**A close up of a logo

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SPEAKERS

Kate – Kate Hartmann

Sarah – Richardson

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00:00:01:02 - 00:00:15:26

**Kate:** All of us are kind of responsible for bringing about the kind of world that we want to live in, and I think a world in which religion is treated with a kind of sense of history and diversity and respect is a world that I want us to live in.

00:00:17:27 - 00:00:38:20

**Sarah:** Hello and welcome to this episode of The Circled Square, the podcast where we talk about teaching Buddhist Studies in higher education. My name is Sarah Richardson and I teach at the University of Toronto. In this episode, I'm meeting with the wonderful Kate Hartmann, who is an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Wyoming. Hi, Kate. How are you?

00:00:38:29 - 00:00:42:08

**Kate:** Good. It's so good to be here with you, Sarah. Thanks to you for having me on.

00:00:42:26 - 00:00:55:26

**Sarah:** Thank you so much for being here. I should have also said in your intro you are also the director of Buddhist Studies Online. So we're going to be talking about your teaching both at the University of Wyoming and also in directing that project that you've started.

00:00:56:02 - 00:00:57:16

**Kate:** Yes, I'm excited to talk about both.

00:00:58:00 - 00:01:04:23

**Sarah:** So I wanted to start by asking you kind of simply who are you and what are your current projects?

00:01:05:24 - 00:02:15:02

**Kate:** Yes. So as you said, my name is Kate Hartmann. I am a relatively recent PhD grad, having gotten my degree in May 2020. Shortly thereafter, in the fall of 2020, I started here at the University of Wyoming, where I teach Buddhism in particular, but just Asian religions more generally. I'm the Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation professor in Asian Religions here, so many expressions of gratitude to the Robert H.N Ho Family Foundation in Buddhist Studies, which I know help support this podcast as well. My primary research is on the history of Tibetan pilgrimage, but I'm also a person who likes to keep sort of varied interests and projects otherwise things get old real fast. So I had presented a paper on the opacity of karma, I've written about the modern Tibetan short story writer, Dhondup Gyel, and I'm currently starting a larger project on Buddhism, addiction, and recovery, and the ways that the uptake of Buddhism in the modern West has overlapped and informed addiction recovery communities. So that's very much on the horizon, but I'm pretty excited about it.

00:02:16:22 - 00:03:19:06

**Sarah:** I laughed a little bit when you said May 2020, because we also should acknowledge for the future aliens listening to this that that means you were hired and started your job at like the very beginning of the pandemic that we're all still sort of begrudgingly living through. But I meant to say with that, it also must have been just a wild and crazy time to actually take the big step of becoming a professor or taking up your first big academic position in the midst of a pandemic that was demanding all sorts of flexibility, I guess, from all of us around our teaching. So I guess I want to start with asking you how was your teaching at the University of Wyoming affected, and then also how was that different and or how did that contribute to what you dreamed up as Buddhist Studies Online? So sorry that's a kind of double pronged question, but we'll start maybe with how was the teaching at University of Wyoming affected by this pandemic for you?

00:03:20:07 - 00:04:15:09

**Kate:** It's interesting insofar as in some ways it was easier for me to start during the pandemic. So a lot of my colleagues here in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department have been teaching for 20 or 30 years and they have a way that they do things so when they were forced to move online it required changing everything. Whereas me, fresh out of grad school, I created my classes to be taught hybrid. So I wasn't faced with the task of changing something I'd done for a long time, I could really start from scratch and say, what's the thing that I want to get across and how can I make this work for my students? Probably half who were in-person and half who were online, and the way that I taught it you could kind of move between modalities. So let's say a student was primarily coming in person, but then their roommate tested positive, they were quarantined, they could be online for a little bit, they could come back. So I really got to do that from scratch.

00:04:15:29 - 00:04:16:24

**Sarah:** That's so cool.

00:04:17:10 - 00:05:01:29

**Kate:** Yeah. What I ended up going for was kind of a flipped classroom. So my in-person students and the online students would watch short 15 minute videos. They would do readings on this collaborative annotation app called Perusall, and what's nice about Perusall is you upload the PDFs and then students can sort of highlight and comment on things in the text, and then they can respond to each other's comments, they can answer each other's questions, they can upvote/downvote, post reaction gifs, and it keeps track of how many comments people have done on the reading. So one nice thing about that is that it enables you to kind of make students accountable for reading, which otherwise might be the thing that they're most inclined to skip.

00:05:03:02 - 00:05:03:17

**Sarah:** Right.

00:05:03:19 - 00:05:24:11

**Kate:** For my in-person students, we would often meet outside because I was trying to minimize risk and just discuss. So that was where you had discussions and activities, and the online students would do that in an online discussion forum. So sort of equivalent activities, but with each other online, whereas the in-person students we did that together.

00:05:24:25 - 00:05:32:10

**Sarah:** Right, and online, did you monitor that group when they were online discussing? Or did you leave them kind of to their own devices?

00:05:33:04 - 00:06:16:03

**Kate:** Left them to their own devices in the sense that it was asynchronous. So at certain points in the semester I did actually have a tri-modal thing where some students were live in person, some students were live on Zoom, and some students were totally asynchronous. But I actually found live on Zoom was my least favorite modality, and I'd rather focus all of my attention on the students there in-person and for the students who wanted the online flexibility, they could do that, and then I'm grading those assignments, I'm responding to discussion boards. So I'm definitely keeping tabs, interacting with those students, but not sort of live in person trying to monitor both a Zoom chat and an in-person chat.

00:06:16:24 - 00:06:35:20

**Sarah:** This is really refreshing actually to hear because you sound so positive about the experience. So did it feel productive? Like did it feel like productive teaching, like you were able to get through to both groups the same kinds of things? Or do you feel like they were absorbing material differently in those across those modalities?

00:06:36:14 - 00:07:11:15

**Kate:** I definitely felt that there was a greater sort of distribution for my online students. Some students did really well, and those are often students who would have chosen to be online anyway. At the University of Wyoming where I teach you actually can get a Religious Studies major entirely online, and we do have a couple of faculty members who teach entirely online. They were the experts that I turned to. In some ways, those of us who taught in-person and had to go to crisis online forgot that there was this whole class of people who've been teaching online professionally for years now, and they have great things to teach us.

00:07:13:05 - 00:08:15:29

**Kate:** So some students were used to and well equipped to do the online. Other students, I think, would not have been online except for the pandemic, and those students, I think, definitely struggled. So I had a much greater percentage, I think, than I would have had had it been all in person of students who at seven weeks drop off the face of the earth, and you'd never hear from them again, you know? Whereas I felt that some of those students, had I had them in person, once I have your attention I can work with that. I can draw you in, I can get you to do some activity. But with the barrier of the computer, and with students struggling with mental health, students who feel they need to be working to support themselves or their families, it's relatively easier for students in that situation to kind of check out a little bit and that was something that those students themselves would readily admit, that I learned better in persob But it's easier for me to be online because of work, family, X, Y or Z.

00:08:16:23 - 00:08:33:17

**Sarah:** So tell me a bit more about Perusall. Perusall sounds very cool. I've heard about it before, but not that much. So you're saying you upload PDFs and then they can annotate them and ask each other questions and everything on the PDF, it's like a collaborative kind of Google doc or something?

00:08:34:22 - 00:09:31:09

**Kate:** You know, a lot of us in the humanities think of ourselves as fundamentally concerned with primary source literature. We want to teach our students how to read critically, and yet reading is the thing that our students can be the worst at. Partially because some of them think of reading as like, I'm going to look at this word and then that word and then that word, and you looked at all the words so therefore you've done the reading. That's a good case scenario some of the time... So the problem then is if you get to class and you want to have an interesting discussion, but if people haven't done the reading they can't have an interesting discussion, so you end up trying to print out like little versions of things. You might come in thinking that students want to talk about A, B or C, but actually they were confused about X, Y or Z. Perusall solves a lot of these problems. Essentially it's a free program, you don't have to pay for it, and it plugs in really easily to a lot of learning platforms.

00:09:31:11 - 00:10:24:14

**Kate:** So I teach through Canvas and you can set that up really seamlessly. The grading and everything is done within Canvas. Students just have to create a Perusall log in but then you upload PDFs to Perusall and you say "I require five annotations, and if you do five annotations you get credit for this assignment, and if you don't do five annotations you don't get credit for it". Perusall also has some degree of creepy AI analysis where they'll determine the quality of a student's comments. I've turned all of that off. What's nice is, let's say if I'm discussing something on a Tuesday class, I make it due at midnight on Monday, and then I get to look at their comments before we're in class. I know who's done the reading and what they've been confused about, and again, it just prioritizes reading as fundamental to everything that we do.

00:10:25:00 - 00:10:40:25

**Sarah:** So you've made it like trackable and incentivized... Because you're absolutely right, I mean, it's still something I struggle with all the time, is getting students to read. You're right, we always say we're trying to teach them to read critically, but this sounds like a really cool tool to help with that.

00:10:41:09 - 00:11:26:29

**Kate:** And students really respond to it. I've had a lot of students in their course evaluations mention that they really liked it, and in particular it works for the online students because that's particularly a space where you're missing out on that interaction with students. But insofar as they were interacting in the Perusall comments, they got to know each other a bit more. I make it clear to students, like if you post like a reaction gif or something funny or a joke, like that counts. I don't need your comments to be smart or to be analyzing it all the time, just lowering the barrier, but getting interaction with the text and interaction with each other actually helps create a sense of community that I think students really responded to.

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**Sarah:** Were you often doing this with primary sources? Were you often doing this with like sutras and translation and stuff?

00:11:33:21 - 00:12:34:25

**Kate:** You know, this is always a question for those of us in Buddhist Studies. How do you balance kind of tertiary source material... What can be confusing is that students actually really often like a tertiary source, it helps them kind of place things in what they understand to be an understandable map. So I'll often have a textbook source as an optional reading, but focus mostly on primary sources. So yeah, these are primary sources, they have the benefit of being relatively short. Another nice thing about Perusall is that I can post comments in the reading, so I'll post certain reading questions at the beginning of the reading or at a paragraph. Sometimes a Buddhist sutta can just like go off on something that's unrelated and students get bogged down in the details, you post a little note saying "what's important about this paragraph is X, note that this is what they're talking about but you don't have to worry about X, Y or Z", or posing a question that they'll have to answer.

00:12:35:25 - 00:12:38:16

**Sarah:** This is a hybrid? This is called hybrid or Hyflex?

00:12:38:18 - 00:13:42:28

**Kate:** Yes, so the Hyflex system was actually created before the pandemic. In some sense, again, we tend to think of online education solutions as having emerged in crisis reactions to the pandemic, but there's been folks who've been doing this for a long time. So Hyflex, I understand it, was created for master's degree students who had other careers. So it was designed to be really flexible insofar as one week you could be in-person, the next week you'd be online, you could switch between modalities and that sort of thing. The goal of Hyflex, as I understand it, is to be really resilient. So the pandemic is a great example of something that happened and we needed to change our teaching. But let's say a student has an illness, or a death in the family, or let's say you're teaching in someplace that's affected by climate change and there's disasters and there's a big storm. The goal of resilient teaching is to have things in place before there's an emergency, such that there's a kind of ready plan made in case contingency arises.

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**Kate:** So this question of how to make all of our teaching resilient in case another wave comes or something happens is something that had been thought about in the Hyflex community for a long time. So I've adapted a lot of materials from them. But it's certainly not something without its costs. I do think that a certain subsegment of students do really well, and a certain subsegment of students get lost in this.

00:14:08:05 - 00:14:21:16

**Sarah:** Yeah, resilient teaching. I love that term. So can you tell us a bit about Buddhist Studies Online? What is this wonderful thing? What are its goals? How has it been going? What's up with that?

00:14:21:22 - 00:15:55:11

**Kate:** Yeah. So my alter ego is as the director of Buddhist Studies Online. This is a online educational platform started by Seth Powell and myself back in April of last year, April 2021. So the goal of Buddhist Studies Online is to provide accessible, affordable, high quality courses on the history, philosophy, and practices of Buddhism to an online global audience. The kind of motivation behind that was that we said there's lots of interest in mindfulness, meditation, yoga, Buddhism, X, Y and Z, you can just see that if you're at the checkout in any grocery store, half the magazine covers are about mindfulness. Meanwhile there's this great, thriving academic community of Buddhist Studies, and there's relatively little overlap there. I think this is growing. Podcasts like this, folks like Sacred Rights or on Twitter, you can see this hashtag #SmartInPublic. There's more and growing instances of academia reaching out to this broader audience that's interested. But we still saw a gap there so we wanted to do is take the resources of the academy, the kind of rigor, the scholarship, the training, and bring it to this general audience that's interested and that otherwise might be consuming kind of garbage nonsense on Instagram and YouTube. There's a lot of stuff out there and we as academics should be proactively reaching out to that community.

00:15:56:06 - 00:15:56:21

**Sarah:** Yeah!

00:15:56:24 - 00:16:32:24

**Kate:** So the courses are 4 to 6 weeks and they're online, they're taught by top scholars in Buddhist studies who ordinarily would teach these classes that A) are expensive if you don't have two years and a couple hundred thousand dollars to go to Harvard or something like that, and B) they're doing this great work, but again, it's for this very small audience. So the courses that we have aim to replicate, it's never going to be the exact same as what you would get in a university level Buddhist studies course, but oriented towards an interested public who doesn't necessarily have a lot of experience.

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**Kate:** Often our audience are people who maybe have a meditation practice or maybe have been sort of interested readers, maybe they subscribe to Tricycle but have never taken a formal course, or maybe they're someone in midlife or have recently retired who took courses in the past and kind of want to get back into that, but that's hard unless you enroll in a graduate program. So what's nice about that is it scales really easily. You can teach people online across the world, and just making this scholarship more available to people and giving people opportunities to engage in this deep way. So we very much are not teaching Buddhism, we're not teaching meditation. We leave that to qualified teachers in sort of lineage-based traditions. We are providing this academic, historically grounded perspective, but one that we think can be compatible with people of any or no practice, in any or no tradition.

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**Sarah:** And how has it been going? What's the turnout like? Are you having good response in terms of reaching out to students?

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**Kate:** Yeah. So we've been successful, and I should say that Buddhist Studies Online is based on the model of Seth Powell's previous company that he started in the same exact model about three years ago. It's called Yogic Studies, Y-O-G-I-C Studies, which similarly, lots of people interested in yoga, not a lot of great historical information available to the public, let's get scholars of this to do public oriented courses. So this was a model that he had been successful with already for a couple of years and during COVID people reached out to him saying, "hey, when are you going to do this for Buddhism?" because lots of people are interested in yoga and Buddhism. So whereas yoga studies is more focused on the yoga thing, we wanted to create something similar for Buddhism. So it's been very popular. I think there's been about 250 students in the first course that we taught and between 150 and 200 students in each of the courses that we've had so far.

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**Kate:** The courses are set up so that it's a blend of prerecorded lectures that are released on a monday, students watch them on their own time, there's readings associated. There's a multiple choice quiz that's associated, and then there's optional live Q&A sessions with the instructor on Fridays. Obviously not everyone can make them. It's hard to find a time that works for our global student body. But folks can come in, they can post questions on our discussion forum, the instructor addresses these questions and they get a bit of live interaction, and then those sessions are recorded and posted for anyone who can't attend. So it's a nice blend of totally pre-recorded material that is very flexible, but also the opportunity for live interaction with fellow students and the instructor.

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**Sarah:** That's very cool. What are the courses? What have the topics of the courses been so far?

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**Kate:** So I taught the first one, Buddhist Studies Online 101, Intro to Buddhism: History, Philosophy and Practices. What's also nice about these courses, I should say, is that they're all still up, so they run live but because everything is recorded they stay online in a way that other people can take them later. So people can still enroll in this. Then we did 102, Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice, taught by Daniel Stewart of the University of South Carolina. Then we had 103, Indian Buddhist Philosophy taught by Dr. Karin Meyers. Then we had a class on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* taught by Jay Garfield. So we split classes, we have 100 level classes that are sort of survey classes oriented at beginners, and then we have 200 level classes that are text focused. So Jay Garfield's was 201, focussed on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Maria Haim is just now finishing up 202 on the *Visuddhimagga*, *The Path of Purification* by Buddhaghosa. Then our next course that we just opened enrollment for is going to be taught by Connie Cassor on Tibetan Buddhism, that's 104. We also have classes lined up taught by Jue Liang, Buddhism and Women. Jeff Barstow is going to teach a class on Buddhism and animal ethics, we have one on Buddhism and the climate crisis taught by Dan Cozort, Buddhist art history taught by Becky Bloom, and then various others that are sort of in the pipeline. I'm consulting with instructors and so to the audience that listens to this, if you're interested in teaching for Buddhist Studies Online, send us an email at info@buddhiststudiesonline.com.

00:21:15:11 - 00:21:34:00

**Sarah:** Wonderful, info@buddhiststudiesonline.com. Okay, great. This is very cool. I love this idea. So do you see yourself in this work as a public intellectual? Do you see yourself as a public intellectual, is that the goal?

00:21:34:08 - 00:21:35:15

**Kate:** Maybe aspiring...

00:21:38:16 - 00:21:39:10

**Sarah:** No, you're doing!

00:21:40:19 - 00:22:50:21

**Kate:** Part of this is influenced by, again, the Robert H.N Ho Family Foundation in Buddhist Studies, many thanks to them who supported my dissertation research, this job, this podcast, and from what I understand, just a few days ago they launched this public scholarship initiative where the goal is to take experts in these particular fields and connect them with an interested public. What's interesting about that is that it's hard to talk to the public. One, it's hard to get their attention, two it's hard to do it kind of responsibly, and three, it's hard because you don't get a lot of institutional recognition for this. None of this stuff counts for tenure or job applications for many of us in the field. So another sort of aspiring public intellectual thing that I did recently is there's a YouTube channel called ReligionForBreakfast, and it's run by this guy, Dr. Andrew Mark Henry who is a scholar of early Christianity and early Roman religion but has this YouTube channel aimed at providing short, entertaining 10 to 15 minute videos that are sort of explainers in subjects of religious interest.

00:22:50:23 - 00:23:33:23

**Kate:** So he just did one on Maya religion, he has series on Confucianism, I looked at the one on Shinto before I was teaching Shinto to my Religions of Asia class, and he contacted me to help write a series on Buddhism because he writes the ones that are in his field but when he wants to do religions of Asia, that's not his field, he contracts with scholars and gets them write these videos that then he sort of presents. So I wrote this three part series on what is Buddhism, who is the Buddha, what's meditation and mindfulness, and what's crazy is this is probably the most popular thing I've ever done. It has 330,000 views or something like that as of last count. For a while I was sort of obsessively checking it.

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**Sarah:** Wow. 330,000 views. Wow!

00:23:38:08 - 00:23:40:19

**Kate:** And that's like an average video for his channel, you know?

00:23:40:21 - 00:23:42:12

**Sarah:** Wow. That's so cool.

00:23:42:21 - 00:24:07:15

**Kate:** It's great reach and it's a useful resource. So again, when I'm teaching online I try to assign students a lot of videos and things, something that's going to seem to them a bit more accessible than readings. Really during COVID when you couldn't go on the normal field trip I would have to local religious communities or something like that, just YouTube videos that show lived religion, to the extent that you can.

00:24:08:17 - 00:24:26:29

**Sarah:** Yeah, there's a great question here. So do you think that writing for the public, like doing this kind of work that you're talking about, podcasting and this online teaching that's very much aimed at public teaching, do you think that writing for the public and teaching for the public is and should be a responsibility of scholars?

00:24:27:18 - 00:25:12:00

**Kate:** This is a really interesting and valuable question because terms like "should" and "responsibility", you can answer these in a number of ways. The first thing that I'll say is one of the constraints of Buddhist Studies in general is that we have to make a living and we're trying to make a living in a world where academia is sort of starved of funding and higher education is facing all of these pressures and people are facing time pressures. So any sense that academics should or have a responsibility to do something should never be mentioned outside the fact that, one, it's really, really hard to get a job and that this public intellectual stuff is not rewarded on the job market, so there's no incentive for people to do it.

00:25:12:02 - 00:26:17:12

**Kate:** It's really just taking away your time, and then if you do get lucky enough to have a tenure track job, these things are not rewarded in the tenure sense. So again, you're doing it on your own time, often in an unpaid capacity, or if you're in a contingent position or a lectureship, you're not getting paid extra or rewarded for this. So you're expected to do it kind of from the generosity of your heart. In all of us, the fact that so many of us do it regardless is reflective of the fact that we do care and we do feel this responsibility, but it should never be taken apart from the institutions in which we have to make a living. So if we do think that this is something that we should do or have a responsibility to do, and I'd like that to be the case, that that should be rewarded in an institutional context, or at least there should be support for it, because when there isn't, it feels very much like you have to take away from other things in your life, and all of us already have terrible work life balance. I am not a poster child for like living my life in a responsible way.

00:26:19:03 - 00:26:21:22

**Sarah:** Yeah, maybe it's just phases. Don't worry, I think there's phases.

00:26:22:20 - 00:26:57:10

**Kate:** So I'd love to see more support for that. It's exciting that the Ho foundation is supporting more public facing work, and I do think that that's hopefully getting more recognition. I'll also shout out again the Religion For Breakfast Channel, he pays the scholars who write these videos. So again, there's a temptation to say, "Oh, I'll do this and you'll elicit a service on your CV"... He pays you for your time, which I feel like is actually really good and responsible. But in a broader sense, I do think that we have this responsibility regardless of the world that we live in that doesn't necessarily recognize this work.

00:26:57:28 - 00:27:49:09

**Sarah:** I think all of us, in terms of our teaching, I try to think of like who is a stakeholder in my teaching? It's the students in front of me. It's the communities of living practice in which the texts that I study are still considered important. But also, and this is a thing that I got from Charles Hallisey, is he thinks of the future as a stakeholder. What is the future that we're trying to create? That's hard to think about. It's not something that you can easily have a conversation about, it's not something that's going to reward you. But all of us are kind of responsible for bringing about the kind of world that we want to live in. I think a world in which religion is treated with a kind of sense of history, and diversity, and respect is a world that I want us to live in.

00:27:50:20 - 00:28:23:06

**Sarah:** We don't necessarily know the impacts we're having either, because I think a lot of learning, even for me in my life like a seed was planted, but maybe it was actually several years of thinking about something before I would process it, you know? So sometimes I think about my students, our job isn't to give them answers or opinions, our job is to plant a few seeds and hope some of them sprout. They might not all, but they might, and maybe we won't even ever know because they'll be going on with their lives. But, I don't know. That helps me sometimes.

00:28:23:24 - 00:29:54:07

**Kate:** Yeah, and it is also something that changes when the audience of students changes as well. So in my intro to Buddhism class we do end with what I think are the most pressing issues of our day, which is structural racism and climate change. So we have readings on those subjects and I deliberately post that at the end of the course when we sort of establish norms of talking about these things. I do think that it's important to bring them up so I don't shy away from that sort of politics, but in terms of like a day to day mentioning specific politicians names, I'll usually say "let's save that for another day". But in my other little class, I have a class called Buddhist Ethics, where we spend the first ten weeks reading the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* carefully, chapter by chapter. This is a 7th century text by Shantideva, how to lead an awakened life, that goes through this account of human psychology and transformation. So we look at that for ten weeks. Then last four weeks we say, okay, how does this apply to climate change or structural racism? Issues that were not on the Buddha's or Shantideva's purview, but if Buddhist ethics is to mean something, it's got to be able to speak to these different issues, and how does our reading of Shantideva inform how we think about those issues, and how do those issues affect how we might think about Buddhist ethics? Insofar as they tend to be collective issues rather than individual issues.

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**Sarah:** Yeah, that's so fascinating. What a nice structure to then move from the text to kind of applying it creatively to the world as they see it. So how do you do that? What kind of assignments or what kind of responses have you gotten from them as you try to get them to apply what they've learned from Shantideva about an awakened life to their own outlook, specifically as regards racism or climate justice?

00:30:26:06 - 00:30:52:03

**Kate:** So one of my general pedagogical approaches is... I know Bloom's Taxonomy has been criticized, and for those in the audience who aren't familiar with Bloom's Taxonomy, it's the idea that you sort of start by kind of remembering facts, sort of analyzing text, making arguments, and then as you move up the taxonomy, you get to sort of more creative activity...

00:30:52:05 - 00:30:52:20

**Sarah:** Analytical.

00:30:54:03 - 00:32:01:05

**Kate:** Yeah, you start with these more basic skills, but the goal is to sort of learn to analyze or context switch or apply ideas to new contexts, create things. So I often try to build to that in my classes, we're taking something that we've done in one context and learning to apply it in a different context. So that very much informs the ending of this Buddhist ethics class, where I try to get students to imagine... I'll invite them to have like a dialogue between X and Y, so one person that we read is this fantastic author, Charles Johnson, who's written this book called *Dreamer*, he's written books like *The Middle Passage*, *The Ox Hearding Tale,* a wonderful philosopher who writes fiction that's informed by his experiences as a black man in America, but also by his extensive experience practicing Buddhism. They are just wonderfully funny stories as well. So, imagine a conversation between Shantideva and Charles Johnson, how would that go? What kind of arguments are each of them going to offer?

00:32:04:25 - 00:32:39:14

**Kate:** I forget the Buddhist declaration on climate change, where various Buddhist leaders got together and made a statement on climate change, how would Shantideva give edits to that?Imagine that this was the first draft and it was given to Shantideva that Saturday, we're going to have to make edits on this. But what's tough about each of those issues is that I don't know what to do about climate change and major structural racism. So when we're asking these questions of how Buddhist ethics might lead us to think about these things, it's a really open question for me. Sometimes students turn to me and they imagine that I have an answer to them, and I had said, "I do not"...

00:32:40:28 - 00:33:22:29

**Sarah:** No, right. Which is okay, but I agree. I mean, it's discomforting at first to be the professor of the class and say, "I don't know", and like these kind of questions must really develop also sort of student empathy. So this was one of our other questions for you, apart from teaching content, teaching and learning is often so much about social and emotional learning as well. So what are your thoughts on how to support social and emotional needs of students, either online or in person? What do you think is your kind of role there and how you conceive of that for the classroom?

00:33:23:28 - 00:34:33:10

**Kate:** Yeah, I really do and I start this from the first day, of talking about mental health a lot. I have in the past been very sort of both motivated by and hindered by my tendency to be a bit anxious and worried. I imagine lots of academics can empathize with that. I'm very sort of open with students about that and I know that my students are struggling with these kinds of issues. It seems that anxiety and depression is just so rampant among the populations that I work with that I want them to be open. I include sort of contacts with the University Counseling Center on the syllabus, I make a point to do that. The University Counseling Center puts on various events and I also make spaces for students to talk about their own personal thoughts, feelings, beliefs while we maintain an academic approach in the class. But I often open class or at various points of the class, hand out index cards, and have them do minute papers or snap reflections or things like that where they get to talk about their feelings.

00:34:34:20 - 00:35:20:23

**Kate:** Those are not graded. Part of my students final sort of portfolio that they're turning in is a two page reflection at the end of the semester about their sort of personal thoughts and feelings about what they experienced this semester and how it affected their life in the class, or how the class affected the way they understood their lives. Again, that's pass/fail. I don't want to be grading students based on their sort of feelings or emotions, but giving them a space to reflect allows them to feel like I know that their thinking and feeling humans, that I care about them is thinking and feeling humans, and that I know that their lives are difficult in ways that I don't understand.

00:35:21:10 - 00:35:39:25

**Sarah:** Yeah. Do you think there's a space for wellness activities in your classroom? Like your own version of mindfulness meditations with your students or grounding exercises or wellness kind of toolkit exercises? Anything like that?

00:35:41:21 - 00:36:46:18

**Kate:** This is such an interesting question, and contemplative pedagogy is this thing that scholars in Buddhist Studies are thinking about, and our students are stressed out. I tend not to do that sort of thing. I will often bring in someone from the University Counseling Center to lead a mindfulness thing, or I'll call in or I'll have a zoom in from a lineage-trained meditation teacher to do that. But one of the things that I emphasize in my class, and one of the reasons I love religion as a subject, is that there's many ways to be an expert in religion and I try to really emphasize, okay, what did I do to get to be here? What did a meditation teacher do to get to be there? What did a lineage-trained meditation teacher get to do to be there? What did a counselor at the UCC get to do to be there? Thinking about different institutions and the kinds of trainings that they do and what do they count as expertise. So I very much try to tell my students I don't know anything about meditation. I may have my own sort of personal practice, or I say to them or I may not...

00:36:48:26 - 00:37:52:03

**Kate:** I got here because I wrote a 400 page dissertation based on 15th century Tibetan pilgrimage manuals. That doesn't make me a good person or a super calm person or a skilled meditator or something. So I do often want to expose students to that, but I also view that as an opportunity to bring in voices from the tradition and to think, like I often have students think about, if we're reading the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the sutta of *Turning the Wheel of Dharma*, it says we can't understand it unless we practice, right. What does understanding count as in a liberal arts context? What does understanding count as in a Buddhist context? Just drawing their attention to the differences there, because in some ways, one of the assumptions that we have is like, oh, the liberal arts university way of understanding things is THE way of understanding things. In certain ways I think Buddhism presents a real challenge to our typical ways of knowing.

00:37:53:25 - 00:38:18:27

**Sarah:** There was another assignment you told us a little bit about before this interview that I wanted to ask you about because we're really interested in kind of specific assignments and giving people sort of advice to rethink the ways they can encourage their students to learn through the material differently. So you had a unique assignment on the gradual path. Can you tell us just briefly how you taught that and how it went?

00:38:19:06 - 00:39:24:26

**Kate:** Yeah, so one of the things that I love teaching and I teach it in so many of my classes is there's a translation by Charles Hallisey of a text called *The Advice to Layman Tundila*, and it's part of this genre of gradual teaching in the Buddhist tradition. This is sort of a genre that's not necessarily attested to in the Pali suttas themselves, but it's sort of referenced and it seems to be a very old way of teaching the path. So this text is actually 17th or 18th century in Sinhala, but it's an example of this genre of the graduated teaching. What the graduated teaching is, is often a talk by monks to laypeople of the Buddhist tradition as a whole. So in suttas we very much get like sort of presentations of this, that, or the other thing, and this often tries to present the path as a whole. What's great about this text is one, it's short. I'm always looking for short things to teach students because my students won't read long things

00:39:28:08 - 00:40:14:27

**Kate:** And it's an account, it's much later but it presents itself as a sutta. So it starts with "thus have I heard", and the Buddha is hanging around and a wealthy layperson comes up to him and asks for a teaching. The Buddha presents this teaching to this wealthy lay person that goes through the steps of the path. So the first one is generosity, just a praise of generosity. Then it'll go to Sila or morality, and then it talks about the heavens for a while, and then it talks about the dangers of sense desire and the benefits of renunciation, and finally, it ends with this description of the great city of perfect peace that is sort of a description of nibbana or nirvana.

00:40:16:23 - 00:41:34:17

**Kate:** What I love about this text is you ask students to read it and it presents this like pretty accessible way of presenting the tradition. But then you start asking them about the order, why do we start with generosity? Why is that an important first step? Why then do we move to morality? Why then do we talk about the heavens? And then it has this whole section that the heavens are so nice, you should try to be reborn in the heavens because they're amazing, and then the next section is talking about the dangers of sense desire, you shouldn't be interested in things because they're pleasant and nice and you have to actually renounce all that. Then the next step is Nibbana. It gets students thinking about sort of the structure of the path of Buddhism, which is to say that it is often conceived of as a multi-life path from ordinary suffering to awakening, and that people are at different points on the path and that different teachings are appropriate to different sorts of people on the path, and that each step on the path is meant to get you to the next step on the path. It's not that each step on the path is oriented towards enlightenment in this direct way, but that they all work together.

00:41:34:19 - 00:42:54:12

**Kate:** This helps students understand Buddhism is a lived tradition where some people are oriented towards awakening and other people are oriented towards making it through their daily lives. But the Buddhist tradition has a way of understanding how all of these things are related and how each step leads to another step, and that the sort of grounds of this transformation is this gradual mental or phenomenological transformation of how you experience the world. So with this framework which, again, this is coming out of the Theravada tradition, but it's totally applicable to Mahayana thinking about the path, that if a student then reading something later in the semester says, "oh, isn't this selfish? This person wants a good rebirth, or they're praying for wealth in this life?" Where on the gradual path are they? What are their motivations? How is this oriented towards getting you on the next step of the path? So I very frequently have students graph out the gradual path where one axis is sort of time and one axis is the level of realization, that you can kind of map out this kind of stepwise process. Then as you read things, you say, okay, who on the gradual path is this oriented towards?

00:42:55:02 - 00:43:48:17

**Kate:** Again, having students in their own notebooks or index cards that I pass out graphically representing this is a kind of context switching because they're often thinking about a text in terms of words. But "draw me a picture of this", forces them to kind of put it together, and then we'll return to that and let's say we're reading the life of Orgyan Chokyi when we're reading Kurtis Shaeffer's *Himalayan Hermitess*, where is character X, Y or Z on this path? What would character X say to this person or this person? Or how does Pure Land transform this vision of the path? I often have them again, try to graphically represent it, which is hard. I don't draw very well at all. Students laugh at me whenever I draw things, but it just forces them to try to represent things and just in that process...

00:43:50:29 - 00:45:17:00

**Sarah:** I'm a big advocate of sketching. I love this. I'm a trained art historian, so I often have to teach everything through art even when it's not really an art class. But I get them to just draw, like honestly one of their participation things is just look at this picture of this Korean Buddha statue or whatever it is or thangka painting and draw it, like you have to make a sketch. But I do think we do something really good for them, and I tell them it's absolutely not being judged on the basis of whether it's good art or bad art, that's not the point. It's like you put in the 15 minutes to do the sketch or you don't. That's it. But it can really turn something else on in their brain and make them look harder, closer, of course, and think, in the process we're thinking with our bodies. So cool, love it. I like your graph so much. All right. So thank you so much, you've been really generous with our time, and I know we have to be mindful of that. But I want to ask just at the end, let's turn to your future. What are your thoughts about your goals for teaching and teaching in Buddhist Studies? And more broadly, if we want to sort of end on a note of hope, like when Charles Hallisey gave you that incredible sort of challenge of considering the future a stakeholder? What do you want in that future?

00:45:17:18 - 00:46:40:03

**Kate:** Yeah, that's such a good question. I think I'm going to be thinking about this for the rest of today. In terms of my immediate future, it's getting my dissertation into a book, it's developing new classes. I just got a thumbs up that I'll be able to teach a class in sort of our interdisciplinary honors program on anger, that's going to be largely informed by Buddhist thinking about anger, but then also contemporary black Buddhists. There's a great book by Angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens, *Love and Rage* or *Radical Dharma*. So thinking about what is the role of anger in our lives? A lot of my students say if you're not angry, you're not paying attention. Whereas, again, Shantideva, who's one of my touchstones for the Buddhist tradition, will say that anger is always a bad thing. It harms both you and the object of your anger. Stoicism thinks about anger, Martha Nussbaum has written a recent book about anger, Emily McRae has written about tantra and anger. There's like a lot of great materials that I think would do what I'm always trying to do, which is speak to a contemporary issue but from the sort of basis of Buddhism or the basis of resources from Buddhist sexual traditions or just resources from Buddhist traditions. I'm also going to teach a course on Buddhism in Star Wars.

00:46:40:27 - 00:46:41:22

**Sarah:** How fun!

00:46:42:21 - 00:47:56:17

**Kate:** We're always trying to just get students enrolled in courses here. I would love to see in the future more support for the humanities more broadly from government, from donors, from university administrators, from students, people recognizing that engaging in these kind of deep questions, engaging in cross-cultural exchange, engaging in the study of history is itself important. That's the future that I kind of want to bring about. I just want more, more, more. Well, the problem is that there's not necessarily institutional support for as much Buddhist Studies as I'd like to see. I'd like to see more public engagement, I'd like to see both speaking to contemporary issues, but also not falling victim to kind of presentism that says that everything we have to do has to speak immediately to the present moment, because as a historian, I do think that the past matters and of the past kind of provincializes our present in ways that are important, and just getting students excited. Finding ways that what we do in the classroom can speak to a larger world. So that's a varied collection of future oriented things.

00:47:57:17 - 00:48:06:01

**Sarah:** Yeah. Actually, oh, I wanted to make sure I ask also about your own podcast! So you have a podcast through Buddhist Studies Online. Tell us briefly about that. What's its goal?

00:48:06:03 - 00:48:50:07

**Kate:** Yeah, so the Buddhist Studies podcast is part of Buddhist Studies Online. So our courses are priced affordably, but we do charge money for them. But it was important to me to also produce something that was free and available. It's also worth saying we do offer scholarships for people who have trouble paying for these courses, so we never want money to be a barrier to entry. We do charge because I think that it's important to compensate people for their time and labor, and the instructors put in a lot of work to making these courses good. But so we have these podcasts and in them it's in an hour to an hour and a half of instructors of Buddhist Studies courses where I ask them how they got into the field, what they're working on, what they think, and essentially a preview of what they think is important about their course.

00:48:50:18 - 00:49:19:06

**Kate:** So I say to people before we go on the podcast is "most people aren't going to take your course, but what do you think is important about the *Visuddimagga* that a general audience interested in Buddhism might want to know?"... Make the case that this is interesting and important, that they should want to learn more, or how does this engage with interesting issues? So I recommend that podcast not for my hosting abilities, but for the guests that we have.

00:49:21:18 - 00:49:37:29

**Sarah:** I'm looking forward to listening. I'm really excited. Buddhist Studies, I think, needs more podcasts. I really believe in the podcast format too, so I'm so happy that great people like you are making more. Well, thank you so much, Kate. This was really a delight. Thanks so much for being here with us.

00:49:38:01 - 00:49:41:24

**Kate:** Thank you so much for having me, Sarah. I really appreciate having the chance to talk with you.

00:49:42:27 - 00:50:33:20

**Sarah:** Awesome. So you can find out more information about Kate and her work on her website, and we'll post a link in the show notes. Remember that show notes and a full transcript can be found on our website, which is at teachingbuddhism.net. We invite you to subscribe to this podcast through Apple, or Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcasts. We would especially like to hear from you about what you think about today's episode. Send us an email or message on Facebook, where we're the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto. Lastly, I want to do a special thanks to our multitalented creative director, Dr. Betsy Moss, for managing the technical details of this whole podcast, and our contributing producer, Dr. Frances Garrett. This podcast is supported by the Robert H.N Ho Family Foundation Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto. Thanks for listening, and be well.