

Executive Summary

The Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) Program is **an undergraduate Minor** hosted by New College at the U of T. As an **internationally recognized contemplative science program**, BPMH courses engage rigorous interdisciplinary research interactions between scientists, academics, health practitioners and contemplative traditions. Emerging from two decades of global research on interactions between Buddhist traditions and the sciences, the program trains students in qualitative and quantitative research, scientific literacy, and writing skills. Drawing on critical mental health studies, courses also use student-centered and trauma-aware approaches that emphasize meta-cognitive and reflective learning.

Program statistics

- founded in 2007, in March 2024 has **327 enrolled minors**
- one of the largest college-hosted undergraduate programs at U of T
- in 2023-24, **over 1,100 students** registered in 11 courses; all winter courses had waiting lists
- public events: in 2022-23 hosted **over 1,300 local and international participants**
- two active student groups, BPSU and PATH, provide peer support and mentoring through events and community wellness programming throughout the year
- YouTube channel content has **over 16,000 views**
- Engaging Education in Buddhist Studies project supports enhanced experiential learning opportunities
- home of Contemplative Science Podcast (with **over 37,000 listens** as of Aug 1, 2024)
- units with whom we share the most students are Psychology, Philosophy, Environment, Human Biology, Cognitive Science, Equity & Solidarity, Sociology, Mathematics, Religion (in order of number of students, most to least); 56% of students come from the Sciences & Social Sciences
- **tremendous fundraising potential**, with comparable programs raising hundreds of millions of dollars working with philanthropists who see the importance of evidence-based work that benefits struggling students

U of T Administration recommends program closure, local and international protests ensue

In summer 2023 the Arts & Science Dean commissioned a three member Working Group to investigate opportunities to support the BPMH program. The Group did not consult with program faculty, staff, or students, and they did not review programmatic changes after 2019 or connections between the program and disciplinary movements in contemplative science; in Fall 2023, the Group recommended that the program be closed. This Dossier documents responses from local and international communities.

Letters of support from local & international institutions

Created in response to the November 2023 recommendation to close the BPMH program, the Dossier contains **77 letters of support** from current and past BPMH students, plus letters of support from **44 local and international scientists, scholars, and community members**. A few examples:

- ▶ **“More, rather than fewer, programs like BPMH studies are needed.”** Zindel V. Segal, Distinguished Professor of Psychology in Mood Disorders, Graduate Department of Psychological Clinical Science, University of Toronto Scarborough
- ▶ **“BPMH [is] a flagship program that is a key part of a larger movement that seeks to address the mental health crisis at universities.”** John D. Dunne, Distinguished Professor of Contemplative Humanities, Co-Director, Wisconsin Student Flourishing Initiative, Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison

- ▶ **“This program marks your university as a leader in this innovative approach to scholarship and flourishing.”** Robert W. Roeser, Bennett-Pierce Professor of Care and Compassion, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Health and Human Development, Pennsylvania State University
- ▶ **“The BPMH is one of the jewels that makes U of T a unique place for undergraduate study.”** Norman Farb, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Mississauga
- ▶ **“Your Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health Program is one of the flagship programs worldwide that are bringing the benefits of the contemplative sciences to benefit our students and our university communities.”** Robert M. Bilder, Michael E. Tennenbaum Family Endowed Chair in Creativity Research, Chief, Division of Psychology, and Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences, Jane & Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, Stewart & Lynda Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital, David Geffen School of Medicine, and Department of Psychology, UCLA
- ▶ **“The BPMH program fills an important niche in the educational mission of the University, and its objectives are consistent with the Faculty of Arts & science’s academic plan... The impressive growth of the BPMH program is a testament to not only its success, but also to the demand for such a program at the University of Toronto.”** René Marois, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Vanderbilt University & Lee Ryan, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, University of Arizona
- ▶ **“BPMH represents the cutting edge and future of research and learning in the social and health sciences.”** Michel Ferrari, Professor, Applied Psychology & Human Development, OISE
- ▶ **“BPMH is widely respected among many of us in North American universities who are interested in fusing innovative pedagogy and pioneering research to promote flourishing on college and university campuses.”** Blake Hestir, Professor, Philosophy Department, Texas Christian University and Mark Dennis, Professor, Religion Department, Texas Christian University
- ▶ **“The BPMH program in Toronto is precisely at the crux of our work, uniting undergraduates in a shared passion for rigorous research and experience focused on the critical, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary understanding and practice of flourishing.”** Jeffrey C. Walker, Philanthropist, Chairman of New Profit, Vice Chair in the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Health, Board Member: University of Virginia, On Being, Just Capital, Harvard Business School, Harvard School of Public Health, etc.



President of Buddhist Psychology Mental Health Student Union presents copy of BPMH Journal to HH the 14th Dalai Lama. October 2010, Multi-Faith Centre, University of Toronto

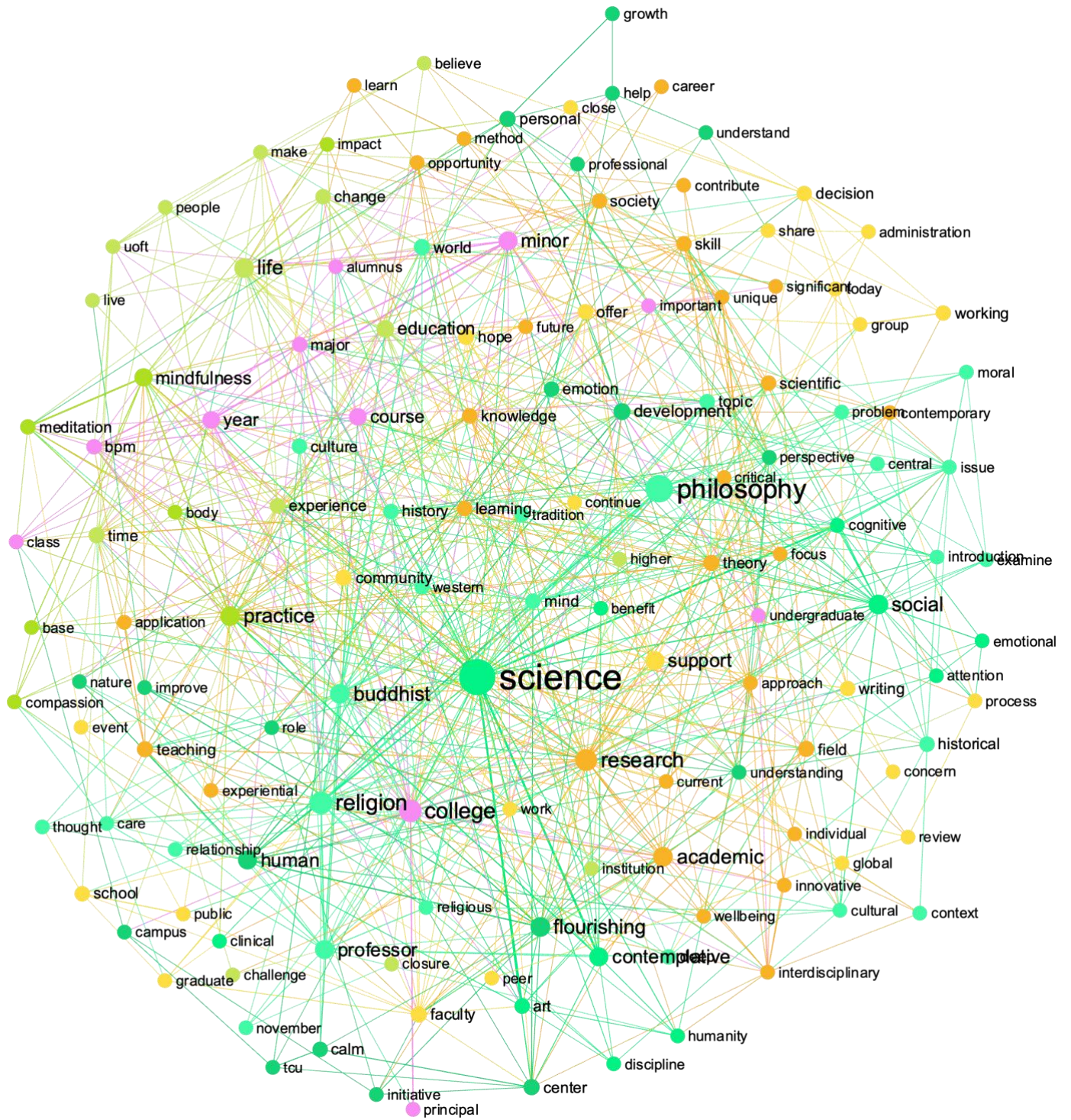
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BPMH At a Glance

Visual depiction of conceptual connections in this Dossier



Responses to the question “What is your major?” from a January 2022 survey of BPMH students



FAQ

Updated July 2024

What is Contemplative Science?

Contemplative Science is a discipline that emerges out of 20 years of interdisciplinary research interactions between Buddhist and scientific traditions. The study of non-Buddhist contemplative methods is still relatively rare in this field. Given limited resources, we have kept our program coherently focused; given additional resources, we welcome expanding into emerging research areas.

To learn more, see this Dossier's letters by Norman Farb (U of T), Zindel V. Segal (U of T), Mark Dennis and Blake Hestir (Texas Christian University), John Dunne (University of Wisconsin-Madison), David Germano (University of Virginia), and Michael R. Sheehy (University of Virginia).

If the program teaches about Buddhism, does it belong in the Religion department?

Not necessarily. Contemplative Science is not a sub-discipline of Religious Studies. Religious traditions are taught about from a variety of perspectives in many departments, including Anthropology, History, Philosophy, Political Science, East Asian Studies, Near and Middle Eastern Studies, and many more.¹ Given the deeply interdisciplinary nature of Contemplative Science as a field, crossing sciences and humanities, at most institutions it is a stand-alone unit.

To learn more, see this Dossier's letters by Mark Dennis and Blake Hestir (Texas Christian University), John Dunne (University of Wisconsin-Madison), David Germano (University of Virginia), and Michael R. Sheehy (University of Virginia).

Are most of the students in the program Religion students?

No. OFR data tells us that only 4% of our enrolled minors are also Religion students. Counting students enrolled in our courses, less than 1% are from Religion. The units with whom we share the most students are Psychology, Philosophy, Environment, Human Biology, Cognitive Science, Equity & Solidarity, Sociology, and Mathematics (in order of number of students, from most to least). 56% of our students come from the Sciences & Social Sciences.

Given the program's name, are Religion and Psychology the only cognate units?

The program's name was assigned 17 years ago. Because we've been caught in the UTQAP process now for 4 years, we haven't been allowed to update the name to clarify our disciplinary context for local audiences. The program investigates *interdisciplinary interactions between* Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health. These are not three nouns in a list, but three nouns that together indicate a field of interdisciplinary research. "Contemplative Studies" was the suggested name change mentioned in the program's 2020 Self-Study.

Should all programs be in Departments not Colleges?

There are 24 academic programs across the 7 colleges; colleges are the traditional homes for interdisciplinary programs. 71% of college programs have fewer than 200 students, 41% of college programs with fewer than 100. With over 300 students, BPMH is one of the largest, most in-demand College programs.

Someone told me that the program lacks "rigor"

BPMH course instructors' student evaluations show above-average rankings within FAS. Research shows that students do better in courses when professors are skilled at teaching and create safe learning spaces, and that

¹ For example: of the 59 courses with keyword Christianity in the 2024-25 Timetable, 29% are in Religion; of the 20 courses with keyword Buddhism in the 2024-25 Timetable (excluding language courses), 40% are in BPMH and 30% are in Religion; of the 62 courses with keyword Islam in the 2024-25 Timetable (excluding language courses), 21% are in Religion.

when students feel engaged in *meaningful* work, it no longer feels like “work.” The BPMH commitment to high quality, evidence-based teaching methods means that classroom tasks may feel “easier” or “less work” for students, compared to coursework that feels burdensome or activating, or that is poorly managed or taught, all of which raises the perception of “work” “burden.” Additionally, mindfulness practice, as taught in several BPMH courses and extra-curricular programs, has been shown in the literature to increase student concentration, cognitive skillsets and academic performance. Student feedback shows that the majority of BPMH students are highly engaged in coursework and the BPMH community, additional factors that are known to increase academic performance. Citations available upon request.

If that person was referring to average grade distributions, [insert OFR data].

The Journal of Contemplative Studies, *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*, or *CONTEMPLATIVA: Journal of Contemplative Studies* are good places to start learning about research in contemplative science. Resources are also available through [The International Society for Contemplative Research](#). If you’re not familiar with the field, please read our syllabi and CVs, do research, learn, and ask questions.

To learn more, also see this Dossier’s letters by Norman Farb (U of T), Zindel V. Segal (U of T), Mark Dennis and Blake Hestir (Texas Christian University), John Dunne (University of Wisconsin-Madison), David Germano (University of Virginia), and Michael R. Sheehy (University of Virginia).

What is “first person” research?

Student-centered pedagogical methods using “first person” research may involve contemplative, action inquiry, phenomenological, experiential, or reflective learning. Along with training students in qualitative and quantitative research, scientific literacy, and writing skills, BPMH courses focus on developing students’ capacities for meta-cognitive and reflective learning. These common, evidence-based methods are used in many disciplines at the University, including Philosophy, Religion, Environment, and others. Citations available upon request.

Is there any fundraising potential with this kind of program?

The Program Support Dossier reveals immense fundraising potential. U of Wisconsin, U of Virginia, Penn State, Monash U, and Texas Christian U, to name a few, have raised hundreds of millions of dollars because philanthropists see the importance of evidence-based work with significant benefits to struggling students. Dr Germano, who has raised **\$200 million** at UVA’s Center for Contemplative Science, writes in his support letter, “I have never seen such openness and passion on the part of the donors as I have seen over the past decade for contemplation and student flourishing.”

To learn more, see Fact Sheet #2: Fundraising potential.

Isn’t teaching mental health literacy the domain of the student health centre?

Not exclusively. BPMH student surveys and support letters show the value of our program’s approach on their academic success and overall well-being. The BPMH Program Support Dossier describes a growing number of universities across N. America now encouraging classroom engagement with mental health literacy. At the very least, universities care about the economic case: research clearly shows the impact of teaching mental health literacy on student health and academic outcomes, which increases student retention and thus also tuition revenue.

Citations available on request. Also see letters by Robert Bilder (UCLA), Robert W. Roser (Pennsylvania State University), and Jeffrey C. Walker (Philanthropist).

Is this closure recommendation the result of a poor UTQAP external review?

We don’t see how. The review is very positive. Reviewers wrote that the program “fills an important niche in the educational mission of the University, and its objectives are consistent with the Faculty of Arts & Science’s academic plan... The impressive growth of the BPMH program is a testament to not only its success, but also to

the demand for such a program at the U of T.” Concerns about the review process are summarized at https://youtu.be/jJDYARnFfOQ_.

Was the consultation that took place during the UTQAP external review adequate for a program closure process now?

In June 2021, during a 4-hour virtual visit, reviewers spoke to 3 undergraduates (less than 1% of program students), 2 TAs (20%), 4 faculty (50%) and administrative staff. Inadequate consultation due to pandemic complications is one of several concerns about the review process summarized at https://youtu.be/jJDYARnFfOQ_.

Has the program changed since its January 2020 Self-Study?

Between 2019 and 2024, substantial changes were undertaken in consultation with program faculty, cognate units, and faculty governance. The program: hired new instructors, selected with new criteria; discontinued some courses and introduced new courses; revised every course description to reflect changes in course content and program orientation; revised the calendar's description and program website; revised the list of courses in cognate units that count for the program. The program also:

- expanded collaborative research opportunities with cognate units, including Religion, Public Health, HCBS, Environment, OISE, Law, Temerty Faculty of Medicine, and Emmanuel College;
- worked with Advancement, resulting in a successful grant from a major donor and other opportunities pending;
- grew its community mailing list to over 1000 members and its YouTube Channel to over 16,000 views;
- created a new and very engaged peer-mentoring program;
- had conversations with Principal MacElhinney and did surveys and focus groups with students, aiming to connect with cognate units to secure teaching faculty commitments; expand online offerings; consider a revenue-generating professional degree stream; expand to an undergraduate major.

Fact Sheet #1: How does BPMH fit into the university's priorities?

Fact Sheets are Citations from the [BPMH Program Support Dossier](#)

Updated March 14, 2024

Lauren Brown, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate, Inlight Fellow, Program Coordinator: Mindfulness, Meditation and Yoga, Multi-Faith Centre, Division of Student Life, University of Toronto

“**The University's support of mindfulness** was even noted in the Presidential and Provostial Response to the Task Force on Student Mental Health in December of 2019.”

Norman Farb, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Mississauga

“Despite widespread promises from the higher administration to support student mental health, the substantive efforts by UoT to support student wellbeing are primarily limited to chatbots and a substantial investment in increasing clinical services, which, while laudatory, serve only to help students once they are already in crisis – these investments do almost nothing to **support student resilience and foster a sense of wellbeing, community, and growing emotional maturity** that are needed in the critical period of young adult development that coincides with undergraduate studies.”

“In fact, if one searches the University of Toronto websites for any substantive content to promote student wellbeing, by far the most prominent and positive exemplar is your own Windvane project, a rich expression of the BPMH approach to engage experts from around the university community to come together and speak directly to students about how to better understand their own minds, and furthermore to cultivate positive qualities as they move into adulthood. What message does it send to shut down one of the only programs dedicated to improving students understanding of wellbeing and flourishing?”

“[BPMH] provides students with a chance to develop virtues in addition to acquiring knowledge; it gives students an opportunity to cultivate community and a sense of belonging. It makes a lasting difference and improves the university's reputation.”

Zindel V. Segal, Distinguished Professor of Psychology in Mood Disorders, Graduate Department of Psychological Clinical Science, University of Toronto - Scarborough

“To take a wider view, it seems to me that more, rather than fewer, programs like BPMH studies are needed. That is precisely why the prospect of its discontinuation is so troubling. It is also puzzling that with The University of Toronto **having, established itself as a centre of excellence for contemplative studies - ranging from neuroscience, clinical science, and the humanities** – would act in a way that could diminish its standing in this regard.”

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

“The University of Toronto's BPMH program is raising the university's profile by tapping into a massive “wave” of interest in mindfulness and meditation across wide-ranging segments of society, including business, professional and Olympic sports, health care, the military, and so on. These groups have done so because they have become convinced by the **explosion of scientific research.**”

René Marois, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Winkelried Family Chair in Neuroscience, Vanderbilt University; and **Lee Ryan**, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Associate Director, Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute, Director, Cognition and Neuroimaging Laboratory University of Arizona

“The BPMH program fills an important niche in the educational mission of the University, and its objectives are consistent with the Faculty of Arts & science’s academic plan, which aims at “enhancing the undergraduate student experience by supporting mental health and well-being, developing new academic and co-curricular opportunities, expanding innovation in teaching methods, and ensuring students are prepared to succeed beyond graduation” (FAS Academic Plan, p. 12). FAS faculty are also encouraged to “develop new programs in cutting-edge fields of study” and to “adopt innovative, high-impact pedagogical approaches, including the integration of digital pedagogies into their teaching, experiential and community-based learning” (FAS Academic Plan, p. 12). With its emphasis on well-being of the students, and on experiential and community-based learning, **the BPMH’s core mission and unique pedagogical approach fits squarely with the University’s academic plan** and adds pedagogical components that are uncommon to other programs. The impressive growth of the BPMH program is a testament to not only its success, but also to the demand for such a program at the University of Toronto.”²

² Comments by Marois and Ryan are cited from their UTQAP External Review Report (Accepted as Final on August 15, 2022), which was based on BPMH Self-Study of January 2020 and a half-day virtual site visit in June 2021.

Fact Sheet #2: Fundraising potential

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

“Each of these centers has been able to raise **tens of millions of dollars** in donations because philanthropists recognize that these evidence- based practices offer clear and significant benefits to struggling college students while also recognizing the immense value of being at the forefront of **a movement sweeping across higher education** that focuses on a holistic vision of human flourishing.”

“TCU Chancellor Victor Boschini was so impressed by Davidson’s work that he asked Davidson if we could visit the center in December 2023 to gather ideas about fundraising the millions of dollars that will be required to establish the TCU CALM Center for Student Flourishing.”

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

“Our administration has made it clear that an especially promising aspect of this work is the way that it can **give students the knowledge and skills to face these challenging times** before they find themselves requesting counseling appointments that may require weeks on a waiting list.”

David Germano, Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Director, Tibet Center, University of Virginia

“I am a full professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Virginia (UVA). I have also led initiatives on entrepreneurship, digital technology, cultural documentation, student flourishing, and contemplative sciences for three decades. In this context I have raised almost **two hundred million dollars** for UVA through private donors, federal grants, and foundations, over half of which has been focused on innovative programs targeting innovation in K-12 and higher education that facilitates student flourishing in the face of the aforementioned mental health crisis, including research, pedagogy, and application in regards to contemplation.”

“I have never seen such openness and passion on the part of the donors as I have seen over the past decade for contemplation and student flourishing.”

Jeffrey C. Walker, Philanthropist, Chairman of New Profit, Vice Chair in the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Health; Board Member: University of Virginia, Berklee College of Music, Grammys Music Education Coalition, On Being, Just Capital, AMP for Health, UVA’s McIntire School of Commerce, Harvard Business School, MIT Media Lab, Harvard School of Public Health; Recipient of the John C. Whitehead Award for Social Enterprise, Harvard Business School Club

“I know BPMH to be a unique and important undergraduate program focused on **rigorous research and innovative experiential learning relating to student flourishing**. This issue stands at the center of my own work.”

Fact Sheet #3: Specific offers of support in 2023-24 from faculty

Jennifer Bright, Assistant Professor Buddhist Spiritual Care and Counselling, Emmanuel College of Victoria University

“A registered psychotherapist myself, I would be happy to share more with the working group and others involved in the decision-making process about the ways that the BPMH program contributes to students’ mental wellness.”

Norman Farb, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Mississauga

“I would be happy to speak directly to any interested members of the university community about this point of view, or to provide more academic references around my claims of the impact of this emerging contemplative science discipline.”

HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Principal, Timothy Eaton Memorial Church Professor of Preaching Emmanuel College of Victoria University; and **Pamela McCarroll**, Vice Principal, Jane & Geoffry Martin Chair of Practical Theology, Emmanuel College of Victoria University

“We have been working toward deepening the institutional relationship between Emmanuel College (Victoria University) and the BPMH program at New College beyond the yearly co-sponsored Forum on Buddhism and Well Being. Our hope is to develop a close partnership in terms of sharing faculty resource and course offering and strengthen a more direct link between the BPMH program and our MPS degree for the sake of our students’ enhanced learning and assisting their careers.”

Zindel V. Segal, Distinguished Professor of Psychology in Mood Disorders, Graduate Department of Psychological Clinical Science, University of Toronto - Scarborough

“I would be happy to have any the administration get in touch with me if can provide further context to support the important work you are engaged in.”

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

“We would be delighted to speak with you about our program in more detail if that would be helpful for coming to a deeper understanding of the many benefits that can be had by continuing to offer generous support to the BPMH program.”

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

“We believe that an informed re-evaluation that takes into account the program's current structure, achievements, and the global relevance of contemplative science, is in order and we would gladly contribute to such a re-evaluation... We would, for example, be very happy offer our experience with our own program to encourage the decision makers at the University of Toronto to reverse their decision.”

Fact Sheet #4: Local cognate units

According to OFR data retrieved in March 2024, the units with whom BPMH shares the most program-enrolled students are **Psychology, Philosophy, Environment, Human Biology, Cognitive Science, Equity & Solidarity, Sociology, and Mathematics** (in order of number of students, from most to least), with other units showing insignificant numbers. According to 2024 OFR data on students who take BPMH classes (but are not necessarily enrolled in the minor), the largest numbers by far are from **Human Biology, Psychology, Immunology and Physiology**.

Based on 2020 data, the External Review notes that “About half of the BPMH students major in the Human Biology program, Psychology, or Cognitive Science. Most of the other students come from other programs in the New College, Sociology, Philosophy, English, Environment, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Political Science, Linguistics, Criminology, Statistical Sciences, St. Michael's College, and East Asian Studies.” In the UTQAP Self-Study prepared in 2019-2020, cognate units listed were Psychology, Religion, Cognitive Science, East Asian Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Centre for Ethics. The External Review acknowledged that part of the program requirements allows students to take course in units such as Anthropology, Cognitive Science, East Asian Studies, Centre for the Study of Ethics, History, Human Biology, History and Philosophy of Science, Philosophy, Psychology, Religion, and Sociology. The External Review also acknowledged that there was no natural strong connection with Religion:

“The BPMH program has natural ties with the Department of Psychology, though while the latter emphasizes empirical and objective, third-person approaches, the BPMH program puts a greater emphasis on the subjective, first-person experience. One of the Psychology faculty has taught a course in the BPMH, and a large number of Psychology courses are available to BPMH students to complete the elective portion of the Minor. BPMH also has affinities with the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR) – the BPMH Director has her primary appointment in that Department – in that both explore Buddhism though from largely different perspectives, and they share a joint course in addition to the many course electives for the BPMH minor that is provided by the DSR Department. Otherwise, there appears to be few formal connections between Psychology or DSR and the BPMH program despite the natural academic affinities between them. It is also interesting to note that while there are more students from the Cognitive Sciences/Human Biology program in BPMH than any other programs, there are no formal relationships between these two units. All of these cognate units provide a fertile soil to strengthen the BPMH program, for instance by forging a greater teaching partnership between them and by leveraging the empirical strength of the Psychology Department. Connections with the school of medicine should also be explored, particularly if mental health will feature more prominently in the future aspirations of the program.”

On March 5, 2023, Garrett sent the following list of recommendations for membership on an advisory committee to discuss how to support the program, explaining that these are people from cognate units who have worked with the program and/or who do teaching/research related to the program:

- Simon Appoloni, School of the Environment
- Marsha Hewitt, Dept for the Study of Religion
- Mark Solovey, Institute for History & Philosophy of Science & Technology
- Zindel Segal, Department of Psychology
- Norman Farb, Department of Psychology
- Jack Miller, OISE
- Sarah Richardson, Historical Studies UTM
- Alistair Dias, Human Biology
- Janelle Joseph, School of Kinesiology
- Rory Lindsay, Dept for the Study of Religion
- David Samson, UTM Anthropology
- Catherine Sabiston, School of Kinesiology
- Jennifer Stellar, Psychology
- Kate Mulligan, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Fact Sheet #5: Connections with Religion

According to OFR data retrieved in March 2024, the units with whom BPMH shares the most program-enrolled students are **Psychology, Philosophy, Environment, Human Biology, Cognitive Science, Equity & Solidarity, Sociology, and Mathematics** (in order of number of students, from most to least), with other units showing insignificant numbers. Only 4% of BPMH enrolled minors are also enrolled Religion program students. Counting students who take BPMH classes (without necessarily being minors), only .75 percent (less than one percent) are from Religion. 56% of program students come from the Sciences & Social Sciences.

This is a balance of student interest that has been consistent over the last five years at least. According to the UTQAP External Review Report (accepted as Final on August 15, 2022), which was **based on BPMH Self-Study of January 2020**, "About half of the BPMH students major in the Human Biology program, Psychology, or Cognitive Science. Most of the other students come from other programs in the New College, Sociology, Philosophy, English, Environment, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Political Science, Linguistics, Criminology, Statistical Sciences, St. Michael's College, and East Asian Studies."

Data suggests that more support may flow from BPMH to Religion than the reverse.

Since 2018, BPMH and Religion have been cost-sharing for one course, JNR301 History of Buddhist Meditation. This is a core course for BPMH students, but Religion makes hiring decisions.

BPMH offers financial support to Religion in several other ways: the program regularly hires Religion grad students as TAs and Course Instructors, and the BPMH Senior Doctoral Fellowship is typically awarded to a Religion student.

Religion offers courses that BPMH students are taking; another way to look at this, is that BPMH provides students to Religion. March 2024 OFR data shows that courses focused on Buddhism in Religion have larger numbers than courses focused on any other religious tradition:

Students in BPMH courses = 1,190 BPMH minors = 327
Students in RLG Buddhism courses = 586 RLG majors, minors, specialists total = 312

(By comparison, RLG Islam courses=409; Hinduism courses=64; Judaism courses=67; Christianity courses=245; other RLG courses are not identifiably focused on a particular tradition)

In Aug 2024, courses in RLG that are most directly relevant to the study of contemplative science constitute **30%** of all student enrolments, and **33%** of student waiting list demand across the department. Buddhism is the fastest growing tradition of interest, per RLG student enrollment numbers in Intro courses.

	2020	2024
Indigenous religions	29	25
Judaism	18	17
Christianity	42	44
Islam	105	144
Hinduism	30	30
Buddhism	46	301

"The BPMH Program pursues the study of Buddhism in conversation with psychology, social work, neuroscience, and other disciplines in the university that are not taken up by the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR). Rolling the classes of the BPMH Program into the DSR would not increase enrollment in the DSR but reduce overall student engagement with Buddhism on campus. Indeed, the BPMH Program as is stimulates interest in Buddhism and the study of religion, thereby supplementing and ultimately supporting the activities of the DSR.... many students take up the BPMH Major precisely because it is *not* in the DSR." – **Tony Scott**, Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, and BPMH Instructor (BPMH-PSD)

Fact Sheet #6: Similar programs across North America

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.”

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.”

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.”

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.”

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.”

“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.”

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.”

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.”

Fact Sheet #7: The program's local and international reputation

Wendi L. Adamek, Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies, Dept. of Classics and Religion, University of Calgary

"[BPMH is] **a leader in the field** of academic adaptation and innovation."

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

"Your Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health Program is **one of the flagship programs worldwide** that are bringing the benefits of the contemplative sciences to benefit our students and our university communities... Your program exemplifies the integration of academic studies with well-being."

Jennifer Bright, Assistant Professor Buddhist Spiritual Care and Counselling, Emmanuel College of Victoria University

"The BPMH program is currently **a world leader** in education that intentionally focuses on student flourishing."

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

"BPMH is **widely respected among many of us in North American universities** who are interested in fusing innovative pedagogy and pioneering research to promote flourishing on college and university campuses among students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the wider community.... the BPMH team at your university has been an inspirational model for our own work."

Michel Ferrari, Professor, Applied Psychology & Human Development, OISE, University of Toronto

"BPMH represents **the cutting edge and future of research and learning** in the social and health sciences."

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

"BPMH as **a flagship program** that is a key part of a larger movement that seeks to address the mental health crisis at universities by teaching students the knowledge and skills that make their personal development and lifelong flourishing a central goal of their formal education."

Norman Farb, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Mississauga

"It is **one a few truly interdisciplinary programs**, integrating experiential learning, empirical research, rich theoretical traditions from both east and west, situating this conversation within a historical context that affords students a unique understanding of their own human potential."

David Germano, Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Director, Tibet Center, University of Virginia

“I urge you to reconsider your decision in light of the extraordinary achievements and innovations of this program. This is particularly so given that its innovations directly concern higher education and student flourishing during a time of unprecedented mental health crises among our young people... It is both rare and inspiring when one comes across a program like BPMH that targets such issues, has achieved great traction with students, and is matches innovation with economical use of resources.”

“I am both impressed and envious of the achievements of BMPH with far less resources than I have made available for faculty and staff at UVA. I have over the last few years read through syllabi, talked with students and faculty, and reviewed program documentation for BMPH. Some of the classes have been personally inspiring to me in terms of these conversations, and caused me to rethink my own assumptions about the possibilities of academic pedagogy in relationship to contemplation and new approaches for student flourishing. I am so impressed also by how the program has woven together curricular and co-curricular activities with public scholarship and research across multiple disciplines and constituencies. **I would so much like to transport this program to UVA—I consider it much more impressive than what we have managed to do here with far more resources.**”

HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Principal, Timothy Eaton Memorial Church Professor of Preaching Emmanuel College of Victoria University; and **Pamela McCarroll**, Vice Principal, Jane & Geoffry Martin Chair of Practical Theology, Emmanuel College of Victoria University

“It is not an overstatement to say that the BPMH program reflects **the very best of what universities might hope to offer** for the living of these days.”

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

“[BPMH is] unique to Canada and it can boast also **a trailblazing international role** with only few comparable initiatives around the globe.... crucial high quality academic programme that brings excellent student recruitment, national and international acclaim, and most of all tangible results for students’ well-being, personal growth, and interdisciplinary learning.”

Tony Scott, Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto

“In many ways, Buddhism is the vanguard of the twentieth-century university. It opens itself up to textual and philological study, as in the DSR, provides opportunities for chaplaincy and community work, as in Emmanuel College, but also sheds light on the problems of psychology, mental health, and politics, as in the BPMH. The University of Toronto is now recognized as **a world leader in the study of Buddhism**, in no small measure to the existence of these three different approaches in the same institution.”

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

“There is a growing body of higher education institutions in North America and globally that are allocating significant resources to the study of human wellbeing through research, teaching, and leadership. The BPMH undergraduate minor at the University of Toronto is **among these important epicenters**. These efforts are exemplified by the Flourishing Academic Network (FAN), a consortium of leading university academic centers who are leveraging knowledge and resources among global experts to promote student flourishing and catalyze systems change in higher education. The University of Toronto is a key member in this network because the existence of the BPMH program exemplifies this vision and virtues.”

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

“College students in particular have both a strong interest in, and a strong need for, attention and emotion regulation strategies and meaning systems to help them to navigate the challenges and opportunities of this critical time of life at this transitional time in history. What is critically important is that programs like the one at U of Toronto offer such strategies and meaning systems and are evidence-based... This program marks your university as **a leader in this innovative approach to scholarship and flourishing.**”

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

“The BPMH program contributes significantly to the field of Contemplative Studies in North America by fostering an understanding of human consciousness, self-awareness, and the interplay between contemplative practices and mental health. Such contributions are not only academically valuable but also have **profound implications for societal well-being.**”

Jeffrey C. Walker, Philanthropist, Chairman of New Profit, Vice Chair in the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Health; Board Member: University of Virginia, Berklee College of Music, Grammys Music Education Coalition, On Being, Just Capital, AMP for Health, UVA’s McIntire School of Commerce, Harvard Business School, MIT Media Lab, Harvard School of Public Health; Recipient of the John C. Whitehead Award for Social Enterprise, Harvard Business School Club

“I know BPMH to be a unique and important undergraduate program focused on rigorous research and innovative experiential learning relating to student flourishing... This program is **a model for universities across North America.**”

Jeff Wilson, Professor, Religious Studies and East Asian Studies, Renison University College, University of Waterloo

“[BPMH] is one of Canada’s most unique and innovative academic Buddhism programs, and as such serves as **a model to other universities** seeking new possibilities in the areas of Religious Studies, Psychology, Health Sciences, Contemplative Studies, and student-centred support programming. It is also a highly successful program which has shown steady and impressive growth since its genesis close to two decades ago.”

“The program positively enhances all of the things that we are trying to emphasize at universities today: mental health, student peer support, intercultural learning, lifelong skills, knowledge of non-Western cultures, and innovation. Indeed, as I look at the BPMH program and consider its successes, I am strongly moved to consider whether it is something we could replicate at my own university. We would be highly pleased to have such a program available to us and our students.”

Selected Student Voices

Fifth-year student majoring in Women's Studies, BPMH and English minors

“I returned to U of T specifically to take this program.”

Third-year Linguistics Major, minoring in Human Geography and BPMH

“The BPMH Program is also one of the reasons why I have chosen UofT.”

First-year student

“The BPMH program is one of the programs which drew me to Arts and Science at UofT. When planning what school to go to and what programs to apply to in Grade 12, the BPMH program really stood out to me.”

Fifth-year History and Philosophy of Science major, minoring in Political Science and BPMH

“I am very grateful to this program and would of dropped out of UofT without it.”

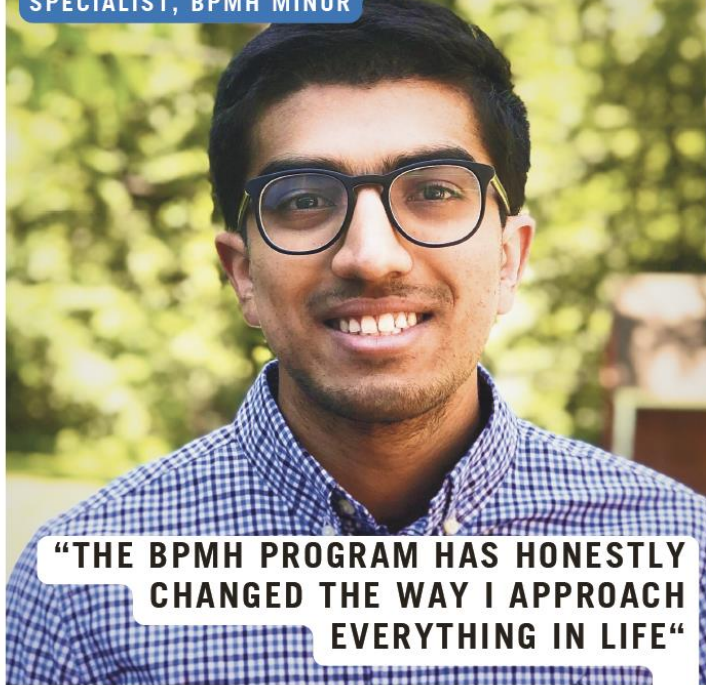
II. Highlights from support letters



**JULIE, CURRENT MASTERS OF ARCHITECTURE
CANDIDATE, BPMH ALUM**

“BPMH IS THE FOUNDATION OF MY HOPES FOR THE FUTURE. IT TAUGHT ME TO TRANSFORM SUFFERING INTO MEANING, AND ALLOWED ME TO VIEW INTERACTIONS WITH THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM AND THE HEALTH OF THOSE AROUND ME AS A REASON TO PUSH FOR MORE INTENTIONAL, CARE-FOCUSED SPACES.”

**SIDDHARTH, 3RD YEAR, COMPUTER SCIENCE
SPECIALIST, BPMH MINOR**



**“THE BPMH PROGRAM HAS HONESTLY
CHANGED THE WAY I APPROACH
EVERYTHING IN LIFE”**

**CHLOE, 4TH YEAR, DOUBLE MAJOR IN PSYCHOLOGY
& BUDDHIST STUDIES, MINOR IN BPMH**



**“BPMH GIVES US SKILLS TO DO
MEANINGFUL, RIGOROUS, AND
ETHICAL SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY
THAT TRANSCENDS TRADITIONAL
DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES”**

“The program positively enhances all of the things that we are trying to emphasize at universities today: mental health, student peer support, intercultural learning, lifelong skills, knowledge of non-Western cultures, and innovation.”

Jeff Wilson, Professor of Religious Studies and East Asian Studies, University of Waterloo



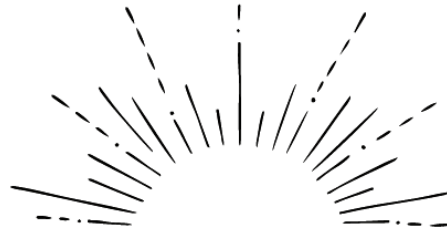
“BPMH is one of the jewels that makes U of T a unique place for undergraduate study.”

Norman Farb, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Mississauga



**“Buddhism, Psychology &
Mental Health is an
exploding field.”**

Mark Unno, Professor of Religious Studies, Religious
Studies Department Head, University of Oregon



**“BPMH is widely respected among many
of us in North American universities who
are interested in fusing innovative
pedagogy and pioneering research to
promote flourishing on college and
university campuses.”**

Blake Hestir, Professor, Philosophy Department, and
Mark Dennis, Professor, Religion Department, Texas
Christian University

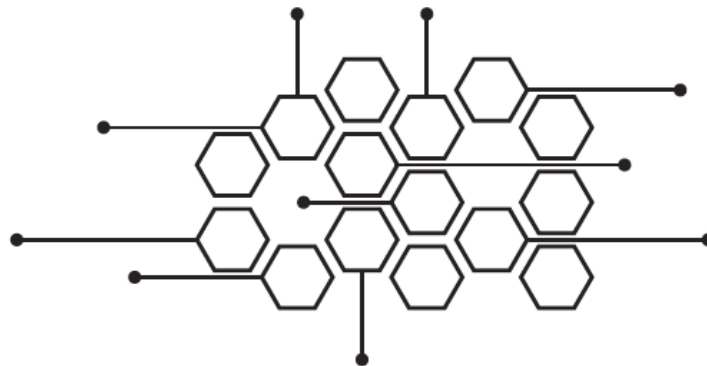
**“BPMH represents the cutting edge
and future of research and learning in
the social and health sciences.”**

Michel Ferrari, Professor, Applied Psychology &
Human Development, OISE



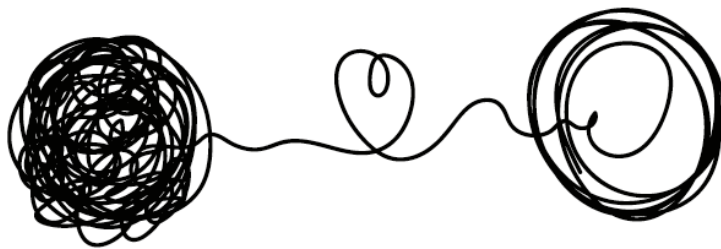
**BPMH “is one of the flagship programs
worldwide that are bringing the benefits of the
contemplative sciences to benefit our students
and our university communities.”**

Robert M. Bilder, Michael E. Tennenbaum Family Endowed Chair in
Creativity Research, Chief, Division of Psychology, and Distinguished
Professor of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences, UCLA



“BPMH [is] a flagship program that is a key part of a larger movement that seeks to address the mental health crisis at universities.”

John D. Dunne, Distinguished Professor of Contemplative Humanities, Co-Director, Wisconsin Student Flourishing Initiative, Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison



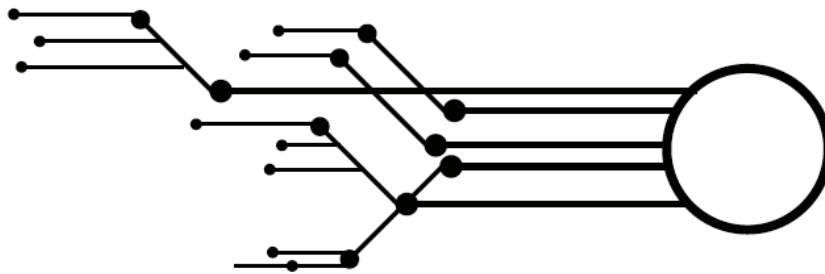
“This program marks your university as a leader in this innovative approach to scholarship and flourishing.”

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



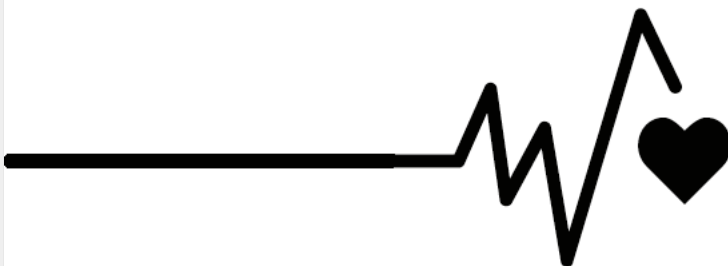
BPMH “can boast also a trailblazing international role with only few comparable initiatives around the globe.”

Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer, Rector, Buddhist Seminary Chair, Buddhist Studies, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam



“More, rather than fewer, programs like BPMH studies are needed.”

Zindel V. Segal, Distinguished Professor of Psychology in Mood Disorders, Graduate Department of Psychological Clinical Science, University of Toronto Scarborough





Program Event: May 2022, "An Evening of Meditation, Music & Poetry"

III. Letters and comments from 48 current BPMH students

The following comments were submitted to a Google form created by BPMH students.

11-22-2023 18:33:16

Department of Arts & Science; Trinity College

Double Major: Psychology & Buddhism & Minor: BPMH

4th Year

Dear Esteemed Faculty,

I am writing to express my deep concern and disappointment upon learning about the potential termination of the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program at the University of Toronto. As a member of the university community invested in a diverse and enriching education, I believe **this program is invaluable** and its position warrants careful consideration.

Throughout my academic journey at the University of Toronto, I have undertaken two advanced statistics classes, which undoubtedly contributed significantly to my understanding of data analysis. However, it was in Professor Weisbaum's class, the director of the BPMH Program, that **I gained the crucial insight into the broader purpose of research: the production of trustworthy knowledge** which can be applied for the betterment of humanity.

This program extends beyond the conventional academic paradigm by delving into the complex considerations of consuming and creating knowledge. As the pursuit of knowledge in this field requires a nuanced approach, the **BPMH program equips students with the skills necessary to conduct meaningful, rigorous, and ethical scientific inquiry** that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries. This program and its faculty stand as an exemplar for fostering a sense of responsibility in the ethical and rigorous pursuit and application of knowledge. On November 21st, an original qualitative research study co-authored by Professor Weisbaum was published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal on the impact of mindfulness interventions for physician well-being and performance. CMAJ is a peer-reviewed general medical journal that has a substantial impact on health care and the practice of medicine in Canada and around the world. The decision to close such a pioneering program inadvertently sends a disheartening message to both students and faculty regarding the institution's commitment to groundbreaking research and academic excellence.

The BPMH program uniquely contributes to the intellectual and cultural diversity of our academic landscape. Two of the most intriguing and well-structured courses I've undertaken at the University of Toronto have been within the BPMH program, taught by Professor Weisbaum and Professor Whissell. By exploring the intersections of Buddhism and mental health, students are exposed to a range of perspectives that challenge our assumptions and encourage thoughtful reflection. This type of intellectual exercise is invaluable in cultivating well-rounded and open-minded individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to society. In my estimation, students are performing well in this program for two reasons. Our professors demonstrate a high level of both competence and care towards fostering student learning, and the content of the program itself is relevant and meaningful enough to genuinely engage students of all focuses. If skepticism exists regarding the program's value, I would strongly suggest first-hand observation of a semester—a modest step before deciding on termination of the program.

The BPMH program is not merely an academic pursuit; it is revolutionary in its approach to understanding and addressing mental health concerns. The program uniquely intertwines the principles of Buddhism with contemporary mental health research to develop an approach that spearheads academic rigor and traditional wisdom simultaneously and recognizes the interconnectedness of the

scientific method and lived experience. As a psychology major hoping to use my degree to practice as a clinical psychologist, this course has had a profound effect on how I would approach my future practice. In a world beset by widespread suffering, ever apparent in the current tragedies occurring throughout the global community, the decision to terminate a program dedicated to understanding and alleviating suffering appears profoundly out of touch. Now, more than ever, **the world requires the insights generated by this research— insights that guide us in facing atrocity while remaining human.** In a recent unit of BPM438, we analyzed studies which found significant results for the impact of mindfulness-based interventions for physicians' performance and well-being. This research is not just academic; it directly influences those entrusted with our health and well-being, and beyond.

Moreover, terminating the BPMH Program is not only academically regressive and ethically out of touch, but also financially shortsighted. The wellness and mental health industry is a burgeoning market worth trillions of dollars. A local exemplar of this trend is Othership, a Toronto-based organization that opened in early 2022 has recently expanded its services in Yorkville and has to date has raised nearly \$10 million in venture funding. Essential to Othership's offerings is meditative breathwork, a practice grounded in the principles explored by the BPMH program. Othership's success highlights the program's relevance to current market trends and current societal needs. **Investing in BPMH is an investment in the long-term relevance of the University of Toronto's academic pursuits** as well as the well-being of individuals and our society at large.

As individuals in positions of decision-making power, your values and priorities influence the direction of this institution, which consequently shapes the educational pursuits and experiences of those within its walls. With this power comes the responsibility to wield it judiciously. I urge you to consider the philosophy of the Iroquois people called the Seventh Generation Principle, which emphasizes the profound impact decisions today can have across generations. The termination of the BPMH Program sends ripples across the future, affecting the wisdom and well-being of generations to come. It would be a disheartening step away from fostering a university environment and academic direction that values the intellectual growth and well-being of its students.

In light of these considerations, I respectfully implore you to reconsider the decision to close the BPMH program. Its academic rigor, ethical focus, and real-world impact make it an invaluable asset to our university and academic community. By preserving and supporting this program, the University of Toronto has the opportunity to continue leading the way in groundbreaking research at the intersection of Buddhism and mental health for the betterment of humanity. It is testimony enough to the value of this program to have students willing to sacrifice time as final exams approach to advocate for its importance.

I appreciate your time and attention to this matter. I trust that, with your leadership, the University of Toronto will continue to be a beacon of academic diversity and excellence.

Sincerely,
(Name removed)"

11-21-2023 18:26:41
SGS
Master's in Physiology
1st Year

I have had the most experience with BPM335 — Meditation and the Body, both as a student and a teaching assistant. It is a vital course offered as part of BPMH Program, on which I will speak about. **As a hard science student, it is seemingly impossible to find a course that seamlessly transitions between scientific, sociological, and ethical practices.** Most PSY courses do not have hard science in them, whereas most HPS courses lack the current advancements of a relevant topic as well as ethics related to them. BPM335 has and continues to provide students a different kind of experience, while discussing practices, which help alleviate stress. By knowing and critically judging the practice of

meditation, students are able to dip their toe into the water and see if it would be beneficial for them to try. This course also has over 300 students (max capacity) in almost all semesters it is offered and even has a huge waitlist, showing its popularity. It is also by no means an "easy" course a student might take to boost their GPA, as when I took the course (Summer 2022), the average grade was a B (3.0), which is on par with most of my other courses in the human biology department.

As a course that promotes good scientific practices and talks on glaring issues in the scientific world relating to publications, its teachings have been on par with most ethical webinars I have been to ever since starting my master's in Physiology. This is just 1 vital course in a series of other important courses offered by the BPMH program by interested faculty members, who have built connections with students through these courses and act as their references offering a different outlook than what some professors in other majors may have to offer. I believe it'd be unwise to shut this program down for the sake of students and faculty alike.

11-21-2023 18:18:20

Victoria College

Computer Science Specialist with a Minor in Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health

3rd Year

The BPMH program has only honestly **changed the way I approach everything in life**. It's changed the way I interact with my peers and really made me much more of a calmer person with respect to how I respond to conflict. It has also just really allowed me to maintain my mental health through a very stressful-filled semesters. But it's also really allowed me to gain a much more powerful education throughout my time in UOFT. Instead of just having a very technical education the BPMH program has given me the skills to connect my technical skill to my soft skills especially my communication skills.

11-22-2023 13:36:56

OISE CTL PhD

3rd Year

The BPMH program was a ray of hope for potential future endeavours as I reach the end of my graduate studies. As a Buddhist monk and researcher of Tibetan Buddhism, I am so hoping that this opportunity to establish intersections between Buddhism, Science and contemplative disciplines is continued. **This is an emerging conversation, not a dying one**. U of T will fall behind other institutions embracing these emerging fields if the program is cancelled. Look at the Contemplative Sciences Centre at the University of Virginia as an example.

11-23-2023 18:58:30

Victoria College Psychology, Biology, BPMH

3rd Year

In the BPMH program, there is a community of people actively striving for mental wellness, something the university is seriously lacking otherwise. In my first year at UofT, I felt like I was struggling. In classes, I felt like professors didn't care about me or my mental wellness, which made me feel alone. In second year when I joined the BPMH program, my stress and my struggles were not only seen by my professors, but they were relieved when I went to class and when I wrote assignments and tests. I didn't know that university didn't have to be about suffering until I joined this program. BPMH courses offer a chance to look inward and reflect on stress and struggles and provide students with thought-provoking suggestions for solutions to our suffering. The BPMH program has provided me with some of the most mentally beneficial classes of my academic career, and **the things I have been taught will last with me for my whole life**. As part of the 2019 initiative towards mental health at the University of Toronto, this program genuinely works towards helping student wellness. Especially in the context of UofT, where students are desperate for support and understanding while they struggle mentally, this program is essential for student mental health.

11-21-2023 18:39:16

UC WGS

5th Year

Throughout my time at U of T I've witnessed the institution grow more mental health informed, and as a student employee of health and wellness, I've seen **how influential this program has been** to my coworkers personal, academic, and professional development. As well, this program inspires student to take action on their own campus, with students and alumni offering much needed mindfulness programming at U of T. U of T would be taking a massive step backwards in its efforts of bettering mental health on campus, and furthering mental health research off campus, by ending this program.

11-21-2023 22:34:57

Victoria College

Neuroscience Specialist, BPMH minor

3rd Year

The BPMH program has been an asset in developing my academic and social skills. Through workshops, courses, and connecting with instructors this program has helped me improve my academic abilities. From first year I have improved my marks and understanding of content due to guidance and skills developed through the BPMH program. I cannot stress how instrumental this program has been in turning me into the student and person I am today. Furthermore, the peers and professors I met in this program have allowed me to gain new perspectives on both well-being and my academic endeavors. It is no coincidence that **focusing on improving my mental health has gone hand in hand with improved academic performance**. I will fight for this program to continue as it is something I hold dear to my heart and believe will benefit many other students in the future. To discontinue this program would be an action of extreme disrespect to students in the program, those who rely on its resources for well-being, and the greater U of T student body.

11-21-2023 23:02:42

Victoria College

Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health Minor, Evolutionary Anthropology Major, Indigenous Studies Minor

2nd Year

At a time when I was seeking a path forward in my educational career, the BPMH program appeared as a perfect opportunity to integrate ancient wisdom with contemporary mental health treatment. As a passionate mental health advocate planning to pursue a career in psychotherapy, this minor was intended to be the cornerstone of my degree, bridging the gaps between the different areas of study I've selected. The content I've learned in the BPMH program has been vital in broadening my horizons and helping me to apply perspectives from other programs. Being enrolled in such a multidisciplinary minor helps me bring this lens to other areas of study, always considering new opportunities with an integrative mindset, leaning into rich discourses. The way the BPMH program has legitimized the relationship between Buddhist meditation and positive mental health outcomes has enabled me to delve much further into practices which have been immensely enriching. Seeing the benefits of learning outside the classroom, I've been able to engage with traditional communities and teachers, as well as deepen my meditation practice. This has had an enormously positive impact on my mental health, in addition to the benefits of being engaged in a program which is so well aligned with my values, passions, and career.

The BPMH program is a very unique offering, compared to what's available here at the University of Toronto and at many other institutions. Given that research and academia is heading towards greater interdisciplinary collaboration, this program is positioned for growth and success in the evolving landscape of education. I know that I am not alone when I say that **the BPMH program is central to my undergraduate plans**, and it would be devastating to be prevented from continuing

along this path here at U of T. I urge the University's administration and the Dean of Arts & Science to please reconsider this decision, in light of the personal and professional significance this program holds for myself, and countless other students.

11-21-2023 18:01:08

University college

Neuroscience major, double minors in physiology and BPM

4th Year

This program has taught me a lot in how to take care of my mental health. Without it, I wouldn't know how to deal with my anxiety and overall sadness at times. It provided me with a better outlook on life in general. **I'm much a happier person with the program than without it.**

11-21-2023 18:04:29

University College

Sociology major with a double minor in psychology and BPMH

3rd Year

I am a lucky individual who knows what I want to do for my career. I am planning on becoming a clinical social worker. I enrolled in the BPMH program to hopefully bring a different perspective and approach to my future practice. **This program has completely altered my way of understanding the broader understanding of mental health** and how I understand my own. The Buddhist influence on psychology and well-being has implications and benefits that much of Western psychology simply neglects. Since beginning this program, I have a new way of calming my own anxiety. One of the core Buddhist ideas is that everything is impermanent. So now when I'm feeling anxious, I repeat to myself, "everything is impermanent and so is this feeling." As is everything, this program is impermanent. However, I believe there is more to be learned and shared and I deeply hope this is not the end of the BPMH program.

11-21-2023 18:32:44

New College History

2nd Year

I was really excited to take a BPMH class as a third-year student as I got the opportunity to learn about some Buddhist psychology concepts at a UC Berkeley class I took in the summer of 2023 and it was by far the most enjoyable topic for me.

11-21-2023 18:38:45

Student

Major in Religion. Minors in Philosophy and BPMH

3rd Year

I am a recovering crack addict and have a deep understanding of the effects of trauma on the brain and body. In my humble opinion of a person with lived experience, the courses in the **BPMH program have offered more insight to healing than all the other courses I've taken at UofT combined.**

11-21-2023 18:49:50

St. Michael's College

BPM minor, Philosophy minor, English Major

2nd Year

It's an interesting program so far and I love the variety of options to choose from when selecting the courses that will go toward that minor. It also has broadened my view on the other courses I'm taking

such as psychology classes. I am so excited to pursue and graduate with this minor and continue life with the knowledge and understanding that I am gaining from it.

11-21-2023 18:58:40

university college BPM Minor

3rd Year

The bpmh program has significantly impacted my life and others I know that are taking courses or currently enrolled in the program. From the classes and extracurricular activities provided within this course, this program has proved to be needed for student's mental health and education. I strongly believed that **Uoft should make this program a major** as the topic of Mental health is so prevalent in our society and especially in these trying times of war etc. Through this program I have been greatly influenced by my professors to implement meditation/mindful practices into my daily routine which has greatly helped my mental health. I am very worried what will happen as I am in my third year and this program is my minor. However, I will be doing my best to share the petition and advocate for the upkeep of this program.

11-21-2023 19:30:50

Victoria College PHL, BPM, Bioethics

5th Year

The BPM program has **helped tremendously with developing my scientific literacy** in terms of the brain and processes of the body that induce various emotions. It has helped me immensely with my mental health journey to a point that I have told other people at Uoft to most definitely consider BPM as an amazing option and do more for their own mental health.

11-21-2023 20:31:05

University College

Cognitive Science MAJ, German MIN, BPMH MIN

8th year

The program has expanded both my knowledge and practice of buddhism. One of the best classes I've taken in my 8 years here was the Mindful Awareness course. The classroom took place over zoom during the pandemic. We practiced giving and receiving compassion to each other and studied the literature on compassion. It was invaluable during that time in my life and **I carry what I learned there till this day.**

11-21-2023 21:13:55

Victoria College

Psychology Major, Anthropology & BMPH Minor

3rd Year

As someone who enrolled in Uoft with the hopes of eventually working in clinical psychology, since the psychology program is largely research-based, I was worried that Uoft was not going to provide me the skills and knowledge necessary for my future career. Once I became aware of the BPMH program, I instantly enrolled with the prospect that I could use my knowledge of a practice that is universally healing in order to help my future clients. If this program were to shut down I would be lost. Not only has the course I have attended comforted me in knowing that I want to be a clinical psychologist in order to help more people have access to this type of healing, but it has also helped my own personal growth as a person. **I do not feel that any other program or course has had the same impact.**

11-21-2023 21:36:10

University College

Statistics

3rd Year

UofT is stressful and BPM program is very helpful for me.

11-22-2023 0:02:36

SMC

Economics major

2nd Year

BPMH is a course I recommend to all my other friends in STEM, it feels good to take a break and utilize time to think about areas in our life we don't find time to seek upon, and BPMH does just that. BPMH help contributes knowledge of Buddhism teachings and reinforcing messages that keeps my mental health going and it's the only course in this university that does just that. In all sectors of the world within and after university, connections made with other beings is a huge contribute to one's success, especially in the busins and economic world (my program). BPMH guides us to a better understanding in one another, seek ways to be patient with yourself and be better. These are skills people often learn too late in life because there are rarely any classes where a student can both benefit in course credit load and learn these skills at the same time. Personally, I rarely take the time out to complete petitions, but this one I feel strongly against. There is no reason to be shutting down a course that is teaching students the values in understanding yourself and those around you better, if anything **the university should reinforce courses in BPMH**. Ultimately, students mental health relies on themselves and their mentality. Nothing is stronger than self realization and self reflection , that BPMH helps us realize about upon ourself and enable for us to move onward. To me, no other counselling or mental health services has helped me as much as my perception of life learnt from the materials and lectures from this course has.

11-22-2023 8:56:48

Innis

Women's Studies major, BPMH and English minors

5th Year

The BPMH program has helped enhance my career as a trauma-informed life coach and given me tools to share with my clients that have been life-changing. In addition, the education I've received in these courses has impacted my life in transformative ways. I have also **gained scientific literacy in terms of reading and understanding psychological research** which has been crucial in writing my book which was published in September. Knowledge about the study of self- compassion has helped to give me a unique edge in my career and I have witnessed it's healing impact on trauma survivors.

I returned to U of T specifically to take this program and it has exceeded my expectations in every way. It would be a huge mistake to eliminate this program as it has so much to offer those who may not be science-minded enough to major in psychology but will benefit from the science-based training in the courses provided along with the more metaphysical aspects of some of the Buddhist/mindfulness based programming. The world needs mental health professionals who are not necessarily cut out to be psychology majors. I can attest to many clients who have been let down by such science-minded health professionals who invalidate them and lack compassion or don't "get them". This program fills a gap that the world needs in my opinion and will contribute to healing that is life-changing on the individual level and world- changing on a larger scale.

11-22-2023 9:30:45

Innis College

Major in Cognitive Science with a double minor in Education & Society and Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health

4th Year

I have transferred my learning from my BPMH programs to all other aspects of my life. A big focus of the BPM courses that I have taken is about self-exploration and becoming more curious about how I respond to different things. This perspective has helped me to reduce my stress, enjoy working on my assignments more, manage my time better and be more present during my classes. Another big focus of the courses that I have taken has been seeing how our actions impact society at large and how we can more effectively contribute to society. I think that the skills and perspectives gathered from this program are invaluable in today's society especially given the plethora of mental health issues and violence that is happening in the world today. The program prepares us to be the fiercely compassionate leaders that we need in the world today; ones who lead by example, understand others and look at more of a holistic picture to come up with the best solutions to problems.

Additionally, after taking BPM438: Mindfulness Science and Research, I am now able to approach other research courses being much more informed about research procedures, methodology and how to effectively extract important information from a research article. Therefore, this program has helped me academically, personally, and professionally and I truly think that is needed in today's society.

11-22-2023 10:30:33

Victoria College

Linguistics Major; Human Geography Minor; BPMH minor 3rd

Year

The BPMH Program is such a great program. This program allows me to view mental health (and the other social issues that are all connected to personal well-being) from a different perspective while somehow putting "religion" alongside but promoting the underlying value of compassion and so on. Plus, it allows me to connect this new perspective to other disciplines and ongoing social phenomena, such as how to tackle climate change through a Buddhist lens. This program, as an interdisciplinary program/ field, also allows students to discover their interest by allowing students to take different courses from different disciplines, from religious studies to psychology and cognitive sciences.

I believe the program is much more than an academic program. While BPMH is a program at UofT, it is not only impacting UofT students. I often share my reflection on Buddhism and mental health with my friends and family and share the Buddhist perspective with my friends who are struggling with some of their current situations. My friends also find this perspective insightful, which relieves their suffering.

Personally, I also find this program important to me in terms of relieving my suffering. As this program introduced me to the idea that the "self" is somehow a great reason for suffering, I am able to think in another way. The BPMH Program is also one of the reasons why I have chosen UofT. And I believe there are people like me. With this program, I am also thinking of pursuing counselling (Buddhist stream) which I have never thought of before! I think Buddhism is much more than "religion". It is a philosophy with important values.

11-22-2023 11:55:59

University of Toronto

Global Health Major, physiology and Buddhism Minors 3rd

Year

This program exceeded my expectations. It is a great intersection of Buddhist discipline and the application of these teachings in psychoanalysis and mental health. Various courses (Buddhism and psychotherapy) deepens my interests in pursuing Counseling and psychotherapy.

11-22-2023 12:15:58

New college
Psychology major, planning to do BPM minor and economics minor
3rd Year

It's very unique to connect Buddhism with psychology and mental health. I didn't learn about self awareness and self care during psychology major. I very like this program and I don't want it to be shutting down.

11-22-2023 13:51:33
Smc
Hps poli sci minor and bpm minor
5th Year

BPM goes hand in hand with HPS and it has helped me understand the wider concepts of physics as well as psychology with the understanding of the self as it pick at concepts that the west. It **helped me also understand what I would want to do for my future career** as it highlights the significance of open mindedness and compassion giving me the ability to understand my peers in a level I couldnt of and wouldnt of been able to if it was not for this program and with that newfound understanding of relationships I want to continue my education in pursuit of human rights law. Not only has this program shaped my relationships with friends classmates and my family it has given me the tools to handle instances of stress in ways that serve my goals in comparison to outburts of anger and stress. It has made my understanding of the world and helped me deal with the loss of my grandpa and friend Marie.

I am very grateful to this program and **would of dropped out of UofT without it.** Its the main program other than HPS that I recommend to take at UofT when I talk to fellow students or potential students.

11-22-2023 14:33:38
Woodsworth College
Major in Critical Equity and Solidarity Studies, minor in enviromental ethics and political science
5th Year

This program has given me the opportunity to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to all my studies. particularly a non-western perspective, that is focused on decolonization. While this progam, has given me insight on how buddhist teachings and principles can help us solve modern day issues. this is immensely important when we think about how western ideologies have failed us.

Additionally, this program also introduced me to the career path of psychotherapy. I realized that through becoming a therapist I can make a difference in my community. the class I took over the summer on psychotherapy and buddhism, really cemented my interest in this career path since we had the opporinity to learn about and practice different therapuectic modalities. I think the most important thing I've learned is how to incorporate these meditations and pratices into every part of my life. Regardless of whether this is in my work, school or in my interpersonal relationships with family and friends. I sentiment I have shared with peers in this program is **how much our mental health improves the semester we are taking a BPM class.**

11-22-2023 15:56:18
St. Michael's College
Rotman Commerce, Specialist in Management and double minor in Economics and Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health
4th Year

The BPMH program provides me the opportunity to dive deeper into my passion for

mindfulness, psychology, mental health and wellbeing. Through courses, I have been able to look through a scientific lens into the benefits and processes of mindfulness, deepening my understanding of it. I have been able to use my knowledge and experience from the program in other areas of my life, including my involvement in the mindfulness, meditation and yoga programming at the multi-faith center, the BPSU, the Talking Circles support program at St. Michael's, and more. Several subjects from the program I have taken from help me deal with difficult situations that come my way, even if it is just simply being mindful of the present moment. This program has taught me how to approach things peacefully, mindfully, without aggression or negativity - which I believe is something everyone should be taught! **I have noticed a significant improvement to my mental health throughout this program** as I apply what I have learned to my day-to-day life. Further, I have been able to share what I have learned from this program to people in my life, whether it is a classmate I have just met or a family member. Whenever I mention this program in a conversation with someone, I notice that the person I am talking to always asks questions about the program and is interested in what I have to say about it, which goes to show that this program impacts more than just an individual student. I deeply care about others and their wellbeing and this program has allowed me to better support others in my life.

11-22-2023 21:21:02

St. Michael's College

Psychology Major, Sociology and BPM minor

4th Year

I joined Uoft as an international student with the hopes of majoring in Human Biology and Psychology. At the beginning of my second year, when my mental health had been drained from school and not being back home, I came across the BPM program and decided to get out of my comfort zone and try a few classes. **My first class gave me goosebumps.** So did the second... and so did the one I attended last week.

Before I give my opinion on the program, I would like to thank all the professors I have encountered who have spoken with such passion, grace, kindness and compassion. I have never taken a course throughout my time in high school and at the University of Toronto where I've felt so at ease and happiness. The personal growth I have gone through just because of the people I have met through this program is indescribable. Every time I attend a BPM lecture, I leave having learnt something about myself, and my peers.

This past summer - I struggled with several personal issues with my family and mental health. I found myself to be more compassionate and kind through these struggles. I would not have been able to come out stronger without this program.

A lot of students talk about their experience at University being one of personal struggle but also growth. This program has not only been a "therapeutic endeavour" but **I am proud to be a student at this University solely because of the person I have become by listening to my fellow BPM professors and students.** By taking away any future students' right to feel the same emotions seems to discount the efforts put forth by my fellow peers in making this a safe, inclusive and compassionate community.

This program has helped me find my "calling" in a lot of aspects of my life. My anxiety seems to be a friend I get to speak to ever so often rather than an enemy I am terrified of. It has also informed me of the patient-centred care I would like to be part of once I graduate. I really hope future students at this University get to experience this beautiful program and feel the same emotions as I do.

Either way - this community has helped a lot of people get through the toughest times. My peers at PATH (Peers Are There to Help) have worked extremely hard in forming a community that stands for compassion and kindness.

While no one can take away the experiences we've had with this program, I can only hope other students realize that there is so much more out there within the field of public health, mindfulness and spirituality. "

11-22-2023 23:31:06

St. Michaels

History and Philosophy of Science and Technology major, BPM minor and Science and Society minor
2nd Year

This program was my number one choice when deciding on my program of study. It helped me personally, and the university needs more programs like this.

11-23-2023 13:26:37

Innis College

DTS Major, WRR Minor, BPM Minor

3rd Year

This program has been instrumental in my own personal development. It has resulted in great academic benefit to me as well. The minor allows for a variety of courses, both within the BPM minor and from other programs. This has provided me with well-rounded knowledge with regards to the brain, mental health, and even physical health. The BPM program has also played a huge role in my own personal growth and has helped me develop beneficial strategies to cope with stress and ADHD management. This information was inaccessible to me without these courses, so I am extremely grateful for the knowledge and opportunity that they have provided. Getting rid of this program will be detrimental to the students. Personally, I have taken three BPM courses this semester (more than any semester previously) and I have seen an increase in my marks all around. My average this semester is about 5-10% higher than previous semesters, and I am also taking more courses than I have in previous semesters. This just proves to me that the BPM minor and the BPM courses are invaluable.

11-23-2023 14:13:08

Woodsworth

American Studies, Political Science

3rd Year

I have taken one course in this program and it has been my favourite course in my time at the university. it is not only educational but has helped greatly with my mental health, something this university tends to struggles with year after year. To shut down this program would not only deprive the world of minds dedicated to helping others but would directly affect the mental health of the student body.

11-23-2023 14:13:52

New College

Political Science Major

3rd Year

The BPMH program has been helpful to my mental health and impacted my well-being in a positive way.

11-23-2023 14:17:00

woodsworth

philosophy and economics

2nd Year

BPMH program teaches me how to do meditation which is very useful to both my study and me life.

11-23-2023 14:23:37

Victoria College BPMH Minor

2nd Year

Please continue this program, I've only just begun my academic journey to a new teaching of mindfulness and meditation and I've already found myself so fascinated with the classes I've only just started. Closing such an immersive program would be extremely disheartening and would leave many like myself stranded in regards to our future careers and education. I've found so much joy and knowledge from just the beginning of my journey and I do not wish for it to stop any time soon, sending lots of support as a BPMH STUDENT. Mental health is a big challenge of my own and finding new ways to cope and gain inner knowledge of myself, mind and body have been a highlight of my year, and I wish to extend this knowledge to others in my future.

11-23-2023 14:37:47

new college

psych major anthropology minor bpmh minor

3rd Year

The BPMH has significantly provided me with insight into mental health and techniques related to cognition at large in academia. special thanks to anderson todd and elanor weissbaum who have played a huge role in interest of the developing field. the disappearance of this program would be a disservice to all and a shame at uoft for such a niche program I don't know a single soul who has had a bad experience. reconsider. are you an institution of learning and inspiration or one of money and greed?

11-23-2023 14:38:15

St. Michael's College Social Sciences

1st Year

My friends have taken courses in BPMH that I hope to take because they sound interesting and fun! They always talk about how much they've learned and how they have improved their own mental health taking learnings from the classes into their lives. **I hope all students can experience something like this.**

11-23-2023 14:44:54

University College

Health Studies Major, Linguistics Minor, BPMH Minor

5th Year

The BPMH program has been invaluable in cultivating my multidisciplinary relationships. It has improved my involvement with other programs by providing distinct insights into the human mind and behaviour. **I've improved my scientific literacy and developed a sophisticated grasp of psychological concepts** entwined with Eastern philosophy thanks to this curriculum. My capacity for a variety of job and educational pathways has been enhanced by this, as it has given me adaptable abilities in critical thinking, empathy, and holistic approaches to mental health. The discovery and enjoyment of this program led me to pursue further education in mental health. Because of this program and the knowledge I learned, I will be studying a mental health graduate certificate in January. I would've never thought to enrol in this program if it wasn't for enrolling in my BPMH classes. In addition, the training has had a significant impact on my personal life by providing priceless insights about resilience, mindfulness, and compassion. Along with improving my mental health, these lessons have given me the ability to have a beneficial influence on my community by creating a more compassionate and understanding atmosphere that promotes mental wellness and personal development. I find this program incredibly valuable and it saddens me to hear that it might not be available for future students. I believe this program has so much to offer and has truly helped me find my passion, and I hope future students will have the same opportunity.

11-23-2023 16:11:58

Victoria

Physiology, psychology, immunology
4th Year

Although I am not in the BPM program since I was accepted into the psychology program, the BPM classes that I have taken have greatly helped my mental health. Learning and having guided meditation practice has greatly improved the way that I view life and has made me considerably healthier mentally. I will continue to improve my meditation skills throughout my life and this course has left a lasting impression on me and my overall life satisfaction. This is my experience with only a single BPM course, and I am confident in saying **that it has forever changed my life for the better**. I am so thankful that I was able to experience this course and it makes me extremely sad and worried that other potential U of T student will not be able to have this same experience. Through this course, I have improved in other courses as well as a side effect of improving my mental health.

This course has also made me view science in a completely different way. As a fourth-year science student, science has always been extremely analytical and methodological, however this course has broadened my view of the scientific field and expanded my horizons in what I now feel is possible for me to accomplish. Many other peers of mine have had similar experiences with the BPM courses. I have never heard anyone say anything negative about the BPM faculty and **they are actively improving the lives of students in each and every single class**. These courses make up for the lacking mental health services at U of T and **without BPM, U of T will be forced to invest more money and time in their mental health faculty**.

11-25-2023 20:08:26

Victoria
CS Specialist
2nd Year

I haven't enrolled in any BPM courses yet, but I was hoping to do a BPM minor in the future since all of the courses seem really fun and interesting! I feel like BPM is a very interdisciplinary subject that focuses on the applications of psychology, religion, and cognitive science which are all subjects I'm very interested in. I'm not a Buddhist myself, but I'm really interested in learning about their traditions and cultures; especially since I'm coming from a Catholic education - I would love to know the differences between both religions. I truly hope this minor won't be cancelled as it's **one of the most unique programs in this school!**

11-25-2023 22:46:37

woodsworth psych & cog sci
1st Year

Saying it is sad or ridiculous is an understatement. Considering removing the program rather than refining it, and/or providing additional funding so that professors and most importantly, students have a successful and unique academic background of knowledge is mind blowing. **The BPMH program plays a pivotal point for students involved, and in every industry**. It is not just AI or machines in the workforce, we are HUMANS who work in multiple industries and without our mental health how do contribute to society? Canada legalized assisted suicide rather than funding better resources for those who are mentally and/or physically in need of help; if our generation and the generations to come, is our future leaders, than what type of foundation are we building for them?

I know i'm not speaking just for myself, there are hundreds and thousands to come, of students who will appreciate and carry this knowledge with them. We humbly ask that you reconsider, and if you still decide to go forth, students and faculty deserve to know exactly where the money that goes toward this program will be going to. Transparency is key!!

Please provide a detailed formal proposal of where the money that goes towards this program would be used towards, additionally, please provide the reasons for why you believe that money is being better allocated.

11-26-2023 0:17:33

University of Toronto Mississauga Psychology

Major

2nd Year

I am pursuing mental health research in mindfulness with Professor Norman Farb. This course has helped me develop my ability to conduct research in clinical psychology and evaluate existing literature in mental health interventions. It has deepened my applied mental health and counselling skills to provide self and peer support which has been impactful as a student with a mental health disability. Contemplative sciences are very experiential so I was very grateful that course evaluation methods allowed us to develop contemplation skills, progress with exploration and reflect on experiences.

I hope the BPMH Program continues to expand to UTM too as I would have loved to enroll in this program. In the meantime, will continue taking these courses as electives. Hope more courses will be available online (either synchronously or asynchronously) for increased accessibility!

11-27-2023 14:54:09

Woodsworth History

2nd Year

I haven't taken a course in the program yet but would love the chance and would hate to see the program as a whole gone. Suffering from mental health issues myself, the more programs and approaches to these issues the better.

11-28-2023 10:44:14

University College Psychology

3rd Year

Contemplative science is a great area of research and study, and it supports the cause to promote mental health awareness which is just what we need in this generation.

11-28-2023 22:00:00

Trinity College (tentative) Ethics, Society, and Law

1st Year

As a First-Year student, BPMH is a prospective program that I am highly interested to minor in next year - and will be greatly disappointed if the University decides to close this program. Recently, I have been striving to take better care of my mental health, and I know this program will enlighten me, providing a sense of community to learn and meet students who believe in the values of protecting mental health and practicing mindfulness daily. I will be quite disappointed if this program is shut down - I believe it is imperative for students to have the opportunity and resources to enrol in BPMH.

11-29-2023 12:49:23

Victoria College

Psychology Major, Women and Gender Studies Minor, and Sexual Diversity Studies Minor 3rd

Year

Although I am not in the BMPH program, I know a lot of people that are and I think it's

abhorrent to close down a program without any notice. From what I know, this program is really important in providing a culturally specific view of Psychology, Mindfulness, and Mental Health. I think that **too often in psychology we discuss mindfulness as a useful therapeutic tool without acknowledging its cultural and religious roots**. Thus, participating in a form of cultural erasure and appropriation.

11-30-2023 21:26:01

Victoria College Life Science

1st Year

The BPMH program is an extremely insightful, interesting, and beneficial program as it makes important connections between 3 important disciplines. I am a first year student who is excited to join this program, and I am very upset about the possible closure of it.

12-1-2023 14:06:24

UC

humanities

1st Year

the BPMH program is **one of the programs which drew me to Arts and Science** at UofT. When planning what school to go to and what programs to apply to **in Grade 12, the BPMH program really stood out to me**. It seemed so unique and interesting and niche and it made me feel like a degree truly unique and personalized to my own interests was possible. As of now, I'm only in first year, haven't even chosen any majors or minors yet, but the BPMH is one that I was certainly hoping to apply to. Mental health especially is super important within an institution like UofT, and I really appreciate the possibly to pursue it and learn more about it with the structure of a curriculum in a program. I just feel this would open so many opportunities for myself, others like me, and others who don't even realize yet that they'd be open to this too. So, please do not close this program and the door to all these opportunities that I was looking forward to before I even enter my second year.

12-12-2023 17:25:04

University College

Major Psych

1st Year

I would really like to minor in BPM and would be extremely disappointed if they get rid of it.

11-24-2023 14:07

While understanding some concerns and reasons why administrations considered closing BPMH, we should also consider its value. Personally, **BPMH is part of why I have chosen UofT**. I'm unsure if I will choose UofT if there is no BPMH.... When I first took BPM232 with Dr Jennifer Bright, I knew I had made the right decision to do the program. Even when I shared the idea from the program with my friends, they told me that that idea helped them a lot, especially when they suffered. It is not only an academic program; it plays a role in helping students, the wider community and even global mental health. UofT, as a leading university, should care about something like this as well....

11-24-2023 14:10

This program was **what got me excited about attending UofT**. It was refreshing to see a big western university putting value in intersectional knowledge that is not centred around the western world and encouraged diverse discussion of mental health that values community kindness and inclusion. I was excited because it made the university seem welcoming and now after taking classes for the past 4 years and learning all the medical benefits of Buddhist

psychology it is extremely disappointing to see the university wanting to get rid of a beneficial program.

As a student it makes me feel like the university does not care about its students if it is planning on eliminating its course because it to me it means the individuals in charge have not educated themselves enough themselves about the programs content to recognize the undeniable significance of this program in improving people's life's and helping people decide their future careers.

IV. Letters and comments from 28 BPMH alumni

Dear Frances Garrett, Dickson Eyou, and Randy Boyagoda:

My name is Sasha Manu, an alumna of the University of Toronto, where I pursued my studies from 2014 to 2019. I graduated with an Honors Bachelor of Science, double majoring in Physics and Philosophy, and minoring in Mathematics. Among the myriad courses that shaped my educational experience, the most transformative were those in the Buddhist Studies department and those through the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH) program. I was so convinced of the program's value that I encouraged my sister to enroll in some of its courses as she began her university journey. She recently graduated, having completed a minor in BPMH.

My career trajectory, enriched with diverse teaching experiences across Hong Kong, the United States, and Canada, stands as a testament to the profound impact of this unique program. The BPMH program's integration of Buddhist principles with contemporary psychological practices has significantly influenced my pedagogical approach, enabling me to incorporate teachings of empathy and well-being effectively in my classrooms. The invaluable insights I gained from this program have been instrumental in my development as an educator. I firmly believe that the interdisciplinary approach of the BPMH program equips future professionals with a holistic understanding that is crucial in addressing the complex challenges of our times.

I am confident that the continued existence of the BPMH program will yield long-lasting benefits for students, the university, and the wider community. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out via email at sasha.manu95@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



Sasha Alexander Manu January 21st, 2024

The following comments were submitted to a Google form created by BPMH students

11-24-2023 13:04:28

Alumni of UC and Emanuel college

Psychology research specialist and BPMH minor Alumni

The existence of this program was a crucial factor that influenced my decision to attend U of T. As an alumni of this program, former member of the BPSU, and former TA I have witnessed **countless students' lives changed by this program**. It's a unique program that offers a unique perspective on psychology that greatly compliments a standard psychology degree. BPMH courses encourage both experiential and academic learning opportunities which inspire high levels of critical thinking. This program taught me to new the world through an intersectional lens and view mental health through biopsychosocial -spiritual cultural lens. BPMH ultimately encouraged me to pursue a career in spiritually integrated psychotherapy. I would certainly not be who I am without this program. As a current psychotherapist I believe this program should continue to grow and expand as it addresses important issues that are very relevant to encourage the improvement of mental health of individuals.

11-22-2023 14:13:14

*Kwantlen Polytechnic University PhD, Study of Religion
Alumni*

The BPMH program at the University of Toronto is a leader in undergraduate education in this emerging and important subfield. It is unique in Canada and to close it at this time, when educators are becoming ever more aware of the importance of our students' mental health, boggles the mind. As an alumnus and as chair of Asian Studies at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, I call on the administration to continue their support for the BPMH program.

11-24-2023 19:21:52

*Victoria College
Life Science – Buddhism Minor Alumni*

This program saved my experience at UofT. I finally felt like I could ask questions, think critically, speak critically, and it is a program that makes me look back to UofT, unlike in the life science courses. I think this program should inspire the rest of departments at UofT.

11-22-2023 14:13:14

*Kwantlen Polytechnic University PhD, Study of Religion
Alumni*

The BPMH program at the University of Toronto is a leader in undergraduate education in this emerging and important subfield. It is unique in Canada and to close it at this time, when educators are becoming ever more aware of the importance of our students' mental health, boggles the mind. As an alumnus and as chair of Asian Studies at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, I call on the administration to continue their support for the BPMH program.

11-22-2023 16:00:03

*Victoria College
Religious Studies, BPMH, Bioethics Alumni*

This program changed my life personally and professionally. It was thanks to this program and Dr Tony Toneatto, Dr. Henry Shiu and others that I am a Registered Psychotherapist in private practice. My father suffered a stroke when I was in my 2nd year learning about Buddhist application to psychology/mental health helped me deal with this devastation. I was able to use my personal experience + course material and learning and apply them together. I went on to do my Masters degree at Emmanuel College which focused on Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy in Buddhist Studies and was able to do so with the same professor from undergrad.

I had always hoped for this program to become a Major during my time and never saw that come to light. I think this program is important for students and should not be scrapped instead it should only grow.

11-22-2023 16:10:29

*St Michael's College/School of Graduate Studies
Religion
Alumni*

Maintain the program for the benefit of as many students as possible and for the greater good.

11-22-2023 19:31:10

St Michaels College

*Psychology Major, BPMH and Immunology Minor
Alumni*

The BPMH program offers novel perspectives to health science, medicine and psychology. It expands students understandings of knowledge and methodologies related to medicine and psychology promoting traditional eastern methods of supporting well being through practices that are slowly become adopting in the western world. While not a traditional program, I think it makes it that much for valuable to keep in a diverse group of course offerings at UofT. Especially in a school commonly stigmatized for poor mental health, removing this program would be a major fault as it contributes significantly to the mental well being of students promoting positive and supportive environments and teaching new ways of thinking and being.

11-23-2023 2:50:50

Current Masters of Architecture Candidate, BPMH Alumni, Architecture Specialist, BPMH Minor Alumni

The BPMH program was instrumental in guiding me towards my design interests as I looked to graduate studies and continuing my career. I am a current Master of Architecture candidate, and completed my undergrad as a specialist in architectural design and completed a minor in BPMH in 2023. I am interested in the way spaces can be used to heal and hope to design healthcare spaces in the future. The BPMH program **helped me gain the scientific knowledge about how to speak about mental health in both clinical and holistic perspectives**, and in particular, the courses I took with Elli Weisbaum about healthcare and institutional stress acted as the basis of my findings of my undergraduate thesis about student mental health and belonging at UofT. In addition, BPM335 (Meditation and the Body taught by Paul Whissell) and BPM338 (Exploring Mindful Awareness with Melanie Viglas) has transformed my life and I am now a daily meditator!

Over the past year, I have implemented practices from the classroom into my daily life and my mental health has truly blossomed as a result. To shut down the BPMH program would be erasing the foundation of my hopes for my future. The program has taught me to transform suffering into meaning and has allowed me to view my past interactions with the healthcare system and the health of those around me as the reason to push for more intentional, care- focused spaces. To quote TNH, "No Mud, No Lotus".

11-23-2023 13:06:38

New College

Criminology, BPMH, Psychology

Alumni

The BPMH program was **central to my learning and well-being during my time at UofT**. It taught me about wellness and provided me with methods to keep myself throughout my undergraduate degree. Additionally it equipped me with methods and data that I could share with others to improve their well-being. The BPMH program broadened my horizons and made me realise I could integrate spirituality and mindfulness with my studies, something I had never envisioned. It helped me realise my interest in spiritual counselling and mindfulness training as careers. The BPMH minor is my favourite component of my studies at UofT because it comprises two seemingly opposing fields, science and spirituality, but actually draws several parallels between the two. This program and the interactions it facilitated with my peers and teachers truly changed my life and made my time at UofT more memorable and joyful. I sincerely believe that the closure of this program would deprive several students of a life changing opportunity.

11-24-2023 10:27:00

University College

Psych Specialist, Buddhism, Psych and Mental Health Minor

Alumni

My Minor in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health helped make my decision to pursue a career as a psychotherapist. It informed me of new research supporting the use of mindfulness in therapy and balanced so much of what I was learning of the mainstream psychology research in my Psych Specialist. It taught me to question - just because something is not yet "evidence based", does that mean it doesn't work, or does that mean it's hard to study, or hasn't been funded? It informed my perspective as a new therapist and helped put me on the path to exploring training and expertise in somatic therapies, which are very well aligned with mindfulness.

It also spurred a personal practice of meditation, and a personal philosophy in alignment with many of the teachings of Buddhism. Any time my mental health has suffered, mindfulness and meditation, first cultivated within this program, have been key tools in my wellness.

This is truly such a unique and rich program and I strongly urge that you don't close it down. It would be such a disservice to current and future students. As a past student, it has been **key in my personal and professional development**.

11-24-2023 10:48:39

Alumnus

Psychology, BPMH, Computer science

Alumni

BMPH, and the extremely successful Mind Matters conference I helped organise, changed my life. They contributed significantly to the person I am today. **I met my closest friends in that program**. They helped my mental health incredibly during a very hard undergrad. I'm going to become a therapist and that's in large part due to that program.

11-24-2023 10:49:17

Woodsworth

Philosophy specialist, BPMH minor

Alumni

This was **the formative program of my time at u of t**. When people ask about my university experience, the things i talk about are not my dorm experience, nor my philosophy degree, nor woodsworth events — it's the professors and students and lessons i learned in BPMH that i sing the praises of.

11-24-2023 10:57:08

New College

Neuroscience, and Buddhism Pscyh and Mental Health

Alumni

This program has changed my life. Without it I would not have been the person I am. **Without it I would have never been able to even survive UofT**. As dramatic as it sounds this program was the best thing to have been a part of UofT for me. I am appalled to hear that you are even considering having this program be taken out. This program helps student and people in so many ways. Writing a letter will never be enough. Words cannot even give justice to this program. I have found out way too late about this or else I would have gotten so many more previous alumni to give their responses to this and I promise you so many would and are against this. I was the president of the student union for three years. I worked tirelessly to make sure this program thrives and become a major and now after all these years I am finding out that this program is considering being canceled? This is actually ridiculous. These courses have been a joy to do many people when UofT had tried to break so many. It was always such a breath of fresh air to come to these classes to see these professors and to be able to actually learn something worthwhile and be able to use in our everyday lives. I am very disappointed in the administration for considering this.

11-24-2023 11:29:23

University of Toronto

Specialist: Religion. Minor: Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health

Alumni

To whom it may concern,

During my tenure at the University of Toronto, from 2012 to 2015, I had the honour of engaging in the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program. Concurrently, I served diligently as a member, Vice President, and ultimately, President of the student union. These roles were not merely academic or extracurricular commitments; they were integral to my growth and development as a practitioner and scholar.

My journey through the realms of meditation, deeply rooted in Buddhist traditions, has been nothing short of transformative. It seamlessly complemented my academic pursuit as I undertook a master's program in psychotherapy. **Presently, as a registered psychotherapist entering my eighth year of private practice, I can attest to the profound impact of this program on my professional and personal life. It was nothing less than game-changing.** It offered a robust framework through which the ancient wisdom of Buddhist teachings could be understood and applied in the modern context of mental health. This intellectual fusion has greatly enhanced my ability to serve my clients and has provided deeper insight into the human condition.

The program was a nexus where influential mentors, including Anthony Toneatto and John Vervaeke, profoundly opened my eyes to the interchange between Buddhism, Cognitive Science, and Psychology. Their guidance and teachings were pivotal in fostering within me a nuanced perspective on life and its myriad challenges. Additionally, the camaraderie with my peers was exceptional. Together, we orchestrated the Mind Matters events, which became a cornerstone of the campus culture due to their popularity and impact.

Opportunities to harmonize academic knowledge with practical applications for living a fulfilling life are rare within the university milieu. This program stood as a beacon of such balance, offering a unique space where academic rigor met with practical wisdom. It was an oasis for those of us seeking not just knowledge, but transformation. The program's value cannot be overstated—it is indeed a diamond in the rough, one that must be preserved for the enrichment it brings to its students and the broader community.

Warmly,

(Name removed), Registered Psychotherapist

11-24-2023 11:47:21

Woodsworth

Major: human bio Minor: Buddhism psychology and mental health + sociology Alumni

BPMH was one of my favorite programs. It also gave me a lot of tools to deal with mental health and provided resources that really opened my knowledge.

11-24-2023 12:11:08

University of Toronto Alumni,

BPMH Alumni Religious Studies

As a Registered Psychotherapist, the BPMH program undoubtedly facilitated my progression into my profession in ways that other disciplines at U of T did not. As a Religious Studies major who focused on Buddhism, the BPMH minor afforded me the opportunity to pursue coursework that incorporated other fields that were not accessible through the RLG department, including cognitive science, psychology, and mindfulness studies. Without this formative experience, not only would I have not

been exposed to the material that piqued my interest in neuroscience, psychology, and psychotherapy, but I would not have obtained the breadth of credentials that were essential for pursuing graduate studies in Counselling Psychology required for psychotherapy licensure. Closing this program would not only be shame for the immediate educational experiences of current students--it also limits their possibilities and potential for later academic and professional pursuits that necessarily shift over time.

11-24-2023 22:56:25

New college

Indigenous studies, Specialist; BPMH, Minor

Alumni

This program helped get me through one of the most difficult times in my life. I learned so much. I still have most of the reading material from this course and every so often, read through my favourite readings.

11-25-2023 0:10:23

New College

Psychology Major, Biology Minor, BPMH Minor

Alumni

The BPMH Program contains **some of my best memories at UofT**. I was most inspired by the courses in the program, became very involved in this program, developed strong academic thinking and writing skills, along with increased self awareness. The courses, professors, and students in this program were amazing! This was certainly a very unique program and I will always be grateful for it.

11-25-2023 10:32:33

New

Cognitive Science/Human Biology

Alumni

I took 1 course in BPMH with Tony Toneatto. It was **unlike anything else I took at UofT**, with meditation, a more personal lecture style, and engagement with ideas and a culture that I otherwise had no access to in my science program. I absolutely loved it and it led to deep personal engagement with the ideas of Buddhism for many years. For many, the BPMH courses were **life changing** and I hope they continue to offer them for others.

11-25-2023 10:34:48

St. Michael's

Psychology specialist, BPMH minor

Alumni

This program was foundational in the development of my multidisciplinary understanding of psychology, especially as it pertains to the different points of view. **I would not be where I am in my career had it not been for this program**, and I am extremely grateful for its existence.

11-27-2023 8:49:10

St. Michael's College Cognitive Science/Art History

Alumni

The BPMH program helped me introduce and incorporate the ideas of buddhism and psychology together through its related ideas and provided a new mindset and perspective on how to provide a better understanding of mental health.

It also helped me see things under a different light, how its ever-circulating process provides a better understanding on setting a discourse needed to untangle mental health obstacles.

11-27-2023 11:26:18

New College Psychology Specialist
Alumni

The BPMH program was **pivotal to my development**. It got me to reflect in new ways and gave me tools I still use today to act as a smart, ethical professional. I would take the BPMH courses all over again if given the opportunity.

11-27-2023 16:59:40

University College
Enrolled in some of BPMH courses
Alumni

This is a very important program for students who are broadening their personal, emotional, and social views. The courses focus on helping students develop mindfulness, which relates to close introspection of own emotions / feelings, as well as raising one's awareness of thoughts and impulse that come to the surface. This program personally helped me later understand mindfulness, which eventually helped me cope with negative emotions arising from many traumatic or adverse events in my world. Such education and training have also helped me develop a sense of well-being (finally) in my late 30's. I strongly believe that one's awareness of impulse or mindfulness is an essential component of one's intelligence as it markedly increases our chance of survival or socio-emotional benefits. For instance, if one is unable to recognize own negative and potentially harmful impulse triggered by the brain but acts on the impulse without any pause or mindful filtering, they will continuously engage in destructive actions which will eventually lead to his/her own demise. The domains constituting the concept of human intelligence focuses too much on memorization, verbal, arithmetic, or problem-solving skills. However, a wise mindfulness practice can prevent problems from occurring in the first place, hence focusing on prevention of potential conflicts. Prevention is always one's best defense. It also has implications for the world peace. Speaking of which, although off-tangent, current definition of intelligence needs to be more carefully reviewed and refined - it should involve one's ability to hold an impulse and to prevent any conflicts from taking place before we discuss problem solving skills.

11-27-2023 18:22:07

New College
Cognitive Science Major, BPMH Minor, Psych Minor
Alumni

The BPMH program provided a robust amount of support for me when I was in my undergraduate program and provided insightful information to what permutations of meaning can be for many.

It **helped develop a considerable amount of scientific literacy and writing skill** and has carried through today in a career that is albeit very different from the field of mental health.

The BPMH community garnered a **large amount of critical discussion allowing philosophical conversations and a deeper experiential learning experience** through aforementioned debate of what was/is an accurate depiction of BPMH academic concepts.

The program deserves to be continued as Tony was a very helpful professor and illuminated much of the overlap between Western and Eastern psychological concepts which aided myself, and many others in the East-Asian community understand the intersection between being a first- generation East Asian born into a Western society.

11-29-2023 20:02:08

New college

Specialist in religion and BPMH minor

Alumni

The BPMH, was the only program that kept me interested in learning and diving back into my studies at university of Toronto. I would have given up without taking Buddhist psychology, it open new doorways to love learning at u of t. I found other programs to be cold and too clinical. This BPMH, minor program is incredibly useful and important to the work I do to this day. I found all the professional profs to be warm engaging, challenging, and thoughtful. I found this minor program to be **life changing**, and deeply moved my life to graduate and continue my studies at university of Toronto. It was refreshingly honest and real, something that other programs at u of t could learn and lean into. It offered so many practical skills, I am extremely grateful for this opportunity for this Minor program to even exist it open my mind academically to stay committed to completing my studies. To this day this program has **forever changed my life** and I get to impact other communities and share my purpose because of this program.

12-3-2023 6:16:31

U of T Alumni of Victoria College

Art History, Psychology, and Economics (BA), Art History (MA), Public Policy (MPP) Alumni

My friends and others who took this undergrad program loved it. They would tell me what they learned a lot from it, and it enriched their lives. I think **this program helped them be successful with their goals and dreams**. One of them is a PhD in Norway at University of Oslo now in Archaeology and the other works at OECD. I regret that my course load was so heavy that I did not take a course in this.

12-5-2023 3:58:07

Victoria College

Anthropology, Digital Humanities, BPMH Alumni

I would have never ended up at the University of Toronto if it wasn't for the BPMH minor degree program. I have been a practicing Buddhist Tantrika for most of my adult life and, when I found this program online, I took it as a sign to return to university to complete my degree.

I knew this program would provide me opportunities to apply the very valuable research findings of Emma Seppälä (emmaseppala.com) who has successfully led applied research on the secular applications of meditation in relation to PTSD treatment, especially in war veterans. At this point, in relation to Dr. Seppälä's work, I would also like to add that what's far more than good enough for Oxford, Harvard, and Google should also be good enough for the University of Toronto too.

Dr. Seppälä's work has had great continued success, and the BPMH program provided me additional opportunities to not only explore the significant links displayed in Dr. Seppälä's research, it also granted me significant opportunities to explore other secular applications in Buddhism, psychology, and mental health like Jungian psychology in relation to Buddhist Tantric principles and iconography, which is amply documented in BPMH faculty's research and work.

I had always expected this program to be offered as a major degree program but, now, I'm hearing that the University is going in the complete opposite direction with this innovative, progressive program. I am especially confused as to the reason why when so many of its courses are already offered in other departments and is especially helping the Religious Studies and Buddhist Studies departments. This decision seems to be a short-term 'solution' with significant long-term losses attached to it.

11-24-2023 14:02

Alumni

As a UofT alum and now grad student in clinical psychology, I can say that the courses and instruction offered through New College were **formative not just to my career but to my identity**. I saw it as a remarkable home for passionate, wise instructors, including in the BPMH program but also in others such as the Jungian stream, who would otherwise not have found a home in the academy. I can think of so many friends and colleagues who have described their time with these courses as nothing short of **life-changing**, and we have all been shocked at their sudden cancellation this year. We hope that New College can continue to offer a home to this extraordinary community.

V-1. Letters from BPMH instructors past & present



EMMANUEL COLLEGE
OF VICTORIA UNIVERSITY IN
THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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November 17, 2023

Jennifer Bright (Emmanuel College)

PhD, RP She/her – Treaty 13

Assistant Professor Buddhist Spiritual Care and Counselling Emmanuel College

Frances Garrett

Associate Professor of Buddhist Studies and Tibetan Studies Department for the
Study of Religion

Dear Frances,

I was shocked when I learned of the decision to discontinue the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH) program at New College. I struggle to comprehend why an innovative inter-disciplinary program that focuses on student well-being is being eliminated when the University lacks substantial resources and supports to address the serious state of student mental health. I am writing to show my strong support for the continuation of the BPMH program.

Before speaking to the many merits of the program, I want to express that I am equally shocked about the decision process itself. I find particularly troubling the lack of transparency and openness in the process, the lack of consultation or communication with the current director, course instructors, students, or experts in the field, and the use of outdated information by the Working Group in making their decision. I believe that universities are instrumental for democracy; they should be a model of transparent, fair, and equitable decision-making processes that follow appropriate norms and procedures. I am concerned as to whether the appropriate norms and procedures of the University of Toronto were followed in the decision to end the BPMH program.

Having taught in the BPMH program for roughly 350 students, I have learned a great deal about the mental health challenges students are experiencing at crisis levels.

Many of our students are dealing with serious personal and intergenerational trauma, sharing with me their experiences of past and current sexual, emotional, physical, and financial abuse; sexual assault; intimate partner violence; addictions and mental health issues including depression, anxiety, PTSD and others; residential school trauma; immigration, war, racial and other forms of discrimination; homelessness, food insecurity, and the deaths of parents, siblings, relatives, and friends. Consciously and unconsciously, our students—from all across the university—are taking BPMH courses because they are suffering and seek support and healing through gaining insight into the individual and social problems they are experiencing. Students have communicated to me that a result of the program, they have started to take steps to move

towards mental wellness and flourishing, including seeing a therapist. Many students have told me that the BPMH program changed and even saved their lives.

The BPMH program benefits student mental health in numerous concrete ways. In our courses, students learn directly about mental health, psychology, and psychotherapy, especially mindfulness and contemplation, and are encouraged to apply this conceptual knowledge to their own lives and experiences. The experiential nature of BPMH courses allows students the opportunity to become increasingly familiar with the interdependencies of ‘head, heart, and body’ in their learning of the course material. Simply put, they have the opportunity to learn about themselves and their relationships through engaging with course material in an introspective and experiential way. This integrated approach has many benefits including increased

self-awareness, improving their ability to stay within an optimal window of tolerance, crucial for students experiencing mental distress. A registered psychotherapist myself, I would be happy to share more with the working group and others involved in the decision-making process about the ways that the BPMH program contributes to students’ mental wellness.

The BPMH program is truly a community that provides students with a sense of belonging through numerous events throughout the year. The PATH program developed by BPMH students for peer-to-peer support is an outstanding example of students co-creating communities of care, mutual respect, and inclusion – important attributes for the well-being of individuals and society. The co-curricular events certainly contribute to the safe and inclusive nature of BPMH classrooms wherein students demonstrate an impressive degree of mutual warmth, generosity, and caring for one another. The BPMH program offers students who are struggling with their mental health a safe place of refuge, community, and learning.

The BPMH program has important relationships throughout the University of Toronto, including with Emmanuel College. A number of BPMH students are furthering their education in our programs, especially the Buddhism stream of our Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS)—soon to be Master of Psychospiritual Studies— program. These students come to Emmanuel particularly well-equipped for the vigorous nature of our programs. Our students go on to become registered psychotherapists in private or public practice, spiritual care clinicians in hospitals universities, prisons, and the military, and religious and spiritual leaders in their own communities.

Of course, much can be said about the ways that BPMH is an innovative, one-of-its-kind program at the forefront of contemplative studies and education. The BPMH program is currently a world leader in education that intentionally focuses on student flourishing, making the decision to end the program all the more confusing. I believe that a lot is at stake for our students, communities, and wider society if we do not support innovative programs that address the very real problems facing our world.

I sincerely hope that the decision to cancel the BPMH program is reversed, and that the program, along with its students, continues to grow and flourish.



Jennifer Bright



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
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Alex Djedovic (U of T)

Sessional Lecturer

Cognitive Science Program, University College
Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology Buddhism,
Psychology, and Mental Health Program, New College University of Toronto

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of the BPMH program at New College, and respectfully ask the relevant decision-making parties not to implement the recommendation that the program be shut down. I think that shutting down an interdisciplinary humanities program focused on mental health in the midst of a student mental health crisis is an instance of arbitrary, callous, unwise, and misinformed administrative overreach into the academic workings of the university. At the very least, this decision needs more transparent consultation with relevant stakeholders, including those of us who constitute the teaching staff of the program.

This is my first time teaching in the BPMH program, so while I cannot speak to the findings of the working group, I can share my thoughts and impressions on the BPMH program as it exists today. It strikes me as an important, existentially valuable avenue for interdisciplinarity in a university where such avenues are few and far between. I teach in a number of interdisciplinary contexts at the University of Toronto, and so have seen how important these avenues are for the intellectual development of curious, motivated, and creative students. The BPMH program is one such avenue, where students can wrestle with large ideas in a supportive and encouraging atmosphere that does not sacrifice academic rigor.

In my view, the review process indicate a serious misunderstanding of the disciplinary nature of the BPMH program. The external reviewers framed the BPMH program as primarily a psychology program; this is simply not the case. It is a program that engages with psychology, but draws on a wider disciplinary matrix that includes history, religious studies, and inter-cultural philosophy. Such a disciplinary context is rare but academically productive. It is somewhat surprising that the reviewers missed this central aspect of the program. I am happy to share course material from my own course, BPM232, "Buddhism and Psychology," which illustrates that psychology constitutes about 30% of the course content, and that the course framing is interdisciplinary, not bound to the norms of psychology as a discipline. As a cognitive scientist, I respect and draw on psychology extensively (some might say *too* extensively), but the concerns of the BPMH program begin where strict adherence to empirical findings ends. The reviewers' misunderstanding of this basic aspect of the BPMH program undermines much of the reasoning they adduce to support the recommendation that the program be shut down.

I have worked in two other interdisciplinary contexts in addition to the BPMH program: the Cognitive Science program and the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and technology. Both were threatened with shutdown at points, also on grounds that seriously misunderstood the disciplinary nature of these programs. In both cases, these threats were successfully resisted. Nowadays, these two programs are the fastest and second-fastest growing programs in the Faculty of Arts & Science. From my experience with teaching BPM 232, one of the introductory courses for the BPMH program, I see similar potential in the BPMH program: it is an interdisciplinary ground for profoundly meaningful encounters between science, philosophy, religion, mental health, and sapiential projects for our students.

In closing, I think it would be a serious mistake to shut down the BPMH program. New College should give serious and respectful thought to the kinds of values it embodies, and what sort of signal it sends to shut down an

interdisciplinary humanities program centered on mental health and well-being in the midst of a multifaceted mental health crisis.

Sincerely,

Dr. Alex Djedovic

Michel Ferrari (OISE)

13 December 2023

To Whom it may Concern,

I have been teaching in the Buddhist Psychology and Mental Health program since 2012 and was interim program director from November 2020 to June 2021. As interim director, I oversaw the BPMH self-study conducted at that time.

I am shocked to learn that the BPMH program is slated to be canceled, with no reason given and so no way to effectively protest this decision. As someone trained in both experimental and contemplative science and the range of methods that they allow, I am convinced that BPMH represents the cutting edge and future of research and learning in the social and health sciences. I say this because it engages such a wide range of methods, typically in a mixed-method design, that invite students to learn deeply by coordinating experiential learning with experimental and scholarly reasoning and evidence.

Allow me to illustrate this point with the example I know best, the course I teach in the program, BPM334 on Wisdom traditions: East and West. The aim of this course is to bring the contemporary science of wisdom—which uses a range of methods, from complex statistical analyses like structural equation modeling to interpretative qualitative methods like narrative analysis—into dialogue with historical and philosophical studies of Indigenous, Chinese, Dharmic and Abrahamic cultural traditions associated with wisdom. Scholarly understanding of these traditions uses a variety of methods (e.g., historical and semiotic analysis) to discern the meaning of historical texts as well as symbolic iconography associated with wisdom in these traditions. This has the advantage that students from a wide range of Arts and Science disciplines begin the course with expertise in some of these methods and something to learn from others throughout the semester. Students invariably comment on the expansiveness of the approach taken to study wisdom, and of the wide range of methods and evidence involved.

Beyond the scholarly exercise of understanding these wisdom traditions, however, students are invited to select a practice within one of these traditions (e.g., mindfulness meditation, stoic journaling of experience) and—in consultation with an expert they interview within it—to personally experiment with using it, to see what they discover. They are also invited to use an established method of autobiographical analysis to analyze their own autobiographical narrative to discover what it says about how they understand their lives. The point of both of these exercises is to investigate personal lived experience in a systematic and empirically rigorous way characteristic of scientific research but that remains deeply personal, and personally illuminating. Over the decade I have taught this course many students have told me that all these assignments were informative and sometimes even personally transformative, bringing to life ideas they had often read about and thought they understood, but now had a participatory understanding of that was deeper. Several of these students have also gone on to pursue graduate studies with me at OISE, making significant contributions to published research and practice themselves, including to counseling psychology and social work.

And my course is not alone in the program to integrate science and experience in this way. In fact, this integration of objective science and reflective personal experience is what makes this program unique among those I have been a part of at the University of Toronto, and an example to other programs around the world studying both social and contemplative science.

Honestly, I really cannot understand how the decision could have been made to cancel this program, when it really deserves to be supported and expanded, and I sincerely hope this decision can be reversed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michel Ferrari". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michel Ferrari, Ph.D.
Professor, Applied Psychology & Human Development
OISE
email: michel.ferrari@utoronto.ca

Amber Marie Moore (U of T)
University of Toronto
Dept. for the Study of Religion
November 20, 2023

Re: Buddhist, Psychology and Mental Health Program

Dear Principal Eyoh, Vice Principal Guerson, and Dr. Garrett,

Last week I was informed that the **BPMH** program with the New College may be shut down and am quite concerned and disheartened to hear about this possibility for a number of reasons. My primary concern is that there seemed to be a substantial and sincere interest and appreciation for the program from the side of many students, specifically Asian students, and students with whom I interacted with while teaching RLG376HI: Touching the Earth: Buddhist Relationships with the Environment (Fall 2021). Many BPMH students were taking my course at that time and I recall the wealth of positive feedback they had to share about their own positive experiences and the benefits of the program.

Several positive aspects I remember hearing of included improvement in their own mental health and wellbeing due to taking part in the program and praise for the opportunity to learn traditional Asian perspectives and the history of meditative practices being incorporated in the study of psychology and mental health. In fields of psychology that teach and conduct research on meditative practices like mindfulness, body scanning for emotional regulation in the psychotherapeutic setting, or the related fields of cognitive science, awareness, mental states or attention, there is a predisposition to divorce the study of meditation from the long history of these practices across Asia and to dislodge them from historical frameworks. In order to avoid the complete cultural misappropriation of these practices, it is therefore essential that anyone, (including psychologists) teaching or studying mindfulness and awareness methods in classrooms or treatment rooms, at least be aware of a modicum of cultural and historical contexts of these practices despite the various clinical approaches to their use within psychotherapeutic and medical communities. In addition to the significance of providing a context for teaching mindfulness in psychology, students shared an appreciation for the pedagogical approach of the program that foregrounded the improvement of their own mental health as an integral part of the learning process. This was a rare gem among courses in a university where emotional and mental overload leading to burnout and even suicide have unfortunately become not all that uncommon an occurrence. I can remember that many students at the time were feeling overburdened and stressed with their course loads and with the post Covid academic scene. They were tired of the desensitized and non-reflective nature of their other courses, stating that they found the BPMH program to be a welcome interdisciplinary opportunity that balanced their other courses.

The second issue I feel may have been overlooked by the working committee is that there have been some more recent curricular revisions and program developments, such as community engagement with Buddhists, Tibetans and other minority groups, a benefit to the student body that may have not been taken into consideration. The removal of this program will, without doubt, be a huge loss and step backwards for the community of students, scholars and instructors at U of T and New College and I urge those who are responsible for these decisions to think carefully and take students into consideration before deciding to discontinue this program.

I would therefore like to offer my full support of Professor Garrett in asking the deans to revisit the Working Group's recommendation to discontinue the BPMH program.

Sincere regards,



Amber Moore University of Toronto, Department for the Study of Religion, E-mail:
ambermarie.moore@utoronto.mail.ca

Carolina Patryluk (U of T)

Dear New College Principal Dickson Eyoh and New College VP Alexandra Guerson,

I am writing to you to express my enthusiastic support for the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH) program at New College. I am a recent hire as a Sessional Lecturer for *BPM336: The Art and Science of Wellbeing*.

As a psychology researcher specializing in wellbeing and self-realization, I cannot fully speak to the impact teaching this course has had on me these last few months. Instead, I will share some encounters I had with students from this class. I have received emails from students expressing their thanks for the content of the course, which I aim to be impactful, intuitive, and easy to follow along. One student came up to me after class, nearly in tears, to express her gratitude for the course. She called her Mondays, when we have class, her chance to “really be in the world.” I was surprised by and grateful for these words, as I try my best to provide lessons on wellbeing that are contextual and apply to the world we live in. One message that has become clearer to me in teaching this course, which is embedded within the BPMH program, is that wellbeing cannot be approached only by looking at individuals. Rather, wellbeing reflects the communities and larger systems to which we are all part of.

The BPMH department is a community of students, faculty, and staff that value global cohesion and sustainability. And even for students who will not pursue a social science degree, the opportunity to take courses such as BPM336 makes a significant difference in their lives. Departments like BPMH are what make the University of Toronto shine amongst other top-tier universities. The inclusion of these types of programs shows that UofT is with the times; one that is challenged by the complexities of an ever shifting, and globally interconnected world. To close this program would be to take a step backwards from progress. Really, more fundings should be allocated towards BPMH.

Please reconsider closing this program, that matters so much to this community. I can confidently share that I have found my voice in teaching this course, and more broadly within the BPMH program, as so many others also have.

Sincerely,

Carolina Patryluk



Political Science
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Tony Scott (U of T)

December 5th, 2023

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Tony Scott, Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Political Science, alumnus of the Department for the Study of Religion, and Course Instructor at the University of Toronto in Buddhist Studies. I have had the honour and pleasure of leading one such course for the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program (BPMH) at New College, *Histories of Buddhist Meditation*, during the 2022 Winter Semester.

I wish to write in support of the BPMH Program, which is facing cutbacks or possible closure, which I assert is a grave mistake. This decision was made after what appears to be minimal or no feedback with students or other community stakeholders, which should be enough to dismiss the recommendations to close this program outright. If the students had been consulted, it would be apparent that this program fills a critical need and space in the university around not just mental health, but decolonializing our campus and introducing students to the study of Buddhism who otherwise would not take up this subject. Please let me take these issues up one by one.

First, in terms of mental health, it cannot be denied that there has been a mental health crisis on campus for at least a decade now. Part of this crisis stems from an academic system that is mute in the face of the trauma that students experience on campus and off. Many classes in other programs gloss over this trauma and alienate students from their peers through zero-sum competition and coercive forms of education. These coercive forms of education do not value the knowledge or experience of students themselves, but rather approaches them as empty vessels to be filled by instructors. The classes in the BPMH Program, in contrast, are designed with trauma-aware pedagogy in mind, empowering the student in their learning trajectory. In my own class and from what I have heard from students in the program, the classes they took in BPMH were the first or even the *only* classes at the University of Toronto where they felt valued, where they felt they were more than just numbers, and where they were no longer isolated from their instructors and peers. This is not to say that the BPMH Program has all the answers, but to offer a reminder that the BPMH is one part of a larger solution to which the administration has committed itself. Closing such a program would be to take a significant leap back on mental health on campus, a slow and fraught process that will take multiple stakeholders in our community.

What the BPMH Program also does is to help students see the social and political factors that affect mental health in this society, which is a unique way to approach the study of Buddhism. In my own class, I discussed the history of Buddhist meditation not just in terms of theory or great men, but as a political development with social and economic factors. The result was that students had a holistic understanding of Buddhism, rather than reducing it to textual study or a mere philosophy. It is generally recognized that the overemphasis on texts and doctrine in the study of Buddhism is partly a colonial relic, the product of an academic discipline dominated by white male voices over the last two centuries. With this dominant narrative, Buddhism becomes depoliticized, disembodied, and objectified. By bringing the politics back into the study of Buddhism, by recognizing the importance of the body, and by valuing the subjectivity of the student, the BPMH Program is a critical and irreplaceable step in the decolonization of the study of Buddhism in the academy. This approach


might seem “weird” or “lacking in rigour” to those who recommended ending the program, but it is instead on the cutting edge of pedagogy, marginalized now but indicative of the future of education. A sanitized, purely objective, and positivistic image of Buddhism is merely a simulacrum of white supremacy, and it is only natural that a program which challenges such a simulacrum would engender hostility as it articulates and asserts itself in the university. I thus urge the administration not to reproduce this hostility in their policy.

Finally, it would be a major strategic mistake to assimilate the BPMH Program into the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR), in which I studied for almost a decade. Both programs have their irreducible strengths, but they fundamentally appeal to a different set of students and thus fill their own distinct niches. The BPMH Program pursues the study of Buddhism in conversation with psychology, social work, neuroscience, and other disciplines in the university that are not taken up by the DSR. Rolling the classes of the BPMH Program into the DSR would not increase enrollment in the DSR but reduce overall student engagement with Buddhism on campus. Indeed, the BPMH Program as is stimulates interest in Buddhism and the study of religion, thereby supplementing and ultimately supporting the activities of the DSR. To see the issue purely in terms of numbers—especially without consulting the students of the BPMH Program—is to miss the point that many students take up the BPMH Major precisely because it is not in the DSR, and vice versa. Each program represents distinct spheres that support each other and appeal to a different subset of the student body. There could be more integration and collaboration between the two programs, work that has been started by the current director, Frances Garrett, but closing one program to serve the other is not the answer. It is my opinion after teaching in both the BPMH Program and the DSR that closing the BPMH Program would only negatively impact the DSR in the long run, and hence the recommendations to axe this program are haplessly shortsighted and out of touch with the motivations of students in both the DSR and the BPMH Program.

In many ways, Buddhism is the vanguard of the twentieth-century university. It opens itself up to textual and philological study, as in the DSR, provides opportunities for chaplaincy and community work, as in Emmanuel College, but also sheds light on the problems of psychology, mental health, and politics, as in the BPMH. The University of Toronto is now recognized as a world leader in the study of Buddhism, in no small measure to the existence of these three different approaches in the same institution. Closing the BPMH Program would severely disrupt this progress and is lacking in any sense of vision or foresight for the University of Toronto in the coming years and decades. It is for these reasons I write to strongly dissuade you from following through with the proposed closure; instead, New College should redouble its commitment to this program and its students, both now and into the future, ensuring the University of Toronto becomes the epicenter for Buddhist Studies in North America and the English-speaking world.

Please write me if you have any further questions or concerns, I am happy to discuss this further in any forum necessary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tony Scott, Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow Department of
Political Science, University of Toronto 403-334-6184,
anthony.scott@utoronto.ca



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Henry Shiu (Emmanuel College)

Shi Wu De Professor in Chinese Buddhist Studies Emmanuel College

November 17, 2023

Frances Garrett
Associate Professor of Buddhist Studies and Tibetan Studies Department
for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

Dear Frances,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the recent decision to discontinue the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) program at New College, as recommended by a Working Group. It has come to my attention that this decision was based on an outdated pre-2020 understanding of the program and, notably, the Working Group lacked representatives with expertise in the relevant academic field. With my previous sessional employment at New College involved in teaching within the BPMH program, I wish to underscore its substantial academic and professional value.

The establishment of the BPMH program was a strategic response to the emerging nexus between Buddhist principles and contemporary psychological disciplines. The program's interdisciplinary approach, blending Buddhist psychology with ongoing developments in psychological and cognate disciplines, is accompanied by a robust research component. It emphasizes personal development and self-understanding, positioning the university at the forefront of a new and growing area of academic inquiry.

The recent surge in dialogue among scientists, academics, and health practitioners highlights the significant contributions of Buddhism to our understanding of physical and mental health. Supported by a growing body of scientific research, the efficacy of mindfulness meditation in alleviating medical and psychiatric illnesses is now well- documented. The BPMH program, by aligning with these contemporary developments, offers students a unique opportunity to engage with and contribute to this evolving field. It caters to the increasing interest among students in the intersection of Western psychology and Buddhist contemplative psychology. It offers a unique educational experience, providing students with exposure to a rapidly expanding field of study, unmatched by any other academic institution. The program not only equips students with comprehensive knowledge and skills but also focuses on personal growth and self- awareness. This holistic approach is particularly beneficial for students who may advance to the professional Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS) program at Emmanuel College, enhancing their career prospects and personal development.

Throughout my time teaching at New College, I have had the privilege of observing the transformative impact this program has had on its students, many of whom have achieved remarkable success in their subsequent careers. To name some of the remarkable examples, one of our alumni, Rory Lindsay, has attained the position of Assistant Professor in Buddhist Studies at

the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. Another distinguished graduate, Leah Stokes, now serves as the Anton Vonk Associate Professor of Environmental Politics in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara, recognized for her influential work in environmental politics and named an advocate on TIME100 Next and as one of Business Insider's top 30 global leaders working toward climate solutions. Additionally, Joseph Tse, another alumnus of the BPMH program, went on to complete his PhD in Clinical Psychology at the Washington State University and is currently making significant contributions in clinical research on ethnic and sexual minority groups.

Beyond these notable examples, many graduates have pursued advanced studies in our MPS program at Emmanuel College, eventually establishing successful careers as registered psychotherapists and Buddhist chaplains. This progression not only demonstrates the foundational role of the BPMH program in preparing students for advanced academic pursuits but also its pivotal contribution to the broader field of psychotherapy and spiritual care. Among the distinguished students in this group are Francis Man-Kit Lau and Daryna Skybina, both of them are registered psychotherapists with the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO) and are making significant contributions to the field of spiritually-integrated psychotherapy. Given these considerations, I respectfully urge a reevaluation of the decision to discontinue the BPMH program. It is imperative that any decision regarding its future be informed by an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the program's current curriculum and its impact on both our students and the wider community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henry Shiu', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Henry Shiu

Paul Whissell (U of T)

Department of Psychology
University of Toronto



I am writing this letter in response to the recent recommendation that the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health program begin preparations to shut down. Though I respect the effort that went into the report and value much of the recommendations given within, I feel that shutting the program down now is not the best course of action. It is my hope that this decision could be revisited. I feel the program has great strengths that exceed its current challenges. I feel it deserves a chance to grow if it is still possible.

I do not say this out of self-interest. As of 2024, I will no longer be a regular instructor in the program. I am assuming a new position with Psychology (CTLA, Teaching Stream) and am very happy to be going there. Though I am assuming a position elsewhere, I still see significant value in the BPMH program. I know how important it is to the student community.

There is a hunger for the type of training offered by a program, with several very popular courses being offered. The course for which I was formerly responsible, BPM335, had large sections (150 – 300 students) several times a year. Wait lists were long. I believe these courses are popular for their transdisciplinary nature. This is a defining feature of the BPMH – its courses integrate complex topics and offer substantive intellectual diversity. At the same time, the transdisciplinary nature of these courses also makes them ill-suited to other academic units with different goals and resources. If the program were to close, I am concerned that many of these courses would go extinct. Student need for these types of experiences would then go unsatisfied.

I recognize the program has areas to improve and I thank the reviewers for insights provided. The review did highlight many productive avenues of development that correspond (to my understanding) with the goals of the BPMH program. However, there was not much time to act on them. The shutdown recommendation comes rather soon after the review. Building research programs, developing tracks, hiring long-term faculty, and forming relationships with other units like Psychology, as suggested, are all excellent ideas. But accomplishing these objectives take time. The unit needed to grow to a point where such goals were within reach.

I feel the unit is approaching that point now. The new director (Frances Garrett) and acting director (Eleanor Weisbaum) have jointly articulated a clear vision for the program and have pushed it with enthusiasm. A lot has changed about the program in a short time. Were it not for the interruption of COVID-19 (from 2019 – 2021), there would have been many more significant changes. I feel that, given time, a lot of what is suggested will happen, perhaps even more.

I recognize that situations like these are difficult and not made lightly. Thank you for your time and consideration. Wish you the best in the process.

Paul Whissell (paul.whissell@utoronto.ca, 647-454-2496)

Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Programs of Human Biology; Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health; New One, University of Toronto (2023)

Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto (beginning in 2024)

V-2. Letters from U of T academics and staff outside BPMH

Lauren Brown (OISE)

From: Lauren Brown laurenalexandrabrown@gmail.com
Subject: In support of the BPMH program
Date: November 26, 2023 at 8:03 AM
To: frances.garrett@utoronto.ca

LB

Dear Frances, my name is Lauren Brown and I am a PhD candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and a staff member at the Multi-Faith Centre. Several students that I mentor at the Multi-Faith Centre brought the potential closure of the BPMH program to my attention and I was stunned to hear this news. For the past six years I have worked in the Division of Student Life planning and facilitating the mindfulness programming for students. During this 9me, I have seen the student engagement in this programming more than triple. Last year we saw roughly 6,000 student visits to this programming. I believe your registration has grown exponentially during this same time which makes this proposal even more perplexing. In fact, it was faculty from your program that were instrumental in getting the Mindful Moments program that I oversee off the ground. To the best of my understanding, it was Tony Toneatto and John Vervaeke along with Dr. Brenda Toner and Janine Robb, the Director of Health & Wellness that were part of the steering committee that launched and oversaw the first few years of Mindful Moments. Your faculty has continued to play a significant role in the co-curricular lives of students by speaking at our events. Each week I meet students who are engaged in the BPMH minor, and they speak of how life changing their learning has been. Students are seeking out this knowledge for many reasons, not the least of which is to support their mental health, and the mental health and wellbeing of the peers, their family and their coworkers. The University's support of mindfulness was even noted in the Presidential and Provostial Response to the Task Force on Student Mental Health in December of 2019.

I was recently debriefed by a student leader from the BPMH program who stated that one of the concerns cited by the Principal was that high faculty turnover. I found this interesting given my understanding that some of your previous faculty retired or took promotions within the institution. I was also reflecting on the fact that those previous faculty were largely men, and as they were replaced by women the program has now come under threat. Through an education lens, there is no denying that the academy has and continues to be a gendered arena, and I wonder if and how this may have influenced the committee and the Faculty. I am also aware that over the years the department has had to rely on sessional instructors who also turn over as more lucrative permanent opportunities arise. As such I believe there is more to be considered here. The student was also given an argument that there is no research funding for this field. Here too I had to pause as gender can be a barrier to entry and progress within the academy and also influences where grant money goes.

It should be clear to all that giving students the religious historical context is essential to ensuring an ethical engagement with Buddhist philosophy and wisdom in order to offset

the risk of culturally appropriating Eastern spiritual traditions. The Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health program stands above all others on campus and beyond when it comes to rising to this ethical responsibility. We cannot simply situate mindfulness studies within Western medical model and the BPMH program stands as an assurance to this. In these complex times, as we situate ourselves in the ongoing mental health crisis impacting young adults, the BPMH program brings these truths to light for the next generation of practitioners and researchers.

Lauren A. Brown,

M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate, [Inlight Fellow](#)

Richard Chambers (U of T)

December 3, 2023

Prof. Frances Garrett

Associate Professor, Dept for the Study of Religion University
of Toronto

Dear Prof. Garrett,

I am disturbed to learn that the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) minor programme may be suspended by the University of Toronto as of Jan 31, 2024. Considering the absolute boom in contemplative mediative studies at all levels of our educational systems, this seems extremely short sighted. From the application and integration of learnings from contemplative science in the curriculum of dozens of public school boards across Ontario to the significant uptake in graduate studies both in mindfulness psychology at OISE and elsewhere, fueled by BPMH undergraduates, the axing of a popular undergraduate programme that distinguishes U of T in the field seems completely out of step with the wider work and reality of the academy.

My own interaction with the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health programme spanned several years in my capacity as the Director of the Multi-Faith Centre for Spiritual Study and Practice at U of T. In addition to actual classroom work Professors in the programme provided significant research and learning opportunities through the co-curricular programmes of the Centre. One only needs to think of the symposium by the Dalia Lama sponsored by BPMH at the Centre in 2010 and the subsequent symposiums by further luminaries such as Khenpo Sodargye that have contributed to outstanding opportunities for undergraduate students and indeed the entire learning community at U of T to appreciate the contribution of the BPMH programme.

Just one of the many unique features of the programme was the annual publication of an engaging undergraduate journal, providing an important educational process and platform for critical discussion and reflection. I have included a picture of the journal being presented to the Dalai Lama by the then President of the BPMH Student Union.

Finally, from my own graduate studies at Harvard University I appreciate that professors *and* student leaders from the BPHM programme have not only provided outstanding leadership in the field of psychology over the years, but due to the crossover with religion, have contributed to understanding, learnings and skills as to how to negotiate religious diversity and foster religious literacy in a secular society. A critical skill for the continuing development of healthy Canadian social cohesion.

I sincerely hope the current decision will be reversed.

Sincerely,

Richard G. Chambers, M.Div., M.Th.

Director (retired), Multi-Faith Centre for Spiritual Study and Practice, University of Toronto

cc. President Gertler



President of Buddhist Psychology Mental Health Student Union presents copy of BPMH Journal to Dalai Lama. October, 2010, Multi-Faith Centre, University of Toronto



Norman Farb (U of T)

Prof. Frances Garrett
Department for the Study of Religion
Director, Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program
University of Toronto

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Dear Prof. Garrett,

I am writing today in strong support of the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program (BPMH) at University of Toronto. I am writing with the understanding that this letter may be shared with the administration as a message of support for the BPMH. I was surprised and disappointed to learn from you yesterday that a Dean's working group had recommended that the program be disbanded. To me, the program represents much of what makes the University of Toronto a special place for undergraduate study. The BPMH is one of the jewels that makes UofT a unique place for undergraduate study. It is one of a few truly interdisciplinary programs, integrating experiential learning, empirical research, rich theoretical traditions from both east and west, situating this conversation within a historical context that affords students a unique understanding of their own human potential. I wish to make two arguments in support of the BPMH on two fronts: first, the impact this program has on students and the university community, and second, the rich potential for such training in a larger disciplinary context- the growing field of contemplative studies and cognitive science as emerging disciplines on the world stage.

1. The BPMH Makes a Positive Difference to Student Wellbeing

Canvassing the socioemotional landscape at the University of Toronto, shelving a program like BPMH sends a negative message to the student body. Despite widespread promises from the higher administration to support student mental health, the substantive efforts by UofT to support student wellbeing are primarily limited to chatbots and a substantial investment in increasing clinical services, which, while laudatory, serve only to help students once they are already in crisis- these investments do almost nothing to support student resilience and foster a sense of wellbeing, community, and growing emotional maturity that are needed in the critical period of young adult development that coincides with undergraduate studies. In fact, if one searches the University of Toronto websites for any substantive *content* to promote student wellbeing, by far the most prominent and positive exemplar is your own *Windvane* project, a rich expression of the BPMH approach to engage experts from around the university community to come together and speak directly to students about how to better understand their own minds, and furthermore to cultivate positive qualities as they move into adulthood. What message does it send to shut down one of the only programs dedicated to improving students understanding of wellbeing and flourishing?

To be clear, traditional social science programs offer students conceptual knowledge and empirical research skills but are not dedicated to integrating an experiential perspective in these efforts, despite strong calls from the administration to increase experiential learning for our students. Why such learning

would then be curtailed rather than being used as an inspiration for other departments is a mystery to me. It is precisely in the investigation of how academic theories and experiential practices intersect that the

most important type of synthesis is possible- that in which a student takes an abstract idea or principle and learns to make part of their own life story.

To me, personal growth and social integration is what the BPMH has represented to countless students. It has offered them a means by which to find and engage with a vibrant university community in a time of isolation. This engagement is evidenced by the many and varied events hosted by the BPMH, including meditation/yoga workshops, launches of popular and topical trade books, speaker series, and international partnerships to host contemplative podcasts. The BPMH has led constructive speaker series on decolonization, minority stress, and self-directed growth, showing rather than just telling students that we care about them and their development.

I suppose the question I am left with is: “what other programs on campus actually seek to leverage academic research and inquiry to improve the lives of our students?” I can’t think of many. What other programs provide a sense of inclusivity and belonging? As an open minor program, this program is open to students from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Finally, I wonder what other programs help students to integrate knowledge across academic silos to engender new ideas and collaborations? Again, the BPMH is unique in urging students to respect different epistemologies as they negotiate their own.

2. Contemplative Science is a Growing and Influential Discipline

From a “where can we save a few dollars” perspective, I can perhaps see where an administrative working group would think that this program stands out as incongruous to business-as-usual at the university. However, I would suggest that this perspective does not recognize the growing prominence of contemplative science on the world stage. The formal study of meditation, yoga, and other alternative studies have grown exponentially in the past two decades. Such research is no longer considered ‘fringe’ or ‘frivolous’; my own research on the neural and cognitive mechanisms of mindfulness meditation has been continuously funded by NSERC in helping us understand basic neural mechanisms of attention, interoception, and the body’s role in informing emotion and the sense of wellbeing.

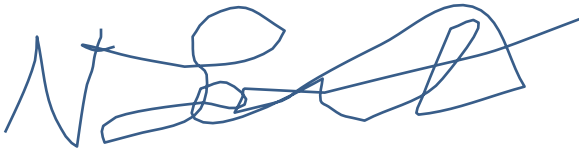
In a similar vein, the National Institute of Health in the USA has placed increasing emphasis on contemplative studies, rebranding their ‘alternative medicine’ institute as the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, with major funding opportunities in other health institutes, especially in chronic pain and addiction, huge social challenges that require innovative solutions. Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy, which has roots in collaborations between UofT and Oxford, now has meta-analytic evidence in one of the highest medical journals (JAMA) that it is superior to other forms of therapy in preventing relapse in depression disorders. Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement has shown even more recent success in helping people to recover from substance-use disorders, again published in the highest journals. In the private sector, apps like *Headspace* or *Calm* are the most successful mental health apps in the marketplace, followed closely by a new wave of evidence-based, therapeutic applications such as *Unwinding Anxiety*. There is clear commercial interest in people who show mastery in the ‘technologies of self’ that the BPMH offers.

We are still suffering from the prescription painkiller epidemic; we are suffering from a new wave of languishing, depression, and anxiety. These problems require novel, integrative solutions. Even the looming integration of psychedelic drugs as a new pharmaceutical intervention in mainstream medicine is going to require a particular set of skills that link psychological theory to evidence-based practice, and the BPMH provides a foundation from which a new generation of thought-leaders in these and related fields to emerge.

So, while there may be a short-term savings in cutting the program, from a more long-term, “return on investment” perspective, it is hard to think of better value for your dollar. The modern cognitive science movement, which has given birth to artificial intelligence, systems neuroscience, and the novel philosophies of our time has come from precisely this sort of interdisciplinary engagement between ‘cognate’ disciplines that is afforded by the BPMH. I imagine the cost of this program is far less than running resource intensive computing or medical training programs. It provides students with a chance to develop virtues in addition to acquiring knowledge; it gives students an opportunity to cultivate community and a sense of belonging. It makes a lasting difference and improves the university’s reputation.

In the broader view, *the BPMH is one of the most valuable and unique learning opportunities at the University of Toronto*. We must not shy away from the unconventional when our conventional approaches leave large gaps in the student experience. I hope that this letter provides a strong rationale for why we must keep and encourage the growth of the BPMH and similar programs. I would be happy to speak directly to any interested members of the university community about this point of view, or to provide more academic references around my claims of the impact of this emerging contemplative science discipline.

Best regards,
Norman Farb,
Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Norman Farb', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Associate Professor
Department of
Psychology
University of Toronto Mississauga
Email: norman.farb@utoronto.ca



HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Pamela McCarroll (Emmanuel College)

17 November 2023

Dear Professor Garrett, Principal Eyoh and Vice Principal Guerson,

We are writing to express our profound distress over the recent announcement of the recommended closure of the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) program at New College. We have become familiar with the program primarily through its graduates who have pursued master-level professional education in our MPS (Buddhism), Spiritual Care & Psychotherapy program that stands at the intersections of Buddhism, psychology, spirituality and psychotherapy. Since its inception in 2015, our MPS, SCP Cert (Buddhism) degree has welcomed many graduates from the BPMH program. These students stand out within our student body as they enter with a profound hunger for learning, strong skills for in self- awareness and self-regulation, insightful capacity to integrate cognitive science and Buddhist thought into their reflections, analysis and practice and a yearning to transform their learning to serve justice and care in the world through the practice of psychotherapy. In fact, this coming week we look forward to hosting almost thirty present BPMH students who are interested in further studies in our MPS (Buddhism), Spiritual Care & Psychotherapy program.

Several graduates of the BPMH and MPS program stand out as emerging leaders in the area of Buddhist spiritually-integrated psychotherapy as practitioners. They have become registered psychotherapists in the province of Ontario (CRPO) and serve the mental health needs of many populations. One now serves at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) supporting the wellness and healing of in- patients and leading the innovative integration of psychospiritual practice into the ethos. Others serve within different healthcare and community-based settings such as Unity Health, Scarborough Health network, campus wellness programs, and community health centres. Several others are featured in Psychology Today and have opened private practices and offer spiritually-integrated psychotherapy for the public. In every case, the BPMH program has awakened them to vocations that serve healing and mental well-being. The legacy of the BPMH program is not only that it supports mental well-being of students when they are in the program, it also has ripple effects that reach out through graduates of the program to build mental, spiritual and emotional well- being in the public at large. We urge you, for the sake of future generations of students and for the ways they might be inspired toward vocations of justice and care, to not close the BPMH program.

We have also become familiar with the BPMH program through emerging relationships with colleagues who teach there and whose expertise and leadership we have drawn on in the formation of our master level program. In fact, one of the regular teachers is, herself, a graduate of our MPS program and of the DSR PhD program, and now also serves as a teacher for us. Another of our faculty previously served as a professor within

the BPMH program. These are both dynamic and creative teachers who have much to offer for our programs and for the BPMH program. We have been working toward deepening the institutional relationship between Emmanuel College (Victoria University) and the BPMH program at New College beyond the yearly co-sponsored Forum on Buddhism and Well Being. Our hope is to develop a close partnership in terms of sharing faculty resource and course offering and strengthen a more direct link between the BPMH program and our MPS degree for the sake of our students' enhanced learning and assisting their career.

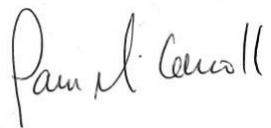
Our understanding from alumni and colleagues connected with the program is that the review was conducted by a Working Group made up of representatives unfamiliar with the program or its academic field. Further, we understand that no students or faculty were consulted in the review process nor was the most up-to-date material utilized for the assessment. Consequently, the Working Group Report includes inaccuracies and errors about the program. Given these realities and the flawed process, combined with the overwhelming support and enthusiasm for the program from many quarters and constituencies, we urge the powers that be to overturn this recommendation and, instead, to work toward building up this innovative interdisciplinary program. It is not an overstatement to say that the BPMH program reflects the very best of what universities might hope to offer for the living of these days. It is a model of higher education that should be celebrated and encouraged rather than negated.

As you are certainly aware, mental health issues are on the rise among students, and the University of Toronto is failing them. The BPMH program is like an oasis in dry land of the U of T campus. The idea of closing the program seems to make the problem worse and would mean the loss of something precious.

We strongly urge re-consideration of the recommendation of the Working Group and we are prepared to offer whatever support we can to continue to build this important program within the University of Toronto.

Sincerely,

HyeRan Kim-
Cragg
Principal
Timothy Eaton Memorial Church Professor of Preaching



Pamela
McCarroll
Vice
Principal
Jane & Geoffry Martin Chair of Practical Theology



Study of Religion
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Rory Lindsay (U of T)

March 26, 2024

Dear Professor Eyoh, Professor Guerson, Professor Boyagoda, and Professor Garrett,

I am writing to express my concern about the decision to end New College's Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program. I had assumed this decision would be quickly reversed given the initial outcry and strong support for the program's preservation, yet I have not received any confirmation of this. This prompts me to reach out to emphasize the importance of this program for New College and for the University of Toronto, and to inquire about the status of the program.

When I was an undergraduate student at U of T specializing in Asian religions, I had the privilege of enrolling in Dr. Tony Toneatto's course NEW403H1 The Healing Mind: Theories and Applications of Buddhist Psychology. This course was offered in the winter semester of 2005 before the BPMH program was created, though it was in part due to the success of this course that the BPMH minor was established. This extraordinary class, coupled with my studies with Professor Garrett, opened my mind to new ways of approaching Buddhist studies. The following year, when I began my master's degree at U of T, I was invited to assist Dr. Toneatto and Professor Garrett in organizing a major conference on Buddhism and psychology, which we titled Exploring the Mind. During this multiday event, experts from across U of T and from other major universities convened to share their insights on the integration of Buddhist traditions with psychological methods. This conference confirmed the deep interest that existed at that time in this emergent area of study, and it galvanized my own commitment to Buddhist studies as an academic discipline.

Since news of the possible closure of the BPMH program emerged, numerous academics and students have written in support of saving the program. You can see the remarkable outpouring of support here: <https://pathuoft.net/program-support-dossier/>. Also, many of the students in my courses on Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism have been enrolled in the BPMH minor. They all have expressed their shock and upset about the potential closure of the program. One student told me just last week that she wishes it were a major rather than a minor. The support for the program is clear, and I respectfully urge you to reconsider your decision to terminate it.

Sincerely,

Rory Lindsay
Assistant Professor
Department for the Study of Religion
Faculty of Arts and Science
University of Toronto (617) 800-
5755 rory.lindsay@utoronto.ca

John (Jack) Miller (OISE)

From: John Miller j.miller@utoronto.ca

FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

Jackman Humanities Building, 170 St. George Street, Toronto ON M5R 2M8 Canada

Tel: +1 416 978-2395 • Fax: +1 416 978-1610 • www.religion.utoronto.ca



Subject: BPMP

Date: November 16, 2023 at 11:20 AM

To: Frances Garrett frances.garrett@utoronto.ca, Dickson Eyoh dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca, Alexandra Guerson De Oliveira alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca

Dear Professors Garrett, Eyoh and Guerson:

I have learned that a committee has recommended the closure of the Buddhist, Psychology and Mental Health program. I strongly oppose the closure of this program at a time when student mental health is severely challenged. I have read the letter that Professor Garrett has made in support of the program dated Nov. 14th. This letter makes an excellent case for retaining the BPMP. I have known Professor Garrett for many years and have the highest regard for her work and leadership of the program.

Sincerely,

John (Jack) Miller
Professor
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. W.
Toronto, ON M5S
1V6
j.miller@utoronto.ca

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_P._Miller_\(educator\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_P._Miller_(educator))

<https://www.amazon.com/author/miller>

<https://www.scipod.global/professor-john-p-miller-the-importance-of-compassion-and-compromise-in-healthy-society/>



Psychological Clinical Science
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Zindel V. Segal (U of T)

Thursday, January 4, 2024

Frances Garrett, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department for the Study of Religion Director,
Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health Program University of
Toronto

Dear Dr. Garrett,

I am writing to offer my unqualified support for the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health Program here at the University of Toronto. My vantage point as both a clinical researcher and meditation teacher provides me with a unique perspective on the value of your curriculum and history of student engagement. My own work in studying the efficacy of mindfulness meditation for relapse prophylaxis in Major Depressive Disorder occurred nearly 30 years ago and required the steady accumulation of clinical outcomes from randomized controlled trials to convince a skeptical (justifiably so) scientific community of the benefits of meditative practice for people managing depression. Since then, these types of agentic behavioral health practices have gained robust worldwide empirical support and have been of benefit to many.

The importance of this work is that it bridges domains that rarely have much crosstalk – clinical psychiatry and contemplative practice. One can develop an expertise in either, but apart from a few satellite centers throughout the world, they remain siloed sets of expertise. The BPMH program is a shining example that offers students two rare educational opportunities. The first leverages experiential learning to understand the value of meditative and compassion practices for their own lives and circumstances. The second allows them to extend this knowledge beyond themselves and understand how it can be scaled in a mental health context. Not only is this type of learning sorely needed on university campuses, but equally, more broadly as supports for the high prevalence of mental health disorders. The fact that BPMH has taught hundreds of students is ample evidence of the interest in and dedication to this type of integrated learning.

To take a wider view, it seems to me that more, rather than fewer, programs like BPMH studies are needed. That is precisely why the prospect of its discontinuation is so troubling. It is also puzzling that with The University of Toronto having, established itself as a centre of excellence for contemplative studies - ranging from neuroscience, clinical science and the humanities – would act in a way that could diminish its standing in this regard.

My hope is that through the concerted support of constituencies who have benefited from their participation in BPMH studies, along with those who are ideologically supportive of its mission, the administration will come to realize how valuable, necessary and timely this program has come to be. I would be happy to have any the administration get in touch with me if can provide further context to support the important work you are engaged in.

Sincerely,



Zindel V. Segal, Ph.D., C.Psych.
Distinguished Professor of Psychology in Mood Disorders Graduate
Department of Psychological Clinical Science University of Toronto -
Scarborough

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1A4 CANADA
Phone: 416-208-2231
Email: zindel.segal@utoronto.ca
<https://betterineverysense.com/>

Kunga Sherab (U of T)

From: Kunga Sherab khenpokunga.sherab@utoronto.ca

Subject: Request for Reconsideration of the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health

Date: November 21, 2023 at 5:04 PM

To: Frances Garrett frances.garrett@utoronto.ca, Dickson Eyoh dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca, Alexandra Guerson De Oliveira alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca

KS

Dear Professor Garrett, Principal Dickson and VP Guerson,

I recently heard that the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program is going to be shut down, and I wanted to express my surprise and disappointment. As a new college Senior Doctoral Fellow, I can attest to the tremendous benefits this program has provided not only for me but also for other students. As a Buddhist scholar, I have found the program at New College to be exceptional. Moreover, considering the challenging times we are currently facing due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is crucial to prioritize our students' mental health. You certainly don't need to be reminded that, having served as Buddha's chaplain in many Canadian prisons and at U of T, I have witnessed firsthand that many of our students' mental health struggles surpass those experienced in prison settings. Discontinuing such a program sends the wrong message and misses an opportunity to address these pressing issues. Instead, I strongly believe that we should be expanding programs that focus on improving our students' mental health and education. It is essential that we combat this problem rather than simply disregarding it. I kindly request that you reconsider the decision to shut down the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program. Its continued existence and growth would greatly contribute to our students' well-being and overall education. Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my concerns.

Sincerely,

Khenpo Kunga Sherab

Buddhist chaplain with a Ph.D. affiliated with the University of Toronto and Bridge of Canada.

Franklin Tall (U of T)

From: Franklin Tall f.tall@utoronto.ca

Subject: Proposed closure of Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program

Date: November 27, 2023 at 11:01 AM

To: Dickson Eyoh dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca, Alexandra Guerson De Oliveira alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca

Cc: Jeffrey Newman jeff.newman@utoronto.ca, Frances Garrett frances.garrett@utoronto.ca, Ng, Chris wisdom.tor@rogers.com



Dear colleagues,

Along with Professor Frances Garrett and Ms. Chris Ng of the Buddhist Education Foundation, I drafted the original proposal for a Buddhist Studies Centre at the University of Toronto. We gathered wide faculty support but were met with a lukewarm reception by the University administration. However, thanks to Ms. Ng's fundraising prowess and strong student and community support, the Centre was established and is flourishing. A related project was the establishment of the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program at New College. This too has flourished, with enthusiastic student support, but its finances have been shaky, although it has also enjoyed substantial contributions from the Buddhist Education Foundation.

Students and faculty were shocked by the decision *without consultation* to close the program, despite a favourable external review and large waiting lists of students wanting to enroll. It is not entirely clear why it was closed; if finances - and hence the lack of permanent staff - were the problem, one solution would be to start a fundraising campaign. The amazing Arbor Awardee Ms. Ng also raised money for a position in Buddhism at Emmanuel College and probably could be convinced to lead such a campaign. However, the University of Toronto has plenty of money so need not depend on her.

There has been a proliferation of EDI programs and mental health initiatives at UofT in recent years. Diversity is not limited to Aboriginal, Black, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals. The non-Abrahamic religions were not well-represented historically as objects of study at the University – the Centre has partially changed that. Considering the huge percentages of South and East Asian students at UofT, there is considerable room for improvement from an EDI perspective. Non-Western approaches to mental health are also poorly represented here. We have no counterpart of e.g. the University of Wisconsin's *Center for Healthy Minds*. I'd like to see such a Centre here.

The relationship between BPMH and the Department for the Study of Religion should certainly be up for discussion. One could also raise questions about where in the University non-Western, non-Buddhist practices relating to mental health could or should be studied. But aside from appointing permanent faculty, Western wisdom has some pertinent advice concerning BPMH: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!".

In sum, pay attention to the many students and faculty who have written in support of BPMH. Breathe in, focusing your minds on ways to support and improve it; breathe out the negative emotions some of you may have attached to BPMH. As my teacher, John Grinder, used to say, "You can have anything you want in this world as long as you are prepared to pay ... attention!"

Sincerely, Franklin D. Tall
Prof. Em., Dept. of Mathematics

Michelle Voss (Emmanuel College)

From: Michelle Voss michelle.voss@utoronto.ca
Subject: In support of BPMH
Date: December 20, 2023 at 5:00 PM
To: Frances Garrett frances.garrett@utoronto.ca



Dear Frances,

I am rather belated in sending my heartfelt support for the Buddhist Psychology and Mental Health program at UofT. As you know, I oversaw the consolidation of Emmanuel College's multifaith programs in psychospiritual care. When I came on board in 2018, our Buddhist focus was only three years old. The program has proven to be one of our most populated programs, and many of our stellar students came to us from the BPMH.

I take from this a couple of lessons. One is that what you are doing at the BPMH program is innovative: it creates a pathway of preparation for those seeking to practice spiritually integrated psychotherapy by drawing on Buddhist wisdom traditions. A second is that your program meets the needs of a growing segment of the Canadian population. We have seen students from diverse cultural backgrounds make the transition from your program into this professional path. BPMH is capacious enough to invite people who are culturally Buddhist (often from East Asia), those from Western cultures who are interested in Buddhism or who have become practitioners, and the rapidly expanding section of society who might identify as "spiritual but not religious." The program gives people the language, frameworks, and practices to navigate a world in which no one religious tradition dominates, but in which a strict secularism is not enough. These students are transforming society to be more peaceful and inclusive, and I think this deserves the ongoing support of the University.

With best wishes for your continued work,
Michelle

Michelle Voss

Make and manage appointments with me [here](#).

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY and PAST PRINCIPAL, EMMANUEL COLLEGE

EMMANUEL COLLEGE OF VICTORIA UNIVERSITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO 75 QUEEN'S PARK CRESCENT TORONTO, ON M5S 1K7

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[A](#)

Explore Emmanuel [h3ps://bit.ly/exploremmanuel](https://bit.ly/exploremmanuel)

V-3. Letters from Canadian academics outside U of T

Wendi L. Adamek (University of Calgary)

To: Program Director Frances Garrett, Principal of New College, and Vice Deans of Undergraduate Programs,
University of Toronto

Jan. 13, 2024

Dear Fellow Educators,

I was shocked to hear that the University of Toronto's New College Minor in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health has been suspended without consultation or evidence-based rationale. The documented quantitative and qualitative success of the program would seem to make it a leader in the field of academic adaptation and innovation. Here at the University of Calgary we are being urged to partner with colleagues in various health and mental health programs and faculties. Shutting down a highly successful program at the University of Toronto sends a message to all Canadian tertiary education institutions that is confusing at best, and further erodes faculty confidence in tertiary education management integrity and expertise. The University of Toronto is looked to as a leader in Canadian higher education, and a decision such as this erodes the university's reputation and standing.

Yes, we live in an era in which the humanities and arts are under pressure or threats of closure at many institutions, often with unsubstantiated (and ideological) claims of lack of economic value to society. My appeal in the face of inevitable uncertainty in this pivotal time of human evolution is that we need to remember our commitments to higher education as support for an informed citizenry. We need to pull together to uphold ideals of the diversity of values, beliefs and practices in the face of inevitable challenges.

I feel that what unites me with fellow scholars in the humanities, arts, and sciences is that we have spent our lives delving into a huge variety of expressions of how humans have paid attention to each other, to other species, and to our lived worlds, our cultural and environmental matrices. Even if that attention is often very far from benign, it is up to us to provide research that tries to consider each facet, each perspective and counter-perspective, on its own terms. The program in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health would seem to represent an ideal intersection of research and teaching that provides care for student needs at the same time that it provides diversity in education. When I am in a classroom, it is the "diffractions" of intersecting differences that I see as the great strength and resilience of our students, and their unique individual potentials. Often, they are not "well." How could they be, given the world they are facing? But they need all of the differential qualities and kinds of attention that we have it in us to give, and to receive.

Thank you for your attention, and I hope that the University of Toronto New College will reconsider this decision.

Wendi Adamek



Professor Wendi L. Adamek
Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies
Dept. of Classics and Religion
University of Calgary

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Pronouns: She/her, they/them. I support use of non-binary terms and concepts, and I support efforts to include the voices and concerns of non-humans in our thoughts and discourses.

I acknowledge and pay tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). Calgary and its environs is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Districts 5 and 6. I invite and honor the spirits of their ancestors, and accept my responsibility to care for the life of their land, sky, water, and air. I honor the teachings of my birthplace: "Ua Mau ke Ea o ka 'Āina i ka Pono."

Sharday Mosurinjohn (Queen's University)

From: Sharday Mosurinjohn <sharday.mosurinjohn@queensu.ca>
Subject: Letter of Support for University of Toronto's Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Minor
Date: January 17, 2024 at 10:38:08 AM AST
To: "frances.garrett@utoronto.ca" <frances.garrett@utoronto.ca>

Program Director Frances Garrett,
Principal of New College, and Vice Deans of Undergraduate Programs

Dear Dr. Garrett,

I am writing with support for the BPMH program for two reasons. The first is because I deeply appreciate the existence of a program dedicated to these ideas and practices and lifeways that, if taken seriously, stand to heal some of the damage wrought by the culture, society, and psychology of alienation that has led to earthly life standing at the existential brink. The second is a sub-item of that larger reason, which is that as part of this damage, some hurting kids who grew up to be politicians like Mr. Ford and the people who voted for him because they saw in him their own pain, are tearing down the education system, and therefore our culture of remembering and bearing forward the growth of our ancestors. My own university is experiencing this horror show currently, as are, or will, many others. I appreciate your effort to let us find ways to stand up together for what makes life more alive, instead of what, like these lashings out at institutions of learning, tramples down the interconnections that sustain us all.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sharday Mosurinjohn
Associate Professor
Graduate Chair
School of Religion
Queen's University,
407 Theological Hall
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6

Queen's University is situated on traditional [Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Territory](#)

Jason Neelis (Wilfrid Laurier University)

From: Jason Neelis <jneelis@wlu.ca>

Subject: Support for Undergraduate Minor in Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health

Date: January 13, 2024 at 6:45:51 PM AST

To: "frances.garrett@utoronto.ca" <frances.garrett@utoronto.ca>

Cc: "dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca" <dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca>, "alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca" <alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca>, "randy.boyagoda@utoronto.ca" <randy.boyagoda@utoronto.ca>

Dear Program Director Frances Garrett, Principal of New College, and Vice Deans of Undergraduate Programs,

I am writing to express support for New College's undergraduate minor in Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health. I would like to encourage administrators at the University of Toronto to carefully consider the merits of this undergraduate program, which contributes to institutional strengths in the field of Buddhist Studies. Although I am more familiar with the graduate programs as an Associate Graduate Faculty member in the Graduate Department for the Study of Religion, I am in solidarity with students and faculty colleagues at the University of Toronto who argue that this program is worthy of preserving and sustaining. As a former Chair of the Religion and Culture Department at Wilfrid Laurier University, I understand that there may be administrative reasons for allocating resources from struggling programs to other units. I hope that arguments for continuing to support this successful and apparently popular undergraduate program take the stellar reputation of the University of Toronto's Ho Centre for Buddhist Studies into account, since there is a symbiotic relationship between undergraduate instruction, graduate advising, and research excellence.

With regards,

Dr. Jason Neelis
Associate Professor (currently on Sabbatical in 2023-2024)
Religion and Culture Department
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, Ontario

Associate Graduate Faculty
Graduate Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa

Faculté des arts

École des sciences de l'information

University of Ottawa

Faculty of Arts

School of Information Studies

André Vellino (University of Ottawa)

To: Frances Garrett, Associate Professor,
Dept for the Study of Religion,
Director Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health Program

Subject: Letter of Support for the BPMH Program

4 December 2023

Dear Dr. Garrett,

I am writing on behalf of the Academy for Mindfulness and Contemplative Studies at the University of Ottawa to express our strong support for the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH) program at the University of Toronto, (which, I might add, is my own Alma Mater).

As you may know 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.

<https://catalogue.uottawa.ca/en/undergrad/microprogram-contemplative-studies-well-being/>

I have no doubt that this microprogram resonates well with the goals of the BPMH program. Indeed our own program was modeled after several such programs in the United States including those at Amherst College (The Mind and Life Institute), Brown University (Contemplative Studies Initiative) UCLA, (Mindful Awareness Research Center) Harvard University (Mind/Brain/Behavior Interfaculty Initiative) to name just a few.

I think the BPMH program contributes significantly to the field of Contemplative Studies in North America by fostering an understanding of human consciousness, self-awareness, and the interplay between contemplative practices and mental health. Such contributions are not only academically valuable but also have profound implications for societal well-being. Between the growing social and psychological consequences of the Climate Crisis and the devastation that wars in the middle-east and elsewhere are having on our well-being, I would have thought

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Ottawa ON K1N 6N5 Canada
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that the mandate of a program such as yours would be of obvious and immediate benefit to students at the University of Toronto.

I am perplexed at the University of Toronto's decision and I cannot believe that it was made in full cognisance of the growing importance of this field. The potential closure of the BPMH program, would be a significant setback to the establishment of such innovative centers for interdisciplinary research and education in Canada. We believe that an informed re-evaluation that takes into account the program's current structure, achievements, and the global relevance of contemplative science, is in order and we would gladly contribute to such a re-evaluation.

Please let me know what we can do to contribute to the continuation and further development of the BPMH program. We would, for example, be very happy offer our experience with our own program to encourage the decision makers at the University of Toronto to reverse their decision.

Best wishes,



André Vellino Ph.D.
Directeur | Chair
École des sciences de l'information | School of Information Studies
Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa
55 Laurier E. (11107)
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5



RENISON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

240 WESTMOUNT ROAD NORTH, WATERLOO, ON, CANADA, N2L 3G4
519-884-4400 | fax 519-884-5135 | uwaterloo.ca/renison

Dr. Frances Garrett
Jackman Humanities Building, Room 214A
University of Toronto
170 St. George Street
Toronto, ON M5R 2M8

January 16, 2024

Dear Dr. Garrett,

I am writing in support of New College's Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health minor at the University of Toronto. It is one of Canada's most unique and innovative academic Buddhism programs, and as such serves as a model to other universities seeking new possibilities in the areas of Religious Studies, Psychology, Health Sciences, Contemplative Studies, and student-centred support programming. It is also a highly successful program which has shown steady and impressive growth since its genesis close to two decades ago.

Central to that success are the positive experiences reported by BPMH students who credit the minor with significantly supporting their mental health, improving their university experience, expanding their understandings of Asian cultures, and even changing their lives. Students have spoken clearly with both their voices and their actions, as the coordinated campaign of sit-ins, meetings, petitions, and networking indicate the strong desire by the student population to continue learning in the BPMH program.

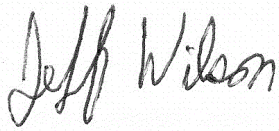
As a former Dean and department Chair, I find the decision to end the minor baffling. The program positively enhances all of the things that we are trying to emphasize at universities today: mental health, student peer support, intercultural learning, lifelong skills, knowledge of non-Western cultures, and innovation. Indeed, as I look at the BPMH program and consider its successes, I am strongly moved to consider whether it is something we could replicate at my own university. We would be highly pleased to have such a program available to us and our students.

The lack of consultation with faculty in reaching the decision is quite troubling. At a time when universities are under strain due to an unsympathetic provincial government, it is more important than ever that administrators, faculty, students, and other stakeholders work closely together in solidarity to maintain the quality of our educational offerings and the health of our systems. In my experience, bypassing collegial governance causes deep harm to faculty and student trust in administration, leading to a poisoned campus atmosphere and operational difficulties on matters unrelated to the original program. These linger for a very long time, and demonstrate that trust, once violated, is extremely hard to regain.

Due to my concern over the minor, I sent information about the program's closure and its non-consultative process to colleagues at over thirty Canadian universities. The matter was also discussed by the Canadian and international Buddhist media, and in the major scholars' forum H-Net. Additionally, I brought the issue to the attention of various faculty and student unions in Ontario and other provinces. There are now many people across the province, country, and beyond who are following the situation and feel alarm over the process whereby the decision was made. They are hopeful that the administration will show University of Toronto's dedication to student health, experience, and learning, and to proper collegial decision-making, by permitting the BPMH minor to continue its excellent work.

Thank you for your work as Director of the BPMH minor, and to all the instructors and students who have made it such a robust, inspiring program.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jeff Wilson
Professor of Religious Studies and East Asian Studies



Dominik Wujastyk (University of Alberta)

23 January 2024

Program Director Frances Garrett, Principal of New College, and
Vice Deans of Undergraduate Programs

Re: Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Minor

Dear Frances,

Our head of our History, Classics, and Religion here at the U. of Alberta has drawn this issue to our department's attention. I am dismayed to hear that the BPMH program is under threat. I am also dismayed to hear that proper procedures have not been followed regarding consultation and the sharing of information and discussion about this with the appropriate faculty members and other stakeholders.

As a cultural historian of India myself, with a background in Buddhist Studies and the history of Yoga, I am keenly aware of how valuable Buddhist mindfulness methods have become in the medical world, ever since Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced them and created the now-famous "Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society" at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in the 1970s. Since then, MBSR has flourished worldwide at hospitals and clinics, supported by an evidential body of double-blind clinical trials. The history and practice of this field are certainly a fascinating and relevant field of academic inquiry, and the student-popularity of your BPMH program at UT doesn't surprise me at all. I am baffled by your administration's decision to cancel a popular and important program that is still strong and healthy and popular with students. Such a program should be supported rather than withdrawn. I am also baffled that an academic decision about course programming was not routed through standard faculty syllabus committees.

I sincerely hope that you can bring the key members of your university's administration to the table for a proper consultative discussion of this issue, and prevail upon them to support the program rather than shutting it down. I hope that they can also be encouraged to use formal faculty councils and committees when academic programme matters are to be decided.

Yours sincerely,
Dominik



Professor Dominik Wujastyk
Singhmar Chair in Classical Indian Society and Polity

V-4. Letters from academics & scientists outside Canada

SEMEL
INSTITUTE
UCLA



Division of Psychology

Jane & Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience & Human Behavior

Robert Bilder (UCLA)

University of California,
Los Angeles 760
Westwood Plaza, Suite
C8-849
Box 951759
Los Angeles, California 90024-1759

November 17, 2023

Frances Garrett, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Dept for the Study of Religion
Director, Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health Program

Dear Dr. Garrett, I am writing this letter of support to you with the understanding that you may share the letter with the University of Toronto administration.

In brief, I believe your Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health Program is one of the flagship programs worldwide that are bringing the benefits of the contemplative sciences to benefit our students and our university communities. As you know, 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. I further believe your program exemplifies the integration of academic studies with well-being as manifest in your undergraduate minor program. We established a minor in Brain and Behavioral Health a few years ago, and we consider it a great success, but your program has more impressive achievements in boasting enrollment of 334 students annually! That incredible growth testifies quite tangibly to the value of your programs, and I surely hope the University of Toronto will identify ways to better support your work so that the BPMH program can continue to flourish and serve as an inspiration to cognate efforts internationally. I hope your administrators will feel free to contact me if I can further support your efforts in any way.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Bilder, Ph.D., ABPP-CN
Michael E. Tennenbaum Family Endowed Chair in Creativity Research,
Chief, Division of Psychology, and Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral
Sciences, Jane & Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, Stewart & Lynda
Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital, David Geffen School of Medicine, and Department of
Psychology, College of Letters & Science at UCLA; and
Codirector, MindWell Pod of the Semel UCLA Healthy Campus Initiative



DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Mark Dennis and Blake Hestir (Texas Christian University)

November 27, 2023

Dear Drs. Eyoh, Guerson, Lockwood, and Ju (CC Professor Garrett),

We are writing with enthusiastic support for the wonderful Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) Program in New College at the University of Toronto. BPMH is widely respected among many of us in North American universities who are interested in fusing innovative pedagogy and pioneering research to promote flourishing on college and university campuses among students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the wider community. The thoughtful work of Dr. Frances Garrett and the BPMH team at your university has been an inspirational model for our own work in developing CALM Studies at TCU. The acronym 'CALM' stands for "Compassionate Awareness and Living Mindfully."

In what follows, we share an overview of our own program which you will see is similar in various ways with the BPMH Program. We do so to highlight the commonalities across our programs and to suggest the ways in which BPMH has the potential to significantly ameliorate the mental health challenges and other types of struggles being experienced by the groups noted above, particularly your institution's students.

We also wish to highlight our belief that the University of Toronto's BPMH program is raising the university's profile by tapping into a massive "wave" of interest in mindfulness and meditation across wide-ranging segments of society, including business, professional and Olympic sports, health care, the military, and so on. These groups have done so because they have become convinced by the explosion of scientific research showing how these practices can benefit individuals and groups from across such a broad spectrum of work environments by, for example, reducing the harmful effects of anxiety and stress while also promoting focus and attention, belonging and meaningfulness, well-being and flourishing.

As such, major American companies, including Google and Aetna, have been incorporating meditation, mindfulness, and other contemplative practices into their workplaces as a way to enhance focus, productivity, and retention while decreasing health care costs.³¹ A second example, which comes from academia, is the benefits for

³ For an exploration of these issues, please see Andrew O. Fort and Mark Dennis, "Riding the Wave: Contemplative Studies Goes Mainstream" *Athenaeum Review*, Summer 2020 at:

students who are able to learn these practices in curricular and extra-curricular offerings, whether in the programming offered by BPMH, or in the meditation retreats CALM Studies sponsors regularly on the TCU campus, or the credit-bearing courses we teach, including Mindfulness and Modern Life; Buddhism: Thought and Practice; Mind Consciousness Self; and the Art and Science of Human Flourishing (ASHF).

The Art and Science of Human Flourishing

The last course was developed through a visionary partnership of the University of Wisconsin's Center for Healthy Minds,⁴ the Contemplative Sciences Center at the University of Virginia,⁵ and the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center at Pennsylvania State University. **Each of these centers has been able to raise tens of millions of dollars** in donations because philanthropists recognize that these evidence-based practices offer clear and significant benefits to struggling college students while also **recognizing the immense value of being at the forefront of a movement** sweeping across higher education that focuses on a holistic vision of human flourishing.

In July 2022, the researchers who collaborated on the Art and Science of Human Flourishing published an article titled "Can the Academic and Experiential Study of Flourishing Improve Flourishing in College Students? A Multi-university Study" (*Mindfulness* 23), which details the promising results of a comprehensive, longitudinal study of the course. They discovered that in comparison to control participants, students who completed ASHF significantly improved their mental health and sense of flourishing, bolstered multiple attention and social-emotional skills, such as attention function and self-compassion, and enhanced prosocial attitudes like empathic concern and shared humanity. Moreover, the prevalence of clinical depression in ASHF participants decreased nearly in half from 33% prior to the course to 17% post-course and severe depression decreased by two-thirds from 12% to 4%.⁶

One of the leading figures in this research is internationally-acclaimed neuroscientist Richard J. Davidson, who is the founder and director of the University of Wisconsin's Center for Healthy Minds. Davidson, who has been working closely for decades with the Dalai Lama and other senior monastics from Tibetan Buddhism,⁷ visited the TCU campus in early March 2023 to deliver the keynote on the foundations of well-being, which kicked off our "March Month of Mindfulness."⁸

As we describe in more detail below, TCU Chancellor Victor Boschini was so impressed by Davidson's work that he asked Davidson if we could visit the center in December 2023 to gather ideas about fundraising the millions of dollars that will be required to establish the TCU CALM Center for Student Flourishing. Hestir and

<https://tinyurl.com/yh8d2a4r>. See also, Fort and Dennis, "Teaching Students about Mindfulness and Modern Life," *Education About Asia* at: <https://tinyurl.com/2x2kuha8>.

⁴ See: <https://tinyurl.com/5n6pvp97>.

⁵ See: <https://csc.virginia.edu>.

⁶ See Hirshberg, M.J., Colaianne, B.A., Greenberg, M.T. *et al.* "Can the Academic and Experiential Study of Flourishing Improve Flourishing in College Students? A Multi-university Study," *Mindfulness* 13, 2243–2256 (July 2022): <https://tinyurl.com/2ae7hb4d>.

⁷ Davidson's website is available at: <https://www.richardj davidson.com>.

⁸ Davidson's keynote can be streamed here: <https://www.tcu calmstudies.org/moore2023>.

Dennis will travel to Madison with Chancellor Boschini and with Liberal Arts Dean Sonja Watson for a two-day visit in mid-December.

The CALM Studies Initiative at TCU⁹

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.

CALM Studies was founded in 2012 by Religion Professor Andy Fort as a way to share meditation and mindfulness with members of the campus community, including TCU students who were beginning to show signs of the severe mental health challenges we outline in the next section. After his retirement in December 2016, Religion Professor and scholar of Buddhism Mark Dennis took over as director, and Philosophy Professor Blake Hestir became associate director in 2019.

The CALM core values which guide all our work are:

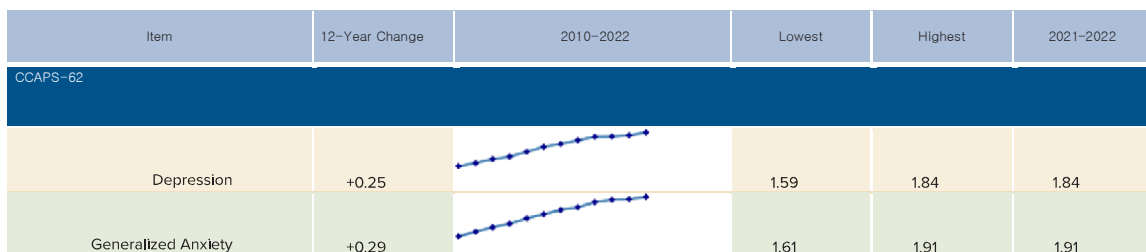
- Belonging
- Wisdom
- Compassion
- Flourishing

Although the three faculty leaders of CALM Studies come out of the Humanities, we have actively cultivated relationships with allies outside the AddRan College of Liberal Arts in Business, Dance, Education, the TCU Honors College, the TCU Medical School, Music, Nursing, Psychology, and Science & Engineering.





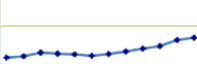

CALM Studies drew on those relationships cultivated over the past decade to create an Advisory Council in 2022. The council includes, Giri Akkaraju (Biology), Dave Aftandilian (Anthropology), Ariane Balizet (AddRan College Associate Dean of Faculty & Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, English), Muriel Cormican (AddRan College Associate Dean of Undergraduate Students, Modern Languages), Sharon Gooding (Director, Office of Institutional Equity, Office of the Chancellor), Lydia Mackay (Theater), and Jane Torgerson MD (Director of TCU Student Health Services).

“Red Alert”: The Mental Health Crisis Among Adolescents

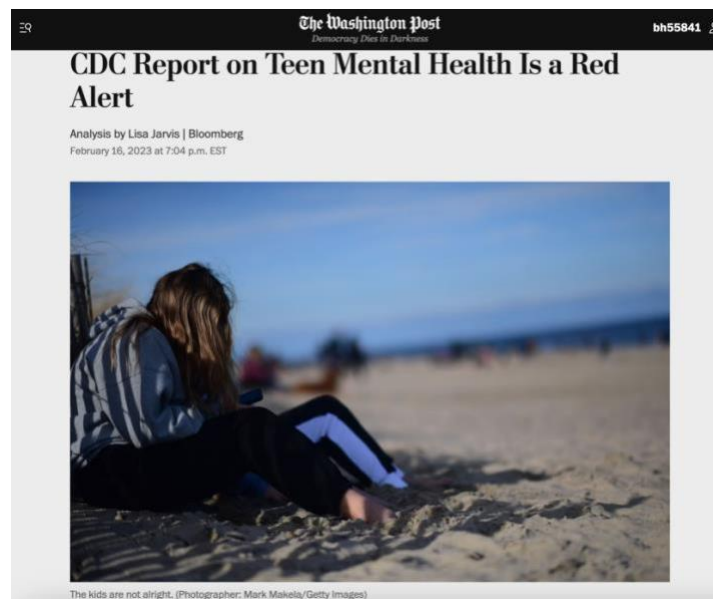
Over the last three decades, the major health risks facing U.S. adolescents have shifted drastically. The following graphic from Penn State University speaks volumes:



⁹ Please visit our website at: <https://tcucalmstudies.org>.

Social Anxiety	+0.31		1.82	2.13	2.13
Academic Distress	+0.15		1.85	2.05	2.00
Eating Concerns	+0.12		1.00	1.12	1.12
Frustration/Anger	-0.07		0.96	1.04	0.98
Substance Use	-0.18		0.58	0.77	0.59
Family Distress	+0.15		1.29	1.44	1.44

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US Surgeon General, and other major American health institutions have issued a series of studies and public advisories about the rapidly deteriorating state of adolescent mental health. Those reports and advisories show that while teen pregnancy and alcohol, cigarette and drug use have fallen, anxiety, depression, suicide, and self-harm have soared. In 2019, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a report noting that “mental health disorders have surpassed physical conditions” as the most common issues causing “impairment and limitation” among adolescents. In December 2022, the U.S. Surgeon General, in a rare public advisory, warned of a “devastating” mental health crisis among American teens.¹⁰



The increasingly dire warnings issued by these groups have served as a “red alert,” occasioning wide-ranging responses by other US governmental agencies, private enterprises, and higher education. Indeed, it has become painfully obvious to those of us who teach at colleges and universities that many of our students are experiencing

¹⁰ Matt Richtel, “Teens in Distress Are Swamping Pediatricians: Around the country, the setting for adolescent mental health care looks ever more like this doctor’s office in Kentucky, the next patient arriving every 15 minutes,” *New York Times*, May 10, 2022: <https://tinyurl.com/e2b2aj75>.

significant—sometimes debilitating, occasionally life threatening—mental health problems.

Students in our CALM Studies courses at TCU share with us in weekly reflections, and sometimes in our classroom discussions, experiencing bouts of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and other quite serious and disruptive mental and emotional states.

In our ongoing discussions with Dr. Garrett as part of the Flourishing Academic Network (FAN), **we have learned that University of Toronto students are, unsurprisingly, experiencing similarly high levels of mental health problems.** 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.

Although the mental health crisis we outline above is clear, its causes and potential solutions are not. Rather than pointing to a single cause, experts often identify a confluence of possible factors, which include increasingly competitive college environments, the addictive power of social media, the constant threat of gun violence, body-image pressures, and the existential threat of climate change. In addition, observers of adolescent mental health point to deep political divisions, systemic racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, poverty, food insecurity, cyberbullying, epic levels of distraction, and other potential causes.

The CALM Center for Student Flourishing



As noted above, the ultimate goal of TCU CALM Studies is to establish the CALM Center for Student Flourishing that will ideally be centrally located on TCU's campus so that it is readily accessible to students, faculty, staff, and members of the Fort Worth community.

Our vision for the center is modeled on the Campus Commons at the University of Virginia, which represents the culmination of the great efforts of faculty, staff, administrators, philanthropists, and others connected with the university's Contemplative Sciences Center (CSC). **The CSC has been wildly successful at fundraising, attracting over \$100 million in donations** to build the commons, which is centrally located on the Charlottesville campus and is slated to open in spring 2024. CSC has also served at the forefront of the Flourishing Academic Network mentioned above, which is seeking to remake North American higher education by creating the conditions in which students and others can thrive and flourish.

Programs and Services

The center will maintain and expand upon the following classes, programs, and services:

1) **CALM Studies Courses:** Ongoing and new courses that form the CALM Studies Minor and emphasize various mindfulness practices, with special emphasis on the relationship between mindfulness, equity, and nature. The group's leaders already teach the following courses: "The Art and Science of Human Flourishing" (Philosophy-Religion), "Mindfulness and Modern Life" (AddRan), "Animals, Religion, and Culture" (Anthropology), "Happiness: Culture, Economics, Being" (Anthropology), "Native American Religions and Ecology" (Anthropology), "Mindfulness for College Students" (Honors), "Buddhism: Thought and Practice" (Religion), "Mind Consciousness Self" (Philosophy), "Mind Body Ecology" (Philosophy), and "The Mindful Leader" (Business).

2) **Research Initiatives:** Innovative cross-disciplinary research initiatives that delve into the intersection of mindfulness, equity, sustainability, and the concept of human flourishing. This includes studies on how sustainable practices and mindfulness together can promote a more equitable society. This research naturally opens many possibilities for collaboration across disciplines at the university and with colleagues at other institutions.

3) **Community Events:** Regular community meditations, lectures, workshops, and group sessions open to the wider community at no charge (since its inception, the group has offered all of its programming for free). These events are designed to foster a sense of shared understanding and communal growth.

4) **Inspiring Minds Speaker Series:** A curated series of talks by leading experts in the areas of mindfulness, science, humanities, sustainability, and equity. This series will aim to inspire and engage the TCU community and beyond, bringing global perspectives and innovative ideas to our campus.

5) **CALM Convos, CALM Buddies, and CALM Guides programs:** Continuation and expansion of our successful one-on-one and peer-to-peer programs that foster deep and meaningful connections within the TCU community. These programs create an environment of mutual understanding and empathy, promoting the principles of the CALM Center.

6) **Digital Outreach:** Comprehensive online resources including virtual meditation sessions, online courses, and a range of additional materials. This ensures that the teachings of the CALM Center are accessible to all, regardless of their geographical location or personal circumstances, reinforcing our commitment to equity and inclusivity.

Trip to the Center for Healthy Minds-University of Wisconsin

As noted above, we will be traveling in mid-December 2023 with TCU Chancellor Victor Boschini and AddRan College of Liberal Arts Dean Sonja Watson to the Center for Healthy Minds (CHM) at the University of Wisconsin. This trip materialized because of Richard Davidson's visit to TCU in March 2023 to deliver a keynote address titled "What is Well-Being?" as part of the CALM Studies group's "March Month of Mindfulness."

During Davidson's visit, he and Hestir met with the chancellor who asked Davidson about the possibility of a group from TCU visiting the center to see its operation. During the trip to Madison, we will tour the facility, meet with CHM's staff, and discuss fundraising strategies for the TCU CALM Center. We hope that this trip will give Chancellor Boschini and Dean Watson a sense of the wide-ranging benefits that the university would reap by creating our own CALM Center for Student Flourishing.

That trip will be funded by an anonymous donor that the chancellor has secured, having recognized **the value of programs like CALM Studies and BPMH for their clear benefits to students but also for their ability to enhance the institution's reputation as leaders in higher education.**

Trip to the Contemplative Sciences Center-University of Virginia

CALM Studies also received a \$10K donation earmarked for completing the planning work for building our own center. We have decided to dedicate a substantial portion of those funds to the costs associated with visiting the Contemplative Sciences Center (CSC) at the University of Virginia, which is one of three universities that collaborated to create the Art and Science of Human Flourishing course (ASHF). We first taught the course in spring 2022 and again in spring 2023, receiving quite positive feedback from students that resonate with the benefits mentioned in the article appearing in *Mindfulness*. The CSC is also the central hub for **the Flourishing Academic Network (FAN), which both the University of Toronto and TCU were invited to join in 2021.**

We will be accompanied to UVA by Adam Baggs, Assistant Vice Chancellor for School & College Development, and David Dibble, Director of Development, AddRan College of Liberal Arts. The purpose of our trip to Charlottesville is to collect additional information on a second model for creating a center dedicated to student flourishing. That is, while the Center for Healthy Minds is focused more heavily on research, the CSC is rooted more deeply in the Liberal Arts. We believe that we will gain much useful information from both visits.

Final Thoughts

Finally, we have become convinced that the sorts of contemplative practices and emotional dispositions that the team at BPMH teaches your students are effective tools for helping administrators, faculty, and staff navigate the rapidly-changing landscape of higher education, especially the student mental health crisis. As we built the CALM Studies program over the past decade, we met with many faculty, staff, and administrators of goodwill and deep compassion devoted to the well-being of students who were simply unfamiliar with the compelling research validating the multiple benefits of these practices.

Thus, an important part of our mission has been helping these varied stakeholders in higher education understand this body of research and also the many ways in which students can benefit from engaging with mindfulness, meditation, and other such practices in a sustained way.

From our conversations with Dr. Garrett, we get the sense that the decision to cut the groundbreaking BPMH program at the University of Toronto is coming from the perceived need to strike a delicate balance between this desire to help students thrive and flourish while recognizing the current fiscal realities of higher education. **We understand that Dr. Garrett has already been successful in fundraising for BPMH, raising over \$50K for the program's teaching, research, and community outreach initiatives, and we know this is only the beginning.** We strongly believe that your University's support of this impactful program will pay off many times over by helping your struggling students better navigate the stresses of daily college life. This program will also enhance your widely-recognized international reputation as one of the premier institutions of higher education.

We would be delighted to speak with you about our program in more detail if that would be helpful for coming to a deeper understanding of the many benefits that can be had by continuing to offer generous support to the BPMH program.

Sincerely
yours,

Blake Hestir (he, him)
Professor, [Philosophy Department](#) Associate Director,
[CALM Studies](#)
TCU, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes lands
Director, Co-founder, [The Mind Body Ecology Institute](#) Book: [Plato on Meaning and Truth](#)
TCU News: [Self and Sustainability](#)

Mark Dennis (he, him) Professor, [Religion Department](#)
Director, [CALM Studies](#)
TCU, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes
lands Honors Faculty Fellow

John Dunne (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

December 11, 2023

Dr. Frances Garrett, PhD

Associate Professor of Buddhist Studies and Tibetan Studies
Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

Dear Professor Garrett:

In our recent correspondence, you informed me that the outstanding and innovative Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) program may face nonrenewal, and I am writing in the hope that this letter will help clarify what a tremendous loss this would be, not only for the University of Toronto but also for higher education in general. For over a decade, undergraduates at institutions throughout North America have faced stark increases in challenges to mental health, as evinced by skyrocketing rates of anxiety and depression. Demand for counseling and mental health services have increased dramatically across all campuses, to the point that universities can no longer keep up with that demand. These developments parallel a decades-long move toward a style of education that largely ignores the personal development of students, such that the knowledge and skills required for a meaningful and flourishing life are no longer central to our curricula.

Faced by these challenges, 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.

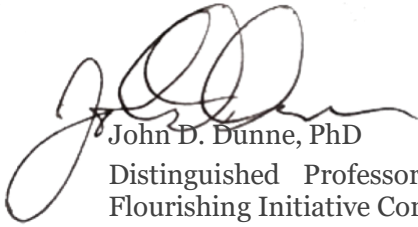
Our administration has made it clear that an especially promising aspect of this work is the way that it can give students the knowledge and skills to face these challenging times *before* they find themselves requesting counseling appointments that may require weeks on a waiting list.

With all this in mind, I am especially dismayed to learn that your university is moving in exactly the opposite direction, and I must assume that this decision is the result of some misunderstanding about the nature of the BPMH program. As you know, close collaborations between research psychologists and Buddhist Studies scholars have produced what is now many years of outstanding research on the impacts and mechanisms of mindfulness and other contemplative practices that have been secularized for use in a wide range of contexts, including our own work with students. The BPMH program is an outstanding example of such a collaboration, and I have been gratified by the several opportunities we have had to discuss

our closely related efforts at our campuses. Given the results of the ongoing research conducted by my team, I was especially enthused about our tentative plans to incorporate elements of ASHF into BPMH and then conduct empirical research on outcomes for students. My team and I had thought that the University of Toronto was fully engaged with this renewed emphasis on student flourishing as a central element of a university education, so it is truly puzzling that the BPMH program is not receiving enthusiastic support.

In closing, I will simply reiterate the tremendous importance of BPMH as a flagship program that is a key part of a larger movement that seeks to address the mental health crisis at universities by teaching students the knowledge and skills that make their personal development and lifelong flourishing a central goal of their formal education. Please do not hesitate to share this letter with your colleagues, and please do let me know if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John D. Dunne', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the left.

John D. Dunne, PhD

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

David Germano (University of Virginia)

March 1, 2024

Dear Professor Frances Garrett:

I submit this letter with the understanding that you will share it with the University of Toronto (UT) administration as a message of support for the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) program.

I want to express my shock and disappointment at the news that you are considering canceling UT's BPMH program, as well as to urge you to reconsider your decision in light of the extraordinary achievements and innovations of this program. This is particularly so given that its innovations directly concern higher education and student flourishing during a time of unprecedented mental health crises among our young people. Higher education is in a state of moral crisis as the staggering deterioration of young people's well being is not being remotely matched by the pace and character of innovation in higher education intended to address this deterioration. Against this background, it is both rare and inspiring when one comes across a program like BPMH that targets such issues, has achieved great traction with students, and is matches innovation with economical use of resources. And, likewise, it makes one wonder what could such a great university like UT be thinking in dismantling it, when instead they should be exploring how to scale it up and extend it.

As context, I am a full professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Virginia (UVA). I have also led initiatives on entrepreneurship, digital technology, cultural documentation, student flourishing, and contemplative sciences for three decades. In this context I have raised almost two hundred million dollars for UVA through private donors, federal grants, and foundations, over half of which has been focused on innovative programs targeting innovation in K-12 and higher education that facilitates student flourishing in the face of the aforementioned mental health crisis, including research, pedagogy, and application in regards to contemplation. At the University, I led programs across all the academic schools at the University in research, teaching, and pedagogy, as well as with various divisions within student affairs. I have also built cross-institutional networks towards this ends across the nation and globe over the past decade. Since 2010, in particular, I have I thus have an exceptional basis to assess BPMH in this larger landscape as well as assure you of the great value of such work for addressing the student mental health crisis, and the prospects of such work for achieving widespread participation amongst students, faculty, student affairs professionals, community members, and, very importantly, the donor community. I have raised money for so many different things over my life, but have never seen such openness and passion on the part of the donors as I have seen over the past decade for contemplation and student flourishing.

In this context, I can honestly say I am both impressed and envious of the achievements of BMPH with far less resources than I have made available for faculty and staff at UVA. I have over the last few years read through syllabi, talked with students and faculty, and reviewed program documentation for BMPH. Some of the classes have been personally inspiring to me in terms of these conversations, and caused me to rethink my own assumptions about the possibilities of academic pedagogy in relationship to contemplation and new approaches for student flourishing. I am so impressed also by how the program has woven together curricular and co-curricular activities with public scholarship and research across multiple disciplines and constituencies. I would so much like to transport this program to UVA—I consider it much more impressive than what we have managed to do here with far more resources. And such a program is so desperately needed during these troubled times when institutions are fumbling to find adequate measures to take in response to student well-being implosion. I urge you not only to rescind your decision to dismantle the program, but also to invest further resources in helping this program to expand and scale across the University to address urgent needs in the student population.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Germano', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Germano
Professor, Department of Religious Studies
Director, Tibet Center
germano@virginia.edu

Ann Gleig (University of Central Florida)

January 14, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my deepest concern and objection to the proposed closure of the University of Toronto's New College Minor in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH). To situate myself: I am an Associate Professor of Religion and Cultural Studies at the University of Central Florida. I am a member of the American Academy of Religion Buddhist Unit and an editor for the *Journal of Global Buddhism*. I am also the Chair of the Program Unit for the American Academy of Religion, the largest professional organization dedicated to the scholarly study of religion with over 8000 members across the world.

Buddhist Studies as an academic field is facing the same challenges and threats as many disciplines within the Art and Humanities. These include declining job positions and student enrollment. As a field, we must develop interdisciplinary initiatives to respond to such obstacles and reinvigorate our field. By all measurements, the University of Toronto's New College Minor in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH) has been an astounding success. Not only is this the most innovative academic program in Buddhist Studies in North America, but it has grown significantly, enrolling hundreds of students each year and becoming New College's second largest academic program. As Buddhist Studies senior professor Jeff Wilson notes, a "key part of that success is the positive experiences reported by BPMH students who credit the Minor with significantly supporting their mental health, improving their university experience, expanding their understandings of Asian cultures, and even changing their lives."

In short, enrollment statistics and student evaluations show that the BPMH program is an exceptional model of success for Buddhist Studies. In fact, in our upcoming state of the field review of Buddhist Studies which will be published in *Religious Studies Review*, my colleague Amy Langenberg and I celebrate the BPMH program as an exemplary model for scholars in Buddhist Studies to make our discipline relevant across disciplinary fields. It would be a significant blow to the field of Buddhist Studies in North America to lose this program.

As such, I urge the administration to reconsider its baffling decision to suspend the program and to consult with the Dr. Frances Garret, the Director of BPMH, the other faculty who teach in the program, and past, present and future students.


Sincerely,



Dr. Ann Gleig
Associate Professor of Religion and Cultural Studies
Philosophy Department, University of Central Florida

Janet Gyatso (Harvard University)
Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies
Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs
Harvard University

Comment posted on Protect BPMH student petition at <https://www.change.org/p/protect-the-bpmh-program/c> - downloaded on January 14, 2024



janet gyatso
1 day ago


This is a valuable program and makes excellent contributions both academically and socially.

♡ 0

[Report](#)

Justin R. Ritzinger (University of Miami)
Associate Professor of Religious Studies
University of Miami

Comment posted on Protect BPMH student petition at <https://www.change.org/p/protect-the-bpmh-program/c> - downloaded on January 14, 2024



Justin Ritzinger
3 days ago

As a scholar, I oppose the shuttering of successful programs on opaque bureaucratic grounds. The mission of a university is not "efficiencies" but teaching and research.

❤️ 2

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November 26, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing in support of my colleague Dr. Frances Garrett and the work she and her colleagues have done around the program in Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health at the University of Toronto. I think this kind of program is timely and incredibly important for meeting the needs of students, faculty and staff and society more generally.

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. Furthermore, college students in particular have both a strong interest in, and a strong need for, attention and emotion regulation strategies and meaning systems to help them to navigate the challenges and opportunities of this critical time of life at this transitional time in history. What is critically important is that programs like the one at U of Toronto offer such strategies and meaning systems and are evidence-based.

I have noted both the creative faculty work and growth of student interest in the program at the University of Toronto and was surprised to hear from Dr. Garrett that a recommendation had been made to discontinue the program. Everywhere I look on college campuses today, I perceive a need and desire for this kind of interdisciplinary scholarship with immediate practical applications in higher education. I urge administrators to reconsider this decision, and rather, to consider investing more in the program and the kind of science and practice that contemplative practices afford.

I hope and trust one day that institutions of higher learning will see the person flourishing of students, and the social flourishing of society as their north stars. For that to happen and thus, for education to change our society and the world, I believe more rather than fewer programs like the program in Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health at the U of Toronto are needed. Currently, this program marks your university as a leader in this innovative approach to scholarship and flourishing. Discontinuing the program would be regressive and counter-productive in my view. I hope the work and program can continue.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Roeser". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert W. Roeser, Ph.D.
Bennett Pierce Professor in Caring and Compassion
814-863-7005, rwr15@psu.edu

Bee Scherer (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

From: "Scherer, B. (Bee)" <b.scherer@vu.nl>

Subject: Concern about the minor BPMH

Date: January 14, 2024 at 8:06:44 AM AST

To: "randy.boyagoda@utoronto.ca" <randy.boyagoda@utoronto.ca>, "alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca" <alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca>, "dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca" <dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca>

To The Principal of New College, The Vice Principal of New College, The Vice-Dean of Undergraduate Programs of New College

Amsterdam, 14 January 2024

Esteemed colleagues,

I am writing to you today with grave concern about the future of a truly extraordinary interdisciplinary programme at New College: the Minor in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH). Not only appears this minor to be unique to Canada but it can boast also a trailblazing international role with only few comparable initiatives around the globe.

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.

Please take all steps necessary to safeguard this crucial high quality academic programme that brings excellent student recruitment, national and international acclaim, and most of all tangible results for students' well-being, personal growth, and interdisciplinary learning.

Kind regards,

Bee

Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer (they/their)
Rector, Buddhist Seminary
Chair, Buddhist Studies
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Michael R. Sheehy (University of Virginia)



CONTEMPLATIVE SCIENCES CENTER

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

November 27, 2023

Dear Professor Frances Garrett:

As you know, over the past two decades, the transdisciplinary field of the Contemplative Sciences or Contemplative Studies has emerged within the Academy to study contributions made by historical contemplative traditions around the world, the procedural dynamics and neurophysiological mechanisms operative in specific contemplative practices, and the varieties of correlative experiences that emerge from different practices of contemplation. Research in the humanities, arts, sciences, and social sciences are congruently advancing our understanding of contemplative practices – including mindfulness, yoga, Tai Chi, etc. – and how these practices contribute to mental, physical, and social wellbeing to enhance human flourishing.

To learn from you that the *Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health* (BPMH) undergraduate minor was being dismantled was weighty news. I am writing with the hope that you will share my letter of undaunting support with the relevant administrators at the University of Toronto. If the administration comes to understand the importance of the BPMH, and its situatedness within the broader emerging academic field, I hope they will reinstall the program with their full support.

There is a growing body of higher education institutions in North America and globally that are allocating significant resources to the study of human wellbeing through research, teaching, and leadership. The BPMH undergraduate minor at the University of Toronto is among these important epicenters. These efforts are exemplified by the Flourishing Academic Network (FAN), a consortium of leading university academic centers who are leveraging knowledge and resources among global experts to promote student flourishing and catalyze systems change in higher education. The University of Toronto is a key member in this network because the existence of the BPMH program exemplifies this vision and virtues.

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.

The interdepartmental and multi-methodological approach that you are taking with the *Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health* (BPMH) undergraduate program at the University of Toronto is imperative for an education that values multiple perspectives and that foregrounds flourishing. Recent and rapidly developing research in the sciences and humanities is demonstrating the efficacies of contemplative practices, sensitive to individual differences and contexts. To situate such knowledge with life skills and know-how in an undergraduate academic program will provide students with the tools necessary to navigate their future selves.

Please let me know how else I might support your efforts.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael R. Sheehy', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Michael R. Sheehy, Ph.D.
Research Assistant Professor
Director of Scholarship, Contemplative Sciences Center Faculty,
Department of Religious Studies

Mark Unno (University of Oregon)

Professor of Religious Studies, Religious Studies Department Head
University of Oregon

Comment posted on Protect BPMH student petition at <https://www.change.org/p/protect-the-bpmh-program/c> -
downloaded on January 15, 2024



Mark Unno

16 hours ago

Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health is an exploding field. Cancelling this program shows complete lack of understanding of the enormous fields of psychology, counseling, mental health, and concomitantly, lack of understanding of finances in higher education. -- Mark Unno, University of Oregon

♡ 0

[Report](#)

V-5. Letters from community members

Michael H. Clifton (Community Member)

On Feb 8, 2024, at 5:31 PM, Michael Clifton <mclifton@cklegal.ca> wrote:

Good afternoon, Dr. Garrett,

I am advised that sending this email to you will ensure that my comments and request are forwarded to all the appropriate administrators at the University of Toronto who have an interest or role relating to the University of Toronto's minor in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (ASMIN1017).

It was with great surprise that I learned today of the decision to close this program. I am also (though perhaps less) surprised to have heard that the decision to end the program was made without consulting faculty or staff, and that the school's administration has so far (at least, as of the date information was forwarded to me) been unwilling to meet with faculty to discuss the reasons for, and resistance to, the termination of the program. Sadly, this brings back to mind my memories of sitting, many years ago, in a meeting room at U of T, as a member of Toronto's Multifaith Anti-Racism Committee, to negotiate issues surrounding the mistreatment of a Chinese professor by the university.

To be clear, I am neither a student (current or former) of the program in question, nor faculty or staff at U of T. I am writing as a concerned Canadian, a U of T (Law) alumni, and based on my long involvement in the Toronto and southwestern Ontario interfaith communities. As mentioned, I am a former member of the Toronto Multifaith Anti-Racism Committee, and I am currently on the steering committees of Interfaith Grand River and Christians Together Waterloo Region.

It is not merely, however, from the rather obvious perspective of promoting equity and diversity that I am astonished that U of T would seek to terminate a program like this one, though that perspective is also very relevant and of concern – there is no question that the majority of students would benefit from in-depth exploration of non-Western traditions and ideas that is so rarely made available in our universities – but I also believe that eliminating a program focussed on in-depth understanding of the contributions of Buddhist thought and practice in the area of mental health is utterly damaging to the breadth of knowledge and experience that should be encouraged and made available for students intending to pursue careers involving mental health research and/or counselling. Apart from the potential benefits of religious involvement generally for mental health, many of the principles and ideas critical to Buddhist philosophy and practice provide an especially beneficial framework and foundation for meaningfully and effectively addressing a variety of mental health concerns.

Lacking the opportunity for in-depth exploration of those principles and ideas is likely to substantially narrow and diminish the scope and scale of students' potentials in their chosen careers and on their future clients. Offering the minor also would provide students who are

Buddhist or who have a South and/or East Asian background to explore cultural, historical, and religious concepts related to their heritages or beliefs, which is significantly beneficial for both educational and personal development.

For such reasons, I encourage U of T to consider retaining this program and not closing. I further encourage the school's administration to, at the very least, speak with faculty and students about the benefits and importance of the program before proceeding to terminate it.

Yours truly,

Michael H. Clifton

Partner

Clifton Kōk LLP Legal Counsel

Real Property/Condominium | Estates | Corporate/Commercial

1-261 Frederick Street, Kitchener, ON N2H 2N2

Phone: (519) 632-9755 ext. 1

Facsimile: (519) 632-8031

www.cklegal.ca

www.condominiumliens.ca

Hazim Hassan (Dalla Lana School of Public Health)

Frances Garrett
Associate Professor, Dept for the Study of Religion
Director (on leave 2022-23), Buddhism, Psychology and Mental
Health Program University of Toronto

Dear Frances,

Re: Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) Program recommended Cancellation

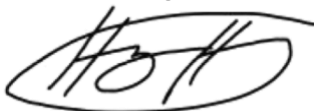
My name is Hazim Hassan, I am an Executive in the Healthcare Sector, a Doctoral of Public Health Student at the University of Toronto, and Mindfulness Meditation teacher and practitioner. It was extremely surprising and disappointing to hear that the school administration is actively considering the cancellation of the Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) Program.

This news surprises me for a number of reasons. First, we are at a time in the world, locally and internationally, where the tenants of Buddhist Psychology of presence, kindness, and curiosity are paramount for us to find a better way to be in a world that has become increasingly stressful and separate. Secondly, I have personally experienced the power of mindfulness in my professional career directly as an executive, and in implementing programs in acute care facilities such as hospitals. This work is essential to address the increasing levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion in the healthcare sector. Finally, housing this study and work in a designated program allows for in-depth study, research, and teaching to foster rich learning for the students regardless of the faculty. Taking a Mindfulness and Science Course with Dr Elli Weisbaum was one of the most rewarding parts of my Doctoral studies.

I sincerely hope that the administration can reconsider this potential change. In fact, I believe this is a time to invest more in programs like this, rather than pulling back. There is too much at stake to wipe this area of rich academic study from the University of Toronto Curriculum.

I sincerely implore the administration to reconsider.

Kind Regards,



HAZIM HASSAN (he/him),MBA
Vice President, Business Planning & Strategy President, OHA Legacy Fund
Doctor of Public Health (Student)
University of Toronto Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Ani Jamyang Donma (Hospital for Sick Children)

To whom it may concern,

December 4, 2023

December

It has been brought to my attention that there is consideration of closing one of the most important courses and experiences for young students I have ever experienced.

The Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) program.

As someone who works in applied mindfulness as a chaplain, psychotherapist, grief counsellor and ally in issues of equity and inclusion I am saddened to think that the importance of direct experiential knowledge and application of the skills of mindfulness, contemplative studies and its research be dismissed when it is so relevant and important for our current times.

Not only do these skills make better professionals, and healthier ones due to understanding one's own spiritual, emotional and mental physiology, but it broadens the view to make wonderful integrated humans who then go on to do important work as a result.

Too often we focus on the academic and leave students adrift when it comes to applications and evaluations of the work and the experience.

When we look out at the world today, at the deepest conflicts, it is specifically the skills and expanded viewpoints of training of courses such as these that will make effective role models, leaders and mentors.

I do hope that this is an error and that the decision will be reconsidered with some proper awareness of what is actually at stake and what is being taught.

I personally was very proud that the University of Toronto would be so advanced to offer training like this. It inspires and informs a young person in a way that cannot be achieved through other methods. So many times as I work with clinicians, doctors, allied health I witness struggles that could be avoided simply by providing this experiential overview of the importance and relevance of contemplative life and research.


We need this in our current times more than ever...please reconsider your decision... please seek out more complete information,

As well it seems obvious to me simply by the numbers of students wishing to enroll that this is really, really needed, as well as desired...

Thank You for your kind consideration,
Ani Jamyang Donma, Staff Chaplain, RP

The Hospital for Sick Children, The Mindfulness Project
Buddhist Advisory, Emmanuel College

John Negru (Independent Scholar)

From: Karma Yonten Gyatso john@sumeru-books.com 
Subject: Potential closure of the BPMH program at U of T
Date: November 21, 2023 at 1:27 PM
To: Prof. Frances Garrett frances.garrett@utoronto.ca

KG

Dear Professor Garrett and University administrators,

It is with great sadness that I heard of the University of Toronto's proposal to terminate this program, in spite of its achievements and popularity. I believe this would be a great loss in our shared societal goal of sustaining the educational pathways the program affords, faced with the challenges we face in the modern world.

As founder and CEO at Canada's leading independent Buddhist book publisher, and as someone who has worked with U of T on a variety of initiatives over the past two decades, I have seen the positive contributions of many Canadian Buddhist professors, teachers, community leaders, and mental health professionals. In our diverse, multicultural society, such contributions are vital.

Many of us in the Buddhist world are concerned that Buddhist Studies programs are viewed as focusing on ancient history, cosmology, and the like. In fact, our aim is to be forward-looking in promoting the Buddhism of the future. The BPMH program, similar to the Buddhist Chaplaincy program at Emmanuel College, is exactly the kind of program we need, because it presents perspectives on current and emerging trends in society.

Please reconsider your decision. You should before elevating this program, not eliminating it.

Best wishes,

John Negru
Karma Yönten Gyatso
Publisher, The Sumeru Press



Chris Ng (Buddhist Education Foundation of Canada)

From: Chris Ng <wisdom.tor@rogers.com>

Date: November 17, 2023 at 11:40:21 AM EST

To: frances.garrett@utoronto.ca, dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca, alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca

Subject: Opposing the proposed closure of the BPMH Program

Dear Professors Garrett, Eyoh and Guerson,

I was very shocked to hear of the proposed closure of the BPMH Program! I have signed the petition <https://www.change.org/p/protect-the-bpmh-program> initiated by the students in the Program. These are my reasons for doing so:

I am the co-founder and President of the Buddhist Education Foundation of Canada (BEFC) which funded the first Buddhism course at New College, Socially Engaged Buddhism (taught by Prof. Henry Shiu) in 2003, followed by the second course The Healing Mind: Theories and Applications of Buddhist Psychology (taught by Prof. Tony Toneatto) under the leadership of then Principal Professor David Clandfield. In 2006, BPMH was proposed as a minor program by Prof. Tony Toneatto, with the support of Professors E. Thompson, Christoph Emmerich, Juhn Ahn, and Henry Shiu. 25 was the number put down as the estimated enrolment for the program.

To our pleasant surprise, the enrolment figures of the BPMH Program grew by leaps and bounds. BEFC stepped up to fund additional courses to meet the demand from students for courses in the program. BEFC provided funding to New College for ten year. We worked very hard to raise funds every year primarily from members of the Chinese Buddhists communities who were from Vietnam and Hong Kong. My team was inspired both by the student response to this program (I checked some years ago that the enrolment was over 380 - from the 25 we expected initially - validated very decisively the vision of the BPMH Program) and the generosity and support of the donors.

Due to such exponential growth of student enrolment, there had been a lot of discussions that the BPMH Minor should be converted to a Major Program. BEFC had expressed support for this possible development. Arising from these discussions, in 2011, the Dean's Office approved the Virtual Centre for Buddhism and Psychology which was to host the first peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated to publishing academic research in this area, the *Journal of Buddhism and Psychology*, and other activities. Realistically though, a program staffed entirely by year-to-year sessional instructors can only go so far. This Virtual Centre did not receive the attention it deserved.

It appears to me that the robust student enrolment and interest as demonstrated by this petition should be met by an appropriate level of the commitment of resources and administrative leadership so that this promising program can flourish.

As someone who was awarded the Arbor Award (2009) by the University of Toronto for outstanding volunteer service to the University of Toronto and a member of the Presidents' Circle, I call on the University of Toronto to allow the BPMH Program to be the world renown program it can be by supporting it to take its well deserved development pathway to become a Major Program housed in the interdisciplinary Centre for Buddhism and Psychology, as an EDU (Extra-Departmental Unit), and most certainly NOT to be CANCELLED!

I would also like to quote from the BPMH Minor Program proposal here for you:

"In recent years there has been an increasing dialogue between scientists, academics and health practitioners of the potential contributions of Buddhism to our understanding of physical and mental health. This interest can best be seen in the growing evidence showing

the powerful effect of mindfulness meditation on medical disorders. The primary goal of the proposed minor, Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health is to reflect this growing convergence between Buddhist philosophy and psychology and the modern health disciplines. The minor will allow students to choose from a wide range of courses on mind, consciousness, cognitive science, psychology of religion, health psychology and sociological analyses of physical and mental health to acquire a firm understanding of the specific contributions of Buddhism to the modern understanding of consciousness, mental health and illness and the determinant of physical health.

The university would benefit from a minor in BPMH by engaging in this dynamic field of research and study that may show great potential for improving the quality of both physical and emotional life. The minor program has been structured not only to be a cross-disciplinary effort that would weave practical and theoretical knowledge across all three campuses, but it would also include sharing resources with international institutions. In essence, we would be creating a world-renowned program that will put the University of Toronto at the forefront of this exciting new field.

This minor will be of great appeal to students interested in learning about the implications and applications of Buddhism in our modern society. In particular, students embarking on a career in health disciplines such as medicine, psychology, nursing and social work may find the programmatic study of Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health to be particularly instructive, especially within the increasingly multicultural and pluralistic nature of Canadian society. By considering the implications of Buddhist spirituality for our scientific understanding of mental and physical illness, the students will be able to integrate both modern and ancient perspectives towards health and illness..."

Everything said there is even more true today than ever. I sincerely hope that you will do what you can to support the wishes and students and communities!

Sincerely,

Ms. Chris Ng, MBA, MPS, RP
President, Buddhist Education Foundation of Canada
<http://buddhistedufoundation.com>
Buddhistedufoundation@rogers.com

Lunugamwehere Rewatha (U of T)

From: Lunugamwehere Rewatha bhante.rewatha@mail.utoronto.ca
Subject: Supporting Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program

Date: November 16, 2023 at 3:01 PM

To: Frances Garrett frances.garrett@utoronto.ca

Cc: Dickson Eyoh dickson.eyoh@utoronto.ca, Alexandra Guerson De Oliveira alexandra.guerson@utoronto.ca

LR

Rev Lunugamwehere Rewatha 4698, Kingston Road
Scarborough, ON. M1E 2P9 2023-11-16

Dr. Frances Garrett

Associate Professor, Dept for the Study of Religion Director, Buddhism, Psychology
and Mental Health Program University of Toronto, New College,
40 Willcocks Street,
Toronto. ON. M5S
1C6

Dear Director,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health Program offered at New College, University of Toronto. As a professional working in a correctional center, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that mental health challenges can have on individuals and communities. The insights and skills gained from this program are not only invaluable in my field but also crucial for fostering a more compassionate and peaceful society.

The world is currently facing significant challenges, with conflicts and crises affecting the mental well-being of countless individuals. In this context, the role of programs like Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health becomes even more critical. They equip students with the knowledge and tools necessary to address these issues effectively and promote mental health on a global scale.

During my time as a non-credit student in this department, I was deeply impressed by the comprehensive curriculum that seamlessly integrates the principles of Buddhism with contemporary psychological practices. This unique approach provides a holistic understanding of mental health, emphasizing the importance of kindness, empathy, and mindfulness. These values are essential for creating a kind nation and a society resilient in the face of adversity.

Furthermore, the program's emphasis on practical application ensures that students are not only theoretically proficient but also capable of making a tangible difference in their respective fields. This aspect of the program is particularly pertinent in correctional facilities, where the prevalence of mental health issues is

alarmingly high. The skills and perspectives I acquired from the program have been instrumental in my work, helping me to better understand and support the individuals in my care.

In conclusion, I strongly advocate for the continued support and recognition of the Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health Program. Its contributions to global mental health and the creation of a more peaceful, empathetic world cannot be overstated. I am confident that the program will continue to inspire and empower future generations of mental health professionals.

Thank you for considering my perspective. I am happy to provide further information or discuss my experiences in more detail if it would be helpful.

With Metta,

Rev Lunugamwehere Rewatha

(B.A [Hons] in Buddhist Philosophy and MA in Buddhist Studies)

A Buddhist Priest, Toronto Mahavihara Buddhist Temple
Student - Med (Global Mental Health Program) at OISE (University of Toronto). Student - Master of Arts in Counseling at Yorkville University.
Teaching Assistant at New College, University of Toronto.
A Site based Chaplain at Correctional Service Canada - Warkworth

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*"Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared."
~Buddha~*

Thomas George William Telfer (Western University)

From: Thomas George William Telfer ttelfer@uwo.ca
Subject: Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health
(BPMH) Program
Date: November 20, 2023 at 1:22 PM
To: frances.garrett@utoronto.ca
Cc: Elli Weisbaum elli.weisbaum@utoronto.ca

Dear Frances, I write with a letter of support for the continuation of the BPMH program at the University of Toronto. I understand that you will share my letter with the University of Toronto.

I was disappointed to learn that there is a recommendation that the BPMH program be shut down. I have reviewed the course offerings from the program and its proposed cancellation will have a serious impact on the well-being of students.

Many of the course offerings consider the fields of mindfulness and mental health which are fields of interest to me. Western University has financially supported my work in these fields and I would hope that the University of Toronto will continue to support the BPMH program.

Western awarded me a three-year teaching fellowship in the fields of mindfulness of mental health. My project was to develop courses in mindfulness and mental health at Western Law. In 2017 I began offering a non-credit course in mindfulness for first year law students. This course has now been offered 7 times. In 2019, I began offering a credit course in mindfulness and the legal profession. This course has now been offered four times. Mental health in the legal profession is an important topic.

There is interest in this topic across Canada as I have offered talks on mindfulness at six Canadian universities.

In 2022, I began a qualitative study on the impact of the Mindfulness and the Legal Profession course. That qualitative study (one of the co-authors is Elli Weisbaum) has now been completed and submitted to a law review. The study is entitled, **Enhancing Lawyers' Well-Being and Competencies Beyond the Traditional Law School Curriculum: The Impact of Mindfulness Education on Law Students**. Our analysis of these reflections shows that the course had a significant impact on student mental health and led to growth in skills relevant to the legal profession, including improved communication skills, enhanced focus, and increased productivity.

For me the most important take away was that the course had a significant impact on student mental health. Courses at the University of Toronto on mindfulness meditation no doubt also have a beneficial impact on student mental health. I believe that the shutting down of the BPMH of the program will deprive students of significant courses that will lead to overall well-being.

I would urge the University of Toronto to reconsider its decision to ensure that the BPMH program continues to be offered.

Professor Telfer

Dr Thomas Telfer
Professor
Faculty of Law
Western University

Co-Editor in Chief, *Canadian Business Law Journal*
Co-Editor, *Journal of the Insolvency Institute of Canada*

Jeffrey C. Walker (Philanthropist)

12750 Marsh Landing
West Palm Beach, FL 33418

November 15, 2023

Prof. Frances Garrett
Department for the Study of Religion
Director, Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program
University of Toronto

Dear Prof. Garrett,

I write you today in support of the University of Toronto's Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program (BPMH). From our work together over the last several years with the Flourishing Academic Network (FAN), I know BPMH to be a unique and important undergraduate program focused on rigorous research and innovative experiential learning relating to student flourishing. This issue stands at the center of my own work, and I am distraught to learn from you that your university has proposed suddenly to close this important program.

I understand that you plan to share my letter with your administration. Allow me therefore to summarize some details that I know you understand well, in order to give context to my assessment of your program.

Personally, as you know, I am the chairman of New Profit, a social change investment fund, and I am also vice chair in the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for health. I serve on the boards of the University of Virginia, Berklee College of Music, Grammys Music Education Coalition, On Being (Krista Tippett's enterprise), Just Capital, AMP for Health, and UVA's McIntire School of Commerce, where I was president for 10 years. I am a partner in Bridge Builders, an investment fund for social enterprises focused on contemplation and mind training. I also serve on the Harvard Business School's Board of Advisors and am on the Advisory Boards of MIT Media Lab and the Harvard School of Public Health. I am co-author of the book, "The Generosity Network," recipient of the John C. Whitehead Award for Social Enterprise from the Harvard Business School Club, and for 25 years I was CEO and Co-Founder of CCMP Capital.

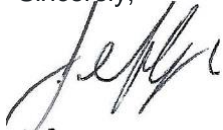
I am also a committed and leading member of the Flourishing Academic Network (FAN), which is where my own work has intersected with that of the undergraduate Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program (BPMH) at the University of Toronto. As you know, FAN is a collaborative of universities across the United States and Canada who share a commitment to student flourishing: we see higher education as a critical catalyst for wellbeing for students, communities, and society. FAN is bringing together faculty and academic staff, student affairs professionals, and community partners with a common interest to enhance student well-being by embedding flourishing throughout higher education.

From our work together with FAN, Professor Garrett, I know we share a knowledge of and commitment to increasing academic research on student wellbeing in a way that includes physical and mental health, the cultivation of a deep sense of wellbeing, and an appreciation of the interrelationships with the world. This is research that lives brightly in students' lives,

and the BPMH program in Toronto is precisely at the crux of our work, uniting undergraduates in a shared passion for rigorous research and experience focused on the critical, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary understanding and practice of flourishing. The University of Toronto's program is the only such program in Canada, as far as I'm aware - making it an internationally important and recognized program, deserving of widespread support. I cannot imagine how such a program could be closed especially now, as we navigate new complexities in student health.

With my voice, and a lifetime of experience in this work, I hope to amplify your concerns over the proposed closure of the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program in Toronto. This program is a model for universities across North America, and it should be expanded and supported. Please allow me to offer my strongest support, and to urge your administration to provide the highest level of support to this invaluable program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey C. Walker', written in a cursive style.

Jeffrey C. Walker

Walkerjcl@gmail.com

(646) 472-9606

VI. Observer reports on BPMH student sit-in on Nov 30, 2023

Stanley Doyle-Wood (U of T)

From: Stanley Doyle-Wood <stan.doyle.wood@utoronto.ca>

Sent: Monday, December 4, 2023 3:03 PM

To: Frances Garrett <frances.garrett@utoronto.ca>

Subject: Re: Thursday's BPMH sit-in

I was there at the sit-in and found that all of the students and the entire action itself through its practice and organization of mindfulness and meditation to be full of love, peacefulness and respect for each other, the space in which the action took place, and the university and the university community at large. As I recall the sit-in consisted of 15 minutes of silent meditation followed by (at times tearful) student testimonies that spoke to a deep collective love for the program and (to paraphrase the students) the unique and significant role the program plays for the university and for students given its focus and concentration on mental health and mental unwellness. It seemed to me, and from my observation that the student action was done in such a way as to generate peace, love, and safety along with a sense of connectedness for everyone. I felt this and appreciated this.

stan

Stan Doyle-Wood

Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity: New College & The Transitional Year Program University of Toronto



Political Science
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Tony Scott (U of T)

December 4th, 2023

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Tony Scott, Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Political Science, alumnus of the Department for the Study of Religion, and Course Instructor at the University of Toronto in Buddhist Studies.

Please let me write to share my observations on the peaceful protest led by students of the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health (BPMH) Program at New College and members of Peers are There to Help (PATH). These students and their allies met in the public area of Sidney Smith Hall on Thursday, November 30th, from 12:00-13:00, for an eminently peaceful and well-organized sit-in. The purpose of this sit-in was to rally support for the BPMH program, which is facing cuts and possible closure after an internal review that did not seek their or any other student feedback. The sit-in was also a chance to engage with other students and stakeholders on campus in this effort, and it provided a forum for students of PATH to express how much this BPMH program meant to them and how it had created a community of support that was essential to their wellbeing on campus.

After explaining the recent decision to cut or possibly close the BPMH program, the event, led by undergraduate students of PATH and the BPMH program, led the group of about 30 or 40 people through a mindfulness practice. During this time, marshals wearing bright vests insured there was no blockage of other student traffic in the public space, explained to observers the purpose of the event, and solicited people to sign the petition. After the guided mindfulness practice, many community members and stakeholders gave ad hoc speeches, most of whom were students. I was inspired by the students' willingness to describe the trauma they had experienced at the University of Toronto, and how the BPMH program provided them a space to articulate this trauma, engage with it through course work and class materials, and create a community that would help them make changes in their own communities after graduation. What most struck me was how these students supported one another, and it was clear that the BPMH program was a site for these students to radically transform their experience at the University of Toronto, taking control of their own mental health and work to support one another and the student community at large.

At no time during this sit-in were the students aggressive towards observers, and instead, the climate was one of understanding, compassion, and mutual support, which truly captures the University of Toronto's culture of excellence. I think this was a formative experience for many of the students involved, allowing them to learn how to register their dissent towards university policies in an eminently peaceful, positive, and productive way, and it was clear that those involved in organizing this event were very thoughtful and engaged members of the University of Toronto community who displayed a great degree of emotional maturity and self-awareness.

Indeed, it is precisely these kinds of protests that the world needs right now, and any efforts to curb, dissuade, or aggressively confront these actions runs counter to the mission of the University of Toronto as a servant of not just the city, but of humanity in general. On the

FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE


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contrary, the University of Toronto should be proud to be a space where such organizing efforts—and the public displays of solidarity and compassion—can be fostered, even if such organizing is borne out of dissent with university policy. Any administrator or instructor who witnessed this event would have been thoroughly impressed and proud of such students, if not taken by the cathartic nature of the event and the sincere support shown to everyone involved.

I must reiterate my full support for the efforts of these outstanding students and unreservedly condemn any actions taken to intimidate or stifle such an initiative. Doing so only shows the critical importance of the BPMH program on campus, providing a space where students can change the academic culture of the university that has proven itself detrimental to mental health of the very people we are charged with nurturing.

Please write me if you have any further questions or concerns, I am happy to discuss this further in any forum necessary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tony Scott, Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow Department of
Political Science, University of Toronto 403-334-6184,
anthony.scott@utoronto.ca

Appendix A: Full list of authors of letters, faculty and community members

Letters from the following people were sent beginning in November 2023, in reaction to an announcement from the University of Toronto administration on their proposal to close the BPMH undergraduate Minor program. Letters themselves are below.

Wendi L. Adamek
Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies
Dept. of Classics and Religion, University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

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

Jennifer Bright
Assistant Professor Buddhist Spiritual Care and Counselling Emmanuel College of Victoria University

Lauren Brown
M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate, Inlight Fellow
Program Coordinator: Mindfulness, Meditation and Yoga
Multi-Faith Centre | Division of Student Life | University of Toronto

Richard Chambers
Director (retired), Multi-Faith Centre for Spiritual Study and Practice University of Toronto

Michael H. Clifton
Partner, Clifton Kōk LLP Legal Counsel

HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Pamela McCarroll
HyeRan Kim-Cragg
Principal
Timothy Eaton Memorial Church Professor of Preaching Emmanuel College of Victoria University
With
Dr. Pamela McCarroll
Vice Principal
Jane & Geoffrey Martin Chair of Practical Theology Emmanuel College of Victoria University

Mark Dennis and
Blake Hestir
Mark Dennis
Professor, Religion Department Director, CALM Studies
Texas Christian University, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes lands
With
Dr Blake Hestir

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

Alex Djedovic
Sessional Lecturer
Cognitive Science Program, University College
Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program, New College

Ani Jamyang Donma
Certified Clinical Chaplain, Registered Psychotherapist, Mindfulness Project Lead Spiritual & Religious Care Department
The Hospital for Sick Children

Norman Farb
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Toronto Mississauga

Michel Ferrari
Professor
Applied Psychology & Human Development OISE
University of Toronto

David Germano
Professor, Department of Religious Studies
Director, Tibet Center
University of Virginia

Ann Gleig
Associate Professor of Religion and Cultural Studies
University of Central Florida

Janet Gyatso
Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies
Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs
Harvard University

Hazim Hassan
Doctor of Public Health (Student) Dalla Lana School of Public Health
University of Toronto

John (Jack) Miller
Professor
Curriculum,
Teaching and
Learning OISE,
University of
Toronto

Amber Marie Moore
Ph.D. Candidate
Department for the Study of Religion
2022-23 Senior Doctoral Fellow at New College

Jason Neelis
Associate Professor
Religion and Culture Department
Wilfrid Laurier University
Associate Graduate Faculty, Graduate Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

John Negru
Publisher, The Sumeru Press
Founder of canadianbuddhism.info

Chris Ng
President, Buddhist Education Foundation of Canada

Carolina Patryluk
BPMH Instructor 2023 Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Psychology
Western University

Lunugamwehere Rewatha
B.A [Hons] in Buddhist Philosophy and MA in Buddhist Studies A Buddhist Priest, Toronto
Mahavihara Buddhist Temple
Student - Med (Global Mental Health Program) at OISE
Student - Master of Arts in Counseling at
Yorkville University Teaching Assistant at New
College, University of Toronto Chaplain at
Correctional Service Canada

Justin R. Ritzinger
Associate Professor of Religious Studies
University of Miami

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

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

Tony Scott
Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

Zindel V. Segal

Distinguished Professor of Psychology in Mood Disorders Graduate Department of Psychological
Clinical Science
University of Toronto - Scarborough

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

Henry Shiu
Shi Wu De Professor in Chinese Buddhist Studies
Emmanuel College of Victoria University

Kunga Sherab
Buddhist Chaplain
University of Toronto and Bridge of Canada
2021-22 Senior Doctoral Fellow at New College

Franklin Tall
Professor Emeritus
Department of Mathematics
University of Toronto

Thomas George William Telfer
Professor
Faculty of Law Western University
Co-Editor in Chief, *Canadian Business Law Journal*
Co-Editor, *Journal of the Insolvency Institute of Canada*

Mark Unno
Professor of Religious Studies, Religious Studies Department Head
University of Oregon

Michelle Voss
Professor of Theology
Past Principal, Emmanuel College of Victoria University

André Vellino
Directeur | Chair
École des sciences de l'information | School of Information Studies Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

Jeffrey C. Walker
Chairman of New Profit
Vice Chair in the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Health
Board Member: University of Virginia, Berklee College of Music, Grammys Music Education Coalition, On Being, Just
Capital, AMP for Health, UVA's McIntire School of Commerce, Harvard Business School, MIT Media Lab, Harvard
School of Public Health
Recipient of the John C. Whitehead Award for Social Enterprise, Harvard Business School Club

Paul Whissell
Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Programs of Human Biology; Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health; New
One, University of Toronto (2023)
Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto

Jeff Wilson
Professor, Religious Studies and East Asian Studies
Renison University College, University of Waterloo

Dominik Wujastyk
Singhmar Chair in Classical Indian Society and Polity
University of Alberta

Authors of observer reports on BPMH student sit-in on Nov 30, 2023

Tony Scott
Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow Department of Political Science University of Toronto

Stanley Doyle-Wood
Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity
New College & The Transitional Year Program
University of Toronto

Appendix B: Background on the 2023 Buddhism, Psychology & Mental Health Program

<https://www.newcollege.utoronto.ca/programs/bpmh/>

The Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health (BPMH) Program is a radically interdisciplinary undergraduate Minor at the University of Toronto that allows students to choose from a wide range of courses in Buddhist Studies, cognitive science, medical anthropology, psychology, health sciences, and sociological analyses of physical and mental health. As a contemplative science program, BPMH courses are developed from rigorous interdisciplinary research interactions between scientists, academics, health practitioners and contemplative traditions. BPMH students explore the discipline with an eye toward global understandings of consciousness, mental health and illness, determinants of physical health, climate justice, systems of oppression, and racism and social justice.

Additionally, in both theory and practice, the BPMH program strongly and directly aligns with the recommendations of the University of Toronto's Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health, December 2019, which addressed the growing and serious mental health crisis of our students. In our courses, students learn how distress and wellbeing are shaped by culture, experience, and opportunity, and they study how diverse models of collective and individual wellbeing may evolve in their lives.

Along with training students in qualitative and quantitative research and enhancing their scientific literacy and writing skills, BPMH pedagogical approaches focus on developing students' capacities for self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-examination in contexts of relational, intersectional, and global interconnections. Courses are shaped by trauma-aware and universal design principals that emphasize meta-cognitive and reflective learning.¹¹

Since its founding in 2007, this undergraduate Minor Program has grown exponentially. Most BPMH courses have long waiting lists each semester. Enrollment in the Minor has risen dramatically since the inception of the program, from 34 students in 2007-08 to 308 students in 2020-21 and **343 students in 2022-2023**. This year we have **1203 students enrolled** in our 11 fall and winter courses, with 182 students still on our waiting lists.

Looking at the 24 academic programs across U of T's seven colleges, 71% of college programs have 200 students or less, and 41% of college programs have fewer than 100 students enrolled. In other words, **BPMH is one of the largest and most in-demand programs hosted by the University's colleges, which are where many of the University's most innovative and interdisciplinary academic programs are housed.**

Below, you will find:

- (1) a selection of program events held in recent years for students and the public;
- (2) a summary of two forms of peer mentoring led by program students;
- (3) a new podcasting initiative;

¹¹ On reflective learning, a student-centered pedagogical model, see the following resources. Baeten, M., Kyndt, E., Struyven, K., & Dochy, F. (2010). Using Student-Centered Learning Environments to Stimulate Deep Approaches to Learning: Factors Encouraging or Discouraging Their Effectiveness. *Educational Research Review*, 5, 243–60. Cundiff, P.R., McLaughlin, O., Brown, K., Grace, K. (2020). In Search of Greater Understanding: The Impact of Mastery Learning on Social Science Education. *Teaching Sociology*, 48(2), 107 – 11. DOI: 10.1177/0092055X20907979. Dangremond Stanton, J., Sebesta, A.J., & Dunlosky, J. (2021). Fostering Metacognition to Support Student Learning and Performance. *CBE – Life Sciences Education*, 20(2), <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.20-12-0289>. Ellis, R.A. (2016). Qualitatively Different University Student Experiences of Inquiry: Associations among Approaches to Inquiry, Technologies, and Perceptions of the Learning Environment. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 17(1), 13 – 23.

- (4) a word cloud based on a Jan 2022 student survey indicating which majors draw BPMH students;
- and (5) a listing of active core courses run by the program, plus
- (6) a list of courses available to program students in cognate departments.

We hope that a quick skim through this data will give the reader an overall sense of the shape of the program currently.

(1) A Brief Selection of 2021-23 Events held for students and the public

- BIPOC Speaker Series 2022 (678 registrants)
 - Panel Discussion: Gender, Identity LGBTQIA+
 - Exploring the Roots of Trauma & Systems of Oppression
 - Buddhist Perspectives on Current Social Issues
 - America’s Racial Karma: An Invitation to Heal
 - Mindfulness in Slow Research for Social-Ecological Justice
- Book Launch: “Zen & The Art of Saving the Planet” (Over 200 attendees)
- Book Launch: “Intraconnected” with Dr. Dan Siegel (Over 2150 attendees)
- “An Evening of Meditation, Music & Poetry” (Over 200 attendees)
- “Day of Mindfulness: Workshop & Practice” (60 attendees)
- “Public Talk” @ Temerty Faculty of Medicine (Over 400 attendees)
- Diverse Perspectives on Mindfulness Series 2022
- Dr. Brent Beresford, “Recognizing the value of the 3rd gem: Relationality in mindfulness and psychotherapy”
- Dr. Liz Pang, “Self-directed neuroplasticity: Can we cultivate our brains to function in healthier ways?”
- Dr. Seonaigh MacPherson, “Mindfulness-based Anti-oppression, Impacts of Oppression on Mental Health”
- Dr. Michael Yellow Bird, “Neuro-decolonization”
- Moustafa Abdelrahmanm RP, “Toward Acknowledging and Healing Minority Stress: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Mindfulness Practice”
- Linda Thai, MSW, “Somatic Embodiment & Regulation Strategies”

(2) Selected Forms of Peer Mentoring Work by program students and faculty, 2022-23

- Peers are There to Help (PATH), <https://pathuoft.net/>: A peer support network in the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program at New College, University of Toronto. PATH has been begun collaborating this semester with New College Student Life to support events such as “Let’s Talk” and do further outreach to the NC student community around mindfulness/compassion-based peer events hosted by PATH
- Wake Up Sangha: Drop-In Mindfulness sessions. Weekly drop-in mindfulness/compassion-based sessions primarily in the tradition of Engaged Mindfulness and Plum Village

(3) Public Outreach through Podcasting: “Contemplative Science”

- BPMH will begin partnering with the internationally recognized “Contemplative Science Podcast” based out of Monash University, Australia, on 25 new episodes starting in 2024
- The episodes will highlight work being done in the BPMH program, along with connecting to international researchers and academics in the field.

(4) Student Body, Based on Jan 2022 Survey of 126 program students

Responses to the question “What is your major?”



(5) Active Core Program Courses

BPM200H1 – The Art & Science of Flourishing

An interdisciplinary survey of recipes for a life of “flourishing,” through satisfaction, well-being, resilience, and accomplishment, as well as critical scholarship on concepts and practices of flourishing. Students explore perspectives from the sciences and the humanities about what it means to flourish across diverse cultures and contexts, and how wellbeing and distress are social, cultural, political, spiritual, ecological, and historical phenomena. Experiential exercises will accompany each thematic topic.

BPM214H1: Socially Engaged Buddhism

Explores how Socially Engaged Buddhism has developed in response to global conversations on systemic oppression, climate justice, equity, decolonization, and trauma. We examine the roots of Engaged Buddhism in countries such as Vietnam, China & Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and India, and its transformation into a global movement. Themes include Buddhist environmental activism, and Buddhist protest movements, along with research on the application of Buddhist teachings in healthcare, education, business, and the criminal justice system.

BPM232H1: Buddhism and Psychology

An overview of the encounter between Buddhism and psychology over the last century, with cross-disciplinary study of topics such as self, embodiment, impermanence, suffering, liberation, and insight. We explore how (and why) scientists, psychologists, and Buddhist reformers have reinterpreted Buddhism as “science” and how Buddhist contemplative practices such as mindfulness or compassion training have been transformed and promoted by modern psychology.

JNR301H1: The History of Buddhist Meditation

This course surveys historical, cultural, and textual contexts for Buddhist meditative and contemplative practices and techniques.

BPM330H1: Mindfulness-Informed Interventions for Mental Health

An exploration of how mindfulness-based approaches are being used in biomedical mental health interventions. We study mindfulness from historical, societal, structural, cultural, professional, and personal perspectives, with an emphasis on its Buddhist foundations and on concepts of the embodied mind. We look at how recent socio-political phenomena are inspiring diverse applications and adaptations of mindfulness-based interventions.

BPM332H1: Buddhism and Psychotherapy

A multi-cultural and interdisciplinary study of therapeutically-oriented practices and theories of the mind. Areas considered include positive psychology, psychoanalysis, cognitive-behavioural therapy, mindfulness meditation, and Jungian psychology, with comparison to various Buddhist teachings and practices.

BPM334H1: Science of Wisdom: Buddhist and Western Traditions

Provides a conceptual and contemplative interdisciplinary exploration of “wisdom traditions.” Buddhist approaches to self-actualization and wisdom will be compared to traditions from Mesopotamia, classical Greece, Christianity, the Renaissance, etc. Coursework includes guided experiential exercises for various traditions.

BPM335H1: Meditation and the Body

In recent years, the effects of meditation on the body have been widely researched. There is an increasing body of evidence that mindfulness meditation can affect brain activity, brain structure, neurochemistry and other psychobiological processes (e.g. blood pressure, cardiac function). This course will examine the research in this emerging field.

BPM338H1: Exploring Mindful Awareness

An overview of mindfulness as a systematic investigation of subjective experience, with a survey of classic descriptions and contemporary scientific literature. Students will explore meditative practices in class and maintain a meditation practice outside class.

BPM339H1: Mind, Consciousness and the Self

An interdisciplinary study of theories of mind, consciousness, and the self, placing Buddhist traditions in dialogue with scientific theories of the mind in psychology.

BPM381H1: Buddhist Perspectives on Current Social Issues

Explores Buddhist perspectives on issues such as climate justice, systemic racism, burnout, and mental health in sectors of society including healthcare, education, and business.

BPM432H1: Advanced Research in Meditation, Psychology and Neuroscience

This seminar-based course prepares students for advanced research on meditation by exposing them to diverse theories, tools and techniques used in the field. Students will learn about the scientific method and

develop critical thinking skills; critique scientific research articles on meditation; practice communication skills; and propose their own original study on meditation.

BPM433H1: Advanced Exploration of Buddhist Psychology and Practice

An in-depth, interdisciplinary exploration of how Buddhist teachings are set in conversation with contemporary scientific research on topics such as suffering, wellbeing, and compassion, through a mixture of lecture, textual analysis, discussion, and hands-on experiential practice.

BPM438H1: Mindfulness Meditation: Science and Research

An exponential increase of scientific research on aspects of Buddhist theories of mind and mindfulness meditation has contributed to the growing popularity of mindfulness across the sectors of healthcare, education and business. Examines the theoretical and empirical basis of mindfulness-based interventions and applications in healthcare settings and beyond. Critically addresses the roots of mindfulness, current models and adaptations, relevant applications, interventions and outcomes. Quantitative and qualitative research methodology will be reviewed, and conceptual, methodological, statistical, and interpretive limitations of the scientific literature will be discussed. The course aims to build scientific literacy skills through the assessment, critique, and discussion of peer reviewed journal articles.

(6) Selected Courses Available to Students in Cognate Units (students must take 3 courses in any of these cognate fields)

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

ANT100Y1 Introduction to Anthropology: Society and culture from various anthropological perspectives: socio-cultural, evolutionary, archaeological, and linguistic.

ANT204H1 Social Cultural Anthropology and Global Issues: A course focused on recent anthropological scholarship that seeks to understand and explain the transformation of contemporary societies and cultures. Topics may include some of the following: new patterns of global inequality, war and neo-colonialism, health and globalization, social justice and indigeneity, religious fundamentalism, gender inequalities, biotechnologies and society etc.

ANT207H1 Core Concepts in Social and Cultural Anthropology: Society, culture, kinship, exchange, community, identity, politics, belief: these and other core concepts are explored in this course, which lays the foundation for advanced courses in social and cultural anthropology.

ANT253H1 Language & Society: This course introduces linguistic analysis with a view towards its application to the study of the relation between culture and social structure. The interplay of pronunciation, grammar, semantics, and discourse with rituals, ideologies, and constructions of social meaning and worldview are discussed in tandem with the traditional branches of linguistic analysis: phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, and semantics. The objective of the course is to provide a broad framework for understanding the role of language in society.

ANT348H1 Medical Anthropology: Health, Power and Politics: This course deepens students' understandings of health and illness as social, cultural, political and historical phenomena. Drawing on theories and approaches from social-cultural anthropology, students will develop skills in critical analysis of experiences and meanings of healing and illness in particular contexts, with a focus on anthropological critique of dominant health policies, discourses, technologies and practices.

ANT356H1 Anthropology of Religion: This course introduces anthropological definitions of religion; debates on rituals and rites of passage; rationality, religion and modernity; belief and body; religion and the media. It also engages with studies in the anthropology of popular and transnational religion, and the politics of religious movements.

JAR301H1 Plagues and Peoples: From Divine Intervention to Public Health: Infectious diseases have afflicted human societies throughout the history of our species. How are diseases shaped by the societies in which they spread, and how do they change culture and politics in turn? This course introduces perspectives from medical anthropology and religious studies to analyze the intersection of cultural, religious and scientific narratives when people confront plagues. We focus on historical and contemporary examples, such as the Spanish flu and COVID-19, giving students the tools to understand how cultural institutions, religious worldviews, and public health epidemiology shape living and dying during a pandemic.

COGNITIVE SCIENCE PROGRAM

COG250Y1 Introduction to Cognitive Science: An introduction to the problems, theories and research [strategies central to the interdisciplinary field focusing on the nature and organization of the human mind and other cognitive systems. Interrelations among the philosophical, psychological, linguistic and computer science aspects of the field are emphasized.

COG341H1 Issues in Cognitive Science I: Attention, Perception, and Consciousness: An examination of core topics in cognitive science building on introductions in COG250Y1. Typical topics include perception and attention; concepts; imagery; consciousness.

COG342H1 Issues in Cognitive Science II: Concepts, Theories of Mind, and Cognitive Evolution: An examination of core topics in cognitive science building on introductions in COG250Y1. Typical topics include: concepts; theories of mind; cognitive evolution.

DEPARTMENT OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES

EAS241H1 Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: A historical introduction to Chinese philosophy, covering selected figures and texts from the Warring States period through the Qīng dynasty. Schools of thought covered include Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism, Legalism, "Profound Learning," Neo-Confucianism, and "Evidential Learning." Texts and thinkers include the Confucian Analects, Mòzǐ, Mèngzǐ, Xúnzǐ, Dàodéjīng, Zhuāngzǐ, Hán Fēi, Guō Xiàng, Zhū Xī, Wáng Yángmíng, and Dài Zhèn.

EAS361H1 Zen Buddhism: This course introduces the Zen Buddhist traditions of China, Korea, and Japan. Emphasis is placed on the radical views of history, language, ritual, self, and enlightenment espoused by these traditions. The course also examines issues related to Zen monasticism, the development of koans, and the definition of orthodoxy in both premodern and modern Zen. Students will be asked to explore these and other topics by paying close attention to the historical, doctrinal, and institutional contexts from which they arose.

EAS393H1 Chinese Buddhism: Topics vary according to the instructor's interests.

CENTRE FOR ETHICS

ETH201H1 Contemporary Moral Problems: How should we live? Which course of action is the right one? When and why should we blame ourselves and/or others? We all have and exercise moral opinions; this course is about justifying them. The course begins with some critical reasoning skills, and then explores

philosophical strategies for justifying moral beliefs. We will then examine some specific issues of moral and political significance before concluding with psychological mechanisms behind moral attitudes and behaviour.

ETH220H1 Moral Psychology: A study of issues that arise at the intersection of psychology and moral philosophy. Why do people act morally? What role do reason and emotion play? Can we know what is right, yet not be motivated to do it? What role can science play in advancing our understanding of morality?

ETH230H1 Morality in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Is morality universal, or does it vary by time and place? This course will examine cultural differences in moral codes from both empirical and philosophical perspectives.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

HIS280Y1 History of China: A critical history of the place we today call China from prehistoric times to the 21st century, tracing shifting borders, identities, governments, and cultures while challenging any singular definition of "China."

HIS282Y1 History of South Asia: An introductory survey addressing major themes in the history of South Asia, examining South Asian political economy, social history, colonial power relations and the production of culture. Emphasis is on the period after 1750, particularly the study of colonialism, nationalism, and postcolonial citizenship and modernity.

HIS489H1 The History of Psychiatry and Psychiatric Illness: Introduces students to current issues in the history of psychiatry and some of the major developments in the evolution of this unique medical specialty. The format is class discussion based on themes covered in the course textbook, covering such topics as changing perspectives on the nature of psychotic illness, the psychoneuroses, disorders of the mind/body relationship, psychiatric diagnosis, and presentations of illness.

HUMAN BIOLOGY PROGRAM

HMB300H1 Neurobiology of Behaviour: This neuroscience course focuses on higher brain functions and the mechanisms underlying human and animal behaviours. Topics may include the emerging role of the gut microbiome's impact on behaviour, pathogens that alter neuronal development and the biological basis of mindfulness and placebos. In addition, the impact that exercise and sleep play in modulating these behaviours are examined. Common experimental techniques used in neuroscience research such as brain imaging and cellular genetics are emphasized.

HMB434H1 Complementary & Integrative Medicine: Introduction to complementary and alternative medical therapies. Topics include, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Naturopathy, Ayurvedic, and Mind-Body Practices. Biological mechanisms will be emphasized and therapies will be critically analyzed from an evidence-based research perspective. Integrating alternative therapies into Western practices with a focus on personalized medicine will be discussed.

Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IHPST)

HPS100H1 Introduction to History and Philosophy of Science and Technology: An investigation of some pivotal periods in the history of science with an emphasis on the influences of philosophy on the scientists of the period, and the philosophical and social implications of the scientific knowledge, theory and methodology that emerged.

HPS110H1 The Science of Human Nature: Why do we do what we do? What factors play a role in shaping our personality? What biological and social elements help configure a person's moral and emotional character? In this course, we examine landmark studies that shook standard beliefs about human nature in their time. We analyze those studies in their historical context and discuss their relevance to social, ethical, and policy debates. The studies may include research on mother love, obedience, conformity, bystander intervention in emergencies, deception, race, and gender stereotypes.

HPS200H1 Science and Values: An introduction to issues at the interface of science and society. Including the reciprocal influence of science and social norms, the relation of science and religion, dissemination of scientific knowledge, science and policy. Issues may include: Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons; Genetic Engineering; The Human Genome Project; Climate Change.

HPS250H1 Introductory Philosophy of Science: This course introduces and explores central issues in the philosophy of science, including scientific inference, method, and explanation. Topics may include underdetermination, realism and empiricism, and laws of nature.

HEALTH STUDIES PROGRAM

HST209H1 Introduction to Health: Determinants of Health & Health Care: A multidisciplinary approach to understanding perspectives in health, health equity, and primary health care. Themes include critical discussion of the measurements of health outcomes and the socioeconomic and political factors that affect health, including neglected and marginalized populations in Canada and globally.

HST305H1 Perspectives in Health, Gender, Ethnicity and Race: This course will examine historical and contemporary health disparities with respect to gender, ethnicity, and race. Other intersectional issues such as Colonialism, class, sexuality, and the urban/rural divide will also be considered as they to social determinants of health. Attention will be focused on examples of disparities that perpetuate and exacerbate current epidemiological challenges for underrepresented populations in Canada and globally.

HST306H1 Health, Nutrition and Food Security: This course examines the antecedents (for example: social structure, environments, human development and behaviour) that underlie nutrition-mediated aspects to human health and disease. This will include review and analysis of seminal, primary, and current research as well as contemporary issues surrounding nutritional literacy and deficits, food insecurity and access, as these relate to morbidity and pre-mature mortality. The course will also examine existing public health practices for health promotion and access, and population-level disease prevention and interventions.

CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS STUDIES

INS300Y1 Worldviews, Indigenous Knowledges, Oral Tradition: A study of the languages and culture of Indigenous peoples through exploration of oral histories, from creation stories until present times, including the role of oral history and methods for studying oral history through accounts told by elders.

INS340Y1 Indigenous Health Science: This course is themed in six-week quarters addressing four aspects of Western Science (basic, applied, clinical and population health). Within each quarter, the Western Science theme is examined holistically using Indigenous Science and the four aspects of the Medicine Wheel (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual).

JFP450H1 Indigenous Issues in Health and Healing: This course consists of an examination of health and healing from a holistic perspective (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual) and how colonialism, culture, and public policy have impacted the health of Indigenous peoples in the present day. This course is built around

a case-based project in which students working in interdisciplinary groups take on the role of a traditional Indigenous healer, and then assess their healing strategy from a biomedical perspective.

MARK S. BONHAM CENTRE FOR SEXUAL DIVERSITY STUDIES

JSR312H1 Queer Religion and Religiosities: This course will introduce students to key terms, theories, and debates in Queer and Religious Studies and to the history of queer identities as they are expressed within various religious traditions, texts, and communities. It asks how dominant heteronormative discourses on gender and sexuality are adhered to, legitimized, negotiated, and contested within various religious traditions. The course will also allow students to interrogate how power and power relationships are shaped by sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, and ability in the world of religion.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHL100Y1 Introduction to Philosophy (Historical): An introduction to the central branches of philosophy, such as logic, theory of knowledge, metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy. Writings from the central figures in the history of Western and non-Western philosophy, as well as contemporary philosophers, may be considered.

PHL200Y1 Ancient Philosophy: Central texts of the pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, and post-Aristotelian philosophy.

PHL201H1 Introductory Philosophy: An introduction to philosophy focusing on the connections among its main branches: logic, theory of knowledge, metaphysics, and ethics. This course is intended for those with little or no philosophy background but who have completed Year 1 in any area of study.

PHL217H1 Introduction to Continental Philosophy: An introduction to some of the post-Hegelian thinkers who inspired the various philosophical movements broadly referred to as continental, such as phenomenology, existentialism, deconstruction, and post-modernism. Questions include the will, faith, death, existence, history and politics, rationality and its limits, encountering another. Authors studied may include: Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Heidegger, Sartre.

PHL232H1 Knowledge and Reality: An introduction to issues in the fundamental branches of philosophy: metaphysics, which considers the overall framework of reality; epistemology, or the theory of knowledge; and related problems in the philosophy of science. Topics in metaphysics may include: mind and body, causality, space and time, God, freedom and determinism; topics in epistemology may include perception, evidence, belief, truth, skepticism.

PHL235H1 Philosophy of Religion: Some central issues in the philosophy of religion such as the nature of religion and religious faith, arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil, varieties of religious experience, religion and human autonomy.

PHL237H1 Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: A historical introduction to Chinese philosophy, covering selected figures and texts from the Warring States period through the Qīng dynasty. Schools of thought covered include Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism, Legalism, "Profound Learning," Neo-Confucianism, and "Evidential Learning." Texts and thinkers include the Confucian Analects, Mòzǐ, Mèngzǐ, Xúnzǐ, Dàodéjīng, Zhuāngzǐ, Hán Fēi, Guō Xiàng, Zhū Xī, Wáng Yángmíng, and Dài Zhèn.

PHL240H1 Persons, Minds and Bodies: Consciousness and its relation to the body; personal identity and survival; knowledge of other minds; psychological events and behaviour.

PHL243H1 Philosophy of Human Sexuality: Philosophical issues about sex and sexual identity in the light of biological, psychological and ethical theories of sex and gender; the concept of gender; male and female sex roles; perverse sex; sexual liberation; love and sexuality.

PHL244H1 Human Nature: Aspects of human nature, e.g., emotion, instincts, motivation. Theories of human nature, e.g., behaviourism, psychoanalysis.

PHL275H1 Introduction to Ethics: An introduction to central issues in ethics or moral philosophy, such as the objectivity of values, the nature of moral judgements, rights and duties, the virtues, and consequentialism. Readings may be drawn from a variety of contemporary and historical sources.

PHL281H1 Bioethics: An introduction to the study of moral and legal problems in medical practice and in biomedical research; the development of health policy. Topics include: concepts of health and disease, patient rights, informed consent, allocation of scarce resources, euthanasia, abortion, genetic and reproductive technologies, human research, and mental health.

PHL302H1 Ancient Philosophy After Aristotle: A study of selected themes in post-Aristotelian philosophy. Topics may include Stoicism, Epicureanism, Neoplatonism, and various forms of scepticism.

PHL310H1 The Rationalists: Central philosophical problems in philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and their contemporaries.

PHL311H1 The Empiricists: Central philosophical problems in philosophers such as Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and their contemporaries.

PHL319H1 Philosophy and Psychoanalytic Theory: A study of the fundamentals of psychoanalytic theory from a philosophical perspective, focusing on the works of Freud and others. Topics include mind (conscious and unconscious), instinctual drives, mechanisms of defence, the structure of personality, civilization, the nature of conscience, and the status of psychoanalysis.

PHL320H1 Phenomenology: Phenomenology is a method used in the analysis of human awareness and subjectivity. It has been applied in the social sciences, in the humanities, and in philosophy. Texts studied are from Husserl and later practitioners, e.g., Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gurwitsch, and Ricoeur.

PHL331H1 Metaphysics: Historical and systematic approaches to topics in metaphysics, such as the nature of reality, substance and existence, necessity and possibility, causality, universals and particulars.

PHL332H1 Epistemology: Historical and systematic approaches to topics in the theory of knowledge, such as truth, belief, justification, perception, a priori knowledge, certitude, skepticism, other minds.

PHL335H1 Issues in Philosophy of Religion: Some specific problem(s) in the philosophy of religion, such as the relationship of religious faith and religious belief, the ontological argument for the existence of God, theories about divine transcendence, the philosophical presuppositions of religious doctrines, the modern critique of religion.

PHL340H1 Issues in Philosophy of Mind: Typical issues include: the mind-brain identity theory; intentionality and the mental; personal identity.

PHL341H1 Freedom, Responsibility, and Human Action: Human action, and the nature of freedom and responsibility in the light of contemporary knowledge concerning the causation of behaviour.

PHL344H1 Philosophy of Emotions: A survey of philosophical topics related to the emotions, from a range of philosophical perspectives. Questions to be considered may include the following: What exactly is an emotion? Are emotions feelings? What emotions are there, and how are they shaped by culture and society? How are emotions related to reason, the brain and the body? What role do — and should — the emotions play in decision-making? Can an emotion be morally right or wrong, and what makes it so?

PHL375H1 Ethics: An intermediate-level study of selected issues in moral philosophy, or of influential contemporary or historical works in ethical theory.

PHL376H1 Topics in Moral Philosophy: A focused examination of a selected issue in moral philosophy.

PHL382H1 Ethics: Death and Dying: An intermediate-level study of moral and legal problems, including the philosophical significance of death, the high-tech prolongation of life, definition and determination of death, suicide, active and passive euthanasia, the withholding of treatment, palliative care and the control of pain, living wills; recent judicial decisions.

PHL383H1 Ethics and Mental Health: An intermediate-level study of moral and legal problems, including the concepts of mental health and illness, mental competence, dangerousness and psychiatric confidentiality, mental institutionalization, involuntary treatment and behaviour control, controversial therapies; legal issues: the Mental Health Act, involuntary commitment, the insanity defence.

PHL404H1 Seminar in Epistemology: Typical problems include the nature of knowledge and belief; perception; theories of truth and necessity; skepticism.

PHL405H1 Seminar in Philosophy of Mind: Advanced study of a problem in the philosophy of mind.

PHL406H1 Seminar in Metaphysics: Typical problems include causality and determinism; ontological categories; mind and body; the objectivity of space and time.

PHL407H1 Seminar in Ethics: Advanced discussion of issues in moral philosophy, including issues of applied ethics.

PHL414H1 Seminar in Philosophy of Religion: Advanced study of topics in the philosophy of religion.

PHL455H1 Seminar in Philosophy of Science: Advanced study of some area or problem in the philosophy of science. Previous course number: PHL415H1

PHL478H1 Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Religion: Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Religion.

PHL479H1 Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Mind: Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Mind

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

PSY100H1 Introductory Psychology: A brief introductory survey of psychology as both a biological and social science. Topics will include physiological, learning, perceptual, motivational, cognitive, developmental, personality, abnormal, and social psychology.

PSY210H1 Introduction to Developmental Psychology: The developmental approach to the study of behaviour with reference to sensorimotor skills, cognition, socialization, personality, and emotional behaviour.

PSY220H1 Introduction to Social Psychology: Contemporary areas of research in social psychology: social perception, attitudes, inter-personal relations, and group processes.

PSY230H1 Personality and Its Transformations: Theory and research in personality structure and dynamics: the interaction of cultural and biological factors in the development and expression of individual differences.

PSY240H1 Introduction to Abnormal Psychology: A critical survey of concepts, theories, and the state of research in the area of psychopathology and therapeutic methods.

PSY260H1 Introduction to Learning and Plasticity: Concepts, theories, and applications of classical and contemporary learning theories, including classical and operant conditioning. Current theories of the physiological and anatomical basis of learning and memory, including synaptic plasticity, the role of the hippocampus, amygdala, frontal cortex and other brain regions. Theories will be related to a practical understanding and applications such as drug addiction, phobias and other disorders.

PSY270H1 Introduction to Cognitive Psychology: An introduction to research and theory on the neural and cognitive architecture of attention, memory, language, thinking and reasoning.

PSY280H1 Introduction to Sensation and Perception: An introduction to the physiological and psychological basis of perception across the different sensory modalities in humans and lower animals, with an emphasis on vision. Exploring visual perception such as shape and objects, scenes, colour, space, and motion as well as auditory perception of simple and complex sounds, and location. Further topics may include touch, including perception of temperature, pain and body posture, the chemical senses, and cross-modal influences of the senses on one another. In-class demonstrations may supplement the lectures.

PSY311H1 Social Development: Theory and research in social attachment, aggression, morality, imitation and identification, altruism, and parental discipline, with discussion of methodological issues.

PSY312H1 Cognitive Development: Examines the developmental of knowledge in fundamental domains such as spatial perception, navigation, object perception, number, language, and theory of mind. Emphasis is on current experimental findings and how they address centuries-old debates surrounding the origin and nature of human knowledge.

PSY313H1 Psychology of Aging: Age changes in sensory and perceptual processes, motor skill, learning, memory, and personality. Theory, methodological problems, social, cultural, and environmental influences that shape behaviour and attitudes towards and among the elderly.

PSY321H1 Cross-Cultural Psychology: One of the hallmarks of human behaviour is its diversity. Some of the ways in which we differ are thought to be relatively idiosyncratic (e.g., specific aspects of personality), whereas others are fairly systematic. Cultural psychology is one area of research in human behaviour that examines systematic differences resulting from individuals' cultural backgrounds. This course will introduce you to the consideration of cultural variation in the study of human thought and behaviour.

PSY326H1 Social Cognition: An examination of theory and research on how we make sense of ourselves and our social world. Topics covered include goals, mood, memory, hypothesis testing, counterfactual thinking, stereotypes, and culture.

PSY331H1 Social Psychology of Emotion: An in-depth review of the role of emotion in human psychology, with an emphasis on the links between emotion and cognition. Topics include theories of emotion, emotion

regulation, emotional expression, and emotional experience, the role of emotion in decision-making, and the relationships between emotion, motivation and behaviour.

PSY333H1 Health Psychology: Examines research evidence concerning the impact of psychological factors on physical health and illness.

PSY336H1 Positive Psychology: A review of the field of positive psychology, which is the study of happiness and fulfillment. Topics include personal growth, meaning, hedonic and eudaimonic approaches to well-being, gratitude, awe, flow states, mindfulness and meditation.

PSY337H1 Advanced Personality Psychology: This course covers major topics in personality psychology including prominent theories and current research in the area. Theoretical frameworks are integrated with specific applications in primary sources. Specific topics may include personality structure, personality development, psychodynamic approaches, genetic methodology, and emotion regulation.

PSY341H1 Psychopathologies of Childhood: This course focuses on cognitive and neuropsychological aspects of neurodevelopmental and psychiatric disorders in children from clinical and theoretical perspectives.

PSY342H1 Cognition and Psychopathology: Work in psychological disorders has increasingly used the theories and methodologies of cognitive psychology to guide research. This course will examine accounts of clinical disorders informed by cognitive experimental psychology, with emphasis on recent work in affective disorders.

PSY343H1 Theories of Psychopathology and Psychotherapy: Examines various theories of how personality functioning may become impaired and corresponding psychotherapeutic interventions. Emphasis on empirical assessment of personality dysfunction and therapy effectiveness.

PSY370H1 Thinking and Reasoning: Problem-solving as a model of directed thinking; conceptual behaviour and mental representation; induction, deduction and learning; probabilistic reasoning; creative thinking and complex problem solving.

PSY371H1 Higher Cognitive Processes: This course covers selected topics pertaining to higher cognitive processes including rationality, consciousness, creativity, and human and artificial intelligence.

PSY414H1 Moral Development: Lecture courses examining cognitive-developmental, psychoanalytic, sociobiological, behaviouristic and cultural-anthropological approaches to moral development. Issues covered include definitions of morality, the relationship between moral judgement and action, gender differences and commonalities, and the role of culture in moral development.

PSY425H1 Self-Consciousness: The distinguishing feature of our species is the reflexivity of our consciousness — the ability to conceive of and interpret ourselves and our experiences. For us, consciousness involves self-consciousness. All our higher symbolic capabilities rest upon this foundation. The aim of this lecture course is to trace out a variety of frames through which we can examine and understand the shared aspects of our subjectivity as self-conscious agents. Using a multidisciplinary approach that draws together ideas and insights from psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and biology, the course is designed to foster articulacy and critical acumen in how we think about reflexive experience.

PSY426H1 Motivational Theories in Social Psychology: With intensive reading and discussion of 'classic' and contemporary articles, this advanced lecture course in social psychology focuses on the central issues,

methods, and findings in the study of motivation. Topics include self-regulation, achievement, and reward/punishment.

PSY434H1 Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief: This lecture course is based on the book Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief. Maps of Meaning lays bare the grammar of mythology, and describes the relevance of that grammar for interpretation of narrative and religion, comprehension of ideological identification, and understanding of the role that individual choice plays in the maintenance, transformation and destiny of social systems.

PSY435H1 Environmental Psychology: This lecture course explores how psychologists can contribute to finding solutions to today's pressing environmental challenges. Topics include persuasion, community-based social marketing, social influence, social capital, and the many ways in which the physical environment affects psychological processes. The course takes a multi-scalar approach to the human-environment relationship, covering individual, community, cultural and global levels of scale, through the lens of complex dynamic systems theories.

PSY450H1 History of Psychology: This lecture course discusses the philosophical predecessors and early development of modern psychology, schools of thought, and shifts in areas of theory and research, as well as history and philosophy of science, in general.

PSY473H1 Social Cognitive Neuroscience: Social cognitive neuroscience is an emerging interdisciplinary field that seeks to integrate theories of social psychology and cognitive neuroscience to understand behaviour at three fundamentally interrelated levels of analysis (social, cognitive, and neural). Topics such as self-regulation, cooperation, decision-making, emotion, morality, and prejudice will be examined in this lecture course.

PSY493H1 Cognitive Neuroscience: This is a capstone lecture course surveying research on how the mind arises from the brain. The first objective of the course is to understand how processes in human brains (ranging from the firing of a single neuron to the dynamics of billions) support cognitive abilities (such as recognizing a face, remembering a birthday from childhood, understanding the words in a spoken lecture, or planning a route home from class). The second objective of the course is to understand the methods of contemporary cognitive neuroscience research, to enable students to read primary literature and to understand ongoing debates.

DEPARTMENT FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION

RLG100H1 World Religions: An introduction to the history, philosophy, and practice of the major religions of the world, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism.

RLG101H1 Reason and Religion in the Modern Age: An introduction to critical thinking about religion as it took shape in modern European thought. We examine major thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hannah Arendt, and others. Issues covered include freedom of thought, the relationship between religion and politics, belief and truth, rational ethics in relation to religious ethics. We explore how issues addressed by these classical authors remain relevant in today's world.

RLG106H1 Happiness: Are you happy? Today happiness is a metric by which a growing number of people assess the quality of their lives, with a range of experts offering innumerable life hacks and opportunities to optimize life. But what does it mean to be happy? And how have people tried to achieve this ever-elusive state? Situated squarely within the study of religion, this course considers how different traditions from around the world and for thousands of years have raised similar questions about happiness—not simply for

the sake of reflection but also to do something about it. And their answers have varied: fast, meditate, pray, go to the desert, come together, get high, suffer, renounce God, and/or make lots of money. Readings will include selections from social theory and religious texts as well as a few authors who seem to be (against all odds) kind of happy.

RLG200H1 The Study of Religion: An introduction to the discipline of the study of religion. This course surveys methods in the study of religion and the history of the discipline in order to prepare students to be majors or specialists in the study of religion.

RLG206H1 Buddhism: The development, spread, and diversification of Buddhist traditions from southern to northeastern Asia, as well as to the West.

RLG209H1 Justifying Religious Belief: A survey course that introduces students to a range of epistemological and ethical issues in the study of religion. The issues include: the justification of religious belief; the coherence of atheism; reason vs. faith; the nature of religious language; religious pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism.

RLG211H1 Psychology of Religion: A survey of the psychological approaches to aspects of religion such as religious experience, doctrine, myth and symbols, ethics and human transformation. Attention will be given to phenomenological, psychoanalytic, Jungian, existentialist, and feminist approaches.

RLG212H1 Anthropology, Religion and Culture: Is religion a matter of belief or a matter of practice? Do all religions share common features? Is one born into religion, or does one learn to be religious? This course is designed to introduce students to some of the ways in which anthropologists have studied and thought about religion. The emphasis is not on memorizing things people believe and do in different societies but on understanding how anthropologists have tried to explain religious phenomena. The themes covered in the course include: magic and religion; the (ir)rationality of belief; the body as a site of knowledge; ritual; ethical self-cultivation; and religion's role in the secular age.

RLG235H1 Religion, Gender, and Sexuality: This course equips students to understand how norms and practices of gender and sexuality are deeply entangled with religious imaginations and traditions. We will examine how ritual, scriptural, and legal traditions enable and constrain embodied and political power. Readings will draw from feminist, womanist, queer, and other perspectives. With a combination of in-class discussions, critical reading exercises, and short essay assignments, students will strengthen their awareness of transnational intersections of religion, gender, and "religio-racial" formations. You will develop skills in analyzing the role of popular culture and legal and religious texts in shaping norms and experiences of gender and embodiment.

RLG301H1 Religion on the Couch: Freud and Jung on Religion: A comparative, critical analysis of the key writings on religion by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Particular attention will focus on the unconscious and its role in the transgenerational transmission of trauma, especially through myths and religions. Freud's theory of dreams are compared with Jung's ideas of universal symbols and archetypes, including the personal and collective unconscious. Jung's theory of synchronicity will be discussed alongside Freud's theory of telepathy or thought-transference, including their implications for different understandings of the unconscious and archaic inheritance expressed and manifested in religions and religious experience.

RLG303H1 Evil and Suffering: The existence of evil poses a problem to theistic beliefs and raises the question as to whether a belief in a deity is incompatible with the existence of evil and human (or other) suffering. This course examines the variety of ways in which religions have dealt with the existence of evil.

RLG304H1 Language, Symbols, Self: Theories of the self that involve the constitutive role of language in its various forms. Problems of socially-conditioned worldviews and sense of self as related to discourse. Myth, symbol, metaphor, and literary arts as vehicles for personality development and self-transformation along religious lines.

RLG309H1 Religion and Human Rights: We will explore the dynamic inter-relations of women, ethnicities and minorities, among others, within the context of religion in this age of human rights, focusing on the contemporary global context. Our aim will be to include both theory and praxis. The approach will be intersectional, cross-cultural, inter-religious and inter-disciplinary. We will do this by drawing on both academic and non-academic resources, grassroots movements as well as global initiatives to approach these issues.

RLG311H1 Gender, Body and Sexuality in Asian Traditions: A study of women in the religious traditions of South and East Asia, including historical developments, topical issues, and contemporary women's movements.

RLG317H1 Religion, Violence, and Non-Violence: People acting in the name of religion(s) have incited violence and worked for peace. How can we understand this tension both today and in the past? Through examination of the power of authoritative tradition, collective solidarity, charisma, and acts of resistance, this course addresses religious justifications of violence and non-violence across varied historical and geographical contexts.

RLG319H1 Death, Dying and Afterlife: This course introduces students to various religious approaches to death, the dead, and afterlife. Through considering different ways in which death has been thought about and dealt with, we will also explore different understandings of life and answers to what it means to be human.

RLG371H1 Interdependence: An exploration of the Buddhist concept of interdependence, or interdependent origination, from doctrinal and contemplative perspectives, as presented in classic Buddhist texts and as used in contemporary environmental and activist movements globally.

RLG372H1 Engaging Tibet: A course in Tibetan Studies, with a different focus each year. Topics may include Tibetan Buddhist literature, Tibetan Buddhism and medicine, Tibet as a historical entity, the Tibetan diaspora, geographic perceptions of Tibet, or foreign representations of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.

RLG373H1 Buddhist Ritual: Daily worship, the alms round, life-crisis celebrations, healing rituals, meditation, festivals, pilgrimage, the consecration of artefacts and taking care of the ancestors are among the forms of Buddhist ritual introduced and analyzed in this course. Liturgical manuals, ethnographic descriptions and audiovisual records form the basis for a discussion of the role of ritual as text and event.

RLG374H1 Buddhist Life Stories: This course explores the genres of autobiography and biography in Buddhist literature. The course will begin with theoretical studies on narrative and religious life-writing. We will then consider the development and distinctive features of auto/biographies and hagiographies in the literature of one or more Buddhist cultures, analyzing representative examples of these genres from a range of traditions and historical periods, and considering how these sources have been understood and used in secondary scholarship.

RLG376H1 Touching the Earth: A study of Buddhist relationships with the earth, including "earth touching" contemplative practices, ritual ceremonies for land spirits or sacred sites, geomantic and cosmographic traditions, the use of landscape imagery to depict enlightenment, contrasts between wilderness and urban spaces, and contemporary ecological movements in Buddhist communities and their responses to climate

disruption. The course combines experiential learning approaches and outdoor excursions with reading and written work.

RLG387H1 Religion and Science: Course explores issues at the intersection of religion and science which may include such topics as evolution and the assessment of its religious significance by different traditions, conceptions of God held by scientists (theism, pantheism, panentheism), ethical issues raised by scientific or technological developments (cloning or embryonic stem cell research), philosophical analysis of religious and scientific discourses.

RLG407H1 The World of "World Religion": A seminar examining the development of western discourses of world religions. We shall explore the roots of these discourses and examine their implications in the academic study of religion in North America and in other parts of the world. Open to students in the Majors and Specialists of the Department for the Study of Religion.

RLG463H1 Tibetan Buddhism: Close study of major themes, texts, and thinkers in Tibetan Buddhism. Themes and texts will vary by year; consult the departmental website for this year's course description.

RLG470H1 Buddhist Tantra: A study of Tantric Buddhism, addressing ritual and scholastic practices, and problems of translation and interpretation. Themes will vary by year; consult the departmental website for this year's course description.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SOC243H1 Sociology of Health and Illness: This course examines (1) the social causes of illness and disease, (2) the experience of illness, and social processes that shape both of these issues, including medicalization. It focuses on population health, the relation between agency and structure, and macro-micro connections. Professional health care is discussed to the extent that it provides context for analyses of illness patterns and experiences.

SOC250Y1 Sociology of Religion: This course will examine religious beliefs, practices, and experiences from a historical-sociological and comparative perspective. Classical and contemporary theories will be reviewed and applied to investigate such topics as: the social origins of religions; the formation of religious communities; heresies, schisms and the making of orthodoxies; secularization and fundamentalism; cults and new religious movements; religious regulation of the body and person; and the variable linkages of religion to politics, war, art and science.

SOC363H1 Sociology of Mental Health and Mental Disorders: An overview of the link between social inequality and emotional inequality, focusing on differences in mental health across social groups and the role of stress and coping resources in explaining group differences.

SOC448H1 Sociology & Emotions: From social cohesion to intergroup violence, emotional processes influence social outcomes. Moral aspects of experience in particular are linked to emotions such as shame and pride. Students in this course will review major theories of, and a variety of empirical approaches to, the link between social and emotional processes. They will be encouraged to extend ideas and analyses in the published literature to new topics. Restricted to 4th-year sociology majors and specialists.

SOC483H1 Culture and Cognition: This course examines the social foundations of thinking and action, with a focus on how individuals think and act through shared cognitive schemas that are embedded in larger social structures. The course is organized around a wide-ranging array of classical and contemporary theories that help explain the various factors that shape culture and cognition. There is a research

component to put this analytical understanding into practice. Restricted to 4th-year sociology majors and specialists.

VICTORIA COLLEGE

VIC106H1 Psychology and Society: This course explores central developments and ongoing controversies in the scientific study of the human mind, brain and behaviour. It examines topics such as: psychoanalysis, behaviourism, humanistic psychology, evolutionary psychology, intelligence testing, and feminist perspectives. Goals include understanding the historical evolution and social relevance of scientific psychology.

VIC206H1 Psychology and Society: This course explores central developments and ongoing controversies in the scientific study of the human mind, brain and behaviour. It examines topics such as: psychoanalysis, behaviourism, humanistic psychology, evolutionary psychology, intelligence testing, and feminist perspectives. Goals include understanding the historical evolution and social relevance of scientific psychology.

VIII. Appendix C: The circumstances of the Fall 2023 program closure recommendation

In summer 2023, the Arts & Science Dean commissioned a three-person Working Group to investigate opportunities to support the program, after a mandated University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP) external review, conducted from 2019-2023, recommended that additional resources be devoted to the program. The Working Group consisted of non-specialists who consulted no one in the program, and who admit to not knowing about any program changes since the review process began in 2019; as a result, their one-page Report, released in November 2023, contained factual errors. The Report recommended that the program be closed.

We are told that the Dean's office now suggests that this closure recommendation is the consequence of a poor external review. In 2019, the then BPMH Director undertook the program's Self-Study as required for UTQAP review. Given pandemic complications, an abbreviated site visit by external reviewers took place virtually in June 2021. The Final Report was received by AP&P in April 2023. This is an exceptionally long time for these reviews. A New College ad-hoc committee's January 2024 "Report to New College Council on the processes and procedures that led up to the recommendation to close the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health program" explains:

"The external review process took **over 3.5 years** – this seems unusually long and straddled multiple changes in roles at the college (the average time from site visit to submission of final report, based on a sample of the 20 most recent submissions to the Final Assessment Reports & Implementation Plans website is 396 days. BPMH took 617 days. Note: the average is 375 days if BPMH is excluded. The majority were concluded in 10-14 months). Pandemic delays meant that the review process may not have run normally."

Despite various complications (summarized at <https://youtu.be/jJDYARnFfOQ>), the UTQAP external review was an overwhelmingly positive assessment of the program. The Dean's response to this review, in early 2023, acknowledged the positive review and confirmed that FAS would take the lead in looking for ways to create sustainable, long-term support the program.

Meanwhile, between 2019 and 2024, substantial program changes were undertaken in consultation with program faculty, cognate units, and faculty governance. In brief, the program:

- ▶ hired new instructors, selected with new criteria;
- ▶ discontinued some courses and introduced new courses;
- ▶ revised every course description to reflect changes in course content and program orientation;
- ▶ revised the calendar's description and program website;
- ▶ revised the list of courses in cognate units that count for the program.

In addition, since 2019 the program:

- ▶ expanded research opportunities in collaboration with cognate units, including Dept of Psychology, Dept for the Study of Religion, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, Ho Centre for Buddhist Studies, The School of the Environment, OISE, Faculty of Law, Temerty Faculty of Medicine, and Emmanuel College;
- ▶ worked with Advancement on program fundraising, resulting in a successful grant from a major donor and other opportunities on the table;

- ▶ grew its community mailing list to over 1000 members through public-engagement events;
- ▶ created a new and very engaged peer-mentoring program;
- ▶ had a series of conversations with Principal MacElhinney and did surveys and focus groups with students, aiming to connect with cognate units to secure teaching faculty commitments; expand online offerings; consider a revenue-generating professional degree stream; expand to an undergraduate major.

Reactions to November 2023 messaging about the program closure recommendation

In summer 2023 the Arts & Science Dean commissioned a three member Working Group to investigate opportunities to support the BPMH program. The Group consisted of non-specialists in the field. They did not consult with program faculty, staff, or students, and they did not review programmatic changes after 2019, or connections between the program and larger trends in higher education. In Fall 2023, the Group recommended, with a one-page report, that the program be closed.

Messaging from the New College and FAS administration about the recommendation has been confused and contradictory, causing stress and anxiety for students and faculty. Student leadership have organized peaceful action protests and shared what little information they could access with student communities. The Interim Program Director and the Program Director (on sabbatical) have spent four months trying to support distressed students, faculty, and community members, and scrambling to correct misinformation about the program being spread by the administration. In November 2023, the administration offered students one meeting, although with such short notice that few students were able to attend, and in February 2024, a limited number of student leaders were invited to an informational meeting with the New College Principal and Vice-Dean. Faculty members were told not to attend these meetings, despite students' requests for faculty support. Meeting minutes are posted at <https://pathuoft.net/blog/>. As of March 2024, program faculty have not been allowed to speak with anyone from the Dean's office about this proposal, despite many requests to do so.

FAS suspended enrollment in the minor of January 31, 2024, meaning that new students are no longer able to enroll in the program. Although program closures must go through a governance process that requires "broad consultation," the consultation process has not yet begun, and no information about the consultation process has been shared.

A Protect the BPMH Petition organized by student groups, PATH and BPSU, has **1,918 signatures** (as of February 29, 2024). (see <https://www.change.org/p/protect-the-bpmh-program>). Student groups held a Mindful Solidarity Sit-In in November 2023 (see below for observation reports of this sit-in). The PATH student group is publishing updates on their blog at <https://pathuoft.net/> as well as on Instagram. A program newsletter goes out to **1,072 subscribers** (for an archive of BPMH Newsletters, see <http://tinyurl.com/2hrtvbn>).

Scientists, scholars, and community members from Canada and beyond continue to send in letters of support as news of the proposed closure reaches international audiences. These are collected here in this Dossier.

The press continues to share the story globally:

- Ming Pao Canada: [多大輔修科「佛教與心理學」報讀人數增 學院叫停招新生](#)
- Bendi News: [多伦多大学计划取消这门课，上千学生签名不舍！](#)
- Fx168 Financial News (British Columbia): [多伦多大学要取消这热门专业！项目停办！](#)

- Zhihu.com (Beijing): [多伦多大学要取消这热门课程！waitlist经常爆满，师生爆发抗议](#)
- Canada News Hong Kong: [多倫多大學要取消這熱門專業](#)
- blogTO: [Outrage after University of Toronto Threatens to Cancel One-of-a-kind Program](#)
- Buddhistdoor Global: [Academics Seek Support to Save Unique Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program in Toronto](#)
- Lion's Roar: [Join the Campaign to Save Toronto's Minor in Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health](#)
- The Varsity: [U of T cancels Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health minor, prompting backlash](#)