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Message from the Executive Director

Pick up a newspaper or turn on a radio or television anywhere in the world and one ineluctable fact becomes immediately clear: beliefs and values are at the very heart of why we humans do what we do—and who we say we are—to ourselves, others, and the world at large. From politics, religion, education and the arts, to marriage, family, gender, and sexuality, what is arguably most interesting about the varying opinions we express on such topics is not whether this belief is “right,” or that value is “wrong.” Much more important is understanding the complex interaction among affect, cognition, context, and development that culminates in a unique constellation of beliefs and values for every human being, as well as how and why these different versions of reality are inevitably linked to the actions, practices, and policies of individuals, groups, organizations, governments, and societies all over the world.



Craig N. Shealy, Ph.D.

At one level, these considerations regarding human nature and society are as old as recorded history, which can be read as nothing more or less than a catalogue of causes and campaigns that were justified on the basis of beliefs and values that fit a unique time and place, and were designed for specific ends. However, it might also be argued that matters have become much more complicated of late, for if the past century and beginning of this one teach us anything, it is that we now have the necessary means and methods—and all too frequent inclination—to express the beliefs we hold to be true or false, and value as good or bad, through actions, practices, and policies that can harm large numbers of people, subvert democratic processes and institutions, and damage the global environmental systems that are necessary to sustain life. The rationale for the IBAVI is highly congruent with the above observations, in its assertion that:

...a critical mass of the world's population must come to understand that the actions, practices, and policies of individuals, groups, organizations, governments, and societies are mediated by beliefs and values that may be highly subjective, non-conscious, and self-serving rather than just, equitable, rational, and sustainable. Such understanding must be sufficiently achieved in the near future by a substantial proportion of the world's population—as well as those who are in positions of relative power and influence—and subsequently translated into relevant actions, practices, and policies.

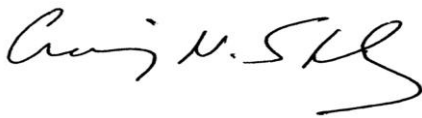
A nonprofit and nonpartisan organization hosted by Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia, the International Beliefs and Values Institute (IBAVI) explores the linkage between beliefs and values and actions, policies, and practices around the world through interdisciplinary research, education, and service.

At the IBAVI, we address these real world issues and objectives head on, and at multiple levels of action and analysis. Through interdisciplinary scholarship, education, and service—and in partnership with a wide range of international academics, policy makers, community leaders, organizations, and funding agencies—we rigorously pursue the mission of the IBAVI, which is to examine, describe, and explain the linkages between the implicit or explicit beliefs and values of individuals, groups, organizations, governments, and societies around the world and those actions, practices, or policies that are demonstrably grounded in or legitimized by these specific beliefs and values. We do so in a way that is deliberately pluralistic, critically-minded, and self reflective, grounded in sound scholarship, and informed by reasoned dialogue. By way of example, here are a few of our current initiatives:

- ***Beliefs and Values: Understanding the Global Implications of Human Nature***, an international and interdisciplinary journal developed in collaboration with Springer Publishing, which bridges scholarship and application, showcases exemplary people, projects, and programs, and facilitates a greater understanding of self, others, and the world at large (<http://www.springerpub.com/bv>);
- ***Making Sense of Beliefs and Values: A World of Views***, a documentary series in development with MacNeil Lehrer Productions (<http://www.macneil-lehrer.com/about.html>), regarding the nature, origins, and implications of beliefs and values—both historically and currently;
- the **Forum BEVI Project** in collaboration with the Forum on Education Abroad (<http://www.forumea.org/research-bevi.htm>), which examines how, for whom, and under what circumstances “beliefs and values” are changed as a result of study abroad as well as other international and multicultural learning experiences; and,
- **Art Around The World**, in which students and teachers from different countries share their art and words in order to promote tolerance, understanding, and respect for different ways of thinking, believing, and living (<http://www.ibavi.org/aaw>).

Additional information regarding the IBAVI and its activities is available at our website (see <http://www.ibavi.org>). We are always interested in collaborative projects that are of mutual interest and benefit, so if you or your organization would like to talk further, please contact us by phone at +540-887-7338 or via e-mail at ibavi@ibavi.org. We look forward to working together in the pursuit of meaningful answers to these complex questions that are of fundamental relevance to us all.

Regards,



Craig N. Shealy, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Professor of Graduate Psychology