

**PSY 3005 - Fall 2026**  
**Mindfulness: Science and Practice**

**Class Meetings:** W-F, 11-12:15

**Prerequisite:** General Psychology (PSYC 1101)

**Instructor:** Paul Verhaeghen, Ph.D.

Email: verhaeghen@gatech.edu

Office hours: by appointment (make your appointment by email)

**Teaching Assistant:** TBA

**Course description and objectives:**

Mindfulness, simply put, means paying open, accepting, non-judging attention to what is happening here and now, either or both inside and outside yourself. This sounds deceptively simple, but it is a skill that is deviously difficult to master. (Your instructor, rest assured, has not.)

Your instructor is certified as mindfulness teacher through the Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults (MEIA, fka Koru Mindfulness) and a cognitive psychologist by training. He is not a clinical psychologist or a medical professional and it is not qualified to diagnose or treat mental health conditions.

This course has both a knowledge and a practice component; it is thus a hybrid of a skills class and a lecture course. Typically, more skills-oriented classes will alternate with more science-oriented classes.

Skills: We will **practice a variety of meditation and mindfulness techniques** and (ideally) glean effective ways to integrate these into our lives. We will alternate more skills-focused classes with more science-focused classes; every science-oriented class will also start with a practice period and some space and time to share our experiences. The expectation is that you will practice the techniques-of-the-week on your own in between classes. Techniques take between 8 and 20 minutes. (We ramp up the time.)

Lecture: We will also explore the **science of mindfulness** – the workings and effectiveness of meditation and mindfulness practices and the background needed to understand those.

Learning goals: The hope is that after this class you will be able to

- understand, implement, and adapt key mindfulness practices;
- describe in detail your own experience with these practices;
- apply these practices to enhance your life and work;
- understand and assess current theory and research on consciousness and the mind, broadly defined;
- understand and assess research on meditation and mindfulness and their effects;
- use your knowledge about mind and consciousness to analyze and reflect on your own meditation and mindfulness practice.

It is my intention to make the class quite interactive. In lecture portions, I do tend to lecture, so you might have to just stop me and jump in. Feel very free and welcome to do so!

Important note: There are no ‘stupid’ questions/comments. If you do not understand something or have no idea why we are talking about it, or if practice instructions aren’t clear, chances are somebody else has the same problem. Things that are not clear are always the fault of the instructor (except at exam time), so please ask any questions about the materials before the exams.

**Required text:**

The first eight practice classes are based on Williams, M. & Penman, D. (2011). *Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World*. New York: Rodale.

There is no textbook for the science part of the class. (It simply doesn’t exist.)

PowerPoints will be made available on Canvas.

Audio or audio links of guided meditations are made available on Canvas practice by practice. Some of those come from the book and are labeled W&P; some come from MIEA (they are confusingly marked “Koru”) or other sources.

**Attendance policy:** There is no attendance policy for this class

**Course requirements and organization:**

Evaluation of course performance is based on (a-b) **two examinations**, (c) **one term paper**, and (d) a set of **weekly reflections**. Each of those four evaluative moments will be given equal weight for the final grade.

**Exams** will consist of 25 multiple-choice questions (one point for each). Both exams will also include two short take-home essay questions (12.5 points each). I will send you the essay questions at least two days ahead of time.

No answers to essay questions will be accepted after the day of the exam.

Exams cover the lecture topics discussed in class over the applicable period (including research discussed in the more practice-oriented PowerPoints). Exams are not cumulative. The level at which you should study is the level at which we covered the materials in class.

Both exams are online, open book, not proctored, but time-limited to 50 minutes. They can be taken anytime during the 24 hours of the exam date, counting from midnight to midnight, Edinburgh time. Note that the time restriction means it’s a good idea to actually study for the test, take notes, and have some form of indexing system.

There will be no class on the day of the first exam.

The **term paper** should be a reflection on your mindfulness practice during the semester. Examine what (perhaps) worked for you, and what (perhaps) did not, and

why. Also look forward: Is mindfulness practice something you want to continue? If not, why not; if so, how? I expect a 1000–1500-word paper (excluding title page and references). Any essay-ish and/or scientific style of writing and referencing is welcome. The paper is due on the last day of classes.

You can approach this in many ways. Maybe there is a specific reason why you are taking this class. Say you want to feel less stressed. You could then, for instance, measure your levels of stress over the semester, relate those to your mindfulness practice and to external circumstances. You could do this via an app (e.g., sema3.com allows you to set up your own questionnaires and beep yourself at specific times of day) or you could even use objective measures such as heart rate variability of sleep quality using a smartwatch or smart ring. Your paper would then resemble a more traditional scientific paper. Or maybe you prefer to briefly record your experiences and reflections every day, writing a paper that is more experiential in nature – a case study of your mind observed.

What I am trying to get at is a self-examination of the way you worked with the different mindfulness practices over the course of the semester. What appealed and what did not? What stuck and what did not? Why? Where there patterns you noticed in your practice? What did you get out of these practices, if anything? How did external factors (e.g., midterms, travel, ...) impact your ability to maintain or adapt the practices and did this affect your life? What changes did you make to accommodate your own personal situation and inclinations? How did you deal with resistance? How did you form a habit of practicing (if you did)? What challenges did you encounter and how did you deal with them? Did you get any insight in your own patterns of behavior or thinking? Was anything in this process surprising or unexpected to you?

In your paper, include at least three external scientific references that relate to your findings (i.e., papers in peer-reviewed journals containing actual data; meta-analyses and systematic reviews are fine, speculation papers are not; when in doubt, ask). This is to help you place your experience in the wider context of psychological/sociological/neuroscience/humanistic exploration of mindfulness practices and their effects.

If you have *any* doubts as to the suitability of your project or the literature you're citing, please talk to me way ahead of time.

Late papers will not be accepted.

The **weekly diary reflections** are to be posted on the Discussion tab on Canvas. A reflection is 100 words or so (more is always welcome), and it consists of any kind of comment or questions you might have about your meditation/mindfulness practice, the practice for that week, the lecture topics we discussed in class, something you read or heard that is pertinent, etc. (you can attach files or snippets). Due date for week X is midnight on Monday the following week. *Late postings will not be accepted* as counting for the previous week. I will accept a maximum of 13 entries (i.e., you can give yourself a week or two off and still get a perfect grade). This also allows for some buffer for illness, unforeseen circumstances, etcetera. (Multiple entries within one week, though

welcome, will count as a single submission.) Given the large number of students in this class, I might not be able to comment on each entry.

Each of your diary entries will be scored on a total of 4 points, thus yielding a potential maximum of 52 points (out of 50 – 2 free points). Typically, I just count (4 points for each valid entry), but I reserve the right to give an entry a lower score if it is not up to snuff; in that case, I will email you.

The goal of the diary reflection is not to keep you busy, but to help the class. That is, it helps to move things along more smoothly on my part if I have some idea of where you have problems or what criticisms you have, or what is not being covered that perhaps should be. It helps prepare you for discussions, and maybe you can find something useful in other people's experiences and comments. It also helps keeping the class topics alive in your mind throughout the week. Unfortunately, I cannot react to each of your reflections.

You can earn **extra credit** by participating in up to 2 hours of *research credit* (remember your PSYCH1101 days?). Each hour will add 2 percentage points to your final score. To participate in experiments, you will need to sign up on the Web-based Psychology Subject Pool Manager (through the SONA website: [gatech-psych.sona-systems.com](http://gatech-psych.sona-systems.com)). There is a pdf with more explanation in the Files tab in Canvas. Note that your SONA ID should be the prefix to your @gatech.edu account. SONA adds @gatech.edu to your user name as your email address. (Note that your @gatech.edu prefix may be different than your @mail.gatech.edu prefix. This is the most common problem for why students do not receive SONA messages.)

Alternatively, you could do a short (5-10 min) *class presentation* on something that fits into a particular topic we are discussing, or that we have just discussed in class. Your presentation will be judged on a 0-5 point scale, and be added as extra credit (i.e., your total marks could get a 2% boost). Give me at least one class day's notice before you do a presentation.

If you require **special accommodations**, contact the Office of Disability Services at (404) 894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs if you feel the instructions in the accommodations letter are not clear.

**Make-up exams** are given only in case of proven emergency and at the discretion of the instructor. Please remember that being granted a make-up exam is a privilege, not a right. If a foreseeable conflict arises, please notify me **before** test time. If an emergency arises, **provide documentation** of the emergency.

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest **ethical standards**. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>. Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on a quiz, exam, or assignment (which includes the use of AI on assignments) will get a score of zero for that exam or project and be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations. This includes using AI (like ChatGPT) to write your term paper or answer essay questions.

**Counseling:**

Meditation and mindfulness, as we shall see, generally bring about positive effects, especially in the areas of stress. It is also possible, however, that meditation leads to sharper or deeper insights into existing and underlying emotional problems and might make them more acute. Your instructor is not a medical professional and is not clinically trained. We are far away from the Atlanta campus, but here are some links that may help you find help:

[https://gatech.instructure.com/courses/245818/pages/where-do-i-go-for-help?module\\_item\\_id=2329974](https://gatech.instructure.com/courses/245818/pages/where-do-i-go-for-help?module_item_id=2329974)

**Grading:**

The traditional dividing line of 90/80/70/60 for the A/B/C/D range of grades will be used. The instructor reserves the right to alter criteria if necessary (popularly known as 'grading on the curve'), with the restriction that alterations will always be to the advantage of the students. *All grades are final*. If you are one point short of a particular grade, you are one point short of that particular grade. PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT ME TO ASK FOR AN EXCEPTION (I will not reply).