

Spiritualities

Summer 2025

SDS 6938 Special Topics for Graduate Level

MHS 3930 Special Topics for Undergraduate Level



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Meeting time: Mondays; periods 3-5 (9:35 am to 12:35 pm) and/or special arrangements.

Location: UF Norman Hall, classroom 1707A Norman Hall.

Student cap: 20 maximum.

Office hours: By appointment (sabgru@ufl.edu).

The course is part of the [UF Certificate in Spirituality and Health](#).

Course Overview

In this course we will explore contrasting mind-body constructs and practices from Western psychological, modern spiritual, and Buddhist perspectives. We will immerse ourselves in the study of

select mind-body practices, explore their theoretical underpinnings and traditional roots as well as benefits for wellbeing, health, and human flourishing. Such learning approach discovers the 'Why', 'What', and 'How' that undergirds mind-body practices and transpersonal and transbody states of consciousness and embodiment brought forth by them. We will explore mind-body interactions, psycho-spiritual experiences, and potential liberative personal transformation paths and goals. To embody the lived experience of a particular moment through mindfulness and body awareness means to viscerally feel sensory, motor, emotional, and imaginal experiences rather than to funnel arousal into mental concepts, ideas, and categories ("chatter mind, ruminating mind"). We will immerse in a variety of mind-body practices and spiritualities and discuss experiences.

Course Objectives

From Western psychological, modern spiritual, and Buddhist perspectives:

- 1) Understand the purpose of prominent mind-body constructs and practices.
- 2) Discover the view and traditional roots of diverse mind-body constructs.
- 3) Unpack mind-body interactions, psycho-spiritual experiences, and potential liberative transformation paths and goals.
- 4) Explore the effects of mind-body practices on health, well-being, and human flourishing.
- 5) Discuss how mind-body practices support and nurture one's own personal development and how to integrate these practices into counseling, psychotherapy, trainings, and the academy.

Course Description

Mind-body practices, such as yoga, breath meditation, body scan, whole body breathing, tai chi, qi gong, and energy healing, have received increased interest, due to their benefits to support health, well-being, and naturalness (in contrast to psychopharmacology and risk of addictions). In psychotherapy and counseling the benefits of mind-body practices, such as somatic experiencing, have been recognized in context of trauma work, emotion regulation, whole person psychology, and embodiment. The latter is the felt sense of being localized within one's physical body and references the lived immediate experience of one's own body. Western psychology has focused on mind-body from a secular health perspective and prevalent Western philosophies have emphasized neurophysicalism, the medical model, and mind-body dualism. The neurobiological body model emphasizes empirical measurements of bodily processes and sensations through and within our human bodies. Other spiritual and philosophical mind-body views go beyond the skin of the body boundary touching on soul, spirit, divine, consciousness, and subtle energies. Spiritualities and ancient wisdom traditions address such transpersonal (beyond ordinary ego consciousness and mind) and transbody (beyond physical body boundaries) possibilities.

Ancient Buddhist traditions have embraced mindfulness meditation, mind-body practices, embodied ways of being, and well-being as well as liberative paths freeing oneself from suffering and pain. These mind-body practices are increasingly integrated into Western psychology, therapies, and trainings, although too often ignore the original purpose and beliefs of these practices. In this course we will explore mind-body practices rooted in Buddhist traditions to better understand the meaning of those mind-body constructs and practices. We will touch on a plurality of mind-body constructs and

spiritualities, such as multiple versions of nonduality, mind-body hybridization, cosmic body/ies, expanded body conceptions (e.g., collective bodies), subjective body constructs (“being body” as phenomenological experience in meditative states; “letting be”), subtle energy bodies, emptiness (i.e., paradoxical conception claiming that ‘body’ (form) is the same as ‘no body’ (formless), emptiness of emptiness, and more. Some of these spiritual ontologies and epistemologies have been integrated, or even been adopted, in Western approaches such as participatory spirituality, body consciousness theories, dharma inspired modern spiritualities, and somatic psychology. We will critically discuss issues of misappropriation and secularization of ancient mind-body practices and spiritualities into contemporary Western culture, counseling and psychotherapy, for example, mindfulness-based stress reduction, secularized mindfulness, McM mindfulness and McBody.

Course Format

This course is highly experiential and stresses engagement and study of various mind-body practices and spiritualities. Evidence-based research and phenomenological qualitative research studies that have assessed the effects of mind-body practices on health, well-being, and spiritual/mystical experiences will be given special attention in form of student practices, reflections and discussion, and a Mind-Body final paper.

Home Practice. Due to the nature of this class, at home mind-body practice is a mandatory and essential aspect of this course. Detailed instruction will be given weekly on specific mind-body practices that each course participant can practice throughout the semester. The time commitment for mind-body practice is 10-20 minutes ideally daily or at a minimum 3 times a week. Learning from and through practices will be an essential element of this class that is as important as learning from books or through writing.

Required Textbook

Baker, W. B. (2021). *The wakeful body: Somatic mindfulness as a path to freedom*. Shambhala Publ.

Other Course Materials

Select journal articles (UF elibrary), book chapters, podcasts, and video recordings.

Course Schedule and Modules

Module 1: Introduction to Mind-Body Practices and Spiritualities. Learning objectives:

- Discover mind, body, and spiritualities.
- From Western philosophical and psychological, modern spiritual, and Buddhist perspectives:
 - Understand the purpose of prominent mind-body constructs and practices.
 - Discover the view and traditional roots of diverse mind-body constructs.
 - Uncover mind-body interactions, psycho-spiritual experiences, and potential liberative transformation paths and goals.
 - Explore the effects of mind-body practices on health, well-being, and human flourishing.

Module 2. Mind, Body, Soma, Embodiment and Disembodiment.

Module 2.1. Mindfulness, Body Mindfulness, and Somatic Mindfulness. Learning objectives:

- Discern between mindfulness, body mindfulness, and somatic mindfulness.
- Discuss the spectrum of mind-body practices in counseling, psychotherapy, trainings and the academy.

Module 2.2. Trauma, Embodiment and Disembodiment. Learning objectives:

- Critical review of mind-body trauma.
- Explore disembodiment and embodiment.

Module 3. Multiple Bodies & Mind. Learning objectives:

- Explore different body conceptions from Western materialist, positivist, and naturalist perspectives.
- Study different body conceptions from Buddhist perspectives.

Module 4. Essential Body, Grounding and Relaxation. Learning objectives:

- Understand body awareness.
- Explore methods to infer on somatic experiences.

Module 5. Bodyfulness, Mindfulness & Heartfulness. Learning objectives:

- Define bodyfulness and understand the principles of bodyfulness.
- Explore relations between body anatomy, body systems and mind-body practices.
- Discern mindfulness and heartfulness practices.

Module 6. Presencing Bodyfulness: Sensing, Breathing, Moving and Relating. Learning objectives:

- Discover the tenets of bodyfulness: Sensing, breathing, moving, and relating.
- Discern psychological constructs implicated in coregulation of relating bodies: Sympathy, empathy, empathic concern, and compassion.
- Deep dive into Buddhist psychology.
- Learn about compassion and loving-kindness practices.

Module 7: Body Identity, Body Authority, Body Stories and Change. Learning objectives:

- Explore 'who you are'. What is your self-identity?
- Discern between notions of 'self' from Western psychology, Buddhist and other liberative Eastern spiritual traditions.
- Discover narrative stories (past, present, and future).
- Reclaim body and self-authority.
- Discuss relation to external and internal change from practitioners' perspective.
- Learn about spiritual activism that arises from within to bring forth outer transformation.

Module 8. Subtle Body and Spiritualities. Learning objectives:

- Explore the subtle (energetic) body.
- Learn about perennialist spirituality.
- Discover participatory spirituality.
- Juxtapose participatory spirituality and *Vajrayāna* (tantric and yogic) Buddhism.

Module 9: Emptiness and Embodied Liberation. Learning objectives:

- Learn about different conceptions of Buddhist emptiness, nondualities, enlightened body (truth body).

- Connect mind-body practices, Buddhist assertions of the spiritual path, and fruition (liberation).
- Explore the possibility of embodied liberation through different lenses.

Module 10: Mind-Body Practices and Spiritualities in the Domains of Mental Health, Wellness, Well-being, Human Flourishing and Spirituality. Learning objectives:

- Explore dialogue between personal developmental and fruitional (liberative) Buddhist views.
- Discuss relationships as an evolving path in the pursuit of happiness.
- Discuss the integration of mind-body practices into life, relationships, and to be in service to others (counseling, psychotherapy, body and somatic therapy, trainings/workshops).
- Recognize the potential of metamodern *bodhisattvas*.

Course Assignments and Grading

1. Reflection Assignments (30% of final grade):

Each post invites reflection. To receive full credit for each discussion 1 original post and 2 thoughtful response posts are considered for grading.

Read all assigned readings, view the video recordings, and search for other relevant publications that inspire your reflections and discussion. Each 'original' post is expected to have a minimum of 200 words, but less than 400 words. The 'original post' is written in concise and succinct style and thoughtful voice (make every word count and be pregnant with meaning). Respond to at least two other posts (i.e., post comments, questions, engage in dialogue with minimum of 150 words per post). Additional response posts will deepen your knowledge (no word limitations). Use scholarly voice, precision of writing, and APA formatting (APA: American Psychological Association, latest version of the APA Publication Manual). Some questions in the Discussion Forum invite you to speak from your own personal experience about mind-body phenomena, which does not require citations from the literature but keen observational skills.

Grading of Reflective Assignments: Ten discussion/reflection assignments will be considered for the 'Reflection Assignment' grade. Each reflection assignment is awarded a maximum of 100 points.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT or Bard, Large Language Models (LLMs): There is an open policy to make use of AI models for assignments focused on writing. If you make use of them provide a citation and acknowledgement to the AI tool/chat bot you used to write a post or paragraph in a report (i.e., make it transparent that it was not you who produced the text but a machine). Note that the quality of AI-LLM differs widely and issues persist (e.g., hallucinations / false claims made by AI LLMs, mismatched citations and arguments, lack in transparency where the data or information come from (i.e., insufficient or improper sources), missing or incorrect citations, etc.). In this course, reflective discussion means that you gain knowledge on a topic, reflect deeply and be thoughtful in your personal and creative perspective when posting. Embodied writing that uses your mind/thoughts, feelings/emotions, and body/soma is encouraged.

2. Mind-Body Paper (30% of final grade)

A *proposal* (max. 100 points) will identify the topic selected for the Final Mind-Body Paper (1-2 pages in length, excluding reference list in APA style, due mid-semester). Students can submit a preliminary abstract and section breakdown of their research paper. The proposal is expected to identify the purpose(s) of the paper.

The theme of the *Final Mind-Body Paper* is expected to focus on a topic related to this class "Mind-Body Practices and Spiritualities". Identify the purpose(s) of the paper and organize your paper to cover the following elements: (1) Introduction and Rationale (explain the significance of the selected topic); (2) Purpose statement; (3) Literature review; and (4) Conclusions or Final Remarks. The Final Mind-Body Paper should include a cover page with title, running head, first and last name, abstract, text, and reference list of all materials cited in the paper (adopt APA guidelines). Please double-space the entire paper except block quotations, which should be single-spaced. The Final Paper is expected to be between 8-15 pages long (graduate students) and 3-6 pages (undergraduate students) with the following specifications: Double-spaced line spacing, font 12-size Times New Roman, and 1-inch margins on each side, top, and bottom. The page count includes text, tables and figures, but excludes the cover page, abstract (<250 words), endnotes, and reference list. Attention to APA style is critical. Papers with excessive errors in grammar and APA style formatting will be returned unread for correction. The Final Mind-Body Paper counts max. of 500 points.

3. Mind-Body Practices (40% of final grade)

Mind-Body Practices are an essential part of the course and consist of the following:

- Self-observation of mind-body experience (max. 100 points) – Report #1
- Facilitation of mind-body practice in class (max. 100 points) – Report #2
- Observation of mind-body facilitator/teacher (max. 100 points) – Report #3
- Weekly mind-body practice journal (max. 100 points) – Report #4

Each of these four mind-body modes takes a different viewpoint of observation (i.e., self, other, relational) that will be formalized in form of short reports (500 – 1000 words length). Detailed instructions will be provided for each mind-body practice mode. In class, practice segments will be followed by a debrief and sharing to learn from one's own and other observations and reflections about the benefits, challenges, and pitfalls with different mind-body practices. Here, the goal of practice is not to "be the best practitioner in class or the whole universe"; rather students are invited to participate in non-judgmental observation and discovery of mind, body, and beyond in a safe and trustful class setting. Experiences with mind-body practices will be compared to theoretical knowledge of these mind-practices that are supposedly bring forth specific states of consciousness and bodies. Some of the non-dual and effortless practice outcomes (e.g., enlightenment or emptiness) may be not achievable within few weeks practice of one semester. There is the possibility to awaken or be liberated at any moment in time according to some spiritual traditions, while some traditions claim that we are already free and fulfilled (though we may not recognize it in our momentary experience). In this course, the emphasis is to explore the benefits of embodied mind-body practices for human meaning making, health, well-being, and flourishing.

Policies and Resources

Attendance and Participation: Attendance and participation are equally important and students are expected to attend and participate actively. Due to the participatory nature of this course, students are allowed only ONE unexcused absences throughout the semester. Individuals who miss more than one

university approved absences will have their grade lowered by half a letter grade (i.e.: B becomes B-) for each sequential class missed. Students with three or more unexcused absences throughout the semester will automatically fail the course.

If you must miss a class, please let the instructor know *in advance* about your absence *by email* and *consult with a classmate about materials covered during that class*. It is the expectation that you will come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings and instructor recordings. At times, you may be invited to participate in discussion and sharing of mind-body experiences.

Late Assignments: Late assignments will be *deducted a half a letter grade each day* they are late. If you anticipate a problem completing an assignment on time, please communicate with the course instructor as soon as possible. Extensions may be granted in certain circumstances with prior written approval (at least 24 hours in advance before submission deadline).

Common Courtesy: Cell phones and other electronic devices (including laptop computers) must be turned off and out of sight during class (*vibrate is not silent*). Students who make or receive calls or texts during class will be asked to leave. Laptops may be used at times to take notes. However, laptops are not required during class time. Students may be asked to switch laptops off, especially during mind-body practices.

Honor Code: All work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. For more information about the definition of these terms and other aspects of the Honesty Guidelines, see <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>. Any student demonstrated to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code on any assignment for this course will fail. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action and the sanctions listed in paragraph XI of the Student Conduct Code.

Software Use: All faculty, staff, and students of the University of Florida are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements regarding software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will also be taken as seen appropriate.

Evaluations: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Accommodations for Disabilities: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center by visiting www.disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Health, Wellness and Counseling:

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources:

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services. Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.

On-Line Students Complaints: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.