



# The Lamp

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE

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## 2003 Spiritual Summer Session: a Great Success

Nine students from across the U.S. and as far as Korea gathered with eight faculty for the 2003 Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization summer session. The nine-day residential session focused on the theme of "An



The 2003 Spiritual Foundations class accompanied by Counselor Steve Birkland (rear) and member of the National Spiritual Assembly David Young (with moustache, in the back).

Ever-Advancing Civilization." The unprecedented student/faculty ratio afforded students the opportunity of working closely with distinguished authors and lecturers in exploring the Bahá'í teachings for regenerating civilization and creating the Kingdom of God on earth.

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## Annual Student Survey: Wilmette Institute Having an Impact

The Wilmette Institute's annual email survey of its students reveals that it continues to have an important impact on the institute process, on Bahá'í education in general, and on teaching the Bahá'í Faith to others. The survey was sent to nine hundred current and former students on the WINews email listserver in September. Twenty-four persons replied. Here are the questions and the tabulated answers:

About how many firesides have you given over the last year using Wilmette Institute course materials and ideas? 37

About how many deepenings have you given over the last year using Wilmette Institute course materials and ideas? 70

About how many institute classes have you given over the last year using Wilmette Institute course materials and ideas? 10

About how many children's or youth classes have you given over the last year using Wilmette Institute course materials and ideas? 13

About how many people have entered the Faith over the last year at least partially because of what you gained from the Wilmette Institute? 3

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## Summer Session . . . Continued from page 1

Classes were held at the former Bahá'í Home for the Aged, now rented by the Wilmette Spiritual Assembly, and students stayed in the dorms at National-Louis University, both within a short walking distance of the Mother Temple of the West. Regular devotions at the House of Worship and the opportunity to serve as guides or assist in garden teaching complemented the summer session's daily academic program. The classes and workshops focused on the study of the Bahá'í social teachings including such subjects as the establishment of world peace, the oneness of humanity, global prosperity, and the creation of a world administrative system. Other global issues, such as the protection of the environment and the harmony of science and religion, were considered as well.

Nader Saiedi guided students through the Bahá'í writings on global civilization and global prosperity and their relationship to Western social theory and modern sociological thought. Martha Schweitz's courses on world peace complemented Saiedi's by exploring Bahá'í involvement in the body politic and the establishment of embryonic global institutions such as the International Criminal Court. Jaleh Dashti-Gibson's course built on the discussions in Saiedi's and Schweitz's courses to explore Shoghi Effendi's writings on the movement toward a new political order.

In explorations of specific topics of broad social concern, Richard Thomas lead students through a day-long study of the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly's statements on gender equality, *Two Wings of a Bird*, and racial equality, *The Vision of Race Unity: America's Most Challenging Issue*. Thomas challenged students to see these issues not as ones that are mutually competitive but rather as inextricably interrelated. Craig Loehle stimulated discussion among students about the relationship of science and religion.

Finally, Robert Stockman, Nancy Davis, and Morris Taylor rounded out the week by engaging students in their respective discussions of recent Bahá'í history, curriculum development, and approaches to teaching the Faith. Robert Stockman surveyed the years from the Guardian's death

through the ministry of the Hands of the Cause of God, and from the establishment of the Universal House of Justice through the first-half of the Five Year Plan, on which we are now embarked.

Nancy Davis worked with students in identifying the many different pedagogical approaches to learning and the range of methodologies available in the Bahá'í community. In the final class of the week, Morris Taylor conducted an interactive workshop on teaching the Bahá'í Faith. Activities in this workshop were designed to help each student identify their strengths in teaching and to devise strategies to improve in areas in which they feel further work is needed.

The summer session drew to a close on August 9, 2003, with a graduation dinner. Dr. David Young delivered the official greetings of the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly. Stephen Birkland, a member of the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas, gave the keynote address, enthraling students with stories from the early and recent days of the Faith, reminding them of how precious it is to be able to work so intimately in studying the Bahá'í writings. Student presentations included a dance performance, a poetry reading, and one student's reminiscences of her trips to the House of Worship over the years and how those visits changed the course of her life.

The program concluded by recognizing two students who completed the four year program: Theresa Ganong and Pamela Solon. They received standing ovations as they were handed their diplomas, joining the ranks of alumni who have completed the Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program. ▲

## Huqúqu'lláh Course Delayed

The Wilmette Institute has delayed its course **The Right of God: Huqúqu'lláh**, originally scheduled to start October 1. The Institute Board is consulting to produce a course of the highest possible quality and effectiveness. It is hoped the course will be rescheduled for the first half of 2004. ▲

## Annual Survey . . . *Continued from page 1*

The student comments about the Institute remain uniformly enthusiastic. A selection follows:

It was a lot of fun for me, and very educational, even if I never turned in my final written project. It gave me greater interest in studying the Revelation of Muhammad, and I have since then read a bit more on it. I feel it has given me a better appreciation of its links to the Bahá'í Revelation, and I am more appreciative of our own Holy Writings. I feel it has also helped me in my efforts at translating the Bahá'í Writings from English to Tagalog. And definitely it has helped me interact better with Muslims at interfaith events here.

— Adore Newman (Philippines)

I encourage people everywhere to take courses from the Institute. The Institute tries its very best to respond to the needs of all students, no matter which level a student is at. Introductory level students are accorded the same dignity and time as those taking courses at the graduate student level. In teaching the Faith, these courses provide the answers to most questions that seekers and receptive souls will ask.

— Patricia Nelson-Tsui (British Columbia)

I cannot say enough good things about the Wilmette Institute. The Institute adds a whole new dimension to my desire and ability to study the writings. Some of the handouts, provided with each course, are materials that I would, normally, not have access to. It is the faculty's ability to get me to read the material and view it, often, from an historical context and then try to apply it to current and future events that compels me return to the Institute for further study. Each student is encouraged to read the Writings with a new vision, and it is with these new eyes that I have discovered ideas or concepts either previously overlooked, or not fully understood. As a result, new questions have arisen which required further reading, on my part, than just the required reading material.

The student discussions are, for me, the most fun. I love sharing and reading the insights of other students, some of whom are long-time deepened Bahá'ís, while others have just recently accepted the Faith. I only wish

that more of the students would share their ideas. It is one thing to read the Writings, it is another to try and articulate what you have read and comprehended. I think the Institute provides a very safe place for individuals to bounce their ideas off one another, and what better way to become more confident in our teaching efforts. The quote "immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths . . ." has taken on a whole new life for me. To date, I have taken 3 courses from the Institute and I look forward to more.

— Chula Eslamieh (Arizona)

I gained a lot deeper understanding of the life of Bahá'u'lláh and the problems He faced. Even though I have not had formal deepening classes, I think my deeper understanding has reflected in a more focused life, which includes a lot of travel and very little opportunity for more than individual teaching and firesides with the native people I normally work with.

— Nina Kaczmarek (Manitoba)

I have only been in the course a couple of weeks but so far it is great...It gives me a chance to really ponder the material not just read it.

— Bren Goode (Maine)

I very much enjoyed the course (though I have yet to complete the essay... arrggghh!) The readings and comradery of our discussion group, as well as the telephone session I participated in were all great! Thanks for instituting the group rate approach!!!

— David Walline (Pennsylvania)

I felt filled up after returning from my courses (Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization) this summer. The classes filled in the gaps, things that I had questions about were answered finally.

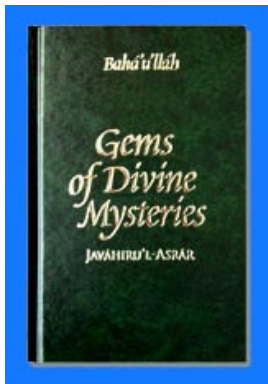
— Diann Stevens (California)

I am very grateful to have found the Wilmette Institute. Their great courses allow one to delve deeply into subjects with the help of expert faculty. It is a wonderful opportunity for pioneers, especially for those of us who are relatively isolated. It has been a gift!

— David Khorram (Guam)

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## Upcoming Courses



One of the Books  
Covered in Mystic Writings

The course **Bahá'u'lláh's Early Mystic Writings: Hidden Words, Seven Valleys, Four Valleys, and Gems of Mysteries** starts on November 1. The three-month course will explore the earliest of Bahá'u'lláh's revelations, which focused on the love of God, the spiritual path, and how to live one's life. An optional unit will examine the *Rashh-i-Amá*, a mystical poem widely thought to be Bahá'u'lláh's earliest revelation. Another optional unit will cover Sufism and *The Conference of the Birds*, a work by Farid ud-din Attár, an early Sufi. The Seven Valleys follows the general outline of *The Conference of the Birds*.

Registration for **Selected Letters in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh**, a three-month distance-learning course that starts December 1, 2003, is now open. The course will examine the three letters that the Universal House of Justice, in its Ridván 2003 letter, asked Bahá'ís to study: "The Goal of a New World Order," "America and the Most Great Peace," and "The Unfoldment of World Civilization." The Institute will provide students with study guides to supplement other published study materials.

On December 15, the Wilmette Institute will begin a three-month distance-learning course on **How to Study the Bahá'í Writings**. The course seeks to help Bahá'ís learn how to read the sacred texts, recognize their salient points, note metaphor and symbolism, and understand terms and ideas derived from an Islamic background. The course is the second in the Institute's **Basics of the Bahá'í Faith** course group, four courses that were created to help students

acquire a basic ability to understand the Faith and its scripture.

In response to popular demand, the Institute will again offer **Christianity for Deepening and Dialogue**, a three-month distance-learning course, starting January 15, 2004. The course is not a study of biblical prophecy, though the topic will be an aspect of the course. Rather, Christianity will be examined from the beginning to the present, with a focus on the life of Jesus, the contributions of the apostles, the early church, the formation of the New Testament, changes to the church in the Middle Ages, the reformations and the rise of Protestantism, and the vast range of Christian diversity present in the world today. The course will provide Bahá'ís with the context for dialoguing with their Christian neighbors. Lively discussion is expected. ▲

### Annual Survey . . . Continued from page 3

During the course, I came into contact (through the listserver) with a group of people who were committed to learning and this encouraged me a lot to learn. The constant exchange of ideas on the listserver was a source of learning in addition to the excellent materials the students received. Studying the letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 17 January 2003 to the Bahá'ís of the world with an eye to identify strategies leading to a purpose helped a great deal in broadening my vision of the Five Year Plan. Looking at the three core activities mentioned in that message and asking the question why are we to do this leads to one understanding more deeply the purpose of these activities and helps one to see how they serve as portals for entry by troops. I got the idea to study the message in this way from the Wilmette Institute Course.

— David Simbo (Ghana) ▲

## Improvements to the Distance-Learning Courses

In June the Institute started using web-based forums as the principal medium for discussion in its distance-learning courses. The forums replaced Internet-based listservers, where emails discussing course material were automatically sent to everyone in the course. Many students liked the change, noting that it was much easier to find postings, verify the course schedule, and remember when to complete tasks.

But the web-based technology has proved to have two drawbacks. First, some students were already familiar with the technology behind listservers but did not know how forums work, which meant that even simple operations—like clicking on a forum to open it—proved mystifying to a certain number of students. Second, forums require one to go to a particular website to read them, and many forgot to do that regularly.

Consequently, the Wilmette Institute has decided to try blending the two technologies. Every course will now have forums *and* a listserver. The latter will be set up to send automatic notices to everyone when a message has been posted on the forums, with a clickable link to take one straight to the posting. Furthermore, the listserver will be used to give students access to various tutorials so that they can practice using the forums. It is hoped that the result will be the best of both worlds: the neatness and organization of the forums with the accessibility of listservers. ▲

## Other Future 'Irfán Colloquia

54th Session — English

July 1-4 Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, UK

55th Session — Persian

July 7-13 Center for Bahá'í Studies, Acuto, Italy

56th Session — German

July 15-18 Berghotel, Tambach, Germany

57th Session — Persian

Oct. 7-10 Louhelen Bahá'í School, Michigan, USA

58th Session — English

Oct. 7-10 Louhelen Bahá'í School, Michigan, USA

## News About the 'Irfán Colloquium

A forum for presenting papers and participating in dialogue on the scripture and fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith

**SEE** "<http://www.irfancoolloquia.org>" for the latest information on

- Dates and venues of the 'Irfán Colloquia in English, German, and Persian
- Calls for papers
- Programs, abstracts of presentations, and reports
- Publications and distributors
- Address, telephone, fax and e-mail

52nd Session — Persian

May 27-30 Bosch Bahá'í School, California, USA

53rd Session — English

May 27-30 Bosch Bahá'í School, California, USA

**NOTE:** Every session starts after dinner on the first day and runs through the end of the last day.

The 'Irfán Colloquium starts its eleventh year at Bosch Bahá'í School, providing a unique and exciting opportunity for systematic study of the scripture and fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith. Philosophy, science, and the Bahá'í Faith will continue to be the main theme of the Colloquium. The seminar will be mainly devoted to the Writings of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá including special sessions on the Bayán and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Hidden Treasure. Presenters will include Muin Afnani, Ian Kluge, Stephen Lambden, Sholeh Quinn, Fariborz Sahba, Habib Riazati, Alá Ghods, Heshmat Shariari, Sheila Banani, Maryam Afshar, Iraj Ayman, and others who will be announced later. For up-to-date information on the program and the presenters, please look at [www.irfancoolloquia.org](http://www.irfancoolloquia.org). For registration and reservation, contact Bosch Bahá'í School; 831-423-3387 (tel); 831-423-7564 (fax); BOSCH@usbnc.org (email). ▲

# Wilmette Institute Distance-Learning Course Schedule

Note: Courses are "Beyond the Basics" Unless Otherwise Noted

## 2003:

Nov. 1-Jan. 31: **The Early Mystic Writings of Bahá'ú'lláh: Hidden Words, Seven Valleys, Four Valleys, and Gems of Divine Mysteries**

Dec. 1-Feb. 28: **Selected Letters from *The World Order of Bahá'ú'lláh***

Dec. 15-Mar. 15: **How to Study the Bahá'í Writings** [Basics Course]

## 2004:

Jan. 15-April 15: **Christianity for Deepening and Dialogue**

Feb. 15-May 15: **'Abdu'l-Bahá's *The Secret of Divine Civilization***

Mar. 15-June 15: **The Bahá'í Community, 1921-57: Administrative Consolidation and Worldwide Expansion**

Apr. 15-July 15: **Health and Nutrition**

June 1-Sept. 30 [four months]: **Bahá'ú'lláh's Revelation: A Systematic Survey** [Basic Course]

July 1-Sept. 30: **The Dispensation of Bahá'ú'lláh**

Sept. 1-Nov. 30: **The Kitáb-Í-*iqán***

Oct. 1-Dec. 31: **TBA**

Nov. 1-Jan 31: **Rediscovering the Dawnbreakers: Bahá'í History, 1844-53**

Dec. 1-Feb. 28: **Bahá'í Theology: Concepts of God, Revelation, Manifestation, Humanity, Creation, Afterlife, and Covenant** [Basics Course]

All distance-learning courses include web-based discussion forums for students and faculty, regular conference calls, systematic lesson plans, and a wide variety of learning projects to help students apply their learning in their local communities. All courses are available at the "introductory" level for those unsure they can commit to taking a university-level course, the "intermediate" (undergraduate) level for those wishing to go into more depth, and the "advanced" (graduate) level for those wishing to do extensive research or writing.

More information on all of them can be found on the Web at <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org>. ▲

## The Lamp



THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE was established in January 1995 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to offer academic, professional, and service-oriented courses related to the Bahá'í Faith. In addition to offering university level courses on Bahá'í topics, the Wilmette Institute fosters Bahá'í scholarship; develops new, innovative curricular materials; creates high quality courses on teaching the Faith; and refines Bahá'í concepts of pedagogy.

It aims to produce teachers and administrators of the Bahá'í Faith of great capacity, capable of sharing and demonstrating Bahá'í truths in their lives and speech.

For more information about the Bahá'í Faith, the Wilmette Institute, or its courses, contact:

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