Introduction to Mindfulness Practice for College and University Students

An Instructor's Manual and Syllabus

Samuel A. Green, PhD
Associate Professor of Nursing
Facilitator, Compassionate Care Initiative
University of Virginia School of Nursing
Claude Moore Nursing Education Building
225 Jeanette Lancaster Way
PO Box 800826
Charlottesville, VA 22908-0826

email: sag4y@virginia.edu

This work is dedicated to the memory of Mark Oberman, a dear friend and a gifted teacher. He showed me how to practice, how to teach, and how to face death mindfully.

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Preface

After years of being overwhelmed by stress, the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Program offered me a way forward. As I learned more about mindfulness practice, it became far more than a stress management tool; it became my path. I eventually became an MBSR teacher. Along the way, I was drawn to the idea of teaching mindfulness practice to young people, before they are overwhelmed, with the hope that it might prevent them from suffering the way I did when they are older. Since 2009, I have taught a full-semester Introduction to Mindfulness Practice class for undergraduates at the University of Virginia that is derived from the MBSR Program, although extensively modified to reach a different population.

Two of my colleagues who are familiar with the course have encouraged me to write a detailed description, with the intention of making this kind of course more widely available. My primary target audience is other MBSR teachers, who will readily understand the approach and the sequence of events. Teachers unfamiliar with MBSR may also find this syllabus useful, but I believe this course is effective for some of the same reasons that MBSR is effective. Most importantly, this course is taught without any reference to religion. It is true that in some circles Eastern religious traditions and practices are increasingly accepted, even fashionable, in our culture. It is also true that there are much larger circles in our culture, including a large majority of undergraduates (at least at UVA), who are quite resistant to practicing anything perceived as foreign or religious. My intention in teaching this class is to cast as wide a net as possible, which means scrupulously avoiding religious or spiritual overtones and foreign terminology. I am in the Jon Kabat-Zinn “lineage”, one that practices and teaches in plain English, requiring no dogma or faith or belief system.

There has been a lot of discussion recently about how to teach mindfulness in a way that is not overtly religious, and also not egocentric and materialistic. I think there are many legitimate concerns here, discussed in a bit more detail in the manual. I believe that mindfulness should not be offered as simply a self-improvement program, to be used in the service of the ego. I have tried to achieve a balance between motivating the students to start practicing, and maintaining the core values and ethics of the practice without reference to religion. Students in this course are offered a series of reasons for taking on the practice, beginning with the practical (“If you are worrying, you are not studying.”) and then progressing to deeper, more meaningful reasons. This progression is described to the students at the last class, along with a few thoughts on the importance of cultivating both wisdom and compassion in their practice. Some teachers may feel that the balance is off in one direction or another. I am certainly open to modifying my approach as these discussions evolve. Meanwhile, the perfect is the enemy of the good, and there are students to teach now.

I have received feedback on the course and the manual from several instructors who have participated in the course. However, the manuscript has not been professionally edited or formally peer reviewed. I have prepared it as carefully as I can, recognizing that the perfect is the enemy of the good. My intention is simply to promote teaching

mindfulness practice in a collegiate setting by making what I have learned freely available. To that end, you are welcome to use as much of this manual and syllabus as you choose in your teaching. If you do incorporate all or part of the syllabus into your teaching, I welcome your feedback on what works and what doesn't work for your students. If you object to parts of this syllabus because you believe it is too materialistic or too spiritual or not spiritual enough, I welcome your input on those issues as well.

If you are a student, you may or may not learn anything useful from the instructor's manual. I have met very few people who taught themselves how to practice. We need a teacher or two, and a community. However, my students have some things to say to you, mainly in the last three chapters. If you find their thoughts interesting, perhaps you can find someone in your community who would consider teaching a course such as this.

I offer what I have learned with the hope that it will serve to prevent more suffering in the future than I have created in the past.

1. How And Why The Introduction To Mindfulness Practice Class Was Developed.

I will begin by briefly describing how I came to develop this curriculum. While the details of my journey are not important, my own experiences have a lot to do with why I am so committed to teaching this course, and why I feel strongly about how the course is taught.

I came to the University of Virginia in 1994 to do research at the medical school. My wife and I were both running our own labs, and our son was then 2½ years old. Two years later, I was so stressed out that I could barely function. One day I found myself yelling at my son and having an out-of-body moment; watching it happen, knowing that I had no reason to be taking it out on him, and being completely unable to stop. That was the moment I knew I needed help. When I told my doctor that the stress was killing me, the first thing he said was, “Would you like me to write you a prescription?” I told him I didn’t think I had an organic problem, I just wanted to learn how to deal with the stress. He referred me to a cognitive therapist who immediately taught me to meditate. A few months later, when he and a friend of his offered a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) class, I signed up. I was almost 40 years old at the time.

Like many MBSR students, I was highly motivated to change, so I followed the instructions diligently, and kept at it after the class ended. I took additional classes my teachers offered for MBSR graduates. I gradually realized that my whole life had changed. What began as stress management became my path. In 2001, after a four-week class for MBSR graduates, eight of the participants met weekly for a year, using Stephen Levine’s book *A Year to Live – How to Live This Year as if it Were Your Last* as a practice guide. This was a life-changing experience for all of us. In fact, five of us quit our jobs within a year of “dying”.

After closing my lab, I took a part-time teaching position at the medical school, leaving me more time to pursue practice, learn some Tai Chi, attend the MBSR teacher-training workshop, and sit a few week-long retreats. I was invited to join the UVA Mindfulness Center as an instructor, and began to teach MBSR classes.

Along the way, I became curious about what my young son might be able to learn about mindfulness. I was especially interested in whether he could learn to see and perhaps avoid some of the mental and emotional traps I fell into at a young age. As an 11-year-old baseball player, he decided he wanted to be a pitcher. I taught him to use the “earth breath” to regain focus after throwing a bad pitch, a practice that he naturally transferred to other aspects of his life. Thankfully, he seems to have inherited my wife’s “glass half full” disposition, so he is not trying to change his outlook in any substantial way (at least not yet) and he doesn’t meditate, but he has internalized something that works for him.

I have thought many times that my life might have been very different if I had started practicing at a younger age. Of course, that is just another story, but it led to the idea

that teaching people when they are just old enough to take on the practice might allow some of them to learn something that would keep them from melting down later on, the way I did. If learning mindfulness practice at age 40 saved me from creating so much suffering for myself and everyone around me, how much more suffering could be prevented by teaching 20-year-olds? In other words, if the MBSR program is the “pound of cure” I needed, how can we provide an ounce, or perhaps a few ounces, of prevention?

Educators are teaching and promoting mindfulness in more and more forms and contexts; as experiential learning for students of all ages, as a skill for teachers to apply in the classroom, and as a complement to cognitive learning in a wide range of topics. (I believe there is a very legitimate and growing concern about what has been termed “spiritual materialism”, applying mindfulness practice as a tool in the service of the ego. More on that later.) What seems to be relatively uncommon, as far as I can tell, is introducing mindfulness practice to students who are sufficiently mature and disciplined to pursue it for its own sake, and to decide for themselves how to incorporate it into their lives.

While maturity and discipline are necessary, they are not sufficient. Having an interest in the practice may be even more important. Many educators, myself included, are careful not to require a captive audience to participate in mindfulness exercises that are not part of the class syllabus. Many students object to being told they have to try it because they may believe mindfulness practice to be religious, or too “new-age”, or just not something they need. Offering a class in which mindfulness practice *is* the syllabus allows the interested students to self-select.

The MBSR program was not only a highly effective way for me to learn, it might have been the only way that I could get it. I didn’t know I was a seeker when I signed up, I just knew I was stressed out and needed help. I had no particular interest in meditation and absolutely no interest in organized religion, so I probably never would have gone to a Buddhist group to start. I had an interest in reducing my suffering, which seems to me to be a much bigger initial doorway. Yet, very few undergraduates sign up for MBSR classes at the UVA Mindfulness Center. Perhaps they don’t see it as appropriate for them because they are not that stressed out, or it is too time-consuming, or too expensive, or they are just not aware that it is available. Therefore, what I had in mind was to make mindfulness practice more available and accessible for students by offering a class similar to MBSR in scope and style, but tailored for undergraduates and offered for academic credit.

2. Introduction To Mindfulness Practice For Undergraduates

There are doubtless many effective ways to teach an introductory mindfulness practice class in a college or university setting. This is one of them. Mindfulness practice can only be taught from one's own experience. My experience, as a student and a teacher, has come mainly through the MBSR Program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and described in detail in *Full Catastrophe Living*. It is not my purpose to restate or summarize that work. Rather, I would recommend it (enthusiastically) to anyone not already familiar with it. My purpose is to describe an undergraduate syllabus that is derived from the MBSR program. It is taught in a similar manner and covers much of the same content. The syllabus described below may be of use to teachers who are unfamiliar with MBSR, but it is primarily intended to be a resource for other MBSR teachers who have the interest and opportunity to try reaching a younger population. I have tried to make this book concise: If you already have a working knowledge of MBSR, you won't need much additional explanation. If you don't have it, this is not the place to get it.

It is also not my purpose to review the research documenting the many benefits of mindfulness practice in health care, wellness and education. There are reviews published regularly by those who do the work, and I am an enthusiastic supporter of the research; it just isn't what I do. As mindfulness research is reported more frequently in the media, I have noticed a tendency for some mindfulness teachers (and students) to talk about the research quite a bit, with the subtext that documenting the benefits "justifies" doing the practice. I believe there is great utility in discussing the research findings with people who don't practice, particularly those whose own work might be directly affected, such as health care professionals and educators. However, students enrolled in the undergraduate class are already interested in mindfulness practice, so there is no need to convince them. More importantly, given the limited time they have available, I encourage them to spend every minute of it paying attention to their own experience, not talking or thinking about anyone else's experience. Similarly, I assume that if you are already teaching mindfulness practice you understand from your own experience the benefits of practice in daily life, and don't need to read the research to know that it is worth doing and worth teaching.

<u>The MBSR program, a big doorway</u>: The MBSR program provides an accessible, experiential introduction to mindfulness practice. It is explicitly non-religious (I don't think "secular" is quite the right word) and taught in plain English, so it is equally available and appropriate for any student. This is one very significant reason that MBSR is such a big doorway in our society. Practices that become associated in the students' minds with religious traditions, either explicitly or implicitly, by describing them in a foreign language, appeal to a much smaller segment of the population (more on that later). A variety of practices are introduced, and a wide range of applications of mindfulness in daily life are examined and discussed. The program is intensive: Students are expected to invest at least 45 minutes each day in addition to the eight 2.5 hour classes and one

all-day retreat. Students are challenged to examine their own experience and assumptions closely. Many MBSR students arrive experiencing very high stress levels and not coping well through other means, or they would not be in the program. As a result, many are highly motivated to change and are willing to work hard at it.

Introduction to Mindfulness Practice For Undergraduates – Not MBSR: The purpose of the undergraduate course is to provide a substantial introduction to mindfulness practice for young people, who almost never sign up for an MBSR class and are generally not as motivated as MBSR students to change their behavior or outlook. Many do not consider themselves to be in dire need of stress reduction. A number of changes have been made to the MBSR format to create an undergraduate course that is effective and accessible for a very different population and uses a full-semester (14-week) schedule. It is intended to be as big a doorway as possible.

Logistics and Administration

There may not (yet) be any truly appropriate venue for a mindfulness class such as this at most schools. This course has been offered through a series of decreasingly inappropriate venues. Introduction to Mindfulness was first offered at UVA as a physical education (PHYE) course. All PHYE classes, and all subsequent versions of the mindfulness course, are one credit, pass/fail.

At first, the PHYE class met twice a week at 8:00 am for 65 minutes in the dance studio. Sixty-five minute class periods are far too short to do much practice and have a discussion. (I would also caution against scheduling a mindfulness class in a room that has a mirror running the entire length of one wall. That is not conducive to doing yoga with non-judging and non-striving.)

Finding a reasonably large and quiet space for a weekly 2- 2.5-hour class during the day is difficult at UVA, and probably at most schools. I eventually found suitable classroom space that could be used in the evening. The PHYE class then met once a week for 2.5 hours, for 14 weeks. More recently, the class has been offered through the McIntire School of Commerce, the Interdisciplinary Studies program, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the School of Nursing as a 14-week seminar or lab, with two-hour classes. In 2013, the School of Nursing created a mindfulness classroom that comfortably accommodates 20 students, and is available during the day, allowing more sections to be scheduled. The course has had several names, since it has had several different course numbers. It is now called Foundations of Mindfulness Practice in its permanent home, the School of Nursing.

A slightly modified 12-week version of this course was offered several times in the School of Engineering as a Rodman Seminar. The Rodman Scholars are honors engineering students. As part of their program, they take several one-credit, pass/fail seminars that generally have little or nothing to do with engineering. The papers and course evaluations from the Rodman Seminar were indistinguishable from the papers

and course evaluations from the 14-week classes, and the feedback from the Rodman Scholars is included below.

Several people have suggested that offering a two- or three-credit course would justify expecting the students to spend more time on daily practice. Two- or three-credit academic seminar courses typically include a significant reading and writing component. Reading and writing are deliberately kept to a bare minimum in this mindfulness class. The emphasis is on having the students devote their time outside of class to practicing, not reading about it, and examining and then discussing their own experience, not reading about anyone else's experience. This format is designed to foster active participation and experiential learning, in and out of class. However, offering a two- or three-credit seminar may be the least inappropriate venue for this kind of class at other schools, and there are two- and three-credit mindfulness classes at UVA that do incorporate a significant reading and writing component.

Adjusting the initial order of events to accommodate the add/drop deadlines and waiting list: A few changes from the MBSR format are necessary simply for logistical reasons, not least the changes in the roster during the first two weeks. The add/drop deadlines occur after the second class, so the roster is not finalized until the third week. The students receive an email well in advance of the class explaining the policies, goals and expectations in detail (Appendix I). Another email is sent a week before classes start, emphasizing the importance of attending the first class. Students on the waiting list are expected to attend if they wish to stay on the list. This policy insures that everyone on the final roster has attended the first two classes, so there is no need to repeat the introductory material in the second or third week.

The first class deals with administrative requirements, and moves to a general discussion about the ground rules for the class: bringing full attention to the class, maintaining confidentiality, speaking honestly and listening without judgment. Students are then asked to introduce themselves, describe their conception of mindfulness, and say a few words about why they signed up. In part because there are several people attending the first two classes who will not get enrolled, and in part because even the students who are enrolled are not all fully aware of what the course is about, there is a ~20 minute introductory talk. This includes a couple of very brief guided practices. The talk gives the students a chance to settle in, it gives the instructor a chance to establish the tone for the class, it is an overview and orientation for those who stay, and it provides a little training that can be applied right away for those on the waiting list who do not get enrolled. Students are briefly introduced to the use of cushions or benches for sitting meditation, and given time to try out various options. This allows them three weeks to procure their own seat if they wish (their "textbook" for the class, to be used to do homework). They are sent an email with links to help them find what they need. This is followed by a long body scan. Students are assigned a daily body scan for the week, using a 20 minute guided body scan recording.

The second class includes a long check in to address questions, another long body scan ending with awareness of the breath, the first mindful eating exercise (the raisin),

and an introduction to informal practice (noticing a few moments throughout the day). Most of the next several classes follow the order and general outline of the MBSR program to the extent possible, with some changes detailed in the weekly plan (below). The pace is slowed down a bit once sitting meditation is introduced, to allow the students to gain more experience doing mindfulness practices on their own.

Other significant modifications: Because the class is 14 weeks, it is also possible to explore some practices and ideas in greater detail than in the MBSR class. The seventh MBSR class on consuming in the broadest sense has been reorganized into three classes; consuming food and chemicals, consuming information and messages (including non-verbal communication), and sending messages, developing awareness of our constant, barely conscious nonverbal interactions and reactions with everyone and everything around us. Later classes are devoted to introducing a variety of different practices (mountain meditation, random bells meditation, forgiveness meditation) and reinforcing a few practices that were infrequent earlier, including walking meditation, and a longer self-guided mindful eating exercise. A discussion L.P. Jacks' description of "The master in the art of living" in week 12 provides an accessible way for many of the students to see what it means to practice mindfulness all day, every day.

Like MBSR, Only Different

Differences in the group and group dynamics: Most undergraduates are not as stressed out as the average MBSR student (although some are), many are reluctant to discuss anything personal in a class setting, and virtually none are willing to spend up to an hour every day on homework for a one-credit class. I have a strong sense that most of them also would not spend an hour every day on homework for a three-credit class. Students in the undergraduate class are expected to spend at least 20 minutes each day doing formal practices, which is probably the limit of what most students consider reasonable effort. Some students do more than that, some less. Although this is perhaps less than ideal, the fact is that the students are busy with other coursework, and the mindfulness class is not as central to their lives (at least at first) as an MBSR class might be. Fortunately, with 14 weeks, those students who practice regularly develop some facility with the practice by the end of the semester. I also have the sense that 20-year-olds learn things, including mindfulness practice, faster and more readily than 40-year-olds.

Undergraduates are not accustomed to paying full attention for the duration in most of their classes. They are told that bringing their full attention to what they are doing is really the whole point in this class. One important point is establishing explicitly that the class is an electronics-free zone, even during the breaks - no outside distractions during class. Many students are so accustomed to having a constant stream of text messages that simply not being able to use their phones for a couple of hours may itself be a valuable experience.

Enrollment is limited to 18 - 20 students in each section to foster participation and a sense of community, and since I rarely admit anyone after the first class (except

students graduating that semester), most sections wind up with 15 - 16 students. We do a little group building, especially early in the semester, to allow the students to become more comfortable participating in the group discussions. Students usually begin their discussions in groups of three or four, getting to know different students each week. They are asked to introduce themselves and get to know each other for a few minutes, then begin their discussion. The small groups take a few notes so that when we get back together everyone has something to contribute. For two early discussions, pleasant moments and unpleasant moments, we go around the circle and have everyone say a few words. Subsequently, it is up to the students to contribute to the group discussion whenever they feel they have something to add. In MBSR classes, having productive discussions is less dependent on whether the students get to know each other, and in fact is less dependent on having widespread participation.

Motivating young, relatively content people to practice: Mindfulness practice is simple but not easy, so convincing the students of the importance of regular practice is challenging. As described above, many MBSR students are highly motivated to change, many undergraduates less so. Students are given brief summaries for each of the practices (see Appendix) after they are introduced in class but are told early on that reading about the practice is not going to get them anywhere, they have to actually practice to learn anything. (They receive a book list at the end of the course.) Several ideas are repeated frequently, either in the course of discussions or when assigning homework:

- As with any skill, such as playing a sport or musical instrument or typing, the ability to notice thinking and call attention back to the present moment is strengthened by repetition. Formal practice serves to provide a lot of repetition, to reinforce the new habit. For all of these skills, at first it doesn't work very well and seems to take a lot of effort, but with enough repetition, it starts to work. With more repetition it starts to feel natural, and with a whole lot more repetition, it starts to happen automatically.
- Progress is not linear, so just try to follow the instructions without being attached to the outcome.
- Relaxation is a frequent side effect, but it is not the point. Even if the mind is wild, every moment of NOTICING that the mind is wild is good practice.
- Although it certainly takes some discipline to practice regularly, it is helpful to think of this practice as life maintenance, like brushing your teeth, not as a self-improvement project, like a workout program at the gym. It is "brushing your teeth" discipline. Do it just because that's how you take care of yourself, not because you think it will make you better.
- The first half of the course is mostly about how to practice and the second half is more about why, but if the students have not put in the time and effort, they will not have much success applying the "why". The more firmly the new habit of noticing thinking and calling the attention back to the present is established in formal practice, the better the chances of applying it in the rest of the day, when it counts.

Using a variety of vocabularies to describe non-cognitive experiences: The limitations of language in discussing awareness are pointed out in the first class. The concept is that words are inherently cognitive, while sensation and awareness are not. Inevitably, all of

the words used to describe the experience of present awareness are inadequate in some way, so we use a lot of words that are each inadequate in different ways but taken together provide an approximate description of the experience. Jon Kabat-Zinn's Seven Attitudes that Support Mindfulness Practice (from *Full Catastrophe Living*) are introduced as the main language system, in which each attitude is a partial description of a single mind state, or can be seen as different manifestations of that mind state. The Seven Attitudes are referred to throughout the course as ways to bring attention to particular aspects of the practice (e.g. beginner's mind in doing the body scan or walking meditation; non-judging, patience and acceptance in sitting meditation; trust, non-judging and non-striving in yoga). A variety of poems are read either just before or during practice to illuminate various aspects of the practice.

One addition that has proven to be very valuable is a brief examination of parts of the first two chapters of Jonathan Haidt's *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Haidt develops the metaphor of the conscious mind being a rider on the back of an elephant (the subconscious, automatic and emotional processes). This is presented in the fifth and sixth classes, which coincide with beginning to examine stress reactions. *The Happiness Hypothesis* provides a very useful framework and vocabulary for describing the workings of the thinking mind (mental intrusions, confabulation, affective priming, negativity bias), and the effects of mindfulness practice (the 'Like-o-Meter" and "training the elephant"). This also slows the pace of the program for a couple of weeks so that students can gain more experience practicing, in class and on their own.

The original writing assignment, given two weeks in advance of the last class, is to consider the Seven Attitudes in light of what the student has learned, and to write one page about their experience of any one of them that is particularly meaningful, either because they feel they have learned something about it or because they are still struggling with it. The papers are not graded but are required for participation. It is always gratifying when some students realize that the attitudes are so inter-related that they feel they can't really write about just one. More recent classes have also written a short reflective paper early in the second half of the semester, distinguishing the thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviors that arise in moments of feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

Another important note on language: Many students eventually realize that the "mind" in mindfulness is not what they first thought, since in our culture "mind" commonly refers to thinking. They think it would be more accurate to call it "mindlessness practice" (or in Jon Kabat-Zinn's parlance, "awarenessing"). It seems to me (and many others) that it would be more accessible in our culture simply to use the word "awareness" to describe "that which is conscious". The students are told that in this class, the word "mind" is used to refer to thinking in all of its forms, the word "awareness" refers to that which witnesses thinking, sensation, and everything else we experience. Thus, "Noticing what is in the mind" and "Noticing what is in the awareness" are completely different ideas. It is important to remind the students at every opportunity of the difference between thinking and awareness, since learning to be aware of thinking is such an important

element of the practice. Using the language in this way is an effective tool if the instructor is consistent in the use of the terms.

One idea that follows from this is that the common Western definition of yoga as union of mind, body and breath is more than a little misleading, and may partially explain why "yoga" in the West often means "a fitness class" and not "mindfulness practice". Defining yoga as union of awareness, body and breath points the students in a different direction (see Guiding Formal Practice, below).

Instructor qualifications and training: Mindfulness practice can only be taught from one's own experience. Instructors teaching the MBSR program are expected to have quite a bit of experience. When I got involved, the minimum expectation for teaching MBSR classes included maintaining a daily meditation practice for at least a few years, as well as some form of movement practice (yoga, Tai Chi), attending at least two silent meditation retreats lasting seven days or more, and attending the teacher training workshop, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Mind-Body Medicine: A 7-Day Residential Training, with Jon Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli. Significantly more teacher training is now expected for new MBSR teachers. I believe similar personal practice and some form of teacher training are also appropriate for teaching the Introduction to Mindfulness class (or any mindfulness class) because, like MBSR, this class introduces a number of practices, and deals with a number of topics, in a particular order and in a particular way. For teachers who are not trained in MBSR, reading Full Catastrophe Living (including the order of events and how to present them in the MBSR program), or taking an MBSR class could provide useful background. As with MBSR classes, what happens in the undergraduate class depends heavily on the personal practice, training and skills of the instructor. The potential to teach poorly may even be somewhat greater for the undergraduate class than for an MBSR class, because undergraduates see things, hear things, and express themselves differently than older adults, and they are not doing as much work themselves as MBSR students. It would be far worse in my opinion to teach this class poorly, possibly turning people off to the practice or messing them up, than to not teach the class at all. As we were told at the end of the MBSR teacher-training workshop, "You can teach anything you like, just don't call it MBSR unless it is."

Non-religious practice: Another point about the MBSR program and the undergraduate class that is extremely important for a lot of the students, and should be considered carefully by any school, especially public schools, is that it is not a course on how to practice Buddhism. As Jon Kabat-Zinn points out, and as my students hear from me, many of the practices are ancient, and came from the Buddhist traditions, but the course is simply about paying attention to our own experience in a particular way, and is taught entirely in plain English. I emulate my teachers by avoiding even the English terms used by the Buddhist teachers, to prevent any possible confusion. I do tell the students that the Buddhists have been teaching mindfulness practice for millennia, so their instructions are quite good, and I quote several Buddhist (as well as Taoist, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and atheist/humanist) teachers and poets. However, the emphasis is always on direct experience, taking nothing on faith. "Just follow the

instructions and notice your own experience." Or, more to the point, "Don't take my word for it, test it." As with MBSR, teachers whose training is primarily Buddhist may benefit from a little re-orientation to present many of the same practices and concepts using different language. Insufficient attention to these issues has recently led to several well-publicized lawsuits in grade school programs. I believe these problems are completely avoidable with careful attention to the language and instructions.

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years about whether a "secular" mindfulness class is teaching "real" practice. What about ethics? Can you legitimately teach practice without ethics, and can you teach ethics without religion? I find this concern most often expressed by those with an overtly religious background (Buddhist or otherwise). I am opposed to teaching mindfulness simply as a tool to be used in the service of the ego, and there is certainly a lot of that going on these days, at major corporations, the military, and elsewhere. However, we have to start somewhere, in a way that draws beginners in. For me, it was stress reduction first, a deeper path second. In my classes, the students are told on the first day, "If you are worrying, you are not studying", which is obviously very utilitarian, but gives the students an immediate and tangible reason to do some daily practice. A month later we are defining suffering as "wanting the moment to be different than it is", which they understand firsthand from the examination of their own unpleasant moments. Several weeks after that, they have been asked to notice all of the messages we send and receive, especially the non-verbal messages. Then they are introduced to loving kindness practice. We explore the universal human experience of interbeing, and the notion of seeing our behaviors and interactions as "skillful" or "unskillful" based on whether they prevent or create suffering, rather than thinking they are "good" or "bad". By this time many of the students have already recognized the ethical dimension of the practice on their own. I have no qualms about encouraging the rest of them to look in that direction, but always with reference to their own experience. I believe that the ethics of interbeing, of balancing wisdom and compassion, are integral to the practice, and a natural outcome of deeply exploring one's own experience. This is briefly spelled out to the students at the last class. Although of course these issues have been discussed in religious contexts for millennia, it is also possible to discuss them in terms of the student's direct experience, without reference to any belief system. This class includes ethics, but it is not "preached" (for lack of a better word) to beginners because it is really only integral to their lives if they see it in their own direct experience, in their own time. This might be a useful place to draw the line between practice and religion.

3. Guiding Formal Practice

I assume that any teachers reading this already know how to guide formal practice, and I do not mean to question anyone else's skills or training by spelling out my usual practices. I do mean to provide adequate detail to describe what happens in the undergraduate class, and in some cases to distinguish that from what might happen in MBSR classes or in groups with more experience. The guidance described here is effective for my students. YMMV.

I have known teachers who provide beginners with little or no guidance during formal practice, and others who provide quite a bit. For beginners, especially those who are not spending a lot of time practicing at home, I believe some guidance is good, more is better, and occasionally too much is just right. Most beginners have a very limited ability to maintain attention on the practice and are not yet familiar with the usual obstacles. Although it is of course valuable and ultimately necessary to just sit and watch the mind do its thing for extended periods, early in the semester it is important to keep students looking in the right direction by providing frequent guidance. With too little guidance, the students spend most of the practice time just thinking, which is frustrating for many, and does not inspire them to do a lot of practice on their own. The frequency of guidance gradually diminishes as the course progresses. I try to present a wide variety of instructions, some frequently and some occasionally. I have been gratified many times when the students tell me, either directly, in their papers or in the course evaluations, that one particular instruction or another really stood out in their experience. This is part of making the class a big doorway.

Students are provided recordings for a 20 minute body scan, a 15 minute awareness of breath meditation and a 20 minute choiceless awareness meditation at the appropriate times to be used on their own, with a caveat about the challenges of practicing with beginner's mind once the recording is familiar, and an admonishment to let go of the guidance once they have gained some experience. However, I believe it is never appropriate to use recorded guidance (or any electronics) in class. Guiding is mainly a matter of doing the practice, noticing what comes up, and talking about the experience. Also, it is not appropriate or necessary to use Sanskrit or Pali names for practices. There are perfectly adequate English names, and many students are distracted or even distressed by having things described in Pali.

Body Scan

There are a number of reasons to begin formal practice with the body scan: It is simple and accessible, it comes with frequent guidance so the student's attention is not elsewhere for long, and it begins to cultivate awareness of the body just as it is. It is also (usually) relaxing, which is good motivation for the students. Inevitably, the first body scan leads to some discussion of all of the things that people almost never noticed or anticipated until they begin to practice:

Q: Is it bad that I fell asleep? (In every class I have ever taken or taught, someone falls asleep during the first body scan.)
A: Maybe your body is telling you something. If you are stressed out or sleep deprived and you relax, that may be enough to go to sleep. The connection between sleep and practice is that both entail letting go of thinking. However, the intention in practice is to stay alert, so try to find a time of day and conditions that keep you awake, such as lying on the floor, not the bed, sitting in a chair, or even opening your eyes if necessary. Of course, that doesn't mean you can't also try doing a body scan if you are having trouble getting to sleep.

Q: What do I do if someone starts snoring?
A: Notice that you have some stories about it. If the story is "that shouldn't be happening", notice the judgment as just a thought and let it go. It is not necessary to "fix" anyone else, or to do the practice "right". If the story is that the noise is disturbing you or maybe disturbing everyone, notice that it is just "sound", just vibrations in the air. It only becomes "noise" when there is a story in the mind about it. This applies to people coughing or moving around, sounds outside the classroom, the inevitable phone ringing, or any outer distractions. In fact, if you do something that creates sound during practice and you have stories about that, notice that they are only your stories. You really don't know whether your coughing or shifting or phone ringing distracted anyone else, and even if it did, that's their story. We only have to take care of our own minds.

Q: What do I do if I have an itch?
A: Scratch it – mindfully. Notice the urge to scratch arise, notice that you have a choice about if and when to scratch and are choosing to scratch it, take a few breaths before moving, notice the sensations of your hand moving and scratching, not just the sensations of the itch, notice the story in the mind change as the itch is relieved. All of that is happening in the present, so attending to it is still being present. The same practice can be applied to any other discomforts in the body that may arise in other practices.

Yoga

"Yoga" is a somewhat charged word these days, since it is used to describe such a wide range of practices in the West. In particular, it has evolved into a fashionable term for many types of fitness classes that may or may not involve any mindfulness practice (in my experience, often not, or not much.) As in the MBSR program, this class uses beginner's hatha yoga poses mainly to provide body sensations as objects of awareness. The goal is not to be strong or flexible, or to get "better" at it. The goal is just to be present, and notice whatever arises in the body and in the mind. In order to make this clear, a distinction is made between *yoga* and *bodywork*. Yoga is defined as the union of awareness, body and breath (NOT mind, body and breath), with the only intention being full, non-judgmental awareness of the moment-to-moment experience. If the "goal" is to be strong and flexible, if the students feel judged or are judging themselves or others, if they feel they would be "better" at it if they were more flexible, that is bodywork. There is certainly nothing wrong with taking care of the body, or with striving to be strong and flexible, it just isn't in and of itself mindfulness practice. Mindfulness practice means being aware of the sensations in the body and the breath AND noticing the various reactions and judgments in the mind without attaching to them, calling the attention back again to the direct experience of the sensations present in the body at that moment.

It is of course extremely important to tell the students to pay close attention to their own bodies and trust their own experience, especially for the first yoga session but frequently thereafter. If any pose seems beyond the capacity of their bodies or potentially hazardous, they should trust that sense and not attempt it, and just ignore any guidance that feels as if it might not be OK for them at that moment. It is valuable to explore the limits of the body with beginner's mind and non-striving, but pushing the limits to the point of pain is unwise. This is described as letting the body, not the mind, lead the practice. The body, not the mind, knows what the limit of each stretch is, knows when a strength pose has been held long enough and should be released. Students are encouraged to notice any judging or striving that arises as simply another kind of thinking. Like all thinking, it is not a problem that it arises as long as we don't attach to it. As soon as we notice the thought or feeling, whatever its source or content, we have another opportunity to come back to the present moment.

In spite of any instructions given beforehand, many students will judge and strive at first. Beginners have been conditioned by the popular misconceptions about yoga (or the truth about bodywork) to expect that they will be "bad" at it because they are not flexible, and may overdo it to try to appear more experienced or to keep up with their peers. Some students who have taken a lot of bodywork classes are even more inclined to overdo it: They consider judging and striving and pushing their limits to be a normal part of "yoga", and want to demonstrate their experience clearly to the rest of the class, or to themselves. It is therefore very important when guiding, especially early on, to keep the focus on moment-to-moment practice; call attention frequently and repeatedly to "how it feels to breathe in this position", to "the spot where the sensations are most noticeable or intense", "using only the muscles that are necessary, and relaxing everything that can

be relaxed", and occasionally to "any reactions in the mind (or "stories about the sensation"), and calling attention back to the sensation itself", "noticing whether this is the limit of the stretch - perhaps asking, not insisting, whether there might be a little more give with the next out breath", and after the pose is complete, "noticing any sensations remaining in the body as a result of doing that pose".

The first time yoga is introduced in class, the students are in a circle facing in, and the instructor is in the middle of the circle. They are told that the guidance will be very explicit and complete so that it is not necessary to look at the instructor. However, classes always include some students with absolutely no prior experience, so the first time through they will want to watch the instructor so that they know exactly what to do. They are also told that most of the poses can safely be done with the eyes closed, which helps to keep the attention inside. The first session is long, introducing a large number of poses at a very slow pace. Subsequently, yoga is done with everyone, including the instructor, in a circle facing out. The explanation offered to the students is that it is very difficult to see others in the group without judging and striving and reacting. In fact, it is so automatic as to be practically unavoidable, so facing away from the group greatly increases the likelihood that we can keep our attention inside, on our own experience. Most students appreciate the value of this practice right away, especially those who have taken bodywork classes. In fact, many students report that their experience in other yoga classes, however they are taught, becomes much more mindful after this explanation.

Very few poses are named, and these are named only in English. For some students, particularly the large fraction with a strong Western religious background, using the Sanskrit names can be a significant distraction, or even a source of angst or resistance, and it is unnecessary. My own experience as a student was that hearing Sanskrit terms tended to create a sense of separation, as if I couldn't appreciate the sensations in my body properly until I learned the traditional terms. That creates a significantly narrower doorway. Students learn Mountain Pose, Table Pose, and Corpse Pose by name. Everything else is described step by step, starting either from one of the named poses or from "sitting with the legs extended".

The language for guiding yoga (and every practice) employs gerunds rather than commands, which fosters a sense of moving "just because that's what we're doing" and not "because he said so". Identifying body parts as "the", not "your", fosters an impartial "witness" stance. If it's "my leg", it's my pain. If it's "the leg", it is a little easier to experience the sensation without judgment. It is important to give instructions with enough detail so that the students do not have to look at the instructor to follow them. For example: "Beginning in Mountain Pose, draping the right hand over the left shoulder and bringing the left hand or left wrist to the right elbow. Keeping the feet flat, turning everything to the left, from the ankles to the head. (wait) Noticing how it feels to breath in this position. (wait) Checking to see whether there is a little more give anywhere or whether this is the limit. (wait) Turning back to center and letting the arms relax back down (or "returning to Mountain Pose"). Noticing any sensations that remain in the body as a result of doing that stretch."

For self-guiding, either at home or in class, students are advised to hold poses until they know they have found their limit, listening to the body to insure they are not pushing the limit too hard. For some stretches, that may be less than a minute, others (e.g. forward bend), may continue to develop for a couple of minutes. Let the body lead. For strength poses, notice if the mind gets busy as the sensations become more intense, and then ask the body (don't insist) whether the limit has been reached. If you are sore afterward, that was probably too much, so ease up next time.

Sitting Meditations:

1. Awareness of breath (AOB) meditation.

Concentration practice comes first. Students have one object of awareness, the sensations of the breath, and always return to that object after recognizing that the attention is elsewhere. Early on, frequent guidance is provided so that the students don't stay lost in thought for too long. I firmly believe that protracted silence is counterproductive at the outset. I begin by calling attention to the sensations in the body for a minute or two (posture, contact with the seat and the mat, relaxing the face, jaw, shoulders) to make sure everyone's attention is in the room, then move on to awareness of the breath. I allow some time after each instruction, gradually increasing the intervals, and gradually reduce the amount of guidance in each meditation. The following are examples of typical guidance that might be used in sitting meditation, used according to my sense of how the group seems to be doing. Any or all may be useful at one time or another:

- Finding a comfortable, stable sitting posture. Sitting with a strong back and a soft front, upright and relaxed, alert and receptive. (Later on, after a few repetitions, just "Sitting with a strong back and a soft front.")
- Bringing attention to the sensations of sitting, and any particularly noticeable sensations in the body.
- Noticing if there is any tension or tightness in the body, and bringing attention to those places. Softening the face, especially around the eyes and the forehead, relaxing the jaw, the shoulders, the belly.
- Allowing the attention to settle gradually on the sensations of the breath.
- *For beginners:* Finding one particularly noticeable sensation to follow, perhaps the air moving in the nostrils or throat, movement in the chest, or movement in the belly.
- *After a month or so:* Noticing the sensation of the breath wherever it presents itself, perhaps even feeling the breath (or the energy of the breath) in the whole body.
- Noticing all of the sensations of each in breath and each out breath.
- Finding the rhythm of the breath. Is it deep or shallow, regular or irregular? No need to change it or control it or fix it, just noticing how it is right now.
- Perhaps the in breath and out breath are the same, perhaps one is a little longer than the other.
- Noticing the slight pause, the moment of stillness, at the end of each in breath and each out breath.
- Like driving a car and choosing to look only at the road right in front of you, even as there is scenery and sound coming and going, choosing to bring full attention to the breath, even as other sensations and thoughts arise and pass by.
- If the mind is very busy, counting a few out breaths, counting right at the end of the outbreath. As the attention settles, letting go of the counting and returning attention to the sensation itself.
- If the mind is very busy, opening the eyes and gazing softly at the floor. When the attention is back in the room, closing the eyes again.

- If the mind is very busy, bringing full attention to softening the face, especially around the eyes and the forehead. When the face is very soft, returning attention to the breath.
- If you feel very sleepy, opening the eyes and gazing softly at the floor.
- If it feels as if the breath is being controlled, perhaps allowing it to stop for a few moments, and watching the urge to breathe arise on its own.
- If the attention is elsewhere, gently and patiently calling it back to this breath.
- Noticing how many moments of awareness pass with each breath.
- If the attention is steady, knowing that the attention is steady. If the mind is busy, knowing that the mind is busy.
- This in breath, this out breath, this moment.
- Coming back patiently, and starting again.

2. Full body awareness.

Once the students have some capacity to return to the sensation of the breath, the field of awareness is gradually expanded to include other sensations in the body. In one meditation, inviting them to expand awareness from just the sensation of the breath to include sensations of sitting, of the whole body breathing. Later, including awareness of sound and sight (looking into the backs of the eyelids). The invitation eventually becomes “awareness of all of the sensations of being alive in the body”. At each step, always reminding the students that if they notice the attention has wandered off, they can always start again with the breath, and as the attention settles, gradually including other sensations.

3. Choiceless Awareness (CA) meditation.

Choiceless Awareness (Open Monitoring) meditation requires some facility with concentration practice. This is introduced at the end of the course. After spending some time on sensations in the body, awareness of thoughts and feelings are included. At each step of the choiceless awareness meditation, any time the attention wanders into thinking it can simply be called back to the sensations of the breath until the mind settles down. At first, allowing at least a few minutes between each step after awareness of the breath. Later on, the steps can be simplified and compressed into the first few minutes, then sit in silence.

Bringing attention to the sensations of sitting.
Bringing full attention to the sensations of the breath.
Expanding awareness to include the breath and all of the physical sensations in the body, including the sensations of sitting.
Expanding awareness to include sound, sight.
(At the end of the course) Expanding awareness to include feelings and thoughts.
Noticing thinking as just another sensation that arises and dissipates, like sound.
Like sitting on a riverbank watching all of experience flow by – the sensation of the breath, a sound, a thought. If you find that you have waded out into the river, just coming back to the bank and sitting down again.

4. Mountain meditation

The mountain meditation, introduced late in the semester, can be a very effective practice, especially for visual learners. After getting quiet, students are asked to visualize a mountain. Gradually the mountain is seen in greater detail, and over time – changing weather, changing seasons. Noticing all the activity and change on the surface, and then considering the unchanging silence and stillness deep inside. The imagery is then expanded to equate the mountain and the direct experience of being. Weather is likened to emotional states, clouds float by like thoughts, seasons change, and all the while there is stillness deep inside, always available, unaffected by what happens on the surface.

5. Random bells (awareness of sound) meditation

Also introduced late in the semester, students are told that the singing bowl will be struck three times at the beginning and the end of the meditation. In between, it will be struck or made to sing at random intervals. There will be moments of experiencing the sound of the bowl, moments of no sound of the bowl, and of course moments of other sounds arising and dissipating. Throughout, the breath is there as the anchor to the present moment if the attention wanders off. For many people, the sound of the bowl can be heard without generating thoughts about it, unlike most other sounds that are almost instantly and automatically named by the mind. Once the student has had the experience of just hearing, it is more accessible, both for other sounds and for other senses.

Walking Meditation

Many students, and I am one of them, have more trouble settling in to walking meditation than just about any other practice (although some get into it right away). This is a wonderful opportunity to emphasize beginner's mind. I tell the students that, like the sensations of the breath, the sensations of walking are so routine and normally so taken for granted that paying deliberate attention to them can seem foreign. And if the mind is telling a lot of stories, noticing that the mind is telling a lot of stories is still good practice.

There are many ways to introduce this practice. Here is one, delivered along with demonstrations:

Normal walking is falling forward and catching yourself. In walking meditation we are just going to walk, but we will S L O W D O W N to the slowest pace that allows natural movement, and take shorter steps so that we can stay balanced at that pace. Slow down and shorten the stride enough so that we could stop at any point in the stride and back up. No need to name anything or think about anything, just feeling the sensations, the weight shifting, the feet lifting and coming down, the moment when the weight is equally balanced on both feet, the moment when one foot leaves the floor, the moment it comes back down. Finding a pace that keeps your attention right here. Perhaps you will also notice the sensations of the breath, but it is not necessary to include or exclude them from your awareness. Just keep coming back to the stream of sensations of walking. If the mind is very busy, it can be helpful to bring full attention to just the soles of the feet, or just the center of gravity. If the attention is steady, perhaps expanding awareness to other sensations in the body.

Walking meditation is always done for at least 20 minutes in class, to give students plenty of time to settle in. Guidance is very infrequent, often just "bringing full attention to this step", "noticing the sensations in the feet", "finding a pace that keeps the attention on walking", or "If the mind is very busy, perhaps speeding up or slowing down the pace just a bit."

After students have done walking meditation in class once or twice, they are instructed after 15 minutes or so to increase their pace a little bit. A little later, they are instructed to increase their pace a bit more. Next they are instructed to increase their pace to something approaching a slow stroll. Then they are instructed to increase their pace to their normal relaxed walking pace. After a little more time, they are instructed to stop and bring full attention to the body. After that, they are invited to see if they can carry their walking mediation around with them during the week, even if it is only for a few steps at a time.

4. Guiding Discussions

There are a number of basic teaching tools and strategies that foster effective group discussions. Most or all of these will be familiar to MBSR teachers, and most mindfulness teachers regardless of training. Since they are an integral part of the course and are all used in every class, they are still worth mentioning.

Modeling mindful discourse: Of course, the single most important element in guiding group discussions is being fully present; listening objectively and patiently, accepting whatever comes up, allowing space for the students to go wherever their own experience takes them. There may be an intended theme or end point in certain discussions, but some of the unexpected diversions are at least as interesting, and cutting them off too quickly will be perceived (correctly) by the students as a judgment, so it is important not to be too attached to a plan. Being non-judgmental is absolutely crucial to the success of the class. This is expressed in the instructor's speech, obviously, but also in body language and eye contact. (I still marvel at the way Jon Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli handled this at the teacher-training workshop, where a few people came up with some pretty wild off-topic stories.) It can be effective to ask the students to examine their own statements, or to offer a possible alternative explanation, rather than just pointing out that they are caught in their stories. Once Jonathan Haidt's rider-on-an-elephant metaphor has been introduced, it is simple enough to say that we are more interested in talking to the elephant, not the rider, since we know the rider is just rationalizing what the elephant already feels. This can be a kinder, gentler way of saying that they are caught in their stories.

Connecting mind states and physical sensations: It is important to point out early and often that the body and mind are connected, and that emotional reactions are accompanied by physical sensations. When a student says, "I felt angry", asking where in the body the anger was felt, and how it feels in that spot. Drawing attention to these physical sensations allows us to examine the experience more clearly, since it is no longer just the label that the mind attaches to the emotion. Connecting emotions to body sensations is also a tremendously useful habit to cultivate; as we become accustomed to noticing those sensations, we can use them to catch ourselves reacting and call ourselves back to the present in the moments between the initial reaction and the generation of the story in the mind. This is addressed explicitly in discussing stress reactions and emotional reactions, but is a theme that comes up in virtually every discussion. Late in the course, students may be encouraged to explore making the physical sensations that accompany emotions their object of awareness if they arise in meditation.

Focusing on the direct experience of a single moment, not a story about an event: We are so accustomed to presenting an interpretation of our experience, even to ourselves, that people are often unaware of the difference between the experience and the story. It may not be possible to remind the students too often about noticing all the things that are in awareness (as opposed to in the mind) in each moment, especially the physical senses. When the students describe an experience, some will be objective and precise.

Others will tell their stories about the experience, or the meaning they ascribed to the moment after the fact, instead of the experience itself. In the latter case the students can be encouraged to recall what they felt in the body at that moment. Sometimes they will just restate the story, in which case they can be asked to recall what happened “just before that thought arose”. Connecting the physical experience with the moment allows them to understand the difference between the direct experience and the story that follows. This is another way of distinguishing awareness and thinking.

Comfort zone: Each teacher will naturally have their own style of speaking and relating to students. I am not very funny so I rarely tell jokes, but it is important to keep the atmosphere casual and reasonably light, even when the discussions are serious and deep. A little humor and/or humility at the right time can go a long way. I occasionally tell the class relevant stories from my own experience. This gives them an idea of what the acceptable boundaries are for discussion (I usually try to stretch the boundaries a little without scaring the students off) and how to explain their experiences to the group. It also gives them the idea that I am not the expert they mistake me for, but am constantly being run around by my own poor crazy mind just as they are. This is another way of emphasizing that in mindfulness practice, everyone – everyone on the planet – has more in common than they have differences. We all have a poor crazy mind that generates all kinds of thoughts, and we all have the capacity to notice what is present. This theme is addressed specifically in many of the later discussions, but fostering the sense of shared experience right from the start is extremely useful in its own right (see “What did you notice?” below for the students’ thoughts on this).

Students in the undergraduate class tend to be a little less open than MBSR students in discussing their personal experiences. Partly because they are young, and partly because they see the class as a class and not as a stress reduction program, their comfort zone is a bit narrower. It is probably counterproductive to push too hard in this area. We sit in a circle (“A smaller, rounder circle!”) for discussions so that everyone can make eye contact with everyone else. The students are told before the semester begins and again at the outset that although we are interested in examining the unvarnished truth of our own experiences, they are not required to reveal their secrets; we are more interested in examining the process of thinking, not the content. Some are more comfortable than others talking about their experiences. Once we are beyond the pleasant moment and unpleasant moment discussions (after the fifth class), nobody is called on to speak, they just volunteer if they feel they have anything to offer. It can take a while for anyone to speak after a question is asked. Early on in the course, the question might be rephrased after a period of silence if the group seems to be getting tense. Later in the course, the students are more comfortable experiencing longer periods of silence. I sometimes break a long silence to say that I can’t tell if they are deep in thought or just totally confused. This gives them permission to say they don’t get it if that is the case, and often prompts them to start talking if they were deep in thought. A few students contribute regularly to the discussions, and a few students almost never speak, much like MBSR students. It is clear from reading the papers that even those who never speak are still learning from the discussions.

5. Introduction to Mindfulness Practice - Weekly Plan

The design of this course grew from the MBSR program, so the order of events and many of the themes and discussions will be familiar to MBSR teachers (and students). Modifications were made based on the schedule, the recognition that the students are not doing as much daily practice as MBSR students and so need a little more time to develop their practice, and a sense of what engages the interest of the students. Additional changes were made based on feedback from the students in the form of papers and course evaluations. The following plan provides a detailed description of what currently happens in my classes. As with the MBSR program, practices and discussions are introduced in a certain order and in a certain way for a reason, and this plan has worked well for me and for my students. The detail is provided to convey what I have learned about teaching this age group in this format, to identify the ideas about thinking and awareness that are discussed, and to specify the order in which they are introduced. It is certainly not intended to be a script that anyone else has to follow, although everyone is welcome to use as much of this plan as they find useful. Mindfulness practice can only be taught from one's own experience, so even if you follow the entire plan, you will be teaching your version, not mine. Also, there is no telling what the students will say in class (after seven years, I am still learning something new each week, and I have no doubt that will continue). For these reasons, the only absolutely essential "plan" is to be present, and respond mindfully to whatever arises. If you teach with non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go, the students will get that, and almost anything you say or do will be useful to them. If you do not embody these attitudes, they will no doubt get that too, and nothing you say or do will make up for that. Having said that, in the words of two of the students, "There was a lot of content covered over the course of the semester. Overall, it represented a coherent body of learning, and presented a very thorough introduction to mindfulness practice." and "Each class built on its predecessors, and each class had a purpose. I thought the course as a whole is very, very soundly constructed."

Week 1. Mindfulness Practice – Developing Any New Skill Requires a Lot of Repetition

Overview: The main goals of this class are to establish all of the ground rules, get everyone to say something to the group, and get everyone oriented to what mindfulness practice is and how to get started. Along the way, it is helpful to begin to establish a casual but respectful atmosphere, including a brief discussion of paying full attention in class, maintaining confidentiality, and practicing non-judging. It is especially important to have all of the students introduce themselves and speak briefly to the group to establish that behavior as a norm. This class begins with everyone sitting in a circle of chairs, but we move the chairs and take out yoga mats when it is time to try out seats for meditation, and we sit in a circle on cushions or yoga mats thereafter.

Administrative, participation and grading:
Discuss the importance of bringing full, non-judgmental attention to listening and speaking (including avoiding side conversations, silencing and putting away all electronics, and maintaining eye contact with the group), maintaining confidentiality. Note that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions we will discuss, only the answer that it true for each student, and that may or may not be the same as anyone else's answer. Discuss in-class participation and the importance of daily homework. Note the paper assignments, required but not graded. Define attendance policy.

Go around the circle and have everyone (always including the instructor) introduce themselves (first and last names for a couple of weeks, to make it easier to remember), define their idea of "mindfulness" and say a few words about why they signed up for the course, what they hope to gain. Note common themes (these usually include stress management, curiosity about the practice, wanting to try something completely new, wanting to learn to deal with all that thinking and judging, or perfectionism).

Summary of the Introductory talk: Describe mindfulness practice as bringing attention fully and non-judgmentally to the present moment. The mind lives mainly in the past and the future. The handle we have on the present moment is physical sensation, which only occurs in the present moment. Do a short stretching exercise (seated), directing awareness to the sensations. Point out moments of thinking, moments of not thinking, and moments of noticing thinking (mindfulness). Discuss the myth of multitasking – "If you are worrying, you are not studying." Do a short awareness of breath exercise. Again, there are moments of thinking, moments of not thinking, and moments of noticing thinking. The moment we notice thinking, we have a choice about whether to pursue the thought or to let it go and come back to the present. Discuss the idea that, once our physical needs are met, most stress is not caused by the conditions we encounter, but by our reaction to the conditions. Illustrate with examples. My favorite example is my response to being cut off in traffic. Unmindful: "Oh, you jerk!" After I had been practicing for a while: "That person is a road hazard." After a lot of practice, on a good day, sometimes: "Thank you for giving me this opportunity to practice patience." The same conditions, with three very different experiences for me. We have no control over most

of the conditions we encounter, but we have a choice about the response. Next, call attention back to the breath even as they are listening and thinking. Distinguish formal practice (lots of repetition) and informal practice (applying the new habit throughout the day, one moment or breath at a time). Emphasize that progress is not linear, so simply follow the instructions and try not to be attached to the outcome. Every repetition of noticing thinking and calling the attention back to the present is progress.

Discuss limitations of language in describing non-cognitive experiences. Introduce Seven Attitudes That Support Mindfulness Practice (Appendix). Differentiate applying these attitudes in the outside world and applying them to our inner experience. For example, of course there is judging and striving in the outer world, but it is possible even in the midst of that world to cultivate a non-judging, non-striving mind state.

Move chairs, have everyone take their shoes off and get a zabuton or yoga mat to sit on. Discuss sitting posture - tilting the pelvis forward to relieve strain on the lower back, and keeping hips higher than knees. Demonstrate various sitting alternatives and have everyone try out benches and cushions, to be purchased and available to use in their rooms by the fourth class. This is not just practical, it is an effective ice breaker.

Have everyone get comfortable lying down on a yoga mat. Introduce the body scan. Do a 30 - 40 min body scan, beginning by making sure students are comfortable, and aware that they should take care of themselves (cushion or folded blanket under the knees, blankets if they are cold), followed by discussion of the students' experiences.

Assign: daily body scan, with recording, review Seven Attitudes
Post: Body Scan and Seven Attitudes files, 20-minute body scan mp3

Ideas for discussion:
Introductory talk and discussions of practice:
Students are told early and often that mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening in the present moment, not being perfectly at peace. The ability to notice thinking and call the attention back to the senses improves with repetition – LOTS of repetition. Stress is mainly due not to the conditions we encounter, but to our reaction to the conditions. Everyone has a "poor crazy mind" that generates all kinds of thoughts, some more useful than others. We are not out to do battle or exert control over our minds, just to get more familiar with how they work. We cannot force the mind to be quiet ("Don't think of a white bear!"). The practice is just noticing and letting go, over and over. The moment we notice we are thinking, we have a choice. (This idea is repeated many, many times.) Mindfulness is not being perfectly peaceful or relaxed, although that is a frequent side effect, it is being aware of where our attention is. The moment of noticing thinking IS mindfulness.

Week 2. Informal Practices – Noticing Moments All Day, Creating a New Habit

Overview: This class expands on the idea that formal practice develops and strengthens one's capacity to call the attention back to the present, but the point of doing practice is to have moments of awareness in the rest of our lives. This habit can be fostered right away by developing reminders to call the attention back even for one moment, or one breath, many times each day. Each moment of noticing thinking and calling the attention back reinforces the new habit a little more.

Sit in a circle – have everyone give their first and last names, and say something positive about themselves, how they would describe themselves on a good day. This begins to bring everyone's attention into the room, helps with learning names, and provides a little low-stress group building.

Do a 30 - 40-minute body scan, ending with a short awareness of breath (AOB) exercise.

Small groups – Have the students form groups of three (or four) with students they do not already know, and spend a few minutes introducing themselves. Then discuss the experience of doing the body scan, in class and on their own, finding time to practice, any other observations from the first week.
Circle – Ask what the students noticed when they practiced, ask about resistance to practice, how it went finding time, etc. Remind them that the goal is not to be relaxed, but simply to practice noticing when they are thinking and calling attention back to the present. There is always some mention of falling asleep. The body scan may be very helpful for getting to sleep, but the intention with formal practice is to stay alert. Trying to find conditions (time of day, lying on the floor instead of the bed, sitting in a chair, or even opening the eyes) that foster wakefulness.

Do the guided mindful eating (raisin) exercise followed by discussion. This includes engaging all of the physical senses, and the sense of thinking, being aware of all of the conditions that were necessary to create the raisin and bring it to them (interbeing). After any practice, the first question is usually, "What did you notice?" often followed by some silence. Subsequent questions are more specific, in this case perhaps commenting on any specific sense, or noticing whether the information provided by the eyes and the fingertips seemed similar or different, what came up when they considered where the raisin came from, and whether anyone can't stand raisins. Emphasizing noticing whatever arises without judging it, even if it is aversion to raisins.

Introduce informal practice as a way of collecting moments of awareness throughout the day, and pass out key covers and/or pebbles and/or small stickers to apply to their phones or computers. The key covers/pebbles/stickers are offered as one kind of "remember" sign – each time they feel or see it, recall the attention to the present for just a moment, maybe one or two breaths, to step out of the constant stream of thinking.

Suggest other “remember” signs, such as the phone ringing, red lights, opening doors, sitting down to eat.

Assign: Formal practice: daily body scan with recording

Informal practice: developing some “remember signs”, one complete mindful meal if possible, a few moments of mindful eating every day

Post: Mindful Eating and Informal Practice

Ideas for discussion:

Mindfulness is simple, but not easy. All it takes to develop the skill is repetition. Formal practice provides a lot of repetition, and informal practice helps to carry that awareness over into daily life. Notice resistance to doing the practice. It can seem like doing nothing, and so not very important. Do it anyway. Just follow the instructions, and try not to be attached to the outcome.

Week 3. Yoga

Overview: Introducing yoga provides opportunities to refine the definitions and goals of mindfulness practice, and point out any expectations or biases, particularly because "yoga" often means so many things other than mindfulness practice these days. This comes up again and again later on.

Begin by having everyone introduce themselves again, and say something they consider to be interesting about themselves – where their family originally came from, where their name came from, hobbies (G-rated only, please), etc.

Check in: Ask how it is going finding time for practice, and whether there are any insights or questions arising from body scans, how they are doing with informal practice and "remember" signs, mindful eating. Remind the students that progress is not linear, to practice without being attached to the outcome, and that every repetition is progress. Gandhi quote re: finding time to practice – "I'm so busy, in order to get everything done, I will have to increase my meditation time from one hour to two hours every day."

Yoga: Begin with a brief discussion – yoga means union of awareness (not mind!), body and breath. Discuss mindfulness practice vs. bodywork. Bodywork is easily distinguished from mindfulness practice by the mind states that are fostered – judging, striving and competition. If the student feels they would be "better" at it if they were more flexible, that's bodywork. Ask the students who have taken yoga classes whether they felt judging, striving or competition, or whether being more flexible means being better at it (many will say yes). Give general instructions; keeping attention inside, being patient and kind toward their bodies and not overdoing it, especially at the beginning, trusting their own bodies to tell them what is enough. Ignore any instruction that the body might not be comfortable with. We are simply generating sensations to be used as an object of moment-to-moment awareness. Suggest practicing with non-judging and non-striving, and for those with experience, beginner's mind. For the first yoga session, the students face the instructor, but the guidance will be explicit and complete, so it should not be necessary to watch in order to follow.

Reading: Two Kinds of Intelligence – Rumi

Do yoga for 50 – 60 minutes, with lots of poses, lots of guidance, and a very slow pace. If the room is large enough, have students in a circle facing the instructor. Remind them frequently to notice how it feels to breathe in each position, to notice whether they are at their limit or whether there may be a little more give in the stretch, to bring attention to the most noticeable sensation in each pose, to relax any muscles that are not needed for the pose. Noticing when there is a story in the mind about the pose or sensation (or anything else) and returning the attention to the body is just as much a part of the practice as doing the pose. After poses, notice any sensations that remain in the body as a result of doing that pose. Afterward, discuss what they noticed doing yoga; perhaps some judging and striving, perhaps some moments of contentment, perhaps noticing

the difference between the sensations in the body and the story in the mind about the sensations (pain vs. suffering). When doing yoga on their own, hold stretches until they are sure the stretch has reached its limit. Hold strength poses until the body (not the mind) says that's enough. The poses don't matter as much as the quality of attention brought to the practice.

Assign: Formal practice: daily yoga (or alternate with body scan).

Informal practice (in addition to remember signs): Noticing pleasant moments (What makes a moment pleasant?) Emphasize noticing the moment, not the event, and the direct experience of that first pleasant moment, not the story about it.

Remind students that there will be sitting meditation beginning with the fourth class. If your room does not have sufficient supplies, the students should bring their meditation seats with them if possible.

Post: Yoga, yoga diagrams, Pleasant Moments calendar

Ideas for discussion: Yoga is a form of meditation, with moments of being aware of sensations, moments of thinking, and moments of noticing thinking. In particular, yoga tends to provide many opportunities to notice judging and striving. Noticing the reactions in the mind and letting them go is just as much a part of the practice as the pose. This is also an opportunity to tap into the body's own wisdom, tuning in deeply to what the body is saying rather than what the mind may want it to say.

Week 4. Sitting Meditation, Pleasant Moments

Overview: Introduce sitting meditation with thorough explanations of posture, practice, the attitudes involved and, most of all, noticing the difference between thinking and awareness. Emphasize that relaxation or perfect stillness is not the point, simply being present is the point. Thinking is not a failure, and the moment of noticing thinking is mindfulness. Every one of those moments is progress.

Group building: Hope snowballs. Ask the students to collect their attention, maybe even closing their eyes and tune in to the breath for a few moments, then think about what they hope for – not the next exam grade, and not world peace, but something they could conceivably change about their lives within a year. Offer a suggestion or two: maybe taking better care of their health, or becoming more patient, or more diligent about their work, or more sociable. Distribute note pads and pens and have everyone write down their hopes in a few words, then tear off their page and pass the pad and pen around. When everyone has their page, crumple the paper into a loose ball, throw it into the middle of the circle, and have the students do the same (or collect them in a bag). Collect the snowballs into a pile, mix them up a bit, then throw one to each student, mentioning that now they are anonymous. Go around the circle having each student say their name, then read what is on the page they are holding. This can be done with some discussion of common themes, or with minimal discussion.

Check in – insights or questions from yoga, finding time to practice.

Introduce sitting meditation: Getting intimately acquainted with the poor crazy mind. Using the sensation of the breath as the main object of awareness, and patiently calling the attention back whenever it has wandered off. Remind students of sitting posture, and help them find a posture that is stable and comfortable, upright and relaxed. Explain the use of the bells, if you use them (they tend to lead to less thinking than using words to begin and end the meditation, and eventually there can be an almost Pavlovian response – hear the bells, settle the mind).

Begin with a 10-minute awareness of breath meditation, with frequent guidance. Next, do yoga for 15 - 20 minutes, with students and instructor in a circle, facing out. Provide detailed guidance, including “noticing how it feels to breathe in this position”. Then do another 10-minute awareness of breath meditation, beginning with finding a stable comfortable posture and “noticing how it feels to sit in this position, notice how it feels to breathe in this position”, connecting yoga and sitting meditation. Debrief. Usually some students will notice that they were quieter after doing yoga for a few minutes, which can then be suggested as a good way to practice at home. Sitting meditation can be described as a yoga pose that is held for a long time.

Small groups - Ask the students to get into groups three or four with students they don’t already know. Have them spend a few minutes introducing themselves, then talk about

what makes a moment (not an event) pleasant. Give each small group a file card and pen to take notes, so that they will remember what came up.
Circle - Ask everyone (including the instructor) to describe a pleasant moment. Ask the students about their felt sense of the moment, not the story about it, especially if they describe something other than noticing physical senses. Ask the group what all the moments they have described have in common. Usually, they will notice right away that pleasant moments are moments of noticing the physical senses and/or moments of feeling connected to others. Often there will be some awareness of being content with the conditions just as they are at that moment.

Assign: Formal practice: daily short sitting meditation in addition to (or immediately following) yoga or body scan. I encourage students to use a timer for meditation, so that they will not look at the clock constantly while sitting.

Informal practice (in addition to remember signs): noticing unpleasant moments – what is happening, what comes up in the body, what comes up in the mind in that first moment that is recognized as unpleasant

Post: Sitting Meditation

Ideas for discussion: There is a freshness and ease in the moments of not thinking, with attention on direct experience. Noticing what is in the senses, even for a moment or two, has tremendous power. All it takes is noticing thinking and letting it go, instead of being swept up in it. That's where the formal practice comes in.

Week 5. The Poor Crazy Mind Part I, and Unpleasant Moments

Overview: This class and to some extent the following class slow the pace so that students can accumulate more experience doing formal practice on their own. In addition, the discussion of *The Happiness Hypothesis* provides a lot of very useful language for subsequent practice and discussion.

Group building: Fear snowballs.
As for the hope snowballs, ask the students to collect their attention, then think about their fears, again thinking on the scale of the coming year, not the coming week or decades. (If any students were absent for the previous class, describe the process.) Offer a few suggestions: fear of failure, of not finding a job, of letting people down. As the pages are read, noting common fears, often fear of failure or not measuring up. Simply having them voiced, and especially finding that they are not alone, can be a great comfort.

Do a 15-minute awareness of breath sitting meditation, emphasizing acceptance of thinking and whatever else arises, and letting go of whatever is not the breath, with lots of guidance.

Reading: The Guest House – Rumi (during or immediately after the meditation)

Short discussion of non-judging and non-striving: “the dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing and invite them in”. Everyone has a poor crazy mind that generates all kinds of thoughts. Accepting and letting go means acknowledging all of it, without judging. Ask whether anyone judged the fact that they were thinking, and point out again that thinking is not a failure, it is inevitable. Noticing that the mind is thinking is progress, and another opportunity to recall the attention to the present. Allow time for discussion of any questions or comments about formal or informal practice that arose in the past week.

Introduction to Jonathan Haidt – *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Chapter 1
Take 20 minutes to read selected passages and discuss them. In particular:
The rider and elephant metaphor
The divided mind: body/mind, old/new, left/right (the rider is essentially the interpreter module), controlled/automatic
Failures of self-control, mental intrusions, the difficulty of winning an argument:
The rider as a lawyer for the elephant.

Small groups – As for last week, ask the students to get into groups of three or four with students they don’t already know. Have them spend a few minutes introducing themselves, then talk about what makes a moment (not an event) unpleasant. Give each small group a file card and pen to take notes, so that they will remember what came up.
Circle – Ask everyone (including the instructor) to describe an unpleasant moment. Ask the students about their felt sense of the moment, not the story about it. Ask the group

what all the moments they have described have in common. Usually, they will notice right away that unpleasant moments are moments of resisting the experience, of wanting things to be different than they are. Wanting the moment to be different than it is, resisting the experience, is one definition of suffering, which comes in all sizes. Wanting the moment to be a little bit different is a little suffering. Wanting the moment to be very different is more suffering.

End with a short sitting meditation if there is time.

Assign: Formal practice: sitting meditation at least every other day, using the recording if they wish, and yoga or body scan on alternate days.

Informal practice (in addition to remember signs): noticing stressful moments (a special case of unpleasant moments)

Post: 15 min. awareness of breath meditation mp3, Summary of *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Chapter 1

Ideas for discussion:
Our conscious minds (the rider) are only a small part of thinking. Much of what we do is driven by instinctive reactions, emotions and automatic thinking processes (the elephant). Mental intrusions (The Guest House) are inevitable. It is only our resistance to them that creates a problem.

Unpleasant moments are moments of resistance, of wanting the moment to be different than it is. “Wanting the moment to be different than it is” is one definition of “suffering”, which comes in all sizes and shapes. (This comes up almost every week.) Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional. The difference is whether there is resistance in the mind to the experience. We all sometimes encounter conditions that are painful and unavoidable, and it is not wise to pretend otherwise, but we always have a choice about the response in the mind, one moment at a time.

Week 6. The Poor Crazy Mind Part II, and The Stress Cycle

Overview: Keeping the pace slow, allowing more opportunities for the students to gain experience with sitting meditation, with guidance and discussion. Linking the direct experience of acceptance with literature and cultural ideas describing acceptance. A discussion of stress and the stress cycle, and how to step off. This class winds up including a fair amount of thinking, but the language and ideas are very useful thereafter.

Begin with self-guided yoga, 15 – 20 minutes, allowing the students to gather their attention.
Do a 15 – 20 minute awareness of breath sitting meditation, providing less frequent guidance.

Reading (during or just after the meditation): The Summer Day – Mary Oliver

The Happiness Hypothesis, Chapter 2 – the Like-O-Meter and training the elephant. Again, reading a few selected passages to illustrate the ancient wisdom that it is not the conditions that determine our experience, but our response to the conditions. Main points to cover: The Like-o-Meter and affective priming, negativity bias, affective style, and training the elephant.

Small groups – Ask the students to get into groups of three or four with students they don't already know. Have them spend a few minutes introducing themselves, then talk about what makes a moment (not an event) stressful. What do they notice in the body and mind at the moment they recognize stress? Give each small group a file card and pen to take notes, so that they will remember what came up.

Circle – Ask students to describe a stressful moment. From this point on, allow students to contribute to the group voluntarily, rather than going around the circle and asking each student to speak. (Some will speak frequently in the circle, some infrequently and some never again.) Distinguish moments of physical stress (tripping on a step, getting too close to traffic) and the more frequent social, work, or emotional stress. Ask the students about their felt sense of the moment, not the story about it. Bring attention to the physical sensations as much as possible, and the space between the physical sensation and the story that follows. Ask the group what all the moments they have described have in common. As student input slows or ends, discuss stress and the stress cycle. Point out that some stress is beneficial, in that it keeps us moving. Too much stress, or the wrong kind, wears us down. Reacting vs. responding to stress. Noticing that there is a positive feedback loop – stress leads to stressful thoughts, which produces more stress, and suggesting ways to get out of it. Addressing the importance of paying attention to sensations in the body, which afford the cue to come back to the present moment if the story takes over.

Short sitting meditation if there is time.

Assign: formal practice daily, including sitting meditation at least every other day;

Informal practice (in addition to remember signs): noticing moments of feeling stuck or overwhelmed by unhelpful (not necessarily stressful) thoughts and emotions

Post: Summary of Chapter 2 of *The Happiness Hypothesis*

Ideas for discussion:

From *The Happiness Hypothesis*:

Once you recognize negativity bias in your own thinking, you really don't have to believe everything you think. Affective priming shows that life is indeed what we deem it, but the deeming happens instantly and mostly subconsciously. The Like-o-Meter is always running, adjusting our affect (approach, withdraw or neutral) in response to everything we experience. Meditation trains the elephant by raising the threshold for reactivity.

Stress:

Some stress is useful; without it we would be vegetables. Too much stress, or certain kinds of stress, can be very unhealthy.

The stress reflex is very adaptive for dealing with physical threats, where activating the sympathetic nervous system allows a burst of physical activity for fight or flight. Unfortunately, we have the same physiological response to all kinds of social situations or mental activity, where the burst of physical activity that adrenaline enables is almost never an appropriate response.

Adrenaline is very expensive. It wears us out physically, emotionally and mentally, so try not to waste it.

Tuning in to the sensations in the body allows us to recognize stress reactions as they arise, and to respond mindfully rather than react automatically.

The stress cycle is a positive feedback loop, where each stress reaction triggered by external conditions elicits stressful thinking, thereby piling on more stress, and predisposing us to be more reactive. Breaking the cycle is simply a matter of noticing, one moment at a time, that there is a reaction, and calling the attention back to the present moment, releasing that reaction. This allows us to respond to conditions with awareness, rather than reacting automatically.

Almost regardless of what thought arises spontaneously, our minds try, usually successfully, to connect it with what we already know. Pretty soon, we’re playing one of our “ten favorite recordings” in our minds. The same memories and plans, our stories about who we are, come up again and again. Some of these stories are stressful, most are not entirely true, and almost all lead us to expert’s mind, limiting our perception and possible responses.

Week 7. Dealing with Difficult Emotions, and Walking Meditation

Overview: This class provides a lot of formal practice, and a short discussion of applying formal practice in our daily routines. The emphasis throughout is on practicing with the seven attitudes, emphasizing the attitudes that are most noticeable in each practice (yoga – trust, non-judging, non-striving; sitting meditation – patience, non-judging, acceptance, letting go; walking meditation – beginner's mind, patience, non-striving).

Begin by reviewing the seven attitudes, emphasize that they are for inner practice, not living in the outer world (e.g. judging and striving). Ask students to identify the attitude that is most difficult or elusive for them at that time. Ask them to do yoga with particular awareness of that difficult attitude.

Guided yoga, 20 – 25 minutes – exploring the most difficult or elusive attitude

Remind students of the ancient wisdom that it is not the conditions, but our response to the conditions that determine our experience. For example, there is sound (pressure waves in the air, converted to nerve impulses in the ear) and there is noise (the resistance in the mind to those nerve impulses).

Reading: Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House – Billy Collins
Awareness of breath sitting meditation for 20 minutes, limited guidance.

Circle – Begin with any comments or observations about sitting meditation, and concentration in general.
Ask what the students noticed during the week about feeling stuck, getting unstuck.
Introduce STOP as a more conscious, systematic way of applying the practice to dealing with difficult emotions in daily life.
Stop what you are doing.
Take a breath. (come back to the present)
Observe your experience – distinguish thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
Proceed based on what is really there.
Point out the difference between having unpleasant emotions and letting them run their course, and having unpleasant emotions and resisting the experience. Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.

Introduce walking meditation, and walk for at least 20 minutes. Ask for comments, observations about the experience.

Assign: sitting meditation at least every other day and walking meditation at least once during the week. In general, daily formal practice of their choice (every week hereafter).

Informal practice: Try STOP practice daily; also noticing difficult communications – How do you communicate when there is resistance or conflict? What is each party trying

to accomplish? What is the style of communication? Where is the resistance? How does it feel?

Post: Walking Meditation

Post: Reflection Paper #1 (Due in two weeks, by the ninth class)

3 - 5 double-spaced pages (1 inch margins)
Consider recent experiences in your life and identify a time in the last month when you felt overwhelmed or stuck in unhelpful thoughts.
a) Describe the experience. Describe thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and behaviors associated with this experience. Tease apart and describe the distinctions between thoughts, emotions, sensations, and behaviors.
b) What was it that triggered your reaction? Was this experience of being stuck or overwhelmed part of a habitual pattern, or was it caused an unusual circumstance?
c) As you reflect on this experience, what have you learned? And how can these insights help you in the future?
Papers will not be graded (so you don't have to count words or spend a lot of time polishing the prose), but are required for participation.

Ideas for discussion:
In moments of feeling overwhelmed, it can be very helpful to take a moment to distinguish the sensations in the body, the emotions, the thoughts in the mind, and the behaviors that arise. (STOP practice). Just recognizing the thoughts, which can be quite rigid, and drawing attention to the feelings or sensations, which are constantly changing, can provide enough space to respond instead of react. This does not mean that difficult feelings will magically disappear. Indeed, they need our kind attention to allow them to come up and eventually to run their course. It does mean that in those moments of feeling sad or angry (or embarrassed or bored, etc.) we have a choice about whether we accept the feelings as they are, or resist the experience, creating suffering in addition to the feelings. Finally, accepting the experience does not mean that nothing should be done to change the conditions. (This is a common misunderstanding of the seven attitudes, applying them in the world rather than in the mind. It bears repeating every time it comes up.) Sometimes action is necessary, but that action can be undertaken consciously and from a place of real understanding, rather than from the reactive mind.

8. Mindful Communication

Overview: This class illustrates one important application of mindfulness practice in daily life – mindful verbal communication. Remind students that the first half of the course was mainly about how to practice, the second half is more about why, but they will only be effective in applying what they learn if they actually practice (train the elephant).

Acknowledging that the course is half over. Asking the students to notice being in the circle and whether that feels any different than it did at the beginning. Asking them to recommit to simply following the instructions and not being attached to the outcome for the second half.

Sitting meditation for 20 minutes with stepwise instructions, beginning with just the breath and gradually expanding awareness to include sitting, then sound and sight (looking into the backs of the eyelids).

Reading: The Journey – Mary Oliver

Small groups – Ask the students to get into groups of three or four with students they don't already know, or haven't talked with lately. Discuss difficult communications. What was the communication? How did it feel (in the body!) to be in conflict, or misunderstood, or ignored? How did you respond? How did the other person respond?

Circle – demonstrate communications styles (Recruit a volunteer before class begins, and supply instructions for each demonstration. Set out several mats to land on.), then discuss the demonstrations one at a time. Emphasize that, just as sitting posture is meant to be an embodiment of the mind state of present awareness, the demonstrations are meant to be an embodiment of verbal communication styles, and do not represent actual violence. That way the communication style can be introduced initially without any specific content. Ask for comments and observations after each demonstration, including a name or description of each style, examples from their own experience, and whether and how the communication style works for either party. Many of these styles avoid direct confrontation, at the expense of any real exchange. Styles: 1. Passive (you push, I fall). 2. Aggressive (you push, I push back, you fall). 3. Passive-aggressive (you push, I step out of the way, you fall). 4. Taking blame (you push, I fall and say it was all my fault). 5. Locking horns (we both circle and yell "I'm right, you're wrong! How can you think that?") 6. Mindful – blending (I take your arm, turn, and tuck your arm under mine so we both face the same direction, both have partial control). After all six demonstrations and discussions of each style, ask the students how to communicate mindfully. Usually they will come up with using "I" words. Judgments such as "You're a jerk" instantly generate defensiveness and resistance. Starting with "I" words, such as "When you did this, I felt that", is a statement of facts, not a judgment. Being assertive without being aggressive increases the likelihood of a constructive exchange. Still, it is only mindful if it can be done without being attached to the outcome, and adjusting one's position after listening carefully to the other person. This is an opportune time to reinforce the idea that all of this is just talk unless we put in

the time practicing and truly become less reactive, and more adept at noticing the story in the mind without getting swept away by it.

End with a short sitting meditation if there is time.

Assign: Formal practice daily

Informal practice: noticing consuming food and chemicals. How do you know you're hungry? what you want to eat? If you don't have choices, how does that feel? How do you know when you're full? How do you feel after you eat? What are the social aspects of eating? Consider the same questions for alcohol and other chemicals.

Post: Summary email on verbal communication

Summary email:
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Common unmindful communication styles:
Passive; Aggressive; Passive/Aggressive; Taking blame inappropriately; Locking horns

Mindful communication:

You can learn to be assertive without being aggressive. One key is to speak in terms of your own experience - "I" words, not your interpretation of the other person's possible thoughts or motives: "When you said that, I felt this, and therefore I thought this." If it is framed in this way, most people will respond in kind. In any case, speak in terms of observable facts (e.g. behavior), not a judgment of the person or their motives. The moment someone feels judged, they will usually get defensive, which resets the like-o-meter to withdraw mode, and then there's not much middle ground.

Two other essential elements of mindful communication-

1. Active listening - listen with full attention until the other person is finished speaking, and make sure you have understood what they said. Asking for clarification if you need it is not only useful, it lets them know that you care about their point of view. Then take a breath or two and sort through your thoughts and feelings before even considering how to respond. This is one place where STOP might be helpful.

2. Not being attached to the outcome (this can be the hardest part). Maybe you will come to some agreement, more or less in the middle. Or, you may learn that the other person really was trying to give you a hard time, or that you have an irreconcilable difference of opinion. It may not be what you wanted to hear, but if it's the truth, I would consider it progress. And, even if that's where you end up, getting there without a lot of unnecessary fireworks is worth the effort.

If anyone is too upset for this kind of exchange, it can be a good idea to postpone the discussion "until we are both ready."

This may seem cumbersome at first, but if you start with mildly difficult communications, you can get the hang of it more easily. Remember, dealing with family can be advanced practice, so don't expect miracles right away.
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Ideas for discussion:
Being mindful in difficult communications does not mean being passive, or being a doormat. In communicating with others, it is possible to be assertive without being

aggressive. One practical tool is stating your experience without judgment, using “I” words. (“When you said that, I felt this.” instead of “That was mean.” or worse, “You’re mean.”) Beyond that, communication can only truly be mindful if you are not attached to the outcome. When listening, listen fully. Then notice what arises in you and respond as authentically as possible. There may be times when it is appropriate to say that you would like to talk, but it might be best to wait because one or both of you may be too upset at the moment. There may also be times when someone just won’t engage in a real communication, or will engage with genuine hostility. That might be progress – at least you know how they really feel.

9. Mindful Consumption of Food and chemicals.

Overview: This class continues applying practice to daily life. The emphasis in the discussion is not to judge their eating or drinking behavior, but to be more aware of the impulses that drive it. Everyone has a lot of thoughts and opinions about food, so this is always a lively discussion, and it sometimes needs a little guidance to stay on topic.

Walking meditation: Review the seven attitudes, emphasize that they are for inner practice, not living in the outer world (e.g. judging and striving). Ask students to identify the attitude that they feel they have really learned something about, one that is working for them. Ask them to do walking meditation with particular awareness of that attitude, as a celebration of that attitude. Walk for at least 20 minutes.

Reading - Autobiography in Five Short Chapters – Portia Nelson

Sitting meditation, beginning with the breath and gradually expanding to awareness of all of the physical senses, 20 minutes, with minimal stepwise instruction, always just staying with the breath if the mind is very busy, and starting again with just the breath if the attention wanders off.

Small groups, then circle – Discuss mindful eating. How do you know you're hungry, and what you want to eat? If you don't have many choices, how does that feel? How do you know when you're full? How do you feel after you eat? How often do you eat alone? Consider the same questions for alcohol and drugs.

A few key questions for the circle:
Do you ever eat standing up or on the run? Do you eat while reading, or watching a screen? Do you eat when you are not hungry? Why? What need is being addressed? (boredom, feelings of emptiness, procrastinating, etc.) To what extent is eating a social event? There is meaning in feeding people beyond nutrition, so we may feel compelled to taste everything so as not to offend. This is especially noticeable at family feasts and potlucks. Ask about food cravings, sweets and other treats, caffeine. To what extent is food a drug?

A few points to bring up at the appropriate time:
It takes ~20 minutes for the gut to send messages to the brain about being full, so if we eat fast, it is much easier to overeat.
The body knows what it needs. Subjects given access to a wide range of food choices and told to eat whatever they really felt like eating do not eat a very balanced diet each day, but they do over the course of a week.
Oil, salt and sugar were not part of our diets until agriculture developed. Our bodies crave those things as if they are still very scarce, but they are now very abundant, especially in processed food.

Ask about alcohol, distinguishing between drinking alcohol with meals, social drinking (getting a little loose) and binge drinking (getting really drunk). How do you decide to drink, what to drink, when to stop? What are the social aspects of drinking? Isn't the whole point to lower inhibitions? How does it feel to be sober in a group that is drinking (again, there is getting a little loose, and there is getting really drunk)? Can you lower inhibitions without drinking? Why binge?

Ask about prescription and recreational drugs. Why do we medicate? What impulse or need is being served? (Wanting the moment to be different than it is?)

Assign: Daily formal practice
Informal practice: consuming information/messages: What kinds of messages are you taking in? How much control do you have over that? How does information affect you? There are obvious sources, such as news media, advertising, fashion, internet, but also more subtle sources, such as body language, eye contact, tone of voice.

Ideas for discussion:
We eat when we're hungry, but we often eat when we're not hungry, too. Eating is often done mindlessly, especially when we're in a hurry. Slowing down a little, noticing how much judgment constantly arises in everything we do affords us more choice. Instead of reacting automatically, we can respond authentically to what is before us. It's not that there is a right or wrong choice, only that we so often don't even see the choice if we're moving too fast. In addition to all of the reactions in the mind and body, eating is often a social event, with many additional rules that we follow almost unconsciously. Most people consume chemicals mainly because we are not satisfied with the way we feel or the way we behave to begin with, and want to change it. One big reason people drink is that alcohol lowers inhibitions. Another is that there can be a lot of social pressure to conform. Maybe we can lower inhibitions to socialize more comfortably without the alcohol. Noticing the feeling of inhibition is the first step.

10. Mindful Interactions, Part I

Overview: This is a point in the course when many students start to experience deeply the connection between doing formal practice and being mindful in daily life. The discussion ties together what they have already learned about the automatic, often subconscious judgments generated by the poor crazy mind, the connection between thinking and stress, and communication styles. The emphasis is again on noticing the impulses, not judging behavior. As usual, some formal practice at the beginning brings their attention fully into the group and their own experience.

Begin with 15 – 20 minutes of guided yoga, emphasizing beginner's mind.
Reading – Peace Is This Moment Without Judgment – Dorothy Hunt
Sitting meditation, starting with breath and gradually expanding to the whole body, all of the physical senses, 25 minutes.

Small groups, then circle: Discuss consuming information: What messages do you consume? How much control do you have over what you take in? How conscious are you of receiving information? How do messages and information affect you?

Some key questions for the circle:
Do you read or hear news regularly? How does that affect you? This can often lead to thoughts about whether it is useful or pointless to hear about problems that are beyond our control in the name of being informed. Some students are well informed about the larger world, some are quite insulated.

What kinds of advertising are you exposed to? Does it work on you? Advertising is meant to communicate directly with the elephant, to generate feelings of wanting. How does advertising (and perhaps buying) feel? There are many things we all buy (food, clothes, etc.), but WHICH food and clothes?

How much information is there in the way people dress? Do you categorize people based on their clothes? Remember affective priming and the Like-o-Meter! How do you identify your in-group based on appearance? Have you ever met someone and instantly thought you would not like them, and then became friends? What was that initial judgment?

What do you learn from body language? Do you recognize passive or aggressive or engaging or withdrawn body language? How many judgments arise automatically just walking past a stranger on the sidewalk?

What are the unwritten rules for eye contact with strangers, with friends? How about tone of voice? Notice how sensitive we are, automatically and unavoidably, to nonverbal cues.

How many students have ever been misunderstood by email or text message? How much do we rely on non-verbal cues to communicate?

Assign: Daily formal practice
Informal practice: noticing messages you send, especially non-verbal messages. Be aware of your body language, eye contact, and tone of voice.

Ideas for discussion:
Advertising and other messages we are exposed to are designed to talk directly to the elephant. We constantly judge our environment to determine how we fit in. We judge people automatically and subconsciously based on appearances. Much of this automatic judging is a useful, even essential way of filtering all of the information we take in, but if it is not recognized as judgment, we can wind up with a very distorted view of reality. We are very social beings, and we are very sensitive to subtext and nonverbal cues. We judge and recognize being judged in these non-verbal ways mainly subconsciously. Each message we absorb resets the Like-o-Meter a little bit, predisposing us to be slightly more approach or withdraw oriented in the next moment. This is usually subconscious, unless we get pushed hard in one direction or the other. The moment we notice we are thinking or reacting, we have a choice.

11. Mindful Interactions, Part II: Loving kindness practice

Overview: This class expands a bit on some ideas that are touched on in MBSR. It introduces loving kindness practice, reinforcing the connection between practice and daily life in a way that many students find very meaningful. It is the beginning of the core ethical teaching, interbeing.

Begin with self-guided yoga – "letting the elephant lead", meaning listening carefully to the body to decide which poses would feel right at that moment, thinking about it as little as possible. Witnessing the body doing yoga "on its own" instead of thinking through it.

Brief reading from Thich Nhat Hanh on interbeing (see Appendix), then introduce language for the loving kindness meditation. This is presented as an "intentional" meditation addressing four aspects of our experience that we have been dealing with throughout the course; the body, the feelings, the thinking mind, and "insight", defined as knowing the difference between awareness and thinking, between pain and suffering. The intentions are; for the body, "being well"; for the feelings, "being filled with loving kindness" or "good will" whatever words work best for the student; for the mind, "being peaceful and at ease"; for insight, "being free from suffering".

Before doing the meditation, I present two different ideas about how people interact with each other. Read the Gestalt Prayer by Fritz Perls (which I characterize as a somewhat selfish and possibly delusional view of how people interact in the world), then Interrelationship by Thich Nhat Hanh, emphasizing "isn't it obvious that we inter-are?"

Do loving kindness meditation. A typical cycle would be; a person for whom your feelings are overwhelmingly positive, yourself, a person who is central in your life such as a family member or very close friend, a casual friend, a neighbor or classmate that you might speak with but who is not significant in your life, a person with whom you are in conflict (twice), your immediate community, your whole community – everyone you feel connected to in any way (every person on the planet?), ending by coming back to yourself.

Discuss the practice. What came up when the intentions were for yourself? for others? for a difficult person? for the community? for the whole world? How big is your community? Emphasize that we "inter-are" all the time, whether we want to or not.

Discuss interbeing, e.g. the butterfly effect. If the person in front of you in line at the store gives the clerk a hard time, you are going to pay for it. That clerk's Like-o-Meter has been pushed toward withdraw mode, which will affect how they interact with you, which will affect your Like-o-Meter. If the person in front of you is especially nice to the clerk, you are going to benefit from that, even if it is in a subtle way. We inter-are, all day every day. Continue discussion of non-verbal communication, of being available and open as we move through our communities. Noticing that our own Like-o-Meters and everyone else's are influenced by all of the subtle nonverbal messages we

constantly send and receive. Ask how students feel when they are with someone who starts texting, and then ask how many of them have done it themselves. Ask how long they hold a door for the person behind them before it feels awkward. How do they feel when a door is not held for them? Our lives are made up mainly of these ordinary moments, not peak experiences. We have a choice about how we experience the ordinary moments.

One way to practice interbeing, to have an effect on your community is to think “I see you” when you say hello to or make eye contact with people, even strangers. There is no need to say it out loud (which would be rather awkward in most cases), just thinking it can make you more present. (This greeting has been used in parts of Africa for a very long time, where the traditional answer is “I am here”. It was co-opted in the movie Avatar, so most college students have heard it.)

Reading: Wage Peace – Judyth Hill
Suggest waging peace with your breath when you witness conflict or suffering.

Assign: Daily formal practice. In addition, do a brief loving kindness practice daily, including yourself and one other person.
Informal practice: wage peace with your breath, practice “I see you”, and do three kind acts when you have nothing to gain, including at least one for a stranger.

Ideas for discussion:
Thinking of behavior or especially people as “good” or “bad” can generate a lot of judgment and rigid thinking. Judgments such as these arise from expert’s mind. If behavior can be seen as “skillful” (reducing or preventing suffering) or “unskillful” (creating suffering in yourself or others), there are more choices about how to view the your own behavior or that of others.

We “inter-are” all the time, whether we want to or not. The butterfly effect (a butterfly flaps its wings in China, and as a result eventually there is a tornado in Kansas) means that eventually everyone suffers from unskillful behavior, and everyone benefits from skillful behavior. We pass it around all the time, whether we want to or not, by subtly adjusting each other’s Like-o-meters. So, it is to everyone’s benefit to behave skillfully, regardless of what is coming at us. Like suffering, unskillful behavior comes in all sizes and shapes, not just the big arguments, but even the body language or eye contact with a stranger passing on the street. These are all opportunities to notice, and make a choice.

People behave in unskillful ways mainly because they are suffering, not because they are evil. Again, this comes in all sizes. Judging ourselves or others for behaving unskillfully is not nearly as useful as trying to notice and deal with the source of the suffering.

12. Other Ways to Hold the Practice

Overview: At this point, most of the students have learned to pay attention to some significant degree, and they are reasonably familiar with the standard practices. The practices introduced in this class, and the discussion, are intended to expand their view.

Check in: ask about loving kindness practice, waging peace, doing kind acts. Many students are pleasantly surprised to find that these practices improved their mood and their energy noticeably.

Mountain meditation, 15 – 20 minutes. This is presented as another way of understanding the practice, it is not meant to take us anywhere else or generate a lot of thinking. Follow the meditation with a discussion of the practice ("What did you notice?"). Many students are able to get very quiet with this practice. Equating thoughts with clouds passing by, or emotions with storms that come and go while the core of the mountain remains silent and unchanging is very empowering for some students.

Reading and discussion: The Master in the Art of Living – Lawrence Pearsall Jacks. This discussion has proven to be very powerful. After reading the passage, ask the students to describe based on their own experience the difference between work and play, labor and leisure, body and mind, education and recreation, love and religion (here emphasizing that it is not about any specific religion, but the felt sense of the experience). Work is usually thought of as something we would rather not be doing, while the mind state of play is being engaged and content. People who enjoy cooking often consider it to be leisure, but washing the dishes may be perceived as labor. Ask the students to think about classes they took because they were required and classes they took because they were interested in the topic. The students quickly recognize that the difference is whether they want the moment to be different (our functional definition of suffering), or accept the experience just as it is, or as one student said, the difference between "want" and "should". What does it mean to pursue your vision of excellence at whatever you do? Can you clean your room with a vision of excellence? Can you do an assignment for a class you don't enjoy with a vision of excellence? This is an opportunity and an invitation for the students to recognize in their own experience what it could mean to be fully engaged with what is present all day, every day. I suggest that instead of doing "schoolwork" and "housework" in the coming week, the might try doing "schoolplay" and "houseplay".

Random bells sitting meditation, 20 minutes, followed by a brief discussion of the practice. A singing bowl is preferable to bells for this, because it makes several different sounds and resonates for a long time. Many students find the sound of the bell to be a very compelling object of awareness because it doesn't generate stories about its meaning, unlike sounds of the elevator or ventilation or someone coughing or shifting.

Assign: review all of the formal and informal practices
Post: Reflection Paper #2 (due in two weeks, by the last class)

Reflection Paper #2 Assignment: Consider the Seven Attitudes that support mindfulness practice in light of your experience this semester. Write 1 - 2 pages about any one of the attitudes that is particularly meaningful to you, either because you feel you have learned something about it, or because you are still struggling with it. Focus on your direct experience related to this attitude, not your ideas about it. (It is OK to write about 2 attitudes closely related to the same experience; they can be hard to separate.)

Optional half-day retreat

Late in the semester (ideally, two or three weeks before classes end) the students are offered a four-hour mini-retreat. This is presented as a way to deepen their experience, and serves as a makeup class for the occasional student who has too many absences. It is described as a series of practices, as in class, and a mindful lunch, with a few minutes at the end for discussion.

The announcement is made in week 9, with an email to follow up. Students who think they have a reasonable chance of attending are asked to reply to the email with their vote on two or three options for the date. Experience indicates that Sundays are better than Saturdays for most students, and students are more likely to show up at 10 am – 2 pm than at 9 am – 1 pm. They are told to bring a light lunch and their beginner's minds.

When the students arrive, they are told to take care of themselves as necessary, getting comfortable and taking breaks as needed. They are also asked to observe silence and custody of the eyes for the duration of the retreat, as an aid to keeping their attention inside, on their own moment-to-moment experience, and to hold the space for everyone else to do the same.

A typical schedule would be:
Welcome and instructions, 10 minutes
Sitting meditation with a moderate amount of guidance, 15 minutes
Yoga, ~50 minutes
Sitting meditation, minimal guidance, 20 minutes
Walking meditation, 20 minutes
Sitting meditation, 20 minutes
Lunch, 30 minutes
Walking meditation 25 – 30 minutes
Sitting meditation 25 minutes
Pair up and notice how it feels to make eye contact, begin speaking by whispering.
Circle – open discussion of what came up, what the students noticed.

13. Old and New Practices, with Beginner's Mind

Overview: This class is intended to let the students see for themselves what they have learned.

Round-robin yoga – Explain the language used in guiding yoga (gerunds, not commands; moving "the" leg, not "your" leg; being loud enough and specific enough with the instructions so that nobody has to look to understand what to do, clearly indicating the beginning and end of each pose). We then go around the circle taking turns guiding (facing out, as usual). Students are encouraged to notice their own reactions before, during and after their turn, and to lead any pose that feels right at the moment, even if someone else already led it. Poses are limited to those already introduced in class, to insure that we only do beginner's poses.

Debrief. This is usually a very interesting discussion. Many of the students say they dreaded having to lead and had a lot of stories about it, but they almost all wound up enjoying the experience, feeling connected to each other and appreciating how much they have learned about non-judging and non-striving, or at least noticing judging and striving when they arise. Many students worry about messing up, but normally all of them will agree that nobody actually messed up. There is our negativity bias in action. Perhaps they can think of other situations that cause them to worry excessively and unnecessarily.

Reading: Meditation: Calming the Mind – Bob Sharples

Sitting meditation, expanding gradually from awareness of the breath to awareness of the whole body, all of the physical senses, 20 - 25 minutes, mostly silent.

Mindful eating revisited, -25 minutes. Students are given a small bag containing a few pieces of dried fruit, 2 almonds, a piece of dark chocolate and a small pretzel or cracker (as long as there are no food allergies) and are told they will have 25 minutes or so to eat mindfully. This is followed by a discussion, in particular noticing whether this exercise was any different than the raisin exercise. This leads to asking the students more generally what they have learned. What would this mindful eating exercise have meant two months ago? How many of the recent discussions could we have had two months ago?

Assign: how have you changed? What have you learned?

Combining Weeks 12 and 13 in the event of a cancelled class.

There have been a few weather-related class cancellations, necessitating an abbreviated schedule. Based on feedback from the students on which activities had the greatest impact, the combined next-to-last class has been arranged as follows:

Round-robin yoga

Discussion of the Master in the Art of Living

Random Bells Meditation

Assign: how have you changed? What have you learned?

14. The End of the Beginning – Making the Practice Your Own

Reading: Free and Easy – Lama Gendun Rimpoche. Emphasizing the idea of unclenching the tight fist of grasping, unclenching the striving mind.

Introduce choiceless awareness practice, observing activity in the mind as just another sensation. Choiceless awareness meditation, with stepwise guidance, 25 – 30 minutes. Inviting the students always to start again with the breath if the attention wanders off.

Discussion: The Seven Attitudes, and anything else they noticed. This is the students' opportunity to talk to each other about what they have learned, how they have changed. I usually get the ball rolling with a few brief quotes from previous students' papers (quoted anonymously and with permission), and invite the students to say whatever they would like to say about their own experience. Allow lots of time, lots of silence.

Closing thoughts:
Thoughts about the structure and purpose of the course. This is summarized in the post "Wisdom and Compassion".

Mindfulness is simply a tool, which can be uses skillfully (to reduce or prevent suffering) or unskillfully (to create suffering). Skillful practice requires some wisdom and compassion. We have not discussed this explicitly until now, but that it the direction we have been heading in all along.

At the first class, you were told "If you are worrying, you are not studying." This does have value, even if it is a rather limited and utilitarian reason to practice, and it is accessible and hopefully provided some motivation to do some homework at the beginning. A month later, we discussed suffering as wanting the moment to be different than it is. This is a more meaningful reason to practice, and the foundation of bringing wisdom to the practice. In the second half of the semester we considered a number of ways to carry the practice into all of your interactions with the world, ending up with loving kindness practice and the experience of interbeing. This is the foundation of bringing compassion to the practice. There is no need to try to force yourself to develop wisdom and compassion, simply keep practicing what you have already learned, pay attention to what comes up, and they will gradually and inevitably emerge.

This is contrasted with a few examples of unskillful practice. Teaching a sniper to meditate will make him a better sniper. Corporations are hiring mindfulness teachers, and then telling their employees that if they are still stressed out, it is not due to the unreasonable working conditions, but because they are not mindful enough. There are obvious benefits to teaching young children a little mindfulness, but it is not wise or compassionate to do that instead of providing adequate resources for their schools.

Thoughts about what comes next, making the practice your own. This is summarized in the last post "Maintaining Practice". Some key points:

Hold the practice lightly in your life, so that it does not become a burden. Start where you are, with as much as you can comfortably accommodate into your daily routine right now. Allow the practice to grow at whatever rate it can grow naturally. It is not wise, or even possible to force it or rush it. There is nowhere to arrive in any case. We are not trying to accomplish something or become someone else through practice: We are only being more fully who we already are, where we already are. This quote speaks to that point:

> When I get to heaven, they will not ask me, “Why were you not Moses?” They will ask me, “Why were you not Zushya? Why did you not become what only you could become?” - Zushya, Hassidic Rabbi

Mindfulness practice is not meant to be a crusade. We all know people who might really benefit from doing mindfulness practice, but you can’t sell it to anyone who is not already looking. Use that energy to do your own practice. If you want the people around you to benefit from mindfulness, just work on yourself. We inter-are.

Having a practice community, even one other person, is very important. (The final email has information on practice groups, and how to form their own group.) Finding as many other teachers as possible is also very helpful. It is also important to stress the idea that even when using recordings or hearing the same instructions from different teachers, we are different every time we practice. The more carefully we pay attention with beginner’s mind, the more we recognize that this is true, and the more we learn.

Post: Wisdom and Compassion, Maintaining Practice, Book List, 20 minute choicless awareness meditation mp3

6. The Seven Attitudes That Support Mindfulness Practice, And Other Messages From The Students

The students are reminded often that he Seven Attitudes that support mindfulness practice are meant primarily to guide our inner experience, and are not necessarily applicable to living in the outside world. In spite of the repetition, some students still can't figure out why they are being asked to stop judging and striving. Isn't striving how they got where they are? Isn't judgment essential in everything we do? Call attention repeatedly to the moment-to-moment experience, not the events that contain so many moments and judgments and actions.

The Seven Attitudes are discussed as being different facets of one mind state – full awareness of the present moment. This can be explained to the students as seven partial descriptions of that mind state, or descriptions of seven qualities that arise from being fully present. It is only due to the limitations of language and our own experience that we find it useful to separate the non-cognitive experience of awareness into categories. Also, they can serve as different gateways to mindfulness for different students, as they notice one aspect of awareness sooner or more clearly than other aspects. A little of the context is described below for each of the attitudes.

In the final writing assignment, the students consider the Seven Attitudes in light of their experience, and write one page about any one of them (or two, if they find they can't separate them) that is particularly meaningful to them, either because they feel they have learned a lot about it or because they are still struggling with it. Even though most students ultimately identify one attitude to write about, it is often the case that their observations are easily described through at least one or two other attitudes. In particular, but by no means exclusively, non-judging and non-striving frequently show up together, as do acceptance and letting go. The other valuable information to be gleaned from the papers is hearing from the students which experiences or readings or discussions were most useful for them. The overall message has been that it is important to provide a wide variety of content, because each part of it was especially meaningful to some students. I have placed the quotes from the papers (with the permission of the student) under the attitude identified by the student. A few of the quotes were minimally edited to protect anonymity.

Non-judging

Almost everyone has a clear understanding of what judging means in the conscious mind, and can easily describe some of its positive and negative aspects. Many people are much less aware of the subtler automatic and subconscious judgments that stream through the mind almost constantly. One of the early effects of mindfulness practice is waking up to that kind of judgment. There are endless ways to point this out, since it comes up in everything we do.

One way this is discussed in class is that judging is a normal function of the mind. One of its main jobs is to evaluate everything we experience, compare it with our past experience, and make a plan for the future – lots of judgment. There is not only nothing wrong with that, and for that matter nothing wrong with thinking, having judgment is a great gift, and essential to our lives. However, there is a lot of thought and judgment that is not objective and takes us out of our experience. (I suggest to the students that on a good day at least 95% of what goes through my mind is not very important and could easily be dispensed with. On a really wild day, it could be 99%.) In mindfulness practice, we develop the ability to notice thinking and judgment as products of the mind, not as the absolute reality that we often mistake them for. The moment we notice, we have a choice about whether to pursue that thought and believe that judgment, or to let it go.

Another important idea is that it is not possible, or even desirable, to suppress judging, or any kind of thinking, as an act of will. Allowing the mind to do what it does without attaching to it is the essence of the practice. The discussion of mental intrusions in *The Happiness Hypothesis* provides a concrete framework for this particular point: The only way to monitor what we're thinking or whether we're thinking is to think about it. These distinctions are immediately obvious to students as they begin formal practice. Most or all will go through periods of trying to control the mind, only to realize at some point that exerting that control IS judging.

> "The Mindfulness course has been very eye opening for me especially with respect to the non-judging attitude. Previously I would walk around making judgments every second with no conscious control over the whole process. However, now I feel that I am more likely to notice, which I have realized helps a lot. I realized how sometimes I make rapid blanket judgments over people and also how I often have several negative thoughts in a row. I have recently caught myself going down these negative spirals, just sub-vocalizing one judgment after another in my head. And this vicious cycle usually puts me in a bad mood that just further feeds the negativity, which is the worst part. However, through practice I now not only sometimes notice my thoughts, but I feel I am able to shut off the judging thoughts in my mind just like a switch by simply taking a breath."

> "Prior to the class, I never noticed how judgmental I was of both others and myself in every sense of the word. This was not necessarily in a negative context, but I often made huge assumptions about complete strangers based on the way they were dressed, the people they were hanging out with, or simply their facial expression. As the class progressed, I noticed more and more that my initial reaction to seeing or hearing someone was often to make some sort of judgment. It was amazing how quickly I could create some grand sort of story about the person within seconds. More recently, I've noticed that the more I become aware of thoughts like these, the less likely I am to respond to them. I feel it has already influenced the way I approach others especially in not developing unjustified expectations of them."

> "This cycle of judgmental thoughts and rejection continued through each yoga

session in class and during personal practice. Then on the day of walking meditation, I found the judgments coming in as usual. However, this time the judgments were much milder and I was able to observe them rather easily. After this initial awareness of my thoughts, it dawned on me finally that these thoughts were of course simply thought. No one could read my mind, they would not hurt me or anyone else, and they were not truths either to me or to others; they simply were. In addition, on the day we each individually led a yoga pose, I realized that everyone else, whether they admitted it or not, was also making judgments and that I was no worse or better than my classmates for it.

I still have difficulty observing my judgments and not creating stories about them, but there has been progress. I don't get a knot in my stomach when I stand up for yoga and I don't feel the urge to combat my thoughts. This is not a battle against my mind, but a slow and patient reeducation of it."

"After being confronted with the enormous workload that two of my classes required last semester, not to mention the other three that I was taking, the stories in my mind became overwhelming. It came to point where I was on the verge of or having stress-induced panic attacks almost every day. The stories in my head were ridiculous but I couldn't get them out. I was living in the stories in my head, which was not the real world, not even close. In my stories I was judging my actions and myself. Even after rearranging my schedule, the stories continued, this time judging my action to rearrange my schedule and "copping out"… Needless to say, one of the biggest things I took away from this class was non-judging. After the number of discussions we had about the "poor crazy mind," and the stories that it comes up with, I began to realize that I had a choice of letting them rule my life or not. The mindfulness practice, through being present, really helped me let go of the stories. It allowed me to take a step back, look at the stories and recognize the ridiculousness of them with out getting caught up in them."

"Non-Judging has been one of the most difficult attitudes for me to face, mainly because I had never noticed how much my mind judges others around me and, the most challenging of all, myself. The feeling of judgment is exhausting; I realized how much mental energy is spent in viewing and assessing different parts of my life. When I judge something around me, there is a voice in my head that becomes competitive; it tells me I need to be better or perform better than those around me. Before taking this class, I never noticed that voice, I just assumed I had a "competitive spirit." This class, however, has allowed me the opportunity to differentiate myself from that voice, which is a sigh of relief."

Patience

Everyone knows that patience is a virtue. That is one reason why it can be a little bit tricky, but very important, to highlight the difference between cultivating the seven attitudes to support inner practice and cultivating the attitudes we associate with living in

the outside world. Still, many students notice and appreciate that as we become more patient inwardly, with our own poor crazy minds, we also become more patient outwardly.

Most students arrive feeling that they are at least somewhat impatient in life and in their minds. They virtually all learn something new about what that means that as they observe the persistence of the thinking mind. Once again, the emphasis is on moment-to-moment awareness of the activity in the mind without having to control it or fix it. In the longer term, patience means simply following the instructions and observing one's own experience, rather than looking for a specific outcome. This applies to working with the thinking mind in all of the formal practices, and comes up again and again. It is emphasized particularly in sitting meditation because that is where most students really feel impatient and are tempted to apply a little force rather than allowing the mind to settle down on its own. The image of having "the patience to wait until your mud settles and the water is clear" from *Tao Te Ching* is very helpful. We can no more force our minds to settle down than we can force the mud to settle, but if we are patient and we don't keep stirring it up, gradually it will happen on its own. Students are reminded of this point frequently. Relatively few students write specifically about patience, but it shows up in many other papers.

> "Out of the Seven Attitudes, patience is the one that is most important to me. This is because I now have little patience. Although my patience is minimal these days, it is far better than it once was- not patient at all. I have slowly come to learn to take a step back and slow down so that I do not miss what is right before me. Since I have learned this new skill, I have become much less stressed. I have realized that being five minutes late is not the end of the world. Also, I have become more patient with myself. If I cannot figure something out right away, I take my time to learn it, instead of beating myself up, because of my lack of speed at learning something."

> "I am really happy that I am finally becoming more patient in my life. It is much easier for me to relate to people. Instead of jumping to conclusions when I am angry, I wait a few seconds, take a deep breath, and patiently wait for them to explain themselves without jumping down their throats. This has made it much easier for me to control my temper, as well."

Beginner's Mind

Students in general, and especially the seniors that almost completely filled most of the earlier classes, are all about being experts. They are constantly rewarded for knowing things, in and out of the classroom, and penalized for not knowing. This may be part of the reason that for so many of them beginner's mind is so surprising and powerful and delightful. They are able to use beginner's mind as their first or strongest gateway to awareness, especially as it is practiced through the physical senses. It is the main focus of the first mindful eating (raisin) exercise. It is also emphasized when they are given

recorded guidance for body scans or sitting meditations. They are told that even though they will quickly memorize the recording, they are different each time they hear it, and the more fully they pay attention, the more they will recognize that truth. Also, it is very helpful when paying attention to the breath or walking, sensations we normally experience all the time without really noticing. As always, we examine its application to daily life, in taking in the surroundings instead of speed walking to class, or in interacting with the person who is actually with you, not with your stories about who that person might be or who they were in the past.

> "Before this class began, I prided myself on having an excellent ability to determine the objects of my sense: to identify a taste, to connect a sound with its source, to figure out a particular smell. But always in that mindset, my goal was to immediately explain my senses. I've realized through this class that I, in a sense, prided myself on *not* having beginner's mind. As the semester progressed, I came to appreciate what I was missing out on: the ineffable experience of not judging a detected object for its source, but instead noticing it for the unique and unusual experience it was.
>
> My first encounter with this occurred during one of our first meditations, with the bells that are rung at the beginning and end. Although I knew they were bells, for some reason that particular pitch had an almost hypnotic effect on me. As the sound of the bells resonated, I began to forget what was making it and the sound began to fill my entire being. This is the one place in the course I would say not only did I experience the effect right away, but it was consistent for each meditation. With other sounds, I had less success: I would many times hear the fan or lights buzzing and my mind would immediately identify the source. I guess I achieved some success in realizing this was happening: probably halfway through the semester, I started to learn how to let my mind absorb the sound, but have my thoughts back away from describing it. I would say it felt as if something in my mind was opening up, probing for new alcoves it hadn't yet explored. The result was extremely relaxing and I felt as if the world wasn't quite the one with which I was familiar…
>
> A semester ago, I never would have realized the immense difference the objects of our senses can have apart from the explanations that we bestow upon them. I think beginner's mind is not even an attitude you choose, but a mindset that becomes you, that encapsulates your mind and body like a shadow that has no originating source. I appreciate now the feeling of relaxation and, most strongly, the way in which noticing things without justifying them actually opens me up to an entirely new type of experience, a world without semantic restrictions."

> "Starting with my walk after class, I began to practice beginner's mind. I would approach the walk as a new experience, not just another walk home or to grounds. With this mind frame, I would notice so much more about my surroundings even though it is a path I walk often... These sorts of in-between times, where I do not have a focus like studying or socializing were times I would let my mind wander around from story to story. This practice often created a lot of

stress for me. By practicing beginner's mind at these times, not only am I reducing my stress by not indulging my mind in stories, but also by having such a pleasant experience."

"As I write this, I am in a city in which I have lived for the past three years, sitting in an apartment in which I have lived for the past two years, and writing on a desk with which hundreds and hundreds of hours have been spent. For so long, I have forced myself into this chair, consigned to the recurring toils of earning a… degree. For so long, I felt caged in this white-walled room; every single part of it I knew all too well, there was nothing which I hadn't seen before. However, sitting here at this moment, I do not feel ennui with my surroundings; instead I am noticing for the first time how brilliantly the rays of the midmorning sun filter through my blinds, a strange pattern dancing across the mountainous surface of my white sheets. When I walk to the gym as I have a thousand times before, I do not just load the "walk" program and think about impending assignments—I observe the intricacies of everything around me, marveling at just how large the lights are at Scott Stadium, how peaceful the streets of the university are at night."

"The idea of approaching a well known task with the intention of treating it like something new and different struck me as an oddity… I have derived much enjoyment from the simple act of pretending that every food I eat is a new experience. Every class I walk in to, I press the "restart" button and remove all judgment and expectations about what the lecture will be about, how entertaining and enjoyable the teaching style is, and how likely I am to fall asleep in class. It really creates a much more desirable learning environment, one in which I actually learn well. Using a beginner's mind in social situations has produced interesting results. Instead of judging people before I meet them, I try to remove all preconceptions about them and meet them with a blank slate. More often than not, people are very different from the initial social niche we place them in. This effect works well even when meeting a well-known friend. People make mistakes, and judging a person on their past allows no room for them to change. However, by removing this judgment, people are given second chances..."

"…I realized that in most moments of my daily life I was trying to experience the past rather than the present. Rather than listening to whatever I was sensing or feeling or thinking or aware of, I was trying to compose intricate stories about good or bad things that had happened before. One day, I had finally grown used to mindfulness to the extent that I was using my walk to class as walking meditation, and I realized that all those lessons and hardships I was so attached to don't actually inform upon mindfulness at all- the entire point of practice is to be connected to what is happening right now. No amount of information supplied by my memory will ever be able to replace or augment or even productively inform upon the direct, simple reality of one present moment. So for one moment, it was a warm spring day and I was walking and I was aware. For just a few seconds I stopped telling myself I would never learn to relax, and that I was

"better" at yoga than I was at meditating, and that I was "worse" at walking meditation if I was going somewhere specific- none of those things were true because all that was actually true was my awareness of that moment."

Trust

Although very few students write their papers explicitly about trust, they make reference to it in many other ways. They are asked as the semester progresses to reflect repeatedly on the seven attitudes, and are asked whether the meaning of the words changes based on their experience. In fact, much of the language we use is really just words until they have experienced quiet mind, then the words have deeper meaning. Many of the students' comments ostensibly describing other attitudes or other ideas about their experience arise from learning to trust their own experience. Trust comes to the fore especially in yoga, as a way of knowing without thinking, knowing without judging or striving, learning directly from the body.

"Starting this semester, I began to feel very run-down… I spent a lot of time looking my symptoms up online. As it turns out, the internet can prove to be more of a bane than a boon. Talk about stories! You can really convince yourself of anything if you look at enough websites. After this proved unhelpful, I sought the advice of my friends and family. Doing meditation throughout the semester helped so much in figuring out exactly what the problem was. By being mindful, I was able to slow down and really hone in on what felt "wrong" in my body. I was able to come up with a very clear list… I went in to the doctor and specifically asked them to test my blood to see if I was iron deficient. Bingo!"

Non-striving

Many students find non-striving to be the most elusive and ultimately the most rewarding of the seven attitudes. They are told early and very often that striving in mindfulness practice is just another way of thinking and judging and not being present. They are told that practically all of their academic learning has been cognitive, and of course it requires striving, but this is different. In fact, so much of our non-academic learning and success in the outside world is based on effort and often competition, it can be very difficult to shake the idea that the way to get better at something is to push harder. This is where the distinction between inner work and outer life is often clearest.

One obvious place to work with non-striving and its partner non-judging is yoga. The emphasis is on listening to and trusting the body, allowing the mind to take a break. Most students have many, many opportunities to notice the striving and judging and call the attention back. Another place to point out striving is sitting meditation, where especially at the beginning many students try to apply a little force to keep their attention on the breath. It is also important to point out striving when it comes up in

discussions about applying mindfulness in everyday life. It is often in the shadows right behind judging, leading us to react out of habit rather than to respond from awareness.

> "In yoga, I strive to be more flexible or to hold poses longer. If I'm sitting or doing a body scan, I strive to reach a state of relaxation. Even if I was aware that I was striving, I would strive to correct it – I would strive to *not* strive. Even further, I couldn't grasp what it would mean to embody overall an attitude of non-striving. Wouldn't that just make you lazy and unsuccessful?
>
> A couple of weeks ago in class, two things really struck me that changed my idea of what it means to embody the attitude of non-striving. The first was the mountain meditation, which was the first time that I have ever really been able to just let my thoughts float by without following them. Perhaps because I am such a visual learner, it was the metaphor of clouds floating by a mountain that somehow allowed me to see my thoughts as those clouds, and not strive to eliminate then but instead to let them float by.
>
> The second was the reading about 'the master in the art of living,' and how he does not separate work and play. For me, this poem perfectly verbalized the results of non-striving: to be present for *everything* you do, whether it's work or play, rather than striving to achieve something that you think will make you happy. The 'master in the art of living' brought me a crystal clear understanding of the bumper-sticker idea that happiness is the journey and not the destination.
>
> This new understanding of what non-striving means hasn't immediately changed my life in some huge way, but I have noticed some small changes. Reading for class is more enjoyable if I focus on what I'm reading, rather than striving towards the goal of finishing it so I can get to my next task. Trips to the gym go by much faster if I focus on what I'm doing rather than thinking about the end result I wish to achieve."

> "Earlier in the semester during meditation I would desire some sort of mental state, condition or feeling and force myself to feel how I thought I should feel. Once I stopped striving during practice I found that the practice became more rewarding. I felt at ease and that my mind had settled after practice where I felt I had not strived to feel a certain way. Furthermore, non-striving allowed me to really notice where my mind was going, where the elephant was running away to, and why it was running away. When I stopped forcing myself to be different I really tuned into my mind and the birth and death of thoughts in my mind."

> "Beyond formal practice I have seen the power of non-striving in my day to day life. I find that just being, just being where I am and not being concerned with where I have been or where I will be has kept my stress levels down during an unusually stressful semester. In some ways not striving to be somewhere or get somewhere faster has brought me a simple happiness that I missed out on before. I don't strive to run to the bus anymore so I can get home in 8 minutes rather than walk for 15 minutes. By just letting go of my need for my circumstance to be different than it is originally I find that I can experience the little things like walking down the sidewalk. Non-striving is an attitude that has

made the simple and mundane tasks of daily life into enjoyable ones; instead of striving to finish quickly or be somewhere else I am now able to take the time and feel that task in my whole body and feel that task in my mind. I think the reason non-striving has been so critical for the development of my mindfulness practice is because I initially believed my ability to be present, clear-minded and aware of my thoughts was a state of mind I needed to force onto myself."

"The first time we did sitting meditation, I strove to blank-out my mind, painting a black canvas in front of my face... It took two or three weeks, but I finally realized what it meant to, "let the stories happen, notice them, and then gently let your mind return to the present moment." I slowly began to realize that mindfulness and meditation is not the absence of thinking, it is the act of being conscious as to what is going on in the mind. When stories occur in body scans, sitting, or walking meditation, I needed to let them happen, recognize the fact that it happened, and then return to awareness. These thoughts will happen, and while a completely quiet mind might be the culmination of years and years of formal practice, it will not happen within an introductory course. Ever since week 5 or 6, I have been going into each meditation, both in and out of class, with an open mind. I no longer strive to think about nothing, I just enjoy the feeling of being able to observe the mind in a setting so different from daily college life."

"Even though you spent a not insignificant amount of time hammering home the point that we aren't doing relaxation practice but mindfulness practice, when we first started doing body scans and sitting meditation, I desperately wanted to achieve a sense of peace, or a moment of transcendence, or something. This led me to get frustrated if I felt I was "failing" at meditating. If my mind wandered, I would briefly notice it, get mad at myself for allowing my mind to wander, briefly notice that, get mad at myself, and so on and so forth. However, after a while, your messages started to seep in, and I began to treat formal practice as a practice that is its own reward. By focusing on the process instead of the output, I have been able to meditate in a much more non-striving manner. While my mind can still be very busy at times, more often than not, if I have a stray thought, I am more likely to simply notice it and go back to my breath or whatever I'm feeling in the moment. So now, I've come to the realization that a busy mind can actually be something of a blessing in disguise. Because the practice and process is what's important, a busy mind simply gives you more opportunities to notice your thoughts and to accept and let them go, which is exactly the whole point."

Acceptance

Along with letting go, acceptance is discussed as not just the absence of judging, but full awareness of our whole experience, even the unpleasant stuff. One idea is that the great secret of being human is that every single person has a poor crazy mind that generates all kinds of thoughts, many of which we would never dream of expressing, sometimes even to ourselves. Rumi's instruction in The Guest House, "the dark thought,

the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing and invite them in" goes right to the heart of acceptance (more on this in the next chapter). For the thinkers in the class, there is an important idea relevant to acceptance from the discussion of *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Mental intrusions are random, sometimes "inappropriate" thoughts that arise from time to time. Attempting to suppress unpleasant or shocking or otherwise inappropriate thoughts sets the automatic and controlled thinking processes at odds, so the suppressed thoughts can become amplified to the point of obsession. This gets right back to Rumi's guest house. It is a short journey for many students from acceptance to empathy, and from there to greater compassion and forgiveness. Still, acceptance (and letting go) does not mean being passive. In fact, acceptance enables us to be much more engaged since we have our full attention more often, and are not distracted by false stories about our experience.[1]

> "For me, the exceptionally high standards to which I have traditionally held myself never seemed to end whenever the task or goal at hand was complete. I have always been hard pressed to accept the quality of my own performance, even after I know that I've done the best I could and ought to have every reason to be proud. This is why I believe that acceptance has been the most meaningful attitude for me throughout the course. When I began to learn the art of acceptance in my formal practice, it steadily spilled over into my informal practice and eventually every aspect of my life. And *oh*- how good it feels."

> "I am often plagued with thoughts that more things have gone wrong for me than for the average undergraduate student… (*The student then validates those thoughts, describing a series of very difficult circumstances and relationships.*) I decided to join this class because the burden of my emotions about all of these things was growing far too heavy for me to deal with in the ways I had already tried. I didn't really expect a solution as much as a temporary sanctuary from the turmoil of constantly thinking negatively, so I was surprised when something was said in class that really struck a chord. Unpleasant moments arise from wishing a moment were different from what it is. It was striking because I had spent so much time feeling like I was a victim of circumstance, like the way I felt and the burdens I have to bear were out of my control, and like I was condemned to feelings of hopelessness until the past was distant enough to be less painful. Instead, I was empowered by the knowledge that the solution is to accept a moment as it is and accept myself as I am in that moment. When I am able to slow down enough to evaluate my thoughts as responses to emotions, instead of breaking down and feeling completely out of control, I can accept those emotions and the things that trigger them and the thing that makes moments like that most unpleasant can simply be released.

[1] Another point relevant to acceptance follows from Haidt's description of Buddha's teachings as advocating "detachment". I point out to the class that "detachment" is not at all the same as "equanimity", and in the mindfulness class "acceptance and letting go" is our functional definition of "equanimity". I believe this is far more than just semantics, and I am by no means the only person to point out the common Western conflation of detachment and equanimity.

I am still surprised by the peace that acceptance brings… I still struggle with accepting the consequences of damaged relationships, but it is easier to do as I understand the futility of wishing that they were different than they are. By accepting myself as a product of both good and bad circumstances, I can find a peace that I thought I might never have."

"I find it impossible to cultivate any of the other attitudes without *accepting* experience as it is. Non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, and letting go all require me accepting whatever is in that moment. Without accepting I cannot stop judging, cultivate patience, stop striving, or let go.

I am making progress in it, I have noticed a definite change in how I react to what could be judged as negative circumstances. What I have found particularly interesting is to see the reflection of this change in the way those closest to me react to my reactions. I have an unfortunate tendency to be a very reactive when things go unexpectedly… Through this stressful time, I have had several incidents happen (e.g. car accident, sickness, etc.) that when I have informed my family, they treat me with kid gloves, as if I am a live bomb. They continue and wait and wait and are so confused when my usual reaction does not come."

"I was a chronic sufferer before taking this class. I have always been aware of feelings like hunger and sleepiness but could never do anything about them besides satisfying them uncontrollably. In addition, I have obsessive-compulsive disorder for a variety of things like evenness and organization. This has made the concepts of acceptance and letting go especially meaningful to me… Before this class I noticed feelings like hunger - now I accept feelings like hunger. Interestingly, I have found that acceptance can apply to literally any moment. Whenever I am in an undesirable situation, I now attempt to accept the moment and focus on the endless sensations streaming into my mind… Suffering is a positive feedback loop and the only way to end the vicious cycle is by accepting the real cause of the suffering.

I still suffer on a regular basis but my ability to accept moments has gotten a lot better. Occasionally I will look at something that triggers my OCD and not react at all; more likely I will notice my internal reaction for a few moments before reacting. I have made the most progress in physical sensations and have a long way to go in more complicated sensations like feeling awkward or shameful."

""In my mindfulness practice, acceptance has gone hand in hand with non-striving. When we first started meditating, I was almost never quiet. I would think about not thinking, and in doing so, just think more… I was not able to let go and stop this way of thinking until I accepted that my mind naturally wanders. When I finally came to this realization, I found myself having more and more moments of peace. Once I accepted it, I was able to stop striving and just enjoy the moments that I did have. While these moments are still few and far between, I cherish them and try to learn from each one.

Acceptance has also helped me refocus this semester. I have spent a lot of time the last few years worrying. Most of the things I have worried about are

things I actually have very little control over. I cannot control the weather, I cannot control the traffic, and most of all, I cannot control other people. Coming to terms with this has been a very enlightening experience. Accepting that some things just happen has allowed me to focus on the current moment. When I don't spend my time thinking of the outcomes and trying to work everything out in my head, I notice so much more. I notice things around me, my relationships with people, and my reactions to events. I am less tied to an outcome, and instead I am open to more possibilities and more equipped to deal with whatever comes at me."

Letting Go

Letting go is sometimes discussed, even by the students, as the culmination (along with acceptance) of all the other attitudes and practices. It is about letting go of the story, of the resistance in the mind to whatever is actually happening. Students often recognize the great cost of recalling especially painful or unpleasant or embarrassing moments from the past over and over again, or of having the same fears and worries about the future come up repeatedly. Once they experience that, they begin to see their clinging in smaller and smaller increments, finally recognizing the moment-to-moment nature of letting go. They often also realize that our constant inner monologue is a big energy and attention sink even when not explicitly stressful, and it is largely dispensable. Some students get as far as noticing that clinging to pleasant moments is just as much of a trap, although that tends to happen a little later, and may meet with some resistance.

"I also found that concentrating on the present has helped me move on and get over situations I may have typically dwelled upon. If I make a mistake, whether socially or academically, I recognize and acknowledge it and am finding it much easier to let go. Before taking this class I would let my personal screw-ups stay in my mind for days and often weeks after they had occurred. I feel much less insecure about my flaws now that I can acknowledge them and move on."

"… Although I am certain I will continue to struggle with this attitude more than any other, practicing letting go only furthers my awareness and appreciation of the new, entirely unique experiences each moment brings me. I tried to control my stories but instead they controlled me. If I let go, each new moment can be a new experience just as worthwhile and life-changing as my past, perhaps more pleasant, experiences."

"I tend to get an uncomfortable feeling in my ankles when I sit on my meditation bench. I used to always fidget and try to figure out how I could make this feeling go away. However, after some time, I would just notice that feeling was there and I would be okay with that. Eventually the pain in my ankles would seemingly go away because I would not focus on trying to get into a more comfortable position. This has also helped a lot with my studying. When I have a

lot of work to do, or many exams to study for, I tend to get stressed out. But I have learned that when I focus on how nervous I am about how much work I have to do, I can't actually get the work done. Sometimes I need to step back and accept the work that I have to do and just get it done. I frequently do informal meditation practice at the library when I feel myself getting stressed out. I like to sit back and close my eyes for a few moments to calm the mind."

"The most surprising thing I learned about letting go is that even holding onto positive experiences can detract from being present. While not as stressful or unhealthy as holding onto negative experiences, the inability to let go of past positive experiences is not a good thing. Positive memories are pleasant in the present, but they are just that. The experience is in the past, no longer present, and does little for me but prevent me from being present. Now this is not to say that pleasant memories are a bad thing, but I have found other, better ways to spend my time mentally. "

"Sometimes I imagine my subconscious as an exuberant Jack Russell terrier with an attention span of only five seconds. Trying to let go of a thought in my mind can be like trying to take a stick away from the terrier. The harder you tug, the more effort you put into the endeavor, the harder the terrier clamps down upon its prize. However, if you feign disinterest, the dog will likely set the stick down at your feet without you even needing to try."

"I think this clinging and expectation-setting is mainly derived from my constant quest for happiness. Whether it is improving my own happiness or the happiness of others, it has led me to take actions and imagine actions that will provide optimal happiness. Learning about this concept in class has really made me stop and think about how such actions can be constricting in a way that I never thought of before. While I have nowhere near mastered this attitude of letting go, changes have been made in pockets of my life. When I am running late to class, for example, I look at the time once, let go of my desire to want the experience to be different, and then walk swiftly to class with significantly less anxiety than before. With such small steps I feel well on my way to an attitude of continuous letting go and a life fully in the present."

Training the Elephant

The readings from *The Happiness Hypothesis* provide different language and a cognitive framework for understanding what is happening in mindfulness practice. For example, understanding confabulation provides a Western, cognitive explanation for what anyone who meditates quickly recognizes as the often ridiculous inaccuracy of the stories and judgments that arise in the mind. Knowing that we naturally have negativity bias makes it a little easier to recognize and let go of worries about the future in our own experience. Most importantly and most usefully for the students, the "rider on an elephant" metaphor sensitizes the students to the normally unnoticed workings of the

elephant. This is one doorway that leads concretely and literally to not believing everything you think. It is mentioned very often in the course evaluations and occasionally in correspondence (as in “I hope to spend the rest of my life training my elephant.”), but is rarely discussed in the papers, since it is not part of the assignment.

> “After some reflection, I have realized that class has really taught me a lot about myself. I have learned so much about how I communicate with others and how to be aware of each moment. To use our favorite metaphor, I have really begun to have the rider control and be aware of the elephant and prevent it from stampeding around. Though of course I am not perfect, I catch myself before the emotions that I feel are rationalized in my brain. Instead of getting frantic over things that I cannot change, I am able to calmly handle the stress of work and difficult situations. My friends and family have noticed the change that I have gone through just by doing mindfulness practice for this short amount of time—I am excited to see what happens as I continue to practice.”

Whole Practice.

As noted above, some students recognize that the words we use to describe the seven attitudes are all facets or partial descriptions of one experience. They may say that they had trouble picking one attitude to write about, or have decided that they have to write about two or three to explain their experience. In addition, some students, presumably those who were most ready and put in a good bit of time practicing, have described some rather deep insights into the practice, and some have described their non-cognitive experiences with exceptional eloquence:

> “How to choose an attitude? As I look over the seven attitudes of mindfulness now, I am overwhelmed by the importance of each one in my life – how I have thought about all of them throughout the semester, and how each one is more gratifying than the next. I am also amazed at how simple each one is. To be patient, to not judge, to let things go. How can such simple ideals be so easily dismissed?”

> “I will write about two attitudes: acceptance, which I believe I have learned a great amount and non-judging, which I have yet to fully understand and begin making significant improvements. Of course, I will touch on most of the attitudes, as they are all connected.”

> “Finally, in preparing for this assignment and reading over the descriptions of the seven attitudes again, I’m amazed at how different they seem as opposed to the first time they were discussed in class. I can now see how I’ve managed to incorporate them into my everyday life, whether consciously or not. For this, I am very grateful.”

> “A few one-line bulleted observations that I’ve had about the attitudes:

- Beginner's mind makes everything fascinating; how cool!
- Patience seems to come hand in hand with non-striving.
- Feeling like you have all the time in the world is one of the most comforting feelings I have ever felt.
- I don't have enough confidence yet to fully trust myself; perhaps that will come with time.
- "Letting go" leads me to believe that life isn't about being happy necessarily, but rather being content."

"Practicing mindfulness throughout the semester has taught me the importance of patience and practice. The best way for me to think of formal practice is the analogy to teeth brushing. Even though it's not always the most enjoyable and exciting point of my day, I know how much better I feel after taking time out of my busy, sometimes stressful, day to uncharge and become aware of my breath and my presence. I know that I want to take what I have learned and continue with my practice after this class ends."

"In deciding which attitude to write about, I noticed a relationship between judging, acceptance, and letting go with my experience. I believe that I still have much to learn in each of these areas, especially letting go. I have decided to write about the judging attitude because I believe that I have become most aware of this struggle."

"In recognizing my struggle with judgment, I also recognize a struggle with letting go. In addition, the judgment attitude is connected to the acceptance attitude. To be able to let go of the times that I notice that I have a judgmental thought, I have to accept the circumstance to be able to let go."

"I also had to tell myself that there wasn't a set goal to achieve with mindfulness. Unlike many other aspects of life, goals, dreams, and objectives with deadlines and time constraints flourish everywhere. With Mindfulness, there is no point that a person can reach where you feel accomplished. Everyday is you just becoming still and experiencing life to what its worth in the present moment and no other."

"I have had a few moments during sitting meditation where I have felt that I have been able to achieve a level of detachment from the thoughts that surface during meditation. Sometimes if I entertain those thoughts passively, I can let them slide from my mind more quickly. I imagine that my thoughts are self-contained worlds floating along an expansive river that forms my subconscious. If I sit on the bank, I can watch each story pass by. I need never touch it or interact with it in any way. If I am somehow tempted enough to swim out to meet a particularly tantalizing story, I only need to make my way back to the bank to try again."

“During several meditation sessions I felt my awareness, my sense of self, reach outside of my body. It felt as though I was not in my body anymore. I had dissolved. After experiencing that a few times I started to want it to happen every time I sat down to meditate because it felt so amazing. But as soon as I started to want it, I stopped experiencing it. Then I started to judge my meditations as unsuccessful because I was not having those experiences anymore. It was a bad cycle - I was judging, not accepting, impatient, and striving too much. But after talking to you and being reminded that those positive, pleasant experiences were not the purpose of meditation, I was able to mostly let go of the striving and all of the other emotions. Those experiences are a nice side effect but they are not the purpose. With this in mind, the next meditation we did felt so much better. I was more accepting of whatever experience I had and my goal was no longer to have the experience of my boundaries dissolving. By not wanting, my experience was improved. And even if I start wanting, I need to be aware of it and accept it as my current state.”

“I have a slight fear of losing my individuality and while I knew there was something in particular holding me back from being aware rather than thinking, part of me refused to release my body from my poor, crazy mind. As I practiced more and more throughout the semester, I gradually became better at being present and focusing only on my bodily experiences at the current moment. I had not realized the extent to which I was missing out on all of the amazing happenings in the body at the present moment by being so consumed with my memories… Still, my experiences have shown me that I even get wrapped up in the pleasant moments during formal practice. I often would have a moment of great release in which I was very peaceful and completely absorbed in observing my body and mind and then I would suddenly be so pleased with the experience that I’d start focusing on the pleasant moment that had just occurred. I now know that letting go of all of the positive associations with pleasant memories doesn’t mean I’m letting go of what makes me an individual, but rather I am simply being content in the present moment for all that each moment offers. Letting my memories control me prevents me from recognizing the newness of each new experience with a beginner’s mind…”

“This semester, through meditation I feel like I expanded my space of perception. I feel as if there is whole lot to be aware of that I didn’t know it existed. This feeling is so powerful. I am more aware of what I say to people, what I eat, what I feel about the person that I have negative feelings for and what I convey with my body language.”

7. “What Did You Notice?”

This is the question that starts many of the discussions, and is almost always the first question to the group after doing any kind of practice. Here are some of the answers to that question, mostly in the students’ own words. Most of these quotes are responses to three questions on the anonymous course evaluations: “What course learning activities were most valuable? Why?” “How would you evaluate the content of this course?” and “Please make any overall comments or observations about this course.” A few are responses to other questions, or quotes from the papers.

Carrying mindfulness practice into daily life.

> “I appreciated the discussion about applying mindfulness to everyday life (for example, communications, eating, media we consume, etc.) I think that I can still do a lot of work in these areas (as in all other areas of mindfulness practice) but I thought it was very helpful to connect mindfulness to areas outside of formal practice. Of course, teaching us how to do different types of formal practice was also useful.”

> “I really liked the class on communication, because that was pretty relevant to my life. It wasn't so much a wake-up call, because I know I'm passive, but it was a second realization of that fact, and it helped me see a way to effectively change. Really, all of the classes on how to apply meditation practice to daily life were useful.”

> “The concept of unpleasant moments was very insightful. Also, learning how to listen to your body and realize when a reaction is coming.”

> “What I most took from the course is that no matter how anxious and stressed I get, I can always just go back to my breath because it will always be there.”

> “I think pretty much everything we covered was useful. Each activity exposed us to the many different practices and ways to incorporate mindfulness into everyday life--something that was very valuable.”

> “The discussions were most useful and the ways in which to incorporate informal practice into everyday situations. Of course, having a significant amount of time dedicated to formal practice every week was also very helpful.”

> “The various ways in which we could apply mindfulness to our every day lives were really helpful. These ranged from the informal to formal practices as well as the mindsets that we discussed.”

Everyone has a poor crazy mind.

One of the usually unspoken truths about being human comes to light in mindfulness practice: We all occasionally have wild and crazy thoughts, and we all sometimes think we're the only ones who do. One of the ideas repeated frequently in class is that everyone on the planet has a "poor crazy mind" that generates all kinds of thoughts, and everyone on the planet has the capacity to pay attention to what is present. When it comes to mindfulness practice, we all have more in common than we have differences. As with almost all secrets, the moment we bring them to light, say them out loud, they lose most of their weight. This is probably not an insight that can be taught effectively to the students by the instructor. The students really teach it to each other, and it arises from having a cohesive group, where everyone feels safe enough to discuss their secrets.

> "When I first started practicing, I would find myself closing my eyes and having five billion thoughts running through my head. I would sit there and wonder if this was happening to anyone else. Why couldn't I get quiet? I thought I must be doing something wrong and that maybe there was just something wrong with me. My brother always told me I was crazy…maybe he was right!! I would sometimes open my eyes to make sure no one could see all of the struggles I was going through. I was for sure that Sam could read my mind and know immediately how much of a loony bin I was! Then through the discussions, I came to realize that I wasn't the only one distracting myself and be distracted by the surroundings. Talking with the group helped me to see how I could stop judging myself and to know that even if I sit and don't get quiet until fifteen minutes into the practice, I was still being aware of my thoughts and thought processes."

> "Sitting around and talking about our experiences was probably the best way to learn about ourselves. I found myself agreeing with a lot of other people's comments even if I didn't realize it myself."

> "Noticing my "ten favorite tapes" playing and seeing the "like-o-meter" go off were somewhat eye-opening."

> "Other than the formal practice we did in class, the discussion we had in class was extremely valuable because I got to know what other students in the class were going through and could relate to them."

Many students have commented that hearing me describe my own struggles with my practice and my poor crazy mind was very important for them. As noted above, a little humility at the right time goes a long way toward setting the right tone. Unlike most classes, this is a place where being seen by the students as an expert rather than a colleague is not useful, not just because it is not true (or at least not as true as the students tend to think). Describing myself as a beginner who is right there in the trenches with them, and backing that up with some stories, gives the students

permission to open up to each other. Here are a few comments in response to the question “What instructor characteristics contributed to the effectiveness of the course?”

> “The fact that he has been in our place and is still in our place as a student of mindfulness meditation.”

> “It was nice that he had experience and stories to help us relate to him.”

> “Peacefulness and honesty about his own practice - his reasons for getting involved in mindfulness and that he also still struggles.”

> “His knowledge of the subject and recognizing that he didn't know everything.”

> “…he remembers well when he first began practicing so he understands why students may be struggling.”

In addition, students are told many times that the practice unfolds in its own time for each of us, so it is not a race or competition. This illustrates (again) the importance of establishing non-judging as a foundation of the class and the practice.

> “I never felt extremely pressured to "do well" for lack of a better term. The instructor made me feel that my efforts were my own and that was enough.”

> (Most useful experience) “Reinforcing that there is no "goal" in this practice.”

> “There were no goals to strive for, and so I believe everyone felt comfortable with their own ability level, etc.”

<u>This class is not about spiritual practice.</u>

“Spiritual” is one word that is never brought up in class, along with any Sanskrit or Pali terms, except yoga. The vast majority of UVA students are Christian, Muslim, Jewish or Humanist/Atheist and very few of the mindfulness students have expressed an interest in Buddhism per se, although a few students have signed up because they wanted to learn how to meditate after taking a class on Buddhism. I have had many students tell me that they appreciated the non-religious stance of the class, recognizing that many of the discussions dealt with experiences that are often discussed elsewhere in “spiritual” or religious terms, or in religious venues. Although the connection to Buddhist practices is pointed out at the beginning, the language is always secular (for want of a better word) and the practices and discussions are always focused on the students’ direct experience. Presenting the practice as normal “life maintenance” instead of something foreign, exotic, mystical or spiritual is part of casting a wide net.

> “Very interesting. I greatly appreciate that it was religion-neutral.”

> "When he (*the instructor*) would mention something related to Buddhism, he would say that he wasn't telling us to go be Buddhists. He was aware that some people may have strong religious convictions and that such references may bother them."

One student in particular confirmed for me the importance of this non-religious stance in creating a big doorway. She approached me after class in the middle of the semester to ask about my views on religion. When I asked why she wanted to know, she said that it seemed to her that what we were doing was "wise and balanced" in a way that I sense was associated in her experience with religion. Her query led to a couple of long conversations and email exchanges outside of class that I think turned out to be very informative for both of us.

The gist of our exchange was that she is a devout Christian and I am not, so we agreed to disagree about the origin of the universe, and about knowing through faith as opposed to knowing through direct experience. However, I think we were in agreement on all of the issues that stem from practicing the Seven Attitudes. She felt that she got a lot out of the class, and that learning to live in the moment was a valuable way to know herself better. In her words, "I am so thankful for the lessons that I have learned and the peace that I have been able to notice and learn new practices to find this peace." She also articulated what I had long sensed from many other students, "I don't think that I would have stayed in the class or been as open-minded to the practices if it was taught as more of a spiritual class."

I also had a student contact me three years after he had taken the class to say that he was interested in teaching mindfulness. He had spent several months in a monastery in India, and was considering a long training program there. He said he was grateful that he took the mindfulness class first, because there was no ritual or dogma. When he went to a place where there was ritual and dogma, he could see it for what it was, and bring his attention to the practice itself.

In my classes, the practice is discussed as "life maintenance" or "a way to take care of yourself", not a "spiritual path". Like MBSR, it is presented in a way that is compatible with any or no religious beliefs. It is not just unnecessary to alienate those with strong religious beliefs by using language carelessly, it is important to be careful not to alienate them. Down the road, some of the students may develop a deeper practice, as I did, and they may seek out Buddhist teachers and authors, as I did. Still, even if they don't, they will have learned something valuable that will gradually change the way they live in the world, something they would not have learned if they were put off by "spiritual" language, or if they felt they were being asked to practice Buddhism.

<u>We "inter-are".</u>

One advantage of having more classes than the MBSR program is being able to explore some issues in greater depth. Thus, the seventh MBSR class on consuming has been

split into a class on consuming food and chemicals, a class on consuming messages and information, and a class on sending messages, especially non-verbal messages. After spending a week noticing and then discussing the non-verbal messages they receive, the students spend a week attuned to the non-verbal messages they send. When they get to class, we begin with formal practice to get settled down, then read Thich Nhat Hanh's Interrelationship (Isn't it obvious that we "inter-are"?) then do a loving kindness meditation. Many students appreciate our interconnectedness at a much finer level after this discussion, which leads them to appreciating suffering and empathy and, eventually, compassion at a much finer level. For some, this brings new meaning to practicing mindfulness all day, every day. It also allows them to understand the suggestion made in the last class that they not advertise their practice or try to recruit people they may feel could really benefit from learning to practice. They are told, "If you want the people around you to benefit from mindfulness, just work on yourself. If you become less reactive, everyone around you will feel it, because we inter-are."

> "I really enjoyed thinking about how we inter-are. Following these lessons, I realized that I had more empathy toward others."

> "It was a really interesting class. I found the discussions about relationships and communications to be very helpful when I observed how I interacted with other people."

> "This is a life management course everyone could benefit from taking. It even benefits the lives of people who interact with someone taking the course."

8. Conclusion: Many College Students Really Get It.

Students are asked during the first class to say a few words about why they signed up. For the first few semesters, a large majority said it was because they were stressed out and wanted help with that. Although it was a little disconcerting to know that college life is that much more stressful than I remember it being 35 years ago, it is encouraging to think that at least some students are recognizing their stress as something that they might learn to manage. More recently, some students still say they signed up for stress management, but many more say they have heard about mindfulness or dabbled in it, and are curious about it. Clearly, the word is getting out in the media, for better or worse, and a number of students are looking for something meaningful and/or practical. This is even more encouraging, in different way. I believe it is accurate to say that some of them are seekers, whether or not they recognize it in themselves, and most of them come to recognize mindfulness as a deep practice.

Although the course has been very well received overall, not every student is enthusiastic about the class and the practice. Students report (anonymously, in the course evaluations) a wide range of time investment outside of class, from practically none to more than four hours per week, with the majority reporting 1 – 3 hours per week. A few students signed up and then never did much practice, and a few students feel as if they did not learn very much (based on the individual responses in the evaluations, these groups overlap extensively). For every student who says walking meditation was the most useful learning experience, there is another who says it was the least useful. A few students have said that they get little out of sitting meditation, and a few have said that they get little from the group discussions. I have not been able to discern any pattern in the criticisms or complaints that would suggest changing the syllabus. Rather, I think it is inevitable that the practice is not for everyone, and is different for everyone. In an introductory “survey” course that deliberately introduces a wide variety of practices and experiences, many students will not engage with all of them, even if they are deeply engaged with some of them. Indeed, virtually everything that is said or done in the course has been mentioned by at least a few students as an important experience.

The vast majority of the students report that the course was very accessible, useful and rewarding, which I attribute primarily to its roots in MBSR. As the quotes from the papers and many of the comments below demonstrate, a lot of these students were ready for this, more than I had anticipated or even hoped. They feel they learned something valuable and enduring, and can immediately see the value in a wider context. As I said at the beginning, I offered this course with the intention of teaching something to young people that would keep them from suffering the way I did when they get older – at least some prevention, maybe an introduction that would lead to something deeper. My own practice in teaching the class is trying not to be attached to the outcome, and of course I will never know how significant the outcome is for most of the students, but I am encouraged to offer this book and to promote this approach to teaching mindfulness at the college level because of what these students have to say:

“Mindfulness practice can become a fundamental instrument in helping college students cope with a lot of different issues. I personally learned a lot about myself and how to deal through taking this class.”

“This is a course that all college (*students*) should be required to take in my opinion. It teaches students how to identify what stresses them out and how to cope with stress and be in the moment.”

“This course has taught me so many things and has helped me to mature as an adult. Offering this course to more students can really help our student body in managing stress, becoming happier individuals, and creating unity.”

“This material is incredibly useful. I'd say it's a lot more useful and practical than a lot of other "necessary" classes that we take here. If every student, or at least more students, took this course, they would be healthier and more successful, not to mention this would be a more understanding and non-judging campus.”

“I fully intend to continue in my mindfulness journey (it is life maintenance, after all) and believe it has already had a very positive impact upon my life.”

“Every single time we practiced, whether we were learning a new formal practice or doing what would outwardly appear to be the same meditation as the week before, I definitely learned a lot. Similarly, every talk helped me understand what we were doing and how it related to the rest of our lives. The careful balance between practice, explanation, and discussion is what made it all so useful.”

“It was wonderful - such a nice and necessary break from my other classes. The ideas in this class will stay with me forever and I hope to do more practice in the future.”

“I've learned to be aware of my surroundings, actually feel calm sometimes, not be so bothered by uncontrollable events and people, communicate with people better than ever- in short, this course… somehow showed me a whole different way of being that I had completely given up on ever figuring out. I didn't expect any seminar, no matter how atypical or wonderful, to completely change the way I perceive and interact with the world, but this one definitely has.”

“This class makes you learn a lot about yourself and it is one of those few courses that provide knowledge you will never forget. Unfortunately college students are not given the opportunity to take many courses like this.”

“… it was such a beneficial course and I feel very fortunate to have gotten the chance to take the course through the University.”

“This was the most meaningful course I have ever taken. It allowed me to see how I can change my own thoughts in any situation to control my own stress and suffering. I can honestly say that this class challenged my previous way of thinking more than any other I've ever taken.”

“I'm really glad that a course like this is offered for free through UVA.”

“I can't say enough how much I enjoyed and learned from this course... I hope everyone who wishes to do so has an opportunity to take this course…”

“Please make this class available to more students.”

So: If you are able, please make this class available to more students.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to all of my wonderful teachers. I hope I can repay some small part of what you gave me by passing it along to others. Thanks to Jon Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli for the MBSR program. It's probably the only way I would have started practicing, and I am very grateful that it was available when I was ready. Thanks to Joe Jackson and Mark Oberman for teaching MBSR as it was intended (as I learned later), and for guiding me, and so many others, after the class was over. Thanks to Larry Rosenberg for leading wonderful retreats at Insight Meditation Society. I have benefited tremendously from the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh and Jack Kornfield, and have incorporated numerous bits of their wisdom into the course. I have picked up valuable lessons from many other teachers and authors, but those named have been most central to my path.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to making the Introduction to/Foundations of Mindfulness Practice classes possible. Allie Rudolph invited me to join the UVA Mindfulness Center, and to co-teach my first MBSR class with her. I had countless fruitful conversations with Joe Jackson and Laura Meyer about developing and teaching the class, and they both encouraged me to write down what I was doing so that more people could teach it. Diane Whaley, the director of the former Lifetime Physical Activity (now Kinesiology) program at UVA, arranged for me to offer the first version of the class before any of us knew how, or even if, it would work out. Dorrie Fontaine, Dean of the School of Nursing, has provided wisdom, encouragement, and resources, and for the last few years a faculty position and a permanent home for the course, under the umbrella of the Compassionate Care Initiative. The Compassionate Care Initiative was established by Dean Fontaine "to cultivate a resilient and compassionate healthcare workforce". In this environment, the mindfulness class is no longer seen as an oddity, but as an integral part of the program. Susan Bauer-Wu taught me a great deal about mindfulness and about teaching while she was the Director of the Compassionate Care Initiative, and facilitated my move to the School of Nursing. Laura Meyer, Dorothe Bach, Sandy Seidel, Anthony DeMauro and Anna DeLong are mindfulness instructors who have participated in the course and provided feedback on my teaching and on the manual.

Thanks to my wife Judy White for listening patiently to all of my thoughts about this whole endeavor before they were fully formed, and especially for being tolerant about giving up so many evenings together so that I could teach classes.

Finally, thanks to the students for showing up, and for sharing themselves with me and with each other. I have learned a great deal about myself, about mindfulness practice, and about teaching from them.

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Appendices:

I. Email sent to students after registration.

II. Risk/benefit page and Student Information Form (mental health screen).

III. Seven Attitudes that support mindfulness practice

IV. The Body Scan

V. Informal Practice

VI. Mindful Eating

VII. Yoga

VIII. Sitting Meditation

IX. Walking Meditation

X. Poems and Quotes

XI. Summary of *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Chapters 1 and 2

XII. Wisdom and Compassion (concluding remarks on the course)

XIII. Maintaining Practice (what comes next, now that the course is over)

Appendix I. Introductory email.

This email message, along with the syllabus, the Risk/Benefit page, and the Student Information Form (Appendix II), is sent 1 - 2 months in advance of the first class. It is copied on the email sent one week before the first class.

All-

You are receiving this message because you are registered or on the waiting list for Introduction to Mindfulness Practice.

WHEN YOU HAVE A LITTLE TIME TO PAY ATTENTION (after final exams?), first please read the attached course description/syllabus and this message to get an idea of what the plan is. I will discuss a lot of this when we meet, but I do want to make sure you really know what you are signing up for beforehand. This course will almost certainly be completely unlike any other course you have ever taken. It will require group effort, with emphasis on both GROUP and EFFORT. If even a few students don't quite get this, it can have a significant effect on the whole class. A lot of students have told me that the course was harder than they anticipated, but if they did the work it was also more rewarding than they expected. This message is intended to give you a clear idea of what to expect.

Once you have read the rest of this email and the course description, please read carefully the attached Risks, Benefits, Resources page. As indicated, mindfulness practice can sometimes bring up difficult emotions. Most mindfulness instructors, at UVA and elsewhere, try to be aware of students who may be more susceptible to these reactions so that we can provide appropriate guidance. Please complete the attached Student Information Form and return it to me. If any of the conditions listed are a concern for you, I will contact you to discuss it. Checking something on the list does not mean that you shouldn't take the class, it simply means that you and I should both be aware of the situation beforehand. The information you provide is strictly confidential, and the forms will be deleted after classes begin.

Now down to business. This class is derived from the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. The MBSR program was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn 35 years ago, and was my first introduction to mindfulness practice about 20 years ago. I was an instructor at the UVA Mindfulness Center for 10 years, where I taught MBSR, other classes offered through the Center, and a little bit of mindfulness practice for medical students. I think MBSR is a great program; very accessible and effective for beginners, and comprehensive, both in introducing a variety of formal and informal practices and in exploring many possible applications of mindfulness practice in daily life. I also have a long-standing interest in teaching mindfulness to younger people, who almost never take an MBSR class. Therefore what I have tried to do with the undergraduate class is adapt as much of the MBSR program as possible to our situation. However, there are some important differences:

1. GROUP: MBSR students are almost all WAY stressed out, and their normal coping mechanisms are failing them. As a result, they are highly motivated to change. At least that's where I was when I signed up. Most MBSR students are willing to contribute to the group by talking about their own experiences. Everyone has stress (and I am sure that everyone can benefit from changing their relationship to their stress, which is one reason I'm teaching the class), but not too many young people are absolutely at their wits' end with it. Also, I find there is considerable reluctance among many people your age to speak candidly in front of strangers, e.g. classmates. So, the motivation for undergraduates to contribute to the discussion is considerably less compelling than for MBSR students. In order to address that, we will spend some time getting to know each other a little, so that everyone can get comfortable speaking in the group. Ultimately, students in this class can learn more from listening to each other than they can from listening to me. This is in large part because you may mistake me for an expert and think that any experience of mindful awareness I describe is beyond your reach, but you will tend to believe what you hear from your classmates who have no more experience than you. Once we get rolling, the more talking you do, and the less I do, the better. So, it is extremely important to SHOW UP mentally and to be willing to listen and to speak non-judgmentally about your own experience.

2. EFFORT: MBSR students are expected to spend 45 – 60 minutes every day practicing on their own what they learned in class. I certainly don't expect that of undergraduates taking a one-credit course, but I do expect that you will find 20 quality minutes **every day** for doing mindfulness practices (once they have been introduced). These practices are often very relaxing, but at times they can be boring, frustrating or even agitating. As we will discuss, the outcome is not important. What is important is simply putting in the time. A number of informal practices will also be introduced, which are more about noticing everyday experiences and will take very little time, but do require that you remind yourself to do them regularly. Mindfulness practice is simple, but not easy. It flies in the face of our deeply rooted habit of paying attention to our thinking. Developing a new habit of letting go of thinking and paying full attention to what is present, like any new skill, requires a LOT of repetition. Nothing you can read will give you the experience of present awareness, you have to actually practice. The more time you put in, the more you will get out of it. If you spend very little time practicing outside of class, you will get almost nothing out of it, which will be frustrating for you and detrimental to the group. I will assume that everyone is making an effort, and will teach accordingly. Later in the course, those who do very little practice on their own find the class periods not just confusing but rather… challenging. Students from earlier classes almost all said they either practiced regularly or wished they had.

3. Attendance and grading: Obviously, this is an academic class, not a stress-reduction program (well, maybe it’s both). Getting credit requires participation, not just attendance. Participation in this course means Showing Up physically and mentally, contributing to the group discussions, finding time to practice on your own, and writing two short reflective papers (see syllabus). Students will also be encouraged, not required, to procure their own seats for meditation by the fourth class - think of it as your “textbook” - to use for doing your homework. I’ll discuss the value in this when the time

comes. There are benches and cushions you can try out at the first class to see what works for you, links to purchase a seat online (~$40 – 60 with shipping) or build your own bench (~$10 – 20), and a free but less comfortable alternative.

What the course is not:

Not yoga. Yoga will be only one component - important, but not central.

Not therapy. If you are currently getting any help dealing with stress, anxiety, PTSD or depression, or are in counseling for any reason, keep it up, and get clearance from your health care provider to take this class. This course is not a substitute for counseling, nor is it a quick fix for anything, although most people who do mindfulness practice regularly EVENTUALLY find it to be very effective for reducing stress and anxiety. Also, discussions in class are meant to explore the process of thinking, not the content. Students will be expected to keep class discussions confidential so that everyone can safely be honest about their experience, but you will not be required to reveal your secrets. You are only expected to talk about your experience of observing your thoughts.

Not religion. As Jon Kabat-Zinn points out, most of this practice is ancient, and key elements are derived from Buddhist practice, but it is not religion. This was very important to me when I learned the practice, and remains very important to me when I teach it. The course is simply about learning to pay attention to our own experience in a particular way. No belief or dogma or faith is required. In fact, quite the contrary - the only thing I will ever ask you to believe is your own experience.

Please send me an email if you have any questions. I don’t mean to discourage anyone from signing up, but I do want everyone to understand what we’re doing and what will be expected of you. If you really can't participate in a discussion with a room full of (at first) strangers, and make a commitment to set aside some time every day for mindfulness practice, even if at times it seems boring or frustrating or just not much fun, you may find this class to be more trouble than it’s worth. For those who are interested, and willing and able to make the effort, space and schedule details will be sent out a week before the first class. Wear comfortable street clothes for this class, we’ll be sitting on the floor most of the time.

****
IF YOU ARE ON THE WAITING LIST: One-credit classes typically have some turnover in the first couple of weeks. This is no big deal for most seminars, but a real problem for a mindfulness class. I am sending this message now to try to minimize the turnover or, more accurately, get it to happen before classes start. If you are still interested in joining, you should show up for every class until the add deadline passes. I can’t guarantee that you will get in, but I can guarantee that you will have a very hard time catching up and being part of the group if you miss the first class or two. I will remind you when the time comes.
****

Appendix II. Risk/benefit page and Student Information Form (mental health screen)

Risks, Benefits, and Resources for Support Should the Need Arise
Here are some of the potential benefits of the mindfulness course, and some potential risks. This class is modeled on the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, an intensive eight-week course. MBSR classes tend to be somewhat more intense than undergraduate classes because the average stress level of MBSR students is higher, and they are doing a lot more daily practice than undergraduates. Most of the undergraduates I have taught have found the course to be very beneficial, and to my knowledge none has had any significant adverse reactions. Still, I want to point out the potential risks, so that you can consider whether any of these might become an issue for you.

BENEFITS may include increased awareness, improved concentration, a quieter mind, a sense of balance and enhanced wellbeing, learning new ways to cope more effectively with your stress, difficulties, pain or suffering, and learning to take better care of yourself, among others. Many physical and emotional health benefits have been described in scientific research, but obviously there is no guaranteed outcome for any individual.

There are some risks in this class:
PHYSICAL RISKS: The physical risk is associated with mindful movement (yoga). Taking care of oneself is at the core of practicing mindfulness. If you hear any instruction that you feel is not healthy for your body, or if you are feeling pain, disregard the instruction and trust what your body is telling you. Explore your limits carefully and respectfully. Because (very low-intensity) yoga will be used to teach mindfulness, in this class the emphasis is on moment-to-moment awareness, not strength, flexibility or proper form.

EMOTIONAL RISKS: Practicing mindfulness meditation and other contemplative practices explored during this course can bring up uncomfortable feelings. Feelings of sadness, anger, fear or anxiety could seem stronger early on because you may be paying attention to them in a more conscious way for the first time. You may make discoveries about yourself that you may not like. A history of trauma, abuse, substance addiction, or suicidal thoughts may heighten these reactions. If you experience persistent emotional distress (such as increased agitation or anxiety, impaired sleep or appetite, poor concentration, low mood or an inability to function as usual), please seek professional help immediately (see below for available resources).

OTHER PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE: It may be a challenge to set aside the space and time to do this practice, so it's important to request support from your roommates (or housemates or friends). You may find that you change patterns of reactivity, behavior and communication, and your family and/or friends may not like these changes. You may find that some of your relationships change.

TIME: Finding time to make a new habit of mindfulness practice can be challenging: it's normal to have the idea that there is not enough time to practice. Many students find, counter-intuitively, that setting aside time for practice increases a sense of spaciousness in the rest of the day. We will discuss this throughout the course. Also, it is very important to arrive on time, or a few minutes early, for class. We have a lot to do.

I have tried to be very complete with this description. Please feel free to email me or indicate on your student information form if you have any questions or worries about taking the course so that we can discuss them thoroughly.

Support and Counseling Services

Resources for psychological support are available for UVA students:

If you find yourself experiencing problems of an emotional type, I strongly encourage you to contact Student Health Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). The CAPS staff knows that this course is running and what it is teaching. They are ready to serve you – they even have a staff member who teaches meditation! Usually you can get an appointment within a day or two. Students in crisis between 5pm and 8am can call the Student Health After Hours line.

Student Information Form

Name _____

UVA computing ID (email, e.g. sag4y) _____

The goal is for all students to engage fully. However, certain factors can interfere with learning in this course. This course is designed as an educational experience. It is not group therapy. The following information will be useful in helping to better support your learning.

Please indicate if any of the following are present or are concerns for you:

_____anger
_____depression
_____severe anxiety
_____eating disorder
_____suicidal thoughts
_____previous psychiatric hospitalization
_____excessive use of alcohol and/or recreational drugs
_____addiction (drug, alcohol, or other substance)
_____recent health condition requiring hospitalization
_____hearing loss
_____back pain or other chronic pain that interferes with every day functioning

Please elaborate on any of the concerns noted above or indicate other health issues you feel would be significant for me to be aware of:

Check the word that best describes the current state of your **well-being**:

poor
average
good
excellent

Appendix III.

Seven attitudes that support mindfulness practice (adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn 1990, *Full Catastrophe Living*), and some relevant quotes.

1. Non-Judging. The mind is a very busy place, and a good deal of what goes on there is judgment. Paying attention to the constant judging of each part of our experience, in ways great and small, we can miss out on what is actually happening, attending instead to the story in the mind. Non-judging means witnessing our own experience impartially, including witnessing the activity of the mind, noticing what is there without getting carried off by it or needing to change it. You don't have to believe everything you think!
2. Patience. Mindfulness practice unfolds in its own time. Learning to calm the mind, like all natural growth and learning, can't be rushed or forced. We need to cultivate "patience to wait until our mud settles and the water is clear."
3. Beginner's Mind. We are accustomed to bringing so much thinking and judgment to our experience that we often assume we already know what is happening, and what will happen next – the expert's mind. If we observe carefully, we find that this is rarely true – we really don't know. Beginner's mind means approaching each moment, each experience with openness to what is there, without limiting our attention to what the mind already expects. It allows us more choices in each moment, since we have not narrowed our perceptions and thereby narrowed our possible responses.
4. Trust. When it comes to your own experience, the only authority is you. We can learn to trust our own senses and our own instincts, learn to listen to the wisdom of the body and the wisdom that arises in silence, not just the wisdom that arises in thinking. Ultimately, any instructions you are given are only suggestions. You alone can make the practice yours.
5. Non-Striving. Almost everything we do is intended to get us somewhere, make us different in some way. In mindfulness practice, trying to accomplish something, anything, can quickly become a source of more thinking and judging, and another obstacle to noticing our moment-to-moment experience just as it is. In mindfulness practice, our only intention is to notice where we already are, to be who we already are.
6. Acceptance. Acceptance means that we can recognize the truth of our experience, instead of distracting or misleading ourselves with ideas of what we want or expect our experience to be. This doesn't mean being passive or never trying to change anything. It is only by first accepting things as they are that we can begin to see our habitual reactions; we then have some choice over how we respond to what comes up.
7. Letting Go. We all have our have preferences, our likes and dislikes. If we get caught up in holding on to pleasant moments, trying to prolong or repeat them, or trying to rush past or ignore unpleasant moments, we very soon lose track of what is present. This constant holding on to our stories about what we want our experience to be is the source of a great deal of internal stress. Instead, we can recognize that our experience is changing in each moment, and let go of each moment, each experience, as it passes. That is the only way we can be awake and fully present in the next moment. We have only the present moment to live.

Another take on beginner's mind:

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength."
- Rachel Carson

Another way of thinking about acceptance
(non-believers can substitute "the cosmos" for "God"):

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."
- Marianne Williamson (often erroneously attributed to Nelson Mandela)

On letting go:

"What good will it do you to think, "Oh, I have done evil, I have made many mistakes"? It requires no ghost to tell us that. Bring in the light, and the evil goes out in a moment."
- Vivekananda

Two amazing comments related to mindful awareness

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." Vicktor Frankl

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."- Vicktor Frankl

Appendix IV. The Body Scan

In the body scan (as in all formal practices) we bring full, non-judgmental attention to physical sensations. These sensations may be readily noticeable, such as sensations of pressure where the body is in contact with the mat, or may be quite subtle, such as the awareness of the position of the parts of the body with respect to the whole. There is no right way to feel, nothing to fix, just noticing and accepting whatever sensation (or lack of sensation) shows up. This practice begins to integrate our sense of the mind and the body, which are sometimes separate. As James Joyce wrote of Mr. Duffy ("A Painful Case"), "He lived a little distance from his body." – something that can easily happen to any of us when we spend too much time dwelling on where we aren't. Doing the body scan, we also notice our mental reactions to paying attention to various parts of the body, practicing non-judging with our thinking and emotions, and acceptance of the way things are with our body.

The body scan can be done in any position, but the recording assumes you are lying on your back. We first direct attention to the body as a whole, relaxing the body as much as possible. We then direct attention to specific regions of the body systematically, and finally return to awareness of the entire body. It's that simple. Take your time scanning through toe to head (or head to toe) with attention. You can also scan the left and right limbs separately. If you only have a few minutes, you can just scan briefly through any noticeable sensations. In any formal practice, it is inevitable that at some point your awareness will wander off into thinking. This is not a problem, it is just the nature of the mind. Whenever you notice that your attention is elsewhere, simply recognize that you are thinking, gently let it go, and return the attention to the body. If this happens during a guided scan, just return to the guidance. If you are doing the scan on your own, return to the region you were last paying attention to. Losing focus is not a failure, it is simply another opportunity to cultivate the new habit of coming back to the present moment. It is not necessary to "finish" or "accomplish" the scan. If you are doing an unguided scan and you find that after 20 minutes you haven't made it past the knees, that's OK. Remember there is nowhere to go and nothing to strive for. Coming back to paying attention to what is present in each moment, over and over, is the only "goal".

N.B. It is not unusual to feel sleepy or to actually fall asleep when first trying this practice, especially if you have been sleep-deprived or stressed out. If this happens to you, your body is probably trying to tell you something. (Corollary- if you are having trouble getting to sleep, try a body scan!). However, when doing formal practice, the intention is to maintain a relaxed alertness. Sleepiness can be minimized by lying in the corpse pose, lying on the floor, not the bed, and if that isn't enough, by opening the eyes. Alternatively, try doing the body scan sitting.

Appendix V. Informal Practice (everyday mindfulness)

In addition to formal practice, it is very helpful to reinforce the new habit of mindful awareness with moments of informal practice whenever possible over the course of the day. As one teacher put it, we do not meditate to become good meditators, we meditate so that we will have moments of awareness in the rest of our lives. Having these moments of being fully present in our everyday lives is really the whole point of doing practice. One way to increase the likelihood of having these moments is to use everyday events as cues to remind us to come back to the present, even if only for a moment or two. Remember, no matter what else is happening, you always have the sensation of the breath available as an anchor to the present moment. This may seem a little awkward at first, but with repetition there is less thinking ("Oh yeah, time to find the breath.") and judgment ("This is silly", or boring, too hard, a waste of time, etc.). Gradually the thinking and language fall away and it becomes truly habitual and natural to go straight to awareness of the breath, or other sensations. Some ideas to start with:

Come back to the breath for a moment every time you notice your pebble, or sticker.
When the phone rings, bring your attention to where you are and take one breath before you move to answer it.
If you come to a red light while driving or walking, take the opportunity while you have a few seconds to yourself to come back to the breath.
When you reach for a door handle, pay attention to the sensations in the hand and arm as you open the door.
Whenever you transition from one activity to another, notice where the attention goes. Take a moment to be aware of where you are. You may even start by thinking "ending (this activity)" or "beginning (this activity)" to be aware of these transitions. When my family sits down for dinner, we all look at each other, smile, and say "Good evening" to each other as a way of marking the transition from "before dinner" to "dinner", and bringing our attention fully to the table (thanks to Thich Nhat Hanh for this one). The non-meditators felt a bit silly for a short time about doing it, but everyone soon became very enthusiastic, because this simple "coming to the table" moment really changes the experience of sitting down to eat together.
When you first wake up in the morning, notice the sensations of getting out of bed. Seeif you can really notice your feet hitting the floor as a moment of transition from "sleeping" to "not sleeping" (or whatever words work best for you).

When you walk down the hall or down the street, just walk. Instead of daydreaming or thinking about what you will do when you arrive at your destination, really feel your steps for a little while.
If you have a watch with a timer or a phone app, set it to go off once on the hour. When it goes off, notice where the attention is at that moment. If you have the opportunity, stop what you are doing and take a few breaths. If not, just notice whether your experience of doing whatever you are doing changes after returning attention to the present moment even briefly.

You may discover your own mini-mindfulness cues in your daily routine. Mindfulness practice is simple, the hardest part is just remembering to do it.

Appendix VI. Mindful Eating

The foundation of mindfulness practice is bringing attention to sensations as they occur. Mindful eating can be a wonderful practice, in part because there are so many different sensations – sight, sound, touch, and of course taste and smell. When eating, as with just about everything we do, our minds constantly wander. Mindful eating means bringing full attention to where we are, to the reactions in the mind and the body to what we are doing. We notice what we are putting into our mouths, perhaps appreciating where the food came from, noticing the texture of the food, the sensations of chewing and tasting, the urge to swallow, the sensations of swallowing, the sensations of hunger changing to the sensations of satiety – very straightforward, but for most of us, quite outside of our normal experience. When you begin to practice mindful eating, as with any practice, it is important to remember not to judge yourself when you notice your mind drifting off the experience of eating. Just notice the thinking, and recall the awareness to that taste, chew, bite or swallow. Remember the raisin!

Thich Nhat Hanh writes:
"Some of us, while looking at a piece of carrot, can see the whole cosmos in it, can see the sunshine in it, can see the earth in it. It has come from the whole cosmos for our nourishment…When you chew it, you are aware that you are chewing a piece of carrot. Don't put anything else into your mouth, like your projects, your worries, your fear, just put the carrot in."

This is obviously not a practice we can pursue all the time. Unless you are at a retreat center or monastery, it would usually be considered rather anti-social even to eat in silence, never mind with full attention on your meal, when others are eating with you. However, most of us can find time to eat one meal mindfully on occasion. And, every meal is made up of many moments. It is always possible to be fully present for at least some of them.

Simple ways to foster mindfulness while eating (alone or with others):

* Eat sitting down, without reading or watching anything.
* Take a moment when you sit down to allow your mind to catch up with your body – "come to the table" fully before you eat.
* Eat with chopsticks (if you do not routinely. If you do, try a fork).
* Eat with your non-dominant hand.
* Put your utensil down after each bite, and don't pick it up again until you swallow.
* Chew your food twice as long per bite as usual.
* Eat in silence.

Appendix VII. Yoga

Yoga means union (literally, yoke), and refers to union of body, awareness and breath. In our part of the world, some yoga classes are taught in a way that fosters a lot of striving, trying to develop the strength and flexibility to get into a particular position, or to do the pose "right". This approach, which I think is more properly called "bodywork" than "yoga", can give rise to a lot of judgment (of yourself and/or others), striving, and competition - the very antithesis of mindfulness. In doing yoga as mindfulness practice, we just use the sensations that occur while doing various poses or stretches as the object of moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness. In addition to providing a readily noticeable - or even intensely noticeable - object of awareness, this practice can provide insight into how we deal with approaching our limits. We may be overly cautious, not truly exploring our limits (a good idea for beginners, to avoid injuries), or we may be overly determined or impatient or frustrated, and possibly risk doing more than we can safely handle. When we listen carefully to what our body is telling us and trust our senses, we can simply observe as the body reveals our limits to us. In addition, paying careful attention to the more intense sensations can shed light on the relationship between what we call "pain" – intense sensations in the body - and "suffering" – which is really just the story the mind tells us about those sensations.

There are many thousands of asanas, or yoga poses, described in the various traditions. From the standpoint of mindfulness practice, it really doesn't matter which poses or stretches you do, although from a physical standpoint it makes sense, and generally feels better, to do a variety of poses that focus on different parts of the body. If you are new to yoga, you can start with the poses demonstrated in class, but any stretches you already do can be treated as yoga poses – the only difference between a warm-up stretch and a yoga pose is the quality of attention you bring to it. Another interesting variation is to pay close attention to the body while standing, sitting or lying still (think of the body scan), and let the body tell you which stretch is called for at that moment. Hold stretches until your body tells you that you have reached your limit. That is usually at least 30 - 40 seconds, but for some poses (e.g. forward bend) it may be well over a minute. In strength poses, try to let go of the story in the mind about when to stop, and listen carefully to the body. Again, there is no need to push your limits, but there is some value in exploring them.

N.B. Many yoga (or "bodywork") classes, at least in the West, include music. This draws the attention outward, and serves as a distraction from the work of paying full attention to the body, to the intense sensations of the more difficult poses, and (maybe especially) to the reactions in the mind. If your intention is to become strong and flexible, which is itself a worthwhile goal, this distraction is of little consequence. However, if your intention is to cultivate mindful awareness - union of awareness, body and breath, it is wise to minimize distractions such as music, and bring ALL of your attention inward to the physical sensations and the reactions in the mind, especially when you are just beginning to learn mindfulness practice (the first several years). Being aware that the mind is judging the experience or that it would rather be somewhere else, and bringing the attention back to the experience of the present

moment over and over, is just as much a part of yoga practice as the physical work. Practiced with beginner's mind - your limits really are different each day, each moment - and with non-judging and non-striving, yoga is very challenging and rewarding, both worthy and demanding of your full attention.

Appendix VIII. Thoughts (!) on Sitting Meditation

Sitting meditation enables us to get intimately acquainted with the difference between awareness and thinking. Normally we get caught up in all kinds of thinking - judging, memory, planning, stories, often without realizing it. In meditation we just witness whatever comes up and let it pass, returning attention to the present over and over (and over and over…). As in most meditation traditions, the first object of awareness we use to come back to the present is the sensation of the breath, which is always available, no matter how agitated or peaceful we become.

Seated, with posture that is upright and relaxed (as discussed in class), and closing your eyes, bring attention to the sensation of the breath as it is naturally occurring, without trying to manipulate it or change it at all. You may notice air flowing through the nostrils, a tingling in the throat, movement in the chest, or movement of the belly in and out. It can be helpful to start with the most noticeable sensation and stay with it. Notice in as much detail as you can each in-breath, out-breath, and the spaces between them. Eventually, you will notice that you are thinking. Generating thoughts is what minds do. Whenever you notice that the attention has wandered off, whether it is after a few seconds or 10 minutes, just note it ("thinking"), and gently bring the attention back to the sensations of of the breath. It doesn't matter how quickly or how often the mind wanders off, or how long your attention is elsewhere. Each time we notice the thinking, let it go, and recall our attention to the breath, we reinforce the habit a little more. With patience, the mind will gradually settle down. It may help at first to count three outbreaths, starting over whenever you notice thinking (or make it to three).

Meditation is not about trying to relax, or transform yourself; it is simply developing a new habit of letting go of thinking and being present. Relaxation may be a frequent side effect (not always!), but it is not the "goal". There is no need to judge your performance. Every time you sit, it's worthwhile, no matter how calm or agitated the mind may be. Doing formal practice each day can make a huge difference in how we experience our lives. Witnessing the activity of the mind without automatically reacting to it, we can develop a new relationship to thinking, one that allows for more choices in responding to what arises in the mind.

It is so important to be patient and nonjudgmental with the mind. We have reinforced the habit of attending to whatever the poor crazy mind cooks up for many billions of moments. It takes a while to learn to let go of this habit. Jack Kornfield (1993) writes in *A Path With Heart*:

"...meditation is very much like training a puppy. You put the puppy down and say "Stay." Does the puppy listen? It gets up and it runs away. You sit the puppy back down again. "Stay." And the puppy runs away over and over again. Sometimes the puppy jumps up, runs over, and pees in the corner or makes some other mess. Our minds are much the same as the puppy, only they create even bigger messes. In training the mind, or the puppy, we have to start over and over again.

"…frustration comes with the territory. Nothing in our culture or our schooling has taught us to steady and calm our attention. One psychologist has called us a society of attentional spastics. Finding it difficult to concentrate, many people respond by forcing

their attention on their breath…with tense irritation and self-judgment, or worse. Is this the way you would train a puppy? Does it really help to beat it? Concentration is never a matter of force or coercion. You simply pick up the puppy again and return to reconnect with the here and now."

"What we need is a cup of understanding, a barrel of love, and an ocean of patience." St. Francis de Sales

"If we see that we have no mindfulness… that we have little well-being, that is not confusion, that's the beginning of clarity." Pema Chodron

Appendix IX. Walking Meditation

Most of us walk all the time, for many different reasons, but it is almost always to get somewhere else. We usually take walking for granted, much like breathing. Perhaps because it is so easy to walk without really noticing the sensations (much like breathing!), we almost never “just” walk. We are virtually always doing something else at the same time, usually involving some kind of thinking. So, walking meditation, in which we devote our entire attention to the sensations of walking without trying to get anywhere, can be rather challenging at first. That is what makes it such an excellent way to practice patience with whatever the mind presents to us, and beginner’s mind as we observe the experience.

Walking meditation can be done anywhere, but it is often helpful to begin by just walking back and forth in a room that is large enough to take at least several steps before turning around. This can help support the sense of not trying to get anywhere. So, beginning at the slowest pace that allows natural movement (which may vary day by day), pay attention to the sensations of walking – nowhere to go, nothing to accomplish except cultivating the habit of noticing when the attention wanders into thinking, and returning to awareness of the present moment. Just as with watching the breath without controlling it, the practice in walking meditation is not to THINK through the act of taking each step, but to FEEL the constantly changing stream of sensations – pressure and release, shifting balance, muscles working and relaxing. As always, when the mind starts up some commentary or wanders elsewhere, recognize that it is just thinking and return to the sensations of the step. It can sometimes help to notice breathing, if it meshes with the walking, but this is one practice where it is not necessary to pay attention to breathing, or even to deliberately not pay attention to breathing if it takes the attention away from the walking.

Walking meditation is practiced frequently in many meditation retreats, where it is alternated with sitting meditation to keep from injuring the body with too much inaction. It can also be approached as a bridge between the stillness of the body scan or sitting meditation and the action of everyday life. Walking meditation is the embodiment of being fully aware of where you already are even as you are going somewhere else. That is really what all of mindfulness practice is about.

Appendix X. Poems and Quotes

Poems and *quotes, in order of appearance

Two Kinds of Intelligence – Rumi
The Guest House – Rumi
The Summer Day – Mary Oliver
Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House – Billy Collins
The Journey – Mary Oliver
Autobiography in Five Short Chapters – Portia Nelson
Peace Is This Moment Without Judgment – Dorothy Hunt
*On Interbeing – Thich Nhat Hanh
Gestalt Prayer – Fritz Perls
Interrelationship – Thich Nhat Hanh
Wage Peace – Judyth Hill
*The Master in the Art of Living – Lawrence Pearsall Jacks
The Good News – Thich Nhat Hanh
*Meditation: Calming the Mind – Bob Sharples
Free and Easy – Lama Gendun Rimpoche

Appendix XI. Summary of the main points from *The Happiness Hypothesis* – Jonathan Haidt

Chapter 1. The Divided Self

The rider on the elephant: Our minds are not processors, like computers. They are more aptly described as animals, with temperaments. Our conscious minds are like a rider on the back of an elephant. The elephant is the subconscious, automatic and emotional mind. The rider can guide the elephant, and learn from other riders, but it cannot rule the elephant by force.
The divided mind:
1. Mind and body: The body has a mind of its own, including visceral reactions a.k.a. gut feelings. There are strong reciprocal connections between the mind and the body.
2. New and old. The old brain was thought to be the seat of emotion, the new brain the seat of reason, but the neocortex is not just for reasoning, it also makes emotionality more complex.
3. Left and right: The brain is modular, demonstrated by studies of split-brain patients. The left brain houses the "interpreter module", which is the seat of language and the source of our narrative. This is essentially the rider, translating our experience into words. The interpreter module is good at generating logical (if not necessarily rational) explanations, but not good at knowing where the original impulse came from. Generating a story that may have no basis at all in reality but justifies feeling what we already feel is called confabulation. We do it all the time.
4. Controlled and automatic thinking. We can only have one abstract thought at a time (so there is no such thing as multitasking!), and abstract though requires language. Controlled thinking requires effort, so eventually it runs out of gas. Most of our routine activities are driven by automatic processes, which are very ancient, and guided primarily by emotional reactions. They can run in parallel, endlessly and effortlessly. It is primarily the automatic processes that control our emotional states, for example insuring that behaviors that are adaptive are also pleasurable.
Failures of self-control: The elephant wants what it wants. The rider can't overpower it by willpower alone, but it can distract it, a form of emotional intelligence.
Mental intrusions: Trying NOT to think about something, or trying not to think at all, sets the automatic and controlled processes at crossed purposes. The only way to know if you are thinking about something is to check, using controlled thinking. Thus, trying to suppress specific thoughts because they are shocking or shameful can result in having those thoughts obsessively. Trying to suppress thinking in general can result in an overwhelmingly busy mind.
The difficulty of winning an argument: Most of our judgments about the world and our experience are made subconsciously and automatically, at an emotional level. The rider then generates (or possibly confabulates) an argument to justify *what we already feel*. We are not really so logical after all.

Chapter 2 Changing Your Mind

Through the ages, it has been recognized that our perceptions, not the actual conditions we encounter, determine our experience. However, we cannot just decide to be happier or more content through thinking, we have to train the elephant, too.

The Like-o-Meter: The elephant has two basic responses: approach and withdraw (or like and dislike). We are constantly adjusting our emotional set point, which in turn influences the kinds of thoughts likely to be generated by the interpreter module (affective priming).

Negativity bias: Our minds react more quickly, strongly and persistently to negative stimuli than positive stimuli. This is highly adaptive, providing a “red alert” system to respond quickly to any potential danger. There is no equivalent “green alert” system, because the costs of not noticing advantageous situations are small compared to the costs of not noticing real or potential threats. Activating the withdraw system influences emotions AND conscious thought.

Affective style: Some people tend to be easygoing and optimistic (approach mode), many tend to be a bit more tense and pessimistic (withdraw mode). Affective style is highly heritable. Those of us who lost the genetic lottery can still change our affective style.

Training the elephant: Meditation, cognitive therapy and Prozac are all effective means of training the elephant. The key is to learn to notice a lot of the automatic and emotional reactions as they arise, before they become thoughts and plans.

Appendix XII. Wisdom and Compassion

Mindfulness is simply a way of paying attention, and it can be applied skillfully or unskillfully. Skillful practice, which prevents or reduces suffering, requires applying mindfulness with wisdom and compassion. There is nothing wrong with using mindfulness to studying more efficiently, but that is more of a fringe benefit, not the central point.

Wisdom means understanding the nature of the thinking mind, and the difference between awareness and thinking. With that understanding, you can know from your own experience the difference between pain (unpleasant conditions) and suffering (the resistance in the mind to those conditions). We may not be able to control the conditions we experience, but we have a choice about the response, one moment at a time. The more you practice, the less reactive you become, the more you will recognize this wisdom in your own experience.

It is important to learn to deal with our own suffering, but that by itself is not enough. If the people around us are suffering, we are inevitably affected by that suffering, because we inter-are. This too is something you know through your own experience, especially regarding non-verbal communication. Compassion is the ability to identify with the suffering of others, and feel moved to act to relieve it. If we practice loving kindness, and carry that into our community with the informal interbeing practices (“I see you”, wage peace), the impulse to act gradually arises naturally.

If you have a lot of wisdom and not much compassion, that is a narrow, limited practice. If you have a lot of compassion but little wisdom, you can easily become overwhelmed by suffering. By cultivating both wisdom (the difference between pain and suffering) and compassion (we inter-are), we gradually develop the ability to acknowledge and address the suffering we witness without becoming overwhelmed.

Mindfulness practice (like yoga before it) has been appropriated in some very unskillful ways in recent years. Meditating with the sole intention of increasing your effectiveness in your tasks can be unskillful. Meditating to avoid dealing directly with problems in your life or in your world, or to treat the symptoms but not the source of the suffering, is unskillful. Consider the difference between yoga as mindfulness practice and “yoga” as a competitive sport. When you hear about “mindfulness” in various contexts, ask yourself whether you can recognize wisdom and compassion in it, or whether there should be quotes around it.

Appendix XIII. Thoughts and suggestions for maintaining your practice.

Stages: 1) Unconsciously unmindful. 2) Consciously unmindful. 3) Consciously mindful. 4) Unconsciously mindful. This practice takes time to develop, but the changes that result are permanent. Real growth and learning can never be forced. All we can do is establish favorable conditions (a little formal practice every day, a little informal practice every day) and allow things to take their own course in their own time. Start where you are, with the small stuff, and proceed gradually. You may eventually get around to family, and other advanced practices.

The seven attitudes are helpful both in cultivating moment-to-moment awareness and in keeping perspective on mindfulness practice in your life over the long term. For example, patience is important in a moment-to-moment sense in sitting meditation, letting go of the story in the mind over and over. It is also important in a long-term sense, in not rushing the practice as it unfolds at its own pace in your life. If you ever find that you feel bored or frustrated or impatient or apathetic about the practice in the long-term sense, consider the seven attitudes. One or more of them may give you an idea of where you're stuck, and how to get past it.

You can't unlearn whatever you have already experienced, so you will likely notice some changes in awareness even if you never meditate again. However, the breadth and depth of your experience will only grow if you continue to practice. The new habit of letting go of thinking and coming back to the present takes a lot of reinforcement to maintain, and even more to strengthen. This obviously calls for some discipline, but it is helpful to think of it as the kind of discipline you need to brush your teeth, not the discipline of going to the gym to work out; not self-improvement, but life maintenance. If you are drawn to this practice and intend to continue with it, hold it lightly so that it does not become a burden. The practice will be useful and meaningful only to the extent that you can incorporate it naturally and comfortably into your life. What this means to you will change over time. So, try not to rush, strive, or expect results, and don't judge yourself if you find you are doing less formal practice, or even none for a time. You can always come back and pick it up again, just like watching the breath. Since the "goal" of the practice is not to become someone else, but to be more fully who you already are, there's nothing to "achieve", no place to "arrive". You're already there, you just have to let go of your story to experience it directly. This is the opposite of effort, in the usual sense of the word.

When I get to heaven, they will not ask me, "Why were you not Moses?" They will ask me, "Why were you not Zusya? Why did you not become what only you could become?"

-The Hassidic Rabbi Zusya

This practice is also not meant to be a crusade. Truly, "the only life you can save" is your own. Trying to sell mindfulness to anyone who isn't already looking for it tends to dissipate the inward energy you need to deal with your own poor crazy mind, and can generate a lot of judging. You don't have to advertise your practice any more than you have to advertise brushing your teeth. If you want the people around you to benefit from

mindfulness, just work on yourself, remember that we “inter-are”, and trust in the butterfly effect.

On the other hand, it is VERY important to find other meditators with whom you can practice and talk. Mindfulness practice is hard work, maybe the hardest work there is, and having a group (= more than one person) to provide mutual support and encouragement greatly improves your chances of staying with it. Fortunately, you can find groups almost everywhere these days.

It is also very helpful to practice with other teachers whenever you have the chance. Mindfulness can really only be taught from experience. There are many ways to practice, and other teachers may not only know more, but may present things in a way that is simply more accessible to you, or in a way that sheds new light on what you have learned already. Most importantly, you are different every day, so the same instructions that didn’t mean much to you today might really open you up another day, when you are ready to receive them.

And finally, you are always welcome to contact me to talk about problems and/or progress with your practice.