necessary for graduates to enter today's sophisticated and complex world of work.

Now I say this with sorrow and a singular spirit of enthusiasm for Weimar; this is my third time on the faculty. I have returned because I believe in what Weimar stands for, but I cannot in good conscience close my eyes while many students "foul out" in frustration over the loss of college-level training, to say nothing of the lack of a viable degree that qualifies one for occupations outside our corridors.

The above problem cannot be overstated. It is exponential beyond belief. But neither is it "unfixable". Already our outstanding administration has arranged to connect our school with Griggs University to help solve the accreditation problem and they have hired a "Spanish Armada" of teachers for the college. It's a thrill just to be part of the team! But I know that the same exuberant atmosphere was here in 1991, the year the college topped 130 students. And that fact solemnizes me greatly. Why? Because the causes of the unraveling of our college in the 90's are still present, and unless we are willing to bluntly face the reasons for that tragedy, it's only a matter of time until we will again be struggling to rise from the ashes of low student enrollment and a faltering college.

What exactly are those "causes" that bring educational disaster?

They are primarily two-fold: Firstly, even the most dedicated educators usually remain only a short time at Weimar because there is no "living wage"; and secondly, as a result of this constant flux of faculty, the viability and standards of the college will continue to oscillate like an EKG machine.

The result? Even after "great and grand" interludes of high academics and stellar teachers, there is frequently a corresponding period of stagnation and struggle just to maintain a skeletal façade of what "used to be." And all this in the context of the excellent teachers who remain, but are "out-gunned" by the overwhelming academic workload and lack of qualified colleagues necessary to maintain a successful program.

How have students responded to all these challenges?

Well, you've heard the saying: They "voted with their feet." Certainly, that's exactly what has been happening at Weimar. If we could keep just half our students who have prematurely left, we'd be literally awash in funds and high enrollment.

One can't help but wonder: Why do so many leave "before their time?" And what can we do to arrest this tragic development? To answer, I'm going to let a few students share in their own words just how they and many others feel...may we all read, ponder, and pray!

[From student questionnaires given to me when I returned to Weimar this past fall]

1. “If there wasn’t such a huge staff turnover there would not be so much confusion and change. Teachers cannot guide students because students often outlast the teachers.”

2. “That’s quality [Griggs University], we aren’t quality---[just] slip through the easy way.”

3. “Griggs supposedly lends Weimar more credibility. Griggs is widely recognized as an accredited school and Weimar is not.”

Add to the above student statements the following sentiments, written one year ago by an outstanding, dedicated, yet frustrated student who, thankfully, is now having a much more positive Weimar experience:

“User-friendly is not a term that can be used to describe Weimar College. As a senior and potential graduate of Weimar College, I look forward to the day I can ‘grab my diploma and run.’”

After being “subjected” to such frankness, I suppose we older folk can respond one of two ways. Either we can shake our heads and point our fingers or we can “get real serious” with ourselves and admit that indeed this student dissatisfaction is not without just cause.

While much more could be said, suffice it to say that now is the hour to seriously re-examine the role and reason for the existence of Weimar College. If we choose to remain as we are, we’ll continue to stumble along, providing limiting degrees to a limited number of students.

Conversely, we can rise to the occasion and proclaim: God has brought Weimar College to the Kingdom for such a time as this! We have a unique calling, not to replicate the wonderful work that many short-term self-supporting Adventist “colleges” are providing, but to train committed youth who seek to be professionally qualified as teachers and health workers.

Consequently, I respectfully propose that we immediately and diligently seek accreditation for Weimar. And why? So that we are neither bound to the State nor to other educational institutions to obtain “permission” for our students to enter the teaching and medical ministries.

With God’s help, we can mightily overcome this challenge...as a team!