

**JIVAKA PROJECT
SAMPLE SYLLABUS:
BUDDHISM IN THE US
(6 WEEK SUMMER CLASS VERSION)**

COURSE SUMMARY

This course focuses on Buddhism in the United States. It provides a overview of the historical factors that led to the development of Buddhism in the U.S., the many traditions that currently exist in the U.S., the role of Buddhism in the daily lives of different types of Americans, and various problems or frameworks that have characterized American Buddhism (such as race, gender, technology, and media representations). One major theme of the course is meditation, which is explored through interdisciplinary perspectives (including looking at meditation technologies, such as virtual reality, mobile apps, and other popular meditation aides). Another major focus for the class is Buddhism in Philadelphia, which we will explore through guided site-visits to local temples for ethnographic observation. Throughout the semester, students will interact with an online ethnographic database on American Buddhism, and will gain experience working with online demographic mapping tools, newspaper archives, and other digital research technologies.

TEXTBOOK

The required book for this course is:

- Scott Mitchell, *Buddhism in America: Global Religion, Local Contexts* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

All other required readings on the syllabus below are to be found on the course management system webpage for this class.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

* Note: The following schedule is a prototype for a 6-week summer course. It is based on Penn State University's requirement that a semester-long course include 37.5 hours of instruction. The assumption is that students can be granted 10.5 hours for the three site visits, and that the remainder be split over three 90-minute sessions on MWF. Of course, this can be adjusted as necessary for individual circumstances.

1. Introduction

Topics covered in class this week:

- (M) Introductions & overview of syllabus
- (W) Lecture: What is Buddhism?

- (F) Introduction to the Jivaka Project (www.jivaka.net)

Recommended reading for advanced students and faculty:

- David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford University Press, 2008) — essential background reading on modern Buddhism in global context.

2. History of Buddhism in the West

Student reading assignment for this week:

- Mitchell introduction, ch 1–4

Topics covered in class this week:

- (M) Keywords quiz and discussion of readings
- (W) Lecture: Ethnographic ethics and methods
- (F) Lecture: Practicalities and strategies for visiting Buddhist temples

Recommended reading for faculty and advanced students:

- Wakoh Shannon Hickey, *Meditation as Medicine* (forthcoming) — on the reception of Buddhism in 19th century USA.

3. Traditions of American Buddhism

Student reading assignment for this week:

- Mitchell ch 5–8

Topics covered in class this week:

- (M) Keywords quiz and discussion of readings
- (W) Watch documentary film *Exclusion Act*. Student response questions: How has racism structured American immigration policy and civil rights, and how have Buddhists reacted to these trends? (350 words).
- (F) Library Lab: Searching for Buddhism in historical local newspapers.

Recommended reading for advanced students and faculty:

- Richard H. Seager, *Buddhism in America* (Columbia University Press, 2012) — Part 2 offers more details into specific lineages in the US (Jodo Shinshu, Sokka Gakai, etc.), “Profiles” offers short introductions to influential American Buddhists.
- Wendy Cadge, *Heartwood* (University of Chicago Press, 2004) — on early Theravada communities.

Weekend: Site visit #1

4. Problematizing “American Buddhism”

Student reading assignment for this week:

- Mitchell ch 9–12

Topics covered in class this week:

- (M) Keywords quiz and discussion of readings
- (W) Library Lab: Mapping local demographics using Social Explorer.

- (F) Oral presentations on site visit #1: Discuss your experiences, and any troubles you had in carrying out the assignment. Introduce the temple using the temple data sheet, illustrated with the multimedia materials you acquired. Include a summary of the demographic shifts of the neighborhood from 1960s to the present based on Social Explorer, using screenshots of maps as evidence to corroborate the story you are telling. Also include any relevant information from local newspapers about this temple or other local temples operated by this particular group.

Recommended reading for advanced students and faculty:

- Scott Mitchell and Natalie Quli, *Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States* (SUNY Press, 2015) — individual essays offer analyses that complicate the category of “American Buddhism” in various ways.

Weekend: Site visit #2

5. Race and American Buddhism

Student reading assignment for this week:

- Wakoh Shannon Hickey, “[Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism](#),” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 11 (2010).
- Natalie Quli, “[Western Self, Asian Other: Modernity, Authenticity, and Nostalgia for 'Tradition' in Buddhist Studies](#),” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 16 (2009).
- Chenxing Han, “[We’re not who you think we are](#),” *Lion’s Roar* (2017).
- Funie Hsu, “[We’ve been here all along](#),” *Lion’s Roar* (2017).

Topics covered in class this week:

- (M) Discussion of readings
- (W) Watch documentary film “Aloha Buddha.” Student response questions: What challenges and obstacles did Japanese immigrants face in practicing Buddhism in the US, and how was American Buddhism transformed in response to these challenges? (350 words).
- (F) Oral presentations on site visit #2

Recommended reading for advanced students and faculty:

- J Cheah, *Race and Religion in American Buddhism: White Supremacy and Immigrant Adaptation* (Oxford University Press, 2011). — race analysis of American Buddhist history, with focus on Burmese Theravada community.
- Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2011) — see especially chps. 2 and 4, which discuss stereotypes about Asian religions prevalent in American popular culture.

Weekend: Site visit #3

6. Meditation and wellness

Student reading assignment for this week:

- Ron Purser and David Loy, “[Beyond McMindfulness](#),” *Huffington Post* blog (2013).

- Geoffrey Samuel, [“The contemporary mindfulness movement and the question of nonself,”](#) *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52.4 (2014).
- Ira Helderman, [“Drawing the Boundaries between ‘Religion’ and ‘Secular’ in Psychotherapists’ Approaches to Buddhist Traditions in the United States,”](#) *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84.4 (2016).
- Ann Gleig, [“External Mindfulness, Secure \(Non\)–Attachment, and Healing Relational Trauma: Emerging Models of Wellness for Modern Buddhists and Buddhist Modernism,”](#) *Journal of Global Buddhism* 17 (2016).

Topics covered in class this week:

- (M) Discussion of readings
- (W) Guest speaker or lecture: Introduction to the practice of meditation.
- OR, watch the film “Dhamma Brothers.” Student response questions: How do the concepts introduced in Mitchell’s discussion of “Buddhist modernism” and “engaged Buddhism” (in Part 3 of the book) help us to make sense of the program introduced in the film? Do you think that Buddhist-inspired meditation has a role in the modern American penal system, particularly in a place where local religious mores lead to resistance? (350 words).
- (F) Oral presentations on site visit #3

Recommended reading for advanced students and faculty:

- Jeff Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2014) — detailed examination of history and issues surrounding mindfulness.
- Selections from David McMahan & Erik Braun, *Meditation, Buddhism, and Science* (Oxford University Press, 2017) — a range of sociocultural perspectives on the dialogue/encounter between Buddhist meditation and science.

Final exam

GRADING

The grades for this course will be calculated as follows:

Keywords quizzes	20 points
Film responses	15 points
Temple visits materials	20 (surveys, media, demographic data)
Oral presentations	15
Final exam	20
Effort & engagement	10