

RELS 150 Mindfulness and Narcissism,
Jeremy Wisnewski

Office Hours: MW 2:30-4:00 PM by appt; TTh 11:00 AM-12:00 PM by appt

This course requires meditation.

Course Texts

1. Bhante Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, Wisdom Publications, 2011
2. David Forbes, *Mindfulness and its Discontents: Education, Self, and Social Transformation*, Fernwood Publishing, 2019.
3. Ronald E. Purser, *McMindlessness: How Mindfulness Became the new Capitalist Spirituality*, Repeater Press, 2019.
4. Tim Parks, *Teach Us to Sit Still*, Rodale Press, 2010

Course Description

Despite ancient roots, the term ‘mindfulness’ shows up in surprisingly contemporary contexts. Corporations use it to increase worker productivity, law enforcement uses it to reduce incidents of police violence, couples’ therapy uses it as a way to improve couples’ communication. The earliest forms of mindfulness, however, are not designed to *improve* the self, but rather to *eliminate* our attachment to the idea of self. In this course, we will explore the historical roots of mindfulness and meditation in ancient philosophy and religion, contrasting the technique of mindfulness meditation in the past with its more contemporary instantiations. We will grapple with the issue of whether mindfulness can be effective, and to what extent, in a culture characterized by a deep commitment to the idea of ‘self’ and the narcissism that tends to go with it. To what extent has mindfulness been tethered to notions of mental health and productivity that would not find a place in ancient Buddhist practice, for example? Is it possible to avoid the narcissism of our age with mindfulness, or are we condemned to make even our mindfulness narcissistic?

Honors Credit for this FYS

All students who pass the course will receive academic credit. For the course to count as a successful Honors Challenge, however, a student must earn a B+ (88%) or higher.

Learning Outcomes for All First Year Seminars

- (1) *Reinforce standards of college-level writing.* The FYS supports the Hartwick College writing requirement and builds toward the LAiP learning outcome of effective communication in written English. (LO 1.1)
- (2) *Introduce college-level modes of discourse.* Through in-class discussion and oral presentation, the FYS builds skills of scholarly debate and supports the LAiP learning outcome of effective communication in spoken English. (LO 1.2)
- (3) *Improve student skills in evaluation, interpretation and analysis of texts and other forms of expression.* In so doing, FYS supports the LAiP learning outcome of producing interpretive or problem-solving creative work. (LO 6)
- (4) *Cultivate information literacy and research techniques.* By introducing the skills of identifying appropriate sources and assessing the quality of information, the FYS cultivates individuals capable of evaluating and determining the relevance of information.

Course-specific Goals

At the end of this course, students will be able to demonstrate:

1. Basic understanding of some traditional approaches to mindfulness and their roots in Buddhist philosophy and religion.
2. Familiarity with techniques of open-awareness meditation as well as their attendant challenges
3. Familiarity with some of the contemporary applications of mindfulness, as well as how these applications might depart from traditional views of the practice

4. Basic ability to compare and contrast divergent viewpoints with comprehension and care

How you will earn your grade

(all of these assignments are designed to facilitate the goals listed above)

1. Short response papers (30%)

Each student must complete two short response papers. They are to be approximately three standard pages. **Papers that have not been proofread for errors will receive an F.**

2. Short presentations (20%)

Each student will give four presentations. Presentations will focus on a specific reading, and should include both exegesis and analysis. The first presentations will be approximately 10 minutes; the rest should be approximately 30 minutes. **Failure to give any of the presentations will result in failure for the course.**

3. Pop quizzes/Short assignments (10%)

I will give pop quizzes. These will focus on the reading assigned for the day. You may use any *handwritten* notes on the reading, but not the texts themselves, during these quizzes. I will also assign specific tasks (such as those required to write a research paper) that will be included under this heading.

4. Final Meditation Project (10%)

You will be required to meditate for one-hour at the end of the course. Seriously. [We'll talk about any concerns you may have. Everything will be fine. Return to the breath.]

5. Participation (10%)

Attendance is compulsory in this course. Our learning requires active involvement, both in our discussions and in our meditation. It also involves coming to class fully prepared, *with notes on the reading*, ready to raise questions, and to otherwise engage with the material. **Missing more than two classes may result in failure for the course.**

6. Research Paper (20%)

Each student must complete a 6-8 page research paper, due at the time of our final exam. In addition, each student must complete (and turn in) the preparatory steps listed below. These steps aim to facilitate *success* in writing a top-notch paper.

Note: Failure to complete any assignment is sufficient for failure in the course.

Summary of Grade Distribution

30%	Short Papers (15% each)
20%	Short Presentations (5% each)
10%	Short Assignments/Quizzes
10%	Final Meditation Project
10%	Participation
20%	Research Paper

100%	Total

More Information on Selected Assignments

Presentations

Assessment Criteria for Presentations are as follows:

Written assessment

Each student must provide a handout to the class covering the reading she has been assigned. Each person must write her own analysis. Important: The task here is *not* simply to summarize the reading. **I do not want to read summaries.** The task, rather, is to focus on the *significance* of what you are presenting. Why is X discussing what he is discussing? How does it relate to the topic of the course? What is problematic about the claims being made? What are the most important things a reader should get from the reading?

If you use any sources, you must cite them—but keep the use of any such sources minimal. I want to see *your* thinking through the text—not someone else’s.

Oral Presentation

Students will be graded individually. You should divide the work equally for the presentation if it is a joint presentation. If you are silent when your group presents, you will get a zero.

1. *Organization and Content.* The presentation should be well thought-out and organized—presenting your interpretation of the text you were assigned. What does the text mean? What is important about it? What isn’t clear?
2. *Discussion.* The presenter(s) should have several good discussion questions, capable of generating class participation. *If your classmates are not drawn into discussion, you will lose points! Help each other!*

The Research Paper

The final research paper of the course will be worth 20% of your grade. To adequately complete this assignment, we’ll be completing several smaller assignments along the way (which will be included in the 10% of your grade under the category ‘Short Assignments’)

What is a research paper in philosophy?

In philosophy, ‘research’ involves tackling a philosophical question with care and rigor, and with attention to what others have already said on a given topic. It *is not* simply reporting what others say, however. To do research in philosophy is to *do philosophy*. This means taking seriously objections to your views, responding to others who disagree with your views, and constructing arguments that stand up to scrutiny. This is exactly what I would like you to do in your final papers.

What are the steps along the way?

1. writing a paper proposal
2. constructing and submitting a bibliography
3. writing and submitting a précis of one of your bibliographic sources
4. Handing in an outline/draft of your paper
5. Presenting the thesis of your paper to the class

Policies

Academic Dishonesty: All students are responsible for knowing the academic honesty policy of the college. Violations of this policy will not be tolerated.

Electronic devices: Electronic devices are not to be used during class time. No computers, no phones—not even calculators. Under no circumstances should a phone ever ring during class. Under no circumstances should a student ever check his or her phone, favorite website, Facebook feed, computer battery, etc. during class. **No recording of audio or video is permitted at any time during class without prior permission.**

Special Accommodations: Hartwick College makes reasonable accommodations for qualified students with documented disabilities. If you have a learning disability, a chronic illness, or a physical or psychiatric disability that may have some impact on your work for this class and for which you may need accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of Disability Services. 5th floor Library, 607.431.4546

Sex Discrimination, Harassment, and Misconduct Statement

Hartwick College is deeply committed to equal opportunity and a tolerant, supportive learning environment and thus prohibits Sex Discrimination, Harassment, and Misconduct (www.Hartwick.edu/TitleIX).

Please note that faculty and staff are required to report incidents of sexual misconduct and thus cannot guarantee confidentiality.

If you wish to speak *confidentially* about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact one of the following resources: Perrella Wellness Center, Health – (607) 431-4120, or Counseling – (607) 431-4120; or Opportunities for Otsego’s Violence Intervention Program – (607) 432-4855.

If you wish to report an incident to the College or have questions about school policies and procedures, please contact our school’s **Title IX Coordinator**, Traci Perrin, at PerrinT@Hartwick.edu or 607-431-4293. In an emergency and to request immediate assistance contact Campus Safety at 607-431-4111.

Tentative Schedule (subject to change at Instructor's discretion)

Reading (to be completed <i>prior</i> to class)	
Introduction to the class	
Gunaratana, 1-32	Presentations #1 Presentations #1, #2, #3
Gunaratana, 33-72	Presentations #4, #5, #6, #7
Gunaratana, 73-130	Presentations #8, #9, #10, #11, #12
Gunaratana, 131-170	Presentations #13, #14, #15, #16
Film: Dhamma Brothers	
Film: Dhamma Brothers	
Tim Parks, 3-142	Presentation #2 Group 1: Presentation: Tim Parks, 3-72 Group 2: Presentation: Tim Parks, 73-142
Tim Parks, 243-256	Group 3: Presentation: Tim Parks, 143-214 Group 4: Presentation: Tim Parks, 215-256
Tim Parks, 257-318	Group 5: Presentation: Tim Parks, 257-318
Forbes, 1-34	Presentation #3 Presentations #1 and #2
Forbes, 35-60	Presentations #3, #4, #5
Forbes, 61-90	Presentations #6 and #7
Forbes, 91-113	Presentations #8 and #9
Forbes, 114-142	Presentations #10 and #11 (one chapter)
October Break	
Forbes, 143-163	Presentations #12 and #13
Forbes, 164-178	Presentations #14
Forbes, 179-206	Presentations #15 and #16 (one chapter)
Purser, 7-46	Presentation #4 Presentations #1 and #2
Purser, 47-82	Presentations #3 and #4
Purser, 83-114	Presentations #5 and #6
Purser, 115-150	Presentations #7 and #8
Purser, 151-182	Presentations #9 and #10
Purser, 183-202	Presentations #11 and #12
Purser, 203-218	Presentations #13 and #14
Purser, 219-240	Presentations #15 and #16
Purser, 241-262	Presentations #17
Thanksgiving Break	
Final Paper presentations	
Final Paper presentations	
8AM-11AM	
Final Exam	