South Asian Program Description

The language and degree programs in South Asian languages at the University of Washington's Department of Asian Languages and Literature are renowned nationally and internationally for their excellence. The Department's programs in South Asian languages are systematic and rigorous, as well as tailored to the needs of a diverse student population. These programs equip students with a full complement of skills, including speaking, reading, writing, aural comprehension, translation, and grammatical analysis, in order to meet the needs of students with different interests and goals. Full programs of instruction, comprising three years of basic instruction plus an array of supplementary courses, are available at both the undergraduate and graduate level for Hindi and Sanskrit. In addition, three years of instruction is available for Urdu and two for Bangla (Bengali). Other languages taught at the graduate level on a more limited basis include Apabhramsa, Avadhi, Braj, Pali, and Prakrit (including Gandhari). Students at the UW have also been able to obtain language training in other South Asian languages (e.g. Malayalam, Panjabi, Tibetan) through the UW's participation in various national and international consortia and language training programs.

At the undergraduate level, the Department of Asian Languages and Literature offers both majors and minors in Hindi and Sanskrit, with comparable tracks for Urdu under development. Undergraduate majors in South Asian languages, in addition to taking course work in languages, are encouraged to draw from an extensive array of courses in South Asian studies offered in departments and units such as Anthropology, Art History, Comparative Literature, Comparative Religion, Geography, International Studies, Music, Political Science, Women's Studies. Many students have elected to pursue double majors, in which a major in a South Asian language has been paired with majors in professional fields (e.g. premed, International Studies).

At the graduate level, the South Asian Languages Program offers both the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, with concentrations in Hindi, Sanskrit, and Buddhist Studies. It provides an excellent environment for not only developing advanced proficiency in South Asian languages, but also, through its various classes, seminars, and colloquia, for acquiring professional training in the description, analysis, and critical interpretation of South Asian languages and literary texts. A sample of classes and seminars rarely taught elsewhere include those on the decipherment, translation and interpretation of early Buddhist texts, Sanskrit Epigraphy, on the life of Buddha in comparative perspective, on Pali, Prakrit, and Gandhari, on medieval Hindi literary languages (e.g. Braj, Avadhi, Rajasthani) and literatures and on the study of Indian religious themes and motifs throughout history.

There are several areas of research in which the Department's faculty and programs in South Asian languages are particularly well known, including the following: Sanskrit literature and language; Middle Indo-Aryan languages and literatures; Indian religion; Buddhist studies; epigraphy, paleography, and the history of Indic writing systems; Hindi and Indo-Aryan linguistics; medieval devotional texts and religion; comparative mythology; hagiography, and the description of Indian gods and goddesses throughout the course of South Asian history. The Department of Asian Languages and Literature is the home of the Early Buddhist Manuscript Project, a joint enterprise of the University of Washington and the British Library, which has attracted international attention for its research into the language and texts of the earliest surviving written materials of the entire Buddhist tradition.

Funding opportunities for Graduate students include research assistantship in the Early Buddhist Manuscript Project and a limited number of teaching assistantships for Hindi. Graduate students in the Department of Asian Languages are also eligible to apply for
National Resource Fellowships, formerly designated FLAS, administered under the auspices of the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies.

The Department of Asian Languages and Literature sponsors many lectures and colloquia, many in conjunction with other units on campus. The University of Washington Libraries boast one of the most extensive collections of South Asian materials in the country. The University of Washington is the location of a National Resource Center for South Asian Studies, funded through a grant from the United States Department of Education. Opportunities to participate in South Asian cultural events abound as Seattle is home to a significant South Asian population with an active cultural and arts scene. Seattle is the site of many concerts of classical and popular South Asian music, of festivals of South Asian film, and of exhibitions of South Asian art. Seattle is also the home of a vibrant and growing South Asian community, which interacts with faculty and students at the University in numerous ways.

See degree requirements for the South Asian: Major || Minor || M.A. || Ph.D.

Department of Asian Languages & Literature
University of Washington
225 Gowen Hall
Box 353521
Seattle, WA 98195-3521

Phone: (206) 543-4996
asianll@uw.edu

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