

Nālandā: The Spirit, Heritage, and Contemporary Relevance

Foundation Course FC-1 · 2 credits · 30 contact hours · Semester I & 3 2026

Session schedule and continuous evaluation scheme

Concept Note

Course Description

Designed for students from diverse international and cultural backgrounds, this course introduces the intellectual and institutional legacy of ancient Nālandā through a critical engagement with its historical evidence. Rather than treating Nālandā merely as a nostalgic memory of the past, the course approaches it as a historical institution and as a significant expression of the intellectual, philosophical, cultural, and civilisational ethos of Indian knowledge traditions.

The course creates an interdisciplinary space in which students from diverse academic disciplines engage with major strands of Indian thought, their historical development, wider intellectual and international connections, and contemporary relevance. Its scope therefore extends beyond the historical study of ancient Nālandā to an examination of the intellectual values, methods, and traditions associated with it and their relevance to the present.

The curriculum is organised around four principal objectives:

Objective I: To critically examine archaeological and textual evidence relating to Nālandā, distinguishing historically substantiated evidence from later tradition, legend, and hagiography.

Objective II: To examine the classical Nālandā curriculum, including the *pañca-vidyā* and sixty-four *kalās*, as an integrated framework of human formation, and to situate it within the wider network of Indian and transregional centres of learning.

Objective III: To revive *śāstrārtha* as a method of intellectual training, requiring students to present the *pūrvapakṣa* in its strongest form, formulate and defend their own *siddhānta*, and engage rigorously with critical questioning.

Objective IV: To relate selected intellectual, ethical, economic, and artistic dimensions of Nālandā to contemporary questions, developing students' capacity for reasoned written argument and oral defence.

Session Schedule

Date	Session	Title and scope	Faculty / Resource person
5 Aug Wed	Inaugural Lecture	Nālandā: Wisdom, Heritage and the Idea of a Living University Course orientation — learning outcomes, the reflective journal, and the continuous-assessment scheme explained in full.	Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor
10 Aug Mon	—	<i>No class — Chancellor's visit</i> One 1.5-hour slot lost. Recovery slot required (see Note 3).	—
12 Aug Wed	Lecture 2	The Origin, Foundation and Chronology of Nālandā Mahāvihāra	Prof. K. T. S. Sarao

Date	Session	Title and scope	Faculty / Resource person
		Foundation legends against established evidence; the Gupta-to-Pāla sequence; what can and cannot be fixed in time.	
17 Aug Mon	Lecture 3	Testimony of the Travellers: Faxian, Xuanzang, Yijing, Hyecho and Dhyānabhadra What each observer saw, when, and for what audience they wrote; the limits of pilgrim testimony as historical evidence.	Prof. K. T. S. Sarao
19 Aug Wed	Lecture 4	Pratītyasamutpāda as Ecological Reasoning: Interdependence, Sustainability and Voluntary Simplicity The vinaya regime, the tank-and-field economy of the Mahāvihāra, and the ethic of restraint read from the sources.	Prof. K. T. S. Sarao
24 Aug Mon	Lecture 5	Nālandā and Its Extension: Vikramaśīlā, Odantapurī and Valabhī, and the Older Centres of Learning	Dr Pranshu Samdarshi
26 Aug Wed	—	<i>No class — Holiday (Eid Milad-un-Nabi)</i>	—
31 Aug Mon	Lecture 6	Knowledge Heritage of Nālandā: Nālandā Masters, their Teachings and Contemporary Science Nālandā ācāryas and transmission by lineage; commentary and contemporary reflections.	Dr Pranshu Samdarshi
2 Sep Wed	Lecture 7	Buddhist Monasteries, Nālandā, and Indic Religious Traditions: Integrated Learning.	Prof. Shailendra Raj Mehta (Invited)
7 Sep Mon	Lecture 8	Śāstrārtha: Vāda, Jalpa and Vitaṇḍā; the Pūrvapakṣ a Stated at Full Strength Vedic, Buddhist and Jaina disputation compared; live demonstration by the resource persons.	Prof. Sachchidanand Mishra (Invited)
9 Sep Wed	Lecture 9	Art, Classical Traditions and the Spirit of Ancient Nalanda	Dr Sonal Mansingh (Invited)
14 Sep Mon	Lecture 10	Sanskrit, Pāli and Prakrit as Connective Media; the Link Language and Linguistic Connections of Nālandā Language choice as institutional policy; the phonological logic of the contribution of Brāhmī to South-East Asian scripts.	Prof. D. Venkat Rao
16 Sep Wed	Lecture 11	Pañca-vidyā and the Sixty-Four Kalās: An Integrated Curriculum for Human Flourishing The five sciences and the sixty-four arts as one scheme; physical, mental and contemplative formation together.	Prof. Godabarisha Mishra
19 Sep	Field Visit I	The Excavated Mahāvihāra and the Nālandā Museum Testimony tested against ground truth; stratigraphy, seals and sealings; staggered group routes (half day).	Coordinated by all Department / School coordinators with Dr Elora Tribedy, Dr Tosha and Dr Azad
20 Sep	Field Visit II	The Excavated Mahāvihāra and the Nālandā Museum Testimony tested against ground truth; stratigraphy, seals and sealings; staggered group routes (half day).	Coordinated by all Department / School coordinators with Dr

Date	Session	Title and scope	Faculty / Resource person
			Garima, Dr Chandan and Dr Kashif
21 Sep Mon	Lecture 12	Pāla Bronzes: Patronage; Custodians of the Artistic Heritage Metallurgical evidence read as historical evidence; the workshop as an institution; who keeps the tradition now.	Dr Elora Tribedy
23 Sep Wed	Lecture 13	Where the Sciences Converge with Spirituality: Environs of Nālandā and Holistic Development How the environmental mechanism supported the doctrine.	Dr Satyanarayan Shastri
26 Sep Sat	Field Visit I	The Excavated Mahāvihāra and the Nālandā Museum Testimony tested against ground truth; stratigraphy, seals and sealings; staggered group routes (half day).	Coordinated by all Department / School coordinators with Dr Elora Tribedy, Dr Tosha and Dr Azad
27 Sep Sun	Field Visit II	The Excavated Mahāvihāra and the Nālandā Museum Testimony tested against ground truth; stratigraphy, seals and sealings; staggered group routes (half day).	Coordinated by all Department / School coordinators with Dr Garima, Dr Chandan and Dr Kashif
5 Oct Mon	Lecture 14	Nālandā as a Living Network: Sompura and Śrīvijaya; the Nālandā Extension The extension centres; an endowment made across the seas; the self-sufficient knowledge economy that paid for it.	Prof. Arvind Kumar
7 Oct Wed	Lecture 15 Symposium	Living Continuity: The Ancient and New Nālandā Connections	Dr K. K. Muhammed (Invited)

Continuous Evaluation Scheme

1 • Purpose and Principles

The Foundation Course is assessed continuously, for 100 marks, with no end-semester examination. This document converts the components named in the syllabus into working instruments: the reflective journal, with its column template and module-wise entries, and the written test, the written project and the śāstrārtha presentation that follow it.

Three principles govern all four instruments. First, each instrument assesses something the course has actually practised: nothing is examined that has not first been demonstrated in class. Second, every component maps to a stated learning outcome, so that the marks ledger doubles as a record of outcome attainment. Third, the burden is distributed across the semester: no single instrument carries more than a third of the marks, and the two heaviest sit at the close of the course, where the written project supplies the position that the śāstrārtha then defends.

2 • Distribution of Marks

Component	Timing	Marks
A • Reflective journal	Ongoing; reviewed twice	25

Component	Timing	Marks
B · MCQ (online)	Close of first month	20
C · Final project — written submission	End of course; departmental	25
D · Śāstrārtha presentation	End of course; departmental	30
Total		100

3 · Component Specifications

A · Reflective Journal — 25 marks

One entry per module, submitted in the prescribed three-column template: what was presented (the content recorded), what was questioned (the student's own difficulty, objection or query), and what shifted (a revised understanding, or a reasoned refusal to revise). The third column is the substance of the instrument; the first exists only to anchor it. The journal is reviewed twice — at mid-course and at the close — so that the second review registers development rather than repeating the first. Ten marks are awarded at each review.

B · MCQ (Online) — 20 marks

Conducted online at the completion of the first month of the course, of fifteen minutes' duration, covering the historical and archaeological foundation of the course: the chronology of the mahāvihāra, the epigraphic record and the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims, the excavation history of the site, and the transmission of the Nālandā curriculum. Given the fifteen-minute limit, the paper is wholly objective: twenty multiple-choice questions of one mark each, delivered in randomised order from a common question bank, with no negative marking. The test is conducted in the Vishwamitralaya Auditorium. Marking is one mark per correct response, machine-scored, with results released to students together with the answer key, so that the test also functions as a corrective for the month that follows.

C · Final Project — Written Submission — 25 marks

A written submission of 2,500–3,000 words on an approved topic connecting one aspect of the historical Nālandā to a contemporary question. The proposal is approved by mid-course. Citation follows the Chicago notes-and-bibliography style, and the use of at least one primary source, in the original or in translation, is required. The project is administered at the departmental level. Each department nominates a course coordinator, who approves topics, assigns tasks within the department, sets the internal submission date, and returns the marks to the Office of the Controller of Examinations.

D · Śāstrārtha Presentation — 30 marks

An oral defence conducted at the departmental level in the pūrvapakṣa–uttarapakṣa form that the course has practised: the student states the opposing position fairly and in its strongest form before advancing his own, and then answers questions from the panel and from peers. Twelve minutes are allowed for the presentation and eight for contestation. The departmental course coordinator convenes the sitting, constitutes a two-member panel, circulates the common rubric sheet, and ensures that each student's written project is before the panel at the time of the defence. Marking: fidelity of the pūrvapakṣa and strength of the siddhānta, 8; response under questioning, 8; clarity and register of delivery.

4 · Departmental Coordination

The department coordinators assigned are responsible for scheduling the panel constitution, application of the common rubrics, and topic of project and transmission of consolidated marks to the Foundation Course convenor. Components A and B remain centrally administered so that the standard of the journal review and of the question paper is uniform across Schools.