

Course Outline

SOCIAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

COURSE TITLE: Buddhist Meditation Traditions: Principles and Practice

COURSE NUMBER: Rel 231

COURSE CREDITS: 4

COURSE PREREQUISITES: None

COURSE HOURS PER WEEK: 4

Lecture: 4

Lec/Lab: 0

Lab: 0

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines a number of Buddhist meditation principles and practices, drawing on the historical Buddha, and content from the Zen, vipassana, metta, and vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhist traditions. The course will stress conceptual understanding, and making use of meditation as a cognitive tool for improving mental and emotional intelligence.

GENERAL COURSE OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of this course, the successful student will be able to:

Articulate explain the purpose and effective use of at least 10 Buddhist meditation practices examined and used during the course.

Develop a deeper understanding of one's own thought processes, feelings, attitudes, and desires and how these internal states affect one's experience of life.

Develop a greater understanding of the underlying thought processes of Western culture and how they differ from thought processes cultivated by classic Buddhist teachings drawn from Asian cultures. Acquire a better understanding of the value and weaknesses of both Eastern and Western approaches to cognition.

Develop the ability to make use of and benefit from the meditation principles and practices from the course in the context of the student's own life.

These outcomes will be verified by one or more of the following assessments:

In-class written exams.
Periodic short writing assignments.

Students will write in a meditation journal that will be evaluated by the instructor throughout the term and as a complete body of work at the end of the term.

Mid-term and Final examinations, periodic short writing assignments, and writing in a meditation journal.

Periodic short writing assignments, and meditation journal.

COURSE OUTLINE BY MAJOR TOPIC:

I. Introduction to the Study and Practice of Buddhist Meditation

Life and basic teachings of the historical Buddha

Differences between Eastern and Western approaches to life

Overview of the purpose and nature of meditation in Buddhist philosophical/religious traditions

II. Meditation Practices for Calming the Mind

Stopping our own reactivity and regaining the ability to make conscious choices regarding responding to events

Acknowledging mental content as it arises

III. Understanding Vipassana Meditation (also known as Insight Meditation)

The connection between seeing our mental processes clearly and ending unnecessary suffering

The idea of “mindfulness” in Buddhist teachings and its role in achieving increased awareness

Using immediate perceptions as a tool for increasing present moment awareness

Meditations for increasing our perception of specific aspects of the world

“Looking deeply” (“seeing the cloud in a piece of paper”)

IV. The Practice of Metta

Creating a greater capacity for compassion

Seeing the connectedness of all living beings

V. Zen Meditation Practices

“Beginner’s mind” and “expert’s mind”

Practices for decreasing our sense of separation from others and the world

VI. Vajrayana Meditation

Tonglen meditation

Chanting meditations

Use of a mantrum

VII. Guided Meditations

Guided metta practices

Guided meditations for increased self awareness

Breathing meditations

VIII. More Active Forms of Meditation

Walking meditation

Working meditation

Eating meditation