Mindfulness Training Catches On in College

By Rick Nauert PhD

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College is full of distractions, enticements and pressure. The environment may be especially troublesome for incoming freshmen, many experiencing their first taste of freedom away from parental guidance.

This lack of concentration interferes with learning and is associated with stress, which tends to increase during the academic term.

To address this issue, University of Miami researchers are
To address this issue, University of Miami researchers are incorporating mindfulness training, specifically designed for undergraduate students. And a new study suggests the intervention shows promise as a tool to train attention and improve learning during the academic semester.

The study is the first to examine the incidence of mind wandering and the impact of mindfulness training, at different time points in the academic calendar.

Study results are published in the journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*.

“This work was the first to integrate mindfulness training into the academic semester by embedding training in students’ course schedules, hosting training in the academic building to best accommodate their schedules, and providing a supervised space for mindfulness exercises,” said Dr. Amishi Jha, associate professor in the Department of Psychology, and principal investigator of the study.

Mindfulness is a mental state in which a person pays attention to the present experience without ruminating about the past or worrying about the future. Mindfulness training (MT) emphasizes attention-building exercises and learning to observe the activity of the mind, according to Jha.

For the study, 58 UM undergraduate students participated in an experiment testing the effectiveness of a seven-week mental training program designed to tame the mind wandering and increase focus.

The students were assigned to either the MT group or a control group, who received no training. All participants completed two testing sessions, one at the start of the semester and again at the end of the training interval, as final exams neared.

Attention was measured by examining overall accuracy and other performance measures in a computer task of sustained attention. The students also self-reported the incidence of mind-wandering during the task.

The results indicate that the groups did not differ at the start of the semester. However, by the end of the training interval, the control group showed diminished attention and reported increased mind-wandering, while those who participated in the program showed significant improvements in attention and no increase in reported mind-wandering.
Researchers say future studies will work with larger cohorts. Investigators also want to look specifically at how MT may not only impact laboratory measures of mind wandering but also real-world mind wandering, which could influence academic learning, decision making, and psychological stress.

This research is funded by the U.S. Department of Defense to determine how to best offer effective MT that has low time requirements while also being highly effective in high-stress cohorts.

As a result of Jha's work, UM is implementing a campus-wide mindfulness initiative, which will include a speakers and retreat series beginning in March, creation of a website with mindfulness information for all UM constituents, and the formation of a student group dedicated to the study and practice of mindfulness training.

Source: University of Miami

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About Rick Nauert PhD

Dr. Rick Nauert has over 25 years experience in clinical, administrative and academic healthcare. He is currently an associate professor for Rocky Mountain University of Health Professionals doctoral program in health promotion and wellness. Dr. Nauert began his career as a clinical physical therapist and served as a regional manager for a publicly

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physical therapist and served as a regional manager for a publicly traded multidisciplinary rehabilitation agency for 12 years. He has masters degrees in health-fitness management and healthcare administration and a doctoral degree from The University of Texas at Austin focused on health care informatics, health administration, health education and health policy. His research efforts included the area of telehealth with a specialty in disease management.

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