

Mindfulness at Middlebury 2015-2016 Steering Committee Report

Submitted August 15, 2016 by Erin Quinn, Director of Athletics and Michelle McCauley, Professor of Psychology, co-chairs on behalf of the steering committee appointed by Vice President for Academic Development Tim Spears in Fall 2015.

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Part I: Looking Forward

Over the 2015-2016 academic year, a group of 16 colleagues and students from across Middlebury¹ were invited to convene regularly and examine Middlebury's institutional engagement with mindfulness. Although Middlebury's mission statement does not directly name mindfulness², it alludes to it, noting that we offer students "an inspirational setting for learning and reflection." Thus, mindfulness—as an initiative to facilitate community members' engagement and practice in intentional focus, overall well-being, and a calm approach to life and problem solving—supports our core values of educating beyond the classroom and working with the whole student.

Beginning in November, this committee met regularly in person and using inter-campus conferencing technology to discuss the role of mindfulness at Middlebury. Tim Spears asked our group to approach our work as a "vehicle for discovery" and to function as a "hovercraft" to gain a broad perspective on the mindfulness work already being done across Middlebury as an institution. Our long-term charge was to "identify programs and structures to frame our future development of resources around mindfulness and contemplative practice, with a strong emphasis on the academic dimensions of mindfulness."

In engaging this charge, we looked inward at what we have already been doing and outward to mindfulness initiatives at other institutions. We reviewed earlier work on mindfulness at Middlebury. We asked ourselves what the next level of contemplative culture at Middlebury

¹ We wish to be clear that throughout this document we use Middlebury to refer to the entire institution that includes both academic campuses as well as our schools and programs.

² Mindfulness is typically defined as the quality of awareness that arises when one pays attention to one's present moment experience on purpose and without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness thus refers both to a quality of being and the attention and awareness practices found to cultivate it (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

would look like on the ground, in practice, and what it will take to make this happen. We quickly recognized the impressive, dynamic nature of what is already happening on our various campuses. Informally, we noted over three-dozen academic colleagues who actively incorporate principles of mindful pedagogy into their classrooms across both campuses and at our schools.³ Mindfulness is a topic of inquiry in classes and it is the focus of scholarly work for many colleagues across the institution. We have invited multiple college-wide speakers over the last few years to both campuses (e.g., the Dali Lama as well as less well known but nationally recognized researchers such as Judson Brewer, Willoughby Britton, and Cathy Kerr). The College Center for Teaching, Learning, & Research (CLR) has hosted multiple, well-attended mindfulness pedagogy events over the years, including workshops led by Arthur Zajonc, former academic director of The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. The Bread Loaf Translators Conference invited MIIS professor Julie Johnson to infuse mindfulness sessions into their June session, the Center for Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) focused on mindfulness in their June forum, and mindfulness is the theme of this year's 2016 Clifford Symposium in September. Our athletic faculty routinely incorporate aspects of mindfulness in their work, and mindfulness techniques are explicitly covered in other co-curricular programs such as MiddCORE and CSE. Students (as well as staff and faculty) are seeking and creating space and opportunities across our campuses for personal practice options beyond the classroom. In line with this we now have multiple offerings for yoga and meditation classes, as well as qi-gong, all of which are frequently oversubscribed. We were heartened by the number of colleagues and students (from both the College and MIIS) who dedicated two full Saturdays, along with six weeks in between, working with Kay Stewart in developing stronger personal mindfulness practices.

We also noted synergies spontaneously arising. Many colleagues have combined our goal for a more contemplative community with our commitment to the environment, both in classes (e.g., Gould, Lapin, McCauley, and Young among others) and in the way we consider our physical space. For example, the College Organic Farm is now highlighting its value as a restorative, contemplative space as is the Organic Garden at MIIS. Both the museum and the library in VT are working to create contemplative spaces for students to engage with their collections as well as space for students to pause and pursue mindfulness activities (especially during pressure points in the semester such as midterms and finals).

Thus, although the steering committee certainly realized upfront there had been tremendous mindfulness work already done at Middlebury (courses developed, research conducted, practice opportunities offered, in-class activities created, etc.), we leave the process humbled by the magnitude and reach of what colleagues and students have accomplished to date. Our foundation is strong, mindfulness is already deeply woven into the fabric of our community, and any initiatives moving forward will primarily codify and communicate an existing organic interest and commitment.

The need to provide students and colleagues with tools to be less reactive and more contemplative has never been clearer than in the past 18 months, as we have dealt with concerns

³ For example, *Mindfulness for Interpreters, Working with Self, Others and Institutions and Communicating in a Changing World* at MIIS and *Religion and Science: Mindfulness and Modern Psychology, Introduction to Mindfulness, Buddhist Philosophy, Contemplative Education: The Art and Science of Mindful Learning*, among others at the College.

of student stress and the need to fully embrace and manifest our commitment as an inclusive institution. Fortunately, our analysis indicates Middlebury is poised to emerge as a leader supporting student, staff, and faculty well-being, thus optimizing successes across campus. And while this work is important for everyone at the institution, we argue it is particularly important for students because, we believe, developing mindfulness practices and contemplative tools will give students a foundation to not just succeed, but thrive, in their personal and professional lives beyond Middlebury.

Throughout our meetings, we deliberated on the importance of space, time, opportunity for practicing mindfulness, and the resources available for learning and training about practice. We discussed methods to incorporate mindfulness in the classroom and venues to share these approaches widely. We returned repeatedly to the fabric of our community and the promise of mindfulness to strengthen this fabric, while building resilience and the capacity to welcome diversity and difference.

In the end, we arrived at one large overarching recommendation and 31 smaller suggestions that capitalize on and enhance efforts already being undertaken at the institution. The latter fall into seven sub-areas that focus on: mindful pedagogy in the classroom, enhancing opportunities for personal practice, mindfulness for leadership, outreach to widely share Middlebury's successes in these areas, structural opportunities of physical space and time, and allied well-being initiatives. In these, we highlight initiatives that would require relatively little infrastructure or resources and, thus, could be implemented easily at this time. These are primarily related to mindfulness; however, we also note the importance of branching out and considering best practices in other allied well-being initiatives (e.g., those found across positive psychology). The 31 smaller recommendations are presented in the second section of this report.

Although much work is already being done across the institution involving mindfulness and well-being, our interventions are less effective than they could be because there is no centralized place where those interested in mindfulness and well-being can find initiatives, training, research, and help. Furthermore, although the organic development of mindfulness initiatives at Middlebury to date bodes well for community investment, we suggest it is time to bring this work into the institution in a formal manner to insure the efforts already put forth are resilient. Placing this work, conceptually, under the banner of well-being and, organizationally, in the form of a Center would help different offices and programs coordinate and communicate well-being initiatives, including those related to mindfulness.

Thus, to maximize our efficacy in creating a contemplative, mindful community, we suggest the establishment of the *Middlebury Center for Well-Being*, which would serve as the hub to coordinate and communicate existing mindfulness initiatives and support new opportunities for teaching, research, personal practice, leadership initiatives tied to mindfulness, and allied programs aimed at increasing well-being. Given that much of this work is now being done piecemeal at the institution, the Center would provide vision and synergy across the different campuses, departments, and offices currently working on mindfulness. We choose *well-being* specifically because (a) we see mindfulness as a key component of well-being, and (b) we believe placing mindfulness within this broader context will increase the efficacy and reach of the Center.

The Center would share our leadership on cultivating well-being and mindfulness both in-house and with other institutions. It would maintain a directory of contemplative spaces and a calendar of all events and practice sessions offered across the institution. It could be responsible for assessing the effectiveness of an enhanced focus on personal well-being as a key component of the Middlebury experience. The Center could host events for colleagues across the institution to learn and exchange their successes and difficulties in incorporating mindfulness in the classroom. Furthermore, the Center could help expand the reach of our work by hosting meetings open to colleagues beyond Middlebury, in which we would share our work in this area and bring to our campuses experts from outside to discuss their work. The Center could organize the dissemination of these events via live-streaming and by maintaining an online video library as a permanent resource for our community.

Obviously this entity (or the colleagues associated with it) would be working in collaboration with other programs, departments, and centers on campus, but the Center would serve as the main focal point for well-being and mindfulness efforts across Middlebury. We want to note that there are funding possibilities to support this type of center if we wished to pursue them, but that it is possible to begin immediately, with relatively low expenditures, by relying on digital spaces rather than physical spaces and coordinating efforts that are already being dedicated to this cause. As a potential long-term model of a fully developed Middlebury center, we suggest the *Center for the Advancement of Well-Being* at George Mason (<http://wellbeing.gmu.edu/>). Their tag line is “Creating a World That's Thriving Together.”

Given economic realities, we are not suggesting, as an initial goal, a dedicated physical space for the Center (although as you will note in our discrete recommendations in Part II, we do note the necessity of identifying designated spaces for practice opportunities on our respective campuses). Rather we propose the creation of an entity that will coordinate the efforts already occurring and provide information to those interested about events, training and practice opportunities, etc. Finally, for such an endeavor to flourish, we suggest that in addition to an in-house advisory committee, there also be an outside advisory committee of professionals who have expertise in both mindfulness and in establishing similar centers (people like Susan Bauer-Wu, Kay Stewart, Richard Davison, and Amishi Jha come to mind as possible members of such a team). In short, we see both opportunity and necessity for Middlebury to explicitly provide the women and men of the next generation with the skills they will need to thrive and to lead. Understanding the role of mindfulness, contemplative practice, and resiliency will be as important as understanding Excel (or the swimming of a prior era). Explicitly establishing well-being as a goal of a Middlebury education will secure our leadership role in defining a top-tier learning and working environment as one that encourages individuals to not only succeed, but to thrive. Weaving well-being into the fabric of a Middlebury education will give our students a resilient, deliberative, and empowering foundation upon which they can build their adulthood, their careers, and their lives.

Part II: Mindfulness Across the Institution: Specific Recommendations

Below, we discuss the discrete areas in which mindfulness initiatives are currently imbedded at the institution and our suggestions for moving forward in each. We target opportunities where it would be possible to enhance mindfulness for the community at large.

Mindfulness in the classroom: Contemplative pedagogy

Middlebury is well known for its commitment to exceptional teaching, and our colleagues at the Monterey and Vermont campuses have a long history of incorporating mindfulness pedagogy into their classes. In our informal audit of what is being done now, we found that numerous colleagues already incorporate some aspect of mindfulness into their teaching. For some, this may be beginning (or ending) the class with a few minutes of silence, or it may be incorporating more extensive practice into the course. Many report using best practices in mindful pedagogy to design their courses (or parts of them). Also, colleagues are increasingly teaching specifically about mindfulness as it relates to their disciplines (e.g. Julie Johnson, John Spackman, John Huddleston, Bill Waldron & Kim Cronise, and Melissa Hammerle, to name a few). Over the year, the CTLR has hosted numerous workshops and panels that highlight the role of mindfulness and contemplative practices for teaching and learning. The attendance at these meetings suggests our faculty are interested in continuing to learn more about the role of mindfulness in the classroom. In line with this interest, we suggest the following:

1. Continue CTLR offerings on mindful pedagogy, broadly defined, to support professors wanting to adopt more contemplative, whole-person approaches to teaching and learning; support similar offerings at MIIS.
2. Continue to incorporate a session on mindful pedagogy into the new faculty j-term course at the College and include it as part of faculty orientation at MIIS. Additionally, add a session on mindfulness into the College's annual writing retreat (which is often attended by newer faculty).
3. Create additional opportunities for colleagues to share successful interventions in contemplative pedagogy with each other (we recognize the leadership of Julie Johnson, Michel Gueldry, Peter Shaw, Andrea Olsen, and Nukhet Kardam in this area at MIIS and of Melissa Hammerle, Marc Lapin, Rebecca Gould and Jonathan Miller-Lane, among others, at the College).
4. Support colleagues who wish to offer students (at campuses across Middlebury) elective experiential opportunities in mindfulness and other contemplative, embodied practices that foster deep awareness and connection with self, others, and the world within existing courses.
5. Consider creating a mindfulness/contemplative cluster designation for students at both campuses who take enough courses in this area. For example, at MIIS this could

be an evolving cluster of credit-bearing elective courses focused on the connections between personal well-being and awareness and professional practice⁴.

6. Long term vision: Host an annual event for colleagues across the institution to learn and share their successes and difficulties in incorporating mindfulness in the classroom. This could be streamed across the Middlebury institution.

Encouraging optimal well-being: The role of personal practices

The value of supporting individuals who are interested in developing personal mindfulness practices has become increasingly clear. Many members of our community have found mindfulness to be an important tool in personal development, stress reduction, and increased well-being. We observed a growing interest among students and colleagues in developing personal mindfulness practices. We propose scaling up efforts to support the development of practices among students, staff, and faculty in the service of developing a culture of well-being such that we are promoting, not simply surviving, but actually thriving.

Our research suggests that mindfulness practices will help us meet this challenge insofar as personal practice supports people physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Thus, goals for the community regarding an enhanced mindfulness initiative might include stress management, attention, clarity, resilience, empathy, compassion, connection, a sense of purpose and meaning, enhanced performance and leadership. These efforts would reach beyond the classroom to support well-being within the broader Middlebury community. Specifically, we recommend that Middlebury:

7. Establish a contemplative culture such that students understand they will be exposed to multiple types of mindfulness and contemplative practices at Middlebury. In this situation, students would understand the institution's commitment to well-being via mindfulness practices before they arrive on our campuses.
8. Provide additional training opportunities to those wishing to incorporate practice personally and at work, but who do not currently know how to accomplish this. Currently, academic faculty, coaches, and supervisors are using mindfulness practices in their respective areas to good effect. We suspect more colleagues would do this if they had the opportunity to receive training on how to do so. The institution could facilitate personal practice by expanding free and low cost opportunities to students, staff, and faculty to receive training and engage in group meditation and other mindfulness practices. The Wellness Committee on the Middlebury campus has supported and promoted a wide array of activities (e.g., yoga, tai chi, and meditation). At MIIS various faculty, staff, and students have created a thriving and growing community by offering similar activities through the Wellness Program and student-run clubs. Thus, although the cultivation of these skills is already happening in many ways on the Middlebury's campuses, we recommended a more coordinated effort to increase these opportunities.

⁴ Research has shown that students remain more committed and enjoy better outcomes in curricular courses compared to informal co-curricular offerings (e.g., see *Mindfulness for the Next generation* by Rogers and Maytan, 2013)

9. Offer more in depth opportunities for *training* by professionals in the field such as that provided by Kay Stewart this spring at the Vermont campus.
10. Make the opportunities that are available now more accessible in the broadest ways possible, including financially, within a variety of spaces, times, and diverse modalities. It is also important to characterize these activities in such a way that our community understands the connections between otherwise disparate activities and the intention to create a culture of mindful well-being.
11. Provide opportunities for students (and employees) to gain in-depth training, perhaps certification, in particular practices as co-curricular offerings. This would be an invitation, but not unlike our commitment to the environment, every Middlebury student would understand that, as an institution, we are committed to the value of contemplation/mindfulness (broadly defined to include nature walks and other embodied activities).
12. Use orientations (for students, faculty, and staff) to present information about mindfulness and contemplative offerings at the institution (and keep practice sessions in MiddView).

Physical space and spaciousness

Across both campuses, it is clear that there is a need for additional contemplative spaces. This does not necessarily mean new spaces, although new spaces would be valuable in many situations. Specifically, we recommend the following:

13. Capitalize on existing space on both campuses by designating multiple spaces at particular times as “contemplative space.” This will result in multiple, flexible spaces that are protected during certain, predictable hours for contemplative use. The designated times would be viewed easily on a website and we could use physical signage to indicate the times they are available as contemplative space. At the College, these spaces might be in Davis Library, MCFA, Peterson Family Athletics Complex, McCardell Bi-Hall, Axinn, or any number of other buildings. Various partner groups such as the Center for Social Entrepreneurship, MiddCORE, the Scott Center, and others would likely be interested in setting aside space as well. MIIS no doubt has spaces that could be used at least part of the time for this endeavor. A complete list of possible contemplative spaces could be compiled by the Scheduling Office working with colleagues who already schedule the individual spaces on campus.
14. Expand the designated opportunities for silent reflection on both campuses. For example, Mead Chapel could be opened beyond the single evening time (students could be enlisted to supervise the space during the day).

15. Similarly, create areas in dining halls at the College and for the schools that are set aside for silent eating (at least at breakfast).
16. Think creatively about options at Monterey—perhaps looking beyond the campus to adjacent properties—as it is clear that MIIS is particularly space-challenged and requires serious commitment to provide the needed resources for sponsoring practice opportunities to students, staff, and faculty. In line with this we hope that Middlebury can preserve spaces currently used at MIIS for contemplative and mindful movement activities (e.g., McGowan 215, the organic garden, the prayer room).
17. Continue to develop and encourage use of the organic farm/garden at the College and MIIS as contemplative, restorative destinations. In addition, create additional outdoor spaces (or three season porches) that would serve as contemplative nature spaces.
18. Advertise the natural contemplative spaces that already exist on our campuses to a greater degree so students, staff and faculty understand these spaces are available.
19. Develop long-term goals for establishing more permanent spaces for contemplative practice at both campuses. For example, a Japanese Tea House has been suggested in Vermont. This space would satisfy a need for contemplative space for the College and the summer language schools. Additionally, it would send a clear message about the significance of contemplative practices at Middlebury.

Supporting and encouraging scholarship on mindfulness

Because we are an educational institution, we believe it is appropriate that we continue to support the creation of new knowledge on mindfulness at Middlebury. Some of this work will center on the value of mindfulness initiatives for teaching. Some colleagues will examine mindfulness within their disciplines. Given the breadth of Middlebury's offerings, as well as our in-house expertise, we expect these initiatives will span the disciplines. In addition, inviting outside experts to talk at Middlebury allows the opportunity for the entire community to learn about new research on the mechanisms and efficacy of mindfulness interventions. With this in mind we make the following suggestions:

20. Continue to invite internal and external experts to speak to our community and discuss new research on mindfulness across disciplines.
21. Coordinate these talks with departments, programs, and existing centers and encourage them to collaborate on this such that every year (or two) those already hosting speakers set aside one slot for someone whose work touches on mindfulness or contemplative practice within the specific discipline (for example ES could invite someone whose writing and research is in contemplative environmental studies; Psychology could invite someone doing research on attention and mindfulness; athletics could invite someone whose work is on leadership and performance). We are pursuing ways to gain shared expertise without adding extra events to the schedule.

22. Provide seed money for faculty (and in some cases staff) to conduct mindfulness-related research and to attend conferences in the area. Collaborative research on mindfulness across Middlebury entities should be encouraged. In all cases, sharing what one learns from this funding with the larger Middlebury community should be expected (e.g., a colleague could receive extra funds to attend a conference on mindfulness interventions for higher education with the assumption that the person will give a presentation on his or her home campus).
23. Long term vision: develop dissemination opportunities at Middlebury to share what our scholars are learning, perhaps, for example, as a series of white papers online or as presentations at a Middlebury-run conference, or a series of podcasts or short video presentations.

Time, assumptions, spaciousness

We note a number of structural changes to our schedules and assumptions that would facilitate a shift to a more mindful, contemplative Middlebury community:

24. Consider adding five minutes between classes at the Vermont campus to increase community bonding and reduce a hectic arrival when students need to travel across campus (it is challenging to move between the MCA to MBH).
25. Reduce the number of extra events happening the last three weeks of sessions. This is a hectic period as students across Middlebury wind up semester-long projects, or projects they will be presenting or performing for a group. Adding additional out-of-class events at this time is counterproductive if the goal is learning.
26. Consider extending the periods when major assignments are NOT allowed to be due to include the two days following any holiday break.
27. Begin explicit discussions about the amount of time students are expected to devote to their job on a weekly basis (on average). If students have 15 contact hours (some have more) and four classes that each take 6 hours' preparation outside class, this is 39 hours a week. This is a full-time job. Unfortunately, many classes assume a student will have 8 to 12 additional hours to commit to the work. We suggest that we reconsider whether this level of time investment is truly resulting in deeper, more lasting learning of the material. (In making this recommendation we recognize that the appropriate time commitment may differ from campus to campus, school to school, and undergraduate to graduate degree. Our goal is to foster a discussion for each group).

Mindful Leadership

Middlebury is well-positioned to be creative and forward thinking regarding the development of leaders and leadership. Mindful leadership provides an ideal paradigm for Middlebury to teach and model leadership for the administration, faculty, staff, and students. We examined the work

being done at George Mason University as well as recommendations by experts such as Janice Marturano, the founder and executive director of the Institute for Mindful Leadership and former executive and deputy general counsel at General Mills. Marturano⁵ suggests that “A mindful leader embodies leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity, and compassion in the service of others.” We believe these four goals fit with Middlebury’s existing culture and our mission as an educational institution. To this aim we suggest the following:

28. Highlight the work being done in this area in Athletics and also Facilities (e.g., in Facilities, Mike Moser has reduced employee injuries by incorporating mindfulness interventions into the work place. Mike does not label these interventions mindfulness, rather they are simply best safety practices – and they have led to well-being. Perhaps Mike could share his ideas with managers in other areas and other campuses? Perhaps some of these could be brought into chemical safety training in labs?).
29. Continue to support efforts on mindful leadership with the CSE and MiddCORE.
30. Recognize that leadership in this area involves educating students, but also our administration, faculty and staff, all of whom are helping to create an engaged, compassionate, and inclusive community.

Mindfulness and the allied programs of *Positive Psychology*

31. Finally, in addition to the formal mindfulness programs, a number of empirically-supported interventions exist under the rubric of positive psychology. These include the work on mind set, gratitude, and grit. All of these are conceptually connected to mindfulness and thus should be included to enhance wellness and thriving across Middlebury. Thus, these would be valuable tools and skills to include as we move forward with any initiative aimed at increasing well-being at Middlebury.

Respectfully,

Michelle McCauley & Erin Quinn
On behalf of the Mindfulness Steering Committee

⁵ In Janice Marturano (2014). *Finding the Space to Lead: A Practical Guide to Mindful Leadership* (2014). Bloomsbury Press.