A Contemplative Approach to College Life: Lessons from Buddhist History
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Abstract
Mindfulness programs, which typically draw on Buddhist meditation techniques, have recently enjoyed a surge in popularity. Like many North American universities, USC has established major initiatives aimed at helping students cultivate skills that may aid in stress reduction and mental health. This micro-seminar, taught by a historian of Buddhism, will take a slightly different tack. Here we will not learn mindfulness or meditation techniques as such; instead, we will consider classical Buddhist texts with an eye for the broader advice they offer about regulating emotions, training the mind, interacting with others, and caring for the body. Students will then be given the opportunity to "translate"these ideas to the challenges of contemporary college life. The seminar will thus offer historical background for those interested in contemporary mindfulness practices while also giving students a chance to think about how certain insights from the distant past might be applied to our lives today.

Faculty Biography
Professor Lori Meeks (B.A., Columbia; Ph.D., Princeton) is Associate Professor and Chair of Religion. She also holds a joint appointment in East Asian Languages and Cultures. Meeks teaches courses on Buddhism and Japanese Religions, and much of her research focuses on the lives of Buddhist women in premodern East Asia. She is the author of Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan, as well as many articles and book chapters. She is currently working on a book about medieval Japanese practices aimed at saving women from Buddhist hells comprised of uterine blood. She and her husband, who also teaches at USC, have two small children and live in Northeast Los Angeles.