



**SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT  
IN  
PALI AND BUDDHIST STUDIES**

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council  
University Grants Commission  
Sri Lanka**

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## FOREWORD

The work in connection with the development of Subject Benchmark Statements was begun in August 2003 as a part of the overall quality assurance framework that supports academic standards and the furtherance and dissemination of good practice in Universities in Sri Lanka. Subject Benchmark Statements will support and promote quality and standards by:

- Providing universities with a common and explicit reference point for internal and external programme approval and review;
- Guiding and promoting curriculum development, especially in new departments and new universities, and in other institutions of higher education;
- Evolving over time to take account of changes and innovations that reflect subject development and new expectations;
- Providing an authoritative and widely recognized statement of expectations of what is expected of a graduate in a specific (or designated) subject area in a form readily accessible to students, employers and others with a stake in higher education;
- Providing a clear and transparent reference point for External Examiners;
- Assisting international comparison and competitiveness of higher education awards and student achievement.

# **SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT**

## **PALI AND BUDDHIST STUDIES**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- Some main universities in Sri Lanka contain a department of Pali and Buddhist Studies attached either to the faculty of arts or to the faculty of humanities. This department offers at least two or three subject disciplines in combination of:
  - Either (1) Pali and (2) Buddhist Studies
  - Or (1) Pali, (2) Buddhist Philosophy, and (3) Buddhist Culture.
- As such, in the universities that come under the University Grant Commission, four different but complementary special degree programmes are offered for the undergraduate students of Pali and Buddhist Studies.
- In all universities, two or three of these subjects are also taught in the general degree programme.

#### **Pali**

- Pali is a Middle Indo-Aryan language and is the language in which the scriptures of early Buddhism as well as the scriptures, commentaries, sub-commentaries, chronicles, law books, and devotional texts of the Theravada Buddhism have been preserved to this day. Hence, the departments where Pali is offered as a special degree subject concentrate on the study of history, content, grammar, translation, interpretation, and literary value of these texts.

#### **Buddhist Philosophy**

- Buddhist Philosophy deals with the questions of existence (ontology/ metaphysics), language (logic and hermeneutics), knowledge (epistemology), mind (philosophical psychology), and ethics (ethics and social-political philosophy) from the perspective of early Buddhism and its later developments. As such, courses on early Buddhism, Buddhist metaphysics, logic, epistemology, psychology, ethics, and social-political philosophy form the core of the special degree programme in Buddhist philosophy.

#### **Buddhist Culture**

- Buddhist Culture deals with the accumulated storehouse of Buddhist ways of thinking and acting that have arduously been discovered, passed along, and added by successive generations of Buddhists, contributing to the formation and development of Buddhist institutions, art and architecture, language, literature, livelihoods, and the ways of thinking and behaviour of the people in the areas where Buddhism has been or had been a civilizing force. As such the special degree programme in Buddhist culture contains courses on history, language, literature, art, architecture, mythology, rituals, festivals, and monastic institution of the Buddhist tradition.

#### **Buddhist Studies**

- In the special degree programme in Buddhist Studies, a combination of courses belonging to both Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist culture are taught.

## 2. SUBJECT AIMS

**BA Special Degree Programme in Buddhist Studies is aimed at** producing graduates who could

- Comprehend the philosophical dimension and/ or the cultural dimension of Buddhism
- Conduct research on topics in the main teachings of the Buddha, Buddhist philosophy and/ or Buddhist culture
- Understand the fundamentals of the Buddha's teachings and also their later developments
- Apply the Buddhist theories and values to real life situations
- Serve humanity following the Buddhist principles
- Give leadership to the country's moral development, and in turn to its material development
- Evaluate modern social, economic, political, and psychological theories and practices from the Buddhism's perspective
- Present Buddhist perspective on and propose Buddhist solutions to the current social, economic and political issues and problems
- Be informants on the history, culture, language, society and environment in Sri Lanka and in Buddhist countries of Asia
- Work for the religious and ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka
- Practice Buddhist meditation and counseling
- Be unbiased, unprejudiced, exemplary, positive, active, creative, and dynamic in character
- Be diplomatic, tolerant, sympathetic, empathetic, and accountable persons
- Be committed to maintain law and order, and discipline in society
- Be able to work for enhancing social, economic, political, and religious well-being of all individuals and social groups and communities
- Organize and lead local, national and international Buddhist societies, organizations, and institutions to achieve their objectives
- Teach Buddhism and Buddhist civilization subjects in the pirivena, school and dhamma school curricula from grade 1 to GCE Advanced Level
- Teach Buddhism and related subjects in the Oriental Studies curriculum
- Pursue postgraduate studies in Pali and Buddhist studies or in a related field locally or abroad

**BA Special Degree Programme in Pali is aimed at** producing graduates who could

- Conduct research on various aspects of Theravada Buddhism
- Translate grammatically the Pali canonical, post-canonical and commentarial and other Pali works into Sinhala/ English
- Write Pali essays
- Compose Pali gāthās (verses)
- Edit Pali manuscripts/ texts
- Read, comprehend and evaluate various Pali literary works
- Prepare Pali curricula for both Pirivena education and dhamma school education
- Teach Pali in the pirivena, school, and dhamma school curricula
- Teach Pali in the Oriental Studies curriculum of Sri Lanka
- Pursue postgraduate studies locally or abroad

### **Extent of the Subject Area**

- Buddhism has been studied and taught by scholars belonging not only to Buddhist Studies but also to such other disciplines as philosophy, ethics, psychology, psychotherapy, counseling, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, comparative religion, art, archeology, history, philology, language, literature, education, economics, political science, management, law, women's studies, and Asian studies. For this reason, the Pali and Buddhist Studies is a subject area where scholars from both the social sciences and humanities work together enriching both fields. Moreover, it has the potential of developing many other degree programmes in Sri Lanka, particularly in the area of social sciences.

### **3. SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**

- The graduates of Buddhist Studies should
  - Be familiar with the canonical, post-canonical, and commentarial works of Pali Buddhism
  - be familiar with the fundamentals of Buddhist teachings embodied in the Pali canon
  - be familiar with the religious and philosophical background of Buddhism
  - be knowledgeable on the philosophical, religious, psychological and ethical aspects of Buddhism
  - be equipped with the most up-to-date knowledge of Buddhist studies
  - be knowledgeable on the early history and later developments of Buddhist thought and culture in India and Sri Lanka
  - be knowledgeable on the history of Buddhism in other Asian countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, China, Japan, and Korea
  - be knowledgeable on Buddhist art and architecture in the Indian subcontinent
  - know the origin and evolution of the Buddhist vinaya and the monastic life
  - know the Buddhist social, economic and political thought
  - understand the Buddhist cosmology
  - be knowledgeable on the history and the doctrines of early Buddhist philosophical schools both Hinayana and Mahayana
  - know the unique characteristics and fundamentals of Buddhist logic and epistemology
  - know the special characteristics of Buddhist ethics in comparison with those of the west
  - be familiar with Buddhist psychology and counseling
  - be knowledgeable on Buddhist meditation and its varying techniques
  - not only see the relevance of the Buddha's teachings to contemporary society but also be able to make proposals for resolving contemporary issues
  - be knowledgeable on the Pali language and be able to read and understand the Pali text
  - be knowledgeable on the Sanskrit language and the Buddhist sources in Sanskrit
  - be knowledgeable on the origin, history, development, institutions, scriptures and doctrines of Theravada Buddhism
  - similarities and differences between the Theravada and non-Theravada traditions and their relation to early Buddhism
  - be knowledgeable on the disciplinary rules and jurisprudence

- be knowledgeable on the origin, spread, and methods of the Theravada Abhidhamma
- be able to demonstrate the depth, sophistication, and diversity of Buddhism as well as the studies on Buddhism
- In Pali studies, the graduate should:
  - Know the language, content, and literary value of the Tipitaka and its commentaries
  - Know the traditional, historical, analytical, and linguistic Pali grammar
  - Be able to read and understand both prescribed and unspecified Pali texts
  - Know basic Sanskrit
  - know some basic middle Indo Aryan languages
- In the BA Special Degree Programme in Buddhist Philosophy the core should be:
  - Religious, philosophical, social, and cultural background of early Buddhism
  - Fundamental teachings of the Buddha
  - History and development of Buddhist philosophy
  - Buddhist social, political, and economic philosophy
  - Buddhist ethics
  - Buddhist psychology
  - Buddhist epistemology
  - Buddhist logic
  - Buddhist metaphysics
  - Sri Lankan Buddhist philosophy
  - Studies in Indian Philosophy
  - Studies in Western Philosophy,
  - Study of the primary Buddhist sources
  - Scholars and their works in Buddhist philosophy
  - Buddhist Meditation
- In the BA Special Degree Programme in Buddhist Culture, the core should be:
  - Religious, philosophical, social and cultural background of Buddhism
  - Fundamental teachings of the Buddha
  - History and geographical expansion of Buddhism from ancient India to modern West
  - Buddhist social, political, and economic philosophy
  - Buddhist scriptures and literature
  - Buddhist art and architecture
  - Buddhist rites and festivals
  - Buddhist monasticism
  - Buddhist education
  - Buddhist management
  - Sri Lankan Buddhist culture
  - Studies in world religions
  - Study of primary Buddhist sources
  - Scholars and their works in Buddhist culture
  - Buddhist Meditation

- In the BA Special Degree Programme in Pali, the core should be:
  - Introduction to Pali studies (importance, tools, facilities, places, books, etc)
  - Basic Pali grammar
  - Historical Pali grammar
  - Traditional Pali grammar
  - Reading from the Vinayapitaka
  - Reading from the Suttapitaka
  - Reading from the Abhidhammapitaka
  - Pali composition
  - Study of the Pali canon
  - Pali commentaries and sub-commentaries
  - Pali chronicles
  - Pali poetry
  - Pali manuscripts and their editing
  - Modern Pali scholars and their works
  - Buddhist Meditation

#### **4. SKILLS AND ATTITUDES**

- All Buddhist Studies graduates should acquire a measure of skills required by the discipline. Graduates will be expected to have acquired the following intellectual abilities:
  - Demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the teachings of the Buddha
  - Reading and using appropriate literature on Buddhist studies
  - Identify, gather and analyze primary data and source material, whether through textual studies and fieldwork
  - Giving a clear and accurate description on the topics in Buddhist studies
  - Articulacy in identifying and explaining Buddhist principles, concepts, and theories
  - Precision of thought and expression in the analysis and formulation of complex and controversial problems and themes in Buddhist studies
  - Sensitivity in interpretation of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts
  - Clarity and rigor in the critical assessment of arguments in Buddhist texts
  - Use specialized Buddhist Studies terminology
  - Abstract, analyze and construct sound arguments in the field of Buddhist studies
  - Communicate information, ideas, arguments, principles and theories in Buddhist Studies by a variety of oral, written and visual means
  - Move between generalization and appropriately detailed discussion, inventing or discovering examples to support or challenge a position, and distinguishing relevant and irrelevant considerations
  - Consider unfamiliar ideas and ways of thinking
  - Represent views of different Buddhist traditions and other world religions with fairness and integrity
  - Demonstrate intellectual flexibility in Buddhist studies through the practice of a variety of complementary methods of study
  - Express one's own views without denigration of others, through critical engagement in a spirit of generosity, openness, and empathy
  - Examine critically presuppositions and methods within Buddhist studies
  - Argue and debate without recourse to insult or susceptibility to take offence

- Willingness to evaluate opposing arguments, to formulate and consider the best arguments for different views and to identify the weakest elements of the most persuasive view
- Honesty in recognizing the force of the conclusions warranted by a careful assessment of pertinent arguments
- Cross traditional subject boundaries, examining the limitations and virtues of other disciplines
- Apply the Buddhist teachings, skills and techniques to issues arising outside the academy
- Graduates will have developed skills that are generic to study in the humanities/ social sciences. They should learn
  - To think independently, set tasks and solve problems
  - To gather, synthesize, analyze and summarize information
  - To listen attentively to complex presentations
  - To read carefully a variety of technical and non-technical material
  - To use libraries effectively
  - To reflect clearly and critically on oral and written sources, employing powers of imagination as well as analysis
  - To remember relevant material and bring it to mind when the moment of its relevance arises
  - To marshal a complex body of information
  - To construct cogent argument in the evaluation of this material
  - To present, in both oral and written forms, a clear and well-structured assessment of relevant considerations
- Students should have the opportunity to develop skills in the following areas:
  - Information technology – word-processing, email and WWW
  - Information search and retrieval, using online computer resources to access bibliographic material
  - Making power-point presentations
- The study of Buddhism fosters the development of a range of personal attributes that are important in the world of work that will strengthen the graduate’s ability to engage in lifelong learning, and that will contribute to the wider community. These will include:
  - Ability to motivate oneself
  - Ability to work autonomously
  - Ability to work collaboratively as a member of a team or group
  - General management of one’s own work to time limits
  - Having a flexible and adaptable mind that enables to face new situations
  - Ability to think creatively, self-critically and independently
  - Having an unbiased, unprejudiced, exemplary, positive, active, creative, and dynamic character
  - Being a diplomatic, tolerant, sympathetic, empathetic, and accountable person
  - Commitment to maintain law and order, and discipline in society
  - Readiness to work for enhancing social, economic, political, and religious well-being of all individuals and social groups and communities

## 5. TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

- Successful forms of teaching and learning may vary widely, including:
  - Lectures
  - Tutorials
  - Assignments
  - Seminars where students are responsible in turn for introducing topics
  - Guided reading coupled with submission of short writings for discussion
  - The writing of a substantial dissertation under supervision
  - Student-led discussion groups
- Given the nature of Buddhist Studies, the learning has to be an active process. As such, the special degree programme should include
  - a substantial element of learning through the student's own thoughtful reading, starting from an appropriate reading list
  - discussion, whether in tutorials, seminars, or in some other format, including live presentations by students; and
  - considered presentation of writing by students of their understanding and critical appraisal of material they have studied, with provision of feedback on what they have written.
- Given the nature of Pali and Buddhist Studies, the learning should be progressive. As such, the special degree programme should allow students to progress incrementally in the development of their understanding of Buddhism; and lead the students in a progression from study with support and assistance to more independent and self-directed study.

## 6. ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

- Assessment in Buddhist Studies aims to test both knowledge and understanding of a corpus of material; and ability to reason rigorously, critically and autonomously.
- Various methods and combinations of methods could be used for this purpose. The principal methods are
  - Formal timed written examinations
  - Essay assignments with access to information sources
  - Project reports
  - Portfolios of coursework
  - Dissertations
  - Formal assessment of performance in live presentations and debates, ranging from seminar presentations to formal viva voce examinations
- A dissertation will often form part of the overall assessment. However, as there are other ways of assessments, making it compulsory or not should be a policy of an individual programme/ department giving considerations to those assessments.
- Whatever system of summative assessment is employed, it should web appropriately with the teaching and learning stipulation, wherever possible form part of the overall learning process.
- Student should be told what they are expected to achieve, and about how the assessment process is intended to measure their success in working towards these achievements.

- The standards of student achievement reflect the knowledge and understanding of Buddhist Studies (Pali, Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist culture) and its various techniques and methods, together with a profile of skills, which students should attain.
- The benchmark statement documents these standards in the broadest terms, recognizing the variety of course content and the different emphases that may legitimately be placed on specific elements of the skills profile. The statement is not intended to block experimentation and innovation in the development of new courses or the introduction of novel methods of assessment.
- Not everything that is valuable can be separately tested, measured or quantified.

## 7. STUDENTS ATTAINMENT AND BENCHMARK LEVEL (STANDARD)

Two levels of achievements, threshold and good, are taken into account.

- **Threshold:** the threshold level achievement marks the minimally acceptable repertoire of special degree in Buddhist Studies, generally the bottom of the Second Class Lower Division.
- **Good level:** a good level of achievement marks work of the standard attained by the majority of graduates. The list of standards is especially appropriate for the special degree students in Buddhist studies taking a wide range of course units including a variety of skills which reinforce each other. The standards permit examiners to distinguish different degrees of accomplishment.

### **Knowledge and Understanding - Threshold Level of Achievement**

On completion of a special degree course, students should be able to show to some extent most of the following:

- To demonstrate familiarity with some of the discourses of the Buddha
- To demonstrate familiarity with the writings of some of the major Buddhist studies scholars
- To demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge in the central teachings of the Buddha
- To demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge in the political, social, economic, and environmental teachings of Buddhism
- To demonstrate a broad knowledge in the ethical, epistemological, psychological, and metaphysical teachings of Buddhism (Buddhist Philosophy)
- To demonstrate a broad knowledge in the main topics in Buddhist art, architecture, rituals, institutions, language, and literature.
- To summarize, represent, and interpret a range of both primary and secondary sources in Buddhist philosophy/ Buddhist culture
- To demonstrate awareness of key themes, theories and arguments in Buddhist philosophy/ Buddhist culture

### **Knowledge and understanding - Good Level**

- To demonstrate comprehension of and intelligent engagement with the richness of Buddhism in its varied and central forms
- To demonstrate comprehension of the fundamental teachings of the Buddha
- To demonstrate the thorough grasp of the theories and arguments of Buddhist philosophers and scholars
- To employ historical doctrines to illuminate contemporary problems and issues

- To state clearly, discuss and demonstrate critical comprehension of the main topics in Buddhist philosophy/ Buddhist culture.
- To discuss and demonstrate critical comprehension and analysis of the primary and secondary sources in Buddhist philosophy/ Buddhist culture.
- To demonstrate critical comprehension of key themes, theories and arguments in Buddhist philosophy/ Buddhist culture

**General Skills in Buddhist Studies – Threshold Level**

- Communicate information, ideas, principles and theories by appropriate oral and visual means
- Identify, gather and discuss primary data and source material, whether through textual studies or fieldwork
- Attend to, reproduce accurately and reflect on the ideas and arguments of others
- Engage with empathy and integrity with the convictions and behaviours of others
- Work collaboratively as a member of a team or group
- Undertake independent study (including time management)
- Use library resources in order to identify source material, compile bibliographies, inform research and enhance presentations
- Use IT and computer skills for data capture, to identify source material and support research and presentations
- Show critical self-awareness about one's own beliefs, commitments, and prejudices

**Specific Skills in Buddhist Studies – Threshold Level**

In general, work at the threshold level of attainment shows weak understanding of the material and contains elementary errors.

- Ability to identify the key Buddhist terms and concepts
- Ability to explain some Buddhist concepts
- Ability to understand the importance of careful interpretation of Buddhist texts
- Familiarity with the use of specialized Buddhist terminology
- Communicate information, ideas, arguments, principles and theories by a variety of means, for example, clearly organized and presented essays of various lengths
- Represent views of different Buddhist traditions and other world religions with fairness and integrity
- Use a number of complementary methods of study, for example, philosophical, historical, social scientific, hermeneutical, textual.
- Demonstrate awareness of Buddhism's contribution to debate in the public arena about values, truth, beauty, identity, health, peace and justice.
- Translate accurately the Pali canonical, post-canonical and commentarial and other Pali works into Sinhala/ English (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Read and comprehend various Pali literary works (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Make critical evaluations of the Pali canonical, post-canonical and commentarial and other Pali works (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Write fairly good Pali essays (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Compose Pali gāthās (verses) following popular meters (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Familiarity with editing Pali manuscripts/ texts (Pali Special Degree Students)

### **General Skills - Good Level**

On completion of a special degree programme in Buddhist Studies, students would be able to show to an adequate degree most of the following skills:

- Ability to identify and analyze the key Buddhist terms and concepts
- Ability to read carefully and interpret texts drawn from a wide range Buddhist schools and traditions
- Ability to review the writings in Buddhist studies by the academics
- Ability to use and understand properly specialized Buddhist terminology
- Ability to abstract, analyze and construct logical argument
- Readiness to review unfamiliar ideas with an open mind and a willingness to change one's mind when appropriate

### **Specific Skills – Good Level**

- Represent views of different Buddhist traditions sensitively and intelligently with fairness and integrity
- Ability to express one own views without denigration of others, through critical engagement in a spirit of generosity, openness, and empathy
- Demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the teachings of the Buddha
- Demonstrate intellectual flexibility through the practice of a variety of complementary methods of study
- Demonstrate awareness of and critical assessment of religious contributions to debate in public arena about values, truth, beauty, identity, health, peace and justice
- Communicate information, ideas, arguments, principles, theories, and develop an argument by a variety of means, for example essays of various lengths and dissertations which are clearly and effectively organized and presented
- Communicate information, ideas, principles and theories and develop an argument effectively by appropriate oral and visual means, and relate materials to an intended audience
- Identify, gather and analyze primary data and source material, whether through textual studies or fieldwork
- Attend to, reproduce accurately, reflect on and interact with the ideas and arguments of others
- Engage with empathy, integrity and critical reflection with the convictions and behaviors of others
- Work collaboratively as a member of a team or group in a way which allows each individual's talents to be utilized effectively
- Undertake independent/ self-directed study/learning (including time management) and reflect on one's strengths and weaknesses as a learner
- Make discriminating use of a full range of library resources in order to identify appropriate source material, compile bibliographies, inform research and enhance presentations
- Use IT and computer skills for data capture, to identify appropriate source material, support research, and enhance presentations
- Show independence in thought, and critical self-awareness about one's beliefs, commitments and prejudices
- Translate the Pali canonical, post-canonical and commentarial and other Pali works, both in prose and verse, into Sinhala/ English demonstrating a fair knowledge in and skills in using both languages (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Read and comprehend various Pali literary works (Pali Special Degree Students)

- Make critical evaluations of the Pali canonical, post-canonical and commentarial and other Pali works (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Write well-organized and well presented Pali essays (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Compose Pali gāthās (verses) following popular meters (Pali Special Degree Students)
- Ability to edit Pali manuscripts/ texts demonstrating one's familiarity with Pali textual criticism (Pali Special Degree Students)

## **8. ANNEX1. MEMBERS OF THE BENCHMARK GROUP**

Prof. G. A. Somaratne	University of Peradeniya
Ven. Dr. M. Gnanananda	University of Peradeniya
Ven. Dr. Naimbala Dhammadassi	University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Prof. W. A. G. Perera	University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Prof. G. D. Sumanapala	University of Kelaniya
Ven. Prof. Dewalegama Medhananda	University of Kelaniya
Ven. Dr. Induragare Dhammaratne	University of Kelaniya
Rev. Prof. Midigama Soratha	University of Ruhuna
Ven. Dr. Wilegoda Ariyadeva	University of Ruhuna