

What is the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE)?

<http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/education/bihe>

In what the *New York Times* called “an elaborate act of communal self-preservation,” the Baha'i community in 1987 established its own higher education program to meet the educational needs of young people who had been systematically denied access to higher education by the Iranian government.

The Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) is an informal arrangement because the Iranian government will not allow the establishment of any Baha'i institutions in Iran.

Initially, the BIHE made use of the volunteer services of Baha'i professors and lecturers who had been dismissed from their university posts. The Institute operated largely by correspondence. Later, classes and laboratory work were carried out in private homes and basements. Online studies were added in more recent years.

In September and October 1998, agents of the Iranian government staged a series of sweeping raids, arresting at least 36 members of the BIHE's faculty and staff and confiscating much of its equipment and records, which were located in over 500 homes. In subsequent years there have been periodic onslaughts of varying intensity against this endeavour, most notably in 2001 and 2003.

The BIHE nevertheless continued to conduct its courses according to the highest academic standards.

At the time of the latest raids on its staff and resources, it was offering 17 university-level programs. Some 200-300 people were teaching classes and supporting its work by way of administration. An average of 1000 students apply to BIHE every year.

The BIHE issues a degree to its graduates but, since the Iranian government does not recognize the Institute, the degree is not certified. Nevertheless, a number of universities in Europe, North America, Australia, and India, have admitted BIHE graduates to pursue post-graduate studies. Most of these students return to Iran upon the awarding of their degrees and, in turn, volunteer to teach courses, enabling the BIHE to maintain its academic standards.

There can be no doubt that the attacks on the BIHE are being carried out under a centrally orchestrated campaign aimed at demoralizing Baha'i youth and eroding the formal educational level of the community so as to hasten its impoverishment.

Not content with excluding Baha'is from the nation's universities, the Iranian government is callously revitalizing its efforts to thwart the educational arrangements that the Baha'i community has undertaken to enable its youth to expand their knowledge beyond the high school level.

Baha'i Institute for Higher Education's (BIHE) Vision for the 21st Century

<http://www.bihe.org>

BIHE was born out of a need to educate those who were unjustly denied access to a university education. As such, the origin of BIHE is rooted in a spirit of purposefulness, dedication, and a belief in the power of true education. The unique circumstances surrounding BIHE, whereby professors taught without compensation, and all staff and students participated in the university at great personal risk, unwittingly forced the university to become a leader in combining online learning, traditional classroom instruction and preparation for a successful career.

Today the exigencies of higher education are different from the past. Rapid cultural and technological changes are creating new demands. At BIHE, we believe that through collaborative and versatile learning that emphasizes conceptual as well as practical aspects of living in a global society, challenges can be transformed into possibilities. Indeed, that has been the founding principle of BIHE.

BIHE aspires to make its services accessible to all Iranians, irrespective of their religious affiliations, and to be a useful instrument for the well-being and prosperity of the nations in the 21st century.

BIHE at a Glance

- BIHE was founded in 1987
- In the first year of its establishment, 1987, students were accepted in two fields of studies, namely sciences and humanities
- BIHE has five faculties with 5 associate programs, 18 undergraduate degree programs and 14 graduate programs
- BIHE offers over 1050 courses ranging from Persian Literature to Applied Chemistry.
- BIHE has a combined faculty and administrative staff of over 955 members
- An average of 1000 students apply to BIHE every year
- BIHE currently accepts about 450 students into its first year programs
- BIHE applicants must conform to the same rigorous academic standards as other students in Iran. They must pass the national entrance exam, and meet all the BIHE academic requirements

- BIHE graduates have been accepted at more than 85 different university graduate programs outside of Iran including:
 - Harvard University, Yale University, University of California, Berkeley, Stanford Medical School, Columbia University, University of Chicago, and over thirty other U.S. universities
 - Universities in Canada, India, United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway, Finland, France, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Portugal, Australia, New Zealand