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What was the focus of your Faculty Development grant project?

The Mindfulness Project: Integrating Mindful Practice into 21st Century: Graduate Education Programs at Lincoln University

This Mindfulness Project is intended to enhance the Lincoln University Graduate Education program offerings in a way that will strongly impact teacher candidates overall well-being by raising awareness of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. More importantly, candidates will become competent and empowered to reach out and share this precious knowledge as mindful educators to the many students they will encounter in their current and subsequent careers in the classrooms of tomorrow. There is a growing body of research that regular meditation (mindfulness) can have a profound effect on brain functions and there is a sweeping movement to integrate meditation into higher education (Bush, 2006). In October of 2008, a review of the empirical research by Shapira, Brown and, Astin, revealed that meditation complements and enhances educational goals by helping to develop traditionally valued academic skills. It also illustrated that meditation can support important development of the “whole person”. “Sustained mindfulness practice can enhance attentional and emotional self-regulation and promote flexibility, pointing toward significant potential benefits for teachers and students. (Meilkejohn, et al, 2012)

Why that project was important to you: what led you to propose it?

It was important to me to think about integrating more than content knowledge and skills to graduate teacher education students because I became aware of the challenging time many of them have while juggling their full-time jobs, families, etc. and striving to learn content to present the state exams for teacher certification. It is a way to remind them of self-care and its importance to being able to serve yourself first, then be in service to others. Holistic teaching for me is key to any learning environment. This was one way of implementing that.

Where will the project go from here?

As I moved to the main campus, I continued to focus on this idea of self-care for students, specifically mindfulness and its utility to improving academic performance and life in general. Therefore, I integrated it into my FYE class of freshman and found it even more interesting to create awareness of *breath and presence* so that there is then space created for peaceful reflection of coursework and

assignments as well as test taking.

How has this project informed your teaching?

This project is in process while I examine the data I collected in the form of student writing and reflections provided as feedback to their introduction to mindful activities. Postings of articles and videos on Moodle were made available to students as well as information on this trend that many sectors of society have adopted. Those using mindful practice include Google, Nike, Yahoo, k-12 classrooms, professional sports teams, counselors, medical professionals, etc. Students were moved to see that this idea of “being present” could help them with staying focused and performing better on tests. It really helped for them to see the popularity today and growing research to support its effectiveness.

What did you learn that has made a difference in your teaching?

Most definitely, I have been reminded to practice what I preach and use the techniques myself to be present in my teaching. Reading the literature and having open discussions that are student-lead, have allowed me to be a better facilitator and moved me to use their feedback to continue to refine and improve my planning and teaching. It also helped me integrate at least some part of this in all classes.

What is the “takeaway” for other instructors?

I believe that the “takeaway” would be for us to remember that only focusing on course content, does not make for “holistic” instruction. We teach “people” not “subjects” and it is impossible to get student “buy in” if we do not approach them as whole beings. Talking about “non-subjects” is critical to their success.

In short, mindfulness is a simple concept to introduce into any class and when you say “improves test taking, better academic performance, and a better social life”, well it just sells itself. Students got excited about it and were grateful that there was a time in class to talk about their personal concerns. It also helped to know that these mega-corporations offered mindfulness centers and services to their own employees to improve production. The videos brought it alive and sparked an ongoing dialogue on simply being “present” in all that we do.