

**REL 373R-Q Special Topics in Religious Studies:
“Introduction to Buddhism through Sacred Scripture and Modern Texts”
Continuing-writing/HAP/Inquiry, 02A1, 5480
Mon/Wed 2:30, Lang 202, Fall 2013**

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Course Description

This writing-intensive, inquiry-based course will serve as an introduction to Buddhism as a major world religion. The course employs sacred texts from a variety of Buddhist canons, both Theravada and Mahayana (including Vajrayana and Zen), as well as materials from modern Buddhist authors. The latter category includes mainly autobiographical material exhibiting a diversity of contemporary interpretations of Buddhist doctrines, descriptions of Buddhist practices as socially and ethically engaged, and general representations of Buddhism as a lived religious experience. The seminar-style class will focus upon readings in and discussions about the Buddhist tradition's foundational sacred scriptures, found in translation in Donald Lopez's *The Buddhist Scriptures*, as well as the religion's diverse, contemporary forms, via the students' own explorations of our chosen modern Buddhist writers: Thich Nhat Hanh, The Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, Aung San Suu Kyi and Alan Watts. A chapter by James Livingston helps introduce students to the comparative study of religion.

We begin with the most basic questions, “What is Buddhism?” and “What does it mean to be a practicing Buddhist in modernity?” The students are called upon to identify major Buddhist ideals, virtues and patterns of morality in sacred Buddhist texts and their modern interpretations. Such creativity and discovery are vital to the Inquiry work in the course: there is no “textbook” for our course, and students perform the work of discovery themselves. Via the course's textual sources we will understand that sacred scripture is an ongoing “human activity,” to borrow from Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Perhaps in no other religious tradition can sacred scripture as an evolving, constantly adapting religious experience be seen so clearly. The coursework requires your own increasingly independent research, culminating in a final project in which you may pursue any contemporary issue of interest to you via related Buddhist sources and interpretations (for example Buddhist ecological activism, Buddhist feminist movements, Buddhism and science, Buddhist medicine, Buddhism and conflict resolution, Buddhism and sustainable living, Buddhist philosophical argumentation, and more). The individual project ideally will show the student's progression as a scholar of Buddhism and exhibit the ability to inquire and answer one's own scholarly inquiries like an expert religion scholar would.

Inquiry-based learning requires that students embark on a journey of questioning within our scholarly study in order to learn also about the academic discipline of the comparative study of world religions. In other words, you will be asked to investigate the Buddhist traditions we study via your own increasing scholarly vocabulary and reflective analysis projects. In occasional breaks from the seminar style of our class, instructor and library staff guidance will familiarize you with some of the approaches, methods and categories employed in the comparative study of world religions. In addition, you will be asked to apply in a disciplined manner what you learn in our course readings in Buddhism in order both: 1) to cultivate an appreciation for such methods and categories and 2) to critique and offer improvements to them in the manner of an independent religion scholar.

An aim of any study of cultural traditions is an understanding of the basic assumptions and practices of different peoples. A fundamental aim of this course is an informed appreciation and respect for the Buddhist traditions studied. The discipline of comparative religious studies is not a means to evaluate traditions for worth, but a scholarly means of determining patterns, commonalities and differences between religious practices, beliefs, and traditions in general while recognizing the unique characteristics of and pluralities within each. Buddhism is a highly diverse tradition with many internal vicissitudes. We will question essentializations of the religion and hopefully achieve a de-centered, new understanding of how “Buddhism” might be defined.

Course Objectives

From the foregoing you can see that the ultimate aim of the course is to neither glorify nor critique any tradition but rather to equip you with an understanding and skills in the study of religion as an academic discipline. In short, the goals and objectives for you as a student in this course are:

- to learn how to ask useful questions within the framework of the comparative study of religion,
- to discover relationships between Buddhist scriptures and modern Buddhist practices
- to familiarize yourself with patterns, commonalities, and differences in modern Buddhist worldviews,
- to explore, question, discover, and reflect analytically upon Buddhist worldviews and experiences,
- to discover Buddhist ideals, concepts and practices via both classic and recent Buddhist texts,
- to develop further your critical skills as a thinker, reader, writer, and speaker within and beyond the academic study of religion, particularly in order to identify and deconstruct stereotypes, and
- to conduct an individually designed project of inquiry in the discipline of religion with successful research results.

Course Requirements and Grading

You do not need prior experience with the academic study of religion to take this class. I do, however, expect you to work hard and to contribute to class discussions. If you are not comfortable with the expectations for reading and writing in this class, you should consider taking another class instead. You are expected to keep up with and master all reading assignments. If you have not done the readings, it will simply be impossible for you to participate in the discussion. While we will suffer from that, the main damage will be done to your own learning, test and exam grades, performance in paper assignments and your participation grade. One's final grade will be calculated according to the following:

Participation	15%
4 Tests	20% (5% each)
Presentation	10%
2 Reflective Analysis Papers	20% (10% each)
Research/Site Visit/Interview Paper	20%
Final Exam	15%

Participation (15%)

You must be fully engaged with the course materials in order to do well in the course. Assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class discussions, exercises, writing, information, and more. Class participation is part of the learning process. As it is also part of the final grade, there will be ample opportunity for it over the course of the semester. You will be involved in activities such as reading students' in-class questions (see below), break-out group work (see below), post-group-work presentations, peer reviews, discussions with your professor about your writing and in-class writing. I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments and to get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. I will call on you often to ask about the content of assigned readings, and you are strongly encouraged to ask questions and suggest topics for discussion in class on your own. You are allowed to be absent from a total of three (3) class sessions. With every additional absence your final grade for this class will go down 5%. This means you will have to plan ahead with your allowance of three absences. Lateness will be counted as absence. Talk to your professor ahead of time if you foresee any difficulties for yourself with this policy.

Students' In-class Questions: At the start of each week, every student must bring into class one question about the reading assignment for that week to share. After all initial queries are read aloud, the class will assess each question for its usefulness within our academic study with the goal of creating an online **assessment rubric** themselves, gradually increasing in detail and finesse, for better inquiry. Assessment questions may include: Is this question feasible within the academic study of religion? Is it appropriate from a phenomenologist's point of view? What approach from within the discipline of religion would help answer this question? What bias may be present in the question? How might the answer/s to this question be sought? To what additional questions does this give rise? **The rubric created by students will be an ongoing project on our course Blackboard Discussion site online; weekly individual contributions will be tracked, and part of one's overall participation grade. Visit and contribute to the Discussion Board each week.** More importantly, the rubric will be practical; students can rely on the rubric they created to help guide further questioning in all their class endeavors.

The Students' In-class Questions will in part define the tasks of Break-out Groups.

Inquiry Sessions and Break-out Groups: Break-out groups in class will discuss the reading assignment contents and synthesize what has been learned via the previous readings on and discussions about Buddhist traditions. What themes emerge in your readings? What religious assertions, questions and praxes are prominent? What do the authors emphasize? How do the authors differ in theme and emphases? Use the Students' In-class Questions of your choice. Bring in questions and observations from your readings, and be prepared to speak in class. Your group will present findings in class.

In these exercises, our goal is to identify patterns of behavior and belief that might be called "Buddhist." In this way students will define Buddhist ideals, virtues and patterns of morality and answer our foundational course questions: "What is Buddhism?" and "What does it mean to be a practicing Buddhist in modernity?"

Presentation (10%)

Included in the class participation is your presentation of a reading summary with discussion question. The reading, for which you will present an in-class summary and one discussion question for your peers, will be assigned to you by the professor. Presentations should be between 10 and 12 minutes long, should offer a question for the class (which can count as your Student In-class Question for the day), and should cover the highlights or main points of the reading. Please bring a handout for your fellow students to serve as an outline of your talk. This outline will help your classmates follow your presentation. All students must keep up with all reading assignments, regardless of who is presenting a summary.

Reflective Analysis Papers (10% each)

These two short papers (5-6 pages, 12 pt TNR, double-spaced, one-inch margins) are meant as scholarly reflection opportunities on any one topic or issue from your reading assignments, class discussions, course film or media items, or lectures to date. You will reflect in a thoughtful, mature, informed, and scholarly manner. For each paper, you should focus on one topic in depth; broadly defined topics tend to result in oversimplifications and unhelpful generalizations. Thus, choose your thesis well, and narrow your topic in an appropriate manner for this assignment. If writing primarily on readings, avoid mere summarizing. The assignment calls for your analyses and well-argued assertions. In your writing I will look for relevant, independently done research, increasing use of terminology relevant to the academic study of religion, exploration of religious concepts, questioning that extends beyond class discussion, and informed attempts on your part to answer your own questions that arise from your interaction with the material. The criteria for grading the assignments are: a) evidence of mastery of material and informed voice evidenced by appropriate and relevant use of terms, concepts, theories, and scholarly sources; b) application of scholarly theories or frameworks to your own observations from the source material you chose; c) coherent thesis, conclusion, argument and clear presentation of points; and d) focused discipline and depth of scholarly engagement with the material, including criticisms of and suggestions for improvement of the scholarly concepts or theories used. Correct citation usage and bibliographies are ex-

pected. MLA style is suggested. Choose one style of citation, and be correct and consistent with it. Be sure to cite all references, including quoted passages and unquoted ideas. Include a bibliography.

Papers are due in hard copy at the start of class on the due dates, no later. Late papers are not accepted. Common sense tells you not wait until the last moment to print your submissions. Please consult the schedule for due dates.

Tests (5% each) and Final Exam (15%)

In this course, students do not learn information then discard it week to week but instead constantly build upon the knowledge gained throughout the semester. Careful reading of assignments provides the foundation for productive group discussions, reflective analyses, research projects and more. Four essay tests are designed to evaluate one's grasp of foundational knowledge and offer opportunities for the student's own informed, scholarly analyses. The final exam will cover both the reading assignments and in-class material. The exam is comprehensive and cumulative. You may be asked to reflect critically upon any conclusions, categories or methodologies we covered in class. The exam is a take-home exam to be emailed as an attached document to emullen@emory.edu by 11:00am on December 18. This is an "open book" exam; use and cite correctly any course texts you wish.

You must bring an exam blue book (found in the bookstore) and a pen with blue or black ink to tests. See the schedule of readings, topics and events below for test dates.

Research/Site Visit/Interview Paper (20%)

One paper on a topic pertaining to Buddhism is also required. This paper should be between 10 and 12 pages long, typed, double-spaced (use 12pt font and one-inch margins). Any topic, tradition, or text relating to our course is permissible, but the project must showcase your own skills as a religion scholar. Ask useful, discipline-specific questions about your chosen topic, and formulate a thesis through your sound research. Support your thesis with research evidence. A successful paper will exhibit an informed perspective from within the study of religion, in-depth research, mastery of relevant vernacular, and a convincingly argued conclusion.

You have much freedom regarding this assignment. You may write a research paper without interview or site visit descriptions, a paper on a site visit that incorporates research, or an interview/s-centered paper that incorporates research. You may also follow the example of our course and explore an autobiographical or other work by a Buddhist author (see professor for suggestions if needed). As this is a research paper at foundation, citations and a list of references are of course required. MLA style is suggested. It is perfectly fine for you to undertake these site visits in small collaborative groups. Each group member, however, must write an individual paper. When visiting in a group, please be careful to avoid intimidation of the community members of whom you are a guest, particularly when interviewing: groups must be polite.

Please note again that Site Visit or Interview Papers must also show preparedness in research; in other words, your paper must not only be descriptive or simply transcribe an interview. It must be meaningfully explanatory, as well. Please see the professor not only for approval of your topic but also for help in finding resources. Note: You must have cleared your topic with me via email by **October 30**. The paper should exhibit your applied knowledge of approaches and intellectual grasp of the material at hand. Of greatest importance is that you choose a topic that interests you. Plagiarism is easy to spot, and harshly penalized by the University. Don't be afraid to trust your own words and scholarly analyses. Around the middle of the semester you will write a progress report on your research to-date. It will provide a snapshot of your work and should include a brief description (no more than 300 words) of your research topic, interesting findings so far, as well as any difficulties you have encountered. In addition, attach an outline of your research paper and a bibliography of the works you are using or planning to use in your research. Internet sources other than those via the library online are strongly discouraged, as most are unscholarly. Your progress report is due **November 13**.

Finally, assigned group members will critique each others' papers in helpful, constructive peer reviews. Email the first draft of your research paper to your assigned peer group members **November 25**.

On **December 4** peer reviews are due in class; we will exchange thoughts and suggestions for improvement of the papers via the written peer reviews and discussion. This will allow you to revise your paper before turning in a final draft, with the peer reviews you received attached, **December 9**. Late papers will not be accepted. Please refer to the peer review handout for guidelines on critiques.

Remember that your professor is available to help you at any time in the semester. If my office hours are not convenient for you, please make an appointment or email me. Your research project is yours, however, and the choices of topic, approach, thesis and conclusion are your own decisions.

Note: Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford and Emory faculty/staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

Conferencing about Your Writing

The number and nature of the writing assignments make this a writing-intensive course. Feedback on your assignments is meant to help you reflect on your writing and to improve your written work through revisions. In addition to these formal procedures, I encourage you to see me in order for us to reflect together on how to improve your writing. I will be happy to make an appointment with you at a convenient time. At a minimum, I expect everyone to **stop by my office at least once** in the semester. Bring a piece of writing so that we have something to discuss.

Paper Submissions

Due to the writing-intensive nature of the class, all assignments will be submitted to the professor and returned with comments from the professor in hard copy. Submit your assignments in plenty of time before a final deadline; never wait until the last moment to print and risk the paper or yourself being late. Late papers will not be accepted. Late students are counted as absent.

Online Tools

This course will use the online communication tools on Blackboard as well as readings and documents located there. Please get acquainted with some of the online features and use Blackboard frequently for our syllabus, assignments, discussions, documents and more.

Academic Honesty

All students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code, which includes the “responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work.” The Honor Code also indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so we all are obligated to report violations. Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully.

In Class

Respect the class, the people, the topic, our atmosphere of maturity and our high standards for diligence and civility. Respect yourself; arrive prepared and in the correct frame of mind for hard work. Lateness for class is counted as absence. Bring no food in the classroom. Silence your cell phones, and refrain from use. Phones must be off for tests. Those wishing to use a notebook computer in class may do so, but presence in and focus on the class must be paramount. This is a course with a heavy reading load, high expectations for student participation, and an intensive schedule; consider your choice of this class with care and maturity.

If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please see Disability Services on campus for proper aid. The campus library staff is available for help with sources, research projects, citation styles and methods, citation rules and more.

Required Course Texts

1. Donald S. Lopez, ed. *Buddhist Scriptures*. London: Penguin Books, 2004.
2. Thich Nhat Hanh. *Essential Writings*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
3. Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, with Sophia Stril-Rever. *My Spiritual Journey*. New York: HarperCollins, 2010.
4. Aung San Suu Kyi. *The Voice of Hope: Aung San Suu Kyi Conversations with Alan Clements*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008.
5. Alan Watts. *In My Own Way, An Autobiography*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1972.

The above texts are available in the bookstore. Additional readings by these authors and others may be made available either in class or online in our Blackboard "Assignments" folder. These include:

James C. Livingston, "Sacred Scripture" chapter 6 in *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.

Thich Nhat Hanh, "The Last Tree" and "Earth Gathas," in *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1990.

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Events

Section One: Inquiry-based learning, the study of religion, and our course

- Week 1 (8/28) Introductions to each other and the class
Reading: Syllabus
- Week 2 (9/4) Elements and Forms
Reading: Livingston Chapter 6 "Sacred Scripture"

Section Two: Buddhist Sacred Texts

- Week 3 (9/9, 9/11) Approaches to sacred text
Reading: *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 3-33, 13-128, 159-171, 223-339
- Week 4 (9/16, 9/18) Hermeneutics according to the Buddha, Buddhist sacred texts
Reading: *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 343-440, 441-512
Reflective Analysis Paper 1 due Wednesday

Section Three: Thich Nhat Hanh

- Week 5 (9/23, 9/25) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, media.
Reading: *Essential Writings*, Introduction - Chapter 2. Presentation.
- Week 6 (9/30, 10/2) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, Break-out group activities
Reading: *Essential Writings*, Chapter 3 - 5. Presentation.
Test 1 Wednesday
- Week 7 (10/7, 10/9) Buddhism and Sustainability
Reading: *Dharma Gaia* selections

Fall Break

Section Four: The Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso

- Week 8 (10/16) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, media.
Reading: *My Spiritual Journey*, Foreword - Chapter 5. Presentation.
- Week 9 (10/21, 10/23) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, Break-out group activities
Reading: *My Spiritual Journey*, Chapter 6 - end. Presentation.
Test 2 Wednesday

Section Five: Aung San Suu Kyi

Week 10 (10/28, 10/30) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, media.
Reading: *The Voice of Hope*, Preface - Chapter 8. Presentation.
By Wednesday: Individual Research topic approved.

Week 11 (11/4, 11/6) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, Break-out group activities
Reading: *The Voice of Hope*, Chapter 9 - end. Presentation.
Reflective Analysis Paper 2 due Monday.
Test 3 Wednesday

Section Six: Alan Watts

Week 12 (11/11, 11/13) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, media.
Reading: *In My Own Way*, Foreword - Chapter 7. Presentation.
Progress Reports due Wednesday

Week 13 (11/18, 11/20) Discussion of Students' In-class questions, Break-out group activities
Reading: *In My Own Way*, Chapter 8 - end. Presentation.
Test 4 Wednesday

Section Seven: Individual Research Project Work, Buddhism in Modernity

Week 14 (11/25) Your conclusions
Rough Drafts for Peer Reviews due to peers Monday via email to each other.

Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 (12/2, 12/4) Redefining "Buddhism"
Peer Review Day in Class Wednesday.

Week 16 (12/9) Conclusions and Review for Final.
Research/Site Visit/Interview Papers due Monday.

Exam Week
email Final Exam: Take-home, open-book exam. Due December 18 at 11am via
to emullen@emory.edu.