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## **Philosophy students connect Eastern religions to their lives**

**PLATTEVILLE, Wis. – Stephanie Prochaska, a senior double majoring in Spanish and international studies, and Alexandra Mines, a senior chemistry major with an emphasis in criminalistics-DNA, recently helped raise student awareness about how their chosen topics for a short essay illustrated Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. These are among the religions and philosophies studied in Major Traditions in Eastern Religions, a philosophy course taught by Dr. Mary Lenzi, associate professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.**

In “The Origins of Chutes and Ladders,” Prochaska discussed the controversy of Hindu or Islamic origins regarding Chutes and Ladders, a popular children’s board game, and the religious connections with the game. She also discussed the iconography of the classic game, in which the game board follows the players’ life cycles until they reach the end of their lives, whether it be the Islamic or Hindu afterlife.

“I really enjoyed being able to bring a religious context to a game so well-known,” said Prochaska. “In society, sometimes we forget where things really come from. I am hoping that students like me choose to learn about the world in this way and get down to the very base meaning of things, no matter how insignificant they may seem.”

In “The Symbol to Bridge Philosophy and Religion,” Mines conveyed the spiritual significance and use of the mandala in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. She also discussed the mandala made by Buddhist monks, whose construction began in New York City, New York, three months after 9/11 and was finished in Washington, D.C. in January 2012. It was preserved in Washington, D.C. for a short period.

**Mines explained that in Buddhism, the mandala symbolizes the universe in which nothing is permanent so the mandala was then dismantled and dispersed in the Potomac River to aid in the nation's "journey of healing." "As mandalas are appropriated into modern society, I hope the information from my presentation helps other students understand more fully what a mandala represents and how to use it properly," said Mines.**

**"Students are increasingly turning to individual experiences and culture to understand academic texts and content, something I encourage and discuss with students in preparing for their course assignments," said Lenzi. "In the case at hand, this was directly borne out in Prochaska's and Mines' class presentations, which emerged from their own background stories. Although faculty of different generations offer bridges and rhetorical strategies to connect philosophical or sacred texts to students' lives and times, our courses are enhanced when students and peers make their own bridges, in turn, making teaching and learning integrated personally into the college experience."**

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