

# Mindfulness, Contemplation & the Search for Meaning

**AHL1100**

University of Ottawa

Winter 2017

Wed 10AM – 1PM



**Professors André Vellino & Anne Valley**  
[see BBL for contact info and office hours]

**Perez (PRZ)109**

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course unabashedly tackles the “big questions”: it asks about the nature of human consciousness, about happiness and about the constituents of a meaningful life. It takes seriously the Socratic warning about the perils of the “unexamined life”, and begins with the premise that the ability to cultivate conscious awareness of one’s own experience is at the heart of creativity, joy, insight and compassion. Mindfulness, in other words, is the starting point for genuine personal and societal transformation.

The aim of this course is to have students study the human capacity for self-awareness and to have them explore it first-hand in their own lives. Their explorations of contemplative states of mind from diverse disciplinary points of view (philosophy, religion, anthropology, poetry, art, neuroscience, psychology and medicine, women’s studies etc.) will be complimented by weekly first-person exercises (“meditation labs”) that will enable them to critically appraise mindfulness practices on the basis of their own experience.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

After this course is completed, students will

- have an understanding of the characteristics of contemplative practices
- be able to apply mindfulness practices in everyday circumstances
- understand some of the research literature on mindfulness and contemplation
- demonstrate the capacity for introspection and self-examination
- develop an increased sustained ability to concentrate and engage their critical thinking skills.
- have an understanding of the relationship between contemplative states of mind and personal and social well being.

## LEARNING MODULES & LEARNING RESOURCES

This course is organized around weekly learning modules of **key themes** in the field of Mindfulness and Contemplative studies, as well as on weekly practicums that focus on first-person experiments in **mindfulness training**. Learning resources (readings, videos etc.) are organized in conjunction with these key themes/mindfulness lessons. Each class will comprise:

- 60-90 minutes of lectures
- 40-60 minutes of small and large group discussion/ activities
- 45-50 minutes of mindfulness practice/ “meditation labs”

Because of the highly interdisciplinary nature of the burgeoning field of Contemplative Studies, students will be exposed to ideas from diverse academic fields within the Humanities, Sciences and Creative Arts. To facilitate this, we have invited specialists to join the class to provide a guest lecture on the particular theme being explored. This will begin in week 3.

## REQUIRED READINGS

Readings are organized according to a weekly theme, and most of them are available as PDF documents on Blackboard (BBL). Please refer to the weekly units for details. In addition to the readings available on BBL, three texts are required for purchase:

**Haybron**, Daniel M. Happiness: A Very Short Introduction

**Smalley**, S. L. (2010). Fully present: The science, art, and practice of mindfulness. Da Capo Press.

**Frankl**, V. Man’s Search for Meaning ([1946]2006) Beacon Press

*\*\*\*FYI: For those looking for additional resources, we will be regularly placing readings and links of interest on our BBL site under the heading “Additional Optional Resources”.*\*\*\*

## EVALUATION

In this course, students read and analyze texts, watch and discuss films, as well as engage in reflective writing assignments and mindfulness exercises. Students should have read, watched, and listened to the week's materials in advance of coming to class. This is a discussion-oriented course, therefore students are expected to attend all scheduled class meetings and to actively participate in class discussions as well as in the mindfulness practice. Attendance will be taken for the meditation component of this course. Students will maintain a journal throughout the semester in which they will have the opportunity to reflect upon their own personal experience with the readings and practices. In addition, more traditional forms of evaluation will be employed. A series of online mini-quizzes will be given over the course of the semester will test the student's knowledge of theme-based course material and readings. Finally, a cumulative final exam will be written during the formal exam period will test the student's knowledge of the course material and readings.

**Attendance** for meditation "lab". A sign-in sheet will be distributed each week during this component of the class. **10%**

**Journal.** The journal will be submitted on a weekly basis (but marked only twice during the term, during week of Feb 22 and after April 12<sup>1</sup>). The journal will contain three components: i) a short reflective entry of approximately 200 words on the weekly required reading/s; ii) a short reflective entry of approximately 200 words on the weekly mindful practice; iii) self-monitoring of cell phone use. Using the "break-free" app, you will be able to keep a record of your ongoing use (or abuse!) of your phone. This component will not be graded and is for your benefit alone. Monitoring our cell phone use can be excellent mindfulness strategy. **20%**

**Mini Quizzes.** 4 online mini-quizzes over the summer. 4 x 10% (see tentative dates below in schedule). Quizzes will test your knowledge of readings and concepts/ideas developed in class. The quizzes will include a variety of multiple choice and fill-in-the blank questions pertaining to the material covered in class and in the readings. Once posted, a quiz will be active for several days on BBL. Once you access it, you will have 40 minutes to complete it. *The weakest grade will not be counted. In other words, only the top 3 grades will be used, and converted into 40%.* **40%**

**Final Exam.** The final cumulative exam will be held during the regular end-of-term exam period. It will test your knowledge of basic concepts learned throughout the class, from discussions, lectures, films, and readings. **30%**

### University Grading Scheme

A+ = 90 - 100%

A = 85 - 89%

A- = 80 - 84%

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<sup>1</sup> = one week after the last class.

B+ = 75 - 79%

B = 70 - 74%

C+ = 65 - 69%

C = 60 - 64

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1 [11 January 2017]: Introduction to the Course

Preparation For Class	In Class	Mindfulness Lab
Read <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “What is Mindfulness” (Chapter 1) in <i>Fully Present</i> pp 1-20</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction to course and to each other</li><li>• In-class viewing of Sherry Turkle’s “Connected, but alone” TedTalk</li><li>• BreakFree Challenge</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction to mindfulness practices</li></ul>

### Week 2 [18 January 2017]: Mindfulness, Meaning and Happiness

Read <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Happiness</i> Book Ch. 1-4</li><li>• “Getting Started” and “Breath and Awareness” (Chapter 2 and 3) in <i>Fully Present</i>.</li></ul>	Watch <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Search for Meaning &amp; Happiness in the “Mindless” Age of Anxiety</li><li>• In-class viewing of “Happy”</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mindfulness of breathing</li></ul> Homework <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jack Kornfield – Breathing – Meditation for Beginners on BBL - (MP3 – 12’41)</li></ul>
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### Week 3 [25 January 2017]: Happiness and Meaning in Ancient Greece

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plato’s Republic (excerpt from Book VII – 5 pages) on BBL</li> <li>• “What Gets In the Way” (Chapter 10) in <i>Fully Present</i>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Quiz 1 opens (includes Weeks 1-3)</b></p>	<p>Guest Speaker: Dr Catherine Collobert, Dept. of Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtue &amp; Happiness among the Ancients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness of listening / breathing / body</li> </ul> <p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diana Winston – Breath-Sound-Body Meditation on BBL (MP3 – 12’00)</li> </ul>
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#### Week 4 [1 February 2017]: Contemplation and Christianity

<p>Read</p> <p>Selection from <i>Seeds of Contemplation</i> by Thomas Merton on BBL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesson Two: Movement and Stillness in <i>Finding the Missing Peace</i> (p.25-32)</li> </ul>	<p>Guest Speaker: Dr Fabrice Blée, Department of Theology. St Paul’s University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contemplating silence and meaningful words</li> </ul> <p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jack Kornfield – Thinking – Meditation for Beginners on BBL - (MP3 – 9’56)</li> </ul>
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#### Week 5 [8 February 2017]: The Contemplative Body (Hinduism)

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection from <i>Yoga Sutras</i> by Patanjali on BBL</li> <li>• “Mindful Movement” (Chapter 4) in <i>Fully Present</i>.</li> </ul>	<p>Guest Speaker Shree Kanhere Hinduism, Mindfulness &amp; Yoga</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In class viewing: “Gurukulam” – a contemplative film on Hindu ashram.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yoga</li> </ul>
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## Week 6 [15 February 2017]: Contemplating Nature

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selections from nature writers on BBL</li> <li>• On Walking Meditation (p. 132-133) in <i>Finding the Missing Peace</i></li> </ul> <p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Andy Goldsworthy's Rivers &amp; Tides on BBL</li> </ul> <p><b>Quiz 2 opens (includes Weeks 4-6)</b></p>	<p>Guest speaker: Dr. Brenda Vellino (Carleton University)</p> <p>Poetry and contemplation on inter-being. Selections from Basho, Gary Snider, and Mary Oliver will be read together in class</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walking meditation</li> <li>• Contemplating nature objects</li> </ul> <p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jack Kornfield – Walking Meditation – Meditation for Beginners on BBL (MP3 – 12'41)</li> </ul>
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## Week 7 [22 February 2017]: Reading Week. No class

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> by Viktor Frankl</li> </ul>		<p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diana Winston – Complete Meditation Instructions on BBL (MP3 – 19'00)</li> </ul>
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## Week 8 [1 March 2017]: Contemplation, Well-being and Meaningfulness

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Happiness</i> by D. Hayborn, chps 5-6 (pp 52-90)</li> <li>• “Feeling Good and Finding Happiness” (Chapter 7) in <i>Fully Present</i>.</li> </ul> <p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Human Experience</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Quiz 3 opens (includes Weeks 7-8)</b></p>	<p>Discussion of Frankl’s book + other readings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditations on gratitude and compassion</li> </ul> <p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diana Winston – Loving Kindness Meditation on BBL (MP3 – 9’31)</li> </ul>
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## Week 9 [8 March 2017]: Contemplation and Ethics

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Fast Food Nation</i> by Eric Schlosser</li> <li>• Selections on “Mindful Eating” on BBL</li> </ul> <p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview with Jonathan S Foer on “Eating Animals” on BBL</li> </ul>	<p>In-class viewing of part of documentary <i>Food Inc.</i></p> <p>Guest Speaker from Ecology Ottawa on Being Mindfulness, Nature and Animals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindful eating</li> </ul> <p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jon Kabat-Zinn– Eating Meditation on BBL (MP3 – 9:31)</li> </ul>
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## Week 10 [15 March 2017]: Brain and Consciousness

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Puzzle of Conscious Experience” by David Chalmers on BBL</li> </ul> <p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TedTalk by David Chalmers on BBL</li> <li>• Ted Talk by Jill Bolte Tylor on BBL</li> </ul>	<p>Guest speakers: Dr. Georg Northoff (University of Ottawa Brain &amp; Mind Research Institute) will discuss with Professor Claude Lamontange:</p> <p><b><i>What is the nature of consciousness?</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindful speaking and listening</li> </ul> <p>Homework: assigned in class</p>
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## Week 11 [22 March 2017]: Contemplation and Social Justice

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “How Mindfulness Can Defeat Racial Bias” by Rhonda Magee (3 pages on BBL)</li> </ul>	<p>Guest Speaker Erin McCarthy (Chair, Dept of Philosophy, St Lawrence University) on Contemplation &amp; Social Justice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness in everyday life</li> </ul> <p>Homework: assigned in class</p>
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## Week 12 [20 March 2017]: Contemplation and Mental Health



<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assigned reading on the clinical application of mindfulness meditation will be posted on BBL</li> <li>“Feeling Bad” (Chapter 6) in <i>Fully Present</i>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Quiz 4 opens (includes Weeks 10-11-12)</b></p>	<p>Guest Speaker Dr Diana Koszycki, Dept. of Education, University of Ottawa</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mindfulness of moods and feelings</li> <li>Diana Winston – Working with Difficulties on BBL (MP3 – 06'55)</li> </ul>
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## Week 13 [5 April 2017]: Living the Contemplative Life

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Living a Contemplative Life” by Ajahn Viradhammo on BBL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REVIEW OF COURSE / PREP FOR FINAL EXAM</li> <li>Guest Speaker Theravada Buddhist Bhikkhu Ajahn Viradhammo</li> </ul>	
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### SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The University of Ottawa does not tolerate any form of sexual violence. Sexual violence refers to any act of a sexual nature committed without consent, such as rape, sexual harassment or online harassment. The University, as well as student and employee associations, offers a full range of resources and services allowing members of our community to receive information and confidential assistance and providing for a procedure to report an incident or make a complaint. For more information, visit <http://www.uottawa.ca/sexual-violence-support-and-prevention>

### BEWARE!

#### Plagiarism = automatic failure of course

- When borrowing another person’s words, use quotation marks and include a complete reference (author’s name, date, pages).
  - Internet sources must also be acknowledged.
- When borrowing another person’s ideas, acknowledge their origin.
  - Do not paraphrase another writer’s words and pass them off as your own.

#### TWO BASIC RULES:

- If you use someone else’s words, data, etc., use quotation marks and give a complete reference.
- If you borrow someone else’s ideas, give a complete reference. : if you are unsure, please check: [www.uottawa.ca/plagiarism.pdf](http://www.uottawa.ca/plagiarism.pdf)

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