

Application Summary

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Application Information

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Honors Program

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Application Details

Proposal Title

Mindfulness for Mental Acuity: An Academic Approach to Stress Reduction in Students

**NOMINATION FOR 2021 CETL AWARD
“INNOVATION IN COCURRICULAR EDUCATION”**

**Mindfulness for Mental Acuity:
An Academic Approach to Stress Reduction in Students**

Co-investigators: Monica Halka, PhD; Paul Verhaeghen, PhD; Ameet Doshi, MLS, MPA

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Mindfulness for Mental Acuity: An Academic Approach to Stress Reduction in Students

Co-investigators: Monica Halka, PhD; Paul Verhaeghen, PhD; Ameet Doshi, MLS, MPA

Background

Student stress is a serious and endemic problem at Georgia Tech. The report from the Student Mental Health Support at Georgia Tech (2017) mentions: ‘Data from the 2011 National College Health Assessment (NCHA) revealed that 89.9% of Georgia Tech students reported they were "very stressed" while the national rate was 52.9%’ (p. 3). Chronic stress takes its toll: In studies conducted at Tech looking at the link between depression and creativity, one of us routinely finds that 20-25% of the undergraduate population queried score above the depression threshold on a standardized instrument (CES-D; e.g., Verhaeghen et al, 2014, 2017).

The Honors Program (HP) initiative, *Mindfulness for Mental Acuity*, arose from this understanding that Georgia Tech students suffer from a high level of perceived stress, and that this can prevent students from studying and working at the level of their scholarly ability, and could negatively impact mental, physical, and social health.

When faced with such data, a standard approach is to increase and improve therapeutic efforts – to better detect students at risk, and to support those students towards better mental health. Georgia Tech has excellent resources devoted to such efforts, such as CARE, and the Counseling Center in general. An alternative approach is to *proactively* build up student resilience by providing them with their own skills and tools to handle stressful situations. Specifically, the Honors Program elected to offer mindfulness training for interested students.

Mindfulness has a broad impact on cognition, stress, and wellbeing (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012; Verhaeghen, 2017). Crucially, mindfulness training has been shown to be effective in college student populations, with effects indistinguishable from more traditional cognitive and behavioral therapeutic approaches (Regehr et al., 2013). Mindfulness may also increase sleep quality in college students (Greeson et al., 2014). In addition, two studies show better academic performance in students trained in mindfulness (Mrazek et al., 2013; Lin & Mai, 2018).

Description of the Co-curricular Initiative

The Honors Program decided to try a curricular approach to mindfulness. In early 2015, Dr. Monica Halka (HP) and Dr. Paul Verhaeghen (PSYC) organized a small group of interested Georgia Tech faculty to discuss how to address this problem. A new model for our GT 1000 HP courses was planned to include a variety of stress reduction techniques. The first two such courses were introduced in fall semester 2015, taught by Halka and Verhaeghen. Enrollment met capacity and the classes were well-received by students. A third instructor, Ameet Doshi (Library), was recruited to teach in fall of 2016. The course has evolved to incorporate active practices that can improve focus, awareness, memory, creativity, mental balance, clarity, and emotional well-being. Since 2016, between three and six sections have been offered each fall.

Objectives

- Students will acquire a varied set of skills and tools, based in the scientific mindfulness literature, to increase their natural ability in mindful thinking and acting.
- Students will engage in self-regulation practices that can enhance their coping and social skills,
- Students will train in methods to alleviate self-perceived stress, anxiety, and depression, alleviate mood, increase well-being, and enhance prosocial attitudes (measured in our effects study by empathy)
- Students will attain an awareness of the science behind the practice of mindfulness and its effects on stress, the attendant anxiety, and the burdens of mental exertion.
- Students will experience a more beneficial and meaningful transition to college through repeated exposure to and practice of mindfulness techniques.
- Student will practice skillful application of these newly-acquired mindfulness techniques outside of class through assigned practices involving social interaction, world awareness, self-awareness, and an understanding of interconnectedness.

All three instructors have strong, but varied, backgrounds in mindfulness training. As the instructors have been trained in different approaches, the class sections differ slightly in content but share the same objectives. In each of the classes, students are offered a variety of techniques and encouraged to experiment with as many of those as possible, so that each student can ultimately learn what subset of techniques work best for him or her in various circumstances. Besides encouraging exploration, this also empowers students to engage creatively and confidently with these skills and tools, ultimately teaching them to take responsibility for their own well-being. We also note that a lot of the actual work in the classes takes advantage of group dynamics, where students learn from and support each other, as well as of implicit modeling of an open, mindful, and curious attitude to life by the instructors. A brief description of the various approaches appear below.

Monica Halka's section: Dr. Halka practices Tibetan mind-training, which she has studied at the Drepung Loseling Buddhist Center in Atlanta for the past eleven years. She was invited by the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative to teach introductory physics at two of the Dalai Lama's monasteries in India during the summers of 2015 and 2016. That extraordinary experience among the community of monks reinforced her dedication to sharing mindfulness meditation techniques with her students and anyone else who would like to learn how to integrate these valuable practices into their everyday lives. Her section of the GT 1000 mindfulness course moves from simple practices to more advanced techniques in a three-level scheme, each of which lasts three to four weeks. First, students are introduced to research on stress and health, including the risks of sleep deprivation and perceived lack of time. Here is where they learn the meditative practices of mental-clearing and the body scan relaxation technique. Next, they read and discuss the subject of mental acuity, in which we explore focus, awareness, memory, creativity, and synthesis. The students practice specific techniques in and out of the classroom that can help in each of these areas and complete journaling assignments that help them articulate how useful the practices seem. Lastly, we move into an exploration of self-awareness and cognitive flexibility, which includes an in-depth examination of academic major choice, personal

day-to-day decisions and interconnections, and why we hold the opinions we have. At this level, students practice analytical meditation, in which one learns to recognize negative mental states and methods for reducing them.

Paul Verhaeghen's section: Paul Verhaeghen is a certified instructor in KORU mindfulness, a program developed at Duke University, explicitly aimed at building resilience and fostering stress reduction in college students and other emerging adults (Rogers & Maytan, 2012). Students are introduced to practices such as body scan meditation, breathing meditation, belly breathing, dynamic breathing, *gatha* meditation, labeling-of-thought and labeling-of-feelings meditation, walking meditation, *metta* meditation, and gentle yoga. They also go through a 75-minute silent mini-retreat. Additionally, students are encouraged to meditate every day on their own, building up from ten minutes to twenty minutes per day, as well as choose a different mindful activity each week; they keep logs of these practices and share these with the instructor. Students also conduct a group project where they apply these skills (and/or others) to real-world interactions, and report back on their experiences to the whole class.

Ameet Doshi's section: Ameet Doshi was trained in Cognitive-Based Compassion Training via two training workshops developed at Emory University. He also received a Georgia Tech Provost travel grant to participate in a week-long training about the science of social-emotional learning at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center (GGSC). The curriculum for his GT 1000 course is a mix of mindfulness meditation and cultivation of social-emotional learning skills drawing from the GGSC archive of active learning techniques. A particular aim of this mindfulness-based GT 1000 course is to better understand contemplative practices that can help students enhance social-emotional health and well-being. Through the course students acquire strategies that promote a healthy and calm mind, ruminate less over negative stressors, and help them *do well* and *be well* during their time at Georgia Tech.

Furthermore, as a research librarian, a critical component of his curriculum is connecting claims about the efficacy of SEL and mindfulness techniques with relevant scholarly research. Students are taught how to take an intentional approach to locating and critiquing information using scholarly library databases. Students are challenged to not simply take research on face value but, rather, they are encouraged to intentionally critique empirical claims as their ability permits. Cultivating this information literacy skill is highly valuable as students move through their undergraduate careers at Tech and beyond.

At close of the fall 2020 semester, 351 students had completed the course (which is encouraged, but not required, for Honors Program freshmen). In addition, the HP mindfulness faculty have given invited presentations in more than a dozen non-Honors GT 1000 classes, thereby exposing an additional cohort of more than 250 students to stress-relieving practices.

We see this work as fitting within Georgia Tech's goal of graduating global citizens who develop respect for other cultures, and explore the leadership qualities and ethical behaviors necessary to contribute to society, for two reasons. First, the course experience is intended to take away barriers to such development by allowing students to flourish, despite the many and serious challenges thrown at them. Second, the mindfulness classes explicitly ask students to explore their career choice(s) and path to success at Tech mindfully, that is, in a context of thoughtfulness, deliberateness, and care.

Intended audience

All entering first-year undergraduate students in the Honors Program are eligible to enroll in the GT 1000 HP mindfulness courses. The reasons for targeting first-year students are twofold: (a) students are likely most vulnerable when transitioning into Tech, which is a new and (for most students) unusually challenging environment; and (b) it makes sense to equip students with such new skills and tools as early as possible in their student career.

Evaluation of effectiveness

As part of the Honors Program's required self-assessment for the 2016-17 academic year, Dr. Halka oversaw a pre- and post-survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the HP mindfulness GT 1000 sections in the fall 2016 semester. A slightly modified version of the University of Scranton Stress Survey was administered to all students in five standard non-mindfulness, non-HP GT 1000 sections and to two of the HP mindfulness (MfN) sections. This short, seven question survey gauges perceived stress in the categories of living away from home, tests, grades, workload, and life.

Briefly, the relevant results were as follows. End-of-semester perceived stress in all categories (living away from home, tests, grades, workload, life) was reported as above average or extreme for 20% of MfN students as opposed to 35% of standard GT 1000 students. 69% of MfN students reported good or excellent coping skills vs 52% of standard GT 1000 students. In addition, for MfN students, feelings of being focused or energetic doubled and tripled, respectively, with no significant change in those markers for standard GT 1000 students. (Sample sizes: Standard GT 1000: 82 pre, 74 post; MfN GT 1000 HP: 24 pre, 21 post). Dr. Halka's section also makes use of an end-of-semester reflection paper to assess student perception of the worth of the course and its methods. Students are guaranteed full points for this brief assigned paper, as long as they answer the questions: (1) What did you learn? (2) How might what you learned affect your future actions? (3) Would you add to or omit anything from the course?

Each semester, 100% of students in this section report that they personally benefit from the course. Below are a few typical comments excerpted from the reflection papers.

- "I have learned that I am free to let thoughts fade away if and when they do not serve a beneficial purpose."
- "I tend to stop and observe the world around me more often."
- "I was able to have a more positive mental outlook."
- "I have learned many things in this specific class that I believe to be much more helpful than any other class."
- This course has made a positive lasting difference on my life."
- "The benefits are astounding."
- "I would not mind taking this course every semester..."

In Fall 2019, with funding from the Mental Health Joint Action Committee, we conducted a quantitative effects study to tap into our primary outcomes, using well-established, valid, and reliable measures of (a) mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006), (b) different mechanisms for self-regulation, namely self-compassion (Raes et al., 2011), emotion self-regulation (Gross & John, 2003), and coping (Carver, 1997), and (c) potential outcomes, namely perceived stress (Cohen et al., 1983), depression and anxiety (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), mood (Watson et al. 1988), psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and empathy (Spreng et al., 2009).

We invited all first-year students in the HP to fill out this set of surveys (they were paid \$10 to do so at the beginning of the semester, and \$15 at the end). Students did not know that our focus was on the evaluation of the mindfulness sections of GT 1000, and they only indicated which section of GT 1000 they completed (if any) at the end of the set of surveys. To examine effectiveness of the program, we compared the 21 mindfulness-trained participants in our sample with the 34 first-year HP students in our sample who were not trained in mindfulness; independent-sample *t*-tests were used to test for group effects; tests were one-tailed, $p < .05$.

Given the size of the groups, significant effects have an effect size of around 0.5 *SD*, which is considered a ‘moderate’ effect in psychology, and is about the typical effect size for a behavioral intervention (Lipsey & Wilson, 1993). Note that surveys were collected during finals week, traditionally a period of high stress.

Results are illustrated at the end of this presentation [Figure, page 10], with significant differences between the mindfulness-trained students and the not-mindfulness-trained students indicated by asterisks.

Main objective 1: Mindfulness: Mindfulness-trained students score higher on acting with awareness; no significant differences were found on the other 4 facets.

Main objective 2: Self-regulation:

Self-compassion: Mindfulness-trained students score higher on self-kindness and on total score for self-compassion; they engage less in self-judgments and report lower levels of isolation.

Emotion regulation: Mindfulness-trained students engage less frequently in emotion suppression; no difference on reappraisal.

Coping: Generally, we found no group differences, except that mindfulness-trained students engage less in self-blaming. Note that students report excellent coping skills in general – the highest scores are for coping strategies that generally are considered to be effective.

Main objective 3: Psychological outcomes:

Perceived stress: Mindfulness-trained students indicate lower levels of stress.

Distress (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale): Mindfulness-trained students report lower levels of depression; there is, however, no difference between groups in anxiety and stress. (Note that there is good evidence that the stress scale on the DASS measures anxiety, not stress.) The difference in levels of depression is such that the mindfulness-trained students score on average in the normal range, while the non-trained students score on average in the mildly depressed range.

Mood over the past week: Mindfulness-trained students indicate a lower frequency of negative emotions.

Psychological well-being: No significant differences between groups.

Empathy: Mindfulness-trained students score higher on the empathy survey.

Generally, the effects of these mindfulness interventions appear to be beneficial. The effects on negative mood, stress and depression are especially noteworthy, particularly given that posttest occurred during final exams. Differences in acting with awareness, self-compassion, emotion suppression, and self-blame suggest that our mindfulness-trained students might possess valuable tools towards resilience. The difference in empathy suggest that mindfulness training might open up students to prosocial attitudes.

Impact on the quality of the teaching and learning environment at Georgia Tech

As a result of our apparent success with student appreciation of the course, Dr. Halka was invited to lead a session on “Bringing Mindfulness into your GT 1000 Class” for the Annual GT 1000 & 2000 Instructor Workshops in 2018 and 2019. In total, 65 instructors attended those sessions, and she has been invited to again lead a session in 2020. In October 2019, she was invited to present a workshop on stress relief at the monthly meeting of the Georgia Tech Academic Advisors Network. During the fall semester, eight presentations in standard GT 1000 classes were facilitated by either Halka or Verhaeghen. At the end of each of these events, attendees expressed their appreciation and reported feeling more relaxed than they had in a long time. Certainly, the availability of stress reduction workshops like this for students, faculty, and staff can only improve the quality of the teaching and learning environment at Georgia Tech.

Future directions

The course will continue to be offered as a GT 1000 HP course in fall semester 2021. The positive outcomes of the quantitative assessment of the class warrant expansion of the program. As of February 2021, Dr. Halka is collaborating with the Georgia Tech Police Department to develop and implement an eight-week course for police officers, “Mindfulness for Stress Relief and More.”

Another possibility would be to offer the class as a one-credit mini-mester course on mindfulness that could be a complement to APPH 1040 or 1050. A third possibility we are exploring is to offer free, not-for-credit mindfulness courses (such as KORU) to the broader campus, potentially through the CRC, to keep the threshold for enrollment as low as possible.

Acknowledgments

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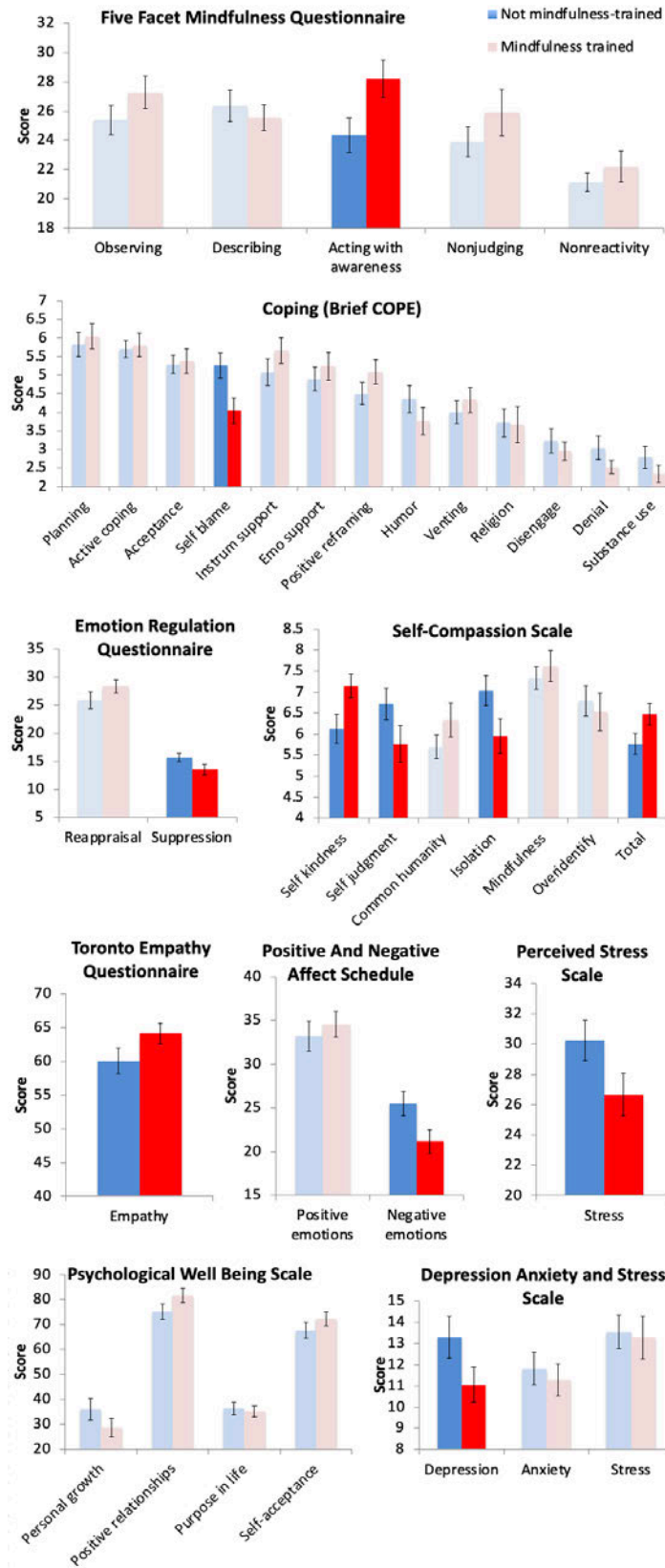


Figure: Results from the 2019 HP posttest assessment on all measured variables; asterisks denote a significant difference at $p < .05$.

Letters of Recommendation

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February 19, 2021

In Support of the “Mindfulness for Mental Acuity” entry for the 2021 Innovation in Co-curricular Education Award, Georgia Tech Center for Teaching and Learning

To whom it may concern,

I would like to recommend the “Mindfulness for Mental Acuity” project led by Monica Halka, Paul Verhaeghen, and Ameet Doshi for this award. I am an instructor for a global communications and awareness section of GT1000 and Dr. Halka has given a mindfulness presentation in my class on multiple occasions, as well as leading the class in mindfulness practices in in-person and virtual environments. I have found these activities to be very informative and useful for both the students and instructors. I believe that any college student (or person, for that matter) would greatly benefit from incorporating mindfulness practices/approaches in their lives, and Dr. Halka provided a helpful overview of ideas about mindfulness and described how to put those ideas into practice.

I definitely see the value of mindfulness in improving the wellbeing of anyone, and college students in particular. Especially in the current pandemic/remote learning (and teaching) environment the importance of mindfulness is even greater to reduce stress and could be an integral part of anyone’s wellbeing.

Kind regards,

Scott Bleiweis

A Unit of the University System of Georgia An Equal Education and Employment Opportunity Institution

February 10, 2021

Dear Award Committee,

I'm a 3rd year Honors Program (HP) student who took Dr. Halka's GT1000 course *Mindfulness for Mental Acuity* during my first semester at Georgia Tech. As a first-year student, I faced struggles that many Georgia Tech students encounter: I easily became stressed and overwhelmed, I had poor time management skills and disorganized thoughts, and I struggled to focus on my tasks at hand. However, the skills I learned in the HP section of GT1000 fundamentally upheaved these faults and are still impacting the way I study and behave to this day.

In the course, we took a hands-on approach to understanding and mastering mindfulness by practicing a wide variety of accessible and engaging meditation techniques that were easy to use outside the classroom. Not only did we meditate in class, we also read mindfulness-related studies and were given concrete evidence explaining why the curriculum was important and invaluable. Now, mindfulness is a somewhat delicate subject, as it can evoke a range of responses from students: some may be skeptical of mindfulness practices, others may struggle with the mental gymnastics of exercising control over the mind, and others may experience an emotional response to meditating and quieting their minds. However, this combination of exploring different techniques, meditating outside of class, and understanding the benefits of mindfulness resulted in an extremely effective course that addressed these responses in a supportive and effective manner. I especially appreciate that we were taught a plethora of different mediation techniques, so that students can find what works for them and continue to practice outside of class and when the semester is over.

More than a year has passed since I took Dr. Halka's section of *Mindfulness for Mental Acuity*, and to this day I still reap the benefits of her course. This semester, I have been meditating for 1-2 hours a week on average, and I have found that the physical effects of stress that plagued me my first year (shortness of breath, shaking hands, racing thoughts) have significantly subsided since utilizing the practices from the course. I also discovered that meditating before doing schoolwork or a difficult task significantly improved my mental clarity: homeworks that used to take hours while stressed are finished in an efficient 60-90 minutes following a guided meditation. Through *Mindfulness for Mental Acuity*, I also discovered that guided meditations are the most effective mindfulness tools for me, and have pursued these techniques by listening to guided meditations on the internet recommended in the course.

I highly recommend this curriculum to be chosen for the 2021 Innovation in Co-curricular Education Award, as this course has been, by far, the most impactful and useful course I have taken in my time here at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Without this course, I wouldn't have the mental resilience skills needed to cope with and complete rigorous coursework and extracurricular expectations I've had, and I am far more equipped to perform the best that I can and contribute to society as an efficient, calm, and collected leader.

Sincerely,



Paulina Schuler
Georgia Institute of Technology
Computer Science, Honors Program

February 11, 2021

Dear Selection Committee,

Dr. Verhaeghen has played an integral role in easing the physical and mental pressure first-year students faced as they entered Georgia Tech in the fall of 2020. I was introduced to Dr. Verhaeghen in a virtual environment when I took the HP mindfulness GT 1000 section. At a time when most students and professors felt pressured and unsure about the future, Dr. Verhaeghen remained motivated and driven to understand the worries of students and help them by providing effective strategies to understand themselves and the world around them. As a professor, he was diligent, sincere, and thoughtful in his work and always supported students by helping them feel heard. Though the pandemic put a strain on the lives of people all over the world, Dr. Verhaeghen took this as an opportunity to teach students how to accept change, which is why I am truly delighted to recommend him and the GT 1000 mindfulness classes for the Innovation in Co-Curricular Education Award.

As freshmen, I and many other students greatly felt the stress of moving away from home and protecting ourselves from COVID-19, while also remaining active in our academic activities. Though the other HP students and I came into GT 1000 with all of these worries, Dr. Verhaeghen established a safe and welcoming environment in which we could have a sense of peace. Our weekly chats and daily journal entries helped us connect with ourselves and other students in ways that I thought were not possible during a pandemic. Assignments such as the academic plan design and mindfulness career exploration helped us attain a sense of clarity in our future plans that would have not been possible without the help of Dr. Verhaeghen and his mindfulness class.

Moreover, Dr. Verhaeghen's passion for teaching different strategies, such as labeling-of-thought meditation and body scan meditation, provided us with the tools to manage our own stress. Though many of these meditations were complex in nature, he made them easy to understand and also pushed for us to try these exercises on our own. His continued determination to make a positive impact on the lives of students was easily seen through his detailed explanation of exercises and compelling assignments that pushed students to be introspective.

Dr. Verhaeghen's openness and empathetic nature has beneficially impacted many students, including myself, from a new perspective on life. Additionally, by truly caring about the worries that students faced, Dr. Verhaeghen was able to provide solutions that were both powerful and practical. His enthusiasm to help students "find themselves" was one-of-a-kind and his amiable nature allowed students to learn how to be vulnerable. As an apprehensive first-year student, I feel genuinely honored to have met Dr. Verhaeghen and learn from his mindfulness class. He has continued to make positive changes in the lives of many students and I feel privileged to be able to recommend him for the Innovation in Co-Curricular Education Award.

Sincerely,

Sanjana Chandrasekar

To the 2021 Innovation in Co-curricular Education Award Selection Committee,

For most students, there exists a collection of memories from their first semester of college they wish could be erased. Fortunately for those in the Honor Program's mindfulness-focused GT 1000 course, there also exists a collection of first-semester memories to never be forgotten. More than a year later, I still reflect on the lessons learned and practice the techniques developed from that singular class.

Whether it was through an exercise in mindful eating or one on resume help, each class in the course provided students with practical tools on how to navigate college. One such skill involved insight into accessing the library, which is a destination I find myself navigating more and more. Students not only learned about the resources available through the library, but also gained valuable insight into conducting research, assessing the reliability of sources, and more.

Throughout the course, students not only learned facts, but they also learned how to redefine their perspective. Mindful activities, such as deep work and active listening, provided students with a more well-rounded and holistic approach. The course's emphasis on mindfulness then served as a guide for students to approach all other courses with the same receptive outlook.

The receptive outlook I personally cultivated throughout the course has helped me to navigate one of colleges biggest adversaries, better known as stress. By proactively practicing the techniques I developed from class, I have been able to approach challenges with a clearer, more growth-focused mindset. As an aspiring teacher, I can think of no higher compliment for a class than one that speaks of its ability to inspire its students to keep learning and keep exploring. The Honor Program's GT 100 course is one of the few classes deserving of such praise, as I constantly push myself to further my growth.

Sincerely, Jaimee Francis

February 8, 2021

Georgia Tech Center for Teaching and Learning
2021 Innovation in Co-curricular Education Award

Letter of Support for: “Mindfulness for Mental Acuity: An Academic Approach to Stress Reduction in Students”
Nominees: Monica Halka, PhD; Paul Verhaeghen, PhD; Ameet Doshi, MLS, MPA

Dear Selection Committee:

A central aspiration of the Honors Program is to incubate educational innovations that bring life-changing benefits to our students, the larger Georgia Tech student body, and the world. The efforts of nominees Halka, Verhaeghen, and Doshi model that aspiration. Over the past five years, these nominees have delivered mindfulness training to hundreds of Honors Program students, enabling and encouraging them to learn, practice, and grow their capabilities inside and outside the classroom. They then extended their reach across the Institute, offering training to students across the Institute, both in classes and drop-in sessions, and offering training to Georgia Tech instructors to enable them to incorporate mindfulness modules in their classes. In spring 2021, one of the nominees is collaborating with the Georgia Tech Police Department to create and deliver an 8-week stress relief course for police officers based on the mindfulness training first delivered to Honors Program students. The nominees are now pursuing opportunities for broadening and sustaining mindfulness training across the Georgia Tech curriculum and co-curriculum, with the promise of benefits for generations of Georgia Tech students and the world to which they will contribute.

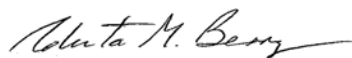
The benefits they have brought to many students and are striving to extend to many more are substantial—especially so for our Georgia Tech students. The nominees came together around the shared goal of addressing the problem of student stress, manifest at particularly high levels on our campus. Studies indicate that student stress is a serious problem, negatively impacting students’ capacity both to learn and to thrive, mentally, physically, and socially. But how to address the problem? The team drew on their diverse experiences, knowledge, and practice from around the globe to design an educational innovation that addresses the problem proactively, equipping students to manage their stress rather than suffer its effects and then seek help and support.

This mode for addressing the problem yields additional benefits, expanding the impact of their innovation on the teaching and learning environment at Georgia Tech. Students are empowered to learn about the problem, its causes and manifestations, and its implications for their own lives and the lives of others. With new knowledge comes fresh insight, then the opportunity to learn how to address the problem, then to practice the skill, inside and outside the classroom, observe its effects, reflect, learn more, and practice again. This is a model of what studies in learning science tell us works best. Senior learners, the nominees, guide and support a community of fellow learners, providing opportunities for hands-on active learning extending beyond the classroom, practice that promotes continued reflection and learning, and shared pursuit of a goal that benefits oneself, one’s community, and the world. The nominees have brought a seriousness of purpose appropriate to the seriousness of the problem they address. They have seized opportunities for assessment both on their own and supported by the award of a 2019 grant from the Mental Health Joint Allocation Committee (JAC) at Georgia Tech. The results of these assessments indicate that their innovative efforts to address the problem have yielded the impact promised by their study, reflection, and design and delivery efforts.

Finally, I would point to the background, training, experience, and years of dedicated effort of each of these nominees. Their biographies also are filled with the promise of the results that assessment results confirm.

I offer my strongest support for these nominees and their project, a model of the potential for life-changing benefits through educational innovation and of the teaching and learning environment that enables realization of those benefits.

Sincerely,



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