



:: 10 Kamál (Perfection) 162 BE - 8/9/2005

- [· Home](#)
- [· Cluster development](#)
- [· Core activities](#)
- [· Outward orientation](#)
- [· Community life](#)
- [· International service](#)
- [· Distinction in society](#)
- [· Material means](#)
- [· Bahá'í Newsreel](#)
- [· Obituaries](#)
- [· Persian](#)
- [· International news](#)
- [· Comics](#)

:: SEARCH ARTICLES

[Advanced Search](#) | [Help?](#)

:: BANNERS



:: LATEST NEWS & FEATURES

On campus, a new approach to developing leaders

Published: 7/15/2005



Richard Thomas (second from left) gathers with History 454 students.

A Bahá'í college professor has taken a unique approach to using the revelation of Bahá'ú'lláh to develop future leaders.

Richard Thomas, at Michigan State University in East Lansing, already has had what a Bahá'í colleague calls "an unmeasurable but immeasurable impact on the changing scene of race relations locally" through his book *Understanding Interracial Unity: A Study of U.S. Race Relations* and the campus Multiracial Unity Living Experience program he co-founded.

Understanding Interracial Unity has been used in many MSU classrooms, including that of Christopher Buck, who invited Thomas in as a guest lecturer.

"These were moments I will never forget," recalls Buck, a fellow Bahá'í and professor of world religions and American studies.

"My students sat spellbound, enthralled not only to see the author of one of their course texts in person, but to be personally encouraged by Dr. Thomas to seize the 'moral opportunity,' here and now, to do something about the ongoing racial crisis in America -- the solution to which must essentially be an interracial endeavor."

This past spring Thomas took his efforts in a new direction by teaching an upper-level class on the Bahá'í approach to contemporary issues.

Thomas and his five enrolled students examined the history and teachings of the Faith and how Bahá'ís have applied those teachings to specific global problems.

As it turns out, the students are all Bahá'ís. To Buck that's not necessarily a bad thing.

"Seminars tend to attract a select few students," he explained. "Bear in mind that History 454 is an upper-level course. Very few students would even dream of taking such a course to fulfill a general elective requirement.

"Dr. Thomas more or less treated the Bahá'í students much like the graduate students he supervises," Buck continued. "Thus, the course was designed to prepare prospective leaders, if I may be so bold as to say, not to make a direct impact on campus or community life -- such as a service-learning course, for instance."

:: RELATED FEATURES

[Print This Article](#)
Opens new window

:: IMAGE GALLERY

 [View Image Gallery](#)
Opens new window

The class met weekly on Tuesday nights from 7 to 10. Often, class discussions were so intense they would last until 10:30.

Students were required to read materials including *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* by William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin; selected letters from *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* by Shoghi Effendi; *Century of Light* by the Universal House of Justice; *The Vision of Race Unity* by the National Spiritual Assembly; and various statements of the Bahá'í International Community.

They also wrote weekly reflection papers based on the readings, and a major research paper of 10 to 15 pages.

As a capstone of the course, students presented their research to an audience of invited guests in the home of Richard and his wife, June, a fellow MSU professor and Bahá'í.

Research topics ranged from Kathleen Bingham's "The Bahá'í Approach to Capacity Building in Women for the Attainment of Peace" to Takur Buck's "Bahá'í-Sponsored Health Development Projects: Models for Health Education and Treatment Delivery," Taraz Buck's "Bahá'í-sponsored Moral Development Projects," Hassan Malouf's "The Role of Music in Promoting Interactions Both Within and Among World Cultures" and Navid Motlagh's "A Survey of Bahá'í Action in the Field of Civil Rights."

Reflecting on the course, Motlagh said it "opened my eyes to the importance of Bahá'í involvement in social and economic development projects in order to benefit all mankind."

Takur Buck said that in writing his research paper, "I came across many provisional translations, including the Lawh-i-Tibb (Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Medicine), which was of great personal interest to me as a Bahá'í pre-med student."

And Taraz Buck remarked that the course's focus on "the dual process of integration and disintegration of human society during this period of rapid global transformation ... is helping me better understand the significance of both past and current events, and leads me to be less worried about what I see going on around me."