

Integrating Mindfulness Strategies into Post Secondary Curriculum: A Contemplative Thought

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The prevalence of mental health-related concerns, including stress and mental illness, continues to rise among post secondary students in Canada (Linden, 2021). A publicly distributed online survey to students across Ontario post secondary institutions revealed that 66.5% of the 448 respondents reported a decline in their mental health since starting their studies (Moghimi, 2023). Increased stress levels are not only linked to negative health outcomes but also poor academic performance (Gardner and Kerridge, 2019). Students are asking for assistance, and post secondary institutions pan-Canada wide, including Seneca, are prioritizing their mental health and wellbeing (Seneca Polytechnic, CICIC).

A technique proven to support the health and wellbeing of post secondary students is the practice of mindfulness (Gary, 2021; Lynch et al. 2018). Rooted in ancient and eastern traditions, mindfulness is a practice of intentional present moment awareness with an attitude of non-judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Research supports that consistent mindfulness practice can strengthen the neural pathways in our brain that play a role in building concentration, self-awareness, and emotional self-regulation (Tang et al. 2015).

Have you heard about the mindfulness-based programming Accessible Learning Services offers and what students are saying? Our service area has offered a wide variety of mindfulness interventions, including single session workshops, 3-5-week closed groups, a 7-week therapeutic yoga program and a 4-week evidenced-based mindfulness program known as Koru. Post-program, anonymous surveys from students indicated the mindfulness sessions helped their ability to manage stress, increased their sense of peace while also fostering self-compassion and community connection with their peers. For more information about our events, [click here](#).

Mindfulness in Education

The benefits of integrating mindfulness practices into curriculum is emerging. An in-class

mindfulness-based initiative implemented at a Canadian university over a 4-year period demonstrated the positive impact of mindfulness (Gardner and Kerridge, 2019). Students were lead through a 5–8-minute mindfulness activity at the start of each class over a 12-week period. Data revealed that the practices improved students' ability to listen, focus and learn while also providing a calm break during a stressful day. Students also reported the exercises helped to foster a sense of community within the classroom.

Similarly, a randomized control trial investigating the impact of a mindfulness-based training program for college students, known as Koru, demonstrated statistically significant results, including a decrease in perceived stress, sleep problems and improved self-compassion (Greeson et al., 2014). This is the same mindfulness training program I facilitate at Seneca.

While more research is needed, integrating mindfulness in a post-secondary context can help students reduce stress, improve concentration, and build self-awareness. And improved wellbeing not only promotes their academic success but also supports a positive student experience!

Mindfulness Activities

Here's a list of mindfulness exercises anyone can do:

Mindful eating: guiding students to use their senses to eat a small snack.

Gratitude: end class by having students write 3 things they are grateful for on sticky notes and place them in a visible spot.

Start class with a short mindfulness practice: a minute of silence, deep breathing, guided relaxation. Check out some examples [here](#) and [here](#).

Guide mindfulness exercises prior to tests/exams.

Mindful Movement: guide accessible movement to release stress/anxiety. Here are some ideas.

Offer mini mindful breaks midway through lectures.

Mindfulness and Choice

Given the diversity of our student population, including their individualized needs, encouraging choice is key to caring for students. It is also fundamental to embody a practice of mindfulness and be respectful and inclusive of the diverse student backgrounds. While mindfulness strategies have demonstrated a positive impact on wellness, it may not be a good fit for everyone, and we need to provide a non-judgemental space for students to opt

out of any practice that does not serve them.

Interested in a mindful discussion about integrating mindfulness into curriculum? Feel free to contact Cheryl Mitri.

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