

# Religious Education for a Changing World

**January Term: January 16-20, 2018**

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*The great end in religious instruction is not to stamp our minds irresistibly on the young, but to stir up their own ... All the elementary ideas of God and duty and love and happiness come to [the child] from his [sic] own spiritual powers and affections. Moral good and evil, virtue and vice, are revealed to him in his own motives of action and in the motives of those around him.*  
 - William Ellery Channing (1837)

*I loved learning. [Classrooms were] the place where I could forget someone else's image of who and what I should be... I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself.*  
 - bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994)

*We have somehow to understand a dangerous and endangered world, and provoke others to understand it if we are in some fashion to transform it.*  
 - Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination* (1998)

## Overview

This cornerstone Religious Education (RE) course provides religious professionals with a comprehensive, integrated, overview of the past and present impact of RE philosophy, methods, and controversies. Students also grapple with issues of human and faith development in a multi-racial, multicultural world. *This course is required for all degree candidates entering fall 2009 or later.*

## Course Blueprint

Religious Education in its American Unitarian Universalist context has come a long way since the days of Benjamin Rush who, alongside kindred spirits in the 1790s, was searching for a way to correct immigrants who “drank too much” and lacked moral cohesion! From its early days, RE has been one of the constant vehicles for passing along the traditions of Unitarians, Universalists and Unitarian Universalists. At the same time, it has also been the location where children, youth and adults could explore the great questions of what it means to live a quality life and face imminent death, craft intentional communities of care and support, and advance actions that correct social wrongs. In a 1960 lecture, Sophia Fahs, one of the redwoods of liberal religious education, stated that, “It is not our ancestors who will be changed by what we do. It is our contemporaries, and our descendants for generations to come, for whom we should be feeling responsibilities.” Indeed, Religious Education – as both noun and verb – is a central place in our tradition where values and practice meet and mingle. It is our public face, the container that holds and transmits our traditions from one generation to the next. It is a springboard for action and, equally important, a wellspring from which we draw inspiration, solace and deep connections to that which is Holy in our lives.

This course is designed to be a comprehensive introduction to ideas and practices that give Unitarian Universalist Religious Education its meaning and purpose. It is also a course that shows how to make alive those ideas to young and old alike. As one might expect, crafting such a course in a way that is satisfying for broad swaths of people is a near impossible task, for there is limited time in a seminar to explore the countless ideas and practices that merit our attention. Such a project is all the more complicated in that every student will have had experience in “being educated” in both formal and informal settings, so the course must balance issues of learning with those of un-learning and re-learning. But jumping into it is our challenge, and that is what we will do!

*Religious Education for a Changing World* builds on our UU tradition of thinking sharply while loving expansively and deeply. We will explore our rich **history of religious education** and make note of how formative women and men shaped its **philosophy**. Angus H. MacLean, yet another one of our big-thinkers, famously said, “the **method** is the message.” In that tradition, students will experience first-hand a variety of different teaching strategies that stir the **imagination** and evoke new ways of thinking and being. As an interdisciplinary people, UUs call upon a variety of sources that enable us to discern the terrain of the human spirit and experience. Having a solid understanding of **how humans encounter and make meaning of the world** in different ways is

central to being an effective educator. The very role of education is to introduce new ideas into the mix, many of which will land as **controversial** on the ears and hearts of the receiver. The course will explore the issues that flummox religious education as well as religious educators (e.g., technology, intergenerational work, ageism, multi-racial families, gender and RE, power stratification, etc.). And, finally, context matters. Students in this course will be asked to investigate religious education as it lives presently in congregational life, defining its essence, and exploring ways it might go in the future.

It is also noteworthy that the entire course is designed with principles of anti-racism, anti-oppression and multicultural teaching and learning in mind, so as to model how this lens applies to religious education.

Meadville Lombard is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, they must fill out the Request for Accommodation form found in the Appendix of the Student Handbook and submit it to the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, Ken McHugh ([kmchugh@meadville.edu](mailto:kmchugh@meadville.edu)) (312) 212-0673. Please note that classroom accommodations cannot be provided without an approved Accommodations Form.

## Required Texts & Media for January 2018

### Religious Education: History and Purpose

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

**Gilbert, Richard** (ed.) (2013). In the Middle of a Journey: Readings in Unitarian Universalist Faith Development. Text available from the UUA Bookstore.

**MacLean, Angus** (1962). Method is the Message. Unitarian Universalist Department of Education: Boston. [[PDF essay](#), [LiveText](#)]

**Nelson, Roberta** (2001). The teacher as spiritual guide. In The Essex Conversations: Visions for lifespan religious education. Skinner House Books: Boston. [[Read essay](#), [PDF](#), [LiveText](#)]

**Sweeney, Kimberly** (2017). The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation. [[PDF White Paper](#), [Live Text](#)]

### Learning & Teaching Styles, Developmental Theory

**Bowens-Wheatley, Marjorie.** (1995). "Cornrows, Kwanzaa, and Confusion: The dilemma of cultural racism and misappropriation."

[www.uua.org/multiculturalism/introduction/misappropriation/37852.shtml](http://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/introduction/misappropriation/37852.shtml)

**Garvey-Berger, Jennifer.** (2012). Key Concepts in Adult Development. Changing on the job: Developing leaders for a complex world. Stanford Business Books: 2012. [PDF Chapter, LiveText]

**Goodman, Diane.** (2001). Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups. [PDF Chapter, LiveText]

**Gardner, Howard.** (1993). Multiple intelligences: the theory in practice. A reader. Basic Books: New York. [PDF Chapter, LiveText]

**Hurd, Tracey.** (2005.) Nurturing Children and Youth: A Developmental Guidebook. [PDF Summary/cheat sheet, LiveText]

**Patton, Sally** (2004). *Welcoming Children with Special Needs* (book out of print, available online at [http://www.uua.org/documents/lfd/welcoming\\_children\\_specialneeds.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/lfd/welcoming_children_specialneeds.pdf)) [Read Introduction and 1-69]

**Wilkerson, Barbara** (ed). (1997). Multicultural Religious Education. Religious Education Press: Birmingham, AL. [Read Part I of the text. Then choose and read about a racial/ethnic group you have had the least experience with.]

### Teaching & Learning

**Baym, Nancy.** (2010). Personal Connections in the Digital Age. Polity Press: Cambridge: UK. [PDF, LiveText]

**Bellavance-Grace, Karen.** (2013). Full-Week Faith: Rethinking Religious Education Ministries for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Unitarian Universalists. [fullweekfaith.weebly.com](http://fullweekfaith.weebly.com) [Read text on website]

**Dewey, John.** (1938). Experience and Education. Simon and Schuster: New York. (available <http://tinyurl.com/bbftlvt>)

*NOTE: There will be additional short readings and evening assignments over the course of the week.*

### Highly Recommended, But Not Required

**Hewitt, Erika.** (2010). Story, Song, and Spirit: Fun and Creative Worship Services for All Ages.

**Hicks, Mark.** (2017) Beyond the Critique of Racism: Moving Forward with Audacious Hope. [PDF, LiveText]

**Palmer, Parker.** (1997, 2007, 2009). The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life

**Roberto, John** (2012). Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation (available at Amazon.com or [www.faithformation2020.net](http://www.faithformation2020.net))

## **Pre-Course Assignment**

### The Religious Education Landscape Project

Educational processes are never static, and require the investigator to consider several distinct yet related elements in order to gain a fuller understanding of its character. Issues such as theology, culture, demographics, staffing, budget, schedules, community and church history, even current events have extraordinary impact on the hows and whys of any RE program. Your task during this course is to explore issues of context in light of the curricular decisions that are made by RE teachers, staff and/or ministers.

Prior to our collected time together, get a first-hand understanding of the workings of religious education in a UU congregation (or, if you are not a UU, then your home congregation. If you are enrolled in the Congregational or Leadership signature course, you should consider using the M/DRE in your Teaching Congregation. Persons who are currently M/DREs should consider choosing another UU congregation, or a non-UU congregation in your community). **Take into account that children's religious education programs often coincide with the program year of the church.**

### Phase One

1. Choose a congregation that has programs for adults, youth and adults.
2. Set up an appointment with the person in charge of RE in your selected congregation. Explain that you are taking this course, and wish to learn how this particular congregation has decided – for whatever reason! – to conduct religious education as it does. You will need to explain that your first task is simply to observe, and after the Intensive week in January, you will return with another set of questions based on our class

- discussions and readings. The pre-interview should take up to one hour, and the post-class interview may take up to two hours.
3. Conduct the interview. Consider questions such as:
    - a. How, when and why was RE started in the congregation?
    - b. How is it organized? (e.g., organizational chart, staff, enrollment figures)
    - c. What is the general philosophy of RE? Are there specific sub-objectives the program seeks to achieve? Are goals different for different age groups?
    - d. What do you see and hear people learning? How closely does that evidence match stated intentions?
    - e. How are instructors recruited, oriented, and supported?
    - f. What are the particular challenges of doing RE in this congregation (congregational culture issues, politics, staffing, theological diversity, etc.)?
    - g. Get permission from the director to attend ONE class session for EACH of the following groups: a children's class (3-12 year-olds); middle/high school; and an adult RE course.
    - h. Include other questions that provide insight into the "culture of RE" in this particular setting
  4. Attend one class session for **each** age group in order to jot down observations of what you see and hear happening. Create a worksheet to your liking that allows you to take DETAILED field-notes. Pay particular attention to:
    - a. the goals and outcomes of the session you are observing (if possible, you should ask the teacher about her/his goals prior to the course);
    - b. the difference between the explicit curriculum (the stated goals) and the implicit curriculum (the unstated goals that are actively being taught). What participants are *really* learning?
    - c. who is participating in the course (notice issues of verbal and body language)? How does that participation look different for various people?
    - d. the instructors style and preferences in terms of his/her decisions about use of instructional strategies?
    - e. To what degree does each class have the potential to change the way children/youth/adults live in the world? In other words, does the lesson have potential to shift/change the STRUCTURES of how they make sense of things (i.e., issues of development)?
    - f. how does the physical set-up – the *aesthetics* – of the room inform how people are learning?

## Phase Two

5. Think about *yourself* as a learner at each stage of instruction you witnessed. Where would you have been engaged? Where would you have lost interest? Consider how your own preferences and needs make your responses true for you. How were your experiences different or similar to your peers? *Capture your musings in a journal entry that you attach to your field-notes.*
6. Clean up your notes and bring a hard copy to class.

### Phase Three – Preparation for our January Term Intensive Week

7. When prompted, post a picture of yourself on Populi and short ‘get to know you’ introduction.
8. When prompted, post another introduction to me, your professor about you, as a student. What do you want me to know about you? Consider your previous experiences with group learning (formal and informal). Write a list/chart out the factors or conditions that were necessary for you to learn well. What would have made more learning more complete?
9. Post a 300-500 word essay in our electronic forum, LiveText, about your first impression of Religious Education based on what you observed. Post in LiveText under the assignment, “Pre-Course Observations.”

NOTE: Please contact me with concerns or questions about this project. [rogers@uua.org](mailto:rogers@uua.org) Indeed, it is expected that you’ll need to shape this assignment to your context, and the culture of your congregation and/or community.

### **Post-Course Assignments**

Please number your assignments when you turn them in. Thank you!

1. Re-visit your learning notes from our week together in January. As “theology” arises out of lived experiences, **re-visit how your experience of faith formation informs your theological framework.** Write about it (about one page). Be specific by citing examples from your observations and experiences.
2. Statement of Personal Theology or Religious Philosophy:
  - a. Please provide a statement of your personal theology or religious philosophy in a paragraph or more.
  - b. Please provide a statement on your understanding of the meaning of faith.
  - c. Please provide a statement of your preferred pedagogy.
3. Sophia Fahs famously stated, “Life becomes religious whenever you

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make it so.” Choose a single day from your personal life last week and bring to mind an encounter that can be an opportunity for religious meaning-making. **Weave in the frameworks and theories we explored in class.**

4. Examine *your own* learning over the duration of the course. Think about:
  - a. How did your own experience as a learner in formal education prepare you to engage with the work of faith formation?
  - b. Where did you find yourself most engaged/disengaged during the course of the week?
  - c. How did the experience of the class shift your understanding of the role and potential of religious education/lifespan faith formation?
  - d. How can you integrate your insights from the week into your own faith formational practices as well as your role as a religious professional?
5. Take any of the above assignments and turn it into a (<500 word) blog post and post them on the Fahs Collaborative’s FaceBook page (or to some other public format, such as a Church Newsletter, blog, etc. Paste your posting in your memo if you do not use our FaceBook page). What do people need to know about Unitarian Universalist Faith Formation in today’s changing world? Share your insights with the world!
6. Post five tweets to the world about RE for a Changing World. Using @TheFahsCollab, #GrowingUU, #RE4ChangingWorld. Or cut and paste them on page.
7. Conference Call: We will find times that work for folks the during our week together.

**Final Course Reflections Due by February 2, 2018**



## Assessment Rubric

<b>Framework for Assessment</b>
<b>Beginning</b> (evidence of awareness but expressed without depth);
<b>Developing</b> (awareness of challenges, but significant work yet to be done);
<b>Accomplished</b> (awareness, depth and facility with ideas and practices)
<b>Exemplary</b> (awareness, depth, nuanced treatment of ideas, visionary response to problems)

Category for assessment	Comments from Tandi
<b>Were all the elements of the assignment completed</b> and submitted on time (raw field notes, analysis of field notes, final reflective papers – please number them and make sure your name is on them)?	
<b>Articulation of a theological framework</b> that speaks to the vision and power of faith formation.	
<b>Exploration of self-learning</b> during the course. Reflection on impact of classroom experiences, visits with a professional religious educator, the noticing of areas of future growth and development, collaborative spirit.	
<b>General comments:</b>	