

**Letter of Application**  
**and**  
**Statement of Teaching Experience and Capabilities**

Dear Dr. Eberhart and Department Selective Committee,

I am writing to apply for the non-tenure-track instructional assistant professor in Religious Studies (H0121) that has been advertised since October 19, 2021 on the school's job search website. When I reviewed the job description of this teaching position, I was excited to see how well my teaching experiences align with the department's needs and the position's requirements. I feel your core mission and culture suit what I offer as a professional. In this letter of application, I will briefly outline my contributions and accomplishments in the areas of teaching, research, and service.

At present, I am an adjunct faculty in Religious Studies of the Department of Comparative Cultural Studies, which is under your supervision. I began teaching at the University of Houston in 2015, and I am in my seventh year at the school. I have been teaching at least four courses and sometime even five courses over two semesters for a total of 26 courses (13 for *Introductory Buddhism*; 10 for *Introductory Asian Religions*; 2 for *Mindfulness*; and 1 for *Buddhist Meditation*).<sup>1</sup> As a result, I can handle the department's requirement of four courses over two semesters.

As part of my teaching tasks, I have designed four separate courses, two regular and two selective seminars, which enhanced the department's diverse course offerings. For instance, I primarily teach two introductory survey courses (*Introduction to Buddhism* and *Introduction to Asian Religions*) and two advanced undergraduate seminars (*Buddhist Meditation* and *Mindfulness Practices*).

I specialize in the religions of South Asia, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. At Indiana University Southeast, I have been teaching *Buddhist Meditation* and *Mindfulness Practices* courses for both graduate and honors students for several years. For instance, I mentored graduate students on their independent studies in spring 2014 and spring 2019.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, I provided counseling sessions for students who were struggling with their academical and psychological challenges, and I mentored them with their coursework.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 20: Course Taught at University of Houston.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 21: Courses Taught at Indiana University (regional campuses).

With my great teaching experiences at both schools, the University of Houston and Indiana University (regional campuses), I strongly believe that I can serve as a mentor for undergraduates' majors and minors, supervise students' independent study courses, and facilitate their honors theses. These areas of concentration match perfectly with the department's position of preferred instructional assistant professors, who must support the delivery of introductory survey courses and advanced seminars as well as be a specialist in South Asian religions.

In my pedagogical methodology, I employ a non-traditional, less stressful approach by allowing students to write their essays, reports, and presentations instead of taking quizzes or multiple-choice tests. I allow the students to select one question from a pool of questions for the week so that they can feel encouragement, joy, comfort, and freedom from fear in writing their responses. In this way, the students may have more time for their reflections and will better retain the subject matter information.

I also provide an online platform for students to interact with each other through sharing their ideas and opinions about the same topics of discussion in the online forum. After posting their response to their weekly question, they can write their comments on the other students' postings to learn and interact with one another virtually.

During the online meeting sessions, I create mini-discussion groups according to the students' chosen questions and then let them speak at that time or contribute to class discussion later to train them in interpersonal interactions and improve their public speaking skills. For example, if there are 10 questions for 40 students to discuss in a session, I allow four students to select the same question and then talk about it for five minutes in 10 breakout rooms on Zoom. Afterwards, they return to the main Zoom room to share their group's discussions of the questions. Here, I give them the freedom to voice their own opinions on the discussion board regardless of the inputs they may share with each other without any reservation.

In the Asian Religions class, I provide the venues for them to have first-hand experiences and broaden their views about traditions by assigning them a field trip report to write after their visitations to any Asian religious center. Sometimes, after learning that some students set up the group accounts on social media for these courses, I also encouraged others to join in these groups and interact with each other.

I grade their writings according to the levels of their understanding about the studied materials. Also, toward the end of the semester, I usually send out a courtesy email to remind them

to submit their missing assignments so that they will remember and turn them in for grading. Usually, I don't deduct any points for late submissions because I value the quality of the students' work over the time frame. Few professors would allow their students to do this because it is a burden on their workloads to grade the students' papers, especially close to the end of the semester. In my perspective, students frequently stress out when they are overwhelmed with the assignments' deadlines. As a result, they rush to finish their work on time without enjoying and retaining much the studied materials. Since my main goal is to assist students to retain as much of the studied materials as possible, I want to create an environment so that students can enjoy and have peace of mind in my classes. With that in mind, it is more likely that they will be successful in my classes.

My foremost perspective is that I am a successful educator only whenever my students are successful in my classes. If they study hard and fulfill all the courses' requirements, then I will assist them in being successful in my classes. Moreover, I want my students to acquire knowledge in learning subjects but also learn the valuable life lessons to prepare for real-life situations. Indeed, I really care for students' well-being, mental health, and study qualities.<sup>3</sup>

I am proud to be a minority scholar at UH in the United States because of its diverse students and faculty members. I hope the department will give me the opportunity to earn a permanent position so that I can serve as an instructional professor and devote my life to pursuing religious research and sharing my knowledge with talented students. Teaching at UH fulfills my lifelong dream, and I look forward to making even greater contributions in the future.

Personally, as an Asian Buddhist clergy, I have a history of and commitment to mentoring Asian students because they come from underrepresented minorities. As of the fall 2020, the percentage of Asians among all students at UH was 21.6%, which is equivalent to 10,173 registered students.<sup>4</sup> Also, approximately in every semester from one-fourth to one-third of my UH students are Asians. Although most Asian students are not in religious studies majors or minors, some of

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<sup>3</sup> As parts of evidence of effective teachings, in the Appendix 9 of my student evaluations, "UH Students' Evaluations, 2015–2021," you will find all the required materials that will illustrate a consistently high rating of my effective teaching and commitment to improvement and professional growth in support of my application for this position.

<sup>4</sup> University of Houston, "UH Experiences Record Enrollment, Master's Student Headcount and Diversity Increase," accessed January 14, 2022, [https://uh.edu/news-events/stories/2020/september-2020/09142020-uh-record-enrollment-diversity-increase.php#:~:text=UH%20's%20total%20preliminary%20enrollment,fall%202019%20final%20enrollment%3A%2046%2C148](https://uh.edu/news-events/stories/2020/september-2020/09142020-uh-record-enrollment-diversity-increase.php#:~:text=UH%20's%20total%20preliminary%20enrollment,fall%202019%20final%20enrollment%3A%2046%2C148).)). Shivani Parmar, "UH diversity ranking shifts from second to eighth," accessed January 14, 2022, <http://thedailycougar.com/2021/08/13/uh-diversity-ranking-shifts-from-second-to-eighth/>.

them took my classes due to the recommendations of their Buddhist parents, who might have known me directly or indirectly as a Buddhist leader within the Buddhist community in Houston. As an Asian professor and a Buddhist clergy, I have gained great experiences in teaching Buddhism and other Asian religions, both in academic and non-academic settings for several decades to Asian people and their children. As a result, I think I am the best candidate for your department to be a mentor for Asian and other underrepresented students because I know their problems and challenges such as the doing-well myth and exotic un-American stereotype.<sup>5</sup>

This permanent position not only provides me with the opportunity to get involved with the school's academia more deeply, but it also affects the Asian Buddhist communities in Houston greatly because it demonstrates clearly that UH stands on its principles of recruiting and retaining minority scholars like me.

At UH, we fortunately have very diverse classrooms since students came from different backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability, age, religious belief, and political inclination. Each of them brings special strengths, ideas, and experiences to the classroom. As a result, my pedagogical approach of diversity is tailored around a diverse group of students to bring the feelings of being represented and included as well as to improve their social skills and academic confidence.

I have learned not only to be sympathetic but also sensitive. Since students come from all walks of life, to help them achieve their full potential of success is critical. To be flexible and design my curriculums that favor my students' interests, that is a must. Each student will know that they matter, and that they can learn comfortably and think critically because my classroom will, without a doubt, be a place for the empowerment of their talents.

With the responsibility to promote a global community, teaching South Asian religions is a source of pride and fulfillment for me even though to some those traditions seem remote and alien amid the advanced western technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, I really enjoy bringing South Asian religions alive in the classroom setting and empowering students to dive deeply into those traditions to acquire sufficient knowledge theoretically and practically so that they are well prepared as global citizens in future.

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<sup>5</sup> Staff Writers, "The Asian American Experience on College Campuses," accessed January 14, 2022, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/aapi-experience-college-campuses/>.

Regarding my commitment to improving access to higher education for disadvantaged students, I began developing free onsite after-school programs for K-12 students at my Buddhist center prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and have created similar online programs since 2019. These programs assist K-12 students in overcoming social stigma and economic circumstances that hinder their ability to learn at school. For instance, for those students who may have social skill challenges at school, they may feel more comfortable to open themselves for learning at our Buddhist center. Also, for those students whose parents could not afford financially to send their children to local after-school center, they can join our after-school program free of charge. Due to our programs, some of them eventually can finish high school and move on to college.<sup>6</sup>

Within the last couple years, I have published two academic articles, which empowered my pedagogical specialization in Buddhism and Mindfulness practices, in the *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* and *The Studies Texan*.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, I am currently an executive editor of the newly developed academic journal, *Vietnamese and Global Buddhist Studies* (VGBS), which affiliates with the IUScholarWorks Journals.<sup>8</sup> I hope that under my leadership, this scholarly journal will contribute greatly the discussions of Buddhist studies in general and the Vietnamese Buddhist studies in particular.

I am a co-chair of the Buddhist Pedagogy Seminar within the American Academy of Religions, the largest scholarly society devoted to the academic study of religions. Our Buddhist Pedagogy Seminar aims to foster the critical thinking on how our Buddhist pedagogy enriches the understanding of Buddhist traditions, practices, and values. As a founding member of this seminar, I, together with my co-chair and other steering committees, administer the whole process of submitting the unit's call for papers to evaluate as "blind review" proposals and select the final presenters. We take a crucial leadership role in the selection of special topics and then initiate sessions for Buddhist experts and scholars to join in our scholarly discussions. We also report our

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<sup>6</sup> "Buddha Blessed Temple," accessed January 14, 2022, <https://buddhablessedtemple.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Please see "Publications/Writings" of the Curriculum Vitae.

<sup>8</sup> The *Vietnamese and Global Buddhist Studies* (VGBS) journal is a peer-reviewed, open-source journal that focuses on the scholarly discussion of Buddhist Studies and specifically placed the emphasis on the Vietnamese Buddhist Studies and its diaspora (IUScholarWorks Journals, "Vietnamese and Global Buddhist Studies," accessed January 14, 2022, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/vgbs>). The IUScholarworks (IUSW) is an open access compilations developed by Indiana University Libraries for sharing and keeping the intellectual writings of Indiana University Scholars. It also collaborates with Indiana University Press to run several technical aspects of the journal publishing program (Indiana University Bloomington, "Open Scholarship@IU Bloomington," accessed January 14, 2022, <https://openscholarship.indiana.edu/oa-iusw#iusw>).

program units' activities directly to the program committee.<sup>9</sup> In short, I engage in this scholarly community to expand my lifelong learning and teaching career.

Besides teaching as a religious scholar, I serve as a president of four Buddhist centers in Sugar Land, Texas; Louisville, Kentucky; St. Louis, Missouri; and Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey. Weekly, monthly, and yearly, I oversee and run the religious and spiritual activities as well as the community services such as blood drives and homeless help at those centers. So, with those administrative experiences, I can assist and support the program director.

In summary, after evaluating the aforementioned qualifications, I think you and the department's selection committee may have now recognized that I am the best candidate for this position of instructional assistant professor in religious studies because I am a dynamic and accomplished teacher who can offer four courses over two semesters, mentor undergraduate majors and minors, supervise students' independent study courses and honors theses, and support the program director with administrative service.

Also, you and the department's selection committee can count on me as I am an outstanding candidate with excellent teaching experiences working with students from different backgrounds and a commitment to improving access to higher education for disadvantaged students.

Finally, I hope you and the department selection committees will grant me this position, instructional assistant professor specialized in South Asian religions, so that I can fulfill my lifelong dream of serving UH's students and academic community, and I look forward to making even greater contributions in the future.

## **Bibliography**

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Appendix 9: UH Student Evaluation-2015-2021.

Appendix 20: Course Taught at University of Houston.

Appendix 21: Courses Taught at Indiana University (regional campuses).

"Buddha Blessed Temple." Accessed January 14, 2022. <https://buddhablessedtemple.com/>.

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<sup>9</sup> AAR, American Academy of Religion |PAPERS, "Buddhist Pedagogy Seminar," accessed January 14, 2022, <https://papers.aarweb.org/pu/buddhist-pedagogy-seminar>.

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