Junior Danny Englert, junior Mason Schechter, and senior Emma Wheeler participate in an SIY shot, with Miami Mindfulness on Friday afternoon in the Arboretum. An SIY shot is a way to infuse the skills and habits from the Search Inside Yourself curriculum into daily life with one or more mental training exercises done in a group of two or more. Monica Herndon // Photo Editor

Junior Jose Miguel Rosillo sits in a relaxed yet alert position on the second floor of the Student Activities Center. His window seat has a view of Lake Osceola, and the sun is setting. But his eyes are closed.

He inhales. Then exhales. For one minute, he focuses on his breath. This short exercise aimed at clearing up his mind is an example of mindfulness training (MT) in its simplest form.
Mindfulness consists of a purposeful, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment.

“What you’re doing with mindfulness is training two faculties: attention and meta-attention,” Rosillo said. “There’s both instant gratification and long-term gratification.”

As Rosillo describes it, mindfulness helps you recognize the many layers of your current reality, and it increases the resolution and vividness with which you perceive things.

“There are people who think you just sit around, that it’s passive,” he said. “That’s a misconception.”

In his quest to bring the message of mindfulness to the school, Rosillo has done much more than sitting around. There’s been some lying around, too.

Rosillo introduced junior Augustine Kazicks to the principles of mindfulness by recommending that his friend read “Search Inside Yourself” by Chade-Meng Tan, the book that started it all for Rosillo.

Kazicks read it over the summer, and they returned to campus in the fall feeling the need to share mindfulness with the University of Miami community. One day in September, they were lying in the grass near the Knight Physics building, talking the idea over.

“We really talked about it – for like three hours. And then we decided, ‘Let’s teach it,’” Rosillo said.

They considered UM's Design-a-Course option, according to Kazicks, but ultimately settled on forming an informal student organization called the UM SIY Club, named for the “Search Inside Yourself” book.

**Searching for inspiration**

The UM SIY Club met every Sunday last semester, studying a chapter of the book each week. Rosillo explained the theory taught in the book, interspersed with the actual exercises.

In the first week, he could tell they had started something special.

“After that meeting, I was on cloud nine,” he said.

Throughout the semester, new members joined, while others came, saw, and didn’t return. And still, there were those who were consistent from the first meeting they attended.

Senior Emma Wheeler was one of them. She was first introduced to mindfulness meditation as a senior in high school when she was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder, which causes cells in the body to attack themselves.
“At that point it seemed like some sort of hippie, new-age thing,” Wheeler said.

Wheeler had been experiencing emotional swings and suffering from depression from her diagnosis.

“I was expecting to play sports in college, and all of those plans for the future ended,” she said.

When she started at UM as a freshman, Wheeler became a participant in one of UM mindfulness researcher Amishi Jha’s studies.

Even before Rosillo, efforts to bring MT to UM had been coming from disparate elements of the university community, including Jha who researches the effect of short-term mindfulness on individuals in high-stress situations.

“She was measuring our focus, our grades, and how we felt emotionally,” Wheeler said.

Still, it wasn’t until Wheeler began practicing meditation on a daily basis that she truly noticed a difference. In between weekly meetings with the SIY Club, she practiced 20 minutes of focused meditation in the mornings.

Wheeler said her grades have gotten better, and her concentration has improved.

On her own, junior Lucy Hartwell has also seen the benefits of practicing mindfulness meditation using an app called Headspace. It starts the user off with 10 consecutive days of 10-minute exercises and works its way up to 20-minute sessions.

“I’m a complete insomniac. I tend to over-think things, ruminate, and my mind spins,” Hartwell said. “Mindfulness has helped me step back and be able to see, so I can catch myself right at the beginning of it. In terms of sleeping, I can shut off my mind a lot faster.”

**Coming together**

While all these experiences transpired separately, Jha brought Rosillo, Kazickas and Hartwell together.

Together, the SIY club has transformed into Mindfulness Miami, and the members are in the process of applying to become an official student organization with COSO, despite Rosillo’s initial doubts.

“We felt like a community, and we didn’t want to lose that,” he said. “We didn’t want to get restricted by the school.”

Rosillo finally reasoned that he should emulate the ideas of the “Search Inside Yourself” author, who wants to create the conditions for world peace by making meditation available.
“I wanted to make the benefits of meditation widely available to the University of Miami,” Rosillo said. “The best way to fulfill this mission is by becoming an official organization.”

**Looking ahead**

This decision aligns well with Jha’s goal, which is to make mindfulness initiatives sustainable on campus.

That entails bringing in guest speakers, holding retreats, starting up a lending library to share resources and CDs, and creating a mindfulness practice room.

“We’re hoping to have a mindful space where people can come and have set practices throughout the week,” Jha said.