

God's Bible School and College

Response to ABHE Team Report

November 14, 2006

Recapping the Team Visit

God's Bible School and College (GBSC) was pleased to host the evaluation team for the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) in this 10-year reaffirmation visit (Sept. 25-27, 2006). Since the faculty and staff were well prepared, they were somewhat relaxed, helping the visit to proceed smoothly. The team was professional and easy to host. They consisted of:

- Dr. Charles Bethel, VP for Academic Affairs, Appalachian Bible College;
- Dr. James Estep, Christian Ed Professor, Lincoln Christian College and Seminary;
- Mr. Robert Schriek, Library Director, Somerset Christian College;
- Mr. Steven Witter, Director of Advancement & Constituent Services, Emmaus Bible College;
- Mr. Tom Sass, VP for Financial Affairs, Free Will Baptist Bible College.

The team came to campus to verify what was presented in GBSC's self-study documents as well as to meet with various staff and to review documents relevant to the institution.

From the initial dinner with the team and GBSC administrators, it was readily apparent that the ABHE office had assembled an excellent team. They were indeed high-quality professionals and great people. The team members were gracious guests, and it was a joy getting to know them and learn from them. Not only did they ask good questions, but also the suggestions they made came from a wealth of administrative experience.

In addition to meetings with the administration and with individual faculty and staff, the team met representatives from of the following groups: Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, and students.

At the end of their visit, the team conducted an Exit Interview with the administrators and a small group of selected staff. The team chair was complimentary of our institution, our leadership team, faculty and staff and commented that this was one of the most comfortable visits he had ever been on. He then read a list of the team's commendations, recommendations, and suggestions. President Avery thanked the team and conveyed how appreciative GBSC was for their work.

While we are very pleased with the ten commendations, the remainder of this document will focus on the team's four recommendations.

GBSC's Commitment to Work on the Identified Areas

The institution not only accepts the findings of the ABHE team, but has also begun considering how it can improve in these identified areas. In fact, the four recommendations largely relate to concerns we had identified in the process of self-study and were already working on. Action steps have already been taken, and plans have been drawn up to move GBSC forward.

Recommendation 1: Assessment and Planning

The Team recommends that the college give full attention to and demonstrate proof of a well-defined, comprehensive planning and assessment document which provides use of data for utilization in future strategic planning and budgeting. (Standard 2)

The team noted that the “school is in embryonic stages of developing an institution-wide, vibrant assessment document that encompasses a continuous, structured process. While the faculty assessment is further along, the complete college family is not scheduled to be fully involved until 2007.” Additionally, the team mentioned that “not all collected assessment statistics are distributed back to the various affected departments” and that “there is not sufficient evidence that the assessment process is being utilized.”

On the planning front, the team discussed the connection between assessment and strategic planning, stating that “comprehensive funding for items included in strategic planning should be quantified and tied to figure budgeting.”

It is true that assessment on the academic centers of the institution is in fairly good shape. In the process of self-study, we identified two weaknesses in this area: insufficient assessment of institutional effectiveness and lack of robust process mechanisms to evaluate the data and allow it to impact planning and budgeting. The team's concerns validate our self-assessment in this area.

To address these concerns, the Assessment Committee has been tasked with broadening the focus of assessment beyond the academic divisions. The first step was identifying all of the “units” that comprise the campus. Thirty-two of these Units of Institutional Effectiveness (UIEs) were identified.

Each faculty or staff member with oversight of a UIE was asked to do the following:

- Write a short mission statement or statement of purpose;
- Develop 3 to 5 objectives that can be used to measure mission achievement;
- Determine how fulfillment of these objectives will be assessed.

Each member of the Assessment Committee was assigned to be a liaison between the Assessment Committee and four or five of the UIEs, giving them assistance in preparing for adequate assessment. The first phase of this project is to be completed by December 15, 2006. Subsequent to that, the first campus-wide UIE assessment will take place, with assessment data being distributed to UIEs as determined in their respective plans. The following sequence of events will then follow:

- UIE Reports due to Director of Institutional Research (DIR) by March 15, 2007. These are to contain assessment results, critical analyses, changes suggested as a result of assessment (if any), and budget needs to effect changes.
- The DIR, with the help of the Assessment Committee, will produce the institution's Annual Assessment Report, which will be placed on the GBSC intranet for feedback and discussion.
- Departments/Units will discuss their relevant sections of the Annual Assessment Report during Assessment Week 2007 (May 28-June 1). They will discuss suggested additions to the next year's plans. Minutes of these meetings will be sent to the Strategic Planning Team (SPT) at the end of Assessment Week, indicating proposed action items.
- The SPT will review all the minutes and determine which action items will be placed into the next year's schedule of strategic-planning action items. Some items will most likely be scheduled for succeeding years, rather than the next year. The SPT's suggestions will go to the Administrative Committee.
- The Administrative Committee will review and approve the changes to the plans.
- Updated plans will be circulated on campus and on the GBSC intranet.
- During Faculty Week at the beginning of the next academic year, the faculty and staff will have a joint meeting that includes the "Annual Planning Update," which reviews the plan accomplishments of the previous year and orients personnel to what is scheduled to be accomplished according to the plan for the current year.

This schedule of assessment and planning will recycle. Each year will begin with the Annual Planning Update and will end with assessments and suggestions during Assessment Week at the end of the academic year.

It is of note that every 3-5 years the school will convene a strategic-planning retreat: the main purpose of which will be to generate new ideas – broader, more long-term goals – that the Strategic Planning Team will review and consider for inclusion in future updates of the plan. The next such session is scheduled for 2007 and will be modeled after the process utilized in December 2004, which involved administration, faculty, staff, students, and members of the Board.

Recommendation 2: Attention to Salaries

The Team recommends that the increase of salaries be given heightened attention in the strategic plan and budgeting processes. (Standard 6a)

Noting that “most employees have housing and a substantial amount of meals provided,” the team also stated that “remuneration is still considered inadequate.” Particularly important on this front, the team expressed the belief that GBSC’s “ability to attract and maintain future high-quality employees will be enhanced as attention is given” to salary increases.

There has been a commitment on the part of the administration and the Board to increase salaries. This began four years ago by giving year-end bonuses to employees that amounted to a minimum of 5% of the annual compensation. Even when a reduced bonus was given one year, the amount was added to next year’s bonus to “catch up.”

The bonus plan had been intended to demonstrate that such increases could be sustained within budgetary parameters. At that point, the bonuses would be institutionalized as increases in salaries. This was on our STAND Plan to begin AY 2005-2006. However, the enrollment (and corresponding revenue) drop in Fall 2005 postponed those plans. Efforts were made to address the new realities in order to recalibrate the timing of the increases. The current 5-year budget has built in the following salary increases:

- 5% salary increase in 2009
- 5% salary increase in 2011

Recommendation 3: Revenue Considerations

The Team recommends that increased efforts be put forth to bolster unrestricted fund giving, increase enrollments and boost revenue streams from the K-12 program in order to assure proper levels of revenue for the future. (Standard 6b)

The team expressed concern that in recent years, perhaps due to our successful capital campaign, restricted giving has increased at the expense, in part, of unrestricted giving. The Fall 2005 enrollment drop also negatively affected income. Finally, the team noted that the K-12th grade on-site academy “is partially subsidized by the college.” These concerns are best addressed individually.

Bolstering unrestricted fund giving. Nearly 40 cents of every dollar used to operate GBSC must come through donations. Over the last five years, much has been accomplished, including many of the projects of the Faith in the Future capital campaign. Through the campaign our debt has been eliminated, a new floor for our academy constructed, a number of properties acquired, and a new

building begun. But even though total giving is up, the percentage of giving for general operations is down. In 2001, only 7% of all giving was specified. In 2006, 41% of all giving was specified, leaving only 59% of all giving that was available to run the day-to-day operation of this institution. This shift is problematic, even in a climate of increased overall giving.

To address this change in giving patterns, the Vice President for Advancement has written a prominent article in the November issue of the institution's publication, the *Revivalist*, with pie charts to educate the constituency of the necessity to increase unrestricted fund giving. As the capital campaign comes to an end, the time may be ideal for this constituency education, with efforts helping to shift new, but restricted, giving from the campaign to continued, unrestricted giving.

Increasing enrollments. The institution did experience a 9% drop in enrollment in Fall 2005 from its 20-year high of the previous year. This, coupled with a budget built on a 3% enrollment gain, caused the institution to reconsider some expenditures.

The Vice President for Advancement has reported that although Student Recruitment's computer-driven task sequencing did occur, it was not complete. Therefore, prospects did not get all the contacts the sequence demands. This condition has been addressed and the sequence has been up-to-date since that time. Additionally, there are ongoing efforts to increase staffing in the Office of Student Recruitment to enable increased efforts.

There was another 9% decrease in enrollment in Spring 2006. At that time, the Vice President for Academic Affairs mobilized the academic community to be more involved in both retention and recruitment efforts. A system of spreadsheets was developed that assisted each academic division in working to retain its current students and to recruit new prospects. All of these spreadsheets were based on a four-year study of retention/attrition and of conversion rates for accepted prospects. Additionally, returning students not registered or accepted prospects are given weighted ratings by division advisors and the recruitment personnel as "weak," "strong," or "not returning/coming." The data from all the individual division spreadsheets automatically updates a one-page "Grand Summary Enrollment" spreadsheet. These were placed on the institution's intranet, which allows the campus family to stay apprised of enrollment projections. The formulas behind the spreadsheets performed well for Fall 2006. We were able to stabilize our falling enrollment with a modest gain. Spreadsheets are now being utilized for Spring 2007. We are attempting to maintain the Fall 2006 enrollment for Spring 2007, which would be quite a feat in that our historical average change from Fall to Spring is 7.1% decrease. Additionally, our STAND Plan goal for Fall 2007 is 288. It is our intention to keep this as our goal, which will put us back on track with a 3% increase per year.

Another strategy for addressing enrollment decline is to improve retention. A major initiative arising from the STAND Plan was the creation of the Student One Stop (SOS), which opened in September 2006. The SOS is staffed by a full-time employee who assists students in solving any problem they may have. The SOS Director was also asked to chair the Cross-Functional Retention Team, which has been functioning for approximately two years.

Additionally, the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) began a new initiative at the beginning of Fall 2006. For a number of years, incoming students had taken the College Student Inventory (CSI), which identifies and gives specific information on “at-risk students.” The VPSA met with the Academic Committee and explained to the division chairs that they now had access to all CSI data. Division chairs and the SOS Director were tasked with identifying the at-risk students and exhausting all options in getting them appropriate support. As this group was not specifically targeted in the past, we will have the data necessary to determine if we retained a greater percentage of at-risk students. Relatedly, we are participating in the ABHE retention study through Noel-Levitz; we anticipate gaining additional helpful information from this project.

The STAND Plan also calls for a marketing study to identify new prospect markets and new marketing strategies. The end result is to create a new marketing plan for the college with an implementation plan complete with timeline. One specific aspect of the plan is to develop a strategy to target home-school students as prospects.

Boosting revenue from the K-12 program. Although the K-12 program is not under the authority of the ABHE, there is a concern that the program should not constitute a financial drain on the larger institution and, therefore, the college. The most recent financial statements indicate that the K-12 program covered its costs and contributed about \$12,000 in profit to the General Fund. With this slim margin, the institution is looking at ways to both boost revenues and to cut costs.

The STAND Plan calls for an increase of six in the K-12 headcount. The target of 185 was missed by 11 (174). Additionally, the Plan calls for a marketing analysis to identify new markets and a marketing plan with an implementation strategy and timeline. The project is to be completed by the end of the current academic year.

Another initiative underway this semester is a “Process and Staffing Study” that is intended to find more efficient ways to implement processes and deal with staffing concerns.

Finally, the Academy’s administrator has recently begun studying the possibility of participating in the State of Ohio’s voucher program. Some area public schools’ performance enables their constituents to access vouchers in order to enroll their students in private schools. This provides, then, a possible additional source of enrollment – and therefore revenue – increase for the Academy.

Recommendation 4: Library Software and Staffing

The Team recommends that the college add an integrated library system to the Flexon Librar, and address any staffing needs, particularly in the area of cataloging. (Standard 10)

In this recommendation, the team summarizes two areas of concerns. First, the team noted that the current library software is flawed: the software lacks “access to any bibliographic utility;” “certain needed functions. . . are no longer working;” the software “is no longer supported by [its] company.”

The staffing concern is partly related to this: the lack of adequate software creates a need for more human resources to catalog materials efficiently. The team notes that relying primarily on student workers “does present a problem of continuity, and would seem to require a considerable amount of retraining.”

These concerns are addressed separately below.

Library software. Since 1990 the library software utilized by the institution has been SLiMS (Small Library Management System). Unfortunately, this is a DOS-based system and is only available in the main library, not remotely. Three years ago GBSC purchased a new library software program, but the company was never able to transfer our data out of SLiMS. We were repeatedly told that “the next release would be able to do this.” It never happened.

Since that time, we have been searching for an affordable integrated library system. Involved in this process is the Head Librarian and the Technology Advisory Group (TAG). After reviewing three main possibilities, TAG, in its November 3, 2006, meeting, agreed to put together a recommendation to purchase an integrated library system offered by Follett. Earlier, the VPAA had asked the Director of Finance to allocate \$8,000 in the current fiscal year for the purchase of library software. Therefore, the move to Follett software, plus the conversion of our collection data, is forecast to be in place by May 15, 2007.

Important in this move is the ability within the new system to access automatic cataloging services. At the present, we have a backlog of new materials not available to patrons because they await manual cataloging.

Library staffing. For a number of years, we had one head librarian, one assistant librarian and a number of library assistants who were current students. The husband of the assistant librarian had a major stroke, which necessitated her relinquishing the position as assistant librarian. Since that time, we have been compensating for the lack of non-student library help with additional hours from student assistants. However, this does not afford us the level of control and the flexibility we desire in our library staffing.

Even though the software upgrade should help address the staffing concern, with expedited cataloging capabilities, we still seek to improve staffing. We had identified a prospect who was finishing his graduate degree in June 2007, and had oral agreements that he would join the GBSC staff. However, at the end of October, we received a letter informing us that upon graduation he was taking a position outside the United States. While this is a setback in our plans, we remain focused on hiring a non-student Library Assistant and will advertise internally and also through our publication, the *Revivalist*.

Conclusion

God's Bible School and College was honored to host this gracious, knowledgeable, thorough, and helpful ABHE team. The institution's personnel were greatly encouraged by the team's statement that

Preparation by the College for the team visit was well done. The team appreciated the cooperation of the God's Bible School & College community throughout the team visit. The administration, faculty, staff, and students demonstrated a positive attitude toward the accreditation process including the self-study and team visit. The team appreciated the excellent hospitality and warm reception provided. It was a pleasure serving ABHE at this institution.

As the institution looks over all that has transpired on the journey to reach this point, the view is encouraging: ABHE's processes have challenged GBSC's personnel to dedicate themselves anew to mission fulfillment, to continuous improvement, and to excellence in every aspect of campus culture. Indeed, the process of self-study has helped all those involved demonstrate their dedication to "lifelong learning."

Yet, easy as it might be to linger at this point and enjoy recounting the successes and growth experienced so far, GBSC's administration, staff, faculty, and students remain uninterested in laurel-resting. Rather than self-congratulation, the tone and tenor of institutional life continues to press the campus community to seek new heights, and to continue this forward progress.

Prepared by:

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