KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY
CENTRE FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES AT
RANGJUNG YESHE INSTITUTE

Web Syllabus

Course Code	ATSE 501/601
Course Title	Advanced Textual Study English I / III
Course Topic	Entering the Middle Way (Madhyamakāvatāra, dbu ma la 'jug pa)
Credits	6
Course Delivery Mode	Monthly meetings
Semester, Year	Fall 2027
Schedule: class day & time	Please consult F27 course schedule
Class Location	Please consult F27 course schedule
Required texts	All the required readings will be distributed in Teams.
Optional Readings	N/A

Course Description

This course consists of two components: 1) The textual studies of a Tibetan philosophical treatise, and 2) the study of secondary academic literature on the topic.

1) The Textual Study

Entering the Middle Way by Candrakīrti is a seminal work of Madhyamaka philosophy that systematically presents the path to enlightenment grounded in the realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Structured as a commentary on Nāgārjuna's thought, the text integrates philosophical analysis with the stages of the bodhisattva path. The work is organized around the ten *bhūmi*s (stages of spiritual development), emphasizing both ethical cultivation and wisdom. Candrakīrti argues that all phenomena lack inherent existence and arise dependently (*pratītyasamutpāda*), thereby rejecting essentialist metaphysics. He critiques rival Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools, particularly those that posit intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*).

A central contribution of the text is its defense of the Prāsaṅgika method, which employs reductio arguments to reveal contradictions in opponents' views rather than asserting independent theses. Ultimately, Madhyamakāvatāra presents the Middle Way as a balance between nihilism and eternalism, guiding practitioners toward non-conceptual wisdom and compassionate engagement with the world.

The monastic scholar, or Khenpo, will give a word-by-word oral commentary on the text, while also allowing time for questions and answers with students. Students are thus expected to prepare for class daily by reading the text covered in the previous day's class.

2) The Academic Component

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The MA academic component consists of academic research and seminar-style meetings. There will be three seminar meetings during the semester. The exact times and dates of these meetings will be decided at the start of the semester.

Since the purpose of the course is to train students in academic methods in preparation for preparing their MA theses, there will be specialized readings assigned for each of the meetings. Students are required to come to the meetings with a reflection paper based on the readings. The course concludes with a research paper.

Learning Outcomes	
On successful completion of the course, students will have a solid grasp of the root text and the ability to navigate and use resources for Buddhist Studies research in the field of **Madhyamaka**.	
Course Requirements	
How do I succeed in the course?	**Class attendance of at least 80%,** active class participation (question and answer, in Tibetan), one mid-term exam and one final exam. The exams will be given in Tibetan. Come to class prepared to participate actively in class discussion; complete all written assignments on time, correctly, and with all components of the assignments intact.

Assessments	**Weight**
1. Assignments in the Textual Study Part consisting of	**50%**
• Midterm exam	• 25%
• Final exam (may consist of 2 elements)	• 25%
2. Assignments in the Academic Component consisting of	**50%**
• Reflection papers to be submitted before the monthly meetings (3)	• 20%
• Research paper: approximately 12-15 pages (3000-3750 words) on a topic related to the text under study. Paper topics should be discussed with the supervisor well in advance of exam week and must be approved.	• 30%