

# Identity in American Buddhism (IDS 2935:) | Fall 2022

Professor Mario Poceski | Religion Dept., Univ. of Florida

## General Information

Quest 1: Identities

### Class meetings

Lectures: Monday and Wednesday, period 8 (3:00 PM - 3:50 PM); online, via Zoom (links in Canvas)

Discussions: Fridays, (1) period 2, TUR 2303; (2) period 3, LEI 242; (3) period 5, LEI 242

### Instructor

#### Mario Poceski

- Office: Anderson 132
- Office hours: Friday, 10:30 to 11:45 am. Also, by appointment, which can be via Zoom. Appointments need to be made 24 hours in advance. The student has to set up a Zoom meeting at the agreed upon time and send a link to the instructor.
- Email: [mpoceski@ufl.edu](mailto:mpoceski@ufl.edu); webpage: [www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski/).

### Teaching Assistant

#### Zheyuan Deng

- Office: Anderson 009
- Office hours: Wednesday, 10:30-11:45. Also, by appointment, which can be via Zoom.
- Email: [dengzheyuan@ufl.edu](mailto:dengzheyuan@ufl.edu).

### Course description

How are religious identities constructed, and how they intersect with other key identities, fashioned by diverse individuals and communities, within the context of modern life? The course explores this essential question via the lenses of the historical growth and ongoing transformation of Buddhism in America. To that end, it analyses the ways in which Buddhists try (or fail) to reconcile their multiple identities with the central Buddhist doctrine of no-self.

The focus of the course is on the key processes of identity formation as important factors in the making of American Buddhism, and the complex patterns of interaction among discrete identities. Students explore the historical events and central issues that continue to shape the growing presence of Buddhism as an integral part of America's remarkably diverse religious and cultural landscapes, in relation to the ways individuals and communities fashion overlapping identities based on religious

affiliation, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or nationhood. The course adopts a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating perspectives and methodologies from several academic disciplines: religious studies, history, Asian studies, anthropology, and sociology. Students learn and reflect on the relevant themes and issues by critically engaging with select readings, lectures, discussions, experiential learning, research, and writing.

### Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities
- Diversity (D)

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

### Required readings and works

- **Textbook** (required): Seager, Richard H. *Buddhism in America* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2012).
- **Other Readings** (required): distributed in digital format, via Canvas and Course Reserves. Listed in the weekly schedule.
- **Reference works** (optional/recommended)
  - Robert Buswell, ed. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Macmillan Reference, 2003); available at the UF library, in hard copy and e-Book formats.
  - Buswell, Robert E., Jr., and Donald S. Lopez Jr. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. [Electronic Resource, UF lib.]. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- **Materials and Supplies Fees:** n/a

## Graded Work

### Description of graded work

- **Summaries and critical responses** on the weekly readings. Students need to write seven assignments of this kind; each is worth 5%, for a total of **35%** of the final grade. Each assignment is due by 10 am on Thursday, in the same week when the reading(s) in question is assigned (see weekly schedule below).
  - The length of each assignment should be around 200 words. It should consist of two parts: a summary of the reading, and a suggested topic for Friday's discussion session. Student can choose the seven weekly readings to write about (only covering the required readings), from among the ten weekly readings.
  - Each assignment must be submitted by the relevant deadline; there are no exceptions to this rule, for any reason. Accordingly, students should plan their written submissions

carefully; they are advised to have at least six submissions done by week 10. That means not skipping writing about the weekly readings early in the semester, lest students find themselves in situations where they cannot fulfill the requirement of having seven submissions of this kind.

- **Experiential reflection on the practice of mindfulness** (graded paper, based on experiential learning), worth **20%** of the final grade. Due by 10 am, on the Tuesday of week 9; around 400-500 words long. It should offer a brief introduction to the practice of mindfulness, followed by the student's personal reflections on his/her experience with the practice and its relevance to contemporary life.
- **Title and abstract** for the final paper, worth **5%** of the final grade, due week 11, on Thursday, by 10 am. The abstract must clearly state the topic and must be accompanied with a provisional title for the final paper. The abstract should be around 200 words.
- **Analytical essay on a topic related to the course** (graded research paper), worth **40%** of the final grade. Students should choose one of the key identities examined in the course (race, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.), and explore how it shapes the developmental trajectory of a specific institution, tradition, or community within American Buddhism. The length of the final paper should be 1,000 words, plus notes and citations. The final deadline is 5 pm, Tuesday of week 16 (Dec 6). There should be a bibliography at the end of the paper, which it should follow standard academic format.

### Written assignments instructions

- All written assignments are graded in a wholistic manner, considering all the major elements of good and effective academic writing: demonstrated mastery of the key concepts and ideas, clear articulation of the main argument(s), effective use of relevant evidence, overall quality of writing (including grammar and diction), logical and coherent structure, usage of appropriate academic style, and originality of ideas.
- The written assignments must be submitted in MS Word and must follow standard academic format. Use standard font, such as Calibri 12, with 1.5 spacing and 1" margins.
- Do not forget to include paper title, course name, instructor title and name, date, and page numbers.
- The written assignments must be **submitted digitally**, via e-Learning, before the final deadline.
- **No late submissions** will be accepted under any circumstances. Students are encouraged to avoid procrastination and make early submissions, well before each deadline.
- Students are welcome to ask for feedback/advice about their papers, during the office hours.

### Grading scale

A	94 – 100%	C	74 – 76%
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A-	90 – 93%	C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%	D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%	D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%	D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%	E	<60

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

### About grades

- The final grades are solely based on each student’s individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously, from the first day of classes. There are no opportunities to do additional work for an extra credit or a better grade.
- The same course rules and expectations apply equally to all students—no student is entitled to special consideration or unique treatment. Other extraneous or irrelevant factors, including individual student’s desires or expectations about grades, are not considered.
- Students should not expect retroactive changes or other forms of grade modification at the end of the semester.
- No incomplete grades are given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the student should contact the instructor no later than a week before the last day of classes.
- Final grades are computed according to the standard grading scheme in Canvas.

## Annotated Weekly Schedule

### **Week 1: Introduction to the course**

- **Summary:** We start with an introduction to the course and its subject matter. We also briefly address relevant theoretical and methodological issues, as they pertain to the study of Buddhism and American religion, and discuss the aims and objectives of humanistic scholarship. Students are also able to talk about their backgrounds and expectations for the course.
- **Required Reading**
  - Seager, ix–xviii

### **Week 2: Buddhist teachings and history**

- **Summary:** The week’s reading and lecture will provide a basic outline of Buddhist history, and introduce students to some of the basic beliefs, doctrines, and practices of Buddhism.

- **Required Reading**
  - Seager 3–8, 18-38
- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week’s reading; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 3: American contexts**

- **Summary:** We examine relevant aspects of American culture and society, and the ways they shape the construction of distinct identities. Additionally, we cover the early history of the encounter between Buddhism and American culture, and the impact of changing immigration policies on the growth of American Buddhism.
- **Required Reading**
  - Seager, 9-17, 39–53
- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week’s reading; due 10 am on Thursday
- **Note:** no class on Monday (9/5)

### **Week 4: Main traditions of American Buddhism I**

- **Summary:** This is the first of the two weeks that provide a survey of the main traditions of American Buddhism. Its focus is on Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, two prime examples of “convert Buddhism,” in which most practitioners come from privileged white backgrounds.
- **Required Readings**
  - Seager, 112–157
- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week’s reading; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 5: Main traditions of American Buddhism II**

- **Summary:** This week we explore the Buddhist traditions brought into America by Asian immigrants (Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, etc.). We discuss some of the challenges faced by diverse immigrant communities in their efforts to transmit and adapt their religious and cultural traditions; we also reflect on the general process of acculturation and the place of multiculturalism in American life.
- **Required Reading**
  - Seager, 158–203
- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week’s reading; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 6: Nationhood and culture in the making of American Buddhism**

- **Summary:** During their growth in America, Buddhist communities have had to contend with the challenge of negotiating several diverse identities. Here we explore how religious identities centered on Buddhism interact with other identities, especially cultural and national identities.

We also look closely of the intersections of these identities by focusing on the historical experiences of Japanese Americans during the WW II.

- **Required Reading**

- Williams, Duncan Ryūken. "[Camp Dharma: Japanese-American Buddhist Identity and the Internment Experience of World War II.](#)" *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*. Edited by Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann. University of California Press, 2002: 191-200.

- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week's reading; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 7: Ethnic divisions as lines of demarcation**

- **Summary:** American Buddhism is hardly unified or cohesive, and some of the most notable lines of division are largely constructed along ethnic or racial lines. This week we explore the divisions that separate white from ethnic Buddhists, as well as some of the tensions that exist within specific communities of ethnic Buddhists.

- **Required Readings**

- Fields, Rick. "Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism." *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, by Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds. U. of California Press, 1998: 196-206.
- Tanaka, Kenneth K. "Issues of Ethnicity in the Buddhist Churches of America." *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, eds. RoutledgeCurzon, 1999: 3-19.

- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week's readings; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 8: Mindfulness practice (experiential learning)**

- **Summary:** Experiential learning is an important part of the course. This week students learn firsthand about the practice of mindfulness. In addition to receiving background information about the practice and its place within the Buddhist contemplative traditions, students engage in two guided sessions of mindfulness practice. Additionally, during the Friday discussion session, they can share their personal experiences and reflections on the practice.

- **Optional Reading**

- Poceski, Mario. "Mindfulness, Cultural Appropriation, and the Global Diffusion of Buddhist Contemplative Practices." *International Journal for the Study of Chan Buddhism and Human Civilization* 7 (2020): 1-15.

### **Week 9: Being black and Buddhist**

- **Summary:** Race is one of the defining issues of American history and society. This week we explore and reflect upon the experiences and concerns of African Americans, within the context

of American communities of Buddhist converts. We also discuss the general topic of race in America, and the intersections of racial and religious identities.

- **Required Reading**

- Smith, Sharon. "Widening the Circle: Black Communities and Western Buddhist Convert Sanghas." *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*. Christopher Queen, et al, eds. RoutledgeCurzon, 2003: 220-36.

- **Optional Reading**

- McNicholl, Adeana. "Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86/4 (2018): 883–911.

- **Assignment 1 (mandatory):** personal reflection on the practice of mindfulness; due by 10 am on Tuesday

- **Assignment 2:** summary and response to the week's reading; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 10: Gender Equity**

- **Summary:** Among the striking features of Buddhism in America is the emphasis on gender equity, which reflects the progressive political leanings of the majority of Buddhist converts. Consequently, many women have emerged as influential Buddhist leaders. At the same time, many Buddhist communities have experienced scandals centered on sexual harassment or impropriety, which have led to discussions about the roles of power, sexuality, and gender in the making of American Buddhism.

- **Required Readings:**

- Seager, 217–232
- Wilson, Liz. "Buddhism and Gender." *Buddhism in the Modern World*. Edited by David McMahan. Routledge, 2012: 257-72.

- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week's reading; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 11: Instructions and discussion of the analytical paper**

- **Summary:** This week's instruction will focus on formulating a paper topic, formatting a paper, developing a thesis and structure for your paper, and writing an abstract.
- **Assignment:** title and abstract for final paper, due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 12: Visiting speakers**

- **Special event 1 (Monday):** A session with Dr. Dixuan Chen, a Buddhist nun and assistant professor at Grinnell College. Students will be able to ask questions and learn about her experiences of being a female monastic in the US.

- **Special event 2** (Wednesday): A session with Sonia Marcus, the executive director of Southern Dharma, a Buddhist meditation center in NC. She will talk and answer questions about her perspectives and experiences on being a “Bhu-Jew from New York City.”
- **Optional assignment:** A short (250 words) summary and response to the guest speakers’ presentations. Will count as a bonus, worth up to 3% of the final grade.
- **Note:** no class on Fri

### **Week 13: Blending of Jewish and Buddhist identities**

- **Summary:** Among the striking features of American Buddhism is the disproportionately large participation of individuals with Jewish background. That is especially notable within converts communities, where many meditation teachers and practitioners are Jews. Here we explore key aspects of the interreligious dialogue and the blending of religious and cultural identities that characterize much of the Jewish-Buddhist encounter in America.
- **Required Reading**
  - Sigalow, Emily. *American JewBu: Jews, Buddhists, and Religious Change*. Princeton Univ. Press, 2019: 148-77.
- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week’s reading; due 10 am on Thursday

### **Week 14: Research and discussion**

- **Summary:** Students can focus on the written assignment; they can also bring up questions related to their coursework.
- **Note:** no class on Wed and Fri (Thanksgiving)

### **Week 15: Queer identities in American Buddhism**

- **Summary:** Issues related to sexual orientation are among the hotly debated topics in contemporary America. They are also relevant to understanding important facets of American Buddhism.
- **Required Reading**
  - Corliss, Roger. “Coming Out in the Sangha: Queer Community in American Buddhism.” *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds. Univ. of California Press, 1998: 253-65.
- **Optional Reading**
  - Gleig, Ann. “Queering Buddhism or Buddhist De-Queering? Reflecting on Differences Amongst Western LGBTQI Buddhists and the Limits of Liberal Convert Buddhism.” *Theology & Sexuality*, 18/3 (2012): 198-214.
- **Assignment:** summary and response to the week’s reading; due 10 am on Thursday

## **Week 16: Personal reflections and final discussions**

- **Summary:** The semester ends with a general discussion of the main questions that frame the whole course, about identity formations and interactions among diverse identities. Students can also share the findings of their research and their reflections on these topics, considering their personal backgrounds and experiences, and in relation to life in contemporary America.
- **Assignment:** final paper, due Tuesday at 5 pm

## **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) learning outcomes as follows:

**Content:** *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- Students learn how to identify, describe, and explain the construction of religious identities and their intersections with other forms of identity, in relation to the growth and transformation of Buddhism in America (**Q1, H, D**). **Assignments:** weekly reading responses and final paper.
- Students learn how to identify, describe, and explain the religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity of America, in the context of the acculturation of Buddhism and its integration into the diverse religious landscape of contemporary American society (**D**). **Assignments:** weekly reading responses and final paper.
- Acquire knowledge about the historical development, teachings, and traditions of American Buddhism, and learn about some of the key concepts deployed in Buddhist studies. (**Q1, H, D**). **Assignments:** weekly reading responses, experiential learning report, and final paper.

**Critical Thinking:** *Students carefully and logically analyze information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- By careful reading, critical analysis, thoughtful reflection, and open discussion of the course materials and the topics about American Buddhism and identity formation presented in them, as well as by conducting independent research, students receive valuable training in critical thinking and effective analysis. (**Q1, H, D**). **Assignments:** weekly reading responses, experiential learning report, and final paper.
- Students learn how to analyze or evaluate complex issues, such as cultural diversity, or the intricate intersections of racial and religious identities, from a multiplicity of perspectives (**Q1, H, D**). **Assignments:** weekly reading responses and final paper.

**Communication:** *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- Students develop important writing and oral communication skills that enable them to intelligently identify and discuss key issues, explaining them clearly and logically, with a sense of nuance and from a multiplicity of perspectives (**Q1, H, D**). **Assignments:** weekly reading responses, experiential learning report, and final paper.

**Connection:** *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Students reflect on some of the central issues that shape life in contemporary America, including the make-ups and impacts of racial or religious identities, the current debates about sexual orientation or gender equity, the nature of multiculturalism, and the possible ways of coming to terms with religious diversity. The course topics lend themselves to critical self-reflection about issues of central import that affect us all, in a manner that is meant to stimulate critical thought and engagement. That (hopefully) will have lasting effects on the students intellectual and personal developments, at UF and beyond, as they enter the professional world and participate constructively in Americas multicultural society and democratic system of governance (**Q1, H, D**). **Assignments:** weekly reading responses, experiential learning report, and final paper.

## Quest Learning Experiences

### 1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

Experiential learning is an important element of learning that is closely integrated into the regular schedule of the course. There is a whole week dedicated to it, during which the students learn and gain firsthand experience in the practice of mindfulness. First, students receive background information about the practice and its place within the Buddhist contemplative traditions. Then, the main part: students engage in two guided sessions of mindfulness practice, given by the instructor. Additionally, during the Friday discussion session, they share their personal experiences and reflections on the practice. This is followed by their writing of a short paper, which contains personal reflections on the practice of mindfulness and its relevance to contemporary life.

### 2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

Throughout the course, students are encouraged to think deeply and have ample opportunities for self-reflection. Given the pervasiveness of religion and the importance of identity creation for individuals and communities, the very topic and the contents of the course lend themselves readily to thoughtful reflection and self-examination. Students can reflect on their own identities—religious, cultural, racial, ethnic, etc.—along with the assumptions that are embedded in them and the

implications of that for their understanding of others and the worlds they occupy. Additionally, the course facilitates students' enhanced understanding and appreciation of other religions and cultures, which can serve as constructive conceptual framework for reflecting on their own social mores and cultural norms. The self-reflection component is embedded in all aspects of the course: reading of the assigned texts, listening to the lectures, the Friday discussions, research, and writing. In terms of specific graded assignments, self-reflection is incorporated in the weekly reading summaries and responses, the personal reflection essay on the experiential component, and the final paper. Additionally, the two special events, with the two visiting speakers, provide fecund grounds for thoughtful reflection on key issues related to the perennial human quest for identity and meaning, in a contemporary American context that is relevant to the personal life and civic engagement of each student.

## Required Policies

### Attendance and Participation

- Attendance is expected of all students, starting with the first day of classes. Students who have problems with class attendance or punctuality should think twice before enrolling in the course.
- Students are advised to come to each class prepared, stay actively engaged, and take notes. All of these are essential for success with the exams, written assignments, and the final grade.
- Weekly attendance and participation are not directly factored in the main grade. But students with exceptional attendance and participation performance may be awarded up to 3 bonus points (3% of the final grade). This bonus is at the instructor's discretion and is based on an assessment of the student's record. Such assessment considers student's record of attendance, as well as the quantity and quality of the student's participation in classroom discussions, as observed by both the main instructor and the TA.
- Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

### Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

## **UF Evaluations Process**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

## **University Honesty Policy**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

## **Counseling and Wellness Center**

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx> , 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

## **The Writing Studio**

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

## **In-Class Recordings**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.