

SYLLABUSES FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF BUDDHIST COUNSELLING (MBC)

These Syllabuses apply to candidates admitted to the Master of Buddhist Counselling curriculum in the academic year 2026-27 and thereafter.

1. PURPOSE

The programme aims at providing students with the fundamental knowledge and skills required for Buddhist teaching-based counselling. It offers an interdisciplinary curriculum that focuses on the study of a variety of applied Buddhist and psychological knowledge while simultaneously cultivating students' spiritual formation. During each course, students will be encouraged to develop knowledge of, skills for, and experiences in a given subject and apply them in a contemporary psychosocial environment.

2. CURRICULUM DURATION

The curriculum shall normally extend over one academic year of full-time study or two academic years of part-time study.

3. CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

All courses are offered on a credit basis. Candidates must complete eight courses by selecting three compulsory core courses, four elective courses, and one course for capstone experience. Candidates have to complete a total of 63 credits for graduation. A limited number of courses may be offered in online or hybrid mode. Such options will not necessarily be offered every year, nor for all courses.

1. Core Courses (9 credits each)

- BSTC7600. Theories and practice in Buddhist counselling
- BSTC7602. Spiritual formation through contemplative practices
- BSTC7612. Foundational Buddhism for counselling

2. Elective Courses (6 credits each)

- BSTC6055. Buddhist psychology I
- BSTC7112. Buddhist ethics
- BSTC7120. Buddhist psychology and mental cultivation
- BSTC7603. Dharma therapy
- BSTC7604. Awareness training program
- BSTC7605. Being with the elderly, sick and dying
- BSTC7606. Buddhist homiletics: The art of presenting Buddhist teachings
- BSTC7607. Buddhist liturgy and rituals
- BSTC7608. Buddhist mediation
- BSTC7609. Special topics in Buddhist counselling (1)
- BSTC7610. Special topics in Buddhist counselling (2)
- BSTC7611. Group work in Buddhist and traditional counselling

- BSTC7613. Theories and practice in prevailing counselling
 BSTC7614. Note, Know, Choose: An early Buddhist teachings-based intervention
 BSTC7615. Special topics in Buddhist counselling (3)

3. Capstone Experience (12 credits)

BSTC8998. Capstone Experience

Not all elective courses listed above will necessarily be offered each year.

Students from the MBC programme will be provided with options to select elective courses from the Master of Social Sciences in the field of Counselling programme. Teachers from the Master of Social Sciences in the field of Counselling programme may also serve as the co-supervisor in the Capstone Experience if the area of study is relevant. The selection of cross-listed courses and co-supervision of Capstone Experience should be subject to the approval of the Programme Director/Chairman of the two respective programmes. Please contact the MBC Programme Office for details.

4. SYLLABUSES

A. Core Courses

BSTC7600. Theories and practice in Buddhist counselling (9 credits)

This course provides students with basic knowledge and experiences in Buddhist teachings-based counselling and helping skills. Using fundamental Buddhist teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, Dependently Co-arising, and Non-Self as framework, students will be introduced to the Buddhist understandings of human nature and suffering. Theories and practices of classical counselling interventions and practices will also be introduced so that students can see the similarities and differences between Western psychotherapy and Buddhist counselling. Through lectures, class discussions, role playing, and other experiential learning activities, students will acquire a wide range of Buddhist counselling skills, such as compassionate engagement within therapeutic relationships, deep listening, reflection of meanings, and development of insight. Based on the ethical standards of the Association of Professional Chaplains and the Buddhist ethics, this course also introduces students to ethical decision making including an awareness of ethical issues, knowledge about what constitutes an ethical dilemma, and an understanding of the steps to take when one encounters an ethical dilemma.

Assessment: 80% coursework and 20% examination

BSTC7602. Spiritual formation through contemplative practices (9 credits)

Across the fields of professional psychology and chaplaincy, both the Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality of the American Psychological Association and the Association of Professional Chaplains emphasize the importance of spirituality in human

psychology, promote the incorporation of spirituality into clinical settings in accordance with academic research, and foster constructive dialogue between psychology and religion. In alignment with these organizations' support of the importance of the spiritual quality of Buddhist counsellors, this course aims to cultivate the necessary spiritual competencies required for professional spiritual care through an introspective approach in which students deepen their personal practice and hone their approach to Buddhist counselling. In particular, students will have a deeper awareness of their attachments, gain insight into the relationship between their spiritual well-being and defilements, cultivate loving kindness and compassion for self and others, and foster their skillful means through Buddhist practices such as precepts study and meditation. The model of teaching for this course will include lectures, group discussions, and contemplative exercises.

Assessment: 80% coursework and 20% examination

BSTC7612. Foundational Buddhism for counselling (9 credits)

This course introduces the major Buddhist philosophical and soteriological frameworks that underpin contemporary Buddhist counselling. Spanning early Buddhist, Abhidharma, Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, tantric, and buddha-nature traditions, it examines how these traditions conceptualise suffering, affliction, cognitive distortion, selfhood, and ethical transformation — and how their therapeutic resources differ from those of modern psychological paradigms. The course is structured around the classical Buddhist pedagogical progression of textual study (*śruta*), critical reflection (*cintā*), and practice-oriented cultivation (*bhāvanā*): students move from disciplined engagement with primary sources, through comparative philosophical analysis, to the design and critical testing of counselling scenarios grounded in Buddhist doctrinal and contemplative materials. Throughout, emphasis is placed on working responsibly with the plurality of Buddhist pedagogical and psychagogic methods, on cultural and ethical sensitivity, and on the professional standards required for Buddhist counselling practice.

Assessment: 100% coursework

B. Elective Courses

BSTC6055. Buddhist psychology I (6 credits)

This course takes a psychological perspective to introduce Buddhism as a moral and psychologically healthy way of life. The early Buddhist way of life as practiced by the Buddha and his disciples is introduced through selected readings from English translations of the original Pali texts Majjhima Nikaya and Anguttara Nikaya. This source is chosen over other more theoretically oriented secondary sources on the belief that the early Buddhist way of life provided the experiential (and empirical) basis for Buddhist philosophy. The narrative format offers lively and concrete examples of problem solving in daily life that are easily understood by most readers and more importantly- less readily misunderstood. Theories and important concepts in Buddhism are introduced later in the course to bind together the rather loosely organized teachings of the Nikaya texts. Finally, the epistemological foundation of Buddhism is introduced through selected readings from the Yogacara tradition (in particular the Thirty Stanzas) and compared with recent developments in theoretical psychology (in particular social

constructionism).

Assessment: 50% coursework and 50% examination

BSTC7112. Buddhist ethics (6 credits)

Ethics is the foundation of the Buddhist path, and a dimension of human life which Buddhism accords critical importance. This course seeks to equip students with an understanding of the concepts and teachings that may be said to comprise a foundational Buddhist ethical repertoire. It also seeks to bring these concepts and teachings into dialogue with topical real-life ethical issues that include animals rights and the environment, gender equality, abortion, suicide and euthanasia, violence, economics, and the AI-human relationship. To this end, the course begins by exploring the nature of Buddhist ethics, the Buddhist view of good and bad, the Buddhist view of an ethically meaningful life, role of ethical training in the pursuit of Buddhist spiritual goal, and Buddhist social ethics. As we progress to specific applied topics, we explore whether Buddhism has a defined ethical stance on these issues. If not, we consider how to draw on Buddhist ethical resources to develop a position and examine how Buddhist ethical teachings can enrich our understanding of these topics. In doing so, students will gain practical insights into applying Buddhist ethical principles to navigate complex ethical dilemmas in contemporary society.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7120. Buddhist psychology and mental cultivation (6 credits)

The course introduces positive psychological concepts and meditation theory of the Buddha based on early Buddhist discourses and Abhidhamma philosophy of Theravāda Buddhism. It critically analyses those doctrines and meditation techniques that have their aim to amplify and foster in young people positive human emotions, strengths, virtues, and skills that are conducive to achieving success, well-being, and happiness in their personal, family, social and professional lives, and compares them with those of modern positive psychology. It investigates not only the positive emotions, strengths and virtues but also positive institutions such as family, democracy and free inquiry that support fostering them.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7603. Dharma therapy (6 credits)

Dharma therapy is a therapeutic intervention modelled after the Buddha's path to awakening. Its theoretic foundation is built on the Buddhist dharma, the core of Buddhist teachings, together with mindfulness as one of its key components. This course will introduce the theory and structure of the therapy and how these Buddhist interventions to end suffering can be applied in a psychotherapeutic manner by enabling practitioners to better understand their problems in a more realistic and constructive manner.

Pre-requisite: BSTC7600. Theories and practice in Buddhist counselling

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7604. Awareness training program (6 credits)

This is an experiential as well as theoretical course that covers the latest research and theories regarding Buddhist-derived interventions. The main aim of the course is to provide students with knowledge and understanding of the awareness training program, a Mahayana Buddhist teaching-based group intervention for enhancing the ability of participants to handle stress and fostering well-being. Students will participate in introspective exercises, experiential activities, meditation practices, group discussions, and quizzes based on the 7-week awareness training program. They are expected to deepen their experience through home practice and apply their experience to counselling services and their daily lives.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7605. Being with the elderly, sick and dying (6 credits)

What are prominent psychological reactions in the midst of pain and suffering? What is a “good death”? Regarding caregivers, what are helpful responses and what are not? What are healing practices that bring pleasure to both parties? This course offers a Buddhist perspective of the psychology of perception, emotions, and thoughts in response to illness and incapacity, particularly at the end of life. All aspects of dying—the medical, legal, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual—require discussion. The course also aims to provide training that conveys thoughtfulness in interacting with patients, their family, and health care staff in a multi-faith setting. The course comprises lectures, small-group discussions, class exercises, role playing, and seminars on selected topics. Students are expected to perform their own research on basic medical knowledge, such as the symptoms, treatments, and prognosis of serious illnesses. Therefore, they are required to listen well and having an understanding of details.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7606. Buddhist homiletics: The art of presenting Buddhist teachings (6 credits)

Buddhism has come a long way since the Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma in Barnes, India, more than 2,500 years ago. This course will examine how Buddhism has evolved and adopted itself to suit the needs, customs, and temperament of different people in different lands. The relevancy of Buddhism in our time and how to promote it in light of today’s social, educational, and political environments will also be explored. Various styles and types of dharma talks are studied and considered. Over the course of interactive sessions, students will hone their skills in preparing and delivering mindful, focused, and inspirational presentations on Buddhist teachings. Each student will be video-recorded delivering a brief speech, followed by a question and answer session and a supportive feedback session.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7607. Buddhist liturgy and rituals (6 credits)

Although many claim (based on a selective reading of canonical Buddhist literature) that the Buddha's "original teaching" involved a rejection of ritual activity, from the very early period and throughout the entire Buddhist history, the Buddhist traditions have adopted indigenous rituals and practices and have devised a great variety of their own rituals. This course provides an introduction to Buddhist ritual practice in different Buddhist tradition to the students who are interested in Buddhist studies. We will begin by exploring several theories and research methods of adopting rituals in anthropology and religious studies. After having grasped the theoretical basis of ritual studies, the students will go further to study the doctrinal, mythic, and other dimensions of Buddhist practice, identify the various sources of ritual power, examine the structural patterns of various rituals, survey the different categories of ceremonies, and analyse the most important groups of rituals, especially different death rituals that are performed to assist the deceased to enable rebirth into the better realms. It will focus on how experiences of ritual site and ritual time will generate meanings that affect individual enlightenment as well as the understanding of Buddhist teaching. As a comparative approach to Buddhist rituals, this course will cover materials such as myths, texts, and video records of rituals. Rituals are studied in some detail by reading ritual texts and conducting fieldwork (or studying rituals by watching video recordings of them) to examine the actual ritual practice.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7608. Buddhist mediation (6 credits)

By integrating the techniques of solution-focused brief therapy and the mediation process with Buddhist theories and practices, the course will teach a model of conflict resolution that reflects the Mahayana ideal of the practice of the Way of Bodhichitta for benefiting oneself and others, to resolve conflicts for oneself and for others, and to learn about the process of change and transformation through applications of the model. Students will acquire basic knowledge of theories and practices of Buddhism and mediation using an integral approach and will apply the appropriate skills to be their own mediator and to mediate other people's disputes in the family context such as for couples and parents and children, in the care of the elderly/sick, and in the probate of a deceased member of the family. The mode of teaching will be by lecture, demonstration by recordings or role plays, role play exercises in small groups, and self-reflective learning.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7609. Special topics in Buddhist counselling (1) (6 credits)

This course is offered from time to time. Students should consult the Centre of Buddhist Studies on the content of the course on offer.

Assessment: 50% coursework and 50% examination

BSTC7610. Special topics in Buddhist counselling (2) (6 credits)

This course is offered from time to time. Students should consult the Centre of Buddhist Studies on the content of the course on offer.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7611. Group work in Buddhist and traditional counselling (6 credits)

This course provides students with fundamental knowledge, techniques, and experiences of group work in Buddhist and traditional counselling. Different group process theories will be introduced so that students can recognize the similarities and differences between Buddhist and traditional counselling. Students will acquire and learn the knowledge and skills in group work through a variety of means, including lectures, videos, group discussions, reflective exercises, role-playing, and other experiential activities. Since the class itself also serves as a group, students will be able to experience and observe the group dynamics and identify some interventions that could enhance their growth and development through this learning platform. Ethical issues that have importance for effective group work will also be discussed with reference to the Code of Ethics for Professional Buddhist Counsellors, such as informed consent, confidentiality, conflicts of values, professional competence, and so on.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7613. Theories and practice in prevailing counselling (6 credits)

Counselling is an important health service in modern days. Numerous therapies have been developed and are utilized for relieving clients' psychological distress or problems in counselling service. This course provides an examination of long-established and recently-developed therapies employed in prevailing counselling. It focuses on the key theoretical concepts and practical techniques of these therapies. It furnishes students with an opportunity to understand the application of these therapies through case discussions. It explores similarities and differences between these therapies and Buddhist teachings, with the purpose of integrative practice in Buddhist counselling. Students will be able to apply the knowledge of these therapies in their own counselling practice, combine the theories and practice of these therapies with Buddhist teachings for implementing in Buddhist counselling, and foster an interest in further training and research in these therapies.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7614. Note, Know, Choose: An early Buddhist teachings-based intervention (6 credits)

This experiential course offers an in-depth exploration of the Note, Know, Choose (NKC) model—a psychospiritual intervention grounded in Early Buddhist teachings and developed as a stand-alone therapeutic framework for addressing various mental health disorders. It positions

NKC not merely as a set of techniques but as a coherent, theoretically grounded approach to alleviating human suffering through mind training. Rooted in the psychological architecture of the Early Buddhist canon, particularly the Five *Nikāyas*, NKC operates on a fundamental premise: suffering arises from clinging to the self-notion through the five aggregates, and liberation becomes possible when the mind is trained to observe (Note), understand (Know), and act with wisdom (Choose). This course invites students to embody this progression—first in themselves, then in their work with others. Structured as a practice-based learning community, each session integrates didactic teaching on the theoretical foundations of NKC and its relationship to Early Buddhist Teachings, live demonstrations of NKC techniques by the instructor, guided role-plays where students practice NKC interventions in pairs and small groups, case discussions analyzing the clinical applications of NKC with different client populations, and experiential reflections on students' own internal processes as they engage with the model. Throughout the course, students will also explore how components from other Buddhist-derived and mindfulness-based interventions can be skillfully adapted and integrated within the NKC framework.

Assessment: 100% coursework

BSTC7615. Special topics in Buddhist counselling (3) (6 credits)

This course is offered from time to time. Students should consult the Centre of Buddhist Studies on the content of the course on offer.

Assessment: 100% coursework

C. Capstone Experience

BSTC8998. Capstone Experience (12 credits)

The capstone experience is designed for the students to demonstrate their competencies as a Buddhist counsellor while participating in a single original supervised project of the student's choice. The purpose of the project is to integrate knowledge and skills acquired, and which are prescribed in the MBC curriculum. In particular, students should demonstrate their depth of Buddhist knowledge, application of Buddhist counselling skills, adherence to Buddhist values, acquisition of communication skills, and enhancement of self-awareness by fulfilling one of the following capstone experience options. All options offered should enhance students' ability to integrate Buddhist knowledge, apply Buddhist counselling skills to self and/or others, understand the importance of Buddhist values, enhance writing and/or oral communication skills, and demonstrate self-awareness. The title of the project output should be submitted for approval on a date set by the Centre.

Option A: *Contemplative and religious practices in Buddhism*

Contemplative and religious learning and experience are important parts of Buddhist practices both as a means to develop spiritual and religious competency and to acquire the necessary knowledge and experience to assist and provide counselling to clients. There are various forms of Buddhist contemplative and religious practices varying from meditation retreat to more ritualist ceremonies such as Shuilu Fahui (the Buddhist Rite for Deliverance of Creatures of

Water and Land). A crucial part of training in Buddhist counselling is to foster spiritual, religious, and cultural competencies in students to enhance their understanding that Buddhist meditation practices and Buddhist rituals could be a form of self-cultivation as well as a form of professional spiritual care.

An in-depth and reflective report of a student's contemplative and religious practices and experiences could be an indication of whether the student can integrate Buddhist knowledge, practices, history, and rituals into one's learning experience as well as applying them as counselling tools to help others. With approval from faculty and supervisors, students will participate in one Buddhist contemplative and religious practice, such as Buddhist meditation retreats, repentance rituals, or other practices and liturgy. In a 6,000- to 8,000-word paper, students will: (1) describe the Buddhist contemplative and religious practices in detail; (2) explain the significance of the practice with in-depth analysis of the Buddhist teachings, traditions, and values embedded in the practice; and (3) articulate their learning and personal growth, self-awareness and spiritual formation, and demonstrate reflective learning in relation to the Buddhist practice. Students will be required to use academic resources such as research studies and Buddhist scriptures to support their analysis of the Buddhist practices.

Assessment: 100% coursework

Option B: *A self-contemplative and reflective autobiography*

Self-awareness is a crucial component in Buddhist counselling. It is a necessary quality in self-cultivation in which the knowledge and insight of oneself such as seeing one's attachments, noting mental proliferations, and being aware of the causes and conditions contributing to suffering are essential to the practice of Buddhist counselling. When counsellors develop these abilities, they become more effective in helping their clients to do the same. One of the most common ways for counsellors to enhance their level of self-understanding is the continuous process of self-awareness and self-reflection. Due to these reasons, Buddhist counselling students could use self-awareness and self-reflection as a means to develop self-understanding by writing an autobiography guided by the framework of Buddhist teachings and practices. Under the guidance of a supervisor, the student will: (1) identify one core personal problem, (2) collaboratively design a self-treatment plan with the supervisor, (3) engage in the assigned interventions (e.g. appropriate and structured meditation program, contemplative exercises, seeking professional counseling, self-reflection journals, five aggregate analysis, etc.), and (4) articulate the experiences in an organized autobiography. In this 6,000- to 8,000-word paper, students will describe their problem and relevant background, introduce the treatment plan and its rationale, conduct an analysis of their dukkha, delineate how different conditions and attachments give rise to the dukkha, describe the process of applying Buddhist teachings and practices to alleviate their own suffering, and insights and self-knowledge gained in this experience. For example, students can describe their own insights regarding their attachments to the past experiences, how their defilements impair their daily life by dragging them away from the present moment, and how a consistent meditation practice helps them gain wisdom to diminish suffering. A general assumption is that the efficacy of a Buddhist counsellor is directly proportionate to one's level of self-awareness and self-cultivation. Hence, Buddhist counselling students should be the first one to benefit from practice of Buddhist counselling, thereby increasing the confidence and understanding of this model of healing. Therefore, the goal of this capstone project is to help students to incorporate all the learning materials in the MBC programme into their personal and professional growth by being ones' own clients.

Assessment: 100% coursework

Option C: *Buddhist homiletics*

In the history of Buddhism, the Buddha and his disciplines used homiletics as a way of teaching and counselling to help people reduce suffering. Buddhist homiletics is the art of the composition and delivery of a specific Buddhist topic. The presentation and delivery of the Buddhist topic involves advanced and skillful understanding of Buddhist knowledge, skillful usage of Buddhist concepts in didactics presentation, innovative and appropriate translations of Buddhist values, and strong communication skills. Students who take this option will present two 1-hour talks or equivalent on a specific topic in Buddhism to a target group of audience. In other words, students need to summarize what they have learnt in the programme and prepare to deliver a discourse on a chosen topic with accuracy and skillfulness. Working closely with the supervisor, students will identify their particular strength and weakness to identify the appropriate styles and methods to carry out their homiletic. Students will write the presentation, give the presentation in an approved setting, video-record the presentation, and collect feedback from the audience in a written format. The deliverable of this capstone experience will be a portfolio consisting of: (1) a reflection paper (less than 2,000 words) about the experiences informed by audience feedback; (2) the written form of the presentation; (3) completed feedback forms from the audience; and (4) video-recording of the presentation. This capstone project involves strong skills in delivering talks and advanced communication skills. Students choosing this option are required to take *Buddhist Homiletics: The Art of Presenting Buddhist Teachings* as one of the elective courses.

Assessment: 100% coursework

Option D: *Buddhist counselling case study*

Students who are practicing as a helping professional (e.g., psychologists, social workers, counsellors, etc.) can apply knowledge and skills learned from the curriculum to conduct a case study of a client. In a 6,000- to 8,000-word paper, students will use a Buddhist perspective to conceptualize the client's psychological disturbances, describe the application of Buddhist counselling skills and responses of the client, and reflect on the process of counselling. To protect the client's confidentiality, all identifying information of the project should be removed.

Assessment: 100% coursework