



**Comm 400:
Mindful Communication
(4 units)**

Spring 2021

Tues, Thurs 2:00-3:30p (Zoom live session)

Instructor: Professor Andrea Hollingshead
Contact Info: aholling@usc.edu

Course Description:

Mindfulness is being fully present, aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions without judgment or reactivity. Mindfulness can increase focus, improve emotion regulation, reduce anxiety, and improve wellbeing.

This course applies the concept of mindfulness to the practice of communication. In most work and life situations, the goals of mindful communication are to promote common understanding, meaningful conversations, and positive relationships. However, difficult situations can arise where the goals of mindful communication are personal safety and self-preservation. A mindful communicator observes, listens and adjusts their communication to the context.

We will explore a range of research topics that relate to mindful communication including mindful breathing, attention, presence, deep listening, perspective taking, empathy, compassion, kindness, gratitude, emotional intelligence, psychological safety, and many others. We will also examine real world examples of mindful (and mindless) communication among strangers, in relationships, at work, in contemporary society and in social media. (See Course Schedule on page 5 for full topic list.)

The course is interactive, experiential and organized around team activities. Readings, discussions, class activities, assignments and guest speakers are designed to enhance mindful communication practices and skills. The diverse set of guest speakers each has their own mindful approach to communication that has, in large part, contributed to their success.

The course is divided into weekly modules and designed as a "flipped classroom." This means that most content is delivered before class in weekly readings and class preparation. Class sessions focus on activities and discussions that integrate and apply concepts in the readings. Because much of the learning in the course is team-based and experiential, **attendance in our weekly Zoom live session is required**. Unfortunately it is not possible to take this course asynchronously.

The course is inspired by the *Mindful USC* initiative (<http://mindful.usc.edu>).

Learning Objectives:

The specific objectives of the course are to provide students with:

- Theory and research-based knowledge on the benefits of mindfulness
- Concepts and a language for understanding mindful (and mindless) communication
- Understanding of factors that influence how people decide what to say and how they respond to other people
- Analytical tools to accurately assess communication situations across contexts (friends, strangers, face-to-face, social media, etc.)
- Insight into their own communication and the ability to communicate more mindfully
- Skills to recognize and navigate through conflict and other difficult communication situations
- A safe and supportive class environment for learning and experimentation

Class Materials:

All course materials, which include readings, TED talk videos and other learning materials will be provided in the Weekly Modules (see below) on Blackboard a week before they are due in class. There is no required textbook.

Zoom Class Live Sessions:

As mentioned earlier, because this is a small interactive class, **participation in the live Zoom class sessions is required.**

I expect everyone to keep their video on during class and especially during breakout rooms and team activities. This is especially important in a small interactive class. Seeing one another keeps the class energy level high, creates accountability and builds a sense of community. If you have a personal circumstance that makes having your video on difficult, no problem, just let me know, and you can keep it off.

Live class discussions will be recorded and made available to students through Blackboard. Course content is intellectual property and our class meetings are confidential. USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of our class learning environment. As a student, you are responsible for the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing SCampus policies regarding class notes (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/>). These rules will be strictly enforced, and violations will be met with disciplinary sanction.

Important: All students must enter our Zoom classroom through Course Blackboard. If you find yourself in the waiting room for class, you did not enter class correctly, and need to sign off and try again. See link: <https://keepteaching.usc.edu/students/student-toolkit/classroom/zoom/> for more detailed instructions.

Assignments:

More specific guidelines on assignments will be given later in the semester.

Weekly Module Completion. As mentioned earlier, this course is structured as a flipped classroom so everyone will be well-prepared to participate and benefit from classroom activities. Course work is divided into weekly modules that will appear on Blackboard the week before they are covered in class. Each module contains learning materials and short assignments on each course topic, and should take 4 hours on average to complete. I believe you will find each module informative, thought provoking and entertaining. It will usually consist of one or two academic research articles, TED talks and other videos, news and other popular press articles, scales and surveys, and short essays where you will apply the knowledge gained from the module.

With the exception of Week 1, all weekly modules are due by 12-noon on Tuesdays. This component is worth 25% of your course grade.

Midterm Book Review Video. Instead of a midterm exam, you will read, describe, and critique a book of your choice that relates to the topic of mindful communication (broadly defined) in an 8 min video. Midterm videos will be shown in class during the week of. Book topics will be approved by me in advance and are due on Feb 16. Creativity is highly encouraged. This component is worth 20% of your course grade.

Final Class Research Project Video. You will produce an 8 min video on a research topic that relates to mindful communication. The videos will be shown to the class during the last week of the semester: Apr 27 & 29. The topic should be one that interests you, has relevant academic research and goes into some depth on the topic. A short topic statement is due on Mar 30. The final research project video is due on Apr 27. Creativity is highly encouraged. This component is worth 25% of your course grade.

Final Self-Reflection Paper (in place of Final Exam). One course goal is for students to gain insight into their own communication patterns and to become more mindful communicators. Instead of a final exam, you will write a self-reflection paper on your thoughts and discoveries about mindful communication over the semester. Reflecting on the small assignments in the modules will be helpful for this assignment. It may also be helpful to keep a journal during the semester. I recommend setting aside a 20-min block on a specific day and time in advance each week. In Week 1, reflect on your strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations as a communicator. After that, it's up to you. The final self-reflection paper will be open-ended and will be posted on May 5. It will be due on the last day of final exams: May 12 at 12-noon. This component is worth 10% of your course grade.

Class Participation, In-Class Work Products, and Professionalism. I want to cultivate a safe and positive learning environment where everyone treats one another with the highest respect

and participates fully in class activities. Being “present” in the Zoom session is not enough to earn class participation credit, you must **also** contribute to discussions and complete all in-class work products. These will vary depending on the class. Some will be done individually; some as a group. These work products may require participation in polls, surveys, chats, breakout rooms and/or in-class short assignments. In-class work may be assigned at any point during the class. There will be many opportunities to contribute to class discussions by making comments verbally, chat, or in break out rooms. All of which count toward class participation.

In addition, the class participation grade includes a professionalism component. Professionalism relates to your personal conduct and communications in and outside of Zoom sessions with our class.. I expect everyone in Comm 400 to treat one another with respect and kindness, and to do their part in creating a safe, positive and comfortable space for sharing knowledge and ideas.

If you miss class, you can make it up by doing an alternative assignment based on the Zoom session recordings. Each alternative assignment is due by 11:59pm PST the day following the missed live session to receive full class participation credit.

The Class Participation and Professionalism component is worth 20% of your course grade.

Assignment Submission Policy:

All assignments are due on the date and time specified and must be submitted via Blackboard to receive full credit. Allow plenty of time to upload assignments by the deadline. Please do not email your assignments to me. You should receive a confirmation from Blackboard if the assignment was successfully submitted.. Late assignments will receive a penalty.

Course Grading:

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Weekly Modules	25	25
Midterm Book Review	20	20
Final Class Research Project	25	25
Final Self-Reflection Paper	10	10
Class Participation and Professionalism	20	20
TOTAL	100	100%

Course Grading Policy:

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A/A-	Outstanding, thoughtful and careful work
B+/B	Above average work, good insight, could benefit from more attention to detail

B-/C+ Needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow through
 C and below Incomplete, bare minimum and/or showing little understanding of the material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned. Your percentage scores on the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

A	= 100-93	C	= 76-73
A-	= 92-90	C-	= 72-70
B+	= 89-87	D+	= 69-67
B	= 86-83	D	= 66-63
B-	= 82-80	D-	= 62-60
C+	= 79-77	F	= 59-0

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: Be advised that the topics/daily activities may change based on the progress of the class, guest speaker availability, and unforeseen consequences. Assignment due dates will not change.

All Course Materials are available via Blackboard. Each weekly module should be completed before Tuesday's class to receive full Module Completion credit.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Dates: 1/19, 1/21	Introduction to Course and Mindfulness	Module 1: Breathing, Meditation, and Everyday Mindfulness	Module 1 due: Jan 21 by 12:00-noon PST
Week 2 Dates: 1/26, 1/28	Awareness, Presence and Perception	Module 2: Mindfulness vs. Mindlessness	Module 2 due: Jan 26 by 12:00-noon PST
Week 3 Dates: 2/2, 2/4	Empathy and Compassion	Module 3: Having Compassion for Yourself and Others	Module 3 due: Feb 2 by 12:00-noon PST
Week 4 Dates: 2//9, 2/11	Perspective Taking and Emotional Intelligence	Module 4: Perceiving Others' Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions	Module 4 due: Feb 9 by 12:00-noon PST
Week 5 Dates: 2/16, 2/18	Kindness, Gratitude and Forgiveness	Module 5: The Power of Vulnerability in Communication	Module 5 due: Feb 16 by 12:00-noon PST

			Midterm Book Topic due: Feb 16 by 12-noon (in Module 5).
Week 6 Dates: 2/23, 2/25	Communication Goals, Intentions and Norms	Module 6: Adapting to the Communication Context	Module 6 due: Feb 23 by 12:00-noon pm PST
Week 7 Dates: 3/2, 3/4	Psychological Safety and Trust	Module 7: Creating a Safe Space for Communication	Module 7 due: 3/2 by 12:00-noon PST
Week 8 Dates: 3/9, 3/10	Midterm Book Review Video Viewing & Discussion	No Module	Midterm Book Review Video links are due on Mar 9 by 12-noon on Blackboard.
Week 9 Dates: 3/16, 3/18	Relationships	Module 8: Communicating Mindfully in Relationships	Module 8 due: 3/16 by 12:00-noon PST
Week 10 Dates: 3/23, 3/25	Conflict and Difficult Conversations	No Module	University Wellness Day on Mar 23, NO CLASS
Week 11 Dates: 3/30, 4/1	Culture and Diversity	Module 9: Embracing Differences	Module 9 due: Mar 30 by 12-noon Final Project Topic Due on Mar 30 by 12-noon (in Module 9)
Week 12 Dates: 4/6, 4/8	Anti-Racism	Module 10: Reversing Hate	Module 10 due: Apr 6 by 12:00-noon PST
Week 13 Dates: 4/13, 4/15	Online Civility and Incivility	Module 11: Mindful and Harmful Social Media Use	Module 11 due: Apr 13 by 12-noon
Week 14 Dates: 4/20, 4/22	Mindful Leadership	No Module	University Wellness Day on Apr 22, NO CLASS

Week 15 Dates: 4/27, 4/29	Final Research Project Videos and Course Recap	No Module	Final Research Project Video links are due on Apr 27 by 12-noon.
STUDY DAYS Dates: 5/1-5/4			
FINAL EXAM PERIOD Dates: 5/5-5/12		Final Self-Reflection Paper Assignment will be available on May 5 at 12-noon PST	Final Self-Reflection Paper is due: May 12 by 12-noon PST

XII. Policies and Procedures

Blackboard

I use Blackboard extensively. Check everyday for updates and announcements.

Communication

Use USC email for contacting me, and check your USC email every day for time-sensitive information.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity Policy:

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course, without approval of the instructor.

Accommodations:

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure this letter is delivered to the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30 am -5:00 pm. The office is in the Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776."

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity during COVID 19. See the university's site for the latest information: <https://coronavirus.usc.edu/>.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Scholarships and Awards

<https://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Emergency Fund is distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses.

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.