

Fall 2016

# Teaching Mindfulness for the Self-Care and Well-Being of Student Affairs Professionals

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## Recommended Repository Citation

Burke, Monica G.; Dye, Lacretia; and Hughey, Aaron W.. (2016). Teaching Mindfulness for the Self-Care and Well-Being of Student Affairs Professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 34 (3), 93-107.

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# **TEACHING MINDFULNESS FOR THE SELF-CARE AND WELL-BEING OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS**

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The demands and expectations placed on student affairs professionals can lead to stress, burnout, a lack of work-life balance, and decreased job satisfaction. Accordingly, it could be beneficial to teach graduate students and professionals in student affairs graduate preparation program how to use self-care practices focusing on mindfulness. This mixed method study examined the perceptions of graduate students in a student affairs graduate preparation program regarding mindfulness training in increasing self-care, awareness, and coping strategies.

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**B**y virtue of student affairs professionals' roles and responsibilities, serving in a helping role is common and as Reisser (2002) noted, "...as helping professionals we feel responsible for meeting the needs of the students, those of the frayed staff, and those of the organization itself" (p. 49). In helping others, however, we can sometimes forget to help and care for ourselves. Furthermore, as with any human service profession, student affairs professionals can be inclined to enter into interactions in which they can lose track of their needs in the service of another, making it difficult to set limits when viewing themselves as the only person who can solve the problem, provide the answer, or complete the task (Manning, 2001). According to Corey and Corey (1998), "no one is immune from the cost of caring for others" (p. 321) and recommended that it is best for helping professionals, such as student affairs professionals, to understand the external realities that likely produce stress for them and their contribution to their stress by how they perceive and interpret reality.

Unfortunately, due to the nature and involvement of student affairs work as well as the demands of being a helping professional, it can be difficult for student affairs professionals to find a balance between their personal and professional life (Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005). Therefore, "finding time for family and/or friends, personal renewal, wellness, and other priorities while juggling the demands of a job that requires a 24/7 commitment is more of a goal than an achievement" (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes & Terrell, 2005, p. 137). As student affairs work becomes more complex, however, work should not become a student affairs professional's whole life (Renn, Jessup-Anger, and Doyle, 2008). Student affairs practitioners should be more mindful of their obligations to themselves (Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005). However, achieving wellness requires intentionality through choice (Myers, 1991).

### **The Case for Self-care and Well-being for Student Affairs Professionals**

Perhaps due to the changing needs of students (e.g., mental health, academic and remedial, career and developmental, and multicultural needs) or the competitive postsecondary education environment (e.g., compete with other public, private and for-profit institutions for students and faculty; compete for funding from state, federal, corporate, foundation, and other private sources; maintain or improve status in ranking and rating systems; and strategies to recruit national and international students), there are increasing demands on student affairs professionals (Burkhard, Cole, Ott & Stoflet, 2005) and accordingly, the responsibilities of student affairs professionals create a high personal demand in terms of time, talent, and energy (Carpenter, 2003). Furthermore, student affairs professionals are at times subject to conflicting demands, work long hours, are objects of public criticism, and are often not thanked for what they do, they are physically and emotionally exhausted by the end of any semester or academic year (Sandeen & Barr, 2009). As a consequence of trying to meet these demands, expectations, and circumstances, a student affairs professional can suffer the consequences of poor work-life balance, the feeling an individual has when he or she devotes more energy in one area while neglecting other areas (Chick, 2004). The constancy of demands and the integration of many roles and duties can produce uncertainty, stress, and anxiety, especially for new professionals. Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, and Morrell (2000) posited:

Demanding schedules and work overload may frequently be responsible for interpersonal and time conflicts which can reduce job satisfaction and increase stress. Thus, job dissatisfaction and stress may play a role in the level of satisfaction an administrator receives from life in general. (p. 99)

A student affairs professional who is tired, tense, or stressed out for long peri-

ods of time clearly cannot do his or her best work and "...mental and physical relaxation and rest are necessary" (Carpenter, 2003, p. 585).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of mindfulness activities on the perceived stress, mood and self-efficacy as well as mindfulness of student affairs professionals. We also explored the perceptions of mindfulness activities on student affairs professionals' mindfulness and experiences. Research questions developed for this study included a quantitative and qualitative foundation. Specifically, through the quantitative portion of the study, we examined the following questions:

1. Do mindfulness activities increase mindfulness in graduate students in a student affairs preparatory graduate program?
2. Does a change in mindfulness for the graduate students in a student affairs preparatory graduate program relate to mood, self-efficacy, and perceived stress?

Through the qualitative portion of the study, we examined the following question:

3. How do student affairs professionals experience mindfulness activities?

By understanding the manner in which graduate students in a student affairs preparatory graduate program experience stress and day-to-day functioning, possessing an awareness of their self-consciousness and how to implement self-care when needed are beneficial. Specifically, the participants in the study could develop new coping mechanisms for managing anxiety and stress, which has implications for all student affairs practitioners.

### **Self-care, Well-being, and Mindfulness**

Personal wellness, inherently, involves self-care, described as "an integral part of multiple aspects of a person's life, including health and wellness" (Collins, 2005, p. 264), which can assist an individual in coping with daily stressors. Understanding how to cope during stressful or uncertain times

as they arise and finding time for personal wellness are integral for any professional's success. Furthermore, by engaging in self-care, student affairs professionals can better assist students and the campus community and as Carpenter (2003) asserts, "The ultimate obligation of a professional is to self" (p. 585). Focusing on caring for self and taking time to be "in the present" have the potential to enhance one's attention and focus, as well as improve memory, self-understanding, and self-management skills (Baer, 2003). For the purpose of self-care and general wellness, student affairs professionals should learn to be aware of their mind and body. One way to promote mind-body awareness is to engage in mindfulness activities (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Carmody & Baer, 2008; Greeson, 2009). Preparing student affairs professionals to acquire personal and professional growth opportunities through self-care and mindfulness practices can help prevent burnout, be essential for enhancing work-life balance, and decrease attrition.

Practicing mindfulness can be used as a part of an integrative approach to wellness and self-care. Mindfulness is a process of being fully present in the moment, suspended from judgment or correction and starting with a simple awareness of one's body and thoughts (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), without attachment to a particular point of view, resulting in freedom from automatic, habitual views of the self and others (Martin, 1997). Existence in an automatic, non-mindful mode can cause an individual to refuse to acknowledge or attend to a thought, emotion, motive, or object of perception and disengage individuals from automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behavior patterns (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness can be cultivated through formal (e.g., yoga and sitting meditation) or informal practice (e.g., noticing the sounds of water and the scent of the soap during a shower). Coaching student affairs professionals to use tactics for self-care and mindfulness, such as mindful yoga, can be

advantageous to the organization and the individual, especially since mindfulness interventions are associated with a range of psychological and physical health benefits (Mehranfar, Younesi, Banihashem, 2012).

Mindfulness skills have been shown to be effective in increasing relaxation and coping skills when faced with stressful situations (McKay, Wood, & Brantley, 2007). Mindfulness practice gently counters the mind's inherent need to evaluate experiences as positive or negative. Instead, the mind begins to observe experiences with an attitude of curiosity, suspended judgment, and without worry of the future or regret of the past. Cashwell, Bentley, and Bigbee (2007) also suggested that mindfulness practice may be beneficial for enhancing an individual's capacity for attention and concentration, strengthening ability to accept the present moment, possessing a greater self-awareness and compassion, and increasing one's capacity for self-regulation.

An issue with life balance and job-related stress affects student affairs practitioners across all levels (Guthrie et al., 2005). Thus, promoting self-care through mindfulness activities can help a student affairs professional deal with the many stressors associated with student affairs work. Mental focus on the present moment and meditative practice may help increase levels of mindfulness and decrease levels of stress for student affairs professionals. It is advantageous for the student affairs professional to get appropriate exercise, pay attention to health needs, and attend to needs for recreation and renewal since students need their optimal effort (Carpenter, 2003). Personal enhancement practices, such as mindfulness activities, can facilitate the self-awareness process in order to better prepare student affairs professionals to take care of themselves.

### **Method**

A mixed method research design was used to assess how mindfulness-based activities could influence or assist graduate

students and professionals enrolled in a student affairs graduate preparation program in maintaining wellness. A mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2012). The mixed method case study design allows researchers "to represent a plurality of interests, voices, and perspectives" (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p.14). For this study, both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were employed to make meaning of the data through use of questionnaires and a follow up with a focus group. The rationale for this approach was that the quantitative data and results provide a general picture of the research problem (i.e., does mindful activities increase mindfulness and does increased mindfulness relate to mood, self-efficacy, and perceived stress?), while the qualitative data and its analysis will refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views about the experience in more depth.

The participants were identified and drawn from courses in the Student Affairs in Higher Education graduate program, at a mid-size, public four-year institution in the southern region of the United States. The 27 participants, which included full-time and part-time graduate students, were entry-level full-time student affairs professionals (30.8%) or Graduate Assistants working a minimum of 20 hours per week (69.2%). Of the participants, 20 were female and seven were male. Data were collected in the spring of 2014 and the fall of 2014. Prior to any participant solicitation, approval for this study was secured from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **The Program**

Participants of the study were asked to participate in a mindfulness program, which met six times for about 30 minutes throughout the semester. The group sessions were conducted by one of the authors who is a cer-

tified Yoga Calm Trainer and RYT- 200 adult yoga teacher and has over 15 years of experience with yoga/meditation techniques. In general, the mindfulness-based practices incorporated in the sessions included meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, mindful walking, and focusing exercises followed by reflective discussions and explorations of the core concepts introduced during the session. The sessions were adapted from the Yoga Calm (Gillen & Gillen, 2008) protocol and principles.

Yoga Calm is a unique blend of the traditional practices of mindfulness, physical activity and counseling techniques (Gillen & Gillen, 2008). Each session started with breath work as a way to bring students' attention back to their bodies and individual selves. This activity was followed by a short period of meaningful physical movements, such as mindful walks or chair yoga, and then ended with a short guided mental relaxation activity. This process was intended to develop student ability to transition and practice self-regulation, as they go from calm to active and then back to calm. The participants were also asked to participate in reflective discussions and explorations of the core concepts introduced during the session.

### **The Quantitative Component**

Participants completed survey instruments at the beginning and end of the program. The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), the General Self-Efficacy Scale, the Four Dimensional Mood Scale (FDMS) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) were used to explore the programs' impact on student affairs professionals' and graduate students' mindfulness, mood, and general self-efficacy.

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), a 15 item self-report instrument, was created to specifically capture attention and awareness in daily life (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The scale assesses mindfulness of one's internal states (e.g., emotions) and overt behavior (e.g., attention to tasks, so-

cial interactions) on a 6-point Likert scale (1= almost always to 6= almost never). The trait MAAS has been validated for use with college students and community adults (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and is deemed as a valid measure of mindfulness (MacKillop & Anderson, 2007). Based on a mean of all items, MAAS scores can range from 1 to 6 and higher scores reflect higher levels of dispositional mindfulness.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) was created to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim in mind to predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. The GSE consists of 10 items using a four-point Likert format (1=not at all me to 4=exactly true). The final composite score ranges from 10 to 40 with higher scores indicating stronger belief in self-efficacy. Studies have shown that the GSE has high reliability, stability, and construct validity (Leganger, Kraft, & Roysambu, 2000; Schwarzer, Mueller, & Greenglass, 1999).

The Four Dimensional Mood Scale (FDMS) is based on a circumplex model of dispositional mood measuring Positive Energy, Tiredness, Negative Arousal, and Relaxation. The scale consists of a 20-item adjective self-report checklist using a five-point Likert format (1=not at all to 5=extremely). Evidence of internal consistency of the scales as well as generally good concurrent and discriminant validity exists for the FDMS (Huelsenman, Furr, & Nemanick, 2003).

**Positive Energy (4 items).** People who score high on positive energy have positive affectivity and high activation. Positive affectivity is the tendency to experience positive emotional states.

**Relaxation (5 items).** People who score high on relaxation have positive affectivity and low activation, meaning that people who score high on this scale experience more passive (less energizing) positive emotions.



**Negative Arousal (6 items).** People who score high on negative arousal have a tendency toward negative affectivity and high activation. Negative affectivity is the tendency to negative emotions. Negative arousal also includes high activation, meaning that people who score high on this scale experience negative emotions that demand attention (e.g., anger, upset).

**Tiredness (5 items).** People who score high on tiredness have a tendency toward negative affectivity and low activation. Negative affectivity is the tendency to negative emotions. Tiredness also includes low activation, meaning that people who score high on this scale experience more passive (less demanding) negative emotions.

The Perceived Stress Scale-4 (PSS4) is a four item Likert format scale designed to measure the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. The higher the degree and longer the duration of self-perceived stress, indicated by a higher score (16 being the highest possible score), is considered a risk factor for physical illness or a clinical psychiatric disorder. The PSS4 has been proven to possess substantial reliability and validity and is correlated in the expected manner with a range of self-report and behavioral criteria; yet, the abridged (4-item) scale provides a less adequate approximation of perceived levels than the entire scale. However, a repeated measure of perceived stress in large samples is feasible because of the limited number of items (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983).

Responses to the MAAS, GSE, FDMS and PSS4 were used in the statistical analysis of the data. Paired t-tests and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were conducted to address the quantitative research questions. In light of the theorization of mindfulness as a feature of self-regulation, one's capacity to alter behaviors and possess flexibility and adaptability to adjust to societal and situational demands encountered on a daily basis (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), it was postulated that a higher score on the mindfulness scale will relate to perceived stress,

self-efficacy, and general mood.

### **The Qualitative Component**

In the study, participants also participated in a focus group at the mid-point of the program that allowed them to provide their perspective about mindfulness. A focus group method was used as a research tool in this study as it gives a 'voice' to the research participants by giving them opportunities to define what is relevant and important to understand about their experience and helps the researchers capture shared lived experiences (Liamputtong, 2011). This inductive approach allows research findings to emerge from the summary themes or categories inherent in the raw data, intended to aid in the understanding of meaning in complex data (Thomas, 2006). Verbatim accounts (as transcribed from tape recordings) of the focus group were coded by isolating observations, sentences or incidents in an attempt to name and categorize concepts and themes. Researchers conducted line by line coding to create the initial open codes and identify themes.

During the focus group, the participants offered their perspectives regarding their engagement in mindfulness activities as well as their self-care and wellness. By completing the focus group, it was hoped that this would provide credibility checks as well as aid clarification subsequent to the survey instrument. Additionally, at the end of the semester, participants were asked to provide overall self-reflective comments regarding mindfulness practice, self-care, and wellness.

### **Limitations**

As is the case with all research studies, there were a few limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the significance of the results obtained. First, all participants in the study were graduate students in a Student Affairs in Higher Education program at a mid-size university in a metropolitan setting which could limit the generalizability of the results and thus, applicability to other settings. Another

	Pre-test	Post-test
	M (SD)	M (SD)
I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later.	3.73 (1.25)	4.20 (1.19)
I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.	4.65 (1.54)	4.80 (1.25)
I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.	4.15 (1.28)	3.80 (1.29)
I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.	3.23 (1.72)	2.88 (1.64)
I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.	4.15 (1.46)	4.36 (1.31)
I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.	3.38 (1.49)	3.12 (1.39)
It seems I am running on automatic 'without much awareness of what I'm doing.	4.46 (1.33)	3.40 (1.19)
I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.	4.00 (1.52)	4.08 (1.18)
I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I am doing right now to get there.	4.03 (1.03)	3.96 (1.36)
I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.	3.61 (1.32)	3.48 (1.19)
I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.	3.15 (1.25)	3.00 (1.19)
I drive places on "automatic pilot" and then wonder why I went there.	4.23 (1.24)	4.24 (1.45)
I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.	2.61 (1.26)	2.88 (1.20)
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	3.42 (1.10)	3.64 (1.35)
I snack without being aware that I'm eating	4.42 (1.17)	4.48 (1.47)
Note. Scores are based on the pre-test data (n=26) and Post-test data (n= 25). Items were introduced by the following text: "Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. The accompanying 6-point scale was 1-almost always, 2-very frequently, 3-somewhat frequently, 4-somewhat infrequently, 5-very infrequently, and 6-almost never.		

er potential limitation of the study is that the independent variables are measured as subjects' perceptions, not actual behaviors. Events or transitions occurring in the participants' lives at the moment of assessment obviously impact the efficacy of the responses given, especially given the reali-

ty that self-reported data are limited by the fact that it rarely can be independently verified and can contain several potential sources of bias. Finally, a control group cohort could have offered a different perspective if the researchers wanted to see if there is a difference between groups.



## Findings

### Quantitative Findings

An examination of the mean scores of the participants' level of mindfulness, as assessed by self-report on the MAAS and as summarized in Table 1 (shown on the previous page), revealed that participants in this study had a similar level of mindfulness in the overt behavior subscale before sessions as they did after the sessions; however, for the internal state, the participants' moved toward more consciousness, attentiveness, and awareness.

**Paired t-tests.** Paired t-tests compared pre- and post-session scores on the PSS4, GSE, FDMS, and MAAS (see Table 2). Paired samples t-tests were comput-

ed to test for differences in mood for pre- and post-sessions based on the four scales (tiredness, positive energy, negative arousal, and relaxation). The *t*-value for the difference between the variables, pre-FDMS and post-FDMS (with *p* = .05 for each scale) is  $t(27) = -0.64$ ,  $p = .5285$  for the tiredness;  $t(27) = .24$ ,  $p = 0.8156$  for positive energy;  $t(27) = .94$ ,  $p = 0.3539$  for relaxation; and  $t(27) = .51$  and  $p = 0.6163$  for negative arousal. Therefore, the difference between pre-FDMS and post-FDMS was not statistically significant for each of the four scales.

Paired sample t-tests were computed to test for differences in stress for the pre- and post-sessions. The *t*-value for the difference between the variables, pre-PSS

Table 2  
Paired t-tests of Measures (PSS4, GSE, FDMS, and MAAS) Pre-session and Post-session

Scale	N	Pre-Post Session		
		M (SD)	t	p-value
PSS4 Score	27	-0.7037 (3.3029)	-1.11	0.2784
GSE Composite	27	0.4231 (3.7221)	.58	0.5674
FDMS				
Tiredness	27	-0.0944 (0.7682)	-0.64	0.5285
Positive Energy	27	0.0309 (0.6806)	0.24	0.8156
Relaxation	27	-0.1259 (0.6931)	-0.94	0.3539
Negative Arousal	27	-0.0802 (0.8222)	-0.51	0.6163
MAAS				
Internal State	25	-0.0300 (0.5720)	-0.26	0.7954
Overt Behavior	25	-0.0229 (0.5695)	-0.26	0.7954

Note: PSS4 scores range from 0=never to 4=very often. GSE scores range from 1=not at all me to 4=exactly true. FDMS scores range from 1=not at all to 5=extremely. MAAS scores range from 1=almost always to 6=almost never.  
 $p < .05$

and post-PSS, is  $t(26) = -1.11, p = .2784$  (at 0.05 alpha level). Therefore, the difference between the pre-PSS and post-PSS is not statistically significant. Paired sample t-tests were also computed to test for differences in pre- and post-session efficacy scores. The t-value for the difference between the variables, pre-session GSE and post-session GSE, (at  $p = .05$ ) is  $t(25) = .58, p = .5674$ . Therefore, the difference between the pre-PSS and post-PSS scores is not statistically significant.

Finally, paired sample t-tests were computed to test for differences in mindfulness scores for pre- and post-sessions on two scales— internal state and overt behavior. The t-value for the difference between the variables pre-MAAS (internal state) and post-MAAS (internal state) is  $t(24) = -0.20, p = .8426$  (at 0.05). Therefore, the difference between the pre-MAAS and post-MAAS (internal state) is not statistically significant. Moreover, the t-value for the difference between the variables pre-MAAS (overt behavior) and post-MAAS (overt behavior) is  $t(24) = -0.26, p = .7954$  (at 0.05). Therefore, the difference between the pre-MAAS and post-MAAS (overt behavior) is not statistically significant.

**Correlations.** The strength and direction of the inter-relations between mindfulness and efficacy, mood, and stress were examined, which included an analysis of MAAS scores based on the subsets of internal states and overt behavior and the composite scores of the GSE; the subscales scores of the FDMS; and sum score of the PSS4. In addition, codifying the data, “a process that permits data to be “segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation” (Grbich, 2007, p. 21), was used to organize textual data derived from the focus groups. These data are summarized in Tables 3 and 4.

Correlations were computed among the post-session for each of the four mood scales and mindfulness score (overt behavior and internal state). There was a sig-

nificant correlation between the two variables of mindfulness (overt behavior) and tiredness (post-session),  $r(25) = 0.46462, p = 0.0193$ , as well as mindfulness (internal states) and tiredness (post-session),  $r(25) = -0.49930, p = 0.0111$ . In addition, there was a significant correlation between the two variables of mindfulness (overt behavior) and relaxation (post-session),  $r(25) = 0.57235, p = 0.0028$ , as well as mindfulness (internal states) and relaxation (post-session),  $r(25) = 0.57235, p = 0.0025$ . There is also a correlation between mindfulness (overt behavior) and negative arousal,  $r(25) = 0.46427, p = 0.0194$ . The means between the pre-session and post-session assessment showed that the participants' disposition over the previous six months, slightly increased for tiredness, relaxation, and negative arousal and slightly decreased for physical energy (see Table 3).

Correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between post-session mindfulness and post-session PSE scores. The variables of mindfulness (overt behavior and internal state) and stress (post session) were not correlated. Further, there was an increase in the means between the pre-session assessment ( $M = 6.0740741; SD = 2.2858415$ ) and post-session assessment ( $M = 6.7777778; SD = 3.4566918$ ). Correlational analysis was also computed to assess the relationship between post-session mindfulness (overt behavior and internal state) and post-session efficacy (GSE). The analysis showed there was a significant correlation between the variables mindfulness (overt behavior) and post-session GSE,  $r = 0.58152, p = 0.002$ . The analysis also showed there was a significant correlation between the variables mindfulness (internal state) and post-session GSE,  $r = 0.60608, p = 0.0013$  (see Table 4). Generally, the efficacy scores remained the same for each of the respondent from pre-session ( $M = 32.23077$ ) to post-session ( $M = 31.61538$ ).

As noted, there was a significant relationship found between MAAS (overt behavior and internal state) and efficacy, the

Table 3  
Pre and Post Means and Standard Deviation of Measures (PSS4, GSE, FDMS, and MAAS)

	Pre-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Post-test
Variable	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
PSS4 Score	27	6.0740741 (2.2858415)	27	6.7777778 (3.4566918)
GSE Composite	27	32.1481481 (3.3131870)	26	31.8076923 (3.9599922)
FDMS				
Tiredness	27	3.1185185 (.8792641)	27	3.2129630 (0.8250399)
Positive Energy	27	3.361111 (.5430210)	27	3.3302469 (0.6846460)
Relaxation	27	2.8592593 (.6320049)	27	2.9851852 (0.8207425)
Negative Arousal	27	2.4444444 (.7424837)	27	2.5246914 (0.8239260)
MAAS				
Internal State	26	3.6442308 (.7613248)	25	3.6500000 (0.7006322)
Overt Behavior	26	3.8736264 (.8965484)	25	3.8742857 (0.7006322)

Note: PSS4 scores range from 0=never to 4=very often. GSE scores range from 1=not at all me to 4=exactly true. FDMS scores range from 1=not at all to 5=extremely. MAAS scores range from 1=almost always to 6=almost never.

dispositions of tiredness (tends toward negative affectivity and low motivation) and relaxation (tends toward positive affectivity and low motivation). A significant relationship was also found between mindfulness (overt behavior) and negative arousal (tends toward negative affectivity and high activity).

### Qualitative Findings

Engaging directly with a specific population is an effective qualitative strategy to receive the most comprehensive understanding of the explored issue, allowing specific themes to emerge for final recommendations (Creswell, 2007). Through the use of focus groups and self-reflective comments, the researchers were able to gain

a richer perspective from the participants. Central emergent themes derived from the focus group discussion suggest that students experienced an increased awareness of body and the need for relaxation; recognized and appreciated the benefits of mindfulness practice; and intended to continue integrating mindfulness practice into daily functioning as a coping mechanism.

**Increased awareness.** The participants reported greater awareness of their bodies and increased awareness to their body's needs, movement, and position. This awareness was seen in a student's comment about her awareness after participating in the mindfulness activities for about two months:

I notice myself more. Like, a couple of

Table 4 Pearson Correlation for Pre and Post of Mindfulness (MAAS) and Efficacy (GSE), Stress (PSS4), and Mood (FDMS)		
	Post-Mindfulness	Post-Mindfulness
	Overt Behavior	Internal States
Pre-Stress (PSS4)	-0.16586 (0.4281)	0.24474 (0.2384)
Post-Efficacy (GSE)	0.58152 (0.0023)*	0.60608 (0.0013)*
Post-Mood (FDMS)		
Tiredness	-0.46462 (0.0193)*	-0.49930 0.0111*
Positive Energy	0.37479 (0.0649)	0.32240 (0.1160)
Relaxation	0.57235 (0.0028)*	0.55415 (0.0040)*
Negative Arousal	-0.46427 (0.0194)*	-0.25409 (0.2203)
Note * < .05		

weeks ago you mentioned opening up your chest and stuff. So I notice that when I am talking to people, I tend to hunch over and then I'm like no wait, you don't need to do that.

In addition, the participants noted how they were more conscious of their mental state and the need for calm at moments of distress or discomfort. For example, one student stated that they "possessed more awareness of how stress and tension manifested" in their body. All participants asserted that the training helped them manage distractions and anxiety, facilitated their ability to focus, and encouraged them to be more self-aware and flexible. Further, students described being more thoughtful about the mind-body connection. One participant stated, "I've become more self-aware of my movement, especially like when I sit down, sometimes I am not always sitting up properly and I notice that now..." indicating an increased awareness.

**Recognized benefits of mindfulness practice.** All participants reported that they liked the mindfulness activities and found them beneficial. As explained by one

of the participants, engaging in mindfulness activities "gives me an opportunity to get away from work and class and just gives me a second to breathe and actually use self-care." Another student said that she looked forward to the activities after work and before class as the mindfulness activities allowed her to "let it all go".

Because the mindfulness activities occurred in a group setting, a small number of students initially expressed a concern of looking awkward in front of their peers and skepticism about mindfulness activities working for them. However, each indicated that these feelings soon dissipated. For example, one student communicated,

At first I thought it was kind of silly, because I was like, this is not going to work; this is not going to help. The first time, I really did not give it a try, then I was like, well I will give it a shot. And then after the first couple of ones, it took me a while to kind of let myself go there but after I did, it was very beneficial. Like it really did relax me. It makes me feel just a little bit freer from what I had to do that day, that week.

After the uneasiness and uncertainty passed, the benefits and impact of mindfulness activities were acknowledged. As a student reflected, "...[practicing mindfulness] is your own personal journey. Now I am a little more relaxed and able to do that, realizing it's more personal and it's about me."

**Integrating mindfulness practice into daily functioning.** In addition, a majority of the students reported intentions of integrating mindfulness practices into their personal and professional lives. One participant intends to purposefully incorporate mindfulness activities because, she tends "to sleep better on the nights we engage in mindfulness activities compared to the other nights I go to sleep." Students also see the mindfulness techniques and practice as reliable tools for self-care and thus, reported that mindfulness practice will be incorporated into their lives as a way to reduce stress and take better care of themselves. A student concluded, when necessary, an individual should use mindfulness to "make yourself aware of what is stressing you out."

Overall, the participants noticed notable changes in their personal and professional lives as a result of learning mindfulness practices. Several of the students indicated ways they have become more skillful in observing their thoughts and identifying physical reactions to stress, recognizing that mindfulness techniques can be used to address it. As one student stated,

I really take [practicing mindfulness] to heart and I am like, okay, I am going to treat myself kindly and gently for these five minutes and literally, breathe out the stress and breathe in kindness and try to let my mind do those things for me.

Accordingly, the students' responses and observations align with Brown and Ryan's (2003) claim that self-awareness is an internal awareness of one's cognitions and emotions and mindfulness is "shown to relate to and predict more positive well-being" (p. 843).

## Discussion and Implications

Preparation for the student affairs profession should occur beyond the educational and developmental level, including self-care and personal well-being of students in training and new professionals. The results of this study suggest the potential benefits of mindfulness training and practice for graduate students and professionals in student affairs graduate preparation program with those participating reporting increased awareness to their mind-body connection and efficacy. Comparing participants' perceptions before and after the sessions suggest that the training is a significant learning experience as it relates to an individual's ability to use mindfulness activities to increase awareness of stress and attentiveness. According to Brown and Ryan (2003, p. 832), higher scorers on the MAAS tend to be more aware of and receptive to inner experiences and are more mindful of their overt behavior. They are more "in tune" with their emotional states and able to alter them, and they are more likely to fulfill basic psychological needs. In addition, from participant feedback, it is evident that participants found the mindfulness activities worthwhile and recognized how to use mindfulness activities in daily routine.

Graduate preparation programs in student affairs have an opportunity to expose its students to tools necessary to intentionally and successfully navigate and sustain themselves in the field, including providing information about balancing their work and personal life (Scott, 2000) and maintaining personal wellness (Beeler, 1998). Preparing student affairs professionals to acquire personal growth opportunities through self-care practices as well as professional growth through mindfulness practices can potentially help with stress management and optimistically, prevent burnout which can be essential for enhancing work-life balance and decreasing attrition. Because the functions of student affairs professionals are essential to the success of students in their respective institutions, it is under-



standable that work factors related to burn-out need to be identified and addressed in order to maximize the recruitment, retention, and successful performance of the student affairs professionals (Hays, Arthur & Cosgrove, 2015). Teaching mindfulness practice to student affairs professionals and professionals in training can serve as an avenue to address any job-related stress and burnout. Similarly, Shapiro, Brown, and Biegel (2007) found that training in mindfulness resulted in decreased anxiety and increased self-compassion, which are core components for student affairs work. Having time, permission, and a place to learn and practice mindfulness-based exercises will assist practitioners with being aware of stress and what is “actually happening” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Issues with life balance and job-related stress affects student affairs practitioners across all levels (Guthrie et al., 2005). Thus, promoting self-care through mindfulness can help student affairs professionals deal with the many stressors associated with student affairs work. Balance is required to be a good person and a better person will also be a more valuable professional (Carpenter, 2013). Moreover, teaching mindfulness techniques to student affairs professionals can help them be more effective in responding to the students they serve (Frato ni, 2015). An enhanced awareness through mindfulness practice can also increase self-care which can, in turn, positively affect the quality of service student affairs professionals provide to their students. Our research indicated that student affairs graduate students noticed notable changes in their lives, personally, emotionally, and physically as a result of engaging in mindfulness practices.

Consequently, it could be advantageous for student affairs graduate preparation programs and leaders in student affairs units to create ways to incorporate mindfulness training and practice as a part of students’ and staff’s professional development to promote self-care and well-being.

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