Classic Buddhist Texts
Theology 3724. PW1. (Summer, 2020)

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Description
This course will address themes that appear in Buddhist writings from the past twenty-five hundred years, including the problem of human suffering and its cause, the qualities and role of a spiritual guide, and the nature of “enlightenment.” We will focus on primary materials, whether they be discourses attributed to the Buddha and his disciples, narratives about preeminent Buddhist figures, treatises by Buddhist luminaries, or contemporary commentaries on the above. The thematic structure of the course will allow us to think about how similar ideas morph in the hands of different authors and communities, who themselves articulate their ideas using radically different arguments, literary forms, and modes of persuasion.

Goals
- Gain familiarity with common Buddhist concepts and strive to interpret them, sympathetically and critically.
- Develop confidence in our ability to respond to religious texts, intellectually and emotionally, paying attention to both the ideas involved and the strategies used to present the ideas.
- Practice asking questions of the texts that we read by responding to specific passages, sentences, and even words.

Requirements
- Weekly readings and participation. In addition to taking notes on readings, students will be asked to annotate readings with their questions, respond to questions generated by the professor, and carry out thought-exercises.
- Film Responses. Students will write informal responses to one Buddhist film.
- Exams. Exams will ask students to display facility with key terms and themes.
- Final Project or Final Exam. Students will have some freedom to choose how best to show off their learning at the end of the summer session.

Grading Rubric: TBD
Course Plan

**Module I. The Problem of Suffering**

Unit 1. Three Sufferings
Unit 2. Impermanence
Unit 3. Four Truths
Unit 4. What is Karma?

**Module II. Buddhist Heroes: Responding to Suffering**

Unit 1. Who Is the Buddha?
Unit 2. A Second Buddhist Superhero: The *Mahayana* Model

**Module III: Confronting Reality: What is Beneath Suffering?**

Unit 1. Interbeing
Unit 2. No-Self

**Module IV. Training: Practicing with Suffering**

Unit 1. Developing Enlightened Qualities
Unit 2. The Poetry of the Bodhisattva Path