

CYCLE 36: MAIN SEQUENCE

Insights, Data, and Reflections from Study Circles Across the Triangle

p.2 New Study Circles and Data

A list of the study circles that started this cycle, along with an overview of the growth and loss that occurred between cycle 35 and cycle 36.

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An analysis of how the goal for this cycle was exceeded, and plans for reaching 100s serving 1000s.

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An introduction to those helping with coordination of study circles across the cluster.

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Tutors from across the cluster gather to reflect on how to align our study circles with the cycles of growth

A Note from the Coordinating Team

Dear Friends,

It has been a very fruitful and encouraging cycle so far! Huge steps forward have been made in terms of increasing both the quantity and quality of the Ruhi study circles in our cluster. During this past cycle, 4 tutor gatherings were held, where tutors had the opportunity to share insights and cross-pollinate their learning. The North Carolina Youth Gathering took place in August, giving rise to tightly knit groups of youth making concrete plans for how they can play a role in bettering their communities. Also this past cycle, 7 assistants across the cluster have arisen to work with the main sequence, contributing to the rapid growth of activities. And among other advancements, the goal for number of new study circles this cycle has been surpassed! This newsletter provides a brief snapshot of these and other exciting developments.

- Aneesa Glines and Luis Dechtar



Current Statistics

A snapshot of the main sequence in **Cycle 36**

41 Study Circles

- 10 in Durham
- 18 in Chapel Hill/Carrboro
- 2 in Orange County
- 6 in Wake County
- 5 Cluster-Wide

202 Participants

- 155 Bahá'ís
- 47 Friends of the Faith
- 57 Youth

Comparison to Previous Cycle

A snapshot of the main sequence in **Cycle 35**

32 Study Circles

- 6 in Durham
- 12 in Chapel Hill/Carrboro
- 5 in Wake County
- 2 in Orange County
- 7 Cluster-Wide intensives

165 Participants

- 119 Bahá'ís
- 46 Friends of the Faith
- 64 Youth

New Study Circles This Cycle

Book	Locality	Participants	Tutors
Book 1	CHarrboro	11	Faith Moavenzadeh, Zayne Dadressan
Book 1	CHarrboro	1	Rotating
Book 1	CHarrboro	3	Suzan Kalantar
Book 3	CHarrboro	5	Christine Krug
Book 5	CHarrboro	5	Emily Kleinhenz, Brian Kurzius
Book 5	CHarrboro	3	Luis Dechtiar
Book 6	CHarrboro	6	Jacob Hill, George Costant
Book 8.2	CHarrboro	7	Yovania Dechtiar
Book 8.1	Cluster-Wide	9	Arlene Thatcher, Bob James
Book 8.2	Cluster-Wide	8	Amanda Hartley
Book 8.2	Cluster-Wide	7	Mary Ann McFarland
Book 1	Durham	5	Ruhiyyih and Jay Green, Cinnamon Black
Book 1	Durham	3	Kathy Lee
Book 3.2	Durham	5	Amanda Hartley
Book 3.3	Durham	6	Elham Zelikman, Soo-Jin Yun
Book 4	Durham	9	Pam Brode, Joan Belshaw
Book 7	Durham	2	Becky Louis
Book 1	Wake	3	Sasha Ghofrani

Cycle 35 - Cycle 36

- 18 New Study Circles with 98 Participants (above)
- 4 Study Circles completed the Ruhi book they were studying
- 3 Study Circles discontinued before finishing their book
- 3 Study Circles went on hold and plan to get back together to complete the book
- 2 Study Circles have merged and are now counted as 1

How the Cycle Goal Was Met

There were a variety of contributing factors which allowed for the number of new study circles to significantly increase! Here is an analysis of some of the contributing elements:

- 4 new study circles were formed as a result of plans made at the Youth Gathering, as youth explored the themes central to the process of community building, and invited other youth interested in studying and serving alongside them
- 2 resulted from the efforts to reach out to neighborhood residents interested in participating in the activities offered by the Bahá'í community
- 3 resulted from assistants to the study circle coordinator reaching out to fellow Bahá'ís to see if they were interested in completing the main sequence, then identifying the necessary tutors
- 2 new study circles were formed by a Bahá'í reaching out to like-minded friends, co-workers or other Bahá'ís interested in engaging with the material
- 4 were generated out of enthusiasm to complete the newly-released course Ruhi Book 8: The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh
- 3 study circles emerged from individuals' desires to perform an on-going service, therefore starting the corresponding Ruhi course (for example, a person planning to serve as a junior youth animator who decided to take Ruhi Book 5)

Other factors that may have contributed to the increase in activities this cycle:

- Closer accompaniment and encouragement from the coordinator and assistants
- This cycle took place during the summer, which can be more conducive to starting activities, due to the greater availability of students
- 5 of the study circles this cycle were completed during intensive periods, enabling participants to complete the course who are normally not able to commit to study over extended periods
- Four tutor gatherings which encouraged certain study circles to begin sooner and remain strong

Tutor Gatherings

We began this cycle with a gathering for tutors across the cluster to come together and analyze how they could better align their study circles with the phases of the cycle of growth - expansion, consolidation, and reflection. The tutors who attended found it helpful to make concrete plans, share insights with one another, and to begin to feel that there was a vibrant network of support from their peers. As each of the 35 tutors introduced themselves, they were asked to share what were some of the strengths and challenges of their study circle. The 3 most common challenges were then identified, so that subsequent tutor gatherings could be organized to specifically address those themes. Below are brief summaries of each of the resulting tutor gatherings.

Part I: Scheduling and Commitment

Summary by Robert L. Rogers, August 23, 2014

Attended by eight adults and two children, this gathering focused initially on two sections from Ruhi Book 7: "Walking Together on a Path of Service". Section 2 of Unit 2, which explored the theme of motivation, asked participants to examine both our own motivation and the motivation of the study circle participants. We also looked at Section 3 of Unit 2, which focused on enthusiasm, the attitude of the tutor, and what we can do to help create zeal and vigor.

A section from the document "Learning About Growth" was also discussed, focusing on two quotes from Bahá'u'lláh dealing with ways of helping participants to achieve understanding, helping to generate interest, summarizing in advance what the participants will be reviewing, and seeking purity of heart throughout the whole process.

Three accounts from other tutors experiencing success with scheduling and commitment were included in the handout. One dealt with the issue of timing and how we can deal with regularity of attendance, or provision of child care for participants, for example. In some cases perhaps a children's class could be arranged alongside the study circle. Another tutor's account was titled "Creative Scheduling", exploring how communication is an important factor in dealing with time issues, and how our modes of communication influence the outcome: email, phone, personal contact through home visit, etc. Also highlighted was the role the tutor plays between sessions, in helping to encourage participants, especially in a study circle which takes place over an extended period. Drawing on Ruhi Book 2 as a resource in this respect may be helpful to participants.

Other highlights of the discussion on Scheduling and Commitment included:

- Time expectations – the Ruhi courses do have clearly defined time estimates for completion, but it is up to the participants and tutor to set realistic expectations and pace
- Catching up people who have missed a session is a common challenge; ideas included meeting with the participant before the regular session, or in between sessions, to highlight what was missed, or plan repeat sessions if more than one participant has missed a session

- How to handle someone joining a study circle after it has started? One thought was to have the person who invited the new member to help to catch them up on the material
- Pre-Book 1 assistance – for those who would benefit from a general introduction to the Bahá'í Faith before starting Book 1, one idea was to share with them the material studied during the Youth Conference, available through the main sequence coordinator. The understanding gained through this material increases motivation to progress through the main sequence of courses and to serve.

Part II: Incorporating the Arts into Our Study Circles

Summary by Faith Moavenzadeh

September 2, 2014

About 25 people attended this tutor gathering. We read through selections from Book 7 Unit 3, discussed specific art forms in small groups, and heard accounts from tutors in the area. We looked at what the Writings say about the arts and discussed the idea of art as a channel for the Holy Spirit, which when used effectively can enhance understanding, enliven the study circle and heighten the senses of the participants. This idea gives art a higher purpose - as a spiritual conversation. Art is seen as a universal language, everyone can express it because anyone can channel the inspiration of the Blessed Beauty. This idea can also help if someone is skeptical or worried about doing art, because the tutor can frame it in terms of praising God. Additionally, using art to express the concepts in the training institute can help the participants more fully grasp the ideas. By expressing a new learning in a different form, we can deepen our understanding of it.



Additionally, during the tutor gathering, we split up into small groups to discuss specific concepts and forms of art, and how they can be incorporated: attraction to beauty, appealing to the higher nature, music, storytelling, drama, and crafts. Some of the things we learned were as follows:

- Incorporating the arts can help express the main idea of the study material in a concrete way

- The tutor may want to incorporate the arts from the beginning of the study circle, so that the participants adapt more readily to the idea
- Both tutors and participants should feel free to experiment without fear of failure
- The tutor can be constantly thinking about how to weave the arts into the studies, and express the concepts visually, through music, movements, etc.
- Prolonged art activities can detract from the rhythm of progress. Good preparation allows artistic expressions to move at a suitable pace. For example, one tutor facilitating a collage exercise had previously cut photos from magazines to save time during the study circle which allowed participants more time to focus on creation.
- If the tutor has a sincere passion for the arts, the participants are more likely to be willing to participate.
- It is important to create an environment in which everyone feels comfortable to share their various forms of artistic expression with the group no matter their skill set. Sharing art is as important as creating as it leads to further reflection and dialogue.
- Try to be as flexible as possible when it comes to artistic activities, be prepared to do a spontaneous art project if the group so desires or if you think it would be beneficial for the group's understanding.

Part III: Implementation of the Ruhi Practices, and Building Capacity in the Participants to Perform a Service

Summary by Amanda Hartley

September 18, 2014

There were 17 participants including 2 children and several youth, from all corners of the cluster. We studied powerful excerpts from the Universal House of Justice Ridvan 2010 message about the dynamics of an irrepressible movement, how to translate the Bahá'í teachings into reality and thereby carry the work of the Faith forward into sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation. We discussed the imperative for education to be coupled with experience in the field, a concept reiterated in this message, both in the Bahá'í world and in any successful educational curriculum. We discussed the important role that the Universal House of Justice says tutors have with regard to providing the spiritual environment that is envisioned in the institute process, and how we as tutors need to increase the quality of the educational process fostered in our study circles. We talked about the importance of tutors creating an environment that is conducive to the spiritual empowerment of individuals. As indicated by the House of Justice, this environment that we are supposed to foster is one that will be totally transformative, at the individual and community level. We discussed that the concept of our “two-fold moral purpose” can't only be explored with youth and junior youth, but needs to be explored more deeply with adults of the Bahá'í community at large. Learning should be our mode of operation, and this process takes a great deal of accompaniment.

We discussed some examples of how to carry on service long-term and as a life-long process instead of just a one time experiment or short-term activity. We then reviewed the practice components and acts of service that are associated with each course in the Ruhi sequence. We consulted about how the practice can be strengthened and implemented through a deeper understanding of the institute process in general and through our reflection and learnings in the field.

Lastly, we broke up into several groups and tried to glean new understanding from stories that shed insight into what made other tutor's experiences helping participants arise to serve successful. We also made concrete plans for all the study circles represented to be accompanied to gain experience in the field or form an activity this cycle. We asked ourselves, "when does the role of the tutor end?" It cannot end merely with completing the study of the book, rather, it must be carried forward until the participants have reached a basic proficiency with the corresponding act of service the course intends to develop. What a great meeting! There was a spirit of love, support, acceptance, and encouragement in the room. It felt like a very spiritually close group of friends supporting each other and working towards the same goal.



Youth Movement

Last summer, when the Universal House of Justice called for 114 conferences for youth worldwide, one of the key principles of the gatherings was that the youth were not coming alone, but in groups of friends that would return home and continue their service together. The conference was therefore not meant to be seen as a one-time isolated event. In the months that followed, we began to revise and strengthen our scheme of support for these groups, putting in place small group facilitators who were older youth from the same localities as the younger youth, and who could help them plan, carry out, and reflect on their community building efforts. Likewise, this summer, when the North Carolina Youth Gathering was held, these youth interacted as large groups of 80 to 100, and broke out into their smaller group of 15 to 30 comprised of individuals living in a similar localities, often already working together on an ongoing basis. The key responsibilities our small group facilitator are performing at this time are:

1. To assist a growing number of youth to increase their engagement with the core activities and the various processes of the Five Year Plan.
2. To provide systematic and sustained support and encouragement for all youth to advance in multiple dimensions of their lives.

3. To strengthen collective identity, vision, determination and reflection amongst groups of youth in different areas of the cluster to help each other advance in enhancing the spiritual and social well-being of society.
4. To assist youth to continuously reach out to their peers to form new groups of youth and expand existing groups.

Below are brief descriptions of these small groups of youth, so that you can become familiar with who they are, what plans they are currently trying to carry out, and who are serving as facilitators. If you have other youth in mind who you think could join these groups, or if you would like to provide a service to these groups of youth, please contact the respective small group facilitators.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

We are the university community, mostly comprised of students at UNC, but the group includes students from some surrounding colleges. We have met on several occasions since the conference. The most noteworthy meetings were the UNC mountain retreat, and our regular campus meetings (Donut and Discussion every Wednesday). The main purpose of the mountain retreat was to strengthen our bonds of friendship



and nurture the interest of seekers met during a post conference teaching project. About 14 of us went up to a mountain retreat center for the weekend where we studied some sections from Some Answered Questions, discussed selected quotes on how to become seekers of truth, practiced telling stories of the Manifestations of God and finished with a meditation practice. We also plan on starting a study of Some Answered Questions on Monday nights and a Book 6 for some of the members who are interested in becoming better teachers. Several of our members from the youth conference have branched off to start a book 1 in Durham. They will likely form a new small group in Durham over time. For now, they will be loosely associated with the university community and will be invited to our activities when appropriate. There is also a small group of members of the UNC club who have joined a Book 1 with local high schoolers and other youth, which meets weekly in Chapel Hill. The group is large and fluid. There are about 18 active members, and when school resumed after the Youth Conference, we reached out to 6 seekers who are interested in participating in activities with us in the future.

The facilitators for the University Community are Jacob Hill and Faith Moavenzadeh.

DURHAM

The Durham group is made up of mostly African American and Hispanic American males and a few females. Ages range from 15-30 and geographically the youth span nearly the entire county of Durham. They are all very spiritually receptive and mostly come from Christian and Bahá'í backgrounds. The group enjoys playing sports and games together and storytelling has proven to be an effective means



of conveying information. Trust has been developed gradually, and over time strong bonds of friendship have emerged. Talents are wide-ranging, from delivering comedic relief to musical and athletic abilities. Areas of interest and activities they most enjoy span a wide continuum and find expression in the diversity of their life experiences. This Youth Gathering had a far larger number of participants who expressed advancement in their understanding of themselves and their community. The participants left the gathering a unified group with a palpable identity. The production of art at this year's gathering was a much greater success than the previous year. Projects ranged from a collage describing our understanding of social forces, to a "human puzzle" that helped us understand the importance of coherence in our lives, to a video that captured skits they had put together to explore the meaning of mutual support and assistance.

The youth made plans moving forward, including:

- The formation of two junior youth groups
- One children's class
- A continued home visiting campaign in a Central-East Durham Neighborhood
- At least one new Book 1, and finish Book 1 with about 5 youth who had previously expressed interest
- An after school group at Holton center and consistent Saturday study for youth living in a greater East Durham neighborhood.
- Accompaniment of a children's class in Willowdale
- Continued strengthening of an already existing youth group in South Durham City

The facilitators for the Durham group are Shawheen James and Kyle Cory.

CARRBORO

The Carrboro small group consists of 16 youth, 15 of which attended the youth gathering. The majority of youth are from the wider community and many of them had been a part of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program in some aspect. At the gathering, our identity as a group was strengthened and

plans were made to reunite one week after the gathering. Plans were made at the gathering to start a junior youth group and children's class and to begin the study of "Reflections on the Life of the Spirit". Since then we have met for devotions, a barbecue and a fireside where the illustrative example in Book 6 was shared with some of the youth. We are continuing to strengthen our bonds of friendship and to support each other in all aspects of our lives.



The small group facilitators for Carrboro are Maia Schuster and Megan Nunes Nasseri.

CHAPEL HILL

Our group is mostly made of high school students who live in Chapel Hill. Many of them are currently assisting either with a children's class or a junior youth group in their neighborhood. Some of them are also talented artists, athletes and community organizers. The group plans are mostly focused on outreaching to their friends and new youth to invite them to this community building process. They plan to meet regularly, at least once a month, to learn together, deepen their bonds of friendship and support each other in the activities that they are engaged in. During the Conference, the youth became really involved and interested in the materials and started natural discussions between themselves and the facilitators. During the arts night and open mic, seeing all the diverse talent across the state and the beautiful, thought-provoking, and uplifting arts that were shared really demonstrated that these concepts, especially that of mutual support and friendship, were being expressed and taken to heart. When we broke off into even smaller groups of two or three, we really gained a greater understanding of the



concepts and statements, what the other participants' experience was, and what they still needed assistance with. The way the youth related their experience to the texts was great to hear.

The facilitators for the Chapel Hill group are Jordan Baese, Zarrin and Josh Patton (taking over for Yovania Dechtiar), and Alberto Franco-Quiroz.

WAKE COUNTY

The Wake County Small Group consists of 15-30 year olds (with almost every age in between) who reside in Wake County, 30 of which were able to attend the NC Youth Gathering. A good portion of the small group are graduates of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program, and many are friends of the Faith. Since we are such a diverse group, we are split up into subgroups which facilitates making plans and carrying them out in a more systematic fashion. Our current subgroups are the Cary youth, consisting of mostly high-schoolers who live in Cary; the NSCU subgroup which consists of all of the youth who attend NC State University; the Raleigh Youth, consisting primarily of high schoolers who live across Raleigh; the Chavis/Oakwood Youth, who are any and all youth who are serving or living in the Oakwood and Chavis neighborhoods; and the RCHS Youth, who are a group of students at Raleigh Charter High School. Each of these larger subgroups has smaller groups within them that focus on specific acts of service or plans made at the youth gathering. We have a variety of lines of action being carried out, including starting 2 new junior youth groups, starting a youth group, starting a weekly devotional, starting a service club at a high school, starting a Book 1 with new friends, starting a children's class, expanding current junior youth groups, and holding regular youth nights where new youth can be engaged in a dialogue about service.

Those currently serving as small group facilitators for the entire Wake County Small Group are Sasha Ghofrani and Rocío Arguijo.



Scheme of Coordination

An introduction to the Assistants to the Main Rubi Sequence Coordinator, Aneesa Glines

During the past year, between high school and college, I've been blessed with the opportunity to serve full-time as the Cluster's Main Sequence Coordinator. The main sequence across the Triangle has continuously grown in size and complexity, and my availability has recently become more limited due to my return to school this August. Therefore, various friends from across the cluster have arisen and moved in to assist in key areas. These dedicated souls are enthusiastically assisting in three essential categories of service:

Unit Main Sequence Coordinators: These assistants have been helping with the formation of new study circles and with the accompaniment of existing study circles. They begin the process by identifying adults in the cluster who have a desire to complete the sequence, and providing them with the necessary resources to complete the course. This includes identifying and training tutors, accompanying new study circles during the first weeks after they are formed, making ongoing visits as the study circles continue, providing spaces for the tutors to come together to reflect and support one another, and lastly documentation of learning.



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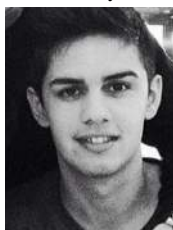
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Main Sequence Coordinators Focused on Youth: Noah Liebman and Zayne Dadressan

These friends work hand-in-hand with the Small Group Facilitators to assist the youth in the small groups to complete the necessary training for the youth to implement their plans. A key part of this includes organization of intensive studies of book 1, 3, and 5. Additionally they will help organize training for youth met during expansion phases. Their role includes the roles of the Unit Main Sequence Coordinators, with a focus on youth.



Cycle 36

Administrative Assistant: Luis Dechtar

The administrative assistant is responsible for tasks such as fulfilling Ruhi book orders, assisting with data collection, documentation, publishing of the Main Sequence Newsletter, and the logistical and conceptual planning of cluster-wide tutor gatherings. (luisgd@gmail.com)



DATES FOR CYCLE 37:

September 29th - October 10th ~ Planning Phase

October 11th - October 26th ~ Expansion Phase

October 27th - January 2nd ~ Consolidation Phase

October 30th ~ Cluster Tutor Gathering: Pace of Study Circles & Presenting the Training Institute to the Wider Society

January 3rd and 4th ~ Reflection Gatherings

Contact the Unit or Cluster Main Sequence Coordinator if...

- You are interested in taking a Ruhi course
- You are interested in tutoring a Ruhi course
- You are interested in accompanying a participant of a study circle to form an ongoing activity (devotional, children's class, junior youth group, study circle, regular home visits)
- You are interested in supporting others to take Ruhi courses (hosting a study circle, providing transportation, providing meals for intensives, etc.)
- You have any other question regarding the main sequence!
- YOU HAVE A STORY FOR THE NEXT CYCLE'S NEWSLETTER!

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