

Standards for Awarding the BHAKTI-VEDANTA Degree

Any ISKCON center can apply for recognition by the Board of Examinations (BoEx) as a Bhakti-vedanta degree-awarding center provided the center certifies that it will conduct its program according to the standards below. The course can be conducted in any regional language and all the assessments are carried out in that language.

1. Who can enroll?

1. The candidate must certify that s/he chants 16 rounds of *japa* daily and follows the four regulative principles for at least 10 years.
2. The candidate must have the Bhakti-śāstri and Bhakti-vaibhava degree certificates or should have been assessed as successful in the completion of an approved Bhakti-vaibhava program, awaiting the formal issue of the degree.
3. The candidate must have been recommended by an ISKCON authority who knows the candidate well, certifying that the candidate is engaged favorably in the mission of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu for at least the previous 6 years, participating in direct preaching activities.
4. All students should be registered in the Ministry of Education institute database before the commencement of the course.

Srila Prabhupda Disciples, GBC Members, Initiating Gurus Senior Preachers & Leaders

Approved Exam Centers are authorized to award Bhaktivedanta Degrees to Srila Prabhupda Disciples, GBCs or Initiating Gurus, with Bhakti-śāstri and Bhakti-vaibhava degrees, who complete selected components of assessment, at the discretion of the Exam Center. Senior Preachers & Leaders who fulfil the criteria below, can also be given the same facility.

Senior preaching/leadership responsibility for minimum of 15 years

At least 50 years of age (recommended).

Or with other extenuating circumstances, i.e. illness, etc.

With the approval of the BOEX.

With endorsement from a ISKCON 2nd initiated brahmana , in good standing, and one of the following:GBC member, GBC Minister, ISKCON Sannyasi, ISKCON Diksa guru,

Zonal or Regional Secretary, Global Duty Officer, Zonal Supervisor, Temple President or Temple Board.

2. Learning Outcomes to be Assessed

1. Comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the philosophy and pastimes contained in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* Cantos I to XII, and the Bhakti-śāstri texts.
2. Knowledge and memorization, with adequate pronunciation, of at least 70 verses found in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* Cantos VII to XII.
3. Expertise as a speaker and preacher of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.
4. Personal behavior, evaluative skills, wisdom, and maturity reflect principles consistent with *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

3. Teaching Standards

1. The Bhakti-vedanta teacher must have studied complete *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and Bhakti-śāstri books at least two times and must have the experience of teaching/preaching these subjects several times, summing up to at least 750 hours of teaching/preaching.
2. Bhakti-vedanta classes need to be conducted for at least 150 hours (either on-site or online or a combination of both) with –
 - a. Detailed explanations on the philosophical episodes of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* Cantos VII to XII.
 - b. Highlighting principles of practical application in Vaiṣṇava dealings from the pastimes of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, while summarizing some well-known pastimes.

Note: Because those who enrol for Bhakti-vedanta degree have already studied the first six Cantos of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the Bhakti-śāstri books, and have at least a decade practicing Krishna consciousness and contributing directly or indirectly for preaching activities, and also because the number of philosophical episodes and technical topics in Cantos 7-12 are less in comparison with Cantos 1-6, it is not mandatory to conduct a detailed verse-by-verse classes for long hours on all chapters of Srimad Bhagavatam Cantos 7-12, especially for the well-known pastimes. So the class time can be more utilized for discussing the philosophical episodes in detail, while well-known pastimes can be summarized or discussed briefly.

4. Course Assessment

To ensure a basic minimum standard and at the same time allow a degree of flexibility, approved centers may establish their assessment policies within the following boundaries:

Assessment Categories

A1. Open Book Essays/ Articles [20-40%]

- The candidates need to write open book essays or articles numbering in total 20,000 words on pertinent themes in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, quoting relevant references from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and the Bhakti-śāstri texts.
- Their articles / essays should not be just a write-up on a topic, but a well-researched material presented with logic and comprehensive philosophical analysis, suggesting practical application perspectives, relevant for the devotee community of ISKCON and beyond.

A2. Thesis [10-20%]

- The candidates need to write a thesis or publish a booklet of about 7,500 to 15,000 words on a pertinent theme in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, quoting relevant references from Bhagavad-gītā and the Bhakti-śāstri texts.
 - The work should not be just a write-up on a topic, but a well-researched material presented with logic and comprehensive analysis, suggesting practical application perspectives, relevant for the devotee community of ISKCON and beyond, and should serve as a ready reference material on that topic.
- The students need to choose a mentor, provided by the Exam Center, under whose guidance they would be writing the thesis.
 - The candidate should consult their teachers, and propose a concept note of about 750 words for approval.

The thesis is to be defended in the presence of 3 BoEx approved teachers.

Note: Students who find it too difficult to write a thesis can skip A2 and write extra articles/open-book essays as a part of A1, as recommended by their teachers.

A3. Closed Book Exams [10-15%]

- Answering at least 100 short-answer questions.
- Experienced teachers can answer just 20 questions.

A4. Sloka Assessment [8-10%]

- Being able to recite from memory, with adequate pronunciation, the original Sanskrit text and approximate English translation of at least 70 verses from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* cantos VII to XII.

A5. Classes/ Seminars [20-25%]

- At least four presentations of a minimum of one hour each (these presentations have to be evaluated by the teachers/ program administrators/ a jury panel)
 - Two presentations on *tattva* from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* Cantos VII to XII.
 - Two presentations on *līlā* from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (Cantos VII to XII) highlighting core vaiṣṇava principles.
- Should have given at least 20 hours of classes either in temples, festivals, *yātrās*, workshops, and so on.

A6. Conduct / Behaviour [10%]

Personal vaiṣṇava behavior, *sādhana*, extra-curricular service, cooperative mood, and ability to function as part of a team, as acknowledged by seniors and peers.

There will not be any gradation within the Bhakti-vedanta award.

A student may change to another approved center, and transfer all previous study accomplishments for reasons such as the first center becoming inactive, having to change

physical location because of work or service. This can be coordinated by the respective Exam centers.