

ABHE

Proposed Guidelines

Introduction

In recent years the ABHE leadership has been approached by member institutions with requests for greater flexibility in meeting the ABHE Bible/theology standards for accreditation. The rationale for these requests comes in a variety of forms, but, for U.S. institutions, one of the most significant arguments has been the need for better options for attracting community college graduates into Bible college programs. It has been argued that it is very difficult to plan a good program for such transfer students when they arrive with virtually no coursework in Bible or theology. This results in a situation where almost half of the required work taken with an ABHE member institution will have to be in the form of Bible or theology courses. Unfortunately, since few students are willing to enroll in such a program, our institutions lose the opportunity to impact their lives. Canadian institutions have similar issues with graduates of their technical colleges.

Throughout the history of the Association, people have acknowledged that a standard based upon “seat time” in a subject area does not really provide a good indication that the desired learning outcomes have been achieved. The current standard requires “a Bible/theology component equivalent to 30 semester hours” in curricula leading to a traditional four-year degree, particularly where the program is designed to prepare people for a church vocational ministry. The primary advantage of the standard, as written, is that it promotes “inter-rater reliability” during evaluation cycles. Evaluators can readily count hours to determine if the standard has been met. As a consequence, their conclusions regarding an institution’s compliance with the standard are quite consistent. In the past, versions of the standards actually expressed the desired outcome of the Bible/theology requirements as follows: *“The major should enable the student to develop a biblical world-view that includes an appreciation for the historical and redemptive flow of the Scriptures, the ability to articulate biblical principles in relation to contemporary issues, the development of an understanding of essential theology, the mastery of the skills necessary for lifetime study of the Scriptures, and the resultant acquisition of a compassion to serve the needs of the church and to reach the lost.”* Of course, this is a good description of what we are trying to accomplish through the standard. If an institution can demonstrate that these outcomes are being achieved, ABHE should be satisfied regardless of the curricular design employed to achieve the outcomes. The problem has been an inability to achieve consistency in assessing whether such outcomes have been truly achieved, particularly when the evaluative conclusion is being determined by

a broad spectrum of people. Because of this inability, by default, ABHE has employed its current quantitative standard.

The Commission wrestled again with this issue at its last meeting. We are now circulating its proposal for offering an option that can be used by institutions that need an alternative to the 30 hour Bible/theology standard for some of its offerings. If the guidelines are approved, the Commission would anticipate that proposals to employ the alternative guidelines would be submitted as substantive changes for specific Commission review and approval. Here is the proposal:

GUIDE FOR ALTERNATIVE BIBLE AND THEOLOGY COMPLIANCE

ABHE Standard 11a., Essential Element #9:

“A Bible and theology component equivalent to 30 semester hours, 9 of which may be interdisciplinary Bible-related courses for a non-church related baccalaureate, 18 semester hours of Bible/theology for a non-traditional degree completion program and 12 semester hours of Bible/theology for a one- or two-year program.”

ABHE “Policy on Biblical and Theological Studies” (2008 Manual, p. 58):

“Programs that do not meet these minimal requirements must demonstrate a satisfactory alternative.”

Issue: On what basis would ABHE evaluate an alternative proposed by a member institution?

Taking into account long-standing precedents, the Commission would use information generated by the following questions to determine the adequacy of an institution’s alternative means of complying with ABHE’s curricular standards for Bible and theology.

Questions for Consideration:

| Policy | Question |
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| Any proposed alternative must include direct study of the Bible. | Does the proposed alternative include direct study of the Bible? If so, how is this quantified? |
| Any proposed alternative must contain courses and/or assignments that require significant Biblical study by students. | Does the proposed alternative require courses or assignments that require significant Biblical study? How is this quantified? |
| Any proposed alternative must provide the student with skills in Biblical interpretation and application. | Does the proposed alternative provide the student with skills in Biblical interpretation and application? |
| Any proposed alternative must include ways for the student to demonstrate skills in Biblical interpretation and application. | How does the student demonstrate mastery in interpreting and applying Scripture in the proposed alternative? |
| Any proposed alternative must fulfill the student learning outcome goals related to Biblical and theological studies. | How does the student satisfy the institution's stated outcome goals related to its Biblical and theological studies curricular component in the proposed alternative? |
| Any proposed alternative must result in the achievement of equivalent outcomes over time. | Can the institution demonstrate that student achievement of outcomes in the alternative program is equivalent to achievement of outcomes in the regular program? |
| Institutions must be clear about how the proposed alternative compares to their regular program or to a standard 30 credit program. | How do the course requirements in the proposed alternative compare to the course requirements in the regular program or to the 30 semester credit ABHE standard? |
| Proposed alternatives should only be used in special cases. | Approximately what proportion of students at the institution will be taking the proposed alternative program? |

The Committee on Criteria of the Commission will be considering this proposal at its forthcoming meeting. Please provide us your comments regarding these guidelines by **February 1** to Randall Bell, Director, Commission on Accreditation – rebell@abhe.org. We will forward your comments onto the Commission members for their consideration. ABHE's *"Policy on Changes to the Association's Policies, Procedures, and Standards"* (Manual, pp, 116-117) provides for Commission adoption of these guidelines after consideration of member feedback.