



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

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

REL 75: The Baha'i Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction

Dates: Sept. 15, 2019 – Dec. 7, 2019

Faculty: Robert Stockman, William Collins (see bios at end)

Course Description:

The Bahá'í Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction offers a thorough and systematic study of the Bahá'í religion. We will start with a review of the vastness of the Bahá'í Faith's authoritative texts (21 million words), which sets it apart from other religions. In subsequent units we will examine the fundamental concept of unity and its implications for creating community, reforming the world, and re-conceptualizing such subjects as leadership, politics, and conflict; the nature of God, revelation, manifestation, humanity, creation, religion, and the Bahá'í Faith's relationship to other faiths; the nature and spiritual development of human beings and the role of marriage and family life; and the Bahá'í approach to reorganizing the social life and civilization of the human species.

In the historical section of the course we will examine the development of the Bahá'í community from the time of the Báb (1844) to the present, considering the development of new Bahá'í institutions and the Faith's focus on several important priorities: diversity, geographical spread, and empowerment of the membership.

Learning Objectives: To be able to explain:

- The central concept of unity and its many ethical and social implications
- The notions of God, revelation, Manifestation, creation, and the nature of human beings
- The basic concepts of individual and social transformation
- The development of the Bahá'í authoritative texts, teachings, and community during the ministries of the Báb (1844-53), Bahá'u'lláh (1853-92), `Abdu'l-Bahá (1892-1921), Shoghi Effendi (1921-63), and the Universal House of Justice (1963-present).
- To demonstrate your understanding through postings in the course, weekly essays, and a final paper or project.

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 video presentations, readings, and online discussion among course participants. The course has been structured so that it typically requires an estimated 6 hours per week of readings and graded discussion, in addition to the videos and a graded weekly essay. A final project or paper is expected.
- Because the requirements of colleges and universities differ widely, the course may be taken at one of three different levels:
- REL 175: The 100-level requirements are suitable for many freshmen (first-year) students. In addition to the readings and videos, the student is expected to complete at least two postings in the discussion forum of each unit, one of which should be at least 300 words in length and reflective of what the student has learned. The final project is a paper of at least 5 pages or a PowerPoint and recorded presentation to the course.
- REL 375: The 300-level requirements are suitable for juniors and seniors or students at more rigorous universities. In addition to the readings and videos, the student is expected to complete at least two postings in the graded discussion form of each unit, one of which should be substantive, and a 500 to 750-word (2-3 page) graded essay each unit. The final project is a paper of at least 10 pages (exclusive of bibliography) or equivalent.

- REL 575: The 500-level requirements are suitable for Master's degree students. In addition to the readings and videos, the student is expected to complete at least two postings in the graded discussion form of each unit, one of which should be substantive, and a 500 to 750-word (2-3 page) graded essay each unit. The final project is a research paper of at least 15 pages (exclusive of bibliography) or equivalent.
- Additional requirements may be requested by the credit-grading institution.

Course Readings:

Robert H. Stockman, *The Baha'i Faith: A Guide for the Perplexed* (available in paperback and Kindle). This book will be used in every unit of the course (chapters are available in pdf form; please do not share outside the course). A Kindle e-book does not require ownership of a Kindle device. See here for [downloading a Kindle reader](#) application for your laptop, tablet or smartphone if you purchase the e-book.

Each unit will also have a collection of readings from the Bahá'í authoritative texts or from Bahá'í scholarship.

Course Discussion:

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.

- 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.

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	Sept. 15-18
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This unit reviews the course topics and dates, provides information about learn how to use Moodle (our course management system), and is the time to set up your user profile and learn how to post and reply in the discussion forums.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 1 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To analyze and compare the Bahá'í emphasis on scripture with other religious traditions.

Unit 2	The Watchword: Unity	Sept. 19-25
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This unit covers the basic teaching of the Bahá'í Faith: unity. The concept of unity is a theological principle--it's a principle about the basic organization of creation--but as we will see, that principle has immense ethical implications for how human beings behave and treat each other.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 2 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To summarize the Bahá'í concept of unity and analyze its ethical and social implications.

Unit 3 The Divine and Its Relationship to Creation Sept. 26- Oct. 2

This unit covers what could be called basics of Bahá'í theology: the concepts of God, revelation, manifestation, humanity, and creation. It includes the principle of progressive revelation and the relationship between the Bahá'í Faith and other religions.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 3 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To describe the Bahá'í concept of religion and analyze its implications for relations with other religions and understanding human history.

Unit 4 The Path of Individual Transformation Oct. 3-9

This unit explores the Bahá'í approach to personal transformation, which has a vertical dimension (the relationship with God) and a horizontal dimension (the relationship with other human beings, which involves polishing our qualities through interaction and service). It could also be said to have an inner dimension (the heart or soul).

Some Christian paths for salvation center solely on faith; others on mediation by the church. Some Buddhist and Hindu paths to liberation require close work with an abbot or guru. In contrast, the Bahá'í path to transformation involves prayer, fasting, study of the Word of God, bringing oneself to account each day, and service. Important aspects of personal development in all religious traditions involve marriage and family life.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 4 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To explain the Bahá'í concept of spiritual transformation and analyze its implications for building marriages, families, and unified societies.

Unit 5 The Concept of Ever-Advancing Civilization Oct. 10-16

This unit explores the Bahá'í approach to the reformation of society and the construction of a world civilization. Every religion has brought teachings to help humans live together peacefully in ever larger social units. Bahá'u'lláh claims that His revelation comes at the time of globalization, when a world civilization embracing the full diversity of humanity is necessary.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 5 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To summarize the Bahá'í concept of an ideal society and analyze its implications for social change.

Unit 6 The Báb and the Bábí Community, 1844-53 Oct. 17-23

This unit covers the life and writings of the Báb, founder of the predecessor Babi Faith, his martyrdom in 1850, the development of His religious community, and its near total destruction through a series of pogroms.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 6 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To summarize the life and teachings of the Báb, the development of the Bábí community, and its impact on the currently Bahá'í community and on society.

Unit 7 The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, 1853-92 Oct. 24-30

This unit reviews the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and the development of the Bahá'í community during His lifetime.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 7 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To summarize the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the development of the Bahá'í community during his lifetime, and its impact on the currently Bahá'í community and on society.

Unit 8 The Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá, 1892-1921 Oct. 31-Nov. 6

This unit explores the life and teachings of `Abdu'l-Baha and the development of the Bahá'í community during His ministry.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 8 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To summarize the life and teachings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the development of the Bahá'í community during his life, and its impact on the currently Bahá'í community and on society.

Unit 9 The Ministry of Shoghi Effendi, and the Interregnum, 1921-63 Nov. 7-13

This unit considers the life and teachings of Shoghi Effendi and the development of the Bahá'í community during His ministry. It also reviews the turmoil following his unexpected passing in 1957 and the decision to elect the Universal House of Justice in 1963.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 9 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To summarize the life and accomplishments of Shoghi Effendi, the development of the Bahá'í community during his ministry, and its impact on the currently Bahá'í community and on society.

Unit 10 Developments under the Universal House of Justice, 1863-present Nov. 14-20

This unit covers the election of the Universal House of Justice and its guidance of the Bahá'í community through its rapid expansion from 1963 to 1973, its important messages, and developments in the Bahá'í community to the present.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapters 10 and 11 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To summarize the election and subsequent accomplishments of the Universal House of Justice, the development of the Bahá'í community since 1963, and its impact on society.

Unit 11 Overview and Prospect Nov. 21-23

This unit looks back over 175 years of development of the Bahá'í Faith and forward to its future.

Read *The Bahá'í Faith, a Guide to the Perplexed*, chapter 12 plus the unit reading packet.

Learning Objective: To review the contents of the course and its implications for one's university work.

Unit 12 Completion of Course Work Nov. 24-Dec. 8

Two weeks to write a final research paper and wrap up any other work. A 1-page outline of the paper (title, 1-paragraph summary, 5 or 6 major points, and a list of at least three sources) should be submitted by November 1.

Faculty

Lead Faculty: Robert H. Stockman



Robert Stockman, Director of the Wilmette Institute, has a doctorate in religious studies from Harvard University (1990) and is adjunct faculty in religious studies at Indiana University South Bend. He is the author of four books on American Baha'i history, one introductory textbook about the Faith, and of numerous articles on Baha'i subjects. He has served on the Boards of the Association for Baha'i Studies, *World Order* magazine, and the Baha'i Encyclopedia project. He lives in South Bend, Indiana, with his wife and two children.

Support Faculty: William Collins



William P. Collins was Director of the Bahá'í International Library, 1977–90, Chief of the Cataloging Division, United States Copyright Office, 1991–2000, and Program Planning Officer with the United States Copyright Office 2000-2016.

He is author of *Bibliography of English Language Works on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, 1844–1985* (1990), and numerous articles on Bahá'í history and beliefs. He has served in the past in various professional capacities on boards for the Bahá'í Faith, including the United States National Bahá'í Archives Committee, Bahá'í Publishing Trust advisory board, the Editorial Committee of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, and the Editorial Board of the *Bahá'í Studies Review*.