

University of Central Florida
PHI/REL 3930 H: The Buddha's Brain: Buddhism and Cognitive Sciences
in Dialogue
Spring 2018, Syllabus



Course Information

- Title: The Buddha's Brain: Buddhism and Cognitive Sciences in Dialogue
- Course number: PHI/REL 3930H
- Credit hours: 3.0
- Term: Spring semester 2018
- Days and times: Tuesday and Thursday; 4:30 pm – 5:45 pm
- Location: Burnett Honors College (BHC) 0128

Instructors Information

- Name: Luis Favela, Ph.D.
 - Email: luis.favela@ucf.edu
 - Website: <http://philosophy.cah.ucf.edu/staff.php?id=1017>
 - Office location: PSY 0245
 - Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 12:00 – 1:00 pm
- Name: Ann Gleig, Ph.D.
 - Email: ann.gleig@ucf.edu
 - Website: <http://philosophy.cah.ucf.edu/staff.php?id=569>
 - Office location: PSY 0226
 - Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00 – 4:00 pm

Course Description

- In 1987, the first Mind and Life dialogue was held in Dharamsala, India between His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and cognitive scientists. The purpose of the meeting was to begin a conversation between religion (Buddhism) and science (cognitive sciences). Having completed its 32nd meeting in December 2017, the Mind and Life dialogues have gathered together Buddhist practitioners and scholars with cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, and physicists to address topics such as addiction, altruism, cosmology, death, emotions, meditation, and memory. The unifying theme across these interdisciplinary conversations is that it is mutually beneficial to bring together “Eastern” contemplative practices, with “Western” sciences. Though one group is categorized as “religious” and the other as “scientific,” both are interested in gaining deeper understanding of the human condition. By demonstrating the (sometimes surprising) similarities and differences between religious and scientific ways of understanding how humans are in the world, the Mind and Life dialogues have confirmed how enriching such interdisciplinary conversations can be.

In continuing this tradition of dialogue between religion and science, this course brings together perspectives from Buddhism and cognitive sciences to examine three topics: (1) the nature of mind and self; (2) meditation; and (3) the role culture plays in such interdisciplinary conversations between religion and science. In order to do this, students will engage with each other and the instructors, and the instructors will be in dialogue with each other. One goal of this course is for students to experience what real interdisciplinary dialogues can be

like between religion and science. The course is structured around five modules. The aim of the first two modules is to give students a foundational literacy of the two disciplines so they will be better equipped to put them into dialogue. In module one, Dr. Gleig will present an overview of Buddhism, and in module two, Dr. Favela will present an overview of the cognitive sciences. The next two modules will engage more specifically with ways in which Buddhism and cognitive sciences are similar and different in how they approach meditation and understand the mind and self. Finally, we will critically examine the nature of cross-cultural, interdisciplinary dialogues. In this final part of the course, we highlight the need to be cautious when doing interdisciplinary work and not overlooking the truly unique contributions of each field. With that said, we hope to demonstrate just how fruitful (and fun) cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, and religion/science dialogues can be.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to *define* and *describe* the main theories and concepts of Buddhism.
- Students will be able to *define* and *describe* the main theories and concepts of the cognitive sciences.
- Students will be able to *distinguish* normative information from descriptive information.
- Students will be able to *synthesize* cross-disciplinary information from Buddhism and the cognitive sciences in order to address issues related to the mind, self, and meditation.
- Students will be able to *critically evaluate* the application of information from one domain of inquiry to another, namely, from Buddhism to cognitive sciences and vice versa.
- Students will be able to *articulate* their positions concerning Buddhist and cognitive scientific approaches to the mind, self, and meditation.

Course Materials

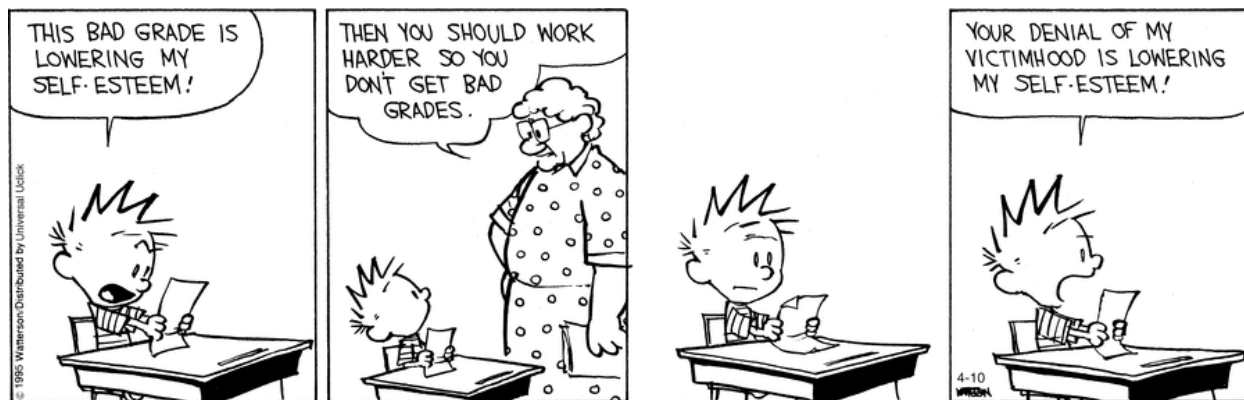
- Required textbooks:
 - Flanagan, O. (2011). *The bodhisattva's brain: Buddhism naturalized*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. ISBN # 9780262525206
 - Keown, D. (2013). *Buddhism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press. ISBN # 9780199663835
 - McMahan, D., & Braun, E. *Meditation, Buddhism and science*. Oxford and New York. ISBN 978-0-19-049580-0
- All other readings will be provided as PDFs via Webcourses.

Course Requirements

- **Required Academic Activity**
 - All instructors/faculty are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the following academic activity by the end of the first week of classes or as soon as possible after adding the course. Failure to do so may result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.
 - Activity: Submit signed last page of syllabus. Due 4:30 pm, Thursday, January 11.
- Participation
 - Participation is accounted for by means of various in-class activities.
 - Examples include: class discussions, quick writes, and think-pair-share.
- Quizzes

- There will be 5 quizzes.
- Quiz questions will be based on material from the assigned readings and in-class lectures and discussions.
- Paper
 - Students will have one paper assignment.
 - Guidelines and expectations will be distributed closer to the assignment date.
- Creative First-Person Assignment: Mindfulness Meditation: Religious and Scientific
 - The practice of meditation has been at the heart of the conversation between Buddhism and the mind sciences (i.e., cognitive sciences, neuroscience, and psychology). Classical Buddhist meditations have been the object of many scientific research studies and mindfulness meditation, a secular practice derived from early Buddhism, has gone mainstream as a result of scientific studies that suggest it has numerous health benefits. Given the centrality of meditation to the encounter between Buddhism and the mind sciences, this course will require a first-person experiential project. You will be required to practice a *secular* or *Buddhist* meditation exercise daily for a period of ten days and record your experience in a journal. You will put this first-person learning experience into dialogue with two different theories or narratives of this practice: one narrative will be drawn from the mind sciences and the other will be drawn from classical Buddhist sources. Detailed instructions will be given for this assignment.
- Note: You are responsible for all reading assignments. Unless stated otherwise (e.g., “optional” readings), anything assigned to you is potential quiz or paper material.

Grading



- Participation:
 - 10% of total grade
 - Students are allowed to miss two classes without penalty. After, each absence is a 2% deduction from the participation portion of the final grade.
- Quizzes:
 - 5 quizzes
 - 10% each, 50% of total grade
- Paper: 20% of total grade
- Creative First-Person Project: 20% of total grade
- The following example demonstrates how +/- are assigned
 - B- = 80, 81, 82%

- B = 83, 84, 85, 86%
- B+ = 87, 88, 89%
- Percentages are rounded from 0.5+, for example, an 82.6% is a B, an 89.8% is a A-, etc.
- Incomplete grades: The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course and the remaining work can be completed the next semester. As the instructor for this course, I am the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete. Incomplete work must be finished by the end of the subsequent semester or the “I” will automatically be recorded as an “F” on your transcript.
- Extensions and late assignments
 - In general, no extensions will be allowed or late assignments accepted. (Really.)
 - However, extensions and late assignments will be considered for exceptional circumstances (e.g., family or medical emergencies) if appropriate documentation can be provided (e.g., doctor’s note, funeral program, etc.).
 - If an assignment is accepted late, then it will be deducted 5% of the total possible points for every 12-hour block of time it is submitted late, including weekends.
- Extra credit: There is no extra credit.
- Grade distributions: The final grades will not be curved.
- Grade dissemination: Graded quizzes, papers, and other materials in this course will be returned individually by request. You can access your scores at any time using the Grade Book function of Webcourses. If you need help accessing myUCF Grades, see the online tutorial: <https://myucfgrades.ucf.edu/help/>.

Course Policies

- Contact procedures
 - In-person contact: If you have questions related to the course, then see me before or after our scheduled class meetings, or during my office hours. We can attempt to schedule another time if you are unable to meet during those.
 - Email: Keep emailing to a minimum. It is better to ask me in person. However, if you do email us, then be professional (e.g., start the email with “Hello Dr. Favela” or “Hello Dr. Gleig” and not “Hey you, can I have...”) and concise. Allow 24 hours for a response during the week, and possibly more during the weekend and holidays.
 - Webcourses: Do not contact Dr. Favela via Webcourses. He does not check it and will not reply. Dr. Gleig is available via UCF email or Webcourses.
- Professionalism policy: Per university policy and classroom etiquette, mobile phones, iPods, etc. must be silenced during the entire class time period. Those not heeding this rule will be asked to leave the classroom immediately so as to not disrupt the learning environment. Please arrive on time for all class meetings. Students who habitually disturb the class by talking, arriving late, etc., will be warned and can suffer a reduction in their final class grade.
- In-class technology policy: “Stay focused” rule (cf. Shirky 2014): *Electronic devices such as laptops, iPads, smart phones, etc. are not allowed in class, unless an assignment requires it.* Why not? First, numerous studies show that students spend a great deal of their laptop time in class on activities not related to the course (Facebook, games, Reddit, etc.) and—most importantly—that these



distractions negatively impact learning and grades (Fried, 2008; Gorlick, 2009; Holstead, 2015; Thagard, 2010). Second, research shows that non-class-related laptop use distracts and impacts the learning of other students (Fried, 2008; Thagard, 2010). Third, other research shows that taking notes by hand is more effective in learning (Berninger et al., 2006; Bounds, 2010; James & Engelhardt, 2010; Konnikova, 2010; Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). In summary, electronic devices are not allowed in class, except for those with documented needs, which, if that is the case, you need to talk to one of us during the first two weeks of class. Contact either of us if you would like full references for the above citations.

- Academic integrity and plagiarism
 - As reflected in the UCF creed (<http://creed.ucf.edu>), integrity and scholarship are core values that should guide our conduct and decisions as members of the UCF community. Plagiarism and cheating contradict these values, and so are very serious academic offenses. Penalties can include a failing grade in an assignment or in the course, or suspension or expulsion from the university. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and follow the University's Rules of Conduct (see www.osc.sdes.ucf.edu).
 - Plagiarism: Many incidents of plagiarism result from students' lack of understanding about what constitutes plagiarism. However, you are expected to familiarize yourself with UCF's policy on plagiarism. All work you submit must be your own scholarly and creative efforts. UCF's Golden Rule defines plagiarism as follows: "whereby another's work is used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own."
 - Plagiarism-detection service: In this course we will utilize [turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com), an automated system which I use to quickly and easily compare each student's assignment with billions of web sites, as well as an enormous database of student papers that grows with each submission. Accordingly, you will be expected to submit all assignments to both [turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) and me. After the assignment is processed, I receive a report from [turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) that states if and how another author's work was used in the assignment. For a more detailed look at this process visit <http://www.turnitin.com>.
- Course accessibility: It is my goal that this class be an accessible and welcoming experience for all students, including those with disabilities that may impact learning in this class. If anyone believes the design of this course poses barriers to effectively participating and/or demonstrating learning in this course, please meet with me (with or without a Student Accessibility Services (SAS) accommodation letter) to discuss reasonable options or adjustments. During our discussion, I may suggest the possibility/necessity of your contacting SAS (Ferrell Commons 185; 407-823-2371; sas@ucf.edu) to talk about academic accommodations. You are welcome to talk to me at any point in the semester about course design concerns, but it is always best if we can talk at least one week prior to the need for any modifications.
- Syllabus adjustments: The instructor reserves the right to make adjustments to all parts of the syllabus during the course. If any adjustments are made, the instructor will inform students of such changes.

Important Dates <<http://calendar.ucf.edu/2018/spring>>

- Classes begin: January 8
- Last day to drop and request full refund: January 11
- Add deadline: January 12
- Spring break: March 12-19
- Withdrawal deadline: March 21
- Classes end: April 23
- Study day: April 24
- Finals: April 25-May 1
- Grades available: May 7

Schedule**JANUARY**

9. Introductions & “Emptying Our Cups”

- Bushwell & Lopez “Ten Misperceptions About Buddhism” <

<http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/ten-misconceptions-about-buddhism-249449>>

- Lindemann “Many people believe myths about how the brain works” <

<https://www.researchgate.net/blog/post/many-people-believe-myths-about-how-the-brain-works>>

- Table A1 in Appendix A in Macdonald et al. “Dispelling the myth: Training in education or neuroscience decreases but does not eliminate beliefs in neuromyths” <

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01314/full>>

11. Buddhism (The Life of the Buddha)

- Keown Ch. 1-3.

16. Buddhism (The Four Noble Truths)

- Keown Ch. 4.

18. Buddhism

- Keown Ch. 6
- Documentary: The Life of the Buddha

23. Buddhism (Mahayana)

- Keown Ch. 5.
- The Parable of the Burning House (PDF on Webcourses)

25. Buddhist Philosophy

- Rahula “The Third Noble Truth” (PDF on Webcourses)
- Madhyamakha & Yogachara (PDF on Webcourses)

30. Buddhism (Vajrayana)

- Paul Williams “Tantric Buddhism in India” (PDF on Webcourses)

FEBRUARY

1. Buddhism (Meditation)

- Keown Ch. 7&8.

- *Satipatthana Sutta* (“The Four Foundations of Mindfulness”)

<<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanasatta/wheel019.html#found>>

- Metta Sutta (“Loving-Kindness Sutta”)

<<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.amar.html>>

- Module 1 Quiz

6. Cognitive Science

- Readings TBA

8. Cognitive Science

- Readings TBA

13. Cognitive Science

- Readings TBA

15. Cognitive Science

- Readings TBA

20. Cognitive Science

- Readings TBA

22. Cognitive Science

- Readings TBA

- Module 2 Quiz

27. Neuroscience and Happiness

- Readings TBA

MARCH

1. Neuroscience and Happiness

- Readings TBA

6. The Scientific Buddha

- Keown Ch. 9

- Dharmapala, “Buddhism and Christianity,” World Parliament of Religion

<https://parliamentofreligions.org/sites/default/files/Dharmapala_0.pdf>

8. Buddhism and Science: A Match Made in Heaven?

- Readings TBA.

- *Introduce Meditation Project*

- Module 3 Quiz

MARCH 13-15 SPRING BREAK

20. Complicating the Dialogue: Meditation, Buddhism and Science
- McMahan & Braun Introduction and Ch. 1

22. Mindfulness as Universal Dharma?
- McMahan & Braun, Ch. 9 & 10.

27. Cognitive Science Considerations
- McMahan & Braun, Ch. 3 & 4.

29. Meta-Reflections on the Scientific Study of Meditation
- McMahan & Braun Ch. 5 & 6.
- Module 4 Quiz

APRIL

3. *Bodhisattva's Brain*
- Readings TBA

5. *Bodhisattva's Brain*
- Readings TBA

10. *Bodhisattva's Brain*
- Readings TBA

12. *Bodhisattva's Brain*
- Readings TBA

17. *Bodhisattva's Brain*
- Readings TBA

19. Last Class: Review
- Module 5 Quiz

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Please fill out and sign this sheet once you have read the syllabus, detach this page, and turn it in to the professor during the first week of class—or, if you transferred in late, by the end of that week.

I have read the syllabus. I understand and agree to follow all course policies in the syllabus.

Name (print clearly): _____

Student ID #: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____