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West Chester University

Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs

THESIS



Grades Do Not Define You: Mindfulness-Based  
Intervention Effects on College Students' Self-  
Efficacy, Health, and Wellbeing

Jayla B. Godfrey

May 2022

Grades Do Not Define You: Mindfulness-Based Intervention Effects on College Students' Self-Efficacy, Health, and Wellbeing

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Master of Science in

Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs

By

Jayla B. Godfrey

May 2022

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to myself as writing this thesis was one of the toughest things I have ever done. For the woman I once was, the woman I have grown into, and the woman I aspire to develop into.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to first acknowledge the challenging task of writing a master's thesis. The time and dedication over the last two years will not go unnoticed!

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To my grandparents for continuously checking-in on me to see how I am doing, how things are going, and if I need anything. You both always meet me where I am at, are so caring, and show unconditional support and love. I hope you are proud.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the punitive grading norms and lack of support from institutions and how it effects college students. More specifically, how it effects college students' self-efficacy, self-esteem, health, and wellbeing. Through the lens of critical action research this thesis investigates the experiences of stakeholders and will integrate research and methods that have been supported by seasoned scholars. In this thesis, a two-part program focusing on imposter syndrome, fear of failure, grades, mindfulness, and improving student's self-efficacy and wellbeing is proposed.

The leadership of this programmatic intervention relies on the facilitator and focuses on mindfulness-based interventions and group discussions. An evaluation is designed based on a pre and post self-efficacy survey, as well as a self-perception questionnaire regarding stress, health, and wellbeing. This helps to understand college students' self-concept and self-awareness. The intervention will assist college students in detaching grades from their identities and implementing a lifelong stress-reduction technique.

*Keywords:* Self-efficacy, mindfulness, mindfulness-based intervention, health, wellbeing, grades, grading, stress, learning, growth, college students

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The topic of this thesis revolves around college students struggling with developing a strong sense of self-efficacy due to universities' punitive grading norms and a lack of support from their institution. Since a young age I have always believed that my success was defined by the grades I was receiving in class. I believed those grades defined how smart I was, up until my undergraduate college career when I began to distance myself from that belief. I recognized that there was more to me than a grade for a class. I worked hard outside of the classroom, became involved, and gained a variety of experiences. I felt more confident as I could support myself even if my institution did not. I knew my grades were not an accurate representation of me. I am not alone. There have also been many works published by authors who validate this common experience that college students lack wellbeing and self-efficacy due to punitive grading norms (Choi, 2005; Han et. al 2017; Ruthig et al 2011).

During my graduate college career this idea was further solidified for me. In my first fall semester, I was introduced to a different grading system I have never witnessed before. The grading system was implemented by Dr. Jason Wozniak in our Historical Foundations of Higher Education course. Dr. Wozniak would offer you a grade on your assignments you submit. Then, you were able to argue your grade. If you were satisfied, that was the grade you would receive. If you did not like the grade you received, you were able to edit your work and resubmit it for a new grade. Even then you were able to argue your grade again. I felt heard. I received critical feedback. There were open lines of communication. There was less pressure and anxiety, and most of all, I felt more confident. However, this type of grading system was hard to get used to. The normal grading system was so engrained in my mind, it was hard to communicate what I felt I deserved on my work. It was even more odd that a professor was more interested in you receiving the information and ensuring that you comprehended it than judging your work for a grade.

## **The Current State of Education**

Institutions were initially created to prepare targeted individuals for “democratic citizenship” (Kober et al., 2020, p. 2) and commodified work. Intentions were apparent as power and governance sought to prepare individuals for jobs and citizenship. Throughout the growth of the United States also came the growth of public schools. There is the history of unequal access for all, but this became more relevant in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. As time continued, unequal access was periodically addressed, but the issues were often exacerbated by the decentralized local, state, and federal levels. Still, the rhetorical objectives shifted from commodifying individuals to “unifying a diverse population and promoting equity” (Kober et al., 2020, p. 7). Today’s education system continues to espouse commitments to diversifying the system and providing equity to all, however, commodifying individuals and preparing them for the workforce is still a foundational purpose of education today.

## **The Role of Grades**

This purpose is enacted in schools in many ways, but it is primarily enforced through grades. Grades are a way of ranking or sorting something. It could be ranking a piece of work or an individual. Grades in a school or college stand for both. Grading is a way that demonstrates how instructors value student work and the student as an individual in the institution. Imagine if when every day you woke up, your every move was graded by some authority figure. How would you feel? Do you feel as if this would be an accurate representation of your abilities? Now think about this concept in the school setting: all the work you hand in is graded, your participation as a student is graded, whether you understand the material correctly is graded. By living life by other peoples’ standards, opinions, and expectations, one’s choices are degraded.

I believe that grades both hinder students' learning and encourage competition with individualistic focuses. Additionally, grades and the grading system encourage the enhancement of inequalities between students. Not only do grades and the grading system encourage the enhancement of inequalities between students, but professors and the environments they foster within their classroom encourage the enhancement inequalities between students as well. Without grades, schools and institutions would have the opportunity for environments to encourage individuality, comprehension, co-creation, and comfort. Students would no longer be memorizing meaningless information to regurgitate and then forget once they graduate. As a result, the school system, education, and learning would change as all individuals know it. This system would be able to adapt as time goes on. Instructors will no longer be inhibiting students' creativity and views of the world around them.

Instructors are not the only thing inhibiting learning for students. Grades and the grading system put additional shackles on students. This environment punishes students for mistakes or misunderstandings, thus creating risk averse behavior. Students will be afraid to step outside of the box pushing the boundaries of norms, ideologies, and master narratives. This goes against self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning, according to Shuy (2010), is one's ability to understand and control one's learning environment (p.1). Grades hinder a students' ability to be able to fully control their learning environment. Self-regulated learning is all about freedom and autonomy. Grades and grading norms negatively impact self-efficacy. Self-efficacy according to Bandura (1997) refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainment. Thus, grades and grading norms hinder one's beliefs that they are able to succeed in specific situations or accomplish certain tasks.

## **Another Pawn: My Experience**

From a young age, the ideology that having the best grades will result in a future of many successes was engrained into my mind by those close around me. Beginning with the slight hand of a couple dollars as a result of my report cards around second grade, this action blindly shifted my motivation. From there on out, I did not think anything of this passive influence towards better grades. Fast forward a couple years to high school, the money I was receiving stopped coming with the report cards. I started to wonder why did getting good grades matter without some sort of reward.

Throughout high school I was never a “straight A” student. I had overall good grades ranging from As to Bs with a few Cs here and there. I never liked grades. I never enjoyed my intelligence being defined by grades nor did I like people classifying me into categories due to my grades. I felt I deserved to be more than a single letter. Plus, how is a single letter an accurate and adequate form of feedback? Regardless, I played the game; I was happy when I got an A and indifferent when I got a C or below.

However, one big thing stood out to me: I only ever had one teacher in my four years of high school that truly cared about her students’ learning and growth. This teacher did not put pressure on her students’ needing to receive a certain grade. From the beginning, she preached learning the information because it will be beneficial to us when we graduate. Throughout the duration of the class, she ensured we were learning the material correctly and graded us accordingly on effort, engagement, and communication. That was not until my senior year. Yet, as I reflect on this experience, I am disappointed, as she made an impact in my life and I have never reached out to tell her. Additionally, the people that I was influenced by really made a

difference in my life. I never realized that the relationships and the individuals I surrounded myself with impacted me, my self-image, and self-efficacy.

Let's take a few steps forward now into my undergraduate college experience. This was a bit of a roller coaster ride for me. I began my freshmen year in 2016 at a PASSHE institution in their Pre-Physician's Assistant program. I thought when you are in such a program, learning the material is key to your future. Things were different. If I could not produce a grade and keep my grade point average (GPA) above a certain level, then I could not be in the program. Even if I was asking questions, studying, going to class, trying my best to learn the material, if I could not regurgitate it on an exam and show my proficiency, then I could not be successful in this program. Thus, this pressure I felt towards grades resulted in my change of academic major and ultimately the change of institutions after a single semester. I took time for myself – to regroup and find the person I had lost. During that time, I went to a community college, got my grades up according to the needs of the institution I was interested in attending, and was accepted into a different PASSHE institution. This college was my first choice, as this was where I knew I belonged.

My experiences at this new institution is where my perspective really started to shift. I had built great friendships and relationships with my professors, developed a healthy lifestyle, and became involved in extracurricular activities. My motivation had changed. I realized there was more to my life than grades. I was no longer holding on to that idea of my future success hanging in the ballads of my grades and the skewed grading system. I began taking classes that I was honestly interested in. I did not care if the class was in relation to my major or general education requirements – if I thought the topic was interesting, intriguing, or I have always



wanted to learn about it, I took it. After branching out of my comfort zone and getting my life to where I wanted to be, I was more open-minded than I ever was before.

### ***Growth in Mindfulness***

One of the most influential activities I experimented with was meditation and mindfulness. Mindfulness assisted me in personal growth, certain realizations, and decrease in stress. Mindfulness as described by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) is “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally.” Throughout my time practicing, my mindset shifted from external motivations to intrinsic motivations. This change to intrinsic motives had me questioning what is in it for me. Why did getting a certain grade matter? What could I do to change this outlook?

As I continued down this path of discovery and growth to see what else could be in store, there was a noticeable alteration in my grades. My grades were in a decline. This decline was not very drastic or life altering, but it is clear where and when ideas began to change. I started to realize there is more to life than aggressively studying for an exam and then immediately disregarding the information you crammed. Grades were no longer my main concern. I knew whether I received an A, B, or C, I would graduate and get a job. Thus, I focused more of my time on other aspects of my life. I still learned and taught myself the information from class, but I no longer felt the pressure to meet the education systems standards. This is where and when my concerns were fostered. Furthermore, let us not forget how COVID-19 disrupted the grading system with the blink of an eye. This additional factor and institutions quick response to adapt the grading system helped put things into a more intriguing perspective to me. Yet, it was not until graduate school where I was really challenged to question such power, authority, and master narratives.

## **Preview of Thesis**

This thesis will introduce a mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) in a two-part program that entails college students discussing grades, learning to better manage stress, becoming more self-aware, and practicing regulated introspection to improve their self-efficacy, and overall health and wellbeing. Utilizing the framework of critical action research (CAR), the design and implementation of this intervention will have a strong focus on the increase in students' self-efficacy, wellbeing, and success. Within the next chapter I will discuss my philosophy of education using works from John Dewey (1983), Paulo Freire (1968), Alfie Kohn (1994 and 2011), and Donald McCown (2011, 2013, and 2016). I will discuss how the education system is to be responsible for instituting the conditions for growth in the present experience. I will divulge into how the education system and instructors should seek to liberate and create students into conscious beings and how a MBI can support this process. To fully understand the background of college students' low self-esteem and lack of self-efficacy due to inadequate, inaccurate, and inconsistent grades, the historical context and current state of my concern will be evaluated in chapter three.

My program design will implement a two-part program breaking down the stigma surrounding grades and introducing a MBI where students can challenge ideologies, assist students in detaching their identities from their earned grades, and practice self-regulated introspection. This program design aims to help students manage stress and improve their self-efficacy and overall health and wellbeing. In the beginning of the workshop, I am going to introduce the concept, practice, and history of mindfulness. I will teach my students about MBIs and how it will impact their health. After I discuss mindfulness with the class and the students are comfortable openly communicating with one another, I will utilize an experience-based

discussion forum about grades. Moreover, the students are going to lead the class conversing about grades and the grading system, their feelings regarding grades, and imposter syndrome. After this happens, I will introduce the grading system, the education system and the ideologies within these systems. I hope to destigmatize grades and the grading system while brainstorming how the college students can detach their wellbeing and self-worth from grades.

The final chapter dives into the role assessment and evaluation plays in successful program development, implementation, and achievement of goals and/or objectives. Chapter five will also include a timeline of my program and my plans for obtaining funding, a budget, and how I will market and recruit for my program. Finally, I will look ahead to limitations that may have not been addressed in my intervention. In the future other individuals may want to address specific issues or populations, thus I will include a few ideas to help aid in future discussion and research regarding MBIs improving college students' growth, self-efficacy, and holistic health.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks**

The education system society currently relies on is a flawed system. Instructors teach to fill students like containers, students memorize, regurgitate, and eventually forget the information with time. According to Paulo Freire (1968) this is the “banking” concept of education (p. 72). Freire outlines the results of this style by writing that this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking. The theory and practice of “banking education serve this end quite efficiently” (Freire, 1968, p. 76). In other words, students reading and memorizing pieces of information, then spitting it back out onto a quiz or essay to be graded by the instructor is the banking theory; it serves to remove students’ thoughts. This is not learning.

There is evidence to suggest there is a better way to learn and become knowledgeable (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1968; Kohn, 2011). Through co-creation, comprehension, growth, participation, and support, instructors can shape education from what it is to something completely new and invigorating. In the words of Paulo Freire (1968), current education is “an act of depositing,” but through liberation, education can become an act of cognition, freedom, and identity development (p. 72). Yet, how can instructors and learning communities strive towards cognition, freedom, and becoming? And, why should higher education want to get to this point of liberation? I argue, as well as several educational experts, that demolishing the grading system and grades more generally will be the best step towards this aspect of true learning.

### **Philosophy of Education**

Examining the goals, forms, methods, and meaning of education have encouraged me to identify my own philosophy of education. This is important to identify my own philosophy of

education in order to understand my own system of beliefs, values, and morals. In result, I am able to easily describe my teaching style. My philosophy of education consists of the intertwining of pragmatism and critical theory. Pragmatism is an individual interacting with environment or experience; this can always be changing. Similarly, critical theory can be ever changing as well, but this critical analysis is constructed in terms of power politically, socially, and economically. The epistemology of critical theory comes from “critical analysis of conflicts in society” (Ornstein & Levine, 1997). There are also more specific educational philosophies, but I will only be touching on essentialism, constructivism, and humanism. These philosophies will support my beliefs of fostering holistic growth, lifelong learning and sharing of knowledge, less punitive grading systems, and providing broad experiences for college students that are not all academic based. All of these philosophies of education are the epitome of my beliefs. Education should be student-centered. It should also provide lifelong learning. According to Dewey (1938), upon educators “devolves the responsibility for instituting the conditions for the kind of present experience which has a favorable effect upon the future. Education as growth or maturity should be an ever-present process” (p. 50). As educators, we should want to encourage students to take control of their education. The student and the educator need to be focused on the learner as a whole. Feelings are an important part of learning. As well as strengths, weaknesses, personalities, identities, backgrounds, and social capacities. Ultimately, educators should be supporting students in holistic growth regardless of any of the aspects listed previously; plus, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, accessibility, and so on.

A second philosophy I have regarding education revolves around grades and the grading system. I believe grades are an inaccurate and inadequate form of assessing a student’s learning and determining their future success. Grades inhibit motivation, engagement, interest, and

achievement. Research from Alfie Kohn (2011) supports three robust conclusions: a) grades tend to diminish students' interest in whatever they are learning, b) grades create a preference for the easiest possible task, and c) grades tend to reduce the quality of students' thinking (p. 29-30). Kohn's (2011) conclusion is for the ridding of grades and a grading system completely. I also agree, however, a small step in the right direction I believe is closer in terms of feasibility is a more communicative and interactive form of discussion and feedback. Grades do not prepare students for the future. Grades do not divulge where students were possibly mistaken or could improve. If educators want students to inquire, learn, solve problems, and think critically, they are going to need more feedback and guidance than a letter grade with miniscule meaning. Through the opportunity of discussion with educators, students will have the chance to grasp a better understanding of where they are at in terms of learning material and skills. In this setting, the students can also communicate how they are feeling, how they are doing, and if they have any questions or concerns. This type of system encourages students and educators to grow and become knowledgeable in many different ways.

### **Educational Philosophy "isms"**

The philosophies that will support my beliefs of fostering holistic growth, lifelong learning and sharing of knowledge, less punitive grading systems, and providing broad experiences for college students, are essentialism, constructivism, and humanism. Essentialism is the philosophy that knowledge and certain skills are vital for living and needed in society. This philosophy identifies learning and sharing of knowledge as important to becoming a functioning member of society. Additionally, experiences that may not be academic based are important for developing the vital skills for living needed in society.

In addition, knowledge is actively constructed. This process of learning and creating your own knowledge is constructivism. It is a learning theory that uses education to shape a student's world view. Bruner (1963) stated, "the first object of any act of learning, over and beyond the pleasure it may give, is that it should serve us in the future. Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further, more easily" (p. 17). This quote helps tie in my last educational philosophy of humanism as it is in support of the idea of fostering students to their fullest potential. Through essentialism, constructivism, and humanism, college students have the opportunity to develop and grow academically, intellectually, empirically, and holistically.

### **What is the Purpose of Education and Higher Education?**

The purpose of education, in my eyes, is to develop as a person holistically and to become more knowledgeable through lifelong learning. As explained by bell hooks (1994), the traditional expressed role of the university has been "the pursuit of truth and the sharing of knowledge and information" (p. 29). Yet hooks argues that this mission has been distorted by biases that uphold and maintain systems of oppression (i.e. white supremacy, imperialism, etc), which have distorted education as the practice of freedom (p. 30). Instead of preparing students for definition of preparedness determined by the powerful, higher education should be focusing on the sharing of knowledge and genuine academic freedom. Students should be able to pursue the truth, challenge ideologies, and demand transformation in higher education.

The purpose of education should be to develop a person professionally and personally. It should prepare them for society, politically, civically, economically, but it also prepares them academically, intellectually, and holistically. This means that knowledge, as noted by Freire (1968), must not be one directional. In his definition of the banking concept of education, he

explains that traditional teaching practice “becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 72). Knowledge, instead, should be reciprocated by students and faculty. If professors are speaking at students and are not open to what their students have to offer, they are conforming to the systems of oppression that hooks mentions.

I believe the most important purposes of higher education are giving people the opportunity for holistic growth, upgrading their skills, increasing in-depth knowledge, and other advancements, such as personal or professional development. Higher education should give people the opportunity to pursue a passion or desire. It provides the atmosphere to explore wherever it may lead without undue or unreasonable influence. It is a site that offers academic freedom. Furthermore, personal development could also mean from social experiences. Higher Education is a different site than high school. There are going to be very different social contexts and experiences that come with them. Lastly, with regard to personal development, I believe autonomy is another facet fostered by Higher Education. The site of Higher Education could be a lot of students first time having the power to self-govern. Higher Education holds students more accountable for their decisions as self-advocacy and independence is an important part of becoming an adult and going to college.

Next, professional advancement and learning is another purpose of Higher Education. Students come to college for that specific reason. However, there is more to professional development than simply learning what they need to know for their major. There are moments for networking and other career preparation opportunities. Networking is a process where students can exchange information with others, develop professionally, and gain contacts. This process can be conducted with other peers, faculty, or staff. It is not limited to one type of group



or individual. In respect of networking, students can gain career preparation or career development from networking too. There may be someone who knows of a workshop, class, or internship that may benefit the student. Someone could also reference the student to a specific individual that may assist them further. Regardless, Higher Education has career preparation as one of their main focuses and missions for their students.

Overall, my larger beliefs regarding the purpose of education and Higher Education are developing the college student personally and professionally. Within these aspects there will be the act of lifelong learning, the transfer of knowledge, opportunities for growth, life experiences, and development and strengthening of skills.

### **What is the Role of Student Affairs and Student Affairs Professionals in these Purposes?**

Student affairs professionals take on many roles. However, to help support the purpose of higher education, student affairs professionals need to take on roles such as an advocate, a supporter, a teacher, a mentor, and a leader. Some students may not know where to begin when they are new to college. Student affairs professionals are the individuals who are there to support the college students. They should provide support and resources to assist students in growth and success. Moreover, student affairs professionals' roles also include providing knowledge, development of opportunities, and support of lifelong learning. These roles entail evolving students' skills, helping students acquire and strengthen values, create academic freedom, and build social cohesion. For these things to happen, student affairs professionals need to take on further roles of *Good Company* or a mentor. Good company is defined as someone you can look up to (J. Hodes, 2020, personal communication). Similarly, a mentor is a trusted or experienced advisor. All in all, the biggest role a student affairs professional will embrace is being a leader.

## **Connecting My Philosophy to My Thematic Concern**

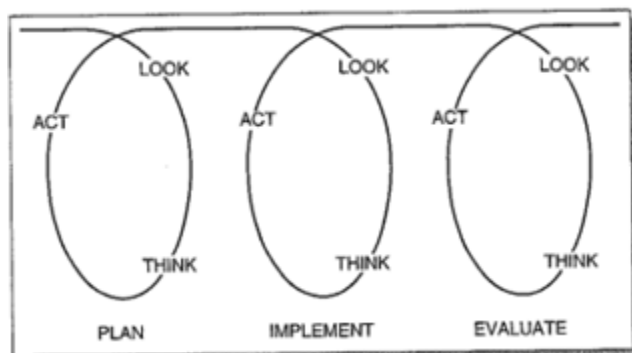
My thematic concern is that college students are struggling to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy due to universities punitive grading norms and lack of support from their institution. The beliefs I listed above relate to my concern because for college students to feel supported and to build a strong sense of self-efficacy, these ideas and values should be implemented. If these philosophies are used throughout the intervention, the program will meet its goals and help improve students' wellbeing and sense of self-efficacy. Without these aspects of my philosophy implemented, students may not recognize their worth, shape their identity, strengthen their self-efficacy, and positively impact their wellbeing.

## **Critical Action Research**

As explained by Stringer (2014), action research provides a means for people to understand their situations more clearly and to formulate effective solutions to problems they face. The framework is often described by the following steps: Look, Think, Act or Plan, Implement, Evaluate. The format of these steps (Look, Think, Act) should be going through a constant process.

## **Figure 1**

*Action Research Interacting Spiral*



*Note.* The Look, Think, Act routine in a continuing cycle. Reprinted from *Action Research* (p. 9), E. T. Stringer, 2014, Sage Publications Inc. Copyright © 2014 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

As described by Stinger (2014), *look* is the step where we are to gather relevant information (data) and describe the situation (define and describe). This is directly followed by the *think* step, where we explore and analyze, as well as interpret and explain the situation at hand. Lastly, *act* is the step in which we plan, implement, and evaluate, identifying a course of action based on our previous analysis and interpretation. Researchers then “review (look again), reflect (reanalyze), and re-act (modify their actions)” (Stringer, 2014, p. 9) to improve their situations.

Ultimately, this process seeks to link research and action in our practice. In the words of Stringer (2014), “action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives” (p. 27). Action research is also commonly conducted in groups, where the researcher is a participant in the process of exploration and examination. These participants are individuals directly affected by the issues or concepts that are being researched. Stringer (2014) states “action research works on the assumption that all people who affect or are affected by the issue investigated should be included in the process of inquiry” (p. 6). Individuals are valuable assets to action research

because their experiences, perspectives, and points of view are important parts of the process of analysis.

As explained by Greenwood & Levin (2006) “participation became a vital element. Through engaging all stakeholders in the inquiry, the distinctions between outsiders and insiders are gradually wiped out” (Greenwood & Levin, 2006, p. 33). In short, instead of doing research *on* people, individuals are now doing research *with* people. In my mindfulness-based intervention, with support of works from McCown et al. (2011 & 2016), McCown & Gergen (2013), and McCown et al. (2016), it will become more evident that research is done with people and not necessarily on people. There is evidence to suggest that participation from all parties in research is a vital element (McCown 2011, McCown 2016). Participation from all parties brings forth knowledge, valuable information, and unique points of view. These aspects also help to facilitate learning, understand issues, increase public awareness, disapprove lies and support truth, foster critical thinking, and provide opportunities. For the success of mindfulness and action research, communication, collaboration, and exploration, are valuable.

### **Introduction to Critical Action Research**

Action research is a research method that is used to understand problems or weaknesses in a particular topic or issue and make change. Critical action research adopts this methodology to address issues of power, injustice, and inequality. During the process of critical action research, the aim is to achieve historical self-consciousness and respond to challenges. This process of critical action research is not possible without participants collectively helping to solve an issue or problem. Critical action research aims to understand and transform “social life at the moments and places where specific crises occur” (Kemmis, 2008, p. 122). While critical

action research may be a more personalized and intimate form of research, the research done by these individuals may activate a chain of events, seen through other researchers' use of the study.

### **Critical Action Research in Connection to My Thesis**

As we recall, my thesis is focusing on the struggle college students face with developing a strong sense of self-efficacy due to universities' punitive grading norms and a lack of support from their institution. This issue is important because retention rates are decreasing, admission rates are decreasing, and students' overall well-being is declining. Students' need to know they are valued, they belong, and that they can be successful regardless of their grades. My solution to this is implementing a semester-long class introducing a mindfulness-based intervention where students can manage stress and practice regulated introspection to improve their self-efficacy, self-esteem, and overall health. The class will also dive into grades, the grading system, and brainstorming alternative forms of grading that can be applied. Critical action research connects to this program because of the social context achieved collectively by participants. Not only are the participants engaged in a social context, but they are also achieving personal growth from the development of their self-consciousness and self-awareness through the mindfulness-based intervention. In addition, there is going to be many opportunities of exchanging information, investigating, evaluating, and discussing other alternative outcomes to this issue of grades and the grading system. The students are just as important to this process as the instructor is.

### **Connection to Higher Education and Student Affairs**

Due to the participatory nature, the process of critical action research is distinct in educational research. The education context is very participatory and is based in a social context. There is a lot of communication, language, challenges, and development. Critical action research

is a great framework to use in Higher Education and Student Affairs. Higher Education revolves around inquiry, communication, collaboration, and has many people involved. It is a practical educational context that generates knowledge through the actions mentioned previously. Additionally, Kemmis (2008) adds “it is a site in which critical capacities are exercised and expressed” (p. 133). Some of the critical perspectives utilized by both critical action research and Higher Education and Student Affairs include aiming to respond to challenges, exploring existing conditions, collaborative reflection, concern for social justice, and being a communicative form of life. This type of communicative form of life allows for opportunities of exploring boundaries and crises to flourish. Higher Education and Student Affairs offers a space where participants and others involved or affected can be open and communicate. These individuals are learning through action and experience. There are obviously goals to learn and develop professionally, but with acting deliberately to interpret and understand social life/context, students can transform outcomes to certain crises while growing personally as well. These aspects are all key to Higher Education and Student Affairs and critical action research; another reason why critical action research is an important framework for Higher Education and Student Affairs to use.

### **Chapter Three: Literature Review**

In chapter two, I reiterated my thematic concern of college students struggling with wellbeing and developing a strong sense of self-efficacy due to universities' punitive grading norms and a lack of support from their institution. My philosophy of education approaches this concern by stating that education should foster holistic growth and development, and provide experiences for college students that are not just academically related. As I have mentioned previously, a few purposes of higher education are to support lifelong learning, increase knowledge production, and provide the atmosphere and the opportunities for students to upgrade skills and pursue their passion. Through a CAR lens, student affairs professionals can take on roles to help college students challenge ideologies, address social injustices, and redefine the master narrative. In this chapter, I will dive into the history of the education system, the grading system, mindfulness, and the overall health of college students. I will also utilize works regarding relevant factors from Higher Education and Student Affairs literature that further supports my thematic concern. Some of these topics will include social identity theories, power, mindfulness, and traditional grading models versus new alternative grading models. Lastly, I will address the current state of the education system, the grading system, mindfulness, and the overall health of college students.

#### **Historical Context of the Education System**

The emergence of colleges and universities in the American colonies began in the 1800's. Higher education was new, so we modeled our institutions after the British education system, following "standards for behavior, for learning, and for spiritual development that were absolute and individuality was not brooked" (MacKinnon, 2004, p. 15). Not long after there was a push for more marketable disciplines, however, some institutions refused to adapt to diverse, different

specializations like economics, science, psychology, and empiricism. It slowly started to shift from mental, religious, and spiritual enlightenment to academic freedom of teaching, learning, researching, and extracurricular activities. After, the creation and implementation of The Morrill Act of 1862 and the creation of land grant universities, the United States finally had their own style of higher education and institution.

The Morrill Act made it possible to establish public colleges for their citizens. The Morrill Act guaranteed specific amounts of the land the United States had acquired to universities to build on. It was essentially created to deem the stealing of land as the state's federal property. According to Boggs et al (2019) the Morrill Act invested eastern states in the settlement, speculation, and securitization of federally claimed lands in the West as a means of generating capital for state colleges. The Act also enabled Western states to use colleges as a means of accumulating state capacity by mandating military training for college students (Boggs et al, 2019). During this time, the movement to abolish slavery was in progress. Free individuals who were previously enslaved were now demanding they be educated as well. This movement forced important hands to create The Morrill Act II. The act no longer allowed racial discrimination in the university. This led to the development of colleges strictly for people of color.

Since both versions of The Morrill Act were created, universities have become dependent on land-grants and the capitalist market; but how did we get to this point? When those of a high caliber "identified as those fit to lead the state and church, a very limited, elite population" (Patton, 2016a, p. 44) were beginning to build sites for universities, they would seize Indigenous peoples' lands and capturing them as slaves. These slaves are the ones who began building universities. After universities were built, the slaves would then work inside the universities. This is mentioned plenty of times in Craig Steven Wilders' work *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery*



*and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. Universities such as Yale, Harvard, Georgetown, University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth, Rutgers, King's College, and The College of Rhode Island (Brown) were created on land accumulation that was stolen by these men and then built by captured slaves.

As more rich, older, white men continued to come to the United States, they occupied more land, enslaved more people, and received a higher education. Stein (2017) states that these "early United States colleges served as instruments of Christian expansionism, weapons for the conquest of indigenous peoples, and major beneficiaries of the African slave trade and slavery" (p. 4). Individuals in power reproduced this idea in Higher Education. Other men who had already graduated then either lent, rented, or sold their land they stole to these new graduates, thus solidifying and reinforcing accumulation by dispossession. Additionally, normalizing the dehumanization and commodification of people to these recent graduates. This movement kept the industry growing, coining the term free-market capitalism. Without colonization and enslavement, there would be no capitalist markets. As Alexandra Karelesses (2020) said in a lecture given to our Historical Foundations of Higher Education class, this established a horribly cyclical relationship between plantation money and the funding of universities, all on the backs of people they chose to exclude and saved for their labor. Plantation and slave money support higher education in the form of endowments to this day.

### **Historical Context of the Grading System and Grades**

This history of the grading system is not one of longevity. The first clue of some sort of grading was found in Yale's President Stiles' diary from 1785. It is not like the grading style we know today. The markings according to Durm (1993) was a scale that was made up of

descriptive adjectives and was included as a footnote to Stile's 1785 diary. As explained by Durm (1993), "President Stile wrote that 58 students were present at an examination, and they were graded as follows: "Twenty Optimi, sixteen second Optimi, 12 Inferiores (Boni), ten Pejores"" (p. 2). Yale seemed to set the scale for other grading methods as they were also noted to have another book of records regarding exams and referencing a scale of 4.0 from 1813-1839. Eventually, Yale changed to a scale of 9.0, but after many requests by faculty resorted back to 4.0. In 1896, according to Smallwood (1935), Yale relayed to their students that they must have a standing of 225 for the previous term or half term in order to continue. Thus, the decimal point system must have been discontinued. There is a big gap between 1785 and 1813, but Durm (1993) said it is hard to imagine there were not any records or statements concerning grading written during this time, but apparently none of have been found.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was one of many trials and errors in terms of grading scales and systems. There was no set standard, thus there are many records reporting a variety of attempts to evaluate and grade college students. The next scale identified by Smallwood (1935) was William and Mary Faculty Reports of July 16, 1817. The following classification was used: No. 1. (Names listed) The first in their respective classes; No. 2. Orderly, correct, and attentive; No. 3. They have made very little improvement; No. 4. They have learned little or nothing. William and Mary used expressive adjectives to grade college students until 1850 where they first reported the use of a numerical scale. The next noted scale was a numerical scale of 20 used at Harvard dated in 1830. In 1837, Harvard mathematical and philosophical professors used a scale of 100 (Smallwood, 1935). During the 1850's and 1860's, The University of Michigan also tried many grading systems. They first used a numerical system, then a pass-no pass system, plus signs, and

an abbreviation for conditional. After, they switched back to a numerical scale of 100. Finally, Michigan adopted a P for passing, a C for conditional, and an A for absent (Smallwood, 1935).

Throughout the next 30-40 years, many universities and colleges kept trying and trying again to find a grading system that worked well. Harvard took precedent and tried many different forms of grading in a 15–20-year time frame. They started with dividing college students according to merit. Smallwood (1935) provided a list of divisions ranked by merit: Division 1 – 90 or more on a scale of 100, Division 2 – 89 to 75, Division 3 – 74 to 60, Division 4 – 59 to 50, Division 5 – 49 to 40, Division 6 below 40. Then, Harvard tried sorting their students into classes to rank them. Classes I, II, and III are students who have passed with distinction. Class I, II, and III corresponded to the 90's, 80's, and 70's on their present 100 percent scale. Class IV was a lower rank on the percentage scale deemed the minimum mark for passing, but without distinction. Lastly, Class V were college students who had failed to pass. Finally, Harvard's last attempt for classifying merit was "Failed," "Passed," and "Passed with Distinction."

In the 1890's is where you finally begin to recognize more familiar grading systems to what we use today. Michigan adopted marks similar to Harvard's latest attempt: "Passed," "Incomplete," "Conditioned," "Not Passed," and "Absent." The cornerstone for grading emerged from Mount Holyoke in 1897. This is the first-time letters were used for marking college students. Smallwood (1935) stated there was a single reference to a student making a B at Harvard in 1883, being the first use of a letter grade that can be found, but Mount Holyoke's was much more advanced and descriptive. Their first form used adjectives, letters, and percentages. The scale looked like so: A – Excellent, equivalent to percent 95-100; B – Good, equivalent to percent 85-94 (inclusive); C – Fair, equivalent to percent 76-84 (inclusive); D – Passed (barely) equivalent to percent 75; F – Failed (below 75). Later, their second scale was updated to look as

so: A – 95-100; B – 90-94; C – 85-89; D – 80-84; E – 75-79; F – Failed. Similarly, most colleges and universities mentioned the letter grades also denotes the grade point scale of A for 4.0, B for 3.0, C for 2.0, and D for 1.0.

Somewhere during the implementation of these grading systems in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, I believe college students began considering higher grade point average to be more important than learning, knowledge, and development of skills. Austin (2018) from The Graide Network states the primary reason grades did begin to develop in the 19th and 20th centuries was to ease communication between institutions. As more colleges were founded and those that existed grew larger, schools and teachers needed a way to communicate student readiness and accomplishment. This makes sense to designate a universal system of grading to indicate attainment of material.

However, upon implementation of this system, priorities began to become skewed. The priority of learning and developing skills shifted to attaining the grade to be deemed successful and prepared for life outside of education. Moreover, standardized testing and sorting students by rank according to achievement and high-test scores was invented. Thus, leading to the negative impacts grades and grading norms have on students. Assessment, competition, and ranking are now essential to the education system. It is now so fundamental to schooling that we are still using the A, B, C, D grading system today. The buildup of an insufficient grading system is now on display in the students who have no choice but to accept their fate and deal with it.

### **Historical Context of Mindfulness**

There is a stigma surrounding mindfulness. In my experience, people believe mindfulness is merely meditation where you sit with your legs crossed, you are quiet for 10-

minutes, and you place your hands on your knees. I like to wonder why this stigma surrounds mindfulness, as mindfulness is a stem of meditation with a 20<sup>th</sup> century twist. I believe this stigma is still around as people are misinformed, uneducated on mindfulness, and utilize resources that are inaccurate. Mindfulness is an adaptation of the practices of Hindu, Buddhist, and Sufi. Once mentioned in a Mindfulness Theory and Science course, “Across the American historical record, from Colonial times to now, contemplatives have made use of concepts, language, and practices from philosophies and religions of Asia” (D. McCown, personal communication, 2021). When we break this down, it means that influential people of the history of mindfulness, derived their knowledge from that of Asia. Mindfulness began as contemplative practices, then moving into public consciousnesses, where the activities morphed into adaptations used for medical settings. After, it again shifted into this common public phenomenon of mindfulness.

This public phenomenon of mindfulness is important to note in connection to my thesis because the use of a MBI will help college students increase their holistic health and wellbeing. The history below through the works of many individuals and their evidence supports the notion that mindfulness can have a significant impact on an individual. I first mention the important figures throughout the history of mindfulness. I then touch on two of the most important figures. Both individuals provide evidence and support that mindfulness increases peoples’ health and wellbeing. Plus, it begins to introduce the mindfulness that everyone knows today as meditation. It is valuable to recognize the impacts of history and the shaping of mindfulness to what it is today to show the use of the MBI that I will be utilizing in my program intervention.

### ***Important Figures***

There are a few important figures that need to be identified throughout the course of the history of mindfulness. I will point out a few notable individuals from the American Colonial times but will focus most on the more recent individuals. McCown (personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022) states “Cotton Mathers and Hannah Adams shared the same thoughts of sympathy, religion, and spirituality. Mathers was an early founder of Harvard College who was mainly focused on the greater scale of what religion and spirituality looked like all over the world.” Adams was a writer who presented and fleshed out every religion unbiasedly in one book for all people to attest to them. Next, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were both interested in the philosophical foundations in the ethical behaviors of individuals and nations as a whole (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022). They conducted research, sent language scholars to India, and had William Jones transcribe and rewrite these works from the East.

### ***19<sup>th</sup> Century Figures***

From the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Transcendentalists were very interested in books from Hindu, Buddhist, and Sufi traditions. “Thoreau and Emerson were classified as the first philosophers in America before academic philosophers due to their sympathy in contemplative thinking and their contemplative way of being” (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022). Late in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, during the economic depression, people turned to the *Light of Asia*, a book entailing the thought of the east and the story of Buddha. The World Parliament of Religions toured Zen masters Soy and Chaco to lecture on Buddhism. Henry Steele Olcott and his late wife Madame Blavatsky were so intrigued that they created the Theosophical Society to

investigate all things Eastern Contemplative. More on the academic side, William James, God son of Ralph Waldo Emerson, allowed his high interests in Buddhism to shape his outlook on Psychology. Coming directly from readings and dialogues with Buddhists, William termed the popular phrase, “stream of consciousness.” His muse, Annie Payson Call, wrote columns for Ladies Home Journal illustrating ideas that sound like mindfulness (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022). Her main points were how do we keep mind and body calm so that we can do our best work and be available to others.

### ***20<sup>th</sup> Century Figures***

Contemplative practice is found nearly everywhere. Slowly during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, this contemplative thought transitioned from thinking and more into the practice of doing. McCown (personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022) notes DT Suzuki was the most influential person of this time period. He taught Zen to those of intellectual power at the Zen Center in New York. Deeply influenced by DT and the practice of Zen, Erich Fromm showcased this idea into psychoanalysis, and Fritz Pearls founded Gestalt Therapy. Another deeply influenced person by DT and the practice of Zen is Thomas Merton. Thomas is a Trappist Monk known for 1) bringing Zen into Catholic spirituality, and 2) taking a vow of silence and to never leave his monastery. Only once did he leave his monastery for DT Suzuki’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday after two years of petitioning (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022). This next individual really helped make the transition from thoughts to being interested in what we can do, practice, and feel. Alan Watts is a very popular, influential, and promoter of contemplative practice and Zen. He wrote 40-50 works, one highly noted for his exploration of the consciousness further utilizing psychedelics

and LSD. Lastly, poets, Buddhists, and teachers of Zen, Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder are the last steps to mindfulness.

### ***The Most Influential Individuals***

Beginning in the 1970's the United States moved into a state of vibrant color and decorations. People were becoming more acceptable of things that were once classified as alternative (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022). Maharishi Mahesh Yogi took advantage of this opportunity. Yogi took basic Hindu practice of mantra meditation, repackaged it, culturally renegotiated it to make it more acceptable to people in the West. McCown (personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022) gave an example showing how he used The Beatles and Mia Farrow to help publicize mantra meditation and strengthen his case. Mantra Meditation is when one focuses ones' mind on a particular sound made by a particular syllable. The most common examples of this are "uhm" or "om." This form of meditation focuses on that syllable and sound to block everything out and be aware or pay attention to a singular thing. During mantra meditation, the body moves into a much lower metabolic state, the breathing slows, blood pressure drops, and your metabolism slows (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022).

Stemming from this form of mediation came Transcendental Meditation. This form of meditation was more visible in the culture and became more popular because people saw and/or experienced these health benefits (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022). Herbert Benson, a Cardiovascular Specialist at Harvard Medical School experienced transcendental meditation. He also repackaged this form of meditation as a relaxation response. However, Herbert had the medical research to support his



claims. McCown (personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022) displayed outcomes of actual people's results from the use of Herbert's transcendental form of mantra meditation. Herbert did this very well and continues to do so at Harvard. This proof of numbers and readouts from machines show meditation helps. Finally, shifting everything from a cultural, artistic, religious, and philosophical viewpoint to a science viewpoint.

Most importantly, the true creator of mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn. He was a Microbiologist working at the Medical Center at the University of Massachusetts. Jon was very aware when applying his trade of the people falling through the cracks who were not getting help. As a meditation and yoga teacher who ran the Cambridge Zen Center in Boston, he wanted to help people educationally instead of medically (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Jon went to the President of the hospital, explained what he wanted to do, and used Herbert Benson to support his claims. Upon eventually getting approval under the circumstance that he conducts research; Jon implemented his first course. This course came to be known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). This course utilized meditation and yoga to teach people with chronic pain skills that will help with their wellbeing. The scientific outcome displayed tremendous improvement among the people who participated. "This research Jon conducted opened the United States up into the depths of the science of meditation and other practices we have come to explore over the past 40 years" (D. McCown, personal communication, WCU Mindfulness Theory and Science course, 2022).

### **Current State of My Concern**

There has been increasing discussion regarding my concern that college students are struggling with developing a strong sense of self-efficacy due to universities' punitive grading norms and a lack of support from their institution (Choi, 2005; Han et. al, 2017). Additionally,

there has been an increase of works regarding the holistic health of college students (Larson et. al, 2016; Moeller et. al, 2020; Ramler et. al, 2015). I believe part of this issue has to do with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the longstanding pressure that everyone needs to attend college and receive a college degree to be successful and attain a good job. In this section, I will address this issue with the support of many works and authors.

### **Neoliberalism and Grades**

Neoliberalism defined by Harvey (2007) “is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p.2). Neoliberalism occupies positions of influence in education. The institutional framework of higher education is a perfect environment for Neoliberalism and its ideologies. Neoliberalism is pervasive, a guiding principle, and significantly impactful. Since it has become “a hegemonic mode of discourse” (Harvey, 2007, p. 3), higher education educators and college students have become machines. They are both forms of human capital.

Educators continue to strengthen this ideology for themselves and the college students they are teaching, both another pawn in capitalism. The capitalistic market needs more workers. Educators are already a part of this system, but they are now creating college students into tools for the same market. Moreover, grades and grading norms assist this neoliberal ideology. Grades are used to measure students and their achievements. This emphasizes competition and implementation of competitive elements into schooling. The repeat consumption of this neoliberal ideology is destroying the people involved as well as the institutions, divisions, and powers it has inhabited.

## **Education System & Grading**

Regarding my thematic concern, there has been an increase in research concerning grades and grading systems. There have been many recent articles stating the correlation between grades and college students' overall health. For example, Deroma (2009) showed a significant, negative relationship between college students' depression and academic performance. The college students who presented moderate levels of depressive symptoms demonstrated lower performance within academic environments compared to those with normal and minimal levels of depression. In addition, Han et. al (2017) also discovered results determining that low belongingness and academic motivation show low credits earned. On the bright side, the research also displayed that high self-efficacy returned high grades, and a high sense of belonging resulted in high rates of first-to-second year retention.

Attitude seems to be very important when it comes to mindset, motivation, and performance. Naylor (2017) investigated students' attitudes about successful student experiences. Results concluded that the completion of a degree and the achievement of good grades were the highest among college students. This displays a sense of grading-oriented mindset instead of a learning-oriented mindset. Having a grading-oriented mindset means students are more interested in receiving high grades, achieving high levels, and appearing competent. This orientation is associated with fear of failure and associating grades with self-worth. The learning-oriented mindset is where students are more interested in learning, development of skills, and sharing knowledge. Lastly, Choi (2005) found that college students who have a high degree of self-percepts, or self-perception, tend to attain higher academic achievement. Self-perception is important to how you view yourself, the kind of person you are, your self-esteem, and self-concept. Choi (2005) explained:

that the closer the level of specificity of self-efficacy and self-concept, the stronger the relationship between the two constructs. Both academic self-concept and specific self-concept were significant predictors of term grades. In addition, academic self-concept was also a significant predictor, whereas neither general self-efficacy nor academic self-efficacy was significant. (p. 202-203)

Furthermore, having a grading-oriented mindset presents the idea of learning as a mindless duty. This idea of a mindless duty is described by Fried (1995) as something to get through any way you can or what he calls playing *The Game of School*. To go through the *Game of School*, you go through the motions like it really is a game and you pretend it is not real. Fried (1995) sums up what school even looks like today:

The particular offense of playing the Game of School lies in the disengagement of our intellect and our feelings from tasks that deserve to be taken seriously: tasks like writing, reading, thinking, planning, listening, researching, analyzing, performing, applying, evaluating. We do harm when we reduce these acts of intellect, creativity, and judgment to rote exercises [...] or meaningless gestures. When the Game of School is played frequently enough, and by enough people, the game becomes school. The artificial and superficial replaces what's authentic and purposeful in a lesson or curriculum. The pursuit of learning turns into the avoidance of conflict or extra work. A powerful feeling of unreality takes over. Passion, idealism, self-respect, the search for knowledge, and the pursuit of excellence give way to a [...] mind- and spirit-numbing mediocrity. We go along to get along. (p. 95)

Not only students, but educators fall into this system of school (Gatto, 2003). Both have allowed themselves to be enslaved by this certain pedagogy and ideology. Luckily, Kohn (2011)

references multiple educators he has spoken to who have begun shifting away from this system and the type of environment they foster in their classrooms. These environments include less assessments, more communication, increased engagement and activity, and less competition.

### ***Mindfulness***

One way of fostering a more learning centered environment, I argue, is through the use of mindfulness. Mindfulness according to Kabat-Zinn (1990) is “moment-to-moment awareness” (p. 2). Mindfulness is a conscious state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment nonjudgmentally. It is the acknowledgement and acceptance of one’s feelings, thoughts, and sensations. Mindfulness and mindfulness practices will help students increase their self-efficacy. Through time and practice, mindfulness will assist in the growth and strengthening of one’s self-efficacy due to the development of perceiving themselves, being more aware in the moment, being less judgmental, and recognizing how they are feeling or what they are thinking moment-to-moment.

According to Bamber & Kraenzle (2016), there is no concrete mindfulness intervention that is most effective. Bamber & Kraenzle (2016) examined 109 studies regarding anxiety, self-reported stress, psychological stress, and mindfulness finding mixed results. There were 38 studies that showed significant decreases in anxiety and stress. There were 22 studies that showed an increase in mindfulness. Thus, only a little over half displayed some sort of results; also indicating a need for further research. Since 2016, there has been an increase in research due to mindfulness gaining popularity.

In a more recent study completed by Moeller et. al (2020), the results were more promising. A total of 1185 undergraduate students were asked questions regarding

demographics, anxiety, depression, loneliness, perceived stress, coping, self-esteem, physical activity, and mindfulness. The researchers wanted to examine the differential contribution of three stress management approaches (coping, physical activity, and aspects of mindfulness) on college student adjustment and maladjustment. Results showed participants experienced moderate to high levels of stress, severe levels of anxiety, and moderately severe levels of depression. Engagement coping was associated with lower levels of depression and loneliness. Engagement coping actively aims at dealing with stress, stressors, and stress-related emotions and feelings. This type of coping includes the use of problem-solving, support-seeking, and positive thinking. “Conversely, greater levels of disengagement coping were associated with greater levels of perceived stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness” (Moeller et. al, 2020, p. 6). Disengagement coping includes denial and wishful thinking due to avoiding threats, confrontation, and other stress or stressors. Higher rates of physical activity were predictive of lower levels of depression, lower levels of loneliness. Mindful awareness and mindful non-judgment were both associated with lower stress, lower anxiety, lower depression, lower loneliness, and positive outcomes.

Nevertheless, I believe there needs to be a more factual way of measuring mindfulness and its effects. In a study conducted by Ramler et. al (2015), they utilized salivary cortisol samples to help measure stress levels. Undergraduate college students in an eight-week MBSR intervention revealed results stating, “that such an intervention can contribute to enhanced adjustment across multiple domains and reduce physiological stress levels as indexed by salivary cortisol” (Ramler et. al, 2015, p. 185). Findings suggest that certain mindfulness skills can be cultivated in a college student population through a short period of time. Likewise, Vidic & Cherup (2019) provide encouraging results regarding utilization of MBIs that are a part of

academic curriculum as a potential way of benefiting the students. This was a seven-week MBSR course for undergraduate college students. All the topics discussed were specifically aligned with college life and how mindfulness could influence student appraisal of their academic experience.

### **Health of College Students**

Another important factor that we need to consider regarding the current state of my thematic concern is college students' health. College students' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and overall holistic health is lacking due to college and universities lack of support and punitive grading norms. College students are stressed, their mental health is being affected, physical health is being neglected, depression is gaining control, and anxiety is lurking. All of these described above are in turn hurting college students' performance and grades. A study done by Ruthig et. al (2011) examined the changes in health perceptions and behaviors among undergraduate college students over an academic year. Students' perceived stress, health symptoms, psychological health, diet, exercise, tobacco use, binge drinking, and sleep were assessed. Results suggest that health-related changes over time do predict success and performance and that the patterns of these relationships do differ for men and women.

The degree to which health factors are related to academic success and predicts GPA of college students also needs to be assessed. In a study done by Larson et. al (2016) college students had their health data analyzed to measure well-being and student academic performance. The health data collected included stress, physical health, substance use, and mental health. Health showed to be significantly related to GPA and students' academic ability to succeed. Most importantly, however, the results from this study indicated that both students' perception of their degree of stress and their ability to cope with the stress were positive and

significant predictors of GPA. The data suggests that as the demands of college studies increases, along with students' perception of their ability to effectively manage the workload, it will have a positive predictive relationship with academic success.

Lastly, I would like to touch on the aspect of competition amongst students and how that impacts their health. Posselt & Lipson (2016) retrieved data from the 2007–2012 administrations of the Healthy Minds Study (HMS), an annual online survey of mental health and related issues as well as service utilization among college students. The sample is composed of 40,350 undergraduate college students at 70 colleges and universities. The online survey measured college students' relationships of academic competition with anxiety and depression. Only a few studies have formally measured these topics together before, however this article proceeded to even include minorities and underrepresented groups. Results concluded academic competition is a factor in college student stress, impairing their academic performance. The study also revealed important variations in the relationships of competition with depression and anxiety across student identities and academic disciplines. Further, they found that experiences with discrimination and weak peer support increase the already significant risk of mental illness that accompanies perceptions of intense competition.

### **Relevant Factor: Power**

Power is control, influence, dictation over others, and obedience. Power is often exerted through suppression, inequalities, marginalization, and reproduction. From what I have witnessed from the institutions I have attended; power looks like control over students, particularly through the use of grades. Grades are a primary form of power in the university. They exert control and influence over students' thoughts and behavior. They can dictate what others do and encourage obedience. Grades can even suppress students, creating new or



increasing existing inequalities and marginalization among all college students. Finally, grades reproduce ideas and behaviors in students that can last a lifetime.

### **Grades, Ideology, and Althusser**

Grades are an ideological construct created by those who are in power. The ideology of grades was implemented long ago, but no longer holds the same meaning. Originally, grades were meant to measure student learning and attainment. Grades now have a few new ideological ends that they represent including: the measurement of correct information a student can recall, the measurement of student intelligence and identity, and also an accurate depiction of student future success. These new ideologies of grades misconstrue the idea of genuine learning, knowledge, and growth, so why do students and educators continue to let grades impose on these aspects and govern how universities control us? Philosopher, Louis Althusser (2014) states, “in a determinate representation of the world whose imaginary distortion depends on their imaginary relation to their conditions of existence, in other words, in the last instance, to the relations of production (ideology = an imaginary relation to real relations).” Thus, people believe in these ideologies and believe that they define them. Ideologies according to Althusser have material existence. It is only manifested through actions, behaviors, thoughts, and so on. Ultimately, Althusser is saying that ideologies are not real, people attach them to real conditions, making ideologies seem real.

Through the reproduction of these ideologies in dominant systems such as the education system, it seems that ideologies do define us and dictate our lives. These ideologies were engrained into everyone by those in power as soon as we began schooling at a young age, thus reversing the effects becomes a hard task to accomplish. Allowing students to believe their success, intelligence, identity, and self-worth are attached to a single letter grade or percentage

for so long is detrimental. Students no longer care about learning and enhancing their skills but are too concerned with what is going to be on the test (Durm, 1993).

This has changed the definition of going to school and getting a degree. Brown (2015) says it best herself, in today's world:

knowledge is not sought for purposes apart from capital enhancement, whether that capital is human, corporate, or financial. It is not sought for developing the capacities of citizens, sustaining culture, knowing the world, or envisioning and crafting different ways of life in common. Rather, it is 'sought for positive ROI' - return on investment. (p. 178)

The education system has become an ideological state apparatus (ISA) (Althusser, 2014). These environments produce the dominant ideologies. They then reproduce these dominant ideologies onto their students.

Althusser begins to introduce the idea of ISA in his 2014 work *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. As he stated:

we have brought the concept of Ideological State Apparatus into play and demonstrated that there are several such apparatuses, while also showing the function they have and the fact that they realize different regions and forms of ideology, unified under the State Ideology. (p. 177)

Althusser realizes there are many forms of ISA, and they all have different functions and ideologies. Universities are an example of an ISA and universities have their own norms and ideologies. In an ISA, interpellation happens. Interpellation is defined as "a concrete moment of ideological reproduction" (Backer, 2018, p. 2). Backer (2018) explains that when you are interpellated, you get with the program of a dominant imagined relation to real conditions. When

you are interpellated, you become a subject of that ideology, recruited to the ideology, so that you “go” all by yourself and follow the ideology without any force compelling you. I argue that grades are a key tool of interpellation in the ISA of the university.

### **Grades, Conduct, and Foucault**

The question comes to how to challenge these dominant ideologies. College students must begin to ask themselves how and by whom do they want to be conducted? And, towards what do we want to be conducted (Foucault, 2007)? French philosopher, Michel Foucault (2007), defines conduct as the activity of conducting, but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself, lets oneself be conducted, is conducted, and finally, the way in which one behaves as an effect of the conduct of others. To simplify, Foucault understands conduct as how one is managed by themselves and others.

Education systems, and those who work in them, conduct students, particularly through the coercion of grading. Students, however, are able to work towards reversing, redistributing, nullifying, and discrediting this power through *counter-conduct*. In reference to my thematic concern, mindfulness is going to be a counter-conduct to the conduct of grading and how it impacts college students. The practice of mindfulness will help students resist, escape, or even modify the way they allow themselves to be affected by grading norms and unsupportive institutions. Through the discussion of imposter syndrome, feelings, and implementing a healthy coping mechanism, students will demand to be conducted a different way. By demanding to be conducted a different way, refusing to believe something, and questioning accuracy and validity, students can challenge those in power and the ideologies in place. There are norms, social constructs, and repercussions to face, but think to yourself, how you would want to be conducted, by whom you want to be conducted, and towards what do we want to be conducted?

### **Relevant Factor: Student Identity**

Change is inevitable. Throughout life everything is constantly changing, including yourself. There are many aspects that shape our lives: media, culture, family, friends, experiences, education, identity, and so on. In this section I go into detail regarding the many theories that explain identity development and are relevant to my thematic concern. Identity and identity development are vital when it comes to understanding self and participation in social systems. The theories I touch on revolve around learning, knowledge, growth through experiences, social contexts, and understanding of self. First, I will describe identity development for college students. This section will include discussions of Multiple Identity Theory, self-efficacy, and self-authorship. Then, I will outline the learning theories in my program. The learning theories I will be describing are Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, Theory of Emotional Intelligence, and Theory of Mindful Learning. These theories are important to note as they apply to the discussion of punitive grading norms and unsupportive institutions impacting college students. These environments, contexts, experiences, and influences can change a student unnoticeably. Thus, the importance of change we must distinguish and how the change impact's identity, identity development, and shapes college students.

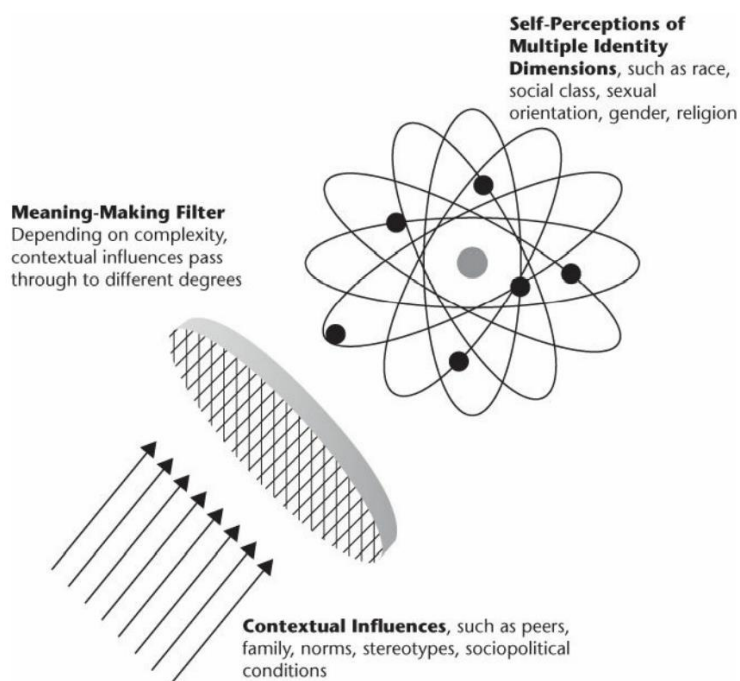
#### **Identity Development for College Students**

Multiple Identity Theory is one lens through which we can view impacts on college students' identity. The Multiple Identity Theory is when you develop multiple identities through different experiences in different settings. This theory takes into account all the influences that will impact your identity. Sometimes these may go unnoticed, however, thinking about identity changes, contexts, and experiences, it is easier to recognize all of the dimensions involved. A

few dimensions involved include race, social class/socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, and religion. Below I attached Figure 2 from Patton (2016b) to help better understand the process.

**Figure 2**

*Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity*



**Figure 4.1** RECONCEPTUALIZED MODEL OF MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY

Source: Abes, Jones, & McEwen (2007).

*Note.* The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity displays how multiple identities can influence one's identity. Retrieved from *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (p. 85), Patton, 2016, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This diagram shows how these multiple dimensions can influence your identity. This could be peers in class, college friends on campus, friends from high school, family, norms, they all have some sort of impact. One underexplored influence on student identity development is that of

grades. From my own experiences, I know that grades played a key role in shaping how I viewed myself throughout my schooling. I let my grades I achieved in my classes dictate how smart or not smart I thought I was. Letting grades determine your self-worth and how you view yourself is not good when attaching it to identity, identity development, self-efficacy, and health and wellbeing. Some students may identify having good grades and being ranked very high as one of their most valued identities. However, on the opposite side, students who believe they are a bad student due to not achieving good grades, can fall into learned helplessness and other negative ideologies. Learned helplessness is a state where a person may feel powerless, defeated, and incapable after multiple failed attempts at something. This state can be caused by a lack of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Consequently, the idea of always earning bad grades and failing to succeed can impact a student's identity, identity development, and overall wellbeing and health. Grade, rank, and intelligence can be a crucial part of one's identity and how they perceive themselves.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy according to Bandura (1997) refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainment. Self-efficacy is important when it comes to student identity and identity development because it revolves around beliefs. Self-efficacy also impacts motivation, behaviors, and goals we choose to pursue, even majors in college (Bandura, 1995; Bandura, 1977). Additionally, a person's attitudes and abilities are incorporated in their self-efficacy as well.

To preface, it is imperative to discuss weak and strong self-efficacy and what it looks like. Weak self-efficacy consists of avoiding challenging tasks, believing that difficult tasks and situations are beyond capabilities, focusing on personal failings and negative outcomes, and

quickly losing confidence in personal abilities. Difficult and challenging tasks are viewed as threats. They are more likely to experience feelings of failure and depression, thus the avoidance of challenging tasks. Individuals with weak or low self-efficacy tend to avoid setting goals for this reason. They also lack determination and confidence in their ability to achieve goals. Likewise, they have a low level of commitment and will give up easily if obstacles or setbacks appear. As you can see, these individuals are less resilient and struggle with dealing with stressful situations.

However, their counterparts who have high and strong self-efficacy are able to remain optimistic and view challenges as tasks to be mastered. Difficulties are not threats to those with strong self-efficacy as they perceive failure not as defeat, but an opportunity to apply more effort and discover new ways to overcome. These individuals are intrinsically motivated, recover quickly from setbacks or disappointments, form a stronger sense of commitment to interests and activities, and develop deeper interest in activities they participate in. Individuals with strong and high levels of self-efficacy are very confident. Bandura (1995) lists they are confident in their abilities, performing well, doing well on tests, sticking to goals, learning new information, managing their health, and taking control to improve their health. Ultimately, individuals with strong self-efficacy believe they can do well in all areas and aspects of life (i.e., school, work, sports, hobbies, friendships, relationships, parenting). They have the confidence in their abilities to fulfill their identity's task or requirements.

College can be a very big and lifechanging experience. For some students, this may be a time where they explore and really discover who they are. In this time, students also have the chance to eliminate anything they no longer believe fits in their identity or who they are. Bandura (1995) says "judgements of one's knowledge, skills, strategies, and stress management

also enter into the formation of efficacy beliefs” (p. 205). Self-efficacy encompasses more than beliefs; it is important to view how identity can also impact self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, identities, and identity development go hand-in-hand. A few identities students may identify with include race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, social class or socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religions, (dis)abilities, occupancy, and so on. Students’ identities and how they view themselves also affect self-efficacy. Bandura (1995) specifically notes culture, social class, gender, gender identity, work ethic, involvement, and physical activity impact self-efficacy. Culture and social class are comprehensive. There are many different levels, ideologies, and so forth. Yet, each one is unique and will impact an individual’s beliefs differently. Gender and gender identity are not only vital when it comes to male and female norms, but they also play a role when considering them alongside culture and social class. Adding culture and social class ideologies to the very many norms already associated with males and females makes things a bit more complex. Another significant impact to self-efficacy is work ethic and involvement. Bandura (1995) indicates students who work harder and are more involved have higher self-efficacy compared to their counterparts who may not work hard and are not as involved (p. 204). Corresponding to that, is also physical activity. Bandura (1995) states increased physical activity results in higher self-efficacy (p. 264-265). Therefore, being an athlete, a consistent gym-goer, or a very involved individual whether it is academics or community, means having a stronger sense in belief of attainment.

Bandura (1995) wrote “Successes build a sense of self-efficacy; failures weaken it” (p. 149). Knowing who you are, your abilities, and what you are capable of can strengthen self-efficacy and help diminish failures and fear of failure. If students can formulate and commit to their identity’s to further bolster the strengthening of their self-efficacy from many dimensions,



students will no longer allow grades and grading norms to affect them as much as they may have before. Students will no longer need the support of their universities because they will be confident, optimistic, and prepared to face challenges.

### **Self-Authorship**

Self-authorship supports self-efficacy. As defined by Robert Kegan and referenced by Baxter Magolda (2002), self-authorship is the capacity to author, or invent, one's own beliefs, values, sense of self, and relationships with others. Self-efficacy encompasses belief in oneself. Self-authorship helps strengthen one's beliefs, values, sense of self, and so on like mentioned previously. If one has a strong sense of self-authorship, then they will have strong self-efficacy and vice versa. Self-authorship is an important trait to have when it comes to guiding one's life. This requires constructing your own self-definition. Self-definition is defining your role in your life or individuality. This also requires taking ownership and responsibility for one's life. However, this does not come easily as this is a long and unique journey. This next quote really pulls into how I believe education should look in terms of my philosophy of education:

Self-authorship encompasses the multitude of expectations educators have of college students. Educators strive to promote critical thinking, appreciation of diversity, and mature actions both on campus and beyond. Educators want students to acquire knowledge, learn how to analyze it, and learn the process of judging what to believe themselves. Educators want students to appreciate diversity and engage in civil interactions. Educators want students to make wise choices about alcohol use and dating behavior. These are expectations for complex ways of constructing knowledge, one's identity, and one's relations with others that would make campus life healthier and

prepare graduates for productive participation in adult society. (Baxter Magolda, 2002, p. 3)

In turn, all of these actions and characteristics educators strive to foster in students, will only in turn strengthen the students' own beliefs, identities, and relationships ultimately improving their self-authorship. Additionally, there are three assumptions linked to promoting self-authorship in individuals. These three assumptions are linked to contexts and environments individuals may encounter along their journey to self-authorship. Baxter Magolda (2002) states the three assumptions as so: 1) that knowledge is complex and socially constructed; 2) that self is central to knowledge construction; and 3) that authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers. As you can see, they all revolve around learning and sharing knowledge. Individuals will be taking on many different roles, responsibilities, situations, and when they are in knowledge producing situations. These assumptions assist in effectively growing students into self-authorship. By developing self-authorship in students', they will be able to take charge of their life and learning.

### **Relevant Factor: Learning Theories and My Program**

In this section I will discuss several learning theories that have informed my intervention detailed in Chapter four. As stated, this program will be a mindfulness-based intervention that seeks to address students lagging self-efficacy and well-being due to punitive grading practices. Below I will discuss Experiential Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, Theory of Emotional Intelligence, and the Theory of Mindful Learning, all of which have informed my program.

## **Experiential Learning Theory and Situated Learning Theory**

Before I dive into Experiential Learning Theory and Situated Learning Theory, I will note that I will be approaching these theories from a constructive point of view. Constructivism is a theory that says learners create, build, and form knowledge rather than passively taking in information. All experiences have a useful purpose. Students can reflect on these experiences and build their own knowledge from them, then incorporating it into their already preexisting schema.

Similar to constructivism, Experiential Learning Theory is an active collaborative student experience. This experience Reis (n. d.) states emphasizes the unique and individualized nature of interaction in the learning experience. John Dewey believed that learners construct new knowledge based on previous knowledge and that experiences are unique to each learner. If a student does not continue to interact and experience, they do not learn. This theory promotes active participation by the learner in their learning environment, reinforcing the importance of effective teaching and learning experiences. As you can see, the educator plays just as valuable of a role as the student learner. Communication, dialogue, and active engagement are going to be resources that everyone involved is going to want to utilize frequently. This is important in regard to my program design and program sessions. My program design revolves around group discussion. Students will have the opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge, hear about others' experiences, and listen to what they have to offer. Each program sessions' focus is to interact, collaborate, and learn.

The next theory places a great emphasis on roles in contexts. Situated Learning Theory states ideas and actions are generalizable and are adapted to the ongoing environment. The learning process still takes place in a social context; however, it is situated in that specific

context, culture, or activity. This learning seems unintentional due to it being situated. My program will allow imposter syndrome, feelings regarding grades and grading norms, and mindfulness to be learned in a situated social context. There will be specific activities in place to help students feel comfortable and be authentic. Similar to my program, the Situated Learning Theory includes elements of observation, sharing of knowledge, reflection, acquisition of skills, relationship building, and learning. Participating in this type of social interaction is a critical component encouraging learners to become a community of learners espousing certain beliefs and behaviors (Reis, n. d.).

### **Theory of Emotional Intelligence**

When thinking of emotional intelligence, what are some adjectives that come to mind? The Theory of Emotional Intelligence is a way of recognizing and understanding how we think, feel, and act. The Theory of Emotional Intelligence fits well into my program design due to the discussions based around feelings, actions, experiences, and thoughts. However, having emotional intelligence of motivation, determination, and vision are not enough. Reis (n. d.) restates from Daniel Goleman that the Theory of Emotional Intelligence also includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These five components suggest we include feelings and attitudes into our learning experiences.

This theory had people stopping in their tracks to rethink the skills or traits needed for effective leadership. Educators now needed to consider more aspects than environments and behaviors. I believe this Theory of Emotional Intelligence helps to guide thinking and actions adequately in accordance with the other theories mentioned above as well. In terms of my thematic concern of college students struggling to build a strong sense of self-efficacy and improvement of overall health due to universities punitive grading system and lack of support,

the Theory of Emotional Intelligence is one of importance due to the focus on self-awareness and self-regulation. Additionally, the introduction of mindfulness and practice of meditations are steps towards emotional intelligence. Mindfulness involves understanding ourselves, our feelings, and being aware in the present moment.

### **Theory of Mindful Learning**

The last theory that will be discussed in this section of student identity is the Theory of Mindful Learning. It is essential to touch on this theory due to mindfulness being an important part of my program. Ellen Langer, a Psychology professor at Harvard University has studied mindfulness since the 1980's and has coined this theory. The Theory of Mindful Learning is learning in which the learner is aware of their mental state. Mindful learning means learning will have to be engaging and more thoughtful. Three characteristics are important in this type of mindfulness. The three characteristics are "creating new categories, openness to new information, and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective" (Langer, 1997, p. 4, as cited in Reis, n. d.). Mindful learning and mindfulness seem to be getting closer to critical thinking, although there is no research to currently support this claim. In the Theory of Mindful Learning, students are aware of their mental state, meaning they know what they are thinking, how they are feeling, and so forth. Like I mentioned above, educators will be dealing with more self-aware individuals. This is getting closer to the building and strengthening of self-efficacy that students need.

### **Relevant Factor: The Mindful Way of Living is Sustainable**

When looking at mindfulness and even the grading system, sustainability does have a partial influence. Sustainability is the ability to maintain over time. The concept of sustainability

contains three pillars: environmental, economic, and social. Society tries to push all three dimensions equally. Let's think about what society is trying to promote for a second – going to college, getting a job, helping the economy, living more sustainably, promoting wellness, and much more. Living life sustainably is a mindful way of living. For example, eating healthy food, only taking what you need, and having little to no waste can all be completed with a bit of mindfulness. Becoming more aware of your eating habits and what you are eating is a simple task. When at the grocery store, instead of buying excess items, only purchase what you absolutely need. Only consuming what you know you will and can eat helps reduce waste. Additionally, do not forget about reusing and recycling. By living more mindfully, all these activities can be done. These actions can spark the promotion of better wellness. Slowly you are switching to a healthier lifestyle by watching what you are eating, you are eating healthier options, and paying more attention to simple things. This could result in taking better care of your body, going to the gym, getting outside more, biking to work, and so on.

According to Ivan Illich (1973), “the engineering of consumers has become the economy's principal growth sector” (p. 21). Consumerism is fast growing in the market. How are we able to take consumerism and turn it more positive? Consumerism takes on a very purposive behavioristic approach. A purposive behavioral approach is “the idea that much of behavior is goal-directed” (King, 2019, p. 190). To further connect this to my thematic concern, grades are a product of consumerism. Grades have now become what students “buy.” They go to college, they receive their grades, earn credits, and graduate and leave. There is no deep lifelong learning or development, only a product with one end in mind. This idea also connects with the idea of Neoliberalism that I mentioned earlier. The main goal is economic prosperity for society, yet with switching our mindset to be more mindful the goal can change. Learning to be more

mindful can happen with consistency in implementing this type of behavior. Moreover, people will find mindfulness in their learning. Not only are people being more mindful, but they are also learning a lifelong skill and supporting their health and wellbeing. This type of growth mindset is complementary to holistic growth.

### **Relevant Factor: Traditional Grading Models vs. New Alternate Grading Models**

Mindful education is the act of authentic engagement and true learning. This is the type of education I advocate in my philosophy of education. Authentic engagement and true learning are also what new alternate grading models encourage. Alfie Kohn (2011) claims “if we take the research seriously, then the absence of grades is a necessary condition for promoting deep thinking and a desire to engage in it” (p. 31). Since we are currently unable to rid of grades entirely due to it being such a monumental task at hand, we can at least propose other ways of grading that will still nourish engagement, growth, and learning.

Ergo, how are educators to do things differently? A process that is becoming more popular insists on communicating and providing feedback. This form of grading can help students learn more effectively (Butler, 1988; Kohn, 1994). However, at some institutions educators will still have to provide a letter grade. After conducting copious amounts of research, I found a few notable institutions that have been employing various different modes of grading their college students. Alverno College, Brown University, Fairhaven College, Goddard College, New College of Florida, and Sarah Lawrence College are all institutions that are not following the norm. Each institution has a form of narrative evaluation or transcript from professors. The professors also must give the opportunity to the college student to meet with them to discuss the critical feedback. Likewise, at half of the institutions, the college students must also critique

themselves and provide their own self-assessment to their professors. Additionally, only two institutions mention having their college students set specific goals at the beginning of every year that they must achieve. This is a signed contract by the student and their advisor, thus these goals and whether they were achieved or not do play into if they graduate. Next, two institutions utilize portfolios. The portfolios are combined of the work college students complete every semester. At the end of their college career, the final portfolio is evaluated. Lastly, three institutions specifically state they utilize the pass/fail option. When choosing “Satisfactory” as your grade, college students have the option to show the letter grade that corresponds to what they have earned. When choosing “No Credit,” no grade is reported. Anything that is below a “C” is a failing grade, which is not recorded. There were two institutions who noted that they can translate their evaluations into grades if needed for additional schooling or transferring purposes.

Out of all six institutions I spoke about, all of them implemented those types of grading systems because they support college students learning and understanding, development of skills, holistic growth, effective goal setting, and improvement of knowledge. These institutions encourage taking risks and exploration of freedom. No one person's experiences are the same, hence none of the institutions I mentioned compute GPAs. All institutions define a few set abilities their students will achieve and attain that will make them best equipped and prepared for success after graduation.

On the other hand, conventional grading ceases all that is accomplished with the alternative grading methods above. Traditional grading damages college students as it is not a correct representation of their knowledge, learning, or determinant of future success. Letter grades undermine learning – or as I call it, mindless learning. Mindless learning is a type of passive learning where one lacks mind, thought, care, or consciousness. Learning is senseless;



the emphasis is on what is taught and was it delivered. Educators are too concerned with meeting the expectations given by those above them. This outlook of what did you get instead of what did you learn negatively impacts students. Ivan Illich (1973) says,

School prepares for the alienating institutionalization of life by teaching the need to be taught. Once this lesson is learned, people lose their incentive to grow in independence; they no longer find relatedness attractive, and close themselves off to the surprises which life offers when it is not predetermined by institutional definition. (p. 22)

From a young age we are told we need to obey and follow the rules to learn and be taught. This deteriorates individuals' creativity, curiosity, and desire to learn and discover. Keep in mind this is not all due to educators. Common assessments, standardized testing, and accreditations are all factors as well. Some educators could be trying their best to loosen the shackles grading has around them, but these make it hard. My program, detailed in the next chapter, will seek to remedy some of the consequences of this system.

## **Chapter Four: Program Design & Implementation**

The intervention based on my thematic concern that I propose is a two-part program to address the issue of low self-esteem and lack of self-efficacy for college students. Many college students struggle to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and consequently have a decrease in wellbeing. In my experience, much of this state is caused by punitive grading norms and lack of institutional support. This issue is important because low self-esteem and lack of self-efficacy contribute to a decrease in retention, satisfaction, well-being, and graduation. As the research shows, enrollment is challenging, retention rates are decreasing, and students' overall well-being is declining (Choi, 2005; Kohn, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2019). It is clear that students are struggling to succeed. Students need to know they are valued, they belong, and that their institution wants them to be successful (Baxter Magolda, 2002; Han et. al, 2017; McCown, 2011, 2016) regardless of a specific grade in a specific course.

This educational system and its norms are very competitive. The pressure students face when expected to achieve a specific grade or GPA is important to note as this pressure contributes to stress and anxiety. Students tend to lose focus on their learning and focus more on if the information will be on an exam or not – or worse, how their performance compares to others (Kohn, 2011). Additionally, parents, friends, families, and even teachers add to the pressure students face when it comes to grades. According to a 2019 report by the Pew Research Center, stress, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation are a major problem among students. Mitchell & Ortega (2019) and Eyler (2022) both state with the increase in evidence from major research studies that these health issues have been getting much worse over time and are not likely to get better without some sort of serious sustained intervention. Therefore, I am proposing this program.

## **Purpose and Goals**

In this intervention, my intentions are to help students identify their feelings, emotions, and confront imposter syndrome. The intervention will also help students detach their identity from grades, learn and implement practicing mindfulness, and combat stress. Additionally, I want the intervention to result in increasing student's self-efficacy and improving their wellbeing and overall health. These things will be accomplished through three intervention goals.

The first goal is to increase student awareness and practice of mindfulness. The mindfulness-based intervention will assist students in combating their stress, identifying their feelings, and improving their wellbeing and health.

College students will develop a personal use of mindfulness practice that they will engage in outside of the program. To achieve this goal, college students will learn two of the practices utilized in the program. The intention is that they can then use the practices themselves. The mindfulness practices are very simple and easy to learn. They can also be shortened or lengthened. In addition, at the end of each session, I will encourage the college students to practice at home. I will also mention the importance of keeping a journal to write about each practice they did and what they experienced. This is beneficial to reflect on their experiences to visualize their growth and learning (McCown, 2011). The journal can also be another way to assess students' participation and understanding of the program. My hopes are that this will keep students consistent and that they will develop a habit of practicing in their own time a few days a week.

The second goal is for college students to articulate how traditional grading contributes to their feelings of imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and stress. This goal will be accomplished

through open discussion, recognition of feelings/emotions and stressors, and implementation of mindfulness.

A second goal that will be achieved through this program is that college students will be able to articulate how traditional evaluation and grading contributes to their feelings of imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and stress. To achieve this goal, the college students will learn what imposter syndrome is and what it means to them. During discussion in the program session, the facilitator should ask students about their experiences when they felt imposter syndrome. This will aid in college students being able to articulate some of their feelings. From this open conversation regarding their feelings, the college students will be able to explain what fear of failure means to them. The dialogue will approach where the feelings stem from and how we can combat them. Additionally, the facilitator should connect these comments to grades and grading norms if they have not already been mentioned by students beforehand. To note, this talk will encompass a lot of stressors and stress. Resulting from this exchange, students will have learned about how their peers have been affected by the same concepts, but in much different ways.

Finally, the third goal is to engage the campus community in the discussion of how grading, imposter syndrome, mental health, etc. contribute to student dissatisfaction and lack of self-efficacy. Creating an advisory board of interested and motivated faculty, staff, and students to address these issues, explores nontraditional grading methods and advocates for mindfulness practices will be part of the proposed intervention.

The advisory board will advocate for nontraditional grading. To achieve this goal, the advisory board will implement a nontraditional grading method into their classroom if they are professors. The professors involved will be piloting nontraditional grading and can help add to the research supporting it. They also have the opportunity to try different grading methods,

determine their effectiveness, see how students react and adapt, ask what students think about it, and analyze the results. Furthermore, doing this could add to the evidence and argument of why institutions should consider changing grading models. For staff to help achieve this goal, they will bring in guest speakers, have monthly meetings, inform colleagues, and assist in the continuation of the program. The advisory board will further help by being additional advocates on campus. They can inform others of the program, how to get involved, and how to help students.

I have proposed this intervention for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, I want to help students improve their self-efficacy, health, wellbeing, and reduce their pressure, stress, and anxiety. The intervention will support students holistically including addressing issues of mentality/mindset, overall health and wellbeing, self-introspection, communication skills, recognition of feelings and emotions, stress management, lifelong learning, self-efficacy, self-concepts, self-perception, identity development, and more.

### **Theory to Practice**

As I mentioned in chapter two, CAR informs my intervention by addressing issues of power, injustice, and inequality. It also informs my intervention by aiming to achieve historical self-consciousness and responding to challenges. Critical action research connects to this program because of the social context achieved collectively by participants. Not only are the participants engaged in a social context, but they are also achieving personal growth from the development of their self-consciousness and self-awareness through the mindfulness-based intervention. In addition, there will be many opportunities for exchanging information, investigating, evaluating, and discussing other alternative outcomes to this issue of grades and the grading system.

A few frameworks and theories mentioned in my previous chapters that will also inform my intervention are ideas from Bandura (1995, 1997a, 1997b), Choi (2005), Han et. al (2017), Kabat-Zinn (1990), Kohn (1994, 2011), and McCown (2011, 2013, 2016). The key aspects of my intervention are improving self-efficacy and the utilization of a mindfulness-based intervention. The intervention will result in addressing and increasing student self-efficacy and overall health and wellbeing. Bandura's work on self-efficacy is key to informing this intervention. He found that self-efficacy impacts many aspects of one's life – beliefs, identities, motivation, behaviors, goals, attitudes, abilities, knowledge, skills, stress management, work ethic, and much more. In the program, college students will learn how to articulate how traditional grading contributes to their feelings of imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and stress. Choi (2005) found that college students who have a high degree of self-percepts tend to attain higher academic achievement. Han et. al (2017) discovered high self-efficacy and a high sense of belonging returned high grades and high rates of first-to-second year retention. Additionally, Kabat-Zinn (1990) and McCown (2011, 2013, 2016) inform this intervention by supporting the use of mindfulness and MBI's. They found that through the use of mindfulness and MBI's, individuals decrease their stress, become more aware, live in the moment, grow, and become more in tune with themselves. Moreover, both state it is important that mindfulness becomes a lifelong habit as it is most beneficial if used consistently long-term.

These frameworks, theories, and utilization of CAR help detach grades from student identities, understand grading norms and nontraditional grading methods, implement healthy coping mechanisms through mindfulness, and increase students' overall self-efficacy, health, and wellbeing.

## **Professional Competencies**

Through the lens of the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA) professional competencies, we are able to visualize how my thematic concern intersects with my proposed intervention. The competencies that represent the overlap of my thematic concern with my proposed intervention are Social Justice and Inclusion, Leadership, Advising and Supporting, Personal and Ethical Foundations, and Values, Philosophy, and History.

### **Social Justice and Inclusion**

ACPA/NASPA (2015) states the competency area of Social Justice and Inclusion “as a process and a goal which includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power” (p. 14). Social Justice and Inclusion relates to my thematic concern and proposed intervention by addressing issues of oppression, privilege, and power. My proposed program will do the same. It will address the oppression college students face from grades, grading norms, and their institutions. It will address the privilege of having a strong sense of self, self-efficacy, and good holistic health and wellbeing. Lastly, it will address the power grades hold and the power of institutions regarding grading norms. The facilitator also has the social responsibility of creating a learning environment that fosters equitable participation of everyone while addressing the issues of oppression, privilege, and power.

## **Leadership**

ACPA/NASPA (2015) states the competency area of Leadership “involves both the individual role of a leader and the leadership process of individuals working together to envision, plan, and affect change in organizations and respond to broad-based constituencies and issues” (p. 13). The facilitator will serve as a leader, the college students will serve as leaders, and the individuals on the advisory board will serve as leaders. The facilitator will lead the program, sessions, and discussions. The college students will serve as their own leader and leaders to their peers. Certain college students will be their own leader recognizing their feelings and expressing them to the group. They are able to take control over their own lives, define their imposter syndrome, recognizing how they feel, and identifying where their fear of failure stems from. Some students may not be open to communicating until someone else takes the first step and opens up. Therefore, some students may be a leader for their peers taking that first step and setting the tone.

## **Advising and Supporting**

ACPA/NASPA (2015) states the competency area of Advising and Supporting as “Addresses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to providing advising and support to individuals and groups through direction, feedback, critique, referral, and guidance” (p. 15). Advising and Supporting relates to my thematic concern and proposed intervention by stating the individuals involved will be serving as advisors and supporters. The facilitator and college students will have the opportunity to provide feedback, guidance, direction, and support during discussions. Advising and Supporting is important because they take into account self-knowledge and the needs of others. Plus, it is critical in advancing the holistic wellbeing of all involved. Lastly, the advisory board will help set the tone for others to follow or join for



advocating for nontraditional grading models and support of students' wellbeing and self-efficacy. They also have the chance to provide support to other staff and faculty who may want to take that step into a nontraditional grading model.

### **Personal and Ethical Foundations**

ACPA/NASPA (2015) states the competency area of Personal and Ethical Foundations as “the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop and maintain integrity in one’s life and work; this includes thoughtful development, critique, and adherence to a holistic and comprehensive standard of ethics and commitment to one’s own wellness and growth” (p. 12). Personal and Ethical Foundations relates to my thematic concern and proposed intervention because it connects to the outcomes from practicing mindfulness, improves self-efficacy, strengthens self-awareness, fosters growth, increases wellbeing, enhances self-authorship, and reflection.

### **Values, Philosophy, and History**

ACPA/NASPA (2015) states the competency area of Values, Philosophy, and History as “knowledge, skills, and dispositions that connect the history, philosophy, and values of the student affairs profession to one’s current professional practice” (p. 12). This competency area embodies the foundations of grades, grading norms, education, and mindfulness and where current and future research/practice will develop and transform. It is important to demonstrate this competency area in my thematic concern and proposed intervention because it ensures that the college students are informed and understand the values, philosophy, and history of grades, grading norms, the education system, and mindfulness.

### **Related Professional Experience**

The first time I noticed there was an issue with the ideologies behind grading and grading systems was not only my personal experience as a college student during my undergraduate career, but when I was a Teaching Assistant for a general psychology course. Students were always asking about extra credit and trying to achieve a specific grade. It seemed as if no one was really interested in the information that was being taught during class. The next time I noticed this was during a summer internship with the Financial Aid Office. I never knew grades and having a low GPA impacted students' ability to attain financial aid. Students who were on academic probation or were below a certain GPA, were unable to receive financial aid – until they reached a specific GPA.

The last time this issue appeared was in and still is in my experience of working in disability offices. I had and still have the opportunity of working one-on-one with students in academic success coaching. During this experience, I again recognized how punitive grading norms punished students registered with the office. Not to mention, some individuals who identify to have a disability may already be at a disadvantage to their peers who do not identify with a disability. My current office also offers a mindfulness program. Through learning and experience with this mindfulness program, I realized how much it has to offer to individuals in terms of increasing wellbeing and decreasing stress. I believe it was so impactful and interesting that I researched mindfulness more and ultimately decided to join a Graduate Certificate program in Applied Mindfulness. After the opportunity to learn more about mindfulness, become more involved, and “preach” what I was practicing, I knew I could use this as my intervention in my proposed program. I had the realization that this great tool, technique, and concept of

mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions could benefit more people in many different ways.

Throughout these experiences, there is one reoccurring theme – stress and anxiety caused by punitive grading norms. The majority of students were concerned with getting a certain grade and passing their classes. Not many students were interested in learning and enjoying the material they were being taught. I have heard a lot of negative comments made regarding classes and their content. These students have been trained to achieve a certain grade, pass, get their degree, and get a job. In a few of my graduate classes, my thematic concern was reinforced continuously. Plus, COVID-19 has been made a significant impact in higher education (Adedoyin & Soykan 2020; Gamage et al. 2020a, 2020b; Pokhrel & Chhetri 2021).

### **Program Proposal**

Throughout the duration of the program, each topic referenced will address my thematic concern. I will incorporate building college student self-efficacy, improving student health, and how mindfulness practices reduce stress. Additionally, I will be discussing grades, thoughts about grades, how grades are attached to student identities, and what students can do to detach their grades from their identities. Additionally, the sessions will include discussions about how they feel, their emotions, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, and mindfulness.

My solution to my concern is implementing a two-part program, *Mindfull*: Practices to Reduce Stress, in order to address the issue of college students struggling to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and decrease in wellbeing caused by punitive grading norms and lack of institutional support. The play on words with “*Mindfull*” is meant to signify the mindfulness-based intervention that aims to decrease stress. Additionally, the “*Mindfull*” is meant to signify

the recognition of feelings, meaningful group discussions, and learning many techniques and skills to holistically improve oneself. Part One, “Grades Don’t Define You,” will focus on discussing grades, traditional grading norms, fear of failure, and imposter syndrome.

Mindfulness and mindfulness practice will be introduced during this portion of the program. Part Two, “Mindfulness and Other Strategies to Improve Wellbeing,” will continue to discuss grades, grading norms, fear of failure, and imposter syndrome in more depth. It will then go into tips, coping mechanisms, and alternatives to traditional grading models. Plus, more mindfulness practices will be introduced and practiced, as well as further exploring mindfulness. In Appendix A is an outline of a schedule and agenda for Part One and Part Two of the program.

I created an outline of a schedule and agenda (See Appendix A) of the program as a guideline for others to follow. This outline is subject to change according to how others would like to run their program. I chose this flow and organization of the sessions so there is always an opportunity for an individual to join the program at any time. Some students may be very involved and motivated right at the start of the school year. Some students may struggle to get involved, get comfortable with the flow of their new routine, feel motivated, discover resources, and so much more.

Since Part One is on a continuous rotation, I have each session from Part One following the same topics, descriptions, and guidelines. This consistency will help ensure that no one is falling behind, missing important information, or feeling confused or lost. For the mindfulness practice and information, I am following a close outline created by McCown (2011, 2016). The first few sessions begin with simple practices that are trauma-informed, have a good foundation for future practices, show people what they can expect, and help people learn the basis of

mindfulness and mindfulness practices. The practices after that are more developed, intricate, and need the groundwork of the easier practices.

The “Description” section explains everything that will take place during the session. Part One sessions are very similar since they are rotating, but the mindfulness practices that will be introduced and participated in will be different every session. Part One sessions will consist of introductions, introduction to the program and program goals, questions, and introduction to mindfulness and a specific practice. It will also be comprised of many discussions regarding imposter syndrome, fear of failure, grades, stress, anxiety, feelings, experiences, thoughts, and sensations. Part Two sessions are also similar but consist of more differences. Every session will contain learning of and discussions about self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-concept, their definitions, what those mean to students, students’ feelings, and how to improve those aspects. Additionally, there will be tips and coping mechanisms taught every session to combat stress and anxiety. There will be research provided to support and inform students learning and growth regarding these topics. On the other hand, the mindfulness and mindfulness practices will be different every session. There is a lot of information and practices to teach, so it is hard to fit it all in.

### **Part One: “Grades Don’t Define You”**

Part One, “Grades Don’t Define You,” will be two sessions that are one hour long and offered once a week. This first part will be a requirement for students in a health (HEA) class; thus, they need to attend the first part with the two sessions to attain completion credit for their HEA class. Prior to beginning the program, I will get in contact with professors who are willing to implement this into their course outline. Other students who are not required to attend this program for health course credit are also encouraged to join. They will not have the opportunity

to receive credit for class, but there will be incentives offered in Part Two. These incentives are described below.

To recruit these other students, the facilitator will need to market the program around campus. The use of flyers, ads on televisions around campus, descriptions in newsletters, and attachments sent to departments to share with their students are great ways to market the program. The facilitator can also take marketing a step further. This would be done by attending classes briefly, providing informational pamphlets to the students, and pitching an elevator speech to the class.

Part One will be held every week. This rotation of Part One taking place every week is for individuals who may join in throughout the semester. Since Part One will be running every week, students are able to join in at any session to start their process through the program. If someone joins midsemester they are able to join effortlessly, understand the content, and not miss anything important.

Class one of the first part of this program will begin with the discussion about grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, an introduction into mindfulness, and actively participating in a mindfulness meditation with group discussion afterwards. The class will develop the groundwork for students to become more open with sharing their feelings, thoughts, what they believe imposter syndrome is, what that looks like for them, and fear of failure. This will also be the base for destigmatizing grades. The second class of the first part of the program will continue this discussion but will take it a step further. This step will include detaching their grades from their identities, nontraditional grading methods versus traditional grading methods, more information about mindfulness, and another mindfulness practice with group discussion after.

Upon completion of the first part, students can move into the second part of the program if they desire. As mentioned above, there are incentives provided at the end of each session from Part Two. If a student attends every session in Part Two, they will have received four free gifts. Other incentives that will be awarded at the end of the program to students who attended both sessions in part one and all four sessions in part two include developing a lifelong habit of practicing mindfulness, the possibility of becoming a Mindfulness Mentor, and a guest speaker.

An additional incentive that will be awarded to three winning students from a raffle will be a one-time, all paid for goat yoga class. Again, the students had to attend all Part One and Part Two sessions to be entered into this raffle. Mentioned previously at the end of the Theory to Practice section above, I touch on the importance of why making mindfulness a lifelong habit is important with support from Kabat-Zinn (1990) and McCown (2011, 2013, 2016).

A Mindfulness Mentor would be an opportunity for college students to be a peer mentor who practices teaching mindfulness to their peers with support of the facilitator. If an individual enters the program after a session from Part Two has passed and they are interested in becoming a Mindfulness Mentor, I will allow them the opportunity to have a private meeting with me to discuss the process moving forward. I will go into more depth regarding a Mindfulness Mentor in chapter five. Next, the facilitator will have already booked a guest speaker in advance. The guest speaker will be scheduled for the weekend after the last session of Part Two convenes. The students will be permitted free attendance to the guest speaker. However, to other students who attended the program but did not attend all sessions, the guest speaker event will be offered at a discounted rate.

## **Part Two: “Mindfulness and Other Strategies to Improve Wellbeing”**

Part Two, “Mindfulness and Other Strategies to Improve Wellbeing,” can only be entered after completing the two sessions from Part One. The second part will be biweekly sessions that are still an hour long. In one semester, I will only host four sessions. Like I mentioned previously, students are able to join the second part as well at any time throughout the semester as long as they completed Part One. Part Two continues the discussion about grades and grading norms. These sessions, however, will dive more deeply into college students’ self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, and tips on how to manage fear of failure, imposter syndrome, and stress. The first 30-minutes of the sessions will entail those topics listed previously. Then, the other 30-minutes will continue to teach mindfulness, complete a practice, and discussion with the group about how the practice was for them and what they experienced. These sessions are meant to connect mindfulness into how it can help students manage stress, improve wellbeing and health, and create a comfortability in students to express their feelings. Mindfulness-based interventions can help combat these feelings and introduce a lifelong technique that can be used to cope with many situations, experiences, feelings, and sensations.

Part Two and its sessions will have free incentives built in to retain and recruit students. Incentives will be given out at each of the four sessions per semester. The incentives will include an institution t-shirt, a journal and pen, a reusable water bottle, a yoga mat, a month subscription to a mindfulness app, a meal swipe or flex dollars, and a gift card to the bookstore. Below is a table of when the incentives will be awarded.



**Table 1**

*Table showing when the incentives will be awarded*

<b>Completed Session</b>	<b>Incentive</b>
Part Two, Session One	A journal and a pen
Part Two, Session Two	A reusable aluminum water bottle
Part Two, Session Three	A plain yoga mat OR an institutional t-shirt
Part Two, Session Four	A meal swipe/flex dollars OR a gift card to the institution bookstore

The students will get their incentive(s) at the end of the session. There will also be refreshments and snacks provided at every workshop session. These refreshments and snacks will change with every session to fit the students' needs and interests. Ideally, the building of relationships, meaningful experiences, strengthening of skills and self-concept, and improvement of health and wellbeing will be what keep students coming back to the program, not just the incentives.

### **Challenges**

A few challenges I anticipate that I or others may face when implementing my program and intervention include booking a space, finding a convenient time of day, receiving program approval, lack of attendance in Part Two, and not finding professors who are willing to implement attending Part One into their course for credit.

Booking a space and finding a convenient time of day seem like easier challenges to mitigate. These can be accomplished by completing minimal research, then scheduling what seems best. Doing this work in advance is optimal so students, faculty, and facilitators can advertise the program. Booking space at convenient times of day for students will help program success. When looking into times and space, it is important to account for popular class times, extracurricular activities, and possibly even transportation.

The other three challenges will be more difficult to mitigate. Receiving program approval, finding professors willing to implement the program as part of their course for credit, and getting students to attend Part Two are going to be challenges one must begin early on as these may take more time. All three of these problems are similar – people may not like what you are offering and what you want to accomplish. There may be pushback on the topics or activities that will be taught and are taking place. Additionally, one may encounter individuals who are not as likeminded or who are simply not interested in what is offered. To help better prepare for these challenges the facilitator must do their research, engage the stakeholders, and formulate an adequate timeline to follow.

## **Conclusion**

This two-part MBI will provide current college students at the institution with the space to explore their harmful perspectives on grades and identify alternative mindsets and practices to support their growth. They will be able to connect with other students experiencing similar things, learn a lifelong stress-reduction technique, and have the opportunity to become a Mindfulness Mentor. Through this process, I hope to play a role in combatting the harmful outcomes brought on by universities punitive grading systems that convey to students they are not enough.

## **Chapter Five**

In chapter four, I explained my proposed intervention. The first part of chapter four included the program details, program goals and objectives, and how specific ACPA/NASPA (2015) professional competency areas inform my thematic concern and proposed intervention. The second part of chapter four included a background on how I came to my program design, a timeline of my proposed program, challenges that may arise when trying to implement my program, and detailed descriptions of Part One and Part Two of my program. The main feature of my intervention is the use of a MBI with open dialogue among the group and self-introspection. In this chapter, I will explain the timeline of my program, the budget and funding for the intervention, the measures that will be used to determine successful achievement of goals and objectives, limitations, and future considerations.

### **Implementation**

As mentioned in chapter four, there are a few challenges that could be mitigated if the right steps are taken when implementing the program. I have created an adequate timeline for those to follow to help better prepare for these foreseen challenges. The timeline can be located in Appendix B. This timeline is subject to change and based on the needs of the institution and program. The timeline provides a general idea of certain steps to implement the program. As this is a general timeline, it will still help the facilitator implement the program adequately.

### **Budget**

The budget for this intervention considers materials, supplies, incentives, and operational costs. You can find the breakdown of the budget in Appendix C. Some of the budget is subject to change depending on the institution size and sponsors/donors. The budget estimated for this

program is manageable until the addition of a guest speaker as an incentive was added. Booking a guest speaker will likely come from a booking agency. Online, AllAmericanSpeakers.com (AAE) provides abundant lists of speakers, their prices and fees, biographies, videos, frequently asked questions, availability checking, and pictures. The prices and fees per speaker are dependent upon a few factors including time of presentation, length of presentation, type of presentation, travel distance/location of event, schedule, and supply and demand/market value.

As an example, Jon Kabat-Zinn speaker fee is \$50,000-\$100,00 for a live event compared to \$20,000-\$30,000 for a virtual event (AAE, 2022). The ranges are guidelines and are subject to change. The other incentives combined are less than \$12,000. These expenses are important to achieve the program goals and objectives. They are meant to help bridge the gap from getting students from part one of the program to part two of the program. Plus, for the students who do not receive course credit for attending part one, the small items may be incentives to attend and explore what is being offered.

The operating expenses that include marketing materials, recruiting materials, supplies, and refreshments total \$2,000. These expenses are necessary to properly market the program and recruit students. The refreshments are a nice bonus when attending sessions. The sessions are an hour long and depending on the time of day they are held; refreshments may be a smart investment. Not only do refreshments keep participants hydrated and satisfied, but they create an opportunity to foster community. This means participants can chat with the other individuals involved, develop a sense of belonging, create relationships, and network. Typically, reserving a room/location does not have an associated cost.

Staffing this intervention would be included in a program director's time. If this program is replicated and that individual would like to be compensated for their time, work, and effort, it

needs to be allocated accordingly in the budget. I recommend a monthly stipend or a scholarship that is used to conduct official research with this program design.

## **Funding**

Mindfulness has been gaining popularity recently. Bamber and Kraenzle Schneider (2016) state that MBIs have been widely applied in research and integrated into college programs (p. 2). I believe institutions are making a wise investment to implement and research mindfulness. There are limitations that come with this intervention, but there is a chance to retrieve data. Institutional departments and certain majors could find funding through academic partners to implement a program and conduct research.

Departments, faculty and staff, and students will have the opportunity to learn mindfulness, experience a MBI, gain a new coping mechanism/technique, explore themselves, and manage/reduce stress. Not only would the department, the major, faculty and staff, and students benefit from this experience, but the sponsors would as well. The sponsors will be able to attach their name to findings and potentially receive marketing, resulting in sponsoring and funding other programs. The funding for this program will mainly come from sponsors and donors. In order to find sponsors and donors, the facilitator will have to research sponsors. This is very important. Once the facilitator has identified a few sponsors, reach out to said established companies and build a connection with a contact. After, the facilitator can pitch the program. The pitch should outline incentives to the sponsor to come off as more enticing. Upon completion of this process, the program will hopefully have donations.

Additionally, the second part of my program entails detaching identities from grades, recognizing, and exploring feelings of failure and imposter syndrome, and how to increase self-

efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, and overall health and wellbeing. Mental health and health are common research topics (Bambler & Kraenzle Schneider, 2016; Eyler, 2022; Mitchell & Ortega, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2019). Grades, GPA, and success have been becoming a more researched topic as well (Austin, 2018; Kohn 2011; Larson et. al, 2016; Naylor, 2017). Not long ago, COVID-19 became a variable that individuals can and should include in this conversation about health, grades, and success. This new variable presents a new idea for individuals to research. Since COVID is new and there is minimal research, this offers another avenue for obtaining funding. Considering COVID is new, more people will be willing to fund research regarding the topic. Presenting this during a pitch to a potential sponsor will help pull them in to why they should sponsor said program.

### **Leadership in a Mindfulness-Based Intervention**

This intervention necessitates most of the leadership to come from the facilitator. This means the program requires the facilitator to be the leader. With this intervention, students will develop their leadership skills, as well as the benefits of reducing stress, learning mindfulness practices, increasing self-efficacy, and others mentioned previously. Using The Social Change Model of Leadership Development and the 7 C's of Leadership from Astin & Astin (1996), I will identify how a MBI can be implemented to develop and enhance leadership and self-knowledge in students. Students who participate in the program are their own leaders already but will benefit from learning leadership competence. The facilitator implementing this intervention will encompass each of the 7 C's of Leadership and traits from multiple types of leadership styles. These leadership styles are participative/democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, servant, transformational/transformational, and effective. The model examines leadership development from the perspectives of the individual, the group, and the community/society. The 7 C's of

Leadership include consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship (Astin & Astin, 1996).

Consciousness of self is the ability to be “aware of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate one to take action” (Astin & Astin, 1996, p. 22). This means being aware and understanding what you are experiencing in the present moment. Consciousness of self informs the programs’ MBI because of the self-awareness, awareness, and being in the present moment. In terms of a leader, the facilitator and students can identify their feelings, understand their experiences, and improve their weaknesses. Consciousness of self is also interdependent with congruence. Congruence is consistency in thinking, feeling, and behaving genuine, authentic, and honest towards others (Astin & Astin, 1996, p. 22). Therefore, congruent individuals are consistent with their own values, beliefs, strengths, and limitations. Facilitators in this intervention will need to practice (mindfulness) what they are promoting and encouraging others to do. This illustrates a trustworthy, honest, and motivated leader, which, in turn, will spread to the students.

According to Astin & Astin (1996), “commitment is the psychic energy that motivated the individual to serve and that drives the collective effort” (p. 22). To ensure passion, engagement, and consistency, commitment requires knowledge of self and congruence for it to be directed correctly and to have value. Facilitators will pave the way for students by showing their dedication to mindfulness and helping students learn, grow, and develop.

Collaboration is the process of working with others or in a group in a common effort. For collaboration to be more effective, it helps to understand similarities, differences, strengths, weaknesses, and perspectives of all individuals involved. In this intervention, facilitators must lead and encourage the students to communicate and share during group discussions.

Collaboration fosters trust, requires leadership, and generates creative solutions or actions.

Through trusted and successful collaboration, common purpose can be recognized. Common purpose as explained by Astin & Astin (1996) is best achieved when all members of the group work with shared aims and values and engage in collective analysis of issues at hand and the task to be undertaken (p. 23). The intervention states that the issue at hand is grades and punitive grading norms negatively impacting college students' wellbeing and their ability to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, the purpose and goal of the program is to help college students improve their self-efficacy, health, and wellbeing. Other goals that may be achieved include managing and decreasing their stress, anxiety, and unpleasant feelings. These goals are accomplished through actively participating in the implemented MBI.

Controversy with civility as defined by Astin & Astin (1996) refers to differences existing in the group but accepting and resolving conflict through an identified common purpose, collaboration, and open and honest dialogue. This can help one another understand everyone's differences. Differences are inevitable – yet controversy can lead to new, creative solutions to problems when it occurs in a civil atmosphere (Astin & Astin, 1996). During the program, the facilitator will solidify their leadership role and foster a new level of trust among the group by ensuring that the students respect one another, are open-minded, and do not criticize the views or actions of their peers. Students will be openly expressing their feelings, views, experiences, beliefs, values, and so on. They should feel confident to share, interact, and grow with the support from their peers and facilitator.

Citizenship is the process whereby the facilitator and the collaborative group of students become responsibly connected and actively engaged to the community and the society (Astin & Astin, 1996). To be a good citizen, you are not simply a member, but you work for positive



social change on behalf of all interdependent individuals and the community that are involved in or affected by efforts. Likewise, controversy with civility, good citizenship recognizes that the common purpose of the group must incorporate a sense of concern and responsibility for the rights and welfare of all those who might be affected by the group's efforts. All students and the facilitator are working towards the common goal of positive change. This common purpose of the collaborative group is attained through students actively engaging in discussions and mindfulness practices. Citizenship and the other six of the 7 C's imply everyone involved to be responsible for treating their peers respectfully throughout the entirety of the program.

Leadership is a process. The Social Change Model of Leadership Development intends to integrate already established leadership development concepts, but it does not confront types of leadership styles. There are benefits and challenges to each type of leadership, however a few styles inform my intervention. The types of leadership are participative/democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, servant, transformational/transformational, and effective. Personally, I believe it is smart to include different characteristics from each type of leadership because it may be more effective in supporting diverse groups of people. The qualities from participative/democratic leadership my program requires are offering guidance and values input. The quality from laissez-faire leadership my program requires is that group members have freedom. The qualities from transactional leadership my program requires are leaders set goals and followers are rewarded for completing work. The qualities from servant leadership my program requires are the sharing of power, serves others, has concern for all stakeholders, and uses self-reflection. The qualities from transformational/transformational leadership my program requires are the leader is a motivator, inspirational, helps members reach their potential, develops followers into leaders, challenges power structures, positive change, and causes change within individuals and social

systems. The qualities from effective leadership my program requires are having a vision and goes the way, shows the way. These traits of leaders and leadership display inclusivity, courage, ambition, inspiration, and care. This program and intervention seek to change the way students think about what is possible (Northouse, 2019, p. 14).

### **Assessment of Program**

In order to assess continuous improvement of self-efficacy and overall health and wellbeing of the students throughout the intervention, surveys and focus groups will be utilized. These assessment measures will also help the facilitators understand students' knowledge, skills, beliefs, feelings, and thoughts throughout the program. The aim of the surveys will be to measure the development of coping mechanisms and stress management techniques, the impacts of implementing a MBI, and students' health and wellbeing. The aim of the focus groups will be to explore students' past experiences with grades and grading norms and to foster discussion around feelings of failure and imposter syndrome.

Surveys are standardized sets of questions administered to the students in order to understand their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions. The surveys will be structured to engage the students in self-reporting the above information. There are benefits and challenges to this approach, so the questions I will be using will be closed-ended and open-ended. The survey will have no more than 10 questions – seven closed-ended and three open-ended. Provided in Appendix D, you can view a sample survey I created. The surveys should be given at each Part One session. If it is the students very first session, the survey can be given at the beginning of class and will serve as a baseline for that specific student. Surveys should be administered student's second Part One session to use as comparison. The surveys are important to gain data that is quantitative and has little to no subjectivity/bias.

Focus groups are a group interview of six to twelve people who share similar characteristics or common interests (CDC, 2018, p. 1). The focus group will be used in every program session. The program design is already set up to encourage students to share their experiences, feelings, thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs. The facilitator will be guiding each one of these focus groups. The topics that will be discussed include fear of failure, imposter syndrome, feelings around grades and the traditional grading system, and their mindfulness practice experience. In Appendix E are a few sample questions that can be asked during the focus groups.

The focus groups will be semi-structured to allow for generating more open discussion and knowledge sharing. Semi-structured indicates that the facilitator will have a predetermined list of questions to ask but will permit the conversation to flow freely at times. The facilitator must be careful as focus groups can become susceptible to bias, can become swayed by others, and can be dominated or sidetracked by a few individuals. To mitigate this, the facilitator will ensure all voices are heard and the conversation is brought back on track. The use of focus groups is important to gain descriptive qualitative data that fosters more in-depth insight on students' perceptions, experiences, beliefs, etc.

### **Evaluation of Program**

In order to evaluate the goals of the intervention, to increase self-efficacy, and overall health and wellbeing of students, the students will take pre and post-tests, as well as a mid-term questionnaire. These are different than the survey mentioned above. The pre-test and post-test can be found in Appendix F. The questionnaire can all be located in Appendix G. This form of evaluation is another way for the facilitator to determine if the program was successful in developing a stronger sense of self-efficacy and improving students' health and wellbeing.

The pre-test will be similar to Albert Bandura's General Self-Efficacy Scale (Bandura et. al, 2005). This scale will help the facilitator understand where students' self-efficacy level is and their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and knowledge. This will be given to students in the first session of Part Two. The mid-term questionnaire gives students the chance to reflect on the program thus far, their starting point, and where their self-efficacy, health, and wellbeing are now. This questionnaire should be given at the end of the second session of Part Two. This questionnaire will have statements where participants circle whether they strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree, or strongly agree with what is being said.

The post-test that the students will take at the end of the program will again be similar to Albert Bandura's General Self-Efficacy Scale (Bandura et. al, 2005). This scale will serve as the students' final evaluation to gauge whether they achieved the identified goal of increasing self-efficacy. These forms of evaluation will provide the facilitator with information to compare scores throughout the program. The facilitator can analyze the students' experience, what they learned, how their feelings changed, and if the program helped increase their health and wellbeing. If students from the classes that were attending the program for course credit completed the entirety of the program, the facilitator will want to meet with those professors to discuss findings. An increase in self-efficacy and overall health and wellbeing would display understanding, implementation, and impact of content. A decrease in stress would also show the same.

### **Limitations and Looking Ahead**

Beyond the scope of this paper, there are a few factors to address moving forward that were not mentioned. The issues I would like to address include COVID-19, facilitator burnout, expansion of implementing MBIs to others, and Mindfulness Mentors. The populations I would

like to address include educated facilitators and populations to consider. These will be important to consider in the future if implementing this program and intervention to aid in effectively executing the program and getting it to be the most successful it can be.

The first aspect to consider moving forward is COVID-19 and the impact that has had on the education system and people. It may be too soon to tell, but COVID-19 is important to consider when thinking about grades, grading systems, and the health of students and faculty/staff. To be adequately prepared to face this issue when implementing the program, one will want to complete some research regarding how COVID-19 has impacted all these factors. When it comes to discussion throughout the program, the facilitator will want to be educated on the research and results to properly inform their participants.

The second point to consider is being knowledgeable and educated in teaching mindfulness. For this program to be implemented, the facilitator will need to have experience practicing and teaching mindfulness. Since the intervention is a MBI, the preferred facilitator would have a degree or certificate in mindfulness. If the facilitator has years of experience practicing and teaching mindfulness, this may suffice, however, it is important to inform participants that you are not accredited.

Given that this pool of facilitators may be limited, there may be an increase in the potential for facilitator burnout. They could be running the program by themselves all semester long, with sessions twice a week four weeks of the semester. If this is the case, facilitators should recruit one or two more faculty or staff members who also practice mindfulness, are educated on mindfulness, or have years of experience with mindfulness. Additional facilitators will help lessen the workload required by this program. Additionally, the facilitator should consider their

own workload before determining to implement the program. Likewise, upon this decision, the facilitator should consider creating a schedule of self-care to follow to limit burnout.

Next, the individual who would like to execute this program should take into account the populations they could pilot this to and the expansion of the MBI. I have started with health, social, and behavioral related departments/majors. This is only a small number of the population of students on campus. Plus, they are getting a small amount of exposure about mindfulness in the program. Mindfulness is a lifelong technique that can be utilized in many aspects of life. Other areas to think about include counseling centers, disability services, diversity equity and inclusion departments, and faculty and staff. These campus resources work with populations that could benefit from an additional resource that focuses on stress management, self-regulation, self-introspection, identity development, self-efficacy, self-esteem, health, and much more.

Faculty and staff would benefit as well because it is added to their own collection of techniques, they can use for themselves, or they can add it to their list of tips to share with their students. If this program is run during both the fall and spring semester of college, the facilitator has the opportunity of pursuing multiple populations.

Lastly, I addressed the idea of creating Mindfulness Mentors. Mindfulness Mentors would be students who completed the entirety of the program. These students who wish to become Mindfulness Mentors will be directly supervised by the facilitator that ran the program. Mindfulness Mentors entails learning more about mindfulness, learning the practices more in-depth, and teaching mindfulness to their peers. This addition of student staff may add to facilitator burnout, but if they are able to handle this opportunity or have other faculty involved, Mindfulness Mentors would be a great way to get students more involved.

Other matters to consider when addressing this intervention are time, funds, and student interest. If the facilitator was to get enough student interest from students who want to be a Mindfulness Mentor and those who want to be mentored, they will want to consider if the Mindfulness Mentors will be compensated for their time.

### **Conclusion**

When reflecting back on my experiences, I am able to identify when the issue of student self-efficacy and wellbeing became very important to me. This intervention is to help those who may have been feeling the same as me was when it came to my grades and traditional grading norms. During COVID-19, everything changed in an instant. Everyone needed to adapt and step outside of their comfort zone. I needed to learn ways to cope with new stressors and how to stay healthy in time when Zoom™ fatigue was prominent. This MBI that teaches a new technique to reduce stress, introspection, and to reflect on experiences, feelings, and so on is intended to help others become non-judgmentally more aware of the present moment and themselves. The group discussions around destigmatizing grades, recognizing feelings and perceptions, and brainstorming ways to combat them can help students develop new skills, grow, and decrease stress. By combining all these experiences into this one program, I hope students can implement these skills, the new knowledge, develop their self-efficacy, and improve their health and wellbeing. Students will always face these issues even after college. Preparing students with the tools they need to grow, be confident, and healthy are just one step in this lifelong journey.

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## **Appendix A**

### **An Outline of a Schedule and Agenda for the Program**

- **Week 1, Part One**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
      - Questions
  - **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
    - Sitting/Breathing meditation
    - What is mindfulness?
  - **Description:**
    - The facilitator will introduce themselves, the program, what the program is about, and the goals of the program
    - The facilitator will have willing participants go around the room and introduce themselves (nothing that will disclose too much identifying information)
    - The facilitator should allow the participants to ask any questions they may have periodically throughout the session
    - The facilitator will begin with questions to get the conversation going around imposter syndrome

- After, they can do the same for fear of failure
  - The facilitator should introduce grades, grading norms, and how that may associate with their feelings, stress, and anxiety
  - Discussion
  - The facilitator will introduce and define mindfulness
  - The facilitator will describe the Sitting/Breathing meditation and then direct a practice for everyone to participate in
  - Following there will be discussion around feelings, experiences, thoughts, sensations, and so on
  - Final questions, wrap-up, reminder about the next session, and a sneak peek into next session
- **Week 2, Part One**
    - **Workshop topics:**
      - Introductions of individuals in attendance
      - Introduction into the program
        - What is this program about? What are its goals?
        - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
        - Questions
    - **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
      - Soles of the Feet (SoF)<sup>1</sup>
      - Background and information regarding the SoF

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<sup>1</sup> This workshop topic is a common practice for instructors trained in mindfulness.

- **Description:**
  - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the SoF meditation and directing a SoF practice that everyone participates in
- **Week 3, Part One**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
      - Questions
  - **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
    - 6 Anchors
    - Background and information regarding the 6 Anchors practice
  - **Description:**
    - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the 6 Anchors meditation and directing a 6 Anchors practice that everyone participates in
    - Part One is in rotation
- **Week 4 (Part One and Part Two will be held in the same week/day but at different times)**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - **Part One**
      - Introductions of individuals in attendance

- Introduction into the program
  - What is this program about? What are its goals?
  - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
  - Questions
- **Part Two**
  - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
  - Feelings, self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, tips, mindfulness with a longer practice
- **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
  - **Part One**
    - Body Scan
    - Background and information regarding the Body Scan
  - **Part Two**
    - History of mindfulness
    - Sitting with discomfort
    - Introduction to either the Sitting/Breathing meditation, 6 Anchors, Body Scan, or SoF meditation and a short practice
- **Description:**
  - **Part One**

- The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the Body Scan meditation and directing a Body Scan practice that everyone participates in
  - Part One is in rotation
- **Part Two**
  - The facilitator will teach the history of mindfulness and introduce sitting with discomfort
  - Introduction to either the Sitting/Breathing meditation, 6 Anchors, Body Scan, or SoF meditation, then a short practice everyone participates in
  - Discussion of the practice, experiences, if anyone has been practicing in their free time, and how that is going
  - Dive into self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, etc. What this means to them, definitions, feelings, how to improve, and provide research to further support/inform
  - Tips and coping mechanisms to combat stress and anxiety
- **Week 5, Part One**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice

- Questions
- **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
  - Seated yoga
  - Exploration of sensations
  - Sitting with discomfort
- **Description:**
  - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the seated yoga meditation, exploration of sensations, and sitting with discomfort, then directing a seated yoga practice that everyone participates in
  - Part One is in rotation
- **Week 6, Part One**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
      - Questions
  - **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
    - Standing yoga
    - “Stress talk”
  - **Description:**

- The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the standing yoga meditation and directing a standing yoga practice that everyone participates in
  - Additionally beginning the “stress talk”
  - Part One is in rotation
- **Week 7 (Part One and Part Two will be held in the same week/day but at different times)**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - **Part One**
      - Introductions of individuals in attendance
      - Introduction into the program
        - What is this program about? What are its goals?
        - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
        - Questions
    - **Part Two**
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
      - Feelings, self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, tips, mindfulness with a longer practice
  - **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
    - **Part One**
      - SoF meditation



- Continued “stress talk”
- **Part Two**
  - “Stress talk”
  - Exploration of sensations
  - Introduction to either the standing yoga or seated yoga and a short practice
- **Description:**
  - **Part One**
    - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the SoF meditation and directing a SoF practice that everyone participates in
    - Part One is in rotation
  - **Part Two**
    - The facilitator will introduce the exploration of sensations
    - The facilitator will do the “stress talk”
    - Introduction to either the seated yoga or standing yoga, then a practice where everyone participates
    - Discussion of the practice, experiences, if anyone has been practicing in their free time, and how that is going
    - Dive into self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, etc. What this means to them, definitions, feelings, how to improve, and provide research to further support/inform
    - Tips and coping mechanisms to combat stress and anxiety
- **Week 8, BREAK**

- **Week 9, Part One**

- **Workshop topics:**

- Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
      - Questions

- **Mindfulness and the Practice:**

- Expanding awareness
    - Introduction into the Mountain Meditation

- **Description:**

- The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the Expanding Awareness meditation and directing an Expanding Awareness practice that everyone participates in
    - After, introducing the Mountain Meditation
    - Part One is in rotation

- **Week 10, Part One**

- **Workshop topics:**

- Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?

- Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
  - Questions
- **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
  - Seated yoga
  - Mindful habits
    - Eating, showering, listening, etc
- **Description:**
  - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the seated yoga meditation and then directing a seated yoga practice that everyone participates in
  - After, introducing mindful habits and ways to practice/implement them
  - Part One is in rotation
- **Week 11 (Part One and Part Two will be held in the same week/day but at different times)**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - **Part One**
      - Introductions of individuals in attendance
      - Introduction into the program
        - What is this program about? What are its goals?
        - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
        - Questions
    - **Part Two**

- Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
- Feelings, self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, tips, mindfulness with a longer practice
- **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
  - **Part One**
    - Standing yoga
    - Mindful habits
  - **Part Two**
    - Mindful habits
    - Expanding awareness
    - Introduction to the Mountain Meditation
- **Description:**
  - **Part One**
    - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing standing yoga and directing a standing yoga practice that everyone participates in
    - Part One is in rotation
  - **Part Two**
    - The facilitator will teach about mindful habits and the Mountain meditation
    - Introduction to the Expanding Awareness practice, then a practice everyone participates in

- Discussion of the practice, experiences, if anyone has been practicing in their free time, and how that is going
  - Dive into self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, etc. What this means to them, definitions, feelings, how to improve, and provide research to further support/inform
  - Tips and coping mechanisms to combat stress and anxiety
- **Week 12, Part One**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
      - Questions
  - **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
    - Body Scan
    - Introduction to the Loving Kindness practice
  - **Description:**
    - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the Body Scan meditation and then directing a Body Scan practice that everyone participates in
    - After, introducing and describing the Loving Kindness practice
    - Part One is in rotation
- **Week 13, Part One**

- **Workshop topics:**
  - Introductions of individuals in attendance
  - Introduction into the program
    - What is this program about? What are its goals?
    - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
    - Questions
- **Mindfulness and the Practice:**
  - Loving Kindness
  - Introduction to the walking meditation
- **Description:**
  - The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the Loving Kindness meditation and directing a Loving Kindness practice that everyone participates in
  - After, introducing and describing the walking meditation
  - Part One is in rotation
- **Week 14 (Part One and Part Two will be held in the same week/day but at different times)**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - **Part One**
      - Introductions of individuals in attendance
      - Introduction into the program
        - What is this program about? What are its goals?

- Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
- Questions

- **Part Two**

- Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
- Feelings, self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, tips, mindfulness with a longer practice

- **Mindfulness and the Practice:**

- **Part One**

- 6 Anchors
- Group discussion on practices, their experiences, feelings, sensations, and if they are practicing in their free time

- **Part Two**

- Loving Kindness practice
- Introduction into walking meditation
- Final group discussion
- What's next? Next steps? How can you learn more and become more involved?

- **Description:**

- **Part One**

- The same as Week 1, Part One, but describing the 6 Anchors meditation and directing a 6 Anchors practice that everyone participates in
  - Part One will no longer be in rotation as this is the second to last class
- **Part Two**
  - The facilitator will teach the Loving Kindness meditation and the walking meditation
  - Do a Loving Kindness practice everyone participates in
  - Final discussions and questions
  - Discussing what are the next steps, how to continue learning, and how to become more involved
  - Future plans and final incentives
  - Provide resources
- **Week 15**
  - **Workshop topics:**
    - Introductions of individuals in attendance
    - Introduction into the program
      - What is this program about? What are its goals?
      - Grades, fear of failure, imposter syndrome, introduction to mindfulness with a short practice
      - Questions
  - **Mindfulness and the Practice:**



- SoF
- Final questions
- Provide resources
- **Description:**
  - The same as Week 1, Part 1, but describing the SoF meditation and directing a SoF practice that everyone participates in
  - Final discussions and questions
  - Future plans and final incentives
  - Provide resources
  - Discussing what are the next steps, how to continue learning, and how to become more involved

## **Appendix B**

### **Timeline to Implement Program**

- One year prior to implementation:
  - Get the program approved by Dean or supervisor
  - Upon approval, begin preparing materials for speaking with professors and department chairs.
  - Book desired guest speaker.
- 10-12 months before:
  - Recruit professors who are willing to implement this program as a part of their course for credit. Aim for professors in departments like Health, Psychology, Social Work/Sociology, Exercise Science/Kinesiology, Contemplative Studies, and Interdisciplinary/Multidisciplinary Studies.
  - Reach out to department chairs to see if they are willing to share your program information with other professors you may have contacted.
  - For the departments and professors who are not willing to implement the program for course credit, ask them if they would be willing to allow you to come to their class to speak to their students for a few minutes regarding the program.
- 8-10 months before:
  - Research and establish a convenient time of day for the program. Keep in mind part one will run every week. Then, when part two begins you will have four weeks in the semester where you will have the program twice in one week.
  - Begin researching locations/rooms that will be available at the time of day you select. Make sure the room is the right size for your estimated group number.

- 6-8 months before:
  - Reserve the location/room for every week of the semester for your desired time slot. Again, keep in mind that four weeks out of the semester you will have the program twice that week, so you must reserve the room a second time for that specific week.
  - Begin creating flyers, pamphlets, ads, and sample excerpts for newsletters.
  - Purchase incentives (institutional t-shirts, journals, pens, reusable aluminum water bottles, yoga mats, meal swipe/flex dollar vouchers, and gift cards to the bookstore).
- 2-4 months before:
  - Prepare lesson plans (18 total) for each part one (14) and part two (4) session.
  - Recruit students outside of the classroom.
    - This will depend on when you are planning on beginning the program.
    - If it is over the summer, you could recruit students who are on campus and student athletes that arrive early. Plus, you can still reach out via email and putting ads in virtual newsletters.
    - If it is over the winter, you will want to recruit students via email and with ads in virtual newsletters.
  - Begin posting flyers around campus, book ads for televisions around campus, and prepare descriptions for newsletters or emails.
  - Plan out snacks and refreshments for each session.
- 1-2 months before:

- For the students who are registered in the classes of the professors who have included the program as course credit, you will want to create informational documents of the program to provide to the professors.
- Reach out to the professors who are implementing the program in their course as credit to schedule a meeting to go over everything together.
  - Here you should decide with the professor if you are able to contact the registered students. If you are able to, reach out to them to begin informing them of the program.
- Continue recruiting students from outside of the classes. (Refer to 2-4 months before if needed)
- Purchase snacks for each session. Purchase five cases of water bottles.
- Purchase the vouchers for the three individual goat yoga classes.
- Program launch and maintenance
  - Attend the classes of the professors you received permission from to recruit students who are not attending the program for course credit.
  - Purchase other refreshments weekly.

## Appendix C

### Budget

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Cost &amp; Units</b>	<b>Total</b>
Refreshments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 cases of water (for the whole semester)</li> <li>- Different refreshments every week (i.e.: iced tea, lemonade, soda, juice, coffee, etc)</li> <li>- Snacks that are prepackaged</li> <li>- Occasionally more fresh snacks throughout the semester</li> </ul>	Operating expenses	\$100/session for refreshments and snacks  \$30/five cases of water bottles (40 bottles per case, \$6 per case)	\$1,800
Materials/Supplies for the recruiting, marketing, and the sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Paper</li> <li>- Staples</li> <li>- Paperclips</li> <li>- Pencils</li> <li>- Prints</li> <li>- Posters</li> <li>- Flyers</li> </ul>	Operating, marketing, recruiting expenses	\$100 - prints  \$100 - the rest of the materials	\$200
Journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free gift to students for attending sessions</li> <li>- Spiral notebooks</li> </ul>	Incentives	\$1.50/per Quantity - 100	\$150
Pens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free gift to students for attending sessions</li> <li>- Bic pens (blue)</li> <li>- Can also use for the materials/supplies needed for the sessions</li> </ul>	Operating expenses and incentives	Pack of 240 for \$25	\$40 (allocated extra for shipping)
Institutional t-shirt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free gift to students for</li> </ul>	Incentives	\$20/t-shirt Quantity - 200	\$4,000

	attending sessions - Will provide different colors and different sizes - Plain and simple with logo and institution on the front			
Yoga mats	- Free gift to students for attending sessions - Will provide different colors - Plain, no designs	Incentives	\$10/mat Quantity - 100	\$1,000
Reusable aluminum water bottles	- Free gift to students for attending sessions - Plain, no school affiliation on it. - 24 oz.	Incentives	\$7/bottle Quantity - 150	\$1,100 (allocated extra for shipping)
Meal swipes or /Flex Dollars	- Free gift to students for attending sessions - Normally, the most expensive meal swipe is dinner at \$11. I have provided a few extra dollars just in case this is not accurate. - To keep it fair, provide the same amount for the flex dollars - These follow normal institution rules - Students will have the choice	Incentives	\$15/meal swipe Quantity – 100  \$15 in flex dollars	\$3,000

	of one or the other, not both			
Gift card to the bookstore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free gift to students for attending sessions</li> <li>- One per person</li> <li>- No restrictions</li> </ul>	Incentives	\$20/gift card Quantity – 100	\$2,000
One-time goat yoga class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free gift to students for attending sessions</li> <li>- Facilitator will locate and choose a facility nearby</li> </ul>	Incentives	\$35/per session Quantity - 3	\$105
Guest speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free gift to students for attending sessions</li> <li>- Will cost a specific price for students who did not attend all sessions, but at a discount</li> <li>- Open to the public who were not involved in the program, but tickets will be full price</li> </ul>	Incentives	\$50,000/speaker fee	\$50,000
				<b>Overall Total:</b> \$63,395

## Appendix D

### College Student Stress Survey

The purpose of this survey is to measure the types of stress in college students and how they cope with stress. The survey also measures how aware the participant is of their own stress, what causes stress, and how they react to these stressors.

Q1 What are your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, or perceptions about mindfulness? What does mindfulness mean to you?

---

Q2 What types of coping mechanisms do you currently use to relieve stress?

---

Q3 How do you usually experience stress? Explain how you normally manage your stress and describe physical sensations or feelings you encounter when facing stress/stressors.

---

Q4 How stressed do you feel on a daily basis during the academic year?

1 - Not at all stressed      10 - Very stressed

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Please slide the bar to a number on the scale.





Q5 What are the usual causes of stress in your life? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Studying
- ☐ Financial
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Significant Other
- ☐ Work-related
- ☐ Health-related
- ☐ Sports/Activities
- ☐ Involvement in clubs/organizations
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None of the above

Q6 What are the usual behavioral effects of stress you have noticed in yourself? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Changes in activity level
- ☐ Difficulty communicating
- ☐ Irritability outbursts of anger or frequent arguments
- ☐ Changes in eating habits
- ☐ Changes in activity performance
- ☐ Increased use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sugar, or caffeine
- ☐ Decreased efficiency or effectiveness
- ☐ Increased sense of humor
- ☐ Inability to rest or relax
- ☐ Changes in sleep patterns
- ☐ Periods of crying
- ☐ Accident prone
- ☐ Hyper-vigilance about safety or the surrounding environment
- ☐ Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None of the above

Q7 What are the usual psychological effects of stress you have noticed in yourself? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- ☐ Anxiety or fear
- ☐ Irritability or anger
- ☐ Sadness, moodiness, grief, or depression
- ☐ Guilt or "survivor guilt"
- ☐ Feeling isolated, lost, lonely, or abandoned
- ☐ Over-identification with survivors
- ☐ Denial
- ☐ Worry about safety of self or others
- ☐ Restlessness
- ☐ Vivid or distressing dreams
- ☐ Apathy
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed, helpless, or hopeless
- ☐ Feeling misunderstood or underappreciated
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None of the above

Q8 What are the usual cognitive effects of stress you have noticed in yourself? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Memory problems/forgetfulness
- ☐ Confusion
- ☐ Disorientation
- ☐ Slowness in thinking, analyzing, or comprehending
- ☐ Difficulty calculating, setting priorities, or making decisions
- ☐ Limited attention span
- ☐ Inability to stop thinking about disaster or an incident
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Loss of objectivity
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None of the above

Q9 What are the usual social effects of stress you have noticed in yourself? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Withdrawing or isolating from people
- ☐ Difficulty sharing ideas
- ☐ Blaming
- ☐ Intolerance of group process
- ☐ Impatient with or disrespectful to others
- ☐ Difficulty listening
- ☐ Difficulty engaging in mutual problem solving
- ☐ Criticizing
- ☐ Difficulty in giving or accepting support of others
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None of the above

Q10 What are the most pressing factors in your current academic context? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Study workload
- ☐ Work, life, study balance
- ☐ Relationships with other students
- ☐ Relationships with faculty members
- ☐ Grades
- ☐ Financial pressure
- ☐ Campus social life
- ☐ Other

## **Appendix E**

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. What was your experience with grades in high school?
  - a. Now in college?
2. How do you feel about grades and traditional grading norms?
3. Can you tell me about a time where you felt out of place like you don't belong? Maybe you felt like a fraud, phony, or you were lucky?
4. How do you combat stress, fear of failure, and other unpleasant thoughts/feelings?
  - a. What coping mechanisms do you currently use?
5. When you hear the word "mindfulness", what comes to mind?

## Appendix F

### Pre and Post-Test: General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)

#### Scoring:

All questions on a scale from 1-4. The total score is calculated by finding the sum of all the items. The total score ranges between 10 and 40. The higher the score indicates a higher level of self-efficacy.

1 – Not at all true      2 – Hardly true      3 – Moderately true      4 – Exactly true

	Not at all true	Hardly true	Moderately true	Exactly true
#1 – I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough				
#2 – If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want				
#3 – It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals				
#4 – I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events				
#5 – Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle				



unforeseen situations				
#6 – I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort				
#7 – I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities				
#8 – When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions				
#9 – If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution				
#10 – I can usually handle whatever comes my way				

Score Total: \_\_\_\_\_

0-10 Very low levels of self-efficacy

11-20 Low to moderate levels of self-efficacy

21-30 Moderate to high levels of self-efficacy

31-40 High levels of self-efficacy

Adapted from: Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio*. Causal and control beliefs (pp. 35-37). Windsor, UK: NFER-NELSON.

## Appendix G

### College Student Health and Wellbeing Questionnaire

For the following statements, circle how well you feel the statements resemble how you are feeling in regard to your health, wellbeing, and identity.

1. In the last 12 months my health (mental, emotional, physical) has been good.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

2. I believe I am where I am supposed to be at in my life right now?

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

3. It is an unpleasant experience to think about grades.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

4. I am afraid of failing

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

5. My level of physical fitness is equivalent to others my age.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

6. I have felt high levels of stress over the past 12 months.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

7. I have tried to reduce/manage my stress over the past 12 months.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

8. I am able to ask for help when I am not feeling well/healthy.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

9. I am currently feeling happy, content, fit, healthy, joyful, etc.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

10. I am currently feeling lonely, stressed, anxious, depressed, unfit, etc.

Strongly disagree

Disagree


Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

## Appendix H

### Flyer to Promote the Program



**NAME TBD**

*Join us this semester to try something new!*

**ONCE A WEEK: DAY TBD  
BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 1ST  
IN-PERSON, ON CAMPUS, LOCATION TBD**

Learn about mindfulness, meditation, coping mechanisms, stress management, and how to dismantle grading/grading norms!

Please reach out to Jayla Godfrey at [jaylagodfrey@gmail.com](mailto:jaylagodfrey@gmail.com) with any questions or to express your interest.

Snacks and refreshments will be provided at each session.

