



**Comm 400:
Communication, Mental Health and
Mindfulness (4 units)**

Spring 2024: Mon, Wed 2:00-3:20p

Section:

Location: ANN 406

Instructor: Prof. Andrea Hollingshead

Office Hour: Thurs 3:20-4:20pm

Contact Info: aholling@usc.edu

Course Description:

This course promotes mental health and wellbeing through the study and practice of mindfulness and mindful communication. Mindfulness is being fully present, engaged, and aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions without judgment or reactivity. Mindfulness reduces anxiety, increases focus, helps with emotion regulation, and improves wellbeing. Although mindfulness is thought of as an intrapersonal process, this course applies principles of mindfulness to the practice of communication. Mindful communication promotes common understanding, meaningful conversations, and positive relationships.

This course explores a range of research topics related to mindfulness, mindful communication and wellbeing. Specific topics include: breathing and meditation; deep listening; attention and presence; perspective taking; empathy and kindness; compassion and self-compassion; emotional intelligence; gratitude; (dis)honesty; trust, reputation and respect; psychological safety; relationships and difficult conversations; apologies and forgiveness; giving and receiving feedback; creativity and problem-solving; conflict escalation and resolution; diversity and inclusion; and mindful use of social media and AI.

The course will be very different from any course you have experienced at USC. It is small, experiential, and highly interactive. Demonstrations, activities, discussions, and guest speakers bring topics to life. Be ready for an unusual, engaging, and meaningful semester!

Learning Objectives:

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

- Theory and research-based knowledge on the benefits of mindfulness for mental health
- Concepts and a language for understanding mindful (and mindless) communication
- Evidence-based strategies for reducing stress and regulating negative emotions
- Understanding of factors that influence how people decide what to say and how they respond to other people
- Analytical tools to assess communication situations across contexts (friends, strangers, face-to-face, social media, etc.)
- Insight into communication patterns 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 Modality:

The class will meet on campus for most class sessions. We may meet on Zoom occasionally to accommodate guest speakers, etc.

Class Readings and Materials:

All course materials, which include readings and videos, will be available in the Weekly Modules on Blackboard with the exception of materials required for students' midterm and final research project videos. Each module will be posted about a week before it is due in class. There is no required textbook.

Assignments:

Below is a summary. I will provide specific guidelines later in the semester.

Weekly Module Completion. The course is divided into weekly modules. Each module contains learning materials and short assignments on the weekly topic, and should take 3 hours to complete. 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 or experiential assignments. In general, weekly modules are due by 11:59 pm on Tuesdays. See course schedule for specific due dates. This component is worth 30% of the course grade.

Midterm Book Review Video. Instead of a midterm exam, students will read, describe, and critique a book of their choosing in an 6 min video. The book should be informed by research and relevant to course topics. We will watch the midterm videos in class during the week of Feb 26. Book topics are due in Module 4 (Feb 6) for my feedback and approval. This component is worth 20% of the course grade. Creativity is highly encouraged.

Final Class Research Project Video. Students will produce an 8 min video on an academic research topic related to the course for their final projects. We will watch the videos as a class during the last week of the semester: Apr 22 & 24. A short topic statement is due in Module 8 (Mar 26). The final research project video is due on Apr 21 at 11:59 pm PST. This component is worth 30% of the course grade. Creativity is highly encouraged.

Final Self-Reflection Paper (in place of Final Exam). One key course goal is for students to gain insight into their own communication patterns and to become more mindful communicators. Instead of a final exam, students will write a self-reflection paper. Details will be provided later in the semester. It is due on the day of the scheduled final exam: May 6 at 5:00 pm. This component is worth 10% of the course grade.

Class Participation. 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 discussing ideas. The main requirement for an “A” class participation grade is active engagement during class sessions, which includes contributing to class discussions; and completing any in-class work products. Although it is not possible to make up missed classes, one or two absences will not affect your overall class participation grade. Class Participation is worth 10% of your course grade.

If you have a special circumstance, let me know as soon as possible. We will figure out a solution.

Assignment Submission Policy:

All assignments are due on the date and time specified **on Blackboard** to receive full credit. Late assignments will receive partial credit. You will receive a confirmation from Blackboard if the submission was successful.

Course Grade Breakdown:

Assignment	% of Grade
Weekly Modules	30
Midterm Book Review Video	20
Final Research Project Video	30
Final Self-Reflection Paper	10
Class Participation	10
TOTAL	100%

Course Grading Standards:

- 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 receive a percentage score. The assignment percentage scores will be weighted, totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below.

- A = 100-94
- A- = 93-90
- B+ = 89-87
- B = 86-84
- C = 76-74
- C- = 73-70
- D+ = 69-67
- D = 66-64

B- = 83-80
 C+ = 79-77

D- = 63-60
 F = 59-0

Your percentage score must be over the threshold to receive that grade.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

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

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Dates: 1/8, 1/10	Introduction to Course and Mindfulness		
Week 2 Dates: 1/15 (No class - MLK), 1/17	Awareness, Presence and Everyday Mindfulness	Module 1: Presence, Attention and Everyday Mindfulness	Module 1 due: Jan 16 by 11:59 pm PST
Week 3 Dates: 1/22, 1/24	Mindset and Perspective Taking	Module 2: Mindset and Perspective Taking	Module 2 due: Jan 23 by 11:59 pm PST
Week 4 Dates: 1/29, 1/31	Empathy, and (Self) Compassion	Module 3: Empathy, and (Self) Compassion	Module 3 due: Jan 31 by 11:59 pm PST
Week 5 Dates: 2/5, 2/7	Emotional Intelligence, Kindness and Gratitude	Module 4: Emotional Intelligence, Kindness and Gratitude	Module 4 due: Feb 6 by 11:59 pm PST Midterm Book Topic due: Feb 6 in Module 4
Week 6 Dates: 2/12, 2/14	Mindfulness and Creativity	Module 5: Mindfulness and Creativity	Module 5 due: Feb 13 by 11:59 pm-PST
Week 7 Dates: 2/19, 2/21	Mindful Technology Use	No Module	
Week 8 Dates: 2/26, 2/28	Midterm Book Review Video Viewing & Discussion	No Module	Midterm Book Review Video links are due on Feb 25 by 11:59 PST on Blackboard.
Week 9 Dates: 3/4, 3/6	Culture, Identity and Inclusion	Module 6: Identity, Inclusion and Belonging	Module 6 due: Mar 5 by 11:59 pm PST

Dates: 3/11, 3/13	SPRING BREAK- NO CLASS	No Module	
Week 10 Dates: 3/18, 3/20	Communication Goals and Intentions	Module 7: Speaking up, Silence and Safety	Module 7 due: Mar 19 by 11:59 pm
Week 11 Dates: 3/25, 3/27	Communicating Mindfully in Close Relationships	Module 8: Communicating Mindfully in Close Relationships	Module 8 due: Mar 26 by 11:59 pm Final Project Topic Due in Module 8
Week 12 Dates: 4/1, 4/3	Approaching Difficult Conversations	Module 9: Approaching Difficult Conversations	Module 9 due: Apr 2 by 11:59 pm PST
Week 13 Dates: 4/8, 4/10	Trust Violations, Apologies and Forgiveness	Module 10: Sources for Research Project Videos	Module 10 due: Apr 9 by 11:59 pm
Week 14 Dates: 4/15, 4/17	Course Review and Capstone	No Module	
Week 15 Dates: 4/22, 4/24	Final Research Project Videos and Course Recap	No Module	Final Research Project Video links are due on Apr 21 by 11:59 pm.
STUDY DAYS Dates: 4/27-4/30			
FINAL EXAM PERIOD Dates: 5/1-5/8			Final Self-Reflection Paper is due: May 6 by 5-pm PST

XII. Policies and Procedures

Blackboard

I use Blackboard extensively. Check every day for updates and announcements.

Communication

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

Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity. The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university. . Any assignment that includes an instance of plagiarism will receive a 0. Two or more instances of plagiarism in a semester will receive an automatic failing grade (F) in the course.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct

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.

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

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies. USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class is prohibited without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is also prohibited. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

The Use of AI Generators. Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be completed entirely by you.

That said, I may permit the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-powered text generation tools on a few specific assignments during the semester. You should be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced on these assignments and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism.

Students and Disability Accommodations

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems

Annenberg Student Success Fund. 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.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund. Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086
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
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

TrojansAlert TrojansAlert is an alert system that allows university officials to contact you during an emergency. It is your connection to real-time updates, instructions on where to go, what to do, or what not to do, who to contact and other important information. Visit the website to sign up.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis. In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on [Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness](#).

ITS Customer Support Center (CSC): (213) 740-5555

The ITS Customer Support Center (CSC) provides support to the USC community for connecting to the USC Network and using supported applications. For help with network connectivity and software, contact CSC. Walk-in support is available in Leavey Library's Information Commons.

Violence-Free Campus. Visit the website to read more about prohibited behaviors, reporting responsibilities and where to report.

Student-Athlete Travel Excuse Letters

Prior to a university-sponsored away competition, Student-Athletes are responsible for providing their Instructor with a Competition Excuse Letter (provided by their academic counselor) for the classes missed while on the road (i.e., excused absence). It is the responsibility of the Student-Athlete to provide the letter prior to leaving on their trip and to make arrangements for a make-up of any missed assignments or exams. Please refer to the [SAAS site](#) where they detail travel and travel excuse letters.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001

(15 weeks: 1/8/2024 – 4/26/2024; Final Exam Period: 5/1-8/2024)

Link:

<https://classes.usc.edu/term20241/calendar/>

Last day to add: Friday, January 26, 2024

Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund: Friday, January 26, 2024

Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Friday, January 26, 2024 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund or change to Audit:

Tuesday, January 30, 2024

Last day to withdraw without a “W” on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade:

Friday, February 23, 2024 [Mark of “W” will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply.]

*Please drop any course by the end of week three for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

Last day to drop with a mark of "W": Friday, April 5, 2024

About Your Instructor

Andrea Hollingshead is a Professor of Communication, and an expert on interpersonal and group communication. She also studies connections between mindfulness, communication, and wellness. She has published three books and her research articles appear in top-tier social science journals. Professor Hollingshead teaches courses on group communication at the undergraduate, masters and PhD levels. She also teaches Comm 305 “Understanding social science research.” Professor Hollingshead earned her B.A. in Psychology from Yale University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Illinois. Before returning to graduate school, she worked in advertising and marketing research. She is an avid scuba diver and enjoys running, LA farmers markets, cooking, and plants. She is married, and has a sweet pup (German Shepherd-Husky mix) named Pancho.