Theological education in a Christian institution is no longer complete (if indeed it ever was) without consideration of the majority of persons in the world who follow different religious traditions. Although we cannot do a just inquiry into these historic faith traditions in a single semester, we are able to begin an exploration. This class will study major religious movements from our ever-shrinking world, anticipating the students will continue to investigate these faithful persons with whom we share the planet long after the semester concludes.

This class will not be a comparative religion class. We will attempt to explore each tradition on its own terms, immersing ourselves in the teachings, beliefs, and scriptures of each individually. The class aims to introduce students to the basic ideas of each faith tradition, to learn some of the history and foundational tenets, and to recognize the legitimacy of those who follow them. In addition, students of the Christian faith may hope to expand their understanding of others, especially into areas of religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue, crucial ingredients for moving toward peace in the 21st century. An important admission: we cannot hope to learn enough to understand followers of any tradition in just a week or two of study, but we can pledge ourselves to be open to learning what we can and to welcome these new ideas. A final and continuing goal of the class is thus to introduce students to resources which they can use into the future, allowing them to continue learning about these important religious traditions.

Class sessions will consist of lectures, discussions of readings, and student presentations. Weekly reading assignments will come from the explanatory text and the selections of scriptures. Some weeks, students will prepare written responses to specific questions raised in the text. In addition, each student will prepare an oral presentation on a particular facet of a religion (of your own choosing), to give in class. However, make sure your topic is approved. An ungraded, 3 page summary of the presentation is due the day of the presentation (no summaries will be accepted except on the day of your presentation). From this presentation, the student will develop an 18-20 page final paper (so it is to your advantage to turn in the ungraded summary for professor’s comments).

Required Texts:
Mary Pat Fisher, Living Religions (seventh edition)
Robert Van Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures

Additional texts on reserve cover various facets of the religions we are studying and should be helpful for your presentation. A list of those titles is available. Your presentations will also include other sources. Supplementary on-line material from scholarly sources is encouraged (note: Wikepedia is not considered a scholarly website).

If costs of materials or library hours cause difficulty, please see me.

* * * Please turn off cell phones before class begins.
Grades, Assignments, and Expectations
Let’s agree to come to class prepared each week. If you must miss a class, please inform the professor in advance. Weekly class participation is an essential part of the education process.

Requirements for written work: In an effort to grade fairly, all written work needs to be in 12 pt, Times New Roman, with standard margins. No cover sheets are necessary. You are encouraged to submit papers on recycled paper.

3-4 page paper answering assigned question on Hinduism
3-4 page paper answering assigned question on Buddhism

30%

3-4 page paper answering assigned question on Chinese religions
3-4 page paper answering assigned question on Islam

20%

Weekly participation in class discussion of reading material (Note: discussion should show you read the material; extraneous comments will hurt your grade)

Final 18-20 page term paper from your in-class presentation (In-class oral presentation and 3 page summary are ungraded)

January 22  Introduction to a Study of World Religions
Preparation for study, some basic ideas, expectations for the class, introductions, using the texts and text CD.
Sign up for student presentations.

Assignment for next class: Read Fisher, chapter 2 (you may want to skim chapter 1, but it is not necessary); James Treat, Around the Sacred Fire, p. 1-35 [on reserve].

Jan 29   Traditional Religions: Focus – Native Americans
Considering Native American religious traditions (past expressions and modern concerns); Because there is no student presentation today, class discussion will be particularly important. Make sure presentation topic is approved before leaving class today.

Assignment for next class: Read scripture text, chapter 2 (note: class discussion will be on scripture texts, so you may want to reflect on questions on page 62); Fisher, chapter 3.

February 5  Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma)
Considering Hinduism – history, major tenets and texts, developments through the millennia. Class discussion of scripture ideas.

Assignment for next class: Prepare 3-4 page written response to UUDiscussionUU question 1, Fisher, page 119. View Hinduism videos through your text CD.
Feb 12

Hinduism foci – Gandhi; Hindu Nationalism
Turn in 3-4 page paper responding to question 1, Fisher, page 119.
Considering Hinduism in the 21st century world; modern manifestations.

Student presentation: ______________________________;
Class discussion on Hinduism in today’s world. What did you learn?

Assignment for next class: Read scripture text, chapter 3 (note: class discussion will be on scripture texts, so you may want to reflect on questions on page 107); Fisher, chapter 5.

Feb 19

Buddhism
Considering Buddhism – history, major tenets and texts, developments through the millennia and around the world; major divisions; missionary motivation and activities. Class discussion of scripture ideas.


Feb 26

Reading week – no class
(You may want to read ahead in Chinese religions)

March 5

Buddhism foci – Nhat Hahn; Tibet; His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Turn in 3-4 page paper responding to Review question 2, Fisher, p181
Considering Buddhism in the 21st century world; modern manifestations.

Student presentation: ______________________________;
Student presentation: ______________________________;
Class discussion on Buddhism in today’s world. What did you learn?

Assignment for next class: Read scripture text, chapters 6 and 7 (note: class discussion will include scripture texts, so you may want to reflect on questions, page 160 and 179); Fisher, chapter 6. View Confucian and Daoist videos through your text CD.

Mar 12

Chinese Religions – Confucius, Lao-tzu, and Buddhism
Considering the philosophical and religious traditions of China; Taoist and Confucian responses to a world like ours; ritualistic manifestations; trying to figure out how Communism fit in.

Student presentation: ______________________________;
Student presentation: ______________________________;
Class discussion on philosophic basics, as well as scripture texts; Confucianism and Taoism: What did you learn?

Assignment for next class: Prepare 3-4 page response to professor’s question on Chinese religion. Read scripture text, chapters 10 & 11; Fisher, chapters 8 & 9. View videos through your text CD. Since you are probably familiar with much of this material, it should read fairly easily (and quickly). As you read, think how strangers to Judaism and Christianity would read it.
Mar 19 **Biblical Religions – Judaism and Christianity**
Considering the history and major ideas of Judaism and Christianity; what are the most crucial concepts; major divisions; biblical faith in the 21st century.
Class discussion on how we present the faith to the world; does familiarity breed contempt? Can we see through new eyes? How does our study of our faith tradition open our understanding of others’? What have you learned?

**Assignment for next class:** Read scripture text, chapter 12 (since the discussion will cover scripture, you may want to reflect on the questions on page 325); Fisher, chapter 10.

Mar 26 **Islam**
Considering the history and major ideas of Islam; the role of Muhammad; thinking about the motivation of missionary religions (Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam)

Student presentation: ________________________________________

Class discussion on scripture. What is distinct about the Qur’an?

**Assignment for next class:** Prepare 3-4 page paper of UU Discussion question 1, Fisher, page 433. View Islam videos through your text CD. You may want to read something by Malcolm X and/or Elijah Muhammed.

April 2 **Muslim focus – Modern Divisions**

Turn in 3-4 page paper on Discussion question 1, Fisher, page 433.
Learning the historic major divisions. Considering what North American Christians need to know. Who are the Black Muslims?

Student presentation: ________________________________________;

Student presentation: ________________________________________

Class discussion on how even this basic study may have changed your thinking about Islam. What did you think before? What have you learned?

**Assignment for class April 23:** Read and bring some recent publication about Islam (an article from the newspaper, The Christian Century, a Muslim publication, a conservative Christian magazine). Be prepared to summarize the article in class discussion and share in conversation about what each article is claiming about Christianity (if anything) and Islam. (You may want to make copies for classmates) You may want to glance at chapter 11 in World Religions in American, ed. Jacob Neusner (on reserve).
Be working on final paper.

Apr 9 **Easter recess – no class**

Apr 16 **Guest lecturer**
Apr 23  

**Muslim focus – 21st Century possibilities**

Considering what are the most significant obstacles and promises for Muslim-Christian relations; Why does it seem there is a world-wide, cultural clash between Jews, Christians, and Muslims? What is it about? 

Class discussion: sharing your articles and their claims. What might the future hold? What is your response to these articles? 

**Assignment for next class:** Be working on final paper. In light of your theological education so far, reflect on what you have learned in this class about people of other faiths. Class discussion will revolve around what our responsibilities are within our Christian faith community and our society at large.

Apr 30

**Responsible relations: Your lead in our inter-religious world**

Considering the responsibilities of those with theological educations. What does it mean to be a leader in a local congregation (ordained or not)? What should we require of ourselves? What might God think? Want? Yearn for? 

Class discussion: Reflecting on each of the religious traditions we have studied, what is expected of us? What can we do? How can we balance religious tolerance and the call to share the faith? What is the purpose of the church? What are we doing in the world? How can we balance our responsibility to teach the faith in our local congregation and our duty to be involved in justice and peace making in the world?

May 7

**Final paper due by 2:15. Turn in to professor in room 239. If she is not in, turn in to faculty secretary, Joyce Krauser.**