

A Reflection on the Unification Theological Seminary Online Education Program

William Selig
June 9, 2019



For those who want a top-level interfaith education, accredited class work, and a self-paced schedule at affordable cost, I heartily recommend the [UTS-Online education program](#). I'd like to give a brief reflection about my experience teaching a UTS Online course -- Unification Rituals and Traditions -- an 8-week intensive graduate class for students from America and worldwide.

As the instructor, my first task was to prepare the syllabus content in the form of 8 modules on Unification rituals and traditions -- 8-Day Dedication, Il Shim, Blessing, Seonghwa, Pledge, Hoon Dok Hae, Holy Candles, Holy Songs, Holy Salt, etc.

For each module, the students heard my overview lecture, then had several reading or viewing assignments usually from the Founders' speeches, but also included were testimonies from elder Unification members on such topics as attendance in daily life, creating a culture of heart, the Il Shim program, hospice, caring for aging parents, nearing the time of transition, grief and bereavement, and organ donation.

I felt it was important to also look at the rituals and traditions of other faiths in order to appreciate the points Unification has in common with other faiths, as well as the differences, so I added links to talks by the Dalai Lama, Rick Warren, and others.

The students were required to dialogue and interact in online discussions and complete weekly writing assignments and a quiz. It was an interesting and welcome surprise that some of the students came from Muslim backgrounds and added their own cultural and spiritual diversity to the discussions.

The technical side of online classes does present a learning curve for both instructor and students, but the benefits far outweigh any difficulties. The students, all church leaders with busy schedules, also had to juggle their studies with full-time jobs along with responsibilities to their families and communities. However, through online learning, the students receive college credits from an American-accredited institution, don't have to deal with housing or transportation costs, and have the flexibility to organize their own schedules.

The course ran from March 11 to April 29, 2019, each week I interacted with the students on the discussion board where I posted topics and questions, including:

What is your one-minute presentation to introduce [True Parents'](#) philosophy of life – To live for the sake of others?

Share your thoughts on the spiritual and practical meaning of this statement by True Parents:
"Blessed families are to establish the tradition of community life through which all people can

live together and love one another, transcendent of nation, race and religion."

Exchange ideas and views about the [Holy Marriage Blessing](#) in the [Era of Tribal Messiahship](#).

Discuss the internal and external preparations for your own [Seonghwa](#).

Share why you believe religious people fear death, and should Unification members feel differently?

Lastly, each student was required to submit a Research Paper/Project on a topic of interest related to the course. I was pleased by the students' original research and surveys, which included papers on:

Life in the Spirit World

Our Mission as a Tribal Messiah: Challenges and Difficulties to Care for the Blessed Families after Receiving the Blessing!

How to Pass on Rituals and Traditions to 430 Blessed Couples

A Comparison of the Unificationist Birth Tradition to Other Faiths and Cultures

Arranged Marriages in the Secular World (A Comparison of Arranged Marriages in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Unificationism),

What is the Tempo of [Hoon Dok Hae](#) in a FFWPU Community?

Aside from the academics, each time I logged on to Canvas, the online learning management platform that UTS uses to host the course, I always went to the roster and prayerfully said each student's name. As a UTS graduate myself (1981 and 2012), I have many memories, particularly in the early years when the Founders came to the Barrytown campus and shared spiritual guidance and earnest hopes to raise up students to serve as spiritually and religiously mature leaders for the Unification Movement.

My bottom line thinking was not only to teach the external Blessed Family Traditions; these are readily available in a recently updated online version [Blessed Family Traditions](#), but to challenge the students to reflect on the internal side and spirit behind the traditions. Leaders are constantly challenged to apply their beliefs in unexpected ways. For example, what should a Unification church leader do at a Seonghwa ceremony if there are relatives or guests in attendance who are skeptical or unaware of Unification traditions, or when a deceased person no longer considers himself/herself a follower of the Unification faith? What should be the attitude of a leader in a situation when the child of a Unification member chooses to marry outside the faith and requests the Blessing? Everyone's life would surely be very simple if all people followed the Principle, so I wanted to push the Unification students to think deeply and pray about both the internal and external dimensions of the rituals and traditions.

I appreciate Dr. Keisuke Noda, UTS Academic Dean, along with the exceptional staff who helped and guided the students and myself with technical and administrative issues.



[Dr. William Selig](#) is a board certified hospital chaplain living in the Bay Area of Northern California.