

Sul Ross State University- Rio Grande College
Counseling Program

Department of Education

2623 Garner Field Road
Uvalde, Texas 78801



Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Counseling

EDSR 6344

3 semester credit hours

Summer II Semester 2023

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Student Availability and Office Hours:

Available to meet with students by appointment in Uvalde.

Available for virtual assistance via Collaborate Ultra, email, text or voice Monday-Friday 10:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m.

Available at other times and locations by appointment

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

EDSR 6344 Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Counseling (3-0). This course explores mental health wellness counseling and cutting-edge neuroscience through the lens of mindfulness-based counseling paradigms. Emphasis is placed on students developing knowledge and skills in the applications of mindfulness-based theories and strategies in the counseling process. Equivalent courses: EDUC 6344 (through Summer 2022).

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.

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; and

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; and

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 Objectives: Student Learning Outcomes

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.

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.

Readings

Students are expected to read the articles and resources made available on the class Blackboard site. Additionally, 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

Course Requirements and Grading

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------|
| *mindful participation | 50 points |
| *mindful counseling practice reflections | 50 points |
| | 50 points |
| *mindfulness collaborative research project | 75 points |
| *mindfulness-based approach paired presentation | 75 points |
| *final objective examination | 100 points |

Course Grading Scale

Proposed Course Outline

| DATE | TOPICS, TASKS & ASSIGNMENTS DUE |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week #1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">*Introductions*Course Overview and Expectations**View Video Introduction and Syllabus |
| Week #2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">*Becoming Conscious: The Science of Mindfulness*Mindfulness and Meditation*Construction of Consciousness*Neurobiology, Neuroscience and Mind-Body Healing*Experience of Mindfulness**First Collaborate Session: |
| Week #3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">*Learning a Mindfulness Practice*Informal Practices*Formal Practices*Professional Practices*Maintaining Curiosity and Critical Mind**Personal Practice Experiences: Disclosures and Discussions |
| Week #4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">*Cultivating and Nurturing Non-Judgmental Attitudes*Compassion and Generosity*Efficacy of Altruism in Counseling*Compassion Practices*Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups**River City Retreat: Saturday, February 15, 2020 10:00 am to 4:00 pm |
| Week #5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">*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**Retreat Review and Reflections: Personal Perspectives |
| Week #6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">*Building a Mindful Life*Mindfulness for Romance and Sexuality*Mindfulness for Parenting*Mindfulness for Teaching**Presentation Preparations: Collaborative Conceptualization |

Week #7

- *Benefits of Group Mindfulness Practices
- *Teaching Others Mindfulness Practices
- *Obstacles to Regular Practice
- *Check-In with the Brain
- **Collaborative Research Project:** Fundamentals and Foundations

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

Spring Break

**** Spring Vacation:** No Class Meetings

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
- **Collaborative Research Project:** Methods and Measures

Week #10

- *Mindfulness in the Cognitive-Behavioral Paradigms
- *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
- **Mindfulness-Based Approach:** Paired Presentation

Week #11

- *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
- *Surviving the World of Third Party Payers
- *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups
- **Mindfulness-Based Approach:** Paired Presentation
- **Collaborative Research Project:** Results and Reactions

Week #12

- *Dialectical Behavior Therapy
- *Adaptations and Applications to All Clients
- **Mindfulness-Based Approach:** Paired Presentation
- **Personal Practice Experiences:** Disclosures and Discussions

Week #13

- *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- *Applications of Mindfulness-Based Counseling
- **Mindfulness-Based Approach:** Paired Presentation
- **Collaborative Research Project:** Reviews and Reports

Week #14

- *Reframing and Re-Experiencing Sadness & Depression
- *Being with Emotion (“*Sitting with the Feelings*”)
- *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups
 - ****Mindfulness-Based Approach:** Paired Presentation
 - ****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
 - ****Collaborative Research Project:** Culminations and Conclusions
 - ****Objective Final Examination:** Available Online 5/10/19 – 5/16/19

Week #16

- *Personal and Professional Review of Mindfulness
- *Formal and Informal Practice Check-Ups
 - ****Sustaining a Personal Practice:** Resistance, Reluctance and Routines
 - ****Objective Final Examination:** Available Online 5/1/20 – 5/7/20
 - ****Due by 05/7/20:** Completion of Blog and Practice Reflections

Assignments and Activities

Mindful Participation in the Virtual World

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 purposefully non-traditional. The format for this course is purposefully non-traditional. It is being taught in an “Enhanced” Web-Based format. Enhanced Web-Based courses regularly use the Collaborate Ultra feature of Blackboard. During the spring semester of 2020 regular 150-minute Collaborate class sessions (in real-time) will be conducted on Wednesday evenings from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Students who, because of employment requirements, are not consistently able to logon until after 5:00 p.m. will be able to review the recordings of the class Collaborate sessions. Here is the tentative format we will use each week:

- 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.** Mindfulness Practice Training and Instruction
- 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.** Content Discussion and Lecture/Presentation
- 7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** Mindfulness Practice Review, Summary and Conclusion

Since all Wednesday evening sessions will be video recorded and stored on our class Blackboard site, if you miss any practice instruction or course content all you have to do is review the recording of the class session as part of your weekly study routine. As with any of the Collaborate class sessions, students can participate in the class meetings from home, office, the RGC computer labs, or the corner coffee bar. Blackboard Collaborate Ultra is a simple, convenient, and reliable web conferencing feature created especially for graduate education and training. The Collaborate function facilitates a learning experience in which the student often feels like she or he is in the same room with the professor and the other students, regardless of the student’s actual physical location or digital device. The Collaborate tool is accessed through the course Blackboard site. All Collaborate class sessions will be recorded and subsequently made available for student review at later dates. Students do not need to install any particular software in order to fully utilize the Collaborate feature of Blackboard. The creators of Blackboard recommend that to have the best learning experience students should use Google Chrome when using your desktop or laptop computer. Relevant readings, resources and learning materials will be available to students on the class Blackboard site.

As much as possible this course 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 intensive, entitled the **River City Retreat**; at Dr. Russell’s home in San Antonio on Saturday, February 15, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Students who are unable to participate in the retreat are expected to complete the alternative assignment – the **Community Mindfulness Service Project**. Participation in the day-long **River City Retreat**, or the completion of the alternative assignment, is worth the same amount of points possible toward your final grade in the course. The **River City Retreat** will take place on Saturday, February 15, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at 503 E. Rector Street (78216) and it is open to all counseling students, alumni and guests. (You can bring family members or friends for free!) Breakfast, lunch, snacks and drinks will be provided by the hosts.

Mindful Counseling Blog and Practice Reflections

You are expected to create and maintain a **Mindful Counseling Blog** on Blackboard. At a minimum, blog entries must be at least three times per week, and the level of analysis must reflect a depth of awareness and introspection expected of a graduate student. You are required to interact with other students via the blogs. The blog posts should be based on the events and experiences of that week's class as well as your own personal practices. Each entry must be comprehensive, insightful, and analytically in-depth; but also personal and introspective. On our class Blackboard site there is a blog space entitled, *Mindful Counseling Blog*. You must title this blog entry with your first and last name (e.g., Mark Smith) like **Todd Russell's Mindful Blog**. Your initial entry must start with the date, and then followed by your observations and awareness. When you return to the blog space for your second, third and fourth (and so on and so forth) entries, you will simply edit your existing blog entry by clicking the gray down-arrow and selecting "Edit." Begin the subsequent entries by first posting the date (e.g., February 1, 2020) and then your comments. You must make at least three substantial entries (300-500 words) per week, and all entries should be thorough, insightful and dynamic. Maintaining an active and current **Mindful Counseling Blog** is worth a total of **50 points** possible toward your final grade in this course. All blogs must be finalized by May 4, 2020.

All students are expected to follow the blog postings of fellow classmates. In so doing, observations, insights, feedback and questions can be posed for the blog author simply by using the "Comment" button at the end of blog journal. If someone has made a comment on your recent blog entry, you should respond to the comment in the regular body of your blog. Do not use the "Comment" button to respond to someone's comment of your blog. Simply address the issue raised right in the body of your blog journal. At various points throughout the semester, the Instructor will provide feedback regarding the content and depth of the mindful counseling blog entries. In your initial blog entry, please tell us about your current familiarity with mindfulness and meditation, and your expectations for this class and your continued professional growth and development.

A primary component of the Mindful Counseling Blog is a journal of your personal practice experiences throughout the semester. You are expected to practice mindfulness meditation and other mindfulness-based awareness exercises for at least 20 minutes, seven days a week, through May 4, 2020. This can consist of one single 20-minute practice routine at the same time each day; or two 10-minute practice routines (morning and night). Your record of reflections and insights on your mindfulness practice experiences are key significant learning endeavors of this course. It is through practice and reflection on your practice experiences that will have the greatest personal and professional benefit for you. You should share and discuss your practice reflections within your Mindful Counseling Blog at least three times per week. These practice reflections should be included in the context of your Mindful Counseling Blog; you do not need to create a separate or additional blog space. The entries for the practice reflections should employ the **DISCOVER** format.

D: Describe and discuss your daily practice experiences, the particular mindfulness practices you employed, and the intended (desired) environmental setting and factors.

I: Identify and interpret the challenges, distractions, obstacles and emotions you encountered before, during and after your mindfulness practice routine.

S: Specify and scrutinize the external environmental factors that were conducive to your practice; those factors and elements that were problematic and hindered your practice; and the physical and environmental adjustments you want to make in future practice routines.

C: Characterize and clarify the circumstances surrounding your “*automatic mindless*” responses and actions that arise during your practice routines, as well as the novel and unique methods your mind employs to distract and mislead you.

O: Observe and outline your use of gentle discipline when “*labeling the thinking*” and “*returning to the breath*” (or the equivalent), as well as your ability to maintain a loving and nonjudgmental attitude regarding your practice discipline.

V: Vent and validate your emotions that arise in contemplation insights, in the evaluation of your practice routines, and in the aftermath of your mindfulness practice experiences.

E: Evaluate and expand the presence of your own patience, compassion, generosity, loving-kindness and self-acceptance before, during and after your own daily mindfulness practice routines.

R: Recount and report on the beneficial personal and professional experiences you encounter “*off the cushion*” that may well be the direct outcome of your personal mindfulness practices, and the unexpected arising of clarity about *things* that may help you maintain your daily practice routines long after this graduate counseling class is over.

Constructing a Personal 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 mindfulness 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 simply be 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.

Counseling with E.L.S.A.

Therapeutic transformation and change occur when the following elements are achieved: Observations 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 embrace the situation at hand the way it is arising. Let go of your instinctive reactivity to it by recognizing the hijack mechanisms. See the stopping of that reactivity; and then Act by responding instead of reacting to being hijacked.

You are a counselor scheduled to see a familiar client. There's a knock on your office door and your client appears. Embrace (E) that person as unconditionally as you can (i.e., be open to the client, who they are, and how they are presenting in this moment). Accept that person for who they are. Read the face, what they're saying to you through their eyes, through their expression, through their body language. Then Let go (L) of the reactions that arise in your mind such as your judgments about the client's clothing or their compliance with the construct of time. Don't condemn your reactions – just let them go. See (S) them as the natural, completely ordinary responses of one organism to another. This allows you to stop (S) the hijacked reactivity and settle (S) into that non-reactive, mindful attention that you're trying to sustain as this person walks into your office. See the fact that when you're aware of these things, that seeing is actually non-reactive. You can be non-reactively aware (A) of your reactivity.

Now you seek to respond to your client's suffering. You seek to respond to them in a way that's not determined by your instincts, your reactions, your likes, your dislikes. It's responding in a way that's not conditioned by your greed, your attachment, your fear, your hatred, your egoism, or whatever it might be. The reason we do formal practice is to somehow break the process down into manageable training segments, so we'll spend time actually cultivating attention that embraces our situation, which is largely just being mindful and aware. We'll pay more attention to what it means to not get caught up in our reactive patterns. We'll learn to know what that feels like, and we'll become particularly attuned to the tastes and the feel of what it's like to be in a nonreactive state of mind.

Objective Final Examination

All students are 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 during the entire semester. 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 online from Friday, May 1, 2020 until **Thursday, May 7, 2020 at 11:00 pm**. This examination is worth a total of **100 points** toward your final grade in the course.

Community Mindfulness Service Project

Students who are unable to attend the six-hour **River City Retreat** on Saturday, February 15, 2020, can complete the **Community Mindfulness Service Project** for the same amount of possible course credit. This alternative assignment is worth a total of **50 points** toward your final grade in the course and its various components and due dates will vary based on the specifics of the particular project.

Engaged mindfulness involves “*taking it to the streets*” and implementing positive change on a scale larger than ourselves or our own lives. The primary objective of this project will be to “*make a mindful difference*” in your community in a mindful fashion. Projects will be action-oriented and the specific details and required components will be negotiated between the Instructor and the student.

Community service is voluntary work (no-cost) done by a person or group of people that benefits others. It might be organized through local groups, such as churches, schools, or non-profit organizations, or it can be an entirely grassroots creation. This alternative assignment ultimately requires full community implementation. However, there are many phases required for getting the service project off the ground. Although these steps, stages and strategies are entirely dependent on the particular service project, the following steps (or versions of them) will be demonstrated and documented in the process of designing and implementing the service project:

- 👤 Identify a need within your community
- 👤 Assess your skills, strengths, and savvies
- 👤 Choose a project and develop a plan
- 👤 Invite and solicit partners and/or participants
- 👤 Formulate a timeline implementation and/or sustainability
- 👤 Promote, publicize and popularize
- 👤 Implement the service project

Examples of the Community Mindfulness Service Project

🌀 Mindfulness in the Work Setting

This example of a community service project could involve establishing a mindfulness practice group on the job that meets for 30 minutes weekly (on company time and in company space). Perhaps the particular employment setting would be more open to hosting a mindfulness training workshop for the employees.

🌀 Sustainable Practice Community

Mindfulness meditation groups are a great way of connecting with others to share and deepen your personal practice. Like the traditional “*Book Club*,” practice groups can come in many shapes and sizes and provide community, accountability and a supportive space to connect with others while strengthening and enriching your own personal mindfulness practice. A

neighborhood library might be an ideal location for a weekly mindfulness practice group to convene.

❁ **Compassion Connection Circle**

Counselors typically have their fingers on the pulse of their communities. They know how to access various support groups and when to establish therapeutic groups. This example might involve interfacing with a local oncologist in order to establish a weekly (or biweekly) mindfulness practice group for chemotherapy patients and/or their family members. Since there is a direct connection between mindfulness meditation and compassion, the primary focus of such a service project could be on compassion and loving-kindness.

❁ **Bridging the Digital Divide**

In the vast rural areas of South Texas there are great demands for using the Internet and the “online world” as a primary avenue for interpersonal connections and linkages. Perhaps the service project could involve a weekly podcast or radio spot on mindfulness and mental health.

❁ **Mindful Schools are Mindful Communities**

Effective school-based mindfulness projects must involve both students and teachers (and perhaps parents too). To maximize the benefits of this service project a special focus on sustainability would be important. A school-based service project might well have multiple components and activities from classroom instruction for students to teacher trainings on mindfulness. A team of teachers and parents could join forces to bring mindfulness into the classroom communities.

❁ **Love Makes the World Go Round: Cultivating Mindful Relationships**

This service project might involve collaboration with a church, social agency, or school and can be directed at enhancing marital or spousal relationships through mindfulness and compassion. Perhaps the focus could be on mindful parenting of adolescents; or its reverse – teens learning to relate mindfully to their parents.

Mindful Sharing, Debriefing and Discussion

A rich and important aspect of learning about mindfulness and meditation is having the opportunity to 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.

Mindfulness-Based Approach Paired Presentation

Being able to give an effective presentation to colleagues is an essential skill in the toolkit of the professional counselor. Prior to the end of February, all students will select a presentation partner (no more than two to a presentation team) and one of the mindfulness-based approaches to counseling and psychotherapy on which a class presentation will be designed and conducted during the last half of the semester. Student presentations will be about one hour in length and conducted during the weekly Wednesday evening Collaborate class session. The Instructor will schedule the presentations based on the particular theoretical approach chosen by the presentation team. Student presentation teams will select one of the following mindfulness-based therapeutic approaches. Students can expect great overlap between and among authors since this field is in its infancy; and there will be great diversity between groups of authors and founders.

- ☸ **Mindful Therapy** (D.Siegel/Germer)
- ☸ **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction** (Kabat-Zinn)
- ☸ **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy** (Teasdale/Williams/Z. Segal)
- ☸ **Mindfulness-Based Therapy** (Epstein/ R.Siegel)
- ☸ **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy** (Hayes)
- ☸ **Contemplative Therapy** (Trungpa/ Wegela)
- ☸ **Core Process Therapy** (Sills)
- ☸ **Dialectical Behavior Therapy** (Linehan)
- ☸ **Buddhist Psychology and Psychotherapy** (Epstein/Trungpa/Nissanka/Welwood)
- ☸ **Morita Therapy** (Morita/Reynolds)
- ☸ **Other Mindfulness Approach** (Approved by Instructors)

The primary goal of each student collaborative presentation is to thoroughly familiarize fellow students with the fundamental principles and strategies of the selected therapeutic approach. The presentation can include practice applications, counseling interventions and therapeutic exercises. At the end of the presentation the collaborative team will disseminate ten multiple-choice questions as evaluation of the presentation effectiveness in achieving its defined objectives. These test items will be included in the pool of possible final examination items. The team of presenters should allow sufficient time for questions and class discussion via the Collaborate platform.

The **Mindfulness-Based Approach Paired Presentation** is worth a total of **75 points** possible toward your final grade in this course. The following criteria and point value allocations will be used to score the collaborative presentation.

Mindfulness-Based Therapy Presentation Scoring Rubric

Organization (15 Points)

Information is presented in a logical and engaging sequence.
Presentation team members comfortably share and/or balance responsibilities.

Content (25 Points)

Technical terms, phrases and interventions are well-defined and grounded in the practice of counseling.
Extent and expanse of material shared is appropriate and relevant.
Suitable empirical research is shared as evidence of therapeutic effectiveness.

Presentation (35 Points)

Presenters effectively utilize the Collaborate platform as an instructional method.
Presenters speak clearly and comfortably in an organized and engaging fashion.
Various teaching aids, visuals, handouts and activities are well chosen and effective.
Creativity and originality are demonstrated in both content and style.
Presenters are responsive to participant questions and relevant discussions are facilitated.

Total Points Possible: 75 Points

Distance Education Statement

A large portion of the full experience of this course will take place on Blackboard. 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 Middle Rio Grande Campuses 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 Sul Ross 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.

Accessibility and Learning Environment

The Counseling Program of Middle Rio Grande Campuses 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 of Middle Rio Grande Campuses 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 Middle Rio Grande Campuses 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 (830-279-3003), Ms. Kathy Biddick (kbiddick@sulross.edu), serves as the Disability Services Coordinator and she 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 Middle Rio Grande Campuses 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 Middle Rio Grande Campuses 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.

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.

Professional Counseling Identity and Behavior

In registering for classes in the Counseling Program at Middle Rio Grande Campuses, 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. By the time a student is admitted to the Experiential Block, it is expected that she or he has thoroughly read and comprehended the complete policies, procedures and recommendations of the most recent issue of the *Counseling Program Handbook*. This document 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 Middle Rio Grande Campuses, 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