UNCW UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP
COVER PAGE

APPLICANT NAME: Elizabeth Saunders

MAILING ADDRESS: 56 Yaupon Way
Oak Island, NC 28465

MAJOR: Anthropology

EXPECTED DATE OF GRADUATION: May 2010

TELEPHONE#: (619) 991-3549   **E-MAIL ADDRESS:** ets5524@uncw.edu

DEPARTMENT WHERE YOU PLAN TO WORK: Department of Anthropology

FACULTY ADVISOR NAME: Dr. William Alexander

PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of the Internet on Western Zen and the

Exploration of a Subsequently Formed Digital Subculture

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT NEEDED FOR PRESENTATION: None

For Faculty Advisor:

I have read the proposal and can attest to the project's significance. I have discussed the project with the student and can confirm that the student has written the proposal; that he/she is a rising junior or senior; that he/she has completed at least one semester at UNCW; and that he/she has the ability to complete the project in a timely, conscientious way. I agree to supervise this student in the above project and will be responsible for evaluating the student's performance. I also agree to ensure that a final report on the project's findings be submitted to the Director of CSURF, Dr. Kate Bruce, by the last day of the Spring semester 2009.

Signature: _____

For the Department Chairperson:

I have read this proposal and the necessary support for the applicant is available within our department.

Signature: _____

The Impact of the Internet on Western Zen and the Exploration of a Subsequently Formed Digital Subculture

Elizabeth Saunders

INTRODUCTION:

For Ethnographic Research Methods (ANT445) I selected Kanzeon Zen Center as a microculture to research. Kanzeon, established in 1982, is an international Zen Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. It's campus is comprised of two adjacent single-family homes and an office where Buddhists as well as non-Buddhists practice Zen, meditate, receive teachings, and commune. It is also where retreats are held throughout the year. Genpo Roshi founded Kanzeon and teaches the only form of Western Zen recognized by the Japanese Soto School of Zen. This recognition is important because one of the biggest challenges Western Zen Buddhists face is gaining acceptance and recognition by Eastern Zen Buddhists.(Ostrowski) While conducting research for my ANT445 project, the Internet stood out as being a major tool at Kanzeon in terms of practice, as well as having significant impact on the culture in general. One informant told me that she had progressed slowly in her early practice because she lived in Europe and she was only able to see her teacher, Genpo Roshi, once or twice a year but now that she can contact him via e-mail, she can progress more quickly and further her practice. This personal account is congruent with statistical data presented in 2006 by Ally Ostrowski reporting that 32.6% of Buddhists using the Internet for religious purposes do so because there is not a teacher nearby to

study under. Not only do members of Kanzeon use the Internet to communicate with their teacher, a subculture has been created by the inclusion of the Internet through the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, You-Tube, and Kanzeon's own site Zen Eye. Given the limited timeframe of my project for ANT445, I was unable to research in full the effect the Internet has had on this traditional religious practice, it's value within the culture, or the resulting digital subculture. This research project will allow me to continue and focus my research on that subject.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this research is to discover the impact the Internet has had on a traditional and accepted Western Zen microculture as well as explore the digital subculture created as a result of the incorporation of the Internet. My hypothesis is that the Internet has positively impacted Kanzeon by facilitating easier, as well as global, access to information and teachers. It has also allowed for the creation of a digital subculture, which promotes frequent interaction and support between practitioners and members of Kanzeon who do not permanently reside at Kanzeon and would otherwise have minimal contact with other members of the microculture.

JUSTIFICATION or RATIONALE:

This project is important to the field of Anthropology because it breaks into the new and cutting edge field of Digital Anthropology. In Fall 2009, University

College London will be the first institution to offer a Master's program in Digital Anthropology. While a smattering of Undergraduate and Graduate programs offer a course in Digital Anthropology, the lack of Digital Anthropology programs shows the Anthropological field as a whole has yet to embrace Internet cultures as they do traditional cultures. By studying an accepted traditional culture like Zen Buddhism, which has already been studied by Anthropologists, this research will hopefully help bridge the gap between known or comfortable territory and the foreign territory of digital microcultures.

This research is also important outside of the Anthropological field because a large amount of the research currently being done on Internet users and groups is statistical and focuses on outcomes, such as cult formulation, or some research simply focus on the ease of access to information on various religions. The lack of cultural research is evident by the little relevant research found when looking for background information for this project. By conducting this research I also hope to help breakdown the barrier and negative relationship often formed between digital and traditional cultures in academia as well as in the eyes of the wary everyday Internet user.

METHODS:

In order to conduct my research, I have secured living arrangements next door to Kanzeon and will spend four to six weeks conducting fieldwork during July and August 2009. During this time, one way I plan to collect the data needed for this project is to conduct two or three, 30-45 minute interviews with 7-10

cultural informants. In order to gain information from all perspectives I plan to interview at least one of each of the following Kanzeon members: an unmarried resident and non-resident, a married resident and non-resident, an international resident and non-resident, a monk, a teacher, a member of the office staff, and a digital subculture member. To decide which members of the digital subculture to interview I will cross-reference subculture members with Kanzeon members I have access to for interviews. Some informants will embody more than one of these categories but that will not reduce the number of informants I will interview. I also plan to solicit at least one interview with the head of Kanzeon, Genpo Roshi. During the interviews I plan to ask questions about the Kanzeon culture as a whole but mostly questions directly related to the Internet and digital subculture. I will use ethnosemantic research methods to elicit specific data and language through listing activities and filling in taxonomic paradigms. Also, during my time at Kanzeon I plan to conduct participant-observation during daily and weekly meditations and services, as well as online within the digital subculture. Field notes and transcriptions of interviews will be analyzed to conclude relevant information and will be compiled during Fall 2009 semester. Follow-up interviews and additional participant-observation will be conducted in December 2009 as necessary. The same living arrangements will be available to facilitate fieldwork during December.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRODUCT:

The final product will be presented as a written Ethnography.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Ostrowski, Ally. "Buddha Browsing: American Buddhism and the Internet."

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