



**MEDITATION ROOM PROGRAM:
10-Year Anniversary Summary Report, 2007-2017
Prepared by Fran Grace, Faculty Steward
Website: click [here](#).**

Introduction

The Meditation Room opened in 2007, the first contemplative classroom of its kind in the country, as reported in [InsideHigherEd](#). The program’s mission is “Changing the World from the Inside-Out,” which we carry out through a wide range of academic courses, community outreaches, and public events. Contemplative learning helps participants forge a relationship between their inner and outer worlds. They come to see that they belong to, and have a responsibility for, the interdependent web of life. In this way, the program fosters learning environments that fulfill the root meaning of education (*educare*): “to bring forth what lies within.” Contemplative methods are diverse and applicable to most academic disciplines.¹

Meditation and Yoga classes have had a long history at the University, which values holistic and experiential learning. Professor Patricia Geary (CRWR), for example, has been teaching a Yoga course for decades. Professor Fran Grace (REL) began teaching a Meditation course in 2004. However, there was no dedicated space for contemplative learning. In 2007, Professor Lorenzo Garbo (ECON), a practitioner of Zen, presented the idea to then-Provost Nancy Carrick (ENG) of creating a meditation space on campus. Carrick, Garbo, Geary, and Grace made the crucial decision that it be a *classroom* space so that the inner arts and inner sciences would be integrated very explicitly into the college curriculum. Larsen 210 was an underused classroom due to poor acoustics, which made it perfect for renovation into the Meditation Room. Prof. Grace worked with Facilities over the summer of 2007 to oversee the renovation project. An alumnus interior decorator created and donated the curtains that grace the room.

¹<http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/acmhe> is a national resource for educators.

The Advisory Committee consists of faculty from across the University—Fran Grace (Steward of the program), Pat Geary (CRWR), Lorenzo Garbo (ECON), Lillian Larsen (REL), Karen Derris (REL), Bill Huntley (REL), Lisa Olson (BIOL), Kimberly Cass (BUS). Its programming and classes extend beyond the College of Arts and Sciences to the School of Education, the School of Continuing Studies, the School of Business, Student Affairs, and the Inland Empire community. Denise Spencer has served as Department Coordinator since our inception, and she brings vital talents and training to the program office, event planning, communications, social media, and our outreach to the campus and community. We have been very fortunate to evolve our program with strong support from the Deans across the university, Provost, and President.

There is a continual daily flow of residents from the public community into our sphere, some of whom drive over an hour to attend our classes. The composition of these learning environments is increasingly intergenerational and multicultural. The program has become a hub for seekers from all walks of life, looking for meaningful community and wanting to learn spiritual practices that can help them deal with the stressors of modern life.

Academic Courses

CAS courses taught in the Meditation Room:

REL 210 - Introduction to Meditation (Huntley/ Grace/ Garbo/ Holubeck)
REL 290 – Intermediate Meditation Practicum (Grace)²
REL 250 - Compassion (Grace)
REL 360 - Advanced Zazen (Huntley)
JNST – Yoga (Geary)
JNST – Tai Chi (Su)
REL – Yoga: Theory and Practice (Ackley)
REL 260 - Guided Imagery for Healing (Culpepper)
REL 260 – Meditation and Writing (Holubeck)
REL 323 – Quest of the Mystics (Grace)
JNST FYS – Fearlessness (Garbo and Schoonmaker)
Prouidian Seminar – Greed (Garbo)
REL 260 - Getting High, Staying High: Paths to Peace and Happiness (Grace)
JNST – Sufi Path of Love (Grace)
REL 260 - The Way Seeking Mind (Garbo)
BIOL 116 - Neuroscience of Meditation (Olson)
REL 358 - Psychology and Religion (Grace)

²At times taught in U-Hall event room to accommodate enrollment of over 50 students.

CAS courses not taught in the Meditation Room that include contemplative components and/or relate to the mission of the Meditation Room:

REL 125: World Religions (Larsen/ Derris/ Huntley/ Tayyen)

FYS: Mindfulness, Food Choices, and Health (Ko)

FYS: Interpersonal Mindfulness (Rabinowitz)

BIOL 104: Introduction to Neuroscience (Olson)

PSYCH 344 – Abnormal Psychology (Ko)

PSYCH 440 – Counseling Psychology (Ko)

PSYCH 450 - Health Psychology (Ko)

For two years, Prof. Karen Derris took groups of college students to India on a unique JNST travel course called Sustainable Compassion, which included extended dialogues with His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, the fruits of which are two books of the Karmapa's teachings, co-edited by Prof. Derris: [*The Heart is Noble*](#) and [*Interconnected*](#).

The Value of Inner Education

College students say they *want* this kind of inner education, but for the most part they do not find it within American universities. According to the national survey of college students conducted by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute—the largest survey research ever done on the spiritual / religious / existential attitudes of the U.S. college population—college students have high levels of interest in spiritual, religious, humanitarian and existential matters. The study found that a majority of entering students expected their college education to develop their “self-understanding” and be supportive of their inquiries into the “meaning and purpose of life.” They also expressed the desire to become “more loving and compassionate people.” However, the students’ expectations were largely not met.³

In *theory*, self-knowledge and self-cultivation have always been viewed as foundational to liberal arts education. As Diana Chapman Walsh, president of Wellesley College, wrote in 2005: “Moral citizenship arises out of an inner core of integrity....The liberal arts disciplines instill in students humility, awareness of the limits of their knowledge, eagerness to hear responsible critique, appreciation that the first and most

³UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose: Executive Summary* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2005); Elizabeth Redden, “More Spiritual, But Not in Church,” *Inside Higher Ed.Com* (December 18, 2007).

difficult obligation of a citizen is the Socratic injunction to ‘know thyself.’”⁴ In 2007, the Association of American Colleges and Universities published *College Learning for the New Global Century*.” The document highlights the importance of interior, humanitarian accomplishments as an outcome of liberal education. It is precisely this inner learning that distinguishes “liberal” education from “instrumental” education:

Throughout history, liberal education—especially the arts and humanities—has been a constant resource not just for civic life but for the inner life of self-discovery, values, moral inspiration, spiritual quests and solace, and the deep pleasures of encountering beauty, insight, and expressive power. Ultimately, it is this dimension—serious engagement with questions of values, principles, and larger meanings—that marks the difference between instrumental learning and liberal learning.⁵

In specifying the interior qualities that befit a “liberal artist,” this recent AAC&U document emphasizes the importance of cultivating “inner fortitude, self-knowledge, and personal renewal.” It underscores the key values of “empathy,” and “the ability to care about and even identify with perspectives and circumstances other than one’s own.”⁶

In practice, however, few universities provide training in the disciplines of self-inquiry, the search for meaning, and cultivation of compassion and empathy. It is not enough to read about the theory of such concepts any more than it is enough for chemistry students to read a theory of chemistry. Students learn chemistry by hands-on practice in the laboratory. The same need for *applied* learning is recognized for studies in business, creative arts, psychology, environmental science, teaching, administration, etc. In terms of inner education, we have found that students want and benefit from experiential learning in the *inner* arts and sciences.

Benefits to Students

What are the benefits of contemplative courses to college students? Based on ten years of [qualitative data](#), we have seen a positive impact on students, across a range of indicators: reduction of prejudice, increase in compassion toward self and others,

⁴Diana Chapman Walsh, quoted in J. Simmer-Brown and F. Grace, *Meditation and the Classroom* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), xvii.

⁵*College Learning for the New Global Century* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007), 3, 22.

⁶*College Learning*, 6, 23.

enhancement of attention and thinking capacities, increase in self-regulation of stress and mental-emotional processes, reduction in depression and anxiety, prevention of suicide, improvement of relationships and relational capacity, reduction or resolution of addiction, increase in physical health and well-being, enhanced creativity, increased motivation for academic success, and more.⁷ We have also conducted quantitative research on the effects of the [Compassion course](#) on student wellbeing.⁸

Improvement of physical health is often a byproduct of meditation, as noted by Chemistry major, Steven Mee, who reported that the meditation course decreased his blood pressure significantly due to the changed outlook on life that reduced his anxiety, ADD, and judgmental attitude.

In December of last year, four months ago, my average blood pressure was tested to be around 145/80. A healthy 22-year-old should not have hypertension. The last time I checked my blood pressure, last week, it was at 118/55. The significant difference is most likely a result of my decreased stress coming from my daily meditation practice. — Steven Mee, chemistry major

Students say that what they learn in our classes helps them to be better learners overall, [as described in the Huffington Post](#). It's fairly obvious that self-knowledge enhances *all* knowledge. As one art student in the Meditation class wrote: "You must cleanse your mirror in order to see yourself and others with an undistorted view. [SEP]Meditation cleans my mirror." It also enhances critical thinking capacity.⁹ Even students who fail the Meditation course say they are happy they took it because of the life skills they learned.¹⁰

Contemplative methods teach students to self-regulate the stress response and thereby increase their learning capacity. Stress blocks learning. It arrests the brain functions that are needed for learning by inducing self-preservation, which shuts out new information, literally producing a "closed mind." Even short-term stress, lasting just a few hours, can

⁷F. Grace, "What Students Say They Learn," in Simmer-Brown and Grace, eds., *Meditation and the Classroom*, (SUNY, 2011).

⁸"The impact of meditation curriculum on physiological and psychosocial stress, well-being, and correlates of academic success" – ongoing interdisciplinary research by Profs. Lisa Olson (BIOL), Celine Ko (PSYCH), and Fran Grace (REL), since 2013. A portion of the research is published in the *Journal of American College Health* (2018).

⁹ David Sable, *The Impacts Of Reflective Practices On The Dispositions For Critical Thinking In Undergraduate Courses*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Dalhousie University), August 2012.

¹⁰*A Semester Within*, documentary film, 50 min., produced by F. Grace, (2008).

weaken brain-cell communication in the areas needed for learning.¹¹ When students are stressed out, what we teach them doesn't get in.

It is common for universities to value academic achievements, a heavy workload, demanding rigor, productivity, and engagement with the world. These pressures can lead to a stressful culture of workaholicism that equates human worth with quantities of "doing." A multiplicity of goals becomes counter-productive if students are not taught how to discern the priorities consistent with their own inner values. Contemplative inquiry gives the space and methodologies for them to discover their core values and live a meaningful life from that core.

Intergenerational Learning

The Meditation Room program has always been a learning space for people of different ages and walks of life and hub for circles of people with a global concern. College students from other countries such as China, Vietnam, and India and Lebanon appreciate our offerings because, through a spiritual practice, they keep alive a key aspect of their heritage. ESRI employees who come from other countries, especially India, attend our free public community sessions.

Since the first semester it was opened, 2007, the Meditation Room program received requests from older local residents who wanted to attend our academic classes. They were invited to come on an informal basis. Their presence in the classroom was found to be enriching for college students.

In May of 2014, we created a formal avenue for local residents of all ages to register for the Compassion class through the School of Continuing Studies. This was repeated and extended to the Meditation Practicum course for 2015. Lillian Larsen's course in Christian Scriptures had a very successful intergenerational component in Spring 2017.

The intergenerational dynamic exponentially increases the learning and meaningfulness of the course material. In the Compassion course, for example, the college students got to hear from the older adults what it was like to grow up in India with parents who worked for Gandhi's revolution, or what it was like to visit the Dalai Lama at his home, or what it was like to be an attorney in a law office, principle in a high school, or a single mom with two kids. This kind of educational dynamic isn't about facts, dates in history,

¹¹Y. Chen, C. Dubé, C. Burgdorff, T. Z. Baramof, "Rapid Loss of Dendritic Spines after Stress Involves Derangement of Spine Dynamics by Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone," *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 12 March 2008, 28(11): 2903-2911.

or theory. It is about wisdom. It opens the space for genuine interactions that heal long-standing divides, [as described in this article](#). A 75-year-old member of the Compassion course noted the lifelong nature of learning: “Compassion is a lifetime work, and I’m glad I’m only 75!”

Free Community Public Classes and Events

We have managed to create a public program that is rich in diversity and depth, with a minimal annual budget. This is possible due to the goodwill of local experts, faculty members, alumnae who wanted “to give back” by teaching for us, and even parents who were visiting their child on campus and offered a class while they were here.

Currently, we offer 4 weekly classes in Meditation and Yoga. The composition of the classes tends to be 70% local residents, 20% students, 10% faculty/staff.

Community Classes - here is a sampling of our topics:

Restorative Yoga (Pat Geary, faculty)

Zazen (Lorenzo Garbo / Bill Huntley, faculty)

Loving Kindness Meditation (F. Grace, Valerie Cusson, alum)

Introduction to Meditation (F. Grace)

Opening the Heart – Universal Kindness (visiting Tibetan Buddhist monks)

Simplicity (Elder Pavlos visiting from Egypt)

Stress-Reduction and Meditation (Swami Chidatmananda visiting from India)

Labyrinth Walk (F. Grace)

Buddhist Chant – Juseige (Brian Hamilton, School of Business staff)

Zen Meditation on Fridays (William Wesson, grad student, School of Education)

Meditation for People of Color and Allies– Series (Valerie Cusson, alum)

Qigong Breathing (David Beaudry, alum)

Gentle Yoga (Mina Jain, local resident)

Kriya Yoga (Armound Mahmoudi, local resident)

Yoga on Monday Morning (Ian Wittenmeyer, local resident)

Contemplative Music and Sound Art (Marco Schindelmann, faculty)

Sufi Poetry and Music (Sean Longstreet, alum, and F. Grace)

Centering Prayer (F. Grace)

Jungian Active Imagination (Diane Eller-Boyko, local Jungian analyst)

Dreamwork - Small Group Series (Diane Eller-Boyko, with Meggan Austin, alum)

Mother Teresa’s Work of Love (Sister Callisita, visiting from India)

Prayers of the Heart – Sufi and Christian (F. Grace)

Daoist Quiet Sitting and Self-Massage (Louis Komjathy, visiting from USD)

Byzantine Chant, Greek Orthodox Church (Xenia and Erich Enke, local residents)
Graceful Embodiment: Fundamentals of T'ai Chi Ch'uan (Kimberly Cass, faculty)
Sufi Practice with Kirtan and Zikr (Gitanjali Lora Rivera, parent)
Forgiveness Meditations (F. Grace, with Nathan Yarrell, local resident)
Mindfulness Groups for Students (Michael Novak, Counseling Center; F. Grace and Lorraine Young, Counseling Center)
Walking Meditation – Outdoor Aromatherapy (Carrie Anne Parker, landscape artist)
Deep Relaxation (F. Grace, Urmila More, local resident)
Breath Awareness in Sufism (F. Grace)
Quaker Silent Meeting (Jim Spickard, faculty)
Contemplative Crafting (Kelly Templeton, staff)
Ch'an Buddhist Saturday Retreat (Gilbert Gutierrez, local resident)
The Jesus Prayer (Father Maximos, local resident)
Progressive Relaxation (Lorraine Young, Counseling Center)
Meditations for Health and Healing (F. Grace)
Feldenkreis Method (Donna Eshelmann, visiting from L.A.)

Special Events

We estimate that the Meditation Room program has offered 30-40 sessions/ events per year. Attendance at community practice sessions ranges from 1 to 30, while attendance at large events ranges from 75 to 2,500 people.

Here is a *small sampling* of recent Public Events, and some of the media reports:

2011 – [Tibetan Buddhist monks from Drepung monastery](#) to come to Redlands for 5 days. They constructed a Sand Painting Mandala in the Chapel. 2,500 visitors came.

2013 – [Swami Chidatmananda](#) from India gives talk on stress-reduction

2014 – [Co-founders of the Growing a Global Heart foundation](#) – addressing issues of climate change, Ghana, racial healing, and African-American activism and spirituality.

2014 – [Dialogue event with Dr. Adam Ackley on his transgender journey](#), which was national breaking news at the time, as he was the first Christian minister in the country to come out as transgender.

2015 – [Film Screening with Alexander Vesely, grandson of Viktor Frankl](#), the famous Holocaust survivor. Vesely is an award-winning filmmaker. We arranged for him to

screen his documentary about his grandfather, *Viktor & I*, and guest lecture in three courses in ENG, REL and PSYCH that were studying Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

2015 – [International Exhibit on Mother Teresa](#), on loan from the Mother Teresa Center in Tijuana, Mexico.

2015 - Film screening, the “Life of Yogananda,” at the Krikorian Cinema.

2015 – [Maitreya Loving Kindness Relic Tour](#), containing the relics of Buddhist masters. 1500 visitors. The three-day event was inaugurated by an interfaith ceremony, with participation from our university chaplain, local Native American elders, Cambodian Buddhist dancers and monks, Swami Chidatmananda from India, and others.

2017 – [Film screening](#) of “As She Is” by Sufi filmmaker Megan McFeeley, with special Q and A, in conjunction with [JNST Seminar, Sufi Path of Love](#).

Outreach

Over the years, the teaching mission of the Meditation Room Program has extended to various organizations and groups, upon request, such as:

- STEP program of first generation students
- CHAMPS program for teenagers
- Casa De La Vista affordable housing for senior citizens
- Arrowhead Medical Center – training for physicians and medical residents
- Girl Scouts of America – local headquarters
- College Success Symposium
- Spirituality and Mental Health Symposium
- Center for Spiritual Living – Riverside
- Sustainability Festival
- Wellness Fair
- Alumnae Weekend Mini-Course
- Counseling Center
- Office of Community Standards and Wellbeing (formerly Student Conduct)
- Department Coordinators
- Board of Trustees spouses
- Various student groups such as athletic teams, dorm communities, PRIDE
- Central City Lutheran Mission – San Bernardino

Overall the University has seen an increase in the use of inner practices to support student wellbeing. For example, Robin Cooper, the Associate Director of the Counseling Center, offers a Mindfulness and Stress Management Experiential Workshop.

Radio Program – KDAWG

Shapari Samimi ('19), KDAWG station manager and a student in the Meditation course and Compassion seminar, has worked with Prof. Fran Grace to produce a radio show/podcast at KDAWG station. Called [Heart Matters](#), the show features interviews with students, faculty and special event guests.

Wider Influence

Beyond the campus, our Meditation Room program has become an exemplar of contemplative education around the country. We regularly receive requests from colleges and universities far and wide (even internationally) for information on contemplative education. Faculty from other universities ask to come and look at the Meditation Room and get information on what we do. Each year, several universities contact us, wanting to know how to create a similar program at their campus. Others contact us and come for day-long visits as part of their research on meditation in higher education. Our publications are read in undergraduate and graduate classrooms around the country.

Summary of Our Research and Publications Related to Contemplative Education

Our groundbreaking curriculum is highlighted in publications by other researchers, such as the book published by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, based on its 10-year study of universities nationwide: *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*, (Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Our faculty and students have published and presented many different scholarly works about our curriculum. Below is a sample listing. We are grateful for partial funding from the Trust in Meditation Process and also the University of Redlands.

Professors Lisa Olson (BIOL) and Celine Ko (PSYCH) have done extraordinary work to train undergraduate researchers and mentor them to give presentations around the country.

(*denotes undergraduate author)

BOOKS

2011. *Meditation and the Classroom*, F. Grace and J. Simmer-Brown (State University of New York Press).

JOURNAL ARTICLES

2018. C. Ko, F. Grace, G. Chavez,* S. Grimley,* E. Dalrymple,* L. Olson. ["Effect of Seminar on Compassion on Student Self-compassion, Mindfulness and Well-being: A Randomized Controlled Trial,"](#) *The Journal of American College Health*.

2011. F. Grace, "Learning is a Path not a Goal: Contemplative Pedagogy – Its Principles and Practices," *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April), 99-124.

2011. F. Grace, "Contemplative Pedagogy: FAQs," with Thomas Coburn, Anne Carolyn Klein, Louis Komjathy, Harold Roth and Judith Simmer-Brown, *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April), 167-174.

2009. F. Grace, Guest Editor, ["Spirituality in Higher Education: Problems, Practices, and Programs"](#) in *Journal of Religion and Education*, 36:2 (Summer).

2009. F. Grace, ["A Pedagogy of Reverence,"](#) *Journal of Religion and Education*, 36:2 (Summer), 102-123.

2009. F. Grace, ["Breathing in Suffering, Breathing out Compassion,"](#) *UCLA Spirituality in Higher Education Newsletter*, Volume 5, Issue 2 (May), 1-10.

2009. F. Grace, ["A Contemplative Response: The Part IS the Whole,"](#) with Judith Simmer-Brown, *Journal of Religion and Education*, 36:2 (Summer), 150-152.

BOOK CHAPTERS

2018. F. Grace, "Spirituality within Higher Education," *Our Breath Within: The Heart of Spirituality*, ed. Michael Brannigan, (New York City, NY: Rowman & Littlefield).

2015. F. Grace, "A Semester Within," in *Learning Journeys with the Labyrinth: Creating Reflective Space in Higher Education*, edited by Jan Sellers and Bernard Moss, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan).

2013. F. Grace, "The Power of Meditation in College Learning," in *Embodied Pathways to Wisdom and Social Transformation*, edited by Jing Lin, Edward Brantmeier, Rebecca Oxford, (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing).

2011. F. Grace, "From Content, to Context, to Contemplation: One Professor's Journey," in Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace, eds., *Meditation and the Classroom* (SUNY Press), 47-64

2011. F. Grace, "Meditation in the Classroom: What Do the Students Say They Learn?" in Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace, eds., *Meditation and the Classroom*, (SUNY Press), 237-250.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2016. *Acevedo M., *Alford Z., *Anigbogu E., *Brown A., *Dalrymple E., *Ellingwood L., *Espinoza M.-A., *Grimley S., *Hawkins G., *Kammer K., *Krause K., Grace F., Ko C, and Olson L.E. *International Symposium for Contemplative Studies*, San Diego, CA. Some unexpected relationships between self-compassion, anger, and binge drinking.

2016. *Brown, A and Olson L.E. *41st West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference*, Point Loma, CA. Using heart rate variability to test the effect of self-compassion, trait forgiveness and prayer on anger recovery in college students.

2016. *Cuomo S., Ko C.M., and Olson L.E. *Western Psychological Association Convention*, Long Beach, CA. An exploration on self-compassion and disordered eating.

2015. Ko C.M., Olson L.E., and Grace F. *Society of Behavioral Medicine*, San Antonio, TX. An exploration of the effects of a seminar on compassion on student psychological outcomes.

2015. *Schenker, L., Ko, C.M., Olson, L., Grace, F. *Western Psychological Association 95th Annual Convention*. Las Vegas, NV. Stress and body dissatisfaction in first generation students.

2015. *Chavez G.N., *Dalrymple E., *Grimley S., and Olson L.E. *40th West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference*, San Diego, CA. Psychophysiological impact of meditation on stress.

2014. . *Chavez G.N., *Dalrymple E., *Grimley S., and Olson L.E. *22nd Annual Southern California Conference for Undergraduate Research*, Fullerton, CA Psychophysiological impact of meditation on stress.

2014. Grace F., Ko, C.M., and Olson L.E. *American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting*, San Diego, CA, 2014. Mindful teaching and learning: contemplative studies in the university setting.

2013. *Heuerman A.C., *Chavez G.N., *Green M.C., *Huerta M., *Ov J., *Overton-Harris P.L., Grace F., Ko C.M., and Olson L.E. *Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting*, San Diego, CA, 2013. Use of a modified Trier Social Stress Test to assess an undergraduate meditation course.

2013. Olson L.E. *Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting*, San Diego, CA. An interdisciplinary, experiential, one-month course on the neuroscience of meditation.

2013. *Hernandez, M., *Gannon, C., Ko, C.M., Olson, L., Grace, F. *Western Psychological Association 93rd Annual Convention*. Reno, NV. Impact of one-day mindfulness intervention on mindfulness and state anxiety

DOCUMENTARY FILM

2008. *A Semester Within*, 50 min., directed by Fran Grace and co-produced with Richard Spencer.

Looking Ahead

Internationalization:

In Spring 2019, we will have our first International Visiting Scholar, Srividya Chaityana, a Hindu monk from Hyderabad, India. She will enroll in contemplative courses and also teach a community course in the Meditation Room.

Ideas for future community classes:

1. Listening and Conversation Group (discussion of podcasts on spiritual topics)
2. Book Club
3. Sister Circle
4. "In the Company of Friends" weekly group for people to share their experiences, hope, questions, struggles, dreams, and sources of inspiration.

Ideas for future program endeavors:

5. Labyrinth Workshop and Labyrinth Facilitation Certification
6. Compassion training for Medical and Hospice Practitioners
7. Certificate Program(s) in the areas of Mindfulness, Compassion, and Contemplative Studies. Specific emphasis not yet clear. Conroy Reynolds and Janee Both-Gragg in the SOE and Dan Otter in the SCS have been vital to those conversations.
8. Intergenerational courses – continuing to grow in this direction, with an eye to the inclusion of University Village residents in the next ten years.

10th Anniversary Celebration – Q & A with Faculty Steward, F. Grace

Are you celebrating the "room" or the "program"?

We are celebrating the Meditation Room "Program," because what we do is much more than a room!! The Meditation Room opened in 2007. It wasn't called a program back then but it quickly evolved to encompass programming far beyond four walls! We have events all over the campus – film screenings, lectures, Dances of Universal Peace in University Hall, intergenerational academic courses, scientific research on meditation, and much more. -- and we have even extended some of our programming out into the larger IE community.

With regard to the academic courses, what do they entail? Is it more than meditation sessions? Are there other components to the courses – outside reading, papers, research?

The academic courses held in the Meditation Room are diverse. We offer 2 courses that are specifically for the theory and practice of meditation, and also 2 courses for the theory and practice of Yoga. These 4 courses are electives and "practicum"-oriented. And then we offer 7+ courses that entail a heavy reading and assignment load and that also incorporate a range of contemplative practices such as mindfulness, walking meditation, nature observation, etc. In the Compassion course, for example, students read 7 books, do exams, oral presentations, community service, and they also learn

several meditation practices that cultivate compassion. In that kind of course, the contemplative or meditative practices are **integrated** into a traditional academic course.

Some courses, while not held in the Meditation Room, are affiliated with the program. For example, Professor Celine Ko (PSYCH), offered a First Year Seminar on Mindfulness, Food Choices, and Health. While it is a traditional academic course, experiential activities on mindful eating and meditative practices were conducted throughout the semester.

I read that you started the meditation courses/program as an experiment. What prompted you to do so?

In 2004, I came back from a life-changing sabbatical and offered a meditation class on top of my normal load, with no extra pay. I had personally experienced the transformative effect of inner practices on concentration, mental and physical health, creativity, and heart intelligence. I wanted to see if such practices could benefit college students. Professor Pat Geary had been teaching a Yoga class for decades - what about meditation? I offered the course in the spirit of the classic dictum of liberal arts education, "Know thyself." In other words, self-knowledge is the foundation of all other knowledge. Inner practices such as meditation cultivate this vital self-knowledge. I didn't know if a meditation course would be meaningful to students, but in fact it turned out to be very beneficial and they asked for the course to be offered again. In 2007, Professor Lorenzo Garbo of the Economics Department (longtime practitioner of Zen meditation) proposed the idea of a Meditation Room to then-Provost Nancy Carrick, and we worked over the summer to renovate a classroom into the Meditation Room.

How popular has the Meditation Room been over the 10 years on campus for students?

We have several hundred students each week who use the room for a variety of reasons--- academic courses, free public community classes in meditation or yoga, or their own private practice. Students also come to the space for special, one-time meditation or yoga sessions for athletic teams, mindfulness exercises for peer counseling groups, and deep relaxation exercises for dorm communities. They say the room has a tranquil atmosphere, different from anywhere else on campus. They find it centering.

Why are the academic meditation courses important?

Students in the Meditation courses say, "This should be required for all college students!" What we're really talking about is the "inner arts and inner sciences," not just meditation. Whatever field they go into, it matters completely who they are **on the**

inside and whether they have learned how to work with their own mental and emotional reactions. A liberal arts education does well to include courses that introduce students to time-tested methods for self-development and self-inquiry. On a basic level, contemplative learning is an inner training, and as such, improves the intellectual and attentional capacity of our students. As one pre-med student told me, "Of all the classes I have taken so far, none has improved me as a thinker as much as the contemplative class...."

"This class helped me as a thinker, as a scientist, more than any other." Just as importantly, students learn through meditation how to access the **intelligence of the heart**, which holds the key for our future as a global community. Empathy and compassion are qualities of the heart and can be cultivated. They will be the basis of any real solution to the pressing problems we face in the world.

In what ways does the practice of meditation help students (whether personal practice, free sessions or academic course)?

Inner practices such as meditation equip students with life skills. They learn how to reduce test anxiety, speech anxiety, insomnia, substance abuse, self-harming, negative thinking, etc. They connect to their inborn goodness and their innate capacities for resilience, lovingness, empathy, integrity, meaningfulness, and overall wellbeing.

Why are the Meditation Room's community classes open to the public?

Two reasons. One, to offer something truly beneficial to the public, to contribute something positive to our community. Our mission is "Changing the world from the inside-out." Our classes help people from all walks of life to develop inner peace and compassion, and this helps everyone around them. We know we offer something that will help participants and the world at large. A genuine sense of community has emerged among those who come here. Some people come once, and other people come weekly, for years.

Two, to provide for our college students a multi-generational "hub" where they can have meaningful encounters with people of all ages, backgrounds, and from various professions. Students say the interactions get them "out of the ivory tower" and connected to "the real world." They meet lawyers, school principals, psychologists, journalists, nurses, etc. They see that learning is truly lifelong!