COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this off-campus program, we will explore the history of the Mustang region of Nepal to understand how global forces are affecting geographically isolated communities. Based in one of the most remote sections of Nepal on the border with Tibet, the program will introduce you to a community undergoing profound transitions—culturally, socially, politically, linguistically, and religiously. Through a two-week initial orientation in Burlington, and then four weeks in Nepal, we will examine how this Tibetan Buddhist area has adapted to those changes, and what strategies have emerged for facing further changes in the future.

During the course, we will have four main thematic areas of focus. First, we will look at the various ways in which Mustang is and has been connected to the outside world historically through trade, migration, national policies, and more. To do this, we will visit families whose sons and daughters have migrated to the US and elsewhere for work, explore state education policies to see how the state is promoting a single Nepali identity among diverse linguistic and ethnic groups, and analyze the profound effect that took place when China took over Tibet and closed the previously open border to trade. Second, we will explore environmental changes in the region, where 2” of annual rainfall leave very little margin for weather variations or human mistakes, analyzing how adaptations to landscape have changed over time. Third, we will compare Western popular culture visions of the high Himalayas with realities on the ground, critically examining how areas like Mustang have been represented in popular culture, media, and literature as romantic, exotic, or authentic, and analyzing the histories of and assumptions underlying such representations. Finally, we will assess cultural responses to change, from conservation efforts to preserve historic monuments led by groups like the American Himalayan Foundation, to educational initiatives to promote the use of dying languages, to the conflicts that arise when tradition and modernity compete for hearts and minds.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course requirements include five components, worth the following portions of your grade:

- Four short papers (2 pages/5% each) 20%
- Pre-departure presentation 10%
- During trip writing notebook 25%
- Participation 20%
- Post-trip paper 25%

NOTES ON REQUIREMENTS

1. **Four short papers**: Due every other day during the initial 2-week orientation, these are designed to familiarize you with the four key thematic topics on which the course focuses and to get you
thinking critically about the readings assigned for class. You obviously can’t work out in full
detail all your ideas in two pages or less, which is the limit for these papers. You do, however,
need to do three things. First, each paper must have a thesis that answers the question posed in
the assignment. Second, the paper must present evidence from the readings to support your
argument. And third, that evidence must be properly cited using Chicago style footnotes.

Since these papers are designed to help you get ideas on paper and work out your evidence, I
will not be giving them extensive feedback. Rather, I will use a grading rubric indicating areas of
success or weakness; I will give you a copy of this ahead of time, so you know my expectations.
Overall I will grade papers with only a 0-4 scale, with a 1 corresponding to a 65 (or a D), 2 = 75
(or a C), 3 = 85 (or B), and 4 = 95 (or A); papers that fail to meet the expectations at all (in terms
of either not addressing the assigned question or not including adequately cited evidence) will
receive a zero.

NOTE: Since the short papers are designed to prepare you for discussion, I will not accept them
after class at all. Period. No excuses, no exceptions.

2. Pre-departure presentation: FRIDAY JUNE 1st: On the final day of the UVM-based
orientation, you will be responsible for a group presentation summarizing what we have learned
so far about one of the four themes of the course. This will be your chance to draw together all
the orientation materials on that theme, as well as to highlight what you think are the key issues
that we as a group should focus on related to that topic as we leave for Nepal. This presentation
is also the foundation for your post-trip paper, which will ask you, after our time in Nepal is
over, to reflect back on how your ideas on your theme have changed by being in country.

3. Trip writing assignments: During the trip, you will keep a notebook recording written responses
to topics/questions assigned for each day. (For specific writing prompts, see below on the daily
schedule.) This notebook will be turned in at the end of the trip, and will be graded for
thoughtfulness of responses.

4. Participation: You are expected to participate in all program activities and events, except in cases
of illness. This includes the initial two-week orientation at UVM, which will run five days a
week, eight hours a day. The orientation is an integral part of the course, so you MUST
participate in the full two weeks to go to Nepal.

5. Final paper: DUE DATE JULY 13th, 5 pm (via email): After the completion of the trip, you
will revisit the topic on which you made the group presentation on the last day of orientation in
Burlington, and submit a 7-8 page reflection paper explaining how your ideas about that topic
changed during your time in Nepal. NOTE: This paper must be turned in by the assigned time
and day. Late papers will be penalized a full letter grade per day. In other words, if you submit
an A paper a day late, it will now be B paper. If it is two days late, it will be a C.

READING MATERIALS

All readings will be available on Blackboard; there are no books necessary for this course.
POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Academic Honesty: Please be advised that I take academic honesty seriously and personally, and will expect you to uphold the highest standards of honesty in this class. Plagiarism or other offenses against the university’s policies will result in an F for the class. We will discuss plagiarism in class, but for a full explanation of the university’s policies regarding academic honesty, see: http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmppg/ppg/student/acadintegrity.pdf

Special needs: I am happy to accommodate students with specific learning needs; please let me know if you are entitled by the university to special provisions or assistance.

SCHEDULE AND MAIN TOPICS

May 21st, Monday
Morning session: Welcome and overview of course themes
Afternoon session: Introduction to Nepal: geography, society, religion

May 22nd, Tuesday
Morning session: A brief history of Nepal, up to 1857
Afternoon session: A brief history of Nepal, 1857 to 1990

May 23rd, Wednesday
Morning session: Nepal since 1990: democracy, Maoism, politics
Afternoon session: Western perceptions of the Himalayas
READING:
Peter Bishop, The Myth of Shangri-la, 1-24
Orville Schell, Virtual Tibet, 3-49
FIRST PAPER DUE: In two pages or less, answer the following question: In what ways does Western popular culture distort the image of the Tibetan-Himalayan region?
EVENING EVENT: Film, ‘Lost Horizons’

May 24th, Thursday
Morning session: Cultural divisions in Nepal: language, religion, ethnicity
GUEST SPEAKER: Emily Manetta
Afternoon session: Introduction to Nepali
GUEST SPEAKER: Steve Conlon

May 25th, Friday: Global connections
Morning session: Global connections through trade, politics
Afternoon session: Migration
GUEST SPEAKERS: Community members from the Mustang region of Nepal
READING:
SECOND PAPER DUE: In two pages or less, answer the following question: How important were the historical connections between Dolpo and the outside world, to residents of Dolpo?

EVENING EVENT: Community dinner with Nepali visitors

May 28th, Monday
Morning session: Adaptation to environment
Afternoon session: Environmental changes
READING:

THIRD PAPER DUE: In two pages or less, answer the following question: How significantly have humans changed the landscape of the high Himalayas?

EVENING EVENT: Film, “Himalaya”

May 29th, Tuesday
Morning session: Development politics in Nepal
Afternoon session: American development aid for Nepal
GUEST SPEAKER: Scott Skinner, Former Peace Corps volunteer to Nepal

May 30th, Wednesday
Morning session: Cultural preservation efforts: schools, monasteries, foundations
Afternoon session: Cultural adaptations
READING:
Helena Norberg-Hodge, Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh

FOURTH PAPER DUE: In two pages or less, answer the following question: Why is it important, in Norberg-Hodge’s eyes, to hold onto traditional ways in modern times?

EVENING EVENT: Film, “Forbidden Child”

May 31st, Thursday
Morning session: Traditional Tibetan medicine
GUEST SPEAKER: Sienna Craig, Dartmouth College
Afternoon session: Foodways of Nepal, with cooking lesson

June 1st, Friday
Morning session: Group presentations
Afternoon session: Wrap up, final preparations for departure

June 3rd: fly to New York, then depart for Kathmandu

June 4th: En route to Kathmandu

June 5th: Arrive in Kathmandu, fly to Pokhara

Introduction to Nepal: Review of expectations for group travel
Informal writing assignment question: What is the most surprising thing about Nepal, upon your arrival here?

June 6th: Pokhara

Guest Lecture: History of Mustang
Community event: Visit Himalayan Mountaineering Museum
June 7th: Flight to Jomsom

- **Guest Lecture:** Education in Nepal
- **Community Event:** Visit local boarding school
- **Daily investigation:** Talk to students to see how far they have come to attend this school, what challenges they have faced in pursuing their education.

*Informal writing assignment question:* What are the major challenges facing someone who wants to get a college degree in Nepal?

June 8th: Trek to Kagbeni

- **Guest Lecture:** Monastic structures and educational systems
- **Daily investigation:** Based on observations at the monastery, compile a list of the resources the monastery needs to sustain its activities on a daily and yearly basis. Discover what you can about where those resources come from.

*Informal writing assignment question:* How are monasteries economically linked to local and more distant communities?

June 9th: Trek to Muktinath

- **Guest Lecture:** Significance of Muktinath as a pilgrimage site
- **Daily investigation:** Interview at least three different pilgrims in order to determine why they have come to Muktinath, how far they have traveled, and what they think of the pilgrimage. Also find examples to demonstrate what you think the economic impact of spiritual pilgrimage is on this area.

*Informal writing assignment question:* How has spiritual tourism affected the economy of this area?

June 10th: Trek to CHuksang

- **Lecture:** Trade connections through the high mountains
- **Daily investigation:** On the trek today, keep track of what things you see which have come from outside the local area, noting which things you think have traveled farthest, and how they might have gotten here.

*Informal writing assignment question:* How important is trade to the communities you traveled through today?

June 11th: Trek to Shyangmochen

- **Lecture:** Environmental stresses in mountain areas
- **Daily investigation:** On the trek today, keep track of changes in the landscape and how those affect everyday subsistence for local communities.

*Informal writing assignment question:* How have humans shaped this environment?

June 12th: Trek to Tsarang

- **Lecture:** Contemporary manifestations of Buddhism and Bonpo
- **Daily investigation:** Pay attention to the various religious symbols or expressions visible along the path, at people’s houses, or at stops along the way.

*Informal writing assignment question:* What role does Buddhism play in daily life in these communities?

June 13th: Day in Tsarang
Guest Lecture: Tsarang’s connections to the outside world
Daily investigation: Interview at least three people about how life in Tsarang has changed in the last 20 years.
Informal writing assignment question: What are the important ties that connect ordinary people to the outside world?

June 14th: Trek to Ghara
Guest Lecture: Controlling water in high altitude environments
Daily investigation: Pay attention today to how different communities and individuals use, store, conserve, and waste water; be sure to include in your observations both traditional and modern methods of water supply/storage.
Informal writing assignment question: How is the value of water expressed in this area?

June 15th: Visit to Luri Gompa
Lecture: Monasteries and communities
Daily investigation: Explore the ways in which the monastery at Luri is connected to the outside world: specifically, pay attention to the way in which this remote site is linked to other monasteries and religious orders elsewhere.
Informal writing assignment question: What allows this monastery to survive in this isolated place?

June 16th: Trek to Lo Manthang
Guest lecture: Communication in the hills
Daily investigation: Pay attention to the work needed to maintain this trail as a vital link to outside communities; specifically, try to assess what kinds of resources, labor, and time are needed to keep the trail viable.
Informal writing assignment question: What kind of work is required to keep this trail open?

June 17th: Lo Manthang
Guest lecture: Cultural preservation efforts of the American Himalayan Foundation
Daily investigation: As you explore Lo, come up with a list of all the projects you might undertake to preserve cultural heritage in the city; be prepared to defend why that project is important to the cultural fabric of the city.
Informal writing assignment question: If you were responsible for the cultural heritage of Lo, what would your top priorities be, and why?

June 18th: Lo Manthang, visit to cave residences
Guest lecture: The architecture of defense
Daily investigation: Pay attention today to the ways in which residents of Lo and the caves nearby sought to defend themselves from dangers—whether military, environmental, spiritual or otherwise.
Informal writing assignment question: What were the key threats against which residents tried to defend themselves over time?

June 19th: Trek to Tragmar
Lecture: Labor migration
Daily investigation: As we return on a route we’ve traversed before, explore what would motivate some to leave the region, and what would motivate others to stay.
Informal writing assignment question: If you were 20 years old and living in this part of the world, would you stay, or leave?

June 20th: Trek to Ghami
  Guest lecture: Development aid in the mountains
  Daily investigation: In our conversation with former Peace Corps volunteers, pay attention to the ways in which outside agencies have been involved in development work in this region: specifically, try to assess what motivated that involvement, and how much local populations might be able to shape aid programs.
  Informal writing assignment question: What motivates foreign aid to remote areas like Mustang?

June 21st: Trek to Chuksang
  Lecture: State conservation efforts in Nepal
  Daily investigation: On the trail today, note what the major environmental challenges of the area are, and try to figure out possible conservation ideas to address those.
  Informal writing assignment question: If you were to design an environmental conservation plan for the Mustang region, what would your priorities be?

June 22nd: Trek to Jomsom
  Lecture: Industry and modernization in the hills
  Daily investigation: Back in Jomsom after two weeks, track how your sense of it has changed, now that you’ve been in more remote areas; specifically, think about how popular Western images of Nepal’s mountain communities are or are not reflected in what you see here.
  Informal writing assignment question: How does Jomsom compare to western popular culture ideas about high-mountain Nepal?

June 23rd: Fly to Kathmandu
  Guest lecture: National integration policies in Nepal
  Daily investigation: In our conversation with members of the Loba community in Kathmandu, pay attention to the ways in which Lobas have experienced national integration, whether through language, education, migration or other factors.
  Informal writing assignment question: How effective are national integration policies in Nepal?

June 24th: Kathmandu
  Guest lecture: Migrants in the city
  Daily investigation: In your travels around the Kathmandu valley today, pay attention to the ways different communities are accommodated within the city.
  Informal writing assignment question: How integrated are different communities within the Kathmandu Valley, in terms of religious practices, residential accommodation, and economic opportunities?

June 25th: Kathmandu
  Program Wrap-up: Review themes, issues of the trip
  Final dinner with Loba community

June 26th: Fly home