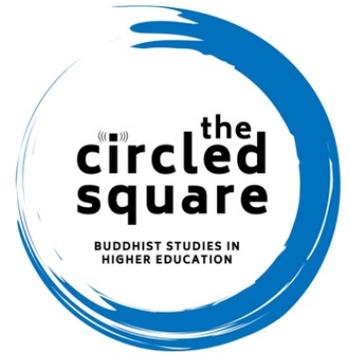


## Episode 12: Daigengna Duoer, Teaching A Zen Buddhism Course Online



File Length: 01:06:08

Speakers

Sarah Richardson

Daigengna Duoer

00:00:00:03 - 00:00:15:29

**Daigengna Duoer:** But I was really shocked after reading the results from the survey, actually, 74 percent of my students actually preferred asynchronous nobody or zero student preferred a one hundred percent Synchronoss formats.

00:00:22:09 - 00:02:00:14

**Sarah Richardson:** Hello and welcome to this episode of the Circeled Square the podcast about teaching Buddhist studies in higher education. My name is Dr Sarah Richardson and I teach at the University of Toronto. In this episode titled "Teaching a Zen Buddhism Course Online with student Preferences in Mind." I speak with Daigengna Duoer, a Ph.D. student in Buddhist studies at UC Santa Barbara. She taught a class fully remotely during the covid-19 pandemic shutdowns this past summer at UC Santa Barbara. One of the teaching strategies she used was scheduling flexible yet mandatory Zoom one on one appointments with her students related to their papers, something she said the students responded really well to in the post course feedback. In this episode, we'll learn how one instructor successfully developed and delivered this course on Zen Buddhism, almost entirely asynchronously, meaning there were no meetings together in real time other than those Zoom one on one sessions, instead, students access the learning materials, watched her lecture videos and submitted assignments at different times. Daigengna used a pre course survey before the course to decide this because that was what they wanted, and this helped her meet the needs and expectations of her students. She used many different and creative strategies to engage her students, and since many of her students were taking this course for a general education requirement, she was sure to remain focused on developing real world skills they would need in reading texts, analyzing media and presenting research in creative ways. If this is interesting to you, please subscribe to our show, The Circeled Square, and also please share this with your friends. Enjoy our conversation.

00:02:00:29 - 00:02:02:16

**Sarah Richardson:** So thanks so much for being here, Daigengna.

00:02:02:20 - 00:02:05:05

**Daigengna Duoer:** Thank you so much for inviting me. It's really a pleasure to be here.

00:02:05:24 - 00:02:14:04

**Sarah Richardson:** So could you please just start for us by introducing yourself, starting with my name is and telling us a little bit about your background and what you study, et cetera.

00:02:14:06 - 00:03:02:25

**Daigengna Duoer:** Sure. So, hi, everyone. To all the listeners of the Circled Square. My name is Daigengna Duoer, and I'm currently a fourth year PhD student in religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I major in Buddhist studies and my dissertation right now is going to be a digital humanities project mapping transnational and trans-regional Buddhist networks centered in early 20th century Inner Mongolia and Manchuria. And actually before coming to UCSB, I actually did both of my B.A. and M.A. in Buddhist studies at the University of Toronto. So, yeah, I had a great time. I, I really learned a lot from the wonderful professors and fellow graduate students there. So it's really a pleasure to be part of this podcast and speaking with my alma mater again.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Oh, well, thank you. It's really nice to get to speak with you again in this evolution of your life and. Yeah. And your research sounds so interesting, I'm so excited for it. We're interviewing you, especially in light of your teaching this past summer. So can you tell us a little bit about what you taught this summer?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah. So this summer I taught this course called Zen Buddhism, which is a introductory course on Zen Buddhism for undergraduate students at UCSB. So most of them just take it for a GE requirement and just general education. Some of them do take it out of interest, but it's a introductory course.

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**Sarah Richardson:** And had you taught much before or was this a new teaching experience?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** For Zen Buddhism I've only served as a teaching assistant for this course before the summer, which is usually taught by Professor Gregory Hillis at UCSB, who is just like a really, really wonderful professor, and the students really love him. So this was my first time teaching this specific course on Zen Buddhism as the instructor. But before this course, I was able to teach introduction to Buddhism in the summer, in the previous summer, and also introduction to Japanese religions last fall. Yeah, both courses were also introductory courses for undergraduate students, like survey courses on the topic. And they were both taught in person, of course, and this was before the Covid-19 outbreak, which seems like a really long time ago.

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**Sarah Richardson:** I know, I know the before times. Right. So I would love to ask you also about your intro to Buddhism, but I'm going to hold off on that for now because if we get what we really wanted to talk to you about was what was sort of different this time around, i.e. online and in the age of this covid pandemic.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Yeah, there's so many things that are different. So with covid-19, it's definitely very different in terms of the class structure, how you meet the students, how you set up grading and and so on, so forth. And it was also kind of an emergency move online to remote teaching. So all classes were really quickly moved online in the spring for our university. And so the summer instructors had to really quickly figure out how to switch their courses into an online format.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Many of us, for example, other graduate students have taught the courses before and they already have the syllabus and they already have the materials ready. But then, boom, suddenly you have to kind of switch all that, transform all that preparation beforehand into remote teaching, into something that's suitable for online teaching. So it's really emergency. And unlike online courses, of course, are developed again to be developed over time with ample preparation.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** But our university actually provided a lot of support. So luckily, I was able to get a lot of help from both the technology side and also the pedagogy side. So my department as the lead TA for our department last year, I got the opportunity to organize a series of workshops where I was able to invite really experienced TAs and also instructors in my department to kind of get together and get ideas about teaching religion online.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** So we had a workshop called TAing Religion Online in March. That's right after our campus went into lockdown. So at that workshop, I invited three really experienced and really tech savvy TAs in my department. So William Travis, Maharshi Vyas and Peter Romaskiewicz and they all shared tips, strategies and applications and resources for TAing religion online. And that was really helpful for my course design. We also created a handbook for our TAs from our slides, which I can provide in the links for our podcast, maybe.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Sure, that'll be wonderful. Thank you so much for kind of outlining the difference, too, because the emergency remote teaching is I mean, of course, what we were all doing in the spring and in the summer and I mean, maybe some people are really still doing it in the fall in some cases, because many schools only decided late to be fully remote in the fall. We really wanted to do this interview with you because you did such an amazing job of getting feedback from your students about what they did and didn't like in the experience of emergency remote teaching that so many of us could use as we develop more effective online teaching going forward. Because many of us are now kind of realizing slash being told that many of us are going to stay remote probably for most of this year and winter and spring. And I think it's on us if we're not doing a better job with remote teaching by January. Of course, in the first experience with emergency remote teaching, we're not doing everything perfectly, but there's a lot to learn, right, from what what you did with your students and what you would do

differently. How did you structure the class? What did this structure emphasize for your students?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** I think it's really useful to just ask the students directly when you want to get sort of opinions or ideas about how to better structure the class for online teaching. So that's that's also what I did before the course began. I attended those pedagogy and online teaching kind of training seminars that our University provided. But I also created a pre-course anonymous survey, which is similar to the survey that I posted post-course.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Right. So a pre-course like survey of the students who were signing up?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah. For the students who are already registered and also for students who are waitlisted in the course. So I asked them about their preferences to online teaching. Do they prefer synchronous or asynchronous, their current situations with regard to the pandemic, their perceptions about religion, and Zen, whether if they have backgrounds in Buddhist studies and things like that, to get a general sense of how I should better structure the course. So before that, I had plans for the course. I had planned to meet them in real time synchronously, just sort of holding the regular lecture, but in an online format.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** But I was really shocked after reading the results from the survey. Actually, Seventy four percent of my students actually preferred asynchronous. And then the rest preferred a mix. Nobody, zero students preferred one hundred percent synchronous formats. It was really shocking. I had assumed that everybody probably wanted to get more face to face interaction.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Yeah, and just for our listeners who might not know, so synchronous means at the same time, like on Zoom or Microsoft teams or whatever your school might use, whereas asynchronous means probably prerecording things and then having the students respond by deadlines, but not necessarily meeting us.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Yes, exactly. So most students did prefer to not meet in real time.

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Hmm, amazing. And also, who were your students like? Were your students religion majors or. Not necessarily?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah. So about the student makeup. So I had twenty seven students sign up for the class who also stayed till the end. And only one student out of that group was a religious studies major. By the way, he did a really wonderful media essay, which I will talk about later as one of the examples. But the rest of them were majoring in various different topics, economics, biology and they're signing up for fulfilling the GE requirements.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Right, right. Religion as a breadth requirement in their case. Amazing. So did you take them up on that suggestion? Did you do it mostly asynchronously?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Yes. So I really changed a lot of my plans originally for the class to best meet their preferences and needs. So I decided to do the entire class with recorded lectures. But I also wanted to keep some kind of face to face interaction. So I incorporated mandatory zoom kind of appointments to discuss their papers, but it was more of a soft mandatory. I also told them that if they're really uncomfortable with meeting me in person, like turning their camera on, I also understand, we can just talk through voice. It's also OK, turning off the camera. I understand that some students might have difficult situations at home. They're probably not very comfortable about showing their surrounding or their rooms, things like that. So I was kind of flexible about that. But the students really kind of enjoyed that from the Post-survey score survey that they enjoyed this little bit of a one to one, also face to face interaction.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Wonderful. And I'm just curious, did they turn their cameras on or not?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** So 90 percent of the students did. And they and we ended up speaking more than 30 minutes per student. So that took quite a few days to complete all twenty-seven appointments. But it was really fun. It was really fun learning about their interests in the in the class and also a bit about their themselves and what they were doing, their part time jobs, things like that. So I thought that was a really interesting kind of aspect of the course. It's lucky to include.

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**Sarah Richardson:** So how did you engage your students in your online video lectures? What tools did you use to keep those videos alive and keep yourself engaged too in recording?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** That's a great question. It was really difficult to evaluate engagement, especially when you're recording these lectures alone in your house and you just have to kind of guess what the reactions might be. So our university, we use Panopto, and actually you get to see student engagement in numbers in a way. How many students have watched the video, where, you can kind of see that in numbers. But then again, it's hard to see how to evaluate how much, which part of the lecture was interesting for the student. Which part is confusing,

things like that? But I did try to embed multimedia as much as possible, for example, showing clips, incorporating actual rituals or meditation. So trying to show the sights and the sounds and atmosphere of certain aspects of religious practice from lots of images, as little text as possible, and also using a lot of voice acting. For example, I acted out some dharma battles.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Awesome. What do you mean by that? Like you played two voices?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** So I played out the scenario, trying to sort of show the, I guess, the atmosphere and the attitudes of the master versus the student. This is a technique I learned from Professor Hillis from UCSB. When he taught Zen, he usually incorporated those things that really caught the student's attention. He used the shock method of Zen to teach Zen. Yeah so I'm definitely embedding a lot of multimedia, I thought that was useful. The students also commented on that, too.

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**Sarah Richardson:** But so you you created quite a lot of content, right? Even you were. How much were you recording for a week. You were doing like four meetings and they were all like an hour and a half?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah. So our structure at UCSB for the summer classes is that it's six weeks and you meet this is before the pandemic. So you meet in person four times a week, eight minutes each for each lecture, 80 minutes, yeah an hour and a half.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** It's just quite a lot. So I just assumed that that's probably what is required of me as an instructor, the amount of control that was supposed to deliver. So I recorded the lectures according to this kind of format. So 80 minute long lectures, which was difficult, but with editing, that was possible. So what I did to structure the content of the course is that it's in six weeks. So I did the first two weeks as sort of background information on the history of Buddhism, early Buddhism, and also Buddhist philosophy, philosophical foundations for Zen traditions, since a lot of students, actually the majority, have never had a class on religion or Buddhism. So we spent the first weeks sort of talking about the foundations of Buddhism.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** And then in the third week we went to Chan Buddhism in China. So we discussed the usual transmissions, lineages, schools and philosophies, but I also put emphasis on practice, Buddhism in practice. So here I kind of wanted to emphasize, how Chan Buddhism it's not just the philosophical tradition, right? The monks are not just preoccupied with meditation, and dharma battles, but they also value rituals and manual labor and things like that. And also in the fourth lecture I turned our attention to Chan Buddhism in modern and contemporary East Asia. This is a topic that I'm personally interested in for my research anyway.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** So we talked about, for example, the Buddhist revival, the creation of humanistic modern Buddhism and also its legacy in many parts of the Chinese speaking world today. And then in a week four we turn to Zen Buddhism in Japan. The structure is kind of similar. But here we also talked about Zen Buddhism's involvement in World War two and also the colonization of many parts of East Asia under the Japanese Empire. This is part of my research and many students have never heard of a Zen Buddhist participation in such acts.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** And they were quite shocked. And also for contemporary Zen. In the first lecture, we discussed how Zen is portrayed in post-war Japanese pop culture which a lot of students are really interested in anime and movies and so on, so forth, but also how contemporary Zen Buddhism in Japan are using really creative ways to kind of revamp themselves using, really eye-catching, but sometimes also controversial methods such as the monk bar phenomenon, where monks are sitting in bars serving alcohol and it's becoming sort of a tourist trap.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Sorry, are they real monks?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, they are ordained monks and real bars.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** And also monks creating and playing music in rock bands and things like that and techno music rituals. So a lot of the stuff that students were really love to see but also were kind of shocked to see. And then week five, I was a really experimental approach that I took to this class. So week five we talked about Zen in Korea, Vietnam and even Tibet,

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**Daigengna Duoer:** which I feel are areas and topics that could benefit from more discussion. And when we teach Zen and when we teach Buddhism or these areas are often sort of overlooked. And those were really challenging for me to teach this week. But because I'm not really personally familiar with these topics. So I had to do a lot of research. But I also learned a lot along the way. And we always almost always have a student with a heritage student coming from Vietnamese Buddhist backgrounds. So they also offer a lot of really interesting insights. So we talked about how Zen is practiced in Korea in the Seon tradition. And also how Zen is practiced in Vietnam, for example, in engaged Buddhism, and Thich Nhat Hahn.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** We also talked about Zen in Tibet, which is really shocking for a lot of students. So for this one, I mainly relied on Dr Sam Van Schaik's work on Tibetan Zen found in

the Dunhuang manuscripts, which is really kind of interesting approach for me, a really new thing for me.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** And then the last week was actually the most enjoyable to teach for me. So in the last week we talked about Zen in the West and also Zen globalised. So we talked about Transmissions and lineages of the Zen traditions coming to the US, for example, and introducing California as part of the sacred landscape of Buddhism. And the students were surprised about how they're located in this Buddhist map. We also talked about the introduction of Buddhism into the West.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** It's agents of transmission. How it was understood and practiced. Who practiced in what ways? Again, there were also kind of the students were also kind of surprised to learn the segregated history of Buddhist transmission into the United States. How some were practiced in white middle class circles, while you also have immigrant communities, who are trying to preserve some kind of traditional practice, on the other hand. And then the second lecture was kind of experimental for me as well.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** We talked about the Zen tradition and the phenomena of Mmindfulness, which is a phenomenon observed by Dr. Ronald Purser in his recent book on the same topic. So here we looked at the mindfulness movements and how it's intimately connected with the transmission of Zen Buddhism into the US. We also looked at what mindfulness is in the Buddhist context. A lot of students come to this class having some kind of notion that mindfulness is Buddhist or mindfulness practice is some kind of Buddhist meditation. So we kind of talked about how they're connected and how they're not.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** And the students were really shocked to read Dr. Purser's argument on mindfulness that has become sort of this neoliberal spirituality that privatizes and pathologies individual suffering and stress, sort of putting the blame of stress and suffering on the individual, rather on the systematic and structural causes. So my students really enjoyed the discussion. We had a lot of really great discussions about how mindfulness it works right in our society and whether if it's really helpful to alleviate our structures and sufferings, especially in this kind of pandemic age.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** We also talked about like popular culture and technology. So one of my favorite kind of topics to talk about is AI in Buddhism. So we introduced the AI Kannon Bosatsu or the AI bodhisattva of compassion. In Japan they spent like millions of dollars building this really highly advanced basically, Android. And they they basically just said that this is a bodhisattva and this bodhisattva also preaches and talks and it's in the Kodaiji temple in Kyoto.

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**Sarah Richardson:** What's it look like that look like kind of like, I don't know, thousand armed Avalokiteshvara or what or what's the Kannon in Japan look like?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** I'm just that's a great question. It doesn't really have many arms, which is really interesting. It only has two arms. Yeah. So it's very it's a humanoid robot and it has a female voice which is interesting. It also has, I guess, breasts, these kind of protruding round things on the chest, which is a really interesting kind of choice for the engineers. So we took this opportunity to talk about, do AI's, does this AI bodhisattva have some kind of enlightenment mental state? Is the AI bodhisattva free of mental afflictions? So it was a really interesting discussion.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** And then the last lecture, the last week of classes, we covered something really new, something that I had been working on, which is Zen in the era of covid-19, so I took some research findings from my side project, which is Buddhist responses to covid-19 in contemporary China. We kind of talked about how Chan and Zen Buddhists in China and Japan responded to covid-19, how they understood the virus and also how they responded, especially through not just sort of spiritual teachings, but also through like concrete outreaching philanthropy work, donating things and money to communities. So that was really interesting for the students to.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Wow. Damn girl, you covered some content, that was in six weeks?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** But we did meet four times per week and I can definitely share the syllabus if anybody's interested.

00:24:09:19 - 00:24:33:07

**Sarah Richardson:** That sounds like an amazing course, kudos. That's that's a lot to pull together in a very short time. So I'm curious, what were your. I mean, now you've given us the kind of topic, outline of of the many, many fascinating things you covered. What were you kind of one or two of the best readings or resources that you found students really engaged with and what was good about them?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** Thank you for this question. I'm really excited to talk about some of the readings that I found. I really loved two readings that I decided to assign and I feel thankful to myself for assigning them, and the students really loved them, and I got a lot of interactions between the students from these two readings. So one was a article by Dr Hwansoo Kim, it's titled "The Adventures of a Japanese Monk in Colonial Korea: Sōma Shōei's Zen Training with Korean Masters." It was published in the Japanese Journal of Religious Studies in 2009. So in

this article, Dr. Kim basically traces this Japanese monk Sōma, who trained for six years in a Soen Korean Zen monastery. And he kind of contrasted Sōma, this particular priest, with other Japanese Zen and Buddhist colonial and missionary presences in Korea at the time, and shows how religious identity operates within, but also beyond the colonial context.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** So you also you have at the same time you have Japanese Buddhists right, going in to Korea, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, doing this missionary work on behalf of the Japanese Empire as a kind of colonizing. But then at the same time, you also have individuals like Sōma who are genuinely trying to learn from the local Buddhist traditions and also forming valuable kind of intimate bonds and relationships with the local Buddhists. And the students really found this fascinating. First of all, like many of them did not even have not even heard about Japanese presence, colonial presence, Buddhist colonial presence in places like Korea. And second, they were really shocked to also find that some of them were also not completely in agreement with this colonial project, that they were also trying to form valuable kind of bonds, relationships. So that was a really touching, beautiful article to read together with the students.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** And the second one I really loved, that really answered a lot of questions that I had about the course and also that the students had about the course. For example, at the beginning we did this pre-course survey. I asked the students to give me three words that they associate with Zen and we created a word cloud from this. And many of them, it was very kind of uniformly, you know, associations with Zen with words like calm, meditation, peacefulness. So then I had this question like, why do students associate Zen with these ideas and not others? And also the students were shocked to see that their peers also thought about the same thing when they think about Zen. And so this second article that we assigned really answered this question for all of us. And this article is "Putting a Price on Zen: The Business of Redefining Religion for Global Consumption" by Dr. Joshua Irizarry. And it was published in the Journal of Global Buddhism in 2015.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** So in this article, Dr. Irizarry basically traces historical and also cultural factors which have contributed to the dramatic semiotic transformation of Zen in the popular imaginations and also in the international media. So he basically kind of identified Zen as becoming an ideal marketing by-word, right. When that's freely appropriated and commoditized. He calls it a semiotic blank canvas, which is a really interesting idea. So basically this blank canvas reflects what the consumers think and need and desire. So this part and partially explains why students tend to have certain associations. He also argues that this kind of cosmopolitan appeal of Zen has come hand-in-hand with the kind of decentralization of traditional authority. And also at the same time, this kind of marketing Zen challenges the Zen clergy's role in shaping the future development of Zen. So after reading this together with the students, we also talked about how Zen has been portrayed, how it has been kind of marketed within the Buddhist communities in Japan and China. The kind of response, right, to this

Western perceived notion of Zen, for example, they were trying to create these Temple-stay or these temple lodging experiences. Right. That kind of corresponded to the Western imagination of some kind of Zen that's relaxing. That's calming, that's anti-stress and so on and so forth. So this was also a very new kind of research development for Buddhist studies, but it was really interesting to include the students in the discussions.

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**Sarah Richardson:** Great. Well, those both sound like really wonderful articles, can you? So I'd love to also clarify the names just again of the authors. So what were the names of the authors? Can you say them again and the names of the articles?

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**Daigengna Duoer:** So the first article was by Dr Hwansoo Kim, the title was "The Adventures of a Japanese Monk in Colonial Korea: Sōma Shōei's Zen Training with Korean Masters." I can send you the biographical information.

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**Sarah Richardson:** That's great. Yeah, we'll link to it in the show notes. And was there a second one- we talked about two.

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**Daigengna Duoer:** The second one was by Dr. Joshua Irizarry and the title of the article is "Putting a Price On Zen: the Business of Redefining Religion for Global Consumption."

00:30:21:00 - 00:30:35:28

**Sarah Richardson:** Great. OK, thanks so much and thanks for explaining those that one fits with many of my students experiences, too, right. We've had a lot of conversations at the end of intro to Buddhism about like, why does Dollarama have a "Zen" scented candle. What does that mean?

00:30:36:15 - 00:30:48:10

**Sarah Richardson:** In just a sentence or two? One of the things you did in your class that sounded really fascinating, something you called the "Mind Lab." So could you explain the idea of the Mind lab and what kinds of things you did?

00:30:48:12 - 00:32:35:09

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, so this is really not my original idea. And the idea of the mind map actually came from a fellow graduate student, a PhD student in my department at UCSB, Peter Romaskiewicz. He is my Senpai, basically. And he taught he taught Zen, this class, several times before. And he's really a veteran. He also has a lot of really wonderful ideas, innovative ideas about pedagogy. So he introduced this idea to me when we kind of went over our syllabi for teaching. He also has a website. Peter Romaskiewicz dot com. You can definitely you should definitely check out his ideas and his blog posts about teaching. So according to him, he defines Mind labs as quick and simple exercises to help students to develop their own personal

phenomenology of mind. And one example, for example, that I took from his website is one of the mind lab experiments is to ask the students to sit and observe their thoughts and then after investigating their thoughts, is there an emotional or affective quality of that thought. And if yes, then right now observe that emotional quality, if no... Then simply right now. So basically kind of observing our own minds and how it works. This is what the mind lab is. So it's not us as instructors asking the students to meditate. We're not trained professionals to ask the students to guide the students to do that anyway. But the mind labs are basically these exercises to help the students to get some kind of experience, experiential knowledge of how meditation works and how the psychology of the mind, how Buddhist theories of the mind work.

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**Sarah Richardson:** And so did you change the kind of mind lab experiences that you were assigning based on the content you were delivering?

00:32:43:13 - 00:34:19:26

**Daigengna Duoer:** So after taking this idea from Peter, I kind of developed my own exercises. So I had two different kinds. One is without video, so basically giving them instructions to follow in, the questions to answer. So, for example, I get them to I got my students to observe to pick an object in their room or in their surroundings. Could be a pen or a backpack. And then I asked them to observe this object with their five central faculties, examining also the info that we can collect using these five senses and also asking them to kind of examine the feelings we have towards them and our volitions, right, what do we want to do with these objects? And we also talked about questions like how do we know what the object is? How do we know what to do with it? Which one is real? The object, the name of the object, the concept of the object, the function of object. Which one is the real? If the object is projected on a screen or in a photograph or in an image, which is the real? And why? And also, is it possible to know something without depending on our senses? Or also is it possible to observe anything without developing judgments, feelings and even desires towards them? So these are kind of exercises to help the students to observe how their own mind works. Right. Based on after learning about Buddhist explanations of how the mind works and how the consciousness works.

00:34:20:17 - 00:35:20:02

**Daigengna Duoer:** And we also had mind labs with video instruction. So this is where they actually kind of experienced a Buddhist practice that trains the mind. For example, in the Japanese Zen Buddhism week, I gave them a Zazen instruction video from YouTube, a qualified Japanese Zen priest. Teaching actually his a global audience on YouTube, how to practice Zazen. And there's a whole kind of ten minutes blank space right within that video where you can actually practice Zazen and then there's a follow up after that too so the students are asked to follow his instructions or according to his tradition and practices, and then just ask the students to observe how they feel in the process. Right. What does it feel sitting down that particular posture described by the priest and how they felt after, during, the meditation, how this is different from the kinds of meditation they had before.

00:35:20:12 - 00:35:48:24

**Daigengna Duoer:** And then in the Korean Zen Week, we tried this Kanwa zen instruction meditation where the students actually have to follow instructions and do a meditation not like the Japanese Zazen, but with some kind of koan or some kind of in the Korean Soen tradition it's called a Kanwa, observing the critical phrase. So having some kind of critical phrase to focus on while meditating.

00:35:49:04 - 00:36:27:00

**Daigengna Duoer:** So then students can compare how meditation works in different Zen traditions across different regions, but also students who are uncomfortable with participating or actually sitting down and doing some kind of meditation. They're also encouraged to just watch the video instead and sort of observing how the techniques are different. But apparently everybody participated. So I asked them about this in the survey whether if somebody was uncomfortable participating in any of these mind lab experiments and none of them, none of the students said that they were uncomfortable. So it was interesting.

00:36:27:16 - 00:36:33:09

**Sarah Richardson:** That's great. So even though you gave them an option, surely to not participate, they actually all chose to participate.

00:36:33:11 - 00:36:34:14

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, which is interesting.

00:36:35:12 - 00:36:42:22

**Sarah Richardson:** And then another assignment I wanted to ask you about is your final assignment was something called a media essay. Could you explain this?

00:36:43:22 - 00:37:18:16

**Daigengna Duoer:** So the media essay was something that I developed when I first taught Introduction to Buddhism last summer. So I wanted to create a research assignment that can really teach students concrete skills, not just sort of having them to do a research paper on a topic in Buddhism, but also develop some really useful skills along the way. So the media essay is basically a traditional research paper, plus some kind of media presentation components.

00:37:18:22 - 00:38:19:29

**Daigengna Duoer:** It could be in the form of a website, podcast, YouTube videos, interactive slideshow, so on, so forth. So it's really up to the students to express their creative side. So the media, I say, was also scaffolded. I really like this approach. It really helps the students to not procrastinate. So I asked them to turn in an outline which is worth 10 percent actually of their early on in the quarter, and then we also discussed these through Zoom appointments. I gave them lists of readings and recommendations. I had a lot of books as PDF because our library was closed. So I was I had to actually find a lot of resources for the students. Right. In order for their research papers to work. So we did that through the Zoom appointments and then they have to submit a written draft. So this is basically your traditional college paper. It has to be completely written with citations and bibliography and everything. So this was at 30 percent.

00:38:20:10 - 00:38:52:13

**Sarah Richardson:** So they had to submit this actually in the fourth week of the course. So that gives them a lot of ample time to do editing, to do changes based on my feedback later so that they can get a better grade at their end. And then the final product, was a media essay. So they have to turn their written products. They can either copy and paste it into a website where they can read it or present it in some way in a YouTube video or podcast. So how they do that is really up to them.

00:38:52:25 - 00:39:43:03

**Daigengna Duoer:** So this is where the the skills part comes in. So of course, doing such a research project teaches students how to do research. But also I wanted to teach something called media literacy. Right. For example, when we encounter images, when we Google Zen, the images that we get in the results, are they all about Zen? How are they associated with that? If you choose to use one of these images, like why are you picking this image and not others? So developing some kind of literacy towards the media content that we encounter and teaching the .Students to evaluate this information and also how to choose them strategically to support their specific arguments in the paper and also communication skills.

00:39:43:16 - 00:40:38:29

**Daigengna Duoer:** They've done their research. They've written a great paper. They found something really interesting based on questions that they asked. How are they going to sort of present that in a very communicative way to their audience. Their audience being me and also other people and also their peers. So this is where the students got really creative. There's YouTube videos. You can see influences of current pop culture on the students perceptions of what makes a good communication. So they have YouTube videos where you like a YouTuber they're explaining, they're posing the questions. They're doing this really kind of eye catching intro, giving you a hook and then explaining the research. It was really, really interesting. And also podcasts and emagazines and interactive slides. It got a lot of really wonderful kind of products from the students in the end.

00:40:39:13 - 00:40:52:09

**Sarah Richardson:** That's awesome. I'm curious, was it a struggle to give them feedback after the week four deadline when you were still in the midst of recording everything? That's a lot of feedback to give quickly in a timely fashion for twenty seven students.

00:40:52:11 - 00:42:25:12

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, that's a great question. So I think that's only doable for a smaller class like this. I don't think it would be possible to do it really well, if you have a lot of students, for example, for the intro to Buddhism class, I had sixty students in that summer and although I had a TA, it's still a lot of work for the TA and also for myself. So it really depends on how many students are there. But also I gave all of my assignments have really flexible deadlines, so I don't really, I only have a final final deadline. So they have to get me something by this date because I have to submit their grades into the system. Any any submissions after that it's just too late

because I have a deadline to kind of adhere to for the university. But before that, they can set up their own deadlines and there's no penalties that way. Students who want to just finish the assignments quickly so that they can focus on other things, they will turn them in, I can give them feedback. So I was more of a scattered stream of submissions which worked really well. I had friends who questioned this method. They said, isn't this sort of too much freedom for the students? They might just all turn in their assignments at the very last minute. I also had the same kind of doubt and suspicion, but it turned out that that's not true, at least for this class. Actually, a lot of students wanted to get their assignments out of the way. So it's more of a scattered which is great for grading, for the grader, because you don't have to do everything at once.

00:42:26:00 - 00:42:42:20

**Sarah Richardson:** What a respectful approach too during a global pandemic when everybody's when everybody, including all our students, are doing probably lots of juggling in their lives. So I'm. Just curious, can you give us an example of one that one of these media essays that was really wonderful?

00:42:43:06 - 00:43:27:28

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, thank you for this question. I'm really excited to share some of my students wonderful work. And by the way, by really great project or really wonderful. Actually, I had a rubric for both the written submission, and also for the final media, and there are different rubrics. But basically a really great media essays graded on media literacy rate, how critical they are of the media content that they choose. Right. Not just sort of including a random picture of a Buddha especially like those fat laughing Buddhas, in a class on Zen Buddhism, something like that does not really reflect a critical approach to media content on the Web.

00:43:28:16 - 00:44:40:19

**Daigengna Duoer:** So how carefully and how respectfully they choose media components in their paper, how it's presented, communicatedness, and also creativeness. So based on this, I had a bunch of really great projects, but four that really stood out was: one student created a podcast on, the title of her project was "Connecting Zen Buddhism and the Black Lives Matter Movement." It was a really timely topic at the time and she really dug really deep online into all kinds of resources, looking at how the Zen community responded to the Black Lives Matter movement and how they supported it. Also, the movement and her podcast was made in this really beautiful way. She asked. She structured it with really critical questions, and different sections and she also included really suitable, appropriate musical kind of, I guess, fade ins and fade outs right through and between these different sections. So it was really a pleasure to read. She wasn't really reading her paper, too. She was really engaging with the material.

00:44:41:07 - 00:46:25:25

**Daigengna Duoer:** And there was also another YouTube video by that one student who is majoring in Religious Studies. He wrote a paper on sexual abuse in Zen Buddhism, which is a really innovative and new topic. And there isn't a lot of material, but I was really, really

impressed about his research skills. And he did this really wonderful essay and he did it in this YouTuber kind of structured style that was really engaging to watch. Another student did an interactive slideshow incorporating her own voice over the slides, which is really, really cool. I didn't even know how to do that. So I had the slides were sort of turning her. Her voice is also perfectly timed. And there's also music in the background, so it was really beautifully done. And the topic was Zen Buddhism in Latin America, which is a phenomenon that she observed in her home country, which is really fascinating as well. Again, it's a topic that probably needs more coverage and more research as well. And lastly, there was a student who did this really aesthetically appealing, beautiful emagazine using some kind of I don't even know what some kind of top notch designing software. It was really professionally looking emagazine on science, religion, technology in Zen Buddhism. So she talked about all the different kinds of new and interesting technology that Zen Buddhism is incorporating in their practice and also their outreach. So these four projects, really mind blowing, so many things.

00:46:26:15 - 00:46:34:00

**Sarah Richardson:** Amazing. And I'm wondering, did the students get a chance to hear or see each other's work or was it only for you as the audience?

00:46:34:05 - 00:47:38:15

**Daigengna Duoer:** Thank you for this question. I had thought about this having the students give feedback to each other, but because it was a six week course, it was kind of short and a lot of students didn't have enough time to work on their final products before submitting them. And so they were just there was just not enough time for the students to kind of show each other and give feedback. And also, I taught when I met some of the students through the one to one zoom meetings, some of them also kind of expressed that they didn't want me to post their final products online. So I actually asked for their permissions. Do you mind if I share this with the world? Some of them said, OK, you can share it, but some of them said, I prefer that it's kept private. So those two things, but I think will be a really great idea if I have more time. And if I thought enough about how to better carry this out, it would be a great idea for the students to learn from each other, definitely right?

00:47:39:00 - 00:47:56:18

**Sarah Richardson:** Yeah, I mean, of course, very difficult, though, in a six week format. And then you also had them do something called self-grading. So can you describe the results of the self-grading question that you had in your evaluation form and how you interpreted that data? Did their self-evaluation factor into their grades for the course?

00:47:56:20 - 00:49:43:26

**Daigengna Duoer:** Oh, great. Thank you. So this is something also very experimental that I did for the first time this quarter. So I asked them in the post- course survey how to grades themselves. What kind of grade would you give yourself based on your performance this quarter? The results was really interesting. So 37.5% Of the students actually gave themselves an A+ and 41% gave themselves an A. And so the majority gave themselves an A or A+. However, still quite a number of students did not really feel that they were satisfied with their

performance. So I also had a follow up question asking them what might be the reason for their dissatisfaction with their performance. And the top four reasons were, number one, not enough energy or motivation to do academic work. And that's really understandable given the circumstances. Number two, not enough time. Number three, personal issues. Number four, covid-19 related issues. So you can see that a lot of these things are really impacting how students approach studying and university coursework. And it's really understandable. But I also asked them about if you were to do this course again, what kind of things would you do instead to improve your performance? Many of them talked about, again, time management, how to better manage time, also how to take notes and to how to start the researching process, their big projects, early on. So mostly with time management issues, which again, really reminded me that this is perhaps one of the essential skills that we as educators in higher education should really spend some time teaching.

00:49:43:28 - 00:49:47:12

**Sarah Richardson:** We don't always right where we don't always make the space for that in our courses.

00:49:48:07 - 00:50:32:25

**Daigengna Duoer:** Oh, but I forgot to answer your other question. So today, did self-evaluation factor into their grade for the course? No. I just kind of wanted to get a sense of how they felt about their grades, but it kind of corresponded to their actual grades. So that was just interesting. So most students in the course did get an A or A plus, with some exceptions, who got B or B minus. But those students really struggled to to even turn in the assignments even after ample time. So so that was a issue. I tried to reach out to them, through email, through zoom meetings. But there was still a lot of things that I wasn't really able to kind of help the students with, especially when it comes to time management.

00:50:33:11 - 00:50:38:17

**Sarah Richardson:** So why did you choose to ask students to give so much feedback on every aspect of the course?

00:50:39:03 - 00:51:43:08

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, so there's two things. I think, first of all, our university has this sort of general evaluation that's sent to the students where they have to fill out these bubble sheets, multiple choices, and then submit to the university and we get the results back. But the questions are really general, and I always found that they're not really informative for me. They don't really tell me much about student opinions about how the the course content, for example, is structured. So I wanted to know more quite simply. But also I wanted to get data. I wanted to get some concrete data to help me become a better teacher, of course, and but also to share these data to future teaching training sessions. I'm also serving as a lead TA this year for my department. So I wanted to show some of these data to other graduate students who might have to teach or TA it's going to be really useful, especially this year under these unusual circumstances.

00:51:43:20 - 00:51:53:03

**Sarah Richardson:** Yeah, absolutely. Well, it was even valuable, the Facebook post that you released with all of the charts and graphs. And, yeah, we wanted to ask you, would it be possible to maybe link to that in the show notes?

00:51:53:11 - 00:52:01:17

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, definitely. I would love to. I can also share with everybody else the results from the pre-course survey, some of the questions.

00:52:02:03 - 00:52:15:17

**Sarah Richardson:** What was kind of the big takeaways from that student feedback. You referred already to their preference for Synchronous that you evaluated from the pre-course survey, but either pre or post, what were the other kinds of surprises there in that data for you?

00:52:15:22 - 00:54:44:25

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, there was a lot of surprises from the Post-course survey, which is really interesting to read. And I learned a lot from, you know, from these results about online teaching in general. So first of all, about synchronicity. It was really shocking to find that the majority actually. 91.7% of the students found the asynchronous format suitable to their situation, so they picked this one, the majority picked this one, I think it was seventy five percent or something. And then in the end, right after six weeks, 91.7% thought it was suitable. So this is the recorded lecture format without meeting in real time face to face, and the rest wished so, less than 10 percent of the students wished that there were more synchronous interactions, maybe in discussions, things like that, and also I asked them about for future classes, as long as the pandemic is still happening. 62.5% of the students preferred to stick with the asynchronous approach as long as the pandemic is still going on. Only 8.3% of the students wished to go back to in-person classes as soon as possible, which is also really shocking for me to see. So that's one big takeaway and also, on course, content, the huge majority of the students found the lectures to be overwhelmingly too long. So they found them to be interesting. They were really kind to say this to me, but they also thought it was too long. So 80 minutes per lecture, this is an entire recording of 80 minutes long, four times per week. It's just too much information, although that is the kind of standard format for face to face lectures before the pandemic, which is interesting to learn. And then later, I learned from other graduate students who also taught in summer that they actually recorded their lectures in like 30 minute segments. So they shortened the lectures and they perhaps arranged the topics, arranged the lectures into smaller topics, like ten minutes on a smaller topic and then 20 minutes on some smaller topic. So that I think that would be definitely a better approach to just recording these long lectures, which is really hard on the instructor as well.

00:54:46:00 - 00:55:25:25

**Sarah Richardson:** I taught online in the summer too, and I found that it was hard for me to sustain my own kind of energy, especially just staring into a screen. So I mostly chose to do kind of bite sized pieces because I think what I do mostly in a classroom is I actually lecture in bite sized pieces and then we do something. Then I, then I throw it back to them, and they do

something with think, pair, share or whatever. So I tried to imagine an online equivalent to that, even though they couldn't talk to each other in between but yeah, recording smaller chunks. But that's that's important to note. Thank you. Any other things that were kind of surprises of what they did or didn't enjoy?

00:55:26:09 - 00:56:06:06

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, there's a few more things. So quite a few students actually told me that they were able to watch, that they enjoyed actually watching the lectures on two time speeds, so to double the speed. So that's one really cool function on Panopto that's really interesting, which really kind of makes me think about how how editing, YouTube style editing, has really influenced how we consume information in this generation who want quicker, more bite sized information. The students actually found by speaking too slow and they had to like speed it up, and I tried, kind of listening to my own lectures with double speed. And I sound like a chipmunk

00:56:06:08 - 00:56:07:19

**Sarah Richardson:** but that's inevitable.

00:56:07:28 - 00:57:08:05

**Daigengna Duoer:** So it's kind of amazing how quickly students can consume information, and also are now also used to consuming information. So that's one thing. And another thing was the huge majority, 87.5% actually found the face to face synchronous Zoom meetings to discuss their outlines and also drafts really helpful. So the outline meetings were mandatory, but the draft meetings are optional. But actually, a lot of students did want to meet one on one. I think they were they weren't really interested in meeting as a class in person on zoom, because interaction between each other is difficult, with that format anyway. But they were really, they really enjoyed or they really preferred one on one face to face interactions where you can actually listen to them and talk to them. That way they can get. I think that's sort of the closest thing they can get to some kind of human interaction. So that's one really interesting kind of nuance of the data.

00:57:08:26 - 00:57:26:10

**Sarah Richardson:** Yeah, that's so fascinating. And I don't know if many people in my circle here anyway have recognized the possibility of the one on one Zoom meeting with students. Thank you. I'm just curious, did you do transcriptions from your lectures or was that not necessary for accessibility?

00:57:26:13 - 00:58:05:26

**Daigengna Duoer:** Oh, that's a great question. Yes. So Panopto actually has the function to create subtitles automatically. That helps with. So some of the software that university's prefer, they probably do have these kinds of abilities, functions, embedded already. So that's useful. Also, you can really quickly you can add bookmarks. So I always added bookmarks to my lecture so students can easily jump to certain sections while skipping other sections, which is a

wonderful thing actually. I wish I had that function when I was a undergrad. Students in these huge classes actually jump to the important parts of the lectures.

00:58:06:18 - 00:58:22:29

**Sarah Richardson:** So after this great conversation about the detail of this course and all of the things you kind of got back from them, which sounds like they many of them had pretty significant learning experiences to create those kind of research based creative projects at the end. How has your teaching philosophy changed out of this experience?

00:58:23:01 - 00:59:58:16

**Daigengna Duoer:** So my teaching philosophy is still very much a work in process. I'm still learning so much about teaching through teaching. So it's really exciting to gain a little bit of insight every time I teach or TA. And also teaching in covid-19 really made me become more aware about how students learn, how they want to learn, what they want to learn, especially when it comes to Buddhism and also Zen, things like this, so they are really technology-oriented, but they're also very flexible, I think, and they really want relevant information and material and also arguments for their immediate concerns. So, for example, topics such as: Zen Buddhism in the West, Zen Globalized, Zen in neoliberal capitalism, technology, AI, right, these topics really got a lot more from, a lot more interesting discussion from the students. It seems that they're more interested in these things are immediately relevant to their concerns. I also realized that there is a lot of holes that probably need to be filled in my teaching. For example, media literacy, religion literacy, evaluation of information. We often give students assignments such as research paper, but we don't really sort of hold our hands and teach them the skills. Right. To carry that project out, so that they can do it well instead of just submitting something that they wrote the night before that line.

00:59:59:01 - 01:01:07:03

So I think building crucial, useful skills, concrete skills, for example, how to do research, how to evaluate information that they find, researching how to cite properly, especially when it comes to online content, how to choose certain media content over others strategically to make your points. These are really crucial skills, I think, for today's world that's really exploding with information that that I want to focus with the students in my future teaching courses. So right now, it's more locating and more tending towards my philosophy is more tending towards locating skills that the students might need and also focusing on teaching them, teaching those skills, using the medium of Buddhism. But you can definitely teach those those skills also through other subjects, too. So I think that's one of the advantages we have as instructors of humanities courses where we can definitely teach this exciting content, but we can also teach, useful transferable skills through this content to students.

01:01:08:11 - 01:01:47:23

**Sarah Richardson:** Yeah, because, I mean, for many of our students, they will not become the same kind of nerds we are, who want to just study Buddhist studies forever, so the content can be in some ways secondary or the avenue through which to also cultivate lasting skills. I agree with you a lot there. We're wrapping up now. You did a beautiful job of telling us about this

course, some things worked better online, some things not as well online as you'd hoped. Most importantly, what would you do differently next time if there was a next time for you? If you were going to grow this course from emergency, remote to effective online, what would you do differently?

01:01:48:01 - 01:02:42:24

**Daigengna Duoer:** So the things that I would do differently, definitely based on the student feedback, is to record the online lectures into smaller chunks. So definitely make them shorter and more succinct, maybe organized under a really clear title so they know exactly what kind of information they'll be getting when they click into the video. Get straight to the point. I also would definitely keep, and maybe expand some of the individual zoom meetings maybe create smaller size groups amongst the students so that they can also interact with themselves like you suggested. Maybe having the students give feedback to their own media research projects, incorporating like peer evaluation and peer feedback into that process. And that will be definitely a valuable portion that also adds that human touch, adds the interaction side into online teaching.

01:02:43:18 - 01:03:04:17

**Sarah Richardson:** Yeah, that's great advice. It's so hard in the virtual classroom to find ways to build community, but maybe small groups or even pairing students would be a possibility. And then lastly, I wanted to ask you, how does teaching connect with your own research and writing as a Ph.D. student? Was it too distracting? Did it or did it help you clarify your thinking?

01:03:05:02 - 01:03:45:24

**Daigengna Duoer:** So I really love teaching as a PhD student, so it's not distracting at all. Actually, before I came into the PhD program, right after I finished my BA at U of T, I went into ESL teaching, so I learned a lot about how to teach students with various kinds of backgrounds from there. And I am lucky to kind of bring a lot of that into higher ed. So it's not distracting for me at all, it's something that I genuinely love. And I find that clarifies my thinking and it helps me prepare my exams, for example, that I have to do the comprehensive exams for the PhD program.

01:03:46:06 - 01:03:49:13

**Sarah Richardson:** Those are those are the fun thing coming up for you, right, this winter.

01:03:49:19 - 01:03:54:16

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, reading has been really fun. It's really a privilege to be able to read so much.

01:03:54:23 - 01:04:17:14

**Sarah Richardson:** And I honestly want to tell every student I am in contact with, you'll never know so much as that moment when you've just done your comprehensive exams because you master a ton of information. Really. Quickly. It's a good feeling, so enjoy. Is there anything that you want to add that you want to emphasize for our listeners before we sign off?

01:04:18:11 - 01:04:52:08

**Daigengna Duoer:** Yeah, so this course was definitely a really pleasure to teach. I was really shocked about all the wonderful kind of projects that the students were able to come up with. So that was really the big highlight of my summer. And also I learned a lot from the helpful kind of comments and feedback from the surveys I posted on Facebook and elsewhere. So people were kind of writing back to me and like you guys are reaching out to me. So this other side of the post teaching kind of building of community where you can kind of talk to each other. So this is also a really beautiful kind of thing that came out from the whole process.

01:04:53:12 - 01:05:13:02

**Sarah Richardson:** Well, thank you so much for thank you firstly for sharing, for even developing a course with an eye and a mind towards what students actually want and what they receive from from online teaching. So that was already just a really generous move you made in the, in the planning of your course. And then thank you also so much for speaking with us today.

01:05:13:04 - 01:05:16:14

**Daigengna Duoer:** Thank you so much for your kind words. And it's really a pleasure speaking with you guys.

01:05:22:23 - 01:06:00:07

**Sarah Richardson:** Thank you to Daigengna for your openness and your generosity, there are lots of really great ideas in there, and lots of resources. Thanks to the wonderful Dr. Betsy Moss for recording, editing and producing this podcast. Thanks also to you for listening. Please visit our Web site at [teaching Buddhism.Net](http://teachingbuddhism.net) And for show notes and to find links to articles and other resources mentioned here. Also, a special thanks to the Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto for fully supporting the production of this podcast. Also, thanks to Dr. Frances Garrett for her support as a contributing producer. Be well!