

Griggs University

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Alayne Thorpe, Ph.D., is the dean for the College of Education & International Services at Andrews University. She also serves as the University's dean of graduate studies. Alayne has a long history in distance and higher education, both as an administrator and a faculty member, including roles as vice president and interim president of Griggs University at the time of its transition to Andrews.

In the early 1900s, because educational opportunities were rare, correspondence education was increasing in popularity within the United States. Adventist educators at Walla Walla College and Keene Academy had attempted to develop correspondence schools. Goodloe Harper Bell, the first teacher of the first Adventist school, who is also considered to be the founder of Adventist education, hoped to develop such an organization.¹ Eventually,

Bell collaborated with educator Frederick Griggs, secretary of education for the General Conference, who envisioned educating people around the world. As a result, The Fireside Correspondence School was established in 1909. The goal was to provide the benefits of an education to those unable to attend traditional schools?²

Newly appointed principal Mahlon E. Olsen expanded the work of the Fireside Correspondence School until its enrollment grew to be the largest of any school within the denomination.³ Within two years, the Fireside Correspondence School was offering 11 secondary and nine college courses. By 1916, its students represented nearly every state and province in North America and 12 countries.⁴

In 1931, the Fireside Correspondence School was renamed Home Study Institute. It had an enrollment of more than 2,700 students, representing over 50 countries.



Educator - Frederick Griggs

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

In 1982 the school was renamed Home Study International. In 1990, Griggs University/Home Study International was created, with Griggs University serving as the degree-granting branch of HSI. Also in 1990, Griggs, which had operated for six decades in Takoma Park, Maryland, moved its headquarters to Silver Spring, Maryland. Griggs was granted permission by the Maryland Higher Education Commission to offer degree programs in several disciplines. At that point, the Griggs Board of Directors assigned names to each of its three academic divisions: Home Study Elementary School, Home Study High School, and Griggs University⁵

In 1991 Griggs began offering college degrees to international students who would otherwise have no access to a Seventh-day Adventist campus.

In 2003 the board voted to name the K-12 division Griggs International Academy. These name changes were registered with the State of Maryland and various accrediting agencies.

In 2006 the name Home Study International was retired, and its elementary, secondary and university offerings were given the combined name of Griggs University and Griggs International Academy in honor of founder Frederick Griggs.⁶ Online courses were developed, providing a new learning environment for students.

In 2009 the Seventh-day Adventist church formed a Commission on Distance Education Models and Structure to conduct an in-depth investigation of best practices for distance education and to make recommendations on expanding its distance education offerings to better meet the needs of a rapidly growing worldwide constituency.⁷

In October 2010, the commission brought a formal recommendation to the Annual Council meetings of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University, that ownership of Griggs University and Griggs International Academy be transferred to Andrews University. Andrews University faculty and administration also met and deliberated on the impact that ownership of Griggs would make upon the university structure.⁸

Those deliberations were informed by a long-term partnership that had already been enjoyed between Griggs University and Andrews University, as they offered distance education degree programs through Griggs, and as the university had also been offering its own array of online courses and programs through its academic schools.

At the same time, the Andrews University Board considered a plan to bring Griggs to Andrews University in its entirety.

After researching many models and possible working relationships, Provost Andrea Luxton (who became president of Andrews University in 2016) presented a plan to the Andrews University Board of Trustees at its October 2010 meeting which recommended Griggs University/Griggs International Academy be formally integrated into the general university structure as part of the new School of Distance Education.⁹

With this new plan, there would no longer be a president for Griggs. Instead, Griggs would be overseen by an Andrews University academic dean and two associate deans (one for higher education and one for K-12) who would serve in place of vice presidents. General services for Griggs University (records, admissions, marketing, human resources, technology services, enrollment and finances) would be handled by personnel dedicated to Griggs but embedded and working within the various Andrews University departments handling those services for the entire University. These basic concepts—the creation of an Andrews University School of Distance Education by merging Griggs University and Andrews University and the embedding of Griggs services on campus—became important principles in the transition process. They also helped provide a structure to strengthen both the management and support of online education.

At the same October 2010 Andrews University Board of Trustees Meeting, it was also voted to ask Alayne Thorpe, then president of Griggs University/Griggs International Academy, to serve as the dean of the School of Distance Education. She was given the title of interim president of Griggs University/Griggs International Academy, as well, to meet specific procedural and legal needs for Griggs during this time of transition!¹⁰

After analyzing the physical administrative and teaching space required, Andrews University purchased a building on the edge of its campus that was built and owned by the Lake Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The first floor of the second wing of that building, and several offices on its second floor, provided spaces for the newly formed School of Distance Education/Griggs University & Griggs International Academy.

In a nod to both a shared history and the integration and operation of Griggs University and Griggs International Academy on the Andrews University campus, the entire building space was renamed Griggs Hall after Frederick Griggs, the founder of Griggs University/Griggs International Academy, a person who was also important to the history and development of Andrews University.

Following the Griggs University physical move to and integration with Andrews University, completed in 2011, other organizational changes occurred, including the renaming of the Griggs University Consortium to the Consortium of Adventist Colleges & Universities.¹¹ That Consortium was later fully integrated into the Andrews University School of Distance Education & International Partnerships. At that point, all Griggs University courses and degrees were fully integrated into Andrews University coursework and degrees, and Griggs University no longer operated as a distinct entity.

Also at that point, the School of Distance Education & International Partnerships then fully coordinated all operations of the Consortium of Adventist Colleges & Universities. The newly formed School of Distance Education & International Partnerships continued to offer oversight for all international programs owned and operated by Andrews University.

In 2019, following an academic restructuring, Griggs International Academy—which continues to operate globally—is now a formal part of the Andrews University College of Education & International Services.¹²

In addition to offering programs directly to students, Griggs International Academy and the Andrews University College of Education & International Services works in partnership with a number of Adventist and other private and public institutions around the world to provide religion and business programs to local populations, modeling these international agreements after processes first established by Andrews University.

From its early years, when it operated out of a one-room office, Griggs has focused on the goal of operating a worldwide school system that maintained high scholastic standards, using the services of qualified professionals committed to the Adventist education mission in all phases of its operation. In turn, people from all walks of life discovered that private correspondence, or online study, helped them develop self-reliance, independent thinking, and responsibility. And, since it began in the early 1900s, the Griggs system has emphasized a personal focus in its student-teacher relationships, giving students guidance and tutoring however it's needed.

Today Griggs International Academy continues to play a vital role in the educational development of students in many parts of the world and has a central role to play in the global Seventh-day Adventist school system.

Nearly a century later, more than 240,000 students have been impacted through a variety of distance studies options offered over the years by Griggs International Academy, the Andrews University College of Education & International Services, Griggs University, Home Study International and the Fireside Correspondence School.¹³

Presidents of Griggs University

Frederick Griggs, 1909; Warren Eugene Howell, 1909–1920; Charles Clarke Lewis, 1920–1923; Mahlon E. Olsen, 1923–1946; W. Homer Teesdale, 1946–1965; Delmer W. Holbrook, 1965–1986; George P. Babcock, 1986–1989; Joseph E. Gurubatham, 1989–2004; Alayne Thorpe, 2004–2005 (interim); Donald R. Sahly, 2005–2010; Alayne Thorpe, 2011– .

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NOTES

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2. Gary Land, "Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists," 157.
3. John Wesley Taylor V, "A Safe Place Without Walls," *Adventist World*, June 29, 2018.
4. Gary Land, "The A to Z of the Seventh-day Adventists," 136.
5. P. Clint Rogers and Scott L. Howell, "Use of Distance Education by Religions of the World to Train, Edify, and Educate Adherents," 11.
6. Milton Gaither, "Homeschool: An American History," 79.
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