

The College of the Humanities: Religion Program
Buddhism (RELI 2410A)

Professor: Christopher Jensen
Office: 2A54 Paterson Hall

Office Hours: Tues. 11:30-13:30 (or by
appointment)
Email: christopher.jensen@carleton.ca¹

Course Overview

What is Buddhism? Perhaps a better question is “What are Buddhisms?” The religion we know today as “Buddhism” has developed and transformed over 2500 years, as pilgrims, missionaries, conquerors, and traders transported its teachings, practices, and iconography from South Asia, into Central, East and Southeast Asia, and (centuries later) into the West. At each of these points of cultural contact, different aspects of the tradition were highlighted, while others were downplayed, in order to adapt the tradition to local historical, cultural, and social realities. In this course, we will explore this multifaceted religious tradition in its various local forms, focusing on the ways that stories, rituals, religious artwork, and doctrinal teachings were employed by historical and contemporary Buddhists to answer existential questions, provide a sense of community and social belonging, and offer an array of exemplars seen as worthy of emulation. On the other hand, we will consider the ways that Buddhist teachings have been implicated in violence and bloodshed (with the most current example being the violence perpetrated against the Rohingya people). Finally, we will also discuss the ways that Buddhist Studies, as an academic field, developed in the context of Euro-American imperialism and colonialism, and how this history has continued to shape Western perceptions of “Buddhism” (singular) to the present day.

Given that an introductory course like this one cannot hope to cover the entire depth and breadth of this vast and multifaceted topic, the last month of the course will focus on topics that we have decided upon collaboratively, as a class, using the conceptual and practical tools that we have been honing throughout the semester.

Provisional Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to complete the following knowledge-acquisition objectives (note: blanks will be filled in with student input during our first class session):

- Identify key religious terms (such as karma, dharma, samsara, buddha, bodhisattva, Vinaya) and the ways that they have been redefined throughout history;

¹ As per Carleton University policy, all communication between students and professors should be conducted via our Carleton email accounts. I will be sending out weekly emails regarding course content, including reminders of due dates and the like; it is your responsibility to check your campus email regularly, so as not to miss any important updates.

- Chart out the general features of each of the Buddhist religious traditions under consideration and the importance of migration/interregional transmission in the development of each of these traditions;
- Recognize key figures and their contributions;
- Discuss the central role of ritual and narrative in the development and transmission of Buddhism, and describe some specific ritual practices and narratives in detail;
- Engage in Religious Studies scholarship: a form of thinking stressing outsider discourse and methodological agnosticism;²
- _____
- _____
- _____

By the end of this course, students will have practiced and received feedback on the following skills:

- Summarizing and evaluating academic arguments;
- Developing a familiarity with selected Buddhist primary sources (in translation);
- Engaging in thoughtful academic discussions (both online and in class);
- Writing short reflective essays;
- Engaging in the syllabus-design process by selecting topics that build upon previous course material and contribute to course learning objectives;
- Presenting course-related content to the class;
- _____
- _____
- _____

Ungrading in RELI 2410

In this course, we will be experimenting with an innovative pedagogical approach known as “ungrading.” A substantial body of scholarship in teaching and learning has demonstrated the extent to which grading is not congruent with (if not directly opposed to) learning, in that it impels students to complete their coursework for the sake of the grade instead of for the sake of their learning itself (extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation), it discourages innovative thinking and projects (as students desiring the best possible mark will often “play it safe”), and it promotes product-directed thinking as opposed to process-directed thinking. Moreover, in the vast majority of “real-life” scenarios that a university education is supposed to prepare students for, there is no analogue to an “objective” grade for a given assignment. Instead, most work tasks are

² What this means is that our course does not seek to promote a Buddhist agenda (whatever that would be) nor does it argue for Buddhism through arguments from faith or authority. Instead, it seeks to explore various Buddhisms through a historical, humanistic lens, paying attention to what people have thought, said, felt, and done in particular historical contexts. If you have faith commitments relative to Buddhism, you may find some of the historical materials challenging or surprising; my aim in this course is not to challenge or downplay anyone’s personal faith, but rather to explore Buddhisms as historical, cultural phenomena, and bracket those sorts of faith claims.

collaborative, are embedded in larger projects, and allow innumerable opportunities for incremental development of one's knowledge and skills.

As you have likely noted above, I have already identified several "Course Objectives" (knowledges, skills, and the like) that I hope students will possess by the end of the course. We will talk through these objectives, and add additional ones if desired by the class, in our first session (Sept. 7). The assignments that students will be completing over the course of the semester will focus on developing the skills and conceptual frameworks laid out in the Course Objectives. When turning in each assignment, students will be asked to provide an additional written reflection (template to be provided) in which they explore how / why their work contributed to their achievement of one or more of these course objectives. When I assess these assignments, I will provide substantive comments upon them, but no formal grade; students will then have the option to revise and resubmit.

By the end of the class, students will assemble a portfolio of the evidence of classroom learning and, in particular, of progress towards achieving our course's learning goals (template to be provided) and submit it on Brightspace (due on the last day of class). In their portfolios, students will suggest final grades for themselves, drawing upon this evidence. During the exam period, I will schedule 10-minute meetings with each student (either in person or online), during which we will review these portfolios and decide upon final grades. In the case of a disparity between a student's assessment of their own work and my own (as per the course goals), I reserve the right to adjust the final grade; that said, in my experience to date with ungrading doing so has rarely been necessary.

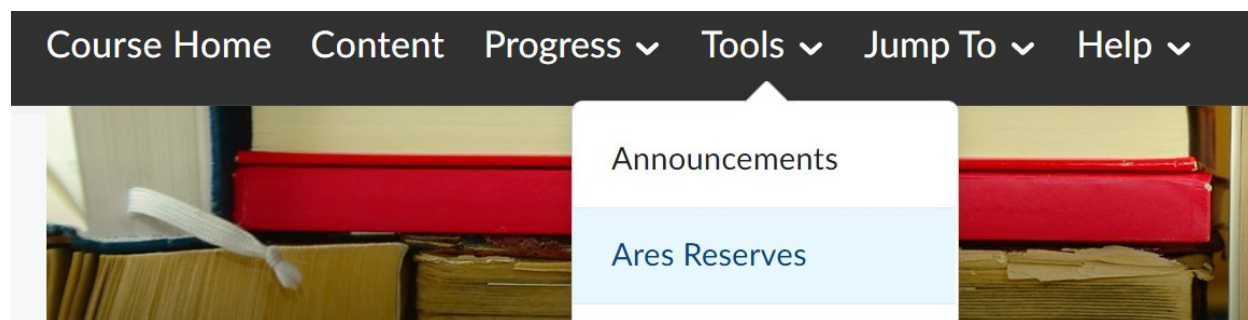
IMPORTANT NOTE (re. grade anxiety): I realize that many students in this course are, understandably, concerned about grades; after all, they often determine access to scholarships, competitive graduate program, and the like. Since the goal of ungrading is to create a more holistic, intellectually compelling learning environment, anything that leads to greater student anxiety is obviously counterproductive. As such, please note that I am *always* willing to discuss your standing in the course with you. In such a discussion, we will review the assignments that you have already submitted and talk through an appropriate final grade based on your work to date, as well as ways that current and subsequent assignments could be improved.

Note concerning assignments and revisions

Given that you will be asked at the end of the semester to demonstrate your learning (both in terms of the subject matter and the practical skills discussed above), one of the best ways to do so is by showing how you successfully responded to feedback. If I return an assignment to you with the note "revise and resubmit," this does not mean that the assignment is *bad* or *wrong* (it is *not* a 0%); that said, it is also not *complete*. To receive full credit for an assignment, you must revise and resubmit (perhaps more than once, if necessary). Doing so provides evidence of learning that you will then be able to cite when writing up your final portfolio.

Textbook

I recognize that academic life (and life in general) has grown increasingly expensive recently. As such, rather than employing a textbook, I have assembled a package of readings that will be freely accessible via Library Reserves on Brightspace. In case you have not needed to use library reserves before, you can most easily access them via the *Tools* menu (Ares Reserves):



Office Hours Policy

I have scheduled this course's office hours every Tuesday, from 11:30 to 13:30. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, feel free to come by and discuss them with me at this time. You are also welcome to ask me questions after class or via email, if that would be more convenient.

If need to cancel my office hours for a given week, I will notify the class via Brightspace. If the scheduled timeslot does not fit your schedule, feel free to email me to schedule an alternate meeting time. I am happy to meet via Zoom if you are more comfortable doing so.

Assignments

- Weekly Reading Quizzes (10 x 2% = 20%)
- Reflective Essays (2 x 20% = 40%) (Due Oct. 5 + Nov. 7) [**Minimum 1**]
- Learning Module Collaboration + Presentation (15%) [**MANDATORY**]
- Peer responses (4 x 2.5% = 10%)
- **Final Portfolio + Meeting (15%) [MANDATORY]**
- Make-up Assignments / Bonus Points (3 x 3% - up to 9%)

Note concerning the percentages: given that this is an ungraded course, these percentages are merely included for your reference. My assumption going in is that every student is seeking an 'A' in the class. As such, when I provide feedback, it will be the feedback necessary to earn an 'A'. If you are happy with a 'B' or a 'C', you can react accordingly: for example, by *not* completing suggested revisions or by modifying your workload.

Detailed example: if a student is seeking a 'B' in the class, and they respond to all requests for revision and resubmission on written work, they could earn that grade even after skipping two reading quizzes, one peer response, and one of the two reflective essays (100% -4% -2.5% - 20% = 73.5% = B). Conversely, if a student does not respond to requests for revisions, they should assume that their work is *not* earning them full points.

Weekly Reading Quizzes (Due weekly, before Thursday's class)

These quizzes are designed to deepen your engagement with the readings by asking questions that will gauge your comprehension. Each question will include feedback (whether the answer is correct or incorrect). The questions (and their correct answers) are intended to help you refine your understanding of the primary course topics (as outlined above in the *Course Objectives* section). If you answer a question incorrectly and then review the relevant section of the reading to figure out how/why you were mistaken, this can serve as a data point demonstrating your learning process (note: doing so is a component of the Final Portfolio assignment). As such, the important thing about these quizzes is not your grade, but rather whether (or the extent to which) you used them effectively to increase your comprehension of the topic.

Reading quizzes will not be reopened if you miss them. That said, you can make up for missed quizzes via completing bonus assignments (described below).

Reflective Essays

Your essays, each of which should be approximately 1000 words / 4 pages in length, will demonstrate your understanding of concepts from course readings and lectures, which you will be using to respond to specific analytical / reflective questions (full assignment guidelines will be posted a minimum of three weeks before each assignment is due). When writing your assignments, you need not refer to any sources aside from the textbook and the primary sources mentioned in the essay questions themselves. That said, you must remember to cite these sources when you employ them. Given the brevity of these papers, try to avoid quoting more than a line or two at a time. Judicious selection of appropriate quotations is a useful skill in and of itself! Your essays will be evaluated according to the following three criteria: 1) comprehension of key concepts; 2) ability to apply these concepts to specific analytical questions; and, 3) structure and mechanics (i.e., citations, paragraph organization, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation).

- **Note #1:** In keeping with the goal of making this course relevant to student learning objectives, we will be discussing the specifics of the feedback protocol, as well as the subject matter of these essays, in class three weeks before each assignment is due.
- **Note #2:** I will be providing substantive written feedback on these essays. You are encouraged to resubmit these assignments in response to my feedback (use Track Changes mode, please!). Thinking critically about feedback and responding to it is a vital metacognitive skill; as such, these resubmission will provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the development of your skills and understanding.

Learning Module Collaboration + Presentation

As mentioned above, the final month of our course will involve the communal selection of topics that address specific student interests. Once we decide upon the additional topics that we will cover, students will be divided into groups and tasked with finding and evaluating readings, as well as planning presentations and classroom activities, for the remainder of the semester. While I know that students tend to despise group work, please note that – in the context of an ungraded class – the primary concern (i.e., worries about unequitable distribution of effort / marks) no longer applies. Your evaluation on this task will be based on your assessment of your own engagement and effort, as demonstrable through concrete evidence of learning. This learning will hopefully include both an increase in subject matter expertise and in relevant skills (research, collaboration, presentation skills).

Peer Responses

The *Reflective Essays* and *Presentations* (as PPTs/PDFs) will be submitted via course forums on Brightspace. Students are encouraged to read each others' work and provide helpful critical comments on it. These peer responses should be factually accurate, supportive, and actionable. We will go through examples of helpful peer responses in class.

- **Note #1:** students will receive brief feedback on these peer responses, especially related to the extent to which they adhere to the three principles noted above.
- **Note #2:** just as students have the option to resubmit essays following my feedback, they are encouraged to respond to these peer responses. Once again, doing so is a great way to learn!

Make-up Assignments / Bonus Points

If you would like an opportunity to either make up for missed work (such as reading quizzes) or to earn bonus points, you can attend up to three relevant extracurricular lectures and write up a one-page summary of its contents and how they deepened / challenged your understanding of our course material. I will maintain a list of eligible lectures on Brightspace, but I welcome additional suggestions.

Late Policy: Grace Days

All written assignments in 2410 have assigned due dates, in order to encourage students to keep up with the course's learning goals. That said, in recognition of the fact that we are all subject to unpredictable draws upon our time, all students have five days of preapproved extensions on these assignments (i.e., students do not need to request our permission to use these extension days). Grace days can be applied to a single assignment or split between multiple assignments, as you see fit, allowing you a little more flexibility in fitting this course into your schedule. Given the course's ungrading policy, you will be responsible to justify assignments submitted later than this policy would allow, as such late submissions create additional pressure on your instructor, as well as reducing the likelihood that they will benefit your classmates (in the case of discussion posts and peer responses); as such, they indicate a lack of commitment to course's learning goals.

Tentative Course Timetable

As a general rule, each of our class sessions will include lecture material, discussion, activities, and close-reading of primary texts (in translation). The final month of class sessions will also include student presentations.

Week	Topic(s)	Readings / Assignments
1 – Sept. 7	Introduction, Course Policies, Buddhisms	Faure, <i>Unmasking Buddhism</i> , 7-11
2 – Sept. 12, 14	Background + Overview: What (in general) Do Buddhists Believe and Do? (Overview of Topics to Come!)	Faure, <i>Unmasking Buddhism</i> , 27-34; <i>Encyclopedia of Buddhism</i> (Prebish and Keown), 245-250
3 – Sept. 19, 21	Buddha: Perspectives on the “Awakened One” (Part I)	Faure, <i>Unmasking Buddhism</i> , 11-18; <i>Encyclopedia of Buddhism</i> (Buswell), 76-92
4 – Sept. 26, 28	Buddha(s): Perspectives on the “Awakened One(s)” (Part II)	<i>Mahapadana Sutta</i> (Walshe translation), 199-221; <i>Prince Vessantara Jataka</i> , DK Jordan translation;
5 – Oct. 3, 5	Dharma: Teachings of the Buddha (Part I)	Strong, <i>Buddhisms</i> , 248-281 Reflective Essay #1
6 – Oct. 10, 12	Dharma: Teachings of the Buddha (Part II)	Selections from <i>The Lotus Sutra</i> , <i>The Greater Pure Land Sutra</i>
7 – Oct. 17, 19	Sangha: The Buddhist Community	Harvey, 287-317
No Class Oct. 24 + 26 – Enjoy Your Break!		
8 – Oct. 31	Adaptation I: China and Tibet	“Returning from Hell” (Tibet) / “Mulian Rescues His Mother from Hell” (China)
8 – Nov. 2	Collaborative Syllabus Development	No readings
9 – Nov. 7	Adaptation II: Buddhist Modernism	McMahan, 4-21
9 – Nov. 9	[Student Selected Topics - Week 1: Part I]	Reading TBA Reflective Essay #2
10 – Nov. 14	[Student Selected Topics - Week 1: Part II]	Reading TBA
10 – Nov 16	Class cancelled (professor away at conference)	
11 – Nov. 21, 23	[Student Selected Topics - Week 2]	Reading TBA
12 – Nov. 28, 30	[Student Selected Topics - Week 3]	Reading TBA
13 – Dec. 5, 7	[Student Selected Topics - Week 4]	Reading TBA Learning Portfolio Due

PLAGIARISM

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- making unauthorized use of AI text-generation software to complete one’s written work (whether wholly or in part);
- using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

OTHER INFORMATION

Statement on Student Mental Health

As a university student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone.

If you are having difficulty navigating Carleton’s various student supports or are unsure about whether your particular situation qualifies, I am happy to discuss such matters with you (as I have completed my *Student Support Certificate*, which required familiarizing myself with the various tools and programs available to Carleton students).

There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus): <https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

Statement on Pandemic Measures

It is important to remember that COVID is still present in Ottawa. The situation can change at any time and the risks of new variants and outbreaks are very real. There are a number of actions you can take to lower your risk and the risk you pose to those around you including being vaccinated, wearing a mask, staying home when you're sick, washing your hands and maintaining proper respiratory and cough etiquette.

Feeling sick? Remaining vigilant and not attending work or school when sick or with symptoms is critically important. If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms do not come to class or campus. If you feel ill or exhibit symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately. In all situations, you should follow Carleton's symptom reporting protocols.

Masks: Masks are no longer mandatory in university buildings and facilities. However, we continue to recommend masking when indoors, particularly if physical distancing cannot be maintained. We are aware that personal preferences regarding optional mask use will vary greatly, and we ask that we all show consideration and care for each other during this transition.

Vaccines: While proof of vaccination is no longer required to access campus or participate in in-person Carleton activities, it may become necessary for the University to bring back proof of vaccination requirements on short notice if the situation and public health advice changes. Students are strongly encouraged to get a full course of vaccination, including booster doses as soon as they are eligible and submit their booster dose information in cuScreen as soon as possible. Please note that Carleton cannot guarantee that it will be able to offer virtual or hybrid learning options for those who are unable to attend the campus.

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow requirements and guidelines regarding health and safety which may change from time to time. For the most recent

information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and health and safety requirements please see the University's COVID-19 website and review the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the Pregnancy Accommodation Form ([click here](#)).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>