

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27

PHILOSOP 2264F
Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course Owl BrightSpace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

There are no prerequisites for this course. It introduces both philosophy and Early Buddhism, and undergraduate students from any field should find the lectures and readings accessible.

COURSE 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.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

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.

TEXTS

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.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Position Papers (~500 words) x 4 (10% each, best 3 out of 4 chosen): 30%

Group Essays (~1000 words) x 3 (15% each): 45%

Take-Home Final Exam: 25%

Notes on assignments:

- Each Group Essay project includes four obligatory elements: the group's work plan; their outline; the Group Essay itself; and the detailed peer evaluation by each member of the team. The whole group will be assigned a grade based on the first three elements, and then that grade will be increased/decreased for each student based on the peer evaluations.
- 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.
- Answers on the take-home final exam must reflect mastery of 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.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

- All written work must be submitted electronically via Brightspace.
- Late submissions will not be accepted without explicit prior permission of the instructor and/or proper medical documentation. There is no "late penalty": unsubmitted works receive a zero.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The Department of Philosophy policies that govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses are available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website <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.

AUDIT

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

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration; however, students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and allows them to produce original written contributions.

If plagiarism or unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes and/or drafts of assignments after the assignment has been submitted. Students must keep all notes and first drafts until the assignment is returned to them.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.”

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodatio
ndisabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodatio%20ndisabilities.pdf)

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western’s efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students”

<http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

The Student Medical Certificate is available [here](#)

SPECIAL EXAMINATIONS

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student’s control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student’s ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.

2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant

Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner. Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Western's Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf.

In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be “given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than **one week** prior to the writing of the test”.

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.

SCHOLASTIC 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 the following Web site:

https://www.uwo.ca/biology/pdfs/undergraduate/rights-and-responsibilities/scholastic_discipline_.pdf

Statement on the use of plagiarism-checking software

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>).

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters.

Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here: https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) 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 (24/7 availability).

GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Western University is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/index.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.