

DEAN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE
STUDENT VENTURE GRANT APPLICATION

Please read all instructions and regulations on the reverse side of this sheet prior to the completion of this form. The original plus 7 copies of your proposal are due in the Dean's Office on the 2nd Friday of the Block by 1:00 p.m.

DATE SUBMITTED October 10th, 2006
13th

NAME _____ CLASS Sr. WORNER BOX _____ EXT. _____

ID # _____ HOMETOWN (Not Address) _____

NAME _____ CLASS Sr. WORNER BOX _____ EXT. _____

ID # _____ HOMETOWN (Not Address) _____

PROJECT TITLE Buddhist Meditation: A Comparison of Experience

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INTENDED USE OF FUNDS Through Film and Literature.

Travel to Myanmar to study Buddhist culture and Buddhist meditation. (Travel, accomodation, food, visas, etc.)

PROPOSED DATE/BLOCK OF USE Dec 26th - Jan 14th / 2006-2007

NAME OF FACULTY SPONSOR John Simons

HAVE YOU BEEN THE RECIPIENT OF A PREVIOUS VENTURE GRANT Yes No

IF SO, WHAT AMOUNT? _____ WHEN? _____ REPORT SUBMITTED? _____

TOTAL AMOUNT OF VENTURE FUNDS NOW REQUESTED \$1,000 each

ARE YOU SEEKING OTHER FUNDING FOR THIS PROPOSAL? Yes No

IF YES, WHAT IS THE SOURCE? President's Fund and Religion Department.

If this proposal is approved, I understand that it is my responsibility to notify the Dean's Office immediately if I do not pursue my project as proposed to the Dean's Advisory Committee. I further understand that all funds are to be used according to the proposal as submitted and approved by the Dean's Advisory Committee. Any changes to an approved project must be submitted to the Chair of the Committee for approval. Please note: the IRS requires that we report Venture Funds as taxable income

SIGNATURE _____ DATE 10/10/06
*****DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE*****

DATE _____ ACTION TAKEN _____ DATE _____

BLOCKS TO BE USED _____ REPORT SUBMITTED _____
COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS: _____

Buddhist Meditation: *A Comparison of Experience Through Film and Literature*

Of all countries in Southeast Asia, Myanmar (formally known as Burma) remains the least influenced by western culture. This is due mostly to political situations within the country since gaining independence from England in 1948. Because of various coups and a militaristic, oppressive government, Burma's borders remained closed to all foreigners until 1989. Since this time limited travel within the country has been allowed. The result of this longstanding isolation from the outside world is a well-preserved Buddhist culture, which remains more traditional than the western influenced cultures of other Southeast Asian countries.

Our student research project is based on the synthesis of Buddhist meditation and individual artistic expression—Nick through film, and Evan through creative writing. The Burmese backdrop of authentic Buddhist culture will provide an appropriate arena for our inquiry into meditation, as well as a colorful canvas for our respective creative projects.

We plan to travel to the Shan state in the remote northeastern region of Myanmar to practice meditation at a Buddhist monastery in Pyin U Lwin, a small mountain town sixty kilometers east of Mandalay. From here we will compose artistic reflections in both writing and film, travel to traditional Buddhist villages, and practice meditation in its original setting. This practice of meditation will be seen in contrast to the meditation we have preformed since we were five years old.

We were raised in a small community in Iowa where Transcendental Meditation, the central teaching of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, was established as a cornerstone of day-to-day life. When we were five, we learned a short meditation technique that could be practiced with the eyes open, making it accessible to young children. We practiced this technique as part of our curriculum through all of grade school. By the time we reached high school, our technique had advanced into one hour of sitting with the eyes closed twice daily. Although neither of us consider ourselves Hindu, growing up in this environment we were exposed to and practiced many principles of Hinduism. These practices included everything from traditional eastern astrology (Jyotish) to Ayur-Vedic medicine and Indian architectural principles (Stapatya Veda). Our unusual upbringing provided a unique insight into Buddhist and Hindu traditions. However, this knowledge had traveled thousands of miles to reach the Midwestern United States, and was undoubtedly a convoluted form of its original source.

As we have grown older and gained an outside perspective on our home community, we have become interested in the distinctions between the principle and practices taught in Iowa and those taught in their more original form in Southeast Asia and India. After graduating from high school we both traveled separately to India where we had the opportunity to explore the roots of the Hindu tradition. This gave us a unique perspective on our own community, exposing us to the source of the Hindu knowledge we had grown up with. Since that time, the urge to explore the parallels of our community to Buddhism

have become increasingly intriguing to both of us. The sections which follow, explain the individual paths that have prepared us for a venture into Buddhist society and its subsequent expression.

I became particularly aware of the connections between my own beliefs and Buddhism while taking visiting professor Jim Moore's class on Buddhism and Contemporary Poetry. The final project for this class, which involved incorporating one Buddhist poem, the teachings of Shunryu Suzuki and my personal experience, brought to light many parallels between the philosophy I was raised with and Buddhist thought. Since then I have continued to explore Buddhism in English literature (my major), through Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and other American writers who apply Buddhism to the central themes of their work. Because my primary relationship with Buddhism has been through literature, I have come to see a strong link between the two. This has inspired in me the idea of combining the study of literature with Buddhism through creative writing.

The Buddhist principle of Beginner's mind is particularly relevant to stream of consciousness writing, because both involve starting with a clear mind and allowing life to unfold. My experience in keeping journals while traveling to India, Italy, and Costa Rica has made me familiar with this spontaneous style and taught me to respect the power it creates. The magazine travel writing class I took freshman year taught me to harness this raw power and transform it into a coherent article. The Literary Non-Fiction class I took the following year taught me to craft articles produced in this fashion into more professional, literary works. The synthesis of skills learned in these classes and my exploration of Buddhism leads me to this project.

I have had a passion for creative writing since my senior year of high school. This passion has expressed itself in many mediums, however non-fiction has remained my favorite genre. While at CC I have been able to pursue this passion in the Literary Non-Fiction and Magazine Travel Writing classes I spoke of earlier. I have also had the opportunity to publish in *The Cipher*, *The Catalyst*, and *Leviathan*, as well as work as an editor for *The Catalyst*. Despite the benefits of these extra curricular activities, I have found it difficult to fit into the poetry, fiction, or standard tracks of the English major. For this reason, my life within the department has remained in perpetual flux, landing me eventually in the regular English track. While I am excited to undergo the activity of literary exploration in senior seminar, I am disappointed that no part of my major will include a final creative writing project. The execution of this project as an unofficial creative writing capstone will supplement my senior seminar and serve to round out my experience in the English major.

My project will begin by documenting my time spent in Myanmar through a traveling journal, in which the writing manifests in whatever form appropriate to each situation I encounter. Upon returning to campus I will synthesize these insights, stories, clips of memory, poems, and other written snapshots into a cohesive piece of literary non-fiction. The aim of this piece is to encapsulate my impression of Buddhist culture in Northern

Myanmar by combining the outer experience of a uniquely isolated culture with the inner experience of mediation. Once completed, this piece will be presented to the campus community through the Leviathan student publication. I have spoken with the writing editor, Devon Frye; he is enthusiastic about the piece and prepared to run it in the first issue of second semester. This experience will better prepare me for a possible future in the writing industry.

Upon arrival at Colorado College I met a student named Nathaniel Popik. Soon after befriending him, I learned that he had spent seven months in northern Thailand and was consistently practicing a form of Buddhist meditation. After speaking with Nathaniel and many others about their experiences, I found myself very interested in comparing my meditation—where one puts subtle intention of thought on a mantra—to Buddhist meditation, which is more discipline oriented. I became interested in this comparison, not in an effort to figure out which meditation is best, but to simply understand the techniques of Buddhist meditations and the philosophies behind them. Then, I began seeing many parallels between the “ideal” lifestyle encouraged in my hometown of Fairfield, to the altruistic life or “dharma” of a Buddhist monk.

As my interest towards Buddhism was escalating, I was enrolled in John Simon’s Introduction to Film class—the first step towards my minor in film studies. In this class we spent time studying the film “Seven Samurai”, by the famous Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa. The film shows the importance of discipline, loyalty, and devotion in Japan during the 16th century. This quality of devotion was very influential in my upbringing, and is still very prominent in my life. Inspired by Kurosawa’s ability to capture emotion and his amazing use of compositional depth, I decided to take my first course in video production. Since then, I have taken three filmmaking classes; have worked as a production intern in New York City, and also as a professional photographer.

With Kurosawa as inspiration, I want to make a film in Myanmar using similar underlying themes as *Seven Samurai* that powerfully captures the dedication imbedded in Buddhism. Portraying the silence of meditation and dynamism of a Buddhist lifestyle is the goal of this project. Using techniques in composition, depth, lighting, and audio that I have acquired in film-making and photography classes, I want to captivate my audience with visuals that show the beauty and grace of rural Myanmar and its people, and more importantly, the incredible respect and devotion that Buddhist monks have for their religion and ancient traditions. I plan on keeping a journal, which could potentially become narration for the film. Although film equipment isn’t allowed in the meditation rooms, the spokesperson for the monastery showed much interest in my academic project and informed me that photography and videography are acceptable in the rest of the monastery.

Upon return to CC, I plan on spending 7th block working independently with John Simons and Tom Sanny editing and finalizing my film project to complete my minor in film studies. I will submit the film into the CC Film Festival scheduled for the first

weekend of eighth block. Evan and I also plan to host a presentation of our trip, sharing our respective projects with the CC community.

Itinerary

We will be arriving in Mandalay, a city known as one of Myanmar's most religious destinations. This city will provide easy access to the mountain town of Pyin U Lwin, home of the Panditarama Shwe Taung Gon Sasana Yeiktha Monastery. We will spend our first twelve days at this monastery participating in a rigorous Buddhist routine with its primary focus on meditation. Once a day, the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw (the head monk) will be giving "Dhamma talks" to all residents of the monastery. We have been in contact with the monastery, and they are happy to accommodate western students who are disciplined and eager to learn about Buddhist teachings. After our time at the monastery we will head north where we will spend our last five days in the remote villages of Hsipaw, Kyanture, and Namshan, where undisturbed temples and payas (Buddhist religious monuments) still exist in their high mountain setting. These last five days will combine our experience of Buddhist meditation with the sights and sounds of rural Myanmar, and provide us with an abundance of images to incorporate in our individual creative works.

We have spoken with Sarah Schultz at the Study Abroad office concerning the safety of our trip. She referred us to the resources she uses when there is debate about the safety of a venture. We looked at the websites for the US Department of State, The Center For Disease Control and Prevention, and The Association For Safe International Road Travel, and found no significant travel advisories for Myanmar. The security rating for Myanmar on the SOS International website is "moderate," putting it in the same risk category as countries such as Mexico, Argentina, and most of Southeast Asia. After indicating some violence in mid September in the northern-most areas of Myanmar along the borders of China and India, the security report stated that travel to Myanmar can proceed, however, foreigners should avoid spending time in public areas that could potentially be targets of attack (hotels, shopping centers, areas of significance). This will not apply in the rural setting where we will be spending our time. We plan on being respectable and cautious while traveling, and are aware of the Burmese political situation. Based on both of our extensive travel experience, we feel that we are prepared for this venture.

Conclusion

While we are not religion majors and do not possess the skill set necessary for intellectual or technical religious comparison, our knowledge, having grown up in a very unique community, enables us to make a specialized comparison between cultures on an experiential level. Our respective training in film-making and creative writing will enable us to capture our perspective on these two cultures and convey what we have learned back to the campus community. By incorporating a more comprehensive understanding of our spiritual life into our senior year, this venture will provide a more rounded, complete experience at Colorado College.

Budget (per person)

Travel

Airplane travel:

-Chicago, IL to Bangkok, Thailand \$1,240.00
Departing—Dec. 26th Returning—Jan. 19th

-Bangkok, Thailand to Mandalay, Myanmar \$200.00
Departing—Dec. 28th Returning—Jan. 17th

Bus travel:

-Mandalay to Pyin U Lwin (return) \$10.00
-Pyin U Lwin to Namshan, Hsipaw, and Kyanture \$15.00

Travel Total: \$1,465.00

Accommodation:

Bangkok, Thailand	(Dec 27 th)	\$20.00
Mandalay, Myanmar	(Dec 28 th)	\$10.00
Pyin U Lwin, Myanmar	(Dec 29 th -Jan 9 th)	free
Namshan, Myanmar		
Hsipaw, Myanmar	(Jan 10 th -Jan 15 th)	\$30.00
Kyanture, Myanmar		
Mandalay, Myanmar	(Jan 16 th)	\$20.00
Bangkok, Thailand	(Jan 17 th -18 th)	\$40.00

Accommodation Total: \$120.00

Food:

12 days at monastery – Free Food
\$10 dollars a day for the other 14 days- 14 days x \$10.00 \$140.00

Food Total: \$140.00

Other Expenses:

Burmese Visa	\$40.00
Airport Departure Tax	\$20.00
4 Video Recorder DV tapes	\$30.00
Travel Insurance	\$100.00
Incidentals	\$200.00

Other Expenses Total: \$390.00

Total Cost Per Person: \$2,115.00

Requested From Venture Grant Committee: \$1,000.00