

ASIANA INSTITUTE

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GRADUATE DIPLOMA PROGRAM IN **Buddhist Chaplaincy & Advanced** **Consciousness Studies**

Course Catalog & Syllabi



*Integrating Buddhist Wisdom, Contemplative Practice,
and the Frontier Sciences of Mind & Consciousness*

About the Program

The Asiana Institute Graduate Diploma in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Consciousness Studies is a rigorous, integrative program designed for those who wish to serve others spiritually while engaging deeply with the most compelling questions at the intersection of ancient wisdom and modern science. Students who complete all required courses will be awarded the Graduate Diploma in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Advanced Consciousness Studies.

This program draws on the rich contemplative traditions of Buddhism, the emerging nonmaterialist sciences of consciousness, groundbreaking research into near-death experiences, and frontier investigations into non-human intelligence and its implications for understanding mind. It is ideal for chaplains, counselors, meditators, hospice workers, healthcare professionals, and spiritual seekers called to a more expansive understanding of consciousness and human flourishing.

Program Structure

The Diploma program consists of six (6) core courses. Each course is offered online, and may be completed in any sequence, though the order below is recommended. Total program length: 12–18 months.

Course Description

This foundational course introduces students to the principles, practices, and professional responsibilities of Buddhist chaplaincy. Drawing on the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions, students explore how Buddhist teachings on suffering, compassion, and impermanence inform pastoral care across diverse settings—including hospitals, hospices, prisons, and the military. Emphasis is placed on developing a coherent spiritual care framework rooted in Buddhist ethics and practice.

Learning Objectives

- Articulate the core ethical commitments and professional standards of Buddhist chaplaincy.
- Apply Buddhist teachings on dukkha (suffering), metta (loving-kindness), and karuna (compassion) in pastoral care encounters.
- Demonstrate competency in active listening, presence, and non-directive spiritual support.
- Navigate the religious and spiritual diversity of care recipients from a Buddhist perspective.
- Develop a personal chaplaincy philosophy grounded in one's own contemplative practice.

Course Syllabus

(Eight-Week Module)

Week 1: The History and Role of Buddhist Chaplaincy

- Origins of chaplaincy in monastic traditions
- Contemporary chaplaincy models in Asia and the West
- The role of the lay vs. ordained Buddhist chaplain

Week 2: Buddhist Ethics and Professional Conduct

- The Five Precepts as ethical foundation
- Boundaries and professional standards
- Cultural sensitivity and religious pluralism

Week 3: Suffering, Impermanence, and Pastoral Presence

- The First and Second Noble Truths in chaplaincy
- Working with grief and existential distress
- The art of bearing witness

Week 4: Compassion as Method: Metta and Karuna Practices

- Loving-kindness meditation in clinical contexts
- Compassion fatigue and self-care
- Tonglen and other compassion-based practices

Week 5: End-of-Life Care and Buddhist Perspectives on Death

- Teachings on bardos and transitional states (Tibetan view)
- Guiding individuals through the dying process
- Ritual and ceremony at the time of death

Week 6: Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care

- Understanding trauma through a Buddhist lens
- Skillful means in crisis situations
- Working with PTSD, addiction, and incarceration

Week 7: Chaplaincy in Diverse Institutional Settings

- Hospital and hospice chaplaincy
- Military and prison chaplaincy
- Interfaith and secular environments

Week 8: Developing Your Chaplaincy Practice

- Supervised practicum reflection
- Constructing your personal chaplaincy statement
- Program integration and professional pathways

Required Reading

1. **Mettanando Bhikkhu, ed..** *Buddhist Healthcare Chaplaincy*. Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2012
 2. **Gross, Rita M..** *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. SUNY Press, 1993
 3. **Sogyal Rinpoche.** *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. HarperOne, 2002
 4. **Thich Nhat Hanh.** *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Broadway Books, 1999
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Course Description

This course examines the philosophical and empirical foundations of nonmaterialist approaches to the study of consciousness. Students will evaluate the limitations of physicalist and reductionist paradigms and engage with leading theories proposing that consciousness is fundamental to—rather than produced by—the brain. Topics include idealism, panpsychism, quantum approaches to mind, and the hard problem of consciousness. Students are encouraged to approach these subjects with both critical rigor and open contemplative inquiry.

Learning Objectives

- Critically evaluate the assumptions underlying materialist theories of consciousness.
- Articulate key nonmaterialist frameworks including idealism, panpsychism, and the filter theory of the brain.
- Engage with the hard problem of consciousness as articulated by David Chalmers and others.
- Situate Buddhist epistemology within contemporary philosophy of mind.
- Apply consciousness studies perspectives to questions of spiritual care and human flourishing.

Course Syllabus

(Eight-Week Module)

Week 1: The Hard Problem and the Limits of Materialism

- Chalmers' hard problem of consciousness
- Physicalist and functionalist responses
- Explanatory gaps and 'zombie' thought experiments

Week 2: Classical Idealism and Consciousness as Fundamental

- Kantian and Hegelian idealism
- Bernardo Kastrup and analytic idealism
- Consciousness as the ground of being

Week 3: Panpsychism and Cosmopsychism

- Whitehead's process philosophy
- Philip Goff and contemporary panpsychism
- Panpsychism vs. idealism

Week 4: Quantum Theories of Mind

- Penrose-Hameroff Orchestrated Objective Reduction (Orch-OR)
- Quantum coherence in biological systems
- Evaluating quantum consciousness claims scientifically

Week 5: The Filter or Transmission Theory of Mind

- William James, Henri Bergson, and the brain as filter
- Aldous Huxley's 'reducing valve' hypothesis
- Implications for survival of consciousness

Week 6: Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Western Consciousness Studies

- Yogacara (Mind-Only) school

- Madhyamaka and the nature of mental phenomena
- Dialogue between Buddhist epistemology and analytic philosophy

Week 7: Anomalous Cognition and Parapsychology

- Peer-reviewed research on psi phenomena
- Remote viewing, telepathy, and precognition evidence
- Methodological challenges and critiques

Week 8: Integrating Nonmaterialist Science and Spiritual Practice

- Implications for chaplaincy and healing professions
- Science, spirituality, and epistemic humility
- Crafting a personal philosophy of mind

Required Reading

1. **Chalmers, David J..** *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Oxford University Press, 1996
2. **Kastrup, Bernardo.** *The Idea of the World: A Multi-Disciplinary Argument for the Mental Nature of Reality*. Iff Books, 2019
3. **Goff, Philip.** *Galileo's Error: Foundations for a New Science of Mind*. Pantheon Books, 2019
4. **Kelly, Edward F., et al..** *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2007
5. **Penrose, Roger.** *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of Physics*. Oxford University Press, 1989

Course Description

This course offers a comprehensive examination of near-death experience (NDE) research, situating it within both the scientific literature and Buddhist metaphysics. Students will study landmark prospective and retrospective NDE studies, analyze the phenomenological features of NDEs across cultures, and consider the implications for our understanding of consciousness, death, and the possibility of post-mortem survival. Attention is given to how NDE research informs chaplaincy work with the dying and bereaved.

Learning Objectives

- Survey the major empirical NDE studies and critically assess their methodology and findings.
- Identify the core phenomenological features of NDEs and their cross-cultural variations.
- Engage with neurological, psychological, and survivalist interpretations of NDEs.
- Apply NDE research insights to pastoral care for dying patients and bereaved families.
- Examine Buddhist teachings on death, bardo, and rebirth in light of NDE evidence.

Course Syllabus

(Eight-Week Module)

Week 1: Introduction to Near-Death Experience Research

- Defining NDEs: history and terminology
- Raymond Moody and the emergence of NDE research
- Overview of major research groups and journals

Week 2: Phenomenology of the NDE

- Core features: OBE, tunnel, light, life review, border
- Distressing NDEs and their significance
- Cross-cultural consistency and variation

Week 3: Landmark Prospective Studies

- Pim van Lommel's Dutch cardiac arrest study (2001)
- Sam Parnia's AWARE study
- Methodological strengths and limitations

Week 4: Neurological and Reductionist Explanations

- REM intrusion, anoxia, and endogenous DMT hypotheses
- Temporal lobe and limbic system theories
- Evaluating reductionist accounts critically

Week 5: The Survivalist Hypothesis and Veridical NDEs

- Out-of-body perception and corroborated observations
- Blind NDE accounts and cross-correspondences
- What veridical cases imply for consciousness

Week 6: Shared Death Experiences and Deathbed Visions

- Empathic or shared NDEs among bystanders
- Deathbed visions in hospice literature
- Implications for chaplains and healthcare workers

Week 7: Buddhist Teachings on Death and the Bardo in Light of NDE Research

- Life review and the Tibetan concept of karma
- The clear light at death: bardos and NDEs compared
- Rebirth, continuity, and the stream of consciousness

Week 8: Integrating NDE Research into Chaplaincy and End-of-Life Care

- Communicating NDE research to patients and families
- Supporting NDE experiencers in integration
- Updating your chaplaincy framework in light of NDE evidence

Required Reading

6. **Moody, Raymond.** *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death.* HarperOne, 1975/2001
 7. **van Lommel, Pim.** *Consciousness Beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience.* HarperOne, 2010
 8. **Parnia, Sam.** *Erasing Death: The Science That Is Rewriting the Boundaries Between Life and Death.* HarperOne, 2013
 9. **Greyson, Bruce.** *After: A Doctor Explores What Near-Death Experiences Reveal About Life and Beyond.* St. Martin's Essentials, 2021
 10. **Ring, Kenneth.** *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience.* William Morrow, 1984
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Course Description

This course investigates the intersection of reports of non-human intelligence (NHI) with consciousness studies, comparative cognition, and contemplative traditions. Students will examine the scientific and philosophical frameworks for understanding non-human minds—from animal cognition and artificial intelligence to reports of anomalous encounters with intelligences that appear to transcend ordinary physical categories. The course situates these investigations within Buddhist cosmology and contemporary consciousness research, and considers their implications for the human understanding of mind and meaning.

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate the scientific evidence for and theories of consciousness in non-human animals, plants, and AI systems.
- Engage critically with research on anomalous NHI encounters and their implications for consciousness studies.
- Situate NHI phenomena within Buddhist cosmology, including teachings on other realms and non-human beings.
- Assess the epistemological and ethical implications of post-human and non-human intelligence for chaplaincy.
- Develop a nuanced, evidence-informed personal framework for understanding the boundaries of mind.

Course Syllabus

(Eight-Week Module)

Week 1: Defining Intelligence: Human and Beyond

- Theories of intelligence: cognitive, embodied, distributed
- The spectrum from microbes to machines
- Why the question of NHI matters for consciousness

Week 2: Animal Consciousness and Cognition

- Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness (2012)
- Higher cognition in corvids, cephalopods, and primates
- Ethical implications for Buddhism and chaplaincy

Week 3: Plant Intelligence and the Extended Mind

- Research on plant signaling and adaptive behavior
- Mycorrhizal networks and distributed cognition
- Philosophical implications for Buddhist interdependence

Week 4: Artificial Intelligence and the Question of Machine Consciousness

- Functionalism and the Turing test reconsidered
- Large language models and claims of sentience
- Buddhist reflections on digital mind

Week 5: UAP Research, Government Disclosure, and the NHI Question

- History of UAP research from Blue Book to AARO
- Congressional testimony, the NDAA 2023–2024 provisions, and government disclosure

- The intelligence hypothesis and its critics

Week 6: Anomalous Contact: Contact Experiences and Altered States

- Contact experiences reported in NDE, DMT, and OBE contexts
- John Mack's research on experiencers
- Consciousness as a medium of contact

Week 7: NHI and Buddhist Cosmology

- Devas, nagas, and other non-human realms in Buddhist literature
- Interdependence and the plurality of minds
- The Jataka tales and teachings on non-human beings

Week 8: Integration and Pastoral Implications

- Supporting individuals with NHI contact experiences
- Epistemology, discernment, and spiritual bypass
- NHI, consciousness, and the future of chaplaincy

Required Reading

11. **Mack, John E..** *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters*. Crown Publishers, 1999
12. **Strieber, Whitley & Kripal, Jeffrey J..** *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained*. Tarcher/Perigee, 2016
13. **Kean, Leslie.** *UFOs: Generals, Pilots, and Government Officials Go on the Record*. Harmony Books, 2010
14. **Low, Philip, et al..** *The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness*. Francis Crick Memorial Conference, Cambridge University, 2012

BCS 605 — **Meditation, Jhanas, and Altered States of Consciousness** (3 Credits)

Course Description

This course provides both theoretical grounding and experiential depth in Buddhist meditation practice, with a particular focus on the jhanas—the profound absorption states described in the Pali canon—and their relationship to altered states of consciousness investigated in modern psychology and neuroscience. Students will study classical meditation texts alongside current scientific research on meditation's effects on mind, brain, and behavior, and will develop or deepen a personal daily practice.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the classical Theravada framework of samatha and vipassana and their interrelation.
- Articulate the eight jhanas and their associated phenomenology, as described in classical texts and modern accounts.
- Engage with neuroscientific and psychological research on meditation, altered states, and the default mode network.
- Compare jhanic states with other altered states, including hypnagogic states, psychedelic experiences, and NDEs.
- Establish and maintain a daily personal meditation practice as part of professional chaplaincy formation.

Course Syllabus

(Eight-Week Module)

Week 1: The Landscape of Buddhist Meditation

- Samatha (concentration) and vipassana (insight) traditions
- Historical overview: Theravada, Chan/Zen, Tibetan approaches
- The role of meditation in chaplaincy practice

Week 2: The First and Second Jhanas

- Prerequisites for jhana: sila, sense restraint, and the five hindrances
- Piti (rapture), sukha (pleasure), and applied/sustained attention
- Phenomenological reports from contemporary practitioners

Week 3: The Third through Eighth Jhanas

- Progressive deepening: equanimity and one-pointedness
- The formless jhanas (arupa jhanas)
- Nirodha-samapatti: cessation of perception and feeling

Week 4: Neuroscience of Deep Meditation

- Default mode network deactivation in deep states
- EEG signatures of jhana and high-amplitude gamma
- Neurophenomenology and first-person methodology

Week 5: Altered States Compared: Jhana, Psychedelics, and Hypnagogia

- Structural similarities between jhana and psychedelic states
- DMT, psilocybin, and mystical experience research
- Hypnagogia, lucid dreaming, and the threshold of consciousness

Week 6: Insight Meditation and the Progress of Insight

- Mahasi Sayadaw's stages of insight (nanas)
- Dark night of the soul and difficult meditation experiences
- The spiritual emergency and chaplaincy response

Week 7: Compassion-Based Practices: Brahmaviharas and Tonglen

- Metta, karuna, mudita, and upekkha as formal meditation
- Tonglen as advanced compassion practice
- Science of loving-kindness: psychological and physiological effects

Week 8: Building a Sustainable Practice and Teaching Others

- Designing a personal daily meditation schedule
- Retreat practice and integration
- Supporting others in meditation: scope of practice for chaplains

Required Reading

15. **Brahm, Ajahn.** *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook*. Wisdom Publications, 2006
 16. **Leigh Brasington.** *Right Concentration: A Practical Guide to the Jhanas*. Shambhala, 2015
 17. **Pollan, Michael.** *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence*. Penguin Press, 2018
 18. **Bhikkhu Analayo.** *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization*. Windhorse Publications, 2003
 19. **Davidson, Richard J. & Goleman, Daniel.** *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*. Avery, 2017
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BCS 606 — Integrative Capstone: Consciousness, Compassion, and Care (3 Credits)

Course Description

The capstone course synthesizes the core themes of the Diploma program, inviting students to integrate insights from Buddhist chaplaincy, consciousness studies, NDE research, NHI inquiry, and meditation into a coherent personal and professional framework. Through reflection papers, peer dialogue, and a supervised practicum project, students consolidate their learning and articulate a vision for their work as Buddhist chaplains and consciousness-informed caregivers in the contemporary world.

Learning Objectives

- Synthesize and articulate an integrated personal philosophy drawing from all program disciplines.
- Demonstrate chaplaincy competencies through a supervised practicum reflection project.
- Engage constructively with the ethical and epistemological challenges at the frontiers of consciousness studies.
- Present original written work suitable for professional or academic dissemination.
- Chart a vision for ongoing professional development, practice, and service.

Course Syllabus

(Eight-Week Module)

Week 1: Review and Synthesis: Buddhist Chaplaincy and Consciousness

- Revisiting core principles from BCS 101–105
- Where ancient wisdom and frontier science converge
- Personal integration mapping exercise

Week 2: Ethics at the Edge: Consciousness, Death, and Non-Human Minds

- Ethical responsibilities with dying patients and NDE experiencers
- Engaging sensitively with NHI and anomalous experience
- Epistemic humility as a professional virtue

Week 3: The Contemplative Chaplain: Identity and Vocation

- Developing a professional chaplaincy identity
- Self-inquiry and the shadow: psychological health for caregivers
- Boundaries, calling, and sustainability

Week 4: Supervised Practicum Workshop I

- Student case presentations
- Peer feedback and mentorship
- Applying theoretical frameworks in real care contexts

Week 5: Supervised Practicum Workshop II

- Advanced case presentations
- Ethical dilemmas in chaplaincy practice
- Peer consultation and communal discernment

Week 6: Writing Workshop: Capstone Project Development

- Structuring a reflective theological or philosophical essay

- Integrating personal narrative with scholarly sources
- Peer review of drafts

Week 7: Dialogue Across Disciplines

- Invited practitioners in NDE, NHI, and consciousness research
- Buddhism in conversation with frontier science
- Communal visioning for the field

Week 8: Final Presentations and Diploma Ceremony Preparation

- Student capstone presentations
- Commitment to ongoing practice and service
- Conferral of Diploma in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Consciousness Studies

Required Reading

20. **Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche.** *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*. Snow Lion Publications, 1998
 21. **Kripal, Jeffrey J..** *The Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge*. Bellevue Literary Press, 2019
 22. **Fenwick, Peter & Fenwick, Elizabeth.** *The Art of Dying: A Journey to Elsewhere*. Continuum, 2008
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