

Contemplative Studies Course Syllabus

Contact

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Course Website:

<https://www.dpapadopoulosnotes.com/A-Course-on-Contemplative-Studies>

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Overview

This course is designed for students to explore and develop a personal ecology of contemplative practices aimed at integrating their academic and professional journeys with their personal values and aspirations. Through a comprehensive curriculum that blends theory, practice, and reflection, students will critically examine their values, motivations, mental models, and habits of mind.

Each week, we will focus on different contemplative practices, their historical contexts, theoretical foundations, underlying philosophies, and practical applications in daily life. Our readings will include ancient and modern manuals of practice coupled with scientific literature on the benefits of these practices, as well as poetry and selected readings from psychology and philosophy. Students will be encouraged to experiment with meditation, journaling, creative expression, and intentional dialogue as they deepen their self-understanding and define a personal vision of self-actualization.

Structure + Aim

This course is broken down into ten modules, each containing a few core ideas/concepts, in-class activities and discussions, and home practices. The readings and other media I've included throughout are there to support our explorations by providing useful language, scientific foundations, historical context, and useful frameworks.

This doesn't mean that we're here to learn facts and analyze texts as we might in a traditional literature or philosophy course. This course is about you, and the most important material is your unique, subjective experience. If something

you read or watch sparks something in you, sheds light on an aspect of your life that feels interesting or challenging or helpful, or prompts a meaningful reflection, great! If not, then feel free to let it go.

I hope that these ideas and practices will serve as tools that you can bring to bear on your pursuit of self-knowledge. In my experience, there's great delight in finding a phrase or story or image that reveals something I felt I knew all along.

No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. - **Kahlil Gibran**

Weekly Practices

My goal is to keep the work you have to do each week to, *at most*, 2 hours. Though the specific practices, journaling prompts, reflection assignments, and readings will vary, this is a rough outline of our weekly workload.

Journaling and Other Reflection Assignments (20 - 30 minutes)

Each week, you'll reflect on the readings, class discussions, and - most importantly - your experiences with the contemplative practices for that week.

Mindful Pauses (1 minute x 5 times/week)

Throughout the week, pause for one minute. Look away from your screen or book, and simply take note of what that moment is like. What are you thinking? What's your general mood? Are you rushing into the next moment? Dwelling on a past experience? Feeling stressed? Joyful? Tired? What do you notice in your environment?

Quickly jot down your observations.

Meditation + Rapid Logging (At least 5mins x 4 times/week = 20+ mins)

Each week we'll add a new meditation practice. You should practice the new one at least once outside of class, and then feel free to mix and match any of the practices from previous weeks. You don't need to do more than five minutes at a time, but I encourage you to try sitting longer. I will be holding 30-minutes Zoom sessions once a week to help support your practice.

Contemplations + Reflections (20 - 30 minutes)

To complement our meditation practice, we'll have specific contemplations and reflections each week. Because these may be very personal in nature, I will make submission for these optional. We'll discuss these in class, but you can be as specific as is comfortable when reporting on your experiences and findings.

Reading/Watching/Listening (15 - 30 minutes)

Most of the reading materials and other media are *suggested*, but not required. On the course website, I'll provide summaries for the core ideas that week, which shouldn't take more than 10 - 15 minutes. Beyond that, you can read, watch, or listen to anything that interests you. In other words, don't feel like you have to consume all the suggested media.

Schedule

All of the materials for the course are organized into ten themes/modules on the course website.

Below is an outline of the course. You'll find summaries of the core concepts and links to suggested media there.

Week 1: Introduction, Motivation, and Beginner's Mind

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- The laboratory of self-inquiry
- Socrates origin story and overcoming self-deception
- Forms of self-deception
- The dialectic of meditation and contemplation
- Beginner's mind

In-Class Activities

- The I AM Exercise
- The Nine Dot Problem
- Six Anchors Meditation
- The Well Meditation
- Mindful Eating

Home Practices

- **Mindful Eating:** Eat slowly and mindfully without any distractions (no phone, laptop, book, etc.). Bring your whole self to the meal.
- **Novel observations of everyday experiences.**
- **Journal:** Spend 15 - 20 minutes summarizing your experience with the practices listed above as well as any reflections on any of the readings and/or class discussions.

Week 2: Having Mode vs Being Mode

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- Erich Fromm on Having vs Being
- Maslow on Deficiency vs Being

- Healthy Authenticity Scale
- Buffered and Porous Selves by Charles Taylor

In-Class Activities

- Revisiting the I AM exercise
- Reflection on B-Needs and D-Needs
- Developing a list or map of B-Love vs D-Love
- Discussion of having vs being in education and vocation

Home Practices

- **Meditation:** Anchor to Open Awareness Practice
- **Field Notes on Having vs Being/B-Needs vs D-Needs:** Throughout the week, during your mindful pauses, take note of whether you're in having mode or being mode or whether you're in the midst of satisfying a having need or deficiency need.
- **Complete the Exploration Scale from Scott Barry Kauffman**
- **Journal:** Take 15 - 20 minutes to reflect on your meditation, your having/being or deficiency/being observations, and the results of the exploration scale.

Week 3: Knowledge

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- The Allegory of the Cave
- Beyond propositional knowledge
- Qualia + Consciousness
- Self-Knowledge

In-Class Activities

- Meditation on thoughts
- Koan practice
- Discussions
 - Can we have a beginner's mind about consciousness, the nature of mind, and self-knowledge?
 - How do you experience your own thoughts? What qualities do they have independent of the contents of the thoughts themselves?
 - What kind(s) of knowledge results from meditation/contemplation?

Home Practice - **Meditation on thoughts** - **Koan practice** - **Journal** - Reflect on knowledge that has changed or shaped you. This could be knowledge in any form or from any source - e.g, a book, a movie, a new skill, a conversation, a quote, a poem, etc. - Based on the meditations we've done so far, how would you characterize the form(s) of knowledge that meditation affords?

Week 4: The Conversational Nature of Reality

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- David Whyte's Notion of the Conversational Nature of Reality
- Thich Nhat Hanh on Interbeing

In-Class Activities

- Mindful communication practice - Interbeing Contemplation - Social-interbeing Contemplation + Map

Home Practices

- **Mindful Communication Growth Challenge:** Do one of the two "growth challenges" from Scott Barry Kauffman's *Transcend*.
 - #4 Grow together, cultivate a secure relationship
- **Social-Interbeing Contemplation:** Expand on your social-interbeing map from class.
- **Choose your own meditation:** In addition to the mindful communication exercise, practice any meditation you like for at least five minutes two or more times this week.
- **Journal:** Reflect on your experiences with mindful communication and your social-interbeing map. Consider applying the frameworks of attachment theory and the key ideas from the longest running study on happiness.

Week 5: Values + Virtues

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- Aristotle's Golden Mean
- The Four Immeasurable Abodes w/ near and far enemies

In-Class Activities

- Caring Moment Practice
- Lovingkindness practice
- Identifying core values
- Discussion: Forms of knowledge, wisdom, interbeing, and virtue

Home Practices

- **Caring moment practice**
- **Lovingkindness practice**
- **Identifying core values:** expand on your work in class
- **Journal:** Reflect on your core values and the compassion practices we did this week. For each of your core values, identify two or three ways that you enact (or hope to enact) those values in your life.

Week 6: Wonder + Awe

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- Peak experiences
- Beginner's mind
- Hermann Hesse and Goethe on wonder

In-Class Activities

- Discussion of wonder, awe, and peak experiences
- Simple meditation on the breath
- Characterizing the conditions for wonder and awe to arise

Home Practices

- **Wonder + awe log:** Throughout the week, rapid log any moments in which you find yourself in a state of wonder or awe. What were the conditions? How did it feel in your body? What emotions and thought came up (if any)?
- **Forrest Bathing:** Try to find time to spend in nature (to whatever extent this is possible for you this week). Keep your phone away, and simply spend some undistracted time with nature. Take some field notes of your experience.
- **Journal:** How do you experience wonder and awe? What are some of the most awe-inspired moments in your life? What are the conditions for wonder and awe to arise? How do wonder/awe experiences relate to meditation/mindfulness for you?

Week 7: Resistance, Liberation, and Creativity

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- Steven Pressfield's idea of *resistance*
- What is inner-freedom?
- Flow and wuwei
- The inner critic and internal family systems

In-Class Activities

- Free-writing
- Reflecting on personal forms of resistance
- Letting be meditation

Home Practices

- **Free-writing/morning pages:** Practice free writing or morning pages for 5 - 10 minutes at a time at least twice.

- **Letting be meditation:** practice for at least five minutes three or more times this week. Rapid log your experience right after each time.
- **Journal:** Reflect on your experiences with free-writing and the letting be meditation.

Week 8: Purpose

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- Ikigai
- Goal hierarchy of personal strivings
- Motivational quality continuum

In-Class Activities

- Ikigai Activity
- Analyzing Ikigai Map through Having-Being Lens
- Self-Inquiry Practices
- Discussion: How do all of the previous themes fit into your conception of purpose in life?

Home Practices

- **Ikigai:** Complete and expand on ikigai activity from class
- **Meditation:** Inquiry practices
- **Journal:** Reflect on your ikigai diagram and analyze your map based on the having-being framework, your values assessment, and any other previous activities.

Week 9: Meaning

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- The meaning crisis
- Meaning as mattering, purpose, and coherence

In-Class Activities

- Revisiting the well meditation
- Revisiting the I AM exercise
- Sketching out a personal ecology of practices
- Designing your personal meaning map (mattering + purpose + coherence)

Home Practices

- **Meditation:** Any meditation from the term, at least five minutes at a time, three or more times this week.
- Complete your **meaning map**
- Work on your sketch of a **personal ecology of practices**

- **Journal:** Reflect on which practices, ideas, and activities resonated the most for you.

Week 10: Closing Thoughts + Discussions

Core Ideas + Further Reading

- Whatever you bring to class
- Backwards-design
- Lifestyle- and value-based vocation planning

In-Class Activities

- One more meditation session together
- Sharing our personal ecologies of practice
- Backwards-design for lifestyle- and value-based vocation planning

Home Practices

- **Meditation:** Whatever you choose
- **Journal:** Reflect on what you learned about yourself this term and how it might shape your life going forward.
- **Final Project:** Complete your term-long work by sketching a plan for living a life that accords with your values, conception of meaning, ikigai map, social interbeing map, and anything else you found valuable this term.

Grading

Your grade for the course will depend on the following elements:

Component	Grade Percentage
Participation	10%
Journals	20%
Reflection/Contemplation Activities	20%
Mindfulness Rapid Logs	20%
Final Project	30%

Participation

Given the reflective, collaborative, and discussion-based nature of this course, I expect student to attend every class, prepared to participate and share their work from the previous week. Of course, things come up! So, I just ask that you let me know in advance if you won't be able to make it so we can make alternate arrangements for your participation that week.

Journals

Your weekly journals should take not more than 20 - 30 minutes. Around 200 - 300 words.

Reflection/Contemplation Activities

We'll start most of these in class together, so your homework will just be to expand on and clarify what you started in class. If anything comes up you feel is too personal to share, you can forgo submitting this work and instead write about it in your journal for that week.

Mindfulness Rapid Logs

You'll submit your rapid logs from meditations and other mindfulness activities each week as part of your journal entries. These can be short bulleted lists. As with the reflection/contemplation activities, feel free to redact anything that you don't feel comfortable sharing.

Final Project

The final project will be a synthesis of everything you've done all term. I'd advise keeping one long running document all term from which you can just copy-paste your weekly submissions.

Disabilities and Accommodations

Students requesting accommodations due to a disability at Drexel University need to request a current Accommodations Verification Letter (AVL) in the Clock database before accommodations can be made. These requests are received by Disability Resources (DR), who then issues the AVL to the appropriate contacts. For additional information, visit the DR website.

- DR Website: <<https://drexel.edu/oed/disabilityResources/overview/>
- Clock Database: <<https://drexel.edu/oed/disabilityResources/students/>
- DR Phone Number: 215.895.1401
- DR E-mail Address: disability@drexel.edu

Academic Honesty

Cheating and other forms of academic misconduct are serious offenses and are dealt with harshly, e.g. at the very least a 0 on an exam and a letter sent to the Office of Student Conduct. Students should be familiar with the following policies:

- <http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic_dishonesty.asp
- <http://www.drexel.edu/studentaffairs/community_standards/studentHandbook/general_information

Course Drop & Withdrawal Policies

Students should be familiar with the following policies:

- http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/course_drop.asp
- http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/pdf/course_withdrawal.pdf