

Understanding Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices for Well-Being

A Faculty Guidebook

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1

Introduction

“We teach students to be professionals and do well in their professional lives but tend to neglect nurturing their personal lives. Your professional and personal life go hand in hand. You can’t nurture one and neglect the other.”

– Pratt faculty



“An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching.”

– Mahatma Gandhi



There are many ways to introduce well-being, practice mindfulness, and creatively use contemplative pedagogy and practices from theory to research. From the perspective of our work at Pratt institute, mindfulness and contemplative practices have produced the seeds of well-being in our community. These seeds grow and are watered from our shared experiences both in and out of the classroom, with small moments of practice many times.

Pratt students define well-being as:

- A state of mind where you are able to cope with life;
- A state of being happy and content, it is when you are emotionally positive;
- A state of being completely comfortable, protected, feeling healthy or happy; and
- One's overall health, mentally and physically.

Building a culture of well-being at Pratt has involved many of our community members actively engaging in positive education research and reflection, creative inquiry and mindfulness practice, and the generosity of sharing.



Pratt students tell us components that are necessary for positive student well-being:

- Counselor, constant feedback, mindfulness activities, and wellness exercises;
- Making students feel like they're part of a community;
- Ensuring that school work is not overly stressful. Avoiding surprises (surprise assignments or tests);
- Feeling a sense of social connection, good health by occupying pleasant environment, support with current and future financial conditions; and
- Communication, support, and understanding.

Creating a culture of well-being by cultivating the motivation and discipline for a personal practice is the first step. Once taken, you can begin to authentically experiment with the application of these strategies in your classroom and studio.

Current Initiatives of Mindfulness and Well-Being at Pratt

There are many strategies and practices to choose from that will lead to and support well-being for yourself and your students. We have seen from our own experiences in the Meditation Incubator, Mindful Pratt and MISA, the COMPOSE teacher training, the Resilience in Teaching Online program, and Mindful Making that mindfulness, contemplative practice, and reflection through mindful inquiry deepens our learning and expands our resilience. Well-being grows from our own intentions and mindfulness practice.

It does take discipline to cultivate well-being and mindfulness, so participating in communities will help make this practice become a habit.



Our Initiatives:

The Meditation Incubator

A 10-week cocurricular course offered to faculty, students, and staff, as both live and as a self-directed online course focusing on building a mindfulness and meditation practice with a specific lens on career visioning. [Learn more here](#).

Mindful Pratt

A central hub for resources and opportunities to engage in this work. This group also arranges community drop-in offerings. We welcome you to the **Mindful Pratt** offerings Mon-Fri. Zoom links can be found on that website: commons.pratt.edu/mindfulpratt.

Mindfulness Initiatives in Student Affairs

Including representatives from all departments within the division of Student Affairs, this group comes together to cultivate personal practice, learn and share practices, and create plans for bringing mindfulness directly into their work and lives. Email sharvey@pratt.edu for more information.

COMPOSE

COMPOSE is an 8-part series that focuses on promoting contemplative practices along with exercises from positive psychology, with the goal of establishing a personal practice framed around the concepts of learned optimism, resilience, and meaning-making while generating well-being pedagogies for classroom and studio teaching. Learn more and join an upcoming COMPOSE cohort.

[Learn more and join an upcoming COMPOSE cohort](#).

Resilient Teaching Online (RTO)

The RTO was a faculty development series, offered by the CTL, with two main goals in mind: (1) To share with faculty best practices of online teaching methodologies and (2) To address resilience and utilize trauma-informed practices guided by research in higher education in order to address faculty and student resilience in the face of uncertainty by providing tools and techniques that were designed to be adaptable to all of the fluctuating conditions and disruptions of our lives. Review all RTO and resilient teaching resources and the impact it made on faculty teaching and student learning [here](#).

Integrating Mindfulness

In this interactive 4-session course, faculty learn how mindfulness practices foster concentration, resilience, wellness, inner calm and self-awareness in the (virtual) classroom. [Learn more here](#).

Wellbeing Series

The CTL offers a variety of programs that support the use of contemplative practices in the classroom and studio setting. These include: Integrating Mindfulness – a series to learn mindfulness practices that foster concentration, resilience, wellness, inner calm and self-awareness; Teaching Through the Art of Storytelling – an interactive, experiential series on teaching the art of storytelling in higher education; and more. Learn more about upcoming series, resources and events [here](#).

teach.well Network

teach.well is an interdisciplinary, cross-campus online community, supported by a grant through NYU's 20x30 Learning and Action Network. It aims to be a space for Higher Ed faculty to come together as a community to explore the benefits of mindfully incorporating wellness into the teaching and learning experience. Join this free network of educators at teachwell.mn.co.

TeachWell Deep Dive Community

Deep Dive Communities are intensive mini learning communities where faculty connect with each other to explore together—through close readings of texts, discussions, sharing practices, and building a community—the key tenets of well-being pedagogy. [Learn more here](#).



Mindful Making

A program hosted through the Pratt Center for the Made in NYC program where we work with local manufacturers to give them tools for building their businesses and managing their stress. [Learn more here](#).

Resilience Project and Resilience, Wellness, and Well-Being Council

This project provides the inspiration and support for existing and new initiatives, and serves as a resource for everyone seeking to improve individual and community resilience, wellness, and well-being. [Learn more here](#).

Flourishing Studio Culture

This initiative looks at studio culture and ways to introduce contemplative and creative space within Pratt. Through classroom design and well-being pedagogy, including faculty training, we can begin to reimagine what studio learning can accomplish. New ways of designing studios will be explored, so that we may look at new furniture arrangements and ways to physically structure classes to aid creativity and well-being. Email rschal20@pratt.edu for more information.





How to Use the Guidebook

Mindfulness and contemplative practices aid well-being, build resilience, and create a sense of wholeness and positive engagement in our lives. Use this guidebook as a starting place to explore your own definition of well-being. Use the practices and strategies to cultivate well-being for yourself and your students.

Keep these suggestions in mind:

Repetition creates a focused mind

As with any skill, the ability to notice thinking and call attention back to the present moment is strengthened by repetition. A focused mind creates a concentrated mind and a concentrated mind is at the heart of a creative mind.

Progress is not linear

Entering each practice with a beginner's mind, and as best as possible, with acceptance and kindness is helpful. Distraction is natural and to be expected.

Stop, take a breath

We invite ourselves to simply take a breath and notice the bouncing thoughts of our busy minds. This is a great opportunity to simply notice and to not get carried away or swept up in the stories of mind.

This Guidebook is to be part of your mindful inquiry and learning, and it is not meant to be comprehensive or a sole resource on your journey. Feel free to explore this guidebook and notice your own lived experience through mindfulness and contemplative practices as you build a culture of well-being for yourself and your students.

2

Practicing Mindfulness

“The things (mindfulness practices) I learnt on the way made me realise how easy it would have been had I known about them earlier. Even though as a student I wouldn’t have practiced them, at least I’d be aware of them and they would come in handy when I need them the most. I believe that introducing these practices in the classroom would make (students) aware of it and if at all they hit a roadblock or are stressed and struggling they’ll know what to do or how to go about with it.”

– Pratt faculty



Mindfulness is the skill to notice the present moment with kindness and compassion, and with judgment held lightly so we can enter each moment with curiosity. Mindfulness is not the stopping of thoughts or feelings. We choose instead to learn to observe them, and not get carried away in the stories of thinking or feeling. By practicing mindfulness, we can learn to calm the mind through cultivating focused attention. Making the space with intention and on purpose to watch the breath, with focus and concentration in our meditation practice creates calm. And at some point, without even noticing it, focusing on the breath becomes a way of being within the calm. We begin to notice our life and our work as creative ways in and through the current moment, as both the witness and the participant. We begin to cultivate this mindset with acceptance and kindness.



Contemplative Practices

Contemplative practices offer opportunities for communion, community and awareness. The tree of contemplative practices by CMind illustrates the many ways to practice and bring practices into academic settings, including activist practices, creative practices, generative practices, movement practices, relational practices, ritual practices, and stillness.

contemplativemind.org/practices/tree

Popular practices utilized by faculty and students at Pratt like reflective journaling and meditation are explained below.

Journaling Practices and Reflection Worksheets

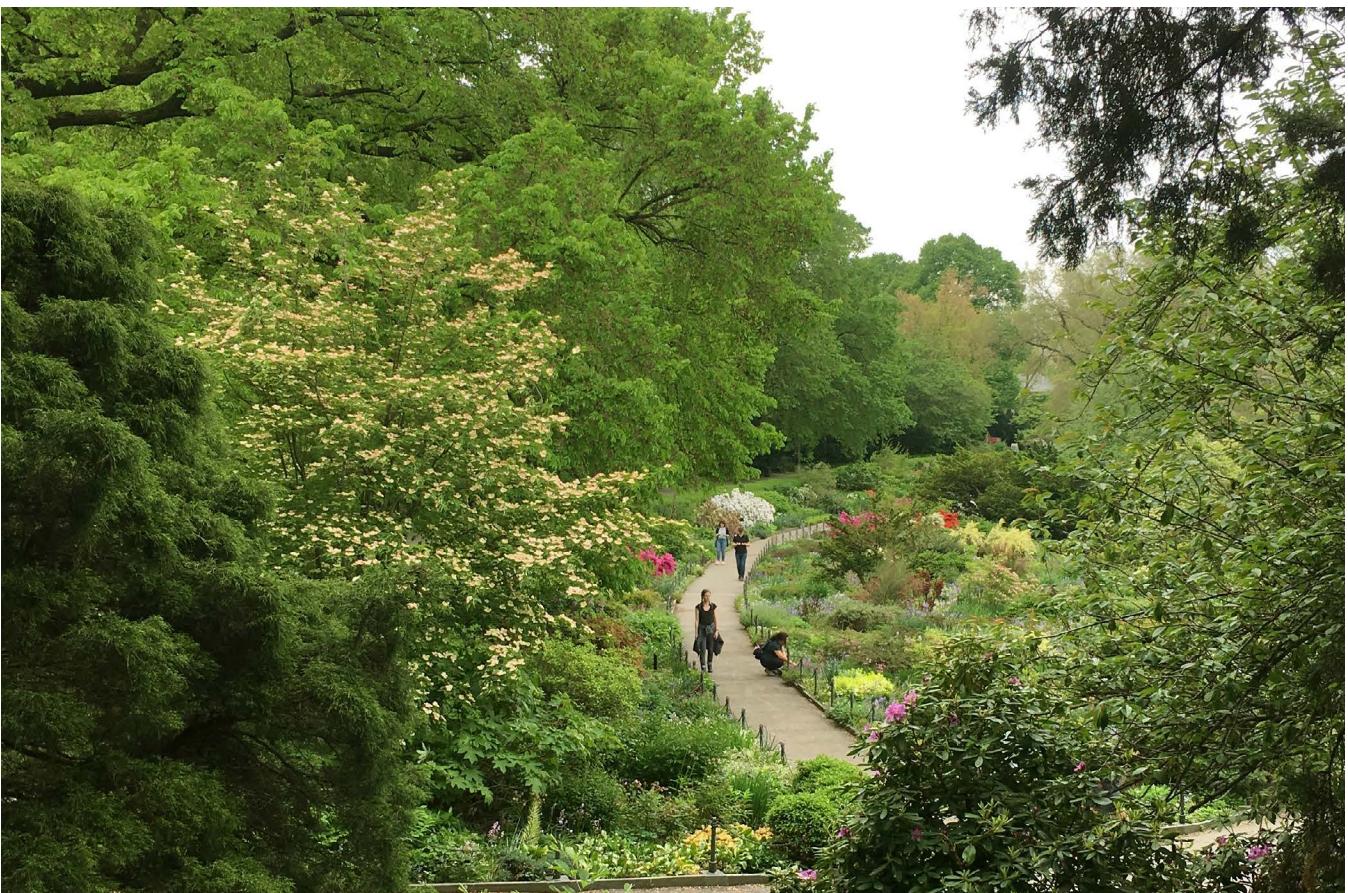
1. Journal Reflection: Noticing

- How do I feel right now, in my mind, body, breath?
- What happened? How did it feel? How did the practice affect me? Did anything change during the practice?
- What do I notice when I bring the practice into the studio, the office, or the classroom?
- How easy, difficult, fun, boring, calming or challenging did I find the practice? When I bring it into daily life?
- How much does my mind wander? If I noticed my mind wandering, was I able to bring it back to my breath and the present moment? In formal sitting practice? Informally in my daily life?

2. Daily Reflection Log

Reflection logs are a great way to keep track of your progress over time. Take a moment after your practice to note down a couple of thoughts about your experience with the practice.

Day	What did you experience today? What did you notice?
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	
Notes:	



3. Journaling about Experience

- What are you noticing about the integration of mindfulness into your everyday life and work? Into your creative practice? In your leadership at work or in the studio?
- Describe your experience with the practices and creativity, with leadership. What are you noticing?
- Do you favor certain practices? Why?
- In general, how would you describe your practice, your creativity, your leadership capacity the more you meditate? Same? Different?
- How is it to practice on a regular basis with the Collective? How are you able to hold yourself accountable to "show up"?
- Are there challenges, if any, that you can identify with your experience both with personal practice and with integration with your creativity and leadership?
- What, if anything, are you learning about yourself, your creative process or leadership at work, and your meditation?
- What has been challenging for you and how are you working with and meeting this challenge?
- What has been exciting and how are you working with this excitement?
- What, if anything, has been surprising to you?
- If you could name one thing you are grateful for from the practice, and being in the Collective, what would it be?

4. Mindful Leadership—Successes, Challenges, and Gratitude

- Continuing with this journal exercise builds resilience when we can notice how our meditation practices can offer us a view into our actions and mindsets. In this way we can honor both our struggles and successes in calm abiding, allowing the space for contemplation.
- My biggest success today was...
- My biggest stressor today was...
- A year from now I want to remember this is the week that _____ happened.
- This week, I am most grateful for because



"I have a meditation practice but getting new guided practices has been really useful as well, a way of pushing beyond my comfort zone and routine. Just how fulfilling and rich that has been is surprising but brings in judgment (have I been doing it wrong?) and keeping that at bay is difficult. Noticing versus judging is most difficult when looking inward I find. I can empathize, understand, forgive others much more easily than I can have compassion for myself and changing that groove in my mind is the most difficult."

— Pratt faculty

Basic Meditation Practices

Sitting Meditation

Arriving and Counting Breath: Begins with centering ourselves as we arrive into the present moment. This transition as we begin to drop down into practice allows us to arrive into the present moment with kindness and acceptance. We notice the busy mind as clouds or ripples on the surface of the river of the mind, and let them pass downstream or across the vast sky, and slowly settle into the body, in this moment, arriving into the "now." We quiet the mind, by allowing ourselves to settle, sit or stand, and arrive through focusing our attention on the breath, with nothing to control or regulate or manage. Simply arrive with intention and on purpose to this moment.

Begin by breathing in and knowing you are breathing in, breathing out and knowing you are breathing out. Watching the breath ebb and flow naturally. Then allow the breath to deepen slowly and naturally, each time knowing you are taking a long breath all the way down into your belly, and letting yourself exhale a long breath. Do this breath in and out, slow long breaths, for 3 more breaths.

Then when you are ready, if you choose, you can find a count that you are comfortable with. It could be 4, or 6, or 10. Breathe in to this count, hold the breath to the same count, and then exhale and release the breath to the same count. Breath in... hold... and now breathe out. Repeat this breathing deeply and mindfully following the breath for 12 repetitions, allowing calm to flow on the breath naturally.

Counting our breaths as a means to focus our mind is a technique for settling the mind. Because we are giving our mind something to do rather than simply turning inward, counting breaths makes it easier for us to sustain attention and cultivate a concentrated mind.

Rising and Falling of the Breath: With each breath the belly rises and falls. When contemplating rising and falling, keep your mind on how the body receives breath and releases breath. You will come to know the upward movement, the expansion of the belly with breath, and the downward movement as the contraction on each out breath. Take a moment to observe this.

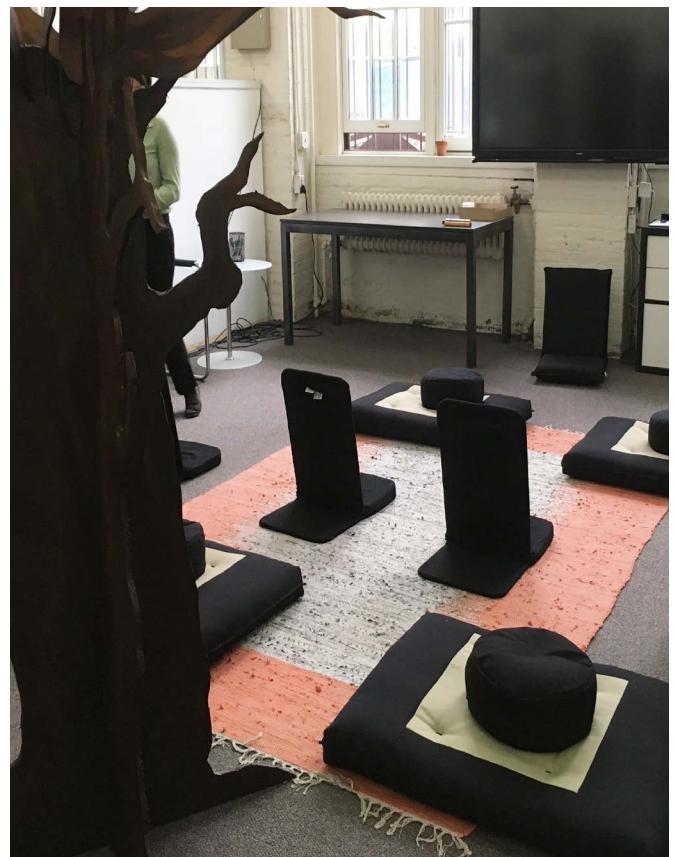
Make an effort to be mindful of the movement of rising from the beginning till the end and that of falling from the beginning to the end, as if this movement is actually seen by the eyes, felt by the body. The entire body is mind. Often it is difficult for us to control our minds. We feel the mind does not cooperate. That is perfectly fine, and natural. Minds wander. That's what minds do.

And if you get distracted, perhaps 100 times, simply escort your mind back to noticing the rising and falling of the breath in the body. Practice with a light judgment, with intention. Over and over again, come back to the rising and falling of the belly, following the full movement of the breath.



"I use breathing techniques I learned in the program to help when feeling overwhelmed by work or distracted in class to focus."

– Student



You will find a great peace both flooding and spreading within you over time with this practice, enabling every breath to carry a lightness and peace within you. No two breaths are the same. Each moment is brand new. See if you can greet the breath with acceptance, kindness, and curiosity. The invitation is to trust, and have patience as you drop down into the body, into each breath with a lightness of being and focused attention.

When you are ready, you may open your eyes and see if you can bring this feeling of peaceful presence through the rest of the day.

Walking Meditation

Walking meditation can be done anytime and anywhere, as a spotlight focus on each step or a floodlight focus that invites the environment into each step. To begin with spotlight walking meditation, simply focus your attention on each step fully. Feel the heel and sole of the foot kissing the ground, and the lift of the opposite foot as it moves forward to greet the ground, and repeat. In full awareness and joy. It is an ideal way to begin to slow down the busy mind, and open awareness to each step which allows for an open awareness that clears the mind.

Through walking meditation, we rest the mind in focusing our attention on each step creating peace, and calm abiding. With each step, remind yourself "I am calm with each step, I am complete with each step, I am love with each step, I am joy with each step."

As you expand into floodlight walking focus, invite the awareness to include the environment. Sounds, sights, sensations. Notice the physical body as

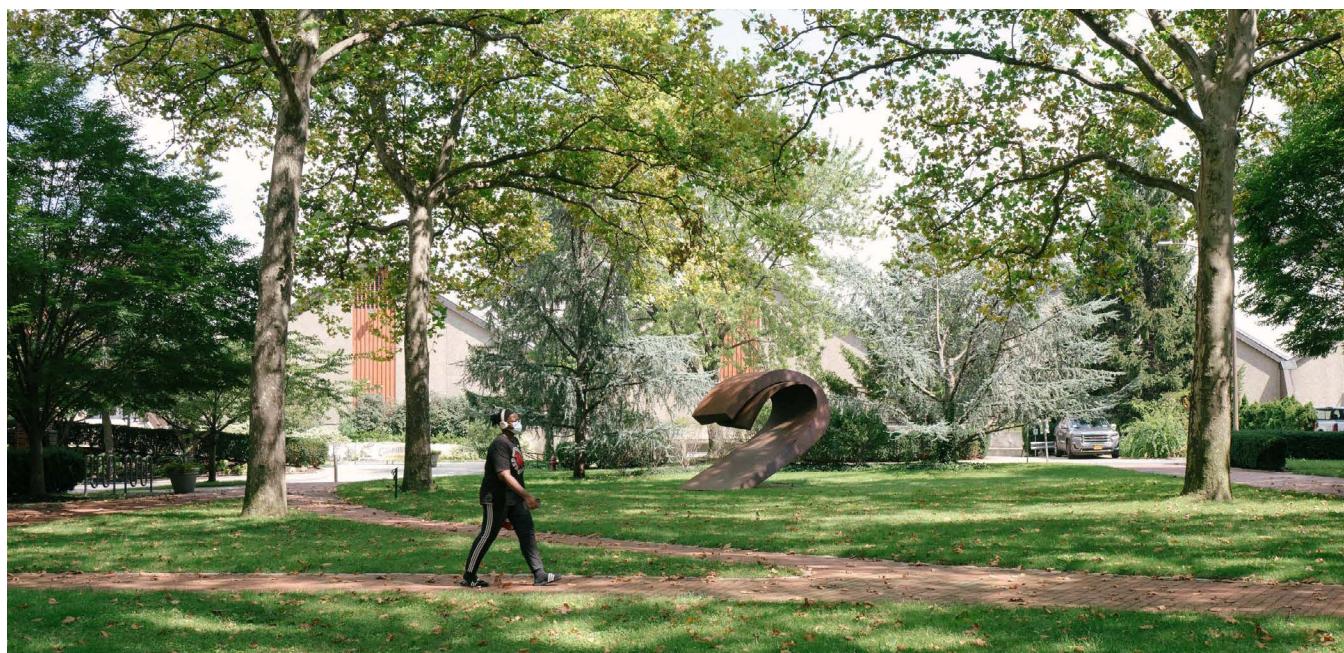


■ “It (meditation) helps me to focus and calms me down.”

– Student

you just walk, the touch of the feet as they greet the ground along with the feel of your clothes. Note the movement of the legs and all that the eyes take in, the objects, the light, nature, buildings, people, and movement. This is mindfulness of seeing. Then noting all of the sounds that you might encounter, birds or planes overhead, so we include mindfulness of hearing. Step by step, walking meditation can be slow or normal pace. We notice the feel of the breeze on our cheek as we walk; this is mindfulness of feeling, of sensation. We do not grasp the environment, or resist the environment. We witness and participate all at the same time that we are in walking meditation floodlight focus.

This can be done anywhere, in your home walking from the kitchen to the living room, on a hike, walking through the grocery store from one aisle to the next, walking in the garden or park. Combine walking meditation with sitting or standing meditation as part of your practice, enjoy the calm abiding and clarity that grows from the body in meditation in motion.



“Meditation became an essential part of my life.”

- Student

Audio: Recorded Meditations

There are audio files of a variety of practices from many of our current projects that are free for your use. These are secular and are provided for the Pratt community.

Audio Files

Settle the Mind	11 Minutes
Awareness of Breath, Sensation, Sounds	14 Minutes
Body Scan	30 Minutes
Walking Meditation—Walking Video	15 Minutes
Tibetan Channel Breath	13 Minutes
Awareness of Rise and Fall of the Breath	11 Minutes
Awareness of Breath, Sensation, Thoughts, Feelings	20 Minutes
Quiet Breath—Image of Pebble	20 Minutes
Awareness of Breathing and Body Scan	25 Minutes
Concentration with Mantra	14 Minutes
Lake Meditation	20 Minutes
Awareness of Breathing, Thinking, Feeling	10 Minutes
Self-Compassion Meditation	20 Minutes
Loving Kindness	20 Minutes
Mountain Meditation	20 Minutes

3

Resilience and Positive Pedagogy



“If 2020 didn’t teach you to care for your students, what on earth would?”

– Pratt faculty

PERMA Model

- Review Seligman's PERMA model [here](#).
- Download a handout [here](#).

Consider writing in your journal on the following questions:

P	Can you think of examples of times you experienced positive emotions?
E	Are there particular activities that tend to lead to your experiencing flow/engagement?
R	Think about someone with whom you believe you have a good relationship. How does this relationship contribute to your well-being? How did this relationship come to be a "positive" one?
M	What is something "larger than yourself" to which you feel connected and that provides you with meaning and purpose?
A	What is an example of a goal (personal or professional) that you have contributed to and that has contributed to your well-being and happiness?

Overall, what are your success factors for your personal happiness and well-being?

WOOP

WOOP is a mental imagery tool to clear things up, find what's important, set priorities, fulfill your wishes. Make yourself comfortable and make a quiet, slow, uninterrupted time for yourself.

Explore the resources on: [Woopmylife.org](#)

Consider journaling on the following:

W (Wish)	What is your wish? Is this wish dear to you? Is it feasible? Is it challenging? Summarize it in 3-6 words.
O (Outcome)	What is the best outcome? Is it a truly fulfilling outcome? Summarize it in 3-6 words. Close your eyes and imagine the best outcome, best result, best feeling. Imagine it fully.
O (Obstacle)	What is your main obstacle? Is your obstacle an inner obstacle? Is it a true inner obstacle or just an excuse? Think about it more deeply! Summarize it in 3-6 words. Take enough time to imagine your main obstacle. Close your eyes and imagine it fully.
P (Plan)	What is your plan? Did you find an effective action or thought to overcome your obstacle? Summarize it in 3-6 words.

Check if the plan has the following structure:

"If obstacle, then I will action to overcome obstacle."

4

Resilience and Well-Being in the Classroom



“Students deal with a lot of stress and I feel like it’s our duty to support them and help them out instead of telling them to figure it out themselves.”

- Pratt faculty



Techniques to calm the mind and body can reduce the negative effects of stress, anxiety, and fatigue and help students stay engaged and motivated, support social and emotional growth, and better resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise. Faculty members at Pratt have tried different approaches in their classrooms to introduce students to mindfulness. Here are some of their stories.

Sharing techniques that worked personally

"Some of the well-being practices in my personal and professional life I've been doing for many years and others have developed through COMPOSE, like reflective journaling, meditation and gratitude practice. All these practices depend on the work schedule. In the classroom it's a little more difficult. I tried to introduce reflective practices by providing students with reflection prompts. I'll introduce simple mindfulness practices like looking at what are 3 good things in your work or extracting what are your primary strengths to deal with new challenges that come up with assignments and projects. With students who struggle more I introduce more practices like journaling, developing a daily routine, and helping them find what works for them." – Robert

"It is important that our students learn how to be more resilient to ultimately know how to better deal with difficult situations. In the classroom, I share mindfulness tools and practices that work for me. It is my I hope that students can use these examples to then create their own set of tools." – Ane

Weekly coffee meetups or peer chats

"This semester I started bi-weekly coffee meetups for students to connect with their classmates. During these coffee chats my students and I talk about everything except schoolwork. These coffee chats are a safe space for students to have informal conversations. I don't make these sessions mandatory, so the number of students participating in each session varies. Occasionally, I schedule sessions that I don't attend so that students can just connect with each other. During some of the sessions, we have had deep conversations, but other times we just chat about more mundane things." – Ane

"I created a peer chat calendar so that students can meet with other students to discuss their work. I'm not a part of that, it's something they do with each other to share ideas and also enjoy casual conversations. I have a Miro board that deals with questions of well-being and mindfulness. Some people share on the Miro board, some don't, but it's still pretty insightful." – Pirco

Utilizing Pratt space for in-person classes

"Recreating social gatherings online is difficult. Usually students would sit around campus and enjoy a fun conversation, but now there is this visceral fear because of which students are more distant, which is concerning, and this is something you really can't force. My classes are hybrid and I meet my students every week. The classroom setup because of Covid feels restrained. We can't sit in circles or be flexible. Pratt has really beautiful spaces around, like the tents, lounges, and the lawn. I try to take classes at different places to add variety to the classroom and just to make them feel comfortable." – Pirco

Encouraging positive feedback

"When I'm asking them for feedback for their work, especially written feedback, I ask them to write down what they felt went really well before they jump in to what they think they didn't do well at. I encourage them to include the positive aspect of the project first. Students have a habit of looking at their failures and mistakes first more than looking at what was successful, which is why I try to implement this format of feedback—What did I do really well? What did I learn? What do I need to grow from—are the questions I ask myself when I give feedback and what I ask students to reflect upon when they're critiquing their own work. I think that giving your students a chance to be whole people in your class and not just students of a particular subject matter helps in creating a sense of community and helps them build confidence in their work and develop their ability to take risks more." – Natalie

"In my observation for things like reflection, I give them five questions about things that happened during the review. Students can answer those questions and may feel free to share it with me or keep it to themselves. Students who do answer these questions regularly and seriously make much better progress because they are more self-aware and aware of what they want to do with the feedback and how they can improve." – Robert



Making the classroom a safe space for students

"Pressure to learn and be perfect can be overwhelming. Letting students know that class is more than a place to learn a new subject and that it's a safe space will help reduce their stress. Reminding students that we're all human, making them feel connected, and being flexible helps students feel comfortable." – Genevieve

"These have been challenging times for me and the people I am close to, including my close relatives and friends. Everyone has their own story, background, and reality, including our students. COVID has exacerbated some of these challenges for many of our students and I've been using my class to talk about this new reality with them. Previously, I think that students were a bit more surprised when I introduced topics of mindfulness and well-being in my class. However, with COVID, I've noticed that they are more receptive and they've appreciated talking about these topics and opened up more. As an educator, I believe that it is important to acknowledge that these realities exist and to think of ways to help students deal with those situations" – Ane

Finding creative ways to share resources as a faculty community

"I use Slack to share resources with students. This platform has allowed me to introduce mindfulness and resiliency tools with my students without interrupting the class schedule and based on their feedback, I know what techniques interest them more." – Ane

"I find it challenging to introduce more specific practices like meditation which are viewed to be more spiritual. So I've tried to do it in ways that are less explicit. Practicing gratitude is one of the easiest which can quickly add positivity to someone's life and easier to discuss in class. I also do some breathing and stretching exercises with my class. Another thing that I find challenging to implement is starting the class with some quiet time because students don't all join in time. These practices work better with a group. It can be very hard doing it alone. When you have other faculty members also implementing practices just like you, you can share resources with each other, talk about challenges you're facing and so on. If you're the only faculty member doing this, students might think you're crazy, but if you have other members with you, they'll understand it's genuine." – Robert





Basic Glossary



Contemplative Practices

Refers to particular forms of observation in which there is an intention to reveal, clarify, and ponder deep questions. This can be explored and expressed in so many ways. The [Tree of Contemplative Practices](#) provided by CMind is an excellent example of the variety to explore. They also offer a community-building [toolkit for diversity, equity and inclusion](#).

Meditation

A disciplined practice and technique utilizing either open awareness or concentration practice. Meditation trains the mind to rest in awareness. In Western meditation practice this cultivates a mentally clear state and relaxation response. Meditation is just one of many contemplative practices.

Mindfulness

A type of meditation that can be practiced as either open awareness (no one particular object) or concentration (one object with focused attention). It is a systematic form of training the mind.

Resources

Bibliography

[The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society's Contemplative Education Bibliography](#) is an excellent list of books and research resources.

Apps, Websites, and Downloadable PDFs for additional reading

[Pratt Institute Meditation Incubator store/resources page](#)
[Mindful Pratt](#) for access to the community offerings.