

Unitarian Universalist History SKOL 4009
Dr. Roxanne Seagraves

This is a graduate course in Unitarian Universalist (UU) History offered by Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California. The course covers the history of liberal religion from its origins in the Renaissance and Radical Reformation and its development in Europe, to its history in America. The course also critically examines contemporary issues.

This is a three-credit, semester-long course designed for Unitarian Universalist seminarians who do not have access to courses in denominational history at or near their seminaries.

The primary text for the course is Earl Morse Wilbur's *Our Unitarian Heritage*. It provides the narrative throughout most of our class. Wilbur's text is supplemented by scholarly articles, helpful bibliographies, and links to the growing body of historical material on the World Wide Web. The course is organized into fourteen units. We cover one unit per week. To successfully complete each unit, students are required to complete all of the assigned readings and to post a weekly one-page reflection paper to the discussion forum to share with other students. Students and instructors are in ongoing conversation throughout the semester. In addition, a final paper (printed copy) will be mailed to the professor at the end of the course.

Syllabus

Thomas Starr King, a Universalist by birth who became a Unitarian minister, thus brought together two movements that would eventually consolidate.

The course syllabus is organized into 14 units. We will cover one unit per week.

Unit 1: Renaissance Humanism

Many of the humanist values of modern liberal religion have their origins in the Renaissance. We will explore some of the key events, ideas, and figures from this period.

Unit 2: Radical Reformation

What made the Radical Reformation "radical"? What were its defining characteristics? Unitarianism (and to a lesser degree Universalism) have their roots in this movement that began in Sixteenth Century Europe. We will explore some of the major groups (Anabaptists, Polish Brethren) and focus on the early antitrinitarians, especially Michael Servetus.

Unit 3: Socinianism and Transylvanian Unitarianism

The first faith communities in which Unitarianism took root were the Polish Minor Church (the Socinians) and the Transylvanian Unitarians. In this unit we explore the history of our movement in these lands.

Unit 4: Unitarianism in England

This unit will explore the link between continental Unitarianism and its distinct origins in England. We will also look at the thought of Joseph Priestley and the important influence of the Enlightenment on liberal theology.

Unit 5: Puritanism and Arminianism in America

This unit will trace the gradual movement of the churches of the Standing Order from orthodox Puritanism to liberal Arminianism. In particular, we will look at the two outspoken representatives of these views: Jonathan Edwards and Charles Chauncy.

Unit 6: Origins of Universalism

There are many hypotheses regarding the origins of Universalism in America. We will explore several of these, and discuss the defining elements of early Universalist thought.

Unit 7: Classical Unitarianism in America

The final split between the liberals and orthodox of New England occurred during what came to be known as the Unitarian Controversy. We will trace the events leading up to this break, as well as some of the important early leaders of institutional Unitarianism: Henry Ware and William Ellery Channing.

Unit 8: Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism is one of our movement's most important contributions to theology, philosophy and literature. Who were the Transcendentalists? What was their dispute between more traditional Unitarianism? What beliefs did they share?

Unit 9: Abolition

Abolition is one of our movement's most important contributions to theology, philosophy and literature. Who were the Transcendentalists? What was their dispute between more traditional Unitarianism? What beliefs did they share?

Unit 10: Women in the Nineteenth Century

Many of the important leaders of the Nineteenth Century Women's movement were affiliated with Unitarianism and Universalism. Recent feminist scholarship has shed much light on their lives and accomplishments. We will explore some of this exciting new research.

Unit 11: Unitarians and Universalists post-Civil War

Though this period is often overlooked in the stories of our movement, the second half of the Nineteenth Century saw many theological and institutional changes as the denominations move westward. Many of these changes are embodied in the story of the Iowa Sisterhood, a group of liberal women ministers in the Midwest. We will read about their experience in Cynthia Grant Tucker's Prophetic Sisterhood.

Unit 12: Crisis of Liberalism

Industrialism and World War I are two of the events that shook liberal religion in the early decades of the Twentieth Century, provoking such diverse theological movements

as the Social Gospel, Humanism, and Neo-orthodoxy. We will discuss the role of Unitarians and Universalists in fostering and responding to these movements.

Unit 13: Consolidation and Polity

The middle decades of the century saw institutional change within each denomination, as well as a movement toward consolidation of the two movements. We will explore the events leading up to this historic event in the history of our tradition.

Unit 14: Justice

The Civil Rights movement was an important event in the lives of many Unitarian Universalists and in the institutional life of the young denomination itself. We will look at UU involvement in the Civil Rights movement as well as other struggles for justice, and discuss the Black Empowerment controversy.

Required Readings

Many of the readings for this course are provided for you online. These readings are copyright protected and are available to you free of charge on the web only because this course is password protected. Please honor the work of these scholars by not sharing your password, and by not reproducing the articles for others' use.

Books for online UU History include:

The Larger Faith by Charles A. Howe, published by Skinner House Books, 1993, ISBN 1-55896-308-1

Unitarian Universalism and the Quest for Racial Justice, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993, ISBN: 1-55896-318-9

Prophetic Sisterhood, by Cynthia Grant Tucker. Authors Choice Press, 2000, ISBN 0-595-00681-7

The Premise and the Promise, by Warren Ross. [Available through the UUA]

The Transcendentalists, by Perry Miller, Harvard University Press, MA, 1950, ISBN: 0-674-90333-1

Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing, Emerson, Parker, introduced by Conrad Wright, Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston, 1980 (4th printing)

Wilbur's Our Unitarian Heritage is also required, but it is available on the course web site. (You do not need to order it.)

Optional:

Emerson: The Mind on Fire, Robert Richardson Jr., University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995 ISBN: 0-520-20689-4

An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity, Edited by Sydney Ahlstrom and Johathan Carey, Wesleyan University Press, 1985, ISBN: 0-8195-5080-9 (this is for hardback, would prefer paperback, if available)

Charles A. Howe, For Faith and Freedom (Boston: Skinner House, 1997) (available from UUA Bookstore)

Phillip Hewett, Racovia: An Early Liberal Religious Community (Providence, RI: Blackstone Editions, 2004) (available through www.BlackstoneEditions.com)

Please note: You may order most texts from the UUA Bookstore by calling (+800) 215-9076, and books may often be found via www.bookfinder.com

Course Expectations

Complete weekly readings on time.

As a graduate course in history, you will be expected to do a substantial amount of reading. We have centuries to cover in one semester. Students are expected to complete all “assigned” readings for each unit. Readings marked “optional” are highly recommended but, of course, optional.

Participate in weekly on-line discussion.

Each week students and the professor will post comments and questions to an on-line “Discussion” forum. This interactive forum is designed to allow students to communicate with one another and to ask questions of the professor.

Have access to (and a working knowledge of) a computer that can browse and download files from the Web.

The primary learning tool for this course is your computer, its Internet browser, and the Internet. Please make yourself familiar with these tools if you are not already.

Complete and post written responses every week.

For each unit, you will be asked to write and post to the Web a one-page written response to a specific topic pertinent to that unit.

Complete a final paper.

By the end of the semester, you will be expected to complete and mail to the professor a research paper of 10 to 15 pages. Your research should include primary and secondary materials. In addition, you will be asked to integrate your historical research with your ministry, or with contemporary issues in our movement. In other words: how does our history speak to you today?

Course Policies

Each student will agree to use the materials for themselves only.

Each student will agree that the lecture notes are not to be printed out or reproduced in any fashion.

Each student will agree that the username and password will not be given to anybody outside this course, and that giving another person this information is a breach of trust and ethics.

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