

# Ten Year Retrospective, 24 July 2023

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Ten Year Retrospective, the discourses of society, with a particular emphasis on professional and academic discourses. Since then, the Association has progressively learned how to translate this and subsequent guidance into action. Now, ten years later, we feel moved to reflect on the advances made in several related areas: fostering evolving conversations within collaborative settings—such as reading groups, writing groups, and seminars—about contributing to professional and academic discourses

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES – NORTH AMERICA1

1. Introduction
2. Settings for learning together about from a Bahá'í perspective; reimagining contributing to prevalent discourses the annual conference; advancing the
3. Reimagining the annual conference
4. Evolution of the publications work Association's publishing endeavors;
5. Vision of growth and approach to and strengthening the capacity of the learning Association to operate systematically.

- 5.1 Objects of Learning These developments have entailed
- 5.2 Elements of the conceptual framework learning about how various elements
- 5.3 Generating and applying knowledge of the conceptual framework discussed

6. A lifetime of inquiry in the 24 July 2013 message,2 including Appendix: Small Group Initiatives learning in action itself, apply to the work of the Association. Attentiveness

1. I to these elements has helped generate new strengths—and given rise to new

On 24 July 2013, the National Spiritual challenges—which have disclosed

new

Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada received a message written on behalf to advance

of the Universal House of Justice re-consolidation,

regarding the role of the Association for in the

Bahá'í Studies with respect to "the notion of an

intellectual life of the Bahá'í community and its greater involvement in the shape to

life of society." The House of Justice elaborated

encouraged the Association to focus (Universal

on building capacity for engaging in

References to "the conceptual framework" in this document should be under-

1 Written in collaboration with the Executive Committee's subcommittees,

is ex-

staff, and other close collaborators.

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possibilities for advancement. the

We have correspondingly refined con-

the mandate of the Association in the mutu-

light of continuing guidance, such as between its

the 30 December 2021 message of the in which

Universal House of Justice addressed That

to the Conference of the Continental understood

Boards of Counsellors. To this end, we by,

created numerous spaces for consultation and reflection within and between

2 "Central to the effort

the work of expansion and

social action, and the involvement

discourses of society is the

evolving conceptual framework, a

that organizes thought and gives

activities and which becomes more

rate as experience accumulates"

House of Justice, 24 July 2013).

stood in light of this description by

Universal House of Justice, which

pledged in section 5.2.

of reference that helps to unify

Association's various activities and

solidate our understanding of the

ally reinforcing relationship

work and the pattern of activity

the Bahá'í community is engaged.

is, the activities of ABS are

to complement, and to be nurtured

the society-building endeavours of

wider Bahá'í community.

committees, with staff and collaborators, and with our senior institutions. ABS

This process led to the generation of the following mandate: We

also highlight some of our key objects

The Association plays a role in fostering the intellectual life of the community, focusing in particular on helping to build the "capacity of the friends to contribute to the prevalent discourses of society in con-

their academic fields and in their professions" in a manner that "enrich[es] the capacity of the Bahá'í community to discharge its mission."<sup>3</sup> It aims to enable partici-

pants of varying backgrounds and academic interests to effectively explore how "to provide, in the world of ideas, the intellectual rigour and clarity of thought to match their commitment to spiritual and material progress in the world of deeds."<sup>4</sup>

to examine the forces operating

Recognizing that all visions evolve, we view this mandate as a point the

discourses prevalent in whatever

3 Universal House of Justice, 7 September 2015.

en-

4 Universal House of Justice, 30 to

December 2021.

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explore such opportunities in relation to their scholarly interests that

their

the endeavours of the Association

In the following

outline the main developments of

over the last ten years, referring

24 July 2013 message as our guide.

of learning as well as our approach to applying relevant elements of the conceptual framework to the work. A theme that runs throughout this report is how the Association can strengthen its capacity to further expand and

solidate its endeavours in alignment with the provisions of the Nine Year Plan.

2. S

In the fourth paragraph of the 24 July 2013 message, the House of Justice explains:

Every believer has the opportunity

in society and introduce relevant aspects of the teachings within

social space he or she is present.

It is, perhaps, as a means to

hance the abilities of the friends

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itself. They may additionally

individuals and groups to pursue

own interests independently, perhaps

for Bahá'í Studies can be con- sharing the results of their  
inquiries at the annual conference.  
ceived. Through the specialized  
Inevitably, as these independent initiatives  
settings it creates, the Association  
pro- liferate, many will occur outside  
can promote learning among a  
our immediate awareness, albeit inspired  
wide range of believers across a  
wide range of disciplines. directly or indirectly by the  
settings the  
Association has established. As such,  
And further: these settings can serve as  
catalysts for  
a range of initiatives aiming to contrib-  
As unity of thought around es- ute to the world of ideas.  
sential concepts emerges, the The main types of specialized  
set-  
Association may find it useful to tings are ABS workshops, reading  
explore fresh approaches with groups, writing groups, other small  
some simple steps that can grow collaborative projects, seminars,  
and  
in complexity. working groups. These spaces are de-  
scribed immediately below; a list of the  
Based on this guidance, the Association workshops, reading groups, and  
semi-  
has fostered a still-evolving set of nars currently known to the  
Association  
activities that aim to promote learn- appears in Appendix A.  
ing about participation in a variety of  
academic, professional, and thematic W  
discourses prevalent in society. The  
Committee for Collaborative Initiatives Workshops are typically half-day  
ses-  
(CCI) coordinates this dimension of sions that help familiarize  
participants with the aims of the Association  
the Association's work, which, as it  
and its  
evolves, is increasingly contributing to approaches to contributing to  
profes-  
the evolution of the annual conference sional and academic discourses.  
They  
and the publications work. explore themes such as the  
dispositions  
Specifically, the Association has conducive to participating construc-  
created several specialized settings and tively in discourses, how to read  
prev-

complementary spaces to help enhance underlying the abilities of the friends to "examine the forces operating in society and introduce relevant aspects of the teachings within" prevalent discourses. These settings aim to enable the friends to foster patterns of collaborative scholarship connected with the Association further

alent discourses for their assumptions, and how attending to elements of the conceptual helps to ensure coherence between the efforts of ABS and the ty-building work and social final section of the workshop possibilities for participants'

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engagement in ABS activities (by, for example, forming their own reading groups, as discussed in the next section). These workshop sessions are currently offered once or twice a month ever-expand- depending on the availability of facilitators and the number of registrants for a given session, with an intensification of offerings in the lead up to the annual conference. Sessions usually bring together between eight and twenty participants and two facilitators. These facilitators are invited to reflect individually and collectively on ways to improve the materials and the workshop space itself based on their experiences. In the years since the 24 July 2013 message was received, the communi-

discourse and how it correlates with teachings of the Faith. Once formed, these groups often come together for six to twelve two-hour sessions, though some develop into longer-term efforts. Reading groups cover an ing range of themes, such as climate change, education for justice, promotion, influential women reparations and reconciliation, government narratives, technology values, and many others (as noted in Appendix A). All reading groups aim to analyze the text(s) they are in the light of the writings of the Faith, the experience of the community, and the framework for action that organizes the Bahá'í community's efforts to transform society. They are envisioned as inviting, thoughtful

settings

ty has become more familiar with the in which the friends can "reflect on the

work of contributing to discourses, implications that the truths found in the

particularly since Ruhi Book 14, Unit Revelation may hold for their work" 1 became available. As the communi- (24 July 2013).

ty's capacity to engage with discourses Reading groups are typically fa- grows, it is not entirely clear whether cilitated by one or a few individuals

and in what form this workshop will whose primary purpose is to encourage

continue to be needed. For the time be- a consultative environment in which ing, it provides a helpful introduction participants strive to correlate insights

for those wanting to be connected with from the text(s) being studied with ABS. those from other key sources of

knowl-

edge, such as pertinent writings of the

R G Faith, the experience and learning of

the participants, and the discussion

A reading group is a small group that that ensues within the reading group forms to read a book or a set of texts setting itself. The facilitators are addi-

from a given field or on a given theme, tionally responsible for arranging the

and to thoughtfully explore the content meetings (most commonly through on- in a collaborative environment. It is an line video conferencing),

identifying a text or set of texts, designing a

accessible way for participants to de- read- velop their understanding of a specific ing schedule, distributing materials,

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making necessary adjustments to the discussions with facilitators to reflect

line of inquiry based on reflections on progress, opportunities, challenges,

with the group, and liaising with the and the knowledge being generated Association. In some cases, they draft within their respective reading groups.

framing questions to assist their groups We have also held facilitator gatherings

to read and consult. They may also where learning can be shared between encourage participants to use informal them. As reading groups and related

writing as a tool for clarifying and articulating individual and collective insights that could potentially be shared with others. A few reading groups have built on this informal writing, evolving into writing groups (discussed below) whose participants eventually present and receive feedback on their work at seminars or during breakout sessions at the ABS conference. Other reading groups have simply given rise to new reading groups. We are, consequently, beginning to see how these reading groups can serve as portals to additional ABS activities, which can in turn lead to yet new reading groups. At the same time, we recognize the value of the reading group in its own right: any short-term reading group can stand on its own as an important contributor to the goals of the Association. While momentum is building, there is still much to learn about how to multiply these specialized settings; to assist more groups to embark on longer-term, complex efforts; and to enable groups focusing on similar themes to coalesce into more sustained initiative

endeavours multiply, it has become evident that more attention must be paid to how the system of accompaniment, facilitation, coordination, and building can correspondingly evolve. Writing Groups The Association has also been exploring how to develop collaborative writing groups that can make significant advances in producing content for the Journal of Bahá'í Studies (JBS) other fora. Of particular concern is how to create consultative environments that enhance individual and collective research, writing, and One key example of such a collective initiative led to the JBS special issue on constructive resilience (Vol. 30, No. 3). This issue was the fruit of a year collaboration between scholars in a range of disciplines, arising from a series of readings groups and seminars on related themes. This group of authors decided to write a set of essays and consulted on their work at various stages of the writing process. One finding coming out of this

working groups (discussed below). We are also finding that reading groups can benefit from accompaniment. To date, such accompaniment has included regular, one-to-one, or small-group

another

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group of collaborators is now submitting six essays for joint publication in JBS. This initiative arose out of a

reading group focused on the harmony of science and religion during the summer of 2020. This reading group

and led to another group that decided to do an in-depth study of Helen Longino's

consultation book *Science and Social Knowledge: author's*

*Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*, correlating insights from this

enterprise book with guidance from the writings

of the Faith regarding consultation and other related topics. Inspired by this

writing study to begin a writing process, the group began by arriving at a shared

vision—distinctive seminars—distinctive

selection of a general area of focus for a set

of essays, to be authored individually

reference or by pairs. With this vision in mind,

disciplinary it then devoted its already-established

weekly pattern of meeting to sharing

context, and providing feedback on the ab-

was that earlier involvement by the JBS Editorial Committee could lead to a smoother process of moving from group collaboration to publication.

Building on this learning,

and revise their respective drafts

a view to both formally submitting them to JBS and presenting them at

seminar at the 2023 annual

This "early and often" model of

providing feedback from the JBS editor

other collaborators, combined with

group's regular space for

discussion on the development of each

paper, has helped to foster unity

and a sense of shared

ownership for the project amongst both the

authors and JBS.

Simultaneously, collaborative

writing has been emerging out of the

'methodologies'

meetings convened in response to

Universal House of Justice's

message in the 24 July 2013 message to

disciplinary methodologies. Writing has

emerged organically in this

context, with groups focused on different

disciplines' methodologies initially creating their respective papers. The core aim of documents for their own internal use. The group was to learn how to foster a collaborative writing aimed at wider circulation, including through publication in JBS. A specific writing project in which each member of the group felt under way is organized around what is currently referred to as scholarly accompanied by the other members to which an initial paper (in this case, a collaboratively written article on a wider group of participants to obtain methodological trends in the social meth- odological trends in the social scienc- es) is circulated to others with additional constructive feedback on their papers. Some months later, the relevant backgrounds to generate a set of group shared the six draft essays with ten responses, which in turn writ- ten responses, which in turn the JBS editor for his initial input. The editor's written comments on each response by the authors of the inform a article. The collaborators in this initial article. The collaborators in this paper, supplemented by a consultation with the group, proved extremely dialogical process are inher- ently dialogical process are tion with the group, proved extremely of this project as an exercise in conceiving sultative inquiry. The aim is to helpful. The members subsequently of this project as an exercise in con- sultative inquiry. The aim is to sultative inquiry. The aim is to continued to assist each other to review publish

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in a special volume of JBS, with three that have been collaborating on a proj- ect online to meet in person in goals: to illustrate a processes-oriented order to work more intensively, and we aim approach to collective learning about to

methodology, to create a resource that can be studied by others who are learn-sustained en- ing to navigate methodological deci- projects, as sions in the social sciences and other focused, at fields, and to help foster the capacity to kinds of participate in discourses on this theme. and While this project is in its early stag- group es, there is a shared understanding be- have tween the writing collaborators and the professional Editorial Committee of the importance to of learning about how this "response" and re- format can promote rigour and clarity more of thought while adhering to consulta- such tive standards of unity, candor, courte- held sy, affection, and generosity in a mutual discuss search for truth, thereby eschewing the often combative stance of academics we towards each other's writing. projects are emerging that we are not aware of, O S C just as some reading groups are likely P emerging that we are not aware of. One small collaborative project, The Association has become increas- ingly aware of the need for sustained pro- consultation and collaboration among un- the friends as they seek to bring insights interrogates from the Faith to bear on their fields.

expand such types of support. To date, most of these deavours have been writing described above. Others are least initially, on less formal writing as a means of capturing sharing insights arising from learning processes. Still others been focused on attending or academic conferences together collectively read the discourse flect on how one might contribute effectively to it. To encourage endeavours, the Association has gatherings for these groups to their connection with seminars and other activities. As noted above, also assume that other small

which grew out of a reading group about economic inequality, has duced a document for study with dergraduate students that the underlying assumptions of

intro-

As noted above, reading groups offer seeks to a simple yet potentially powerful first thinking step towards this end. The Association Bahá'í aims to encourage the emergence of trans- more complex projects from among some of these reading groups. A small Having but growing number of these have al- the ready developed, and we hope to learn sessions how to support more of them in the an coming years. We have gained some annual initial experience with helping groups inspired a

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similar effort to examine materialist as- shared sumptions that are often overlaid onto en- the scientific study of evolutionary leading to biology and neuroscience, which will profes- also be the focus of a seminar at the 2023 annual conference. Such efforts are contributing to the Association's emerging approach to engaging stu- dents in its activities in ways that are House complementary to, rather than redun- and unity dant with, the Institute for Studies in the Global Prosperity (ISGP) seminars for seminars students.

from

Beyond small projects of these

ductory economics courses. It equip students to keep their coherent and aligned with the conceptual framework for social formation even as they engage with the discipline of economics. prepared and refined the document, group has held several online with students, and will be holding in-person seminar at the 2023 conference. This project has

spaces in which insights can be across academic and professional deavors of a similar nature, the formation of academic or sional centers.

S

In the 24 July 2013 message, the

of Justice states that as clarity of thought gradually emerge within Association, "a number of small

could be held to assist individuals

certain professions or academic disci-

kinds, which arise directly or indirectly from ABS-fostered processes, we are also attempting to stay abreast of more advanced endeavours at the frontiers of learning, including the establishment of academic centers, research labs, Bahá'í and so forth, initiated by Bahá'ís and likeminded collaborators. For instance, we have been following developments with the Center on Modernity in Transition, which partners closely with universities such as Duke and NYU; the Center for Resilient Communities at West Virginia University; and the Centre for Digital Tools and Social Transformation at the British Columbia Institute of Technology. We hope to follow and learn from other similar endeavours so that insights gained in these spheres of activity can, over time, be shared appropriately within relevant ABS spaces, and so that systematic learning can begin to occur across a growing range of related initiatives. At some point, it may be appropriate for

plines to examine some aspect of course of their field. Specific topics could be selected, and a group of participants with experience could share papers, and consult on contemporary perspectives and related concepts." Since 2017, the Association has been developing its capacity to hold one to three-day seminars—in online, and hybrid—on a range of topics (listed in Appendix A). To date, we have generated several points of learning regarding the fits of seminars. In the first place, we have found that seminars can vary in terms of format and size, and yet contribute to the objectives of ABS. Some seminars have been organized by working groups (discussed below) and have convened dozens of people at a time for relatively broad and inclusive conversations about important trends across a range of discourses in related fields. These include Health Working Group and Media Working Group sem-

ABS to also take a role in generating these kinds of initiatives, by convening Ten Year Retrospective

more specific conversations informed are by substantial preparatory reading. in- These include seminars on themes in noted the areas of Africana Studies, narrative objectives ethics and media practice, and cooper- lo- atives and next systems. Some of these, seminars, as well as other seminars, such as those participa- focused on science and religion, com- munity action, and methodologies, with have created spaces for participants like-mind- to discuss and provide consultative point, feedback on each other's written work. It has been heartening to witness this academics diversity of approaches, which has al- semi- lowed for both a wide range of partic- various ipation and rigorous engagement with today. prevalent discourses.

As to other points of learning, we have found that seminars help partic- ipants to reflect on how to explicate initial- the principles of the Faith in relation collab- to contemporary perspectives, and to it has appreciate that the conversation about fosters a given theme has different layers to it, thus demanding both depth and flexi-

inars. Other seminars have gathered smaller groups of collaborators for 15

seminars while ensuring that they are coherent with other ABS activities, including the annual conference, as noted in Section 3 below. Other seminars include further systematizing the logistical organization of these opening them up to greater participation from the wider community, and perhaps jointly hosting seminars with other groups of scholars or ed organizations. On this last the Association aims to become much more proactive at inviting and professionals to participate in seminars concerned with examining exigent issues facing humanity

## W G

The term "working group" was ly used to describe a range of orative efforts. Since that time, evolved to signify a group that learning among a growing network of individuals and small

collaborative

bility of thought. Seminars have also been found to draw naturally upon other

organizational ABS processes and activities, such as reading and writing groups, thus reinforcing the growing coherence

participants

between these activities. They additionally foster a culture of accompaniment

among participants with different

shared

levels of experience. Finally, allowing and

sufficient time in these spaces for in-

formal conversation, stories, and the collaborative

arts evidently plays a key role in building

bonds of friendship and "consolidate[ing] understanding".

extending

One major objective of the Association is to multiply these

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As this understanding has crystallized, CCI has become more systematic in its accompaniment of working groups as a whole, and more particularly of those serving as conveners or coordinators of these groups. The respective

committee has continued to learn especially from a small number of working groups at varying levels of development and activity (Economies, seminars,

Health, Media, and Africana Studies), which have organized seminars in addition to reading groups and small projects. Two of these working groups held thematic seminars over the summer of 2022 (a seminar on "Narrative,

groups within a shared academic or professional field. The spaces

are organized by working groups—including reading groups, seminars, and other special gatherings—allow

participants to enter into a sustained

conversation with one another, identify common

interests, consult on questions of

relevance, receive encouragement

and support, and initiate or develop

new lines of inquiry and new

endeavors. As such, the structure

of a working group shows promise as a means of strengthening and

CCI's scheme of coordination at the level of a discipline or field.

its cycle of annual activity. In 2021-

2022, the Health Working Group was accompanied more intensively along the same lines. The CCI coordinators have been assisting these teams to reflect on and adjust their

schemes of coordination to develop structures and practices consistent with the need for a growing number of collaborators to organize

and facilitate reading groups, and learn from longer-term projects. Moreover, while maintaining ongoing lines of action, these working groups have also been exploring how to help some small initiatives enhance the

Ethics and Media Practice" by the  
 For  
 Media Working Group, and a seminar  
 organiz-  
 on reparations by the Africana Studies  
 Working Group). The Media and  
 Health groups have also organized  
 seminars that convened broad con-  
 versations among participants across  
 at  
 a variety of subfields and topics.  
 One of the objectives of CCI is  
 to "multiply working groups while  
 and  
 also building their capacity to evolve  
 independently." CCI has gradually  
 helped certain working groups to de-  
 in  
 fine and operate according to cycles  
 groups  
 of annual activity that include the reg-  
 ular launching and accompaniment of  
 reading groups and small projects as  
 for  
 well as more intensive spaces like  
 in-  
 seminars. In 2020-21, to generate  
 experience that could further inform  
 the functioning of other groups, the  
 CCI coordinators decided to focus  
 on accompanying the Media Working  
 of  
 Group—a relatively advanced  
 group—in order to help it establish  
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rigour and depth of their efforts.  
 one group, this has involved  
 ing three thematic seminars over the  
 course of a four-month period during  
 the spring and summer of 2023.  
 Another has made preliminary plans  
 to organize a larger seminar aimed  
 inviting colleagues and profession-  
 al contacts from the wider society  
 into a sustained process of study  
 consultation.  
 While the overall number of work-  
 ing groups has not so far increased  
 2022-23, the work of the active  
 has continued to expand and deepen.  
 It seems clear that working groups  
 can serve as important structures  
 supporting sustained intellectual  
 quiry. A major area of learning now  
 is how to continue multiplying them,  
 given both the importance of accom-  
 panying one another in the field of  
 service and the current limitations  
 CCI's human resources.

3. R drawn upon to support ABS reading  
 groups, working groups, and seminars,  
 as well as to present at the conference.  
 In addition to multiplying and strength-  
 ening specialized settings, we have also  
 explored how to respond to the House  
 the  
 of Justice's guidance that, "existing ac-  
 seminars.  
 tivities, such as the hosting of a large  
 is

The ISGP coordinator in Canada has  
 also presented at the conference to  
 help the audience better understand  
 nature and purpose of ISGP  
 Nevertheless, an ongoing question  
 is

conference, may be reimagined" (24 and July 2013). Towards this end, we have taken several steps to reimagine the conference over the past ten years in view of the importance of encouraging re-more active participation at the gathering, fostering relationships among Universal participants in similar fields, engaging the youth, increasing the conference's coherence with other ABS endeavours, and aligning it with the emerging patterns of community life more generally. As an example of this last point, we have sought to collaborate early in the involved planning process with relevant Bahá'í continental institutions in the community hosting the conference, striving to ensure that 2) our communications and programming the support and are consistent with their less community-building processes. We still have much to learn in this respect. how Also, with respect to communications, we are exploring how to help ABS the Bahá'í community, and in particular young adults who are familiar and with programs of ISGP, understand the place of the annual conference in relationship to ABS' overall mandate and the specialized settings. We have consequently reached out to the coordinators and

how to build on these connections more systematically engage young adults who have benefitted from the institute's programs. A number of considerations with respect to the conference have been discussed with members of the House of Justice, members of the Continental Board of Counsellors, members of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Canada and the United States, other collaborators, and National Assembly of Canada itself. These include: 1) the costs in attending an annual conference, which have rendered it inaccessible to many (if not most); 2) the possibility of decentralizing the conference over time to make it less costly and more geographically accessible to more participants; 3) the conference might evolve into a space that is directly pertinent to working groups and other initiatives; 4) the amount of time resources consumed by planning the conference over the course of a year, which can hamper the capacity of Executive Committee, subcommittees, and other collaborators to initiate

of ISGP to explore ways in which we worthwhile, can support each other's objectives. that To this end, ISGP graduates have been conference

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may have negative repercussions in the community, which has grown accustomed to gathering together to explore the development of Bahá'í thought on essen- an annual basis; 6) and the fruitfulness knowledge of adopting a gradual approach to re-imagining the conference, noting in particular the importance of developing new lines of action and approaches while also working to organically re- to fine ongoing efforts. Owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, reimagining the conference has also meant learning how to host it online, and which we did three years in a row. their This in turn entailed learning how to improve accessibility to content, such as by providing captions and additional resources for all recorded presentations.<sup>5</sup> During this period, we also the reframed the call for presentations to conference. specifically welcome contributions aimed at exploring how to participate in relevant discourses in the light of the teachings of the Faith and in view of the provisions of the Nine Year Plan. serve With all these considerations in mind, we have developed the following collective vision for the conference by drawing reading,

develop new, potentially lines of action; 5) the sentiment not holding a continental conference

uplifting, welcoming space for participants to explore learning about contributing to academic and professional discourses

tial to the generation of and the progress of humanity. As one among a growing constellation of ABS activities concerned with promoting the intellectual life of the community, it aims foster an animated conversation among diverse participants about how "to provide, in the world of ideas, the intellectual rigour clarity of thought to match commitment to spiritual and material progress in the world of deeds." We have correspondingly identified following objectives of the

First—in view of the importance of fostering coherence between the various ABS activities—the conference aims to as a space of convergence where participants in various initiatives (e.g., working,

upon guidance from the 30 December writing, and seminar groups)  
share  
2021 message of the Universal House with other conference  
participants  
of Justice: insights into the fruits of  
their  
learning about how "to explicate  
The overarching objective of the the principles" the Bahá'í  
commu-  
ABS conference is to serve as an nity advocates, and "demonstrate  
their applicability to the issues  
5 As the presentations are released facing humanity."<sup>6</sup>  
in various formats, these resources accom-  
pany them, providing value for years to 6 This is in keeping with  
the guid-  
come. Further work has been completed to ance of the Universal House of  
Justice that  
prepare the conference platform for ongo- "[o]ne of the aims would be to  
foster a  
ing use. wider participation and to  
encourage and  
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Second—in view of the impor- and age groups; assists young people  
to  
tance of fostering inclusion and understand that contributing to  
profes-  
diversity—the conference aims sional and academic discourses is  
a core  
to serve as an accessible portal dimension of service that is  
coherent  
that enables growing numbers of with the community-building process  
in  
participants with a range of back- which they are engaged; and creates  
an  
grounds and interests to become environment in which conference  
partic-  
acquainted with, participate in, and ipants increasingly see themselves  
as 1)  
thus benefit from, various ABS ca- active participants, rather than  
passive  
capacity-building endeavours. recipients, during the conference  
itself,  
2) part of a learning process that is co-  
Third—in line with the convic- herent with (i.e., that builds upon  
and  
tion that ABS is an association that further enriches) other ABS

activities, seeks to harmonize different perspectives—the conference aims to feature scholars and professionals who are contributing substantially to various discourses of pressing concern. Atlanta, Georgia. A number of seminars will be hosted in conjunction with the conference that will build on the initiatives undertaken throughout the year; they will also complement the plenary and breakout sessions by helping to infuse the annual conference with a dynamic approach to collective learning. As noted above, ongoing considerations include how to make the conference more accessible than it currently is; whether other collaborative initiatives aimed at decentralizing the building capacity to contribute to dis- regard; conference plays a role in this regard; how to moderate the amount of energy courses in academic and professional fields; sharpens clarity of thought among that goes into planning a conference so that other promising lines of action are not sacrificed; and how, a widening circle of participants about that other promising lines of action are not sacrificed; and how, the aims and approaches of ABS in a manner that is progressively inclusive to reinforce the vision that the con- ference is part of a larger of, and accessible to, diverse populations interlinked process of learning that upholds the role of the scholar and the efforts of the friends more generally to advance the inspire many to attempt to correlate ideas within their fields with Bahá'í thought" intellectual life of the

community.

(Letter dated 7 September 2015).

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4. E insights as they develop their articles.

A thematic issue of this kind has the potential to make a signal contribution

The editorial process for the Journal Bahá'í stud-

of Bahá'í Studies has evolved con- ies, accelerating the development of

siderably during the last ten years, further thought. Collaborative writing

becoming not only more rigorous and processes have so far resulted in a the-

systematic, but also more collaborative matic issue on Constructive Resilience,

and more characterized by a spirit of with two other thematic issues (on sci-

accompaniment. ence and religion, and on disciplinary

The beginning of this period was methodologies) in development.

marked by a concerted effort to estab- The emphasis on collaboration also

lish and maintain a regular publishing extends to the committee's approach

schedule to ensure a consistent stream to article review, which continues to

of high-quality scholarly articles. JBS evolve to better combine a spirit of

also shifted to an online-first publica- consultation and accompaniment with

tion model, facilitating access to its the rigour necessary to meet the high

content. As part of this transition, pre- standards expected of an academic viously published articles were also journal. While experience in this

area made available online. is still in its early stages, a collabora-

In addition to these logisti- tive review process, in which a qual- cal improvements, JBS's Editorial ified peer reviewer consults with the

Committee has seen a transformation author on how to strengthen his or her

in its mode of operation. It has ex- article, has proven to be a rich source

panded its previously narrow focus of learning for all involved.

Authors

on soliciting and receiving articles for sup- possible publication by individual authors; while this continues to be an important part of the Committee's work, it is now complemented by the support conversation and accompaniment of collaborative rigor- writing projects that emerge out of other collective initiatives, such as reading encouraged, groups. Examples of such endeavours insights are provided in Section 2 above (see in JBS the "Writing Groups" subsection). major Collaborative writing lends itself to authors to the development of thematic issues of an at- the Journal, in which authors approach to dis- a common topic from a range of per- grounded spectives and benefit from each other's Ten Year Retrospective

As with JBS, ABS Publications (ABSP) is considered an integral part Logos of the evolving network of ABS activi- and ties—reading groups, working groups, writing groups, seminars, the annual Vision of conference, among others—that both the benefits from, and contributes to, their being evolution. Over the last two and a half JBS. years, ABSP has been working to build an independent press that can become

in this process express feeling ported and accompanied; reviewers gain experience in mentoring; and the Editorial Committee learns how to initiate and sustain a between scholars that is at once ous and consultative. Authors are being more systematically where possible, to draw upon from previous articles published and other Bahá'í publications. A objective here is to inspire write in a manner that illustrates tempt on their part to contribute courses that may already be in valuable insights and theory. 21

previously published books that have long been out of print, such as and Civilization (Nader Saiedi) Planning Progress (June Thomas), while select essays from The Shoghi Effendi (proceeding from 9th annual ABS conference) are considered for republication in

the preeminent publisher for Bahá'í scholars in North America who are striving to contribute to the intellectual pattern of life of the Bahá'í world. The audience for these books consists primarily of individuals seeking to understand how to advance prevalent discourses in society within and across disciplines by exploring how ideas and theories found in contemporary thought relate to Bahá'í teachings. The audience also includes individuals interested in commentary on the teachings themselves. Based on the experience of the Association with Wilfrid Laurier University Press (WLUP) and subsequent investigation into other university presses, it was concluded that it is most propitious for the Association to develop its own independent press. Notably, few authors submitted suitable manuscripts while the Association was collaborating with WLUP. Since becoming independent, ABSP has published two books, by Michael Karlberg and John Hatcher respectively, and is on course to publish at least one book per year over

We have learned much about the pattern of action that enables the Association to advance its work and achieve coherence among its different areas of focus. To this end, we have sought to enhance our approach to learning and action itself. Indeed, the Association's capacity to operate in a mode of learning and to nurture a culture of accompaniment has proven increasingly vital to advancing every facet of the work. While this is evident throughout this document, it is the specific focus of this section, which outlines the Association's objects of learning and discusses ways in which we have endeavoured to apply the elements of the conceptual framework highlighted by the Universal House of Justice in its 24 July 2013 message.

This section also addresses how we have paid attention to the and application of knowledge and the subject of methodology.

the next few years, building momentum and expanding from there. The ABS Publications Committee is also man- working on making available again in the

5.1 O L

In our effort to articulate the date of the Association discussed

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introduction to this report, we concurrently sought to articulate its overarching direction

to assist each other to "contribute discourses that influence the

ing objects of learning. In doing so, we progress"

of [spiritual and material]

again found inspiration by relating the experience we had accrued to date with increas-

(30 December 2021). The Association has long been concerned with

the guidance of the 30 December 2021 participating

ing the diversity of those

message. We consequently identified six objects of learning, which are presently conceived of as follows.

in and coordinating ABS activities. However, we gleaned from the 30 December 2021 message that it is

es- The first object of learning is how object

pecially important to stress this

to multiply the number of settings Nine

of learning given the emphasis the

and processes—including seminars, nuclei

Year Plan places on expanding

reading groups, writing groups, and participation—

and fostering universal

conferences—in which participants activities

albeit recognizing that ABS

can collaborate, generate collective insights, and share learning about how "to explicate the principles" the Bahá'í specifically ow-

may not be of interest to everyone.

community advocates, and "demon- groups

The Association has seen some progress in this regard, ing to the emergence of reading

strate their applicability to the issues themes

and seminars that explore such

facing humanity" (30 December 2021).

as promoting racial harmony and the

As alluded to in Section 2 above, which discusses these different settings concerned

role of women in society. In addition, reading groups and seminars

in detail, questions now before us in- diver-

with other themes are striving to

clude: How can we continue to build participation. The capacity to expand and consolidate conference, these settings in view of the growing Atlanta complexity of the work? How can moreover, we do so in a manner that also supports both individual and collaborative initiatives not formally tied to the conference Association? What human resources are now needed to build momentum in the this area, taking into consideration the under-central roles that both accompaniment and systematization demonstrably play in fostering organic growth? we The second object of learning is how to enable growing numbers of diverse participants, intent "on transcending participation differences, harmonizing perspectives, and promoting the use of consultation", Ten Year Retrospective

sify their circles of same is true of the annual particularly beginning with the conference in 2018. It is, anticipated that the plenary breakout sessions, and, to some the seminars at the annual this year will go some way towards meeting this objective. The role of arts (discussed below) is also stood to be vital for promoting involvement in ABS activities. This progress notwithstanding, are continually asking ourselves: How can the Association continue to age greater diversity of within its constellation of small-large-group settings?

23

The third object of learning is to held on Marxism and the Bahá'í Faith develop an outward-looking culture further many years ago)? How can we in which participants in different ABS practitioners involve such scholars and spaces understand themselves to be actively building collaborative learning processes with scholars and professionals in the wider society, and that is how in spaces and processes that shared understanding regarding gent issues of the day? The fourth object of learning

are concurrently aligned with the particular provisions of the Nine Year Plan. A major grad-step in this regard has been the efforts of reading groups and working groups to study texts by a range of thinkers and discover points of unity between imperatives insights stemming from those texts and the teachings of the Faith. Some train-reading groups and working groups have also welcomed participants from Global the wider community, which has added greatly to the quality of their participating in conversations. The same is true of some and seminars and panels at the annual small, we conference. There is, consequently, an engagement emerging pattern of learning about how to go beyond inward-looking conver-generations of sations and provide, "in the world of process, ideas, the intellectual rigour and clarity of thought to match [our] commitment challenges, to spiritual and material progress in the obstacles, and world of deeds" (30 December 2021). of the Nevertheless, we are conscious that vision, it these spaces would be further enriched partic-through a more concerted effort to training translate this outward-looking orienta-process,

to help young people—in university students and recent uates—view participating in fessional and academic discourses as a core dimension of their that is coherent with the of community-building and social action, the objectives of the ing institute, and the programs of the Institute for Studies in Prosperity. While the number of youth and young adults our annual conferences, seminars, reading groups is relatively are seeking to expand this over time. The 24 July 2013 letter vides a vision of rising youth, shaped by the institute who will "wholeheartedly address a wide range of intellectual overcome all pitfalls and render service for the betterment world." Consistent with this has become clear that the prior ipation of young people in the institute, community-building

tion into concrete practice.  
qual-

Questions before us thus include:  
spaces

How can we promote "deep dives"  
on a given topic in collaboration with  
academics and professionals from the  
wider community, perhaps producing  
opportunities

a monograph based on the proceed-  
ings (an example being the seminar  
professional

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and academic discourses. Fostering  
both discipline-specific forms of en-  
discipline-spe-

gagement (particularly among former  
continue

ISGP participants) as well as patterns  
participate in

of mentorship within professional  
and academic spaces appear to be  
how to

distinct contributions the Association  
can make. Recent efforts along these  
contrib-

lines have included the development  
high-quality

of an economics seminar that assists  
"intellec-

students to scrutinize the assumptions  
community

underlying their fields through the lens  
disciplines"

of the Bahá'í teachings (see earlier  
of the

discussion in Section 2). This seminar  
Justice,

has been offered several times to small  
of the

groups of undergraduate students, and  
insights

it has proven fruitful. Based on this ex-  
re-

perience, and as noted earlier, another  
of

and ISGP seminars enhances the

ity of their participation in ABS

and endeavours.

The growing pattern of activity  
within ABS concurrently provides  
an increasing range of

for young people to develop their  
abilities to participate in

whose participants emerge from its  
seminars eager to find

cific spaces in which they can

building their capacity to

discourses of interest to them.

The fifth object of learning is

assist a growing number of authors  
to publish articles and books

uting to "the volume of

literature" that fosters the

tual life" of the Bahá'í

by 1) exploring "certain

and various themes "in the light

teachings" (Universal House of

Ridván 2021) and the experience

community, and 2) correlating

drawn from the wider society with

lated themes found in the writings

group is developing materials examining the materialistic assumptions that are often overlaid onto the study of evolution and neuroscience. These materials are also meant to assist young adults studying in relevant fields. investigate

Questions before us regarding this object of learning include: What are effective ways to reach and engage undergraduate, graduate students, and young professionals, particularly in view of the many demands on their time? How can we ensure that the Association's very efforts to this end are coherent with the independent investigation of truth.

other ways young adults are contributing to the Plan? How can we promote a culture of learning in which more experienced academics encourage and mentor younger scholars in their efforts to participate in discourses and advance research relevant to their chosen fields of study? Also, how can we better coordinate our efforts with ISGP, Ten Year Retrospective

publications work," above. These areas consider- include the encouragement of collaborative writing and the shepherding of thematic issues towards publication; the exploration of the possibilities of collaborative review for strengthening both rigour and a consultative approach to scholarship; and the fostering of greater historical awareness of prior

the Faith. This object of learning, understand, is consistent with the following statement of Shoghi Effendi: It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will ... be led to and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the essence of the principle of

(Quoted in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice dated 19 October 1993)

Towards this end, the JBS Committee continues to advance its learning in the areas described in Section 4, "Evolution of the 25

At this point, additional actions related to advancing this object of learning include questions such as: How can we concurrently uphold the integrity of the content and of JBS while also encouraging that reaches a wider, more diverse, audience—that is, while advancing towards the goal of universal

partic-  
Bahá'í scholarship. These processes  
types of  
are all in their early stages of devel-  
that  
opment; they have already produced  
con-  
significant results and contributed to  
dis-  
advances in the Editorial Committee's  
spaces  
understanding and operations, but  
par-  
much more remains to be learned.  
without  
The work of ABS Publications has  
thus far focused on manuscripts by in-  
dividual authors, but the Publications  
and  
Committee is alert to opportunities  
to learn about collaboration in both  
different  
writing and review. More central to its  
pursuit of the object of learning noted  
how  
above is its continuing development of  
the capacity to work with multiple au-  
thors concurrently on projects at various  
stages of development. One particular  
question before both JBS and ABSP  
view  
concerns writing projects that are of  
an intermediate length—that is, longer  
is  
than a typical JBS article but shorter  
in  
than a book. In the early years of ABS,  
consolidate  
this type of writing was published in  
of  
monograph form; more recently, pieces  
hum-  
of this nature have found a home in JBS.  
doing.  
Both the Editorial Committee and the  
sem-  
Publications Committee are considering

ipation? Are there different  
writing and/or other media spaces  
would facilitate learning about  
tributing to academic and related  
courses—specifically, are there  
that would enable reading group  
ticipants to contribute writing  
burdening them with overly-stringent  
academic standards? What would it  
look like to promote more inquiry  
writing that draws upon and harmo-  
nizes insights accruing across  
collective initiatives?  
The sixth object of learning is  
to draw, where appropriate, on the  
arts as a means of "disseminating  
knowledge and consolidating un-  
derstanding" (30 December 2021).  
On this point, and particularly in  
view  
of this guidance from the Universal  
House of Justice, the Association  
endeavouring to be more systematic  
learning about how the arts  
understanding within various fields  
inquiry, and how they promote a  
ble posture of learning in so  
The Association has sponsored  
inars and working groups focused on

whether it might be timely to revive the order monograph, or a similar form, providing a shorter time horizon to publication academically than is possible with a book. settings,

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groups have explored historical and theoretical discourses that examine the nature of the relationship between art and society, the role of the artist in society, and insights from the Revelation pertaining to artistic endeavours. Based on the learning generated in these contexts and other consultative spaces, and in view of relevant guidance of the Universal House of Justice, we have identified three connected areas of inquiry: How can the arts be more effectively integrated into various ABS spaces? What are artists themselves learning regarding advancing discourses about the arts? And how can the arts play a direct role in disseminating learning pertaining to various discourses? Like seminars and working groups, the annual conference offers an important setting for the advancement of these areas of inquiry. This summer's conference features a plenary panel and several breakout sessions focused on the arts and their place in expansion and consolidation endeavors. We anticipate that discourses related to the arts in order to encourage capacity building among those professionally and academically involved in this area. In these conscious attempt to both clarify and apply elements of the conceptual framework in accordance with paragraph 5 of the 24 July 2013 In this paragraph, the House of Justice states: Central to the effort to advance work of expansion and consolidation, social action, and the ment in the discourses of is the notion of an evolving ceptual framework, a matrix that organizes thought and gives to activities and which becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates. It would be fruitful the elements of this framework most relevant to the work of the Associations for Bahá'í can be consciously and progressively clarified. Below, we consider each of the elements the House of Justice then proceeds to list, briefly

outlining how ideas and concepts emerging from these of presentations will quicken our ongoing While learning in the three areas of arts-related inquiry outlined above. In particular, we are eager to learn much more about how the arts can be integrated into ABS in its spaces in a way that inspires universal participation as well as "intellectual relation-rigour and clarity of thought." This element is a growing feature of the different settings discussed above. For example, we are learning in small settings like reading groups and seminars to A preeminent factor in the development of the Association has been our study Ten Year Retrospective component of this dynamic. With these insights in mind, the attempt to then larg-participate in the relevant discourse is to the the action component of this dynamic; this could take the form of, for example, the simple act of engaging in a possibility discussion with a colleague, or writing on a related subject. Such action can in turn inform subsequent discussions in the group and enable deeper study of the text and the correlated guid-

they have come to shape our mode functioning as an organization. the letter does not suggest that elements are exhaustive, they are sented as the most salient ones ABS to learn about at this point development. The first element is the ship between study and action.

5.2 E  
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also made a conscious effort within these spaces, and particularly the er reflection gatherings, to turn guidance as a lens through which to understand our experience, our realities, and the vistas of emerging before us. Our motivation do so increased with the release of 30 December 2021 message. We have additionally made some efforts to Ruhi Books 13 and 14. Studying such

ance. We are still at the early stages of guidance has helped us to further ap- cultivate this dynamic, but there is appreciate that reading reality and acting evidence that it is taking hold in vari- to transform it must go hand in hand.

ous groups. Some group members, for The second element is the need for focus. There is still much to be learned about how to focus our energies, discussions to social action. Others are particularly given our human resources. partic- ularly given our human resources. striving to ensure that they are more For example, we have identified several outward-oriented, both in terms of what they are studying and with whom priorities, but have not been able to ad- equately attend to all of them, they are acting and collaborating. such as working more closely with students on academics university campuses or with Association's mode of learning ad- and professionals from the wider com- munity on exigent issues. vances when there are sufficient spaces However, we are building capacity to for reflection. These include quarterly concentrate on various lines of action and to reflection meetings as well as regular better ap- appreciate how they and the smaller meetings and informal discus- correspond- ing activities are mutually sions that bring together the different enriching— how, for example, seminars, reading committees and collaborators to share insights and review progress, challeng- groups, writing projects, other smaller collective endeavours, the es, and opportunities for growth, and conference, and publishing, are related, feed study relevant guidance. For exam- into, and benefit from each other. ple, as we resume an annual in-person Moreover, the vision and objects of learning conference with several seminars and we have identified as an association breakout sessions featuring learn- (see

ing generated within various small group settings throughout the year, of the level of collaboration between the assiduously Conference Committee and CCI has that correspondingly increased. We have

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input from participants and collabora- passages tors may disclose new prospects worth ex- exploring. The third element is the challenge of fostering capacity and accompa- itself nying others in service. It has become process, evident that a posture of accompani- conjunction ment is central to eliciting insights; as building momentum; removing, and learning from, obstacles; fostering ca- settings, pacity; and promoting organic growth. multiply As noted under Sections 2 and 4 above, strikes this posture has played a significant centraliza- role in the development of reading attuned groups, working groups, and, more conceptual recently, writing groups. An objective section. now is to expand the nucleus of friends the in- who can accompany a widening net- work of facilitators, who can in turn patterns help with encouraging and coordinat-

Section 5.1) have both emerged out of, and further shaped, which lines action we have chosen to pursue—recognizing, of course, accumulating experience and regular text they are reading with from the writings, with their own perience, and with the insights of fellow participants. At the same time, the group is encouraged to view as part of a larger learning growing and developing in with other ABS endeavours. Again, we gain more experience with these groups and other specialized a question before us is how to these endeavours in a way that a healthy balance between tion and decentralization and is to all the elements of the framework discussed in this

The fifth element consists of stitutional arrangements necessary to sustain ever more complex of activity. To address the

complexity  
ing the expansion and consolidation of of current patterns of activity,  
the in-  
a growing number of collaborative set- stitutional arrangements have  
evolved  
tings that "operate . . . on the principle into the following configuration:  
the  
of universal participation" (OSED, 26 Executive Committee; the Committee  
November 2012). for Collaborative Initiatives,  
which co-  
The fourth element is the dynam- ordinates the settings described  
under  
ics of organic development. As is im- Section 2 and related lines of  
action;  
plicit in the foregoing comments, this the Journal of Bahá'í Studies  
Editorial  
element of the framework has proven Committee; the ABS Publications  
vital to all aspects of the Association's Committee, which focuses on  
publish-  
work. For example, as noted in Section ing books; the Conference  
Committee;  
2 above, a newly formed reading group and various ad hoc and/or  
short-term  
is encouraged to see itself as a setting task forces. In addition, the  
number of  
that aims to advance understanding remunerated ABS staff (now  
equaling  
about contributing to a particular dis- approximately 4.0 full-time  
employ-  
course. At the outset, the group is ees) has had to grow given the  
conti-  
encouraged not to take on too much. mental mandate of the Association  
and  
Rather, its main objective is to create the evolving complexity of the  
work.  
a consultative space in which partic- Much of the work entails  
collaborating  
ipants can reflectively develop their with hosts of individuals  
volunteering  
capacity to correlate ideas from the their time and energy to  
facilitate or  
Ten Year Retrospective 29  
coordinate reading groups, working be judicious yet clear about its  
needs  
groups, collaborative projects, work- going forward, indicating that  
meeting

shops, seminars, elements of the conference, writing endeavours, and so on. coherence

The list of volunteers has been slowly expanding in response. However, we Association are finding that building a vibrant network of volunteers requires those serving in remunerated positions and close and collaborators to devote substantial time to supporting, analyzing, synthesizing, and disseminating learning. Also critical to advancing the work of the Association has been the systematization of its administrative practices. We have paid significant attention to establishing suitably coherent processes supported by apposite technological solutions. The administrative work involves the provision of support to the Executive Committee and other committees and includes attending to logistical matters related to the annual conference and seminars, book-keeping, managing data, maintaining the website, facilitating the editorial process, keeping minutes, handling correspondence, providing IT support, appropriate; and carrying out other sundry tasks. As the work of the Association evolves,

them is a priority. The sixth element is the required among all areas of endeavour. As stated above, the has been striving to further its approach to identifying and objects of learning, setting goals, documenting experience and We have been regularly reflecting and identifying, next steps for each line of action; assessing the coherence between these lines of action and they contribute to and profit from other; and developing a robust system for the retention, updating, and of information. This sixth element view as tied to the seventh element, which consists of sound relations among individuals, the community, and the institutions. Here, a major objective of the Executive Committee—still very much in development—has been to facilitate the creation of of action for each of the areas of focus; to disseminate across its committees as to create spaces for the ongoing eration of insights aimed at

articulating the volume of the administrative growth; work naturally grows, too. Given the advances over the last ten years, and ef- particularly over the last three years, work; the question of the human resources and required to sustain growth and manage in- the escalating administrative needs of is the organization is a regular topic of element consultation. To this end, the National in Spiritual Assembly of Canada has lov- ingly encouraged the Association to 30

an evolving unity of vision of to consult with and accompany staff members and collaborators in their forts to further coordinate their and to explore possibilities with, receive guidance from, the senior stitutions—all of which, finally, directly related to the eighth of the framework, namely, learning action. As alluded to throughout this

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document, we have been making a con- human scious effort to read reality through the lens of relevant guidance, to build on understanding strengths, and to cultivate "an ongoing appro- process of action, reflection, study, and investigate consultation to address obstacles and and share successes, re-examine and revise strategies and methods, and systematize attest, this and improve efforts over time" (24 July received 2013). We have certainly not mastered First, this process, but we feel confident in described affirming that we are now much more cognizant than we were ten years ago ef- of the power of learning in action to "reflect on

the heart of most disciplines of knowledge is a degree of consensus about methodology—an of methods and how to use them priately to systematically reality to achieve reliable results sound conclusions." As the previous sections of this retrospective aspect of the framework has attention in at least three ways. within the various settings under Sections 2 and 3 above, the Association has made a concerted fort to enable participants to

engender growth in the intellectual life found of the community, and of the elements their involved in doing so. We are similarly de- more aware that "[a]s unity of thought achieved around essential concepts emerges [it to set- is] useful to explore fresh approaches with some simple steps that can grow or in complexity. Gradually, those aspects and of the conceptual framework pertain- participants, ing to intellectual inquiry in diverse en- fields will become clearer and grow richer" (24 July 2013). These aspects, in we believe, have become clearer. They have, consequently, empowered us to more effectively learn how to learn as concep- an association. tual framework required to promote the evolution of the Association itself.

5.3 G In addition to those discussed in the previous subsection (5.2), and in view of the conviction that those engaged In the next paragraph of the 24 July 2013 message, the House of Justice any goes on to explain that "One of the tak- critical aspects of a conceptual frame- framing work that will require careful attention activ- in the years ahead is the generation House and application of knowledge . . . At enkindled

the implications that the truths in the Revelation may hold for work" and related discourses. The gree to which this has been has naturally varied from setting ting and depends upon many factors, such as the duration of the setting process of inquiry, the experience time availability of the and the quality of the consultative vironment that is created. Second, we have—particularly more recent years—focused on expanding our understanding of, and applying, the elements of the

in scholarly pursuits "are not from the obligations placed upon believer" (24 July 2013), we have en to heart the importance of participation in the Association's ities in line with the Universal of Justice's descriptions of

souls in recent messages. These souls functioned as spaces to consolidate and share emphasize qualities and attitudes—such as trustworthiness, cooperation, and forbearance—participants, that are building blocks of a stable social order. They champion rationality and science as essential for human progress. They advocate tolerance and understanding, and with the inherent oneness of humanity uppermost in their minds, they view everyone as a potential partner to collaborate with. . . . (30 December 2021)

the year prior. All three insights both within and across disciplinary groups. Throughout the advance of each seminar, organized in disciplinary groups, online meetings (some more frequently than others) to discuss assigned pre-readings and related questions on themes such as the harmony of science and religion, the limits of the nature of knowledge, the implications of materialism for various fields of study, and the qualities and attitudes they want to adopt when participating in the generation of knowledge. These

Ablaze with divine love, they also strive to disseminate this love through intimate conversations that create new susceptibilities in human hearts, open minds to moral persuasion, and loosen the hold of biased norms and social systems so that they can gradually take on a new form in keeping with the requirements of humanity's age of maturity. (22 July 2020)

seminars also gave birth to a collaborative initiatives and science methodologies discussed under Sections 2 and 4 above. Plans are currently being made for another methodology seminar to be held in the fall 2023.

6. A

Towards the end of the 24 July 2013 message, the House of Justice stresses the pivotal role of the training institute, but then explains that "whatever the vital question of methodologies, scope of its curriculum and no matter

the Executive Committee, along with progress two key collaborators, organized three the two-day seminars (2019-21) for graduate students and faculty to assemble and explore the question of methodology within their respective fields and to discuss the implications of the Revelation for this facet of scholarship.

how fundamental it is to the of the community, involvement in institute is only a part of a inquiry in which these friends will be engaged—one that will include exploration of the Revelation as well various disciplines of knowledge." As such, the House of Justice

"looks Each seminar built on the learning of to

to rising generations of Bahá'ís

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wholeheartedly address a wide range of intellectual challenges, overcome enabling parallel pitfalls and obstacles, and render service for the betterment of the world"; anticipates that "in the decades ahead... a host of believers will enter and diverse social spaces and fields of human endeavour"; and asserts that "[t]o this arena, pregnant with possibilities, the Association for Bahá'í Studies can offer an important contribution."

build on the approaches and content the institute, thus further participants to "enter diverse social and fields of human endeavour" (24 July 2013), "explicate the the Bahá'í community advocates, "demonstrate their applicability to issues facing humanity" (30 December 2021).

We have been learning how participating in the institute constructively affects the work of the Association and S???????

A A:  
S G I

W???????

how immersing ourselves in its methods and approaches further propels this work forward. Ruhi Book 14 is directly relevant in this regard, but so are other books, such as Ruhi Books 2, 10, and 13. Together, they help to further attune us to the elements of the framework

2021 Facilitator preparatory sessions: 3 (26 participants) Workshop sessions: 14 (112 participants)

that bear directly on promoting the intellectual life of the community and, hence, the mandate of the Association itself. These books also assist in disclosing to us the degree to which this arena is pregnant with possibilities—particularly now, given both the momentum being generated around North America as the friends apply the elements of the Nine Year Plan, and the growing contingents of youth and young adults benefiting from the programs of ISGP. As noted above, these programs have shaped how participants are thinking about their lives and intellectual development, as well as how they are adopting and applying the conceptual framework. Such developments bode well for the Association as it seeks to

2022  
Facilitator preparatory sessions: 2 (10 participants)  
Workshop sessions: 13 (145 participants)

2023  
Facilitator prep sessions: 1 (7 participants)  
Workshop sessions: 6 as of July (42 participants)

R G

2020

1. Achieving Coherence in Media  
2. Arts and the Pandemic  
3. Business Capital, Access, and Justice  
4. Business Management

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5. Commodification of Knowledge  
6. Constructive Agency  
7. Education  
8. Evolving Role of Law Enforcement  
9. Ideological Foundations of Racism and Crime/Deviance  
10. Inquiries into World Order  
11. International Property Law  
12. Jurisprudence  
13. Justice in the Age of Globalization  
14. Minds, Brains, and Consciousness  
15. Questioning Econ 101  
16. Race, Africanity, and the Bahá'í Knowledge  
Faith  
17. Science, Religion and the Generation of Knowledge (2 groups)  
18. Teaching Economics After Covid  
19. Youth, Narrative Media, and Cultural Production

11. Southern California Media Professionals  
12. Speculative Fiction  
13. Storytelling and Cinema  
14. Technology and Society I  
15. Book: The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and The Making of American Capitalism by Edward E. Baptist  
16. The Village Storehouse  
17. Transdisciplinarity and the Intersection of Scientific and Spiritual/Religious  
Systems in Public Health I  
18. Urbanism: Housing  
19. Virtue, Freedom, and Community: Insights from Influential Women Thinkers I—Simone Weil

Total number of participants: 154

Total number of participants: 206

2022  
1. Adolescent Nutrition  
2021  
2. Chaos, Complexity, and the

1. Building Structural Competency in Natural/Human Sciences the Classroom and Clinical Setting
2. Climate Change Environment
3. Climate Change and the Environment
3. Climate Change and the Environment
4. Crisis and Opportunity: Towards a Vision of Sustainable Global Development
4. Education for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization
5. Examining Health Equity
5. Book: Eating the Landscape: American Indian Stories of Food, Identity, and Resilience by Enrique Salmón
6. Exploring the Role of Asian Pacific Islanders in Eradicating Anti-Blackness
6. Critiques of Capitalism
7. Discourses of Diplomacy I
7. Book: Food Security: From Excess to Enough by Ralph C. Martin
8. Book: Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land by Leah Penniman
8. Book: Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy by Sona Arbab I
9. Narrative and Ethics
9. Book: Finding the Mother Tree, by Suzanne Simard
9. Book: Finding the Mother Tree, by Wangari Maathai
10. Reparations and Reconciliation
10. Book: Food, Farmer, and Community & Wellbeing
10. Book: Food, Farmer, and Community: Agriculture and the Reconstruction of the World, by Winnona Merritt
27. Urbanism: Neighbourhood & Community
28. Urbanism: Neighbourhood & Community
11. Book: Freedom Farmers: Agriculture Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement by Monica White
29. Virtue, Freedom, and Community: Insights from Influential Women Thinkers II—Hannah Arendt
12. Historical and Philosophical Understanding of Complexity, Emergence, and Chaos
30. Virtue, Freedom, and Community: Insights from Influential Women Thinkers III—Iris Murdoch
13. Book: How To Feed The World, edited by Jessica Eise and Ken Foster
31. Whiteness and Patriarchy: Weeding Out Barriers to Oneness, Cultivating Justice and Authenticity, I
14. Investigations into Media, Knowledge, and Culture
32. World Citizenship as a Performative Revolutionary Act
15. Just and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence I
33. World Government Narratives
16. Book: Life in the Soil: A Guide for Naturalists and Gardeners by James B. Nardi
- Total number of participants: 269
17. Book: Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy by Sona Arbab II
- 2023 ( J 24)
1. Discourses of Diplomacy II: Identifying Correlations with Bahá'í Concepts
18. Nature of Work I
2. Books: How to Feed the World, Edited by Jessica Eise and Ken Foster and Food, Farmer, and
19. Nature of Work II
20. News Articles on Climate and Agriculture

21. Overcoming Material and Community: Agriculture and the Spiritual Barriers to Racial Unity: Reconstruction of the World, compiled by Winnona Merritt  
 Reviewing The Sum of Us by Heather McGhee I 3. Indigenous Studies
22. Psychology of Social Change 4. Just and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence II
23. Book: Resetting the Table: Straight Talk About the Food We Grow and Eat by Robert Paarlberg 5. Just and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence III
24. Technology and Society II 6. Looking at Community Building from an Evolutionary Perspective: Contributions from Anthropology and Neuroscience
25. Transdisciplinarity and the Intersection of Scientific and Spiritual / Religious Knowledge Systems in Public Health II 7. Methodological Approaches to the Study of Religion
26. Book: Unbowed, A Memoir by Ten Year Retrospective 35
- within the Discipline of History: 21. Whiteness and Patriarchy: Weeding Out Barriers to Oneness, Cultivating Speculative Approaches in the Works of Arnold Toynbee Justice and Authenticity II
8. Overcoming Material and Spiritual Barriers to Racial Unity: Reviewing The Sum of Us by Heather McGhee II S Total number of participants to date: 219
9. Book: Regensis: Feeding the World Without Devouring the Planet by George Monbiot 2016 1. Education
10. Book: Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness by Frédéric Laloux 2017 2. Health Working Group Seminars
1. Health Working Group (WG)
11. Speech/Language Pathology
2. Economies WG
12. Storytelling and Cinema
3. Law WG
13. Technology and Society III
4. Media WG
14. The Modern Intellectual Tradition I: From the Scientific Revolution to Immanuel Kant Thematic Seminars 1. Religion and Society
15. The Modern Intellectual Tradition II: From German Idealism to Nietzsche Total number of participants: 122
16. The Nature of Work: Perspectives of Race, Gender, Education, and 2018 Working Group Seminars

## Justice

### 1. Health WG

17. The Role of Women in Society: An

### 2. Law WG

Exploration of Mothers as the First

### 3. Media WG

Educators, Equality, and Social

### 4. Technology WG

Change

18. Book: The Systems View of Life: Total number of participants: 149

A Unifying Vision by Fritjof Capra

and Pier Luigi Luisi 2019

19. Towards Vibrant Communities and

Gardening Working Group Seminars

20. Transdisciplinarity and the 1. Economies WG

Intersection of Scientific and 2. Health WG (a)

Spiritual / Religious Knowledge 3. Health WG (b)

Systems in Public Health III 4. Law WG

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### 5. Media WG

3. Narrative and Local Storytelling

Thematic Seminars

4. Resilient Communities

### 5. Science and Religion

1. Methodologies in Academic

Research Total number of participants: 136

2. Propaganda

3. The Bahá'í Faith and Liberalism 2023 ( J 24)

4. Education Thematic Seminars

Total number of participants: 258 1. A Revelation Scientific in Its

Method

2020

2. Brain, Behavior, and Mental Health

1. Business in Youth: Exploring Underlying

2. Methodologies in Academic Frameworks and Forces

Research 3. Climate Change and the

Environment

Total number of participants: 52 4. Collective Inquiry and Social

Action: Considering Participatory

2021

Action Research in Theory and

Working Group Seminars Practice

5. Engaging Introductory Economics

1. Media WG (seminar and

from a Bahá'í Perspective

symposium)

6. Health Equity

7. Navigating Materialist Assumptions

Thematic Seminars in the Study of Biology

1. Questioning Econ 101

8. Technology and Society

2. Methodologies in Academic Research      9. Telling the Story of an Evolving World Order

10. The Commodification of Knowledge  
Total number of participants: 170

11. Trust: The Investigation of Truth  
2022 and Health Care Delivery

Working Group Seminars      12. Methodologies in Academic Research (in planning)

1. Africana Studies WG

2. Health WG

3. Media WG

Total number of participants to date:  
202

Thematic Seminars

1. Climate Change

2. Cooperatives and Next Systems

— Ten Year Retrospective, 24 July 2023 (Used by permission of the curator)