



**Director:** Dr. Robert H. Stockman  
**Email:** [rstockman@wilmetteinstitute.org](mailto:rstockman@wilmetteinstitute.org)

[www.wilmetteinstitute.org](http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org)  
**Voice:** (877)-WILMETTE

## **BCA342: Bahá'í Institutions, the Community, and the Individual**

**Dates:** March 1, 2018 – April 18, 2018  
**Faculty:** Barney Leith, Wendy Momen

### **Course Description:**

"The individual, the institutions, and the community--the three protagonists in the Divine Plan--are being shaped under the direct influence of His Revelation," writes the Universal House of Justice in its 28 December 2010 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, "and a new conception of each, appropriate for a humanity that has come of age, is emerging. The relationships that bind them, too, are undergoing a profound transformation, bringing into the realm of existence civilization-building powers, which can only be released through conformity with His decree. At a fundamental level these relationships are characterized by cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness that governs the universe."

This course will give us the opportunity to study and reflect in depth about the nature of the three protagonists, their roles and relationships. Enriched by our deeper understanding gained from the course, we will be better equipped to play our parts in the building of the new civilization envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- To approach the course with an attitude of learning.
- To learn to quote and describe Bahá'í guidance, experience, and practice relating to the subjects covered in each unit.
- To put your learning into practice throughout the course as the framework for gaining experience, from contributing to the discussions in the forums to initiating meaningful conversations about these topics and to contributing to the discourse on these subjects in the wider community.

### **Course Expectations:**

This course is divided into one-week (or less) sessions beginning with an orientation unit and ending with a unit for review and summary. All units include readings, activities, and an online discussion among course participants. The course has been structured so that it typically 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 will naturally be meeting the course expectations for discussions, activities, and a final project. If you are not taking the course for credit, we suggest you set goals that will help you develop your personal capabilities and will be achievable in and around your other daily tasks.

During the final review unit, 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 (10-20 page research paper or equivalent) and submit it to the lead faculty.

### **Course Guidelines:**

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.

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- 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.

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### Course Project:

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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 (about 10-20 pages including references) on a course-related topic.
- Create an artistic project related to the course with a written explanation about it.
- Alternative final project formats can be discussed with course instructor.

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### Certificate of Completion:

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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. 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.

Learners taking the course for credit must also complete a final project. The Wilmette Institute will send a transcript to the learner and the external accrediting institution within a month of completion of the course.

Learners who are not taking the course for credit will receive a certificate of completion from the Wilmette Institute after course expectations are met.

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### Preparatory Tasks:

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1. Watch the Director's Welcome Video, read about the Technology Requirements of the course, the Technical Assistance we can provide, and our ability to Accommodate Disabilities.
2. Update your personal profile (see instructions in section 4 of the Course Software Tutorial).
3. Tour the course website to get better acquainted with the elements of a course:
  - a. Open and glance through a few of the Unit pages, including the readings and discussion forum.
  - b. Look at the items in the sidebars (columns), especially Local Study Groups and Resources.
  - c. Take a look at the other elements on the course site, especially the instructions in the Reflection and Application Unit, as this will influence your Personal Learning Plan.
4. Read through the Frequently Asked Questions about our Moodle course management system.

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### Course Schedule:

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<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>March 1-4, 2018</b>
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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 10 to 20 page research paper or a project of equivalent complexity.

The course will help us understand how fundamental to the building of a new civilization are the work of the three protagonists—the Bahá'í institutions, the Bahá'í community, and the individual—and the development of good relationships of cooperation and reciprocity among them. In this first unit, we will consider the context within which the Bahá'í institutions, the individual, and the community find their purpose and act.

**Learning objectives**

1. To explain the context within which the individual, the institutions and the community find their purpose.
2. To comment on the paradigm of interdependence and collaboration necessary for the building of a new civilization.

**Unit 2                    The Three Protagonists                    March 5-11**

This unit introduces the concept of a “protagonist” and explores how the Universal House of Justice uses the concept as it guides the Bahá'í world in the Plan.

**Learning objectives:**

1. To define and describe the concept of a ‘protagonist’.
2. To name the three protagonists mentioned by the Universal House of Justice.
3. To list some implications of the Universal House of Justice's use of the term “protagonist” in the context of the Plan.
4. To describe how the three protagonists can contribute to the progress of the Plan.

**Unit 3                    The Covenant                    March 12-18**

The Covenant between Bahá'u'lláh and His avowed followers, also known as the Lesser Covenant, is the foundation on which the whole Bahá'í project is built. The Covenant makes unarguably clear the line of succession from Bahá'u'lláh to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and gives infallible authority to the Universal House of Justice. It underpins the Bahá'í Administrative Order, itself the pattern and nucleus of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. It also grounds the conduct of the individual and the community.

**Learning objectives:**

1. To describe the nature of the Covenant and its two Centres.
2. To list the documents of the Covenant.
3. To map and describe the relationship between the Covenant and the Institutions and the Individual.
4. To show how the Covenant is the foundation for the safe and fruitful functioning of all three protagonists and their interrelationships.

**Unit 4                    The Individual                    March 19-25**

Individual initiative is indispensable for the progress of the Cause. Shoghi Effendi explains that without the individual's “support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure.” In this unit, we will look at the nature and purpose of the individual as a spiritual being, and at their role in taking initiative in relation to the Plan.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To describe key characteristics of the individual in relation service to the Cause of God.
2. To explain the individual's “twofold moral purpose.”
3. To map the relationship of the individual to the institutions and the community.
4. To analyse how individual initiative relates to the authority of the institutions.

**Unit 5                    The Institutions                    Mar 26 – Apr 1**

Shoghi Effendi makes it clear that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have “established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy.” “These,” he says, “are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth.” (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 19) This unit gives us the opportunity to explore the origins of their institutions, their key characteristics, and their centrality to Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To give an account of the origins of the institutions.
2. To analyse the centrality of the institutions to the New World Order envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh.
3. To explore the key characteristics of the institutions.
4. To reflect on the unique nature of the Universal House of Justice.
5. To map the relationships of the Covenant to the institutions and of the institutions to the other two protagonists.

**Unit 6 The Community**

**April 2-8**

"Words have meanings," writes sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his 2001 book *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. "Some words, however, also have a 'feel'. The word 'community' is one of them. It feels good: whatever the word 'community' may mean, it is good 'to have a community', 'to be in a community'." He continues, "What that word evokes is everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting." Bauman's view of community contrasts with the Bahá'í understanding of community as an organic whole, united in love and given solidarity by the practice of Bahá'í consultation. In this unit, we will come to a deeper appreciation of the nature and role of community and of the importance of building community as a central element of the Plan.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To learn to describe the characteristics of the community as set out by the Universal House of Justice.
2. To compare the Bahá'í understanding of community with the understandings of various "secular" thinkers.
3. To analyse the importance of the community in relation to building the new civilization.

**Unit 7 Collaboration between the Protagonists**

**April 9-15**

"When individuals who have chosen the path of servitude come together in a community for the sake of the Cause, they can readily assume a posture of learning that is indispensable for collective endeavor. A systematic process is set in motion within the community 'in which the friends review their successes and difficulties, adjust and improve their methods accordingly, and learn, and move forward unhesitatingly.' Cooperation becomes the norm and service the motivating force that impels progress." (Lample, *Creating a New Mind*, p. 14.) In this unit we will explore ways in which the three protagonists collaborate and learn together in building a new civilization. As you go through the materials, relate them to your own experiences, if possible.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To compare and contrast the roles of the three protagonists.
2. To show how the roles of the three protagonists relate to each other.
3. To reflect on the foundational importance of collaboration to the growth of the Faith and the community building activities.

**Unit 8 Reflection and Application of Learning**

**April 16-18**

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 through their local university will complete their final projects (10-20 page research paper or equivalent) over the next month and submit them to the lead faculty.