Deepening confusion in our culture . . .

In an October 6th *New York Times Magazine* article, feature writer Wesley Morris dubbed the year 2015, *The Year We Obsessed Over Identity*. Citing examples such as Rachel Dolezal (“I identify as black”) and Bruce, aka Caitlyn, Jenner (“I identify as a woman”), Morris aptly observes that we are, “in the midst of a great cultural identity migration. Gender roles are merging. Races are being shed. . . . There’s a sense of fluidity and permissiveness and a smashing of binaries. We’re all becoming one another.”

In our orgy of radical personal autonomy many North Americans, like Adam and Eve before us, have subscribed to the Serpent’s lie that true freedom entitles us to seize the divine prerogative to determine the ontological categories of identity and morality. No longer must genealogical, physiological, cultural, vocational, or ethnic nationality markers—to say nothing of our Creator’s design and designations—define us. We may now defy all such confinement and assert, however whimsically we will, what we fancy ourselves to be. And so we descend ever more deeply into personal dysphoria and cultural disintegration.

. . . Calls us to deeper clarity about our core commitments

Both the cross-currents and confusion referenced above entreat those of us who are engaged in biblical higher education to seek ever greater clarity surrounding our calling. The institutional forms through which we pursue this calling may likely in the future become less uniform, less essential, less enduring than the cause they have been constructed to carry out over the past century or so. As we gathered for our April 2015 ABHE staff retreat, this is precisely what we concluded. Through a series of strategic thinking exercises, consensus emerged that, regardless of what future forms this may take: **at our core, we are a community committed to Bible engagement and Bible-centered leader development.** In subsequent October 2015 deliberations, the Board affirmed our proposal to explore ever broader pursuit of this missional aspiration.
Capacity Building

Board Expansion

In keeping with Bylaws changes adopted by the 2014 Delegate Assembly, we have sought to expand board representation beyond the majority elected from member colleges. The Board’s historic composition has afforded a deep reservoir of wisdom but has been accompanied by inherent limitations in terms of expanding ABHE’s resources and relationships commensurate with our vision. The amendments permit the addition of up to 8 (of 18) board-elected members from outside the association’s institutional membership. The October 2015 election of new board members Wendy Layland, Michael McAfee, and Terry Munday greatly enriches this board capacity-building aspiration. I anticipate we will reach the full board complement by the end of 2016.

Group Research

Proceeds from our Rising Tide Capital Campaign included provision for extensive professional research concerning public and stakeholder perceptions of biblical higher education in order to help shape our member institutions’ messaging and marketing strategies. The Barna Group has completed its year-long research project and will present its findings and recommendations at our 2016 Annual Meeting. We anticipate reverberations from these findings for years to come through general publications as well as association and institutional student recruitment and marketing efforts.
Emerging Leader Development

nexleader*
It’s your turn.


Former Missio Nexus president, Steve Moore, officially joined the ABHE team this past year as Executive Director of our emerging leader development initiative, nexleader. His visionary presence and strategic insight contributed heavily to our team’s April 2015 planning retreat. On the basis of deep listening to ABHE leaders, Steve has created and launched nexleader’s new one-year presidentially nominated emerging leader development journey that combines a rich blend of assessment, coaching, peer learning, and a dynamic July 2016 training event. Meanwhile, Steve has also authored a new eBook, Why Dead People Make the Best Mentors: And How to Learn From Them, and launched the nexleader idea portal which serves as the platform for the nexleader blog, podcast, and vlog.

Staff Changes and Capacity Increase

ABHE’s “home team” has been greatly enriched during the past year. In addition to Steve Moore (mentioned above) Matt Kelly, who had been serving among us as a very part-time volunteer CFO, agreed to join the team on a more official basis. Matt will remain available to ABHE member colleges for consultation; interim CFO service; and CFO search, transition, and training support. Following an extensive and careful search process, Commission on Accreditation Director, Ron Kroll, appointed M. Shane Wood to serve as COA Associate Director. The addition of Dr. Wood to our COA team elevates our capacity to serve increasing numbers of Applicant and Candidate institutions, train and accompany peer evaluators, and achieve USDE recognition renewal and scope expansion. Three new/replacement support staff members Kim Latsa, Jennifer Guerriero, and Stacey Greene each bring further enhancement to our spiritual, professional and relational strength. We are grateful and gratified that, once again in 2015, ABHE has been accorded the Best Christian Workplace designation.

Staff Additions . . .

Steve Moore  Matt Kelly  M Shane Wood  Kim Latsa  Jennifer Guerriero  Stacey Greene
Technology & Communications Capabilities

Working with COA Director Ron Kroll and his team, CIO Lucian Chenard has developed an enhanced database and document management platform to support the work of the COA and peer evaluation teams.

Meanwhile, Director of Communications and Events, Carol Dibble, has continued to profit from the social media savvy and technical support of Bart Caylor and his Caylor Solutions team to develop and implement major enhancements to our website, create ABHE’s first-ever Annual Meeting Mobile App, and launch several new blogs, including TaxTips (Dave Moja), Lead With Connection (Todd Hall), Marketing Minute (Bart Caylor), nexleader (Steve Moore), and 4ThoughtLeaders (Ralph Enlow).

Financial Report

Revenue for the 2014-15 fiscal year was $1.6 million, an approximately 30% increase over the last 5 years. Change in net assets was ($165,000), as was anticipated since Rising Tide capital campaign funds booked in previous years were expended on planned initiatives during FY14-15. ABHE remains in a growth posture as revenue is projected to exceed $2 million in FY15-16. The nexleader emerging leader development initiative is the most significant current driver of this growth.
ABHE at a Glance

- 204 Institutions served in U.S. & Canada
- 75% Retention Rate
- 54,894 Students in ABHE Schools
- 2,493 Programs of Study

Map showing the distribution of institutions across North America.
I sometimes feel a bit like Bilbo Baggins these days. As I talk to presidents across the ABHE landscape, I often detect similar sentiments.

A mounting sense among ABHE leaders of spiritual solidarity and momentum is accompanied by a surging collective awareness of spiritual and cultural cross-currents that simultaneously portend both potential persecution and spiritual opportunity. Not only are we confronted by significant enterprise disruptions relative to higher education policy, values, delivery modalities, and funding, but also proliferation of cultural antipathy and threats to religious freedom.

While these waves are sometimes wearying, they should also evoke from us the ages-long confession and resolve of God’s people, a call to worship from Psalm 33:

> Our soul waits for the LORD;  
> he is our help and our shield.  
> For our heart is glad in him,  
> because we trust in his holy name.  
> Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,  
> even as we hope in you.  

[Ps. 33:20-22, ESV]

Rather than passively being stretched by events, I invite you to join me in boldly stretching ourselves, striding into the uncertain future with unwavering confidence in the occupied throne of heaven and an unwavering conviction that . . .

> Forever, O LORD,  
> Your word is settled in heaven.  

(Ps. 119:89, NKJV)