

Introduction to Buddhism | REL2341, FALL 2021

Prof. Mario Poceski (Religion Dept., University of Florida)



Class Time

Mon, Wed, and Fri, 10:40-11:30 am. This is a synchronous online class, with live meetings via Zoom.

Office Hours

Fri, 4:00 – 5:30, in 132 Anderson Hall, and by appointment. Appointments need to be made one day in advance, and they will be primarily via Zoom.

Contact Information

email: mpoceski@ufl.edu; webpage: www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/.

Course Description

The course is a broad survey of the essential beliefs, doctrines, and practices that over the centuries have fashioned the identity of Buddhism as a pan-Asian religion that transcends ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. The course covers the historical development of the major Buddhist traditions, including the formulation of key doctrinal tenets and religious practices, the growth of the monastic order, and the formation of new religious ideals and doctrines by the Mahāyāna tradition. We will also explore the spread and transformation of Buddhism outside of India, including China and the Western world, before and during the modern period.

Prerequisites

The class is open to students from all majors who are interested in learning about Chinese Buddhism. There are no formal prerequisites, and no knowledge of Asian languages is required.

Course Format

This is primarily a lecture course, but students are expected to engage in class discussions and critical analysis of the course materials.

Requirements

- Reading of the assigned materials.
- Class attendance and participation. Students are also encouraged to take notes on the lectures, which are the main basis for the exams.
- Two short film reviews (20% of final grade), due 10/8 (10 am), & 11/5 (10 am).
- Three exams (80%).

Course Schedule¹

- W 1 | 8/23 **Introduction** (Harvey 1–7)
- W 2 | 8/30 **Indian Contexts and the Buddha’s Life** (Harvey 8–31)
- W 3 | 9/6 **Early Buddhist Traditions** (Harvey 88–108) | **no class** on Mon (Labor Day)
- W 4 | 9/13 **Karma and Rebirth** (Harvey 32–49)
- W 5 | 9/20 **Four Noble Truths** (Harvey 50–87)
- W 6 | 9/27 Review (Mon) & **Exam 1** (Wed) | **Film** discussion (Fri): *The Buddha* (PBS, USA, 2010)
- W 7 | 10/4 **Mahāyāna and the Bodhisattva Ideal** (Harvey 108–161) | **no class** on Fri (homecoming)
- W 8 | 10/11 **Buddhahood and Tantra** (Harvey 161–93, 347–61)
- W 9 | 10/18 **Chinese & Japanese Traditions** (Harvey 226–35; Poceski, “Buddhism in Ch. History”) |
no class on Fri—special lecture instead (details TBA)
- W 10 | 10/25 Review (Mon) & **Exam 2** (Wed) | **Film** discussion (Fri): *The Cup* (Khyentse Norbu, Bhutan, 1999)
- W 11 | 11/1 **Monastic and Lay Practices** (Harvey 264–317)
- W 12 | 11/8 **Buddhist Meditation** (Harvey 318–47, 361–75)
- W 13 | 11/15 **Buddhism in Modern China** (Poceski, “Contemporary Ch. Buddhist Traditions”)
- W 14 | 11/22 Discussion (Mon) | **no class** on Wed and Fri (Thanksgiving)
- W 15 | 12/29 **Buddhism in Europe and America** (Harvey 419–58)
- W 16 | 12/6 Review (Mon) & **Exam 3** (Wed)

Textbook (required)

- Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices* (Cambridge UP, 2012; 2nd ed).

Other Required Readings

- Poceski, Mario. “Buddhism in Chinese History.” Mario Poceski, ed. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to East and Inner Asian Buddhism*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014: 40–62.
- Poceski, Mario. “Contemporary Chinese Buddhist Traditions.” Michael Jerryson, ed. *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017: 79–99.

Additional recommended reading

- Lopez, Donald, ed. *Buddhist Scriptures* (Penguin Classics, 2004).

Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- In addition to facilitating student learning about its main topic, the course introduces key themes and concepts in Buddhist studies.
- Students are exposed to principal values, norms, socioeconomic predicaments, and artistic representations that are characteristic of select Asian countries.

¹ Tentative and subject to change.

- There is coverage of relevant theories and methods used in religious studies, as well as focus on key historical trajectories and relevant socio-religious contexts.
- The course facilitates students' enhanced understanding and appreciation of Asian cultures and societies, which can serve as constructive conceptual framework for reflecting on their own social mores and cultural norms.
- By reading, reflecting upon, and discussing a broad range of materials, students receive training in critical thinking and effective analysis, as well as develop communication skills that will enable them to intelligently discuss key issues from a multiplicity of perspectives.

Online e-Learning System & email Communication

- The syllabus and other course materials are posted online via UF's e-Learning system, using Canvas.
- Students should send all written communications to the instructor directly, using the email address given above.

Grading

- The final grades are solely based on each student's individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously, from the first day of classes. There are no opportunities to do additional work for an extra credit or a better grade.
- The same course rules and expectations apply equally to all students—no student is entitled to special consideration or unique treatment. Other extraneous or irrelevant factors, including individual student's desires or expectations about grades, are not considered.
- Students should not expect retroactive changes or other forms of grade modification at the end of the semester.
- No incomplete grades are given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the student should contact the instructor no later than a week before the last day of classes.
- Final grades are computed according to the standard grading scheme in Canvas.

Attendance and Participation

- **Attendance** is expected of all students, starting with the first day of classes. Students who have problems with class attendance or punctuality should think twice before enrolling in this course. (For more on the university's attendance policies, see the Undergraduate Catalog).
- Students are advised to take extensive notes in class, and to use them prudently in their preparation for the exams.
- Student with exceptional **participation** performance may be awarded up to 3 **bonus** points (3% of the final grade). This bonus is entirely based on the instructor's discretion, and the final assessment will consider both the quantity and quality of student's participation in classroom discussions, as well as other elements of coursework.

Exams

- The exams are to be taken online, via Canvas, during regular class hours. They will be proctored.
- The exams are primarily based on the lectures, along with the readings. They are not cumulative (i.e., Exam 2 will cover the materials studied after Exam 1).
- Exams primarily consist of multiple-choice and short Q&A; there might also be a single short essay (a few paragraphs, and not more than one per exam).
- No make-up exams are given, except in documented instances of illness or other emergency, in which case the student must contact the instructor directly before the exam, if feasible, or as soon as possible.
- If any student has a valid reason to request rescheduling of an exam—such as observance of a religious holiday—he/she must contact the instructor in person and make suitable arrangements at least one week before the examination. Failure to act in accord with these instructions leads to a failing grade.

Written Assignments

- The two short **film reviews** will be of the two films listed in the syllabus. They should follow the standard format of a film review, and it should be around 500 words long.
- The written assignments must be submitted in **MS Word** and must follow standard academic format. Use standard font, such as Calibri 12, with 1.5 spacing and 1" margins. Do not forget to include paper title, course name, instructor title and name, date, and page numbers.
- The written assignments must be **submitted digitally**, via e-Learning, before the final deadline.
- **No late submissions** will be accepted under any circumstances. Students are encouraged to avoid procrastination and make early submissions, well before the deadline.
- Students are welcome to ask for feedback/advice about their papers, during the office hours.

Classroom Conduct

- All students are required to join the online class on time, as late arrivals (and early departures) are disruptive and disrespectful.
- Students are expected to be courteous and respectful, abstaining from disruptive behavior that adversely affects others and is contrary to the pursuit of knowledge. Examples of such behavior include talking with someone, or displaying active disinterest in the class (e.g., dozing or inappropriate computer use). Phones should be turned off during class. Offending students will be asked to leave.

Office Hours and Communication

- Students are encouraged to schedule office hours, especially if they have questions or need help with the course materials.
- The instructor is glad to assist students with their pursuit of knowledge and facilitate their success with the course.

- The instructor is also willing to discuss relevant academic topics that, due to time constraints, are not covered in class in much detail.
- Any questions about the course requirements or any aspect of the coursework should be resolved by consulting the instructor directly, preferably during office hours. Pleading ignorance or lack of common sense are not valid excuses for failures to fulfill requirements or abide by course policies.

Plagiarism and Cheating

- Plagiarism and cheating will result in a failing grade and other serious penalties.
- For more information, see the “Academic Honesty—Student Guide” brochure (posted online by the Dean of Students Office).

Disability

- A student who has a documented disability that may require some modification of testing or other class requirements should consult the instructor in person at the beginning of the course so that appropriate arrangements may be made.
- The student is responsible for communicating his/her needs to the instructor, as early as possible. All arrangements for changes pertaining to the quizzes and the exams must be made at least one week in advance.

Other Notices

- Registration in the course implies that each student enters a contractual agreement with the instructor, whereas he/she is accountable for fulfilling all course requirements and adhering to the course policies.
- Students are responsible for knowing and following all schedules and instructions contained in this syllabus, as well as any other instructions given in class (remember, attendance is not optional).

