

# Vienna, Austria

## AHUM 1716

### Religious and Social Justice



*In this special travel course you will discover:*

- How the world religions have become “globally engaged” and are having a dynamic impact through humanitarian relief work.
- How the United Nations, the European Union, and affiliated faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are collaborating to provide new and effective models for religious and secular partnerships to deliver vital humanitarian services.
- How a multi-cultural city such as Vienna with its rich historical past and a teeming cultural life rivaling only Paris and New York has become a showcase for both identifying and solving the problems of globalization.

*Offered by:  
Special Community Programs*

*Project Director:*

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*Time Period: June 8-15, 2008*

### ***Course Objectives:***

After completing the course students will:

- Be familiar with the basic religious belief systems and ethical approaches of Judaism and Christianity
- Understand how the beliefs and ethics of these two world religions contribute to practical strategies of social action and the quest for social justice
- Recognize the public role that these religions are playing in co-operation with international agencies toward the creation of a global “civil society” and the promotion of social justice in a transnational setting

### ***Background and Purpose***

Most people are familiar with Vienna as a charming as well as culturally and historically rich Central European city that was once the capital of the sprawling, multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian empire. But few in America at least are aware of the degree to which Vienna has become the international center for UN-directed human services and humanitarian relief efforts as well as global headquarters for leading non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Vienna along with New York, Geneva, and Nairobi is one of the four cities that host the United Nations. The Vienna International Center (VIC) for the UN – commonly known as UNO city – is home to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and its international atomic energy agency. Over 400 major NGOs have Vienna addresses.

The sprawling presence of the UN and its NGO affiliates has attracted leading religious relief and resettlement organizations from around the world. Relief agencies from all the world’s major religions, including European entities, are headquartered in Vienna. Unlike the United States, where separation of church and state is the strict norm, in Austria the government, the UN, and world religious groups collaborate closely, both strategically and financially, to deliver effective humanitarian aid services. These sophisticated partnerships between religious and secular entities have proven to be a compelling model for administering such services.

The course will provide an opportunity for students to learn how certain major religions are globally engaged in the promotion of social justice through humanitarian relief work and cultural exchanges. In addition to a brief survey of the historical relationship between the beliefs, teachings, and social practices of the major Western traditions, the course will offer hands-on experience and interaction with Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant relief agencies as well as other NGOs (non-governmental organizations) based in Vienna. Students will also through city tours and field trips discover how the culture, history, and geography of Vienna has nurtured the vast global human services “economy” to which these religious organizations contribute and which are built around the work of the United Nations.

The course

### ***Program***

The course will fulfill elective requirements for the Religious Studies major as well as AHUM requirements. After arriving on Sunday, August 19 and allowing students to rest and find their accommodations, the course will begin with an orientation to the city of Vienna.

### ***Language***

All lectures and conversations will be conducted in English. Virtually all Austrian tour guides, organizational liaisons, and public information officers for the various humanitarian aid agencies are fluent in English.

### ***Entry Requirements***

A passport that is valid beyond the date for the completion of the course or the length of time the student plans to be outside the United States.

### ***Summary of the Trip***

The dates and sequence of field trips may vary due to the availability of organization hosts.

Sunday, June 8. Arrive in Vienna. Students will be met at the airport.

Monday, June 9. Introduction and cultural tour of the city. Introductory historical lecture (beginning at 9 a.m.) by Walter Klimt, descendant of Gustav Klimt and head of the Austrian Baptist Union, the course's hosts. Visit to the Imperial Palace to learn about the aristocratic and multicultural heritage with a global outlook of Austria. : Evening: Consideration of the role of religion today in the formation of international development and "global engagement" strategies in the efforts to foster a worldwide "civil society".

Tuesday, June 10. Klimt lecture (beginning at 10 a.m.) on ecumenicism in Austria and its relationship to social justice efforts.

Visit at 2 p.m. with the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HAIS) and its social work in Austria

Evening session with Dr. Andrea Klimt, co-ordinator for the Austrian Baptist Union "Diakone" about interfaith social projects

Wednesday, June 11. Morning visit (beginning at 10 a.m.) with Miroslav Simijonovic, director of social projects for the Serbian Orthodox church. Visit to United Nations (3 p.m.). Return to

Thursday, June 12. Morning talk-back sessions. Conversations about the history of the Western religious tradition and the development of its teachings on ethics and social justice. Afternoon visit (4-6 p.m.) to ESRA, Israel-based immigrant education society.

Friday, June 13. Visit to Matthausen, a preserved Nazi concentration camp outside Vienna. All day trip. Evening feedback session concerning the shaping of contemporary European secular consciousness and social justice ethic from the Nazi experience.

Saturday, June 14. Visit to Jewish museum, historical museum, and evening wrap-up.

Sunday, June 15. Return home.

\*\*\*There will be approximately 8 hours per day of official course time, including field trips and in-class sessions with guests and speakers (which will be held in "The Cellar," the community center of *Projekt Gemeinde*, next door to the music university) for a total of about 45 hours. That is more than the normal minimum or 4-hour classes, but the schedule and intensity of the course require it.

\*\*\*\* Students are responsible for arranging for transportation and returning state-side on their own.

Pre-requisite reading, as well as reading while abroad will be required. Readings will include an introduction to Western religions as well as handouts on religion and social justice.

Course Requirements: Keep a daily journal which will form the basis of a reflective essay (2000-3000 words) as well as an in-class final essay exam. Students also will function as a collaborative learning group) in which to pool information, compare notes, do in-class writing, and prepare a final in-class report on the final day. Students will be expected to have read a textbook prior to arrival and to complete a take-home final exam after leaving Vienna.

**Books to be read prior to arrival. These books should be ordered directly from Amazon.com.**

Curtiss P. De Young, *Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice* (Fortress Press, 2007). ISBN 10: 0800638417.

William Schweiker, Michael Johnson, and Kevin Jung (eds.). *Humanity Before God: Contemporary Faces of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Ethics* (Fortress Press, 2006). ISBN 10: 0800638220.