

Stanford Academic Courses Related to Contemplative Practices

Partial list of courses in the Stanford Bulletin Explore Courses.

Please write us at contemplation@stanford.edu if you know of a course to add to this list.

Three or Four Unit Classes

CHPR 234: Applying Contemplative Practices

Knowledge and skills for applying contemplative practices to promote individual and community health and well-being in a variety of settings (e.g., clinics, hospitals, non-profit and for-profit organizations, schools, government agencies, secular and spiritual communities, etc.) is the focus of this course. In-depth exploration is provided through: 1) scholarly articles on contemplative neuroscience, biopsychosocial research, theoretical models, and interventions, and 2) experiential learning in which students are guided in doing diverse contemplative practices, including silence, centering, meditation, labyrinth walking, yoga, qigong, self-compassion, deep listening, storytelling, journaling, lectio divina, prayer, ritual, and compassionate action. Multi-modal learning activities include videos, field experiences, guest speakers, ancient and modern texts, class discussions, and personal reflections. In-depth understanding of contemplative practices is developed through consideration of contemplative practices with respect to behavioral science, ethics, social justice, inclusion and diversity, qualitative and quantitative research, motivational interviewing, communication, design thinking and relationship-based care, including deep listening, open-minded observation, empathic need-finding, pattern recognition, and creative confidence. The course culminates with students' presentations of their original design for a research-based health and well-being program or policy incorporating contemplative practices.

Terms: Aut | Units: 3 This course is open to undergraduate and graduate students.

PSYC 233: Mindfulness: An Awareness-Based Stress Reduction Program in Medicine

An experiential program in which the participants learn the techniques of mindfulness meditation and its application in the management of stress and in healthcare. Modeled after the MBSR, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, started by Jon Kabat-Zinn at UMASS Medical Center. Designed to work with the mind/body relationship to stress and chronic illness teaching open sensitive awareness without judgement of mental or physical reactivity. Requirement for the course is the daily practice of mindfulness meditation, attendance at weekly class meetings and the daylong retreat, home reading, and a final paper covering the student's observations.

Terms: Aut, Win, Spr, Sum | Units: 3

LIFE 101: Tools for a Meaningful Life

Explores the foundational skills for a meaningful life. Features lectures by faculty from across the university and labs for experiential practice. Draws on research and practices from fields related to psychology, philosophy, literature, and neuroscience, as well as wisdom traditions from around the world. Focuses on developing human capacities necessary for a meaningful life including; attention, courage, devotion, resilience, imagination, and gratitude. Exposure to these capacities influences personal growth and its development in communities.

Terms: Win, Spr | Units: 3 | UG Reqs: WAY-CE

LIFE 102: Body Mapping: Embracing the Embodied Experiences of Your Life

Utilize an anthropological lens to combine traditional analytic research with experiential contemplative practice to strengthen awareness of the body and embodied experiences. Explore cultural norms around the body as influenced by racial stereotypes, gender hierarchies, and political/economic/religious history. Investigate and express one's own body narrative through written, verbal, and creative methodologies.

Terms: Win | Units: 3 | UG Reqs: WAY-CE

LIFE 125: The Stillness of the Dunes

An advanced writing course in nonfiction craft, drawing, and contemplative practice. a significant portion of each class meeting will focus on the development and sharpening of writing craft, especially of the essay, in a hybrid form both scholarly and personal. We will also explore writing as meditative practice, through examples and through short exercises. We will deepen our cultural understanding of the desert and its impact, through art, literature, philosophy, film, and contemplative practice, and the course will build toward a four-day camping trip to the dunes of Death Valley, six weeks into the quarter.

Terms: Win | Units: 3 | UG Reqs: WAY-CE

MED 51B: Compassionate Presence at the Bedside: The Healer's Art

Students in this class must have already completed [MED51Q](#). This quarter is a skill-based practicum. The skills component of this course is focused on communication and presence at the patient's bedside. Students will learn the theoretical aspects of respectful communication and cultural competence. They will then participate in a variety of immersive simulation activities including role-play, video enacting, class presentations, reflective exercises to understand the nuances of empathetic communication. The focus of the second quarter is to practice the art of communication honestly and compassionately with patients, learning empathy and cultivating the skill of being present at the bedside of a patient. Students will be assigned a panel of seriously ill patients and they do mentored house calls and provide support to patients and families as a volunteer. The idea here is that the knowledge and skills acquired in the first quarter will be utilized in real-life settings to practice [com more »](#)
Terms: Win | Units: 3 | Repeatable for credit

MED 51Q: Cultivate a Compassionate Presence: An Aging and End-of-Life Care Practicum

This is a Community Engaged Learning Course for undergraduate students. This course is designed to prepare students to critically examine values, attitudes, and contexts that govern perspectives toward and engagement of patients within the context of aging and end of life. The course prepares students to responsibly and reflectively interact with aging and seriously ill patients in a mentored setting. Using a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual-cultural framework, students learn about the history, evolution, principles and practice of geriatrics and palliative care. Students will be exposed to the challenges faced by patients from diverse backgrounds and their caregivers. The class has a strong practicum aspect by which students will be trained to cultivate a compassionate and healing presence at the bedside of the patient. After completing formal volunteer training, each student will be assigned a small panel of patients. Students will work with an inter-disciplinary team, conduct regular hous [more >](#)
Terms: Spr | Units: 4

RELIGST 11N: The Meaning of Life: Philosophical, Aesthetic, and Religious Perspectives

What is involved in making personal/existential sense of one's own life? We study artworks and texts by Manet, T.S. Eliot, Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, as well as Ingmar Bergman's classic film, "The Seventh Seal."

Terms: Win | Units: 3 | UG Reqs: GER:DB-Hum

RELIGST 162X: Spirituality and Nonviolent Urban and Social Transformation (CSRE 162A, URBANST 126)

A life of engagement in social transformation is often built on a foundation of spiritual and religious commitments. Case studies of nonviolent social change agents including Rosa Parks in the civil rights movement, César Chávez in the labor movement, and William Sloane Coffin in the peace movement; the religious and spiritual underpinnings of their commitments. Theory and principles of nonviolence. Films and readings. Service learning component includes placements in organizations engaged in social transformation. Service Learning Course (certified by Haas Center).

Terms: Win | Units: 3 | UG Reqs: GER:DB-Hum, WAY-ED, WAY-SI

RELIGST 12N: Perspectives on the Good Life

The question is how to approach and evaluate different perspectives on the good life, especially when those perspectives are beautifully, and elusively, presented to us as texts. We will consider both classic and modern writers, from the West and from China; some are explicitly religious, some explicitly secular; some literary, some philosophical. Most of the class will revolve around our talk with each other, interpreting and questioning relatively short texts. The works we will read - by Dante, Dickenson, Zhuangzi, Shklar, and others - are not intended to be representative of traditions, of eras, or of disciplines. They do, however, present a range of viewpoint and of style that will help frame and re-frame our views on the good life. They will illustrate and question the role that great texts can play in a modern 'art of living.' Perhaps most important, they will develop and reward the skills of careful reading, attentive listening, and thoughtful discussion. (Note: preparation and participation in discussion are the primary course requirement. Enrollment at 3 units requires a short final paper; a more substantial paper is required for the 4-unit option.)

Terms: Spr | Units: 3-4 | UG Reqs: GER:DB-Hum

RELIGST 53: Exploring Jewish Spirituality (JEWISHST 53)

It was once accepted as fact that Judaism is, at its core, a rational religion devoid of any authentic mystical tradition. But the past century of scholarship has reversed this claim, demonstrating that the spiritual life has been integral to Judaism's vital heart since ancient times. This yearning for a direct immediate experience of God's Presence, a longing to grasp the mysteries of the human soul and know the inner dynamics of the Divine realm, has taken on many different forms across the centuries. This course will introduce students to the major texts--from theological treatises to poems and incantations--and core ideas of Jewish mysticism and spirituality, tracking their development from the Hebrew Bible to the dawn of modernity. Close attention will be paid to the historical

context of these sources, and we will also engage with broader methodological approaches--from phenomenology to philology--regarding the academic study of religion and the comparative consideration of mysti [more »](#)
Terms: Win | Units: 4 | UG Reqs: WAY-A-II

RELIGST 50: Exploring Buddhism

A comprehensive historical survey of the Buddhist tradition, from its beginnings to the 21st century, covering principal teachings and practices, institutional and social forms, and artistic and iconographical expressions. (Formerly RELIGST 14.)

Terms: Spr | Units: 4 | UG Reqs: GER:DB-Hum, GER:EC-GlobalCom, WAY-ED

RELIGST 116: Buddhist Philosophy

What do Buddhists mean when they argue that there is "no self?" What about their claim that everything is "empty?" Is their theory of karma a type of "fatalism" (that everything is just a matter of predetermined fate)? Does Buddhism really teach that we are all connected with one another? This course aims to answer these questions, and many others related to Buddhist philosophy. We will begin by exploring the central philosophical arguments attributed to the historical Buddha, and study the major philosophical traditions of Buddhism and the debates between them over the issues of metaphysics (what is really real?), ethics (what should we do?), and epistemology (what and how do we know?). We will also learn about the problems and significance of the modern interpretations of Buddhist philosophy. Through these discussions, we will attempt to critically appreciate both the universality and the particularity of the Buddhist ways of thinking.

Terms: Spr | Units: 4 | UG Reqs: GER:DB-Hum, WAY-A-II

RELIGST 55: Exploring Zen Buddhism

This course is an introduction to Chan/Zen Buddhism. We will study the historical and doctrinal development of this tradition in China and Japan and examine various facets of Zen, such as the philosophy, practices, rituals, culture, and institution. For this aim, we will read and discuss classical Zen texts in translation and important secondary literature. This class will further feature a visit of a Zen teacher, who will give an introduction to sitting meditation.

Terms: Win | Units: 4 | UG Reqs: WAY-A-II, WAY-ED

TAPS 103: Beginning Improvising

The improvisational theater techniques that teach spontaneity, cooperation, team building, and rapid problem solving, emphasizing common sense, attention to reality, and helping your partner. Based on TheatreSports by Keith Johnstone. Readings, papers, and attendance at performances of improvisational theater. Limited enrollment. Improv, Improvisation, creativity and creative expression. All who sign up are placed on a waitlist. Official enrollment will be determined after the first day of class. Attendance at the first class session is mandatory to be considered for enrollment in the course.

Terms: Aut, Win, Spr | Units: 3 | UG Reqs: WAY-CE

Five Unit Classes

RELIGST 217: The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Buddhism

This seminar explores the influence of the Lotus Sutra, one of the most important Mahayana scriptures, in Japan. We will study how different Japanese Buddhist schools have interpreted this sutra and analyze a wide range of religious practices, art works, and literature associated with this text. All readings will be in English. Prerequisites: Solid foundation in either Buddhist studies or East Asian Studies. You must have taken at least one other course in Buddhist Studies. NOTE: Undergraduates must enroll for 5 units; graduate students can enroll for 3-5 units.

Terms: Aut | Units: 5 | UG Reqs: WAY-A-II

RELIGST 256: Readings in Buddhist Tantra: Wheel of Time (RELIGST 356)

The emergence of tantric scriptures in medieval India marked a major turning point in the development of religious thought and practice throughout Asia. These scriptures introduced myths, rituals, contemplative techniques, and artistic expressions that transformed the religious traditions of India; from Hinduism to Jainism and Buddhism. Tantric forms of worship subsequently shaped the religious traditions of Southeast Asia, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, and everywhere else Indian religions spread. This seminar examines the history of Buddhist tantra through English translation of one of the most popular collections of tantric literature in the history of Buddhism: the Wheel of Time. The Wheel of Time blends models of the cosmos, time, embodiment, and aesthetics with rich contemplative and ritual techniques. Since its origin, the Wheel of Time and its associated body of texts

and practices has become immensely popular throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world. The influence of the Wheel of Time continues to this day, as the current Dalai Lama frequently offers the Wheel of Time initiation as a blessing for world peace, and scholars and practitioners continue to study its literature and practice its contemplative techniques. Undergraduates are expected to have at least one prior course in Buddhism or the consent of the instructor. Undergraduates register for 256 for 5 units. Graduate students register for 356 for 3-5 units.

Terms: Spr | **Units:** 5 | **Repeatable for credit**

CSRE 144: Transforming Self and Systems: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation, Gender, Sexuality, and Class (ASNAMST 144, FEMGEN 144X)

Exploration of crossing borders within ourselves, and between us and them, based on a belief that understanding the self leads to understanding others. How personal identity struggles have meaning beyond the individual, how self-healing can lead to community healing, how the personal is political, and how artistic self-expression based in self-understanding can address social issues. The tensions of victimization and agency, contemplation and action, humanities and science, embracing knowledge that comes from the heart as well as the mind. Studies are founded in synergistic consciousness as movement toward meaning, balance, connectedness, and wholeness. Engaging these questions through group process, journaling, reading, drama, creative writing, and storytelling. Study is academic and self-reflective, with an emphasis on developing and presenting creative works in various media that express identity development across borders.

Terms: Aut, Win | **Units:** 5 | **UG Reqs:** WAY-CE, WAY-ED

RELIGST 232: Buddhist Meditation: Ancient and Modern (RELIGST 332)

An exploration of the theory and practice of Buddhist meditation from the time of the Buddha to the modern mindfulness boom, with attention to the wide range of techniques developed and their diverse interpretation.

Terms: Win | **Units:** 5 | **UG Reqs:** WAY-A-II

One or Two Unit Classes

OUTDOOR 9: Travel as a Sacred Journey Towards Presence, Practice, and Purpose

Engage travel and pilgrimage as intentional contemplative practice for exploring one's life purpose. Experientially investigate, both individually and collectively, outer journeying as a support for inner reflection on meaning making and values creation. While immersed in environments ranging from nature settings to retreat communities learn about, contemplate, and practice a range of methods, informed by multiple spiritual and philosophical traditions, meant to enhance insight and human flourishing. All backgrounds and identities welcome.

Terms: Win, Spr | **Units:** 1-2

WELLNESS 123: Living on Purpose

Explore the art and science of purpose-finding as it relates to living a more flourishing life at Stanford and beyond. Investigate the contemplative, psychological, social, and communal factors that deepen meaning-making, support authenticity, and encourage living more purposefully. Drawing from disciplines as diverse as art, storytelling, design, and positive psychology, create and utilize tools that promote wellbeing. Highly interactive course employs creative expression, group and individual activities, discussions, lectures, and mini-field trips to reflect on fundamental human questions in pragmatic ways.

Terms: Win, Spr | **Units:** 1-2

WELLNESS 130: Meditation

Introduces diverse forms of meditation practice in both theory (contemplative neuroscience, phenomenological traditions) and practice. Practices in guided imagery, compassion, loving kindness, positive emotion, mindfulness and mantra meditation will be offered to enhance stress management and well-being. While meditation practices emerge from religious traditions, all practice and instruction will be secular.

Terms: Aut, Win, Spr, Sum | **Units:** 1

WELLNESS 131: Compassion Meditation: Strengthening the Heart

Investigate evidence-based models of compassion meditation and cultivation based on Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) program and following the Stanford Compassion Training Protocol (CPT). Examine strategies to develop self-compassion, experience genuine happiness, reduce stress and negative thoughts, resolve differences with difficult others, and take compassionate action that makes a difference in the world. Courses mixes direct instruction, meditation, and group discussion on current research and its real-world application.

Terms: Win | Units: 1

WELLNESS 132: Breathwork for Wellbeing

Discover the power of the breath as a gateway to reach a meditative state of mind. Combine meditative practice with activities that inspire connection and purpose through community building and mindful leadership. Learn through breathwork, meditation, lecture, class discussion, experiential learning, and yoga. Cornerstone of the course is evidence-based SKY Meditation technique that utilizes the breath to quiet the mind, supporting a deep experience of meditation and a practical approach to happiness. Course requirements include attendance at a mini-retreat (see "notes" section).

Terms: Win | Units: 1

WELLNESS 133: Meditation Retreat: Weekend Campus Intensive

Introduces diverse forms of meditation practice in both theory (contemplative neuroscience, phenomenological traditions) and practice. Selected practices in focused attention, mindfulness, guided imagery, compassion, loving kindness, positive emotion, and/or mantra meditation will be offered to enhance focused attention, insight, stress management, and well-being. Takes place in a weekend immersion format (on campus), which allows more immersive exploration of the topic space. While meditation practices emerge from religious traditions, all practice and instruction will be secular.

Terms: Aut, Win, Spr, Sum | Units: 1

WELLNESS 134: Forgiveness Practice and Meditation

Examines forgiveness from a variety of perspectives with an emphasis on its value for physical and mental well-being. Presents forgiveness both as a useful response to interpersonal hurt and a teachable skill, backed by scientific research from preventative medicine and psychology. Explores the idea that forgiveness and grievance are both narrative responses to painful experience, but differ in their adaptability and utility. Spiritual and contemplative approaches to forgiveness will be considered, but the methods are secular and research-tested.

Terms: Aut, Win, Spr, Sum | Units: 1

WELLNESS 135: Mindful Self-Compassion, Strength, and Courage

Investigate how harsh self-criticism adversely impacts well-being, strength, and performance. In contrast, explore how mindful self-compassion (MSC) enhances emotional well-being, increases resilience and strength in coping with life challenges, and supports positive personal relationships. Using the scientifically validated MSC method (Neff & Germer), learn how to better pursue goals and commitments (academic, personal/social development, community service, and/or activism) with greater inner-peace, confidence, and courage.

Terms: Spr | Units: 1

WELLNESS 138: Mindfulness and Stress Management

Effectively manage stress through mindfulness meditation strategies (sitting and movement-based) that positively impact the brain-body system to enhance clarity, focus, and energy. Examine tools for assessing perceived stress and mindfulness, current findings in the science of stress management and meditation, and cognitive-behavioral theories and interventions demonstrated to reduce stress and enhance well-being. Course is based on the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) curriculum.

Terms: Aut, Sum | Units: 1

WELLNESS 152: Mindfulness and Food

Explore the psychological foundations of a positive relationship with food to enhance mind-body health and optimize performance. Focuses on nutritional science and research-based mindfulness practices shown to enhance physical and psychological well-being. Covers topics ranging from inner and outer wisdom, self-assessment of hunger and satiety, critical thinking about food related media messages, stress, and transitions as they influence eating habits. Emphasizes translating theory and research into lifestyle practices.

Terms: Spr | Units: 1

WELLNESS 163: Meditation and Technology

Challenge the traditional definition of meditation while examining and using the latest meditation technologies that amplify attention and awareness. Learn how these technologies can be integrated into existing practices or help support new meditators. Explore the range of tools, such as brain, heart, and breath sensing/feedback devices, and find what works best in one's own practice. Move past traditional boundaries of meditation and experiment with new ways that wearables, apps, and other tech can support meditation practice both in formal sitting practice and day-to-day living in a hyper-connected world.

Terms: Aut | Units: 1

OSPKYOTO 19: Zazen: A Practicum in Zen Meditation

Zen teaching through practice and experience. Condensed practicum course where students receive zazen training and experience monastic life in Myoshinji, the largest Zen complex in Japan, under the guidance of Rev. Daiko Matsuyama, Deputy Head Priest of Taizo-in temple. Over one week, regular early morning zazen training sessions on site in Taizo-in temple plus visit to World Cultural Heritage site Ryoanji with a private viewing and workshop. Other aspects of monastic life such as temple cleaning, and learning how to rake and care for the dry gardens at Taizo-in. Course culminates in an overnight zazen training session in Myoshinji's magnificent Hatto Dharma Hall. Enrollment limited.

Terms: Aut | Units: 1

Notes: For students participating in the Bing Overseas Studies Program in Kyoto only.

CLASSICS 60: Reading Aristotle's Ethics: Happiness and the Virtues of Character (SLE 60)

How should I live? What should I do to live a happy life? And what does happiness have to do with ethics? What might the best human life look like? What kind of friendships contribute to happiness--and to justice? In the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle offers us a vision of human flourishing that has nurtured thinkers, secular and religious, for thousands of years and continues to shape political and ethical thinking. In this study group we read and reflect upon the first few books of the Ethics, on happiness and the virtues of character, slowly and carefully. Each week you will be expected to read a short, but dense, section of the Ethics, and to share responsibility for asking questions.

Terms: Win | Units: 1