



Director: Dr. Robert H. Stockman
Email: rstockman@wilmetteinstitute.org

www.wilmetteinstitute.org
Voice: (877)-WILMETTE

HS 305: The History of the Bahá'í Faith, 1863-present

Dates: May 22 – July 9, 2017

Faculty: Peter Smith, Moojan Momen

Course Description:

Bahá'í History, 1863-2017, will explore the major themes of Bahá'í history from Bahá'u'lláh's exile from Baghdad (1863) to the second decade of the twenty-first century, emphasizing the development of the Bahá'í Faith over the last century and a half. We will cover the period from 1863 to the end of Bahá'u'lláh's life in 1892; the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha (1892-1921); the ministry of Shoghi Effendi (1921-57); the ministry of the custodians (1957-63); the period from the election of the Universal House of Justice to the end of the twentieth century (1963-96); and the period marking a new direction in the teaching work and outreach to the public (1996-2017).

In most units we will be reading from *God Passes By* by Shoghi Effendi or *Century of Light*, supplementing the books with essays and articles on themes such as the development of the community, attracting minorities, the worldwide spread of the Faith, persecution, and more. The course will also look at the changes in the Bahá'í community since 1996, and in particular the changes brought about by the processes of the Five Year Plans (2001-06, 2006-11, 2011-16, 2016-2021).

Course Text: The course will also use *The Bahá'í Faith: A Short History* by Peter Smith. This book must be purchased. It is available in new, used and e-book editions from Amazon and Google Books.

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.

- 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.

Course Project:

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.

Certificate of Completion:

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.

Preparatory Tasks:

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.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1	Introduction	May 22-25, 2017
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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.

In this unit, you will look at the Bábí movement in mid-19th century Iran, out of which the Bahá'í Faith developed (modern Bahá'ís see the Báb as the co-founder of their religion).

Unit 2 Historical Background May 26 – June 1

For some of you this may be the most difficult unit you encounter in the course. Not only does the required reading consist of 4 chapters, but also we introduce you to a lot of Middle Eastern names and Islamic terminology, which may be unfamiliar to you. We have therefore provided you with a particularly large number of self-review questions if you find them useful.

Unit 3 The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh: 1853 - 1892 June 2-8

This unit covers the growth of the Bahá'í Faith during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh. Read *The Bahá'í Faith: A Short History*, Part II, Chapters 5 and 6. Then read Shoghi Effendi's interpretation of the history of this period in *God Passes by*. Read as many of the remaining articles as you have time for. Ask any questions you have in the Forum and then begin to discuss the articles using the discussion questions as starting points if you have no comments of your own. (We have provided a wide range of supplementary readings for you, but it's up to you how many of them you read.)

Unit 4 The Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 1892-1921 June 9-15

This unit focuses on the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh, who took the title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the "servant of Bahá" upon becoming the head of the Bahá'í Faith in 1892. Before that time, he was known to the Bahá'ís as Aqa, the "master of all work" and in Acre and Haifa as Abbas Effendi. The early Bahá'ís of the West called him "the Master" in imitation of the Eastern Bahá'ís, perhaps not quite understanding the true meaning of the Arabic word.

Unit 5 The Ministry of Shoghi Effendi and of the Custodians: 1921-63 June 16-22

This unit studies the growth of the Bahá'í Faith during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi and of the custodians (who coordinated the Bahá'í Faith from his passing until the election of the Universal House of Justice). As before, this unit contains a large selection of readings from which to choose about the growth of the Bahá'í Faith all over the world.

Unit 6 The Bahá'í Faith: 1963-1996 June 23-29

This unit covers the growth of the Bahá'í Faith from the election of the Universal House of Justice to 1996, when a new series of plans began.

Unit 7 The Bahá'í Faith: 1996-2017 June 30 – July 6

This unit covers the growth of the Bahá'í Faith from Ridván 1996, when the Universal House of Justice announced the beginning of a twenty-five year period focusing on building the capacity to sustain entry by troops and to the present.

Unit 8 Reflection and Application of Learning July 7-9

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.