

## **Introduction to Liberal Religious Education**

**Fall 2010 Semester**

3 units/Limit:15

This online seminar course provides a broad introduction to the theory and practice of liberal religious education, with an emphasis on programs in Unitarian Universalist congregations. Topics include:

- History and philosophy of liberal religious education
- Developmental theories
- Congregations as learning communities
- The role of the religious educator in social justice
- Innovations in liberal religious education
- Professional standards for religious educators
- The role of the Liberal Religious Educators Association
- Curriculum resources

The course draws from another by the same name, developed by Betty Jo Middleton, Roberta M. Nelson, Eugene B. Navias, and Judith Mannheim, with support from a St. Lawrence Foundation grant.

### **Student expectations**

With the goal of creating a learning community, students will share biographical information and learning goals they create for themselves. They are required to log in periodically throughout the week to post assignments, review materials posted by other students, and participate actively in an ongoing discussion of course materials. If they wish to do so, students can contact the instructor to get approval for questions they design, rather than using questions posted by the instructor. Students are required to engage with the course materials, the instructor and each other on a weekly basis. Course materials will include opportunities for engagement with issues of fairness, equity and justice in areas where people experience oppression in this culture, to prepare students for work to create just communities to counter oppression.

As religious professionals, we are all both teachers and learners, engaging with congregations that are learning communities. As a member of an online seminar, your attention, engagement and participation are crucial. Please

plan to complete all readings and assignments in time to post your materials by mid-week, to give others an opportunity to read and comment on your postings. Contact the instructor as soon as possible if you are not able to complete and post the assignments in a timely manner.

In turn, you will be reading and commenting on the postings of others. Your remarks should begin with positive comments. Then provide specific examples of how the writer could make his/her project clearer, more useful, or more effectively aligned with current thinking on the role of religious education programs in strengthening the mission of a congregation, district, or nonprofit organization.

In this course, sometimes you will be working by yourself, and sometimes you will be working in a dyad or small group on an assignment. Every participant in this online seminar is expected to work effectively as part of a group. Please feel free to contact the instructor at any time if you have comments, questions, or suggestions.

Students have options for their final projects. They can write and post final papers consisting of case studies describing any aspect of religious education programs, or use artistic media such as photography, calligraphy, collage, music, lyrics, or any other medium that lends itself to digital posting, to illustrate a multigenerational event or program.

All student work should be original. When the work of others is cited or quoted, information about source materials should be included, using a standard format for citation.

### **Required Reading**

Reader for "Introduction to Liberal Religious Education: A Graduate Course for Unitarian Universalists." Available online at [www.uua.org/documents/middletonbetty/regradcourseoutline\\_reader.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/middletonbetty/regradcourseoutline_reader.pdf).

Bishop, Helen (2002). *Professional Matters*. Go to the LREDA web site and click on "Resources." The monograph can be downloaded from this site. URL is <http://www.lreda.org>.

Harris, Maria (1989). *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*.

- Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. ISBN 0664240526. As of 7-5-2010, Amazon.com suppliers have 58 used copies available, starting at \$0.80 + s&h. Cost for a new copy is \$15.70.
- Hurd, Tracy (2006). Nurturing Children and Youth: A Developmental Guidebook. Boston: Skinner House. ISBN 1558965009. As of 7-5-2010, the UUA Bookstore has this title in stock for \$15.00 + s&h.
- Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) web site: Resources for Fall Conference 2006, "Honoring the Many Gifts We Bring." URL for the resources is [www.lreda.org](http://www.lreda.org). Click on "Events," then "Past events," then find "Fall Conference 2006" and click on "read more." Resources cover six areas of inclusion in the United States and Canada (abilities, affectional orientation, class, ethnicity/languages other than English, gender identity, and race).
- Mosaic Project Report* (2009). URL where you can download the report is <http://www.uua.org/aboutus/professionalstaff/identity-basedministries/racialand/mosaicproject/index.shtml>.
- Owen-Towle, Tom (2004). Growing a Beloved Community: Twelve Hallmarks of a Healthy Congregation. Boston: Skinner House. ISBN 1558964649. As of 7-5-2010, the UUA Bookstore has this title in stock for \$14.00 + s&h.
- Richards, Michelle (2008). Come Into the Circle: Worshiping with Children. Boston: Skinner House. ISBN 1558965335. As of 7-5-2010, the UUA Bookstore has this title in stock for \$15.00 + s&h.
- White, James W. (1988). Intergenerational Religious Education. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press. ISBN 0891350675. As of 7-5-2010, Amazon.com suppliers have 58 used copies available, starting at \$1.12 + s&h. Cost for a new copy is \$10.40.
- Youth Ministry Working Group Report* (2009). URL from which to download the report is <http://www.uua.org/members/youth/youthministries/index.shtml>.

In addition, links will be provided to short biographies and papers related to the contents of this course.

### Week One: Creating and building community

We'll begin our work together by getting to know a bit more about one another, and by sharing the goals we have for the course. One of the

background assumptions for the course is that we are all both teachers and learners. Another is that organizations should take an active role in becoming learning communities. This field of study is known as "Action Learning," which can contribute to the health and strength of a congregation, district, or nonprofit organization. We'll be examining the principles of Action Learning, and exploring the ways in which participants can be encouraged to take an active role as members.

### Assignments

Reading:

Lecture notes

Biography of Sophia Lyon Fahs, found at <http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/unitarians/fahs.html>.

Essex Conversations - read "For the Generations to Come," by Susan Suchocki Brown; "Making Sure There is a There There," by Judith Frediani; "Spreading the Good News," by Susan Harlow; "Seven Reminders," by Tom Owen-Towle," and "Looking Back," by Jeannellen Ryan.

"A Short History of Unitarian Universalist Religious Education," by Eugene B. Navias, in the *Reader*.

Writings:

Post a few paragraphs of introduction, including your name, where you're from, your experiences in religious education, and any unique experiences you've had that we should know about you.

Download and complete the Action Evaluation form, and post your goals for this course. Once everyone has posted goals, the instructor will post a report on common, unique, and contrary goals.

Post a short (1 - 2 pp., double-spaced) paper comparing and contrasting the viewpoints on religious education found in the Navias paper, and the biography of Sophia Lyon Fahs. In what ways do you share these viewpoints?

## Week Two: The place of religious education in the congregation

Strong, healthy faith communities create and review their vision and mission statements at regular intervals. Leaders and religious professionals act on the premise that these statements provide the means by which all aspects of the community can be measured, evaluated and assessed.

Reading:

Lecture notes

Growing a Beloved Community, by Tom Owen-Towle - all.

Biography of Angus MacLean. URL is

<http://www25temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/angusmaclean.html>

Writing:

You'll be assigned a partner for this assignment, so you'll be working in pairs. Write and post a short paper ( 4 - 5 pp., double-spaced) describing how you think the religious education program fits into the congregational system of a liberal faith community. Refer to Tom Owen-Towle's seven reminders, and to his concepts as described in Growing a Beloved Community.

## Week Three: Developing your philosophy of liberal religious education (1)

Reading:

Lecture notes

Essex Conversations - read "Outside the Box," by the Rev. Susan Davison Archer;

*Professional Matters*, by Dr. Helen Bishop - all.

Biography of Bronson Alcott. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/bronsonalcott.html>.

## Presentation:

Using the medium of your choice, post a paper or artistic presentation that reflects your current understanding of a philosophy of religious education. Your statement or image of the philosophy of religious education should be informed by the aspects of systems thinking for religious professionals described in *Professional Matters*. Include references to the chapters by Susan Suchoki Brown, Judith Frediani, Susan Harlow, and Jeannellen Ryan that you've read in Essex Conversations.

Here are some aspects that you may wish to include:

- How is religious education different from "schooling?"
- What experiences in your own life have contributed to your philosophy of religious education?
- Which of those experiences would you like to retain and build on, and which would you like to discard? How does this kind of critical reflection help you to discern elements of your philosophy of religious education?
- Whose body of work do you regard as fundamental in relation to this question?
- How does systems thinking relate to your philosophical statement or image?

If you're writing, your presentation should be 4 - 5 pp., double-spaced. If you're using an artistic medium, you may post it in the "Discussion" section for this unit, or provide a URL where we can find your work. All work must be original, and intended for this unit. Please do not post something you've created for another purpose.

## Week Four: The congregation as a learning community

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century concept of a faith community reflected the kinds of divisions into which society as a whole in Europe and the United States were being sorted. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children, youth and adults lived and worked together once a baby had survived through a host of illnesses and "complaints," and was weaned. For the first time in human history, people were considering what adults needed to know, and how that information

should be transmitted to the young. Children and youth were separated from adults in time and space, and separated again on the basis of race and ethnicity.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we're beginning to explore whether these divisions fill a need, or could be diminished or eliminated. If an entire congregation is a learning community, how should the developmental needs of children, youth and adults be handled? How should culture and history be transmitted? What current practices should be eliminated? Retained?

Reading:

Lecture notes

Essex Conversations - read "Building a Strong Community," by Elizabeth Motander Jones; "The Children's Fire is the Community Fire," by Ginger Luke; and "To Teach an Abiding Faith," by the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Strong.

Intergenerational Religious Education, by James W. White - Chapters One through Five

Biography of Earl Morse Wilbur. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/earlmorsewilbur.html>.

Presentation:

Using the medium of your choice, create and post a model of a congregation, district or nonprofit organization that functions as a learning community. Include the ways in which the organization encourages and suppresses behaviors on the basis of how they contribute to or oppose key concepts of how a learning community functions.

Week Five: Models of liberal religious education

Imagine you're a raven soaring in an updraft, and circling above an educational complex consisting of an elementary school, a middle or junior high school, and a high school. Imagine that a sudden fierce gust took the roofs off of all these buildings. Find something to write on and something to

write or draw with, and draw an outline of the three buildings. Label rooms that serve multiple purposes.

What you've just drawn reflects the educational models you're most comfortable with. This week, we'll explore the implications of a variety of models of liberal religious education, and their implications for congregational life.

Reading:

Lecture notes

Essex Conversations - read "Changing Lenses," by Pat Ellenwood; "Sunday School is Dead - Long Live Sunday School," by the Rev. Greg Stewart; "Child's Play," by the Rev. Dr. John Tolley; and "Outcome-Based Religious Education," by the Rev. Dr. Tom Yondorf.

Intergenerational Religious Education - Chapter 8

Biography of Joseph Jordan. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/josephjordan.html>.

Presentation:

Using the medium of your choice, create and post a model of religious education that is in alignment with your philosophy of religious education, and includes intentional goals and objectives to help move a congregation, district or nonprofit organization toward equity, justice and fairness in the area of your choice. These goals and objectives should acknowledge the realities of this work in the culture in which you intend to work. For example, people who describe themselves as "Afro-Caribbean" have history and background that is often quite different from that of people who describe themselves as "African-American," "biracial," or "multiracial." If you plan to work as a religious professional in Canada rather than the United States, your goals and objectives should reflect your understandings of the work of equity, justice and fairness in a Canadian context.

If you're writing, your presentation should be 4 - 5 pp., double-spaced. If you're using an artistic medium, you may post it in the "Discussion" section for this unit, or provide a URL where we can find your work. All work must be original, and intended for this unit. Please do not use something you've created for another purpose.

#### Week Six: The role of the minister in religious education

Whether or not a particular faith community is served by an ordained minister, professional ministerial leadership plays a significant role. In this unit, we'll consider the ideal role of a minister in religious education programs, and discuss realities of situations in which the ideal is some distance away.

Reading:

Lecture notes

Essex Conversations - read "Religion as Relationship," by the Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer; "Practicing the Scales of Rejoicing," by the Rev. John Newcomb Marsh; "The Core of Our Unitarian Universalist Faith," by the Rev. Meg Riley; and "Taking Our Children Seriously," by the Rev. Gary Smith.

Biography of John Godbey. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/johngodbey.html>.

Presentation:

Create and post a case study or story of a congregation or district in which a minister or ministers support all aspects of religious education. Include vision, mission, goals, objectives, and ways in which a minister or ministers reinforce structural and programmatic aspects of the religious education program, and encourage financial support beyond the bare-bones level. Demonstrate the role of leadership development for volunteers and staff, and include evaluation and assessment to strengthen mutual accountabilities. Your paper should be 5 - 6 pp., double-spaced.

#### Week Seven: Developmental theories

All developmental theories include issues of class, race, ethnicity, use of language, abilities, gender identity, affectional orientation, and age. They also include useful information about maturational processes. We'll consider how current thinking about developmental theories plays a part in how religious education programs are structured.

Reading:

Lecture notes

Essex Conversations - read "Learning Types and Their Needs," by the Rev. Daniel Harper  
"Gabriel Moran's Theory of Religious Education Development," by Makaanah Elizabeth Morriss, in the *Reader*.

Intergenerational Religious Education - Chapters Six and Seven

James Fowler's theory of faith development - URL is [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fowler%27s\\_stages\\_of\\_faith\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fowler%27s_stages_of_faith_development).

Nurturing Children and Youth: A Developmental Guidebook, by Tracey Hurd - all.

"Real-Life Dilemmas, Carol Gilligan's Moral Development Theory. URL is <http://www.psychology.sbc.edu/Gilligan.htm>.

Presentation:

Create and post a table, grid or chart that would be useful to religious professionals working in the areas of planning worship, pastoral care, and multigenerational programming. Do your best to include characteristics of working-class as well as middle-class cultures in the United States, Canada, and any other cultures with which you are familiar. Include the following headers:

Emotional    Intellectual            Physical            Social            Spiritual

## Week Eight: Curriculum and resources

Every faith community must make decisions about curricula and resources. We'll discuss what's currently in use, what's being developed, and where to find resources that are aligned with your faith community's vision and mission.

Reading:

Lecture notes

Fashion Me a People, by Maria Harris - Part One

Intergenerational Religious Education, by James W. White - Chapters Nine through Twelve

Biography of Dorothy Spoerl. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/dorothyildenspoerl.html>.

Writing:

In Fashion Me a People, Maria Harris included exercises designed to help religious professionals consider the nature of curriculum, in the context of learning communities. Complete Exercise 1 at the end of Chapter Three, and post your responses in the "Discussion" section of this unit.

## Week Nine: Multigenerational worship

Whether your faith community engages in multigenerational worship on a regular basis, or only on special occasions, a body of work exists that will help religious professionals plan and offer worship that is interesting, challenging, and meaningful. We'll consider what's available, and how to tailor resources to particular goals.

Reading:

Lecture notes

Come Into the Circle: Worshiping with Children - Michelle Richards.

## Chapters

From the *Reader*, read "Draft. Common Worship—Why and How? The UUA Commission on Common Worship;" "Intergenerational Worship in Unitarian Universalist Communities," by Ginger Luke; "Intergenerational Worship Suggestions," by Kathie Davis Thomas, and "Four Stories for Multigenerational Worship" by Diane Elliott, with an introduction by Eugene B. Navias.

Biography of Augusta Jane Chapin. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/augustajanechapin.html>.

Presentation:

Using the medium of your choice, create and post a worship resource that could serve as the organizing piece of a multigenerational service. You should include enough background information for the reader to know how the service will be structured, and what additional resources will be needed. In addition, post a draft Order of Service, including music and readings, if possible.

Week Ten: Religious educators who have made or are making a difference in the field

Every religious professional should be able to lift up the lives and practices of practitioners who have made significant differences in the field of liberal religious education. We'll explore where to find the resources you need to do so, and encourage one another to become more familiar with leaders in our fields.

Reading:

Lecture notes

*Fashion Me a People*, by Maria Harris - Parts Two and Three

Biography of Clarence Russell Skinner. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/clarence russell skinner.html>.

## Presentation:

Using the medium of your choice, create and post materials about someone who has made or is making a difference in the field of professional religious education. This person could be an historical figure, or someone currently active in this field. Include information about why you hold this person in such high regard, and about the areas in which you think this person will leave a significant contribution. Your posting should be inspirational, and should leave your readers with a sense of excitement and hope. All work must be original, and intended for this unit. Please do not post something you've created for another purpose.

## Week Eleven: Creating just communities to counter oppression

As religious professionals, we are called to lead our faith communities to help bend the arc of the universe toward justice, equity, and fairness. Within congregations, districts, and nonprofit organizations, we must find and use every opportunity to bring our theories in use closer to our espoused theories. We'll also discuss ways in which we can be accountable to one another in this critical area.

## Reading:

### Lecture notes

Essex Conversations - read "Toward Wholeness and Liberation," by the Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley; "Useable Truths," by the Rev. Dr. Richard S. Gilbert; "What Youth Want," by Logan Harris; "Youth Groups as a Model for Transformative Ministry," by Jen Harrison; and "Margin and Center," by the Rev. Dr. Tracey Robinson-Harris.

*Mosaic Project Report* (2009) - all.

Resources posted on the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) web site under Fall Conference 2006: "Honoring the Many Gifts We Bring."

*Youth Ministry Working Group Report (2009) - all.*

Biography of Laura Matilda Towne. URL is  
<http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper275.html>.

Presentation:

Choose **one** resource from those listed on the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) web site under Fall Conference 2006: "Honoring the Many Gifts We Bring."

Create and post a document illustrating how this resource, and the recommendations of the Mosaic Project and the Unitarian Universalist Association's exploration of ministry to youth, could help your congregation, district, or nonprofit organization to expand its work in the area in which you are the most interested. If you're writing a paper, it should be 4 - 5 pp. double-spaced. If you're using an artistic medium, you may post it in the "Discussion" section for this unit, or provide a URL where we can find your work. All work must be original, and intended for this unit. Please do not post something you've created for another purpose.

Week Twelve: Collegial relationships and professional standards

Religious professionals should be in covenantal relationship with everyone serving in a leadership capacity in a particular congregation, district or nonprofit organization. Covenants should be reviewed regularly, particularly if changes in staffing (professional or volunteer) have occurred. We'll compare Codes of Ethics and professional standards in current use, and discuss how models of governance relate to these standards.

Reading:

Lecture notes

"A Blueprint for Excellence: Best Practices for Unitarian Universalist Congregations in the Search for Religious Education Leadership,"  
Code of Ethics of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA)

Code of Professional Practices of the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA). URL is <http://www.lreda.org/content/resources.html>.

Joint Task Force on Professional Standards, Preliminary Report. URL is <http://www.lreda.org/content/resources.html>.

The Good Offices Program. URL is <http://www.lreda.org/content/resources.html>.

Biography of Curtis Reese. URL is <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/curtiswillifordreese.html>.

Presentation:

You'll be assigned to work as part of a small group for this assignment. Each group will post one discussion using a "Qs and As" format to explore collegial working relationships among religious professionals.

In addition, post a rough draft or outline of your final project. Read and comment on at least two other project drafts. If you're writing a paper for your final project, it should be 14 - 15 pp. double-spaced. If you're using an artistic medium, your project should reflect the contents of this course, and your understandings of how religious professionals should be involved in a religious education program. Please feel free to contact the instructor ([BishopHH@gmail.com](mailto:BishopHH@gmail.com)) if you have questions, comments, or concerns about your project.

*Week Thirteen: Growing edges in religious education*

Ten years ago, Geoffrey Canada was exploring ways in which to improve the graduation rates of African-American high school students in Harlem. Today, he has developed a groundbreaking program with the goal of providing educational opportunities for every child born within ten square blocks in Harlem. Canada is particularly concerned about how African-American boys are treated in most public education systems in the United States. His goals and objectives are clear, relevant, and revolutionary.

With the most expansive perspective on his vision and mission, Geoffrey Canada's work represents a growing edge in urban public education that could change the ways in which African-Americans participate in the culture of the United States. People involved in the field of professional religious education are presented with opportunities that could affect lives, work, and relationships in ways we can only begin to imagine.

In this unit, we'll explore issues, methods, curricula and resources that are on the cutting edge of liberal religious education. You'll select an issue or a program with vision, mission, goals and objectives that are in alignment with your philosophy and goals, and let your readers know why you're so excited about the program or issue.

Reading:

Lecture notes

Presentation:

If you want to focus on a particular congregation, district or nonprofit organization, create and post a case statement that could be used to introduce it to foundations or individuals. The organization you select should be involved with an issue of critical importance in the field of liberal religious education, or it should utilize cutting-edge programs or resources to address an issue that has been around for some time.

If you would prefer to focus on an issue facing liberal religious education, rather than an organization, create and post a description of the issue, including ways in which it has affected individuals and/or organizations in critical ways. Describe ways in which people and/or programs might consider addressing this issue, and include resources and programs that you think have a strong potential for creating change. You should also describe ways in which evaluation and assessment of effectiveness could be measured and implemented.

## Week Fourteen: Developing your philosophy of liberal religious education (2) and final projects

### Presentations:

Using the medium of your choice, post a document or exhibit that reflects your current philosophy of liberal religious education. If you're writing, your document should be 5 - 6 pp., double-spaced. If you're using an artistic medium, either post an exhibit in the "Discussion" section for this unit, or provide a URL where we can find your work. All work must be original, and intended for this unit. Please do not use something you've created for another purpose.

In addition, post your final project. Read and comment on all other projects. If you're writing a paper for your final project, it should be 14 - 15 pp. double-spaced. If you're using an artistic medium, your project should reflect the contents of this course, and your understandings of how religious professionals should be involved in a religious education program. Please feel free to contact the instructor ([BishopHH@gmail.com](mailto:BishopHH@gmail.com)) if you have questions, comments, or concerns about your project.