

BUDDHIST MEDITATION | SPRING 2021, REL4349/RLG5338

Prof. Mario Poceski | Religion Department, University of Florida



Class Times & Location

Tuesday, period 7, and Thursday, periods 7-8. On Tue the class will be online, via Zoom, for all sections; on Thu it will be in MAT 108 for the F2F sections, via Zoom for online sections.

Office Hours

Because of the pandemic, office hours will be primarily via Zoom, by appointment. Appointments need to be made one day in advance. There is also the option of F2F office hours, on Thursdays, 9:30-10:30 am, in 132 Anderson Hall.

Contact Information

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Course Description

The course explores the theories and practices of meditation developed by the major Buddhist traditions, in relation to the relevant social, philosophical, and religious contexts. The focus is on the classical models of contemplative practice developed in South Asia, their transformation in East Asian Buddhism, the contemporary practice of meditation in America, and the growing popularity of mindfulness practice.

Prerequisites

The class is open to students from all majors who are interested in learning about Buddhist meditation. There are no formal prerequisites, although students will benefit if they have taken *Asian Religions*, *Introduction to Buddhism*, or other course on Buddhism.

Course Format

This an upper-level undergraduate seminar, organized around class discussions based on the assigned readings, which need to be done before class. Students are required to come to class prepared to engage in analysis and discussion of the relevant materials.

Requirements

- Reading of the assigned materials.
- Class attendance and participation.
- Two exams (50%).
- Film review (10%), due 3/30 (5 pm).
- Paper abstract and annotated bibliography (10%), due 3/23 (5 pm).

- Research paper (25%), due 4/21 (5 pm).
- Class presentation (5%).

Graduate Students Requirements

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

- Longer written assignments.
- Higher expectations regarding level of academic performance, including depth of critical analysis, clarity of presentation, and quality of writing.

Required Textbooks

- Gethin, Rupert. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Zhiyi, and Dharmamitra. *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation: The Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight & Dhyāna Meditation*. Kalavinka Press, 2009.



Course Schedule

- W 1 | 1/12 **Early Buddhist Traditions** | Poceski, “Buddhism: The Beginnings”
- W 2 | 1/19 **The Buddhist Path** | Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 59-84, 224-37
- W 3 | 1/26 **Basic Paradigm: Calmness and Insight** | Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 163–201
- W 4 | 2/2 **Theravada Meditation and Mindfulness Training** | Holder, *Early Buddhist Discourses*; Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*
- W 5 | 2/9 **Meditation in Chinese Buddhism** | Poceski, “Buddhism in Chinese History”; Poceski, “Disappearing Act: Calmness and Insight in Chinese Buddhism”
- W 6 | 2/16 **Tiantai Systematization of Meditation (1)** | Zhiyi, *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation*, 17-97
- W 7 | 2/23 **Exam 1** (Tue) | 2/25 is recharge day (no class)
- W 8 | 3/2 **Tiantai Systematization of Meditation (2)** | Zhiyi, *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation*, 103-67, 189-201
- W 9 | 3/9 **Practice of Chan/Zen** | Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience*; Schlutter, “Kanhua Meditation”
- W 10 | 3/16 **Meditation in a Modern World** | McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*; Fronsdaal, “Insight Meditation”
- W 11 | 3/23 **Film: Enlightenment Guaranteed** (Doris Dörrie, Germany, 2000)
- W 12 | 3/30 **Practice of Mindfulness** | Poceski, “Mindfulness, Cultural Appropriation”; Wilson, *Mindful America*
- W 13 | 4/6 **Neuroscience, Meditation, and Mindfulness** | Wallace, *Mind in the Balance*; Saunders, “Neuroscience, Religion, and the Study of Mindfulness”
- W 14 | 4/13 **Exam 2** (Tue) & **student presentations** (Thu)
- W 15 | 4/20 **Student presentations** (if needed) & final discussion

Required Readings

- Poceski, Mario. "Buddhism: The Beginnings," Neusner, ed. *Introduction to World Religions: Communities and Cultures*. Abingdon Press, 2010: 181–96.
- Holder, John, ed. *Early Buddhist Discourses*. Hackett Publishing, 2006: 42–58.
- Crosby, Kate. *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity*. Wiley Blackwell, 2014: 138–73.
- 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. "Disappearing Act: Calmness and Insight in Chinese Buddhism." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 48/1 (2020): 1–30.
- Schlutter, Morten. "Kanhua Meditation in Chinese Zen." Eifring, ed. *Asian Traditions of Meditation*. University of Hawaii Press, 2016: 165-84.
- Buswell, Robert. *The Zen Monastic Experience*. Princeton University Press, 1992: 161–202.
- McMahan, David L. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford University Press, 2008: 183–214.
- Fronsdal, Gil. "Insight Meditation in the United States." Prebish and Tanaka, eds. *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Univ. of California Press, 1998: 163–82.
- Poceski, Mario. "Mindfulness, Cultural Appropriation, and the Global Diffusion of Buddhist Contemplative Practices." *International Journal for the Study of Chan Buddhism and Human Civilization* 7 (2020): 1–15.
- Wilson, Jeff. *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2014: 133-58.
- Wallace, Alan B. *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, and Christianity*. Columbia University Press, 2009: 15–36.
- Saunders, D, Lavelle-Heineberg, B D. "Neuroscience, Religion, and the Study of Mindfulness." *Religion: Mental Religion*, ed. by N. Clements. MacMillan Publishers, 2016: 301-317.

Recommended References

- Buswell, Robert, ed. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Macmillan Reference, 2003.
- Buswell, Robert E., and Donald S. Lopez. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton 2014.

Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- The course is meant to facilitate student learning about its main topic, the theory and practice of Buddhist meditation.
- The course also introduces key themes and concepts in Buddhist studies.
- There is select coverage of theories and methods used in religious studies, as well as of relevant historical trajectories and socioreligious contexts.
- By reading, reflecting upon, and discussing a broad range of materials, as well as by conducting independent research, students receive training in critical thinking and effective analysis. They also develop writing and communication skills that enable them to intelligently discuss key issues from a multiplicity of perspectives.

- The course facilitates students' enhanced understanding and appreciation of diverse 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, using Canvas.
- The exams are taken online, via Canvas, using online proctoring.
- Students should send all written communications to the instructor directly, using the email address given above.

Grading

- The final grade is 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, are not considered.
- Students should not expect retroactive changes or other forms of grade modification.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously. There are no opportunities to do additional work for extra credit or better grade.
- No incomplete grades are 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 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 the 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 considers both the quantity and quality of student's participation in classroom discussions, as well as other elements of coursework.

Exams

- The exams are taken online, via Canvas, during regular class hours. They are proctored.
- The exams are primarily based on the materials presented in the class lectures/discussions, plus 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 one week before the examination. Failure to act in accord with these instructions leads to a failing grade.

Written Assignments

- The film **review** will be of *Enlightenment Guaranteed*, the film assigned to the class. It should follow the standard format of a film review, and it should be around 500 words long (800 for grad students).
- 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 8 titles (12 for grad students) of academic publications pertinent to the student’s research topic, each of them annotated with a short (one or two sentences) summary of contents that indicates how it is relevant to the stated topic.
- For undergraduate students, the final paper should be 2,500 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 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, at least **a week before the final deadline**.
- Students are welcome to bring early drafts of their papers and ask for feedback/advice, during the office hours.

Class presentation

- Each student needs to deliver in person a short class presentation on the final paper, towards the end of the course.
- The class presentation needs to be accompanied with a polished and informative PowerPoint presentation.

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, abstaining from disruptive behavior 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 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. Office hours are a valuable resource, and students should feel welcome to make good use of it.
- 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 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).