

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY - 01:730:369 / 01:840:369

Syllabus as of Dec 16 2025. Changes will be indicated on the course website.

Instructor: Adrian Liu (Contact: ✉ adrian.liu@rutgers.edu)

Course Website: rutgers.instructure.com/courses/376901

Office Hours: Mondays and Tuesdays on 10am to 12pm Eastern Time. [sign up here](#).

Exam: Friday, Jan 16th, between 10am and 5pm. [sign up here](#).

1 | OVERVIEW

Subject: This course introduces core topics in Buddhist philosophy. In the four weeks, we will study (1) fundamentals of Buddhism, (2) Buddhist metaphysics, (3) Buddhist ethics, and (4) Buddhist practice:

1. **Fundamentals:** What is Buddhism, and what is Buddhist *philosophy*?
2. **Metaphysics:** What is the Buddhist picture of how reality *truly* is?
3. **Ethics:** What is the Buddhist picture of good, bad, right, wrong, and the like?
4. **Practice:** How does Buddhist philosophy connect to the *practice* of Buddhism?

The goal of the course is for you to leave with an understanding of the fundamental ideas and distinctive elements of Buddhist metaphysics and ethics, as well as an understanding of how these ideas are implemented in everyday life and practice. *This class satisfies AHo (Philosophical and Theoretical Issues) and HST (Historical Analysis) requirements from the Rutgers SAS Core Curriculum.*

Course Components: The work in this course is as follows:

1. **Readings:** There will be three readings per week, for twelve readings total, all available on Canvas. This component of the course is not *directly* graded but is perhaps the most important part. I'm not assigning much reading, so each reading should be read carefully. The first reading of each week will be a "primary" text, taken from the tradition itself.
2. **Lectures:** I will post each a week a handout that serves as a lecture and guide to the readings and course topic for that week. This will be a *supplement*, rather than a *replacement*, for careful engagement with the readings.
3. **Forum Participation:** Each week, by Thursday, post a discussion post (responding to a given prompt) to the relevant Canvas webpage. On Friday, respond to two discussion posts by other students.
4. **Quizzes:** Each week there will be a brief quiz on the readings in Canvas, due on Thursday of the week. Each quiz is worth 5%.
5. **Final Paper:** There will be a 1250-2000 word final paper, due on Thursday, Jan 15, at 10pm Eastern time.
6. **Final Exam:** I will hold individual 10-minute oral final exams on zoom on Friday Jan 16th. I will give a list of possible topics before the exam.

Keep reading this syllabus for the **schedule** (page 2), **policies** (page 3), and **other administrative details** (page 4), and email me if you have any questions!

Week 1 (December 22 - 26): Fundamentals

Readings:

→ Syllabus! (This will be on the readings quiz)

- 1.1 *The Heart Sutra* (2 pages).
- 1.2 *Buddhism as Philosophy?* (19 pages), Introduction of *Buddhism as Philosophy*.
- 1.3 *Early Buddhism: Basic Teachings* (23 pages), Ch. 2 of *Buddhism as Philosophy*.

Assignments:

- ☐ *By Thursday Dec 25:* Do the Week 1 readings, readings quiz, and discussion post.
- ☐ *By Friday Dec 26:* Sign up for a 10-minute final exam time.
- ☐ *By Friday Dec 26:* Do your Week 1 discussion post responses.

Week 2 (December 29 - January 2): Metaphysics

Readings:

- 2.1 Primary Text: *Parable of the Chariot* (3 pages).
- 2.2 *Empty Persons* (24 pages), Ch. 2 of *Buddhism as Philosophy*.
- 2.3 *What Does the Study of Religion Study?* (8 pages), by Kevin Schilbrack.

Assignments:

- ☐ *By Thursday Jan 1:* Do the Week 2 readings, readings quiz, and discussion post.
- ☐ *By Friday Jan 2:* Do your Week 2 discussion post responses.

Week 3 (January 5 - 9): Ethics

Readings:

- 3.1 Primary Text: *Parable of Heaven and Hell* (1 page).
- 3.2 *Buddhist Ethics* (25 pages), Ch. 3 of *Buddhism as Philosophy*.
- 3.3 *Reading the Buddha as a Philosopher* (24 pages), by Douglass Smith & Justin Whittaker.

Assignments:

- ☐ *By Thursday Jan 8:* Do the Week 3 readings, readings quiz, and discussion post.
- ☐ *By Friday Jan 9:* Submit the plan for your final paper.
- ☐ *By Friday Jan 9:* Do your Week 3 discussion post responses.

Week 4 (January 12 - 16): Practice

Readings:

- 4.1 Primary Text: *Instructions for the Cook* (14 pages), by Dogen.
- 4.2 *Prologue and Part 1: Right Practice* (32 pages), from *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki.
- 4.3 *One Body, Whole Life: Mindfulness and Zen* (12 pages), by Hozan Alan Senauke.

Assignments:

- ☐ *By Thursday Jan 15:* Do the Week 3 readings, readings quiz, and discussion post.
- ☐ *By Thursday Jan 15:* Submit your final paper.
- ☐ *By Friday Jan 16:* Do your Week 3 discussion post responses.
- ☐ *On Friday Jan 16:* Take your final oral exam with me.

3 | POLICIES

Grading: your grade will be calculated as follows: 30% Final Paper, 25% Final Exam, 20% Quizzes, 20% Discussion-Forum posts and replies, 5% for coming to office hours at least once (I want to get to know you all!).

You must get a passing grade (60%+) in each graded component individually (Final Paper, Final Exam, Quizzes, Discussion-Forum Posts) to pass the class. The translation to letter-grading is as follows:

| Score | < 60 | 60+ | 70+ | 75+ | 80+ | 85+ | 90+ |
|--------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Letter | F | D | C | C+ | B | B+ | A |
| GPA | 0.0 | 1.0 | 2.0 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 3.5 | 4.0 |

The class will **not** be curved down.

Technology Use: The internet and generative AI tools have changed how students learn and interact with educational materials. On one hand, these tools can be great educational aids, helping to clarify and synthesize material, deepening understanding. But they can also help you circumvent the hard process of understanding material *for yourself*. I've thought a good deal about how to address this, with the policy below as a result.

Readings, Quizzes, Postings:

1. After you begin a readings quiz, do not use the internet (outside of Canvas) or AI tools until you have submitted the readings quiz.
2. After you open a discussion forum, do not use the internet (outside of Canvas) or AI tools until you have submitted your post.
3. Do not upload any of the readings, including my handouts, to any AI tools.

Essays and Exam:

1. Do not have an AI tool draft or rewrite your paper for you. After you open a document to compose a paper, write a first draft completely on your own. You may brainstorm paper topics and ideas with AI, or ask an AI tool for feedback.
2. Do not use the internet or any AI tools during your 10-minute final exam with me. Do not upload the exam prompts to an AI tools.

Late Work and Incompletes: Due to the fast pace of winter term, no late work will be accepted in general. If you have extenuating circumstances, please let me know *before the due date* of an assignment and we can figure something out. Incompletes can be arranged if unforeseen life events arise. Please know that it is generally more work overall to take an incomplete and finish work later than it is to just do your best during the term. I will be understanding about obstacles to getting work done.

Collaboration and Coauthoring Working with others is a great way to learn. You are allowed and encouraged to discuss readings and assignments with each other. Coauthoring can also be a great way to deepend your understanding (though I will warn that, done properly, it does not tend to be *less* work than doing it yourself). If you would like to coauthor with one other student, please get in touch with me.

Resources for students: You should come to my office hours, but you should also avail yourself of other resources at Rutgers for students who want to improve their writing capacities, such as the writing center. Here is the link where you can sign up to receive tutoring: <https://writingctr.rutgers.edu>.

Accommodations: I'm committed to supporting you and doing what I can to help you succeed. If there's anything acting as an obstacle to your fully engaging with the course, reach out to me and we can discuss alternative arrangements to make sure you're getting the most you can out of this class. For accommodations on assignments and exams, I will follow any accommodations granted by the Office of Disability Services. <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>.

Academic Integrity: We are all subject to the [Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy](#). It's pretty standard, but you should still review it. For potential violations, I'll always try to engage in discussion before getting the Office of Student Conduct involved.

Mandatory Reporting: I am a mandatory reporter under Title IX. Under this law I'm required to report certain information about alleged sexual misconduct to the University. If needed, I can direct you to resources that are confidential and do not need to report. See [this link](#) as well for more resources.