

# **BASIC: Baha'i and Academic Scholarship Integration and Correlation**

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There is a great need among Bahá'í youth at universities to find ways of correlating their knowledge of Bahá'í teachings with their new experiences in college life and coursework. Many youth struggle with conflicting and confusing demands on their time and attention, especially during the first few years of college. Often there is a strong pull toward university life and secular thought and away from Bahá'í studies. The Bahá'í and Academic Scholarship: Integration and Correlation (BASIC) program responds to this need by providing a systematic and compelling mechanism for students to maintain and strengthen their connection to the Bahá'í Faith, while still being fully involved and successful in school. It is a framework composed of independent study tools and mentorship for university students focused on the integration of their particular fields of study and the Baha'i Teachings. The objective of the BASIC initiative is to assist university students to be "people who not only are devoted to [the Bahá'í Faith] and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world<sup>1</sup>." The BASIC program has been created to increase their capacity to bring the perspectives and insights from the Bahá'í Writings to their fields, while broadening and strengthening the resources of the Faith. The intended result of BASIC will be the raising up of a new generation of skilled scholars in every field of human endeavor. BASIC ([www.basicinternational.org](http://www.basicinternational.org)) is currently in its pilot phase, and will launch in the spring of 2002.

## **The BASIC Idea**

Some fields of study are more conducive to the direct application or introduction of Bahá'í Teachings than others. For instance, a Bahá'í studying International Relations might have many opportunities to include Bahá'í concepts in papers or classroom discussions. Such connections might be more difficult for students of engineering who probably write few papers and whose classroom discussions seem to have nothing to do with their religious beliefs. The heart of the BASIC approach is to establish an evolving educational tool that is accessible to all university students in *any major* during any semester or quarter of study. For some students BASIC will be a way to systematize something that they are already doing. For others, it will provide the means to integrate their Faith with their studies that would otherwise not exist.

In BASIC, the student will enroll in an independent study within his own university's academic department. Every American university department has an independent study option within its curriculum, sometimes called by different names, offering the student an opportunity to spend a few hours a week during one or more semesters on a research paper or project of his/her own design. The student will choose an instructor from his/her university, and will use web-based BASIC materials in conjunction with a Bahá'í mentor to complete the independent study. The student will get academic credit for the work, and will produce reports or other materials that will contribute to a growing body of Bahá'í scholarly material. The BASIC mentor will be as involved with the

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<sup>1</sup> From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (21 October, 1943 to an individual believer), *Lights of Guidance*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn., #1404, p. 515, New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983.

student as much or as little as he/she chooses. This could involve anything from one or two conversations to an ongoing highly interactive relationship. The BASIC mentor will assist the student with an independent study course by helping with literature searches, suggesting “hot topics” for projects or research, connecting the student with other knowledgeable or experienced people in their field, discussing new or challenging ideas, reviewing the student’s papers or projects, and providing feedback on the work from a Bahá’í perspective.

Participation by Bahá’í mentors is the key to the success of the BASIC initiative. Students draw on experience, insight, suggestions, and guidance from their mentors during the course of their independent study within their academic departments. Whether they are engaged in the performing arts, engineering, history, physics, biology, linguistics, medicine, business, mathematics, economics, athletics, computer science, journalism, anthropology, or any other field, Bahá’ís in the “real world” are a valuable resource that BASIC seeks to tap for the benefit of all. Any Bahá’í can be a mentor.

## **BASIC Materials**

BASIC materials available to participants are accessible at a website that is centralized, comprehensive, interactive, and secure. Students and mentors are matched up through searchable databases, and can then agree on the scope and level of their interactions as they explore their topics of interest using the other tools provided by the BASIC web pages. The website will provide general guidance for setting up an independent study project. In addition, it will provide access to detailed expertise and questions for thought, centered around connection points between each field and Bahá’í principles and opportunities for service.

Elements of the website include:

1. *Independent study guidelines.* Students can navigate through on-line guidance on Bahá’í scholarship, techniques for independent thought and critical thinking, methods for correlating their studies with Bahá’í Teachings, and opportunities for service. This set of pages incorporates links to existing study programs, compilations on scholarship, and specific suggestions and tips on how to proceed with the BASIC independent study. In time, it will evolve to provide detailed guidance related to each academic discipline.
2. *Literature databases.* Links to searchable databases of all primary and secondary Bahá’í literature, related books, articles, and papers, and any relevant written material will be available from the BASIC website. This literature database will build on already existing databases and search engines. The content will grow as BASIC students submit their papers, projects, and reports, increasing the breadth and depth of information available to Bahá’í students and scholars.
3. *Searchable student database.* Students will enter their profile containing information about their university, year in school, academic interests, coursework, goals, and other relevant information. Students will be able to search the database on any of these profile elements for other students working in similar fields, at nearby universities, with similar goals, or perhaps find students a few years ahead who have completed BASIC and might offer additional guidance.
4. *Searchable expert and mentor database.* Bahá’í experts/mentors will also enter profiles in a searchable database, so that a student may find one or more Bahá’ís to assist them with their BASIC work. Mentors can indicate in their profiles the amount of time they can devote to the project, and interaction can take on any form that is acceptable to the parties involved. It should be noted that mentors come from all sectors of society, not just academia.
5. *Live discussion forums, and archived bulletin boards.* BASIC participants have the opportunity to enter live chatrooms with students and experts to discuss anything of interest relating to their field of study. Forums will be organized according to academic field to

reflect typical university structure.

## **A Forum for Young Scholars**

A key element of BASIC is the opportunity for the young scholars to present the results of their BASIC projects to each other and to the Bahá'í world. Their work is reviewed both by their university professors as well a peer-review process for publishing in Bahá'í publications or electronic databases. They are encouraged to present their papers at conferences such as Association for Bahá'í Studies, or at local and national Bahá'í schools. They are also encouraged and assisted to find ways of presenting their work in settings outside the Bahá'í community, as appropriate.

## **BASIC in Action: How It Works**

Consider the following example: Gretchen is a general engineering student at a small university in Wyoming, where she is the only Bahá'í on campus. She is in her second year of studies, but doesn't yet know which type of engineering she wants to specialize in. She also does not know why she is studying engineering, but it sounded good and pleased her parents, both of whom are professionals, so she is working hard in her classes. She signs up for BASIC and searches the BASIC website for Bahá'í engineers. She finds many interesting people, but is intrigued most by Joseph, who is a geologist and electrical engineer pioneering in Burundi. Joseph is leading reforestation projects using satellite imaging and remote sensing, and employing innovative project management techniques based on Bahá'í consultation. Joseph points out to Gretchen that the images they are using for locating areas of deforestation are not accurately referenced to Global Positioning Coordinates, and this is preventing them from developing efficient strategies for reforestation. Gretchen then proposes to her academic advisor that she would like to learn how to georeference satellite imagery, and her advisor tells her to speak with Professor Jenkins in the Geophysical Engineering Department. Together, Professor Jenkins and Gretchen agree on the scope and end product of her independent study. Gretchen then sets out to provide Joseph with improved images that can be used for his environmental work. She obtains details from him regarding his needs and specific technical requirements. In the process, Gretchen is able to choose how much of the Bahá'í element to introduce to Professor Jenkins, depending on his interest and the academic environment. Gretchen writes a report of her results and images and submits them both to Prof. Jenkins and Joseph. She receives an A from her professor, and then works with Joseph to write an abstract and prepare a talk for the annual Socio-economic Development Conference in Florida.

Through this interaction, Gretchen is able to explore at least one way in which engineering can be directly applied to advancing Bahá'í principles. At the very least, she has correlated her university experience with Bahá'í service. She has met three other Bahá'í friends from other universities working on remote sensing, and she learns about other possibilities for socio-economic development applications. She might have gained new insight into which field of engineering she should specialize in. She and Joseph may have started something much greater, too, by establishing a precedent for other partnerships between her university and development projects in Africa.

This is just one example of how BASIC can work. Clearly, it could also be an opportunity for a much more direct study of elements of the Bahá'í teachings, depending on the student's major and inclination. It is designed to be flexible, to meet the needs of any student who has a desire to increase his/her level of scholarship and better integrate his/her university studies and Bahá'í life.

## **International Participation and Growth of BASIC**

There is nothing in the design or structure of the BASIC program that limits participation to North American students and experts. International mentors are much needed, as they are able to provide unique perspectives for students, particularly with respect to opportunities for service outside the US. Students around the world can also participate, although their ability to receive university credit for their work will depend upon the policies of the university they attend. The BASIC materials are primarily in English, but could evolve to include other languages as international participation increases. BASIC website infrastructure is being designed for sustainable growth, with mechanisms in place to ensure protection of the Bahá'í Faith and the privacy of BASIC participants. Only some parts of the website, such as approved literature and other student products, will be accessible to the general public, while student and mentor databases and chatrooms will require passwords for access. BASIC is being developed under the guidance of local, national and international Bahá'í institutions.

## **Relationship to Training Institute**

As Training Institutes continue to evolve, numerous possibilities for joint activities and courses with BASIC will emerge. Institute courses could be developed to augment the training of university students in methods of independent search for truth, which students could attend while participating in BASIC. Conversely, students might use BASIC to develop courses that could be taught in Training Institutes. The scope of BASIC could be extended through Training Institutes to include the training of junior youth and children by BASIC students, who could themselves serve as mentors for the younger generation and attract them to a wider variety of fields of study and service.

## **BASIC Schedule**

Selected students and mentors are participating in an initial BASIC pilot, beginning in the autumn, 2001 semester. Development of the website ([www.basicinternational.org](http://www.basicinternational.org)) is underway, and will be completed by spring, 2002, in preparation for the launch of BASIC sometime in 2002. Mentors and interested students are encouraged to register profiles beginning in November, 2001. News and updates will be available at ([www.basicinternational.org](http://www.basicinternational.org)) by November 1, 2001. Early registration as a student or a mentor is possible by sending e-mail to [kellysnook@yahoo.com](mailto:kellysnook@yahoo.com).