



the horizon

The student voice of Indiana University Southeast

Meet the monk



Ashley Sizemore

September 23, 2013

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Adjunct professor shares message and mindset

IU Southeast strives to give students a worldly education, offering a variety of classes with professors from numerous backgrounds. Last semester, the university welcomed a Buddhist monk to the community.



Thich Hang Dat, a native of Vietnam, is an adjunct professor of philosophy and has spoken to the campus several times about his religion.

Currently, Dat is teaching one course, Buddhism (REL-354), to 21 students. One of these students, Tom Bush, philosophy senior, said he enjoys learning from Dat.

"I think it's really cool to have someone from a different background to expand and learn from," Bush said.

Dat said that after he came over to the U.S. he really did not have any trade skills, which led him to his spiritual path of becoming a monk.

“During my freshman year of college I decided I wanted to become a monk,” he said. Dat earned a degree in electrical engineering from Pennsylvania State University in 1990. In 1991, he began his life’s journey as a monk. Dat continued his studies at University of the West in Rosemead, Calif. where he received a Masters of Arts in religious studies in 1999.

When the Dalai Lama visited Louisville in May to do a three-day teaching, he was received by Dat, Louisville mayor Greg Fischer and two other monks. During the teachings, Dat sat on the stage and translated for the Vietnamese people.

“I was an emcee and a translator for the Vietnamese people,” Dat said. “I ran the program.”

Monks traveled from all over the U.S. to come to the event. Dat said there were 40 to 50 monks from out of state and some that had traveled from California. Although not the first time Dat had met the Dalai Lama, he said it was an experience.

“He is a highly respected person,” Dat said. “Of course it is an honor to see him in person. He is like our Buddhist pope.”

Dat has started religious centers in Louisville, Corydon, St. Louis, Mo., and Atlantic

City, N.J. These centers were started so that the local Buddhist people could pray and meditate. He travels to all of the centers twice a year, but said he spends most of his time at the Corydon center meditating and teaching other monks.

“When people came to do an article about me in Atlantic City, did an interview about me they called me the ‘Traveling Monk,’” Dat said.

On the weekends, Dat said he spends time at his Louisville center and often leads other monks in meditation.

Dat said there is not a favorite place that he likes to visit when he goes on trips to talk about Buddhism. To him they are all the same, they just differ by environments. His only concern is if he is able to assist others spiritually and through mediation.

“The only thing is whether I can contribute to the people, to the community,” Dat said.

Dat said one reason he is a monk is because of meditation. He said he likes to help others through meditation. He aids those who are in poor health, performs weddings and does services at funerals.

Dat said a typical day for him and the other monks at the Corydon center is to wake up at 4 a.m. and do prayer and meditation for two hours. Dat teaches other monks about Buddhism until it is time for lunch. After lunch all the monks do chores for around five and a half hours. After chores are done the monks eat dinner and have

another prayer with meditation.

Some of the monks from Dat's center in Corydon travel with Dat to IU Southeast and sit in on his class.

"They listen to my lecture in the classroom so they can learn how to talk with local people later on," Dat said.



"Dat is highly respected by the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Louisville," Hughes, associate librarian said. "I admire that he wants to instill the tradition in children in the community."

In addition to teaching at IU Southeast, Dat is continuing his religious studies at University of the West and is a candidate for his Ph.D.

He has taught at the University of Louisville, Bellerme University, and University of

Southern Indiana.

Student Angela Tolbert, English junior, said she likes the atmosphere of Dat's class. "It's a more relaxed environment, not a lot of stress," she said. "We get a deeper understanding of Buddhism."

Next semester Dat will teach Mindfulness in Meditation as an honors course. He said he hopes to teach students how meditation can be used to control their stress and anxieties.

"Hopefully I can work with the school and enhance the student life spiritually and mentally by applying meditation," Dat said. "Mindfulness is for everyone; meditation is for everyone. It's not just for the Buddhist."

Staff
asnsizem@ius.edu