

# Gandhi's Ashrams: Living the Gandhian Life

2:00-4:52 p.m. Wednesdays (COLE 054)

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Office hours: 2-3:30pm Mondays and Fridays, and by appointment.

## SYLLABUS INTRODUCTION: GANDHI'S ASHRAMS & ENHANCING LIFE

During his lifetime, Gandhi established four major intentional living communities, which he called *ashrams*: two in South Africa during the twenty-one years he lived and worked there, and two more in India upon his return to his home country in 1915. Why did Gandhi found these ashrams, and how are they related to his larger social, religious, and political reform work? What was life like on these utopian farming villages? Who chose to live alongside Gandhi, what were their motivations in doing so, and what were their experiences like? What is the legacy of Gandhi's ashrams in India and around the globe today? How should we live, in order to enhance our lives and the lives of those around us? These questions (and more) are the focus of this upper-level undergraduate seminar.

Course readings are organized to explore the four primary ashrams founded by Gandhi in their chronological order: Phoenix Settlement (est. 1904 in Natal), Tolstoy Farm (est. 1910 outside Johannesburg), Sabarmati Ashram (est. 1915 outside Ahmedabad), and Sevagram Ashram (est. 1936 in Wardha). We will read many of Gandhi's primary writings to think through the ashrams and their significance in both his life and his historical-cultural context. We will also read other primary and secondary sources to explore the ashrams through the eyes of some of the settlers who chose to join Gandhi as co-residents. In the final unit of the course, we will give consideration to the legacy of these ashrams in India and in North America.

The mission statement of Sabarmati Ashram proclaimed, "The object of this Ashram is that its members should qualify themselves for, and make a consistent endeavor towards, the service of the country, not inconsistent with the universal welfare." By examining Gandhi's evolving thoughts on living a good life in the context of his ashrams, we will illuminate how he thought about and then sought to enact the concept of *sarvodaya*, "universal welfare," in order to enhance life.

## COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. You will examine several of the major writings of Mahatma Gandhi and critically engage what it means to live a Gandhian life.
2. You will gain familiarity with Gandhi's concept of *sarvodaya*, "universal welfare," and the ways in which he sought to enact it at his ashrams and beyond.
3. You will understand the legacy of Gandhi's ashrams in South Asia and worldwide, and will critically reflect upon their relevance for our world today.
4. You will continue to hone and strengthen the writing, reading, speaking, listening, critical thinking, and information literacy skills necessary for advanced undergraduate level academic work.

## COURSE MATERIALS

Required books (available at the Bookstore or for purchase at an online retailer):

- Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Beacon Press, 1993)
- Gandhi, M.K. *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Navajivan Publishing House, 2008)
- Gandhi and Parel, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- Gandhi, M.K. *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi* (Berkeley Hills Books, 2000)
- Weber, Thomas. *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Other reading assignments are posted electronically on Moodle at <http://moodle.bucknell.edu/>

## WRITTEN AND ORAL EXPECTATIONS

1. **Topics Paper (20%) and Response Papers (20% total, 10% each):** Each week, one of you will serve as discussion leader and provide the other seminar participants with an 8 to 10-page “topics paper” in advance. The topics paper must be emailed to me and your fellow classmates by noon on the Friday *prior to* the seminar, which meets on Wednesday. Two of you will be asked to respond with a formal written commentary of 2 to 3 pages, and class discussion will proceed from there. The topics paper should summarize the main points of the readings for the week in a synthetic and critical fashion. The commentaries should ideally analyze the topics paper, offer polite critiques, and raise three distinct questions for class discussion. Students not serving in either capacity for any given session are required to bring three prepared questions to help implement discussion. Further instructions and guidelines will be discussed in class.
2. **Preparation and Participation (10%):** As an upper-level seminar, class meetings will be driven by student-led discussion of the assigned materials. Students not serving as either the topics paper writer or a commentator role for any given session are required to bring three prepared questions to help implement discussion.
3. **Final Research Presentation (20%) and Paper (30%).** Students will complete a research paper of 20-30 pages on a topic of their choosing related to the course materials (though paper topics must be approved by the instructor after consultation). The final draft of the paper will be due during finals week on a date assigned by the registrar. An abstract and bibliography will be due mid-semester. A preliminary presentation of the final paper will be given during the final class sessions. Further instructions and guidelines will be discussed in class.

## ADDITIONAL MATTERS

1. **Completion of All Assignments:** Students who fail to hand in all assignments will not receive a passing grade in the course (even if the cumulative average of their completed assignments exceeds an “F”).
2. **Attendance:** As a discussion-intensive seminar, your engaged presence in class is essential to creating a lively and productive classroom environment and will be encouraged with a strict attendance policy. More than one unexcused absence will result in an automatic reduction of the final course grade by 10%. Additional absences will result in further reductions, at the instructor’s discretion. Exceptions to the attendance policy may be made at the instructor’s discretion under certain exceptional circumstances.
3. **Academic Responsibility and the Bucknell University Honor Code:** As a student and citizen of the Bucknell University community, you have pledged: 1) I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors; 2) I will forthrightly oppose each and every instance of academic dishonesty; 3) I will let my conscience guide my decision to communicate directly with any person or persons I believe to have been dishonest in academic work; and 4) I will let my conscience guide my decision on reporting breaches of academic integrity to the appropriate faculty or deans. All students are expected to follow Bucknell’s official policy on academic honor and responsibility. It is your responsibility to read and absorb the policy posted on <http://www.bucknell.edu/x1324.xml> and follow all the links in the “Resources for Students” section, paying particular attention to the discussion of plagiarism, “the act of using another person’s ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source.” Students are directed to use great care when preparing all course work and to acknowledge fully the source of all ideas and language other than their own (even Internet sites!!). If you have questions about this subject, please see me. Any student who is engaged in academic misconduct will be referred to the Board of Review and held subject to appropriate penalties.
4. **Special Needs:** I encourage anyone with a learning disability or special needs that affect your class work to speak with me individually as soon as possible.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### PART I: SOUTH AFRICA: PHOENIX SETTLEMENT AND TOLSTOY FARM

- Week 1      Organizational meeting: In addition to having students sign up for 1 topics paper and 2 formal commentary dates, we will have an informal discussion of the first part of Gandhi's autobiography to discuss his early life and historical context.  
**Reading:** M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, part I
- Week 2      **Reading:** M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, parts II-IV  
M.K. Gandhi, *Ruskin: Unto This Last: A Paraphrase* (Moodle)
- Week 3      **Reading:** M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, entire
- Week 4      **Reading:** Thomas Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, chapters 3 & 4  
Millie Graham Polak, *Mr. Gandhi the Man*, chapters 1-6 (Moodle)

### PART II: INDIA: SABARMATI ASHRAM AND SEVAGRAM ASHRAM

- Week 5      **Reading:** Gandhi and Parel, *Hind Swaraj*, first half
- Week 6      **Reading:** Gandhi and Parel, *Hind Swaraj*, second half
- Week 7      **Reading:** M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, part V
- Week 8      No class: fall break
- Week 9      **Reading:** Thomas Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, chapters 5 & 6  
M.K. Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir: Ashram Observances* (Moodle)
- Week 10     **Reading:** M.K. Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*, first half  
**Due:** final research paper abstract & bibliography
- Week 11     **Reading:** M.K. Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*, second half

### PART III: THE LEGACY OF GANDHI'S ASHRAMS

- Week 12     **Reading:** Vinoba Bhave, *Bhoodan-Yajna: Land-Gifts Mission* (Moodle)  
Ela Bhatt, *Anubandh: Building Hundred-Mile Communities* (Moodle)
- Week 13     **Reading:** Whitney Sanford, *Being the Change: Intentional Communities and the Process of Social Change* (Moodle)
- Week 14     **Due:** Research Presentations
- Week 15     **Due:** Research Presentations

YOUR FINAL PAPER WILL BE DUE DURING FINALS WEEK ON THE DATE SCHEDULED BY THE REGISTRAR.