

## Centering Personal Wellness in School of Education Programming for Undergraduate Students

### Context:

We are at a pivotal moment. It is no secret that mental health is worsening for college students across the country and many universities are struggling to meet the demand.<sup>1</sup> What role will the School of Education play in response to this? What might happen if we further support the University's existing and expanding clinical mental health services by getting creative and provide students with programming related to routine self-care that supports them in developing consistent, positive personal wellness routines that can lead to resilience, hopefulness, a sense of efficacy, and the ability to thrive now and in one of the most stressful occupations of the present time – teaching?<sup>2</sup>

In the article, *Student Mental Health Is in Crisis: Campuses are Rethinking Their Approach*, Zara Abrams notes that, between 2009 and 2015, there was an almost 40% increase in the number of college students in the U.S. seeking mental health counseling services via the counseling centers on their campuses. Campuses have struggled to keep up with this demand, Abrams writes. In addition, in reaction to this problem, many campuses have started employing creative approaches to meeting students' need for support; sometimes counseling is not the only intervention that can provide students with the guidance needed to address their concerns. Abrams writes,

Students who are struggling with academic demands, for instance, may benefit from workshops on stress, sleep, time management, and goal-setting. Those who are mourning the loss of a typical college experience because of the pandemic—or facing adjustment issues such as loneliness, low self-esteem, or interpersonal conflict—are good candidates for peer counseling.<sup>3</sup>

Now, let's fast forward and take a quick look at the professional environment that many of our students will enter post-graduation. According to the National Education Association (NEA) article, *Survey: Alarming Number of Educators May Soon Leave the Profession*, 55% of educators are currently considering leaving the profession earlier than they originally had planned. This percentage is even higher for Latinx (59%) and Black (62%) educators. The article

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<sup>1</sup> “Student Mental Health Is in Crisis. Campuses Are Rethinking Their Approach.” *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>.

<sup>2</sup> Turner, Cory. “Teachers Are Stressed, and That Should Stress Us All.” *NPR.org*, 30 Dec. 2016, [www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/12/30/505432203/teachers-are-stressed-and-that-should-stress-us-all](http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/12/30/505432203/teachers-are-stressed-and-that-should-stress-us-all).

<sup>3</sup> “Student Mental Health Is in Crisis. Campuses Are Rethinking Their Approach.” *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>.

cites “burnout and demoralization” and “pandemic related stress” as major contributing factors to teachers leaving the profession.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, according to a recent article published by NASSP, *How School Leadership Affects Teacher Retention*, “nearly half of new teachers leave the classroom in their first five years, including 9.5 percent in the first year alone. Nearly a third of those leaving their positions chose to leave the profession altogether, opting for careers outside of education.”<sup>5</sup>

You may wonder, why is this happening? In *The Mental Health Crisis Causing Teachers to Quit*, Stephen Noonoo cites a NEA 2022 survey which identifies the top issue facing teachers right now as “feeling burned out;” 90% of educators polled reported this as a very serious or somewhat serious issue. Noonoo also writes,

Before the pandemic, teaching was among the [most stressful occupations](#), on par with nursing. But there are indications that it has only gotten worse since COVID-19 entered the profession. Teaching may now be the most stressful profession period, according to a [RAND survey](#) from June 2021, which found, among other things, that teachers were almost three times more likely to report symptoms of depression than other adults.<sup>6</sup>

If this is what we know about the college and professional landscape that our students face, it seems logical that we would act and prepare them with the personal wellness skills that they need to healthfully navigate their undergraduate careers, as well as the highly stressful career that many of them have come to us to prepare for.

### **What can we do?**

If we think of the development of self-care skills as a critical piece of career readiness, Career Connections, and more specifically the Associate Director for Professional Community Programs, is uniquely positioned to build an integrated self-care program that can positively impact students’ lives now and in the future. There are possibilities for reaching students in other units on campus, our alumni, and the greater community, as well. I view this personal wellness program as having three possible components.

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<sup>4</sup> Walker, Tim. “Survey: Alarming Number of Educators May Soon Leave the Profession.” *NEA*, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession>.

<sup>5</sup> “Making Teachers Stick: January 2020.” *NASSP*, 1 Jan. 2020, <https://www.nassp.org/publication/principal-leadership/volume-20/principal-leadership-january-2020/making-teachers-stick-january-2020/>.

<sup>6</sup> Noonoo, Stephen. “The Mental Health Crisis Causing Teachers to Quit - Edsurge News.” *EdSurge*, EdSurge, 2 May 2022, <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2022-05-02-the-mental-health-crisis-causing-teachers-to-quit>.

1) Adding to the work students do in *Self-care for New Teachers* by creating EDUC-F 203 Mind-Body Skills Groups

We already have a 1-credit *Self-care for New Teachers* course, initiated by Dr. Lemuel Watson, that I now teach. Having had initial training from the [Center for Mind-Body Medicine](#), I currently am integrating into the course a variety of the core techniques that I learned in the training. The Center for Mind-Body Medicine focuses on using techniques such as mindfulness, guided imagery, biofeedback, movement, and expression through writing and art to support psychological and physical healing in communities impacted by trauma.<sup>7</sup> In the initial training, I learned about the physiological processes related to brain function and the autonomic nervous system that make the following techniques greatly beneficial to those experiencing high levels of stress or trauma: soft-belly breathing, shaking & dancing, autogenic exercises, guided visualization, mobilizing the imagination through art, dialoging with symptoms or problems, exploring genograms, mindful eating, gentle movement and body scan techniques. I also had an opportunity to practice each technique myself.

Perhaps the most important thing that I discovered, however, was that practicing the discrete techniques mentioned above in isolation can be helpful, but their effectiveness is often magnified when practiced in the context of community.<sup>8</sup> In the Mind Body Medicine model, this community is developed in Skills Groups. Skills Groups are not settings for group therapy and are not a substitute for clinical support regarding mental or physical health concerns. However, what they do provide is a supportive community in which people can share their experiences with the techniques; this then leads to the opportunity for self-reflection and learning from others. Skills Groups are a place where people can make routine personal wellness hygiene a priority and support each other in keeping it alive in their lives. That said, they are not a substitute for clinical mental health care.

In the advanced training, I was able to deepen my knowledge regarding the discrete, research-based skills that are part of Mind Body Medicine. In addition, I learned how to skillfully facilitate Skills Groups so that they function optimally in support of all group members. Again, Skills Groups are not therapeutic environments. They are communities that support each member of the group in finding the wellness practices that work best for them. Skills Groups are simply environments of social support.

While discrete mind-body techniques are now integrated into the *Self-care for New Teachers* course, the School of Education does not have Mind-Body Skills Groups in place. It would be ideal to have a new EDUC-F 203 course called Mind-Body Skills Group. The course would need

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<sup>7</sup> The Center for Mind-Body Medicine. "Our Work." *The Center for Mind-Body Medicine*, 18 Sept. 2019, [cmbm.org/our-work](http://cmbm.org/our-work).

<sup>8</sup> The Center for Mind-Body Medicine. "About." *The Center for Mind-Body Medicine*, 20 May 2022, [cmbm.org/about](http://cmbm.org/about).

to be capped at 10 students. Alternatively, it would need to be a course designed with a lecture (or more didactic) portion composed of 20 students with two discussion (or experiential) groups each composed of 10 students. The “discussions” would be the Mind-Body Skills Groups.

## 2) Developing a Career Connections Personal Wellness Distinction Program

The second step to building an integrated wellness initiative for SoE students is to develop a Career Connections Personal Wellness Distinction program. Currently, I coordinate the [Career Connections Professional Distinction Certificate](#) which allows students to develop important career readiness skills during their time as undergraduates. The number of undergraduates interested in and graduating with this certificate is steadily increasing, and the UTE is pursuing the process for making this an eNotation on students’ transcripts.

A second Career Connections distinction based on a series of 1-credit classes related to personal wellness could also serve students extremely well. Students would need to complete three of the following four classes to earn this certificate:

- A. EDUC-F 203, Self-care for New Teachers (already exists)
  - The central purpose of this course is to support pre-service teachers in the development of self-care strategies that will allow them to be resilient and thrive in their early years of teaching. Students will explore Ben Greenfield's model of teacher resilience, Peter Salovey, John Mayer, and Daniel Goleman's models of emotional intelligence, recent research regarding mindfulness, and other stress reduction techniques to develop a set of practical strategies that they can use to practice self-care as they begin their teaching careers.
  - [Of note is the fact that IU Medical School has also developed a course for residents based on the Mind-Body Medicine framework.](#)
- B. EDUC-F 203, Mind-Body Skills Group (ready to implement)
  - In this course, students will develop their understanding and practice of self-care skills within the context of a small (7-10 people), supportive group. Students will learn about and practice using meditation, guided imagery, autogenics, breath work, movement, and self-expression. Self-reflection within a supportive group context is at the core of this course. This course focuses on the development of self-care skills that can be used in day-to-day life; it is not formal mental health therapy and is not a substitute for therapeutic and/or medical diagnosis or treatment.
- C. EDUC-F 203, Using Self-care Strategies with Youth (needs to be developed with additional training for facilitator; prerequisite: Self-care for New Teachers or Mind-Body Skills Group)
  - The central purpose of this course would be to support pre-service teachers who have already completed *Self-care for New Teachers* in considering how to utilize mindfulness, meditation, and other Mind-Body Medicine techniques in their own

K-12 classrooms or other environments working with youth to support their students' personal basic wellness and emotional regulation.

- The center for Mind-Body Medicine already has a whole training track for teachers who want to incorporate mindfulness, meditation, soft-belly breathing, etc. into their classrooms. Research suggests that these techniques can have great benefits for youth impacted by trauma and living with depression and/or anxiety.<sup>9</sup> The integration of Mind-Body Medicine into school practices is happening in both [IPS](#) and [Evansville Vanderburg School Corporation](#), at this time. I have contacts in both programs.
- D. Course number to be determined: Possible course title - Becoming a Self-care Peer Mentor (needs to be developed; prerequisite: Self-care for New Teachers or Mind-Body Skills Group)
- The central purpose of this course would be to support pre-service teachers who have completed Self-care for New Teachers learn how to be wellness-peer-mentors to other students in the School of Education. They would learn how to guide others in implementing core Mind-Body Medicine techniques in response to the stressors of daily life.
  - This approach is already being explored with a [Mind-Body Peer Mentor program at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School](#) after they survived a traumatic school shooting in 2018. Formal research is in process regarding the effectiveness of the program, but I have spoken directly with a teacher from the school who coordinated it, and I believe IU has an alumna who teaches there; both could be excellent resources for the development of this program.
  - In addition, [IU-Kokomo has a teacher education mentorship program informed by Mind-Body Medicine practices](#).

Other course opportunities for the certificate could include:

- EDUC-F 350, Departmental Honors: Research in Pre-service Teacher Wellness (needs to be developed; perhaps could be utilized as meeting the research requirement for the emerging Honors program)
  - The central purpose of this course would be to support pre-service teachers who have completed *Self-care for New Teachers* or *Mind-Body Skills Group* AND either *Using Self-care Strategies in the Classroom* or *Becoming a Self-care Peer Mentor* in engaging in their own research related to the use of stress reduction

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<sup>9</sup> Aalsma, Matthew C. et. al. (09/2020). "Mind-Body Skills Groups for Adolescents With Depression in Primary Care: A Pilot Study". *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* (0891-5245), 34 (5), p. 462.

AND

Purgato, Marianna, et al. "Mediators of Focused Psychosocial Support Interventions for Children in Low-resource Humanitarian Settings: Analysis From an Individual Participant Dataset With 3,143 Participants." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 61, no. 5, Wiley, Nov. 2019, pp. 584–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13151>.

and personal wellness techniques by pre-service teachers. This would include a partnership with a faculty mentor.

- Something interesting to note is that the application of the Mind-Body Medicine framework in teacher education programs has not been studied. Research areas thus far have included populations impacted by war, use in veteran communities, use with medical personnel, and use with professional teachers and K-12 students.<sup>10</sup> It could be an incredible opportunity for undergraduates to pioneer research in this area.
- Practicum Placement for EDUC-G 424, Professional Skills and Career Planning in Counseling and Higher Education (specific details to be arranged)
  - On March 9, 2023, I was able to meet with Lynn Gilman and James Brooks of the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology. I provided them with a draft of this proposal for feedback. In that conversation, they affirmed that this kind of routine, non-clinical self-care training for students is worthwhile and there is certainly the potential for collaboration between their department and this program. Along with discussing the Mind-Body Skills Group as being a possible practicum placement for some CASS majors in EDUC-G 424, we also discussed the skills groups as being possible practicum placement sites for Counseling Master's students who may be struggling to get group facilitation hours. They are open to working out the logistics of such placements so that the students have appropriate supervision while co-facilitating the skills groups.

### 3) Serving the Greater Campus Community and Alumni

The third possibility for the SoE integrated personal wellness program involves outreach. This could build on the Career Connections collaboration that is already established with ODEI. Other outreach programming possibilities could include collaboration with Groups, Hudson & Holland, and our own undergraduate Summer Orientation Peer Mentors and Champions. Time is needed to build connections with other units, discover their needs, and learn where collaboration may be possible.

In addition, this work could extend into our alumni network and the local community in several ways. We could offer Mind-Body Medicine Skills Groups as part of a mentorship program that pairs pre-service teachers with alumni in the teaching field, allowing them to grow together in the development of their personal wellness practice. IU-Kokomo's School of Education is already experimenting with this model.<sup>11</sup> In addition, I recently met with IU High School

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<sup>10</sup> "Research." *The Center for Mind-Body Medicine*, 6 July 2022, [cmbm.org/research](http://cmbm.org/research).

<sup>11</sup> "Mentoring Network Aims to Prevent New Teacher Burnout." *IU Kokomo Newsroom*, 18 Feb. 2022, [newsroom.iuk.edu/2022/february/mentoring-network-aims-to-prevent-new-teacher-burnout.html](http://newsroom.iuk.edu/2022/february/mentoring-network-aims-to-prevent-new-teacher-burnout.html).

Principal, Rebecca Itow, and we brainstormed possibilities for what this kind of mentorship program could look like when pairing teacher education candidates with IU High School teachers. Given that little research has been done regarding the use of mind-body skills with pre-service teachers, this could be a locus for research, should we have a School of Education scholar of any level interested in studying this. The Professional Quality of Life Scale might be an interesting tool to utilize in this research.

We also could provide workshops to Alumni Board members and/or early career alumni who have an interest in growing their self-care routines. This small intervention could help some of our early-career alumni stay in the field longer than the statistics suggest they will.

**Request:**

The possibilities for how our school responds to the deep need for personal wellness programming are plentiful.

I am seeking approval to move forward with the development of this program, including using the EDUC-F 203 course number for a 1 credit, S/F Mind-Body Skills Group.

**Alignment with the SoE Mission:**

It is important to note that, according to the School of Education's Annual Report currently posted on the website, but from 2018-2019 (<https://education.indiana.edu/about/AnnualReport-2019.pdf>), developing this program would align with the School's mission to "improve teaching, learning, and human development in a global, diverse, rapidly changing and increasingly technological society."

**Conclusion:**

Developing a deep understanding of the Mind-Body Medicine methodology and developing our own wellness programming for students is a way for the UTE and SoE to address major issues facing our undergraduates and alumni. Furthermore, we would not be alone utilizing the Mind-Body Medicine model to improve the lives of our students and educators. This program is being drawn upon and applied in several different ways throughout the state of Indiana. In addition to the examples provided above, the [Eskenazi Health System](#) has also put great time, energy, and resources into incorporating this model into their healthcare system.

Just imagine what is possible! Imagine a day when we can look at prospective students and families and assure them that an education with us includes developing the personal wellness skills needed to remain resilient, hopeful, and well in the face of a demanding and stressful professional life.