

2016-2017

OPENING THE MIND'S EYE

CONTEMPLATIVE
PRACTICE AND HIGHER
EDUCATION



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Professor Phillip Bimstein



Phillip is an Emmy Award-winning musician and the former two-term mayor of Springdale, Utah (where, after years of polarization, *Parade Magazine* dubbed him “The Man Who Brought Civility Back to Town”). His classical compositions have been performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Abravanel Hall, the Aspen and Spoleto Music Festivals, London’s Royal Opera House, and on NPR. In the 80s, Phillip’s punk rock group’s videos were staples on MTV. His music has been reviewed in many publications including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Billboard*, and *Wired*. Phillip has served as chair of Utah Humanities, vice-president of the American Music Center, and he is currently board president of Heart & Soul. He has practiced yoga, qigong, and meditation for more than 40 years.

Thoughts on the Course

The idea for this Praxis Lab came in the midst of great silence, on day three of my annual eighteen-day silent meditation retreat in 2014. I’d already been practicing meditation and yoga for decades, but on that retreat I thought of the enormous value contemplative practice could have for students – both for the students’ own well-being and for improving their educational experience. Contemplative practices have been shown to cultivate awareness and attention, deepen understanding of material in the classroom, foster compassion and connection, and reduce stress – all valuable qualities for student life. As these thoughts percolated I thought, “How about exploring these ideas in an Honors College Praxis Lab?” I had previously co-taught a Praxis Lab (on Alzheimer’s Disease and Aging), so I knew how valuable and transforming these courses can be. I’m very grateful that the Honors College took on this mission.

John Dewey advocated an “organic connection between education and personal experience.” So from the beginning it felt vital to me to emphasize and foster the experiential nature of contemplative practices – to not just study them, but to practice them daily. From the ground of their personal contemplative practice our students could then develop their own understanding of its benefits, and could better address the need for contemplative practices in higher education by going on to create and design a project that spreads these benefits across the campus.

Very fortuitously, just as these ideas began to formulate, I met Joe Metz, whose wonderful *Interdisciplinary Symposium on Empathy, Contemplative Practice and Pedagogy, the Humanities, and the Sciences* confirmed the need for the course and became a model for how the course could be fashioned. I asked Joe to be my co-teacher, and I’m so glad he accepted. He fleshed out and extended the ideas for the course, and he brought great heart to it. I cannot imagine this course without him.

- Phillip Bimstein

Professor Joseph Metz



Joseph received his PhD in German Literature from Harvard University and is Associate Professor of German and of Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies (CLCS) at the University of Utah. He has published in the United States and abroad on such topics as the body in Rilke's poetry; postmodernism and the Holocaust; the intersections of gender, race, and national identity in Austrian border zone literature; and genre and historicist theory in contemporary British author David Mitchell. He is a meditation practitioner under the guidance of a qualified teacher and was the organizer of the 2014 *Interdisciplinary Symposium on Empathy, Contemplative Practice, the Humanities, and the Sciences*, which brought

together spiritual teachers, artists, neuroscientists, and humanities scholars to work with the U of U community. He is currently the facilitator of a U of U Faculty Learning Community on empathy and contemplative practice and will be teaching a graduate seminar on "Aesthetics – Empathy – Form" in Fall 2017.

Thoughts on the Course

One of the roots of this Praxis Lab was the *Interdisciplinary Symposium on Empathy, Contemplative Practice and Pedagogy, the Humanities and the Sciences* that I organized in 2014. The symposium brought together national experts in neuroscience, pedagogy, spiritual practice, literature, and the arts to brainstorm with the U of U community, but also, importantly, to lead hands-on sessions in which conference participants could directly take part in contemplative practices. As the symposium presenters from the natural sciences argued, there is substantial neuroscientific research attesting to how various forms of contemplation, such as meditation and traditional yoga, can contribute to brain development, empathy, attention, focus, and well-being. Although many of these practices have roots in ancient spiritual traditions, many of them can also be adapted for use in secular settings, as demonstrated by Jon Kabat-Zinn's well-known development of the therapeutic technique of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction at the University of Massachusetts or the more recent growth of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy. The potential benefits for the realm of higher education are also becoming clearer. There are many programs around the country that make up the growing movement of Integrated Contemplative Pedagogy. A key tenet of this movement is the integration of traditional, third-person techniques of critical analysis and inquiry – approaches that are absolutely indispensable to a rigorous university education – with equally crucial first-person modes, such as moment-to-moment mindful awareness of the contents of one's own experience. It was in the spirit of bringing these approaches together to address the real concerns of our students and world that Phillip and I developed this Praxis Lab.

- Joseph Metz

Praxis Lab Members



Grace Heaps

I am an amateur saxophonist, lover of all things summer, recovering perfectionist, chilena en mi corazón, and a mean root-beer float maker. Born and raised in Santaquin, Utah, living in the city and going to the University of Utah has been an adventure. I am studying nursing and am passionate about helping others and myself become well and whole. This Praxis Lab seemed like an unexplored (to me) branch of health and wellness that normally cannot be learned in school, and I felt that knowing how to live my life more mindfully and learning the skills involved in meditation would not only benefit me, but help others with whom I work and play. And I was right – I have learned how to not let my racing thoughts and emotions control me, but to let them be and pass through my mind without allowing them to define me. I have loved teaching others what I have learned, and I hope to continue doing so.

Kristiane Sonnenberg

I am a book lover (English major), big-question asker (Religious Studies Minor), and lover of culture (Spanish minor) who is always looking to expand my horizons and connect to other people. I grew up on an American military base in Tokyo, Japan, so I've been exposed to the idea of meditation from an early age. I became interested in contemplative practices after reading about contemplative prayer practices in from my own faith tradition. I've enjoyed learning to see the connections between contemplation, literature, religion, and culture, and thinking about how a contemplative worldview can shape my everyday life and interactions as I serve as an Honors student, undergraduate leader in my church, sister, daughter, and as a human being.





Jordan Franchina

I am a senior pursuing an HBA in chemistry. I am a native of Salt Lake City, Utah, and suffer from severe wanderlust. I enjoy music, and singing in choirs is one of my favorite ways to learn, enjoy, and introduce music to others. It has greatly enriched my life. Currently fluent in Korean and English, I am a linguaphile and aspiring polyglot. I will soon pursue a Masters to become a physician's assistant. The longer I am involved in working and volunteering in the medical field, the more I know it is where I want to be. I enjoy serving others and knowing I have made a difference in their lives. Meditation and religion play a large part in my life, enveloping everything I do, from

singing to academic pursuits. Seeing the Buddhist temples, shrines, and monks on an almost daily basis while volunteering for two years in South Korea sparked my journey through contemplative practices. I am grateful for the opportunity to have explored and implemented a variety of practices in my daily life, facilitated by the Opening the Mind's Eye Praxis Lab.

Natalie Battad

I am a Finance Major from Cottonwood Heights, Utah. I am a hot chocolate enthusiast and enjoy playing music and spending time outdoors. I chose to participate in this unique Praxis Lab because I believed it could help me find a way to slow down my busy life. Many of us find ourselves trying to juggle so much that we don't stop to ensure we are caring for ourselves and those around us. Opening the Mind's Eye has given me the tools necessary to excel in my academics and life. I have found that doing practice every day gives me a sense of stability and structure. It has trained my brain to focus for longer periods of time and prompts me to always be more aware of myself and those around me. I have been practicing Shamatha for 8 months and plan to continue my practice long after our class has ended. Our Praxis Lab has been an incredible experience, and I know I will hold the things I have learned and the people I have worked with close to my heart always.





Mary Stringham

Coffee addict, Beyoncé enthusiast and musical theatre nerd. Hi, my name is Mary Stringham. I'm currently a junior pursuing a double major in Art History and Theatre Studies with a minor in Spanish. I'm involved on campus as an Emerging Leaders Intern for ArtsForce and a research assistant under Art History Professor Sarah Hollenberg. When I'm not obsessing over pug photos on the internet you can find me at the climbing gym scrambling up some fake rocks with friends. I joined this Praxis Lab because I've always had an interest in meditation from a mental health standpoint. I've

struggled with anxiety throughout my life and I figured implementing contemplative practices into my daily routine would be a productive way to work through these issues. After two semesters meditating and immersing myself in the study of contemplative practices, I now realize the benefits meditation can have. I'm grateful to have created a project with my classmates and professors that will make meditation more accessible to college students so they too can improve their well-being.

Dylan Wooton

I am a junior in the bioengineering program at the U. With a passion for research and an interest in communication, I hope to be at the forefront of regulating and developing genetic engineering technologies. The Opening the Mind's Eye Praxis Lab provided me the unique experience to develop a deeper sense of awareness. My fellow cohort of Praxis students have been a true inspiration to me, and in the future, I plan to continue cultivating my own practice.





Dalton Edwards

Born in Layton, raised in Ogden and Roy, my heart's true Utah home has become over the last four years the breath-catching Salt Lake Valley. I'm presently a student at the University of Utah studying English and Film. I discovered very early the relaxed, perspective-driven principles and practices outlined by contemplative traditions after grappling first-hand with all those stressors that scourge college campuses. Mindfulness, in an important way, sustained me. One year ago, a lay-student of Buddhism and Taoism, I applied to the Opening the Mind's Eye Praxis Lab ready to learn all I could and excited to join a group of people with whom I could share in the struggles and joys that accompany the growth of a compassionate nature. This

last year has been fun, difficult, and needful of the practices our professors taught and encouraged us to cultivate. I write quite often, for school and through other outlets, so the solace I've found in discipline, firm resolve, focus, ritual and routine, compassion, and the quiet observance of all things free of judgment has been enormous and essential. I'm hugely grateful for the opportunity I've had to be a member of this outstanding, brilliant cohort of colleagues and professors, all of whom I warmly consider friends.

Sarai Patterson

I am a huge science nerd and tree-hugging earth lover majoring in Materials Science and Engineering with a minor in Ecology. When I am not in a lab playing with chemicals, you will likely find me hiking a mountain, running, playing piano, baking bread, or just lying in the sun reading a book. My favorite thing to do is travel, and I take every opportunity I can to experience a new corner of the earth. I love learning about people's passions, cultures, and traditions, so I immensely enjoyed exploring the contemplative practices that bring people peace and community all over the world.





McKenzie Martinez

I am a nursing major and will be starting nursing school at the University of Utah this fall. I am so excited to have a career helping others and learning about how amazing the body is. I am from Taylorsville, Utah, which is just fifteen minutes outside of Salt Lake City. I love volunteering. I started volunteering at the age of twelve tutoring young refugees and I since have volunteered in a nursing home, a third-grade classroom, a school in Thailand with Youthlinc, the Fourth Street homeless shelter, in various units at the University of Utah Hospital, as a Connect2Health member, and as an Americorps member. I joined this Praxis Lab because I had been curious about meditation for a while, and this class was the perfect opportunity to explore that curiosity. I also know that I could incorporate

meditative practices in my day to day life, whether through suggesting them to my patients or coping with my own stress. Meditation has changed my life because before I was in this class, I would be so upset after a test on which I didn't think I did as well as I should have that I would be on the brink of tears. Since this class, I have learned to accept things as they are and know if I didn't do as well as I wanted, I would just have to work harder next time.

Lili Huettlinger

My name is Lili Huettlinger. I'm a Sophomore in the Honors College majoring in Nursing with a minor in Nutrition. I work as a Health Care Assistant in the Ortho Trauma and Surgical Specialty Unit at the University of Utah Hospital. When I have the time, I love yoga, running, hiking, and cooking. My life, studies, and work are acutely focused on healthcare. I'm passionate about health and wellness, both medically and holistically, and this class was a beautiful way to explore human health in more than just the body. Mindfulness and meditation work to exercise and heal the mind and soul. In the past, I've used these to control anxiety and depression. After immersing deeply in the various practices presented in this Praxis Lab, I've never felt more happy, calm, and at peace. The greatest take-away from this year-long journey is this: the past and the future cannot be changed or controlled, so simply be content with living in the present moment.

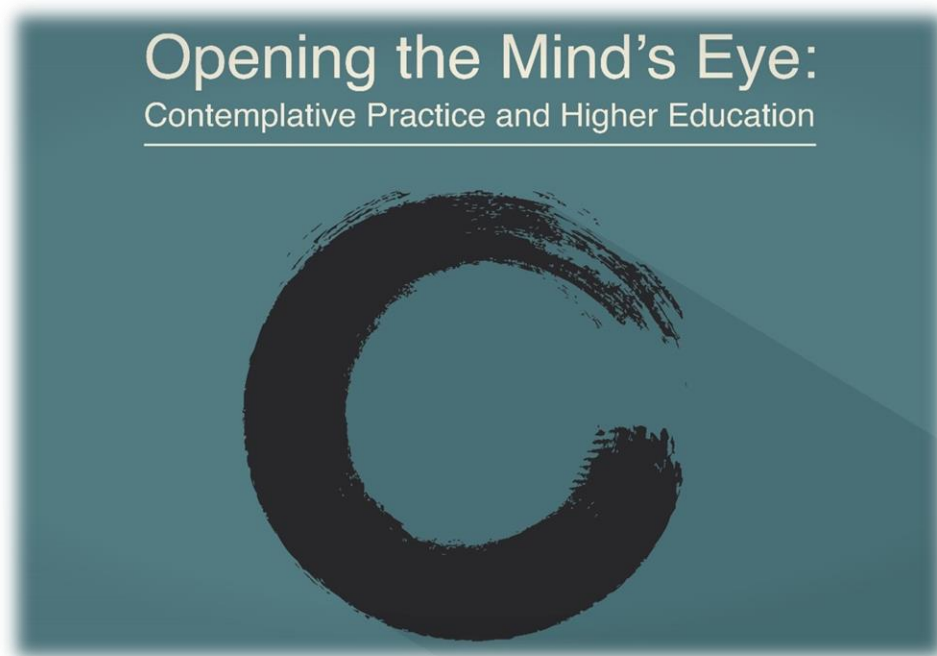




First Semester

Our first semester in the Opening the Mind's Eye Praxis Lab was filled with guest speakers, various contemplative practices, and lots of reading as we searched to discover what “meditation” actually means. We immersed ourselves in our own daily practices and dove into texts that ranged from scientific journals to instructional books on mindfulness. As we slowly gathered information and became familiar with a number of practices, we began to realize how beneficial meditation can be, especially to a stressed out, depressed, and anxious generation of college students.

In this section, you will find more information about the guests we hosted, books we read, and the neuroscience behind meditation.



Openness

Our first semester was defined by the openness that our Praxis Lab's logo represents. It is a single brush stroke, which represents unity of purpose. It is open-ended, which signifies an openness to the world. We sought to embody this purpose and openness as we learned about meditation from traditions that were often very different from those that we grew up with.

We hope that, through our efforts, we can encourage other members of our campus community to engage with mindfulness and meditation. It might seem foreign and scary, but the proven benefits are such that it is at least worth trying. As you read this book, we hope that you will be open, too.

Guest Speakers



Shirley Ray

Shirley Ray began her Vipassana practice and studies at the Barre Insight Meditation Center in 1976. Subsequent study at Sharpham College, Devon England, Spirit Rock, CA, and Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, MA set the course of her practice and learning. In 2001, she organized the Insight Meditation Vipassana center in Salt Lake City and has taught meditation and led retreats

and classes in Buddhist Studies throughout Utah. She devised two University of Utah research projects, each with a meditation component, called Meditation for Fibromyalgia Pain Study funded by NIH and the Mind/Life Institute and Loving Kindness Meditation research in the Psychology department funded by NIH. As part of her practice she served 2 years in the Peace Corps, Moldova '93 to '95. Later, she served seven years as a volunteer Chaplain at Primary Children's Hospital. She currently offers classes and guided meditation practice at the First Unitarian church in Salt Lake City. We were lucky to have Shirley lead our class through the semester's opening mediation. She taught us about mindfulness meditation, how to continually focus and refocus attention on the breath, and led us through a short walking meditation.

Charlotte Bell

Charlotte Bell, yoga teacher at the Mindful Yoga Collective, began teaching yoga in 1986. She's taught classes in California, Hawaii, along the Wasatch Front, at international yoga teacher trainings, and on women's river trips along the Colorado and Green Rivers. She received her 500-hour certification from Yoga Alliance in 2000 and is registered at the highest level of the organization. Her teaching is heavily influenced by the Vipassana and Iyengar styles of yoga, and she takes a mindful, meditative approach to yoga. During her visit to our class, she encouraged us not to view yoga as a means to achieve a particular fitness goal, but rather to let our breath guide our movements and allow ourselves to slow down and listen to our bodies. This level of mindful attention to movement was a relatively new concept for us, as Charlotte was only the second instructor to visit our class, but her insight and advice was invaluable; it carried through the rest of the course and has informed each of our individual practices.





Dr. Heidi Hart

Heidi Hart is a well-known Quaker practitioner here in the Salt Lake Valley. She is a Pushcart Prize-winning poet and singer, and the author of *Grace Notes* and *Edge by Edge*. When Hart visited our class, she taught us how the Quaker form of worship is based on silence. Within silence, she said, one can focus on opening their mind, heart, and spirit. She prompted us to search for our deeper concerns in life and encouraged us to work through our concerns while maintaining an attitude of openness while we entertain the thoughts that came up.

Dr. Michael Berger

Dr. Michael Berger, a master of classic martial arts, provided valuable insight and experience when he guided our class through kinesthetic qigong meditation. After graduating from the University of Utah, he moved his studies to East Asia where he achieved his 6th degree black belt and diploma in Shiatsu-Anma



massage and Reiki therapy in Japan and graduated from the Zhejiang Chinese Medical University with his Master's Degree in acupuncture and Tuina. With wisdom that comes only from experience, he made a great impact on our class. We are very grateful for the opportunity to learn from, and experience qigong meditation with, Dr. Berger.



Diane Musho Hamilton Sensei

A gifted mediator of over 30 years, facilitator, and teacher of Zen and integral spirituality, Diane Musho Hamilton captured our respect and affection when she visited our class with her profound personal story, wonderful teaching methods, and the aura of peace she brings everywhere she goes. She is the author of the book *Everything is Workable: A Zen Approach to Conflict Resolution*, in which she shares her wisdom gained from years as a Zen teacher and professional conflict mediator in the Utah State Court system. She cofounded Two Arrows Zen with Michael Mugaku Zimmerman in both Salt Lake City and Southern Utah. She makes Zen practice understandable and applicable for all people. Hamilton Sensei helped our class

see things with a “big mind” perspective and learn to escape the mind of dualism. We are so grateful for the enormous contribution she made to our class, and for taking the time out of her busy life to meet with us and teach at our public event for the U community.

Michael Mugaku Zimmerman Sensei

Michael Mugaku Zimmerman is a University of Utah Law School graduate who, after clerking for US Supreme Court Justice Warren E. Burger and teaching at the University of Utah Law School, served 16 years on the Utah Supreme Court. Zimmerman Sensei began studying Zen Buddhism in 1993 as a means to find clarity, peace, and grounding. Studying with Genpo Roshi, Zimmerman Sensei received Jukai and Tokudo and became a monk in 2003. He visited our Praxis Lab last fall to work with us on koans – paradoxical statements or questions originating in Japanese Zen Buddhism that aid in one’s meditation practice. “To constantly realize that my sense of who and what I am,” Zimmerman writes, “my expectations of myself and others, my ingrained habits of mind, are all perspectives – all are true, all are partial.”





Dr. Soheila Amirsoleimani

Soheila Amirsoleimani, Associate Professor of World Languages and Cultures at the University of Utah, visited our class in October to discuss the contemplative beauty of Islamic mysticism and ancient Sufi texts. Guided by works like Farid ud-Din Attar's "The Conference of the Birds" and the poetry of Rumi, Professor Amirsoleimani called the class' attention to the holy silence that lurks subtly behind the words of mystic writers of the Islamic tradition. In this silence, the contemplative novice may discover the essence of perfecting the self through harmony with one's surroundings and loving others fully without ego. "Take the English sentence, 'I love you,'" remarked Soheila. "The 'I' is, grammatically, the subject. 'You,' the object. We do this in language – make subjects and objects of one another. The goal is to strip away the subject, 'I,' and to quit thinking of

others ('you') as objects. What's left of the sentence 'I love you,' in this absence of the greedy self, is simply 'love.'" Reclaiming the true self can happen only after the ego is recognized – a feat Professor Amirsoleimani believes is aided by closely reading poetry of Islamic mysticism. The path to spiritual enlightenment becomes one of constantly training the self to see the world as it truly is, with compassion and a beckoning toward silence, in spite of missteps along the way. "Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times," wrote Rumi. "Come, yet again, come, come."

Andrew Briefer

Andrew Briefer is a certified Marriage and Family Therapist who practices in Salt Lake City. His work focuses mainly on creating a satisfying and meaningful life for his clients. For this class, Andrew Briefer discussed the reading "Mindfulness for Borderline Personality Disorder: Relieve Your Suffering Using Core Skill of Dialectical Behavior Therapy." During this lecture, he discussed how meditation and mindfulness can play a role in 'modernizing' our understanding of emotional regulation; mindfulness allows you to pick and choose how you respond to emotional moments and can play an important role in managing your emotional health.





Rev. Tyler Doherty

Rev. Tyler Doherty is the assistant priest at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Mark in Salt Lake City, Utah. Prior to moving to Utah in 2015, Rev. Doherty attended Virginia Theological Seminary and earned a Masters of Divinity before being ordained as a priest in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. He has also earned an HBA in English Literature from McGill University, an MFA in poetry and poetics from Naropa University, and an M.Ed in secondary education from Arcadia University. Rev. Doherty's broad studies have given him a broad base in English literature and contemplative practices. In addition to serving as an assistant priest, Rev. Doherty is a Benedictine oblate and meditation leader in the

World Community for Christian Meditation. Rev. Doherty shared his experience as a mediation leader with us by teaching us the Christian practices of *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer. *Lectio divina* is based on reading a text and moving the reader through the four stages of reading, meditating/thinking, praying, and contemplating. Contemplative prayer invites the practitioner to focus on one phrase (such as maranatha) and immerse oneself in it.



Rabbi David Levinsky

Rabbi David Levinsky, a “Chicago-born, guitar-playing, skateboarding, hipster rabbi,” said in a statement given to the Salt Lake Tribune that he practices “a form of Judaism that is relevant and vital in today's world – and [does] it in a very open way.” This was his approach when he came into our class. He showed us a practice of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah. Kabbalah “seeks to define the nature of the universe and the human being, the nature and purpose of existence, and various other ontological questions.” Rabbi Levinsky guided our class through a few minutes of Kabbalah, which was like a segmented, repetitious chant that got us all to focus on our collective voices and breath. It was interesting, after meditating through the lens of Quaker, Sufi, Zen, and psychotherapeutic traditions, to see how Jewish mysticism relied heavily on repetition, sound, and time.

Dr. Scott Black

University of Utah Professor Scott Black visited our class in November to discuss what he called “Fictions of Contemplations.” Namely, he discussed J.D. Salinger’s two-part novel, *Franny and Zooey*, in light of its deeply contemplative message. Through close reading, Professor Black outlined a vision of Franny and Zooey that illuminated fiction’s potential to expand one’s perspective through carefully-penned cathartic moments. Especially in *Franny and Zooey*, these moments come through explicitly spiritual representations of the characters’ drives to do away with ego, to recognize the joy and non-pretension inherent to all things, people, and places. This supremely Buddhist sentiment, shared by Professor Black and gathered in contemplative silence by the class, drew for everyone a better picture of fiction’s potential to make one think, with a great deal of concentration, about serious topics essential to living full and mindful lives.



Dr. Yoshi Nakamura



Yoshi Nakamura, Ph.D., from the Department of Anesthesiology in the University of Utah’s School of Medicine, visited our class in December to talk about scientific studies completed regarding the neurological effects of meditation. He has participated in many of these studies himself, including studies about pain management, architecturally-induced contemplative states, and methods to scientifically rate different contemplative practices. We are grateful for his work and for sharing it with us.

Dr. Michael Johnson

Dr. Michael Johnson visited our class in December to talk about the science of mindfulness. He is a nurse practitioner, University of Utah professor, and meditation practitioner who studies the effects of contemplative practice on the brain. His current work uses state-of-the-art neuroimaging methods to examine spiritual states in religious and spiritual practitioners. He currently teaches in the University of Utah College of Nursing, where he teaches models of neuroscience that integrate brain and mind to clinical practitioners.



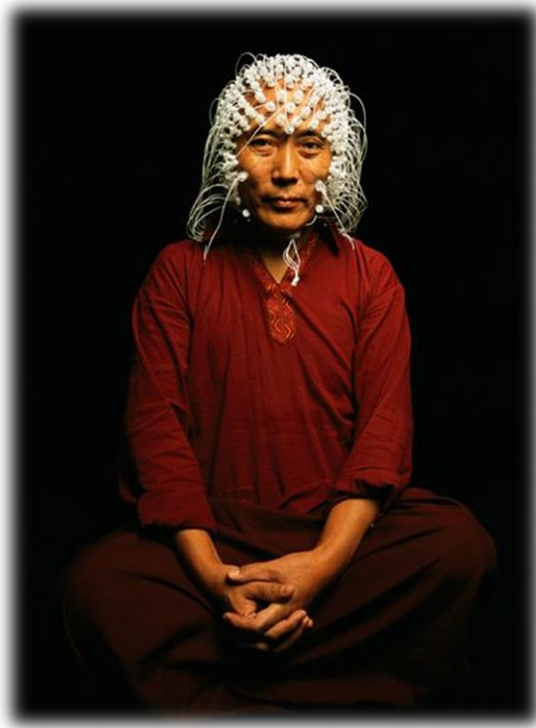
Meg Wheatley



Meg Wheatley is a writer and management consultant who studies organizational theory. She has served as an Associate Professor of Management at Brigham Young University and Cambridge College, as a consultant and speaker for various organizations and leadership programs, as a writer, and as a meditator who brings new perspectives to organizations. Meg spoke to our class about designing our project and how we could ensure that meditation would inform all aspects of it. Her main advice was to “Start anywhere and follow it everywhere.” She explained that this motto encourages an open mindset that leads to creativity and a willingness to embrace change when things do not go according to plan. We learned just how valuable this perspective is throughout the course of our project.

Neuroscience of Mindfulness

In earlier years, research regarding the benefits of meditation had been limited to subjective observations of meditators due to a lack of sufficient technology for more objective, measurable findings. Even though meditation and contemplative practices span back to ancient times, until recently we have had no way to quantifiably measure their effects on our brains. With the ability to measure brain waves and brain activity through EEG, MRI, and other methods, research publications have exploded exponentially. We now know more than ever thanks to the hundreds of scientific research projects completed and in progress that, yes, meditation does change the brain – for the better.

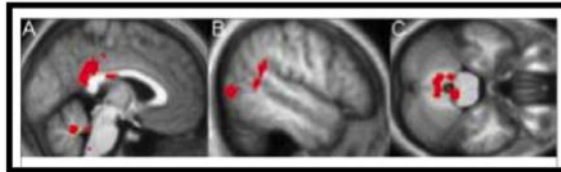


One such project was conducted by Sara Lazar, a Harvard neuroscientist who has been studying the effects of mindfulness and meditation on the brain for twenty years. Her research shows that regular meditation grows the grey matter in areas of the brain associated with focus, learning, cognition, memory, emotional regulation, empathy, and compassion. When the grey matter in these areas grows, these skills improve. Conversely, meditation is associated with shrinking in the area of the brain associated with anxiety, fear, and stress (2). Certain studies show that meditation can rival the effects of antidepressants (3), improve focus after just a few weeks of regular practice (4), and even help addicts kick smoking (5). We would caution that while meditation is extremely helpful in these and other areas of life, it is not a “silver bullet” or a “quick fix” for any problem. Rather, meditation has been proven to help us change our perspective on ourselves and the world by physically using and improving specific parts of the brain.

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Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

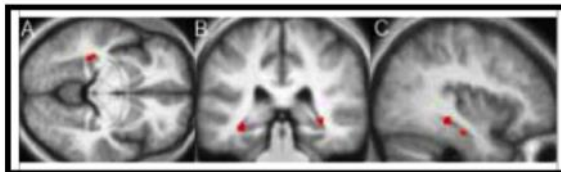


Areas that showed increase in gray matter concentration following eight weeks of MBSR

A: posterior cingulate cortex and cerebellum

B: temporo-parietal junction

C: cerebellum and brain stem



Brain scans of the hippocampus, showing the regions that were affected by meditation.

Integration of Contemplation in Higher Education

The first semester of our Praxis Lab introduced us to multiple resources that discussed the application of mindfulness and other contemplative practices in higher education. In the book *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush discuss the various methods and practices implemented across campuses along with a thorough discussion of their effectiveness. In the book, Alexandra Schultheis and Gregory Grieve report that mindfulness practices introduced to their class at the University of North Carolina “expand[ed] the range of responses possible... We were perhaps most pleased about the ways in which contemplative practices allowed the students to delve deeply into the intellectual core of the course, and then to translate that core into their own terms” (99). Gurleen Grewal taught mindfulness in a women’s studies course at the University of South Florida and noted that the practice was “crucial in developing acceptance, tolerance, and compassion for oneself and others” (100).

Barbezat and Bush state that the essence of mindfulness is flexible thinking, and the students and faculty that practice in and out of the classroom report a deeper involvement in their education. Students learn to better appreciate the information given and love to learn for the intrinsic value of learning. Professors have utilized direct approaches to contemplative reading, such as the practice of *lectio divina*, which involves careful and mindful reading of short passages to help the students learn, internalize, and truly feel what they read. This practice especially has been used to encourage students to deeply engage with difficult material, such as readings on the Holocaust.

We also read Joseph Goldstein’s *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*, which explains mindfulness of body, feelings, mind, and categories of experience in the Vipassana tradition. Each guest lecturer also assigned readings, which ranged from J.D. Salinger’s novel *Franny and Zooey* to Sufi poetry to Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra.

The University of Utah has multiple facilities that incorporate contemplative practices in their programs, including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) at the Center for Student Wellness and almost twenty varieties of contemplative programs at the Huntsman Cancer Institute. Many students in this Praxis Lab contacted professors from different universities, including Brown University and the University of Utah, so that the projects implemented by this Praxis Lab could be as successful as possible. Through these interviews, we found examples of great successes and potential pitfalls, which guided us in the application of our own outreach. We compiled our interviews and research into final papers that investigated a few potential applications of meditation and mindfulness in higher education. These essays helped us transition from just reading and learning about meditation to considering what we can do to spread awareness of mindfulness in our own community.

Second Semester

At the end of the first semester, we asked ourselves how we could best connect others to meditation. Central to this question was determining what our university community needed, and through surveys and our research we determined that the problem was accessibility. Similar to our experience before taking this class, many people had heard about meditation and knew that it was good for them but lacked knowledge about starting a practice and had nowhere that they felt comfortable meditating. During spring semester, we focused on this central problem of accessibility.

Our Praxis Lab approached the problem of accessibility through two questions: what could we do, here and now at the University of Utah, to spread awareness of mindfulness, and how could we make sure that mindfulness would have a lasting presence on our campus?

We answered the question of direct impact by creating an indoor and outdoor meditation space along with an informative website targeted to college students. To get the word out about these new resources on campus we gave informative presentations to various student groups and faculty and created a main event where we discussed our project and had guest speakers explain the scientific and personal benefits gained through meditative practices.

To maintain the longevity of our project we also decided to partner with the Honors College and create a Scholars Group to continue to learn about meditation and maintain the projects we've created this semester.

Small Presentations

We did eight short presentations on the basics of mindfulness, which reached 120 students and community members. These presentations introduced students to a simple definition of mindfulness: "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Jon Kabat-Zinn). They also addressed frequently asked questions, including whether one has to be religious in order to practice meditation. One of our favorite parts of these presentations was getting to share our personal experiences of meditation with other members of our campus community. This sharing of experiences was particularly meaningful because we presented to campus groups we were personally involved with. The variety of students in our class meant that we were able to present to campus groups as diverse as the National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH), the Interfaith at the U of U Club, the staff of the Bennion Center, and the Nursing Early Assurance Program. We gave a flyer with information on meditation, resources, and the date of our main event to everyone who listened to our presentations.

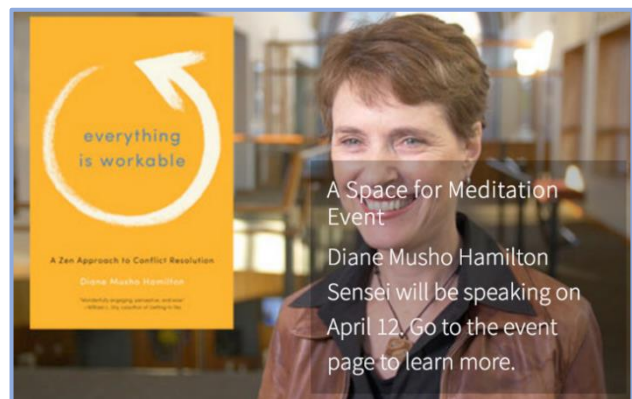
A Mindful Website

Our class created the website www.umeditate.live in a collaborative effort to connect students and community members to meditation through the problems that they are already experiencing in their daily lives. While the website gives practical information about upcoming events on campus and in the larger SLC community (to be maintained and updated by The Art of Living Scholars Group), we also desired to provide a universal, timeless service that students across the nation from all backgrounds and locales could use and from which they'd gather real and tangible benefit. To this end, we came up with a number of "Problem Statements," like, "I can't stop checking my phone," or "I feel stressed all the time." To these we assigned varying meditative and contemplative practices – generally guided or with detailed instructions – tailored toward helping students seek a greater understanding of and resolution for their particular troubles.

In addition to these practices, the website contains a number of resources that students and laypeople alike can use to supplement their own understanding of contemplative practice in light of growing evidence that suggests mindfulness and meditation have positive impacts on the mind and body.

Homepage

Our home page describes the purpose of the site and how students might use the website to navigate their own various challenges.



Practices

A Practices section is composed mainly of “Problem Statements” (e.g., “I don’t love who I am”), the write-ups for which include a few sensitive and affirming thoughts that precede guided meditations students may perform in order to address and focus on that particular issue or problem.

What are you having trouble with?

Once you identify what you would like to address, click on one of the links below to follow a meditation that could help you.



PC: The Fair Toxophilites, 1872 by William Powell Frith; bridgemanimages.com

I'm having trouble with... focus.

I can't focus in class.

I can't stop checking my phone.

I want to get more school work done.

I can't get...

I'm addicted



I don't love who I am.

When we look in the mirror everyday, we sometimes don't like what's reflecting back at us. Maybe we think we're not smart enough, pretty enough, or good enough. We compare ourselves constantly to our friends and classmates, and hold ourselves to often unreachable standards. When we scroll through social media feeds like Instagram and Facebook, we are bombarded with the curated highlight reels of people's lives and we can feel like who we are doesn't even begin to compare to these people. Thoughts like, "Why can't I look like him?" or "She's smarter than I am," or "Should I even try?" can clutter our minds with self hate and doubt about our own worth. We often expect more from ourselves in all realms of life than we do from loved ones. If we love and accept our friends and family for who they are, then why can't we do that for ourselves?

Here are three ways that we can begin to love ourselves:

*Self-Kindness

When we choose to practice self compassion rather than be critical of ourselves it can decrease negative thoughts and emotions. Self nurturing is a key part to self compassion and as humans this is something we should practice daily. No one is perfect which means when we feel bad about ourselves or mess



PC: Pixabay.com

I can't stop checking my phone.

Americans between 18 and 24 years old check their phone an average of 74 times a day. Assuming a regular sleep schedule of eight hours a night (which is a stretch to assume for college students), that means that, as a young adult, you might check your phone at least four times an hour (USNews). You may even use your phone immediately after waking up. This compulsion to check notifications can manifest itself in phantom buzzing (when you think you heard a notification and there wasn't one) or an overwhelming desire to unlock your phone. Sometimes you might not even be aware of grabbing your phone until suddenly Facebook is open on the screen in front of you.

This dependency is very stressful because it can interfere with your ability to do homework, pay attention in class, or join attentively in conversation. You might find yourself spending hours cycling through social media instead of doing homework, fighting the urge to pull out your phone in a lecture, or anxiously wondering if you got a new email instead of listening to your friend or significant other. Phone overuse can seriously impact your life.

First things first: you are not the only one constantly checking their phone. It might not be healthy, but it is a common occurrence. Don't beat yourself up about it. You also don't need to completely swear off your phone. Smartphones aren't bad in and of themselves -- it's the overuse of smartphones that can be harmful. Because you've acknowledged your phone usage is affecting you in some way, you can now do something about it. Try following this meditation once a day to become more aware of your relationship to your phone. Since this is a written meditation, you might want to print it out (looking at it on your phone might defeat the point).

Practice: Be Mindful with Your Phone

*1. Sit comfortably in an upright posture with your phone in the palm of your hand. Rest your hand gently on your lap. (For this meditation, we assume you have a phone -- if you're reading this post, there's a very good chance you do!) Keep your eyes open with a soft gaze.

2. Turn your phone on, but do not open any particular app. Let your thumb hover over top the screen.

3. Take a full, deep breath into the belly. Let yourself feel how the breath enters and leaves the body. For a few minutes, pay close

sion Break

involves using a set of memorized
port yourself when you're in pain.


Learn More

A Learn More section provides links to meditation websites and university departments across the world so students can further research topics of mindfulness and meditation on their own. Many of these pages include further guided meditations and information about different meditative traditions.


Learn More

UMeditate was built to introduce people to meditation through the various issues that they might have in their lives. The meditations included in this website are just a taste of the wide array of contemplative practices and traditions. If you would like to learn more about meditation, you can visit any of these websites or visit the community page to learn about classes in the Salt Lake Valley.


Please note that the inclusion of a website on this page does not constitute support or approval by The Art of Living Scholars Group.



PC: University of Utah Mindfulness Clinic



PC: mindful.org



PC: UCLA MARC

University of Utah Mindfulness Clinic

University of Utah Mindfulness Clinic provides guided meditations, scientific evidence for the benefits of mindfulness, and information about community resources for mindfulness at the University of Utah.

Mindful.org

Mindful.org and its magazine, *Mindful*, provide guided meditations, scientific evidence for the benefits of mindfulness, and articles from leading practitioners and teachers of mindfulness.

UCLA MARC

The UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center provides guided meditations (including Spanish meditations) and cutting-edge research on the benefits of mindfulness.

Community


If this website has sparked an interest in meditation, you can learn more at any of these locations in the Salt Lake Valley. Some offer free meditation, while others are businesses which charge for lessons.

Please note that the inclusion of a business on this page does not constitute support or approval by The Art of Living Scholars Group.



PC: University of Utah Mindfulness Clinic

LEARN MORE



Mindfulness Utah
Mindfulness Utah provides information on classes in mindfulness based stress

Community

A Community tab provides links to services offered in the Salt Lake Valley for students who wish to become more involved in mindfulness and meditation as it's performed by neighbors and community members.

Evidence

An Evidence tab provides links to videos, articles, and websites that both store and produce scientific research on the benefits of mindfulness and meditation.

Collections of mindfulness research

AMERICAN
MINDFULNESS
RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION

CONTEMPLATIVE MIND
IN LIFE

CENTER FOR
CONTEMPLATIVE MIND
IN SOCIETY

Research Labs

UCLA MINDFUL
AWARENESS
RESEARCH CENTER

THE CENTER FOR
COMPASSION AND

Main Event

We decided to put on a large-scale main event in order to introduce the broader campus community to meditation and to raise awareness of the resources that our class had created for the community.

Planning

1. Guest Speaker Selection: After much debate and voting, we chose Diane Musho Hamilton to speak about meditation and to lead a guided meditation. Hamilton Sensei is a respected community member and meditation master, so we were happy when she agreed to present. Though the best way to learn about meditation is to meditate, we also wanted to show how meditation affects the body in a way that is backed up by recent scientific research. We asked Dr. Michael Johnson, who presented to us in the first semester, to speak at the event and brief the audience on the current state of research regarding meditation's effects on the brain. As a sign of appreciation for their time, we gave our keynote speakers contemplative singing bowls to bring them in and out of meditation. We engraved the bowls with our Praxis Lab's name and the year in which the speakers presented.
2. Arranging a space: After a long process of coordinating with multiple spaces, we decided to hold our event at the Student Union because it is centrally located and because our indoor space will be located in the same building.
3. Food: We decided on hors d'oeuvres for 100 people. Though this took up a large portion of our budget, we thought (rightly) that good food would attract students. Our hopes were confirmed when we got compliments on how the quality of the food added to the prestige of the event.
4. Student Speakers: The majority of our class participated in the main event by speaking during the presentation. Students introduced the event and the main speakers, talked about the knowledge-heavy first semester and the praxis-heavy second semester, ran the Q&A session, and thanked the guest speakers. This gave students a good, educational opportunity to speak in front of a crowd on the lessons and insights we'd gathered from the course.

Execution

In total, 75 students, faculty, and community members attended our event. They asked questions, heard from two talented and knowledgeable speakers, learned about our class's contributions to mindfulness on campus, and got to experience meditation for themselves. We hope that this event encouraged our audience to develop their own meditative practices.



Left: The audience enjoy upscale hors d'ouvres while we fix some technical difficulties.



Above: Assistant Dean Monty Paret (Honors College) introduces the idea of a Praxis Lab.



Left: Diane Musho Hamilton Sensei leads a meditation on freeing oneself from the illusion of dualism.

Below: Dr. Michael Johnson presents on advancements in neuroimaging and the latest research on the benefits of meditation.



Scholars Group

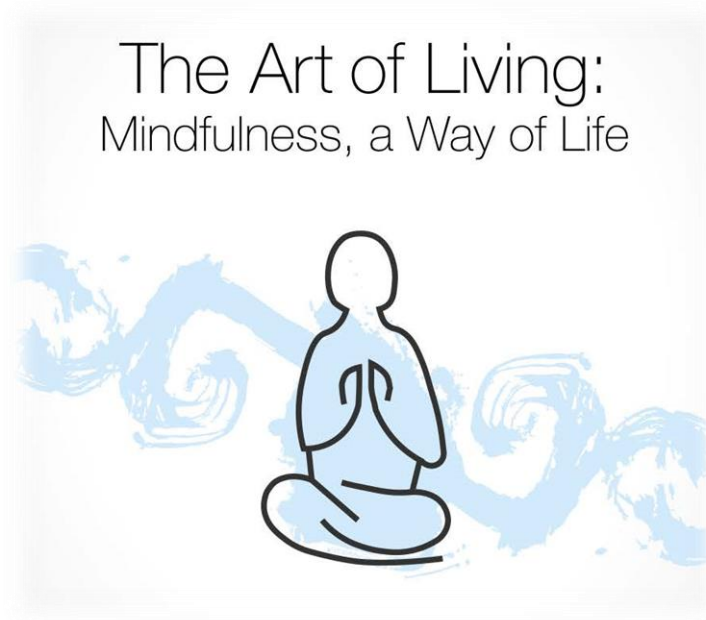
We worked with the Honors College to create an Honors Scholars Group, The Art of Living: Mindfulness, A Way of Life. Honor Scholars Groups are extra-curricular groups that work with faculty members to deeply engage with a topic outside of class. In addition to learning more about contemplative practices, *The Art of Living* Scholars Group will maintain the UMeditate website and will ensure the completion of the campus meditation garden.

The mission of *The Art of Living* is to promote student wellness and academic success through mindfulness and meditation practices, explore different theories of practice and means by which to practice, and recognize the importance of mindfulness in the lives of university students.

The goals of the Scholars Group are to increase student knowledge of mindfulness through readings, guest speakers, hands-on practice, and off-campus trips and to oversee the funding, construction, and maintenance of an on-campus meditation garden.

In pursuit of the first goal, the Scholars Group will discuss contemplative readings throughout the year, invite guest speakers to attend sessions, engage in a variety of contemplative practices, and partner with other campus groups to attend off-campus meditation events.

In pursuit of the second goal, the Scholars Group will fund a portion of the garden, fundraise for the remainder of the garden cost, oversee construction of the garden, maintain the garden through the 2017-2018 school year, and create and implement a maintenance plan for the 2018-2019 school year.



Indoor Space

As part of our action plan, we sought to create an indoor space on campus where students would be able to practice in a quiet, private room. We recognized that there was a lack of physical spaces on campus for meditation, which is why we believed it was so important to procure an indoor space. We had done some research to see if there were any rooms/programs at the University of Utah that offered similar resources. After identifying that the University Counseling Center had a Mindfulness Clinic, we contacted them to see if we could potentially work with them on the space that they already had. The Mindfulness Clinic ended up moving along a track that slightly differed from the goals we wanted to accomplish.

We set out again, seeking a space that would allow us to have more creative freedom. We sought to ensure that our space was centrally located, easily accessible, and had a welcoming environment. After looking at multiple candidates, we were able to partner with the Student Union Building and contribute to a prayer room (Union Parlor C) that is currently in the construction process. The Meditation Space is set to undergo construction beginning May 2017 so that it can be open to the public by the start of fall semester 2017.

Whit Hollis, the Director of the Union, has been working on opening this space for quite some time. He first saw the need for this room so that Muslim students could have access to proper foot-bathing stations on campus. Though the room initially started specifically as a Muslim prayer room, our collaborative efforts will open the space for all types of religious and secular contemplative practices. The room will be a safe space open for all the public to utilize.

Our Praxis Lab will provide the Meditation Space with extra furnishings so that people may have the proper equipment to engage in any practice of their choosing. We will purchase six zabutons (left image) and six cushions (right image) to include in the room. Once construction is complete and the room is re-opened to the public, it will be fully stocked with cushions, mats, prayer rugs, and foot washing stations – all of which will be available for use by anyone. Our Scholars Group will oversee the completion of the Meditation Space through this fall.

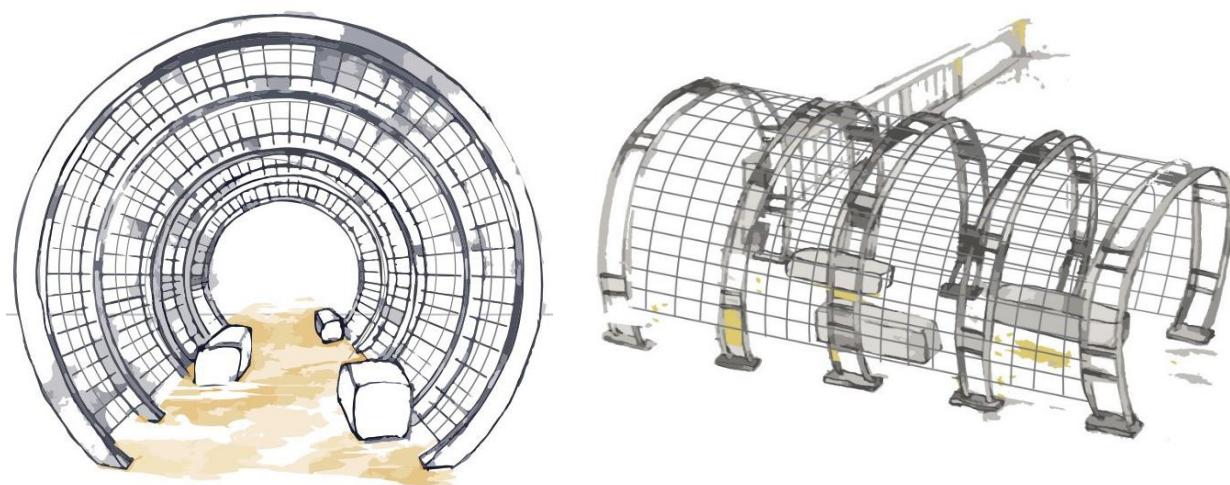


Outdoor Space

One of the main hurdles we identified with regard to establishing a stronger presence of mindfulness on campus was simply the lack of a physical space in which students can comfortably meditate. We decided to create two spaces for contemplation: an indoor meditation room and a meditation garden. Study after study has confirmed the physical and mental health benefits that result from spending time outdoors, so creating an outdoor space will allow us to connect to these immense benefits and the calming, restorative influence of nature.

We met with representatives from the Sustainable Campus Initiative Fund (SCIF) and the Edible Campus Gardens. Our goals and those of the Edible Campus Gardens happened to align very fortuitously. Their efforts to generate more student involvement in the gardens and create accessible, welcoming spaces within the gardens were similar to our goals to create a contemplative space outdoors; therefore, we decided to partner with the Campus Gardens to create a meditative space within the Pioneer Garden on lower campus. This will be beneficial to both parties and will involve far less bureaucratic difficulty because the gardens are already established on campus and have a great deal of artistic discretion with their spaces.

The space we decided to create will be a trellised tunnel encased in bean vines leading into the garden through one of the entrances. It will be approximately 25 feet long and 6 feet wide, circular in cross-section, with three benches and a gong or bell. It will be almost fully enclosed, with a beautiful view of the garden and campus from one entrance.



We contracted Matthew Briggs, a garden intern and student of interdisciplinary design, to draw up a design and proposal for the space to be presented to Facilities Management. Currently, this space is in the planning process, but the Scholars Group that we have created will work on the garden project in the coming academic year and ensure that it is completed.

Conclusion

At its core, Opening the Mind's Eye is a Praxis Lab about the interplay between contemplative practices and the college lifestyle. The benefits and effects of meditation are well documented, and through our Praxis Lab we were able to spread these benefits to roughly 200 students, staff, and community members. Additionally, we secured a physical space inside of the Union and the Campus Edible Gardens to provide accessible locations for students to practice.

We hope that our learning and efforts will positively impact our fellow community members and spread mindfulness and meditation to those who may benefit from them.

Thank You

We would like to say thank you to everyone who took their time to contribute to this class. Special thanks go to the Honors College for allowing us to do this Praxis Lab and learn about such amazing practices from such gifted teachers.

We would like to thank our professors for coming up with such an engaging class, contacting so many different teachers to come and speak to us, encouraging us to practice meditation every day until it became part of our daily routine, and allowing us to collaborate with them on our ideas for our project. Our professors have worked with us to not only become better students and meditators, but better people.

We would like to say thank you to each person who came to our main event, who will come to our indoor space at the Union Parlor C, who will come to our garden, who will become a part of our scholars group, and who will use our website. Each of these places took its own amount of time and effort to create and we thank anyone who takes the time to come and be in or a part of them.

Over the course of the year, our Praxis Lab became a family. We got along and worked especially well as a team, excluding no one individual. We have all put in effort to make this the best Praxis Lab we could and learn from each other while building each other up. We would like to say thank you to each other because we all made it happen.

Lastly, we would like to say thank you to any person who has taken their time to look over all our accomplishments from this year. We worked extremely hard, and we hope that anyone who reads this will be inspired to meditate and try a practice they may have never before considered. As the well-known meditation teacher Jack Kornfield said, "We have only now, only this single eternal moment opening and unfolding before us, day and night." Meditation can open doors you never thought possible: you just have to do it now and not wait until tomorrow. Mindfulness can be found all around us, all the time. You only have to want to find it in the ever-unfolding present moment.

A Closing Meditation

1. **Sit comfortably.** Find a spot that gives you a stable, solid, comfortable seat.
2. **Notice what your legs are doing.** If on a cushion, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. If on a chair, rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor.
3. **Straighten your upper body**—but don't stiffen. Your spine has natural curvature. Let it be there.
4. **Notice what your arms are doing.** Situate your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Rest the palms of your hands on your legs wherever it feels most natural.
5. **Soften your gaze.** Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward. It's not necessary to close your eyes. You can simply let what appears before your eyes be there without focusing on it.
6. **Feel your breath.** Bring your attention to the physical sensation of breathing: the air moving through your nose or mouth, the rising and falling of your belly, or your chest.
7. **Notice when your mind wanders from your breath.** Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. Don't worry. There's no need to block or eliminate thinking. When you notice your mind wandering gently return your attention to the breath.
8. **Be kind about your wandering mind.** You may find your mind wandering constantly—that's normal, too. Instead of wrestling with your thoughts, practice observing them without reacting. Just sit and pay attention. As hard as it is to maintain, that's all there is. Come back to your breath over and over again, without judgment or expectation.
9. **When you're ready, gently lift your gaze** (if your eyes are closed, open them). Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment. Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions.



The body is present, the
heart is soft and open,
the mind is attentive.

-Jack Kornfield

