

Introduction to Buddhism | REL2341/24A0, FALL 2017

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



Class Time & Location

Tue, period 7, & Thu, periods 7-8; AND 134

Office Hours & Contact Information

Tue, 3:00–4:40 pm, and by appointment, 132 Anderson Hall; mpoceski@ufl.edu;
people.clas.ufl.edu/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.

Course Format and Prerequisites

This is primarily a lecture course, but students are encouraged and expected to engage in class discussions and critical analysis of the course materials. There are no formal prerequisites and no knowledge of Asian languages is required.

Requirements

- Class attendance, participation, and reading of the assigned materials (see below for additional info).
- One quiz (7% of final grade).
- Three exams (93%).

Textbook

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

Other 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.



Lecture Topics and Course Schedule

Aug	W 1	Indian Contexts and the Buddha's Life (Harvey 1–31)
	W 2	Early Buddhist Traditions (Harvey 88–108)
Sep	W 3	Karma and Rebirth (Harvey 32–49) Quiz (Thu)
	W 4	Four Noble Truths (Harvey 50–87)
	W 5	Review (Tue) and Exam 1 (Thu)
	W 6	Mahāyāna and the Bodhisattva Ideal (Harvey 108–161)
Oct	W 7	Buddhahood and Tantra (Harvey 161–93, 347–61)
	W 8	Chinese and Japanese Traditions (Harvey 226–35; Poceski, "Buddhism in Chinese History")
	W 9	Review (Tue) and Exam 2 (Thu)
	W 10	Monastic and Lay Practices (Harvey 264–317)
	W 11	Buddhist Meditation (Harvey 318–47, 361–75)
Nov	W 12	Buddhism in Modern China (Poceski, "Contemporary Chinese Buddhist Traditions")
	W 13	Film: <i>The Cup</i>
	W 14	Discussion no class on Thu
	W 15	Buddhism in Europe and America (Harvey 419–58)
Dec	W 16	Exam 3 (Tue)



Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- In addition to facilitating student learning about its main topic, the course will also introduce key themes and concepts in Buddhist studies.
- There will be coverage of relevant theories and methods used in religious studies, as well as focus on key historical trajectories and relevant socio-religious contexts.
- By reading, reflecting upon, and discussing a broad range of materials, students will 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.
- Students will be exposed to principal values, norms, socioeconomic predicaments, and artistic representations that are characteristic of select Asian countries.
- The course will facilitate 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.

Online e-Learning System & email Communication

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

Grading

- The final grade will be based on each student's individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- 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 student's personal desires or expectations about grades, will not be considered. Students should also not expect retroactive changes or other forms of grade modification.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously. There will be no opportunities to do additional work for extra credit or better grade.
- No incomplete grades will be given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the students should contact the instructor no later than a week before the last day of classes.
- Final grades will be 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. The exams will primarily be based on the lectures, along with the readings.
- 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 take into account both the quantity and quality of student's participation in classroom discussions, as well as other elements of coursework.

Quiz

- The quiz will include the readings for that and the previous week, so students should come to class prepared to be examined on them. Remember, the readings are not optional and they should be done in advance.
- Students who are late will not be able to take the quiz and will have to wait outside until it has ended. Be considerate of your fellow students and the professor.
- In most circumstances, there will be no make-up on the quiz.

Exams

- No make-up exams will be 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 one week before the examination. Failure to act in accord with these instructions will lead to a failing grade.

Classroom Conduct

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

Office Hours and Communication

- Students are encouraged to come to office hours, especially if they have questions or need help with the course materials.
- The instructor will also be glad to discuss all relevant 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 and in person, 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 seating, 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).



“There is nowhere where the wisdom of the Buddha does not reach. Why? There is not a single sentient being that is not fully possessed of the wisdom of the Buddha. It is only due to their false thinking, fallacies, and attachments that beings fail to realize this. If they could only abandon their false thoughts, then the all-encompassing wisdom, the spontaneous wisdom, and the unobstructed wisdom will clearly manifest themselves.”

— Huayan Scripture 華嚴經