

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Course Outline

Phil 2664F
“Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy”

Summer Evening 2025	Instructor: Robert J. Stainton
Class Days and Hours: Online only	Office: StH 3126
Classroom: N/A	Office Hours: Mondays 11-noon; Thursdays noon-1
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DESCRIPTION

A very first introduction to Early Buddhist philosophy. The course will overview the connections among the Buddha’s theories of knowledge, being and ethics, comparing them where helpful to doctrines familiar from Western philosophy (e.g., in the pre-Socratics and Early Modern Empiricists). Discussion will focus on the sutras (i.e., works tracing to the Buddha’s own teachings). We will discuss how each of epistemology, metaphysics and ethics relate to Buddhist soteriology (salvation from suffering), but the course will address Buddhism as philosophy, rather than as a religious practice. As such, the doctrines will be explained sympathetically but also assessed critically.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.)(2005). *In the Buddha’s Words*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom.
[ISBN 978-0-86171-491-9]

The textbook costs \$33.95.

Students are welcome to purchase second-hand copies of this textbook.

OBJECTIVES

The twin objectives are enriching students’ familiarity with some “touchstone” *ideas* in human history and honing of their academic *skills*. More specifically, in the present course we will focus on i) Early Buddhist philosophy and ii) philosophical skills.

In terms of ideas (and assuming you have completed the readings and lessons, completed the assignments, and participated in the required activities/discussions), by the end of the course, students will be able to understand and describe key concepts such as merits, karma, *dukkha* (suffering), *samsara* (aimless wandering), the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha’s middle way, and the rejection of a substantial self. They will also be able to analyze the connections between the nature of good conduct, genuine knowledge, fundamental reality, and the Buddha’s prescriptions

for salvation from suffering, and to evaluate the philosophical positions related to Early Buddhist concepts, using criteria such as coherence and relevance to contemporary issues.

In terms of skills, by the end of the course, students will be able to create a well-structured philosophical essay that demonstrates an understanding of key concepts in Early Buddhist philosophy. They will also be able to evaluate and apply philosophical techniques and positions through constructive debates, demonstrating an ability to critically assess arguments. What's more, they'll be able to analyze and apply methodological approaches in philosophical writing, while reflecting on their own writing processes.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Position Papers (~500 words) x 4 (5% each, best 4 out of 5 chosen): 20%

Group Essays (~1000 words) x 2 (5% each): 10%

Glossary Submissions x 2 (10% each): 20%

Midterm: 20%

Final Exam: 30%

Notes on assignments:

- Glossary entries are homework and are to be completed immediately, right after watching the lecture. Given that they are homework assignments, late submissions will be allowed only under extraordinary circumstances such that uploading the assignment is not possible.
- There are no “late penalties”. Barring a medical/compassionate accommodation or a pre-arranged extension, term work not submitted by the deadline will receive a zero.
- The exam will cover materials as presented in class and online and as found in the assigned readings. In particular, the final exam is not a research essay.
- Copying from sources of any kind – peers, websites, etc. – for any of the above assignments, requires proper citation.
- Use of Chat GPT for composing term work is prohibited.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>.

It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic

accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at

http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Any material copied from sources, even a sentence or two, must be appropriately indicated and cited. To repeat, this applies to all submitted assignments: glossaries, essays and the final exam.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning (519) 661-3030 (during class

hours) or (519) 433-2023 after class hours and on weekends.