

Religion 221—Buddhism: An introduction

Course Description

An introductory survey to the Buddhist tradition, focusing on its history and development, key doctrines and practices, geographic spread, and cultural adaptations. Students will examine the intellectual and philosophical history of Buddhism in detail as well as explore how Buddhism functions as a living, practical tradition. This course fulfills the non-western and humanities requirements.

Course Objectives

- To become acquainted with the history of the Buddhist tradition from the beginnings to the present
- To engage with Buddhist textual and artistic traditions both critically and empathetically
- To articulate the importance of Buddhism for understanding Asian art, history, and culture
- To think through Buddhist doctrines and practices in fruitful dialogue with your own values

Literacies in the Major Learning Outcomes

This course will introduce and reinforce key literacies in the Religious Studies curriculum. These include:

Information Literacy

You will learn to cite primary and secondary sources in the *Chicago Manual of Style* citation system.

You will learn how to recognize the purpose and value of different kinds of information, including distinguishing between primary and secondary sources.

You will contribute to the creation of new information by gathering evidence from primary and secondary sources to construct arguments and test hypotheses, synthesizing information into an essay

Oral Literacy

You will participate in discussion, cogently express your ideas, and respond to others respectfully and effectively

Technology Literacy

You will effectively select and use tools to produce complex, professional printed documents.

Visual Literacy

You will look in a sustained way so as to carefully describe an image or object, noting formal qualities distinct from content.

You will learn how to situate images and objects in their historical contexts, aware of distinctions between representation and presence.

Forming a Community in a Global Pandemic

Before we get to all the cool stuff we'll be doing together in this class, and all the hard work we will put into it, let's start with some brutal honesty. We begin our Fall 2020 in the middle of a global pandemic. Particularly in the United States, COVID-19 has brought to the surface profound issues: inadequate public health infrastructure; drastic economic, social, and racial inequality; staggering political polarization; and disagreement and rancor over the most basic questions.

On 3 November, 2020 the US presidential election will take place, which will bring heightened emotions and anxiety on top of everything else we are dealing with.

My primary job as a teacher at this moment in time is to make sure we as a class are able to come together to support each other as a community. We need to get to know each other as people, learn to think and debate and grow intellectually together, and practice respect, kindness, and care for one another.

I promise to do everything I can to make our learning in this class rigorous, engaging, and sometimes even fun! In return, I ask you to promise to let me know what is working and what is not, and to not be shy about reaching out to me if you are facing challenges or need some extra time or help. We are in this together—let's create an awesome community and help each other learn as much as we can.



Our Work Together

Skidmore College requires me to assign you a grade for this course. From my own perspective as a teacher, *grades are basically evil and they work only to divide and disrupt our community of learning*. They corrupt us, pollute our motivations, and remove the joy from education.

To help reduce the anxiety and stress created by grades, in this course we will implement “contract grading.” This is a system whereby you have considerable freedom over the quantity and quality of the work you want to complete. An “A” grade will be the result of a significant amount of solid work. A “B” or a “C” grade will be the result of a choice to spend your time on other things. My hope is that you will all get “A”s because you are thrilled to engage fully in the class, but let’s be honest here. You may not find the course as exciting as you hoped, or you may find yourself overwhelmed by work in other courses. With contract grading you have some power over the amount of time and effort you want to invest in this course, and this is reflected in the final grade you earn. If we must have grades, it is best to give you some power and agency in this unseemly business.

Here is the work we’ll do to learn together as a community:

• **Participation** in the course is essential. This is a remote course, so there are lots of ways to participate. If you are an extrovert, one way to participate is to consistently show up to our synchronous class meetings and help us move the

conversation forward by asking interesting questions, responding to your professor and your classmates, and generally keeping the ball rolling. If you are an introvert, or if you can't make our synchronous meetings, you should keep the asynchronous conversation moving on the Slack by posting questions and responses for the readings and lectures. For the purposes of contract grading, let's consider a "solid class conversation contribution or Slack post" to be the key unit of measurement here.

- One of the biggest initial hurdles to students grappling with Buddhist texts and traditions is the large number of Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese vocabulary terms, unfamiliar place names, and so on. To enable us to read our sources more fluently and confidently, we will feature **terminology quizzes**. These should also prove useful in your preparations for the final exam. At regular intervals throughout the semester I will offer six quizzes with five questions each, for a total of 30 possible correct quiz answers.
- In this class we will learn how to read, analyze, and discuss Buddhist *written textual materials* and *visual materials*. You will have an opportunity to dive deeper into Buddhist art and Buddhist scriptures with **reflection essays** (750–1500 words each), in which you deeply engage with Buddhist ideas.
- At the end of the semester we will have a **final examination**, allowing you the opportunity to synthesize and master all the material learned in this course. The exam will feature multiple choice, word identification, short answer, and essay questions, depending on the grade you are shooting for.

Grading

Category	"C" level	"B" level	"A" level
Participation	10 posts/discussion contributions	15 posts/discussion contributions	20 posts/discussion contributions
Terminology Quizzes	10 correct quiz answers	15 correct quiz answers	20 correct quiz answers
Reflection Essays	1 art reflection + 1 scripture reflection	2 art reflections + 1 scripture reflection	2 art reflections + 2 scripture reflections
Final Exam	Score 50–79% on final exam	Score 80–100% on final exam	Score 80–100% on final exam + satisfactorily complete take-home final essay

Course Policies

Course website and syllabus updates: The *Lotus Sūtra* teaches us about *upāyakauśalya*, "skillfulness in expedient pedagogical techniques." In the Buddhist tradition, good pedagogy is adaptive, adjusting to the proclivities and needs of particular students. As the semester progresses, I may make changes to the syllabus to ensure that our collective efforts are fruitful. If I do make changes to the syllabus, you will be notified via email, via the course website, and in an announcement in class. *Pay close attention to the course website for updates and announcements!*

Decorum: Texting, cell phone conversations, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Tiktok, Instagram, Tinder, &c. &c. are simply

not welcome during class time. If you feel compelled to surrender your privacy to rapacious Silicon Valley marketeers and to contribute to the corrosive forces of what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism,” please do so outside our sacred halls of learning. If you engage in our synchronous class discussions, I strongly urge you to do so with all notifications, email, text messages, etc. turned off and with web browsers shut off.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Skidmore College is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150. Please remember that *it is in your interest to initiate these conversations and request accommodation at the beginning of the semester!*

Title IX: Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal and state regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and options for reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, the Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates (anonymous) are all options available.

More information can be found at the Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct website or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator, Joel Aure (jaure@skidmore.edu), 580-5708, or Deputy Coordinator for Student Affairs, Gabriela Melillo (gmelillo@skidmore.edu), 580-5022.

Extracurriculars & Scheduling Conflicts: This syllabus contains the relevant deadlines for major assignments. You must notify me *by the second week of the term* about any known or potential extracurricular conflicts (such as religious observances, graduate or medical school interviews, or sports activities). If you have a conflict on the due date of an assignment or exam, it is your responsibility to notify me well in advance to work out an alternative date for the assignment or exam. *I will not accept assignments which are late due to extracurricular scheduling conflicts unless you have rescheduled with me well in advance.* It is your responsibility to communicate and plan with your professor.

Academic Honesty and Honorable Conduct: As a member of the Skidmore community, you are expected to follow the [Skidmore Honor Code](#). I take very seriously my commitment to teaching you the scholarly values of proper citation and attribution. Accordingly, I will report all incidents of suspected academic dishonesty—without exception—to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. **All instances of plagiarism, no matter how “minor,” will result in failure on the assignment, with the possibility of failure in the course.** *If you have any questions about the proper citation practices, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

S/CR/U Grade Option: If you are interested in the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/CR/U) grade option, you are responsible for being aware of the pertinent deadlines set by the Registrar’s Office for choosing this option. Please be advised that the college criterion for “Satisfactory” is the equivalent of a C or better. A grade of “C-,” “D+,” or “D” will

result in a grade of CR (“Credit”). Any grade below “D” will result in the student receiving the grade of “Unsatisfactory” or “U” and, as a consequence, the student will receive no credit for the course.

Late Assignments: We are doing a contract grading system this semester. This means you are responsible for organizing your own schedule and working at the pace that makes the most sense for you. There will be regular quizzes throughout the semester which you may opt to take; once the window for a quiz is over there is no opportunity to retake it. The final exam is also taking place in a specific time-window spanning several days, and there is no makeup opportunity if you miss the final exam. Essays must all be submitted by the last day of class to count for credit towards your final grade. *Reach out to me via my office hours if you want to chat about building a solid plan for completing your work!*

Required books

These books are all on reserve at Scribner Library, and for sale through the campus bookstore.

Gethin, Rupert. *The foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN 9780192892232.

Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2009. ISBN 9780415356534.

Lotus Hurvitz, Leon trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. ISBN 9780231148955.

Readings marked **Web** are available to download on the course website!

Course Outline

Emoji key:

 Synch day (class meets on Zoom)

 Asynch day (no meeting). On asynch days, please watch pre-recorded lectures, do readings, and post questions and responses to course Slack!

 Quiz or other time-specific assignment today!

 Readings (to be completed before start of class)

T 25 August: Welcome!

Today we will do some icebreakers and go over the syllabus

Th 27 August: Tools and Tech for this Course

 **Post a selfie with a self-introduction to our #selfies Slack channel!**

 **Gethin** “Introduction,” pp. 1–6

Today we will go over the various tools we'll be using in this course: the course website, Slack, and Perusall.

T 1 September: Buddha

 **Gethin** ch. 1, “The Buddha: the story of the Awakened One,” pp. 7–34

 **Web:** Olivelle, Patrick, trans. *Life of the Buddha*. Clay Sanskrit Library 33. New York: New York University Press, 2008.

Read ch. 5: “The Departure, pp. 123–157; ch. 12: “The Meeting with Aráda”, pp. 359–369.

Th 3 September: Dharma

 **Quiz #1 Available**

 **Gethin** ch. 2, “The word of the Buddha,” pp. 35–49; ch. 3, “Four truths,” pp. 59–84

 **Web:** Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. 2 vols. Teachings of the Buddha. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

Read SN 56.11 *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, “Setting in motion the wheel of the *dhamma*,” pp. 1843–1847.

T 8 September: Saṅgha

 **Gethin** ch. 4, “The Buddhist community,” pp. 85–110

 **Web:** Horner, Isaline Blew. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka)*. Vol. 1: *Suttavibhaṅga*. Sacred Books of the Buddhists 10. London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1938.

Read “Sudinna Recital,” pp. 21–38.

Th 10 September: Growth and development of the Buddhist orders

 **Gethin** ch. 2, “The word of the Buddha,” pp. 49–56

 **Web** Swearer, Donald K. *The Buddhist world of Southeast Asia*. 2nd edition. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010.

Read “Asoka, the Exemplary Buddhist Ruler,” pp. 72–82.

T 15 September: The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism

 **Gethin** ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 224–234

 **Williams** ch. 1, “Introduction,” pp. 1–44

Th 17 September: Abhidharma and the Perfection of Wisdom

 **Quiz #2 Available**

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Online

Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey
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Office Hours: By Appointment

📖 **Gethin** ch. 8, “The Abhidharma,” pp. 202–223; ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 234–237

📖 **Williams** ch. 2, “The Perfection of Wisdom,” pp. 45–62

📖 **Web:** Conze, Edward. *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary*. Vol. 1. Wheel Series. Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation; distributed by Book People, Berkeley, California, 1973.

Read Ch. 2 “Sakra”, pp. 96–102

📖 **T 22 September: Madhyamaka**

📖 **Gethin** ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 237–244

📖 **Williams** ch. 3, “Mādhyamika,” pp. 63–83

📖 **Web:** Garfield, Jay L. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Read chapter 24, “Examination of the Four Noble Truths,” pp. 67–72; commentary pp. 293–321.

📖 **Th 24 September: Yogācāra**

📖 **Gethin** ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 244–252

📖 **Williams** ch. 4, “Yogācāra,” pp. 84–102

📖 **T 29 September: Tathāgatagarbha**

📖 **Gethin** ch. 9, “The Mahāyāna,” pp. 244–252

📖 **Williams** ch. 4, “Yogācāra,” pp. 84–102; ch. 5, “Tathāgatagarbha,” pp. 103–128

📖 **Web:** Grosnick, William H. “The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*.” In *Buddhism in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr., Abridged edition., 92–106. Princeton Readings in Religions. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007.

📖 **Th 1 October: The Lotus Sūtra I**

📖 **Lotus** chs. 1–3, pp. 1–83

📖 **T 6 October: The Lotus Sūtra II**

📖 **Lotus** chs. 10–12, pp. 174–201

📖 **Th 8 October: Buddhism in China**

📌 **Quiz #3 Available**

📖 **Web:** Sylvie Hureau. “Translations, apocrypha, and the emergence of the Buddhist canon.” In *Early Chinese Religion*,

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Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD), edited by John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, 741–774. Vol. 21-2 in *Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 4: China*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

 **Web:** Sharf, Robert H. “The *Scripture in Forty-Two Sections*.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 418–429. Princeton Readings in Religions. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

T 13 October: Buddhist integration in China

 **Web:** Sørensen, Henrik Hjort. “The History and Practice of Early Chan.” In *Readings of the Platform Sūtra*, edited by Morten Schlütter and Stephen Frederick Teiser, 53–76. Columbia Readings of Buddhist Literature. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

 **Web:** Yampolsky, Phillip, trans. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.
Read §1–§38, pp. 125–162

Th 15 October: Tibetan Buddhism I

 **Gethin** ch. 10, “Evolving traditions of Buddhism,” pp. 266–273

 **Williams** ch. 9, “The path of the *bodhisattva*,” pp. 187–208

 **Web:** Schmidt, Erik Hein, trans. *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*. New Delhi: Shambala, 1993.
Read Prologue–ch.4, pp. 29–51

T 20 October: Tibetan Buddhism II

 **Web:** Schmidt, Erik Hein, trans. *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*. New Delhi: Shambala, 1993. Read chs. 6–11, pp. 55–74

Th 22 October: Buddhism in Śrī Lāṅkā and Southeast Asia

 **Quiz #4 Available**

 **Gethin** ch. 10, “Evolving traditions of Buddhism,” pp. 253–257

 **Web:** Swearer, Donald K. *The Buddhist world of Southeast Asia*. 2nd edition. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010.
Read Part I: “The Popular Tradition”, pp. 1–70.

T 27 October: Buddhism in Japan I: State Protection & Zen

 **Web:** Bowring, Richard. *The religious traditions of Japan, 500–1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
Read Chapter 1: “The introduction of Buddhism.” pp. 15–35; Chapter 14: “Zen Buddhism.” pp. 304–320.

Th 29 October: Pure Land Buddhisms

 **Web:** Gómez, Luis O. *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996. Read “The Shorter Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra”, pp. 145–151.

T 3 November: Buddhism in Japan II: Lotus Buddhisms

 **Williams** ch. 7, “The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Lotus) Sūtra and its influences,” pp. 149–171

 **Web:** de Bary, Wm. Theodore., ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume One: From Earliest Times to 1600*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Read ch. 13, pp. 292–305.

 **Web:** Bowring, Richard. *The religious traditions of Japan, 500–1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Read Chapter 15.3: “Worshipping the Lotus.” pp. 332–343

Th 5 November: Buddhist revival in Burma and Śrī Laṅkā

 **Quiz #5 Available**

 **Web:** Bond, George D. *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation, and Response*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Read chapter 2: “The early revival and Protestant Buddhism,” pp. 45–74.

T 10 November: Buddhism in America: The Beat Generation and beyond

 **Web:** Snyder, Gary. *Smokey the Bear Sūtra*

 **Web:** Nattier, Jan. “Who Is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America.” In *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, edited by Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth Ken'ichi Tanaka, 183–95. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998.

Th 12 November: Buddhism in America: Race and American Buddhism

 **Web:** Han, Chenxing. “We’re Not Who You Think We Are.” *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner’s Quarterly*. 14.4 (Summer 2016): 48–55, 83.

 **Web:** McNicholl, Adeana. “Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 86.4 (December 2018): 883–911.

T 17 November: Modern global Buddhisms

 **Web:** McMahan, David L. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Read chapter 2: “The spectrum of tradition and modernism,” pp. 27–59

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 **Th 19 November: Final thoughts**

 **Quiz #6 Available**

 **M 30 November, 08:10–09:30: Optional Exam Review Session**

 **T 1 November–Th 4 November: Final examination conducted on our course website + optional take-home essay**