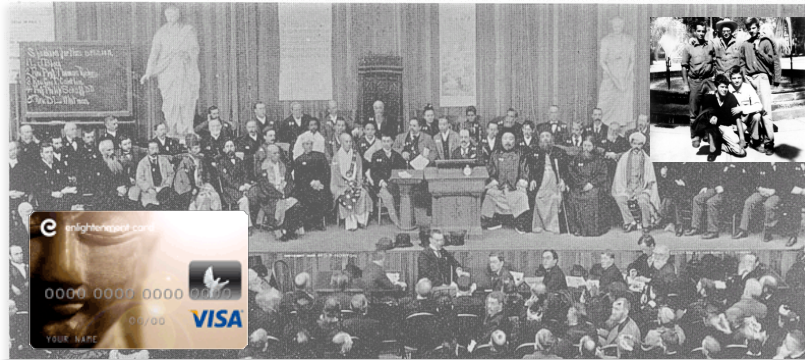


BEAT ZEN, SQUARE ZEN: BUDDHISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE



HUMN 303 • Section 01 • CRN: 16468 • ARHC/DUSC/EGHU

Fall 2012 • TR 2:30–3:52 pm • BIO 221

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Office hours: W 10:00–12:00, or by appointment • Marts 3C

This seminar examines, interprets and explores the arrival and impact of Buddhism in the West generally, and the encounter of Buddhism with American culture in particular. Buddhism 'arrived' in the US in the late 19th and early 20th century in two forms: first, through immigration of Asian laborers to Hawaii and the West coast; second, through the combined adoption of Buddhism by Westerners and the promotion of Buddhism by a few Asian monks and scholars. Over time, a distinctly Western form of Buddhism would develop on the basis of the writings of figures like Paul Carus, D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts. This movement would be picked up and developed further in the postwar period by a group of writers, artists and cultural dropouts known as the Beats, from which it would infiltrate mainstream American popular culture.

The primary objective of this seminar is to introduce students to 'Western Buddhism' as a hybrid religious-cultural project emerging out of the work of figures such as Carus, Suzuki, Watts, Hermann Hesse, Chögyam Trungpa, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Philip Glass. Students will be asked to respond analytically and critically to a number of key works—including novels, poetry, philosophy, works of art, music and performance as well as film, television programs and commercial media—that present variations of "Western Buddhism." This will be accomplished via a number of short writing assignments ("engagement pieces") as well as in the context of regular class and online discussion and presentations. In addition to the material covered in class and via assigned readings, students will be required to engage in library and internet research as part of their in-class presentation on a topic of their own choosing (from a list of possibilities). On-line discussion questions, as well, may occasionally require outside research. This is an *interactive* course; you will be asked to respond and engage with the course material, and with the ideas and opinions of the instructor and other students—though, it is hoped, always in a civil and polite fashion. Evaluation for the course will be based largely on the demonstration of both oral and written critical engagement with course material.

Readings:

Books (available in the bookstore):

- B01: Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Random, 1992)
- B02: Ellen Pearlman, *Nothing and Everything: Influence of Bud'm on the Amer. Avant-Garde* (Evolver, 2012)
- B03: Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*, trans. Bernofsky (Modern Library, 2007)
- B04: Chögyam Trungpa, *Crazy Wisdom* (Shambala, 2001)

PDFs (on Moodle): M1: Keown; M2: Hori; M3: *Discourses*; M4: Lopez; M5: App; M6: Clarke + Arnold; M7: Ama; M8: TBA; M9: Snodgrass + Olcott + Carus; M10: TBA; M11: Kerouac + Mortenson; M12: Ginsberg + Augustine; M13: Snyder + Lavazzi; M14: Watts; M15: Shields

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory. Since this course requires significant student interaction and discussion, and since we are a smallish group, it is absolutely necessary for you to attend each and every class. Only sickness with a note is considered a valid excuse. Each absence without excuse will result in a 2-point deduction from the participation grade. Being late without an excuse will count as half an absence, thus a 1-point deduction. Five absences without a note will result in automatic failure. Zap!

2. PARTICIPATION

20%

Class participation, including discussion of readings and questions posed in class and on Moodle, is a requirement. Participation is a matter of quality not quantity. You do not have to speak every class, but rather show that you have done the readings and are willing and able to engage, in a thoughtful way, with the topics under discussion. Good questions are also an important aspect of participation.

3. ENGAGEMENT PIECES (EPs)

10% x 3 = 30%

A large part of this course will be devoted to writing, understood as a *process* rather than simply a *means* of communication. In order to achieve this, we will be employing methods of *exploratory* writing, i.e., writing that is itself part of the process of developing one's thoughts and arguments. Each student will be required to write a total of three 1500-word "engagement pieces," in response to a major issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). You will have the opportunity to hand in drafts of your work, and will receive written and oral feedback. As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

4. READING QUESTIONS (RQs)

15%

For each and every reading, all students will be asked to submit TWO questions for discussion (one *intensive* and one *extensive*) on the Moodle page (instructions will be provided in class). Questions must be submitted by **midnight** on the evening before the class in which the reading will be discussed. The instructor will choose the best questions and we will use these as a basis for class discussion. At the end of the term, each student will be evaluated on the overall quality of their questions.

5. BUDDHISM IN THE BIG APPLE – FIELD TRIP REPORT

10%

A brief writing assignment in which you respond to one or more events, objects encountered during our New York Field Trip.

6. FINAL PRESENTATION

25%

A 15-minute oral presentation on a topic of your choosing, related to the theme of Western Buddhism as a hybrid religio-cultural form. Proposals will be due in early October, and the presentations will take place in the final two weeks of class.

CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS (the fine print):

- All written work is to be submitted electronically as an MS Word file with a ".doc" or ".docx" suffix and your last name in the filename; e.g., Smith-EP1(d) ['d' for draft; 'f' for final version].
- Note taking on laptops is NOT permitted. Cell phones are to be turned off BEFORE EACH CLASS.
- All late assignments will be penalized at a rate of one grade unit per day (i.e. a B becomes a B- and so forth). Technological excuses for lateness ("My roommate borrowed my laptop for the weekend . . ."; "My dog ate my hard drive . . ." etc.) will *not* be accepted, so please don't try them.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS

I. Introduction: Buddhism & the West, c. 550 BCE–1850 CE

Wk 1	8/23	Course Introduction	M1; M2
Wk 2	8/28–8/30	Buddha, Dharma, Sangha	M3; M4; B1: 4–30
Wk 3	9/4–9/6*	"Oriental Enlightenment": The <i>Philosophes</i>	B1: 31–53; M5

III. Buddhism in America I: Emerson to Carus

Wk 4	9/11–9/13 [§]	"The Light of Asia": Victorian Reactions	M6; B1: 54–69
Wk 5	9/18–9/20 [†]	Immigration of Asian Buddhists to America	B1: 70–82; M7
Wk 6	9/24 (M)	Dis-orienting America Lecture Series I: Gandhi	M8
	9/25–9/27*	"White Buddhists" & "Eastern Buddhism"	B1: 83–166; M9
	9/29 (ST)	Buddhism in the Big Apple: New York Field Trip	

IV. Buddhism in America II: Suzuki, Hesse & the Beats

Wk 7	10/2–10/4 [§]	Buddhism and the Postwar Avant-Garde	B2
Wk 8	10/11 [†]	Beat Buddhism I: Hesse	B3
Wk 9	10/15 (M)	Dis-orienting America Lecture Series II: Siegler	M10
	10/16–10/18*	Beat Buddhism II: Kerouac & Ginsberg	B1: 168–224; M11; M12
Wk 10	10/23–10/25 [§]	Beat Buddhism III: Snyder & Watts	B1: 225–272; M13; M14
Wk 11	10/30–11/01 [†]	<i>Crazy Wisdom</i>	B4

V. Buddhism in America III: Buddhism in US Popular Culture

Wk 12	11/05 (M)	Dis-orienting America Lecture Series III: Shields	M15
	11/06–11/08	Buddhism in Pop Culture I: Film & Television / Art	
Wk 13	11/13–11/15	Buddhism in Pop Culture II: Music / Advertising	
Wk 14	11/20	Presentations I	
Wk 15	11/27–11/29	Presentations II & III	
Wk 16	12/4	Course Conclusions	

CODE: * = EP ASSIGNED § = EP DRAFT DUE † = EP FINAL DUE



GRADING POLICIES

In grading all written assignments I ask the following questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Is the thesis interesting / relevant to the course?
3. Is the paper free from long quotations / excessive borrowing of ideas?
4. Is the paper reasonably well written (i.e., sentence structure, grammar, spelling)?
5. Is it long enough / not too long?

If the answer to any of the above is 'no', the paper will receive a C grade of some form. If the answer to more than two of the above is 'no', the paper will receive a D grade. If all of the above are answered by 'yes', the following additional questions apply:

6. How thoughtful / original is the paper?
7. How well organized is the paper? Does it have a conclusion?
8. Is the style efficient, not wordy or unclear?
9. Does the writing betray any special elegance?
10. Does the paper go 'beyond' the course material to explore other possibilities?

Depending on the answers to these questions, the paper will receive some form of A or B grade.

Grading for the Presentation will be based on your knowledge of the material, as well as your ability to clearly and succinctly respond to significant issues and problems related to the works under discussion.

How to do well in the course? Here are some general tips:

- Sleep 7 hours per night, and eat breakfast; be energetic and enthusiastic, even if it requires espresso;
- Attend every class without exception, or let me know well in advance if you do need to miss a class;
- Read the material prior to each class, and make notes on the reading(s), including questions or points that intrigue, fascinate, confuse or repulse you (or any combination of the four);
- Try to relate the material to other topics discussed in the course;
- Bring your questions and comments to class and be prepared to speak;
- Be willing to engage with others, the instructor and guest lecturers, in a thoughtful and polite fashion;
- Talk about the class outside of class, with others, when you have the chance;
- Write well; and take into account my comments on your drafts; get help if you need it;
- Be nice to me (I like dark chocolate – anything 85% proof or higher).

When it comes down to it, there is absolutely no reason for anybody to get a grade lower than B– in this class. The only way you can get a C, D or F is if you fail to attend and/or do not do the work. Having said that, it is also very difficult to get an 'A' grade (95%+) in this course; to do so, you will need to: a) show consistent excellence in all of your work—both written and oral; and b) go above and beyond the expectations of the course, which may require taking creative risks.

GRADING RUBRIC:	95–100%	=	A	4.00	Near Perfect!
	89–94%	=	A-	3.67	Excellent
	83–88%	=	B+	3.33	Very Good
	77–82%	=	B	3.00	Good
	71–76%	=	B-	2.67	Average
	65–70%	=	C+	2.33	Below Average
	59–64%	=	C	2.00	Barely Acceptable
	53–58%	=	C-	1.50	Not Good
	47–52%	=	D	1.00	Poor
	0–46%	=	F	0.00	Not Acceptable

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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #1

Assigned: Thursday, Sept 6
Draft Due: Thursday, Sept 13
Final Due: Thursday, Sept 20
Length: 1500 words, typed, single-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)
Submission: As Word document, posted to Moodle
Worth: 10% of final grade

Throughout the duration of the course, students will be required to write a total of three short (1500 word) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

ASSIGNMENT

Thus far we have had a crash course in 'Basic Buddhism', and now we are beginning to explore early contacts between Buddhism and Western culture and ideas. This first assignment is intended to allow you to further explore one or two particular Buddhist ideas, issues or value raised in the course of the readings, lectures or discussions, and to develop an argument *as to the applicability of that idea or issue in contemporary American society*. The key here is focus: Do not attempt to look at 'Buddhism' (whatever that is!) as a whole, but rather at specific teachings (or values) that arise from Dharma, at least as understood by most early Buddhists. As for your interpretation of 'contemporary American society', I'll leave that up to you, though you need to be careful not to over-generalize about American values and so on. You *must use at least two of the readings* to back up your arguments, but please do not use Hori or Fields, since their focus is explicitly on the confluence of Buddhism and American culture. And do not use Keown, since his article is simply introductory. Thus, you are limited to the pdf readings M3-M6 (Lopez, Craving, App, Clarke & Arnold). In a sense, I am asking you to 'pre-emptively imagine' some of the issues we will discuss in the remaining sections of this course.

As noted in Grading Policies, you *must* be critical in developing your argument (and there must be some sort of 'argument'), but you also get marks for creativity, so do not be afraid to push the envelope in some way. Having the draft system allows for you to do this without risk—though I may tell you in my comments to give up what you're trying to do.

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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #2

Assigned: *Thursday, October 4*
Draft Due: *Thursday, October 11*
Final Due: *Thursday, October 18*
Length: *1500 words, typed, single-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)*
Submission: *As Word document, posted to Moodle*
Worth: *10% of final grade*

Throughout the duration of the course, students will be required to write a total of three short (1500 word) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

ASSIGNMENT

As noted in class, Hermann Hesse's short novel *Siddhartha*, published in German in 1922 and first translated into English in 1951, became a sensation among post-war American youth and intellectuals. The book is set in ancient India, in the time of the historical Buddha, but focuses on the journey of another figure (also named Siddhartha). The book has been held up as a classic of early twentieth-century 'existentialist' thought, associated with writers and thinkers such as Sartre, Camus, Gide, and Heidegger. For this assignment, I would like to explore and interpret a central 'message' of the book, in relation to specific Buddhist teachings that we have studied, as well as in relation to contemporary, "modern"—and particularly American—ideals. While developing your argument, consider the following questions: *Why was Hesse's book so successful? Is it critical of 'traditional' Buddhism? If so, how? Is the message a "Buddhist" one, in your estimation? Why or why not? What might traditional Buddhist think of the central character? How does this work relate, if at all, to the teachings of D. T. Suzuki and the interpretations of such by the post-war avant-garde? What are the differences, if any, between Buddhism and "existentialism" (this may require some minimal outside research).* You do not have to—in fact should not—answer *all* these questions; they are meant to help you focus and develop your own argument. Make sure to refer to specific passages or scenes from the book to support your argument (but do not spend much space with direct quotes).

And remember, creativity = good; boring = bad.

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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #3

Assigned: ***Thursday, November 1***
Draft Due: ***Thursday, November 8***
Final Due: ***Thursday, November 15***
Length: ***1500 words, typed, single-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)***
Submission: ***As Word document, posted to Moodle***
Worth: ***10% of final grade***

Throughout the duration of the course, students will be required to write a total of three short (1500 word) "engagement pieces," in response to an issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

ASSIGNMENT

Please analyze at least TWO examples of the use (or 'misuse') of Buddhist figures, ideas, themes, terms, etc., in contemporary US popular culture, which can include music, television, film, popular fiction, advertising, or merchandise.).