

Introduction to Buddhism | REL2341, FALL 2025

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

Gen-ed credit: **Humanities (H)**



Class Format

This is an asynchronous online class. There are no in-person lectures. The prerecorded lectures are available on Canvas.

Office Hours

Fri, 10:30 – 12:15, in 107E Anderson Hall, or by appointment. Appointments need to be made one day in advance; they will be via Zoom. The student has to set up a Zoom meeting at the agreed upon time and send a link to the instructor. Office hours are only held during the course dates: 8/21/25 – 12/03/25.

Contact Information

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Course Description

General historical survey of the central beliefs, doctrines, and practices that have fashioned the character of Buddhism as a global religion that transcends ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Covers the early historical development of Buddhism, formation of its major traditions, and emergence of altruistic ideals espoused by the Mahayana movement. Explores the spread and transformation of Buddhism outside of Asia, including historic encounters between Buddhism and Western traditions. Incorporates insights and sources drawn from major humanistic disciplines such as history, literature, philosophy, and religious studies.

Prerequisites

It has no prerequisites. It is open to all students interested in learning about Buddhism and becoming introduced to the humanities.

Requirements

- Reading of the assigned materials (listed in the course schedule) and the study guides for each lecture (posted in Canvas).
- Listening carefully to the lectures posted on Canvas. Students are encouraged to take notes on the lectures, which are the main basis for the exams.
- One film review (20% of final grade), on either of the two films listed below; due 11/18 (Tue), 5 pm.
- Three exams (80%); see schedule below for dates.

Course Schedule

August

Week 1 (8/21-): Introduction to the course

Reading: Harvey 1–7

Themes: Diversity of Buddhist traditions; ideological divisions of Buddhism; basic concepts

Week 2 (8/25-): Indian Contexts and the Buddha's Life

Reading: Harvey 8–31

Themes: Ancient Indian religion and society; life of the Buddha; Buddha's legend; three treasures of Buddhism

September

Week 3 (9/1-): Early Buddhist Traditions

Reading: Harvey 88–108

Themes: Early growth of Buddhism; establishment of the monastic order; spread under King Asoka; evolution of Buddhist teachings and practices; canon formation; Abhidharma literature

Week 4 (9/8-): Karma and Rebirth

Reading: Harvey 32–49

Themes: Buddhist cosmology; Nirvana and Samsara; law of karma; three marks of existence; conditioned arising

Week 5 (9/15-): Four Noble Truths

Reading: Harvey 50–87

Themes: self-transcendence and path to salvation; suffering, its causes, its cessation, and the path that leads to it

Week 6 (9/22-): Exam 1

The exam is scheduled for **9/30, Tue, 8am-11pm**; it covers the materials from weeks 1-5

Week 7 (9/29-): Mahāyāna and the Bodhisattva Ideal

Reading: Harvey 108–161

Themes: Mahayana (Great Vehicle) movement as a new paradigm in Indian Buddhism; theories about the origins of Mahayana; Mahayana literature; bodhisattva ideal; perfections and stages of the bodhisattva path; major bodhisattvas

October

Week 8 (10/6-): Buddhahood and Tantra

Reading: Harvey 161–93, 347–61

Themes: meaning and significance of the Buddha's appearance in the world; mythical buddhas; buddhas' three bodies; emergence of Tantric Buddhism; Tantric symbols and practices; four classes of Tantra

Week 9 (10/13-): Chinese & Japanese Traditions

Readings: Poceski, "Buddhism in Chinese History"; Harvey 226–35

Themes: Native Chinese religions; historical introduction of Buddhism into China; Sinification of Buddhism; Chinese Buddhist canon; religious pluralism; major schools of Chinese Buddhism; introduction of Buddhism into Japan; prominent Buddhist leaders; Buddhism in modern Japan

Week 10 (10/20-): Exam 2

The exam is scheduled for **10/21**, Tue, **8am-11pm**; it covers the materials from weeks 7-9

Week 11 (10/27-): Monastic Ideals and Lay Practices

Reading: Harvey 264–317

Themes: Monasticism across traditions; monks and nuns; ordinations; monastic discipline; monastic economy; lay ideals; five precepts; three refuges; devotional practices

November

Week 12 (11/3-): Buddhist Meditation

Reading: Harvey 318–47, 361–75

Themes: Meditation as a method of spiritual cultivation; objectives and benefits of meditation; two main approaches: calmness and insight; hindrances; mindfulness practice; meditation in E Asian Buddhism

Week 13 (11/10-): Buddhism in Modern China

Reading: Poceski, “Contemporary Chinese Buddhist Traditions”

Themes: China’s encounter with modernity; rethinking of received traditions; Buddhist modernism; revival of the republican era; persecution during the Cultural Revolution; revival during the post-Mao era (1978-); Taiwanese Buddhist resurgence; female participation

Week 14 (11/17-): Buddhism and the Western World

Readings: Harvey 419–58; Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*

Themes: early European and American encounters with Buddhism; academic study of Buddhism in the West; European philosophers and Buddhism; Buddhist influences on Western literature; Buddhism in contemporary America; representations of Buddhism in popular American culture; celebrity Buddhists; Buddhism and American consumer culture

Film review is due **11/18**, Tue (5 pm)

Week 15 (11/24): Thanksgiving week (self-directed study)

December

Week 16 (12/1-): Exam 3

The **exam** is scheduled for **12/2**, Tue, **8am-11pm**; it covers the materials from weeks 11-14

Extra credit assignment is due **12/3**, Wed (5 pm)

Textbook (required)

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

Other Required Readings (available in Canvas)

- 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.

- Droit, Roger-Pol. *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003: 1-23.

Additional recommended reading

- Lopez, Donald, ed. *Buddhist Scriptures* (Penguin Classics, 2004).
- Hesse, Hermann. *Siddhartha* (various publishers and editions; originally pub. in German in 1922). Can be used for the extra credit assignment.

Films (for film review)

- *The Cup* (Khyentse Norbu, Bhutan, 1999); feature film.
- *The Buddha* (PBS, USA, 2010); documentary.

Note: Both films are available in the Course Reserves.

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 regularly log into the course on Canvas and pay attention to all announcements and other posted information. They should also set up automatic notifications on Canvas, so that they receive timely alerts about new announcements.
- 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 must follow all deadlines listed in the syllabus, and should not expect special treatment if they miss exam or assignment deadline.
- 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 extra credit or a better grade, other than the extra credit project described below.
- 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. The time to be concerned about grades is during each week of instruction, and students are expected to be diligent and focused on their studies during the whole semester.
- No incomplete grades are given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the student should contact the instructor, ideally at least a week before the last day of classes. In extraordinary circumstances when that is not possible (e.g., a serious car accident), they should do that as soon as possible.

- Final grades are computed according to the default grading scheme in Canvas.
- For UF grading policies for assigning grade points, see under UF Policies below.

Grading scale

A	94 to 100%	C	74 to <77%
A-	90 to <94%	C-	70 to <73%
B+	87 to <90%	D+	67 to <70%
B	84 to <87%	D	64 to <67%
B-	80 to <84%	D-	60 to <64%
C+	77 to <80%	E	<60

Exams

- The exams are to be taken online, via Canvas, on the dates listed in the syllabus. They will be open from 8 am till 11 pm on the designated days. Those are only timeframes for taking the exams (for exceptions, see below). Students must plan their schedules accordingly and ensure that they are able to take the exams on those days. If they cannot do that, they should not enroll in the course.
- The exams are 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 serious illness or other emergency, in which case the student must contact the instructor directly before the exam (or, if not feasible, 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 can lead to a failing grade.

Written Assignment

- For the **film review**, students should select one of the films listed in the syllabus. It should follow the standard format of a film review, and it should be around 500 words long. Additional guidelines are provided in Canvas.
- The written assignment must be submitted in MS Word. 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 Canvas, 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 paper, during office hours.

Extra credit

- Students can earn up to 3% extra credit by submitting a 400 words essay, in which they describe the depiction of the Buddha and reflect on the conception of Buddhism in Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*.
- The essay must be submitted, via Canvas, by 5 pm on 12/3 (Wed). There are no exceptions or extensions to this deadline.
- In order to receive extra credit, the essay must be well written, thoughtful, and informative.

Office Hours and Communication

- Students are welcome to the 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 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.

General Education Credit

This course accomplishes the General Education objectives of the subject areas listed below.

Humanities (H): Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit. Courses intended to satisfy the general education requirement cannot be taken S-U.

Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [General Education](#) learning outcomes as follows:

Content: *identify, describe, and explain the history, underlying theory and methodologies used.*

- In addition to facilitating student learning about its main topic, the course introduces key themes and concepts in Buddhist studies (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.
- Students are exposed to principal values, norms, socioeconomic predicaments, and artistic representations that are characteristic of select Asian countries and Western worlds (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.
- 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 (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.
- The course facilitates students' enhanced understanding and appreciation of select Asian and Western cultures and societies, which can serve as constructive conceptual framework for reflecting on their own social mores and cultural norms (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.

Critical Thinking: *identify and analyze key elements, biases and influences that shape thought within the subject area. Approach issues and problems within the discipline from multiple perspectives.*

- By careful reading, critical analysis, thoughtful reflection, and open discussion of the course materials and the topics about Buddhism and other related topics, as well as by conducting independent research, students receive valuable training in critical thinking and effective analysis (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.
- Students learn how to analyze or evaluate complex issues from a multiplicity of perspectives (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.

Communication: *communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively.*

- Students develop important writing and oral communication skills that enable them to intelligently identify and discuss key issues, explaining them clearly and logically, with a sense of nuance and from a multiplicity of perspectives (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.

Connection: *connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Students reflect on some of the central issues that shape life in selected Asian countries and Western worlds, including the make-ups and impacts of racial or religious identities, the nature of multiculturalism, and the possible ways of coming to terms with religious diversity. The course topics lend themselves to critical self-reflection about issues of central import that affect us all, in a manner that is meant to stimulate critical thought and engagement. That (hopefully) will have lasting effects on the students intellectual and personal developments, at UF and beyond, as they enter the professional world and participate constructively in

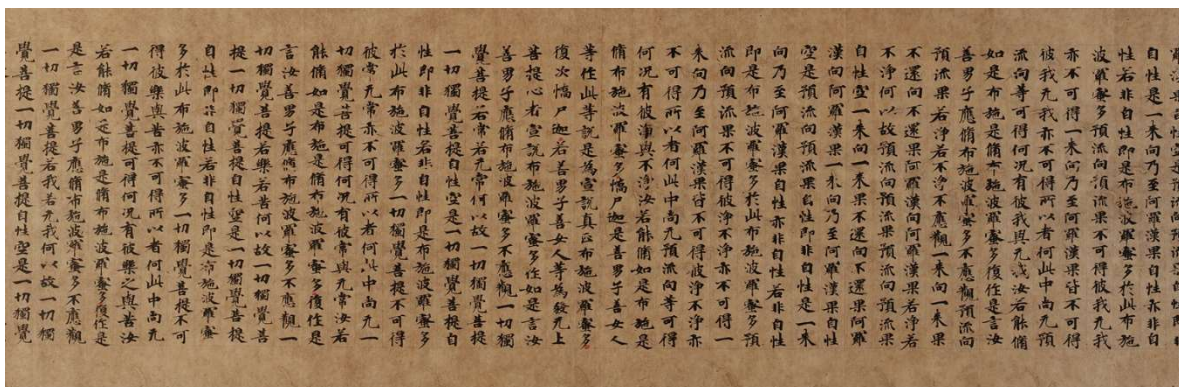
Americas multicultural society and democratic system of governance (H). **Assignments:** exams 1 & 2 & 3; writing assignment.

Plagiarism and Cheating

- Plagiarism and cheating can result in a failing grade or other serious penalties. Using and copying verbatim a sentence or paragraph of text from ChatGPT or other AI software for any kind of course assignments constitute plagiarism. Any suspected instance of dishonesty will be reported via the SCCR process.

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 announcements or instructions given by the instructor.



UF Policies

Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Grade Points

For information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points, visit:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Attendance and Make-up

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

UF Evaluations Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: [1] The email they receive from GatorEvals; [2] Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals; or [3] The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>. Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. See the UF Conduct Code website (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) for more information. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx> , 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

The Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

In-Class Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in

preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.