



**Director:** Dr. Robert H. Stockman

**Email:** [rstockman@wilmetteinstitute.org](mailto:rstockman@wilmetteinstitute.org)

[www.wilmetteinstitute.org](http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org)

**Voice:** (877)-WILMETTE

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

**Dates:** Fall 2021

**Faculty:** Robert Stockman

---

### **Course Description:**

**The Bahá'í Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction** is a starting point for the Wilmette Institute's Bahá'í History, Texts, and Tenets Certificate program. By offering a thorough and systematic study of Bahá'í scriptures, teachings, and historical development of the community utilizing the academic textbook *The Bahá'í Faith: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012), the course provides context for students to take the other certificate courses.

The course provides biographical sketches of its most prominent figures: The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi as well as opportunities to explore their writings. It also illustrates the origins and development of the current head of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, and shows how the House of Justice guides Bahá'ís around the world in their efforts to apply the authoritative teachings in their lives and local communities. Implications of this process for individual and social change will be explored in depth.

We will also begin an exploration of basic theological concepts that will be further developed in the Bahá'í Theology course. Such concepts include the nature of God, God's revelation to humanity, religious truth as both relative and eternal, religious law, and the journey of the soul.

Finally, the course traces the historical evolution of the Bahá'í community from its earliest beginnings in 1844 to its current state as the second most widespread religious community in the world, and among the fastest growing.

### **Relation to other courses in this Certificate Program**

These are the courses offered in this Certificate Program:

- The Bahá'í Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction
- Bahá'í History: 1844 to Present
- Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: A Systematic Survey
- Bahá'í Theology
- Bahá'í Institutions, the Community and the Individual
- Approaches to Nonviolent Social Change

This introductory course will touch on all of the topics explored in the other certificate courses. This is a stand-alone course but it is also designed to raise interest in students to deepen their understanding by taking other courses in this certificate.

### **Bahá'í Texts, Tenets and History Certificate Program Objectives:**

PO 1: Compare and contrast Bahá'í tenets and structures with parallels in other religious traditions.

PO 2: Explore the Bahá'í understanding of God's purpose and process of establishing religion: God and His creation, revelation, the life of the spirit, the Covenant, essential relationships, and individual and collective advancement.

PO 3: Analyze critically ethical and social issues from a historical and Bahá'í perspective; develop an evolving self-knowledge which includes an awareness of one's own ethical values; deepen one's familiarity with one's own sources for personal renewal, encounters with beauty, and compassion towards self and others; and acquire a stronger desire to serve others.

PO 4: Develop skills to become change makers through consultation, discourse, and/or through the application of their knowledge to service.

---

### **Course Learning Outcomes - Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:**

---

- Explain critically the Baha'i understanding of human history: that there is only one human species and that God has guided humanity through the various religious traditions (PO 1)
- Name and describe specific examples of the Faith's relationship with other religions (PO 1)
- Read Bahá'í texts for cognitive comprehension and for individual and collective spiritual implications (PO 2)
- Narrate the life of the Báb and of Bahá'ulláh (PO 2)
- Explore the implications of martyrdom and suffering in the lives of the Bab and Baha'u'llah and the early believers on the growth of religion and the meaning of human life (PO 2)
- Relate mystical aspects of the Faith to the nature of the soul and its journey towards its Creator (PO 2)
- Identify the implications for social progress of the Bahá'í concepts of the lesser and greater Covenant (PO 2)
- Gain a basic understanding of the role of the Bahá'í administrative structure in Bahá'í life (PO 2)
- Articulate the vision of the future of humankind in the Bahá'í Writings (PO 2)
- Grapple with the ethical and social implications of unity and justice (PO 3)
- Document the role of religion in individual and collective transformation and their processes (PO 3)
- Analyze some of the principles of the Faith that have paved the way for social change (nobility of human nature, Independent investigation of truth, gift of understanding, consultation) (PO 3)
- Visualize what Bahá'ís do (PO 3)
- Frame opposition to the Faith past and present in light of the principle of crisis and victory (PO 4)

### [Learning outcomes lined up with course assignments](#)

**Course Structure:** This course has 15 one-week units. Each unit will explore a major theme with its own resources and assignments. A typical unit includes readings, videos, lectures, and two assignments. Assignments will be either reflection papers submitted to the instructor, forum posts or both. Some

units will ask participants to share specific topics with a target audience. We will hold an online discussion session every week over Zoom and these are mandatory. The final assignment will provide students with the opportunity to research an area of their interest, present it to an outside audience, and reflect on it with their classmates. Rubrics are provided for all assignments.

All assignments should be submitted through Moodle unless otherwise noted.

See this [assignment guide](#) for all assignment details.

**Personal Goals:** During Unit 1, students will draft a personal learning plan (PLP) to define the goals they have set for this course. The learning objectives for the course can serve as a guide for development of personal capabilities that are achievable during the semester.

At the end of the course, during the Reflection Unit, students will refer again to their PLPs and complete a self-assessment reviewing the extent to which they met their set goals. Faculty will periodically review progress in the course and provide support to all students.

### **Successful Completion**

- Complete all required assignments. Details can be found below.
- Participate in our weekly online classes conducted over Zoom. These classes are obligatory. Meeting times will be collectively decided in our first meeting (generally the first day of the course).
- Complete the final project.

The course requires an estimated 9 - 11 hours per week of reading, reflection, writing, watching videos, and discussion via forum posts and online classes.

**Texts.** The primary text for this course is Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury 2013). All of the resources posted in each unit are mandatory, except resources posted as "suggested resources" which are optional. All texts and other resources are provided as links in this course.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are responsible for understanding GTU policies on academic integrity regarding how to use sources responsibly. There are no acceptable justifications for plagiarism or failing to uphold academic integrity. Please familiarize yourself with academic citation rules.

### **Assessment**

#### **Final Course Grade**

1. Forum discussions on Moodle = 30%
2. Participation in online sessions = 10%
3. Reflection papers = 30%
4. Final Research Project Presentation and paper = 30%

[Rubrics for all assignments.](#)

[Course alignment with learning outcomes.](#)

#### **Final Course Project:**

A final paper (approximately 15 pages in length) and presentation is required. Topics must relate to the course and be approved by the instructor.

See more details about the final project in the [assignment guide](#).

### Course Outline

Unit Title	Topics
1 - Getting Started	Introduction to this course, Central Figures of Bahá'í Faith, authoritative texts.
2 - The Watchword: Unity	Oneness and unity of humanity, uniqueness of humanity, unity in diversity, consultation, Bahá'í elections, Covenant, religious truth, human nature, the power of the Revealed Word, theology, metaphysics, unity of religions, world citizenship
3 - The Divine and its Relationship to Creation	Bahá'í theology: God, revelation, manifestation, humanity, and creation, progressive revelation, the relationship between the Bahá'í Faith and other religions.
4 - The Path of Individual Transformation	Purpose of life, individual transformation, the individual and society, spiritual qualities, service, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, law, faith, marriage and family life, good and evil, knowledge of God, tension between spiritual and material realities.
5 - The Transformation of Society	Work, wealth, service, Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (Bahá'í House of Worship), teaching, social action, public discourse, global civilization, the Lesser and Most Great Peace, economics, response to Bahá'u'lláh's call, walking a spiritual path,
6 - The Báb and the Bábí Community	Biographical sketch of the Báb (1819-50), Bábí community, writings of the Báb, persecution
7 - The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh	Biographical sketch of Bahá'u'lláh (1817-92), Bahá'í community, writings of Bahá'u'lláh, early spread of the Bahá'í Faith, persecution
8 - The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh	Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh's suffering, the journey of the soul, vision of the future of humanity
9 - The Ministry, Writings and Talks of `Abdul-Bahá	Biographical sketch of `Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), development of the Iranian Bahá'í community, authoritative interpretation, early Bahá'í teachers, persecution. Writings and talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá
10 - The Ministry and writings of Shoghi Effendi	Biographical sketch of Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), the Guardianship, the three Charters of the Faith, building the Administrative Order, creation

	of the Bahá'í World Centre, authoritative interpretation of Bahá'í scripture, expansion of the Faith. Writings of Shoghi Effendi.
11 - The Universal House of Justice	Election of the Universal House of Justice (1963 and every 5 years thereafter), first decisions of the House, reaching minority populations, global expansion, Bahá'í scholarship, persecution in Iran, growth of the Institute process, growth and training since 2000
12 - Embodying the principle of oneness, pt.1	What do Bahá'ís do? Establishing a pattern of activity and administrative structure that embody oneness, the training Institute, cycles of learning, capacity building, elevating devotional character of communities, accompaniment
13 - Embodying the principle of oneness, pt.2	What do Bahá'ís do? 19 Day Feast, the Fund, the calendar, teaching, race unity
14 - Final presentations	
15 - Course Reflections	

Further details for instructors is available here: [Faculty Resource Guide](#).



### 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.