

Mindfulness and Modern Life

HCOL 40023-655

Spring 2020



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1) Course meetings: HEADING

Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:50 a.m.
Scharbauer 2011

2) Instructor information: HEADING

Andrew O. Fort
Office: Beasley Hall 315
Office phone: 817.257.7440
Email: a.fort@tcu.edu
Office hours:
MTWR 11:00-11:45 a.m. or by appointment
Website: PERSONAL.TCU.EDU/AFORT

Mark Dennis
Office: Beasley Hall 309
Office phone: 817.257.6441
Email: m.dennis@tcu.edu
Office Hours:
T&R: 11:00-noon
W: 4:00-5:00 p.m.
Website: contemplativefrogs.com

Feel free to see us before or after class, or by appointment.

3) Course Description: HEADING

What does it mean to live a mindful life today? What kind(s) of thinking and practice does such a life entail? How would it fit into a busy college student's life? We will address these questions through both theory and practice in this course. We will range from traditional Buddhist ideas to modern science, from classic liberal arts reflection to contemporary mindfulness practices. We will consider how practice and reflection influence one another, and how we engage in personal relationships, society, and the natural world. Be prepared to explore (and challenge) common notions of self through our inquiry.

After beginning most classes with a 10-minute meditation, we will discuss the day's reading material. We will then generally do another practice and end with a "circle of discussion." We will also have guest speakers in some classes.

Throughout this course, we ask you to be open and flexible. We may need to make some minor modifications to the schedule and such as we move through the semester. If we do make changes, we'll make sure to announce them in class and notify you by email.

a) Quotations:

The following quotations capture some of the key issues we will take up over the course of the semester as we attempt to be more mindful in a distracted age.

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character, and will... An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.
(William James, *The Principles of Psychology*¹)

Education, in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society, must be based upon experience – which is always the life experience of some individual... There is no discipline in the world so severe as the discipline of experience subjected to the tests of intelligent development and direction...
(John Dewey, *Education and Experience*)

Now the blindness in human beings... is the blindness with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves.
(William James: *On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings*)

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities,
but in the expert's there are few.
(Shunryu Suzuki: *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*)

b) Objectives - leading to Course Outcomes:

Through short reaction papers, various exercises, and a final reflection paper, you will be assessed on your ability to:

- understand theory about and practice of mindfulness and related concepts.
- undertake a variety of contemplative practices.
- comprehend multiple ways of mind-body knowing.
- read critically, think analytically, speak persuasively, and write effectively through the description, analysis, and evaluation of mindfulness teachings and practices.
- perform self-exploration; existential inquiry is an inevitable component of this course.

¹ The first James and Dewey quotations were taken from Brown University's Contemplative Studies Initiative web site at: <https://www.brown.edu/academics/contemplative-studies/about>.

c) Our expectations for your investment and participation:

- Read, think about, and engage with the assignments before class.
- Be prepared with questions or discussion points about the assignments (this will enhance what we call “active learning.”)
- No laptops, cellphones, tablets, etc. You might want to keep a course journal outside of class. See course biosheet and etiquette document.
- Attend all classes. (Come on time, but come even if late; if you arrive late, please wait until we’ve finished the meditation to enter the classroom. See attendance policy below).
- Participate in all the in-class exercises. If you have a question about the exercises or assignments—ask one or both of us.
- Bring the relevant readings to class.
- All topics are open and civil, respectful discourse is foundational.
- Be ready to listen and speak, think, question, and practice.

d) Attendance:

A large portion of course content will reside in the practice and reflection we will do during, or, as a result of, class time. You need to be present to get course content. If you are absent, please make sure to document the reason for the absence by sending us an email and, where appropriate, getting a note from the TCU Health Center or Doctor’s office that states that you have been seen/had an appointment; or, requesting communication be sent to us from the Office of the Dean of Student Life. Bottom line: communicate with one of us. We will work with you. **Note:** If you miss classes and/or class assignments, we may need to schedule a meeting to discuss how to make up missed work. See how attendance is graded in Section 5 below.

4) Required books: READING

Hahn, Thich Nhat. *Being Peace*. (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2005). ISBN: 188837540X.

Harris, Dan. *10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works—A True Story* (Dey Street Books, Reprint 2019). ISBN: 978-0062917607.

Wilson, Jeff. *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2014). ISBN: 9780199827817.

Holly Rogers, *The Mindful Twenty-Something: Life Skills to Handle Stress...and Everything Else*. (NewHarbinger, 2016). ISBN: 9781626254893.

There will also be readings you can find on D2L and online. We will use D2L extensively throughout the semester to post readings, upload papers, post grades, and so on. It is crucial, therefore, to become comfortable with the platform early in the semester. If you have difficulties, contact Mark via email: m.dennis@tcu.edu.

5) Grading:

a) Grading scale: HEADING

A	93-100	C:	73-76.99
A-	90-92.99	C-:	70-72.99
B+	87-89.99	D+:	67-69.99
B	83-86.99	D:	63-66.99
B-	80-82.99	D-:	60-62.99
C+	77-79.99	F:	59.99 & below

You may check in with us about your course standing at any time.

b) Grading distribution: HEADING

Buddhism precepts exercise	7.5%
“I am That” paper	7.5%
Socially-engaged mindfulness paper	10%
Weekly practice reflections	15%
Weekly reading reflections	15%
Outside activities (6 x 2.5%)	15%
Final reflection paper	20%
Attendance (see below)	10%

c) Attendance: HEADING

Please note that coming to class late will disrupt the short meditation that will start right when class begins. If you come to class late, you will be given half an absence.

Absences:

0-1	100%	6	80%
2	96%	7	76%
3	92%	8	72%
4	88%	9	68%
5	84%	≥10	etc.

d) Assignments: HEADING

Instructions for each assignment described below are available on D2L. Please remember to pay careful attention to the Rules for Formatting and Written work that are also available on D2L. Please note that you will lose 5% points from your grade for each 24-hour period an assignment is late.

-Buddhism precepts exercise. Worth **7.5% of your final grade.**

-“I am That” essay. Worth **7.5% of your final grade.**

-Socially-engaged mindfulness paper. Worth **10% of your final grade.**

-You will be asked to write two short reflection papers each week that are due by 8:30 a.m. each Tuesday: one on the reading and one on your mindfulness practice. Each reflection should be between 250- and 350-words. Worth **30% of your final grade.**

-In addition, you will be asked to complete six outside activities during the semester, which include two film reviews (see list below), two podcasts (see list below), and two Contemplative Studies events: the meditation retreat (we will discuss date and time in class) and Moore Symposium Keynote address by Richard Davidson from the University of Wisconsin's Center for Healthy Minds on Wednesday, March 25 at 7:30 p.m. (**note:** if you have a conflict with one of these events, we will work with you to find another you can attend). **Worth 15% of your final grade.**

-Final Reflection Paper at course end. Worth **20% of your final grade.**

6) Disability Statement: HEADING

If you have a problem affecting your course participation, or must miss class, let us both know via email. Also, if you have a disability, which may affect your class performance, please get in touch with the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Service in the Center for Academic Services so that you invoke the support services of the university and are able to inform us during the first week of class. Here are some policy statements:

Disability Statement approved Fall 2007 by the Undergraduate Council / Revised Summer 2011: Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Services located in Sadler Hall, 1010. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at (817) 257-6567.

Adequate time must be allowed to arrange accommodations and accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the academic term for which they are seeking accommodations. Each eligible student is responsible for presenting relevant, verifiable, professional documentation and/or assessment reports to the Coordinator. Guidelines for documentation may be found at http://www.acs.tcu.edu/disability_documentation.asp.

Students with emergency medical information or needing special arrangements in case a building must be evacuated should discuss this information with their instructor/professor as soon as possible.

7) Academic Misconduct: HEADING

Academic Misconduct (Sec. 3.4 from the Student Handbook) –Any act, such as cheating or plagiarism, that violates the academic integrity of the institution is considered academic misconduct. The procedures used to resolve suspected acts of academic misconduct are available in the offices of Academic Deans and the Office of Campus Life and are listed in detail in the Undergraduate Catalog (Student Policies>Academic Conduct Policy Details).

Resources for Students-

We take seriously your well-being and urge you to let us know if you are, for any reason, struggling. We will help in any way we can but will refer you to professionals on campus when we cannot. The following are campus resources you can use for help with issues that may arise during the semester, ranging from mental health to writing.

Campus Life (257-7926, Sadler Hall 2006); TCU Library (257-7117); Center for Academic Services (257-7486, Sadler Hall 1022); Writing Center (257-7221, Reed 419); Student Development Services (257-7855, BLUU 2003); Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (257-7830, Jarvis Hall), and Counseling, Testing, and Mental Health Center (257-7863, Brown Lupton Health Center).

Non-discrimination Statement-

TCU is committed to providing a diverse and supportive learning community that values the dignity and respect of the individual and has a non-discrimination policy that reflects this philosophy. Disrespectful behaviors or comments addressed towards any group or individual, regardless of race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, ability, or any other difference is deemed unacceptable in this class, and will be addressed immediately by the professor. TCU's commitment to these attitudes and behavior have been embedded into the core curriculum through the development of DEI—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Although the process is still being worked out, here is a brief statement about its vision:

What DEI Means at TCU

Diversity reflects a broad range of identities and perspectives.

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Genders
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Socioeconomic status
- Nationality
- Religious beliefs
- Age
- Disability status
- Political perspective

Greater diversity produces more robust, creative, and relevant outcomes in scholarly processes, academic and social programming, and community engagement.

Equity is creating opportunities for equal access and success for historically underrepresented populations. It requires proactive steps to address and transform the current culture.

Inclusion exists when all members of a community feel welcome, respected, and valued regardless of their social identities and when all experiences and cultures are validated and cherished equally. Inclusion requires listening to other viewpoints and embracing differences. Feeling included and connected elevates engagement and a sense of belonging for everyone on campus.

8) D2L Brightspace: [HEADING](#)

As upper level students, we assume you are familiar with D2L. But if you need assistance consult with Mark.

9) Film list: [HEADING](#)

You will be required to watch two films as outside activities during the semester. Select one of the four films listed under “First half of semester films” and complete a 500- to 750-word review by **Thursday, March 5** and submit to the Outside Activity #1: film reflection-1 dropbox. For “Second half of semester film” we will all watch “Kumare.” Please complete a 500- to 750-word review by **Tuesday, April 14** and submit to the Outside Activity #2: film reflection-2 dropbox.

First half of semester films:

Film #1: “Samsara” directed by Ron Fricke and Mark Magidson, 2011 (102 minutes)

Available: TCU Music Library, free on Amazon Prime

Description: “Filmed over nearly five years in twenty-five countries on five continents, and shot on seventy-millimeter film, Samsara transports us to the varied worlds of sacred grounds, disaster zones, industrial complexes, and natural wonders.”

Trailer: [HTTP://WWW.BARAKASAMSARA.COM/SAMSARA/ABOUT](http://www.barakasamsara.com/samsara/about)

Film #2: “Doing Time, Doing Vipassana,” directed by Eilona Ariel and Ayelet Menahemi, 1997 (52 minutes)

Available: on YouTube at: [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=WKXSYV5RISQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKXSYV5RISQ)

Description: “This is the story of an ancient meditation technique named Vipassana, which shows people how to take control of their lives and channel them toward their own good. It is the story of a strong woman named Kiran Bedi, the former Inspector General of Prisons in New Delhi, who strove to transform the notorious Tihar Prison and turn it into an oasis of peace. But most of all it is the story of prison inmates who underwent profound change, and who realized that incarceration is not the end but possibly a fresh start toward an improved and more positive life. These people have shown that reform can work if it is self-reform. Their success has been so dramatic that recently the Indian Government decided to apply Vipassana in all the country’s prisons. Other countries are becoming interested as well. The filmmakers spent about two weeks inside Tihar Central Prison in New Delhi and Baroda Jail in the Indian state of Gujarat. They interviewed inmates and jail officials, and filmed in places rarely accessible to film crews, whether Indian or foreign.”

Trailer: [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=K4LUDQ3LIFW](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4LUDQ3LIFW)

Before watching the film, watch the following clip with one of the directors.

“Vipassana Meditation and Body Sensation,” Eilona Ariel at TEDx Jaffa 2013 (13 minutes).

<https://youtu.be/IXU4KD5RDI>

Film #3: “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring,” directed by Ki-duk Kim, 2003 (103 minutes)

Available: for \$2.99 YouTube rental

Description: “A boy is raised by a Buddhist monk on an isolated floating temple where the years pass like the seasons.”

Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72MFKX4RS8Y>

Film #4: “The Dhamma Brothers,” directed by Andrew Kukura, Jenny Phillips, and Anne Marie Stein, 2008 (76 minutes)

Available: Stream for free through Alexander Street from TCU library web site. If the link below does not work, type the title into the library search bar and follow the links. We will demonstrate in class.

https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C3229240

Description: “East meets West in the Deep South. An overcrowded maximum-security prison—the end of the line in Alabama’s correctional system—is dramatically changed by the influence of an ancient meditation program. Behind high security towers and a double row of barbed wire and electrical fence dwells a host of convicts who will never see the light of day. But for some of these men, a spark is ignited when it becomes the first maximum-security prison in North America to hold an extended Vipassana retreat, an emotionally and physically demanding course of silent meditation lasting ten days. The Dhamma Brothers tells a dramatic tale of human potential and transformation as it closely follows and documents the stories of the prison inmates at Donaldson Correction Facility who enter into this arduous and intensive program.”

Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA8XFeyEM18>

Second half of semester film

Film #5: “Kumare,” directed by Vikram Gandhi, 2011 (84 minutes)

Available: Free on TCU library website through Kanopy streaming service. Search for the film title in the main search bar and follow the links. We will demonstrate in class.

Description: “A documentary about a man who impersonates a wise Indian Guru and builds a following in Arizona. At the height of his popularity, the Guru Kumaré must reveal his true identity to his disciples and unveil his greatest teaching of all.”

Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xvZG6YKUV0>

10) Podcast list: [HEADING](#)

You will be required to listen to two podcasts as outside activities during the semester. Select one of the podcasts listed under “First half of semester podcasts” and complete a 500- to 750-word review by **Thursday, March 5** and submit to the Outside Activity #1: podcast reflection-1 dropbox. You should do the same for those listed under “Second half of semester podcasts” and complete your review by **Tuesday, April 14**. Submit the second review to Outside Activity #2: podcast reflection-2 dropbox.

First half of semester podcasts:

Podcast #1: 10% Happier-#8: Sharon Salzberg, “Real Love”

Released April 13, 2016 (51 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/50324109?AUTOPLAY=TRUE](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/50324109?autoplay=true)

A towering figure in the meditation world, Sharon Salzberg is part of a small group of people who helped bring meditation over from Asia to the United States. Growing up in New York City, Salzberg had a traumatic childhood and was a sophomore in college when an Asian philosophy class she chose sort of on a whim led her to find a personal and positive connection with Buddhist teachings and practices. Today, she is a meditation teacher, the cofounder of Insight Meditation Society and the author of nine books, including best-sellers “Lovingkindness,” “Real Happiness” and “Real Happiness at Work.” Salzberg sat down with Dan Harris to talk about her personal history, her meditation practice and her advice to beginners looking to start practicing.

Podcast #2: 10% Happier-#95: Robert Wright, *Why Buddhism is True*

Released August 25, 2017 (63 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/51239539](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/51239539)

“Progress on the meditation path tends to involve moral progress. You tend to become a better person as well as a happier person... I personally think that you should not be allowed to call yourself enlightened if you’re a jerk,” said Robert Wright, a best-selling author with extensive knowledge on philosophy and religion. Wright, whose new book out now is titled, “Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment,” offers his thoughts (and skepticism) on what it means to achieve true enlightenment and whether mindfulness meditation could change the world.

Podcast #3: 10% Happier-#29: Dr. Richard Davidson

Released August 10, 2016 (67 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/45796142?AUTOPLAY=TRUE](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/45796142?autoplay=true)

Dr. Richie Davidson, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and founder of the Center for Healthy Minds, has been meditating for over 40 years. But it was the Dalai Lama himself who convinced Davidson to dedicate his life to researching the effects of meditation on the brain. Early in his career, Davidson said he “became a closet meditator” and the Dalai Lama “played a major role in me coming out of the closet and encouraging serious scientific research in this area.” Davidson’s team flew in monks from Tibet and Nepal for the study and asked them to meditate while undergoing scans. When they first looked at the scans, Davidson said the results were shocking.

[HEADING](#)

Second half of semester podcasts:

Podcast #4: 10% Happier-#22: Dr. Mark Epstein

Released June 22, 2016 (70 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/44989220?AUTOPLAY=TRUE](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/44989220?autoplay=true)

Buddhist psychiatrist and author Dr. Mark Epstein has for years written about the overlap between Western psychotherapy and Eastern Buddhist philosophies. Epstein sat down with Dan Harris to

talk about the impact meditation can have on the mind, both positive and negative, for those looking for an escape from suffering. He also went deep into the Buddhist concept of the “no-self,” whether Enlightenment can be reached ... and what it might look or feel like. He has written numerous books on these topics, his most recent being, “The Trauma of Everyday Life.” Epstein first discovered meditation in college and one of the “breakthroughs” he said that made the practice click for him happened while he was learning to juggle. “Once I got the three oranges in the air, my mind had to relax in order to keep it going and I understood, ‘Oh yeah, this is what they’re trying to teach me in mediation.’” Before he found meditation, Epstein said he was a very anxious person who worried all the time. Now after practicing meditation for more than 40 years, Epstein said he wouldn’t know what he would be without it.

HEADING

Podcast #5: 10% Happier-#159: Judson Brewer, Unwinding Anxiety

October 30, 2018 (52 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/10-HAPPIER/E/56980155?AUTOPLAY=TRUE](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/10-happier/e/56980155?autoplay=true)

We all suffer from anxiety from time to time. For some, the regular recurrence of anxiety may be the function of a bad habit they have formed, according to mindfulness researcher Dr. Judson Brewer. And like many bad habits, he says, it can be broken. Brewer says the key to breaking out of a worry spiral is understanding how our minds work. He explains how the app he’s created, Unwinding Anxiety, is helping people overcome their struggles with anxiety.

<https://www.judsonbrewer.com/>

<https://www.unwindinganxiety.com/>

HEADING

Podcast #6: 10% Happier-#79: Willoughby Britton, Jared Lindahl—Does Meditation Have a Dark Side?

May 24, 2017 (76 minutes)

[HTTP://WWW.10PERCENTHAPPIER.COM/PODCAST/WILLOUGHBY-BRITTON-JARED-LINDAHL-DOES-MEDITATION-HAVE-A-DARK-SIDE](http://www.10percenthappier.com/podcast/willoughby-britton-jared-lindahl-does-meditation-have-a-dark-side)

Many of us get into meditation because we want to be calmer, less stressed and less yanked around by our emotions, but sometimes there are unwanted effects. Brown University researchers Willoughby Britton, an assistant professor of psychiatry and human behavior, and Jared Lindahl, a visiting assistant professor of religious studies, published a new study today on the wide range of difficult experiences and challenges meditators they interviewed said they faced in their practice.

HEADING

11) Class Schedule: HEADING

Purple indicates paper due dates; orange is for holidays. PDFs of certain readings will appear on D2L under “course readings” according to date.

week 1:	<u>JANUARY 14</u>	<u>JANUARY 16</u>
week 2:	<u>JANUARY 21</u>	<u>JANUARY 23</u>
week 3:	<u>JANUARY 28</u>	<u>JANUARY 30</u>
week 4:	<u>FEBRUARY 4</u>	<u>FEBRUARY 6</u>
week 5:	<u>FEBRUARY 11</u>	<u>FEBRUARY 13</u>
week 6:	<u>FEBRUARY 18</u>	<u>FEBRUARY 20</u>
week 7:	<u>FEBRUARY 25</u>	<u>FEBRUARY 27</u>
week 8:	<u>MARCH 3</u>	<u>MARCH 5</u>
week 9:	<u>MARCH 10</u>	<u>MARCH 12</u>
week 10:	<u>MARCH 17</u>	<u>MARCH 19</u>
week 11:	<u>MARCH 24</u>	<u>MARCH 26</u>
week 12:	<u>MARCH 31</u>	<u>APRIL 2</u>
week 13:	<u>APRIL 7</u>	<u>APRIL 9</u>
week 14:	<u>APRIL 14</u>	<u>APRIL 16</u>
week 15:	<u>APRIL 21</u>	<u>APRIL 23</u>
week 16:	<u>APRIL 28</u>	<u>FINAL EXAM</u>

Note:

We will engage in various contemplative practices throughout the semester. Many of them appear in Holly Rogers, M.D., *The Mindful Twenty-Something: Life Skills to Handle Stress...and Everything Else*. Those exercises are indicated as follows: “(Rogers, page number).” We will explain in class how to do them. Rogers’ book is a sequel to *Mindfulness for the Next Generation: Helping Emerging Adults Manage Stress and Lead Healthier Lives*, which she co-wrote with her colleague Margaret Maytan (we have included one excerpt on scientific studies of the benefits of meditation). Rogers and Maytan, medical doctors affiliated with Duke University, have tried out many of these contemplative practices with medical school students.

We have also assigned mindfulness practices from other sources. We will explain them in class.

Please remember that you should put all technology away before class starts. Our policy on technology is articulated in full in the “biosheet-course etiquette” document.

T-Jan. 14-Week 1

Topic: Course introduction

CLASS SCHEDULE

Discuss:

Look at D2L and discuss course documents (biosheet-course etiquette document due in dropbox of same name before class **Thursday, January 16**). Discuss note taking in class.

Practice:

i) Breath awareness exercise (Rogers, 22) and, if time permits, *metta*, or loving-kindness meditation. You will be required to start the semester doing 5 minutes of breath meditation each day for the first two weeks of class. After that, you should do a minimum of 10 minutes each day. We will introduce different meditation practices. It's important to find one or more that work for you.

Watch (in class): “Author Argues Colleges Focus More on Professional Training Than Transformation,” PBS Newshour September 4, 2013

[HTTP://WWW.PBS.ORG/NEWSHOUR/BB/EDUCATION-JULY-DEC13-TEACHING_09-04/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education-july-dec13-teaching_09-04/)

R-Jan. 16

Topic: Contemplative Studies, the Liberal Arts, and Critical Thinking

CLASS SCHEDULE

Assignment:

i) Andrew O. Fort, “Contemplative Studies and the Liberal Arts,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 2013, 23-32 (D2L)

ii) L. D. Burnett, “Holding On to What Makes Us Human: Defending the humanities in a skills-obsessed university,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 7, 2016 (D2L)

iii) Nicholas Kristof, “Don’t Dismiss the Humanities,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2014 (D2L)

iv) Michael S. Roth, “Beyond Critical Thinking,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 3, 2010 (D2L)

v) Richard A. Lynch, “Rethinking Critical Thinking-Values And Attitudes,” *Dialogic*, February 29, 2004 (D2L)

vi) David Gooblar, “How to Help a Student in a Mental-Health Crisis,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 17, 2018 (D2L)

vii) Tara Parker-Pope, “For the Holidays, the Gift of Self-Care,” NYT, December 10, 2019 (D2L) [HTTPS://WWW.NYTIMES.COM/2019/12/10/WELL/MIND/SELF-CARE-BUDDHISM-MONK-MEDITATION-STRESS-ANXIETY-CALM-HAEMIN-JUNIM.HTML](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/10/well/mind/self-care-buddhism-monk-meditation-stress-anxiety-calm-haemin-junim.html)

Due: Biosheet-course etiquette document due in “biosheet-course etiquette” dropbox before class

Practice:

- i) Belly breathing exercise (Rogers, 32)
- ii) Further instruction on breathing and meditation. Dr. Andrew Weil, one of the leading proponents of integrative medicine (we return to the topic on January 29), has produced the following introduction to three breathing practices, including the 4-7-8 that we tried last week. We will watch these short videos in class and try each practice.

Breathing Exercises And Techniques

[HTTPS://WWW.DRWEIL.COM/HEALTH-WELLNESS/BODY-MIND-SPIRIT/STRESS-ANXIETY/BREATHING-THREE-EXERCISES/](https://www.drweil.com/health-wellness/body-mind-spirit/stress-anxiety/breathing-three-exercises/)

4-7-8 Breath

[HTTPS://WWW.DRWEIL.COM/VIDEOS-FEATURES/VIDEOS/BREATHING-EXERCISES-4-7-8-BREATH/](https://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/)

Stimulating Breath

[HTTPS://WWW.DRWEIL.COM/VIDEOS-FEATURES/VIDEOS/THE-STIMULATING-BREATH/](https://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/the-stimulating-breath/)

Counting Breath

[HTTPS://WWW.DRWEIL.COM/VIDEOS-FEATURES/VIDEOS/BREATHING-EXERCISES-BREATH-COUNTING/](https://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-breath-counting/)

- iii) Joseph Goldstein–”Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening.” Mindfulness of the body. [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=BIWVX6RLNFE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIWVX6RLNFE)

T-Jan. 21-Week 2

Topic: Contemplative Practices and Higher Education

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) Mirabai Bush and Daniel Barbezat, “Chapter One: Transformation and Renewal in Higher Education,” *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 2013, 3-20 (D2L)
- ii) Fran Grace, “Learning as a Path, Not a Goal: Contemplative Pedagogy—Its Principles and Practices,” *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 2011, 99-124 (D2L)
- iii) Listen to the following “On Being” podcast: Matthieu Ricard, “Happiness as Human Flourishing,” July 20, 2017, (52 minutes)
[HTTPS://ONBEING.ORG/PROGRAMS/MATTHIEU-RICARD-HAPPINESS-AS-HUMAN-FLOURISHING-JUL2017/](https://onbeing.org/programs/matthieu-ricard-happiness-as-human-flourishing-jul2017/)

Practice:

- i) Body scan exercise (Rogers, 38-39)

- ii) Observe mental judgments exercise (Rogers, 47)

R-Jan. 23

Topic: Mind and Body in Neuroscience

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) Matthieu Ricard, Antoine Lutz, and Richard J. Davidson, “Mind of the Meditator,” *Scientific American*, November 2014, 38-45 (D2L)
- ii) Listen to the following “10% Happier” podcast: Daniel Goleman, Dr. Richard Davidson, *Altered Traits*; Released September 08, 2017 (72 minutes).
[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/51407909](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/51407909)
Dan Goleman and Richie Davidson, both titans in their respective fields and best-selling authors, have co-written a new book out now entitled, *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain and Body*. Goleman, a renowned psychologist and science journalist, and Davidson, a prominent neuroscientist and founder of the Center for Healthy Minds, talk about their cutting-edge research in this new book, comparing brain activity of “Olympic level” meditators (such as monks) to meditation beginners and how mindfulness can be restorative for brain health.
- iii) Farhad Manjoo, “You Should Meditate Every Day: Sure, it’s become a wellness fad. But it’s the best way I’ve found to keep digital monsters at bay.” *New York Times*, January 9, 2019 (D2L): [HTTPS://WWW.NYTIMES.COM/2019/01/09/OPINION/MEDITATION-INTERNET.HTML](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/opinion/meditation-internet.html)
- iv) Bill Gates, “Why I’m into meditation,” “Gatesnotes” (The blog of Bill Gates,” December 3, 2018 (D2L): [HTTPS://WWW.GATESNOTES.COM/BOOKS/THE-HEADSPACE-GUIDE-TO-MEDITATION-AND-MINDFULNESS](https://www.gatesnotes.com/Books/The-HeadSpace-Guide-to-Meditation-and-Mindfulness)

Watch (in class): PBS “Mindfulness Goes Mainstream,” 2017

T-Jan. 28-Week 3

Topic: Integrative Medicine

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) University of Arizona: Center for Integrative Medicine web site. Read the text on the main “About Us” page and watch the embedded video of Dr. Weil.
[HTTPS://INTEGRATIVEMEDICINE.ARIZONA.EDU/ABOUT/INDEX.HTML](https://integrativemedicine.arizona.edu/about/index.html)

ii) People's Pharmacy: Tieraona Low Dog, M.D.: How Can You Improve Your Immune Response? November 5, 2016 (58 minutes)

[HTTPS://OVERCAST.FM/+FQQS8JRW](https://overcast.fm/+FQQS8JRW)

Guest speaker: Jane Torgerson, M.D. ([HTTPS://HEALTHCENTER.TCU.EDU/OUR-STAFF/MEDICAL-PROVIDERS/](https://healthcenter.tcu.edu/our-staff/medical-providers/)) is the Medical Director of the Brown-Lupton Health Center. She completed a two-year program at the University of Arizona in integrative medicine started by Dr. Andrew Weil and has passed the board certification exam in integrative medicine.

Note: Dr. Weil is a prolific author and has an excellent web site, which can be found at: [HTTP://WWW.DRWEIL.COM](http://www.drweil.com). Trained as a medical doctor at Harvard University, Dr. Weil has sought to harmonize Western, allopathic medicine and other healing modalities, including those found in China, India, and elsewhere.

Before class, please read the short bit on the University of Arizona's Center for Integrative Medicine listed under Assignment and watch the two-minute YouTube clip of Dr. Weil discussing the spread of integrative medicine. Please also listen to the podcast listed under Assignment from the People's Pharmacy on NPR, which is a recent interview by Joe and Terry Graydon (he's a pharmacologist and she's a medical anthropologist) of Dr. Tieraona Low Dog, who has worked with Dr. Weil.

Practice:

Calm lake exercise (from Lewis Richmond's *Aging as a Spiritual Practice*).

R-Jan. 30

Topic: Getting Ready and Getting Started

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: Holly B. Rogers, M.D., *The Mindful Twenty-Something*-Parts 1 and 2 (Chapters 1-7)

Practice:

- i) Guided imagery exercises (Rogers 122)
- ii) Mentor appreciation exercise assignment
- iii) *Gatha* exercise (Rogers, 79)

T-Feb. 4-Week 4

Topic: Expanding Your Understanding

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: *The Mindful Twenty-Something*-Part 3 (Chapters 8-12)

Practice:

- i) Labelling thoughts exercise (Rogers, 125)

- ii) Discuss mentor appreciation

R-Feb. 6

Topic: Mind and Body in Tibetan Yoga

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Guest speaker: Ale Chaoul: Mind and Body in Tibetan Yoga

T-Feb. 11-Week 5

Topic: Developing Insight

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) *The Mindful Twenty-Something*-Part 4 (Chapters 13-16)
- ii) Read the introduction to the Myers-Briggs personality test on the first website and take the test on the second:
 - a) [HTTP://WWW.MYERSBRIGGS.ORG/MY-MBTI-PERSONALITY-TYPE/MBTI-BASICS/](http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/)
 - b) [HTTP://WWW.HUMANMETRICS.COM/CGI-WIN/JTYPES2.ASP](http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/Jtypes2.asp)

iii) Complete the “Life Values Inventory” by going to the following web site, creating an account, and completing the test: [HTTPS://WWW.LIFEVALUESINVENTORY.ORG](https://www.lifevaluesinventory.org)
To sign in, go to this address: [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y59J9XRX](https://tinyurl.com/y59j9xrX)

We hope you’ll find the program easy to use and that it becomes a valuable tool in your personal development. If you have any ideas, suggestions for improvements or if you’d just like to tell us how you feel about the program, please contact us anytime.

Practice: Values exercise (Rogers, 140)

- iv) Discuss “Buddhism precepts exercises.” Due Thursday, February 20.

R-Feb. 13

Topic: Technology and the Brain-Mind

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) Excerpt from Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, 2011, 115-34 (D2L)
- ii) Jean M. Twenge, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation? *The Atlantic*, September 2017 (D2L)

Practice: Digital awareness exercise assignment: Check all digital devices when you wake up, then turn them off. Keep them off unless usage is necessary, or be conscious when you turn them on, and why. Notice mind and body responses. Which social media are you most attached to? texting/email,

Facebook, Instagram, twitter, etc. At **noon, 6:00 p.m., and before bed**, write reflections on digital devices and their presence or absence in a journal—thoughts, feelings, and/or sensory responses (in abstract or in your immediate experience). **If someone—a parent, significant other, and so on—may worry about your lack of communication, please make sure to let them know that you will be engaging in this exercise.**

Watch (in class): “Are smartphones making a generation unhappy?,” PBS Newshour August 7, 2017
[HTTP://WWW.PBS.ORG/NEWSHOUR/BB/SMARTPHONES-MAKING-GENERATION-UNHAPPY/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/smartphones-making-generation-unhappy/)

T-Feb. 18-Week 6

Topic: Carrying On [CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: *The Mindful Twenty-Something*-Part 5 (Chapters 17-20)

Discuss: Results of digital awareness exercise

Practice: Subject-object reversal: In this exercise, one closely observes some object (plant, tree, piece of art, etc.) and then imagines it contemplating us. How do we appear to it (agitated, imposing, etc.)?

R-Feb. 20

Topic: Being Peace-1 [CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, Introduction and Chapters 1-4

Due: “Buddhism precepts exercises”

Practice: i) Walking meditation exercise (Rogers, 76)

ii) Interbeing in class exercise.

T-Feb. 25-Week 7

Topic: Being Peace-2 [CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

i) Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, Chapters 5-7

ii) Listen to the podcast “Brother Thay: A Radio Pilgrimage with Thich Nhat Hanh” on NPR’s “On Being”

[HTTPS://SOUNDCLOUD.COM/ONBEING/BROTHER-THAY-A-RADIO-2](https://soundcloud.com/onbeing/brother-thay-a-radio-2)

iii) Listen to YouTube clip: “How to let anger out?” Thich Nhat Hahn at Plum Village talking to a child about anger (9 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=WTF9XGQLIVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTF9XGQLIVI)

Discuss: Discuss socially Socially-engaged mindfulness paper. Due, Tuesday, March 19.

Practice: Interbeing in nature exercise

Watch (in class): Dan Harris-Embarrassing Panic Attack, *10% Happier*, 2017

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=QVLQ6QUM3P0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVLQ6QUM3P0)

R-Feb. 27

Topic: *10% Happier*-Air Hunger through Happiness, Inc.

[CLASS_SCHEDULE](#)

-Assignment: Dan Harris, *10% Happier*-Preface and Chapters 1-4

-Invitation: We will discuss as a class the practice to do on March 5

-Reminder: film and podcast reviews due next Thursday

T-March 3-Week 8

Topic: *10% Happier*-The Jew-Bu through 10% Happier

[CLASS_SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: *10% Happier*-Chapters 5-8

R-March 5

Topic: *10% Happier*-"The New Caffeine" through Epilogue

[CLASS_SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: *10% Happier*-Chapter 9-Epilogue

Due: First film and first podcast due

T-March 10-Week 9

Spring Break [CLASS_SCHEDULE](#)

R-March 12

Spring Break [CLASS_SCHEDULE](#)

T-March 17-Week 10

Topic: Silence

[CLASS_SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

i) TED Talk: John Francis

[HTTP://WWW.TED.COM/TALKS/JOHN_FRANCIS_WALKS_THE_EARTH?LANGUAGE=EN](http://www.ted.com/talks/john_francis_walks_the_earth?language=en)

ii) “In Pursuit of Silence,” Directed by Patrick Shen, 2015 (81 minutes)

Available: Free for check out from TCU Music Library and for YouTube rental for \$3.99 at:

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=ZTXQLWDWRa0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTXQLWDWRa0)

Description: “A film about our relationship with silence and the impact of noise on our lives.”

Practice: Silence exercise. We will discuss on March 19. During the day, sit silently twice for at least five minutes, being aware of your surroundings. Watch your breath.

Walk silently for at least ten minutes. Attend to each of your senses. What do you notice?

R-March 19

Topic: Contemplative movement

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Guest speaker: Susan Douglas-Roberts (TCU Dance Department)

Web site: [HTTPS://FINEARTS.TCU.EDU/FACULTY_STAFF/SUSAN-DOUGLAS-ROBERTS/](https://finearts.tcu.edu/faculty_staff/susan-douglas-roberts/)

Discuss: Silence exercise

Due: Socially engaged mindfulness paper.

T-March 24-Week 11

Topic: “I am That”

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

i) Instructions for “I am That” exercise. Due April 9

ii) **#122: Bob Roth, Meditation Teacher to the Stars**

February 14, 2018 (64 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/53308218?AUTOPLAY=TRUE](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/53308218?autoplay=true)

Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks and David Letterman are just some of the dozens of celebrities who sought out Bob Roth to learn Transcendental Meditation (TM), a mantra-focused meditation practice. Roth, who has been a meditation teacher for over 40 years and has a new book out called, “Strength in Stillness,” talks about how he found TM and addresses the criticism and suspicions some former members have raised around TM.

Discuss: Animal meditation due on **Tuesday, March 31:** This meditation is intended to help you use mindfulness practices to explore the world through nonhuman eyes. First, choose a place where you can be free of distractions and in contact with nature (e.g., the Trinity Trails, the Learning Garden at Alice Carlson, or somewhere near your home). Take a moment to breathe slowly and center yourself in this place. Then spend 15-20 minutes observing any nonhuman animals you see there (remember that many of these animals may not be immediately apparent; they might be flying in the sky or perched in a tree, swimming in the water, or crawling through the grass or soil at your feet).

- 1) Pick one animal in particular and observe what it looks like, how it moves, how it interacts with its surroundings, how it reacts to you (if it does), etc.; write down your observations.
- 2) Now put down your pen, close your eyes, and imagine that you “are” the animal you have been studying:
 - a) How would your experience of the world as that animal be similar to and different from your own experience of the world?
 - b) Would you feel comfortable describing the animal you have been watching as a “person”? Why or why not?

You should write down some notes on this exercise and bring it to class March 31.

ii) *Metta*, or loving-kindness, meditation

R-March 26

Topic: Mindfulness & Human Flourishing

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Guest speaker: **Judith Simmer-Brown**, Ph.D., is Distinguished Professor of Contemplative and Religious Studies at Naropa University, where she has taught as a Founding Faculty member since 1978. She has practiced Tibetan Buddhism for forty-five years and is an Acharya (senior dharma teacher) of the Shambhala Buddhist lineage.

As a founding member of the Religious Studies department, she teaches world religions and Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, and Buddhist theology and interreligious dialogue for the Masters’ of Divinity program. She is the founder and Senior Faculty Advisor to the Center for the Advancement of Contemplative Education (CACE), exhibiting the University’s leadership as the pioneer institution for contemplative education.

She co-chairs the steering committee of the American Academy of Religion's Contemplative Studies group, and she is on the Board of the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies. Dr. Simmer-Brown lectures and writes on Tibetan Buddhism, American Buddhism, women and Buddhism, interreligious dialogue, and contemplative education. Her books are *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Shambhala 2001); with Fran Grace, an edited collection of articles called *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies* (Religious Studies Series, State University of New York Press, 2010); and with David Steindl-Rast and others, *Benedict's Dharma: Buddhist Comment on the Rule of St. Benedict* (Riverhead 2001).

T-March 31-Week 12

Topic: Contemplative Practices and Animals

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Guest speaker: Dave Aftandilian: TCU website: [HTTPS://ADDРАН.TCU.EDU/FACULTY_STAFF/DAVE-AFTANDILIAN/](https://addran.tcu.edu/faculty_staff/dave-aftandilian/)

Assignment: Read excerpt from Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (Columbia University Press, 2006). Available on D2L.

R-April 2

**Topic: “I am That” and
Mediating Mindfulness and Mystifying Mindfulness**

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) Jeff Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*-Introduction through Chapter 2
- ii) Listen to the following New Books in Religion podcast with Ronald E. Purser, “McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality” (Repeater Books, 2019). [HTTPS://PODCASTS.APPLE.COM/US/PODCAST/NEW-BOOKS-IN-RELIGION/ID426502373?I=1000450197712](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/new-books-in-religion/id426502373?i=1000450197712)

iii) Read the following article: [HTTPS://WWW.IRISHTIMES.COM/CULTURE/HAS-MINDFULNESS-BECOME-JUST-ANOTHER-WING-OF-CAPITALISM-1.3950053](https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/has-mindfulness-become-just-another-wing-of-capitalism-1.3950053)

T-April 7-Week 13

**Topic: Mainstreaming Mindfulness
& Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) *Mindful America*-Chapter 4
- ii) Listen to the following “10% Happier” podcast: **Jon Kabat-Zinn, Creator of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction**, Released May 03, 2017 (60 minutes). “Jon Kabat-Zinn was on a meditation retreat in the late ‘70s when he had an idea to marry science with mindfulness and bring the practice into hospitals, which then led to his redefining an important element of patient care. Kabat-Zinn is the founding executive director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the founding director of its renowned Stress Reduction Clinic, who created Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs that are used in hundreds of hospitals, clinics and labs all over the world.”
[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/50033681?AUTOPLAY=TRUE](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/50033681?autoplay=true)

Examine (in class): Look at mindfulness, meditation, yoga magazines

R-April 9

Topic: Meditation, Mindfulness, and Science

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

- i) *Mindful America*-Chapter 6 and Postscript

Discuss: “I am That” exercise and look back on semester

Due: “I am That” exercise

Practice: Assign eating meal exercise (Rogers, 157)

-Reminder: film and podcast reviews due next Thursday

T-April 14-Week 14

Topic: Mindful Eating

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

i) Holly Rogers, M.D. and Margaret Maytan, M.D., *Mindfulness for the Next Generation*: “The Research Behind Our Teaching,” 2012, 39-54 (D2L)

ii) Michael Pollan: Fixing Food, August 22, 2013

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=4FLUMZHQKAW](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FLUMZHQKAW) (25 minutes)

iii) Andrew Weil, M.D. on *Good Food Fast*, The People’s Pharmacy, December 22, 2016 (58 minutes). “Dr. Andrew Weil, the country’s leading expert in integrative medicine, believes that good health begins in the kitchen. It’s hardly revolutionary to propose that diet matters when it comes to our health, but so many people feel that eating delicious, healthy home-cooked meals isn’t possible for them. They don’t have time, they say, or they can’t afford good food.”

[HTTPS://OVERCAST.FM/+FQSR7DRM](https://overcast.fm/+FQSR7DRM)

Guest speaker: Lexi Endicott, TCU Honors graduate in Dietetics

Discuss: Eating meal exercise (Rogers, 157)

Due: Reflections on second film (Kumare) and second podcast

R-April 16

Assignment: Discuss Kumare in class. Guest: Blake Hestir, Professor of Philosophy

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

T-April 21-Week 15

Topic: Modern Transformations of Buddhist Meditation & How Meditation Works

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment:

i) David McMahan in *Meditation, Buddhism, and Science*, Chapter 2 (D2L).

ii) -Listen to the following “10% Happier” podcast: **#112: Dr. David Vago, This Is Your Brain on Meditation**

Released December 06, 2017 (59 minutes)

[HTTPS://WWW.STITCHER.COM/PODCAST/ABC-NEWS/10-HAPPIER/E/52464662](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/abc-news/10-happier/e/52464662)

There has been an explosion of research in recent years on what meditation does to the brain, but as neuroscientist Dave Vago points out, the science of putting meditation under neuro-imaging is still quite young. Vago, the research director for the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, studies brain scans of meditators to analyze changes in brain activity, blood flow, size and function of certain areas in the brain, and he was part of a group of scientists who published paper aiming to define “mindfulness” and its neurological impacts.

R-April 23

Topic: The Cognitive Science of Mindfulness Meditation

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: Evan Thompson in *Meditation, Buddhism, and Science*, Chapter 3 (D2L).

Discuss: Prepare insights for final paper

Practice: Labelling feelings exercise (Rogers, 164)

T-April 28-Week 16

Topic: Final Contemplation and Expression of Gratitude

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Discuss: Gather and reflect on course and discuss course outcomes.

Practice: Gratitude exercise

April 30/May 1 Study Days

T-May 7

[CLASS SCHEDULE](#)

Assignment: (also available on D2L) Final course reflection paper: In approximately 1500 words, reflect on your experience in the course. We encourage you to review the syllabus, reread your response papers and look for themes that capture the trajectory of your evolving understanding and practice of mindfulness. You might address that which was difficult—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—but also that which was positive and affirming. What, for instance, confused you? What did you resist? What surprised you? What did you find interesting, practical, or enlightening? As you address both the high and low points of your practice, please remember to refer to our texts and in-class discussions.

Suggestions: We encourage you to set aside some time to think about the paper before you write, and make notes of your thoughts. After writing a first draft, check to see if you clearly state, then address, some main ideas(s), issue(s) or theme(s), and if your paper has an introduction and conclusion.

Due in “final reflection paper” dropbox on D2L at **5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 7, 2020**

Mindfulness and Modern Life

HCOL 40023-655

Spring 2020

Socially-Engaged Mindfulness paper



This assignment asks you to explore the connection between your personal mindfulness practice and awareness of wider human suffering by drawing from your experience with the Buddhist precepts exercises. As we discussed, those five precepts serve as the foundation of Buddhist ethical teachings, which are elaborated in the tradition's teachings to include other precepts, such as not eating after midday, handling money, and sleeping on luxurious beds. We explained that the precepts represent one of three parts of Buddhism's eightfold path (the last of the Four Noble Truths): ethics (right speech, action, and livelihood), mental cultivation (right effort, mindfulness, and meditation), and wisdom (right view and intention).

We have also discussed mindfulness in relation to the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, an author, poet, and peace activist who founded the modern Socially-engaged Buddhist movement that has attracted many to its path. That path is based on the ubiquity of human suffering, the first Noble Truth, and how a compassionate mind cannot "turn away" from that suffering, however it manifests in each of our lives. As a teacher of Buddhist forms of mindfulness, he highlights how these practices of mental cultivation are linked inextricably to the alleviation of suffering. We have also discussed in class the legitimate and persuasive criticism that mindfulness practices as taught by many in American society often remove these ethical teachings.

Insights from the precepts could focus, for instance, on the notion of interdependence, non-harming, or truthful speech, among many other possibilities. We ask you to examine how you might draw from those principles, and insights gleaned from them, to gain a deeper understanding of some particular form of suffering (you're welcome to focus on any form of sentient life) in contemporary society by engaging with it mindfully, viewing it, as Thich Nhat Hahn often says, through the eyes of compassion. You can use your deep listening skills to *contemplate* their stories and experience, and you might hold an image of those who are suffering, or the suffering itself, in your daily meditation for

some time and see what insights arise—that is, what percolates up from the deepest levels of your mind. You might jot down some notes as you do so.

The specific sort of suffering you address is wide open and will naturally depend on your own background, identity, and so on. For instance, Andy has dedicated himself to alleviating human suffering by helping to feed the hungry through his work in various leadership positions on the Tarrant County Food Bank, including his current tenure as President of the Board. Mark has done so by teaching students about otherness and its attendant human suffering that we witness abroad in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Burma, but also, in our society, through gun violence, white supremacy, anti-immigrant sentiment, Islamophobia, and many other social ills. He and Andy have also worked with Amnesty International to bring attention to these sorts of issues.

Since this is the first time we've tried this exercise, please try your best and don't overthink it. Don't fret over what you think we want you to discover. We have no preconceived notions.

**Mindfulness and Modern Life:
HCOL 40000-617
Spring 2020**

Buddhism Precepts Exercise



As part of our study of Buddhist notions of *self*, we ask that you complete this set of precepts exercises. You should write about one or two paragraphs on each of the precepts. Your final essay should be 750 to 1000 words. Submit your essay to the drop box titled “Buddhism precepts exercises” before class on **Thursday, February 20**.

These exercises offer you an opportunity to reflect on what it would be like to follow the first five precepts of the Buddhist tradition. You need not accept any Buddhist doctrines to do this; all you need is the capacity to be aware of your thoughts and actions. The aim is twofold: for you to better understand basic Buddhist ethical practices and to become more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and actions, and their effects on other beings. Both understanding other worldviews accurately and increased reflective self-awareness are important goals of liberal arts inquiry and are central to developing as critical thinkers. These exercises will also serve as the foundation for the socially-engaged mindfulness paper.

Choose a different precept for each day and that evening write one or two paragraphs about your experience on the series of questions listed under the precept. You may follow the precept or engage in the proscribed activities; your goal is to be mindful in any event. You may take the precepts in any order. You should combine those individual reflections into a single essay. In your essay, you are welcome to take up each precept individually, or you can integrate them into a broader reflection on the experience.

Note: While the fourth Buddhist precept clearly focuses on avoiding sexual desire, we are choosing not to include that here; instead, we are construing it more broadly to mean lust for consumer products, like an iPhone, clothing, a new car, etc., or for the recognition of others and status within a group: becoming famous or wealthy, attaining a high position in a sorority or fraternity, etc. For the fifth precept, avoiding intoxicants, we encourage you to construe intoxication broadly to mean losing control of one's faculties or behavior, which can include social media, the internet, online gaming, and so on.

1. **Avoid harming sentient beings.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Eaten anything? What? How did it get on your plate—who planted or nurtured it, harvested or butchered it, cleaned and cooked it?

Harmed anyone (or thing)? By striking? By aggressive behavior or avoidance? By speech or facial expression, intentional or unintentional? By laughter?

2. **Avoid taking what is not offered.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Bought anything? How? Was it “freely given?” Where did you get the money? Did you really need the item? Why? What would you do if you didn't have it?

Borrowed anything? Why? Was it really given freely? Will your use diminish its value, or cause hardship to the loaner?

3. **Avoid false speech.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Lied? Said something not strictly true? Equivocated? Exaggerated? Hidden the truth from another? Why? Have you thought about the effect of your words before you spoke?

Have you actively sought the truth in your studies? Out of class? Do you honor your teachers and mentors and the knowledge they share?

4. **Avoid lust.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Wanted something you can or should not have? Why? Why can't or shouldn't you have it? Would it harm others to have it? Would it harm you?

5. **Avoid intoxicants.** In the past twenty-four hours, have you:

Taken or engaged with mind/consciousness altering substances? What was the impact on your senses and awareness? Were there later physical or mental consequences?

Have you intoxicated your consciousness by going on the Internet (checking email, Facebook, gaming), listening to music, or watching TV or a movie?

Did your use of such intoxicants cause you to violate any other precept (harming, taking, lusting, false speaking). Did it take time away from your studies and the pursuit of wisdom?

Mindfulness and Modern Life

HCOL 40023-655

Spring 2020

“I am That” assignment



For this assignment, you should write up and interpret the notes you will take during the two-week “I am That” meditation that we will describe in class on **Tuesday, March 24**. Your final essay should be between 750 and 1000 words. The paper is due in the “I am That” dropbox before class on **Thursday, April 9**.

As background to the paper, the religious traditions that emerged from India—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and others—subscribe to the *samsara* paradigm we described at the beginning of the semester wherein time is understood to be cyclical. In *samsara*, our actions produce good and bad karma that lead us to be reborn in distinct realms of a variously understood cosmological system. The ultimate goal is to attain liberation from this cycle, whether understood as Hinduism’s *moksha*, Buddhism’s *nirvana*, and so on. Each tradition sets forth a particular path to attain that ultimate freedom—in Buddhism, for instance, practitioners follow the Eightfold Noble Path that includes ethics, mental cultivation, and wisdom.

The Buddhist view of the *self* we will discuss in class maintains that the “I” represents a constantly changing amalgamation of the five *skandhas*, or aggregates, which include consciousness—the fifth *skandha*. In this view, the “I” we perceive represents no more than a fictitious unity that becomes an object of intense clinging, which causes us to suffer. Thus, the goal of contemplative and ethical practice is to slowly gain greater insight into the nature of reality and to see through that fiction. In so doing, we come to recognize and appreciate our interdependence—in Thich Nhat Hanh’s words, our “interbeing”—with all that we perceive to be outside ourselves. The notions of *selflessness* and *interbeing* are woven into several of the semester’s readings, but also appears in Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, a book Mark uses in his Buddhism class. In that book, Suzuki states: “What we call ‘I’

is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale” (29). And in his introduction to the book, Richard Baker states:

The practice of Zen mind is beginner’s mind. The innocence of the first inquiry—what am I?—is needed throughout Zen practice. The mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities. It is the kind of mind which can see things as they are, which step by step and in a flash can realize the original nature of everything.

This “I am That” exercise asks you to engage in a type of meditation in which you will try to channel that beginner’s mind so that you can, in turn, attempt to answer this deceptively simple question: “What am I?” In that meditation, you will investigate your perceiving “I,” or self, which constantly appears in your thought and speech. In a single day, you will repeat this simple words many, many times. What does it refer to? What is the essence of that referent?

But the title of the assignment actually is taken from Indian master Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj’s famous book, *I am That*. We have made available on D2L two brief excerpts from the book that you are welcome to read, although they’re not required. They offer background on his teachings, which encourages us to relentlessly investigate this “I” by pondering its essence and source. To do so, we must remain aware, *mindful* in the language of Buddhism, of the workings of our minds and our perceptions of the so-called *self*. He writes in this regard:

By being with yourself... by watching yourself in your daily life with alert interest, with the intention to understand rather than to judge, in full acceptance of whatever may emerge, because it is there, you encourage the deep to come to the surface and enrich your life and consciousness with its captive energies. This is the great work of awareness; it removes obstacles and releases energies by understanding the nature of life and mind. Intelligence is the door to freedom and alert attention is the mother of intelligence (Quoted in Jon Kabat-Zinn’s *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, 10).

Andy was trained in the Hindu philosophical system known as Advaita Vedanta upon which Maharaj’s teachings are based. Indeed, in several of the Hindu traditions, the *atman*—the “I” or self—is understood to be part of Brahman, the ultimate reality. For instance, in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, an early Hindu text, this sentiment is expressed in the story of the father and son Uddalaka and Shvetaketu. The latter teaches his son that the self we perceive dissolves into this ultimate reality, just like salt dissolves into water. Most do not recognize this relationship, however, because they are blinded by *maya*, or “illusion.”

Mark has used this exercise in his Mindfulness and Millennials colloquium three times and Buddhism course once with fascinating results despite its vagueness. Andy and Mark used it in spring 2019 in their Contemplating the Self colloquium. Please try your best and write to us if you get stuck.

Mindfulness and Modern Life

HCOL 40023-655

Spring 2020

Final paper



Assignment: Final course reflection paper: In approximately 1500 words, reflect on your experience in the course. We encourage you to review the syllabus, reread your response papers and look for themes that capture the trajectory of your evolving understanding and practice of mindfulness. You might address that which was difficult—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—but also that which was positive and affirming. What, for instance, confused you? What did you resist? What surprised you? What did you find interesting, practical, or enlightening? As you address both the high and low points of your practice, please remember to refer to our texts and in-class discussions.

Suggestions: We encourage you to set aside some time to think about the paper before you write, and make notes of your thoughts. After writing a first draft, check to see if you clearly state, then address, some main ideas(s), issue(s) or theme(s), and if your paper has an introduction and conclusion.

Due in “final reflection paper” dropbox on D2L at **5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 7, 2020**

Spring 2019:

Student 1:

The most impactful lesson I have taken away from our course on contemplative living has been a shift in how I mentally process my relation to the world and its people. This began at the very start of the semester when we were taught the *metta* meditation. This practice of sending out love and kindness has stuck with me for the entire semester because of its alignment with my personal sense of compassion and my desire to serve others and act out of love. By dwelling on someone else's wellbeing, I have expanded my heart's capacity for empathy. I feel much less self-centered after practicing this meditation and am more aware of what I can do for others to eliminate their sufferings.

My increased compassion throughout the course has made me especially interested in the topic of digital awareness that we have studied as I can clearly see its detrimental effects on mental health. I am extremely saddened to see how much weight teenagers attribute to their social media followings. Personally, I have witnessed how the social pressures of having the right amount of likes and witty-enough captions can harm the mental well-being of impressionable young people. My sister often texts me to ask if her photos are the right level of artsy without being too edited and ask me to get on social media to like her posts if I have not yet done so. It is very upsetting to me how much these social measurements of popularity can take a toll on one's anxiety.

I have found a great sense of happiness in authentic conversations with friends who share my indifference to social media since studying mindfulness and have developed a stronger sense of purpose for my self during this season of uncertainty and unknowns as graduation quickly approaches. I have a great gratitude for the beauties found in nature and have heightened my appreciation for the world by intentionally engaging each of my senses as I experience new settings. I have found direction in living my life mindfully by listening deeply to others and responding with genuine compassion. By engaging in a mindful life, I hope to spread a sense of peace to my anxiety-ridden peers and replace their sense of suffering with happiness and appreciation for the present moment.

Student 2:

As I reminisce over the course of the semester, I am filled with emotions like gratitude and joy... Candidly speaking, *A Contemplative Life* was the absolute best class I have taken at TCU.

What stayed consistent throughout the semester was my obsession with 4-7-8 breath (authors' note: 4-7-8 refers to inhaling deeply while counting to 4; holding the breath counting to 7; and exhaling counting to 8). Every week, I wrote about this technique in my reflection because of the benefits it has provided me with. This technique has calmed my headaches, curbed my hunger, and allowed me to relax considering stressful situations I have encountered during school. It has proved beneficial in countless ways and I know it will continue to be an integral part of my lifestyle.

Metta meditation was the most impactful mindfulness practice I did this year. I am grateful I was taught this meditation because I know it has made me a more gentle, patient person. In

instances where I feel angry and frustrated towards someone, I bring myself back to this practice. When I take a moment to wish that person wellness and happiness, it alleviates my negative feelings and I can move on with my day. For instance, I have been in a group project for the entire semester and one of my teammates never comes to class or team meetings. I have used *Metta* multiple times to calm myself and help refocus my attention. I hope to take this lesson with me going forward and use it in the working environment after college.

Overall, I cannot begin to express the amount of gratitude I feel for the ability to have taken this class. For many reasons, it was a major player in why this why I was successful this semester. This was the first college class I have taken that cultivated building relationships with both my peers and my professors. Having the open-dialogue style format, as well as sitting in the circle, allowed for unencumbered conversation and discussion of each day's topics. It fostered an environment where everyone felt comfortable to share raw thoughts and feelings which ultimately gave the class a chance to get to know everyone on a deeper level.

Student 3:

This semester has been one of intense emotions and hard lessons. I have experienced both profound highs and lows over the last four months and very few things have remained consistent in a meaningful way. Throughout this unpredictable semester, one of the bastions of support I had was this class and the meditation practice it cemented in me.

The high point, on the final day of class, during the affirmation circle,¹ was one of the few moments in my life where I was filled (in a very woo-woo way) with gratitude and profundity.

While resilience helped me handle my personal tragedy, the lesson of gratitude is more likely to impact me in times both good and bad. I have a tendency to move through life quickly, always attempting to pack as much information, entertainment, and experiences into every waking moment. However, taking the time to sit back and recognize the world I am living in, and then to be grateful for it, is a profound change in my perspective. I have learned this semester that life is not always about the quantity of experience, it is also about the quality – and quality experiences abound constantly. I have found a deepened skill to observe the

¹ Authors' note: The semester concludes with the final circle referred to as the "circle of affirmation and gratitude" wherein we identify the positive qualities that each student has brought to the circle throughout the semester. We start out by offering comments about individual students and then invite comments from the other students. Oftentimes, this final exercise can be quite moving as the students have, through the circle, come to know each other well by listening deeply to each other throughout the semester. While these comments focus on personal qualities—kindness, mindful listening, joyousness, openness, and so on—they often bring out rich disciplinary and experiential perspectives too. When all who feel inspired to speak about a particular student have finished, we give her or him one of the stones that had been passed around in an earlier class as a way to remember the experience of feeling deeply connected to the group. We complete the circle with each student by reversing the bowing; that is, we bow to the student and she or he then bows to us.

blueness of the sky or freshness of the air as a result of this class, for which I will always be grateful.

Student 4:

I was living exactly how Dan Harris describes, in which many of us are forever caught in the what's next and how do I get there, perpetually planning. I've seen stress manifest itself in so many different ways in my life: decreased appetite, muscle tension, and lowered immune system. As a student, there are times when I've felt like stress culture is a trend in college, meaning that if you aren't stressed then you aren't trying hard enough or won't succeed. To be honest, I've fed into this culture complaining about my stress and disregarding my current state for future successes, but what kind of life is that. It wasn't until this course that I began to work towards self-care in tangible ways.

My last takeaway from the course was my increased compassion for others and the human experience we are all living. Although each person's life is unique in their own way, we all are deeply similar in the way we experience suffering and human connectivity.

Something that was invaluable to me in this course was our group discussions on different themes aka "the circle." I have never had such thought provoking and in-depth discussions before in a classroom setting or even in life. Each thought that was shared by others was intentional and raw with what their beliefs were on the topic. Additionally, hearing my classmate's insights helped me to increase my knowledge and beliefs about the topic.

Student 5:

After keeping up with the practices learned in this class and engaging with classmates on a deep level, I can say that I am much better equipped to handle the stress and anxiety that I encounter on a daily basis and I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this special type of course at TCU.

An exercise from class that greatly impacted me and helped me to realize that life is not all about what I can achieve and list on my resume was the digital awareness exercise. I took this exercise seriously and started out with the mindset that it would help me focus better on schoolwork, but it quickly began to take on a new meaning. From the number of hours I spent on my phone prior to this exercise, it was immensely clear that something needed to be done about my use of both social media and my phone generally when in the presence of other people. So, I took to deleting social media from my phone and using mindfulness as a tool to be aware of each time I reached for my phone when I was having a conversation with someone. It was incredibly difficult at first, but over time, I started to not miss social media and began to notice that I was reaching for my phone less and less during social interactions. I am still continuing this today and hope to carry it on into the future, since it was so impactful and beneficial to my mental health.

Overall, this class has been immensely beneficial for me and I wish that there were more classes like this offered in college. Aside from the benefits I have discussed, I am also appreciative of having a space to listen and talk freely, learning from classmates and professors in a low-stakes environment.

Student 6:

After the first week, I knew the class was going to be enriching. It was refreshing to be in a class in which I looked forward to the readings. I dog-eared, underlined, and highlighted almost every sentence of *Being Peace*, had to pause and reflect after nearly every page while reading *Mindful America* and *Meditation, Buddhism, and Science*, laughed out loud reading *10% Happier*, and revamped my meditation practice after reading *The Mindful Twenty-Something: Life Skills to Handle Stress... and Everything Else*.

Nevertheless, the key to the wonderful discussion was the small class size. The size allowed us to be vulnerable and get to know one another. At the risk of sounding woo-woo, by the end of the course, I could feel the interdependent energy between everyone in our class. We developed an incredible sangha over the course of four months, and that is something that will be impactful for the rest of our lives.

Looking back at my reflections I came up with three different aspects of mindfulness that I have found particularly beneficial. I recognize that mindfulness helps me eliminate worry, communicate compassionately, and be more present focused.

Student 7:

I got exactly what I wanted out of the class. My stress levels reduced. I developed the ability to recognize anxiety and take a step back from it rather than letting it take over my thoughts. I realized that there was truly no reason to feel undue anxiety over the homework that I would inevitably finish on time, the dirty laundry that I would clean when I could, or the tasks I had to complete at work.

Even in moments of acute stress, such as before major graduate school interviews, I was able to find a sense of calm by focusing on my breath and employing the 4-7-8 technique. People around me even noticed and commented upon this change. My mom told me that I seemed much calmer and less anxious, even noting that I was much more enjoyable to be around. The amount of things I had to do did not change, but the way I approached those things did. I was pleased to realize that meditation did, in fact, reduce stress for me.

In addition, I felt a lessening of the pressures I feel to uphold a certain version of myself or to “find” myself. Through the “I am That” exercise, I recognized that the Western notion of the self is merely a construction. We all change constantly, and that is acceptable and natural. There is no need to tirelessly search for an enduring definition of who I am and what that means. Rather, I simply need to exist in the moment. This message could not have been more timely, given that I was going through my senior year, which is fraught with discussions about the future and what and who you are going to be. While I observed as friends around me grappled with the harrowing search for identity, I was able to step back and simply acknowledge that I just needed to live in the moment rather than figuring out every minute detail of what I would supposedly be in a time that I cannot predict.

However, the greatest change has less to do with myself and more to do with others

around me. As the barriers of the self dissolved, I started to feel more and more connected with the people around me. Through loving-kindness meditation, I was able to practice giving love and support to people who I commonly struggled giving it to. This practice made it so much easier to do the same thing throughout the day. When someone made a sharp comment to me, honked at me on the freeway, or got angry with me, I found myself stepping back and wishing them the best. I started to consider the way that their suffering might have contributed to their behavior towards me.

I have developed a compassion for the fact that everyone around me has an inner life that is equally as complex, troubling, and distressing as my own—sometimes even more than my own. I have also developed a greater awareness of inter-being. I feel more connected to everyone because of our common humanity.... This awareness directly impacts how I relate to others. I extend more kindnesses and offer more leeway to the people I interact with. I smile more, with the intention to make others around me feel happier. I have become a more active listener, as I am more present when speaking to others and more aware of the richness of their own lives. I point out the beautiful things I notice about each day to others with the hopes of helping them to see the world in the new way I am seeing it. I lash out less as others because I have less anxiety pent up inside of me.

This class did more than teach me about the scientific benefits of meditation. It changed how I exist in the world, and most importantly altered how I relate to others. I cherished the small class that grew so close over the course of the semester, and I cannot say thank you enough to the professors who cared more about us as people than as students. I intend to continue practicing daily meditation regardless of the fact that it is no longer a requirement, and I know that I will try my best to be more mindful on a daily basis.

Earlier semesters

Student 8:

However, there are two major topics that I know will follow me outside of this classroom and into my day-to-day life. The first is a refreshed outlook on self-care while the second is an interest in holistic, mind-body-spirit centered medicine... This semester, I have lost count of the number of people who have told me that I seem so “calm.”

I walked into this class with life experiences that have urged me to find a way to take better care of my mental health. I was frankly sick of being consumed by anxiety and of letting circumstances dictate my attitude. The culture that we live in had brewed within me a “need” to be perfect, and I struggled with feelings of inadequacy. Part of my interest in this class came from a hope that it could provide me with the tools to overcome my struggles. After a semester of immersion into mindfulness and meditative practices, I can honestly say that I have seen myself transform. I have been equipped with methods to combat dissatisfaction and stress, and I have an understanding of the benefits of these practices.

Student 9:

I strongly believe every college student could benefit from meditation in some way whether they are a student, an athlete, the president of a club, or have a job outside of classes. I also

learned a lot from our mindfulness exercises. They opened my eyes to my dependency on technology and other distractions in my life. They made me really think about my actions—breathing, walking, eating, cleaning my apartment, etc. I do think I have become more intentional in my actions since I began trying out these mindfulness practices. They also helped me stay positive during stressful weeks of this semester and clear my mind of all the other clutter and outside thoughts that distract me from the more important parts of my week.

I also learned a lot through our analysis of movies and their relationships to Buddhism and our “I Am That” paper. This class forced us to think about subjects that are more removed from our everyday thoughts. What is the “I?” How are all of our individual “I’s” related? I enjoyed hearing everyone’s opinions and sorting through all of this insight into forming my own view of the “I” and its relationship to the world.

Student 10:

Lastly, in addition to realizing my need for rest and experiencing the joy of mindful living, I realized the power of affirmation. My favorite class of the entire semester was the final class period. We sat in a circle and affirmed each person one-by-one. This final circle of affirmation was one of the most powerful things I have ever experienced. People felt so moved, so loved, and so seen. People felt known in ways they did not know themselves. People felt unique, special, gifted, and good. Personally, I left the circle of affirmation astounded by the power of both roles—the giver of affirmation and the receiver of affirmation. Encouraging words do not appear to be a powerful force. Yet, they do something drastic inside the person who gives them and receives them. When giving affirmation, I felt incredibly honored to express the light I see in others. It was a joy to share goodness and kindness. On the other hand, when receiving affirmation, I felt so humbled by the praise from others. I could not believe that other people—some whom I did not know very well—saw the light in me. I will hold onto the stone I received from the circle of affirmation for a lifetime, and I will always strive to remember the goodness people saw in me when I cannot see it in myself.

Student 11:

This course took me on a journey of self-discovery that has changed the way that I look at our culture and the world around me.

If I am being honest, when I first heard that we were required to meditate every day, I dreaded the idea and thought, “There’s no way I will actually do that.” I decided to give it a chance though, and I could not be happier that I did. I fell in love with the practice. Whether it was sitting by the Trinity River and observing the wildlife or sending positive energy to those that we love and hate through loving kindness meditations, I benefitted from every single one. By allowing myself time for internal contemplation and stillness, I saw tangible benefits to meditation, such as better sleep, a longer attention span, and lower stress levels.

Finally, my favorite assignments from this class were the This I Believe and the I am That papers. It is very rare to have the opportunity to take a class that focuses so much on personal development. Not only did we practice meditation to improve our bodies and

minds, but we also explored and articulated our personal code of ethics as well as a detailed description of what makes up who we are with the two papers. I loved seeing how my personal beliefs intermingled with my proclaimed religious beliefs, and it was interesting to see the similarities and the differences.

Student 12:

When I first read about both the mindfulness and precepts exercises, I was skeptical about doing them to say the least. Especially with the precepts, I didn't expect to gain much from these exercises. The opposite turned out to be true. They required me to not only be mindful during the day, but also reflect at the end of the day on how my actions influenced the world around me. These both turned out to be positive additions to my life.

I could make a long list of everything that I'll take with me forward, but to sum it up in a few words: I've learned to be a better person. Honestly, that's all I could ask for from a class in my last semester of college.

Student 13:

I have learned so much about mindfulness in this class, but perhaps more importantly I have learned about myself, my impact on others, and the importance of learning from my peers.

Even better, I found meditating in a group was an incredibly profound and unlike anything else experience. The energy that circulated the room made me feel like every single person was connected no matter if they were sitting right by my side or across the room. It is not something that can be put into words, but it is an incredibly unique and special experience. This group energy positively affected our in-class meditation, but it also facilitated deep and amazing conversations.

Our last class quickly became my favorite class after partaking in the affirmation circle. It was so rewarding to see what everyone thought of one another and have one final connective moment with our peers who we have grown so close to over the course of the semester. I learned a lot about myself in the short moments I was put in the hot seat. I rarely think twice about the way I present myself or the way I come across to others, but it touched my heart to learn the way I affect people. I have always known that I approach life with a certain sense of intense passion, but to learn that others can recognize that within me is an absolutely wonderful feeling.

Student 14:

Until I took this course, I never truly understood the hugely impactful, beneficial, and positive role that mindfulness could play in my life. Utilizing mindfulness and meditation practices has helped me better relate with others and understand myself at a much more profound level. I feel that I am so much more appreciative of even the simplest pleasures of life, and I am grateful for a university that supports contemplative studies in order to help students reduce stress and increase connection with others.