“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.”

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.