



THE SCHOOL  
FOR FIELD STUDIES

# Religion and Culture of Bhutan

## SFS 2010

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This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.

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## Course Overview

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Religious and cultural principles and beliefs underlie much of the Bhutanese attitudes and practices in the environment. Students will learn to read the landscape for religious symbols and will tune their ears to pick up Buddhist principles in what they hear about environment. We will learn a little of the local languages, enough to engage in pleasantries on the street.

## Learning Objectives

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In this course students will develop a conceptual and practical understanding of religious and cultural principles that underlie Bhutanese attitudes and approaches to environment. Specific learning objectives are the following:

- 1) Understand basic principles of Buddhism as practiced in Bhutan
- 2) Learning about local Bhutanese cultural beliefs and practices
- 3) Learn to read the landscape for spiritual symbols
- 4) Be able to perform basic communication in dzongkha.

## Assessment

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Our goal is to conduct ongoing assessment of student learning throughout the course and provide timely and constructive feedback. Some assignments encourage students to work together, to share ideas and knowledge. This allows students to take advantage of the range of backgrounds within the group.

Assessment will be conducted on an individual basis, unless otherwise stated. The final course grade will be based on the following assessment items.

Assessment item	Value (%)
Participation observation exercise at Sangchoekhor	15
Reflective Essay	15
Mid Term Exam	25
Final Exam	35
Preparedness	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

**Reflective essays (15%):** Every student will write one essay reflecting on a particular course reading, lecture or field experience. Students are encouraged to use this as an opportunity for personal reflection or to connect what they have learned in the class to a wider understanding of the environment in Bhutan

**Participant Observation Exercise (15%):** Each student will attend part of a local festival and be asked to write a descriptive passage about their experience. They are encouraged to attempt to tie their experience to what they learned in the course. Prior to the exercise students will have a lecture on the principles and practice of participant observation as a methodological tool.

**Exam (midterm 25%, final 35%):** Students will have a mid-term and final exam which will cover topics from language and culture classes, guest lectures and different field lectures.

**Preparedness (10%):** Students are expected to maintain 100% attendance and be actively involved in all indoor and outdoor classes. All students will start the semester with 100 marks and lose 3 marks each

time they show up for class unprepared or unwilling to participate. Students are expected to attend all classes; exceptions will only be made through the SAM.

## Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100.00%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

## General Reminders

**Plagiarism:** Using the ideas and material of others without giving due credit is cheating and will not be tolerated. A grade of zero will be assigned if anyone is caught cheating or aiding another person to cheat actively or passively (e.g., allowing someone to look at your exam). All assignments unless specifically stated should be individual pieces of work.

**Deadlines:** Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated for several reasons: They are a part of working life to which students need to become accustomed and promote equity among students. Deadlines allow faculty ample time to review and return assignments before others are due. Late assignments will incur a 10% penalty for each day that they are late. No assignment will be accepted after three days. Assignments will be handed back to students after a one-week grading period.

**Participation:** Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade simply because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the program is mandatory because your actions can significantly affect the experience you and your classmates have while at SFS. Therefore, it is important that you are prompt for all activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises, and simply get involved.

## Course Content

**Type- L:** Lecture, **GL:** Guest Lecture, **FL:** Field Lecture, **FEX:** Field Exercise, **D:** Discussion  
Readings in **\*bold** (with asterisks) are required; others are optional supplementary reading.

No.	Title	Type	Time (hrs)
1	<b>Lhabsang (Purification)</b> In this class Students will be taught about the significance of Lhabsang and observe the activities during the process.	L and observation	2hrs
2	<b>Basic Culture of Bhutan</b> Students will be brief on Bhutanese culture and different Bhutanese etiquette	L	1hr:15 min
3	<b>Briefing on the language and culture class</b>	L & D	1hr:15 min

	We will go over the syllabus, introduce the assignments, explain grades and discuss reading materials and go over brief introduction on language and culture.		
4	<b>Language: (Introduction to language)</b> In this class we will introduce the different Bhutanese languages and their history. We will also discuss how language and cultural identity are connected in Bhutan.	L	1hr:15 min
5	<b>Introduction to Buddhism</b> We will teach how Buddhism came, its practices in Bhutan as well as talk about the everyday practices and beliefs of lay Buddhists.	L	1hr:15 min
6	<b>Language: (Introduction to dzongkha alphabet and numbering and dzongkhag proverbs)</b> The class will focus on introducing just the alphabet and numbering, and how letters are pronounced. Students will also be taught some simple proverbs in Dzongkha and finally students will learn how to write phonetically.	L	1hr:15 min
7	<b>Language : Basic conversation I</b> This class is mainly focus on teaching basic necessary conversation so that students can interact with local community and cooks.	L	1hr:15 min
8	<b>Language: Basic conversation II</b> The class will be the continuation of first basic conversation class.	L & D	1hr:15 min
9	<b>Participation observation exercise at Sangchoekhor</b> Students will visit Sangchoekhor monastery and observe the monastic activities. They will be made to write short notes on their exercise.	FEX I	3 hrs
10	<b>Buddhist Iconography</b> Iconography will enable students interpret what they are seeing on dzong and temple walls.	L	1hr:15 min
11	<b>Rural Life In Bhutan</b> The FEX is aimed to make student learn different livelihood and way of life in the rural part of Bhutan. They will also learn how open interview are carried out in the field.	Fex II	3 hrs
12	<b>Women role in Bhutan</b> This lecture will answer questions about the traditional and changing roles, perspectives and aspirations of women and men in Bhutan	GL: Ashi Kuenzang Choden	1hr:15 min
13	<b>Mid Term Exam</b>		1hr: 15 min
14	<b>Bhutanese food and culture</b> A lecture looking at the way in which Bhutanese food and food ways express Bhutanese culture, identity and how it is important in Buddhism.	L	1hr:15 min
15	<b>Class on Buddhist way of meditation</b> In this class, a Buddhist master will teach how to control our minds and learn ways for meditation	GL: Khenpo	1hr:15 min
15	<b>Cooking Bhutanese foods</b> The class aims students to learn cooking few pure Bhutanese food items.	Practical	2hrs
16	<b>Cultural Dance</b> The lecture will focus on teaching different types of Bhutanese dances and their significance. Then we will follow the lecture with dance lesson.	L & Practice	3hrs
17	<b>Worshipping local deities and people belief</b>	FL	1hr:15 min

	We will take students to the one of the deity's site and give field lecture on its importance in Bhutanese culture and beliefs.		
18	<b>Visit to Gangtey Goempa</b> Main objective of the FL is to make student learn more Buddhist iconography, important religious figures and observe Bhutanese architecture.	FL	1hr:15 min
19	<b>Final Review</b> We will do final review on all classes and have question and answer session.	L & D	1hr: 15 min
20	<b>Final Exam</b>		2 hrs
	<b>Total Contact Hours</b>		31:45

## Readings

Beer, Robert (2003) "Tibetan Buddhist symbols": Boston

Driem, George Van. Language policy in Bhutan

Choden, Kunzang. (2008). "To Za- Eat Food (Eat Rice)" *Chilli and Cheese: Food and Society in Bhutan* White Lotus, Bangkok

Gyatso, Kelsang. (2011). "Modern Buddhism": *The path of compassion and wisdom*. Tharpa phulication. USA

Pommaret, Francoise. (1999). Yul and Yul Lha: The territory and its deity in Bhutan. Paris

Chhoki, Sonam. (1994). "Religion in Bhutan: The Sacred and Obscene" *Bhutan: Aspects of Culture and Development*. (eds.) M. Aris and M. Hutt. Gartmore: Kiscadale Publications.

Dorji, K., Choden, K., & Roder, W. (2013). " Diversity in Food Ways of Bhutanese Communities Brought About by Ethnicity and Environment." *Journal of Bhutan Studies* Vol. 28

Hughes, Stuart. (2012). The Life Stories of Padmasambhava and their Significance for Tibetan Buddhists.

Mynak Tulku. (1997). "Religion and Ritual" *Bhutan Mountain Fortress of the God* (eds.) C. Shicklgruber and F. Pommaret Serindia Publication: London

Phuntsho, Karma. (2015). "The cultural construction of Bhutan; an unfinished story" *The Druk Journal* Vol 1, issues 1

Pommaret, F. (2003). "The Tradition of Betal and Areca in Bhutan" *Journal of Bhutan Studies* Vol 8

Harding, Sarah. (2003). *The life and revelations of Pema Lingpa*. Snow lion Publication