



By Steven J. Henderson, Dayton A. Kingsriter and George O. Wood

Choices ... life choices ... we all have to make them. Today's generation of college-age students are on the verge of making some of the most important choices of their lives. These choices include choosing Jesus Christ as personal Savior, a college to attend, a career, and a life-partner.

Most of us are simply naïve about how important the choice of a college is as it relates to these other life choices. But it's clear from the literature, research and experience that the choice of a college has much to do with all of these. So, what else matters about college besides cost and getting a degree?

• **Attendance at a public or private nonreligious college lowers religious commitment.** Fifty-two percent of students no longer claim to be born-again, or quit attending church after three or four years at a secular college or university.

• **Schools affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) have a proven beneficial track record.** Students at CCCU schools experience only one-fourth the drop in church attendance, and one-seventh the drop in prayer and meditation, but nearly five times the increase in

overall religious commitment.

• **Committed faith can become a shipwrecked faith.** Students from more conservative religious backgrounds lose their faith at a higher rate (up to 67 percent loss) than students from less-conservative denominations when they attend non-Christian colleges.

• **The first year away from home can be tricky.** Statistics show that students become significantly less religiously active during the first year of college. One of the greatest benefits of attending a Christian college is to be in an environment where both peers and faculty will encourage you to make biblical decisions.

In light of these findings, students and parents can make some key choices in order to maintain a life direction of spiritual integrity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

• **Attend a faith-based institution the first year.** Research shows the first year is the most critical for setting the course of one's religious commitment.

• **Don't be blinded by dollar signs.** Your spiritual life has an eternal value a college education must not undermine. Compare the

bottom-line financial package and spiritual benefits carefully before choosing a college.

• **Don't become complacent.** No matter which college you attend, commit to an ongoing devotional life and regular attendance at a local church. Find campus ministries that involve you in service to others and provide a place to be with Christian peers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS:

• **Encourage them.** Help your student be consistent in church attendance and involvement.

• **Stay involved.** Visit your student's college prior to his or her enrollment and during his or her college years. Meet your student's friends and invite them to your home on breaks and vacations.

• **Don't relax.** No matter where your student attends, stay involved and connected.

How does the picture look when we move from the home to the church? The Assemblies of God's Annual Church Ministries Report for 2005 shows that 315,000 young people between the ages of 13 and 17 attend 12,301 U.S. Assemblies of God churches. The future of our Movement lies with these young people.

How many of them will be serving the Lord nine years from now? While we can never know the future, we can look at past history to give us an idea of what tomorrow will look like.

In the March 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*, (p.80f), Dr. Steve Henderson, president of Christian Consulting for Colleges and Ministries, Inc., reports on his research and that of other scholars regarding evangelical students who enter nonevangelical public and

private colleges and universities. The studies have found at least half and possibly more than two-thirds of our young people will step away from the Christian faith while attending a non-Christian college or university.

However, the falling-away percentage of students attending an evangelical school stands at about 7 percent.

Let's apply this data to the Assemblies of God. Where will our 315,000 Assemblies of God young people be nine years from now?

- 315,000 Assemblies of God young people from ages 13 to 17 will graduate from high school within the next five years.
- According to national statistics, 105,000 (one-third) will not go to any college or university.
- 210,000 (two-thirds) will

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enter one of the 4,000 colleges or universities in America.

- 31,500 will enter one of the 102 schools belonging to the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (an evangelical association for higher education — in which many of our Assemblies of God colleges and universities hold membership).
- 178,500 will enter a public or

private non-Christian university.

- About 10,500 of our Assemblies of God youth will enter an Assemblies of God college or university.
- Between 89,250 and 119,000 Assemblies of God young people who attend a non-Christian public or private university will have left the faith four years after entering college.

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THESE STUDENTS NEED TO BE IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE BOTH PEERS AND FACULTY ARE NOT HOSTILE TO CHRISTIAN AND PENTECOSTAL FAITH AND VALUES, BUT DEEPLY SUPPORTIVE OF SUCH.

• If the same percentages hold true for the 105,000 AG kids not going to college, then we are set to lose another 52,500 to 70,000 of our youth. All told, nine years from now, as many as 189,000 of our 315,000 youth could be dropouts from the faith.

These statistics raise some deeply troubling questions — one of which is this: “Would we rather lose 7 percent or between one-half to two-thirds of the college-bound

young people who are presently in our youth groups?”

These statistics make the strongest case possible for encouraging our young people to attend one of the 19 endorsed post-secondary institutes, colleges and universities of the Assemblies of God; and marshaling our pastors and churches to stand behind our schools with significant levels of support and prayer.

We are doing a great job

evangelizing junior high and senior high young people. But once past high school, these kids are not only leaving our churches but also the faith — in droves.

One of our prominent laymen made this statement back in the 1950s before we brought focus to higher education for those not entering the ministry: “I have supported my church for a long time and very generously; but the thing I would rather give to the church [my own children] more than anything else was lost to the church because of their experience in higher education.”

What can be done?

• In addition to high-energy programs and emotion-focused responses, our kids need thorough grounding in what we believe, and the underlying reason for why we behave as Christians.

• We must maintain personal contact with students who leave our churches for college.

• We must encourage our college-bound high school students and their parents to go to an endorsed Assemblies of God school.

These students need to be in an environment where both peers and faculty are not hostile to Christian and Pentecostal faith and values, but deeply supportive of such.

• Our churches must ramp up their prayer and financial support of our endorsed AG schools.

• Our churches must ramp up their support for Chi Alpha and help this vital campus ministry expand until all of the 4,000 college and university campuses of America have a vibrant Pentecostal Chi Alpha chapter.

• There must be a renewed focus within our pastoral leadership, church boards, and congregations to conserve the harvest of our present junior and senior high young people.

• Finally, our Assemblies of God churches in the vicinity of colleges

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L I V I N G I T

College blues at secular U

Feeling like the only Christian in your dorm? Missing your family? Are you ready to kill for a home-cooked meal?

Read Daniel 1 and consider the plight of these four freshmen.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah got a full-ride scholarship to Babylon U. Tuition, room and board all courtesy of King Nebuchadnezzar. Top-flight instructors from across the world's greatest empire ready to guide them through a three-year crash curriculum in leadership and diplomacy.

But there were some catches.

Letters from home? Forget it. Their families were decimated when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem. Issues with the cafeteria? This food broke God's dietary laws and threatened the soul as well as the digestion.

Most challenging of all — and a detail that hasn't changed much in 2,600 years — was the godless campus life. These guys were forcibly pledged into a fraternity that awarded nicknames honoring heathen idols. Daniel's three friends are better known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. At every turn they were tempted to give up their spiritual heritage and live for the day.

They would have none of it. They risked their lives to stay true to God, refusing to defile themselves with Nebuchadnezzar's food and wine. They may have been far from home but held true to their home values. They ignored the pagan temples dotting Babylon's skyline and lived as if the true temple were still next door.

"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding" (Daniel 1:17, NIV). They graduated head of their class.

College brings a lot of different pressures to bear. Take a cue from Daniel and his roommates. Look beyond the weekend keggers, co-ed temptations and profs who might be riding you about your faith. Take the long view, the eternal view.

Let God move you to the head of the class.

SCOTT HARRUP is senior associate editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

and universities must penetrate into this great mission field.

As you go through the process of selecting a college that is right for you, answers to the following questions will help you:

1. What is the academic quality on the campus you want to attend? Are full professors or teaching assistants leading the classes? What is the class size? Is radical feminism or pressure from homosexual groups changing how the curriculum is developed and taught on the campus you want to attend? You are more likely to have full professors teaching you in smaller classes at an AG school than a secular school.

2. What are the social conditions? Is sexual promiscuity tolerated, or even encouraged? Do student gatherings often lead to binge drinking and other ungodly behavior? AG schools have policies against drinking and promiscuity.

3. What is the spiritual climate? Are students consistently encouraged to follow God and discern His best direction for life? Godly faculty members and peers will influence you toward God, not away from Him, at AG schools.

Who should attend a Christian college? That decision has to be made individually. However, too many Christian students (or their parents) are not giving God the opportunity to guide them to an Assemblies of God college because they never even consider attending an AG college in the first place.

Keep your options open. Keep your heart sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. In the end, a lot more than your education is riding on the choice you make. **tpe**

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