

Pausing for More: An Exploratory Pedagogical Experience with Mindfulness and Productivity

Sara Wigal

Belmont University
sara.wigal@belmont.edu

Sharee LeBlanc Broussard

Mobile County Commission (formerly Belmont University)
shareebroussard@gmail.com

Abstract: As college students adapt to new workloads and freedom while facing significant stressors and time management struggles, they need tools to assist their transition. Mindfulness practices have consistently been found to be beneficial to college students' mental health. Twenty-six students took the Brown & Ryan (2003) Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) in class, participated in a classroom presentation on mindfulness, purposeful pausing to destress/re-center, and typical personal productivity methods such as time management tools and commonly adopted systems. Then, they selected a way to practice mindfulness and a productivity tool from an in-class presentation and tried implementing them both for three to five weeks depending on when they were able to report progress during the semester again. At this second reporting juncture, students re-took the MAAS, and completed a Qualtrics survey about their practice experience. Students self-reported slightly increased mindfulness via the MAAS, the Qualtrics survey, and anecdotally. Via qualitative feedback, students described their experience of learning the mindfulness and productivity tools in the classroom as understanding, welcoming and comfortable, and of feeling "seen and heard." Briefly inserting mindfulness and productivity tool instruction into courses, periodically mentioning or having student-initiated conversations about these topics, and setting a faculty expectation that students practice these "best practice" tools, may prove beneficial to students regardless of academic major.

Keywords: pedagogy, mindfulness, student productivity, tools, COVID-19, planning, personal mission statement, breathing, meditation, contemplation, journaling

Student transition and development programs focus on acclimating students to college life's freedom, workload, pressures, and, in some instances, spiritual development. Student programming such as campus ministry, counseling services, first-year seminar or orientation, student success programs, alerts programs, and support for at-risk students, vary widely within higher education - see for example, center-based programs like Belmont University's Be Well BU, University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Center for Health Education & Wellness, and Vanderbilt University's Center for Student Wellbeing or full-term courses on mindfulness - see for example Gray (2021) and Larson (2020). These activities are firmly established on college campuses, and yet students self-reported mental health struggles and burnout increase, especially with the added stress of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rava & Hotez, 2021; Haomiao et al., 2021; Copeland, et. al., 2021).

Almost a decade ago, over 95% of college counseling center directors reported the volume of students with psychological problems increasing (American Psychological Association, 2013). The pandemic exacerbated this trend (Haomiao et al., 2021; Rava & Hotez, 2021). Burnout, overwhelm, time management issues, student stress, and mental health concerns were compounded as a result of shifts necessitated by COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) "reported significant increases in symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders among adults aged ≥ 18 years during August

19, 2020–February 1, 2021, with the largest increases among adults aged 18–29 years and among those with less than a high school education,” (Haomiao et al., 2021, p. 1). The CDC (2021) recommends taking breaks from media, breathing, and meditation as healthy ways of dealing with stress, burnout, and anxiety.

Anecdotally and as documented by campus counseling services, before (Mistler, et. al., 2012; Knopf, 2018) and since the pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Redden, 2020; Salimi, et. al. 2021, Scofield and Locke, 2022), more faculty find themselves referring students to mental health programs and coaching students on methods for managing stress, anxiety, overwhelm, and time management, in efforts to support student focus and productivity (Riberio, et. Al., 2018). Additionally, mindfulness has been recognized and practiced for some time in education, for example, the Mindfulness in Schools Project (2020) has worked for more than a decade to expand mindfulness by educating teachers and certifying schools to engage in mindfulness practices that lead to these perceived benefits: wellbeing and mental health, concentration and cognition, social and emotional learning as well as self-regulating behavior.

Mindfulness Definitions

Mindfulness may be understood as an attitude that focuses “on the present moment in a non-judgmental and acquiescent way” (Akyol & Demir, 2019, p. 256), and mindlessness is its absence. Yeganeh and Kolb (2009) draw upon the work of Brown and Ryan (2003), as well as Langer (1989, 2000), and others to describe *socio-cognitive mindfulness* as sensitivity to context, and openness to new information and multiple perspectives. In contrast, *socio-cognitive mindlessness* involves autopilot, as well as following predetermined rules, engaging in routinized behaviors or rigid perspectives, and lacking the capacity for variation. Yeganeh and Kolb (2009) describe *meditative mindfulness* as present-centered, nonjudgmental, and purposeful, whereas *meditative mindlessness* is embodied by habitual rejection, living in the past or future, judgment, and autopilot. Rava and Hotez (2021) describe mindfulness as living in the present, purposefully and without judgment. As Taylor et al. explain, “mindfulness is a practice to cultivate purposeful awareness of the present moment through the careful observation of one’s experiences and sensations as they emerge moment-to-moment without applying judgment,” (2021, p. 1). Understanding and practicing mindfulness may be beneficial to college students as they navigate college life.

A mindfulness practitioner works on becoming conscious and aware through earnest effort to observe self-talk, reactions, actions, thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, breath, etc. (Tolle, 2004). Mindfulness practitioners deliberately pause, contemplate, and notice, which can lead those who practice it to fuller lives. When a mindfulness practitioner retains a competent mindful outlook, an emotional balance may be achieved, which in turn leads to other positive cognitive, interpersonal and professional benefits ranging from anger management to acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Nortje 2020; Cullen & Pons, 2015) and even to inducing functional and structural changes in the brain (Gotink et al., 2016).

Benefits of Mindfulness

As Richard Rohr writes:

[Buddhist teacher/Nun] Pema Chödrön teaches three graces of mindfulness practice: precision, gentleness, and letting go. Once we can honestly acknowledge whatever is going on in the moment with clarity and acceptance, we can let our unmet expectations go. This allows us to live more freely and vibrantly, fully awake to Presence (2015).

It is from this “awakened” emotional state (mindfulness) that college students, as well as any other type of person, can experience an improvement in quality of life. Previous research has indicated that mindfulness is beneficial in the classroom environment. Leupol, et. al. (2020) found that mindfulness classroom interventions outside of wellness courses also increased perceived organizational support in student populations, which negatively correlated with burnout, with the instructor initiating the intervention acting as a simulacrum for the institution. Leupol, et. al. (2020) also found statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level between perceived organizational support and core self-evaluation, which is defined by Judge, Bono, and Thoreson (2003) as self-esteem, self-realized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and internal locus of control, which are all achievable through mindfulness.

Mindfulness practices were demonstrated to be beneficial to mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rava and Hotez (2021) incorporated journaling into coursework during the pandemic and identified four major themes in the entries of 55 undergraduate student participants: COVID-19, assessments of mindfulness and wellbeing (positive, negative), emergent concerns, and coping strategies. Rava and Hotez found students verbalized shifts toward mindfulness and exhibited centering activities such as focusing on what they could hear, see and feel at the moment of journaling.

Although mindfulness is often anecdotally thought of as part of self-care, good health, and even relaxation, Aykol and Demir (2019) explain that mindfulness supports professional achievement. The stressors of students are comparable to any occupational burnout, in that the *work* of students is the educational setting and its responsibilities (Akyol & Demir, 2019). On top of demands for grade achievement, students are undergoing both physical and cognitive development as part of their maturation process. This transitional period can yield emotional or psychological problems (Larson, 2020) unless it is carefully navigated and mindfulness can serve as a solution for various negative emotions, (Akyol & Demir, 2019, Gray, 2021). Using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory Student Scale, Akyol and Demir found a negative correlation between mindfulness and burnout scores (2019), and they encourage incorporating mindfulness into schools to prevent student burnout. Stress is often a precursor to poor mental health and stressors originate from new environments, workload, relationships, and many other sources. Coping skills are crucial to managing negative outcomes (psychological disorders, suicidal ideation, and attrition) in student populations, including mindfulness and time management practices (Akyol & Demir, 2019).

Mindfulness In Action

Yusufov et al. (2018) conducted a retrospective review of 43 mindfulness training studies with undergraduate and graduate students varying in intervention lengths from one day up to twelve weeks. The authors found interventions with the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) techniques were able to reduce medically measured anxiety but not perceived stress. Participants receiving intervention were shown to have a statistically reduced amount of anxiety compared to a control group at $p < .001$ (Yusufov et. al. 2018). The authors also note brief interventions that can easily be incorporated into an academic term may be effective with students, (Yusufov et al., 2018). Similarly, Taylor et al. (2021) found mindfulness indicators increased among individuals who had longer durations of using a mindfulness video streaming service.

Kolb’s Learning Styles are widely used in training and development and are often incorporated into group project coursework, (Chiu, 2019; Halstead & Martin, 2002; Oflaz & Turunc, 2012). Blending concepts of learning styles and mindfulness, Yeganeh and Kolb (2009) found mindfulness can be cultivated using strategies particular to each of Kolb’s four distinct learning styles, defining mindfulness as “a state in which an individual 1) focuses on present and direct experience, 2) is intentionally aware and attentive and 3) accepts life as an emergent process of change,” (2009 p. 14).

Building on Kolb's (1984) work that explains people learn by both grasping (Concrete Experience; Abstract Conceptualization) and by transforming (Active Experimentation; Reflective Observation) the experience, Yeganeh and Kolb examined participants who participated in both Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (2007) and Brown and Ryan's (2003) MAAS to determine whether mindfulness increased learning from experience. Yeganeh and Kolb found that participants benefited from different mindfulness practices according to learning style. Yeganeh and Kolb concluded that "simply presenting techniques for mindfulness practices...generate[s] interest resulting in self-driven exploration of mindful experiential learning," (p. 18) and the authors encourage learning style-based mindfulness practices and interventions be incorporated into coursework. Yeganeh and Kolb suggest different types of mindfulness practices resonate with each of the four learning styles.

One way of practicing mindfulness is outlined by Chadsey and Jackson who explain the history and educational benefits of the Circle of Trust® method created by Parker Palmer. The authors describe how Palmer recognized that the communal inquiry model used within Quaker Clearance Committee Meetings could have valuable applications outside that faith community. Like in Rava and Hotez' (2021) explanation of mindfulness as a way of living in the present, the Quaker practice of communal silence that is implemented in the Circle of Trust® method asks practitioners to focus on the here and now as they wait for wisdom to emerge, ready to be shared in fellowship. This is a mindfulness practice. Palmer identified that a similar method he devised could function specifically to improve secular teaching capabilities: "The more closely a pedagogy can emulate this communal process, cultivating these habits of heart and mind as it goes along, the deeper the learning will go," (Chadsey & Jackson, 2012, p. 1). They explain that the group experiences facilitated by the Circle of Trust® method have transformed the teaching abilities of educators in K-12 and higher education. Educators learn and reflect together in a communal setting, and their experiencing the Circle of Trust® prepares them to create improved learning environments. Chadsey and Jackson (2012) recommend adopting the Circle of Trust® method to the classroom itself so that educators may help their students find inner wisdom too. When practicing the Circle of Trust® approach, purposeful pausing is used to cultivate an attentive state of mind.

Purposeful pausing is more than simply stopping an activity, it involves intentionally settling the mind, focusing, noticing, listening, becoming more open to the experience and channeling attention into the present moment and its experiences (McIntyre, 2018; Marturano, 2019; Golding, 2020). Purposeful pausing and mindfulness seem to make a difference for professionals. Goodman and Schorling (2012) determined that after undergoing mindfulness and stress-reduction training, medical providers' mental health increased and their burnout decreased as measured by the MBI-SS, a questionnaire that measures Emotional Exhaustion (inability to experience emotion at work), Depersonalization (providers' emotional distancing from their patients), and Personal Accomplishment ("feeling of achievement related to working with people") (p. 122). Four types of mindfulness activities were taught to participants, who were asked to practice one of the techniques for 45 minutes per day, six days a week, and had audio recordings to guide them in their at-home work. Session topics included an overview of mindfulness, how to apply mindfulness to daily life, mindful movement, using mindfulness in challenging situations, mindful communication, practicing appreciation, compassion meditation, and a final review of all topics.

The medical professionals were asked to pay special attention "particularly at work, to their physical, emotional, and cognitive responses," (Goodman & Schorling, 2012, p. 122), and their reflections were discussed the following week at the class meeting. Goodman and Schorling determined that after undergoing mindfulness and stress-reduction training, medical providers' mental health increased and their burnout decreased. Lessons learned in long-form interventions in stressful environments should have applicability to other situations.

Fast-paced industries like public relations and publishing, where multi-tasking and hard

deadlines are the norm, are adopting mindfulness-based practices that encourage pausing and reflection, with regular publications focusing on the benefits of pausing or decompressing. For example, Jacques (2020), writing in a monthly publication for public relations practitioners, extols the benefits of disengaging from distractions, sticking to a schedule, making time for quiet, refueling and exercising, and checking in with oneself. Similarly, Swanson (2014) provides examples of mindfulness and mindlessness in public relations practice and stresses the benefits of engaging in mindfulness strategies within public relations, and offers strategies for a more mindful workplace, including understanding the mind, collaborative, non-linear approaches, embracing complexity, expect ambiguity, work for a more mindful media – e.g., provide substantive content, and balance work and life.

Swanson's later study (2020) expressed the value of mindfulness interventions in public relations education. He specifically examined mindfulness among public relations practitioners and students using Brown and Ryan's (2003) MAAS and found both groups answered similarly. He suggests mindfulness intervention strategies in both educational and workplace settings, from asking probing questions to online presentations on mindfulness to in-class activities. He found that public relations professionals and students were familiar with the term and concept of mindfulness. Half of the public relations professionals and 24% of students said that mindfulness was relevant to public relations work. "Most respondents reported that mindfulness is related to presence in the moment and that it has links to productivity and meditation," (Swanson, 2020, p. 44).

Introducing Mindfulness and Productivity to College Students

To introduce students to the benefits of practicing mindfulness and purposeful pausing as well as to expose students to popular concepts related to productivity, the authors prepared an in-class presentation on common mindfulness and productivity practices. It was necessary for practical purposes (a single intervention which had just one class period's amount of time to complete) to narrow down the plethora of options for both portions of the presentation. Faculty engaged with this study presented multiple suggestions to help students tame their deadline-driven workloads, although students did not all apply every method. These tools were determined through a combination of literature review, as indicated below, and author experience. Each author had various personal successful methods of professional productivity, as well as mindfulness-cultivating habits, and drew on these to spark a literature review which eventually informed the presentation.

Mindfulness Tips and Tools Considered for the In-class Presentation

Ways of being mindful include purposeful pausing, reflective writing, and meaningful contemplation of both experiences and texts, as indicated by Chadsey & Jackson (2012), Goodman & Schorling (2012), Brown & Ryan (2003), Gray (2021), McIntyre (2018), and Yeganeh & Kolb (2009). The in-class intervention incorporated mindfulness practice instruction derived from the following.

Reflection at the level of contemplation is much more than knowing, Rohr (2021) describes it as "the practice of being fully present—in heart, mind, and body—to what is in a way that allows you to creatively respond and work toward what could be," (Center for Action and Contemplation, 2021, ¶ 1). This references a deeper level of being and learning, summarized in Ignatian Pedagogy mantra of *Experience – Reflection – Action*, these proven, common practices assist the human learning and growing process (Jesuit Institute, University of Edinburgh) and are aided by purposeful activities such as those described below.

Julia Cameron developed and popularized the concept of Morning Pages in the book *The Artist's Way*. Practicing Morning Pages means that right after waking each day, a person free-writes

three pages about whatever flows through the mind at that moment. It is a brain-clearing exercise that helps one see what is occupying space in the mind, what may need attention, what is important to focus on, etc. She recommends that once the act of writing these pages is complete, they are put away and not looked at again (2016). She explains that there is no wrong way to do morning pages, because just the act of doing them helps “provoke, clarify, comfort, cajole, prioritize and synchronize the day at hand,” (Cameron, 2021, ¶ 1).

Journaling is not the same as Morning Pages. Journaling is more purposeful and is generally based on prompts, that can be anything – e.g., What makes me happy? What am I proud of today? Where do I see myself in five years? What are my career goals? If I were to say anything to my teenage self, what would it be? Etc. Some people journal their prayer life, others journal their hopes and dreams, etc. Many people use journaling as a daily *examen* or examination, through which these types of questions are answered: For what am I grateful? What do I really want for myself? How have I demonstrated love? How can I be better tomorrow? (Ignatian Colleagues, personal communication, 2020). Several planners, like Passion Planner®, Panda Planner®, Erin Condren®, Phoenix Journal®, and religious-based journaling planners build journaling prompts into organizational systems, so commonly available tools can help incorporate journaling into daily life.

A key concept of mindfulness practice is—being present and experiencing the now—focuses on elevating awareness, both (1) internal— of thoughts, feelings, etc., and (2) external— of surroundings, happenings, etc. Eliminating distractions, focusing on the moment at hand, and lessening the amount of psychological time invested in the past (e.g., I should have done X differently), or future (e.g., once Y happens, I’ll be happy), all help a person to create contentment now. *Now* and *presence* are crucial to mindfulness practices.

Tolle (2004) espouses the benefits of living in the now, rather than in the past or future, and stresses the additional importance of consciously experiencing the moment. He also emphasizes noticing thoughts, quelling internal chatter, offering oneself positive affirmations rather than listening to negative self-talk and focusing on handling situations rather than investing psychological time in turning those situations into problems (Tolle, 2004). One way to heighten awareness is via the proven mindfulness practice of meditation. Pencock & Alberts (2019) explain that meditation should be timed, begins with a quiet place and centering breath, then progresses to awareness of physical sensations, and then to awareness of mental activity, then purposeful attempts to calm mental activity, while breathing slowly and deeply, then close the session with positive thoughts. College students with heightened test anxiety or general stress benefit from any nervous system relaxation, which meditation has been proven to provide.

Sometimes contemplation of a purposefully selected text can yield a deeper understanding or clarity of thought. For example, the Circle of Trust® approach includes a poem or other brief text, read silently, then reflected upon, then read aloud, then discussed. This brief pause can help with grounding and focus. Another example of this type of purposeful pausing is Rohr’s daily meditation emails, to which he adds these reflection questions to spur contemplation: “What word or phrase resonates with or challenges me? What sensations do I notice in my body? What is mine to do?” (R. Rohr, personal communication, Dec. 31, 2020). This type of contemplation and reflection, practiced on occasion, can yield clarity of thought, deeper appreciation and gratitude, a welcome respite from busyness, and much more. In the Circle of Trust® approach explained previously as well as in other non-trademarked mindfulness practices, it is common for participants to read, reflect, and discuss a reading of some sort.

Establishing dedicated time to practice smart work patterns, practicing mindfulness, setting goals, prioritizing activities, proactively scheduling time to work on these activities, evaluating progress, minimizing distractions, clarifying thought through freewriting or journaling, focusing on being present/experiencing the now, meditating, and contemplating selected texts may assist in

lessening overwhelm or burnout (Gray, 2021, Chadsey & Jackson, 2012; Rava & Hotez, 2021, Yeganeh & Kolb, 2009, Haomiao, et. al., 2021). While it may seem contrary to productivity inclinations, regular pausing is beneficial. Whether that pause is to organize work, self-center, or purposefully consider something other than a To Do list, pausing may lead to more wellness (Marurano, 2019).

Productivity Tips and Tools Considered for the In-class Presentation

Productivity tips for desktop organization can help users work more quickly and logically (Schubert, 2017). Since most work is done in the digital realm, keeping computer desktops organized boosts productivity (Dachis, 2011). Busy students can be easily distracted, and creating environments for work that is as focused as possible is vital. Dachis (2011) notes that cluttered worktops lead to cluttered minds, and Schubert (2017) suggests that limiting icons and shortcuts on a desktop to less than half of the space can assist with mental clarity. Using a neutral background image can also assist in a clean desktop appearance (Dachis, 2011; Schubert, 2017).

Users should regularly delete or reorganize desktop icons (Alton, 2018). Using the “ABCD method” of prioritizing document importance can help determine what icons should be on the desktop, what should be organized elsewhere, etc. (Schubert, 2017). Only the things used daily qualify as “A” in importance and should remain accessible on the desktop; other applications and folders should be tucked out of sight with varying degrees of fast accessibility. There are even programs that can automatically determine a user’s frequency of use for programs and sweep them from the desktop on their behalf.

Utilizing folder and subfolder organization for files and applications is a best practice (Alton, 2018). Shortcuts to various folders may be created (these are called an alias) and dropped onto the desktop for fast access. This allows older computers to run faster and may save time. The alias shortcuts can be organized on a desktop in several ways: alphabetization, by type (apps and files in separate halves or quadrants), or by theme (e.g., finance, work, and family files in separate halves or quadrants).

The “visual overwhelm” email users experience by working daily out of full inboxes is unhelpful to productivity. Implementing “Inbox Zero” strategies brings email inboxes closer to containing zero messages, which helps professionals’ organization and work speed, and may alleviate frustration (Raphael, 2018).

Rubinstein et al. (2001) demonstrate that general multitasking creates cognitive delay as workers switch between task focuses, thus making each goal task take longer. Johnson (2016) applies this methodology to inbox management by recommending that users check email at designated times throughout the day to increase overall productivity. By not keeping email open all day, users can prevent frequent interruptions from incoming messages (Raphael, 2018). This decreases the overall time major tasks may take by providing uninterrupted work time.

Raphael explains that email response triage is a tool for organizations (2018). To quickly lighten inbox load, an email user can archive messages that need no response, and immediately answer messages that can be dealt with in under a minute. Raphael suggests viewing email as a messaging service. By keeping responses to under five sentences whenever possible, users write responses so that brevity is helpful to their contacts. A final strategy for new email messages is to snooze them until they can be handled. Both Raphael and Johnson exhort decreasing email traffic overall by unsubscribing from marketing emails so that time is not wasted deleting emails daily. Finally, taking time to create email templates for common responses saves time in the long run (Raphael, 2018).

Schedulers and visualizing time management tools (Success Center, n.d.) can improve a person’s ability to do the things necessary to satisfy commitments. These tools can help increase the discipline, quality, and amount of time dedicated to specific tasks. One easy way to effectively manage

time is to define and dedicate blocks of time within the 168-hour week. Student success personnel have been recommending time-blocking grids for decades (see for example Success Center, n.d.). Time blocking begins with a grid (or spreadsheet) that contains columns for seven days and rows for non-sleeping hours of the day, which provides a visual of the roughly 110 weekly hours with which to build a full and productive life. Next, obligated time is blocked out on the grid – e.g., class time, work time, regular meal times, commute, or preparation time. Then, free time is identified and assigned – e.g., studying, having fun, or working toward goals. Time blocking helps visualize what should or can be done and when. It can also help harness time wasters. Setting aside time each day for checking/responding to/acting on email or social media, helps lessen the likelihood that hours per day are mindlessly lost to such activities.

Schedulers like Erin Condren®, FranklinCovey®, and PlannerPad® work similarly. These tools encourage goal setting and scheduling, and also the periodic examination of progress toward goals and external roles. A weekly planning pause helps gather thoughts in the context of roles and goals (Covey 2020; Leonhardt, 2017). Once obligated time is blocked out on the scheduler, then free time can be dedicated to making progress. The PlannerPad system refers to this as a scheduling funnel that encourages users to identify what needs doing, pick a day to do it, then schedule a time to get it done. Establishing a reasonable schedule, adhering to it, setting parameters for the how and when of working and even rewarding oneself for good time management should increase both discipline and productivity.

One way to get the most out of scheduled activity is to commit to high-intensity focus on one task at a time, for a limited time. The word *pomodoro* is *tomato* in Italian, and Francesco Cirillo quite literally named the Pomodoro® Technique after the common tomato-shaped kitchen timers. Benefits of this work method include cutting down on interruptions, improving the content and quality of work products, helping meet deadlines, and decreasing estimation errors for how long tasks will take (Cirillo, 2020). Explanations vary, but contain these common steps: 1) choose a task or project; 2) set a timer for 20 to 30 minutes; 3) work diligently for that entire period on that one thing; 4) when the buzzer sounds, take a break of just a few minutes; 5) repeat for the duration of the block of time dedicated to working on that project; 6) record each session in your planner or notebook with an X or a tick mark and 7) after several sessions, take a longer break (Cirillo, 2020; ToDoist, n.d., Collins, 2017). Larson (2020) similarly recommends focused working.

Covey originally published his seminal work *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* in 1989 after spending most of his career studying successful leaders and leadership. He found several truisms that have helped millions of people achieve both private and public victories yielding greater personal performance and productivity; those are as true today as they were then. All seven habits are important, but some are more applicable to college students. The first of his seven habits is to *be proactive*. According to Oxford Dictionaries, proactivity refers to “creating or controlling a situation by causing something to happen rather than responding to it after it has happened,” (2021). Once time and energy are channeled into proactivity, there are fewer crisis-type situations. For example, students who do a little project work, regularly, from the moment something is assigned until it is due, are more controlled and less frantic than students for whom everything is a surprise or tackled only on deadline. Simply planning out work by considering tasks and order to achieve desired results, then breaking the work into manageable chunks spread out over time will benefit performance and productivity. Covey’s second habit to *begin with the end in mind*, urges the development of a personal mission statement that defines and directs the person, sets clear boundaries, and helps him or her be principle-directed, as well. It should be brief, at most, and provide a framework upon which to make principled, purposeful decisions related to activity, participation, and major life choices. Covey (2020) explains the concept in great detail, but Andrews offers five questions a person can reflect upon to help a person set a personal mission statement: 1) What is important?, 2) Where do I want to go? 3) What does “the best”

look like for me? 4) How do I want to act? 5) What kind of legacy do I want to leave behind? (2021, ¶ 20). Covey’s third habit is to *put first things first*. He encourages classifying tasks along four quadrants: Urgent | Not urgent + Important | Not important (see Figure 1) (p. 173).

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>Quadrant I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis • Pressing problems • Deadline driven projects 	<p>Quadrant II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship building • Finding new opportunities • Long-term planning • Preventive activities • Personal growth • Recreation
Not Important	<p>Quadrant III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions • Emails, calls, meetings • Popular activities • Proximate, pressing matters 	<p>Quadrant IV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, busy work • Time wasters • Some calls and emails • Pleasant activities

Figure 1. Covey Time Management Matrix.

He advocates the least amount of time be spent in Quadrant 4 and the important tasks in Quadrant 2 be given priority. Covey recommends coding tasks by their quadrant in a planner so that more time is given to what’s important than to distractions. His seventh habit, *sharpen the saw*, encourages investing time in continuous self-improvement and development of the physical, mental, and spiritual capability to avoid burnout, effectively extolling the benefits of practices like mindfulness. Covey (2020) urges incorporating some or all of these principles to yield greater productivity.

Undergraduates may not have the organizational or mindfulness skills that administrators, faculty, and internship sites presume the population to have developed before college enrollment, (Balduf, 2009; Dikmen, 2022). Student trial-and-error learning about how to be productive occurs in the high-stress incubator of the busy semester filled with worries about academic performance, pressure to succeed, and post-graduation plans (Beiter, 2015). Exposure to and practice of methods to work efficiently and healthfully should be beneficial to students before internships, real-world employment, and within the educational framework as well (Larson, 2020).

The literature reviewed before the development of the classroom intervention most frequently related to full-term courses or programs (Gray, 2021; Larson, 2020; Rava & Hotez, 2021, Goodman & Schorling, 2012), therefore, the contribution of this study is to demonstrate that a brief in-class introduction to the concepts of productivity and mindfulness with encouragement to test and begin incorporating tools, should prove beneficial to students and their work as this study explores these research questions:

RQ1: In what ways will students who have been introduced in the classroom to concepts of personal productivity and mindfulness report behavioral adaptation?

RQ2: How can faculty incorporate mindfulness and productivity-enhancing strategies into regular curricular offerings, regardless of academic discipline, to assist student well-being?

Classroom Intervention

Method

After approval from the Institutional Review Board, the in-class intervention of a dedicated class session and presentation was conducted during the fall semester of 2021 in two classes of traditional undergraduate students at a 64% female, mid-sized, High Research Activity (R2) institution. Both undergraduate literary publishing classes for this exploratory study were taught by an author of this study: 1) an introductory course (The Publishing Process), and 2) an advanced course (Media Relations & Branding). In both instances, the courses are designed for students who desire to work in a fast-paced entertainment industry. As the presentation was done in class, all students in both courses participated, though only one male student was enrolled in either class. The majority of students studying in this major skews female and only one male student was enrolled in either class.

After an informed consent brief, students were asked to complete a Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale. Next, the instructor gave an approximately hour-long presentation: 30 minutes on productivity tools and 30 minutes on mindfulness. The in-class presentation included 25 slides that covered productivity and productivity enhancement techniques (Seven Habits, goal-setting, Pomodoro, Inbox Zero strategy and desktop management), mindfulness and mindfulness enhancement techniques (definitions, examples, how-to information on breathing, meditation, contemplation, Morning Pages, journaling) and incorporated practicing a purposeful pause that allowed students to contemplate and reflect on a selected poem. “The Guesthouse” by the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi was selected for the in-class text upon which to purposefully pause and contemplate. The poem describes the difficulty of human existence in its transitions between competing and even conflicting emotions, which the authors deemed an appropriate selection at that point of the COVID-19 pandemic:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond. (*The Guest House by Rumi*)

The speaker in the poem lauds accepting present moments as a path to personal growth—the ultimate lesson in mindfulness. The poem was included in the presentation followed by moments of silent contemplation and then brief discussion. At the end of the presentation, they were asked to select one

mindfulness tool and one productivity tool to implement into their routines in the coming weeks. Additionally, students engaged in class discussion and asked questions of the instructor.

Three weeks later, Brown & Ryan's 2003 Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale was readministered in class, followed by a classroom discussion of their selected productivity and mindfulness practices. Because of a *Hyflex* classroom environment (a COVID-19 attendance practice with some students in-person and some online), some students took the MAAS upon return to the class after remote learning, meaning they may have had up to an additional two weeks before taking it, depending on the student. The MAAS contains 22 items that measure openness to experience (fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, values), trait meta-mood (clarity, attention, repair), mindfulness/mindlessness (flexibility, novelty seeking, novelty producing, engagement), self-consciousness (private: self-reflectiveness, internal state awareness), public self-consciousness, social anxiety, reflection, rumination, self-monitoring, need for cognition and absorption, but it is a self-scored tool similar to Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory. To link pre- and post-MAAS responses and to ensure anonymity, students were asked to select a pseudonym and use it to label both in-class MAAS administrations. At the first administration, each student sealed his/her envelope containing the selected pseudonym. These envelopes were collected by the faculty member, held between test administrations, and returned to the student before the second MAAS exercise. After both administrations of the MAAS exercise, a brief 8-question Qualtrics survey developed for this study about the mindfulness tool/productivity tool trial was sent to all students in the class. Students were asked to anonymously report which productivity and mindfulness concepts were put into practice, to rate the helpfulness of what was attempted, and to reflect briefly on the experience. Additionally, in participating classes, the instructor or students occasionally informally referenced materials covered in the presentation related to productivity and mindfulness.

Results

Each student's aggregate score was compared from the first to the second administration, with the overall MAAS pre-intervention mean of $M=3.29$ and the MAAS post-intervention mean of $M=3.55$, the sample was too small for robust statistical analysis but indicates a small, mostly positive increase after the intervention. Of the 26 students who completed both administrations, only six students had a lower MAAS score on the second administration.

Table 1. Students' Aggregate MAAS Scores with difference.

Student	Reported MAAS 1	M Reported MAAS 2	M Difference: MAAS Scores
1	2.4	4.26	1.86
2	2.06	3.73	1.67
3	3.2	4.6	1.4
4	2.6	3.4	0.8
5	4.2	4.87	0.67
6	3.53	4.13	0.6
7	2.73	3.2	0.47
8	3.47	3.93	0.46
9	3.33	3.73	0.4

10	3.2	3.53	0.33
11	3.47	3.8	0.33
12	3.33	3.53	0.2
13	3.07	3.27	0.2
14	4.73	4.93	0.2
15	3	3.2	0.2
16	2.53	2.67	0.14
17	2.87	3	0.13
18	3.6	3.67	0.07
19	2.8	2.8	0
20	3.87	3.87	0
21	3.73	3.67	-0.06
22	3.73	3.67	-0.06
23	4.07	3.93	-0.14
24	4.13	3.73	-0.4
25	4	3.33	-0.67
26	5.13	3.27	-1.86
Sample Mean	3.29	3.55	

In the brief follow-up Qualtrics survey ($n=16$), 31% of the students reported sharing the information they learned with others. Students reported which mindfulness tools they incorporated after the intervention: deep breathing (56%), Morning Pages/journaling (25%), meditation (13%), or contemplation of a text (.06%). The closed-ended ratings and the open-ended responses were aligned and indicated a positive experience. Of the 16 students who rated their experiences with the selected mindfulness tools on a seven-point scale, ($M=5$, $SD = 1$), 50% rated the selected tool as somewhat helpful and 25% rated it helpful. No students rated their selected tool as unhelpful, 12% selected neutral and .06% selected either somewhat unhelpful or extremely helpful.

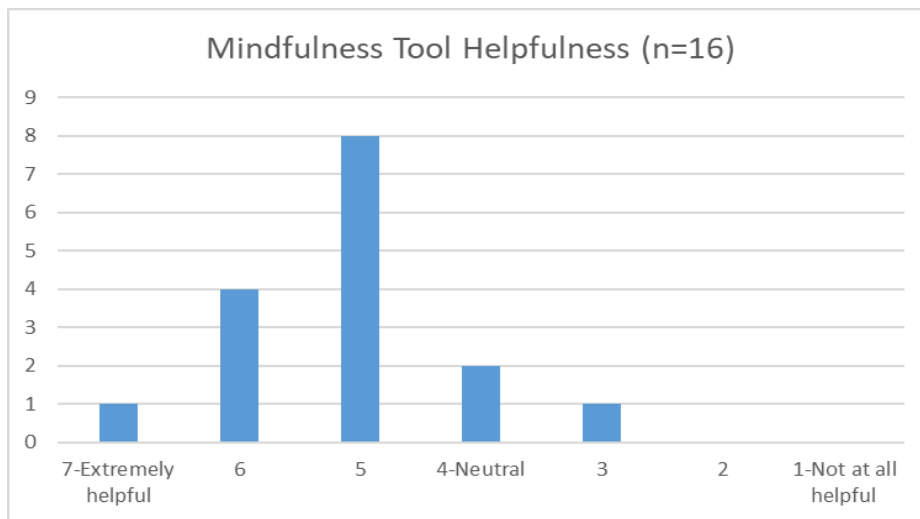


Figure 2. Student-rated helpfulness of the selected mindfulness tool (n=16).

Students then reported which productivity tools they incorporated after the intervention ($M=6, SD=1$) — inbox management (38%), time/schedule management (31%), priority management (19%), or desktop management (13%). They rated their experiences with the selected tools: 50% indicated helpful, 19% said their tool was extremely helpful, 19% selected neutral and .06% said somewhat helpful. No students said the selected productivity tool was either unhelpful or somewhat unhelpful.

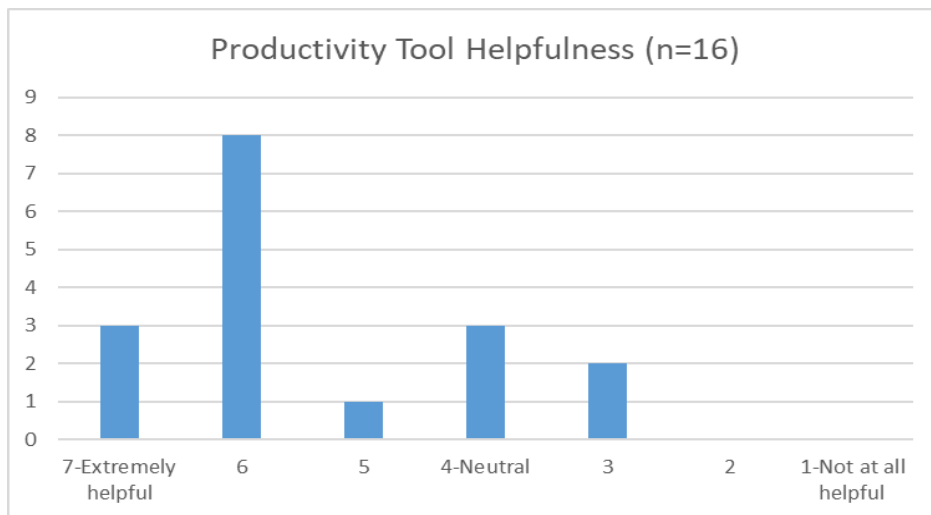


Figure 3. Student-rated helpfulness of the selected productivity tool.

The qualitative responses were positive, without fail, regarding the benefits of the classroom intervention and the students' trial of mindfulness and productivity tools. The *prima facie* themes were *change*, *control*, and *interest* as indicated by these exemplary statements to the question of their “one big takeaway:”

- “It really changed my perspective on how unsustainable my practices were, especially in work.”
- “By planning my day correctly and having a set schedule, I feel much more relaxed and confident about my assignments and throughout my day.”
- “I was blown away by how much there was in this idea of living in mindfulness. I really hope to slowly incorporate it more in my life and to learn more about it because I find it so interesting.”
- “The comparison between mindfulness (being in the present) and mindlessness (ruminating in the past or future) was a really important distinction for me to make as I realized I'd been spending quite a bit of time in mindlessness.”

The *prima facie* themes of how students benefited were *growth*, *agency*, and *awareness*, as indicated by these exemplary responses:

- “I have learned to connect more with my current reality instead of focusing either on the past or the future. This has helped me take bites out of what I need to accomplish instead of panicking at everything that needs to be done and not accomplishing any of it.”
- “The Pomodoro method helped me retain more information when studying, as well as make me feel more productive. I will definitely continue to use this method when studying or getting tasks done.”

- “Being aware of my own mindfulness has made me begin to look at life day-by-day as a way to manage my stress, schedule, and worries.”
- “I feel more present in my life.”
- “ I feel I am better at managing my time and being more efficient within the time I have set aside to do work.”

Because the MAAS was administered as part of a classroom activity, in one course an additional reflective assignment was incorporated into the curriculum. 11 qualitative reflections were gathered as part of the course, which included valuable feedback about incorporating the presentation and tool trial into the course; the following are exemplary:

- I feel thankful that there is an open and honest dialogue about mindfulness in our classroom, and I can’t wait to continue putting these tips to good use.
- Overall, I got a lot of value out of both taking the MAAS and further discussing mindfulness and burnout in class and am very grateful for being able to openly learn about and discuss these prevalent topics in an academic environment.
- This presentation being given in a classroom has made me feel a bit more understood. I feel more valued and seen as a person, rather than one of many students in a classroom. It is comforting to know that I am not the only one who experiences overwork and that professors are open to discussing this problem with us students

Additional Indications of Subject Matter Relevance

An important bit of informal, anecdotal feedback gleaned in subsequent classroom interactions was that by receiving this intervention in a classroom specifically, students felt “seen and heard” by their instructor. Additionally, the informal manner with which the topics of mindfulness and productivity subsequently seamlessly entered multiple classroom discussions in the participating classes as initiated by students also indicates impact. These topics even manifested in unrelated assignments, e.g., in a group project for one of the courses where the intervention was presented, students were assigned to create their own magazine and one group decided a wellness-based publication would be their theme. Interior to the content of the magazine were articles about mindfulness that indicated students’ further exploration and sharing of some tips presented in the intervention, including a quiz they created entitled “What Unique Mindfulness Practice Should You Try?” At the conclusion of their presentation, another student in the course asked the group if the intervention presentation earlier in the year had influenced their decision to use this topic for their project; the group response was that they shared an interest in wellness, but learning about mindfulness in the classroom helped them crystallize this theme when the project was assigned, and provided them additional concepts and material to incorporate and expand on within the assignment. The group verbalized that without the intervention, they probably would not have considered the topic for in-depth exploration through the project.

The intervention has observable “sticking power” for this group of students. Spring semester 2023, nearly two years after this presentation, students continue to, anecdotally and without prompting, comment upon things they learned in the presentation, for example, bringing up in advising appointments the power of implementing “Inbox Zero” strategies or how mindful breathing has become a part of daily routines.

Discussion

Literature indicates the successful incorporation of mindfulness into full courses and campus programming. This exploratory study found that students expressed growth in productivity and mindfulness through both their MAAS scores and through the brief questionnaire as well as informally through subsequent assignment material. Mindfulness and productivity can be informally incorporated into courses briefly through a one-class meeting presentation and limited-time tool adoption trial; the shared experience lends itself to subsequent conversations and informal interactions that include both practices. Dedicating a class period rather than multi-week programming, as previously indicated in the literature, to these topics seemed to improve the courses for their duration, and individual activities or incorporating mindfulness and productivity discussion into regular classroom activities may have a similar impact.

No information shared within the intervention was discipline-specific, and any course with an instructor willing to dedicate a class period to the classroom intervention could support this content. In student programming (e.g. campus ministry, counseling services, freshman seminar or orientation, student success programs) and in general education wellness health courses, students may be exposed to productivity or mindfulness instruction, but integrating these into a regular major or minor course, with adaptation trial expected, seemed to underscore the importance of such activities.

Likely impacts to this exploratory study include the following. The second MAAS was administered closer to mid-semester and the curve of typical mid-semester stress, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, could have overwhelmed possible benefits of students' mindfulness practice and could explain the drop in some MAAS scores between the intervention and the final data acquisition. Additionally, students were not required to implement their tools (either mindfulness or productivity) as part of an assignment, so not all students likely applied their selected methods after the presentation and this could have factored in the second MAAS administration. The *Hyflex* classroom model, adopted for the COVID-19 pandemic, made anonymous participation difficult for fully online students, who were encouraged to participate in the MAAS administrations, but their data were not gathered.

Limitations

Though the institution is majority female, a sample size of 26 participants in two classes, with only one male student enrolled, is exploratory, and more studies with higher numbers of students are recommended, with more diversity in students' areas of study and demographics. Class size could either increase or take away from the impact of future findings if various class sizes were explored, rather than the small sizes within this exploratory group. Aggregate means collected via an in-class activity do not allow robust statistical analysis. The number of questionnaire variables can be increased to allow for more robust data collection and analysis.

For Further Study

More confirmation of the self-report would be interesting to implement in a future iteration of this study. A required mindfulness practice in a course could lead to higher student performance, as indicated by Gray's (2021) study featuring daily practice and Rava and Hotez's (2021) study featuring journaling.

It would be helpful for future productivity and mindfulness in-class activities to include a one-page handout listing the mindfulness and productivity tips so students have an easy reference tool rather than relying on memory, notes, or a multi-slide presentation when implementing their chosen

tips for practice at home.

Although one version of a short intervention was used for this exploratory study, other models of short interventions with varying mindfulness and productivity tool variations could be utilized to broaden future studies, as ways of practicing mindfulness and working productively are more numerous than what this study presented to students.

Another study might shorten the full-class intervention to just a portion of one class. It would also be interesting to progress from a single-session intervention combining productivity and mindfulness to a full-term study examining the impact of multiple in-class interventions during the term, perhaps three: the introductory presentation, a check-in/reminder presentation, and a wrap-up presentation, as an alternative to the multi-week or semester-long studies found in the literature. This latter suggested model for future research maintains the shorter intervention ethos while also offering more check-in points for educator and student to reinforce learning and positive experiences with the tools of the intervention.

Conclusion

The results of this exploratory study were consistent with prior published research indicating positive correlations between mindfulness and quality of life for students (Gray, 2021; Rava & Hotez, 2021). A single class insertion of mindfulness and productivity tool instruction into courses, having regular conversations about these topics, and setting a faculty expectation that students put these tools into practice, may prove beneficial to students regardless of academic major.

Indications related to this single classroom intervention are that students exposed to productivity and mindfulness information and practices seem to have been positively impacted. Students reported trying both productivity and mindfulness practices and finding these helpful. Educators implementing a similar program should benefit undergraduate students' mindfulness and productivity practices, which have been shown to reduce stress and lead to healthier emotional wellness (Leupold, et. al., 2020). Although implementing these types of interventions could seem more practical in a general education or workshop setting, this study seems to indicate the importance of individual professors, across the academic enterprise, addressing the topics of mindfulness and productivity within their classrooms. Though exploratory, this study indicates it is possible to affect productivity and mindfulness through increased familiarity and heightened exposure via a single brief program exposing students to concepts and tools. The advantage to this style of single intervention classroom mindfulness training is in its simplicity and ease for the educator, who need not be a mindfulness expert to implement it (as proven by this study conducted by educators who are hobbyist mindfulness practitioners). It would not be difficult to train educators of any discipline to facilitate this simple classroom tool, which may help college educators facing an ever-increasing population of stressed students to support student wellness and academic success.

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