

Faculty of Science
Department of Psychology and Neuroscience

PSYO/NESC 4225.03
Fall 2020

The Science of Mindfulness

- Instructor:*** Dr. Patricia McMullen
- E-mail address:*** Patricia.McMullen@dal.ca
- Office Hours:*** Wednesday, 3:00am to 4:00 pm.
Available on Collaborate through the course
Brightspace page.
- Class Hours:*** Thursday, 10:05-11:55 am (Synchronous)
- Pre-requisites:*** Instructor's permission.
- Course exclusion:*** PSYO 6225.03, [PSYO 4001.03](#) (offered in
2017/18, 18/19, 19/20)

Description:

In this seminar, you will learn about the practice of mindfulness from an experiential stand-point. Investigation of the effects that this secular practice is purported to have on cognition, emotions, the brain and our bodies will be explored through the scientific research literature. Problems with this research and some of the claims made about the practice of mindfulness itself will also be discussed. Finally, a debate will be held about the pros and cons of integrating mindfulness into society, more widely.

The class will run in a seminar format emphasizing student presentations and discussion.

The first two classes will not involve student presentations but rather Introductions by the instructor to the Course and the Practice of

Mindfulness. Thereafter, the next nine classes will involve 30 minutes for each of three presentations by three (or two) students on assigned readings. Each presentation will involve 25 minutes of presentation and 5 minutes of questions. The last 20 minutes of each class will be for mindfulness practice.

The penultimate class will include a discussion about the outcomes from your journaling. The final class will include a debate on bringing mindfulness into society and a discussion of our experience of mindfulness in and out of the course setting. Students from another course on mindfulness may join us in this debate and discussion.

Learning Objectives:

At the completion of the course, students who have fully participated will be prepared to:

- Critically evaluate and synthesize research on mindfulness
- Verbally report and debate multiple perspectives about mindfulness
- Know several mindfulness techniques that can be applied to their lives

Course Materials:

- Course Brightspace page

Assessment:

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Grade Percentage</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Present 2 Papers	40 % (20% each)	Topics chosen by Sept 15
Debate	20 %	December 3
Written Report	20 %	December 11
Class participation	20 %	

Grades are based on class participation (20%), class presentations (40%), participation in a debate (20 %) and a written report (20 %). In addition, students can earn up to 3 extra credits for participating in experiments approved for the Psychology & Neuroscience Department's subject pool SONA system.

Presentation Mark:

The mark for your **Presentations** will be based on:

Content:

- Demonstration of an understanding of the issues, techniques and conclusions drawn about the paper(s).
- Critique of methods, analysis and/or conclusions.

Style:

- Clarity of vocal and visual presentation.
- Engaging use of graphics and text.

Each week we will cover a different topic related to mindfulness. By **September 15** you will need to commit to orally presenting two topics, one on each of two separate days. The research papers associated with each topic are listed for each week under the *Content* section of the *Brightspace* page for the course. Choose topics that interest you and then choose one paper that is associated with each of those topics for you to read and present. Paper(s) with an asterisk (*) in the title are key papers that will have to be presented by someone that week. By **September 15**, make first, second, third and fourth choices for presentation topics and send this information to Dr. McMullen at patricia.mcmullen@dal.ca. You will be told which of two papers you will present by the second class. In this email, also indicate if you want to be on the *pro* or *con* side of the debate about *Mindfulness in Society* during the last class on December 3.

Participation Mark:

The **Participation** mark will be partly based on creating a **reflective journal (4%)** that you will start during the first week of class. In it you can note your barriers to mindfulness practice, how your impressions about information and practice from the course evolves over the term...really anything related to your experience of mindfulness. Keep track of how often you are practicing and when. Does practice make a difference to how you feel/act? What types of meditation do you resonate with or not? Be your own laboratory. What works for you and what doesn't? This could take about 15 minutes each time, with entries 1-3 times per week. We will discuss your journaling during one of the last three classes **(4%)**.

As part of your participation mark, you will also be expected to post **questions** on the Discussion board of the *Brightspace* page for the **two** papers that are presented each week **(8%)**. Note: even if you are presenting

that week, you are expected to pose a question on the other person's presentation for that week. Questions will be due the Monday of each week so that the presenters can incorporate the questions into their presentations. You will also be expected to participate in the discussion during each presentation (8%).

The Debate:

The debate takes place during the last scheduled class, December 3. You will have indicated by **Sept 15** whether you wish to be on the pro or con side of the debate. You may not be able to be on your preferred side if there are too many requests for one side or the other. The topic for debate is: *Should mindfulness be integrated into society to a greater extent than it currently is?* **Pro:** *If so, why and how?* **Con:** *If not, why?* You are expected to work together with other members of the class who are on the same side of the debate as you. Each side will have 40 minutes of presentation time with a final 30 minutes to discuss the outcome of the debate, talk about our experience of the course and mindfulness and to engage in some mindfulness practice.

Written Report:

You are expected to submit a written report through *Brightspace* by December 11 of no more than 5 pages in length. The topic can be: 1) a position from the debate, OR 2) an integration of your experience of mindfulness as reflected in your journal, OR 3) a synopsis of a topic that was covered in class that particularly interests you.

Conversion of numerical grades to Final Letter Grades follows the Dalhousie Common Grade Scale:

Letter Grade	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
	90-100	85-89	80-84	77-79	73-76	70-72	65-69	60-64	55-59	50-54	<50

Course Policies:

You are expected to attend every class in the Collaborate classroom and to have read all of the papers that will be discussed that week, whether you are presenting or not.

If you will be missing a class, you must inform Dr. McMullen in advance of the class. Alternate arrangements will be made depending on whether you miss a class as a presenter or a participant. You must submit a Declaration of Absence form for any missed classes. You are allowed to submit 2 of these forms.

<p><i>Week 1:</i> September 10</p>	<p><i>Organization and Overview of the Class. What is mindfulness?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the course and experiential practice by Dr. McMullen • Mindfulness Meditation Taster Video- J. Kabat-Zinn • Ricard et al. Mind of the Meditator. <i>Scientific American</i>, (2014) vol. 311 (5) pp. 38-45. • Submit choices for presentations and side of debate to Dr. McMullen (mcmullen@dal.ca) by September 15
<p><i>Week 2:</i> September 17</p>	<p><i>How does mindfulness meditation work? How do we practice it? Are there different types of practice?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B. K. Hölzel, S.W. Lazar, T. Gard, Z. Schuman-Olivier, D. R. Vag, and U. Ott. How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action From a Conceptual and Neural Perspective. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> (2011) vol. 6 (6) pp. 537-559. • Introduction to different types of Mindfulness practice
<p><i>Week 3:</i> September 24</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect the mind and cognition?</i> 3 presentations</p>
<p><i>Week 4:</i> October 1</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect the brain?</i> 3 presentations</p>
<p><i>Week 5:</i> October 8</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect the body?</i> 3 presentations</p>
<p><i>Week 6:</i> October 15</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect Emotion Regulation, Affect, Mood (Depression & Anxiety)?</i> 3 presentations</p>
<p><i>Week 7:</i> October 22</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect Interpersonal Relationships, Satisfaction and Prosocial Behaviour?</i> 3 presentations</p>
<p><i>Week 8:</i> October 29</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect Addictions?</i> 3 presentations</p>

<p>Week 9: November 5</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect Pain?</i> 2 presentations</p> <p>Organizing for Debate</p>
	<p>Study Break: November 9-13</p>
<p>Week 10: November 19</p>	<p><i>How does regular mindfulness practice affect Stress?</i> 2 presentations</p> <p>Buffer class</p>
<p>Week 11: November 26</p>	<p><i>Problems with the Research on Mindfulness</i> 2 presentations</p> <p><i>Discussion about keeping a journal.</i></p>
<p>Week 12: December 3</p>	<p><i>Debate: Should Mindfulness be more widely integrated into Society?</i> <i>If not, why? If so, why and how?</i></p>