

## Survey of Nepali Studies in Europe and the Americas

A Report Produced for BNAC by Sristi Gurung  
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Following the discontinuation of courses on Nepal and Nepali at SOAS University of London, there is now little opportunity for students at British universities to engage academically with Nepali language, literature, culture and society. The Britain-Nepal Academic Council commissioned a survey of Nepali Studies in Europe and America to document current offerings and to identify opportunities for future collaboration that might help to fill this gap. The survey was conducted by Ms. Sristi Gurung under the guidance of Prof. Michael Hutt.

The following report provides profiles of colleges or universities identified as having a Nepali studies offering, including a brief introduction of the institution's Nepali programme, the modules offered and the key academics. The profiles have been built using web-based research, specifically information listed on a university's website and course directory, supplemented by communications with the relevant institutions and key academics. The information contained in this report was accurate and up-to-date as of August 2021.

The profiles in the report are presented in alphabetical order by institution.

### 1. Cornell University, USA

Department: **Asian Studies**

Key Academic: **Hom Acharya**

Website: <https://asianstudies.cornell.edu/nepali>

The Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University offers an extensive Nepali language programme, offered at elementary, intermediate and advanced level. Postgraduate students can undertake Nepali classes as part of **MA South Asian Studies** while undergraduate students can take the courses as part of their minor in **South Asian Studies**. The Nepali language programme at Cornell is led by **Hom Acharya** who has previously held positions at Tribhuvan University, Nepal and Shimane University, Japan. The university offers Nepali classes to other universities under the Shared Course Initiative. Nepali courses are currently being extended to Yale and Columbia under the initiative.

### Modules offered in 2020 and 2021

#### *Nepali language modules*

- **Elements of Nepali Language and Culture** provides students with a basic introduction to Nepali language and culture.
- **Elementary Nepali I** introduces beginner level students to basic grammar, speaking and comprehension. The course is taught using relevant Nepali texts.
- **Elementary Nepali II** builds on Elementary Nepali I and introduces students to reading and writing Devanagari script.
- **Intermediate Nepali Conversation I** allows the intermediate level learner to improve their spoken grammar and comprehension.
- **Intermediate Nepali Conversation II** builds on Intermediate Nepali Conversation I and is indented for intermediate level learners. The focus is on verbal communication skills, particularly building more complex vocabularies.
- **Intermediate Nepali Composition I** focuses on strengthening the intermediate level student's written grammar and vocabulary.
- **Intermediate Nepali Composition II** builds on Intermediate Nepali Composition I to improve written communication.
- **Advanced Nepali I** introduces students to complex reading material and advanced spoken language drills.
- **Advanced Nepali II** builds on Advanced Nepali I and allows students the opportunity to further practice advanced reading and spoken Nepali.

#### ***Other modules with Nepal content***

- **South Asian Religions in Practice: The Healing Traditions** studies the religious traditions and practices in South Asia, including Nepal. The course is offered by the Anthropology department at Cornell.

## **2. Heidelberg University/Universität Heidelberg, Germany**

Department: **South Asia Institute**

Key Academics: **Dr. Christiane Brosius, Dr. Astrid Zotter**

Website: <https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/en/>

Heidelberg offers Nepali as a minor language for students studying at the South Asian Institute and runs for 4 semesters. The university also has a reading group that studies Nepali and Sanskrit documents. The university previously offered an intensive Nepali language summer school, but this has been discontinued. As Nepal is one of Dr. Brosius' regional foci, Nepali material is covered extensively in her anthropology teaching.

## **3. The New School, New York, USA**

Department: **International Field Program**

Key Academics: **Dr. Ashok Gurung**

Website: <https://www.newschool.edu/international-field-program/country-sites/>

In the past, the New School has offered an 'International Field Programme' in Nepal and India. This was a six week long programme that provided students with opportunities to

address pressing social issues in Nepal and India, The 2021 programme entitled 'Social Justice for Dignity and Equity: Learning with Dalits', offered in collaboration with Samata Foundation, Kathmandu, and Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi, had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. It is possible that a new field-based course will be offered in summer 2023 but this has yet to be confirmed.

#### **4. Pitzer College, California, USA**

Department: **Study Abroad and International Programs**

Key Academic: **Dr. Michael Ballagh**

Website: <https://www.pitzer.edu/study-abroad/pitzer-students/nepal/>

Pitzer College offers a semester-long study abroad programme called 'Pitzer College in Nepal', open to both Pitzer and non-Pitzer students. It is an intensive and immersive language and culture programme that allows students to get involved in language classes, family stays, community projects and lectures. The students are hosted by Tribhuvan University, one of Nepal's oldest universities. The programme is divided into 3 courses: Nepali Studies, Intensive Nepali Language and Independent Study Project. The Nepali Studies course provides students with a deep insight into the social, cultural and political issues of modern Nepal. The Intensive Nepali Language allows the students an opportunity to learn Nepali in community settings in Nepal. Finally, the Independent Study Project allows the students to select an independent project that involves ethnographic techniques such as interviews, observation and field research that allows for immersion in the Nepali language and culture.

#### **5. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada**

Department: **Institute of Asian Research/School of Public Policy & Global Affairs; Department of Asian Studies**

Key Academics: **Sara Shneiderman, Binod Shrestha**

Website: <https://himalaya.arts.ubc.ca/>

The **Himalaya Program** at the University of British Columbia is an initiative jointly supported by the **Institute of Asian Research** within the School of Public Policy & Global Affairs, and the **Department of Asian Studies**. It describes itself as a 'transdisciplinary hub' that combines faculty expertise with student and community engagement with the aim of sharing knowledge and insight on the Himalayan region, including Nepal. The Himalaya Program offers community-engaged Nepali and Tibetan language courses in the summer. Aside from the language courses, the program also hosts speaker events centred around the Himalayan region and the experiences of Nepalis and Tibetans in Canada.

#### **Modules offered in 2020 and 2021**

##### ***Nepali Language***

- **Nepali Language in a Community Context**

This intensive language course introduces beginners to conversational Nepali. The community focus of the course combines classroom study with experimental and cultural experiences with Nepali community members and sites. The students are provided with individual and group assignments that involve community engagement. The course is open to both UBC students and the general public. The course is taught by Binod Shrestha who has been involved with Nepali language instruction since 1990.

## 6. University of Marburg, Germany

Department: **Department of Indology and Tibetology**

Key Academic: **Dr. Felix Otter**

Website: <https://www.indologie.uni-muenchen.de/english/index.html>

Marburg University's Newari language programme is based in the Department of Indology and Tibetology. Marburg is one of the only universities in both Europe and the Americas that offers Newari language education. While Nepali language courses are also offered by the university, they are only provided sporadically, based on demand. The university is open to UK-based students taking full-credit courses through the virtual exchange programme.

### Modules offered in 2020 and 2021

- **Classical Newari** is a one-year beginners level course that allows introduces students to Newari language and literature.

## 7. University of Vienna/ Universität Wien, Austria

Faculty: **Philological and Cultural Studies**

Department: **South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies**

Key Academics: **Dr. Martin Gaenzle, Dr. Alaka Chudal**

Website: <https://stb.univie.ac.at/en/>

The Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Vienna has three main study areas headed by three different professors: '**Philosophies and Religions of South Asia**' concentrates on the pre-modern Indic tradition, literature, philosophy and intellectual development based on Sanskrit and Prakrit language sources and is led by **Prof. Dr. Karin Preisendanz**; '**Modern South Asian Studies**' with a focus on modern languages, literature, linguistic anthropology, religion, culture, history and society in modern South Asia, in particular, the Nepal Himalayas, is led by **Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenzle**; '**Tibetan and Buddhist Studies**' with a focus on Buddhist philosophical studies based on Sanskrit, Pali and Tibetan sources, as well as the cultural and social developments in Tibet and their pre-modern conditions in the area of language, history, philosophy, religion, literary history and history of arts from a philological perspective, is led by **Prof. Dr. Klaus-Dieter Mathes**.

Although a specific degree programme in Nepal Studies is not offered, the Department is one of the only University departments in the German-speaking countries which offers

Nepali courses on a regular curricular basis. As part of the BA programme '**Languages and Cultures of South Asia and Tibet**' students are expected to choose two languages, and when opting for modern South Asian languages, Nepali and Hindi can be studied as first or second language. Each language course in the BA programme covers 5 semesters with altogether 55 ECTS points<sup>1</sup> as first language and 2 semesters with 30 ECTS points as second language. Beside these language classes there are also courses on various other topics, including Nepali history, literature and society. Occasionally, the Department also offers courses on other modern South Asian languages such as: Urdu, Newari and Limbu.

The Interdisciplinary MA programme on '**Culture and Society of Modern South Asia**' includes advanced courses on Nepali or Hindi readings, along with courses on social and intellectual history, language traditions, and contemporary developments (ethnicity, popular culture, political movements etc.) in South Asia, with a particular focus on the Himalayan region and Nepal.

The key persons engaged in Nepal Studies at the Department are **Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenzle** (deputy head of department), whose research focus is on Nepali ethnohistory and culture (with emphasis on Limbu and Rai culture and communities) and **Dr. Alaka Chudal**, who specialises in teaching Nepali language and literature to non-native Nepali speakers. Courses on offer cover a broad range of topics and vary considerably, but the following examples from recent semesters can be seen as representative. **Prof. Gaenzle** is due to retire in 2022, but the university is committed to maintaining continuity in this field.

### **Modules offered in 2020 and 2021**

#### ***Philosophies and religions modules***

- **Religious Reform and Secularisation in Nepal** explores how religious practices and communities have changed in the last few decades, using the democratisation in the 1990, end of the monarchy in 2008 and the new constitution of 2015 as the key dates of these changes.
- **A Sant Tradition in Nepal: Texts on the History of the Josmanī** studies the history of the Josmanī order, looking at its spread across Nepal's geographies and ethnicities.

#### ***Society and Culture in Modern Nepal***

- **Constitutional law in Nepal** discusses seven Nepali constitutions since 1948, from the Rana rule to the most recent 2015 constitution.
- **Local cultures in Nepal and the impact of global change** introduces students to the theories of cultural and social anthropology on globalisation. The module focuses on case studies of cultural change at the local level in Kathmandu, Mustang and Kavre.

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<sup>1</sup> European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). 1 ECTS point in Austria is equivalent to 25 academic working hours.

### ***Nepali literature modules***

- **Female Autobiographies of 20th Century in Nepali Literature:** the module aims to enable students to read and analyse autobiographical writings by Nepali women. The texts centres around women's rights and experiences from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Nepali language modules***

- Introduction to Nepali I
- Introduction to Nepali I - additional practice
- Introduction to Nepali II
- Nepali Conversation
- Easy Nepali Grammar
- Advanced Nepali Grammar

### ***Other modules where Nepal and Nepali are included***

- Analysis of selected films from the point of view of philology
- Poetic traditions of the Bhakti movement
- Analysis of selected films from the point of view of philology
- Art and Culture of the Himalayas
- Inclusive Development, Inclusive Peace?

## **8. University of Washington, Seattle, USA**

Department: **South Asian Studies/ South Asia Center**

Key Academics: **Dr. David Citrin**

Website: <https://jsis.washington.edu/southasia/nepal/>

The **Nepal Studies Initiative (NSI)** at the University of Washington was initially founded in 2013 to establish and promote Nepal as a more prominent part of South Asian Studies. The initiative is housed within the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies. The initiative offers students an opportunity to engage with Nepal Studies through a variety of modules, film screenings, speaker series, language classes and study abroad programmes. These offerings are open to students undertaking a degree programme at the South Asia Center.

**Dr. Biraj Karmacharya** (co-director, 2013 – 2017) and **Dr. David Citrin** (co-director, 2013 – 2020) helped establish the Nepal Studies Initiative. Dr. Karmacharya's work encompasses diverse topics on chronic and infectious diseases, as well as microfinance and rural community health and education, while Dr. Citrin's work focuses on the ethics of global health and use of digital tools and information systems for healthcare. Dr. Pasang Yangjee Sherpa served as co-director of the initiative from 2017 to 2018. Her research focus includes human dimensions of climate change and the Sherpa diaspora.

## **Modules offered**

There were no modules offered on Nepal in the years 2020 and 2021.

There were two modules offered in 2018 and 2019 that focused on Nepal:

- **Health and Development in the Himalaya** offers students insights on debates and scholarship on development and global health in the Himalayas, with specific focus on Nepal (Instructor: David Citrin).
- **Destination Nepal: Ethnography of Encounters and Cultural Resilience** provides an ethnographic view of Nepal as dynamic and global country. The focus of the module is on how Nepal culture is changing as a result of being part of a global community (Instructor: Pasang Yangjee Sherpa).

## ***Nepali language***

- **Nepali Summer Language Course**

The university is currently (2021) offering a two-week intensive online Nepali language class for students at the university and the general public. The course is not credited towards the students' final grade. It is designed for beginners and introduces conversational Nepali, Nepali script and Nepali grammar. It is designed for students planning to study, work or travel in Nepal. The course is run by Binod Shrestha of the University of British Columbia.

## ***Other offerings***

- **InterAction Nepal 2020**

InterAction Nepal is an interdisciplinary study abroad programme run in collaboration by the Department of Landscape Architecture and South Asia Center. The programme allows the students to design and implement a small-scale health project in Kathmandu.  
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