

Introduction to Buddhism | REL2341, FALL 2020

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



Class Time

Mon, Wed, and Fri, 12:50-1:40 pm. This is a synchronous online class, with live meetings via Zoom.

Office Hours

By appointment, via Zoom. Appointments need to be made 24 hours in advance.

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 universal 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

- 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.
- One quiz (10% of final grade).
- Three exams (90%).

Textbook

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

Other Readings¹

- 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.



Course Schedule²

W 1 8/31	Introduction (Harvey 1–7) Indian Contexts and the Buddha's Life
W 2 9/7	Indian Contexts and the Buddha's Life (Harvey 8–31) no class on Mon (Labor Day)
W 3 9/14	Early Buddhist Traditions (Harvey 88–108) Quiz (Fri)
W 4 9/21	Karma and Rebirth (Harvey 32–49) & Four Noble Truths (Harvey 50–87)
W 5 9/28	Review (Mon) and Exam 1 (Wed) no class on Fri (Homecoming)
W 6 10/5	Mahāyāna and the Bodhisattva Ideal (Harvey 108–161)
W 7 10/12	Buddhahood and Tantra (Harvey 161–93, 347–61)
W 8 10/19	Chinese & Japanese Traditions (Harvey 226–35; Poceski, "Buddhism in Ch. History")
W 9 10/26	Review (Mon) and Exam 2 (Wed) Monastic and Lay Practices (Fri)
W 10 11/2	Monastic and Lay Practices (Harvey 264–317) Buddhist Meditation (Fri)
W 11 11/9	Buddhist Meditation (Harvey 318–47, 361–75) no class on Wed (Veteran's Day)
W 12 11/16	Buddhism in Modern China (Poceski, "Contemporary Ch. Buddhist Traditions")
W 13 11/23	Discussion (Mon) no class on Wed and Fri (Thanksgiving)
W 14 11/30	Buddhism in Europe and America (Harvey 419–58)
W 15 12/7	Review (Mon) and Exam 3 (Wed)



Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- Acquiring general knowledge about the history, doctrines, and practices of Buddhism.
- Introducing key themes and concepts in Buddhist studies.
- Students are also be exposed to principal values, norms, socioeconomic predicaments, and artistic representations that are characteristic of select Asian countries, especially India and China.
- 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.

¹ Available online, in pdf format.

² Tentative and subject to change.

- 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.
- They Quiz and all 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 are 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 also 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 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. The exams are 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 takes into account both the quantity and quality of student's participation in classroom discussions, as well as other elements of coursework.

Quiz

- The quiz covers the lectures and 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 cannot take the quiz and have to wait outside until it has ended. Be considerate of your fellow students and the professor.] Not applicable for online courses.
- In most circumstances, there is no make-up on the quiz.

Exams

- The exams (and the quiz) are to be taken online, via Canvas, during regular class hours. They are proctored.
- The exams are primarily based on the materials presented in the lectures, plus the readings. They are not cumulative (i.e. Exam 2 will cover the materials covered after Exam 1, etc.).
- They will 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.

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, and abstain 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.
- 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).



- *A fool who knows his foolishness is wise at least to that extent, but a fool who thinks himself wise is a fool indeed.*
- *Think not lightly of good, saying, "It will not come to me." Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the wise man, gathering it little by little, fills himself with good.*
- *Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.*

The Dhammapada