

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES



What's one of the surest ways to understand different cultures? By starting with the world's major religions. That's what Amberjade Taylor realized. As soon as she became aware of the opportunity that religious studies presented, she began making the most of it.

"Just out of curiosity, I took a philosophy of religion course," recalls Amberjade. "That cemented my interest in world religions. I didn't really know what I was getting into, but I liked the material we read and enjoyed the higher-level critical thinking that the professors encouraged – along with the emphasis on discussion. That course was very interactive and very hands on. And the kind of questions that people asked really piqued my intellectual curiosity and made me want to go further."

A year later, Amberjade found herself sitting on the floor of a traditional Ladakhi kitchen in Kashmir. She had come to this remote mountain region of India on a study-abroad course with 11 other students and two College of Charleston professors. "For class," she recalls, "we all sat on rugs with these beautiful brass pots hanging everywhere. That was where our class on Tibetan Buddhism took place. It was really beautiful."

Simply being in physical contact with what she and the other students were studying

was powerful, Amberjade says. "It wasn't just one-dimensional, flat, on the page of a book. It was right in front of us. We touched murals that are thousands of years old. We got to climb over rocks on a pilgrimage route that people make every year. We interacted with the locals in pretty much every aspect of what we were doing, and talked with them about their beliefs."

For her, the best part of this major is the religious studies faculty. "I feel wholly supported. All the professors have a strong grasp of what they're working on, and they're able to integrate that into their courses. So you're not getting just a broad, generic survey of world religions. You're getting specific stories, specific projects, and they're being connected or you're being asked to connect them. It's not a passive environment at all, and I really like that."

## COLLEGE of CHARLESTON

The religious studies faculty support a curriculum focused on the cross-cultural analysis of religious beliefs, practices and institutions, both past and present. Our outlook is comparative; it doesn't promote any specific religious tradition to the exclusion of others. Our faculty includes specialists in the world's major religions, and they work closely with students in class, through independent studies, research projects and internships. The flexible curriculum enables students to explore diverse cultures and religions, while developing important tools for understanding and interpreting these world views critically.

### Facts

Recent graduates have entered careers in medicine, education, counseling and journalism.

Recent courses have included Religion and Ecology; Myth, Ritual and Symbol; Religion and Film.

### Opportunities

A required senior seminar has produced varied studies, including "Death and the Afterlife in Native American Religions," "Voodoo and the Media," and "Women's Rights in Islam."

Students have been able to take religious studies courses with College faculty during summer study abroad in India and China.