

# Syllabus: Wilmette Institute Course on Science, Religion, and the Bahá'í Faith 2022

## Course Details, Unit by Unit

### Unit 1. Welcome to the Science, Religion, and the Bahá'í Faith Course

#### Overall Course Learning Objectives:

- Advance our understanding of science and religion from a Baha'i perspective
- Advance our understanding of the harmony between them
- Prepare for participation in the discourses of society around this topic

#### Activities:

- A. Read Introductory and Overview materials.
- B. Establish Personal Learning Plan (PLP).
- C. Familiarize oneself with course software (Moodle).
- D. Consider term paper topics
- E. Participate in or listen offline to one Zoom discussion meeting hosted by the faculty.
- F. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).

### Unit 2. What is Meant by the Harmony of Science and Religion?

In the first full-week unit of our course, we build a foundation for an understanding of the principle of harmony between science and religion and what it entails. The objectives of this unit are to:

- Understand and explain the principles supporting harmony between science and religion.
- Cite relevant Baha'i writings on this principle and some of its applications.
- Understand the goal of engaging in elevated discourse about these principles.

These will prepare us to examine how the principle applies in specific sciences in units to come.

#### Readings:

1. Study *Course Learning Objectives*.
2. Read *Compilation: A Selection of Bahá'í Writings on Science*.
3. Read *Compilation: The Meaning of Science in Bahá'í Texts*.
4. Read "With regard to the harmony of science and religion." The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 19 May 1995.
5. Read Friberg, Stephen. "Science, Religion and the Bahá'í Faith." *The Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*. Eds. Huyssteen, Wentzel Van, et al. Macmillan, 2003.
6. Read Lample, Paul. "In Pursuit of Harmony Between Science and Religion." *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 26.4, 2016.

7. Read Phelps, Steven. "The Harmony of Science and Religion." *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*, edited by Robert H. Stockman, Routledge, 2021.
8. Read Hatcher, William S. "The Science of Religion." *Bahá'í Studies*, Vol 2, Apr. 1980.
9. Read "Science," in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Eds, by C. T. Onions, Friedrichsen, G. W. S., and R. W. Burchfield. Oxford, 1966. (Also, see compilation by Roger Neyman on OED entry on science.)
10. Read Schewel, Benjamin. "Introduction." *Seven Ways of Looking at Religion: The Major Narratives*, Yale, 2017.

#### Activities:

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.
- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

### Unit 3 – Physics and Cosmology

We now begin a tour of how the principle of harmony affects our understanding of a few specific sciences. We start with physics and cosmology, two sciences that deal directly with the inanimate world of matter. The objectives of this unit are to gain a better understanding of:

- Physics and cosmology
- The relationship between physics, cosmology, and religion
- A Bahá'í-inspired view of cosmology and how it addresses issues such as materialism

This brief look at physical sciences prepares us for inquiring about how the principle of harmony applies to biology.

#### Readings and Videos:

1. Watch Carter Emmart's TED Talk showing the magnitude of the universe.
2. Explore "If the Moon Were Only 1 Pixel".
3. Read *The Relationship between Religion, Cosmology, and Physics: An Overview*
4. Read *An Overview of Bahá'í Cosmology*
5. Read *Thermodynamics*
6. Read Aspect, Alain. *The Two Quantum Revolutions*
7. Read Davies, Paul. "Emergent Complexity, Teleology, and the Arrow of Time." *Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA*, edited by Michael Ruse and William A. Dembski, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 191–209.
8. Read Polkinghorne, John. "The Inbuilt Potentiality of Creation." *Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA*, edited by Michael Ruse and William A. Dembski, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 246–60.
9. Read excerpts from Kauffman, Stuart. *At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity*. Oxford, 1996.
10. Read excerpts from Weinberg, Steven. *Facing Up: Science and Its Cultural Adversaries*, Harvard, 2001.
11. Read 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*. 2nd ed., Bahá'í World Centre, 2014.
  - a. Ch 16 par 1, 2
  - b. Ch 41
  - c. Ch 47 par 1-8
  - d. Ch 48
  - e. Ch 53

- f. Ch 54 par 2
12. Baha'u'llah. *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed After the Kitab-I-Aqdas*. Bahai Pub Trust, 1988. pp 140-142. (Lawh-i-Hikmat)

**Activities:**

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.
- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

**Unit 4 – Biological Evolution and Human Nature**

Based on our exploration of how science and the Baha'i Writings combine to help us understand the nature of the world and our place in it, we now focus on what they say about our origins and our essential nature. The objectives of this unit are to gain a better understanding of:

- The nature and processes of biological evolution
- The questions the theory of evolution raises about human nature
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements on these topics
- Skills required to effectively present and discuss evolution from a Baha'i perspective

This will conclude our brief tour of the natural sciences and prepare us to consider society and human activity. Our discussion about human nature moves from biological evolution to cultural and social issues.

**Readings:**

1. Watch the *Stated Clearly* YouTube Video - *Does the Theory of Evolution Really Matter?*
2. Watch the *Kurzgesagt – In a Nutshell* YouTube Video - *How Evolution Works*
3. Review a modern and up-to-date website on the tree of life at *evogeneao* and *The Interactive Tree of Life*
4. Read *The Changing Philosophy of Biology*
5. Read 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*. 2nd ed., Bahá'í World Centre, 2014.
  - a. *Comments Relating to Species and Evolution*
  - b. Ch 46
6. Read "[T]houghtful questions about a paragraph regarding evolution," The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 21 February 2016.
7. Review different perspectives on the web about evolution:
  - a. *Nicholas19: "The Bahá'í Faith and Evolution"*.
  - b. *Matt Giani: "Perspectives on Evolution"*
  - c. *Steven Phelps: "Crossing the divide between science and religion: a view on evolution."*
  - d. *Badi Shams: "Evolution: The Human Race, Maturing Past Materialism."*
8. View a video of a talk - *Evolution, Design, and the Baha'i Faith* - given at the 2021 ABS conference by Robert Sarracino and Roger Neyman.
9. Read Mehanian, Couroush, and Stephen Friberg. "Religion and Evolution Reconciled: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Comments on Evolution." *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1–4, 2003, pp. 55–93.
10. Read Haught, John F. "Preface" in *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. 2nd edition, Routledge, 2007. Also, read Chapter 1 "Beyond Design" in the same book,

**Activities:**

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.
- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

## **Unit 5 -- Learnings from the Social Sciences**

Human society across the globe is highly diverse and rich with meaning. In this unit, we will learn about some social science concepts and note how they enrich our understanding of the guidance in the Baha'i revelation. The objectives of this unit are to gain a better understanding of:

- Theories of human nature
- The essential unity, diversity, and adaptability of the human race
- Culture, gender roles, racial categories, caste and class, and other kinds of social phenomena
- How knowledge of the social sciences can enhance our participation in the discourses of society

Exploring social sciences helps us better understand Baha'i insights. This prepares us to examine how these ideas are embedded in all aspects of human life, including how we design, build, and use technology, as we will explore in the next unit.

### **Readings:**

1. Read *Models of Human Nature*.
2. Read *The Concept of Culture*.
3. Read *Social Structures*.
4. Read *Shoghi Effendi on Undoing Racial Social Structures in the United States: Noticing Social Science Implications of Shoghi Effendi's Statements on Anti-Black Racism in the United States*.
5. Read the Ridvan 2021 (178 BE) Message from the Universal House of Justice from a Social Science Perspective.
6. Read *On Human Nature* from a talk by Shahriar Razavi.
7. Read the Ruhi Institute's *Statement of Purpose and Methods*
8. Read the American Anthropological Association's *Statement on Race*.
9. Read Ingold, Tim. "On Taking Others Seriously" in *Anthropology: Why It Matters*. Polity, 2018.
10. Read Engelke, Matthew. "Values" in *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*. Princeton, 2018.
11. Read an excerpt from Geertz, Clifford. *Concept of Culture*
12. Read excerpts from Briggs, Jean. *Inuit Morality Play: The Emotional Education of a Three-Year-Old*. Yale, 1998.
13. Read paragraphs 4 to 13 in "Letter to Iranian Baha'is." The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 19 May 1995.

### **Activities:**

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.
- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

## **Unit 6 – Technology and Human Issues**

One of the most obvious characteristics distinguishing humankind from the rest of nature is our extensive use of tools. Through tools and technology, we transform our local environments, the planet as a whole, and even the way we think about things. Our objectives will be to understand:

- Technology and how it relates to science and religion
- A Bahá'í perspective on technology
- Current discourses on technology

Spirituality - or its lack - significantly impacts the directions taken in technological development and the uses to which technology is put. In this unit, we explore some of the ways this happens.

#### Readings:

1. Read *Introduction to Unit on Technology*.
2. Read Matthew Weinberg's "Technology, Values, and the Shaping of Social Reality."
3. Watch a video and read about the work of Ruha Benjamin.
4. Watch Tim Wu's video *Advertising Hazards: Your Attention is a Commodity That Can Be Manipulated*.
5. Watch Ramesh Srinivasan's video *Encoding Culture* and read the article *American's need a 'digital bill of rights'*
6. View Manuel Castells' self-introduction video *The Technology Revolution* and a video that describes the main thrust of his work: *Castells and the Network Society*.
7. Read the compilation *Bahá'í Extracts on Technology and the Internet*.
8. Read Hao, Karen. "We read the paper that forced Timnit Gebru out of Google. Here's what it says." *MIT Technology Review*, 2020.
9. Read Simonite, Tom. "What Really Happened When Google Ousted Timnit Gebru," *Wired*, July/August 2021.
10. Read Deneen, Patrick J. "Chapter Four: Technology and the Loss of Liberty" in *Why Liberalism Failed*, Yale 2019.

#### Activities:

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.
- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

### Unit 7 – A Deeper Look at Science

What does it mean to say that the Baha'i Revelation is scientific in its method? Consideration of the foundations of science, its processes and concepts, will enable us to take up that question with more rigor. Our objectives for this unit are to develop a better understanding of:

- Some aspects of the philosophy of science: presuppositions, the status of evidence, and types of reasoning
- Claims of science and science's limitations
- Scientific method and its relationship to religion
- Further insights into how the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is 'scientific in its method'

With the understanding we have gained by this point in our course, we now are developing concepts to articulate how the failure to realize harmony between science and religion has played a major part in the crises of our age.

#### Readings:

1. Read *Diagramming the Scientific Method; Science, Scientific Method: A Mainstream View of the Scientific Community, and Some Features of Science*,

2. Read *Scientism and the Limitations of Science*
3. View the TED Talk by Naomi Oreskes discussing what makes science reliable.
4. Watch a recording of Robert Sarracino's 2018 Webinar talk.
5. Read three chapters - Chapter 1: "Introduction", Chapter 2: "Science's Four Bold Claims" and Chapter 3: "A Brief History of Truth" - from Gauch, Hugh G. *Scientific Method in Brief*. Cambridge, 2012.
6. Read excerpts from Nagel, Thomas. *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford, 2012.

#### **Activities:**

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.
- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

### **Unit 8 - Science, Religion, and the Crises of our Age**

So far in this course, we have explored the principle of harmony between science and religion in some detail. We are developing a framework of understanding and action to solve critical social problems, some of which have their roots in misapplications of technology and misunderstanding or suspicion of science. Our learning objectives for this unit are to:

- Survey a few of the crises of our age and look for common spiritual themes and causes
- Explore how the harmony of science and religion offers solutions:
  - a culture of learning in which independent investigation and consultation flourish,
  - a renewal of faith that robustly embraces science,
  - a science that is cognizant of its limitations (avoids materialism and scientism)
- Discuss how learning in action (study, consultation, action, and reflection) under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice builds toward these solutions

#### **Readings:**

1. Read *Flat Earthers vs climate change sceptics: why conspiracy theorists keep contradicting each other*
2. Read a *New York Times* article about how "The U.S. is Getting a Crash Course in Scientific Uncertainty"
3. Read *How Science Moved Beyond Peer Review During The Pandemic: And what scientists learned they still needed it for.*
4. Read *How the U.S. Pandemic Response Went Wrong—and What Went Right—during a Year of COVID*
5. Watch a video by Katherine Hayhoe, the climatologist and renowned science educator.
6. Read *Intellectual Humility: the Importance of Knowing You Might be Wrong*
7. Watch a *Ted Talk* by Jay Van Bavel that introduces us to the nature and dangers of partisanship and why we are prone to it.
8. Watch two videos from the *You Are Not So Smart (YANSS)* video series. One (26 July, 2021) is about how psychology can lead to conspiracy and the other (23 Jun 2010) is on confirmation bias.

#### **Activities:**

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.

- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

## **Unit 9 - Science, Religion, Discourses, and Planning for Action**

In the final unit of the course, we consider how to convert theoretical understanding into transformative action from a Bahá'í perspective. We discuss taking practical steps towards developing skills and finding resources that empower personal and community development: Our topics are:

- Science, religion, and transformation
- Participation in the discourses of society
- Exploring opportunities for discourse and activities

### **Readings:**

1. Read *Some Ways That Science and Religion Can Work Together to Transform the World*.
2. Read *Introduction to Baha'i Discourse* (1300 words).
3. Read extracts from "[O]n the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community and its greater involvement in the life of society." The Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada 24 July 2013.
4. Read extracts from "Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'ís are to 'refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations.'" The Universal House of Justice to an individual regarding engaging in social action and public discourse, and non-involvement in political affairs 27 April 2017.
5. Read "[O]n the challenges you perceive in the American Bahá'í community in relation to the issue of race." The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 29 July 2021.
6. Read extracts from Lample, Paul. "Towards a Framework for Action," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 26.3, 2018, pp 11-53.
7. Read *In Support of the Principle of the Harmony of Science and Religion: A Partial List of Actions and Activities*.
8. Read Razavi, Shahriar. "Baha'i Participation in Public Discourse: Some Considerations Related to History, Concepts and Approaches." In *Religion and Public Discourse in an Age of Transition: Reflections on Baha'i Practice and Thought*, edited by Geoffrey Cameron and Benjamin Schewel, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2018, pp. 163–90.
9. Read Smith, Todd. "Science and Religion in Dynamic Interplay." *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2019, pp. 11–44.

### **Activities:**

- A. Participate in or listen offline to the two Zoom discussion meetings hosted by the faculty.
- B. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- C. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

## **Unit 10 – Reflection and Application of Learning**

### **Readings:**

1. Fill out the course evaluation and satisfaction surveys.
2. Read final readings assigned by the four faculty members

### **Activities:**

- A. Participate in the Moodle Online Discussion Forum for at least 1.5 hours (reading and writing).
- B. Write a 600-word essay related to the Unit Readings on a topic of the student's choosing.

**Two-Week Period: Write 8 – 10 Page Paper and Give Zoom Presentation**

**Activities:**

- A. Write an 8 – 10 page paper on a topic to be chosen by the student in consultation with the faculty.
- B. Make a presentation on the paper topic - with questions and answers - to a Zoom audience consisting of faculty members, fellow students, and invitees.