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## **Course: Climate Change**

### **Course Description:**

Many people are already suffering from the devastating impacts of climate change such as increased water scarcity, more severe storms, floods, droughts, famines, malnutrition, diseases, and dislocation from their homes. The threat of climate change to our children and grandchildren is immense and its long term consequences are unprecedented in human history.

Climate change is not just an environmental issue. It has far-reaching implications for our efforts to relieve poverty, to establish and maintain peace, and for the economy. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of human civilization is at risk because we are destroying the foundation for life on this planet.

This short course doesn't claim to be comprehensive. The issue of climate change is vast and complex and its ethical implications are profound. Our purpose here is to lay a foundation upon which you will be able to build your own knowledge, and to help make your actions a service to humankind and a contribution to saving the foundation for life on this planet.

The course is based on the scientific findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), especially on its 5th Assessment Report of 2014, and on some more recent scientific research. The course includes the teachings and wisdom of many religions. While the course is intended for an interfaith group, scriptures were selected for their relevance in the context of climate change. Some sections feature more Bahá'í sources. Units 3, 4, and 6 focus on scientific and practical matters. Units 2, 5, and 7 cover predominantly spiritual and ethical matters.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- To be able to describe the basic science of climate change and how it affects people today and in the future.
- To be able to explain basic ethical questions related to climate change and ways to address them within the context of the spiritual teachings of the world's religions, especially of the Bahá'í Faith.
- To make enlightened decisions about ways one can mitigate climate change that are consistent with one's own spiritual and ethical values and explain them to others.
- To present the spiritual solutions to the climate crisis offered by Holy Scriptures to the increasing number of people who are very concerned about this problem.
- To demonstrate your understanding through postings in the course, devotionals, special research or artistic projects, or presentations to your friends.

**Faculty:** [Christine Muller](#) is the lead faculty for this course. Other faculty members are [Gary Colliver](#), [Carole Flood](#), and [Arthur Dahl](#).

### **Course Expectations and Guidelines:**

This course is divided into weekly sessions beginning with an orientation (Unit 1) and ending with a review and summary (Unit 8). All units include readings, activities, and an online discussion among workshop participants. The course has been structured so that it requires an estimated 5 or 6 hours per week of reading and discussion.

During Unit 1, you will draft a personal learning plan (PLP) to define the goals you have set for yourself by participating in this course. If you are taking the course for credit, one of your goals would naturally be meeting the course expectations for discussions, activities, and a final project. If you are not taking the course for credit, you need to set goals that will help you develop your personal capabilities and will be achievable in and around your other daily tasks.

During Unit 8, you will refer again to your PLP and complete a self-assessment reviewing the extent to which you met the goals you set for yourself. In addition, learners seeking credit from their university will complete their final project (15-20 page research paper or equivalent) and submit it to the lead faculty.

Your instructor will periodically review your progress in the course and be available to discuss things with you. The following guidelines will help you gain maximum benefit from your participation in the course and will contribute toward a rich and rewarding experience through dialogue with others. We recommend that you consider them when drafting your PLP.

- Complete the readings and activities for each unit. Afterwards, your first posting in the discussion area should make reference to the readings and activities in such a way that your instructor can tell you read the material and engaged in the activities.
- Post at least 2 message replies in the discussion area for each unit/session. Each post should contain substantive comments (i.e., a comment like "oh, that's interesting" is NOT substantive).
- Choose at least 2 different days each session when you will participate in the discussions. We suggest posting at least once within the first few days of the session, with your second post at least two days before the next session begins. By contributing more than one post on different days, you will help the group develop rich ongoing discussions.
- If you post on time (i.e., within the time period of each unit on the course schedule), others will be able to read and respond to your post.
- Keep a course journal to help you track your ideas as you work on your final project.

In order to be eligible to receive a **Certificate of Completion**, you must participate in a majority of the discussions, as well as complete a majority of available unit activities and the end-of-course self-assessment. Learners taking the course for credit must also complete a final project. Your first discussion posts within each unit should address the discussion topic and demonstrate understanding of the course/unit concepts. Additional postings should provide substantive comments to other participants that are thoughtful, relevant, and help to extend the discussion.

#### Course Schedule:

<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>Introduction to the Course and to Moodle</b>	<b>March, 1-4, 2016</b>
In this unit, you will review the unit topics and dates, learn how to use Moodle (our course management system), set up your user profile, begin developing a personal learning plan, and learn how to post and reply in the discussion forums. Learners seeking university credit through their own university or an external agency will be required to design a personal learning plan to meet external standards, including active and ongoing participation in the course discussion forums, readings, assigned activities, and completion of a 15 to 20 page research paper or a project of equivalent complexity.		
<b>Unit 2</b>	<b>Nature and Humankind</b>	<b>March 5-11</b>
Part 1 begins with spiritual reflections about "Nature and Creation" and the "Interconnectedness in Nature". It also covers "Photosynthesis" and "Sustainability", prerequisites to understanding climate change. Part 2 is all about "Science and "Religion", their roles, relationship, and relevance for dealing with climate change.		
<b>Unit 3</b>	<b>Science of Climate Change</b>	<b>March 12-18</b>
This unit covers the basic scientific explanation of the causes of global warming, but does not claim to be comprehensive. The materials are written to be understood by everyone. They are fundamentally important for an understanding of climate change. Even if you already have some knowledge about		

climate science the readings will help you get an overview of this complex phenomenon and to wrap your mind around the various aspects. If you like to go deeper into the science now or later on, there will be references under optional readings.

<b>Unit 4</b>	<b>Impacts of Climate Change</b>	<b>March 19-25</b>
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Most people have heard about some present and anticipated future climate impacts. This unit will give you an oversight of the many different impacts of climate change. There is much information in the reading materials. It's not necessary for you to learn all the facts and numbers. Their purpose is to illustrate the scope of the threats. The short documentary will give climate change impacts a human face. The suggested activities will deepen your experience and some are of service to others.

<b>Unit 5</b>	<b>Spiritual and Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change</b>	<b>March 26-April 1</b>
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When reading books about climate change written by scientists or journalists you will often encounter a desperate call for ethics, often in the final chapter. In various ways these authors deplore the absence of a coherent ethical framework. For science and technology can only inform us of facts or know how, but don't tell us what we should do and how we should approach our objective. It is the domain of religion to provide us with the moral guidelines of how to live. In this unit we will study spiritual and ethical principles that are directly applicable to the climate crisis.

<b>Unit 6</b>	<b>Mitigating Climate Change</b>	<b>April 2-8</b>
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By now you know that climate change is a very complex issue: There are many causes and a wide range of effects. Working towards a solution is equally complex. There is no simple prescription to solve the problem of global warming. However, it is quite possible to effectively mitigate global warming by taking a holistic approach. This means reducing emissions in all sectors of human activity.

<b>Unit 7</b>	<b>A Challenge to All of Us</b>	<b>April 9-22</b>
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This unit covers our human response to the climate crisis from various perspectives: psychological, ideological (climate skeptics), social, and spiritual.

<b>Unit 8</b>	<b>Summary and Integration</b>	<b>April 23-25</b>
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In this unit, we discuss the course in general and the relationship of the various topics to each other and review the learning goals set during Unit 1. Those seeking credit will complete their final projects (15-20 page research paper or equivalent) and submit them to the lead faculty.

<b>Course Project</b>	
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Your Personal Learning Plan (PLP) helps you focus on what you want to learn in the course and on what course project you might be interested in creating. The final project is a course requirement only if you wish to receive credit from an external agency. You will have an opportunity to share your final project with course participants.

The following is a short list of possible ideas for final projects. Learners may propose other ideas as well:

- Submit a research/reflection paper (approximately 15-20 pages including references) on a topic related to the course.
- Create an artistic project related to the course with a written explanation about it.
- Alternative final project formats can be discussed with course instructor.

<b>Certificate of Completion</b>	
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- Learners not taking the course for credit will receive a certificate of completion from the Wilmette Institute after course expectations were met.
- For learners taking the course for credit, the Wilmette Institute will send a transcript to the learner and the external accrediting institution within a month of completion of the course.
- Those who are taking this course for university credit should also study the online MetEd Module "Climate Change Fitting the Pieces Together". This Module is incorporated into three units of the Wilmette Course, takes from 2 - 3 hours, and includes a test. There is an option in the module to send the test score to your mentor. Please, take that option if you are taking the course for

credit.