# STUDIES ON HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM VII

# HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM: BUDDHIST MANAGEMENT
# 人間佛教管理與應用

# BUILDING A BUDDHIST ETHOS IN A TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION, NAN TIEN INSTITUTE, AUSTRALIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**Introduction**

The ethos, "the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its behaviors, attitudes and aspirations," [1] of a higher educational institution plays an important role in the learning experiences of its students. As Rodriguez-Sedano[2] argues, teaching and the formation of the student are inseparable. However, McLaughlin points out, "Ethos is relatively underexplored as a form of educative influence by educational researchers, philosophers of education, educational policy makers and teachers, and educational leaders at classroom and school level."[3] This study seeks to contribute to addressing this gap by exploring the relationship between the teaching pedagogy in a higher education institution and its embedded ethos.

The articulation of the Nan Tien Institute (NTI) ethos was established through the NTI leadership team's development of the Strategy Plan 2021-2023.[4] The strategy is grounded in the values of compassion, wisdom, committed service, and practice.[5] These values form the core of the NTI ethos.

NTI is Australia's first government accredited, higher education provider with a strong focus on personal development in the areas of Buddhism, health and social wellbeing, mental health, and mindfulness. NTI sits uniquely across the interface of the Buddhist belief system and the Australian Higher Education system, with the latter being the authority that enables the institute's existence. Thus, NTI's goal is to create a Buddhist inspired ethos within its programs that are shaped by Western civilization's philosophy of education and the unique evolution of the Australian nation.

During early 2020 and the COVID-19 interruption of face-to-face classes, a trial contemplative pedagogy was developed to guide the online courses in Humanistic Buddhism to further develop the emerging NTI ethos. To understand the impact and value of the trialed pedagogy on the transmission and reception of the NTI ethos, a study of two core subjects in the Humanistic Buddhism curriculum, HB901 and HB902, was conducted during 2020 and 2021. It is likely that having teachers and students in the

same physical classroom would enhance the transmission of the NTI ethos to students.

## Methods

This study proposes to research the expression of NTI ethos in the two core subjects of the graduate certificate in Humanistic Buddhism offered by NTI in 2020 and 2021. This project was approved by the NTI ethics committee, reference number 2020-001.

### 1.1 Study Design

The study consisted of observing the two subjects HB901 and HB902, including lectures, office hours, tutorials, learning material, faculty logs, and de-identified assignments. Interviews were conducted with students about their experience with the course. First, some learning activities were discussed with the lecturer in charge of the Humanistic Buddhism course that would be implemented in the subjects. Then, course materials and recordings of the subjects were analyzed, and upon completion of the two subjects, participants were interviewed about their experiences.

### 1.2 Recruitment and Data Collection

HB901 and HB902 students were invited to join the study as they wish. All sessions were held online and recorded. All interviews were also held online and recorded.

The study followed an exploratory line with various recursive loops to ensure continual attention to enhancing the researchers' understanding and the systemic quality of the intervention. The exploratory line is shown in Figure 1.
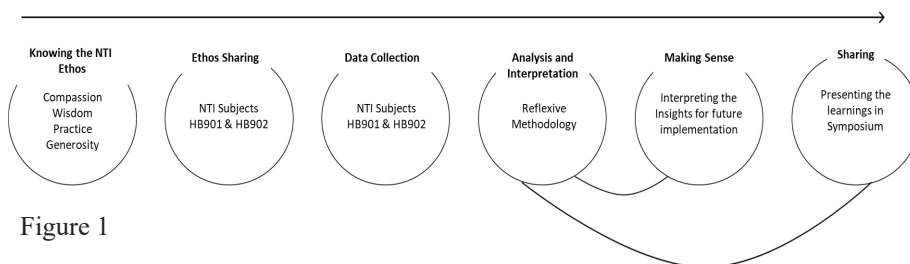
| Knowing the NTI Ethos | Ethos Sharing | Data Collection | Analysis and Interpretation | Making Sense | Sharing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Compassion Wisdom Practice Generosity | NTI Subjects HB901 & HB902 | NTI Subjects HB901 & HB902 | Reflexive Methodology | Interpreting the Insights for future implementation | Presenting the learnings in Symposium |

Figure 1

## 1.3 Data Analysis

All recordings were transcribed by an AI-based software, otter.ai. The transcripts, as well as lecture material, were analyzed following a reflexive methodology set within a critical systems thinking framework.[6] The reflexive methodology proposed by Alvesson and Sköldberg was adopted for the analysis as it invites the researchers to examine the data from different perspectives, and to reflect on their involvement in the analysis.[7] All data were coded by the two researchers (the authors). First, the data were coded using a codebook of NTI values—committed service, compassion, wisdom, practice, plus generosity—expressed in the data at three different levels of engagement—theoretical, discussed, and practiced. Generosity was added to the four NTI values because it is a foundational virtue in Buddhism, and central to the pedagogy of the course. Second, answers to the questions "Overall, how engaged with the NTI ethos is this data?" and "What degree of understanding of the learning medium (NTI ethos) does the data reveal?" were captured from each researcher. A third perspective on the data was through the lens of critical systems heuristics (CSH). CSH consists of a series of twelve questions crafted to reveal the ethical boundaries of the data subjected to the questions.[8] Fourthly, the different perspectives were merged together to form a rich picture of students' encounter with the ethos. The picture was explored by the researchers to identify patterns of observations (insights) that emerge from across the picture. The insights that offered potential improvements to the ethos transmission were articulated as transformation statements.

## Results

Two iterations of HB901 and HB902 were the object of the study, one in 2020, and one in 2021. Seven participants joined the study in 2020, and eight in 2021. Each subject, HB901 and HB902, was five days long with a mixture of plenary sessions, breakout activities, office hours, and pre-recorded lectures. The data included thirty hours of video recordings of interactive sessions, six hours of office hours, and three hours of tutorials for each iteration (2020 and 2021), plus a total of fifty-nine written assignments, and four hours of verbal presentation assignments. Seven 45-minute online post-subject interviews were conducted between December 2020 and January 2021, eight 45-minute online post-subject interviews, and five 45-minute follow up interviews with participants of 2020 cohort were conducted between December 2021 and January 2022.

The findings from the analysis activities came through the application of the different lenses.

The first reflexive lens was focused on observing when students used expressions in their discussions and written assignments or reported engaging in activities about the ethos and its individual values of compassion, wisdom, generosity, practice, and committed service. The second reflexive lens was used to discern the level of engagement of participants with the NTI ethos, and the degree of their perceived understanding of it. The third reflexive lens was focused on identifying four aspects of power—power of motivation, power of control, power of knowledge, and power of legitimation—in the teaching and learning experience of HB901 and HB902 stakeholders. Thirty insights emerged from this detailed coding of the collected material. All insights from the three lenses are listed in Table 1 in Appendix 1.

When these insights were brought together to form a "rich picture" of the participants' experience and understanding of the NTI ethos, five distinct patterns of responses were identified. Each pattern became known as an emergent theme and was given a descriptive label: Self-awareness,[9] personal

stories sharing,[10] knowing the values,[11] classroom environment,[12] role modeling.[13] These emergent themes are explained further in the following paragraphs, and each is specifically cross-referenced with relevant quotes from the 45-minute online post-subject interviews.

## 2.1 Self-Awareness

Self-awareness was developed through discussions and self-reflections about: (1) contemplating everyday relationships to reveal acts of compassion and generosity; (2) learning how to honestly be aware of one's own suffering, ignorance, and excesses combined with an intention to internalize their exposure through the Dharma to gain the confidence to share with others; and (3) being present in every interaction to enable awareness of barriers to expression of the values in oneself and others, so providing motivation and guidance to their removal through multiple small acts of compassion. One participant in an exit interview shared how she has developed self-awareness, and through this a better understanding of her officemates, resulting in having compassion for them.

> After the course, I become more reflective, more contemplative, and more structured. It has calmed me quite a lot. It has this effect on me. I literally stop justifying or trying to make sense of certain things my way. Different people are at different levels of knowing and awareness. So, it is wiser to acknowledge when his or her reality is different from mine. Like office politics or very challenging situations whereby everybody will think that they are correct. This course is beautiful, in the sense that it teaches me to think more critically and ways to express the values I think are important. It also inspired me to go deeper into these learnings. (A participant in exit interview)

The combination of students reflecting on their personal learning objectives and discussion about committed service raised the awareness of students about their intent, and expectations of right livelihood.

> Previously, I seldom did self-reflection, but after this course, I noticed the importance of self-reflection— we didn't learn from experience, we learned from reflection on our experience. Now I do the volunteer work in my community, half of the week, and every time when we finish an activity, I will lead my group to do the self-reflection. I think that self-reflection helps us have a more self-awareness on where we are and what we can improve in the future. (A participant in exit interview)

Dialogue and activities with others in a community of learners who encouraged and accepted one's talents and respected one's efforts to learn how to express them in the world facilitated the awareness of one's own talents. Examples of such activities were sharing stories and personal experiences in a plenary session and sharing experiences in breakout room activities.

## 2.2 Knowing and Understanding NTI Values

The content of the subjects HB901 and HB902 offered opportunities for students to focus on all NTI values. Whether it is reflected in the assignments or in the interactions within the classroom, students showed appreciation, and possible embodiment of the values.

> I think some of the assessments are designed in ways that really allow us to apply the knowledge. For example, I think the first assessment for HB901 asked us to identify an issue in our life and to try to apply a Humanistic Buddhism teaching, and then reflect on it. I think that's a very good way for us to

learn and apply Buddhist knowledge instead of only
learning from the paper or the classics and don't
apply at all. (A participant in exit interview)

Considering the values as interdependent enhanced the process of understanding each individually when discussed in class, as an insight in one area led to insights in other areas, hence the learning was not singular but cumulative and interactive.

The model of the bodhisattva's path presented in the subjects is a clear expression of the value of committed service. The model helped students become informed about the scope and discipline of the bodhisattva's path. Learning to formulate intentions on which to build a life of committed service through which wisdom, compassion, and generosity are shared across communities of interest.

Learning about self-care and self-compassion,
as well as the bodhisattva path, gave me a better
understanding about how to take care of myself first
to better serve others. I try some of the techniques
when I go back to my community and to do volunteer
work. Yes, I found that it's quite practical, and I can
put what I have learned into practice. (A participant
in exit interview)

2.3 Personal Stories Sharing

Stories about expressions of Humanistic Buddhist values in professional engagements were very well received and effective in spurring conversations among students. The stories came from lecturers, both from their personal journey and their research, as well as from students. The encouragement to use personal stories, demonstrated by lecturers, seemed to be particularly effective in helping students aspire to embody NTI values.

The expertise and experiential knowledge shared by Buddhist monastics and invited guests were highly respected. Especially valued were the monastics' references to and quotes from Buddhist teachings and texts. The linking of Buddhist teachings to NTI values through everyday professional experiences and stories highlighted the centrality of knowing the depth and breadth of compassion, wisdom, generosity, and committed practice. The experiential knowledge shared through stories was sought after by students and given credibility as they were seeking a pragmatic understanding of the virtues they were being taught.

There was evidence of students internalizing this knowledge and describing their own interpretations and practices of it, as illustrated in how one participant applied NTI values to her work environment.

> I really try to be the person that brings the Humanistic Buddhism values into my work group. My workplace is not a big company, it is an environmental NGO. So, if you can use your compassion and forgiveness promoted by the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, it really helps in a working environment to gain the confidence of everyone and be encouraged. Everyone can feel the need of others. I do think I bring a little bit of that to my group since I have come back from the NTI program. (A participant in exit interview)

2.4 Role Modeling NTI Values

Lecturers and guest lecturers appeared to be the driving forces of the expression of the NTI ethos in the classroom. The generosity of spirit of the Buddhist nun teaching the subject was demonstrated by the amount of time she offered for tutorials and office hours and by her positioning of assignments as gifts. These actions were expressions of NTI values. Volunteers showcasing their work to the students, such as the developer of the NTI data visualizer, appeared to be another inspiring conveyor of NTI values. Lecturers and others

role modeling the values promoted even greater rates of adoption of these values by students. Specifically, the office hours, plenary sessions, and guest lecturers' gracious presence exemplified their understanding of how the NTI values could be part of one's everyday place in the world.

Time given to students for reflecting on stories and examples given of values expressed in professional life seemed to be very effective in allowing students to penetrate the meaning of the values, particularly for compassion. Self-reflection was also acknowledged as a way to improve one's engagement with Humanistic Buddhism values.

> One person in our class said she sometimes felt powerless, when she tried to help others or the elderly people in her program. She just wanted to learn how she can do better. I think we are all trying to learn more to improve ourselves into being a better self. The course really helped us to be more compassionate and to gain the skills that we need to deal with those difficult, worldly issues or personal issues. (A participant in exit interview)

The classroom presentations both in terms of content and behaviors exhibited by students were an embodiment of the NTI values—the topic is reflective in terms of the engagement, the students were thankful towards each other, supportive, and demonstrated an *esprit de corps*.

Office hours provided opportunities to share self-care tips including self-compassion. The nun lecturing truly embodied NTI values. She always set the tone of acknowledging one's limitations and the importance of others when needing help. This was illustrated by a participant in an exit interview.

> I know the compassion and understanding experienced in office hours really helps. I think that Venerable built up a safe place for all of us to share

our secrets and our life experience, and also our problems that are waiting for us to understand more deeply. (A participant in exit interview)

2.5 Classroom Environment

The learning environment created by the faculty in HB901 and HB902 was also an expression of the NTI values. For example, a participant shared how the learning environment provided an emotionally safe place.

> The one thing I like the most about the courses is the atmosphere of the class […] like this classroom is a safe place for us to learn. To be able to like[...]relax, reflect, and practice and then reflect, reflect again is so important. And if the classroom is not like a safe place for us to share our feelings, or our concerns or questions, then I don't think I will be able to gain deeper knowledge or reflection in the process of learning Buddhist values. So that's very unique about our program. (A participant in exit interview)

Forums such as breakout rooms, and in particular friendship circles offered opportunities for participants to practice NTI values. Friendship circles were breakout time dedicated to students only with no teaching agenda.

> The friendship circle was really nice. It was creating a space where people were free to talk about their own thing. Like, if you're at NTI, and just having lunch together or something like that, you can just chat to whatever you want, whatever we were feeling. The online time is usually so focused, that the individual disappears, and just the content is all there is. This activity made it more holistic. (A participant in exit interview)

Self-reflection exercises were effective as an aid for recognizing the need to express values in everyday activities. Mutual support and reinforcement when expressing gratitude or compassion for one another was apparent and could further be developed by even more regular recognition of such behaviors.

Breakout room activities encouraged participants to practice equanimity, patience, and compassion when faced with learning challenges. Friendship circles offered a forum propitious to the expression of the NTI ethos from participants even without direction in content.

Throughout the program, the primary motivating force was focussed on the students and their desire to learn new knowledge and skills. These were recognized through both faculty assessment and acknowledgement of the student's intention to be a 'better person' by both faculty and peers. This is particularly the case in the friendship circles and the question-and-answer sessions with guest lecturers.

A spirit of loving kindness between all classroom participants nurtured the openness required for new knowledge to be heard and accepted with humility and grace.

The positioning of everyday activities such as listening, punctuality, giving feedback, and sharing insights and knowledge as a gift to oneself and the community reinforced the demonstration of values among the participants.

Creating conditions and activities for quieter minds such as a daily check-in, dedication of merits, and reflective journaling facilitated emerging insights and cultivated awareness of self and others. The check-ins are short meditations to open each classroom session. Dedication of merits is a Buddhist practice of mentally directing any merit produced by virtuous actions to all sentient beings. Such space-time opportunities supported the cultivation of the Buddhist concept of the four immeasurable minds, which are expounded in lectures.

There is a tension between the academic demand of the subject, particularly in terms of time, and the ability of students to truly digest, experience, and manifest their learning. It is acute for HB902 since it is the most reflective subject in terms of NTI values and committed service.

> I think maybe the course is too quick, I wish the process could be longer. We only have like five days of lectures, and it's a mix of watching the video, reading some articles, and having discussion. I think like, after I watched the video, it takes a little bit more time for me to really identify the things that I think I understand, or I didn't understand, or the thing I applied in life that works and doesn't work. (A participant in exit interview)

The structure of the subjects and continual emphasis on doing assigned tasks encourages the students to use assessment grading and marks as the dominant motivator. This factor was regularly reinforced, and impacted negatively on the motivation to experiment and explore the new knowledge. Students expressed a need for continuous learning and support on how to engage professionally in a Humanistic Buddhist way. This highlighted the importance of the Communities of Practice.

The Communities of Practice, based at NTI, is an international group that meets each week online for a Sunday Check In session. While not a formal part of the NTI subjects, all students are welcome to join to spend time in gentle friendship—practicing, reflecting, and learning together. Members of the community take the shared values of generosity, empathy, and community spirit back home to their homes, workplaces, and local communities. The Communities of Practice provides a bridge between the values experienced in the classroom and those lived outside the classroom.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

This study investigated the effectiveness of the teaching pedagogy used in the Nan Tien Institute's subjects HB901 and HB902 in transmitting the institute's ethos to students taught during the years 2020 and 2021. From the analysis, we found that the five characteristics of experiences that enhance or detract from the transmission of NTI values and the emergence of an NTI ethos are self-awareness, personal competencies, knowing/understanding the values, role modeling of the values, and the classroom environment. These five characteristics are interdependent. Activities enabling these characteristics to flourish are conducive to the transmission of NTI values, and the emergence of an NTI ethos in congruence with these values. A learning environment that incorporates participants' role modeling, provides space and time for the participants to practice their understandings of the NTI values, and a teaching team that regularly discusses and provides examples of the values through their personal experiences all work to create effective conditions for the transmission of the NTI values to students.

Each characteristic is discussed below through a statement and questions that can be used to assess the current learning community's activities in regard to that factor, and guide development of actions to improve this aspect of the pedagogy's impact. Each learning context needs to be considered separately as the course's learning content, student attributes, faculty resources, and classroom characteristics will create unique parameters and opportunities. It is proposed that the assessing questions associated with each characteristic could form the basis for testing the findings of this project more widely in similar higher education learning institutions interested in transferring their ethos to their students.

3.1 Self-awareness

Continual development of student self-awareness, in terms of the NTI values, was the most consistent and robust finding of the research project. Regular dialogues between the learning community members, in an

environment of respectful support and generosity, exploring new insights, challenges raised, and emergent misunderstandings provided opportunities for growing self-awareness. Daily reviews of personal learning objectives enabled the students to maintain contact with their wider responsibilities and to be aware of the relationship between the subject content of the course and the wider world. The continuing growth of self-awareness in terms of the values was essential to their effective transmission to students. Intentionally maintaining space and time for this purpose within the teaching pedagogy is required.

Assessing questions:

- Are there open-ended dialogues involving all members of the learning community?
- Are student personal learning objectives regularly reviewed and developed as the student gains greater understanding of the subject?
- Is a specific link made between the cultural values of the teaching institution and the subject's substantive content?

3.2 Personal Stories Sharing

While the usual duration of a single subject was probably too short a time for a student to develop their personal competencies in compassion, wisdom, practice, and committed service to guide their implementation of the subject's new knowledge content, the whole course was not. Hence plans for the student's whole interaction with NTI through a course, to learn these competencies, needs to be formulated and implemented. Without the opportunity to practice their competencies within the NTI environment, it is questionable whether the student will internalize the values and will be able to apply them beyond the boundaries of the classroom, especially over time. Therefore, each course should devise a plan for developing in each student the personal competencies to implement the NTI values.

Assessing questions:

- Is there an integrated plan for the transmission of the ethos to students across the whole course in a specific subject?
- Is there an opportunity for the students to assess the competencies to implement the values promoted through the institution's ethos?

## 3.3 Knowing the Values

To receive and implement the values transmitted as the NTI ethos, students require an in-depth understanding of those values, otherwise they become trivialized and cliched. This in-depth knowledge of the values must be integrated with the transmission practices. This integration requires space and time for reflection on the practices and their meaning both in terms of the subject content and the student's wider life activities. That is, the values need to be known by each student within their own specific patterns of life. A significant threat to the transmission of values is an assumption that students share the same knowledge of the values as those transmitting them.

Assessing questions:

- Is there an opportunity for students to share their understanding of the meaning of each of the institution's values?
- Are examples of the values discussed to show their relevance to the subject content?

## 3.4 Role Modeling

There is a significant degree of authority, respect, and legitimacy of knowledge ascribed by the students to the teaching staff. No doubt the monastic robes worn by some of the faculty can explain some of the students' perceptions. However, the way the faculty conduct themselves during the classes was the major influence. A faculty member giving a lot of emphasis and attention to the academic outcomes (assessments, class performance) of

the subject dilutes the experience of the student in terms of the NTI ethos. Alternatively, a faculty member who spends little time emphasizing academic achievement and focuses on the application of the new knowledge to the student's career and life enhances the transmission of the values to the student and their engagement with them. Since NTI is an accredited place of higher education in Australia, it must find the balance between these two faculty behaviors to optimize the students' experience of the values while attaining appropriate grades.

In HB901 and HB902, guest faculty provided consistent emphasis on the application of the knowledge they imparted to the students' life by describing its application in terms of the NTI values. While full-time faculty also embodied a similar approach, they were continually reiterating academic performance with much attention to the assessment rubrics as a core measure of student success.

Assessing questions:

- Has the balance between an academic assessment focus and value implementation been intentionally adopted and shared with others in the learning community?
- Are the values in the NTI ethos and their expression discussed with visiting contributors to the learning activities?
- Is there a time available for students to reflect and share those reflections about the way they experienced the values through each member of the faculty's contribution?

3.5 Classroom Environment

Currently, the legitimization of the HB901 and HB902 classroom environment is dependent on the two factors: (1) the relationship of a student's class experience to the Buddhist teachings, and (2) the competencies and imagination of the class designer, teacher, and assessor.

The minimal involvement of the student created a pedagogical challenge in ensuring that the values transmission was integrated into the whole student experience and not seen as an optional extra. This could be addressed through the class leader inviting a few students to participate each day in shaping the student classroom experience by providing options for the students to choose between them. Further, students could lead the daily check-in, dedication of merits, and reflective journaling activities.

Assessing questions:

- Do the students have opportunities to participate in shaping and facilitating classroom learning activities?
- Does the whole learning community create shared objectives to guide the establishment of a classroom environment appropriate for the subject?

When these assessment questions were applied to the pedagogy being used in NTI's Humanistic Buddhism subjects, it was apparent from the research data that it was proving quite successful for the 2021 and 2022 students. However, it was also apparent that resolving the tension between meeting academic success factors and optimizing the internalization of the ethos for application beyond the boundaries of the classroom remains a challenge for many students.

3.6 Limitations and Going Further

The embodiment of the NTI ethos by lecturers and students was inspiring for all participants, and created a virtuous circle. It is important to note that it is possible that the classroom environment offers a sort of "fake it until you make it" type of experience, and for some, their behavior may be directed by the expectations of the course. It is possible that only by virtue of a monastic teaching the class were certain behaviors inspired, and these behaviors may not occur in another environment. The HB90 and HB902 subjects are reflexive in nature of NTI values, and the students enrolled in such a course

are likely self-selected when it comes to aspiring to emulate Buddhist values. Participants who volunteered to participate in the study being a subset of this group are even more likely to embrace the NTI values. The different lenses used for the analysis were chosen to alleviate such biases.

The question remains whether students genuinely internalized the values and will be able to apply them beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Nonetheless, the class gives them an opportunity to practice the ethos all the way from lectures to assignments. A longitudinal study of the alumni's expressions of NTI ethos would help assess how much NTI values have been internalized.

## APPENDIX 1

Themes that emerged from each of the three lenses.

| First lens: Observations of students' expressions in their discussions, in written assignments, and reported engaging in activities about the ethos. | |
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| Themes emerging from the coding of the material with NTI values (compassion, wisdom, practice, committed service) plus generosity. | Becoming aware of one's own talents through dialogue and activities with others, in a community of learners that encourages and accepts those talents and respects efforts to learn how to express them. |
| | Learning to formulate intentions on which to build a life of committed service through which wisdom, compassion, and generosity are shared across communities of interest. |
| | Becoming informed about and aware of the scope and discipline of the bodhisattva's vows. |
| | Contemplating everyday relationships and behaviors reveals many acts of compassion and generosity which reflect the gaining of new knowledge. |

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| | Effective practice of the virtues commences with learning how to honestly be aware of our own suffering, ignorance, and excesses plus desire to internalize their exposure through the Dharma to gain confidence to share with others. |
| | As the elements of the ethos are interdependent, so is the process of self-awareness about them gained in the class. As an insight in one area leads to insights in other areas; hence the learning is not singular but cumulative. |
| | A spirit of loving kindness between all classroom participants nurtures the openness required for new knowledge to be heard and accepted with humility and grace. |
| | Being present in every interaction enables awareness of barriers to develop the virtues in ourselves and others so providing motivation and guidance to their removal through multiple small acts of compassion. |
| | The learning environment created by NTI in HB901, and the instructor Venerable Juewei, embodies the NTI ethos. She models it through the lecturers, and promotes its adoption by students. The learning environment includes office hours, tutorials, and guest lecturers' presence. |
| | The combination of students reflecting on their personal learning objectives and discussion about committed service seems to raise the awareness of students regarding their intent and expectations, and spur conversations about right livelihood for example. |

| | Mundane activities such as listening, punctuality, giving feedback, and sharing insights and knowledge are positioned as a gift to oneself and the community, which reinforces the exchange of learning and gratitude among the participants. |
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| | Daily check-ins, dedication of merits, and reflective journaling allow space for emerging insights and cultivation of awareness of self and others by helping create conditions for quieter minds. Such space-time opportunities support the cultivation of the four immeasurable minds which are expounded in lectures, content, and exercises. |
| | During breakout room activities, participants practiced equanimity, patience, and compassion when faced with learning challenges. Friendship circles appear to offer a forum propitious to the expression of the NTI ethos from participants even without specified content. |
| | The combination of a learning environment making space and time for the expression of the NTI ethos, a teaching team role modeling the ethos, and content and activities expounding elements of the ethos creates a lived experience of the NTI ethos. |

| Second lens: Interrogating the material. | |
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| Themes that emerged from the questions: "Overall how engaged with the NTI ethos is this data?" and "What degree of understanding of the learning medium (NTI ethos) does the data reveal?" | The lecturer as well as the guest lecturers appear to be the driving forces of the expression of the NTI ethos in the HB901 classroom. The generosity of spirit and time expended by Venerable Juewei mirrors the ethos. Offering tutorials, office hours, and positioning assignments as gifts are expressions of the ethos. |
| | The content of HB901 offers an opportunity for students to focus on the ethos. Whether it is reflected in the assignments or in the interactions within the classroom, students show appreciation, and possible embodiment of the ethos. |
| | The role modeling of the ethos, which extends to volunteers showcasing their work such as William Chong with the NTI visualizer, seems to be the best conveyor of the NTI ethos, and allow students to embrace it. |
| | Forums such as breakout rooms, and in particular the friendship circles, are opportunities for participants to embody the ethos. |
| | The encouragement of telling personal stories, demonstrated by lecturers, seem to be particularly effective in helping students adopt the ethos. |
| | Mutual support and reinforcement when applying the ethos—such as expressions of gratitude or compassion for one another—is apparent and could be further developed by even more regular recognition of such behaviors. |

| | Self-reflection exercises are effective as an aid for recognizing the need to express the ethos in everyday activities. |
| | The question remains whether students genuinely internalized the ethos and will be able to apply it beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Nonetheless, the class gives them an opportunity to practice the ethos all the way from lectures to assignments. |
| Third lens: Critical system heuristics | |
| Motivation | The primary motivating force is focussed throughout the program on the student and their desire to gain new knowledge and skills, which is recognized through an assessed outcome. However, in some activities the student's intention to be a "better person" is reinforced. This is particularly the case in friendship circles and in engaging with guest lecturers. |
| | The structure of the course and continual emphasis on doing assignment tasks puts an emphasis on student grades as the dominant motivator. |
| | Expressing the motivation is captured in the use of critical thinking in understanding the foundational texts and their interpretation in society today. |
| Control | Following the motivation, the power in the relationships within the program are vested in the subject designer and manager and the assignment marker. |

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| | Control is also expressed through the traditional rituals and authority located in the Dharma, which underpins Humanistic Buddhism. To some extent the ethos and its expression within the class is an influence in some class situations, primarily the plenary and reflective activities. |
| Knowledge | The expert and experiential knowledge shared by Buddhist monastics is highly respected. Especially valued are the monastics' references to and quotes from Buddhist texts. The linking of the Dharma to the ethos through everyday experiences highlights the centrality of knowing the depth and breadth of compassion, wisdom, generosity, and committed practice. Hence this knowledge is sought after by students. There is evidence of students internalizing this knowledge and describing their own interpretations and practices of it. |
| Legitimization | Generally, the legitimization is seen to lie outside the core players in the program. Legitimization is rooted in the course accreditation authorities both within and beyond NTI. Hence the influence of legitimization is faceless. However, the participation of monastics and visiting professors as guest lecturers is to some extent a counterbalance to the faceless alternative and does assist students to recognize the significance and authority the program has within both Buddhist and academic communities. |
| | Bringing the program's legitimization closer to the student experience is one of the emerging challenges for the program pedagogy captured in the study. |

# Notes

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