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Increasing Student Employee Engagement and Knowledge Retention Using Grounding and Mindfulness Practices

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Abstract

Higher education students have a critical need to be fully present and engaged in the learning

space that they participate in. Incorporating grounding and mindfulness practices at the start of

student employee training and team building seminars was tested to determine if their

engagement level and knowledge retention increased. Grounding and mindfulness practices have

predominantly focused on the classroom experience, failing to address additional shared learning

environments that students occupy. In my action research, I implemented a multifaceted and

fundamental grounding and mindfulness-guided practice for student employees in the Student

Activities and Involvement department. I used control groups, whole-group guided practice,

quantitative information quiz, and engagement assessments. Through a greater connection to the

present space and intentional awareness of being more focused on the here and now, student

employee training spaces were proven to be more engaging and effective. My research serves as

a practical approach for grounding and mindfulness practices in higher education spaces, and I

used the findings to demonstrate that these simple practices can be used anywhere shared

learning and collaborative environments take place.

Keywords: mindfulness, engagement, knowledge retention, student employee

Increasing Student Employee Engagement and Knowledge Retention Using Grounding and

Mindfulness Practices

As I reflect on my journey as a student in institutional education, I realize academics and the education system, in general, were never where I had found meaning or purpose. I was kicked out of class weekly, which created a feeling of being unseen and unwanted at an early age. This created a feeling of wanting to be elsewhere, never being happy with being present because I resented the feeling of being unseen and unwanted. Graduate school is the first time I have felt confident in myself and actively wanted to contribute in shared spaces. At the crux of this paradigm shift within educational learning spaces was the continued grounding and mindfulness work I had been doing leading up to that point.

Through continual self-reflection and personal development that included daily journaling, therapy, yoga, and mindfulness practices, I found my way to where I need to be. In letting go of all that no longer served me, I discovered a way to use my past experiences to help provide context for how I want to experience the present. As a then-future practitioner, I told myself I wanted to be there for others in ways that were not available to me; fully engaged, attentive, and present. Grounding and mindfulness practices gave me a new perspective, centered on being present.

The ability to fully engage with ourselves and others is at the essence of grounding and mindfulness practices (GMP). This work has become part of my guiding principles, distinguishing who I am and not just what I do. This practice is iterative. When I have the opportunity to work on myself being fully in the present, my ability to be more engaged increases, my willingness to participate increases, and I become more willing to share space with others.

When I think critically about the research I want to focus on, the need for grounding and mindfulness practices starts with recentering the student's attention and getting their mind and brain connectivity to the space in which they are situated in. Students often enter a space wondering what tests they have next, what assignments are due next week, or even what problems they have at home or with friends—all of which can activate stressors in the brain and engage the sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight). In grounding and mindfulness practices (GMP) work, it is essential to work with the prefrontal cortex and parasympathetic nervous system, ensuring one taps into their logical, rational, and present self (A. Doll et al., 2016). When we show up to a space mindfully aware, we have more control over our senses, emotions, and articulation abilities. In doing so, individuals, especially individuals in shared learning environments, have a more direct path to control how they engage in a space with others.

In my role as a graduate assistant, I worked in the student activities and involvement office. Part of my role was being a supervisor to the involvement consultant (IC) team. I wanted to help students coax out their authentic selves while engaging in the here and now. My goal was to work with the students I occupied spaces with, and incorporate staff supervisors to participate in dynamic practices; this allowed students to find ways to implement these strategies into the community-based spaces they oversee. By doing action research, I sought to test the validity of the claims I have laid through coparticipant feedback and cycles of experiencing these practices. Without this feedback, I would be using my personal, biased practice and experiences to determine proper implementation strategies.

I used a conscious leadership approach for this research. According to Vermey (2014), conscious leadership allows complete awareness of the present moment, and all that factors beyond what can be seen, heard, or felt. In executing a conscious leadership style, leaders must

show up authentically to work with others. In other words, the leader should show up fully present in the space and have the capacity to interact on a more holistic level. GMP allow individuals to know themselves within the present moment and reduce the chance of disassociating with what is happening right now.

The research questions I addressed in my action research were:

Research Question 1: How can grounding and mindfulness practices during student employee training seminars foster better engagement levels and produce stronger knowledge retention of materials covered?

Research Question 2: What type of grounding and mindfulness practices can be most effective in producing these results and achieving measured success?

Research Question 3: Which strategies need to be implemented to create a replicable model for other higher education spaces?

Literature Review

When selecting articles for my literature review, my goal was to seek a comprehensive understanding of grounding and mindfulness practices (GMP) and practical approaches and strategies I could implement into my action research work. Also, I found it imperative to grasp how student engagement had been defined by scholars doing relevant fieldwork and research. The next step was to dissect themes and methodologies used, and tailor that into student involvement and activity spaces that created a more dynamic engagement experience. In sum, I sought literature that informed me of what student engagement looked like, the importance of and benefits to "being present" with oneself and others, how GMP impact the aspect of "being present," and practical applications and interventions I could incorporate. With the assistance of USD's Education Librarian V. Dozier, I was able to develop complex search queries that refined

the sources of literature and addressed studies more corollary to my action research. V. worked with me to incorporate terminology such as "(mindfulness or mindfulness based intervention (MBI) or mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR)," properly utilizing Boolean terms, and searching within correct databases like Springer, Taylor & Francis, and ScienceDirect to name a few. In doing so, I was able to narrow the scope of how GMP was used in relation to higher education and students.

Student Engagement in Relation to Success

To determine the best GMP to enhance student engagement, I first explored a way to define them. Kuh (2006) presented the framework as "the intersection of student behaviors and institutional conditions is student engagement" (p. 8). Kuh's research was paramount to my understanding of student engagement because it explored psychological perspectives, which used Bean and Eaton's attitude-behavior theory. There was great emphasis placed on student characteristics like self-efficacy, self-concept, and an internal locus of control in determining how successful students would be in college. I incorporated GMP that relied heavily on examining breathwork practices that work to engage the prefrontal cortex to enhance community-building spaces.

When determining pertinent factors that influence student engagement, students reported there is critical importance for faculty to care for their problems and listen to the students as individuals and respect them (Günüç & Kuzu, 2014). As someone whose work is centered around the idea of "being seen," Günüç and Kuzu provided tangible evidence that students themselves place great value on faculty, seeing them as individuals and drivers for greater student engagement.

GMP, based on similar premises like mindfulness-based stress reduction and mindfulness-based interventions, work toward college students' abilities to effectively alleviate stress, pain-points, and anxiety, all of which have been proven through studies like Ramler et al. (2016) and Canby et al. (2015). However, Taylor et al. (2020) went further in highlighting how mindfulness-based interventions increase self-compassion and coping self-efficacy. This pushes my research further by establishing "significantly increased common humanity and emotion-focused coping self-efficacy" (Taylor et al., 2020, p. 5). I intentionally set up my space with my coparticipants in a similar fashion so we could continue to explore inward, with the hopes of increasing our engagement in the present moment and heightening the focus needed for improved holistic student success.

Importance of Being Present and Knowing Oneself

If we are to work in relation to one another, we must first work in relation to ourselves. When looking at the University of San Diego's (USD) mission and values, a missing link in the messaging I found was the call to foster individual identity development or knowing oneself. Because self-concept is seen as a central component of student engagement, and therefore student success, we as practitioners and educators have a responsibility to work with students to develop their sense of self and fully know themselves. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a preeminent modern scholar in mindfulness and the creator of mindfulness-based stress reduction, explored the growing interest in mindfulness. His reason for the growing interest spoke to the "emerging hunger for authenticity and clarity and peace within ourselves" (Kabat-Zinn, 2019, p. 973). As a practitioner who seeks to be a proponent of this ideology, I planned my cycles using his works, and took it a step further to demonstrate how inward reflection cultivates stronger community-building.

However, doing self-development work must be done in the present moment. Working on oneself while not fully entrenched in the present can lead to more harm than good due to unresolved trauma (van der Kolk, 2014). As van der Kolk (2014) stated, "not being fully alive in the present keeps them more firmly imprisoned in the past" (p. 67). In their book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, van der Kolk recounted working with trauma patients and the importance of being present to do the work. Incorporating a trauma-informed lens of actively promoting student engagement provided a more holistic approach to the work of GMP, especially after being through a global pandemic.

When thinking about being present and being mindful, particular attention must be paid to the fact that mindfulness enhances engagement to and awareness of current experience or one's present reality (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Using their work from "The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being," I sought to highlight how mindful attention can be used in my research to demonstrate the presence or absence of attention to and awareness of what is occurring in the present.

Practical Applications and Strategies

My lived experience has benefited immensely from GMP. However, I recognized my limitations and sought empirical data to support my lived experience. I also wanted to define mindfulness and meditation. I learned meditation is a formal practice that can calm the mind and enhance awareness of ourselves (Behan, 2020). Meditation can include mindfulness of breathing, compassion-focused meditation, and body scanning. On the other hand, mindfulness is the all-encompassing term for being aware of the present moment, which meditation can fall under. These distinctions are important as I went through my cycles with students as I sought to better inform them of the work we did.

The best path forward is the one with the least amount of resistance. As Oberski (2020) stated in his findings in "Contemplation & Mindfulness in Higher Education," students might have preconceived notions about this mindfulness work. Oberski offered there is a risk in adverse reactions when using terms like "contemplation," "meditation," and "mindfulness," and due to these prejudices, one might find themselves thinking of them as a waste of time. Gordon et al. (2013) demonstrated meditation can be effectively used with college-aged students who have no prior meditative experience. I used their formatting to prevent me from making mistakes during my cycles, which might have otherwise been done without prior knowledge.

Regarding practices, I used strategies that offer easy, digestible ways to understand what they are supposed to do and how to do it. To introduce college students to the mind-body connection and how crucial mindful awareness is, I drew practical demonstration from Dr. Dan Seigel's (2012) "Brain as a Hand Model" video. This visual aid simplifies what part of our brain needs to be engaged, and why mindfulness offers a tangible way to keep that part active. Seigel provided the idea of "flipping the lid" (1:23) into our fight or flight instincts and demonstrated how grounding practices help individuals "close the lid" (1:40) while engaging with the front of our logical, rational part of the brain. Body sweeping, mindful breathing, and nongrasping operated as the foundation for my GMP (Amaro, 2020). There are proven models for setting up my intervention strategies, focusing on open-monitoring meditation and focused-attention meditation being effective strategies for improving student-knowledge retention (Ramsburg & Youmans, 2019). Ramsburg and Youmans also discussed assessment strategies like brief mood introspection scale, positive affect negative affect scale, behavioral relaxation scale, and split testing that demonstrates how to interpret and quantify that data.

Kabat-Zinn (2019) stressed the importance of needing to know the work to effectively lead the work: "in order to really understand the practice of mindfulness and the effects it might have on one's patients, one would have to engage in it wholeheartedly oneself" (p. 978). This is the reason I took an 8-week intensive mindfulness-based stress reduction course at the UCSD Center for Mindfulness, so my practice fully aligned with and informed the action research I had intended to carry out.

With so much literature around GMP, it was critical to continue to tailor each practical application and finding to benefit college students, particularly student employees working in student activities and involvement. When I think about those benefits and how to maximize student engagement, I was intentional with how to set the space up and developed an approachable lens to GMP. Finding creative ways to think about the brain and mind and incorporating assessment strategies for students to articulate their experiences was central to fruitful data.

Context

During my research phase of this Action Research project, I sought out practitioners who were incorporating mindfulness-based implementation strategies. Through referrals within USD's Counseling Center, I was able to connect with Licensed and Clinical Social Worker, Kathleen Grassetti. At the time, Ms. Grassetti was one of USD's Staff Psychologists. Her work as a LCSW was centered around incorporating mindfulness practices with her patients and also her group-led activities. She had been actively and successfully interweaving GMP strategies in her field of work for several years and I had the opportunity to explain to her my Action Research in its infancy planning stages, my intended outcomes and goals, and why I thought GMP was the type of strategy that would be most beneficial. She was then able to share

resources, feedback, and critical insights into how I should approach my interventions and pre-intervention preparation.

Part of the knowledge that Kathleen was able to share with me became fundamental components to my understanding of the GMP as well as the basis for how I explained the reasoning behind why it worked. She told me about the diaphragmatic breathing practices, best practices when leading guided mindfulness sessions, scholarly authors, scaling questions for assessment, and 'flipping the lid.' All these insights she shared have been incorporated in some way within this Action Research project. Most importantly, Kathleen introduced me to the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) training program.

The setting for my research was with Student Activities and Involvement (SAI) at USD, specifically working with student employees. The student employee roles varied, but they all worked to help assist the undergraduate student population to get involved and be involved at the USD, with particular emphasis on student clubs and organizations, and events and communal spaces. With my supervisory role, I cofacilitated and created the student employee training and team meeting seminars.

For a SAI student employee to be successful in their role, a significant responsibility lies in the staff's ability to effectively engage and communicate with them during these initial training seminars and continued team meetings. As so often happens with lengthy training seminars filled with large amounts of content, participant engagement and knowledge retention can suffer. To appropriately assist and inform undergraduate students looking to find meaningful involvement in their community, SAI student employees must retain a large amount of information. With the help of my supportive supervisor (the assistant director of associate student government), I was given ample time and structure to implement the GMP during these

training seminars. Of particular interest was the COVID-19 campus protocols and the additional safety precautions implemented while inside campus buildings.

Methods I

I used O'Leary's (2004) cycles of research (see Figure 1), where "cycles converge towards better situation understanding and improved action implementation; and are based in evaluative practices that alter between action and critical reflection" (p. 140). In O'Leary's experiential learning approach, the goal is to continually refine methods, data, and interpretation after understanding what happened in earlier cycles (Koch, 2005, p. 5). Because these training and team seminars will focus on the continual holistic development of the student employee, a cyclical-based approach allowed room for constant refinement based on student needs by analyzing and interpreting data from previous sessions.

Figure 1

O'Leary's Cycles of Research
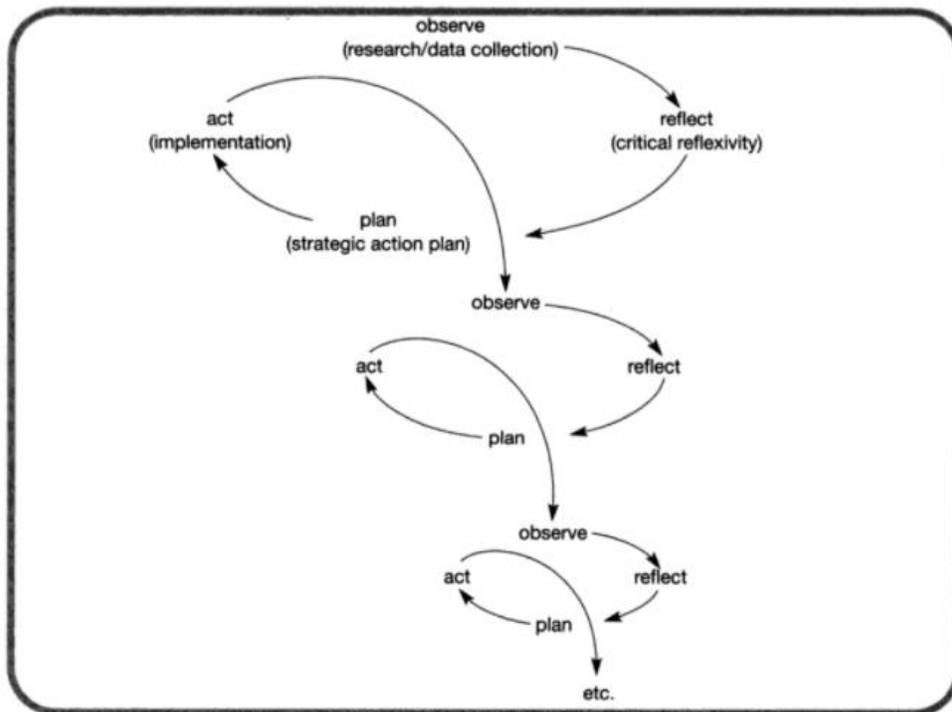
Note. [O'Leary, Z. (2004). *The essential guide to doing your research* (2nd ed.)., p. 141, SAGE Publications.]

My epistemological stance for my action research is one that places a fundamental need for continued refinement, knowledge based on previous data, and meaning created through subject-object relations. As a practitioner whose focus is to understand each coparticipants reception to the GMP each cycle, it was imperative that I developed a methodology that was able to reflect on the student employees' experience after each intervention in the training seminar. Because I was the guide in the GMP intervention, I wanted to have time and space postintervention to determine what I thought went well in my own guided practice and then what fieldnotes I observed while leading them through the training seminar. From there, the ability to observe and reflect on the data from the engagement assessments permitted critical insights into what students found helpful and what they did not enjoy. Not only that, how the students answered the questions would determine if I needed to alter the way in which I asked the questions. Continual refinement in my assessment strategy could only be done after having a critical observation stage in the cycle. Afterwards, the restructuring and planning stage gave me an opportunity to build on the previous cycle, omit that which was not working, and continue on with a path that projected the most engagement receptivity. Planning took form in a variety of ways. I was able to consult with my advising professors on my used strategies and solicit feedback. I had the opportunity to have already observed the data from assessments and field notes and seen what student employees were experiencing and thus, what areas the research needed to progress.

Cycle 1: Student Employee Training Seminar and First Intervention

I began my first cycle in September 2021 at the start of the academic school year, in conjunction with the Fall 2021 Student Employee Training Seminar. Preparation for the student employee training seminar started back in the Summer of 2021, with strategic planning around when to implement the intervention within the training and how it should be executed. I worked with professional staff members who help supervise the student employees for the Student Activities and Involvement department to create the training materials and activities for the 8-hour training seminar. The training was separated in several parts, with a teambuilder, my intervention, informational training/goal setting, a break, and then more operational training.

Since the first cycle would be the most robust of the training seminars, I incorporated a split testing model so that I could determine whether or not there would be a marked difference the knowledge retention and engagement levels. My hypothetical theory surrounding knowledge retention was related to the research I had read about increased focus and awareness. My thought process was that if students who had an opportunity to become more focused and attentive to the training materials presented to them, then they would have high scores on a quiz based on that presented information. The idea behind the split testing was that to produce data that demonstrated the marked improvements on knowledge retention and engagement, there needed to be control group to test against.

Plan

In preparation for the GMP intervention, considerable thought went into the timing of when to conduct the GMP. This was the first time that the entire SAI student employee staff would be meeting in person and, for many, meeting each other. GMP is a vulnerable activity and as such, needs to be conducted in a safe and trusting environment for a communal practice. With

this in mind, it was determined that the GMP intervention would happen after the student employees went through an introduction and teambuilder activity.

In planning the intervention strategy for Cycle 1, I knew it was important to gather impartial data from the student employee team. To do so, I split the control group and intervention groups systemically. With four returning student employees, I split them evenly between their respective teams (Creative Zone/Involvement Consultants). The remainder of the student employees were chosen for their group using a random name generator. In an effort to gather empirical data, the Knowledge Retention Quiz and Student Engagement Assessment were both quantitative assessments. My original goal with the data was to have mean scores, percentages, and charts that could demonstrate the need for GMP without relying on subjective qualitative feedback. The structure of the Student Engagement Assessment was modeled from the National Survey of Student Engagement, with a Likert scale being used.

In order to create a controlled environment for the intervention strategy, I reserved a separate room for the control group next door to the GMP group. I had considered the possibility of handing out randomized guided practice instructions for the two groups. My original thinking was that by doing so, it would create a better replicable format that other higher education practitioners in my department could use. Ultimately, I decided that having myself lead the GMP intervention would provide more enriching results as well as staying more in line with practical action research by embedding myself in the practice.

I should note that this decision was done so through my own participatory experimentation. Prior to the start of my action research, I completed an intensive 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course. This consisted of once a week 3-hour guided mediations along with daily 1-hour self-guided meditations as well as an 8-hour mediation

retreat. The experience of live guided sessions provided far more enriching postmindfulness clarity and connection. Although the self-guided practice was beneficial, I would compare it to taking prerecorded module style course versus a professor leading you through a workshop on course material.

To determine whether GMP increased knowledge retention, I created an eleven-question quiz (see Appendix A). The material on the quiz was pulled from the expectations and informational presentation which occurred shortly after the split group intervention. The questions were True/False, fill in the blank, and multiple choice. Each question was reviewed and approved by the two additional student employee supervisors.

The Student Engagement Assessment 1 was created on a 1–5 point Likert-scale. The style of assessment question and framing was based on the National Survey of Student Engagement, but each questioned pertained to either the subject matter of the materials covered during the training or their experience during the training. The purpose of setting up the engagement assessment in this manner was that the NSSE survey model provided a clear framework that could be visually displayed as a case for further GMP usage in shared learning environments.

Act

With everything prepared and planned out, I was ready to engage in the first intervention cycle. To stay an active participant and to ensure I was practicing what I was about to guide, I went through my own 10-minute self-guided meditation practice 20 minutes prior to the training seminar. In doing so, I felt higher levels of self-awareness in my intentions for the session as well as to engage in the work I deemed important enough to base my project on.

After students were led through a teambuilding activity, I initiated the intervention process. I gave a brief introduction of the research I intended to conduct, but to limit the control group's knowledge of the GMP work about to be conducted, I kept it purposefully vague. The control group (Group A) was placed in the room next door with my co-instructor, while the GMP group (Group B) was left in the current room with me. Group A was then read a script (see Appendix B) by my co-instructor, followed by a soft LoFi Spotify playlist. In the Control Group Script, I paid special intention to the wording of what they were partaking in. I labeled their activity a "mindful reflection," but made sure the terminology surrounding mindfulness and meditation were not talked about. I wanted them to have as little affiliation with a guided practice as possible.

With group B, my GMP intervention started with a brief introduction into the importance of mindfulness when it comes to staying present. I set the scene by contextualizing that when someone walks into a training seminar space, they are usually thinking about everything but the very thing they sat down for. GMP, I stated, was an effective way to pull them back into that space by focusing on the present moment and staying grounded in the physical space. My GMP script (see Appendix C) made reference to the idea of nondoing, of simply being in the space. I wanted to emphasize the point that this GMP was not a test, nor was it an activity that required expectations or standards.

I had annotated the GMP script with timeframes for certain sections and spaces for silence after giving guiding queues. I briefly introduced the types of mindful breathing they were going to partake in, being a body scan, mindful breathing technique, and an awareness of thought practice. My intention for this was to ensure that they maintained a level of awareness and ease

about what they were embarking on. I did not want the process to seem overwhelming or potentially cause anxiety, as I know that a fear of the unknown can create stress and anxiety.

The room was set up with tables in a U-shape and the student employees sitting opposite side of the U from me. I was standing inside of the U arrangement and felt a strong disconnect from the students. While standing in front of the students as a professor would to lecture a class, I began reading my script. It is important to note that I read verbatim from the script, as I had written it exactly how I assumed it would sound reading it aloud.

The script was written in a way that I thought had the most optimal progression for building up to the intentional engagement that students should have after completing the practice. As I read the script, I felt an immense amount of anxiety and nervous energy within me. This was over a year of planning and research put to the test. I could not stop thinking about wanting to get it right and not mess up. In the process, I noticed certain repetitive phrases I would use as a nervous tick. Along with that, I had started to make mental footnotes of the ways in which I thought I had not properly set up the scripting. This put me completely outside of myself and further into a state of distress.

Observe and Reflect

In this section, I wanted to touch upon the dynamics of the physical environment of the intervention, initial observations made post-intervention, and reference the assessment results to for further insights on the student experience. Upon finishing the split test intervention, students were then led through the duration of the information-based training seminar. This consisted of the policies and guidelines for student employees that they would later be tested on for the knowledge retention quiz. My goal during this portion of the training was to keep an intentional focus on the student employees in relation to their grouping. I kept a log of fieldnotes to refer

back to and use in my future preparations. When rereading these fieldnotes this comment was seemingly innocuous but largely important:

"Rooms were very cold"

That is one of the focal points of the first cycle I wanted to touch back on. I made a note of that in my preintervention fieldnotes, and it was a note I circled and bolded in the postintervention notes. The room I had reserved was extremely cold and students had made numerous references about it throughout the training seminar. Being that this was conducted in the beginning of the first semester, and in the middle of summer, it was very warm outside. Many students did not bring jackets or an extra layer to keep warm in the classroom. I myself did not either, and found the cold temperature to be a distraction not only when leading the GMP intervention, but also during my portions of the training facilitation. I think this played into students' ability to feel at ease and comfortable in the environment.

While I acknowledge the inherent confirmation bias that comes with my lens of observation, I made a serious effort to be objective with the way in which I noted who I thought appeared to be attentive, engaged, and active throughout the information sessions. This meant checking to see who was taking notes, asked questions, kept a focused gaze on the presenter, and conversely, who seemed inattentive or distracted.

In my personal observations I noticed that students who I led through the GMP intervention asked more questions, showed a focused gaze, and demonstrated an alertness even after having lunch. In my fieldnotes, I observed:

"student in control group (was) falling asleep during postlunch Involvement Consultant information" And,

"students in GMP group have overall seemed engaged via observation: good eye contact and asking questions" (personal journal).

To me, falling asleep during training is the opposite of being fully present and engaged. I thought it was important to note that the control group student had been falling asleep, while the criteria I had outlined for proper engagement was being displayed by several of the students in the GMP group.

After preparing the format, training materials, split groupings, and assessment models, I had forgotten one crucial element to consider. Anyone indoors at USD during this time period was required to wear a mask at all times. In my pre-intervention notes, minutes before the start of the training seminar, I posited, "

> *students will be doing breathwork exercises with masks on: how might that impact their ability to feel comfortable and get into a calm state?"*

As I had been doing my own personal GMP work within the confines of my own home, I had made a critical error in not accounting for the impact that masks would have on the students' GMP work. When focusing on your breath with masks on, the airflow can feel more constricted and there is a heightened noise that comes with each outbreath. The crux of effective GMP is the ability to limit the number of distractions while conducting the practice. Having an element of distraction and confinement so physically close to their breathwork was a huge detriment to the effectiveness of practice.

Knowledge Retention Quiz Results

The knowledge retention survey (see Appendix A) asked a series of 11 multiple-choice questions that pertained exclusively to the training portion that focused on guidelines, best practices, and employee policies. My goal was simply to use straightforward information and

determine whether or not students who participated in GMP tested higher than their control group counterparts.

Table 1

Knowledge Retention Quiz Results

	Group A – 5 Students (Control Group)	**Group B – 5 Students (GMP Group)**
Correct Answers	49 total correct answers	52 total correct answers
Incorrect answers	6 total wrong answers	9 total wrong answers

Taken in total sum of answers, students in the control group answered more questions correctly than the GMP group (see Table 1). These results were extremely surprising to me and fairly puzzling. I had first-hand recollection of students being more engaged who had participated in the GMP intervention, so I assumed they would have retained more of the information provided. However, the results were fairly nominal for any use of inferring anything conclusive about GMP as it relates to knowledge retention. The problem with anonymity, in this instance, is that I was unable to match up the test results with who I knew were either returning student employees who knew the material already or who were new and seeing this for the first time. This would have been a good indicator in whom answered correctly, and the sorting of wrong answers would have been able to better tell a story if I had more information of which student's it was. Although it was not the results I had hoped for, it allowed me to shift gears and focus more on the engagement component.

Student Engagement Assessment Results

I originally chose the quantitative Likert-scale assessment model in hopes of displaying results that were being tested in a replicable manner. I was originally hesitant to rely on subjective, qualitative data because I wanted to be able to share results with professional staff

that was easy to interpret and something that they might also continue to do without needing my assistance or background. Therefore, my original plan of action was to present the findings as objectively as possible, and the use of quantitative data gave me a way to display that if I did GMP, I hypothesized that those student employees would test better on the questions. In actuality, my results were more of a haphazard and tougher to decipher than I had anticipated. What I had thought would be a better way to display objective results ended up being a very rigid and stifling medium for student employees to convey their thoughts and experiences. I had also incorrectly assumed that basing my assessment model off the NSSE configuration would provide a solid basis for assessing my project. That proved to be an incorrect assumption, because the data I had wanted to know more about required their insights and feelings from the interventions.

With that said, certain data points were still worth noting for their significance in relation to the student engagement. Table 2 shows where enhanced student engagement can be displayed during the training seminar. It is important to note that the choices on the Likert scale ranged from the lowest point, never, to highest point, very often.

Table 2

Student Engagement Assessment Results 1.1

Questions	Group A (control group) results	Group B (GMP group) results
Volunteered to speak or voice opinion	Two out of five responded very often or often	Five out of five responded very often or often
Thought about how the content impacts your professional development	Three out of five responded very often or often	Five out of five responded very often or often
Got distracted	Four out of five responded never or very little One responded very much	Four out of five responded never or very little One responded some
You can describe the knowledge and information presented during this	Two out of five responded very much or quite a bit	Five out of five responded very much or quite a bit

seminar as it relates to your current and professional development		
Identify key information from this presentation	Two responded very much Three responded quite a bit	Four responded very much One responded quite a bit
Demonstrate effective work habits	Two responded very much Three responded quite a bit	Four responded very much One responded quite a bit
Communicate what you have learned, developed, or improved to professional staff or team members	Two responded very much Two responded quite a bit One responded some	Four responded very much One responded quite a bit

These results indicate a strong connection to the impact that the GMP intervention had on the student's ability to stay engaged during the training. In particular, the two biggest indicators of an extremely engaged student were the questions that asked if students could "describe the knowledge and information presented during this seminar as it relates to your current and professional development" as well as "identify key information from this presentation." In both of those questions, student employees in the GMP group tested markedly higher than that of their control group counterparts. To effectively accomplish both of those tasks, student employees in training spaces need to have an increased awareness and engagement, otherwise they would not be able to display that learned information.

Along with those inferences from the data, I made a realization that one could contextualize certain knowledge retention from the results as well. To highly and effectively "communicate what you have learned, developed, or improved to professional staff or team members," you need a great deal of knowledge retention. Because four out of the five GMP group students answered with highest level of Likert scale points, I think this is a correlation that the GMP intervention had a positive impact on their knowledge retention especially when only two out of five participants answered with the highest Likert point.

Similarly, the ability to "identify key information" is only made possible by obtaining a high level of knowledge retention. With four out of five participants in the GMP group responding with the highest Likert point, it shows a trend of increased engagement compared to the Control Group with only 2 responding "very much." Another encouraging sign of increased engagement levels was the GMP Group's perfect five out of five score when asked if they "volunteered to speak or voice opinion." From my experience leading student development trainings, students who are vocal and actively participate in the learning seminars always appear to be the most engaged. With that in mind, only two out of five Control Group students responded with "very often" when asked the same question. Taken in a larger context, those are key indicators that when given an opportunity to participate in GMP, students actively participate, identify key information and communicate what they have learned at the highest level possible.

Cycle 2: Training Seminar 2

The second cycle was conducted in November 2021 during a very different learning seminar space for the student employees. Whereas the Student Employee Training was an all-day event, Training Seminar 2 was conducted during one of their monthly, 1-hour professional development learning seminar. This deviation from the previous format meant that student employees had less time to settle into the space and even less time for facilitators to present the training materials. Because the allotted time had changed, I sought only to assess student engagement and removed the split test model. Unlike the reserved space for the previous training seminar, this and the remaining professional development trainings were conducted in the Creative Zone meeting space. The Creative Zone meeting space was much smaller and had a circular table with chairs facing inward where I sat with the students. It is also important to note

that the room temperature was very moderate and was not noticeable in how it might impact

concentration levels unlike the previous location.

Planning

Shortly after my first cycle and prior to planning my second cycle, I had a conversation

with faculty advisor, Dr. Cheryl Getz. She was extremely monumental in my paradigm shift

about what type of results I wanted out of this research along with my thought process for how I

wanted this action research conducted. Up to that point, my primary goal was to showcase a

replicable model for higher education practitioners. This meant creating a system and process

that was not only repeatable, but available to use for those who were not familiar with GMP

work and who did not want additional work to facilitate and incorporate. In my head, I had an

idea akin to that of a dietician or doctor who was able to prescribe medicine or provide a diet

plan even though they themselves were not actively engaged in the work themselves. Dr. Getz

helped me reassess my approach, one that refocused on an objective of positive engagement in

GMP, attempting to attract as many student employees as possible to the practice instead of a

clinical approach to offer practitioners.

This discovery and alteration forced me to change three crucial aspects of my proposed

second cycle. This first change I made was in the split testing model. Originally, I had intended

to do one more training seminar with the control and GMP groupings to balance the findings

from the previous assessment results. However, the realigned goal of incorporating as many

people as possible in the GMP intervention shifted that mindset. Although the data might have

been more balanced, I did not have enough cycles or students to warrant such a rigid and

standard research-oriented focus. Thus, for this cycle there were 10 student participants, with

several student employees unable to attend this meeting as well.

The second change came in the form of the student engagement assessment. I reassessed what I wanted to accomplish with the questions as well as how I incorporate myself within the group dynamics. To fully understand the student employee experience, I opted to include several short answer questions in hopes it would provide better opportunity to convey their feelings and thoughts surrounding the intervention. After analyzing the first student engagement assessment I realized I was not getting the full story of how the student was engaging with the practice. Incorporating GMP in student spaces means dealing with their internalized feelings and thoughts surrounding themselves, the experience, and the interplay between the two.

The third and final change was the setting and setup of the space. The first intervention felt more like an instructive lesson instead of a coparticipatory experience. I had opted to stand in front of them and read straight from the script in my hand. Part of that decision was due to my nerves and a fear of messing up the words. However, I had instinctually taken up a traditional instructor-student dynamic. This setup caused me to feel alienated and authoritative within the intervention. Standing up created a disconnect from the harmony of those seated in front of me and reading from the script felt like I had lost the essence of coparticipating within the research. In this second cycle I opted to create a group circle around the table and sat down among the student employees.

Act

In the Training Seminar 2, I had taken on a larger role within the overall training. Not only was I leading the GMP intervention, but I was also facilitating the professional development session as well. Due to this added workload, my ability to make fieldnotes and real-time observations were much more limited. Part of the issue with the 1 hour time boundary was the

need to move forward with the session regardless of whether or not the entire confirmed student employee roster was in attendance.

With that in mind, I had begun the GMP intervention when two of the student employees came into the session later in the practice. Leading the GMP intervention this second time around gave me a more spacious and comfortable feeling than the first cycle. I was able to give the directives with a better cadence, but more importantly, I gave the pauses their necessary space to provide more spaciousness and room for students to work with each component of the guided directives. I used my watch as a measurement for when to stop speaking and when to continue on with the next breathing method.

In my pre-intervention notes I asked myself what the most optimal GMP structure was. Referencing back to my original GMP script (see Appendix C), I noticed I had overwritten the guided practice. The script should have been notes or a guide for me to follow, so that is one change I implemented in this GMP script 2 (see Appendix D). Instead of a monologue that included the GMP, I opted for a bulleted list with highlighted keywords and queues. The keywords indicated a change in breathwork practice, while the notes served as a jumping off point for me to lead into a freer flowing guidance. As a participant in this research myself, I did not want to be limited or feel restricted by the constraints of my script. I wanted the ability to make necessary adjustments in the moment based on what I thought the group needed in that space.

The GMP intervention was constructed in a manner that worked through a series of progressions. Starting with the deep breath practice, the coparticipants had an opportunity to bring deeper, enrichening oxygen into their lungs and brain. By starting with deep breathing, you have a particular increased focus and awareness on the noise and sensations that the inhalation

and exhalation brings. I used this first to immediately draw them away from potential distractions of past, future, or outside awareness. From there, I moved them through the intentional awareness section of the intervention, where I gave queues on drawing attention to the physical space they occupy. Noticing the sounds, smells, and visualization their occupied space further brings that intentional awareness to the present moment. Giving probing questions about where they might notice their breath gets them closer inward to their internal presence. As that internal presence starts to build, and as we worked through the middle of the intervention, I was cognizant that this is when thoughts and feelings creep back into coparticipants present awareness. That is when the noting and counting system begins in earnest. I kept this incredibly simple so as to limit their thought process. Coparticipants were instructed to label those thoughts as 'thinking' or 'feeling' without pressing further. Once the thought is labeled, they began their counting to 10 process, with each inbreath as 1 and outbreath as 2 until they reached 10 and started again. I explained that the noting system serves are their anchor during the training seminar. If they catch themselves distracted or their mind wandering, simply noting it and returning back to that present awareness. The final progression that I led them through was the body scan. Because this practice requires the most focus and visualization, it serves as the last part. Similar to that of a yoga practice, I wanted to lead them through less intensive GMP strategies prior to the most difficult part. The body scan works them from the top of their head down to their toes, and after completion, I encouraged them to let it be the positive radiating energy to serve them for the duration of the training seminar.

Observe and Reflect

I wanted to understand what the student employees' initial feeling was like about the GMP intervention. I asked the students, 'What were your initial reactions to this activity (e.g., difficult, relaxing, helpful, anxiety provoking)?' Table 3 displays the results.

Table 3

Student Engagement Assessment Results 2.1

What were your initial reactions to this activity?
Relaxing
Difficult to sit still at first, then extremely peaceful
Relaxing, helpful
I found this incredibly helpful, I was quite stressed and welcomed a mindfulness activity
Relaxing, helpful
Oh no I am going to fall asleep!
Down to relax.
Anxiety provoking
Relaxing

The results for this question presented me with an opportunity to learn that while not everyone was comfortable with the GMP intervention, only one student employee responded with a very negative response. I traced that student employee's responses for this cycle and found a very interesting trend in their answers. Of the ten student employees who took part in the GMP intervention and subsequently took the engagement assessment, they were the only person who responded with "I'm not a huge fan of it," when asked to describe how they felt after having done the guided mindfulness practice. To add more context to this student employee, they also offered this response when asked, "how did the mindfulness activity impact your mood,"

"I personally am not a fan of meditation as I get easily distracted"

To me, that response is crucial in understanding their engagement scores in relation to their counterparts. There is an irony in their dislike of meditation as well. The idea of the GMP intervention is to limit or curb the student employees' ability to get distracted or lose focus. An

inability to fully buy in or partake in the GMP intervention gives them little to no chance at improving their ability to stay focused on the present awareness and training. This student reported that they were not able to redirect their thoughts as time went on. Along with that, they responded "very much" on the Likert scale to losing focus, getting distracted, and forgetting what the presenter was talking about. Lastly, the responded that they "never" thought about how the content impacts their professional development, even though the entire training was about professional development. Taken the results together, it displays a serious need for the student to be engaged, present, and more aware of the training seminar they are in. I would have greatly appreciated the opportunity to explore further just what caused such outlying scores compared to the majority of their fellow employees.

For juxtaposition, Table 5 shows how the rest of the student employees answered the same questions.

Table 4

Student Engagement Assessment Results 2.2

Questions	Results
Did you find it easier to redirect your thoughts as time went on?	Six out of nine students felt it easier to redirect their thoughts, with one remarking neither
During the team learning seminar, how much did you do the following? – Lost Focus	Seven out of nine students remarked very little to never, one remarked some
During the team learning seminar, how much did you do the following? – Got distracted	Eight out of nine students remarked never or very little
During the team learning seminar, how much did you do the following? – Forgot what the presenter was talking about	Eight out of nine students remarked very little or never
Thought about how the content impacts your professional development	Six out of nine students remarked very often or often

Students who were able to fully immerse themselves in the GMP intervention demonstrated

noticeably higher scores in focus, not getting distracted, ability to pay attention, and an ability to

internalize the materials and think about how it relates to their development. Along with that,

eight out of the nine students expressed generally positive feelings about the GMP intervention

and how it impacted their mood (see Table 6).

Table 5

Student Engagement Assessment Results 2.3

How did the mindfulness activity impact your mood?
Made me feel a bit more tired but focused on the activity at hand
It set a level, relaxing tone for the day.
It didn't have an impact on my mood it helped me physically to relax
Definitely helped in improving my mood
Helped me gain more control over my emotions and mood during the meeting as I was in a more relaxed state and better prepared to handle any emotions that occurred during the meeting
It made me less frustrated but I will say that after the mindfulness exercise I wanted to be alone in my own space
Felt better!
I personally am not a fan of meditation as I get easily distracted
It made me realize where I focus my stress on my body so now I am able to work on that

The results for the second cycle were encouraging and there were several key phrases that

pointed toward further success for GMP in these training seminars. Students expressed higher

levels of focus, control over their emotions and mood, less frustration, and an ability to relax.

This is all directly attributed to the GMP intervention, and therefore directly impacting their

engagement levels. Without the ability to pause, collect themselves, and become further

grounded in the space, there would have been the continued cycle of constant doing, moving, and

getting on to the next thing. With these results, I can deduce that students were much better

prepared to take on the very activity in front of them instead of trying to get done with it and

worry about what they had to do next. Breaking that cycle of continually thinking about the future is a rarity in higher education spaces, especially with the rigorous demands and constant pull from all directions that students face.

Cycle 3: Training Seminar 3

The third and final cycle of my action research took place during the December professional development training seminar. The setting and style of training was the exact same as cycle 2, so student employees and I were in a more comfortable and familiar space. After the GMP intervention, student employees were led through their usual teambuilding activity, area updates, and then the professional development workshop. I was once again facilitating the training seminar following the GMP intervention. The final training of this semester came a week prior to finals week, so there were exams and projects looming large for the student employees.

Planning

As the conditions and style of training were going to be nearly identical for the third cycle, the planning stage did not require as much adjustment. The room and configuration were the same as last time, and I felt like the way I was situated among the student employees created a more harmonious shared space. The one variable I could not factor into the preparation was whether or not the student employees that committed to coming would actually be present and would not arrive late. The late arrival of the student employees was mildly distracting for me. I felt like I owed them an acknowledgement as to what was happening and to make motions for them to join in the intervention. This cycle I prepared myself for the late arrival of students by having a plan of a simple head nod acknowledgement and hope they discerned the appropriate

strategy to come into the fold. Thus, eight out of nine of the students arrived on time, with one student coming a bit late and again several student employees not being able to attend.

After observing the previous data results and gaining more beneficial insights from the qualitative short answer questions, I sought to further improve the wording. Starting with the question "what were your initial reactions to this activity," the answers I received indicated that my intent behind the question missed the mark. Although it was useful data to understand their feelings around the GMP intervention, my goal was to find out how they were feeling leading up to the activity. Instead, based on the answers given, I deduced that they assumed I meant their initial reactions to doing the activity. I worded the question in a difficult to understand manner. Along with that, giving the students prompted examples was another choice that gave students an answer instead of prompting them to think of their own. With the restructuring of the new question 1 to say: "describe how you felt coming into this team meeting," I felt confident that student employees would share insights about what they had on their mind upon entering the training seminar.

Act

From my experience in guiding these GMP interventions over the course of three cycles, I realized that there comes a level of connection that has a direct correlation with the familiar and comfortability. Before the first session I had never led a GMP before, and I found myself focusing on so many things in that moment that were out of my control. During this third and final session I found a flow state and an ownership of my role within this group. Because of that, I was able to become more present and participate further in the activity myself.

Based on the GMP script I had led in the second cycle, I was comfortable with the progressions, how they built upon one another, and the overall positive nature in the assessment

results. With that in mind, and with the script further memorized, I opted to try and attempt an improvisational method of delivering the GMP. I still had the script in front of me with the bolded transition queues in case I forgot my next step, but I decided to close my eyes as much as I could during the GMP intervention. Along with that, I mirrored the cadence of deep breath inhalation and exhalation for the coparticipants. I continued to accentuate my breathing patterns throughout the session in the hopes of bringing a subtle reminder of where the focus should be. I also used a directive of thinking the about their inhalations as gentle waves retreating from the shoreline, with the exhalations as soft waves crashing up against the shoreline. There is a breathing technique you can use that creates a sensation of wave-like noises when breathing into the back of your palate and throat. Unlike past GMP interventions, I gave the nonspeaking portions of the guidance their full allotted time, while giving myself that time to work within the practice.

Observe and Reflect

There was a level of expectancy this time around in the cycle. When I was chatting with the students beforehand, waiting for the rest of them to arrive, I made small talk and they asked if we were going to be doing another meditation practice. To me, that signaled there was a level of comfortability that they had prior to the intervention. Since they knew I was leading the beginning of the session, they reasoned that they would be partaking in the mindfulness practice. As I touched on previously, there is a level of vulnerability that comes with GMP. The act of closing your eyes, getting into a comfortable seated position, and opening yourself up further creates a layer of exposure internally as well as externally. So, it came with little surprise that the responses gathered from the assessments were the most fruitful I had received. When we begin to establish routines, patterns of behavior, and habits, we begin to gain more trust and invite a

higher frequency of energy to share with others. I truly felt that in this last training seminar

postintervention.

Previously, I had not thought of asking about what the students were bringing into the

meeting. In this sense, I wanted to get a better understanding of where they were at mentally and

emotionally. These cycles have made me realize the importance of getting to know how a student

enters community driven learning environments. Embarking on student development training

should not be done with external factors impacting their ability to absorb and engage in material.

Facilitators should put time and resources into preparing well, as hours are precious because

students are asked to do so much, especially those balancing multiple responsibilities outside of

being a student. Table 7 summarizes how all of the student employees felt coming into the

meeting.

Table 6

Student Engagement Assessment Results 3.1

Question: How were you feeling coming into this meeting?
Stressed
Slightly stressed but ready to go
I was pretty nervous and hyperactive coming into work today, stressed about the amount of catch up work to do
Tired and stressed
Slightly anxious about (the) exam I had following the meeting
Anxious because I had class right after and came straight from my practice. I was a bit tired and restless as well
Tired
I was rushing to get to the meeting
I felt very comfortable

On the whole, student employees expressed their feelings and headspace coming in to the

meeting with a mind frame that was not focused on the present training space they occupied. As I

mentioned previously, these students were about to or already getting ready for final exams and

projects. The overwhelmingly negative headspace confirmed that there was a need, potentially

subconsciously, to participate in an activity that allowed them to shake off external factors and pressures and step into the space with a clearer focus and attention.

I found that 7 out of the 9 student employees who participated in the three cycles said that they would continue to do GMP on their own if they had the proper resources. Of the two student employees who said no, here were their responses when asked how mindfulness impacts their mood:

"Meditation makes me anxious, it did not help me" And,

"I am the type of person who doesn't like to be left to their thoughts too much. I've never been a big fan of yoga, meditation, etc. I feel that I get easily distracted and it ends up being even more distracting to do a mindfulness practice."

Due to the confidential nature of these assessments, it makes it near impossible to determine who the respondents were that had negative experiences during the GMP. That is most unfortunate because I would love to be able to ask more follow up questions as to the root cause of anxiety within their meditative practice as well as the student who does not like to be left to their thoughts. The goal of these interventions is to alleviate stress and anxiety and enable better focus and energy. Mindfulness practices are not confined to the type of breathwork practices I had guided these student employees through. Having known more about these special circumstances, I would have been able to employ differing techniques based on individual student needs. A students mood can greatly impact their ability to stay present and attentive. With the other seven students in mind, I wanted to examine how GMP impacted their mood.

Table 7

Student Engagement Assessment Results 3.2

Question: How did the mindfulness practice impact your mood?
Made me more focused and open to the career development session

The activity made me anticipate the end of the activity so I could feel productive. But by the time we finished I was confident in my ability to do the task at hand.
These mindfulness exercises improve my mood in the sense that they decrease my stress. I can shut down or become harsh when I am stressed so the calming effect make me generally nicer.
Inquisitive and dialed in.
It helped calm some nerves for sure
It helped me destress about everything I had going on. I was able to feel in the moment during the whole meeting instead of thinking about other things.
It made me feel much less anxious than I already am on a normal basis

Working with student employees in the midst of final exam preparation was a big fear of mine. I was aware of the workload and stress they were already carrying, so the idea of adding another hour-long development training was another potential stressor. Finding out that several of these students reported a decrease in stress was an incredible indicator that incorporating GMP was a positive addition to the seminar. Along with that, students touched on the idea of being less anxious and calming their nerves. The only way a person can become fully engaged in their present space is with the ability to shred as many distractions that their emotions and feelings can conjure up. Anxiety and nervousness can rack the brain with worry and negative thoughts, pushing them outside the current situation.

When looking for key indicators of increased engagement, the terms 'inquisitive,' 'dialed in,' 'focused,' and 'open' are all responses that we are looking for. Even more to the point is the feedback reporting that they 'feel in the moment during the whole meeting instead of thinking about other things.' That feedback is exactly what my intended outcome was for incorporating GMP. I had never made any mention to students about this either, so for them to come to this thought on their own is proof that even if someone has never practiced GMP work before, there is a reasonable chance they will find it helpful in their ability to stay grounded in the present moment. These responses demonstrate that the use of GMP, even for 15 minutes, has the ability to increase engagement levels in a variety of ways.

Limitations

The most obvious limitation for my Action Research was the impact the COVID-19 policies and procedures had during the interventions. I had made an error in the preparation stages by not accounting for the impact that wearing a mask while doing hyper-focused breathing activities would have on the coparticipants. Up to that point, I had only participated in group meditation practices virtually and therefore in my home without a mask on.

When you breathe with a mask on, the inhalations can cause the mask to be pulled inward against the face further. Conversely, the exhalations while wearing a mask tend to radiate heated breath up into the eyes, cheeks, and sides of the face. Not only that, but it exacerbates the noise that breathing causes, which added together can be a very distracting feeling and sensation. From my perspective, that inhibits the coparticipants to be fully immersed in the GMP and therefore, impacts the success and effectiveness of the interventions altogether.

Additionally, when thinking about the research design of my study, I now know that a limitation in the ability to gather the most fruitful data was the fact that I did not make all the questions open-ended qualitative format. With each iteration of the reflection and observation stage, I found myself wanting more descriptive insights from the assessment results. While the quantitative questions provided certain trends that I was able to pinpoint and did not rely on inferences, this limited my chances to refine and actively enhance the upcoming cycle. If I had an opportunity to conduct more cycles, I would have asked more open-ended questions about the physical space, the style of GMP they preferred or did not, as well as what practices make them to feel most present.

Another limitation I ran into was the time constraints for cycles 2 and 3. For the first cycle, I had a full day of training to work with to allow the GMP intervention to be tested at a

much larger scale. Students were given multiple presentations and informational sessions. However, because Cycles 2 and 3 were conducted within the 1-hour professional development seminars, there was only so much information that could be assessed. As each session had a 15-minute GMP intervention and a teambuilding exercise that was 10–15 minutes, there was only time for a 30-minute professional-development seminar. That limited amount of time staying engaged could have skewed the data to be more effective because it was a much shorter duration.

As with nature of many 1-year action research studies, there was such a small sample size of students and a limited number of interventions that could be conducted within the time frame given. I would have loved to have an opportunity to work with different student training spaces, where I was only there to lead them through the GMP intervention and send the engagement assessment afterward. This would have been impactful not only for increasing the amount of coparticipants, and thus more data, it would have removed a layer of participant bias when answering the assessment. I have wondered if students answered my engagement assessments more positively because I had authority over them, as well as a generally positive relationship with them as well.

Lastly, limiting my GMP interventions to center around breathwork activities did alienate at least one participant. Their expressed negative feelings around meditation were an unfortunate factor that I did not have the ability to restructure. That is where the confidential nature of the assessments sent out become a force working against me. Although I knew it was important to protect the coparticipants and also gave them more of an ability to answer as honestly as they could, it prevented me from having a chance to follow up with students who had trouble with the GMP to discover alternatives for them during these sessions.

Recommendations

Incorporating grounding and mindfulness practices in student employee training spaces was an overwhelmingly positive addition. Student employees reported increased focus, decreased stress, and stronger engagement in the present space, to name a few. Of the 9 students that participated and answered the last engagement assessment, 7 of them said they would continue doing guided meditation practices if given the proper resources. Those who said they would not continue with meditation also noted that they did not like mindfulness practices to begin with.

During the course of a 15-minute GMP, those who responded positively to the intervention displayed extremely high scores on not losing focused, not getting distracted, and being able to identify key information from the presentations. These breathwork practices were modified to fit the needs of a student training space, so the intentionality of the guided practice was done in a way that gave the coparticipants subtle tools needed to be as focused and engaged in the trainings as possible, such a remembering their in and outbreaths to bring them back to focus on the task at hand.

Having completed the cycles of my research and facilitated the guided practices, I can confidently say, with evidence, that all student-centered learning spaces in higher education should include a form of mindfulness practice. I think it is very important to have the guided practice be done by a person in the actual space. There is an element of coparticipation and connection that cannot be replicated by playing a YouTube video. With that said, I know it is not as easy practice to lead without any prior experience or working knowledge of mindfulness practices.

With more time and resources, I would have loved to collaborate with practitioners, like Kathleen Grassetti, who incorporate GMP in their respective fields to create a functional

guideline and script. With USD having so many incredible professors, staff, and graduate assistants in the field that are carrying out this type of work, I think it would be beneficial to create an ad-hoc committee to work on a template and resources for all higher education practitioners at USD to be able to use. Utilizing the shared G-suite repositories and enabling share functioning for all University of San Diego email addresses, the access to these resources would not rely on one department or group of people to maintain and gatekeep these materials.

I see countless trainings and team meetings that incorporate teambuilders and check-in questions that provide no tangible value. Each time they are conducted they often have no intentionality or purpose other than to check a box. Most often, they are done with no intentionality, and without intentional thought, they become time wasters instead of added value activities. That time could be used to do a quick 5 to 15 minute long GMP that staff could rotate leading. That GMP session would serve as a functional teambuilder while also increasing the engagement levels, mood, and mindsets of those in the sessions. USD leads countless training seminars for students, so it is imperative that those students are as engaged as possible if we want the sessions to be of as much practical value as possible.

If given ample time and resources, I would create a master GMP script that has highlighted queues, prompts, phrases to use, pauses to make, and more. These scripts could be read without any work on the professional staff. I would have several guided practices housed within a google drive. There would be routine inter-departmental meetings to share insights gathered from training sessions that incorporated GMP in to discuss what is working, key insights, and practical strategies.

Lastly, I want to touch on my personal experiences within this process so that I can impart on others ways in which I think would be beneficial to learn from what I did right and

wrong. When leading the sessions, I found myself increasing comfortable the more times I guided the GMP. Like most areas, repetition and an ability to be more familiar with the space and the coparticipants decreased the overall anxiety and worry about being perfect. I would recommend that if another practitioner were to lead the GMP session, to practice reading the script in front of a mirror, then to a friend or partner, and then have a friend or partner read the script back to you as you become the one being guided. This is a part of the process that I had set out to do, but my anxiety to initiate the outreach deterred me from doing so. Along with that, I would recommend doing this activity anywhere that masks are not required. The ability to be free of the mask constraint will highly benefit all participants to be completely absorbed in their practice and further limits distractions. It should also be noted that the physical makeup of the space should not be overlooked. Having an ambient room temperature, free from noise distractions, limited foot traffic, and an ability to create a full circle of chairs with nothing in the middle is the ideal setup from my experience. The last recommendation from my personal experience would be to have a positive, intentional awareness when coming in to the space before leading the GMP. In the beginning, I was terrified not to mess up the research I had spent so much time creating that I failed to remember why I used the GMP myself. Bring a sense of levity, playfulness, and warm energy to the space so that you can exude that energy out onto others.

Conclusion

As I set out on this Action Research project, I wanted to find a way I could support students beyond our weekly checkins and conversations, and use GMP as an additional resource because of how beneficial it has been within my holistic development as a human. I thought about the ever-growing pressures that students face. There are so many societal pressures and

expectations to achieve, do, and think about what is next. With that in mind, it became increasingly apparent that presenting students with opportunities to pause might inspire a change in their thinking and their way of being. Within higher education leadership, there is a glaring need to embody the practices and advice that we give to our students. Without embodying the work, the words ring hollow. Grounding and mindfulness provided a framework to keep me engaged and present within many facets of my life, particularly my graduate experience. Seeing how impactful only three 15-minutes sessions had within these student learning spaces was fulfilling as it was invigorating.

These practices provided tangible results and feedback that college students' abilities to effectively alleviate stress, pain-points, and anxiety were significantly reduced. While those common issues were kept at bay, I saw the increased levels of engagement that I had hoped would happen. It was interesting how simple it all seemed after completing the three cycles. It was even more interesting how obvious the answers seemed as well. For example, when I completed the sessions I would be surprised by how quickly it all went and how generally positive the student employees responses were. However, without creating the space, intentionally leading them through the GMP, and providing a format to understand their experience, all this remains guesswork and hypothetical. Some times doing the seemingly mundane can make the biggest impact, and I hope that my work have provided a platform to demonstrate that consistent habits to take time to recalibrate and realign with where you are has huge potential for engagement and success.

My research has proven that without too much time commitment and proper resources, the usage of grounding and mindfulness practices can effectively create a better learning environment for all involved. There is a pervasive trend in society that assumes a lack of doing is

waste of time. There needs to be more time to stop, collect yourself within the space you occupy, and disconnect with everything except the beings around you, the energy you bring, and the breaths you take. We can only be in one living moment at a time, and the more time we spend focuses solely on that moment is when true, dynamic engagement occurs.

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Appendix A

Knowledge Retention Quiz

☐ Q1

What group were you in to start the training?

○ Group A

○ Group B

-- Page Break --

Q2

Student employees may use their cell phones if…

○ They want to talk to friends

○ It is an emergency

○ They are using it for school purposes

○ They have no task at the moment

Q3

(True or False) You may use the printer for personal use if you only have to print 1 page

○ True

○ False

+ Add page break

☐ Q4

(True or False) If you are sick or cannot make your shift for any other reason, you need to contact your supervisor AND find a replacement

○ True

○ False

☐ Q5

(True or False) You may NOT use your headphones during work shift, even when no one else is working in the office

○ True

○ False

Q6

If you want to request time off, you must do so how many days in advance?

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

Q7

Which of the following is NOT part of the SMART goal acronym:

○ S - specific

○ M - measurable

○ A - attainable

○ R - repeatable

○ T - time-oriented

☐ **Q8**

What does 'SAI' stand for?

+ Add page break

Q9

What are the office hours for the CZ and IC desk?

○ Mon-Thurs (9:30am -7pm) | Fri (9:30am - 5pm)

○ Mon-Thurs (9:30am -5pm) | Fri (9:00am - 5pm)

○ Mon-Thurs (9:00am -6pm) | Fri (8:30am - 5pm)

Q10

(Select all that apply) If you complete all your work and your supervisor has no additional tasks, you can do which of the following?

☐ Watch tv/movies on your phone

☐ Invite friends to come hang out with you

☐ Work on homework

☐ Leave early

Q11

(Select all that apply) When you have a planned absence scheduled, what must you do prior to your absence:

☐ Find a replacement

☐ Email your supervisor

☐ Promise to do extra work before and after your absence

☐ Receive written confirmation and approval from your supervisor

☐ Q12

(Select all that apply) You will check in with your supervisor...

☐ When you arrive each day

☐ When you finish a task

☐ When a student emails you with a question

☐ Before you leave each day

Appendix B

Control Group Script

Hello everyone,

I'll give you all a moment to get settled into your chair and find a seated position that is most comfortable for you. Today we're going to spend the 15 minutes with an opportunity to sit in mindful reflection. You're encouraged to close your eyes or sit with a soft gaze cast downward, but whatever makes you most comfortable is what's best for this experience. During this time, you're free to let your mind wander and keep yourself at ease as much as you can. There will be some soft music playing in the background, but if at any point you would like to have it turned down please let me know. If sitting with your eyes closed becomes too much or you would like to direct your attention elsewhere, you're encouraged to journal whatever thoughts or feelings are top of mind at the moment. That doesn't have to be what you write about, but whatever feels best to you. Please let me know if any questions arise, for now, I'll let you enjoy your time to unwind.

<div align="center">

Music to play during the session:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lTRiuFIWV54&ab_channel=LofiGirl

</div>

Appendix C

Grounding and Mindfulness Script 1

SAI Student Employee Grounding and Mindfulness Practice Script

Hey everyone,

I'll give you all a moment to get settled into your chair and find a seated position that is most comfortable for you. I want to start by thanking all of you for being generous enough to allow me to lead you in this grounding and mindfulness practice. There are no expectations, no right or wrong, or even good or bad. How you experience these next 15 minutes is just as it should be. In this practice, I encourage you to think about simply being; being present and aware of your thoughts, sensations, and surroundings. Try not to focus on doing anything in particular. If you feel like you need to open your eyes, adjust your seated position, or even stop the practice altogether, that is perfectly acceptable.

When I mention the term 'mindfulness,' I'm referring to the idea of being aware of the present moment and all that it encompasses. Notice your thoughts, sensations, feelings, and anything else that comes up in this present moment.

While this is a guided practice, my vocal queues are there for assistance in noticing certain awareness elements. This practice will incorporate a body scan, mindful breathing, and awareness of thought. Engage in these practices as much or as little as you are comfortable doing so, and if not, please take care of yourself in whatever manner feels best to you.

You can now gently close your eyes or if it's preferred to keep them open, cast an unfocused gaze down toward the floor. I ask that you get seated in an upright position in your chair. Keep your spine aligned from your hip bones up through your neck. If you can, try to make sure your back is straight to prevent any irritation in the lower back. You can place your hands on your thighs, in your lap, or wherever you find most comfortable. Your feet should be firmly planted on the floor.

Once you've found a position that feels best to you, I invite you to draw your attention to your breath. We will start out by taking a few deep breaths. Inhale slowly through your nose and start to notice where in the body you most feel the inhale. It might be deep in your belly, your chest, or even the sensation in your nose. As you exhale, really feel your ribcage and chest shrinking and notice the warm air leaving your nose. We're going to do this a few more times and I encourage you to focus on that particular part of your body where the sensation of breath is most vivid.

After your last long exhale, I encourage you to let your breathing return to its normal cycle and fall back into the usual rhythm. In this mindfulness practice, our breath serves as the anchor for our ability to stay in the present moment and allows us to truly cultivate that sense of

mindfulness. If at any point you notice your thoughts, feelings or sensations start to wander from the present moment, return back to that focused attention on your breathing.

From here, take an inhale and draw attention to your body as a whole. If you'd like, imagine there's a warm beam of light shining down on your whole body. After you've taken a few moments to feel into that focus, zoom in on the beam of light up to the top of your head. Slowly, I want you to imagine that warm beam of energy travel all the way down your body into your toes. Notice any sensations that feel good and even sensations of discomfort. Simply acknowledge that they are there and keep the beam moving downward. I'll give you a couple of minutes to complete this at your own pace.

Okay once you've had a chance to send that warm beam of energy all the way down your body, begin again to draw attention to your breath. To start, I want us all to place one hand gently on the navel of your belly and the other gently on to your heart. With each inhale, I want you to feel like you're breathing into both of your hands, and with each exhale, I want you to feel like it's gently moving away from your hands. Go ahead and do this several times on your own.
Now, shift your attention to where you feel the sensation of your breath the most. This can be in your nose, chest, stomach, wherever you feel it the strongest. You don't need to breathe in any particular way, but listen to where your body cultivates energy and oxygen, life and strength, love and compassion.

Repeat this for another couple of minutes. If at any point you notice your mind start to wander, simply note it as either "thinking" or "feeling" and return to that natural rhythm of your breath. Okay wonderful. With the last minute of this practice, think about your intention for how you want to show up in this space. What is it you want to get out of this present moment for yourself and with the others around you? With that in mind, take a deep breath into your heart and a deep breath out and let go of any lingering thoughts and feelings.
Slowly, begin to open your eyes, and before you start moving around, notice how you feel right now.

Appendix D

Grounding and Mindfulness Script 2

- **Get seated** in a comfortable position with arms by your sides, on your legs, or in your lap
- **Deep breaths** starting with the eyes softly open, leading them through 3-5 cycles of intake through nostrils and outbreath through the mouth
    - o On the 3rd outbreath, closing your eyes, letting them do one more deep inhalation and exhalation, and then instructing them to let their breathing return to its natural rhythm
- **Intentional awareness** of the space around them. Notice the sounds of area around them, maybe soft footsteps passing by or conversations out in the courtyard. Then draw their attention to visualizing the creative zone room, and certain objects they can recall seeing before closing their eyes
    - o As you breathe in your natural rhythm, start to pay attention to where in your body you most feel your breath
        - ▪ Is it in expanding and contracting of your stomach? The rising and falling of your chest? Maybe it's in the coolness of your in-breath and the warm sensation of the out-breath
- **Noting thoughts** as they arise as simply: thinking or feeling? Acknowledge the thought and draw your attention back to the inbreath and outbreath and where in your body the sensation is strongest. If it helps, count to 10, with the inbreath as 1 count and the outbreath as 2, and starting over from there. You can also think of your breath as a wave, with the inbreath feeling like the softly crashing against the shore and the outbreath gently rolling back out to sea
    - o This is your anchor. If at any point you feel your thoughts start to creep back into the front of your mind, simply note it and bring your attention back to the breath
- **Scanning your body**, starting for the very tips of your toes. Feel the pads and soles of your feet touching against the bottom of your shoes...Working all the way up through the spine and into your face. Feel that warm, radiant energy traveling through your face and into the top of your skull. Let that warmth sit at the top of your head and notice now with your next inhalation the energy your entire body now has within you. Feel the interconnectedness of the entire body and radiate that energy out to the rest of your peers. Send this positive energy out to all those around you and let this serve you for the remainder of your day.
- If at any point you feel yourself wandering from the present moment, remember that you can always bring yourself back with an intentional inbreath and outbreath.
- When you open your eyes, notice how you feel before you switch gears into the next activity.

Appendix E

Student Employee Engagement Assessment – Session 1

Q1

What group were you in?

○ Group A

○ Group B

○ ⊘ Not applicable

Q2

During the team learning seminar, about how often have you done the following

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never	⊘ Not applicable
Volunteered to speak or voice opinion	○	○	○	○	○
Asked questions	○	○	○	○	○
Take notes	○	○	○	○	○
Thought about how the content impacts your professional development	○	○	○	○	○
Made connections to your current work and career interests	○	○	○	○	○

Q3

During the team learning seminar, how much did you do the following?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Never
Lost focus	○	○	○	○	○
Checked your phone	○	○	○	○	○
Got distracted	○	○	○	○	○
Forgot what the presenter was talking about	○	○	○	○	○
Have off-topic side conversations	○	○	○	○	○

☐ Q4

To what extent do the following apply to you?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Not at all	🚫 Not applicable
You can describe the knowledge and information presented during this seminar as it relates to your current and professional development	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your supervisors have provided support and assistance within your role and your career interests	○	○	○	○	○	○
What you are learning during these seminars is relevant to your career interests	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your experience during this seminar is relevant to your career plans	○	○	○	○	○	○
Identify key information from the presentation	○	○	○	○	○	○

☐ Q5

How much confidence do you have in your ability to do the following?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Not at all	🚫 Not applicable
Demonstrate effective work habits	○	○	○	○	○	○
Communicate what you have learned, developed, or improved to professional staff or team members	○	○	○	○	○	○
Effectively communicate with other team members	○	○	○	○	○	○
Adapt what you have learned and use it as a transferable skill	○	○	○	○	○	○
Address challenges or issues faced at work and adapt or overcome them	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix F

Student Employee Engagement Assessment – Session 2

What were your initial reactions to this activity (difficult, relaxing, helpful, anxiety provoking)?

Describe how you felt after having done the guided mindfulness practice:

During the team learning seminar, about how often have you done the following

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never	⊘ Not applicable
Volunteered to speak or voice opinion	○	○	○	○	○
Asked questions	○	○	○	○	○
Take notes	○	○	○	○	○
Thought about how the content impacts your professional development	○	○	○	○	○
Made connections to your current work and career interests	○	○	○	○	○

Did you find it easier to redirect your thoughts as time went on?

During the team learning seminar, how much did you do the following?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Never
Lost focus	○	○	○	○	○
Checked your phone	○	○	○	○	○
Got distracted	○	○	○	○	○
Forgot what the presenter was talking about	○	○	○	○	○
Have off-topic side conversations	○	○	○	○	○

To what extent do the following apply to you?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Not at all	⊘ Not applicable
You can describe the knowledge and information presented during this seminar as it relates to your current and professional development	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your supervisors have provided support and assistance within your role and your career interests	○	○	○	○	○	○
What you are learning during these seminars is relevant to your career interests	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your experience during this seminar is relevant to your career plans	○	○	○	○	○	○
Identify key information from the presentation	○	○	○	○	○	○

How did the mindfulness activity impact your mood?

Appendix G

Student Employee Engagement Assessment – Session 3

Describe how you felt coming into this team meeting:

Describe how you felt after having done the guided mindfulness practice:

During the team learning seminar, about how often have you done the following

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never	⊘ Not applicable
Volunteered to speak or voice opinion	○	○	○	○	○
Asked questions	○	○	○	○	○
Take notes	○	○	○	○	○
Thought about how the content impacts your professional development	○	○	○	○	○
Made connections to your current work and career interests	○	○	○	○	○

To what extent do the following apply to you?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Not at all	⊘ Not applicable
You can describe the knowledge and information presented during this seminar as it relates to your current and professional development	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your supervisors have provided support and assistance within your role and your career interests	○	○	○	○	○	○
What you are learning during these seminars is relevant to your career interests	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your experience during this seminar is relevant to your career plans	○	○	○	○	○	○
Identify key information from the presentation	○	○	○	○	○	○

How did the mindfulness practice impact your mood?

After having completed a series of guided meditations, would you continue to do this on your own if you had the proper resources?

○ Yes

○ No