Self-Cultivation & Spiritual Practice: Comparative Perspectives

Course director: Prof. Adrian Ivakhiv, aivakhiv@uvm.edu
Office: Room 211, Bittersweet House, 153 South Prospect Street (at Main St.)
Consultation hours: Tue. 3:00-4:00 pm, Thur. 10:00 am-12:00 pm
Appointments: Book through Cathy Trivieres (x. 64055, envs@uvm.edu) or Outlook
Class meetings: Tuesday & Thursday 1:15-2:30 pm, University Heights North 16

Overview
This course introduces students to the comparative study of religious, spiritual, and psycho-physical practices—exercises by which individuals and groups deepen, develop, challenge, and transform their perceptions and capacities for action in harmony with religious, moral-ethical, or philosophical ideals. The course covers a range that spans from ancient Greek and Roman philosophers (such as Stoics, Epicurians, and Neoplatonists), yogis and monks of South and East Asia, Christian and Muslim ascetics and Renaissance mages, to practitioners of modern forms of westernized yoga, martial arts, ritual magic, and environmental and spiritual activism. Readings of ancient texts and contemporary philosophical and sociological writings are complemented by practical exercises, writing and presentation assignments, and a practice project.
**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Philosophers in the ancient world were less interested in knowledge for its own sake than in the "art of living." From ancient Greece and Rome to China and India, the core of philosophical practice often consisted of spiritual exercises (askesis, ἄσκησις, Gk.) aimed at self-cultivation (xiushen, 修真, Ch.). This interest has been revived in today's growing fascination with spiritual practices undertaken both within and well outside the context of traditional religion.

This course introduces students to the comparative study of religious, spiritual, and psycho-physical practices—exercises by which individuals and groups deepen, develop, challenge, and transform their perceptions and capacities for action in harmony with religious, moral-ethical, or philosophical ideals. This involves a two-part definition of "spiritual practice," with each of these two components being integral to the practices examined: (1) a physical and/or psychological activity that is performed regularly, with the aim of improvement or attainment toward a goal, and (2) an ideal that contains some moral or ethical understanding of "the good," a "good life," a happy and fulfilling life, etc. "Spiritual" in this sense concerns that which affects the "whole person" and which gives people "meaning" in our lives and helps us answer such questions as: what are we here for? how can and how should we live?

Such practices may range from the "internal" or "mental" (e.g., meditation, visualization) to the physical (breathing exercises, dance, pilgrimage, mountaineering); from the contemplative (focused listening) to the expressive (journaling, artistic performance); from the private and individual to the public and collective; and from tightly regulated to highly unregulated settings. They may function in traditionally religious contexts circumscribed by concepts of sanctity or strict codes of duty and prohibition; or they may be completely free of such constraints, as in today's highly individualized "spiritual marketplace." Critically examining "spirituality" raises questions about why this term has become such a popular and appealing category for many people today, and why today's forms of spirituality tend to be individualized and more about the self than about the group or society as a whole. Alternative terms will be explored, including self-cultivation, self-perfection, self- (or personal) transformation, personal growth, transcendence, and others; tensions and contradictions between these will also be examined.

The course will cover a spectrum of practices as well as the philosophies that underlie them, drawn from a broad historical range: from ancient Greece and Rome (including Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics, and Neoplatonists), ancient and medieval South and East Asia, medieval Christianity and Islam, to the "magical" philosophy of Renaissance Europe, to practitioners of modern forms of westernized yoga, martial arts, meditation, neo-shamanism, nature spirituality, environmental activism, extreme sports, and computer apps for mental and emotional strength training and longevity. Readings of original texts (in translation) and contemporary philosophical writings will be complemented by practical exercises and writing and presentation assignments. We will discuss debates over the place of such practices in varying cultural contexts; their relations to religion, conformity and deviance, social order and dissent, economic class, race, and gender; and their changing place in today's pluralistic and globalized world. We will do this, in part, to help facilitate students' own development of a practical life-philosophy that could sustain their pursuit of academic, professional, personal, and relational goals.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**, or, What this course aims to do:

1. Students will be introduced to a historically and culturally informed, comparative perspective on spiritual practices. This perspective will be rooted in current literature in religious studies, philosophy (as practice), and the social sciences, with reference to new fields of consciousness studies, the psychology of happiness and well-being, and the spiritual and "post-secular" turns in religious and cultural studies. In particular, we will aim to give you tools for critically engaging with the landscape of contemporary spirituality, while understanding commonalities and differences from past contexts, including the historical contexts in which contemporary practices originated.

2. Students will be challenged, with the aid of concepts and practices from divergent cultural contexts, to critically think through their own assumptions about religion, spirituality, the self, morality, and
the good life; and will be introduced to tools for critical assessment and evaluation of claims regarding spirituality and spiritual authority, self-help, and personal growth.

3. Students will be provided the opportunity to engage in a spiritual or psycho-physical practice in a sustained manner, to reflect on that engagement through multiple lenses, and to introduce this practice to other students through an appropriate pedagogical format.

4. Students will be provided the opportunity to improve their reading, writing, presentation, research, and analytical skills through iterative writing exercises, class presentations, and other assignments.

**DISCLAIMERS, or, What this course will not do:**

1. This course does not aim to provide students with expertise in any single form of spiritual practice, nor with any single tradition of spiritual, religious, or philosophical thought. Its emphasis is comparative, and the “expertise” that will be aimed for is in comparative and critical thinking about spirituality as a contemporary discourse and as a form of philosophical and experiential practice.

2. (This one’s important!) Students should be aware that some experiential exercises that fall under the rubric of “spiritual practice” can trigger the arousal of difficult and challenging emotions connected to past experiences, beliefs, and concepts of self. The course is not intended to provide a therapeutic function, nor am I a licensed therapist in the position of doing that. Our approach in the course is guided by the goal of learning about the topic—through reading, conversation, and limited practical exercises—and not that of promoting any particular spiritual or psychological result. No classroom exercises of this kind will be mandatory, and students should exercise their judgment about their own level of participation. Students unsure about their personal pursuit of such practices are encouraged to seek counseling support through UVM’s Center for Health and Wellbeing (http://www.uvm.edu/~chwb) and/or through the CAPS office (Counseling and Psychiatry Services, tel. 656-3340). If at any point during a specific experiential exercise, either in class or in a course-related activity, you notice a heightening of anxiety associated with the activity, it is recommended that you discontinue the practice and consult with the instructor.

**READINGS**

All course readings will be made available electronically in BlackBoard. Some will be provided in hard copy. Students are strongly encouraged to print out required readings (if these are not provided) and to keep them in a three-ring course binder, along with the course syllabus and other handouts. This is because research has shown that reading personally owned hard copies of texts (which can be brought to class, marked up, etc.) results in significantly greater “depth” retention of material.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

Students will be evaluated according to the following grading breakdown. Exceptions may be requested in writing to account for different learning styles; any such requests should be submitted by the end of the second week of classes.

1. Classroom attendance & participation
   - Attendance=15, Participation=5  20

2. Personal journal (3+10+12)  25

3. Practice project (& auto-ethnography)
   - Proposal=3, Progress report=2, Workshop=5, Final report=20  30

4. Research paper
   - Proposal=3, First draft=2, Final draft=20  25
   - Total: 100
1. **CLASSROOM ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION** (20%)  

**Attendance and quality of participation:** Your participation grade will incorporate your attendance and performance in class discussions. You are expected to attend all classes. If you will be absent for any reason, please let me know ahead of time and indicate how you plan to make up missed work. Participation is a significant part of your grade and difficult to do if you are not there. Respect and consideration for fellow students, instructors, guests, and the ideas they express is essential at all times. Please see Course Policies below, esp. #5 on respectful class conduct.

**Reading and ‘prompts’:** The course will cover a great deal of material in a short time period, so it is important for you to stay current on the reading. I will not be lecturing on the readings, but we will discuss your responses to readings as we clarify their main points. Please come to class prepared to speak to the substance of all assigned reading materials. We will normally assign one or two students to prepare discussion prompts for each article; these should distill your understanding of the reading material while interrogating its relations to previous readings and class discussion. You will be expected to take on at least two of these throughout the semester (though more will be possible), and they will contribute to your participation grade.

2. **PERSONAL JOURNAL** (25%)  

Students will be expected to keep a journal through the entire semester. The goal of the journal is to make the class materials “your own” by reflecting on them critically and comparatively and by relating them to your own life (to the extent you feel comfortable). As a minimum, the journal should include at least one set of reflections per week (300 words or more) on the themes and readings of that week as a whole. If you wish, the journal could include your class notes, summaries of readings, and your practice journal (related to the Practice Project; see below), but if these are included, please indicate a difference between these categories and your reflections on themes/readings. The journal will be evaluated on the quality and depth of engagement with course materials and ideas. It will be collected and evaluated on three occasions during the semester as marked in the course schedule (for 3 grade points, 10 grade points, and 12 grade points, respectively). The final submission will include an essay-style response to a synthesizing question, which will be announced ahead of time. Note that your journal can be in any format, but if it is handwritten, you must submit a sample of your handwriting for approval (for its legibility) by the second week of the class.

**Journal collection dates:** February 7, March 7, May 2.

4. **PRACTICE PROJECT & AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY** (30%)*  

This will be a multi-part project spread over a large part of the semester. You will be asked to “adopt” a practice or set of practices for a period of about four weeks (see below* for an alternative option). Adopting the practice will normally mean committing to practice it daily, for no less than 10 minutes per day, at least 4 days a week, and no less than 60 minutes per week in total, during the 4-week practice period. These are guidelines; the actual duration will vary depending on the nature of the practice. The practice could be entirely new to you or it could be something you have tried before, but it should not be one with which you have a long and continuous history of practice. Taking it on should mean adding something new and moderately challenging to your daily life. Please keep notes that will help you write your practice report (see below).

The objectives of the Practice Project are as follows: (1) to take on a practice with self-cultivational, transformational, or spiritual intent (however you define those terms, but normally with the intent of having some positive or desired effect on who you are); (2) to practice it with regularity and consistency for an extended period; and (3) to reflect on how it may be affecting you. With the goal of providing feedback and support for your practice, we may organize ourselves into practice support groups based on common themes, interests, or goals. Practices could potentially involve teamwork, but the diary, progress report, and final report should be individual. The support groups may also become presentation groups for the in-class workshops (see (d), below).
Guidelines for choosing your practice: (1) You could join an existing practitioner group, either on campus or in the local area (see list of groups under “Additional Resources” in the back of this syllabus); (2) You could choose something that you have some familiarity with, such as from a religious tradition you were raised with, but which you have not explored in depth before; (3) You could choose some practice or activity that emerges from your daily life, related to activities that you would like to deepen, enhance, or redirect in some way; or (4) You could let your practice emerge from conversations with your practice support group. Practices could take many different forms, e.g., they could be physical or mental, public or private, indoor, outdoor, or virtual (online); they could involve a “slowing down” and “deepening” of some activity, a behavioral intervention of some kind, or simply a “ritualizing” (i.e., a making systematic and intentional) of something that you already do. Please see the practice categories in the “Additional Resources” section for further ideas.

The project will include the following:

(a) **Proposal** (3%): A 1 to 2 page proposal should include a title, a detailed description of the practice you will be adopting (including relevant details about timing, reflection method, and the like), a timeline (including start and end dates of your 4-week practice period, and a proposed date for your in-class workshop on the practice), a list of sources of information you have consulted or will rely on for the practice, anticipated results, and any questions you may still have about the project. **Due:** Feb. 14.

(b) **Practice/diary:** As you take up the practice over its 4-week period, maintain a journal/diary including observations on the effects of the practice, critical reflections on it in the context of class readings and discussions, and any other relevant considerations. Feel free to vary the format as suitable to your practice. The diary should be submitted with the final Practice Project Report on May 7.

(c) **Progress report** (2%): This 1-to-2 page report should specify how things are going, what you are learning, any challenges or obstacles you have come up against, and ideas for overcoming those challenges. It should include (as an appendix) a small sample of relevant notes from your practice diary. **Due:** roughly 1 to 2 weeks into your 4-week practice period and no later than Mar. 28.

(d) **Class workshop** (5%): At some point during the 4-week period or soon afterward, you will be expected to lead the class in a brief workshop on this practice. This should provide basic historical and other background information, ideally conveyed with the aid of a visual medium, handout, Power Point or Prezi, et al. (taking about 5 minutes of class time) and an experiential exercise giving students a “taste” or “flavor” of the exercise (aiming for no more than 5 minutes here as well, unless permission is requested and granted for more time). It is understood that you are not an expert at this practice, but rather that you are presenting what you are learning so that we can together explore its contexts, experiential dimensions, and other questions of interest to the class. Note that these can be conducted in groups of two or three students if there is a clear thematic connection between the topics/practices; durations of presentations will vary correspondingly.

(e) **Final report** (20%): Write a final “auto-ethnographic” report assessing your experience. Questions to discuss may include: How did it go for you, in comparison with your initial expectations? What did you learn about yourself (or about the practice) and how did you adjust, if at all, as you went along? How might you alter your practice if you were to incorporate it, in some way, into your life going forward? Reflect analytically on your experience in context of the literature we’ve read in the course and/or literature you’ve read on your practice topic. Additional sources should be consulted and appropriately documented, with footnotes/endnotes and a bibliography of works cited. Include, as an appendix, any relevant diary notes either in summary format or in their original form. There is no length requirement, but a minimum of 800-1000 words is recommended. That said, it is the quality and depth of your reflections that count, not how much you write. **Due:** May 7.

*4A. Alternative option:* You may choose to study a group of practitioners rather than adopting a practice yourself. This will normally involve carrying out interviews (face-to-face or electronic) with more than one practitioner of some recognized spiritual practice, analyzing them in terms discussed in the course. This will require careful consideration of the group in question as well as the preparation of research review procedures, which we will go over in class.
5. RESEARCH PAPER (25%)

This will be an in-depth research paper assessing some form of spiritual or psycho-physical practice in the context of its cultural or historical emergence, with some reference to its contemporary uses and to the literature on it. The paper can be, but does not have to be, related to your practice project. If it is, it should deepen your knowledge of the practice you took up in some dimensions relevant to the class. If it is unrelated to your practice project, please choose a topical focus that is specific rather than overly generalized. For instance, papers on Yoga, Buddhist meditation, Christian mysticism, Kabbalah, or Pagan ritual magic are far too general. Papers on Zen Buddhist koan meditation, Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala painting, Eastern Christian hesychastic “prayer of the heart,” Boy or Girl Scout routines and rituals, Laughter Yoga, or Spiritual Surfing are potentially feasible, but only if you specify what you will do with them (e.g., examine particular uses of them today, focus on some particular debate around them, compare different schools of thought about them, etc.). The paper should analyze the practice based on a review of scholarly and/or historical sources (to the extent that these are available).

**Recommended length:** 10-12 typed, double-spaced pages or 2500-3000 words.

**Format:** The paper should include sections on each of the following:

a) **Background & cultural-historical origins:** What are the social and cultural contexts in which the practice emerged? Refer here to politics and social order, cultural differences such as race, class, and gender (if relevant), and relevant other dimensions of the social milieu within which the practice originated and/or spread. This section should be written as a concise summary, and normally no more than 2 to 3 pages in length.

b) **Analysis/Phenomenology:** This section would normally summarize the reported experiential impacts of the practice on devoted practitioners, and discuss these with reference to at least one analytical framework discussed in the course. This should normally be the longest part of your paper. You may choose to focus on something other than the phenomenology of the practice (e.g., some controversy around the use of a particular technique/practice, etc.); in that case please specify this in your proposal.

c) **Conclusion and contemporary relevance of the practice:** This should address the relationship between the practice (in its experiential dimensions) and its cultural and historical background. If it is practiced in today’s world, discuss how such practice is different from that of its historical origins or precedents, and what this tells us about the two contexts. What place does or might this practice have in an increasingly globalized and “disembedded” world, and why? This section should be no more than 2 pages long.

d) **Bibliography:** This should be a properly formatted (APA, MLA, or Chicago style) list of works consulted, including at least 12 sources, of which at least 5 should be scholarly in nature and at least two of those be published since 2005.

**Due dates:**

- **Proposal (3%):** This should include a title, a description of the practice you will be analyzing, your methods of analysis, and a bibliography listing at least 5 sources (at least 3 of which should be scholarly). **Due:** Mar. 21.

- **In-progress draft/progress report (2%):** This should include drafts of at least some parts of the paper (including, at minimum, an introduction and beginning of the main text), point form of what else will be part of the full draft, and any challenges you are finding or questions you may have. The more you provide, the more helpful feedback you will receive. Full-text writing should be grammatical and edited, so that I can give you feedback if this needs attention. **Due:** Apr. 18.

- **Final paper due:** May 7.

**NOTE ON GRADING**

Grades in this course will be assigned a letter grade equating with a percentage-grade as follows:

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COURSE OUTLINE

The following is a tentative schedule of topics and readings, and is subject to change. The readings listed will not all be required; specific requirements will be announced in class and/or in Blackboard. Additional materials and links to web resources will also be available in Blackboard.

I. INTRODUCTION

Week 1 (Jan. 15, 17)
Defining Our Terms
Self-cultivation, self-realization, moral education, character development, personal growth, psychotherapy, resilience, inner peace; Religion, spirituality, philosophy, mysticism, esotericism, secularism, post-secularism

II. ROOTS & ROUTES: PHILOSOPHIES & PRACTICES

Week 2 (Jan. 22, 24)
Ancient Greece & the Pursuit of Happiness: Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics, Neoplatonists
2. Stoic Week 2014 Handbook, pp. 9-17; skim days of the week & choose one to do as exercise.
3. “Epicurus on desire, pleasure, and happiness”

Week 3 (Jan. 29, 31)
The Yogic & Meditative Traditions of South Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, & Beyond

Week 4 (Feb. 5, 7)
The Bodymind Arts of East Asia: Daoism, Confucianism, & Beyond
2. Slingerland, “Wu-Wei as a Common Ideal” and “The Paradox of Wu-Wei” from “Effortless Action: The Chinese Spiritual Ideal of Wu-Wei”; and “Trying Not to Try”
Week 5 (Feb. 12, 14)
Spiritual Practice in the Abrahamic Traditions
Judaism & the Kabbalah; Islam & Sufism; Christian spiritual practice from Augustinian confession & Hesychastic watchfulness to Ignatian spiritual exercises and Franciscan 'integral ecology'
1. Eifring, “Meditation in Judaism, Christianity & Islam: Technical aspects of devotional practices”
2. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (Louis Puhl translation): http://spex.ignatianspirituality.com/SpiritualExercises/Puhl (excerpts to be specified)
7. Rumi/Awn, “The Nature of Words: Dig a Hole in This Book”


Week 6 (Feb. 19, 21)
Magic & Esoteric Gnosis Through the Centuries
From the ancients to the Renaissance to Romanticism & the ‘New Age’
4. Ivakhiv, “The resurgence of magical religion as a response to the crisis of modernity.”
5. Robertson, “Active imagination in practice.”
7. Arya, “Contemplations of the spiritual in visual art.”

Week 7 (Feb. 26, 28)
Indigenous Practices & Their Resurgence
Shamanism, animism, vision quests, psychedelics, & colonial encounters & imaginings
2. Deloria, “Native American Spirituality.”
6. Welch, “Appropriating the didjeridu and the sweat lodge.”
7. Evans, “Caves all the way down,” Aeon https://aeon.co/essays/is-psychedelics-research-closer-to-theology-than-to-science

III. MODERNITY: NATURE, BODY, & LIFE SPIRITUALITIES IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

Week 8 (Mar. 7)
Nature Spiritualities I
From nature mystics, Boy Scouts, & ‘wannabe’ Indians to neo-Pagans, back-to-the landers, & wilderness defenders
3. Excerpts from *Handbook for Scoutmasters*.
4. Thoreau, excerpts from *Walden*.

**Journal collection:** Thursday, Mar. 7.

**Spring Break – No classes**

**Week 9** (Mar. 19, 21)

**Body Spiritualities**
From 19th century physical culture and bodybuilding to today's ‘traveling’ practices (e.g., modern postural yoga, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Qigong, et al), bodywork, ecstatic dance, et al.
2. Sassatelli, “Fit bodies: Fitness culture and the gym”
3. Lloyd, “The askesis of contemporary ‘Occidental’ martial arts”
4. van der Veer, “Global breathing: religious utopias in India and China”
5. Bowman, “The circulation of Qi—in media and culture”

**Research paper proposal:** due Mar. 21.

**Week 10** (Mar. 26, 28)

**Mind Spiritualities 1**
From New Thought to ‘positive thinking’ and ‘prosperity consciousness,’ to the ‘science’ and ‘appification’ of happiness and ‘wellbeing culture’
2. Seligman, “The past and future of positive psychology” (excerpt).
3. Wong, “Positive psychology 2.0: Towards a balanced, interactive model of the good life.”

(Practice project progress report due by Mar. 28)

**Week 11** (Apr. 2, 4)

**Mind Spiritualities 2**
2. Sharf, “Is mindfulness Buddhist? (and why it matters)”.

**Week 12** (Apr. 9, 11)

**“Spiritual But Not Religious”**
Is there an evolving global spirituality? Is spirituality what happens to religion in neoliberal capitalism? Is ‘self-improvement’ conducive to health, or part of the problem?
Week 1 (Apr. 16, 18)
Emergent Spiritualities 1
Spiritualities of life, nature, creativity, activism, et al.
Research paper draft due April 18.

Week 14 (Apr. 23, 25)
Emergent Spiritualities 2
Spiritualities of life, nature, creativity, activism, et al.
1. Kieft, “Dance as moving spirituality: a case study of Movement Medicine”
3. Integral Life Practice Starter Kit.
Other readings TBA.

Week 15 (Apr. 30, May 2)
Spirituality, service, and the future
Transpersonal, integral, participatory, and relational spiritualities
3. Heron, from Participatory Spirituality: A Farewell to Authoritarian Religion, pp. 1-9.
Final journal due: due Thursday May 2.

Practice project report due Tuesday May 7.
Final research paper due Thursday May 9.

APPENDIX I: COURSE POLICIES

1. ABSENCES: Students are expected to attend all classes, unless you have an excused absence. Attendance will be taken, and unexcused absences will factor into your final grade. (Absences are not excused unless they are personally cleared with the instructor by phone or email.) If you miss a class, please ask another student for assistance in catching up on the material. We expect you to make it a commitment to attend every class, both for your own learning and to contribute to the community of learning in the group.

2. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS & LATENESS: Unless otherwise specified or agreed upon beforehand, all written work should be submitted in print, not electronically. It should be typewritten, at least 1-1/2 spaced (or double-spaced), in a common font style (such as Times New Roman or Arial) no less than 11-point in size, and with at least 1" margins for comments. Pages should be numbered and stapled together. Please spell-check and proofread your work, and use inclusive language (i.e. be conscious of your use of gendered pronouns and referents, using "people" or "humanity" instead of "man", "he or she" or "they" instead of simply "he," and so on). All written work should be turned in on time, i.e. at the beginning of class on the day the assignment is due. Late work is subject to penalties, with grades dropping half a letter grade each day your work is late unless you have a valid medical excuse or receive an extension from me beforehand.
3. RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: UVM supports students’ active involvement in their religious/faith communities. Students wishing to be excused from class participation or assigned work during their religious holidays, with accommodations made for making up the missed work, must submit a documented list of such holidays by the end of the second week of classes.

3. CLASS LAPTOP & PHONE USE: This class will have a “No Screens” policy, with specified exceptions. This means that students should not be using their own personal electronic devices (laptops, smart phones, et al.) unless requested in advance for Access purposes or similar need, or unless it is announced by the instructor that we will use such devices for a specified class purpose. Students allowed to use such devices should take care to minimize distractions for other students in class. We may of course use a single screen/projector for pedagogical purposes in class.

4. COLLABORATION & PLAGIARISM: You are encouraged to work with others in the class on your assignments, sharing resources and ideas and helping each other with direction, focus, clarity, and personal support. Please make an effort to get to know your peers. Many religious and environmental initiatives have been built on collaborative networking, and such activity is encouraged. At the same time, UVM’s commitment to academic honesty will be followed. This means that unless otherwise stated, all written assignments should be your own. If you draw on other sources, they should be cited properly to give appropriate credit. If you work with other students to prepare for an exam, your written answers should be individually constructed, not copied from each other or shared notes. Work that appears to be plagiarized will be given no credit and students will be asked to meet with the instructor to explain the situation. Plagiarism at UVM constitutes grounds for academic suspension; don’t do it. Further information on plagiarism can be found in UVM’s Statement on Academic Integrity; see http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/acadintegrity.pdf. See also the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities at www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/studentcode.pdf.

5. RESPECTFUL CLASS CONDUCT: The mission of the University of Vermont includes two components: the creation, evaluation, sharing, and application of knowledge; and the preparation of students “to be accountable leaders who will bring to their work dedication to the global community, a grasp of complexity, effective problem-solving and communication skills, and an enduring commitment to learning and ethical conduct” (emphases added; see www.uvm.edu/president/?Page=mission.html). The commitment of “dedication to the global community” is reflected in the D2 diversity requirement, which this course aims to fulfill (though not formally a D2 course). Since spirituality and religion are often deeply personal matters, it is important that students feel welcome and safe in this class to express their views on the subjects of our study. Respectful treatment of others and their views is key to this (and not only because it is consistent with the “ethical conduct” aimed for in the University mission). I will do my best to uphold it in my own behavior, and will expect a similar effort from each student.

As a public university, UVM is also committed to the protection of free speech (which is guaranteed by the First Amendment, except in instances of defamation, obscenity, criminal conduct, or a “clear and present danger” to incitement of harm, injury, and violence). The classroom, however, is not a forum for the airing of any views whatsoever. It is a forum for learning about specific topics, and this is best done within a respectful and open-minded setting in which divergent views can be discussed, critically considered, clarified, and evaluated. In seeking a balance between freedom of expression and respect for difference, I have found the following principles to be most helpful, and I suggest that we adopt them in our class:

(1) Seek to understand other points of view, even if you disagree with them;

(2) Where disagreement or criticism seem warranted, seek to engage constructively and to criticize ideas or behaviors (at most) but not the people who hold them;

(3) When in doubt, practice kindness and civility.

Disrespect of individuals or groups, such as would create an atmosphere of hostility or fear, should not be tolerated in a classroom seminar. If such disrespect emerges, students should feel free to “flag” it without fear of retribution. In the end, however, it is in engaging with differences in perspective and expression that we develop our capacity for “ethical conduct” in a “global community” that is complex and deeply heterogeneous in its values, beliefs, and practices. Through practicing kindness with each other, we learn how to engage in civil conversation with our peers and to model such conversation in our country and in the world.

See also:
- UVM grade appeals policy: http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/gradeappeals.pdf
- UVM policy on disability certification & student support: http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/disability.pdf
APPENDIX II. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Some Practice Categories

- Meditation practices: e.g., “open monitoring” or “insight” meditation, focused attention on breath or other focus-point, “loving-kindness” meditation, Zazen-style “just sitting,” hesychastic “prayer of the heart,” et al.
- Guided religious/spiritual practices: e.g., prayer and visualization of iconic religious forms, contemplation of images of a deity, chanting of a sacred phrase or mantra, contemplation of passages from a sacred text (e.g., Lectio divina), guided imagery visualizations or “pathworkings,” rosary or bead-work practice, et al.
- Mindfulness in daily activities: e.g., “heightened awareness moments” at specific times of day or during specific activities (such as morning preparation exercise, noon-time “view from the cosmos” exercise, evening review of day; see Stoicism); daily practice of mindful walking or bicycling (e.g., awareness of outdoor sights/sounds while walking across campus); mindful litter collection in neighborhood or natural area; committing to greet one’s neighbors with smile and genuine interest; conscious alteration or counteracting of habits; conscious listening to others and acknowledging them before speaking own thoughts; et al.
- Ascetic practices: e.g., fasting, “detoxing,” “spiritual cleansing,” or abstinence from specific activities (such as from media use, cell phones, intoxicants, meats or other foods, “negative thoughts,” et al.)
- Physical movement and bodywork: e.g., Hatha Yoga, Tai Chi/Qigong, “spiritual jogging,” Karma Yoga (service to others), contemplative walking, various exercise regimes, ecstatic dance (e.g., 5Rhythms), spiritual massage, et al.
- Contemplative reading, artistic, or perceptual/arts appreciation activities: e.g., writing, music, dance, movement improvisation, “deep listening,” “beholding art,” et al.

2. UVM Resources on Spirituality and Well-Being

- Center for Health and Well-Being offers many resources including Healthy Lifestyle Programs, a Relaxation Room (with massage chair), and meditation, yoga, and mindfulness programs: see https://www.uvm.edu/health and https://www.uvm.edu/health/mindfulness
- Counseling and Psychiatry Services: https://www.uvm.edu/health/CAPS or 656-3340.
- Interfaith Center: provides many events and resources, including a listserv (INTERFAITH@list.uvm.edu)

3. Local Groups Offering Practice Classes or Training

- The Spiritual & Religious Communities List (pdf), available from the UVM Interfaith Center, lists Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Interfaith, and other churches, temples, and congregations in & around Burlington: see https://www.uvm.edu/interfaithcenter/resources
- UVM has its own Catholic Center (uvmcatholic.com), Jewish (Hillel, uvmhillel.org), Christian Ministry, Muslim Student Association, and other student clubs and religious groups; see https://www.uvm.edu/interfaithcenter/resources
- The Center for Mindful Learning offers Sunday evening mindfulness meditation sessions at the Burlington Friends (Quaker) Meeting House (173 N. Prospect Street, 5-7 pm, $10 suggested donation)
- The Burlington Shambhala Meditation Center (187 S. Winooski Ave.) holds public meditation sittings every Sunday 9 am-12 noon with instruction, and every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday 6-7 pm, and every Tuesday and Thursday 12-1 pm.
- All Souls Interfaith Gathering hosts various events and classes including Karma Yoga on Sundays 8-9 am, Morning Meditations on Sundays 9-10 am, Tai Chi sessions, and others; see http://www.allsoulsinterfaith.org/events-and-classes
- Vermont Interfaith Action (viat.org) is a coalition of faith groups involved in various activist causes
- A variety of centers teaching Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, and many other spiritual and/or transformative practices can be found in the Burlington area (e.g., Evolution Yoga, Sangha Studio, Yoga Vermont, Laughing River Yoga, Wellness Collective, et al.). These can be easily found through a Google search, e.g., for “burlington vermont yoga center” or “burlington vermont tai chi”, or by looking up (e.g.) “best yoga classes” in Burlington VT on Yelp.com.
- See also Burlington Spirituality Meetups: www.meetup.com/topics/spirituality/us/vt/burlington
4. **Digital Apps** (look for them on the App Store, Google Play, et al.)

- Headspace
- The Mindfulness App
- Brightmind: Guided Meditation
- Let's Meditate
- Calm
- Stop, Breathe & Think
- Simply Being

5. **Useful Web Sites**

- Buddhist meditation practices: [https://www.wikihow.com/Practice-Buddhist-Meditation](https://www.wikihow.com/Practice-Buddhist-Meditation)
- Types of meditation: [https://liveanddare.com/types-of-meditation](https://liveanddare.com/types-of-meditation)

6. **Recommended Background Reading**

* Asterisks indicated strongly recommended and on library reserve


