Centre of Buddhist Studies, HKU

BSTC2006 Buddhist Psychology and Mental Cultivation

(6 Credits)

Minor in Buddhist Studies Programme

(The course is open to students from all faculties as a free elective)

Offering Semester: 1st Semester of 2017/2018
Day of the week: Tuesday 4:30 pm – 6:20 pm
Class dates: Sept. 5, 12, 19, 26; Oct. 3, 10, 24, 31; Nov. 7, 14, 21, 28
Venue: Knowles Building Room 223
Lecturer: Dr. G.A. Somaratne
Email: soma@hku.hk
Office: Room 408, 4/F, Jockey Club Tower, Centre of Buddhist Studies
Tel: 3917-5076

Course Description (6 credits)
In this course, we will examine Buddhist discourses on the nature and operation of the mind. We will study basic Buddhist principles and diverse practices of mental cultivation based on ancient Buddhist texts and manuals that present unique perspectives on individual, family, and society at large and world. The main topics covered in this course include psychology of dhamma and the theory of “dependent co-arising”, relation between mind and body, sensory perception and obsession, intentional actions and human wellbeing, positive thinking and self-initiative, controlling emotions and mindfulness practice, selfless being and awakened mind.

Objectives
At the end of this course, students are expected to develop the ability to:

1. Explain the Buddhist teachings regarding the nature and operation of the mind.
2. Identify basic Buddhist principles, meditation practices and personality types.
3. Analyze the principles in which these diverse Buddhist meditation practices cater to different personality types.
4. Relate Buddhist ideas and principles in understanding and finding perpetual solutions to complex psychological, social, political and environmental issues in the modern world.
5. Develop an appreciative and positive attitude towards one’s life, family, society and the world.
**Lecture Topics**

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<tr>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dhamma, Buddha, and psychology</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Theory of dependent co-arising</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Problem of ‘my self’</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Problem of craving</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Name-and-Matter and Consciousness</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Sense perception and obsession</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Psychological analysis of social conflicts</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Intentional actions, positive thinking and self-initiative</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Controlling emotions and dealing with defilements</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Mindfulness practice and working with memory</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Personality types and meditation techniques</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Awakened mind and awakened ones</td>
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**Assessment**

100% coursework with the following breakdowns:

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<tr>
<th>Assessment Tasks</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Reflective Writing based on a concept learned from Lectures 1 to 5 (1000 ~ 1200 words) (Due October 10)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>2. Reflective Writing based on a concept learned from Lectures 6 to 10 (1100 ~ 1300 words) (Due November 21)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>3. Short essay on a topic relevant to the course content (1,400 ~ 1600 words) (Due December 12)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>4. Attendance and participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Note:**
- All written assignments are to be submitted by uploading onto Moodle prior to 23:50 of the due date, late submission will be subjected to mark deduction. Files must be renamed as “LASTNAME First name”, e.g., “LEUNG Chi Wai Tony”. A printed copy of each assignment must also be handed over to the class instructor.

**General expectation of student performance at the various grades:**
What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing is evidence of reflective thinking. In this reflective thinking, you will look back at an idea, concept, or theory learned in the course and see its relevance to analyze one of your unforgettable personal experiences you had in the past or a social issue that you have been interested in. You will analyze the experience or the issue, thinking in depth and from different perspectives. You will try to explain it in relation to the model or theory from your learning in the course. You will think carefully about what the idea, concept, or theory means for you and your ongoing progress as a learner.

Reflective writing is more personal than other kinds of academic writing. We all think reflectively in everyday life, but perhaps not to the same depth as that expected in good reflective writing at university level. Reflective thinking—if done in discussion with others—can be very ‘free’ and unstructured and still be very useful. Reflective writing can be unstructured, for example when it is done in a personal diary. In assignments, it should be a carefully-structured writing.

A possible structure for reflective writing

Reflective writing can be broken down into three parts:

- **Description**: What happened? What is being examined?
- **Interpretation**: What is most important / interesting / useful / relevant about the object, event, issue or idea? How can it be explained in relation to the Buddhist concept or theory?
- **Outcome**: What have I learned from this? What does this mean for my future?

This is just one way of structuring reflective writing. There are others. What is important is your own creativity. Whichever approach to reflection you use, try to bear in mind the following four key points:

- Reflection is an *exploration* and an *explanation* of events—not just a description of them.
- Reflective writing involves ‘revealing’ anxieties, errors and weaknesses, as well as strengths and successes. This is fine, if you show some understanding of possible causes, and explain how you plan to improve.
- It is necessary to select just the most significant parts of the event or idea on which you are reflecting. If you try to ‘tell the whole story’ you are likely to use up your words on description rather than interpretation.
Grading

Grade for this assignment will be decided based on creativity, clarity and organization of the presentation, accuracy in explaining or interpreting the Buddhist theory or concept, depth in reflection, and application of the concept to review and improve your personal life.

Final Short Essay Assignment

30% of the course grade
This is an academic paper. You select your own topic. You undertake a small research into the chosen topic and write a comprehensive essay. You do well if you ask a good question or questions and try to answer it/them by consulting scholarly works, Buddhist discourses and course content. You could also use your own observations/ experiences to clarify things.

Grade descriptors for an ‘A’ grade:
- has chosen a topic relevant to the course content;
- shows familiarity with the topic;
- knows how to contextualizes the topic within the larger psychological or related studies field/s;
- explains the concepts thoroughly and accurately;
- brings in intellectual discussions/debates to explain the topic;
- uses relevant sources;
- provides sufficient, consistent, and relevant notes and bibliography following academic norms (minimum of 5 sources must be used; one referencing system must be followed);
- writes beautifully, clearly and persuasively;
- is innovative and critical in approach.

Due: Tuesday 12 December 2017

Start your work early and submit it before the deadline.

Recommended Reading List


**Recommended Internet Resources**

1. An Entrance to the World of Buddhism [www.buddhistdoor.com]
2. Buddhism and Science [www.mindandlife.org]
4. Mindfulness teachers talks [www.dhammaseed.org]
5. Access to insight [www.accesstoinsight.org]
7. Translations of the Buddha’s discourses [http://suttacentral.net/]

*(Last updated: July 19, 2017)*