

# RE220G: ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Langenberg/Fall 2020/SIEBERT 208/Zoom Office Hours: M 1:30-3:00; T 10-2; R 10-12. In-person by appt.



## Course Description:

In the past hundred years, Asian Buddhist activists and leaders such as Thich Nhat Hanh, B. R. Ambedkar, Tenzin Gyatso (His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama), Sulak Sivaraksa, Maha Ghosananda, A. T. Ariyaratne, Chao Hwei, and Karma Lekshe Tsomo have transformed Buddhism through their insistence that Buddhism and Buddhists be socially engaged. Twentieth and twenty-first century American, Australian, and European Buddhist teachers have also combined Buddhist ethics, Buddhist patterns of community, and Buddhist practices (meditation, ritual, pilgrimage) with social and political activism, addressing issues such as war, social inequity, environmental degradation, poverty, mass incarceration, nuclear proliferation, and, more recently, sexual abuse and structural racism. In this course we take modern engaged Buddhism as our point of entry for exploring the complexities of the world's Buddhist cultures, especially the classical Buddhism of ancient India that is still an authoritative reference point for all Buddhist traditions globally, even modernist ones. We will tack from modern to ancient and back to modern, delving into the ancient roots of modern engaged Buddhism, and analyzing contemporary interpretations of the ancient teachings.

## Learning Objectives:

- That you will gain perspective, through comparison, on ethical, social, and political ideals you may assume to be universal.
- That you will come to appreciate the dynamic, changing, and diverse nature of Buddhism in particular and religion in general.
- That you will acquire a basic familiarity with the origins, institutions, and fundamental ideas of classical Buddhism
- That you will develop a critical appreciation of Buddhist ethical thought, past and present
- *What are yours?*

## **Required Texts (all other readings available on Moodle):**

Tenzin Chögyel and Kurtis Schaeffer, *The Life of the Buddha*, Penguin Classics 2015

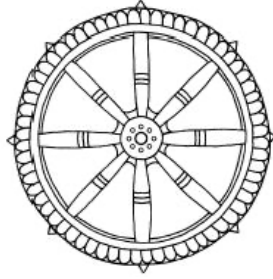
Sid Brown, *The Journey of One Buddhist Nun: Even Against the Wind*, SUNY Press, 2001

Sallie King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*, University of Hawai'i Press 2005

## **Graded Assignments:**

The assignments in this course are flexible and designed to give you space to take care of yourself and others as needed. In addition, certain assignments are self-assessed. You will notice that the assignments add up to more than 100 points, allowing you to choose not to complete certain assignments, depending on your schedule and situation. **The first 1000-word essay is, however, required of all students, as are the tweets. Showing up to and participating class is also considered a requirement.** Your grade will be assigned according to how many total points you earn.

- Written essays (each worth 15 points). Please note that only complete essays that meet the minimum length requirement, are spell-checked and grammar-checked, include citation of sources (when specified by assignment), and are turned in on time will be graded.
  - **Required:** 1000-word essay answering the question: “was the Buddha socially engaged?” (due 11.9 at midnight)
  - Write some number of the following:
    - 1000-word argumentative essay on the question of gender equity within Buddhism (due 11.23 at midnight)
    - 1000-word on the critique and/or embrace of the human rights concept by Buddhist leaders (due 11.30 at midnight)
    - 1000-word “research” paper on the Tibetan liberation movement, Dalit liberation, Buddhist environmentalism, Buddhist prison missions, or Buddhist #MeToo (due 12.13 at midnight)
- **Required:** Three Twitter threads (3 points each) with a minimum of two images and three substantial (200-280 characters) tweets on topics in Engaged Buddhism. Finish your thread with a tweet (or tweets) in which you cite your sources! Remember to include #ECRE240G so we can find your tweet. You should plan to post 2 in November and 1 in December. If you prefer you can post 1 in October, 1 in November, and 1 in December OR 3 in November. Extra credit if you comment on your classmates’ tweets (1 point for substantial comment. No points for likes, retweets or emojis (sorry) but feel free to do it anyway.
- Other assignments (weighted variously)
  - **Required: Showing up with body, speech, mind to class and discussion (self-assessed) (20 points)**
  - Participating in Slack threads (20 points)
  - Starting off Slack discussion with short (2-3 minute) video reflection (7 points) (self-assessed)
  - Leading group discussion (7 points) (self-assessed)
  - Office hour visit to discuss material (2 points, graded credit/no credit, self-assessed)
  - Reading the syllabus carefully (1 point, graded credit/no credit, self-assessed)



## SCHEDULE of TOPICS, ASSIGNMENTS, and READINGS

### I. Beginnings and Breaking News

Mon 10.26 Introduction

Watch:

- "The Buddha," by David Grubin, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6fwoaVnxDU>

Wed 10.28 What is Socially Engaged Buddhism?

Read:

- Sarah Ann Swenson, "Compassion without Pity: Buddhist *dāna* as charity, humanitarianism, and altruism" [Moodle]
- Brooke Schedneck, "Buddhist monks have reversed roles in Thailand," <https://theconversation.com/buddhist-monks-have-reversed-roles-in-thailand-now-they-are-the-ones-donating-goods-to-others-142899>

Fri 10.30 The Buddha and Black Lives Matter

Read:

- Ann Gleig, "Buddhists and Racial Justice: A History," *Tricycle*, <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/buddhists-racial-justice/>
- Edwin Ng, "Fuck Your Right Speech (Are you Listening?)" [Moodle]
- Hebah Farrag and Ann Gleig, "Far from being anti-religious, faith and spirituality run deep in Black Lives Matter," *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/far-from-being-anti-religious-faith-and-spirituality-run-deep-in-black-lives-matter-145610>

Watch and listen:

- Lama Rod Owens, "Buddhist Practice, Healing, Meditation, and Racial Justice," <https://www.lamarod.com/blog/2019/5/3/buddhist-practice-meditation-healing-and-racial-justice>

Mon 11.2 A Buddhist Origin Story

Read:

- *Aggañña Sutta* ("The Knowledge of Beginnings Scripture") [Moodle]

### II. Exemplary (Engaged?) Buddhist Lives

Wed 11.4 The Story of the Buddha's life

Read:

- Tenzin Chögyel, *The Life of the Buddha* (entire)

#### Fri 11.6 The Enlightenment

Read:

- "The Dialogue with Prince Bodhi" [Moodle]

#### Mon 11.9 The Nuns

Read:

- Strong, "The Acceptance of Women into the Order," (63-68) [Moodle]
- *Therigatha*, excerpts [Moodle]

**Due at midnight: 1000-essay answering the question: "Did the Buddha lead a socially engaged life?"**

#### Wed 11.11 A contemporary nun's story

Read:

- Sid Brown, *Even Against the Wind*, 1-61

#### Fri 11.13 Meditation

Read:

- *Satipatthana Sutta* ("Establishing Mindfulness") [Moodle]
- "The Stilling of Thoughts" [Moodle]
- Brown, 62-105

Listen and try:

- <https://mindfulnessexercisess.com/short-meditations/>

#### Mon 11.16 A robed revolution

Read:

- Brown, 106-136
- Susanne Mrozik, "A Robed Revolution: The Contemporary Buddhist Nuns Movement" [Moodle]

### III. Empty Selves Acting: Peace, Justice, Human Rights

#### Wed 11.18 Building from tradition

Read:

- King, 1-41
- Thich Nhat Hanh, "Call Me by my True Names" [Moodle]

#### Fri 11.20 Thich Nhat Hanh's activism during (and after) the war

Read:

- TNH, *Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, excerpt [Moodle]
- TNH, "The Five Wonderful Precepts," [Moodle]

#### Mon 11.23 Human Rights

Read:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- King, 118-163

**Due at midnight: 1000-word argumentative essay on the gender question in Buddhism. Is gender inequity at the heart of Buddhist traditions and institutions? Take a position for or against.**

Wed 11.25 Violence and nonviolence

Read:

- King, 164-201
- Santideva, "Tolerance," [Moodle]

Fri 11.27 Thanksgiving break

Mon 11.30 the Tibetan Liberation Movement

Read:

- José Ignacio Cabezón, "Buddhist Principles in the Tibetan Liberation Movement" [Moodle]
- Wooser, *Tibet on Fire*, 1-27 [Moodle]
- Jack Downey, "A Metaphor for the Planet," <https://thebaffler.com/latest/metaphor-for-the-planet-downey>

**Due at midnight: 1000-essay on Buddhism and Human Rights**

#### IV. Engaged Buddhist Resistance, Movements, and Ministries

Wed 12. 2 Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in India

Read:

- Pankaj Mishra, "God's Oppressed Children" [Moodle]
- Christopher Queen, "Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation" [Moodle]

Fri 12.4 Buddhist environmentalism

Read:

- Barbara Clayton, "Buddha's Maritime Nature: A Case Study in Shambhala Buddhist Environmentalism," <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2013/09/Clayton-Maritime-final.pdf>
- Orgyen Trinley Dorje, "Walking the Path of Environmental Buddhism through Compassion and Emptiness" [Moodle]

Mon 12.7 Prison missions

Read:

- "A Murderer Becomes a Monk" [Moodle]
- Parkum and Stultz, "The Angulimala Lineage and Buddhist Prison Ministries," [Moodle]
- Robina Courtin, "Working with People in Prison" [Moodle]

Wed 12.9 Buddhist #MeToo

Read:

- Ann Gleig, "Sexual Violence in American Buddhism: Interpretive Frameworks and Generative Responses," <http://blog.shin-ibs.edu/sexual-violations-in-american-buddhism-interpretive-frameworks-and-generative-responses/>
- Lama Willa B. Miller, "Breaking the Silence on Sexual Misconduct," <https://www.lionsroar.com/breaking-the-silence-on-sexual-misconduct/>
- Rebecca Jamieson, "Woven: Leaving Shambhala," <https://entropymag.org/woven-leaving-shambhala/>

## Fri 12.11 Final thoughts

Listen:

- Lama Rod Owen and Justin Budjoss, "Talking Sexual Misconduct, Charlottesville, Power, and Buddhism," <https://www.lamarod.com/blog/2019/5/3/talking-sexual-misconduct-charlottesville-power-and-buddhism>

## Mon 12.13

**Due at midnight: "Research" paper on an engaged Buddhist movement or intervention**



## FORMAT

This class is "high-flex." Two-thirds of our class will be attending in-person and one-third will be attending remotely. If you are learning remotely this term, you will find the Zoom link for class on Moodle. We will have an in-depth conversation about how we will manage this format on the first day of class.

## COMMUNICATION WITH ME

I will be holding regular office hours on Zoom and scheduled office hours in person by appointment only. My Zoom office hours are noted at the top of the syllabus. You will find the zoom link to my office hours is on Moodle. I check my email and phone regularly and will respond within 24 hours (though I am usually quicker than that!).

Part of your obligation as a student in this class is to read and, if necessary, respond to emails I or anyone else in the class sends to you regarding course goings-on. **Check your email regularly! Very important!**

## SLACK

We will be using the Slack app to discuss readings at times. Sometimes Slack discussions will occur in real time during class. Sometimes you will complete them before or after class. You will receive an invitation to our class channel on Slack via email. You are required to post at least one 150-200-word comment, and at least one 100 word-response to someone else's comment during each Slack session. You will probably write more, however, as Slack is an energizing space.

Once during the semester, you are invited to initiate our Slack discussions with a 2-3 minute video reflection. You will post your reflection to our class channel on Slack. The class will respond. This assignment is self-assessed. I will share a sign-up sheet for Slack video reflection slots with you in google docs.

*Your Slack participation is worth 20% of your grade. You will receive one point for every Slack discussion, assuming your participation is substantial. At the end of the term, I will add up your points earned and divide by the total number of Slack discussions to find your grade.*

## SELF-ASSESSMENT

Certain assignments for this class will be “self-assessed”. You can find the information about which assignments are self-assessed under the “Graded Assignments” section of the syllabus (page 2). “Self-assessed” means that you will keep track of your performance and offer a brief written reflection on how well you worked/learned. You will also suggest a grade for yourself. I am the final decision-maker regarding grades in this class (part of the unavoidable responsibilities of my institutional role), but I will take your self-assessment for the relevant assignments seriously when I calculate grades at the end of the term. When you assign yourself a grade, please keep in mind that even an “A” performance is unlikely to earn you 100% of the available points for any given assignment. I reserve 100% for very very excellent historically special and rare efforts.

Self-assessment will be recorded on a single form, the “self-assessment form,” which I will share with you on via email and also post to our class Moodle site. You will fill out this form as you complete assignments for the course and return it to me at the end of the term.



## OTHER IMPORTANT CLASS POLICIES

*Late Assignments:* Given the shortened schedule of this term, I cannot grant extensions on written assignments unless a very serious emergency has arisen.

*Accommodations:* If you have a disability or believe that you qualify for accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or other laws, please contact The Office of Accessibility at extension 7724 or via email at [accessibility@eckerd.edu](mailto:accessibility@eckerd.edu) as soon as possible. Appropriate accommodations can only be arranged through that office, located in Brown Hall 101, and may not be made retroactively. The request form for accommodations can be found at [eckerd.edu/aes/academic-accommodations/](http://eckerd.edu/aes/academic-accommodations/).

*The Eckerd College Honor Code:* Students will adhere strictly to the Eckerd College Honor Code and will pledge their honesty by writing the following statement on all examinations and papers: “On my honor, as an Eckerd College Student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to tolerate these behaviors in others” or simply “Pledged” and your signature. Violations of the Honor Code will be referred to the EC Academic Honor Council (AHC). Typically, a first offense violation of the Honor Code will result in failure in the course and a letter documenting academic dishonesty in the student’s file. In this course, violations of the Honor Code may include, but are not limited to: 1) failure to cite all sources used in the preparation of written work according to MLA, Harvard, or Chicago style guidelines; 2) use of another’s written work unless specifically authorized by me; 3) lying about your reasons for being absent to class or delinquent with an assignment, or providing fraudulent written excuses.

*Use of the Internet:* As a general rule, the internet should not be used as a source for reliable scholarly information, unless you can be sure that the on-line material is a reproduction from a scholarly journal or unless the website itself originates from a well-established academic venue (e.g. academic journals that publish on-line, scholarly conference proceedings that are posted electronically, and in some cases even lectures posted on-line by professors at other colleges or universities). If, however, you do choose to consult the internet in the preparation of essays, blogs, or other written or oral assignments, you must cite the web resource specifically, just as you would cite a book or an article in hard-copy format. Please understand that using internet material, whether directly quoted or merely summarized, without the proper citation constitutes a violation of the honor code.

*Title IX Reporting Policy:* Eckerd College is committed to fostering a campus community based on respect and nonviolence. To this end, we recognize that all Eckerd community members are responsible for ensuring that our community is free from discrimination, gender bias, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. In accordance with Title IX, Eckerd is legally obligated to investigate incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault that occur on our campus.

Faculty who become aware of an incident of sexual violence, including harassment, rape, sexual assault, relationship violence, or stalking, are required by law to notify Eckerd's Title IX Coordinator. The purpose of this disclosure is to ensure that students are made aware of their reporting options and resources for support. For more information about your rights and reporting options at Eckerd, including confidential and anonymous reporting options, please visit <http://www.eckerd.edu/titleix/>.

*Anti-racism:* Eckerd College faculty strives to practice and support inclusion, diversity, and antiracism. This means our class will value differences in race, nationality, social class, ability, gender identity, age, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Antiracism is a set of individual and institutional practices that actively involves confronting racism and eliminating racial inequity in everyday life. Eckerd College faculty are committed to making antiracist and inclusive choices in the classroom. Knowing that good education is at times necessarily uncomfortable, we acknowledge that remarks may be made that offend and/or challenge individual biases. As Layla F. Saad explains, "being called out/in is not a deterrent to the work. It is part of the work." For further support, reach out to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion by email: [inclusion@eckerd.edu](mailto:inclusion@eckerd.edu) or phone: 727.864.8841. To share concerns or suggestions about diversity, equity, and inclusion in the academic program and beyond, contact Eckerd's Diversity Action Council at [diversityactioncouncil@eckerd.edu](mailto:diversityactioncouncil@eckerd.edu)

