

Fact Sheet #5: Comparable Programs

Robert W. Roser, Bennett Pierce Professor of Care and Compassion, Professor of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Health and Human Development, Pennsylvania State University

“For about a decade and a half now, many of us have been developing the fields of science and scholarly endeavor related to contemplation, Buddhist mind science, and secular applications in mental health, education, and healthcare. In my own work in education, it is abundantly clear that programs that teach young people attentional and social-emotional and ethical skills like mindfulness and compassion have salutary effects on their well-being and health.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 104)

André Vellino, Chair, School of Information Studies, University of Ottawa

“The Academy for Mindfulness and Contemplative Studies was established within the Mind and Brain Institute in Faculty of Medicine at the University of Ottawa in 2016 and shares a similar interdisciplinary and innovative vision with the BPMH program. Our Academy focuses on the integration of mindfulness and contemplative practices in various fields, including medicine, education, arts, and social sciences. Since its foundation, the Academy now has an undergraduate Contemplative Studies microprogram that employs first-person experiential modes of inquiry (including forms of Buddhist mindfulness meditation) combined with traditional methods of analysis in the study of states of mind. The program seeks to foster empathy, altruism, and creativity with the goal of advancing human flourishing including the psychological study of positive mental states and human wellbeing.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 98)

Robert Bilder, Michael E. Tennenbaum Family Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences and Psychology, Chief, Division of Psychology, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, Jane & Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience at UCLA, Stewart & Lynda Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital at UCLA

“We have established at UCLA the Semel Healthy Campus Initiative (HCI) Center, which has served as a major catalyst for transformative change across our campus, with facets bridging psychological well-being with healthy eating, physical activity, the built environment and more. The HCI has in my opinion been one of the key factors in UCLA being identified as one of the most highly ranked public universities globally, and this in turn attracts wonderful students, faculty, and administrators, yielding an upward spiral of growth and enabling us to thrive as an institution committed to the creation of knowledge for the betterment of society.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 54)

Michael R. Sheehy, Research Assistant Professor, Director of Scholarship, Contemplative Sciences Center Department of Religious Studies, University of Virginia

“Here at the Contemplative Sciences Center at the University of Virginia where I direct research and scholarship, we are undertaking numerous initiatives that range from offering co-curricular courses from departments across the university, extra-curricular undergraduate student programming, leadership training in social innovation to entrepreneurs, faculty teaching support in pedagogies for flourishing, and cutting-edge interdisciplinary research. We host and edit the Journal of Contemplative Studies (JCS, contemplativejournal.org), a peer-reviewed open access

journal that publishes original research and scholarship and is poised to become the flagship journal for the field. This past Spring semester, we hosted the Generative Contemplation Symposium, a three-day event that convened scholars to advance an understanding of contemplation from diverse fields, including religious studies, philosophy, cognitive neuroscience, the arts, and technology.”

“This coming Spring 2024, we will move into our new home in the Contemplative Commons, a 57,000-square-foot building, which includes studios of varying sizes for academic and co-curricular contemplative activities as well as research spaces for in- context research. The building is designed to bring students and faculty together from different schools and disciplines across the university and beyond to foster collaboration and experiment with new ways of teaching and learning.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 88-89)

Mark Dennis, Professor, Religion Department, Director, CALM Studies, Texas Christian University; and
Blake Hestir, Professor, Philosophy Department, Texas Christian University

“For over a decade, the interdisciplinary CALM Studies program has made significant strides in promoting well-being and a culture of belonging in the holistic development of the TCU community.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 66)

“Dr. Garrett serves as one of the leaders of FAN’s Pedagogy Committee—we are both members—which was created by the three universities who created the Art and Science of Human Flourishing course. That committee is working to devise creative, cutting-edge programming to help our students navigate these serious mental health challenges both at our home institutions and across the impressive list of member institutions, which include not only the University of Wisconsin, Penn State University, and the University of Virginia, but also Brown University, Johns Hopkins, Stanford University, UCLA, the University of Colorado–Boulder, the University of Washington, the University of California–Berkeley, the University of Toronto, and TCU.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 69)

John Dunne, Distinguished Professor of Contemplative Humanities, Co-Director, Wisconsin Student Flourishing Initiative Core Faculty, Center for Healthy Minds, Tenured Faculty, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Wisconsin-Madison

“We collaborated with colleagues at the University of Virginia and Penn State University to launch the Student Flourishing Initiative in 2016. Our efforts, while broad, have focused especially on a course for first-year students that we call “The Art and Science of Human Flourishing” (ASHF), which we created after a robust and multiyear process of curriculum development. ASHF is a rigorous, credit-bearing course that draws on both the Humanities and the Sciences across several disciplines, and it brings human flourishing back into the focus of students’ lives—not as some ancillary program outside the university curriculum, but rather as a central theme of their education. Joined to a rigorous research project on the effects of the course, ASHF has proven to be highly effective in its results, with peer-reviewed research that demonstrates positive impacts in numerous domains, including anxiety and depression, attention, and prosocial engagement. The course has also proven to be highly popular: we began with a first pilot in 2017 with 67 students, and our latest offering this semester has over 300.”

“In light of these results, our university administration has provided us with significant resources to expand the course and our related efforts on campus.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 74)

Bee Scherer, Rector, Buddhist Seminary, Chair, Buddhist Studies, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

“I write to you as the Rector of the Buddhist Seminary and chair of Buddhist Studies at the world top 20 ranked Faculty of Religion and Theology at VU Amsterdam. We are officially charged with training Buddhist Chaplains for the Dutch government and society (a unique position for any country in Europe) and we are doing so in close interdisciplinary collaboration with psychology and mental health professionals through our own BA, minors, MA Spiritual Care and post-Master professional training. The intersection of Buddhist thought and practices with students’ wellbeing is very close to our heart, and we are making a real difference for our university community and to society. It is from this immersed experience that put to you the importance to continue your BPMH minor for the benefit of your community.”

“In the last years I have taken steps to enhance the mental health and psychology interdisciplinarity in our own minor in Buddhism, Yoga and Spirituality which has increased cross-faculty and -university recruitment drastically. Non-Buddhist or Religious Studies students make out the largest number of participants and regularly we are receiving deeply moving message about just how much the programme has changed lives. Being involved in suicide prevention initiatives for some of our participants the programme was literally life-saving. All this is very similar to what I know, hear and read about your BPMH minor.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 106)