

Faculty and staff incorporate meditative practices into the classroom

CHAKRA GUIDE

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Muladhara

The Root chakra is about being physically there and feeling at home in situations. If it is open, you feel grounded, stable and secure.



Swadhisthana

The Sacral chakra is about feeling and sexuality. When it is open, your feelings flow freely, and are expressed without you being over-emotional.



Sahasrara

The Crown chakra is about wisdom and being one with the world. When this chakra is open, you are unprejudiced and quite aware of the world and yourself.



Anja

The Third Eye chakra is about insight and visualization. When it is open, you have a good intuition. You may tend to fantasize.



Thymus

The Heart chakra is about love, kindness and affection. When it is open, you are compassionate and friendly, and you work at harmonious relationships.



VISHUDDHA

The Throat chakra is about self-expression and talking. When it is open, you have no problems expressing yourself, and you might be doing so as an artist.

Inquiring about Inquiry ARC

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Rick Chess and John Wood responded to an unspoken need when they organized a group meditation and discussion for UNC Asheville faculty and staff six years ago. When 20 people arrived, they say they knew they had tapped into a veritable hunger for silence, stillness and an openness to possibility.

The learning circle continues to meet regularly, sitting for 10 minutes, followed by discussion. The faculty and staff who attend say they incorporate a variety of meditative practices into the classroom.

"It's an enterprise about being human, a scholar, awake and cultivating openness," says Wood, professor of sociology and anthropology. "Sometimes in class I'll just say, 'Let's just stop, breathe and get in touch with our bodies, the soles of our feet,' and I don't talk about it as meditation. It's just to bring us back to the present."

Chess, professor of honors arts and sciences and director for the center of Jewish studies, suggests meditative practices provide students the opportunity to let go of the internal judgment and reactivity that may prevent one from seeing the world from another perspective.

"We found that these meditative practices help us watch our minds objectively and see when judgment is triggered. We can see it, watch it and let it go long enough to listen on another's terms," says Chess. "It's developing another way to become self-aware of the process of how we come to know things and attaining intellectual humility, such as the recognition that the way I see the world is not the whole world."

UNCA's Inquiry ARC Program adopted these meditative practices as

part of the reflection aspect of its critical thinking emphasis. Lorena Russell, director of the UNCA Inquiry ARC program and associate professor of literature and language, says mediation in the classroom improves learning and teaching skills.

"It may seem odd to think of meditation with critical thinking," Russell says. "Why would you want to empty your mind and create a void when critical thinking should be about filling it with ideas? But I've found the mind actually functions a lot better if I can just take some time to sit quietly and breathe."

Russell perceives meditation similar to refreshing a computer. She says the practice alleviates students' stress of rushing from class to class and keeping up with the workload. Asking them to stop, she says, allows them a few minutes of calm, which recharges their minds.

Ameena Batada, assistant professor in the health and wellness department, speaks not just to the intellectual benefits of meditation, but to the physiological benefits as well.

"When we are constantly stressed from school, work, home or our car is breaking down and we are having trouble getting to places – whatever it is, we aren't allowing our bodies to rest," Batada says. "Our bodies are weathering from the stress and then physiologically we have heightened cortisol. This creates midsection adipose, which results in what is killing our society: heart disease."

Batada says meditation may counteract these physical stress responses, and she integrates many different forms of meditation in the classroom, such as taking her class to the lookout observatory where she asks her students to write what they hear from moment to moment.

"There are different practices such as mindfulness meditation, or loving kindness meditation," Batada says. "Sometimes I'll just tell my



Photo by Matt McGregor - Asst. A&F Editor

Rick Chess says he organized a meditation group for faculty and staff at UNC Asheville.

class we are going to sit for five minutes at the beginning of every class because I want them to develop attention skills."

Chess emphasizes strengthening of focus as a product of meditation, comparing it to a mental version of lifting

weights in the gym.

"Instead of working out your muscles you are working out your brain," Chess says. "At first you can see how good you are at sustaining attention, then respond to that with meditation. If one

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