**GESM 120g: Mindfulness in Cultural Practices**

**Fall 2021,** 35365R, MW 2 - 3:20 p.m., THH 215

Instructor: Professor Thomas W. Ward, [tww@usc.edu](mailto:tww@usc.edu)

Office Hrs. Online, T/Th 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., & by appointment

See Blackboard for instructions for scheduling one-on-one Zoom meetings

**Course Description**: This course will examine the concept of *mindfulness* as a cultural practice in various spiritual traditions and contemporary social settings. Mindfulness, or attentive awareness of the present moment, is a spiritual or psychological faculty that supports critical analysis that ultimately results in wisdom of ‘things as they are.’ Students will read scientific studies to learn of the healing properties of mindfulness, including stress reduction, lowering of blood pressure and heart rate, increasing one’s ability to focus, and inducing a sense of wellbeing, calmness and stability. Mindfulness can help you learn to deal with the stressors of daily life and help you to better focus on your studies. Students will be guided in mindfulness practices and will be required to practice these techniques outside the class as homework, and keep a journal about their experiences in order to document their progress in deepening their practice. We will examine the different uses of mindfulness as cultural practices in various spiritual and religious traditions, as well as in secular life. These include meditative practices within the Buddhist, Christian, Jewish (Kabbalah), Hindu, and Islamic (Sufi) religions. Students will learn how mindfulness has been applied in health care, politics (leadership), prison settings and parenting. The growing interest in mindfulness is illustrated by the fact that many Fortune 500 companies (including Google), government agencies, the military, counseling centers, schools, hospitals, and law firms are now offering mindfulness training.

**Objectives and Outcomes**: Students will get an overview of the history of mindfulness practices in different cultural and religious traditions and learn about current uses of mindfulness in business, government and personal life. The aims of the course are four-fold:

1. To introduce the basic tenets of mindfulness, and provide tools for practicing mindfulness to help deal with stress and explore one’s psyche.

2. To learn about mindfulness practices in the world’s major religions.

3. To learn about the science of mindfulness and what has been empirically validated regarding the benefits of mindfulness for mind and body, and

4. To use scholarly evidence to critically analyze the practices of mindfulness cross-culturally.

By the end of the course you should be able to:

* Identify the importance and uses of mindfulness in each of the world’s major religions.
* Know some of the masters and teachers of mindfulness and their interpretations of mindfulness.
* Know the benefits and healing properties of mindfulness.
* Understand some of the scientific studies of mindfulness – what empirical studies have been conducted and what they have discovered.
* Identify the different types of mindfulness practices.
* Understand the goal of mindfulness and be able to practice mindfulness in formal practice and daily life.

**Humanistic Inquiry**: As a course in humanistic inquiry this class examines what it means to be human and how we relate to one another. It requires both critical analysis and self-reflection. Mindfulness engages us to be keenly aware of our states of mind, our emotions, our relationships to others, and the world around us. It is both an inquiry into our inner consciousness – what it means to interpret, think and feel – and an examination of the minds of others and how they perceive and interpret the world. As such, it gives us a better understanding of ourselves and helps us to understand other people, other spiritual traditions, and other cultures. This knowledge develops self-compassion as well as tolerance and compassion for others. We seek to understand these various traditions and practices historically and cross-culturally in order to become better scholars and citizens of this globalized, interconnected world.

**Course Requirements**: There will be three types of assignments in this course: three written assignments, two exams, and a class presentation. The first writing assignment is a journal of your own mindfulness practice. The second is a five-page *analysis* of your ‘mindful’ progress over the semester. The third writing assignment is a 10-12-page analytical research paper on some aspect of mindfulness. The mid-term and final exams will include objective and short answer questions as well as a critical essay. The exams will cover all lectures, readings, documentary films, and class discussions. The final exam is not cumulative. On the last day of class you will give a short presentation of the findings from your research paper. I will provide prompts for each of these assignments, which I will go over in class and make available on Blackboard.

**Penalties for Late Assignments**: Written assignments are due on the date stated in the syllabus. Assignments handed in late will result in the loss of 5 points for each day late.

**Attendance**: Student attendance during the online class lecture is mandatory, unless you have a legitimate reason for not attending. Speak with the professor if you have a scheduling conflict and cannot attend online sessions. Attendance allows you to participate and ask questions.

# Plagiarism on exams or papers will result in a failing grade. Avoiding Plagiarism: Student Judicial Affairs Web site <<http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS>> includes two student-oriented publications in both viewable and printable forms. Click on Resources and scroll down to ‘Publications,’ under ‘Academic Resources.’ Read "Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism," which addresses issues of paraphrasing, quotations and citations in written assignments.

**Contact Hours and Homework Workload**: The only way to reach me is through email ([tww@usc.edu](mailto:tww@usc.edu)), or during online class. On weekdays, emails will be answered within 24 hours, if not sooner. Your homework workload is approximately 80-100 pages of reading per week plus the time you need to spend on written assignments, mindfulness practice (approximately 15-45 minutes a week), journaling and exam preparation.

**Grading**:

* Journal writing and analysis of your mindfulness practice = 10% of your grade;
* Research paper = 30% of your grade;
* Midterm exam = 30% of your grade;
* Final exam = 30% of your grade

**Statement for Students with Disabilities**: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to your course instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30am to 5:00pm, Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html%20)

(213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) <ability@usc.edu>. Please let me know as soon as possible if you are registered with DSP, so that I can make accommodations for extra time for your midterm and final exams, which will be taken online.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**: USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General Principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, The Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/> Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://usc.edu/student-affaris/SJACS/> Information on intellectual property at USC is available at: <http://usc.edu/academe/acsen/issues/ipr/index.html>

**Required Readings**:

Fraser, Andy. 2013. *The Healing Power of Meditation*, Shambhala Publications.

Hesse, Hermann. 1998. *Siddhartha*, Dover Publications.

Kaplan, Aryeh. 1985. *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*, Schocken Books.

Satchidananda, Sri Swami. 2011. *Meditation,* Integral Yoga Publications.

Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn. 2012. *Sufism: The Transformation of the Heart,* Golden Sufi.

Wangyal Rinpoche, Tenzin. 2006. *Tibetan Sound Healing*, Sounds True.

**Class Schedule**:

(**Readings are to be *completed* for the day listed.)**

**Week** **1**: Monday (8/23) **What is mindfulness?**

*The Scientific Point of View; Benefits of Mindfulness*

Practice: Body Scan

Reading: Fraser, Chapter 3

Wednesday (8/25): **Mindfulness & Emotion**

*State of Mind, Happiness & Psychological Health*

Reading: Fraser, Chapter 5

**Week** **2**: Monday (8/30): **Mindfulness & Neuroscience**

*Changes in the Human Brain*

Practice: ‘Mindful’ Breathing

Reading: Fraser, Chapter 6

Wednesday (9/1): **Buddhist Perspectives**

*Understanding the Mind & Well-being*

Reading: Fraser, Chapter 1

**Week** **3**: Monday (9/6): **Labor Day (holiday) No class**

Wednesday (9/8): **Mindfulness Methods in Buddhism**

*Challenging Our Usual Ways of Seeing Things*

Practice: Sound Meditation

Reading: Fraser, Chapter 2

**Week** **4**: Monday (9/13): **Tibetan Buddhist Perspectives**

*Sound Healing*

Reading: Wangyal, Chapters 1 & 2

Wednesday (9/15): **Tibetan Perspectives cont.**

*Manifesting Virtues*

Reading: Wangyal, Chapter 3 & Appendix

**Week** **5**: Monday (9/20): **Journey to Enlightenment**

*Working with Energy Pathways*

Practice: Visualization Meditation (Candle)

Reading: Hesse, Part 1

Wednesday (9/22): **Arrival (perhaps)**

Practice: Dead Jackal Meditation (Impermanence)

Reading: Hesse, Part 2

**Week** **6**: Monday (9/27): **Mindfulness in Christianity**

Practice: Centering

Reading: Rev. Lawrence Bouldin, on Blackboard

Wednesday (9/29): **Purity of Heart**

*The Teaching and Example of Jesus*

Reading: Mary Jo Meadow, on Blackboard

**Week** **7**: Monday (10/4): Review for Midterm

**RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS DUE**

Wednesday (10/6): **MIDTERM EXAM**

**Week** **8**: Monday (10/11): **Mindfulness in the Jewish Mystic Tradition**

*Kabbalah and Receiving*

Practice: Meditating with Sacred Words

Reading: Kaplan, Chapters 3 & 5

Wednesday (10/13): **Fall Recess** (NO CLASS)

**Week** **9**: Monday (10/18): **Judaism: Mindfulness with Mantra**

Reading: Kaplan, Ch. 6

Wednesday (10/20): **Conversing with God**

Practice: Contemplative Practice

Reading: Kaplan, Chapters 8 & 10

**Week** **10**: Monday (10/25): **Mindfulness in Hinduism**

Reading: Satchidananda, Intro, Chapters 2 & 3

Wednesday (10/27): **Hindu Perspectives**

*Meditation on a Form or Visual Symbol*

Practice: Yantra Yoga

Reading: Satchidananda, Ch. 4

**Week** **11**: Monday (11/1): **Hindu Perspectives cont.**

Reading: Satchidananda, Ch. 7

Film: *Portrait of a Modern Sage*

Wednesday (11/3): **Mindfulness in the Islamic (Sufi) Tradition**

*The Longing of the Heart*

Practice: Dhikr meditation

Reading: Vaughan-Lee, Chapters 1 & 2

**Week** **12**: Monday (11/8): **Sufi Mindfulness**

*Polishing the Mirror of the Heart*

Reading: Vaughan-Lee, Ch. 3

Wednesday (11/10): **Sufi Mindfulness cont.**

*Dreamwork*

Practice: Dream meditation

Reading: Vaughan-Lee, Ch. 5

**Week** **13**: Monday (11/15): **Mindfulness in Health Care**

*Mindfulness-Based Medicine & Psychiatry*

Reading: Fraser, Ch. 7

Wednesday (11/17): **Mindfulness in the Military**

*Mindfulness Fitness Training*

Practice: Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction

Reading: Tim Ryan, *A Mindful Nation*, on Blackboard

**JOURNALS and ANALYSIS PAPER DUE**

**Week** **14**: Monday (11/22): **Mindful Parenting**

*Mindfulness at Home*

Reading: Kabat-Zinn, *Everyday Blessings*, on Blackboard

Wednesday (11/24): **Thanksgiving Break (NO CLASS)**

**Week** **15**: Monday (11/29): **Mindfulness in Prison**

Practice: Silent meditation

Film: *The Dhamma Brothers*

Wednesday (12/1): **Student Oral Reports**

Review for Final Exam

**RESEARCH PAPERS DUE**

**Final Exam**: **Friday, December 10, 2-4 p.m., THH 215**