In this seminar we will take a critical yet sympathetic view of a wide range of religious traditions, including Native American, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, Jewish, and Christian. This will require that we allow ourselves both to identify with and to maintain our distance from each of the traditions covered. We propose to begin by raising questions about the very nature of religion and religious experience, and then explore textual roots and fundamental concerns, looking for basic structural similarities as well as significant differences. We will not be experts on World Religions after taking this course, but we will be more sensitive to the kinds of issues at stake in the study of religion, and more familiar with the origins and evolutions of today's living religions, both Eastern and Western. No attempt will be made to validate, rank or place a value these traditions, but rather to understand them as aspects of culture and drivers of human behavior.

In this interdisciplinary seminar we will read primary materials, meaning for the most part the actual sacred texts of the traditions being discussed. This means that we must be prepared to read some challenging materials about which people have been arguing for thousands of years. There will be no easy answers, and in fact one of the goals of the class is to muddy the water, and resist the pull of superficial and overgeneralized caricatures. We will strive to develop nuance and subtlety. It is important that all participants remain open-minded and critical, especially when dealing with traditions with which they personally identify.