



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

HUMANITIES SEMINARS

THE HISTORY OF YOGA

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Yoga is a ubiquitous presence in the landscape of American fitness culture. For many, it is synonymous with selfcare and holistic healthy living. While yoga is often vaguely connected to Asian traditions, its long history as a philosophical and religious system can be elided with our contemporary focus on the physical and mental benefits of the practice. In this course, we will examine the philosophy, practice, historical roots, and development of yoga over its 2,000-year history. Additionally, we will explore the multiple manifestations of yoga within its original ritual context and as a global phenomenon as a spiritual practice and form of exercise. Over the course of our time together, we will discuss the philosophies associated with yoga as a ritual discipline and identify and analyze key historical and cultural factors that influenced global yoga.

Texts

- Mallinson and Singleton. *Roots of Yoga*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- Patton. *The Bhagavad Gita*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- Singleton. *Yoga Body*. New York: Oxford University Press (**available as an Ebook through UA Library**).
- Singleton and Goldberg. *Gurus of Modern Yoga*. New York: Oxford University Press (**available as an Ebook through UA Library**).

Weeks 1-2: Yoga, Religion, and the *Bhagavad Gita*

In the first two weeks of the seminar, we will explore the earliest textual references to yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most well-known and influential Hindu texts. In this section of the course, we will attempt to recognize traditional yoga as a religious system and contextualize it in the narrative and philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Week 1: Is Yoga Religious?

Patton, *Bhagavad Gita*: "Introduction" & pp. 3-60.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-25006926>

<https://blog.oup.com/2013/08/is-yoga-religious-encitas-public-school-trial/>

Week 2: Yoga, Devotion, and the Meaning of Life

Patton, *Bhagavad Gita*: pp. 61-205.

Weeks 3-5: Process of Traditional Yoga

In weeks 3-5, we will turn to translations of tradition yoga texts in an attempt to see the variety of ways that yoga developed during the first millennium of the common era. In this section, we will see the diversity of approaches to yoga in classical yoga systems, while focusing on the overall unified vision of the eight-limbed process of yoga for the attainment of spiritual liberation.

Week 3: Defining Yoga and Postural Yoga

Mallinson and Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*: pp. 3-6; 17-32; 86-126.

Week 4: The Yoga Body

Mallinson and Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*: pp. 127-227.

Week 5: Yoga and the Mind

Mallinson and Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*: pp. 283-322; 395-435.

Weeks 7-8: Development of Modern Yoga

After developing our foundation in classical approaches to the processes of yoga, we will turn our attention to the historical and cultural phenomena that arise during the period of the colonial encounter to explore the development of modern yoga and its focus on physical fitness and mental clarity. Primarily, we will focus on the ways that European conceptualizations of the body and gender shaped the practice of yoga, as an indigenous fitness and bodybuilding routine.

Week 6: Yoga in India & the West

Singleton, *Yoga Body*: pp. 35-54.

Week 7: New Attitudes Toward the Body

Singleton, *Yoga Body*: pp. 81-94; 113-142.

Week 8: Harmony & Postures

Singleton, *Yoga Body*: pp. 143-162.

Weeks 9-10: Yoga and Gurus

In the final two weekly sessions, we will explore some of the yoga schools and gurus that are well-known in the USA. We will seek to understand the role of transnational gurus in the spread of yoga. We will also compare “Western” individualism with guru lineage traditions to see how they both shaped yoga as we know it. Finally, we will discuss the overlapping and divergent themes from the yoga teachings from the gurus discussed in this section.

Week 9: Swami Vivekananda & Swaminarayan

Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*: pp. 17-37; 237-260.

Week 10: T. Krishnamacharya & the Mysore Schools

Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*: pp. 83-146.