

AMERICAN BUDDHISM (REL 4936/5338) | Fall 2015

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



Class Time & Location

Tue, period 4, & Thu, periods 4 & 5; CBD 230

Office Hours & Contact Information

Tue, 12:00–1:30 am, and by appointment; 132 Anderson Hall; email: mpoceski@ufl.edu (to be used for all communications); webpage: www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/; tel: (352) 273-2937

Course Description

The course examines the transmission, growth, and transformation of Buddhism in America, with a focus on the last several decades. Through select readings, discussions, and research, students will explore the main historical events and issues that have shaped—and continue to affect—the American encounters with Buddhism. The topics covered will include the major traditions of Buddhism in America, the adaptation of Buddhist teachings and practices to an American social ethos, the interfaith dialogue between Buddhism and other religions, and the impact of Buddhist concepts and ideas on American culture.

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites, although students will benefit if they have taken *Asian Religions*, *Introduction to Buddhism*, or other course on Buddhism.

Requirements

- Class attendance, reading of assigned materials, and participation in discussions (10% of the final grade; see also additional information below).
- Field research report (30%), due 10/20 (10am).
- Paper abstract and annotated bibliography (10%), due 11/10 (10am).
- Research paper (50%), due 12/9 (10am).

Additional Graduate Students Requirements

In addition to the basic requirements, for graduate students there are extra expectations and requirements:

- Longer written assignments (see below).
- Higher expectations in regard to level of academic performance, including depth of critical analysis, clarity of presentation, and quality of writing.

Required Texts

- Prebish, Charles S., and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds. *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (U. of California Press, 1998).
- Seager, Richard H. *Buddhism in America* (Columbia U. Press, 1999).
- Tweed, Thomas, and Stephen Prothero, eds. *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (Oxford UP, 1999).
- Additional articles, available in digital format (marked with “AA”; see below for more info).
- Select articles from the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (marked with “EB”; see below for more info).

Optional Reading

- Williams, Duncan Ryuken, and Christopher S. Queen, eds. *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship* (RoutledgeCurzon, 1999).



Course Schedule

Aug

W 1 **Introduction** | Seager ix–xviii; Tweed 1–12

Part 1: Historical Contexts and Backgrounds

Sep

W 2 **American and Buddhist Contexts** | Seager 12–32; Tweed 13–23; Cohen^{EB}; Bellah^{AA}; opt: Williams 71–90

W 3 **American Encounters with Buddhism** | Seager 3–11, 33–47; Prebish 1–10, 183–95; Tweed 25–27, 38–42, 61–65, 73–78, 133–40, 163–68, 193–200; opt: Williams 91–114

Part 2: Traditions of American Buddhism

W 4 **The Theravada Tradition** | Seager 136–57; Prebish 163–180; Tweed 322–24; Crosby^{EB}; opt: Williams 57–68

W 5 **Japanese Buddhist Traditions** | Seager 51–89; Prebish 31–47, 79–97; Tweed 281–85, 324–28; Bielefeldt^{EB}; opt: Williams 3–19

W 6 **Zen in America** | Seager 90–112; Prebish 49–78, 117–28; Tweed 229–235, 261–64; Jorgensen^{EB}; opt: Williams 20–35

Oct

W 7 **Tibetan Buddhism** | Seager 113–35; Prebish 99–115; Tweed 264–68; Davidson^{EB}; Bernard^{AA}; opt: Williams 100–14

W 8 **Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhist Traditions** | Seager 158–81, Prebish 13–30, 129–46, Tweed 268–70, 315–19, 331–34; Poceski^{EB}; opt: Williams 36–56

W 9 Video: *Becoming the Buddha in LA*

Part 3: Themes and Issues

W 10 **Monasticism and Inter-religious Dialogue** | Seager 216–31; Prebish 147–61; Tweed 362–71, 376–77; Samuels^{EB}; opt: Williams 117–42

Nov

W 11 **Ethnicity, Race, and Gender** | Seager 185–200; Prebish 196–206, 238–52; Tweed 274–81; Ohnuma^{EB}; opt: Williams 215–37

W 12 **Socially Engaged Buddhism** | Seager 201–15; Prebish 266–86; opt: Williams 168–80

W 13 **Buddhism and Ecology** | Tweed 342–49; Poceski^{AA}

W 14 No class (AAR conference and Thanksgiving)

Dec

W 15 **Reflections on the Americanization of Buddhism** | Seager 232–48; Prebish 287–98; Tweed 349–57

W 16 Discussion



Encyclopedia Articles

Robert Buswell, ed. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Macmillan Reference, 2003; available as e-Book at UF library):

- Cohen, “India”: 352–60; Crosby, “Theravāda”: 836–41; Bielefeldt, “Japan”: 384–91; Jorgensen, “Chan School”: 130–37; Poceski, “China”: 139–45; Davidson, “Tibet”: 851–59; Samuels, “Monasticism”: 556–60; Ohnuma, “Gender”: 302–06

Additional Articles

- Bellah, Robert, et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, second ed. (University of California Press, 1996): vii–xxxv, 275–96.
- Poceski, Mario. “Buddhahood of Grasses and Trees,” “Buddhism and Vegetarianism,” “Indra’s Net,” and “Creatures’ Release in Chinese Buddhism.” Bron Taylor, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (Continuum International Publishing, 2005): 231–32, 438–39, 847–48, 1691–93.
- Bernard, H. Russell. *Research Methods in Anthropology* (AltaMira Press, 2002): 322–64.



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 not write to the instructor by using the email feature in e-Learning; instead, they should send written communications directly on 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 taken into account. Students should also not expect retroactive changes or other dubious 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 on this scale: A = 100–94%; A- = 92.9–90%; B+ = 89.9–87%; B = 86.9–83%; B- = 82.9–80% ; C+ = 79.9–77%; C = 76.9–73%; C- = 72.9–70%; D+ = 69.9–67%; D = 66.9–63%; D- = 62.9–60%; E = 59.9% or less.

Attendance and Participation

- **Attendance is mandatory** for 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.
- Active and informed **participation** in classroom discussions is expected from all students. In order to facilitate that, students are expected to read carefully all assigned readings before coming to class.
- **Absences** from class will have adverse effect on the final grade. After missing two (2) hours of instruction (unexcused), each subsequent unexcused hour will lead to an automatic 1% reduction of the final grade.

- Students who miss nine (9) hours of instruction (unexcused)—comparable to missing three weeks of classes—will automatically receive a failing grade.
- Student with an 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 individual student’s participation in classroom discussions, as well as all other elements of coursework.
- Valid excuses for missed classes must be submitted *in writing* and in a timely manner, along with pertinent documentation (such as note from a doctor). Written excuses for planned absences—participation in athletic meetings or religious observances, for example—must be submitted in advance.
- Coming late, leaving early, being inattentive, and other forms of disruptive behavior can be counted as unexcused absences. For more on the university’s attendance policies, see the Undergraduate Catalog.

Guidelines for Written Assignments

- The research **report** should be based on field research that involves [participant observation](#), undertaken at a Buddhist group or institution in Florida.
- The **abstract** and **bibliography** must clearly state the topic and provide provisional title of the final paper. It should contain a short—250 to 300 words—abstract of the paper and at least 10 titles (15 for grad students) of academic publications pertinent to the student’s research topic, each of them annotated with a short summary of contents that indicates how it is relevant to the stated topic.
- For undergraduate students, the field research report should be 1,500 words, while the final paper should be 3,000 words, inclusive of notes and citations. Graduate papers should be 50% longer. There should be a bibliography at the end of the final paper.
- 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 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, at least a week before the final deadline.
- Students are welcome to bring early drafts of their papers and ask for feedback/advice, but they have to do that in person during the office hours.

Classroom Conduct

- All students are required to come to class on time, as late arrivals (and early departures) are very disruptive.
- 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 also be turned off during class. Offending students will be asked to leave.
- It is hoped that there will be lively debates and informed discussions. While there is room for individual opinions and disagreements, they have to be expressed in ways that are appropriate for an academic setting.

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 quizzes and 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).

