



RLST203D: BUDDHIST TRADITIONS
MWF 11:00-11:50, Reid 202

Holly Grether, Ph.D.
hgrether@montana.edu
Office Hours: TR 11:00-12:00 (or by appt.)
401 Linfield



Course description:

This course is designed to provide an historical and conceptual introduction to Buddhism across various geographical regions. Buddhism encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices spanning over two millennia and, thus, is more appropriately studied as multiple traditions rather than a singular, homogenous religion. This course is interdisciplinary and, as such, will explore the history, texts, ideas, images, social contexts, and major figures of various Buddhist traditions.

This course meets the diversity core criteria by providing an in-depth, critical analysis of how Buddhism helps shape identity (and identity helps shape Buddhism) in a variety of cultural, social, and national contexts. Students will examine various axes of difference amongst Buddhists such as nationality, gender, political affiliation, and social class. Students are expected to participate regularly in discussions (both during class and online).

Student learning outcomes:

- Identify and define Sanskrit terms important to the academic study of Buddhism
- Read, compare, and critically analyze primary and secondary sources from a wide range of historical and geographical contexts
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the vast diversity of Buddhist traditions as they are understood and practiced by various individuals, societies, nations, and cultures.

Required texts:

- *Introducing Buddhism* (Damien Keown and Charles Prebish). Routledge, 2010
- *Life of the Buddha* (Ashvaghosha). Clay Sanskrit Library, NYU Press
- *Heart of Understanding* (Thich Nhat Hanh). Parallax Press, 2009.
- *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (Paul Reys and Nyogen Senzaki). Tuttle Publishing, 1998.

Grade breakdown:

- D2L reading quizzes & online discussions: 50% [6 @ 10% each, lowest dropped]
- Midterm Exam: 25%
- Final: 25%

Description of Course Assignments:

Midterm Exam (25%):

The Midterm Exam will be 50 multiple-choice questions, given in class, based primarily on material covered in lecture. It will require that you learn major Sanskrit terms essential to the study of Buddhism (see study guide posted on D2L). Take careful notes during class and plan to study hard for this exam.

D2L Quizzes & Online Discussions [50%]:

There will be three multiple-choice online quizzes (on D2L) based on assigned readings. For each quiz, there is a study guide posted to help you prepare. Quizzes are open-note and open-book but, since you will only have 40 minutes to complete 25 questions, you should keep up on these study guides, fill them out in their entirety, and review them prior to starting your timed quizzes. Please note that once you start the quiz, you must finish. Quizzes will be open for one week prior to the due date.

There will also be three mini-papers based on primary source readings that you will post on D2L (discussions tab). The class will randomly be sorted into groups of 10 to make discussion more fruitful. For each discussion, you will be given a specific prompt. Respond carefully to the prompt (minimum 500 words). Your paper should include a short intro & conclusion and at least three brief (yet substantive) paragraphs. You will also be asked to respond to *at least two* of your classmates' posts (note: you won't be able to read classmates' papers until you post your own). Responses should be meaningful and go beyond "good job" or "I agree" (min. 75 words). No late discussion posts will be accepted, but feel free to post early! **Pay attention to due dates!**

Your lowest quiz score OR your lowest discussion post will be dropped. [In other words, out of the six opportunities, only the top five will count].

Final Exam:

Your final exam will be cumulative and given during the designated finals time. It will be essay format, so be sure to bring a bluebook (available at MSU bookstore). Please note that the final for this class is scheduled for Friday, 8 am during finals week (sorry!).

Grading:

Grades will be determined on the traditional 4.0 scale [A = 93%-100%, A- = 90%-92%, B+ = 87%-89%, etc.]. I will update your grades on D2L regularly. Please check your grade often and let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

A Note about Sanskrit terms:

This course will require that you define and explain the importance of several Sanskrit terms foundational to an understanding of Buddhism. Many early Buddhist texts were originally written in *Pālī* language, which is very close to Sanskrit. Therefore, as you come across your terms, you will sometimes notice that there are two alternative spellings for the same word, such as the following:

- ‘Dharma’ (Sanskrit) = Dhamma (Pālī)
- ‘Nirvāṇa’ (Sanskrit) = Nibbana (Pālī)
- ‘Tripitika’ (Sanskrit) = ‘Tipitika’ (Pālī)

Don’t worry about these discrepancies too much—the differences are minor and you can choose to use either the Pālī or Sanskrit spelling in your work.

Course policies:

A) This is a *Religious Studies* course, not a theology course. Therefore, the point of this course is **not** to evaluate whether any given tradition is right or wrong; better or worse. Rather, the point is to study and understand diverse ways of experiencing and explaining the world with an open mind that, to the extent possible, suspends our own preconceived ideas, biases, and judgments. Mere expressions of theology or personal convictions/beliefs are **not** appropriate in this class nor will they be tolerated.

B) If at any point you have questions/concerns about your grade, it is *your* responsibility to come see the instructor after class or make an appointment. No grade justifications or explanations will be given via email.

C) By taking this course, you are agreeing to the following MSU principles/rules:

1. Academic Misconduct:

The Montana State University Student Handbook contains the penalties and procedures in situations of academic misconduct. Section 420 of the Student Conduct Code describes academic misconduct as including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, multiple submissions, or facilitating others’ misconduct. If a student is caught, possible sanctions for academic misconduct range from an oral reprimand to expulsion from the university. **DO NOT** attempt to get by this rule. [LINK TO CODE OF CONDUCT](#)

2. Collaboration: University policy states that, unless otherwise specified, students may not collaborate on graded material. Any exceptions to this policy will be stated explicitly for individual assignments. If you have any questions about the limits of collaboration, you are expected to ask for clarification.

3. Behavioral Expectations: Montana State University expects all students to conduct themselves as honest, responsible and law-abiding members of the academic community

and to respect the rights of other students, members of the faculty and staff and the public to use, enjoy and participate in the University programs and facilities.

4. **Academic Expectations:** Section 310.00 in MSU Conduct Guidelines states students:
 - a. be prompt and regular in attending classes;
 - b. be well prepared for classes;
 - c. submit required assignments in a timely manner;
 - d. take exams when scheduled;
 - e. act in a respectful manner toward other students and the instructor and in a way that does not detract from the learning experience; and
 - f. make and keep appointments when necessary to meet with the instructor.
5. **Accommodations Statement:** If you have a documented disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation(s), you are encouraged to contact me and/or Disability Services as soon as possible to discuss your individual needs: (406) 994-2824; office: SUB, Room 180. For testing accommodation, please sign up in advance with msutestingservice@montana.edu.
6. **Student Educational Records:** All records related to this course are confidential and will not be shared with anyone, including parents, without a signed, written release. If you wish to have information from your records shared with others, you must provide written request/authorization to the office/department. Before giving such authorization, you should understand the purpose of the release and to whom and for how long the information is authorized for release. *Students have the right to access their educational records by appointment. This information is protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). For more info contact Dean of Students office at 994-2826.*
7. **Withdrawals:** Should you need to withdraw from this class, fill out a drop/withdrawal form, bring it to class for me to sign, have your academic advisor sign and finally take it to the Registrar to be processed. If you have not withdrawn by Tuesday, Nov. 22nd the grade you have earned in the course will be posted to your final transcript.
8. **Non-Discrimination Policy:** Montana State University is committed to providing a working environment for all employees and an educational environment for all students that supports and rewards career and academic goals on the basis of results and academic performance. Harassment based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, marital or parental status, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation or preference, age, disability, or veteran status is a form of discrimination and prohibited. University Non-Discrimination Policy: http://www2.montana.edu/policy/affirmative_action/aa200.html. It is our joint responsibility (mine and yours) to maintain a classroom environment which is conducive to free expression and learning. If you have a concern regarding any type of harassing or discriminating behavior, please notify me of your concerns immediately. You may also contact the Office of HR/Affirmative Action, Hamilton Hall, Room 118, email: hraa@montana.edu, phone: 994-2042.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS/READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS

Week	Topic	Assignments
8/29	The academic study of Buddhism	Read: “The Three Jewels” (D2L) and “Intro to Buddhist Scriptures” (D2L)
9/5	Buddhism overview [NO CLASS MONDAY]	Ch. 1 <i>Introducing Buddhism</i> (p. 3-23) 9/8: D2L quiz #1 due by 11:59 PM
9/12	Buddhist origins in India	Ch. 2, <i>Introducing Buddhism</i> [plus skim Ch. 5] 9/18: D2L Discussion #1, “Jataka Tales” due
9/19	The Buddha	<i>Life of the Buddha</i>
9/26	The Dharma [NO CLASS MONDAY]	9/26 (Mon.): D2L quiz #2 due —NO CLASS! Ch. 3, <i>Introducing Buddhism</i> (pg. 42-58)
10/3	Dharma (cont.)	<i>Heart of Understanding</i> 10/9: D2L Discussion #2, “Heart” due
10/10	Mahayāna Buddhism	Ch. 6, <i>Introducing Buddhism</i>
10/17	MIDTERM	Monday: Midterm Exam (in class) Watch Kundun
10/24	DalaiLama	Watch Kundun No readings due
10/31	Tibetan Buddhism	Ch. 10 <i>Introducing Buddhism</i> (skim)
11/7	Meditation [NO CLASS FRIDAY]	Ch. 7, <i>Introducing Buddhism</i>)
11/14	Buddhism in the West & Socially Engaged Buddhism	Ch. 11, 12 & 13 <i>Introducing Buddhism</i>
11/21	Quiz 3 & Thanksgiving [NO CLASS THIS WEEK, QUIZ DUE]	11/21 (Monday): Quiz #3 Due—NO CLASS Happy Thanksgiving!
11/28	Buddhism & Violence	“Buddhism and Violence” (D2L)
12/5	Zen Buddhism Final review	<i>Zen Flesh, Zen Bones</i> & “Zen: Direct Pointing” (D2L) 12/6: D2L Discussion #3, “Zen” due
12/12	FINALS	FRIDAY, 12/16: FINAL EXAM, 8:00 -9:50 am Bring a Bluebook (available at MSU bookstore)