

**Buddhist Philosophy and Philosophy of Language**  
**PHIL 3500-05, 3 Credit Hours**  
**Spring 2025,**  
**11:00am – 11:50am, MWF, Mintz Center 2**

**Instructor:** Jeffrey Colgan

**Office hours & location:** After class or on Zoom by appointment

**Email:** jcolgan@tulane.edu

**Course Description**

This course has two aims: (1) to provide an introduction to Buddhist philosophy and (2) explore some of the ways that Buddhist philosophy engages with traditional questions in the philosophy of language. In pursuit of the first aim—and after some initial familiarizing with the concepts of religion and philosophy—we'll work through both primary and secondary texts to survey some of the core concerns in Buddhist metaphysics and ethics. For the second aim, we'll adopt a comparative approach, exploring how specific topics in the philosophy of language have been treated both in the Buddhist and the Western philosophical traditions. Some of the topics that we'll consider will include truth and meaning, language and metaphysical commitments, translation of religious and philosophical texts, and the status of ethical and mystical language.

**Student Responsibility**

You are responsible for everything communicated in this syllabus. The due dates, scheduling, and policies listed here are as my (the instructor's) act of communicating everything you need to know. You are also responsible for noting information communicated in class and via email or canvas. For this reason, I highly recommend checking Canvas frequently. Any additional due dates, responsibilities, or scheduling changes will be communicated promptly via Canvas, and, if necessary, the syllabus will be updated to reflect any necessary changes. While I will try to remind you of upcoming deadlines, meeting the deadlines and requirements stated here are your responsibility.

**Course Goals/Objectives**

By the end of the course, successful students will have:

- Developed strategies for engaging with challenging religious and philosophical texts.
- Been exposed to certain key concepts and themes of Buddhist philosophy (Buddhist metaphysics, ethics, and philosophy of language), as conveyed in both primary texts and secondary literature.
- Expressed their own ideas clearly to both fellow students and the instructor.
- Articulated and defended interpretations and evaluations of assigned texts in both writing and speech.
- Explored the contemporary relevance of certain Buddhist philosophical themes and questions as well as how these themes and questions relate to Western philosophical traditions.

## **Grade Components**

Attendance/participation (15%)

Reading Quizzes (20%)

Presentations (15%)

Midterm exam (25%)

Final Debate Project: (25%)

### **Attendance/Participation (15%)**

Attendance is mandatory. Two unexcused absences are permitted, but each subsequent absence will be penalized with a reduction in the attendance/participation component of the course grade. Greater than 5 unexcused absences (i.e., 3 more than the 2 permitted) may result in failing the course. Arriving more than 10 minutes late to class will result in an unexcused absence.

Students are responsible for notifying instructors about absences that result from serious illnesses, injuries, or critical personal problems. Medical excuses are issued by the Student Health Center in the following instances: illnesses or injuries that involve hospitalization, a partial or complete withdrawal due to medical reasons, or a missed examination for a medical condition being treated by the Student Health Center. In all of these instances, medical information will be released only with the student's written permission. Instructors are authorized to lower the grades of students who are absent excessively without a satisfactory excuse. With the approval of the Newcomb-Tulane College dean, an instructor may have a student who has excessive absences involuntarily withdrawn from a course with a WF grade after written warning at any time during the semester.

Each student is expected to arrive to class on time, prepared to discuss the assigned reading, meaning that they have the reading materials with them and have carefully read the assigned texts in advance of the class meeting. Full participation points will require evidence of having thought through the material by being able to discuss the readings in class and to ask constructive questions relevant to the reading(s). Each student begins the semester with 85% Attendance/Participation grade, which is a B.

You will lose points for:

- Having three or more unexcused absences
- Using phones or computers in class for anything not related to the class
- Talking over your peers, especially when they are presenting
- Habitually arriving late or leaving early
- Generally demonstrating that you did not read the text

You will gain points for:

- Asking questions
- Contributing meaningfully to discussion
- Answering questions
- Arriving prepared
- Participating in discussion respectfully and constructively
- Participating in classroom activities (e.g., breakout groups)
- Demonstrating a familiarity with the reading

### **Reading Quizzes (20%)**

Almost every class for which there was an assigned reading will begin with a one question quiz on that class's assigned reading. Quizzes will ask a basic question that should be obvious to students that have read closely the assigned materials. Quizzes will be graded pass/fail with no opportunity for re-taking or rescheduling. Each student's two lowest graded quizzes will be automatically dropped at the end of the semester.

### **Presentations (15%)**

Pairs of students will give a 10–15-minute presentation on a specific class's reading or readings. Presentations should give and explain your extended reading summary, answer any clarification questions that come up along the way, and pose a couple of discussion questions to help guide our class discussion. A draft of the presentation (Word Doc attached to an email) should be submitted to the instructor by noon (12pm) the day before the presentation is to be given. Students will be graded individually and not as a group. Further information about this will be provided in class as well as example presentations.

### **Midterm Exam (25%)**

An in-class midterm exam covering material from the first half of the semester will be administered on Wednesday 3.12. The midterm will not be rescheduled, except for serious illness or critical personal problem. Students that fail to sit the midterm exam will receive a 0%. Further information about this will be provided in class.

### **Final Debate Project (25%)**

The final project of the semester will be a series of formal debates between student groups and about important (yet contentious) topics in Buddhist philosophy (and philosophy generally). Students will be divided into groups of debate teams or debate evaluators. In-class group participation in the debates will be complemented by individual student work done outside of class and turned in as a formal assignment at the end of the semester. Further information about this will be provided in class.

### **Grading Scale**

A = 100 – 93		A- = 92.99 – 90
B+ = 89.99 – 87	B = 86.99 – 83	B- = 82.99 – 80
C+ = 79.99 – 77	C = 76.99 – 73	C- = 72.99 – 70
D+ = 69.99 – 67	D = 66.99 – 63	D- = 62.99 – 60
	F = 59.99 – 0	

### **Use of Electronic Devices**

The use of electronic devices (e.g., phones, tablets, computers, headphones/AirPods, etc.) is strictly prohibited. You may not use electronic devices unless you receive written permission from the instructor. The use of any electronic device in class without permission will result in a substantial penalty to your attendance/participation grade. Students with permission to use

electronic devices must sit at the front of the class.

Students are required to have physical copies of the readings in class. Students should purchase physical copies of the required texts. All other readings will be posted on Canvas, so print out the readings before class.

### **Email Policy and Etiquette**

Students are encouraged to discuss course materials and course-related topics with the instructor. I make myself available at the end of every class for both informal discussion and scheduled meetings with students. Students can also schedule meetings either in-person or over Zoom to discuss course materials and class performance. Further, students are encouraged to reach out via email with questions or ideas. However, to avoid inefficient communication and an unnecessary proliferation of email correspondence, students are asked to:

- Check that the question is not answered in the syllabus
- Ensure that the question or comment cannot be offered either in class or after class
- Appropriately address the email (“Dear Mr. Colgan,” “Hi Prof. Colgan,” “Hi Jeff,” etc.)
- Consider frequency of emails (e.g., avoid sending five vague emails by thinking through exactly what your concern is and crafting a concise email)
- Reread your email for vagueness, typos, and grammatical mistakes (I cannot answer a question that is unclear)
- Note that the instructor may not immediately respond to emails (especially those sent between 5pm and 9am)
- Note that the instructor may not respond to all emails (e.g., notifications of absence or tardiness)

### **Tips for Doing Well**

Show up consistently. Do the reading twice. Even if you feel stuck or you’re not sure you understand the text, come with questions or comments. Participate consistently. Ask questions during peer presentations. Demonstrate that you are working to familiarize yourself with the material we cover, including readings. Be a leader in the classroom rather than a free rider.

### **Required Texts**

*Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, Amber Carpenter (Routledge, 2014)

*Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, edited by William Edelglass & Jay L. Garfield (Oxford, 2009)

### **Course Schedule**

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

M 1.13: Syllabus review & course introduction

W 1.15: Class expectations, goal setting exercise, and tools for success

F 1.17: NO CLASS

Week 2: What is Philosophy?

M 1.20: NO CLASS

W 1.22: *Broadview Introduction to Philosophy*, pp. XIII-XVII, XXI-XXIII (On Canvas)

F 1.24: Plato, *Euthyphro* (On Canvas)

Week 3: What is Religion? What is Buddhism?

M 1.27: Schilbrack, “The Concept of Religion” (On Canvas)

W 1.29: Keown, “Buddhism and Elephants” (On Canvas)

F 1.31: Review & discussion

Week 4: Buddhism and Buddhist Philosophy

M 2.3: Garfield “What is Buddhist Philosophy,” pp. 1-14 (On Canvas)

W 2.5: Garfield “What is Buddhist Philosophy,” pp. 14-23 (On Canvas); Bhikkhu Bodhi, “The Sutta on Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion” (On Canvas.)

F 2.7: Review & discussion

Week 5: The Four Noble Truths: What is Suffering?

M 2.10: Carpenter, Chapter 1 “The Buddha’s Suffering,” pp. 1-14

W 2.12: Carpenter, Chapter 1 “The Buddha’s Suffering,” pp. 14-19

F 2.14: Review & discussion

Week 6: What is a Self? What is No-Self?

M 2.17: Garfield, “Who Do You Think You Are? What a Self Is and Why You Think You Have One” (On Canvas)

W 2.19: Carpenter, Chapter 2 “Practice and Theory of No-Self,” pp. 20-34

F 2.21: “Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta, Mahā-nidāna Sutta, and Milindapañha” (Edelglass pp. 265–274)

Week 7: What is No-Self?

M 2.24: Carpenter, Chapter 2 “Practice and Theory of No-Self,” pp. 34-47

W 2.26: Garfield, “Why You Have No Self: The View from Buddhism, Philosophy, and Science,” pp. 13-25 (On Canvas)

F 2.28: Garfield, “Why You Have No Self: The View from Buddhism, Philosophy, and Science,” pp. 25-36 (On Canvas)

Spring Break / Carnival Break

M 3.3: NO CLASS

W 3.5: NO CLASS

F 3.7: NO CLASS

Week 8: Midterm Exam & What Is the Nietzschean Objection?

M 3.10: Review Class

W 3.12: Midterm Exam

F 3.14: Morrison, “Nietzsche on Buddhism,” (On Canvas); Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, Sections 346 & 347 (On Canvas)

Week 9: What Is the Nietzschean Objection?

M 3.17: Carpenter, Chapter 3 “Klésas and Compassion,” pp. 48-60

W 3.19: Carpenter, Chapter 3 “Klésas and Compassion,” pp. 60-71

F 3.21: NO CLASS

Week 10: What is Emptiness?

M 3.24: Carpenter, Chapter 4 “The Second Buddha’s Greater Vehicle,” pp. 72-85

W 3.26: Carpenter, Chapter 4 “The Second Buddha’s Greater Vehicle,” pp. 85-92; Nāgārjuna, Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way (Edelglass, pp. 26-35)

F 3.28: Review & discussion

Week 11: What is Buddhist Ethics?

M 3.31: “Therāvada Texts on Ethics” (Edelglass, pp. 371–387)

W 4.2: Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* & Asanga’s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Edelglass, pp. 388–408)

F 4.4: Review & discussion – Discussion of Debate Format

Week 12: What is Karma?

M 4.7 Carpenter, Chapter 5 “Karmic Questions,” pp. 93-105

W 4.9: Carpenter, Chapter 5 “Karmic Questions,” pp. 105-116

F 4.11: Review & discussion

Week 13: What is Language?

M 4.14: Morris, “Locke and the Nature of Language” (On Canvas)

W 4.16: NO CLASS

F 4.18: Morris, “Frege on Sense and Reference,” pp. 21-36/1-16

Week 14: What Are Buddhist Philosophies of Language?

M 4.21: Garfield, “Logic and the Philosophy of Language,” pp. 242-254/1-13 AND pp. 266-273/25-32

W 4.23: Review & discussion

F 4.25: Debate #1

Week 15: Course Conclusion

M 4.28: Debate #2

W 4.30: Course conclusion – NO READING

F 5.2: NO CLASS (Study Period)

**ADA/Accessibility Statement**

Tulane University is committed to offering classes that are accessible. If you anticipate or encounter disability-related barriers in a course, please contact the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility to establish reasonable accommodations. If approved by Goldman, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. **Goldman Center contact information:** Email:

[goldman@tulane.edu](mailto:goldman@tulane.edu); Phone (504) 862-8433; Website: [accessibility.tulane.edu](http://accessibility.tulane.edu)

**Code of Academic Conduct**

The Code of Academic Conduct applies to all undergraduate students, full-time and part-time, in Tulane University. Tulane University expects and requires behavior compatible with its high standards of scholarship. By accepting admission to the university, a student accepts its regulations (i.e., [Code of Academic Conduct](#) and [Code of Student Conduct](#)) and acknowledges the right of the university to take disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion, for

conduct judged unsatisfactory or disruptive.

Unless I indicate differently on instructions, all assignments and exams are to be completed individually and without any study aid, including textbooks, class notes, or online sites. If you have any question about whether a resource is acceptable, you must ask the instructor rather than assume.

### **The Use of AI**

AI can be used as a tool or a crutch. There are many ways that it can be used to cheat, avoid work, and decrease the challenges of education. However, it may also prove a useful tool for making your intellectual work more efficient. With that in mind, my policy for use of AI is this:

#### **YOU MAY:**

Use AI in ways that enhance your mastery of the material or cut down on tedious tasks.

Examples include:

- Generating outlines of the readings to help you organize notes
- Generating study questions to help you review material
- “Bouncing ideas” as a part of brainstorming

#### **YOU SHOULD NOT:**

Use AI in a way that only serves to reduce your intellectual work or that hinders your learning.

Examples include:

- Depending on AI summaries of the reading
- Asking an AI to fix problems in your writing
- Generating questions to then ask in class

#### **YOU MAY NOT:**

Use AI to do any of the important work of generating anything you will submit as an assignment.

Examples include:

- Having an AI generate any part of your in-class presentations
- Having an AI generate your materials for the in-class portions of the final debate project
- Having an AI generate your materials for the out-of-class portions of the final debate project

Any of the above cases count as academic misconduct and will be reported in keeping with the policy for other forms of academic misconduct.

### **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement (EDI).**

"Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are important [Tulane values](#) that are key drivers of academic excellence in our learning environments. In our drive for academic excellence, we seek to ensure that students, faculty, and staff across diverse social identities, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences can thrive - especially those from underrepresented and underserved communities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, social class, international, veterans, religious minorities, age, and any other classification protected by applicable law - see [Tulane's Nondiscrimination Policy](#)). In order to build a supportive culture and climate for every member of our community, we recognize that we each of have unique EDI strengths to share with others and that we also have areas for EDI growth,

learning, and change. This EDI commitment and cultural humility helps us collectively build a university community and culture where everyone experiences belonging."

### Religious accommodation policy

Per Tulane's religious accommodation policy as stated at the bottom Tulane's academic calendar, I will make every reasonable effort to ensure that students are able to observe religious holidays without jeopardizing their ability to fulfill their academic obligations. Excused absences do not relieve the student from the responsibility for any course work required during the period of absence. Students should notify me within the first two weeks of the semester about their intent to observe any holidays that fall on a class day or on the day of the final exam.

### Title IX

Tulane University recognizes the inherent dignity of all individuals and promotes respect for all people. As such, Tulane is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination including sexual and gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence like sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or is experiencing these types of behaviors, know that you are not alone. Resources and support are available: you can learn more at [allin.tulane.edu](http://allin.tulane.edu). Any and all of your communications on these matters will be treated as either "Confidential" or "Private" as explained in the chart below. Please know that if you choose to confide in me, I am required by the university to share your disclosure in a Care Connection to the Office of Case Management and Victim Support Services to be sure you are connected with all the support the university can offer. The Office of University Sexual Misconduct Response and Title IX Administration is also notified of these disclosures. You choose whether or not you want to meet with these offices. You can also make a disclosure yourself, including an anonymous report, through the form at [tulane.edu/concerns](http://tulane.edu/concerns).

Confidential	Private
<p><i>Except in extreme circumstances, involving imminent danger to one's self or others, nothing will be shared without your explicit permission.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Counseling &amp; Psychological Services (CAPS)   (504) 314-2277</li> <li>☐ The Line (24/7)   (504) 264-6074</li> <li>☐ Student Health Center   (504) 865-5255</li> <li>☐ Sexual Aggression Peer Hotline and Education (SAPHE)   (504) 654-9543</li> </ul>	<p><i>Conversations are kept as confidential as possible, but information is shared with key staff members so the University can offer resources and accommodations and take action if necessary for safety reasons.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Case Management &amp; Victim Support Services   (504) 314-2160 or <a href="mailto:srss@tulane.edu">srss@tulane.edu</a></li> <li>☐ Tulane University Police (TUPD)   Uptown - (504) 865-5911   Downtown – (504) 988-5531</li> <li>☐ Office of University Sexual Misconduct Response and Title IX Administration   (504) 865-5611 or <a href="mailto:titleix@tulane.edu">titleix@tulane.edu</a></li> <li>☐ Student Affairs Professional On-Call (24/7)   (504) 920-9900</li> </ul>



### Emergency Preparedness & Response:

<p>In the event of a campus emergency, Tulane University will notify students, faculty, and staff by email, text, and/or phone call. You were automatically enrolled in this system when you enrolled at the university.</p> <p>Check your contact information annually in Gibson Online to confirm its accuracy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Follow all TU Alerts and outdoor warning sirens</li> <li>☑ Seek shelter indoors until the severe weather threat has passed and an all-clear message is given</li> <li>☑ Do not use elevators</li> <li>☑ Do not attempt to travel outside if weather is severe</li> </ul> <p>Monitor the Tulane Emergency website (<a href="http://tulane.edu/emergency/">tulane.edu/emergency/</a>) for university-wide closures during a severe weather event</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ <b><u>RUN</u></b> – run away from or avoid the affected area, if possible</li> <li>☑ <b><u>HIDE</u></b> – go into the nearest room that can be locked, turn out the lights, and remain hidden until all-clear message is given through TU ALERT</li> <li>☑ <b><u>FIGHT</u></b> – do not attempt this option, except as a last resort</li> <li>☑ For more information or to schedule a training, visit <a href="http://emergencyprep.tulane.edu">emergencyprep.tulane.edu</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Download the Everbridge app from the App Store or Google Play store</li> <li>☑ The Report feature allows you to silently and discreetly communicate with TUPD dispatchers</li> <li>☑ The SOS button allows you to notify TUPD if you need help</li> <li>☑ The Safe Corridor button serves as a virtual escort and allows you to send check-in notifications to TUPD</li> </ul>

**From: Tulane Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response**