

The Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health Program: an undergraduate minor hosted at New College

BPMH is an internationally recognized contemplative science program. Its courses engage rigorous interdisciplinary research interactions between scientists, academics, health practitioners and contemplative traditions. Students explore the discipline with an eye toward global understandings of mental health and illness, and the impacts on health of climate crisis and systems of oppression.

Innovative pedagogical approaches

Emerging from two decades of global research on interactions between Buddhist traditions and the sciences, the program exemplifies a critical departure from a Eurocentric religion and science discourse. BPMH faculty and student research, program curriculum, and teaching methods draw on contemplative, decolonial, and Indigenous approaches, using both “third person” and “first person” inquiry to explore “big questions” about meaning, truth and reality, or the nature of embodiment and experience, for example, as well as “second person” experiential inquiry through relational practices such as deep listening and public engagement.

Developing scientific literacy and meta-cognitive skills

The program trains students in qualitative and quantitative research and enhances scientific literacy and writing skills. Pedagogical approaches also develop capacities for critical reflection and awareness in intersectional and global contexts. Curriculum is shaped by evidence-based student-centered teaching models, prioritizing trauma-aware and universal design principals that emphasize meta-cognitive and reflective learning. Classroom methods and extra-curricular opportunities are structured around the importance of community and relationship, characterized by respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and awareness of experience, affect, and embodiment.

Enhancing academic, social-emotional & professional skillsets

BPMH is a founding member of the Flourishing Academic Network (FAN), a group of faculty and academic staff, student affairs professionals, and community partners across North America working to advance student flourishing. FAN recognizes that universities and colleges are important sites for academic, social-emotional, professional, and identity development for students. Student surveys overwhelmingly confirm that their participation in the BPMH program significantly enhances their well-being, academic success, and preparation for professional life. The program’s collaboration with FAN partner institutions embeds its work into an international community of research and practice centering student flourishing.

Program Stats

- founded in 2007, now has 327 enrolled minors
- one of the largest college-hosted undergraduate programs at U of T
- program faculty include 2 tenured professors; 3 long-term CLTA or Sessional II professors; 2-3 sessional instructors; plus many full-time faculty providing program courses in cognate departments
- 2023-24, over 1100 students registered in 11 courses; all winter courses had waiting lists
- public events: in 2022-23 hosted over 1,300 local and international participants
- two active student groups, BPSU and PATH, hold events, provide peer support and mentoring through events and community wellness programming throughout the year
- YouTube channel content has over 16,000 views
- Engaging Education in Buddhist Studies project funds curricular and co-curricular experiential learning
- host of Contemplative Science Podcast
- cognate units include Anthropology, Cognitive Science, East Asian Studies, Centre for Ethics, History, History of Philosophy, Science, and Technology, Human Biology, Health Studies, Centre for Indigenous Studies, Sexual Diversity Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Study of Religion, Sociology, Ho Centre for Buddhist Studies, School of the Environment, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, OISE, Faculty of Law, Temerty Faculty of Medicine, Emmanuel College

Active Core Program Courses

BPM200H1 – The Art & Science of Flourishing

Explores perspectives from the sciences and the humanities about flourishing across diverse cultures and contexts, and how wellbeing and distress are social, cultural, political, spiritual, ecological, and historical phenomena.

BPM214H1: Socially Engaged Buddhism

Explores how Socially Engaged Buddhism has developed in response to global conversations on systemic oppression, climate justice, equity, decolonization, and trauma.

BPM232H1: Buddhism and Psychology

Overview of the encounter between Buddhism and psychology, exploring how scientists, psychologists, and Buddhist reformers reinterpret Buddhism as “science” and how Buddhist practices have been transformed and promoted by modern psychology.

JNR301H1: The History of Buddhist Meditation

Surveys historical, cultural, and textual contexts for Buddhist contemplative practices.

BPM330H1: Mindfulness-Informed Interventions for Mental Health

Study of mindfulness from historical, societal, structural, cultural, professional, and personal perspectives, emphasizing Buddhist foundations and concepts of embodied mind.

BPM332H1: Buddhism and Psychotherapy

Interdisciplinary study of cross-cultural therapies and theories of the mind.

BPM334H1: Science of Wisdom: Buddhist and Western Traditions

Conceptual and contemplative interdisciplinary exploration of global “wisdom traditions.”

BPM335H1: Meditation and the Body

Exploration of research on how mindfulness affects brain activity, brain structure, neurochemistry, and other psychobiological processes.

BPM338H1: Exploring Mindful Awareness

Overview of mindfulness as a systematic investigation of subjective experience, with a survey of classic and contemporary literature.

BPM339H1: Mind, Consciousness, and the Self

Interdisciplinary study of theories of mind, consciousness, and the self, placing Buddhist traditions in dialogue with scientific theories of the mind in psychology.

BPM432H1: Advanced Research in Meditation, Psychology and Neuroscience

Preparation for advanced research on meditation by studying theories, tools and techniques used in the field.

BPM433H1: Advanced Exploration of Buddhist Psychology and Practice

Interdisciplinary exploration of how Buddhist teachings are set in conversation with contemporary scientific research on topics such as suffering, wellbeing, and compassion.

BPM438H1: Mindfulness Meditation: Science and Research

Examines theoretical and empirical bases of mindfulness-based interventions and applications in healthcare settings and beyond. Students build scientific literacy skills through the assessment, critique, and discussion of peer reviewed journal articles.

Additional courses required to fulfil minor are taken in cognate units: Anthropology, Cognitive Science, East Asian Studies, Centre for Ethics, History, History of Philosophy, Science, and Technology, Human Biology, Health Studies, Centre for Indigenous Studies, School of the Environment, Sexual Diversity Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Study of Religion, Sociology