

# American Buddhism

*Rel 4936 (023F) & Rel 6347 (023G), Spring 2012*

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



## ***Class Time & Location***

Tue, period 7 (1:55–2:45), & Thu, periods 7 & 8 (1:55–3:50); MAT 2 (1/10–4/24).

## ***Office Hours & Contact Information***

Tue and Thu, 1:00–1:50 pm, and by appointment; 132 Anderson Hall; tel: (352) 273-2937; email: [mpoceski@ufl.edu](mailto:mpoceski@ufl.edu); webpage: [www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/).

## ***Course Description***

The course examines the transmission, growth, and transformation of Buddhism in America, with a focus on the last several decades. Through select readings, discussions, and research, students will explore the main historical events and issues that have shaped—and continue to affect—the American encounter with Buddhism. The topics covered will include the major traditions of Buddhism in America, the adaptation of Buddhist teachings and practices to an American social ethos, the interfaith dialogue between Buddhism and other religions, and the impact of Buddhist concepts and ideas on American culture.

## ***Prerequisites***

There are no formal prerequisites, although students will benefit if they have taken *Asian Religions*, *Introduction to Buddhism*, or other courses on Buddhism.

## ***Requirements***

- Class attendance.
- Reading of assigned materials and participation in discussions (20% of the final grade).
- Field research report (25%), due 3/27.
- Bibliography (5%), due 4/10.
- Research paper (50%), due 4/24.

## ***Additional Graduate Students Requirements***

In addition to the basic requirements, for graduate students there will be extra expectations and requirements:

- Longer written assignments (see below).
- Higher expectations in regard to level of academic performance, including depth of critical analysis, clarity of presentation, and quality of writing.

## ***Required Texts***

Prebish, Charles S., and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds. *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (U. of California Press, 1998).  
Seager, Richard H. *Buddhism in America* (Columbia U. Press, 1999).

Tweed, Thomas, and Stephen Prothero, eds. *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (Oxford UP, 1999).

Additional articles, available in digital format (marked with “AA”; see below for more info).

Select articles from the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (marked with “EB”; see below for more info).

## ***Optional Reading***

Williams, Duncan Ryuken, and Christopher S. Queen, eds. *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship* (RoutledgeCurzon, 1999).

## Course Schedule and Discussion Topics <sup>(Tentative)</sup>

W 1 <sup>1/10 & 1/12</sup> **Introduction** [req: Seager ix–xviii; Tweed 1–12]

### **Part 1: Historical Contexts and Backgrounds**

W 2 <sup>1/17 & 1/19</sup> **American and Buddhist Contexts** [req: Seager 12–32; Tweed 13–23; Cohen<sup>EB</sup>; Bellah<sup>AA</sup>; opt: Williams 71–90]

W 3 <sup>1/24 & 1/26</sup> **American Encounters with Buddhism** [req: Seager 3–11, 33–47; Prebish 1–10, 183–95; Tweed 25–27, 38–42, 61–65, 73–78, 133–40, 163–69, 193–200; opt: Williams 91–114]

### **Part 2: Traditions of American Buddhism**

W 4 <sup>1/31 & 2/2</sup> **The Theravada Tradition** [req: Seager 136–57; Prebish 163–180; Tweed 322–24; Crosby<sup>EB</sup>; opt: Williams 57–68]

W 5 <sup>2/7 & 2/9</sup> **Japanese Buddhist Traditions** [req: Seager 51–89; Prebish 31–47, 79–97; Tweed 281–85, 324–28; Bielefeldt<sup>EB</sup>; opt: Williams 3–19]

W 6 <sup>2/14 & 2/16</sup> **Zen in America** [req: Seager 90–112; Prebish 49–78, 117–28; Tweed 229–235, 261–64; Jorgensen<sup>EB</sup>; opt: Williams 20–35]

W 7 <sup>2/21 & 2/23</sup> **Tibetan Buddhism** [req: Seager 113–35; Prebish 99–115; Tweed 264–68; Davidson<sup>EB</sup>; Bernard<sup>AA</sup>; opt: Williams 100–14]

W 8 <sup>2/28 & 3/1</sup> **Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhist Traditions** [req: Seager 158–81, Prebish 13–30, 129–46, Tweed 268–70, 315–19, 331–34; Poceski<sup>EB</sup>; opt: Williams 36–56]

W 9 **Spring Break**

### **Part 3: Themes and Issues**

W 10 <sup>3/13 & 3/15</sup> Video: *Becoming the Buddha in LA*

W 11 <sup>3/20 & 3/22</sup> **Monasticism and Inter-religious Dialogue** [req: Seager 216–31; Prebish 147–61; Tweed 362–71, 376–77; Samuels<sup>EB</sup>; opt: Williams 117–42]

W 12 <sup>3/27 & 3/29</sup> **Ethnicity, Race, and Gender** [req: Seager 185–200; Prebish 196–206, 238–52; Tweed 274–81; Ohnuma<sup>EB</sup>; opt: Williams 215–37]

W 13 <sup>4/3 & 4/5</sup> **Socially Engaged Buddhism** [req: Seager 201–15; Prebish 266–86; opt: Williams 168–80]

W 14 <sup>4/10 & 4/12</sup> **Buddhism and Ecology** [req: Tweed 342–57; Poceski<sup>AA</sup>]

W 15 <sup>4/17 & 4/19</sup> **Reflections on the Americanization of Buddhism** [req: Seager 232–48; Prebish 287–98; Tweed 349–57]

W 16 <sup>4/24</sup> Discussion of student research



### **Encyclopedia Articles**

Robert Buswell, ed. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Macmillan Reference, 2003); available as e-Book at UF library.

- Cohen, “India”: 352–60; Crosby, “Theravāda”: 836–41; Bielefeldt, “Japan”: 384–91
- Jorgensen, “Chan School”: 130–37; Poceski, “China”: 139–45; Davidson, “Tibet”: 851–59
- Samuels, “Monasticism”: 556–60; Ohnuma, “Gender”: 302–06

### ***Additional Articles***

- Bellah, Robert, et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, second ed. (University of California Press, 1996): vii–xxxv, 275–96.
- Poceski, Mario. “Buddhahood of Grasses and Trees,” “Buddhism and Vegetarianism,” “Indra’s Net,” and “Creatures’ Release in Chinese Buddhism.” Bron Taylor, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (Continuum International Publishing, 2005): 231–32, 438–39, 847–48, 1691–93.
- Bernard, H. Russell. *Research Methods in Anthropology* (AltaMira Press, 2002): 322–64.

### ***Further Readings about Buddhism and Religion***

- Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices*.
- Mizuno, Kogen. *Basic Buddhist Concepts*.
- Jones, Lindsay, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion*.



### ***Grading***

- Final grades will be computed on this scale:
  - A = 100–93%; A- = 92.5–90%; B+ = 89.5–87%; B = 86.5–83%; B- = 82.5–80%; C+ = 79.5–77%;
  - C = 76.5–73%; C- = 72.5–70%; D+ = 69.5–67%; D = 66.5–63%; D- = 62.5–60%; E = 59.5% or less.
- The final grade will be based on each student’s individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously. There will be no opportunities to do additional work for extra credit or better grade.
- 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 student’s personal desires or expectations about grades, will not be taken into account.

### ***Online e-Learning System***

The syllabus and other course materials are posted online via UF’s e-Learning system. To access it, go to the e-Learning Support Systems homepage [[lss.at.ufl.edu](http://lss.at.ufl.edu)].

### ***Attendance***

- Attendance is mandatory for all students, starting with the first day of classes. Students who have problems with class attendance or punctuality should think twice before enrolling in this course.
- Absences from class will have adverse effect on the final grade. After missing two (2) hours of instruction (unexcused), each subsequent unexcused hour will lead to an automatic 2% reduction of the final grade; there is no limit to this kind of grade deduction (i.e. a student can fail the course due to a poor attendance record).
- Valid excuses for missed classes must be submitted *in writing* and in a timely manner, along with pertinent documentation (such as note from a doctor). Written excuses for planned absences—participation in athletic meetings or religious observances, for example—must be submitted in advance.
- Coming late, leaving early, being inattentive, and other forms of disruptive behavior can be counted as unexcused absences. For more on the university’s attendance policies, see the Undergraduate Catalog.

### ***Guidelines for Written Assignments***

- All written assignments must be typewritten and follow standard academic format. Use standard font, such as Calibri 11, for all assignments, with 1.5 spacing and 1” margins. Do not forget to include paper title, course name, instructor name, and date.

- For undergraduate students, the field research report should be 1,400 words, while the final paper should be 3,000 words, inclusive of notes and citations. Graduate papers should be 50% longer.
- The report should be based on field research that involves [participant observation](#), undertaken at a Buddhist group or institution in Florida.
- The bibliography should contain at least 10 titles (15 for grad students) of academic publications pertinent to the student's research topic. It must also clearly state the topic (provisional title) of the final paper.
- Each written assignment must be submitted digitally, before the beginning of class on the due date, at the latest.
- No late submissions will be accepted under any circumstances. Students are encouraged to make early submissions.
- Students are welcome to bring early drafts of their papers and ask for feedback/advice during the office hours.

### *Office Hours and Communication*

- Students are encouraged to come to office hours, especially if they have questions or need help with the course materials. The instructor will also be glad to discuss all relevant topics that, due to time constraints, are not covered in the lectures in much detail.
- Any questions about the course requirements or any aspect of the coursework should be resolved by consulting the instructor directly and in person, preferably during the office hours.

### *Other Notices*

- A student who has a documented disability that may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should consult the instructor at the beginning of the course so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Note that the student is responsible for communicating his/her needs to the instructor, as early as possible. All arrangements for changes pertaining to the exams must be made at least one week in advance.
- Plagiarism and cheating will result in a failing grade and other serious penalties. For more information, see the "Academic Honesty—Student Guide" brochure (posted online by the Dean of Students Office).
- Students are expected to be courteous and abstain from disruptive behavior in the classroom that adversely affects others and is contrary to the pursuit of knowledge. Examples of such behavior include talking with someone, making late entrances or early exits from the classroom, displaying active disinterest in the class (e.g. sleeping or inappropriate computer use), or putting down others. Offending students will be asked to leave.
- 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 instructions given in class (remember, attendance is not optional).
- Any questions about the course requirements or any aspect of the coursework should be resolved by consulting the instructor, preferably in person. Pleading ignorance or lack of common sense are not valid excuses for failures to fulfill requirements or abide by course policies.

