

**Unitarian and Universalist Polity and Practices: Seminar**  
**HDS 2990**  
**Fridays, 2:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**  
**Divinity Hall 211**

**Rev. Stephanie May, ThD '12**  
617/519-5504  
[smay@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:smay@mail.harvard.edu)

Office Hours: Fridays, 1:00 p.m.- 2:00 p.m, Rock or by appointment on Zoom.

This course will explore the history, questions, values, and commitments that emerge within the theology and practice of Unitarian Universalist polity.

### **Course Goals**

- 1) Students will develop a framework of critical questions with which to engage multiple situations of governance within congregations and the larger UU world as well as within diverse sites of ministry.
- 2) Students will deepen an understanding of the role of accountability in systems of governance, including accountability to an anti-racist, anti-oppression, multicultural Unitarian Universalism. This will include students examining their own embedded theology and how that may intersect with expressions of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and settler colonialism in the UU faith.
- 3) Students will gain knowledge about the multiple roots in our U/U traditions that shape U/U polity, including significant moments of conflict, change, and social transformation.
- 4) Students will consider pathways for change in Unitarian Universalism through the lens of current and alternate models of polity.
- 5) Students will critically engage a number of the texts included on the “Required Reading List” of the Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Fellowshiping Committee.

### **Course Assignments**

- 1) Regular class attendance and informed participation in class discussion  
To do well, please attend weekly and read the material for the day with reflective attention so as to participate in the discussion. Per HDS policy as of January 14, 2022, all classes will be livestreamed and recorded. As needed due to illness or emergency, please join online or watch the recording. (If you elect to watch the recording, a written reflection on the class will be required.) Everyone in the class is responsible for creating a classroom culture that justly creates space for all participants.  
*Letter Graded 15%*
- 2) Weekly Reflection and Questions: Students will respond to the weekly reading with a short reflection concluding with a question the reading brings up. In addition, students will respond online to at least one question raised by others.  
*Due Weekly by Midnight Thursday* *Graded Complete/Incomplete 20%*  
*(may miss 1; no papers 3/11; questions only 4/22)*

- 3) Lead up to two Class Discussions: Drawing on the weekly reading, students will plan a 20-40 minute discussion. *Graded Complete/Incomplete 15%*
- 4) Midterm Paper: In a 3-5 page, double-spaced paper, students will respond to one of three proposed questions about “Widening the Circle of Concern.”  
*Due Friday, March 11* *Letter Grade 15%*
- 5) Future of UUism Conversations: Conduct two 20-minute conversations with UU’s of different social locations (one interviewee must be from a historically marginalized community), then write a 2-3 page reflection about what you heard and your own thoughts and questions about the future. Post to course site and respond to at least one question posted by another student.  
*Due Noon, Thursday, April 21* *Letter Grade 15%*  
*Highly Recommend Interviews Complete by April 14.*
- 6) Final Paper: In a 5-6 page, double-spaced paper, students will engage a current issue of polity in a congregational, community, professional, regional, national, or international context. The paper should describe the issue using cited resources, locate the issue within historical context, identify the dynamics of authority and accountability in the issue, and make a case for their own position on the issue. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss possible topics with the professor in advance.  
*Paper Proposals due Noon, Friday, April 8*  
*Final Paper Due, Thursday, May 7* *Letter Grade 20%*

### **Class Format**

Each class meeting will primarily focus on discussion with some elements of lecture. Each class will pay close attention to the readings and students are encouraged to bring their questions, comments, and criticisms to class. While personal experience is valued as part of our sources of knowledge, students will be expected to foster a critical dialogue between experience, readings, and questions raised in class. Some class sessions will have a guest for part or all of the time. We will have a break midway through each class.

### **Office Hours**

As an adjunct lecturer, my time on campus will be limited to Fridays. I will be at the Rock from 1:00-2:00pm every Friday. While I prefer an email in advance, please feel free to stop by and see if I am available. I can also meet by Zoom at other times by appointment.

### **Books on Reserve or for Purchase:**

[To support UU authors and publishing, I recommend purchasing books from the UU bookstore at <https://www.uuabookstore.org>]

- Dan McKanan et al., eds., *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism, vol. 1: From the Beginning to 1899* (2017)—selected pages
- Dan McKanan et al., eds., *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism, vol. 2: From 1900 to the Present* (2017)—selected pages
- Rahnema, Mitra, ed., *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry* (2017)
- UUA Commission on Appraisal, *Who's In Charge Here? The Complex Relationship Between Ministry and Authority* (2013)

#### OPTIONAL Books:

- Peter Hughes, editor. *The Cambridge Platform, A Modern Reader's Edition*. Boston: Skinner House, (2008).
- UUA Commission on Appraisal, *Class Action: The Struggle with Class in Unitarian Universalism* (2017).

### **Policy on Absences**

Students who must miss a class or an examination due to a religious observance should inform the instructor during the first two weeks of the semester. Please know that Massachusetts state law specifies that all students who must miss a class, exam, or course requirement because of a religious observance shall be provided with an opportunity to make up the requirement on another day, so long as this does not create an unreasonable burden for the school.

### **Policy on Disability Accommodation**

Students with disabilities that may affect their ability to complete coursework as described in this syllabus should contact the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and provide supporting documentation as soon as possible in order to evaluate eligibility for an accommodation. A specific request for accommodation must then be submitted within one week of the study card deadline.

### **Policy on Classroom Culture**

As a course on the topic of Unitarian Universalist polity, the governance of the classroom will also be a laboratory and living out of Unitarian Universalist principles and values—including commitments to anti-racism and anti-oppression. Everyone is responsible for creating a classroom culture that justly creates space for all participants. The instructor is committed to providing readings and raising questions that seek to challenge assumptions of the cultures of patriarchy and white supremacy. All students are encouraged to bring suggestions for how to embody this vision more fully to the attention of the instructor or of their classmates.

# COURSE CALENDAR

## JAN 28 INTRODUCTION—POLITY, POWER, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### In Class:

- [Effective Congregational Governance: Organizing for Mission and Ministry](#)
- [How the UUA Board Uses Policy Governance](#)

### Resources:

- Laura Park, *The Nested Bowls: The Promise and Practice of Good Governance* (2018)
- Dan Hotchkiss, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership* (2009)

## FEB 4 Sources of Authority and Accountability: HERITAGE, TRADITIONS, AND IDEALS OF UUS

### Required Readings:

- “The Cambridge Platform” in McKanan et al, *Documentary History*, pp 42-53.  
*Optional full versions:* Hughes, Peter, editor. *The Cambridge Platform, A Modern Reader’s Edition*. Boston: Skinner House, 2008. OR free online pdf:  
<https://books.google.dm/books?id= ZYEAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity: A Historical Survey of Unitarian and Universalist Practice* (1997), pp. 1-65  
<https://www.uua.org/files/documents/wrightconrad/congregationalpolity.pdf>

### Recommended:

- Susan Ritchie, “The Pasha of Buda and the Edict of Torda: Transylvanian Unitarian/Islamic Ottoman Cultural Enmeshment and the Development of Religious Tolerance,” *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* 30 (2005): pp. 26-54.

## FEB 11 Sources of Authority and Accountability: UU HERITAGE AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

*Guest: Rev. Clyde Grubbs*

### Required Readings/Video:

- Social Witness Statement: “[The Doctrine of Discovery](#)” (2012)
- Clyde Grubbs, “[Religious Groups Repudiation: Unitarian Universalist](#)”
- TBD—more coming from Rev. Grubbs

### Recommended/Resources:

- Tisa Wegner, “Unitarians in an Age of Empire: Settler Colonialism, Liberal Religion, and the World’s Parliament of Religions,” *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* (Vol. XLI, 2017-2018)

**FEB 18            Sources of Authority and Accountability:  
UU HERITAGE, RACE, AND CLASS**

Required readings:

- Mitra Rahnema, ed., *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry* (2017)
- UUA Commission on Appraisal, *Class Action: The Struggle with Class in Unitarian Universalism* (2017). Alternatively, the pdf of the preliminary report from the UUA Commission on Appraisal can be read from course files.

Recommended:

- Rosemary Bray McNatt, "The Problem of Theology in the Work of Anti-Racism: A Meditation" (2003) in Dan McKanan et al., eds., *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism, vol. 2: From 1900 to the Present* (2017), pp. 463-466.
- Mark Morrison-Reed, *Darkening the Doorways: Black Trailblazers and Missed Opportunities in Unitarian Universalism* (2011)
- Mark Morrison-Reed, *The Selma Awakening: How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Changed Unitarian Universalism* (2014)
- J. Floyd Thomas, *The Origins of Black Humanism in America: Reverend Ethelred Brown and the Unitarian Church*.
- Mark Harris, *Elite: Uncovering Classism in Unitarian Universalist History* (2010)

Additional Resources:

- Dan McKanan et al., eds., *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism, vol. 2: From 1900 to the Present* (2017), pp. 263-266, 270-291, 298-301, 325-328, 416-423.
- Linda Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing* (1997)
- Leslie Takahashi, Chip Roush, and Leon Spencer, *The Arc of the Universe is Long: Unitarian Universalists, Anti-Racism, and the Journey from Calgary*(2009)
- Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones, *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue* (2002)

**FEB 25            The Power of Association:  
CONGREGATIONS AND MEMBERSHIP**

Required:

- William Ellery Channing, "Remarks on Associations."  
<http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/congregational-polity/remarks-on-associations-by-william-ellery-channing/>
- Berry Street Essays: Fredric J. Muir, "From iChurch to Beloved Community: Ecclesiology and Justice" (2012)  
[pdf; online: <https://www.uuma.org/mpage/BSE2012>]
- *Belonging The Meaning of Membership*, A Report by the Commission on Appraisal Unitarian Universalist Association, June 2001.  
[pdf; online: <http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/belonging.pdf>]

## FEB 25      **CONT'D: CONGREGATIONS AND MEMBERSHIP**

### Recommended:

- “A Doctrine of the Church for Liberals” and “Walking Together” in *Walking Together*: Chapters 1 and 2 (1-35)  
[online: <http://uuhhs.org/research-resources/recommended-books/walking-together/>]

## MARCH 4      **The Power of Association: THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS (UUA)**

### Required:

- UUA Bylaws and Rules,  
<http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/bylaws>
- *Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity*, A Report by the Commission on Appraisal, June 1997. [<http://www.uua.org/governance/polity/>] – special emphases on Part 1: Sections 3 & 4; Part 2: Section 12
- Sue Phillips, “Congregational Polity and the Myth of Congregational Autonomy,” GA Workshop 2015. Video [1:16] and transcript online:  
<https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/congregational-polity-and-myth-congregational-autonomy>

### Recommended:

- “UU Denominational Structure” (1986) in Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, chapter 6 (73-95). [pdf; online: <http://uuhhs.org/research-resources/recommended-books/walking-together/>]
- Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity: A Historical Survey of Unitarian and Universalist Practice* (1997), pp. 67-214  
<https://www.uua.org/files/documents/wrightconrad/congregationalpolity.pdf>

### Additional Resource:

- UUA Board Packets are online here:  
<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/board/packets>
- You can also register to attend the open portions of the UUA board meetings by ZOOM. You can learn more and register here:  
<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/board/meeting-dates>
- OR, you can attend a monthly Board Open House:  
<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/board/open-house-dates>
- UUA Governance Manual: <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/manual>

**MARCH 11 The Power of Association: WIDENING THE CIRCLE**

***DUE: MIDTERM PAPER at start of class – no weekly reflection or questions due***

Required reading:

- UUA Commission on Institutional Change, “Widening the Circle of Concern” (2020)— PDF
  - Also:
    - online version:  
<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening>.
    - available to buy at [inSpirit](#) or on Kindle.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Principle of Unitarian Universalism—Read Home and Background  
<https://www.8thprincipleuu.org>

Recommended:

- Assorted UU World Articles on the 2017 Southern Regional Lead Hiring Practices Controversy, Changes in UUA Leadership, and the Creation of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change:  
<https://www.uuworld.org/hashtag/hiring-practices>

**MARCH 18 (NO CLASS)**

**MARCH 25 Association and Accountability:  
MINISTERS. COLLEAGUES, AND CONGREGATIONS**

*Guest: Howard Dana*

Required reading:

- UUMA Guidelines and Code of Professional Practice,  
<http://www.uuma.org/?page=guidelines>
- UUA/UUMA Recommended Ministerial Agreement  
[https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/u/uua.uuma\\_recommended\\_ministerial\\_agreement\\_for\\_full\\_time\\_lead.senior.solo\\_ministries.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/u/uua.uuma_recommended_ministerial_agreement_for_full_time_lead.senior.solo_ministries.pdf)
- The UU Society for Community Ministries Code of Professional Practice  
<https://www.uuscsm.org/resources/Documents/Administration%20Reference/UUSCM-Code-of-Practice-Recommended.pdf>
- UUA, Commission on Appraisal, “Who’s in Charge Here? The Complex Relationship Between Ministry and Authority” (2013)

**APRIL 1 Association and Accountability: MINISTERIAL FELLOWSHIP,  
ORDINATION, ENDORSEMENT, AND AFFILIATION**

*Guest: The Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kūpono Kwong, Ministerial Credentialing Director*

Required:

- MFC Rules and Policies,  
<http://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/support/fellowship/rules-policies>
- Read at least one ordination or installation sermon among list to be provided.

Recommended:

- Liz James, “How Does Someone Become a UU Minister?” (2020)  
<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/how-become-uu-minister>



**APRIL 8 Polity in Global and Interfaith Context**

*Guests: Interfaith Panel on Polity*

***DUE: Topic proposals for final paper at start of class***

Required readings:

- Dan McKanan et al., eds., *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism, vol. 1: From the Beginning to 1899* (2017), pp. 461-463.
- Dan McKanan et al., eds., *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism, vol. 2: From 1900 to the Present* (2017), pp. 18-24, 353-354, 424-428, 442-443, 448-452, 509-516.
- *Additional brief readings may be assigned from participating interfaith panelists*

Resources:

- Mark Morrison-Reed, *A Ménage à Trois: The UUA, GAUFFC and IARF and the Birth of the ICUU* (2017)— <https://icuu.net/2017/05/19/m-nage-trois-the-uua-gaufcc-and-iarf-and-the-birth-of-the-icuu/>

**APRIL 15 Association and Accountability: MINISTERIAL MISCONDUCT**

*Guest: The Rev. Dr. Deborah Pope-Lance*

Required:

- *Berry Street Essays:*
  - Deborah Pope-Lance, “Whence We Come and How, and Whither” (2011) [http://deborahpopelance.com/PDF/2011\\_BerryStreetEssay.pdf](http://deborahpopelance.com/PDF/2011_BerryStreetEssay.pdf)
  - Gail Seavey, “If Our Secrets Define Us” (2016) [http://deborahpopelance.com/PDF/2016\\_IfSecretsDefineUs.pdf](http://deborahpopelance.com/PDF/2016_IfSecretsDefineUs.pdf)
- Lore Stevens, “*Strong at the Broken Places*”: *A History of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville, 1992-2019*” [http://deborahpopelance.com/PDF/Lore Stevens History of Nashville.pdf](http://deborahpopelance.com/PDF/Lore_Stevens_History_of_Nashville.pdf)

Resource:

- [Serving Congregations With a History of Clergy Misconduct](#) (video) December 2016 webinar by Deborah Pope-Lance, an introduction to the challenges of serving congregations that have experienced misconduct by religious leaders.



**APRIL 22 Sources of Authority and Accountability:  
FUTURE GENERATIONS OF UU'S**  
*Guests: Panel of UU Religious Leaders*

***DUE: Future of UUism Conversations—Post by NOON, Thursday, April 21***

***DUE: Respond to at least one question posed by another student in the “Future of UUism” paper—respond by start of class***

Required:

- Leslie Takahashi, “Truth, Trauma, and Transformation: Embracing the Cracks and the Gold” Berry Street Essay (2019)  
[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/bse/truth\\_trauma\\_and\\_transforma.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/bse/truth_trauma_and_transforma.pdf) (written version)
- AND response by Sophia Betancourt—  
[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/bse/berry\\_street\\_response\\_2019.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/bse/berry_street_response_2019.pdf) (written version).
- May instead view video of essay and response:  
<https://www.uuma.org/mpage/MD19BSEVideo>.

Recommended:

- [The UU World](#)
- [UU Reddit](#)

**Saturday, May 7 –Final Paper Due by Midnight**