

**PHILO & ASIA 20245 Buddhist Philosophy**  
**Tues and Thurs 9:30-10:45am DeBartolo Hall 242**

**Louise Williams [Lwilli16@nd.edu](mailto:Lwilli16@nd.edu)**

**Office Hours: Wednesdays 4-5 pm or by appointment**

REQUIRED: *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* by Jay Garfield

RECOMMENDED: *Buddhism as Philosophy* by Mark Siderits

### **Course Description**

In this course, students will explore several key philosophical issues in the Buddhist tradition. We begin by asking if we can make sense of the term “Buddhist Philosophy” and then turn to Buddhist views of the self, interdependence, ethics, and the philosophical role of meditation. The focus of this course will be on Mahayana Buddhist thought, although we will occasionally examine Theravada and Vajrayana views as well. Although many of the texts we will examine in this course come from the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, with special emphasis on Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti, and Dignaga, we will also draw on the Chinese Huayan and Tiantai traditions as well as the Japanese Zen tradition. The goal of this course is to examine questions, and proposed answers, that are critical to the Buddhist philosophical tradition.

### **Course Goals**

- (1) Describe major topics in Buddhist philosophy including what makes them distinctively philosophical
- (2) Identify major issues at stake in these debates and how those apply to contemporary issues.
- (3) Defend and critique your favored view in at least one major topic in a variety of formal and informal settings

### **Unit Goals**

In this course, you will learn about key debates in Buddhist philosophy. Issues we’ll consider include:

What is Buddhist Philosophy?	Does it make sense to talk about Buddhism outside of religion?  What is the relationship between philosophy and this tradition?
------------------------------	---

Metaphysics	<p>What is the true nature of reality?</p> <p>What is the nature of the self?</p> <p>How are the Buddhist views of these questions different than other kinds of solutions?</p>
Philosophy of Mind	<p>How do we perceive the world around us?</p> <p>What role does meditation play in changing our experience?</p> <p>What is the nature of consciousness?</p> <p>How is our mental life explained given the Buddhist answer to the nature of the self?</p>
Ethics	<p>What is right action in the Buddhist account?</p> <p>Why do Buddhists emphasize compassion and loving kindness?</p> <p>What is karma and how does it impact our understanding of complex ethical questions?</p>

This course will largely focus on Mahayana Buddhism, specifically the Tibetan Buddhist school known as Madhyamaka. However, we will bring in components from other traditions including Zen, Huayen, and Therevada Buddhism.

**READING SCHEDULE**

***Unit 1 What is Buddhist Philosophy?***

Week 1

*Buddhism as Philosophy* Siderits 1.1-1.2

*Engaging Buddhism* Garfield pp. 1-3

Week 2

*Doing Philosophy Comparatively* Global Philosophy in Connolly

[Stone Article](#)

***Unit 2 Metaphysics***

Week 3

[BBC Buddhist Universe Explanation](#)

*Engaging Buddhism* Ch 2 intro sec 1 Dependent Origination pp. 26-27 Garfield

Week 4

*Engaging Buddhism* Ch 2 intro sec 2 Impermanence pp. 40-42 Garfield

*Engaging Buddhism* 2 Truths Introduction pp. 56-59 Garfield

Week 5

[The Religions Book](#) by DK section on the self pp. 148-151

*Indian Buddhist Philosophy* The Chariot Principle pp. 43-44 Carpenter

Week 6

*Engaging Buddhism* Ch 3 Varieties of emptiness pp. 59-61 Garfield

*Engaging Buddhism* Ch 3 Madhyamakas pp. 61-62 Garfield

Week 7

REVIEW PREVIOUS MATERIAL

***Unit 3 Philosophy of Mind***

*Waking Dreaming Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation and Philosophy* What is Consciousness pp. 13 -15 Thompson

Week 8

*Engaging Buddhism* Consciousness and the Self pp. 128-131 Garfield

*Waking Dreaming Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation and Philosophy* The Question of Consciousness pp. 80-82 Thompson

Week 9

FALL BREAK – no readings

Week 10

*Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* Role of Meditation pp.70-71 Powers

Abstracts of two empirical studies

Week 11

Review Previous Material

***Unit 4 Ethics***

*Buddhism as Philosophy* Buddhist Ethics 4.3 pp. 76-77 Siderits

Week 12

*An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* “No Self” and selflessness pp. 43-44 Perrett  
[Santideva altruism]

*Engaging Buddhism* Ethics & Interdependence pp. 280-284 Garfield

Week 13

*Engaging Buddhism* Moral Perception pp. 286-287 Garfield

*Introduction to Indian Philosophy* Buddhist Ethics pp. 37-38 Perrett

Week 14

*Foundations of Buddhism* “Good Conduct” p. 169 Gethin

Week 15

*Socially Engaged Buddhism* Ch 2 Philosophy and Ethics in King

Review Readings Related to your Final Essay

Week 16

Complete Draft

Review Peer Essay Draft

*For specific dates, see the document entitled “Calendar Overview.” This document provides a calendar view of the entire course including assignment and essay due dates.*

**Assignments**

Your grade in this course is based on 1) your understanding of the Buddhist philosophical system and 2) your philosophical skill. You will be awarded credit for demonstrating these different skills. Here is the breakdown of the different assignments you can use to demonstrate these two features. You have complete control over your grade in this class—the more assignments you work through and the more class activities you participate in, the more likely you are to earn a high grade. Conversely, if

you miss class, do not complete the written assignments, or fail to be an active participant, then you are not likely to succeed.

**1) ESSAYS:** These essays are an opportunity for you to demonstrate your mastery of the Buddhist philosophical system. You will only need to draw on the homework assignments and class materials to complete these assignments. Late essays will be deducted 25% of the total points possible for each 24 hour period which passes from the deadline. Essays should be uploaded to Sakai. In total, essays are worth 5,000 points:

- ESSAY 1 – 500 points
  - Length = 1 page double spaced
  - **DUE: September 11 at 9:30am**
- ESSAY 2 – 1,000 points
  - Length = 2 pages double spaced
  - **DUE: October 23 at 9:30am**
- ESSAY 3 – 1,500 points
  - Length = 3 pages double spaced
  - **DUE: November 13 at 9:30am**
- ESSAY 4 – 2,000 points
  - Length = 5 pages double spaced
  - **DRAFT DUE: December 4<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am**
  - **DUE: December 14 at 12:30pm**

**NOTE:** You are welcome to send drafts of your essay to me up to one week prior to the essay due date. This will give me sufficient time to generate comments, and you sufficient time to modify your work accordingly.

**2) HOMEWORK:** For each day of class, you will have a reading assignment. You are to complete that assignment by the time class meets on the day it is assigned.

In addition, Monday – Thursday, you are required to upload a handwritten<sup>1</sup> 3 paragraph philosophical reflection. Each day's assignment must be submitted to the class **google folder by 11:59pm on the day it is due**. For example, your Aug 27th 3 Paragraphs must be uploaded by 11:59pm on Aug 27<sup>th</sup>.

On Tuesday and Thursday, your reflection will be guided by specific prompts released at the end of that day's lecture. For Monday and Wednesday, you are to write 3 paragraphs that engage in philosophy in some way. It is the student's responsibility to write such that the work can be read.

---

<sup>1</sup> If you have a learning difference or need an accommodation regarding hand writing 3 paragraphs, please come see me immediately.

- Prompt Guided 3 paragraphs are worth **80** points each
- Free Form 3 paragraphs are worth **42** points each

All 3 paragraph assignments are graded as either no credit or full credit. Feedback on 3 paragraph assignments will be given to the class as a whole. No written feedback will be given for 3 paragraph assignments. The student's **two lowest scores on the 3 paragraph assignment will be dropped** from the final grade calculation.

**3) PARTICIPATION:** Students are expected to attend class, and actively engage. This course is largely activity based, so it is critical that all class members work together to master the material. In total, participation is worth 1,000 points. The student's **two lowest participation scores will be dropped** from the final grade calculation.

- Each day of class is worth **52** points for participation

### **Grades and Grading Policies**

Your grade will be determined by total points earned out of a potential 10,000 points. There are no comparative assessments in this class; it is entirely up to you how well you perform. As you'll see, strong participation and regular writing can make up for your less-than-stellar performance on the essays. There are many routes to a good grade.

**A (9,500+):** This student has demonstrated a thorough knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and their philosophical skill. The student is able to both discuss and write about these topics in a sophisticated and persuasive way by exercising their philosophical abilities, apply elements of the Buddhist philosophical system in novel ways, and is an active and supportive citizen of the class.

**A- (9,000-9,499)**

**B+ (8,500-8,999)**

**B (8,300 – 8,499):** This student has demonstrated competent knowledge of the material covered in both the lectures and readings, is able to analyze arguments and present objections and replies, writes clearly, and actively participates in class activities. The student may show some difficulty in applying elements of the Buddhist philosophical system in new contexts, chose not to pursue some opportunities to develop writing and critical thinking skills, or struggled with one or two particular units in the course.

**B- (8,000 - 8,299)**

**C+ (7,500 -7,999)**

**C (7,300-7,499):** This student shows understanding of most of the material covered in the lectures and readings, demonstrates an ability to analyze

arguments from the Buddhist philosophical tradition as well as consider objections, and participates in class activities from time-to-time. However, the student does not demonstrate competency in some topics of the course, has missed or poorly composed assignments, or is unable to apply the material in new contexts.

**C- (7,000-7,299)**

**D (6,000-6,999):** This student shows understanding of some but not all of the material; serious deficiencies in writing, and may have missing or incomplete work

**F (5,999 or fewer):** This student failed to show understanding of the Buddhist philosophical tradition and may have substantial missing or incomplete work.

### **Academic Integrity**

All students must abide by the Notre Dame Honor Code: “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty.” Details are available can be found [here](#). Please note that academic dishonesty (including plagiarism and unauthorized multiple submissions of work for assignments) will not be tolerated and will be punished severely.

### **Students with Disabilities**

I am strongly committed to working with students who have any disability recognized under the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that they are able to fully participate in class activities. If you feel you require a reasonable accommodation, please follow the process described [here](#).

### **Email Policy**

I check my email once every weekday. That means I may not respond to your inquiry for up to 24 hours during the week. Please plan accordingly.