

Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Counseling

EDUC 6344

3 semester credit hours

Spring Semester 2022



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Student Availability and Office Hours Spring Semester 2021

Available for virtual assistance via Collaborate, email, text or voice

9:00 am – 12:00 pm Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays

Available at other times by appointment

Community Counseling Clinic: <https://www.srsu-mrg-ccc.org/>

Clinic Email: srsu.mrg.counseling@gmail.com

Counseling Program Web Page: <https://www.sulross.edu/page/4849/master-education-counseling>

Course Purpose: This course is a core component of the degree requirements for the Masters of Education in Counseling. All students are expected to develop competencies and skills in the mindfulness-based approaches to counseling and psychotherapy. This course is intended to enrich the student's knowledge base, experience and application of theories and strategies for assisting clients in managing their unconstructive, detrimental and adversarial cognitions and emotions. Current empirical research demonstrates that the practice of mindfulness impacts neurological regions of the brain that are directly related to formulating healthy outlooks on life. This course will offer students multiple opportunities to explore the current research in the contemplative sciences and the implications of mindfulness on human neurological processes.

Course Description: This course explores mental health, wellness, counseling, psychotherapy and cutting-edge neuroscience through the lens of mindfulness-based counseling paradigms. Although mindfulness practices have been in existence since long before recorded history, the inclusion of these ancient techniques and philosophies into modern counseling and psychotherapy is a newly burgeoning phenomenon. The innovative application and integration of theory and methods from classic Asian influences and contemporary therapeutics is a promising development for counselors and a wide variety of client populations. In this course emphasis will be placed on students developing knowledge and skills in the applications of mindfulness-based theories and strategies in the counseling process. Students will become familiar with the integration of western psychological perspectives and eastern philosophical views of mind, wellness and mental illness; the various therapeutic approaches that align themselves with contemporary mindfulness practices and concepts; and the basic concepts of neuroscience as they relate to mindfulness practices and brain functioning. The primary course objective is to enable and empower students to develop personal mindfulness practices.

Cutting-Edge Empirical Foundation: The information explored and presented in this course is extensively grounded in current empirical research. The materials and methods covered in this course are specifically significant to counselors, therapists and other helping professionals and are aimed at both the personal and professional domains. The empirical literature on mindfulness is both considerable and growing extremely rapidly. The psychological and physical benefits of mindfulness practices and meditation are strongly supported by research. Research, as well as personal experiences and insights, suggests that mindfulness practices offer counselors a way to positively affect the counseling process and enhance client outcomes. Mindfulness practices form the foundation of healthy counselor self-care by minimizing and neutralizing professional fatigue and empathy burnout.

Course Goal: There are two major course goals for this course. Personal mindfulness practices form the foundation of healthy counselor self-care by minimizing and neutralizing professional fatigue and empathy burnout. Hence, one goal is to enable and empower students to develop their own personal mindfulness practices. The development of knowledge and skills in the mindfulness-based theories and strategies inform and influence the student's own evolving integrated personal approach to counseling. Therefore, the second major goal of this course is to familiarize students with the various therapeutic approaches that align themselves with contemporary mindfulness practices and concepts.

Student Learning Objectives: Upon successfully completing this course students will:

1. Recognize and define the concept and characteristics of mindfulness.
Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.
2. Describe and discuss the relationship between mindfulness meditation and the counseling process.
Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.
3. Expound and explain the relationship between mindfulness and neural processing as well as the ways in which mindfulness practices impact the functions of the mind.
Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.
4. Demonstrate therapeutic applications of mindfulness-based strategies to the counseling process.
Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness-based counseling skills, techniques, and interventions.
Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.
6. Describe ways in which traditional approaches to counseling and contemplative mindfulness-based schools of thought can be integrated in a complementary manner to enhance counseling effectiveness and counselor creativity.
Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.
7. Describe and discuss the relationships between mindfulness, compassion and generosity in professional practice and personal self-care.
Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.

8. Describe and apply the evidence-based empirical research on the effectiveness and the neurobiological basis of mindfulness.

Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.

9. Design, implement and maintain a personal mindfulness practice.

Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.

10. Articulate and explicate an integrated personal approach to counseling based on the practices, ethics, and personal awareness associated with mindfulness and the mindfulness-based therapeutic paradigms.

Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.

11. Display professional commitment and a path of personal and professional growth and development.

Evaluation Method: Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Guided Practice Facilitation, Participation in the Mindfulness Retreat, the Final Examination and Instructor Observations of Class Participation.

Goals of the Counseling Program: The faculty members of the Counseling Program strive toward achievement of the following programmatic and training goals:

- ☉ Develop and maintain a curriculum based on current knowledge and empirical research concerning the counseling and human development needs of a bicultural and bilingual society with its own vast diversity.
- ☉ Challenge and support the student's and the faculty member's growth in human understanding, personal dignity, mindfulness, ethnic identity, and productive interpersonal interactions on all levels.
- ☉ Preserve and promote the ongoing examination of the interplay between culture-specific knowledge and counseling effectiveness.
- ☉ Achieve and sustain excellence as a counselor preparation program as defined by state and national accreditation and credentialing standards, as well as unique regional cultural and linguistic characteristics.
- ☉ Plan and provide excellent instruction, role-modeling, supervision and advisement.
- ☉ Devise and participate in relevant research, scholarly contributions, and community service that benefit students, families, and the communities of South Texas.
- ☉ Organize and facilitate professional collaboration and networking between current graduate students in the Counseling Program and alumni who serve as counseling professionals in South Texas.

Student Learning Outcomes Based on Counseling Program Objectives: Upon successful completion of the Counseling Program, the candidates for the degree of Master of Education in Counseling, will clearly and unambiguously demonstrate to the Counseling faculty that they:

- ☞ Understand traditional and contemporary personality and counseling theories and can apply appropriate counseling interventions and strategies in individual and small group counseling.
- ☞ Identify and utilize basic assessment principles related to standardized assessments and designing an appropriate treatment plan.
- ☞ Comprehend the role and function of the counselor in a variety of work settings.
- ☞ Know and apply the professional standards of practice and the relevant code of ethics.
- ☞ Attend to their own personal growth, as well as that of their students and clients, through utilizing supervision, valuing interpersonal feedback, and engaging in mindful self-examination.
- ☞ Possess the knowledge and skills necessary to practice as a highly competent counseling professional.
- ☞ Employ personal self-awareness and professional sensitivity to the divergent values, behaviors, traditions, and counseling needs of all students and clients regardless of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, ability, language, religion, ethnicity, or race.
- ☞ Engage in compassionate cultural sensitivity by applying core counseling concepts, mindfulness-based skills, and professional practices with diverse populations, in particular, the bilingual and bicultural students and clients living in the South Texas border region.
- ☞ Model intellectual curiosity and a strong personal commitment to continually expanding their counseling knowledge and proficiency through lifelong learning and professional development.

Proficiencies for Counselors: Proficiencies that students must master in this course are derived from two sources: the *State of Texas Standards Required for the School Counselor Certificate* (§239.15) and the *Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs* (CACREP).

The following school counselor certification standards (TAC §239.15) are addressed in this course:

Standard I. Learner-Centered Knowledge: The certified school counselor has a broad knowledge base. The certified school counselor must know and understand:

- (2) counseling and consultation theories and practices
- (6) changing societal trends, including demographic, economic, and technological tendencies, and their relevance to school counseling
- (7) environmental, social, and cultural factors that affect learners' development and the relevance of those factors to educational, career, personal, and social development, along with comprehensive school counseling programs
- (9) legal and ethical standards, practices, and issues and the importance of commitment to and implementation of ethical principles
- (11) techniques and behavioral interventions to assist teachers with classroom management;
- (13) the roles and responsibilities of a comprehensive school counseling program that is responsive to all students
- (14) counseling-related research techniques and practices
- (16) how cultural factors and group membership impact individual students
- (19) an understanding of systems, including family dynamics and school environments

Standard II. Learner-Centered Skills: The certified school counselor applies the knowledge base to promote the educational, personal, social, and career development of the learner as outlined in *The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs*. The certified school counselor must:

- (3) counsel individuals and small groups using appropriate counseling theories and techniques in response to students' needs
- (4) consult with parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and other individuals as appropriate to enhance his or her work with students
- (9) use counseling-related research techniques and evidence-based practices to address student needs

Standard III. Learner-Centered Process: The certified school counselor participates in the development, monitoring, revision, and evaluation of a campus based on *The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs* that promotes learners' knowledge, skills, motivation, and personal growth. The certified school counselor must:

- (3) use both preventive and intervening strategies to address the concerns of learners and to help them clarify problems and situations, set goals, explore options, and implement change
- (6) advocate for a comprehensive school counseling program and recognize the required time commitment to fully apply the program implementation cycle
- (11) provide school-wide professional development and parent workshops throughout the school year

Standard IV. Learner-Centered Equity and Excellence for All Learners: The certified school counselor promotes academic success for all learners by acknowledging, respecting, and responding to diversity while building on similarities that bond all people. The certified school counselor must:

- (1) understand learner differences, including those related to cultural background, gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic levels, academic ability, and learning styles, and know ways to create and maintain a positive school environment that is responsive to all learners
- (2) advocate for a school environment in which diversity is acknowledged and respected, resulting in positive interactions across all cultures, genders, ethnicities, and learning styles
- (3) facilitate learning and achievement for all students to ensure services that cover an array of exceptionalities, including special populations, by promoting a cooperative, inclusive, purposeful learning environment
- (4) take a positive, strength-based approach that builds on commonalities versus differences in all learners
- (5) understand how environment and behavior may impact or influence individual learners
- (7) understand how family values, group membership, and culture intersect
- (8) acknowledge learners' gifts, strengths, and extracurricular talents when considering programs and services

Standard V. Learner-Centered Communications: The certified school counselor, an advocate for all students and the school, demonstrates effective professional and interpersonal communication skills. The certified school counselor must:

- (1) demonstrate effective communication through oral, written, and nonverbal expression

- (3) support responsive interventions by effectively communicating with parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and community members
- (6) facilitate parent/guardian involvement in their children's education
- (8) work effectively as a team member to promote positive change for individuals, groups, and the school community
- (9) take a positive, strength-based approach that verbalizes commonalities versus differences in all learners
- (10) effectively communicate his or her role and responsibility and counselor identity to all stakeholders to reduce confusion about the duties of a school counselor
- (11) adhere to best practices connected to ethical and legal considerations around appropriate use of technology and email, documentation, record keeping, privileged communication, and informed consent process

Standard VI. Learner-Centered Professional Development: The certified school counselor continues professional development, demonstrating a commitment to learn, to improve the profession, and to model professional ethics and personal integrity. The certified school counselor must:

- (1) use reflection, self-assessment, and interactions with colleagues to promote personal professional development
- (2) use counseling-related research techniques and practices as well as technology and other resources to facilitate continued professional growth
- (3) strive toward the highest level of professionalism by adhering to and modeling professional, ethical, and legal standards
- (4) apply research-based practice to improve the school guidance and counseling program
- (5) engage in ongoing professional development to improve the school guidance and counseling program

The following **CACREP Common Core** standards are addressed in this course:

Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice

- b. the multiple professional roles and functions of counselors across specialty areas, and their relationships with human service and integrated behavioral health care systems, including interagency and interorganizational collaboration and consultation
- f. professional counseling organizations, including membership benefits, activities, services to members, and current issues
- g. professional counseling credentialing, including certification, licensure, and accreditation practices and standards, and the effects of public policy on these issues
- i. ethical standards of professional counseling organizations and credentialing bodies, and applications of ethical and legal considerations in professional counseling
- k. strategies for personal and professional self-evaluation and implications for practice
- l. self-care strategies appropriate to the counselor role

Social and Cultural Diversity

- b. theories and models of multicultural counseling, cultural identity development, and social justice and advocacy
- c. multicultural counseling competencies
- d. the impact of heritage, attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual's views of others
- g. the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients' and counselors' worldviews

Human Growth and Development

- e. biological, neurological, and physiological factors that affect human development, functioning, and behavior
- f. systemic and environmental factors that affect human development, functioning, and behavior
- g. effects of crisis, disasters, and trauma on diverse individuals across the lifespan
- i. ethical and culturally relevant strategies for promoting resilience and optimum development and wellness across the lifespan

Career Development

- b. approaches for conceptualizing the interrelationships among and between work, mental well-being, relationships, and other life roles and factors

Counseling and Helping Relationships

- a. theories and models of counseling
- b. a systems approach to conceptualizing clients
- c. theories, models, and strategies for understanding and practicing consultation
- d. ethical and culturally relevant strategies for establishing and maintaining in-person and technology-assisted relationships
- f. counselor characteristics and behaviors that influence the counseling process

- g. essential interviewing, counseling, and case conceptualization skills
- h. developmentally relevant counseling treatment or intervention plans
- i. development of measurable outcomes for clients
- j. evidence-based counseling strategies and techniques for prevention and intervention
- n. processes for aiding students in developing a personal model of counseling

Group Counseling and Group Work

- a. theoretical foundations of group counseling and group work
- b. dynamics associated with group process and development

Assessment and Testing

- c. procedures for assessing risk of aggression or danger to others, self-inflicted harm, or suicide
- d. procedures for identifying trauma and abuse and for reporting abuse

Research and Program Evaluation

- a. the importance of research in advancing the counseling profession, including how to critique research to inform counseling practice
- b. identification of evidence-based counseling practices
- e. evaluation of counseling interventions and programs
- g. designs used in research and program evaluation
- i. analysis and use of data in counseling
- j. ethical and culturally relevant strategies for conducting, interpreting, and reporting the results of research and/or program evaluation

Counseling Program Marketable Skills: Upon successful completion of the Counseling Program, the candidates for the degree of Master of Education in Counseling will possess the following marketable skills:

1. The Master of Education Counseling student will demonstrate analytical and critical thinking skills.
2. The Master of Education Counseling student will demonstrate empathy and listening skills.
3. The Master of Education Counseling student will demonstrate deductive and inductive cognitive skills.

Marketable Skills Dissemination Strategy: The marketable skills are included in the course syllabi for the Master of Education in Counseling; and the faculty present and discuss these skills online or in-class with students. Each marketable skill includes consideration of the cultural influences on an individual's worldview perspective. The cultural focus is reflected and emphasized in all courses, as are reflective writing or research assignments.

Readings: There are no specific required texts for this course. However, students will be expected to read the articles, chapters and counseling resources available on Blackboard. Furthermore, students are encouraged to access and utilize professional books, guides, journal articles and practice materials available through the university library (online) and the Internet. Mindful counselors are able to interact more effectively with their personal and professional environments; they are able to respond rather than react to life's unexpected happenings; they are more effective communicators professionally and personally; and they are more creative and effective agents of client-desired change.

Class Sessions: Although human beings *bullshit* themselves into believing that all actions are subject to the safe and secure oversight of conscious control, most of the time the human mind is doing what it did 50,000 years ago: *Threat Detection*. Our minds are easily distracted, habitually shuttling between the past and future. Yet, our capacity to listen deeply, to make informed decisions, to effectively handle stress, to ignite innovation, and to access previously untapped resources and apply them to the challenges we face every day – all rely on our capacity to be mindful and present. Only when we are fully present in the moment can we optimize our capacity as counselors. This class will meet via Zoom on **Wednesdays from 7:00 pm to 9:45 pm**. In order to avoid scheduling conflicts among the courses in the Counseling Program, my courses are always scheduled for Mondays and Wednesdays. Fortunately for me and my tentative hold on sanity, I have been a mindfulness practitioner for nearly forty years. Therefore I can observe and engage my chaotically crammed Mondays and Wednesdays through simply *sitting in the Om*. All Wednesday evening sessions will be video recorded and made available to students on our class Blackboard site. Students will be able to use the recordings for practice instruction or course content. All class sessions will be scheduled on the Zoom platform. In advance of each Wednesday's class meeting, students will be emailed the Zoom connectivity information. Students do not need to install any particular software in order to fully utilize the Zoom platform or the Collaborate feature of Blackboard.

Personal Practice Preparations: Setting the stage for a safe and effective personal learning experience requires regular mindfulness practice in a *personally tailored classroom environment* (e.g., physical space and setting) that is free of interruptions and distractions and is conducive to learning, rehearsing and debriefing. Your experiential learning environment must ensure and enhance your participation in all mindfulness experiences and confidential discussions. You may need to "*experiment*" with different settings and accoutrements before deciding on the setup that best supports and promotes your full engagement in the experiences of mindfulness and meditation. Situate your computer so that you can either sit on meditation cushions or in a straight-backed chair with a padded seat. You cannot adequately engage the content and experiences of this class while sitting on a couch, sofa, recliner, overstuffed chair or bed – these important pieces of furniture all have defined purposes and household functions that are not necessarily conducive to the intentional focusing of perceptions and attentions. The cushions or chair you choose must allow you to have both feet firmly on the floor while your back is attentively upright but not rigid. Straight-back chairs that are useful for this type of experiential learning can be simple wooden dining chairs with seat cushions; arm rests are optional. If you reside with others, you will need to clearly communicate the rhymes and reasons of your self-created learning environment and its use for weekly class sessions as well as your daily practice routines and rituals. Request their cooperation in helping you be successful in this course; then reward them for their patience, support and understanding. Family members and friends are welcome to participate in our weekly class meetings, as well as the *River City Retreat* on Saturday, February 19, 2022. If you do not have reliable Internet service you will want to simultaneously connect via the Zoom link and the telephone. This will help ensure that you remain connected to the class even when your Internet "*freezes, fails or fucks up.*"

Spring 2022 Mindfulness and Meditation Retreat: One day in the not-so-distant future we will look back at “*The Days of the Pandemic*,” and we will tell our stories of quarantine routines, social isolation, and endless Zoom meetings. As we approach the two-year anniversary of the COVID-19 global pandemic, it is essential that students mindfully lean into the virtual classroom experience. Our Wednesday evening (7:00 pm – 9:45 pm) class sessions will be conducted in virtual face-to-face meetings in *real time* on the Zoom platform or Collaborate Ultra (if Zoom is uncooperative). As much as possible the instructors will strive to maintain an experiential design. A major requirement of the course is the participation in a daylong (six-hour) mindfulness and meditation practice intensive, referred to as the ***River City Retreat***. In counseling, the term “*retreat*” is typically used to describe a focused gathering in which participants can “*get away from it all*.” It usually involves a defined group of people who gather to rest, relax, and relate to one another (i.e., bonding). Our six-hour retreat is devised and designed to facilitate the creation and implementation of a regular personal mindfulness practice. A student, who for any reason, is unable to fully participate in the retreat will be expected to complete an alternative assignment. To reduce the risks of transmitting COVID-19, the *River City Retreat* will be conducted virtually via the Zoom platform. It is scheduled for **Saturday, February 19, 2022, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** The Counseling Program traditionally schedules mindfulness retreats each semester and in the summer for all current students, counseling alumni and “*friends of counseling*” (i.e., anyone who is interested). The vanguard of cutting-edge counseling arises from mindfulness; counselor self-awareness and therapeutic presence depend on mindfulness. The six-hour *River City Retreat* will commence at 10:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m., with scheduled breaks at appropriate intervals. Participants will need to share their video and audio feeds at particular times for debriefing, discussing and debating that will be delineated on the retreat agenda. All participants will be given unmonitored access to the Zoom seminar. By the first week in February, the agenda and details for participation will be posted. You are encouraged to share this information freely with family, friends, clients and colleagues.

Course Requirements and Grading:

*attendance and participation	50 points
*guided practice facilitation experience	50 points
*mindfulness retreat participation	100 points
*final objective examination	100 points

Course Grading Scale: According to this scale, there are 300 total points possible on which your final course grade will be based. A final point total of 260 or greater will earn you a final grade of A, a total of 230-259 will be a final grade of B, and a total of 200-229 will be a final grade of C.

Proposed Course Outline

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPICS, TASKS & ASSIGNMENTS DUE</u>
Week #1	*Introductions *Course Overview and Expectations **Introduction and Overview
Week #2	*Becoming Conscious: The Science of Mindfulness *Mindfulness and Meditation *Construction of Consciousness *Neurobiology, Neuroscience and Mind-Body Healing *Experience of Mindfulness **Review and Discussion of Course Syllabus **Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions
Week #3	*Learning a Mindfulness Practice *Informal and Formal Practices *Professional Practices *Maintaining Curiosity and Critical Mind **Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions
Week #4	*Cultivating and Nurturing Non-Judgmental Attitudes *Compassion and Generosity *Efficacy of Altruism in Counseling *Compassion Practices *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups **Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions
Week #5	*Comparative Impact: Policies and Politics *Physical Pain is Not Suffering *Meditation or Medication *Transforming Pain and Stress-Related Medical Conditions *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups **Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions

Week #6 *Building a Mindful Life
 *Mindfulness for Romance and Sexuality
 *Mindfulness for Interpersonal Relationships
 ****River City Retreat:** Saturday, February 19, 2022 (10:00 am - 4:00 pm)

Week #7 *Benefits of Group Mindfulness Practices
 *Teaching Others Mindfulness Practices
 *Obstacles to Regular Practice
 *Mindfulness for Parenting
 *Check-In with the Brain
 ****Retreat Review and Reflections:** Personal Perspectives

Week #8 *Being with Emotion (*“Sitting with the Feelings”*)
 *Entering Dark Places with Courage and Fearlessness
 *Befriending Fear and Practicing Patience and Compassion
 *Establishing a Mindful Counseling Practice
 ****Personal Practice Experiences:** Disclosures and Discussions

March 7-11 ****Spring Break: No Class Meeting**

Week #9 *Mindful Counselors and Mindful Counseling
 *Mindfulness in Counseling Practices and Approaches
 *History of Mindfulness in Therapeutic Settings
 ****Personal Practice Experiences:** Disclosures and Discussions

Week #10 *Mindfulness in the Cognitive-Behavioral Paradigms
 *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
 ****Personal Practice Experiences:** Disclosures and Discussions

Week #11 *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
 *Surviving the World of Third Party Payers
 *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups
 ****Personal Practice Experiences:** Disclosures and Discussions

Week #12 *Dialectical Behavior Therapy
 *Adaptations and Applications to All Clients
 ****Personal Practice Experiences:** Disclosures and Discussions

Week #13	*Acceptance and Commitment Therapy *Applications of Mindfulness-Based Counseling ** Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions ** Collaborative Research Project: Interpretation of Findings
Week #14	*Reframing and Re-Experiencing Sadness & Depression *Being with Emotion (<i>“Sitting with the Feelings”</i>) *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups ** Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions
Week #15	*Specific Applications and Issues of Mindfulness *Self-Compassion in Professional and Personal Domains ** Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions
Week #16	*Last Class Session *Personal and Professional Review of Mindfulness *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups ** Sustaining a Personal Practice: Resistance, Reluctance and Routines ** Objective Final Examination Online

Assignments and Activities

Attendance and Participation: This class is being offered as an *enhanced web-based course*. Participation in the virtual world is worth a total of 50 points toward your final grade in this course. The format for this course is non-traditional and experiential. Enhanced web-based courses regularly use the Collaborate Ultra feature of Blackboard or the Zoom platform online. During the spring semester of 2021 regular class sessions will be conducted on Zoom in *real time* on Wednesday evenings from 7:00 p.m. to 9:45 p.m. If you do not have reliable Internet service you will want to simultaneously connect via the link and the telephone. This will help ensure that you remain connected to the class even when your Internet “freezes, fails or fucks up.” All Wednesday night class meetings will be recorded and available to students on our class Blackboard site for review and practice. As with all virtual learning platforms, students can participate in the class meetings from home, office, or the corner coffee bar. Blackboard Collaborate Ultra is a simple, convenient, and reliable web conferencing feature created especially for graduate education and training. Collaborate and Zoom both facilitate learning experience, regardless of the student’s actual physical location or digital device. Relevant and required readings, resources and learning materials are all made available to students on the class Blackboard site. The instructors will strive to maintain an experiential focus. A cornerstone requirement of this course is the participation in a day-long (six-hour) mindfulness and meditation practice retreat via the Zoom platform on Saturday, February 19, 2022 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Participation in the River City Retreat is worth 50 points possible toward your final grade in the course. The *River City Retreat* is open to all counseling students, alumni, family members, and friends. During the *River City Retreat* participants will learn to focus their attentions on the activity of the mind. Although assumed to be subject to our conscious control, most of our “*breathing life*” our minds are easily distracted, habitually shuttling between the past and future. Yet, our capacity to listen deeply, to make informed decisions, to effectively handle stress, to ignite innovation, and to access previously untapped resources and apply them to the challenges we face every day – all rely on our capacity to be mindful and present. Only when we are fully present in the moment can we optimize our capacity as counselors.

Guided Practice Facilitation Experience: All students are expected to design or adopt a mindfulness practice that targets or addresses particular therapeutic issues of interest to the student. Once the student has created, adapted or selected a particular practice experience; instructor permission is required. The instructor will then schedule the practice experience for a class session after Spring Break. Facilitation will consist of leading a particular experience during class time for about 20-30 minutes. Additionally the facilitator should allow at least ten minutes after the practice to respond to questions or feedback from fellow students and the instructor. The *Guided Practice Facilitation Experience* will be conducted during our Wednesday evening class sessions on Zoom or Collaborate Ultra. Students are not required to utilize or incorporate anything other than their presence and voice. However, students are free to include any handouts, stimulus materials or resource references that support and enhance the therapeutic value of the mindfulness guided practice. The *Guided Practice Facilitation Experience* is worth a total of 50 points possible toward the final grade in the course.

Objective Final Examination: Students will be expected to satisfactorily complete a 100-point objective final examination that is based on the readings (posted articles and handouts), resources, lectures, presentations, discussions and class experiences. The examination items will expect you to integrate course content with the readings and will consist of one hundred objective items (multiple-choice and true/false). The final examination will be available on Blackboard from Wednesday, April 28, 2022 through Tuesday, May 4, 2022 at 11:00 p.m. This examination is worth a total of 100 points toward your final grade in the course.

Personal Practice Preparations: The contemplative mindfulness practices typically emphasize silence, self-awareness and nonjudgmental evaluation. The group discussions during our class meetings will allow students to learn from one another regarding how the contemplative practices are being experienced. Participating in the class discussions through sharing your own experiences and thoughts and listening to the contributions of others is very important and is therefore graded on a subjective basis by the instructors. Setting the stage for a safe and effective personal learning experience requires regular mindfulness practice in a *personally tailored classroom environment* (e.g., physical space and setting) that is free of interruptions and distractions and is conducive to learning, rehearsing and debriefing. Your experiential learning environment must ensure and enhance your participation in all mindfulness experiences and confidential discussions. You may need to “*experiment*” with different settings and accoutrements before deciding on the setup that best supports and promotes your full engagement in the experiences of mindfulness and meditation. Situate your computer so that you can either sit on meditation cushions or in a straight-backed chair with a padded seat. You cannot adequately engage the content and experiences of this class while sitting on a couch, sofa, recliner, overstuffed chair or bed – these important pieces of furniture all have defined purposes and household functions that are not necessarily conducive to the intentional focusing of perceptions and attentions. The cushions or chair you choose must allow you to have both feet firmly on the floor while your back is attentively upright but not rigid. Straight-back chairs that are useful for this type of experiential learning can be simple wooden dining chairs with seat cushions; arm rests are optional. If you reside with others, you will need to clearly communicate the rhymes and reasons of your self-created learning environment and its use for weekly class sessions as well as your daily practice routines and rituals. Request their cooperation in helping you be successful in this course; then reward them for their patience, support and understanding. Family members and friends are welcome to participate in our weekly class meetings, as well as the *River City Retreat* on Saturday, February 20, 2021. If you do not have reliable Internet service you will want to simultaneously connect via the Zoom link and the telephone. This will help ensure that you remain connected to the class even when your Internet “*freezes, fails or fucks up.*”

Spring 2022 Mindfulness and Meditation Retreat: A major requirement of the course is the participation in a daylong (six-hour) mindfulness and meditation practice intensive, referred to as the *River City Retreat*. In counseling, the term “retreat” is typically used to describe a focused gathering in which participants can “get away from it all.” It usually involves a defined group of people who gather to rest, relax, and relate to one another (i.e., bonding). Our six-hour retreat is devised and designed to facilitate the creation and implementation of a regular personal mindfulness practice. A student, who for any reason, is unable to fully participate in the retreat will be expected to complete an alternative assignment. In response to the health and safety protocols of COVID-19, the *River City Retreat* will be conducted virtually via the Zoom platform. It is scheduled for **Saturday, February 19, 2022, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** Attendance and participation at the *River City Retreat* are worth a total of **100 points** possible toward your final grade in the course. The Counseling Program traditionally schedules mindfulness retreats each semester and in the summer for all current students, counseling alumni and “*friends of counseling*” (i.e., anyone who is interested). The vanguard of cutting-edge counseling arises from mindfulness; counselor self-awareness and therapeutic presence depend on mindfulness. By the first week in February, the agenda and details for participation will be posted. You are encouraged to share this information freely with family, friends, clients and colleagues. Retreat participants are encouraged to wear the absolute most comfortable clothes they own. During the *River City Retreat* participants will learn to focus their attentions on the activity of the mind. Although assumed to be subject to our conscious control, most of the time our minds are easily distracted, habitually shuttling between the past and future. Yet, our capacity to listen deeply, to make informed decisions, to effectively handle stress, to ignite innovation, and to access previously untapped resources and apply them to the challenges we face every day – all rely on our capacity to be mindful and present. Only when we are fully present in the moment can we optimize our capacity as counselors.

Mindful Discourse and Discussion: A rich and valuable component of learning about mindfulness and meditation is having the opportunity to practice and share experiences with each other in a safe and trusting “*container*.” The following guidelines can help ensure a powerful learning experience for all.

- ☪ Appropriate themes include the joys, difficulties, and insights experienced in meditation practice and the multitude of ways to bring mindfulness alive in relationships, work and daily life.
- ☪ Participants should feel free to share at any time, but will not be obligated to do so.
- ☪ Be comfortable with silence and pauses; slowing down can promote awareness of what is arising within.
- ☪ Speak about what’s alive for you in this moment, from your heart and your own direct experience.
- ☪ Listen deeply to the speaker, noticing what arises within you as you listen – and what arises as you speak.
- ☪ Refrain from offering unsolicited advice and at all times honor unconditional confidentiality.

Constructing a Personal and Professional Mindfulness Practice: The goal of mindfulness is to wake up to the inner workings of our mental, emotional, and physical processes. Mindfulness meditation is exploring. It's not a fixed destination. Your head doesn't become vacuumed free of thought, utterly undistracted. It's a special place where each and every moment is momentous. When we meditate we venture into the workings of our minds: our sensations (air blowing on our skin or a harsh smell wafting into the room), our emotions (love this, hate that, crave this, loathe that) and thoughts (wouldn't it be weird to see an elephant playing a trumpet). Mindfulness meditation asks us to suspend judgment and unleash our natural curiosity about the workings of the mind, approaching our experience with warmth and kindness, to ourselves and others. Mindfulness is available to us in every moment, whether through meditations and body scans, or mindful moment practices like taking time to pause and breathe when the phone rings instead of rushing to answer it. A routine personal practice can involve as little as ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes at night. That is significantly less time than you had to spend practicing a sport or a music instrument when you were a kid; and it is significantly less time than you spend in the bathroom during any given day. Create your own dynamic and evolving personal mindfulness practice by reflecting on these simple steps:

🕯 Establishing a Routine

Mindfulness is best practiced regularly; like building muscle. The more regular your exercise the better you will improve your strength. An easy way to improve the likelihood of regular practice is to include mindfulness into your existing schedule. Before bed can be a good starting place, as there are likely to be less distractions and it might only mean turning the television off 10 to 20 minutes early. Alternatively, if you're a morning person, you can practice when you wake up with a warm cup of coffee. A common beginner's routine is 10 minutes of practice at night and 10 minutes in the morning.

🕯 Starting Small with Expectations of Resistance

You might want start with no more than about 20 minutes of practice per day. If your schedule allows, you may want to divide that into 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes at night. Be aware of your expectations as they arise and allow yourself to let go of struggle while observing your resistance.

🕯 Choosing a Setting

Generally you want to find a spot that is relatively comfortable and free from distraction. In your home it could be your bedroom or office – some place out of the main traffic of your home.

🕯 Identifying an Anchor

Since you will be teaching yourself to improve your ability to focus on the present moment, you need to choose an anchor to the present moment. This will allow you to identify when your attention leaves the present moment. Breath is the most common anchor to the present moment.

🕯 Focusing on Just Being Present

Your aim is to be simply present in the here and now by attending to your anchor (e.g., following your breath). During this time, assume an attitude of openness, curiosity and acceptance of thoughts, feelings, sounds, smells, touch, taste, as you become aware of them.

🚩 Noticing Thoughts as They Appear

Thinking will come and go as you do this exercise – that is the way the human brain is wired. When you notice thoughts, gently note what the thought is about and then return attention to the anchor. It is your mind's job to produce thoughts and to bring immediate attention to troubling and worrying thoughts (primal threat detection). You do not have choices about the arising thoughts; however you do have choices about how you respond to your arising thoughts and sensations. Mindfulness is about improving your ability to notice when your attention is wandering and then refocus on your anchor. When you find yourself evaluating or judging your thoughts and experiences, simply notice that your mind is pushing you to evaluate and then gently return to your anchor.

🚩 Observing Emotions as They Arise

Feelings will also arise, especially when thoughts are less effective at hijacking your attentions. When emotions arise simply make space for them, and allow them to come and go. Note the emotion, its accompanying sensations, its distracting narratives, and then gently return your attentions to your anchor.

🚩 Returning to your Home-Base

Every time you notice that your mind has wandered away from your anchor – this is mindfulness in action! Every time you return your attentions to your “home-base” anchor you are actively practicing mindfulness. When all else goes to hell in a handbasket – return to your safe home-base.

🚩 Expecting Doubt and Struggle

The human brain is ancient. It hates being confined to the same space and time as the body. The mind wants to constantly be on the go accessing for threats, planning for the future, or worry about the past. Our minds see very little value in hanging out in the present moment. Therefore you should expect feelings and thoughts of doubt and resistance. You can look forward to encountering your own inner rebellious adolescent.

🚩 Remember “Practice”

This is called a “practice” for exactly that reason. The idea of mindfulness is to enhance our awareness of what is happening within us and around us. It is to become more aware of the workings of our minds and the rich experiences that are available to us in the present moment. A routine and stable mindfulness practice provides us with the knowledge and skills to:

- 🕒 Slow down or stop the cascade of our automatic and habitual reactions.
- 🕒 See ourselves and others more clearly.
- 🕒 Listen deeply and understand situations just as they are.
- 🕒 Be open to creativity beyond conditioning.
- 🕒 Respond effectively to complex and/or emotionally charged situations.
- 🕒 Act competently and ethically.
- 🕒 Achieve balance and resilience in our personal and professional lives.

Note of Personal Sanity: You do not have to like or enjoy mindfulness practice. In fact, there will be many times and numerous moments in which you feel great loathing and strong avoidance. You do not have to believe that mindfulness practices will have beneficial results. Many empirical studies have shown significant changes in attitudes and behaviors to occur even in people who are skeptical and resistant of the practice.

The E.L.S.A. Approach to Counseling: Therapeutic transformation and change occur when the following elements are achieved through observations, interpretations and analyses of life situations in which **embracing** the experience, **letting go** of the neurotic routines, **seeing** or **stopping** the repetitious cycle of thoughts, feelings and behaviors, and **accepting** the realities of human existence and **acting** in a personally desired, nonjudgmental, and mindful fashion (ELSA) are in play. In other words: Embrace suffering, which means leaning into and embracing the situation at hand the way it is arising. Let go of your instinctive reactivity to the situation by recognizing the hijacking mechanisms. See the stopping of that reactivity; and then accept reality and act by responding instead of reacting to being hijacked. Imagine you are a counselor scheduled to see a familiar client. There's a knock on your office door and your client appears. Psychologically *embrace* (E) him or her as unconditionally as you can (i.e., be open to the client, who he or she actually is, and how he or she is presenting in this moment). Appreciate the client and who he or she genuinely is. Read the client's face, what he or she is saying to you through the eyes, through expressions, and through the body language. Then *let go* (L) of the endless reaction patterns that arise in your mind such as your judgments, condemnations and externalizations about the client's presentation or therapeutic compliance. Avoid judging, evaluating or condemning your reactions – just recognize them and let them go. In this moment, your life does not depend on assessing or appraising. *See* (S) the reactivity and repetition as the natural, completely ordinary responses of one organism to another. This paves the way for you to *stop* (S) the hijacked reactivity and *settle* (S) into that non-reactive, mindful attention that you're trying to sustain as your client walks into your office. *See* the fact that when you're aware of these things, the act of *seeing* is actually non-reactive. You can be non-reactively *aware* (A) of your reactivity; and then you can lean into your acceptance of the client's suffering. You seek to respond to your client in a fashion that's not determined by your socializing, your instinctual drives, your neurotic and repetitive reactions, your likes, and your dislikes. You will observe yourself responding in a way that's not conditioned by your greed, attachment, fear, hatred, egoism, or whatever it might be. The reason we do formal mindfulness practice is to somehow break the process down into manageable training segments. This can provide the space in which you can cultivate attention that embraces the situation, which is largely just being mindful and aware. You will naturally devote more attention to what it means to not get caught up in our reactive patterns. You will learn what patterned reactivity feels like, and you can observe yourself growing more attuned to the tastes and sensations associated with a nonreactive state of mind.

Professional Counseling Identity and Behavior: In registering for classes in the Counseling Program at Rio Grande College, graduate students accept responsibility for attending scheduled class meetings, completing assignments on time, contributing to class discussions, and fully participating in all experiential learning activities. Counseling faculty members maintain specific attendance and participation requirements for each particular class. Faculty members may impose academic penalties upon absences from some classes and/or experiences; however, such penalties for absences will be a part of each course syllabus and will be distributed to each class at the beginning of each class and a copy filed in the departmental office. The Counseling Program expects graduate students to demonstrate the following characteristics and attitudes at all times inside and outside the classroom:

- ⊙ **Commitment** to professional identity as a counselor, investment, advocacy, collaboration, and interpersonal competence
- ⊙ **Openness** to ideas, learning, change, giving and receiving feedback, others, and self-development
- ⊙ **Respect** to self and others, including honoring diversity, self-care, and personal wellness
- ⊙ **Integrity** demonstrated through personal responsibility, maturity, honesty, courage, and congruence
- ⊙ **Self-awareness** modeled through humility, self-reflection, and understanding of context

The Counseling Program has specific policies and procedures which provide students with a sequential, growth-oriented progression of courses to take; students are fully responsible for knowing and following these policies and procedures. The *Counseling Program Handbook* details and describes all aspects of the Counseling Program, from taking the first courses to passing the Comprehensive Oral Examination and graduating with the Master's in Counseling. This is not a singular academic program to prepare students for advanced levels of teaching or beginning levels of administration, but rather a distinctly different profession entirely. Counseling is not an appropriate career field for all students. In the process of pursuing professional training in counseling, some students discover (or faculty may advise) that they are not appropriate for the counseling field and/or the field of counseling is not appropriate for them. Faculty of the Counseling Program will provide continuous, honest and pragmatic feedback to each student regarding progress and suitability in this program. Unethical behavior (as defined by the *Code of Ethics* of the American Counseling Association) by a student enrolled in any counseling course will result in the exclusion of that student from the Counseling Program of Rio Grande College, and may subject the student to civil penalties as well. Professional behavior is expected of each and every student at all times across all counseling courses. Failure to maintain professionalism is considered unethical behavior. The Counseling Program emphasizes professional, personal, and academic development as essential in counselor education and training. Students must not only excel academically but must adhere to the professional and ethical standards of the profession, demonstrate effective counseling skills and competencies, and focus on their own personal development as it impacts their ability to work effectively and ethically as counseling professionals. Counseling students are expected to attend to their own social and emotional development through extensive self-reflection and mindfulness. They must be open to new and divergent ideas, prepared to examine their own values and assumptions, ready to recognize their own prejudices and biases, willing to be present in the moment with highly uncomfortable (painful) emotions that initially evoke the "fight-flight-freeze" hijacking of the primitive limbic system, able to receive critical feedback in the company of peers with an open mind and a tender heart, and capable of engaging in personal growth and transformation. At times this will involve examining one's own life experiences while creating space and understanding for one's inner

demons and emotional obstacles to personal growth. Willingness to do this important personal work is an integral part of any counselor's professional training. Therefore, graduation from the Counseling Program requires that students successfully complete the academic and experiential requirements with mindful regard to both professional and personal development. Students must, in the professional judgment of the faculty and supervisors, understand and behave in accordance with the professional standards of behavior, meet the requisite counseling competencies and skills to work as an effective professional counselor, and be free from any psychological or emotional impairment that may act as a barrier to effective interpersonal and therapeutic interventions. Throughout the counseling course work and the practical experiences, the faculty members regularly review student progress on the following basic qualities:

- Openness to new ideas
- Flexibility
- Cooperativeness with others
- Willingness to accept and use feedback
- Awareness of own impact on others
- Ability to deal with conflict
- Ability to accept personal responsibility
- Ability to express feelings effectively and appropriately
- Attention to ethical and legal considerations
- Initiative and motivation
- Development of professional skills and competencies
- Psychological functioning and mindful self-management

Accessibility and Safe Learning Environment: The Counseling Program of Rio Grande College is committed to providing a learning environment that is free from intentional or unintentional sexual harassment, as defined below, or harassment on the basis of any protected classification including, but not limited to race, gender, color, religion, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, medical condition, marital status, veteran status or on any other basis protected by law. Such conduct is unprofessional, unproductive, illegal, and generally unacceptable. All conduct of this nature is expressly prohibited, regardless of whether it violates the law. The Counseling Program supports equal employment and educational opportunities for all persons. No person shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity sponsored by SRSU on any basis prohibited by applicable law, including but not limited to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability. The Counseling Program is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Students with disabilities are provided assistance in gaining opportunities for full participation in programs, services and activities. The Coordinator of Student Services is located in Uvalde. Services available to all students include consultation, information and referral as well as personal counseling and academic advising. A student is eligible for disability services if s/he has been admitted to SRSU and has a documented physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Qualified students with disabilities who need academic adjustments, auxiliary aids or services or other accommodations to ensure equal access must register with Disability Services. It is the student's responsibility to bring disability documentation with them to an appointment with the Disability Services Coordinator to discuss their individual needs at this time. Each request is considered on an individualized, case-by-case basis. As considerable time may be involved in obtaining complete and adequate documentation and arranging for qualified service providers, prospective and current students should request services in a timely manner. These services should be requested well in advance of the anticipated

need. Recent disability documentation from appropriate qualified professionals must be provided by the student to establish current functional limitations and the impact of the disability. Any recommendations for specific accommodations may be helpful in making determinations and these will be considered as part of the documentation review process. Documentation of disability status and other related information is handled in a confidential manner and is maintained in files separate from a student's educational record. In compliance with applicable laws, unless SRSU can demonstrate that an academic requirement is an essential component of a degree or program, the University will make reasonable adjustments to requirements to ensure that the requirements do not discriminate against qualified students with disabilities. A student with a disability may request a course substitution or a modification of a degree or program requirement through the following process. The student's first point of contact for assistance with this process should be the Disability Services Coordinator (Coordinator of Student Services). The student should submit:

- A written request for the modification explaining his/her difficulties in the relevant areas and reasons for requesting the modification;
- Information about the results of previous efforts in the relevant area (transcripts, etc.); and
- Comprehensive documentation of the disability and the specific aspects of the disability which impair the student's ability to learn or perform in the area in which the student is requesting the modification. The Disability Services Coordinator will meet with the student, review the documentation and prepare a recommendation on the request.
- A diagnostic statement identifying the disability, date of the current diagnostic evaluation (within a 5 year period), and the date of the original diagnosis.
- A description of the diagnostic criteria and/or diagnostic test(s) used.
- A description of the current functional impact/limitations of the disability.
- Treatments, medications, assistive devices/services currently prescribed or used.
- A description of the expected progression or stability of the disability over time.
- The credentials of the diagnosing professional(s) to include the training and experience which enable the person capable of making the diagnoses.

Recommendations for accommodation are helpful and will be given due consideration. If a student feels that s/he has been discriminated against based on disability, it is recommended that the student first attempt to resolve the issue directly with the individual or group suspected of discrimination. If this procedure is non-productive, a second step may be to seek assistance from the Disability Services office. Students may also file a complaint with the appropriate university officer for ADA/504 compliance, the ADA Compliance Officer, according to the student grievance procedure. Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature where such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment. Examples of sexual harassment include but are not limited to: unwanted sexual advances; demands for sexual favors in exchange for favorable treatment; verbal abuse of a sexual nature; graphic commentary about an individual's body, sexual prowess, or sexual deficiencies; leering; whistling; touching; pinching; assault; coerced sexual acts; suggestive, insulting or obscene comments or gestures. The Counseling Program prohibits all conduct of this nature whether or not such conduct violates any applicable laws.

Distance Education Statement: Due to the conditions and restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the experiential learning and skill development of *Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Counseling* (EDUC 6344) will take place on Blackboard, Collaborate Ultra, Zoom and Google platforms. Required readings, assignments, blogs, presentations, and videos will be posted on Blackboard. All students are expected to regularly access the class site on Blackboard and participate fully in the virtual aspect of this course. The policy on Distance Education at Sul Ross State University is as follows: Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at SRSU are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.