

Meditation in Higher Education: The Next Wave?

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ABSTRACT: This article describes the design and advocacy of the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Jazz and Contemplative Studies curriculum at The University of Michigan School of Music. The curriculum combines meditation practice and related studies with jazz and overall musical training and is part of a small but growing movement in academia that seeks to integrate contemplative disciplines within the educational process. The article considers issues such as the structure of the curriculum, the reconciliation of contemplative studies and conventional notions of academic rigor, the avoidance of possible conflicts between church and state, and other challenges encountered in gaining support for this plan, after weeks of intensive debate, from a 2/3 majority of the faculty.

KEY WORDS: meditation; contemplative studies; spirituality; jazz; improvisation.

In 1997, the American Council of Learned Societies launched the Contemplative Practice Fellowship program, the purpose of which is to promote the use of meditation and related disciplines in higher education.¹ These disciplines have been considered in spiritual and philosophical traditions around the world as important tools for the cultivation of insight, clarity, creativity, inner calm, well-being, compassion, and a range of other personal and transpersonal qualities. The ACLS program has enabled the integration of contemplative practices at over 75 colleges and universities including Brown, Columbia, Yale, The University of Massachusetts, and The University of Michigan. Fields as diverse as medicine, business, psychology, religion, architecture, literature, dance, and music have been impacted by this initiative.

While the main thrust of the ACLS project so far has been the design and implementation of individual, elective courses at the various institutions, The University of Michigan School of Music has taken what

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¹For more information about the ACLS program, visit their website at [www.acls.org]. The ACLS program is facilitated by The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. See [www.contemplativemind.org].

may be a further step in this initiative: the implementation of a four-year academic curriculum with a substantive contemplative studies component. This is the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Jazz and Contemplative Studies degree (BFAJCS), which contains within its 120 credits, 25 credits of contemplative studies course work. In these courses, students engage in regular meditation practice and study corresponding philosophical, theoretical, historical and cultural issues. The curriculum also includes a solid grounding in jazz and overall musical studies.

As a fellow in the ACLS program, and as the designer of the BFAJCS curriculum, I will discuss in this article the structure and methodologies of the curriculum, and consider the major questions I encountered in advocating it to my colleagues. I will first define contemplative practice, and then consider how it is taught, evaluated and given course credit in this program. I will then examine the ways in which contemplative practice and related theoretical studies fulfill conventional and alternative notions of academic rigor. This will be followed by a consideration of how possible ties, either real or perceived, between contemplative disciplines and religious practices are addressed. While much of the focus in these sections will be on overcoming the challenges inherent in pursuing an initiative of this nature, I will conclude by sharing my enthusiasm for this project. My involvement in teaching contemplative studies been a tremendous source of fulfillment for me as a teacher and educational reformer, as it has enabled me to see my students blossom in ways that have exceeded what I have customarily noted. This has confirmed my belief that we are in the beginnings of an extraordinarily significant movement in the educational world. I hope the following insights are helpful to others who have already begun, or wish to pursue, similar initiatives.

Definition of Contemplative Practices

Contemplative practices are systematic methods of invoking heightened states of consciousness, or awareness, which have been described by a wide range of terminology. Transcendence, mindfulness, yoga, grace, ecstasy, spirituality, self-awareness, self-actualization, peak experience, and flow are a few of the terms one encounters in regard to these states. Silent or sitting meditation, where individuals withdraw from engagement in physical, intellectual, and sensory activity, is perhaps the most common example of a contemplative practice. However, most meditative traditions, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism, also include a range of corresponding practices that complement the

silent meditative component. Examples include walking meditation, hatha yoga and other forms of movement, chanting, music, creative visualization, and contemplative reading. Testimonies from students engaged in these practices suggest a wide range of benefits, from relieving stress, to “listening more carefully to each other,” learning “to clear the mind and focus better on doing our jobs,” and an “enhanced ability to remain calm in difficult situations” (Riskin, 2002, pp. 43–44).

It is also important to note that transformed or heightened consciousness is not confined to activities pursued with explicitly contemplative goals. Athletes, artists, poets, therapists, and scientists alike report experiences invoked during their respective disciplines that might be categorized as contemplative in nature. Thus the question, “What is contemplative practice?” might be more aptly phrased, “What isn’t contemplative practice?”

In response to these questions, we can draw three major distinctions between contemplative practices, or disciplines, and the broader range of activities and life experiences in which heightened consciousness might be invoked. First, contemplative disciplines are expressly designed for and undertaken with the purpose of accessing a heightened awareness state. Whereas heightened awareness might be a byproduct of, say, musical composition or poetry or mathematical inquiry, these are not formally categorized as contemplative disciplines in that they are generally undertaken in the pursuit of external goals (e.g. a work of music, or poem or equation) rather than internal, contemplative goals.

However, since some practitioners in these domains might conceivably argue that contemplative experience is as much a priority as are the practical, external goals conventionally associated with these fields,² we may cite a second distinction. Contemplative disciplines, unlike activities that might induce contemplative states, are linked to theoretical and philosophical models of consciousness and its development. Thus, while long-distance athletes or environmental engineers may invoke contemplative experiences in their respective activities, there is no corresponding body of knowledge in their fields that explains these states, the mechanics through which they are invoked, the ways they differ cognitively from ordinary experience, and the stages corresponding to their development over time.

²Csikszentmihalyi (1990), for example, noted that activities that consistently promote what he calls “flow” can be pursued in an “autotelic” manner, where they are undertaken for intrinsic, interior rewards as much or even more than for external results.

A third distinguishing feature is that contemplative disciplines have evolved, or have been designed, not just to enable heightened consciousness during the practice itself, but in fact to integrate this kind of experience into life as a whole. These disciplines can thus be argued to not only provide a deeper and more consistent type of heightened consciousness, particularly over time, but also to promote the integration of heightened consciousness more effectively into overall life. Murphy and White (1995), for example, noted tendencies among long-distance athletes who, while experiencing dramatic and frequent transformations in consciousness in their respective sports, nonetheless turn to silent meditation and related disciplines for their systematic and integrative benefits. In no way is this to dismiss the transformational and enriching nature of their athletic activities, even if they are catalysts for heightened states of awareness. It is simply to draw important distinctions between systematic contemplative disciplines and the virtually unlimited spectrum of activities through which these experiences may sometimes become manifest. I believe these distinctions are critical to the understanding of contemplative studies and their incorporation into educational models.

What, then, is it about contemplative disciplines that render them capable of promoting the above transformational and developmental experiences? Let us respond to this from the standpoint of silent meditation practices, which are the preferred contemplative modality in the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Jazz and Contemplative Studies program. These practices are unique in that they involve a complete withdrawal from ordinary physical, mental, sensory, and emotional engagement. The experience of a profound, interior silence offers both a reprieve from, and an enlivening of, these ordinary channels of engagement.

Here, however, it is important to dispel common stereotypes about contemplative disciplines, for the notion of withdrawal from normal activities and experience of deep silence may suggest something along the lines of sleep. Contemplative experience, in fact, is an experience of profound wakefulness and clarity, even if the mind is extraordinarily silent and the body in a deeply restful state. These aspects are supported by a steadily increasing body of neurophysiological research (Austin, 1998; Andresen, 2000; Wallace, 1991) into meditative states. Furthermore, while silent meditation involves a withdrawal from normal activity, its purpose is not to evade or disconnect one from life, but in fact to renew one's engagement and dynamism in life through contact with this core form of awareness. Described variously as pure consciousness, mindfulness, transcendence, no-self, this core awareness appears to be

common to a variety of meditative traditions. (Forman, 1990; Wilber, 2000)

Descriptions of contact with this core as instances of extraordinary clarity, insight, and inner calm can only approximate this awareness state; it ultimately can be understood and appreciated only by the experience itself. In fact, the coexistence of levels of wakefulness and profound calm that exceed ordinary experience, which makes these states so difficult to convey to others in words, is perhaps what renders them so transformational. As one invokes these states on a regular basis, they promote the development of these values in everyday life in a way that, as noted above, most other experiences generally cannot match. However, this is not to devalue other activities, or suggest meditation should replace them, whether they are undertaken with contemplative aims or not. Rather, silent meditation can be thought of as a kind of anchor and means for enriching whatever activities one pursues.

The Teaching of Meditation Practice in the BFAJCS Program

A variety of meditation practices exists, from breath awareness to visual imagery to mantra meditation. Skill in meditation practice, as with most disciplines, increases over time, providing practitioners follow proper procedures. More advanced practitioners experience deeper, clearer meditations on a more consistent basis than do beginners, and they also experience more a permanent infusion of meditative qualities in their overall life. A long-term meditator reports that “with increased familiarity . . . the process of transcending became more and more natural. The whole physiology was now accustomed to just slipping within, and at some point it would literally ‘click,’ and with that the awareness would become fully expanded, the breath would almost cease, the spine would become straight . . .” The practitioner further remarks that “the physiology after that state is incredible,” (Alexander & Langer, 1990, p. 312) pointing to the profound rejuvenation she experiences in her overall life after meditation practice. At every stage of development, expert instruction and ongoing guidance are important to achieving these interior and exterior results.

In the BFAJCS program, this instruction and ongoing guidance are provided both by the faculty and by local meditation centers. Within the realm of instruction, faculty may provide students with introductory exposure to meditation by leading them through guided meditations, where spoken words direct the awareness in a contemplative direction,

or by providing them with basic instructions for a practice they can undertake on their own. This type of instruction generally occurs in class settings. However, students are strongly encouraged to partake of the considerable resources in the community for more formal meditation instruction and ongoing guidance.³ There are several reasons for this.

First, it allows for the variety of approaches appropriate for a diverse student body. Second, this strategy fosters connections between university and community. Third, and perhaps most important, meditation centers offer a broader spectrum of resources within the given traditions than faculty could, and possibly even should, provide. While many meditation practices may share aspects in common, each has their own idiosyncracies, calling for tradition-specific expertise if students are to gain sophisticated instruction and ongoing guidance. While a given faculty member may possess this kind of expertise in a single tradition, it is unlikely that the faculty as a whole will be able to match the multitradeational breadth that the collection of meditation centers found in most university towns can provide. Moreover, experience in meditation does not necessarily qualify one to teach meditation, particularly when it comes to answering questions pertaining to another individual's experience. These centers generally have individuals who have received some type of teacher training in meditation and who thus have such qualifications. Meditation centers also offer students the opportunity to affiliate with a community of practitioners as well as ongoing programs and retreats, all of which are commonly cited by long-term meditators as important to their staying with their practice.

The rich theoretical, historical and cultural grounding of meditation centers, which is tradition-specific, complements the cross-traditional orientation of the curriculum where students elect tradition-specific course work in some contemplative lineages (e.g. Introduction to Buddhism, Jewish Mysticism) and are required to take course work (e.g. Creativity and Consciousness, Contemplative Practice Seminar) that draws parallels between lineages. Exposure to common ground and differences among traditions enhances students' perspectives on what they do and helps cultivate a cross-cultural awareness.

Students declare a contemplative practice early on in the program just as they, and other music majors, declare a principal musical

³As with many university communities, the Ann Arbor-Detroit area boasts a wide variety of such centers. These include Tibetan, Zen, and Vipassana Buddhist centers and dissha Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, and Kriya Yoga centers from the Vedantic tradition. Students bear any costs involved in such instruction.

instrument. Does any contemplative practice suffice? If not, what are the criteria for deeming a practice appropriate or not? Who decides? And if meditation instruction is provided by external resources, how is the integrity of this instruction assessed and monitored? The following guidelines provide a general framework for how these issues are addressed.

First, students must feel comfortable sustaining regular practice with whatever method they choose, which generally requires that they invoke experiences of sufficient depth and frequency to compel them to continue. It is also important that they early on begin to notice benefits outside of meditation, such as those delineated above. The infusion of contemplative awareness in everyday life is as important an indicator of the effectiveness of meditation practice as the meditation experiences themselves, and the latter need not include the dramatic episodes of transcendence that are sometimes reported by meditators. This is one reason students are highly encouraged to affiliate with a meditation center that, as described above, teaches a systematic methodology and is linked to a tradition. In most traditions, proper meditation practice involves not the striving for some preconceived notion of an ideal experience, but rather the letting go and acceptance of whatever comes within the framework of a given technique, when properly practiced. Such guidance is more difficult to come by in self-designed meditation practices, or those learned from a book. This is not to completely rule out the possibility for the effectiveness of the latter approaches. However, given the pervasiveness of “new age” thinking and the flood of “how to meditate” literature, it is important to recognize that meditation practice is as much a systematic discipline as the practice of a musical instrument. Just as musicianship requires expert instruction, guidance, sophisticated technical and theoretical understanding, so, too, does meditation. Granted, one might gain a glimpse of some positive result by following the instructions given in a meditation handbook. One must ask, however, what happens during those phases of practice when results are more subtle, or not noticeable at all, or perhaps where meditations are characterized more by agitation than calm, or when questions arise the response to which is critical to ongoing practice? Here is where affiliation with a systematic methodology is every bit as crucial for the meditator as studying with a master instrumentalist is for the musician.

To help oversee this and other aspects of the curriculum, I formed a Curriculum Advisory Committee, which consists of faculty members from diverse areas throughout the University who have expertise in

the area of contemplative studies and practice. I have been fortunate to be able to call upon colleagues from areas as diverse as psychology, neuroscience, music, biology, art, and religion for this purpose.⁴ (As an extension of this committee, I have since formed a cross-campus group called the Faculty Network for Creativity and Consciousness Studies, which includes over 40 colleagues from many fields.) Several members of the committee are active in the local meditation community and thus provide a direct “town-gown” linkage. The committee approves the list of meditation centers given to students in the program and offers recommendations when questions arise regarding the admission of students to the program, the kind of practice students declare, and what courses might qualify for the contemplative studies component of the curriculum. Courses with either direct or indirect relevance to this curriculum spring up regularly in one area or another of the university, and it is helpful to have colleagues across campus that are on the lookout for and can help evaluate the appropriateness of these courses. Examples of courses in the BFAJCS curriculum that are outside of the School of Music include:

- Psychology and Spiritual Experience
- Jewish Mysticism
- Islamic Mysticism
- Introduction to Buddhist Thought

Credit and Evaluation

Do students receive course credit for meditation practice? If so, how is this practice graded, and how do these grading procedures compare with either conventional or alternative notions of academic rigor? These were among the most challenging questions posed by colleagues. After all, it is one thing to test and grade jazz students on their mastery of,

⁴The Curriculum Advisory Committee for the BFAJCS program serves only a consulting purpose and has no authority to approve or amend any aspect of the curriculum. When the program was proposed, it had to pass through three tiers of approval. The first was the Curriculum Committee in the School of Music, the second was the governing faculty of the School of Music, and the third was the President’s Committee. As Chair of the Jazz Department, which is one of 15 departments in the School of Music, I assigned myself as jazz representative on the Curriculum Committee several years before the proposal was made in order to establish credibility and all-important alliances within this group. The proposal sailed through the Curriculum Committee, 12–3, and then caused an uproar of “historical proportions” at the governing faculty level, where, after a delayed vote, it passed by a vote of 63–44.

say, chord voicings, scales and modes, repertory, or historical knowledge; but it is quite another to evaluate their involvement with a meditation practice.

In responding to these questions, a key point to be emphasized is how meditation is interwoven into the curriculum. The central course in which meditation takes place in the BFAJCS curriculum is the Contemplative Practice Seminar, which students take for four terms, during which they are required to sustain a regular meditation practice (30–40 minutes daily). Each class session begins with a short (10–15 minutes) group meditation, followed by discussion of experiences and assigned readings related to corresponding theoretical, philosophical, cultural, and historical issues. One colleague argued, understandably, that using class time for group meditation precluded valuable instruction that could otherwise take place. The fact that this is a relatively small component of class meeting time, coupled with the enhanced experiences many students report when meditating in groups, overrides these concerns.⁵

The criteria for grading in this course include far more than meditation, but in fact a range of considerations related to meditation. Students are graded on:

- regularity of meditation practice;
- a journal where they describe their experiences in meditation and reflect on the impact of their practice in their lives and studies;
- assigned readings and written assignments regarding the theoretical, philosophical, cultural and historical aspects of contemplative traditions;
- and their participation in classroom discussions related to the issues mentioned above.

Meditation thus exists as part of a continuum of investigation, some of which is relatively conventional in nature. Therefore, the question of grading and awarding credit for meditation practice applies to only a small part of this continuum. In fact, if we look at this from a strictly mathematical standpoint, meditation practice could be seen to amount to approximately two credits out of the 120 credit hours total. The Contemplative Practice Seminar is a two-credit course, taken four terms. If we divide the two credits into the above grading criteria, only the

⁵Some neurophysiological research may support the widely-held subjective notion among meditators that group practice enhances experiences. See, for example, Orme-Johnson, Dilleck, Wallace, & Landrith (1982).

first of which involves direct translation of actual meditation practice into a grade, then that amounts to .5 credits for meditation each of those terms. (Four terms \times .5 = 2 credits total). Yet at the same time, meditation is an essential part of this continuum of this class, as without meditation there would be nothing to reflect on, write about or discuss, nor would the associated readings take on the same kind of meaning. We can look at the entire slate of contemplative studies electives (of which Contemplative Practice Seminar is one component) from this perspective. Even with those classes that do not involve meditation, the fact that students are sustaining a practice adds an inextricable component to the continuum of investigation, and the credits earned, in those classes. The small number which can be exclusively awarded to meditation as an isolated activity reflects neither the importance of meditation in this curriculum nor the manner in which it is integrated.

Might it be argued that students are not given enough credit for the time they invest in meditation? Possibly. Here is where in designing the program I thought it would be prudent to err on the side of caution, suspecting that the strongest dissent would be in response to awarding any credit for meditation practice whatsoever, not for awarding too little. Moreover, students are only required to sustain regular meditation for four terms, a length of time that will certainly yield for them noticeable results in their overall life and studies, but comprises only half of their undergraduate careers. I believe they will nonetheless consider this time well spent even if it were to be determined that they are undercompensated for it in terms of credits. I might add that some students come to the program already involved in a meditation practice, which indicates a commitment to this type of experience that transcends credit incentives.

A parallel to this situation might be found in music and the relatively small number of credit hours music majors receive for instrumental instruction. Not only is it common for music students to put in 3–5 hours of daily individual practice during a given semester, for which the 2–4 credit hours granted pales compared to other courses bearing those credit amounts, these students also sustain intensive instrumental practice routines during holidays and summer recesses. Since students compete for scholarships, seating in ensembles, rankings for solo contests, intensive practice regimes that far exceed normal practice-for-credit ratios are commonplace. Moreover, student ensembles go on concert tours from time-to-time that involve tremendous time commitments and no extra course credit. Meditation practice takes far

less time than daily instrumental study and thus does not stretch the practice-credit ratio to nearly the same extent.

Meditation Practice and Academic Rigor

As noted above, meditation, while practiced privately and in weekly group settings, is also interwoven into otherwise conventional class settings. It is integrated into frameworks subject to the same criteria for grading, evaluation, and rigor as found in conventional studies. In addition to the Contemplative Practice Seminar mentioned above, other courses involving meditation practice include Creativity and Consciousness, offered through the Jazz department, and Psychology and Spiritual Experience, offered through the Psychology department. Moreover, when we look at the contemplative studies component of this curriculum as a continuum that extends from the meditation practice to related theoretical, philosophical, and cultural areas, we see a framework which promotes connection to a truly extraordinary range of extradisciplinary connections. Regular experiences of interior stillness, with accompanying physiological changes (e.g. reduced breath rate, relaxation, lightness), are a catalyst for rich reflection on the nature of mind and consciousness and their relationship to the body. Questions regarding the nature of mind that have been debated by philosophers through the ages become intimately relevant to meditating students. What is consciousness? Is consciousness reducible to, or an epiphenomenon of the brain, as materialists (e.g. Churchland, 1998; Chalmers, 1995; Dennett, 1991) posit? Is the brain an epiphenomenon of consciousness, as idealists (Dalal, 2001; Mansfield, 1995) and many spiritual traditions suggest? Or are consciousness and matter inextricable aspects of a kind of “universal flux,” as panexperientialists (Bohm, 1980; Griffen, 1997; Wade, 1996) propose? Research on non-local aspects of consciousness (John & Dunne, 1987; Radio, 1997; Wallace, 1991) impacts directly on these important questions and is also intimately connected to meditation experience.

A number of questions related to cultural studies also stem directly from meditation practice. Is transcendent experience mediated entirely by one’s cultural and philosophical background and expectations, as Katz (1983) asserts, reflecting a strongly mainstream postmodern orientation? Or is an experience of “pure consciousness” possible, where one transcends relativistic influences and invokes an experience completely devoid of content? Forman (1990), Wilber (2000), Shear (1996)

and others have argued that such an experience is a profound connecting link between cultures, which runs sharply counter to prevailing postmodern tendencies to reject such transcendent connections. Wilber (2000) and Griffen (1997) have posited alternative forms of postmodernism that include the relativistic orientation of conventional postmodernism, where experience is regarded as culturally meditated, along with the recognition of transcendent, cross-cultural universals. Meditating students can bring both contemplative and analytical perspectives to this debate, and as such, gain a first-hand glimpse of the formation and dissolution of paradigms—the sets of assumptions that take hold and shape the thinking of entire communities and disciplines. As a means for enhanced examination of one's own assumptions, as well as those of others, contemplative studies can provide a direct examination of the inner mechanics of change.

Involvement in systematic meditation practice and related theoretical inquiry also yields connections to cognitive and developmental psychology. Transformations in temporal experience, heightened clarity of perception, fluidity in problem solving and creativity, all characteristic of meditation practices, provide a backdrop for investigating related literature on these cognitive capacities. From a developmental standpoint, efforts at mapping transpersonal stages of growth (Alexander & Langer, 1990; Wade, 1996; Wilber, 2000) as reported in various meditative traditions, and as extensions of the continuum of development proposed by Piaget, serve as possible links between meditation practice and conventional terrain. Wilber (2000), for example, situates four levels of transpersonal development—what he calls, subtle, psychic, formal, and nondual—to follow Piaget's highest stage, formal operations. In so doing, he not only bridges what has generally been confined to mystical realms with conventional science. He also, in observing these developmental stages and states as common to a wide array of cultures, makes profound contributions to efforts at multicultural awareness. I should add that he also strongly emphasizes the need to celebrate the rich differences between cultures in how they think about spiritual growth.

In mentioning a few of the interdisciplinary connections that are possible, I do not suggest that every student will be able to pursue all of them fully. As in all fields, the rapidly expanding nature of the knowledge base challenges the energy and focus of students and faculty. However, this may be where a contemplative foundation opens up new ways of approaching this challenge. Because BFAJCS students' investigation into all of these areas is grounded in an interior experience, a degree of intimacy may be possible that does not otherwise occur. In other words,

the direct experience of transformed consciousness through meditation provides a basis for an entirely new relationship to a wide range of theoretical concerns related to consciousness studies. Contemplative experience can thus be thought of as a kind of “entryway” (Gardner, 1993), a psycho-emotional engagement in a subject, that provides an inner basis for introductory exposure to a wide array of intellectual connections, which then serves as the basis for more in-depth pursuit of those areas students are further drawn to. While this initial cross-disciplinary exposure might be provided by faculty whose primary focus lies in any field, the subsequent in-depth studies can be taken with faculty who specialize in those areas. In this way, contemplative studies students are able to partake of the top conventional expertise available in any given field, yet they come to this expertise with a unique kind of inner receptivity and perspective. Thus, contemplative studies may provide a prototype for an entirely new approach to multidisciplinary education, where disciplines are first connected at the foundational level of consciousness and then at the highly differentiated level of the curricular surface. In linking intellectual inquiry to meditative experiences, contemplative studies may also offer a new notion of academic rigor, perhaps along the lines of or even extending beyond what Gardner (1993, 1999) proposed as possible.

In sum, contemplative studies does not replace or reject any conventional area of investigation. Rather, by extending the continuum of experiences comprising education to also include a transpersonal domain, contemplative studies may both extend and enhance the access to conventional and nonconventional terrain alike.

Contemplative Studies and Religion in the Classroom

Might a program in contemplative studies be construed as a program in religious instruction? If so, would this not violate separation of church and state policies at public institutions?

If we view religion in terms of some kind of deity worship, and corresponding beliefs and practices that distinguish one denomination from another—criteria that are problematic from a church-state standpoint—the BFAJCS curriculum is clearly not a program in religious instruction. While students in this program elect from a slate of offerings that include study of various religious traditions—e.g. Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism—these courses do not involve religious worship in those traditions. Rather, these courses, which are found at most institutions’ religion departments, deal with historical,

cultural, philosophical, and theoretical aspects of these traditions. As argued above, they are particularly useful to BFAJCS students in that they foster an awareness of the cultural and historical contexts in which contemplative practices have evolved. However, no single religious tradition is taught or favored, even from a theoretical or philosophical standpoint, in this program; and moreover, no actual religious practice is taught.

What about the contemplative practice component of the program? Don't many of these practices originate in religious traditions and therefore constitute forms of religious practice? Is there a difference between meditation in the classroom and prayer in the classroom?

Here we can still point to important distinctions between religious instruction and what is taught in the BFAJCS curriculum. To reiterate, the credit hours awarded for actual meditation practice are minimal, and this instruction largely takes place outside of the university. Thus even for a student who sustains a daily Buddhist meditation practice and who happens to identify as a Buddhist, the BFAJCS is not a program in Buddhist religious instruction. Rather, the curriculum provides a framework in which this practice can connect to conventional types of investigation (e.g. reading, writing, and discussion) into religious or spiritual experience, from a trans-traditional perspective. Faculty might lead a class through a guided meditation or introduce a basic practice apart from a religious context. While meditation centers may be more closely linked to religious traditions, any such connections are the personal choice of students. Moreover, religious affiliation is often not a requirement at these centers. For example, one can easily practice mindfulness meditation without proclaiming oneself a Buddhist or Transcendental Meditation without Hindu attachments.

Here a concern arises that represents perhaps the other extreme of church-state concerns. This is the fear that contemplative practices might become so extricated from the spiritual traditions in which they originated that these practices become reduced to mere methodologies for stress release, at the expense of what might be considered a more genuine and complete kind of spiritual development. There are several ways to look at this concern, all of which shed further light on the church-state question.

First of all, if contemplative practice is undertaken without explicitly spiritual goals (e.g. oneness with universe, overflowing compassion and love for creation, mystical experiences) but simply to relieve stress and perhaps enhance mental clarity and focus, these results still represent important benefits to the educational process. Second, it could

be argued that more mundane benefits can be precursors to the more mystical, spiritual kinds of developments that can unfold with practice. Extending from this point is a third and highly significant premise, having to do with the emergence of a trans-traditional spiritual framework that addresses concerns shared by multiple traditions. This does not preclude tradition-specific spiritual ties, but provides an expanded framework through which the various spiritual traditions can be more deeply appreciated and understood.

The main idea here is that the extrication of contemplative practices from tradition-specific spiritual contexts allows the construction of a spiritual identity that is rooted, first and foremost, in an interior experience, rather than shaped by exterior, institutional, or denominational influences. This trans-traditional identity is thus naturally more disposed toward acknowledging common ground among traditions because it is grounded in the transpersonal, contemplative core where all traditions intersect, even if their pathways differ. Moreover, not only is this trans-traditional identity spiritually ecumenical, it is also receptive to linkages among intellectual, creative, and other areas of life. Whereas conventional religious practice is often relegated to a sphere of experience and inquiry that is entirely separate from science and art, trans-traditional spirituality embraces all areas as part of a unified experiential spectrum. The peak experiences reported by jazz improvisers or athletes are not fundamentally different than the transcendent experience invoked in meditation; these are simply different versions of the inherent capacity in the human psychophysiology for transformed consciousness. Trans-traditional spirituality celebrates neurophysiological studies on meditative states because objective reality is not seen as separate from subjective reality. The mapping of transpersonal stages of growth, as along mainstream psychological models (e.g. Piaget) of human development, clearly reflects a trans-traditional orientation, as does the embrace of the parallels of such stages between traditions. Conventional religious viewpoints are generally not nearly as receptive to this kind of reconciliation with science, nor with other spiritual pathways.

The academic world may be an ideal place for these trans-traditional models to emerge, because of the close proximity of top practitioners in the sciences, arts, and humanities. While the highly specialized tendencies of the academic world often keep these practitioners apart, contemplative studies may provide fertile ground for faculty members in the most disparate of fields to come together. At Michigan, I am in dialogue with researchers in the medical school and Department of Psychology

regarding the possibility of experiments to measure brainwave patterns in music improvisers and meditators. I also regularly meet with colleagues in the business school to discuss parallels between business creativity, on both individual and organizational levels, and jazz improvisation and contemplative experience.

Now, as mentioned above, trans-traditional spirituality does not preclude tradition-specific spiritual affiliation. In fact, the cultivation of a trans-traditional spiritual vision may lay groundwork that enhances such affiliation. I have seen in myself and many other contemplative practitioners an interest in and increased recognition of subtle values which are retained in spiritual traditions and which can offer enrichment of one's practice. This may be a particular ritual or kind of imagery or way of thinking. When contemplative practitioners embrace, or in some cases return to conventional spiritual sources, they do so grounded in both an interior experience and a recognition of the commonality of this experience to other traditions. This is not to suggest that all aspects of spiritual experience are identical across traditions, but that there is a transcendent core that underlies differences. Awareness of this is highly significant to our times, when divisions between religious factions are the source of such tension and violence in our world. Perhaps ironically, the academic world—due to the necessity of extricating contemplative practice from overtly religious practice—may be poised to play a leadership role in restoring to religious practice the unifying aspects of this important domain of human experience.

Conclusion

My students commonly report increased well-being, freedom from anxiety, sharpened mental and emotional faculties, and other benefits from their meditation practice. My greatest fulfillment as a teacher comes from the fact that I can work with them in the contemplative domain and observe them reap these benefits, while also exploring with them highly detailed issues related to musical creativity. I find that the opportunity to span this continuum in my teaching is a tremendous source of inspiration and personal growth. While contemplative studies may seem to be a radical development in higher education, I believe the idea that it can be integrated with and enhance conventional studies represents a strong basis for its advocacy.

Commenting on the unlikely use of meditation in the training of lawyers, Charles Halpern (1999) noted after Yale Law School's first

contemplative practice retreat that “meditation appears to be directly relevant to what lawyers do, the skills they need, and the way they live their lives. Law study places a great premium on intellectual agility, on an ability to analyze complex facts, and on abstract reasoning.” Not only can these skills be enhanced by “the quiet space created by meditation practice,” but this practice can also be a “place for wisdom and compassion to grow.”(p. 2) Meditation does not conflict with conventional educational models; it enhances them.

Meditation can thus be thought of as simply extending the continuum of what constitutes education from more quantifiable, external kinds of knowledge to those which are more interior and abstract but no less important to students’ overall development. We have already seen the beginnings of this extended continuum in the emphasis that began to escalate in the latter half of the 20th century on developing creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. In music, the correlate here might be efforts to incorporate improvisation and composition into curricula that are exclusively confined to interpretive performance and analysis of “classical” repertory. Perhaps ironically, just as both improvisation and composition were central modes of expression for all musicians in past eras of classical music, and thus their incorporation may represent a return to, rather than a departure from tradition (Sarath 1995, 1996, 2002), meditation might be viewed in the same light. That is, meditation restores core facets of human development to the learning enterprise. Moreover, just as improvisation and composition enhance overall musicianship, meditation can enhance overall personal, transpersonal, intellectual and development. Even from a conventional educational standpoint, where the focus is largely on intellectual inquiry, the direct connections meditation enables to areas such as cognitive and transpersonal psychology, neuroscience, philosophy of mind, and cultural studies yields promising cross-disciplinary prospects for curricula centered in any field. That a steadily-increasing body of transpersonal research frames these connections in highly sophisticated ways supports the argument for contemplative studies as a legitimate academic subject. In addition, by sharpening students’ mental capacities, ability to focus, awareness of self, freedom from anxiety, well-being, and sensitivity to and concern for others, meditation is a means for broadening the scope of human development from what is typically addressed in the educational world.

The more I reflect on the ultimate meaning of the term education and the purpose of a university, particularly in light of the ecological, social, and cultural challenges of our times, the more strongly I am committed

to making spiritual or transpersonal development central to the educational enterprise. I believe we are at the threshold of an exciting new era in the educational world, where the great contributions of conventional learning models can be integrated within an expanded continuum that also includes systematic approaches to spiritual growth. I have managed to make some headway in this direction, and I hope my insights are of help to others who have similar goals.

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