



## Beginning Tibetan

TIBE 1003-1503 (3 credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:  
Nepal: Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples

**PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from term to term.**

### Course Description

Tibetan language is an important tool of communication to study and understand Tibetan diaspora. The primary objective of the Introductory Tibetan language course is for students to develop oral skills that will allow them to communicate with members of different Tibetan communities. The students learn modern standard Lhasa dialect, which is customarily used (at least as a lingua franca) both by Tibetans within Tibet and in exile. Reading and writing skills are also introduced, since students are required to include names and terms written in Tibetan script and/or scholarly transliteration (i.e. the Wylie system) in their papers and research projects.

Although we expect dedicated students will be able to achieve intermediate communication skills, students wishing to interact substantively with Tibetan speakers during their independent study project (ISP) or internship should nevertheless expect extensive collaboration with a translator.

By the end of this course, students should be able to converse in beginning Tibetan in the context of interacting with homestay families, community members and excursion participants, and understand grammatical basics of the language and the ways it diverges from their native language. Students should gain the ability to employ Tibetan in appropriate cultural contexts (for example, using the honorific forms when speaking with elders).

Language classes commence right at the beginning at orientation and continue till ISP (Independent Study Project) or internship time. All written materials are studied directly in Tibetan script and not in a phonetic system. Vocabularies, grammar, sentence structures and tenses are effectively introduced in lessons thoughtfully planned around topics most relevant to daily lives. Besides Tibetan script, students are expected to use Wylie (universally accepted system of Tibetan transliteration).

This course exposes students to basic colloquial Tibetan vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures, with an emphasis on enabling students to gain oral proficiency. This course aims to prepare students to put their language skills to practical use in Boudha and during the ISP research/internship period. Through a combination of formal class and oral training with Tibetan conversation partners and language boost sessions, students can expect to achieve the necessary skills to carry on a simple conversation in modern Tibetan. Students are encouraged to practice their Tibetan outside their classes, in homestay, excursions and ISP/internship as well. The Tibetan script

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is introduced in the first five days of class and therefore all written materials will be studied directly in Tibetan and not in a phonetic system. All quizzes, assignments and examples given in class will be written in this particular Tibetan script.

The course is composed of three components: grammar study, conversational practice with language partners and interactive “language boost” sessions.

- **Language Class:** A native Tibetan speaker and a Western instructor teach selected points of grammar as well as expressions useful in daily life. From the very first day onwards the students will be introduced to the fascinating world of Tibetan grammar and Tibetan grammatical categories which are quite special (even unique). For example, in the Tibetan language letters have genders, and verbs are conjugated depending on the presence or absence of volition, and whether one has direct versus inferential evidence, etc. Students memorize vocabulary lists in addition to submitting written homework (one hour/five days a week). Students are required to learn the grammatical structures in order to be able to take 2 quizzes a week in which the new vocabulary and the grammar will be assessed.
- **Language Partners:** A precious 1:1 learning situation with trained native-speaker conversation partners allows the students to practice the material introduced in class as well as talk about topics of their individual interest. These classes, in which as little English as possible is used, will help the student to thoroughly train and digest the grammar as well as manifold vocabulary.
- **Language Boost:** These sessions are especially designed to augment language partner and grammar study classes through a variety of applied activities. Vocabulary reviews and sentence pattern drills revise previously introduced words and grammar structures through repeated application and usage. ‘Mill and trade’ and language games are designed for students to actively utilize their language learning through interactions with other students and teachers.

### Language Levels and Placement

Students are placed into appropriate language course levels based on oral proficiency interviews conducted during orientation in Nepal.

### Learning Outcomes

The *Beginning Tibetan* language course encompasses 45 academic hours (3 credits). Upon its completion, students should be able to:

- Understand and use intermediate grammatical structures necessary for conversation;
- Discuss research, politics, weather on an intermediate level;
- Negotiate social/commercial transactions (doctor, shopping, ordering a meal);
- Read short stories and media articles with simple grammar;
- Become proficient with a Tibetan dictionary;
- Gain cultural insight based on language usage.

### Course Requirements

#### Methodology

Each week entails: ten hours of teaching (grammar and vocabulary sessions, drills, and sessions with conversation partners). While on excursion, formal language classes will be intermittent, but students will nevertheless be expected to use their previously gained language skills in the field and will be evaluated on these efforts.

#### Useful Texts

- Oertle, Franziska. (2014) *Bod skad slob deb*. Unpublished.
- *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*. (1993) Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House.

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- Goldstein, Melvyn. (2001) *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Available in Indian edition.
- Goldstein, Melvyn. (1984) *English-Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Available in Indian edition.
- Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library (THDL) Tibetan to English Translation Tool. <http://www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/translate.php>. For online usage, as well as instructions to download offline version.
- Tournadre, Nicholas & Sangda Dorje. (2003) *Manual of Standard Tibetan: Language and Civilization*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

### Daily Class Schedule

- We have one hour of Tibetan language class followed by one hour of conversation partner class every morning from Monday through Friday.
- Each class begins with a review session. Students are drilled and each and every student is invited for active participation, which ensures each student's attention in the class.
- Quiz is conducted twice every week for constant assessment of the level in which each student is. The following classes are then planned and structured accordingly.
- Students are given daily assignments. They get help from conversation partners and homestay families to complete the assignments. After assignments are submitted, they get them back the next day with feedback and corrections. As the pace of language class is pretty fast, prompt feedback ensures much needed prompt removal of any doubts or confusions to be able to move forward to new chapters.
- Teaching assistant is available throughout the day from Monday through Friday should the students have any question regarding Tibetan language.
- At the end, before students set off for their ISP/internship, they give their final written and oral exams.

### Course Methods

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### Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Instructors evaluate each student's performance based on following criteria. Final grades are assigned by the Academic Director in consultation with the language instructors on the basis of each

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instructor's evaluation, each student's own self-evaluation and the Academic Director's observation of each student.

## **Methods of Evaluation**

### **Grammar (10%)**

Grammar is an integral part of any language. It governs the composition of word order, conjugation, tenses etc. Grammar is evaluated by going through students' homework, test papers and speech.

### **Vocabulary (10%)**

New vocabularies are introduced with the introduction of every new lesson. Some vocabularies are given more importance than others based on how often the vocabularies are used in daily lives and in the class. Students are also expected to acquire more vocabularies from conversation partners, homestay families and books and practice them.

### **Comprehension (10%)**

Students are graded based on their ability to comprehend statements or questions and to answer or carry on the conversation accordingly.

### **Pronunciation and Fluency (10%)**

Native pronunciation is not expected. However, students' pronunciation should be clear and comprehensible to classmates and others. Fluency is also taken into consideration.

### **Motivation and Attitude (10%)**

Students are expected to be positive and enthusiastic towards the host culture and language class, and to be positive, encouraging and helpful to their classmates as well.

### **Attendance (10%)**

Students are expected to attend all classes. If students get sick or have an important appointment, they need to inform the teacher.

### **Language Use Outside Class (10%)**

Language use is not limited to class. Students need to use Tibetan as much as possible with Tibetan people and among themselves.

### **Tibetan script (10%)**

Reading and Writing.

### **Progress (20%)**

Students' progress is evaluated based on homework, quizzes and exams.

Oral proficiency interviews are conducted at the end of the semester to provide a measurement of students' overall linguistic progress.

**Grading Scale:** The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-

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67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
Below 64	F

### **Expectations and Policies**

Class attendance is mandatory and unexcused absences will reduce the language grade (see attendance policies in the front matter of the syllabus).

Show up prepared. Be on time, have your assignments completed and points in mind for clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.

Have assignments completed on schedule and done according to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.

Ask questions in class. Teachers are highly respected in Nepal and among Tibetan and Himalayan peoples. Your polite and engaged behavior is expected.

Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

Respect differences of opinion (classmates', teachers'). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

**Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the program handbook given to you at Orientation.

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