As a field or discipline Transpersonal Psychology has primarily focused on exceptional human experiences, often described as spiritual, and their correlates. In this course we will consider particular events themselves (experience), theoretical models of consciousness and development (interpretation), and the application of the transpersonal in daily life (integration). Your own research will give a chance for you explore a specific area of your interest and teach the class about it.

The class will operate as a seminar, in which discussion and presentation is primary, and as an experiential human science laboratory in which we experiment with and explore various techniques and ideas. We will base our inquiry in empirical (experiential) psychology and cut across a variety of disciplines (religious studies, anthropology, consciousness studies, philosophy, ecology, etc.).

Objectives include: 1.) Knowledge of several transpersonal theories 2.) Ability to integrate and critique general theoretical concepts within a specific area of your choosing 3.) Ability to apply various approaches of inquiry 4.) Develop written and oral presentation skills.

Evaluation of these objectives include: a midterm paper and brief presentation on a Transpersonal Knower of your choice, periodic assigned “free-writes” on readings, demonstrated competence through seminar discussion and oral presentation of assigned material, completion of a research paper and brief oral summary on a related topic of your choosing.

Texts: to be explained in class.

Background/ Questions
Maslow helped to instantiate the discipline of Transpersonal Psychology in the 1960’s and described it as the Forth Force, launched from the burgeoning humanistic and overlapping human potential movement of that time and expanding the reach of psychology beyond the “institutionalized underestimation of human potential”, as Jacob Needleman described the predominant psychologies of the day. Maslow, Grof, Wilber, a renewed interest in Jung, along with many other influential thinkers, helped to develop the contours of the discipline. In many respects this brought spirituality into the realm of legitimate (though at the margins) empirical inquiry and helped to explicate and normalize hunger for meaning and transcendence. Arguably William James’ *Variety of Religious Experiences*, marks an early legitimizing of the domain and heralds Bucke’s *Cosmic Consciousness*, Huxley’s *Perennial Philosophy*, Stace’s *Mysticism*, consideration of positive exemplars in general and much more. James’ radical empiricism also helps to challenge the orthodoxy of worldview and the danger of scientism, so insidious in modernist empiricism especially when applied to humans. Challenges of this field have been especially about both integrating psychologies’ different views of consciousness and these different means of exploring it. How do different psychologies fit together and enrich understanding? How can we best approach this?

Of course interest in extraordinary experiences and expanded capacities ranging from: mystical encounters to visionary dreams, near-death to pre-birth, unconventional capacities to enlightenment have been a subject of fascination (and sometimes danger for those who challenged convention) across culture and time. It seems there have always been those who have
considered and experienced these “further (sic) reaches of human nature.” Though separated by time, discipline, and culture, we can find resonance through relevant perspectives and familiar experiences in this wisdom stream—medieval mystic Meister Ekhart, Jesuit sage and paleoanthropologist Teilhard de Chardin, quantum physicist Bohm, Indian mystic Aurobindo, American poet Whitman—among many other kin. Does the variety of voices speak to an underlying universality of both quest and experience? Additionally, though sages and saints—those “high-end” exemplars of one sort or another—may be easier to recognize, the field also has the capacity to both normalize the extraordinary and see the extraordinary in the everyday. Is some part of these ways of being or knowing (e.g., compassion, creativity, inspiration, empathy, etc.) available to any of us, even to children? If so, what are these capacities or qualities? Can they be cultivated? What does all this say about spiritual development and how does this fit with other streams of development such as cognition?

The word trans-personal implies going through or beyond the personal, the self. As such, the subtext of this entire inquiry is, at least in part, the nature of transcendence and/or immanence. Are we to transcend the self or is this about infusing another dimension or other capacities into the self? What does it mean to expand the self? What is the self we are working with? Is there a self and a Self and if so what is their relationship, respective roles, developmental arc? Is there a centerpoint or a ground of being to be found? Or is it more useful to talk about transpersonal processes to be activated or tapped? Where does creativity fit in? What does it mean to be “awake”?

Alongside this telos of growth, transpersonal experience is sometimes accompanied by significant clinical considerations. That is, there may be an unraveling of the self and difficulty finding new ground to stand on, a lack of understanding or support, difficulty in integrating, fixation on the experience and more leading to a “spiritual emergency.” In addition, the quest for spirituality or spiritual experience itself may be a source of “spiritual materialism” or “spiritual bypassing.” What is the shadow of this light seeking? How do we integrate transpersonal experience? How do we help?

Cross cultural exposure has challenged presuppositions, opened perspective and helped to bring ideas together. In fact, the east-west dialogues in mid-20th century really shaped the field. Concepts from other and often ancient traditions may provide fresh understanding. For example, the thousands of years of Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Shamanic, and other introspective psychology and related philosophy have often described transpersonal phenomena and have provided conceptual superstructure to build understanding. The Shinto notion of Kami—the animating life in all things—is consistent with and instructive toward the reenchantment of the natural world found in deep ecology and related movements; the Taoist sense of life force and harmony provides alternative to the values of domination and Social Darwinism; Vedanta expresses the multi-dimensionality of being, captured, for example, in the contemporary art of Alex Grey. Shamanic cultures rely on polyphasic knowing which is at odds with the nearly exclusive legitimization of western monophasic rationality but consistent with interest in dreams, meditation, psychedelics, flow states and the like that have contemporary cache and as such speak a hunger for something beyond the self, beyond rationality, and beyond materialistic reduction. Add to this the profound implications of quantum mechanics as well as other research and philosophy that challenges the prevailing Newtonian/Cartesian worldview, and we find ourselves in a culture that is in the midst of a foundational shift in how we see the world, one that has profound practical, epistemic and ethical implications.

In the Homeric tradition, to study a thing we first define it precisely and move forward from there. In the Hebraic style we circle around a thing/idea again and again, perhaps from different
angles in order to know it as best we can, renewing and revising as we go. In the study of the transpersonal we may need both approaches. The source of data for the field has, for the most part, been lived, subjective experience. (Hybrid approaches such as neurophenomenology offer an expansion of methods.) Self-reports of internal processes have proven to be rich and resonating notes that have been articulated, interpreted, compared, and composed. The phenomenological data sounds through the self-as-instrument and thus there is constant question of what is being heard/ seen and who is doing the hearing/seeing. “We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.” The entire nature of experience, objectivity and also ontology is called to question. “How far can we trust and develop perception and interpretation?” “Is experience state dependent?” “What other disciplines (e.g., the arts/ aesthetics) or approaches may provide a way in?” Additionally, the entire project seems paradoxical: “How can dualistic consciousness begin to understand non-dual? (If such a thing exists.)” “Can the self recognize the Self?” “Is paradox the very nature of this inquiry?”

Today, the exploration of human consciousness is at the very forefront of interest from neuroscience to artificial intelligence, from meditation to psychedelics, from happiness to spirituality, from hard science to self-help. The questions that were the origin of both philosophy and religion—“What are we here for?” “What is life about?” “What is real?” “Who am I?”—remain underpinning considerations of the study of consciousness. In many ways, these same fundamental questions are both the prompting for these explorations at the margins, and the outcome of such transpersonal experiences. This quest is evolving more comprehensive and integrative maps of consciousness that attempt to explain how all this—matter and mind, society and the individual—come together. How do ancient wisdom, modernist science, systems thinking, post-modern reflection, and “everything” else fit together?

This field is inevitably personal, often describing the most intimate and important moments and ways of being of a life. It speaks of awe, wonder, mystery, and possibility. Heschel declares that “the beginning of wisdom is wonder, and the beginning of wonder is awe.” The arts and other fields speak of such beauty and intimacy too. The challenge of this as a social or human science is to bring a kind of aesthetic sensibility and appreciative inquiry alongside a scientific, cultural, clinical, critical, philosophical, multi-disciplinary approach that honors experience without making it so precious as to be kept untouchable, or so codified as to become disenchanted; this requires an approach that creates safe space welcoming the inner life while not being afraid to respectfully and playfully engage it, question it, unpack it, and dialogue with it.

In the end and for this topic, like any meaningful inquiry, the “take-away” may be what any of this can tell us about life, about your life and mine.

Please review the following link explaining university-wide policies
http://tinyurl.com/UWGSSyllabusPolicies