



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

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

## **SC315: Bahá'í Approach to Social Change**

**Dates:** September 5 – November 6, 2018  
**Faculty:** Wendi Momen, Barney Leith, Dan Wheatley

### **Course Description:**

The Bahá'í Faith and Social Change considers some of the most controversial issues of the day—politics, economics, human rights, the environment—and what can be done about them from the point of view of the Bahá'í Faith. It provides an overview of the Bahá'í perspective on the nature, purpose, and evolution of society; the role of the individual, the community, and institutions in carrying forward an “ever-advancing civilization”; and the value of social action. Each unit provides an introduction to Bahá'í texts and principles on the topic; the tools used by Bahá'ís to translate these into their own thinking, social action, and discourse; and case studies of the implementation of these at the grassroots. It examines the Bahá'í view of history, its understanding of the role of religion in social evolution, its conceptualization of the direction of social progress and how the Bahá'ís are engaging in social action at present, using the tools of education and training, reflection, service to humanity, and consultation.

Course participants will be encouraged to make use of what they learn in the conversations they have with others and as they participate in public discourses in spaces such as interfaith meetings or meetings or conferences of civil-society organizations. Individual units look at human utterance and the practice of Bahá'í consultation; power, politics, governance, and law; economics; work and business; poverty eradication and wealth; human rights; gender equality; justice; eliminating prejudice; the environment; unity, peace, and development; education; service to humanity; and consultation.

### **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:

---

<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Sept. 5-8, 2018</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 10 to 20 page research paper or a project of equivalent complexity.

**Unit 2 Human Utterance and Consultation: Frameworks and Tools Sept. 9-15**

In this unit we will examine the nature of human utterance, learn how it may be moderated and used positively to encourage change, and practice the art of collective deliberation, otherwise known as consultation.

**Learning objectives**

1. To explain the Bahá'í understanding of the nature of human utterance.
2. To outline the principles of Bahá'í consultation as a means of exploring reality.
3. To practice the use of Bahá'í consultation as a means of exploring reality throughout the course and beyond.

**Unit 3 Concepts Underpinning the Baha'i Perspective on Social Change Sept. 16-22**

This unit provides an overview of the Bahá'í perspective on a number of related concepts that are important for understanding the Bahá'í perspective on social change and the challenges currently facing humanity. Concepts examined in this unit include the nature of humanity and society, the role of religion in social evolution, the nature of human history, human social purpose to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization, moral purpose, and unity as the driver of social evolution.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding, through the study and analysis of relevant texts, of basic concepts underpinning the Bahá'í perspective of a number of social changes that are currently challenging humanity and the world order.
2. Develop an understanding of the relationship among these basic concepts, their coherence, and how they contribute to social evolution.
3. Develop an understanding of the relationship between the task of carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization and the evolution of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

**Unit 4 Power, Politics, Governance, and Law Sept. 23-29**

This unit is focused on concepts of power, politics, and governance within the context of social action, which is defined by the Universal House of Justice as a broad spectrum from fairly informal efforts of limited duration to programmes of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organisations.

**Learning Goals**

1. Develop an understanding of the Bahá'í paradigm on the issues of power, politics, governance and law.
2. Explore the implication of these positions on how the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í community engage with issues of social change.
3. Articulate how these positions may be seen in Bahá'í thinking.
4. Articulate how these positions may be enacted in Bahá'í practice.

**Unit 5 Economics, Work and Business, Poverty Eradication and Wealth Sept. 30 – Oct. 6**

This unit introduces some of the main ideas about economics from the Bahá'í perspective, to set them in the context of the current world crises and to see how these apply to the social change we see around us and the social evolution described by Bahá'u'lláh, as we carry forward an 'ever-advancing civilization'.

This unit also examines in brief some of the elements of the economy that affect us directly and which can be so worrying at present: work, or the lack of it; the role of business in society, both positive and negative; how the first Sustainable Development Goal -- 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere' -- can be achieved; and the nature of wealth, including the gap between great wealth and great poverty, the true role of wealth in a society; and materialism.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding, through the study and analysis of relevant texts, of the Bahá'í perspective of economics, work and business, poverty eradication and wealth -- issues that are currently challenging humanity and the world order.
2. Develop an understanding of how these issues contribute to, or detract from, social evolution.
3. Develop an understanding of how these contribute to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

**Unit 6 Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Racism Oct. 7-13**

This unit focuses on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the maturing consciousness of a global community, and forms of abuse that occur on the intersections across race, culture, gender, and sexuality which have the potential to fuel sentiments of anger, suspicion, and division. Exploring these issues from the Bahá'í perspective offers a unique paradigm for reconceptualising these vital and interconnected issues, and social action connected to them.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding of the Bahá'í teachings that speak directly to the themes of human rights, gender equality and racism.
2. Examine some chapters from Bahá'í history of examples of social action in support of human rights, gender equality, and the efforts to eradicate racism.
3. Study and reflect on Bahá'í Writings that inform these debates.
4. Study and reflect on some Bahá'í scholarship and other materials that inform these debates.
5. To articulate how social action in these three inter-related areas may be enacted in Bahá'í practice and service.

**Unit 7 The Environment, Agriculture, Sustainability, and Sudden Natural Events Oct. 14-20**

This Unit provides an overview of the Bahá'í perspective on the environment, climate change, agriculture, and sudden natural events such as earthquakes and floods, looks at the steps we can take to familiarize ourselves with the key points of the discourse around these topics and links this to the ways in which Bahá'ís and their friends around the world are learning community-building skills which have already been shown to be useful.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding, through the study and analysis of relevant texts, of the Bahá'í perspective of the environment, climate change and sudden natural events -- issues that are currently challenging humanity and the world order.
2. Develop an understanding of how these issues contribute to social evolution.
3. Develop an understanding of how these contribute to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

**Unit 8 Justice and Eliminating Prejudice Oct. 21-27**

In this unit we will look at how the Bahá'í teachings and statements from Bahá'í institutions and agencies bear on the foundational question of how to remove prejudice and bring about justice. Prejudice of any kind is a form of injustice against certain populations. Without overcoming prejudice, there can be no justice; without justice there can be no unity in the world. In order to do this, we will need to consider how the concepts of "prejudice" and "justice" are used in political and other discourses in the world today; and how the Bahá'í teachings redefine these two terms, while setting out a path away from prejudice and towards justice.

**Learning objectives**

1. To learn how to explain and contrast the understandings of the nature of prejudice and justice in general and Bahá'í discourses.
2. To show how justice cannot come about without the elimination of prejudice.
3. To gain a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í teachings about prejudice and justice.
4. To reflect upon how our own (often unconscious) prejudices can distort our perceptions and our contributions to public discourse about world order.
5. To practice contributing to conversations about the state of the world and of our societies with helpful explanations of the Bahá'í teachings about the removal of prejudice and the bringing about of justice.

**Unit 9 Unity, Peace, and Development Oct. 28 – Nov. 3**

In the Bahá'í Faith this principle of unity is based on three interlocking concepts drawn from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings: the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humanity. Bahá'í teachings foresee that peace is

inevitable but that it will come in two stages, known as the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace. Through study and reflection on several resources, this unit will explore how the Bahá'í Writings and principles influence social action in support of peace and development.

### Learning Goals

1. Develop an understanding of the Bahá'í Teachings that speak directly to the themes of peace, development, and human prosperity.
2. Examine some chapters from Bahá'í history of examples of social action in support of the pursuit of peace, and of human development and prosperity.
3. Study and reflect on Bahá'í Writings that inform these debates.
4. To articulate how social action in these areas may be enacted in Bahá'í practice and service
5. Study and reflect on some guidance from the Universal House of Justice that advises Bahá'ís on social action on issues of peace and conflict and on development and economic justice.

<b>Unit 10</b>	<b>Reflection and Application of Learning</b>	<b>Nov. 4-6</b>
----------------	---	-----------------

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.