COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is designed as a seminar with two primary ambitions. The first is that each member of the seminar achieve a well-informed confidence in discussing the main intellectual, social, cultural, and practical features of the Buddhist tradition. The second ambition is that you develop a sense and style of academic inquiry that will both suit your own individual strengths and interests and engage more general issues of understanding and interpretation in the academic study of religion.

After a short orientation, our reflections will begin thematically with a unit devoted to the “Three Treasures” of Buddhism in both historical and contemporary contexts. We will then shift our attention to a geo-historical/cultural focus, exploring the development of Buddhist ideas and practices “on the ground” as Buddhists encountered and came to accommodate new cultural traditions in other areas of Asia and the world. This part of the course will be framed by readings in Buddhism-the eBook and linked resources within the text as well as the resources at Buddhism Online. After the Fall break, we will turn our attention to two case studies (Forest Recollections and The Zen Monastic Experience) that illuminate in poignant and critical ways many of the issues and ideas that we will have been engaging before the break. The class will be divided into two groups, each of which will be responsible for organizing and leading our discussions of one of these books.

Over the course of the semester, you will also be developing a term project on a topic of your choosing that addresses one or more of these same issues and ideas. (In other words, your project must contribute to our common enterprise.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

1) It goes without saying that you are expected to do the readings for each class in advance of the relevant meeting and are expected to attend all class sessions and contribute actively to class discussions. A quick glance at the class schedule will alert you to the place of each reading in the week’s agenda. You should also make use of Buddhism Online and linked resources embedded in the eBook to supplement the assigned readings. (25%)

2) You are expected to make regular DISCUSSION BOARD contributions. For example, each week I would like each of you to research an answer to one question that the readings have posed for you, and then to reflect on the significance of the answer for our common enterprise. A short summary of your findings should be posted so that we can all benefit from your work, and perhaps follow up on it during class time. (25%)
3) Group work will animate the second half of the semester in particular. Your group will be responsible for meeting with me in advance to discuss the text, assigning the sections of the book the class will pay special attention to, posting a preliminary report on the Discussion Board, and leading discussions of the book. Your grade for group work will be determined by a combination of teacher and peer evaluation. Needless to say, everyone will be expected to read all the assigned readings, whether your group is in charge of presenting it and leading discussions or not. (25%)  

4) You will have the opportunity to write a term paper (12-15 pages of text) exploring some topic that strikes you as interesting and fruitful. I will expect you to follow a rather unforgiving research and writing schedule throughout the course of the semester so that you can be proud of your finished product. We will discuss further details about the term project and the schedule in class. (25%)  

If at any time you don’t understand what is expected, PLEASE DON’T HESITATE TO ASK.