



2026 Contemplative Practices for Higher Education Conference

March 12-14, 2026

Hosted by



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Thank You for Joining Us!

The **2026 CPHE Conference** is a three-day event offering over forty breakout sessions along with keynote talks, a participatory community choir workshop, and a daylong contemplative retreat, woven together to enable a profound, insightful, and transformative experience. This is our twelfth annual conference, where we welcome professionals and students interested in contemplative practice in education across all academic disciplines, including higher education leadership, student life, and student affairs.

We seek methods to sustainably integrate contemplative practices into our lives as educators, administrators, and students – whether it is in the classroom, research laboratory, administrative office, healthcare practice, the arts, or to be shared with our communities beyond the professional sphere. Together, we deepen our understanding of how contemplative practice and pedagogy can enhance learning and research across disciplines. We come together in person to build community, support one another, and advance our knowledge and understanding for the well-being of the earth and all those we serve.

The organizing body behind this conference is the **Contemplative Higher Education Alliance for Research, Teaching and Service (C-HEARTS)**, <https://www.c-hearts.org/>.

2026 Conference Organizing Committee

- **Samantha Harden (Co-Chair)**, Associate Professor, Human Nutrition, Foods, & Exercise, Virginia Tech; Physical Activity Specialist, Virginia Cooperative Extension; Co-Director of the Intentional Vibrations Yoga (IVY) School
- **Matthew Komelski (Co-Chair)**, Advanced Instructor of Human Development & Family Sciences, Director of Adaptive Brain & Behavior Minor, Virginia Tech
- **Lance Brunner**, Emeritus Professor of Music, University of Kentucky
- **Colleen Driscoll**, Hokie Wellness Assistant Director of Mental Health Initiatives, Virginia Tech
- **Young Ju**, Professor of Human Nutrition, Foods, & Exercise, Coordinator: Integrative Health and Wellness Minor, Virginia Tech
- **Stephanie Sebolt**, Associate Professor of Education: Teacher Education Preparation Program, Mary Baldwin University
- **Roel Snieder**, Emeritus Professor of Professional Development Education, Colorado School of Mines
- **Juliet Trail**, C-HEARTS Executive Committee Co-Chair & Founding Director, Courageous Compassion Connection
- **Ex Officio, Kevin Ayoub**, Building Operations Coordinator, Creativity & Innovation District (CID), Virginia Tech



Thank You to our 2026 Conference Sponsors!

SPONSORSHIPS enable us to keep the conference costs as low as possible, particularly in providing vastly reduced Student Registration rates. We also raise funds for the Douglas Lindner Scholarship Fund for those requiring partial or full support to be able to attend.



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2026 CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Thursday, March 12

All Conference Sessions will convene in the Creativity and Innovation District (CID) Facility (On campus map: Building #56; quadrant J-4)	
8:30 am - 10:30 am	Light Breakfast Available, CID Lobby
8:30 am - 1:00 pm	Registration at Check-in table, CID Lobby
9:00 - 9:20 am	Welcome & Arriving Practice , Conference Co-Chairs, Matthew Komelski & Samantha Harden (CID Rehearsal & Performance Room)
9:30 - 10:30 am	<p>General Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Connection Project: Finding Connection and Belonging at Virginia Tech, Colleen Driscoll & Jazmin Jurkiewicz (Rehearsal & Performance Room) ● Land-based Literacy: An Invitation Outside Human Relating, Megan McGee (Multipurpose Library) <p>Roundtable Conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In the Sky of Mind: Building a Contemplative Arts Curriculum Integrating Buddhist Attentional Cultivation & Imaginal Practice, Steven Baldino (Seminar Room)
10:45 - 11:15 am	<p>Research Talks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing While in Nature as a Contemplative Practice, Laura Vernon (Rehearsal & Performance Room) ● Taming the Amygdala: The Neuroscience of Contemplative Practice in Education, Zhuo Fu (Multipurpose Library) <p>Student-led/Student-focused Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instilling Purpose in the Engineering Classroom...Does it Matter? Panagiotis Apostolellis, Heba Ahmed, Tugu Baterdene (Seminar Room)
11:30 am - 12:00 pm	<p>Research Talks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● From Pathology to Ecology: Rethinking Student Wellbeing Through Consciousness-Centered Education, Molly Beauregard (Rehearsal & Performance Room) ● Entelechy: The Actualization of Human Potential through Mindfulness, Elizabeth Mackenzie (Multipurpose Library) <p>Student-led/Student-focused Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bringing Mindfulness to Campus: Helping Students Integrate Practice into Daily Life through Free and Accessible Programs, Trenton Matthews & Sara Hassanpour (Seminar Room)
12:00 - 1:30 pm	Lunch On Your Own (many restaurants are located a short walking distance from CID)
1:30 - 2:30 pm	<p>General Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Well-Being Through the Integration of Qigong, Sound, and Brainwave Analysis, Paras Kaul, Rita Gigliotti, Glenn E. Smith (Rehearsal & Performance Room) ● Enhancing Communication through Active Listening and Motivational Interviewing, (FNU) Neha (Multipurpose Library) <p>Roundtable Conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cross-Cultural Mindfulness: Examining the Processes and Outcomes of Study Abroad Experiences Centered on Mindfulness, Michele Kielty, Tammy Gilligan, A. Renee Staton (Seminar Room)

2:45 - 3:45 pm	<p>Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compassionate STEM Education in the Age of AI: Classroom Culture, Faculty–Student Relationships, and Student Wellbeing, Qin Zhu & Roel Snieder (Rehearsal & Performance Room) <p>General Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Healing Out Loud Through Mindful Librarianship, Jenneffer Sixkiller & Chris Robinson (Multipurpose Library) <p>Roundtable Conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contemplative Responses to Criticisms of Higher Education, Rebecca Vidra, Reneé Hosang-Alleyne, Dorothe Bach (Seminar Room)
4:00 – 5:00 pm	<p>Plenary Session, Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sustaining Contemplative Arts Outreach and Engagement, Matthew F. Komelski, Joanna Culligan, Trenton Matthews (Rehearsal & Performance Room)
5:00 – 6:00 pm	Reception & Community Connection Time
6:00 – 7:00 pm	Community Choir Workshop with ‘The Beat Goes On,’ led by Choir Director Jo Culligan. <i>(See full details, p8.)</i>
7:00 pm	Adjourn & Dinner on Your Own

Friday, March 13 Schedule

<p>All Conference Sessions will convene in the Creativity and Innovation District (CID) <i>(On Campus Map: Building #56; quadrant J-4)</i></p>	
8:00 – 9:30 am	Light Breakfast Available , CID Lobby
8:00 – 1:30 pm	Registration and Check-in table , CID Lobby
8:00 – 9:00 am	<p>Contemplative Practice Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No-Mat-Needed-Yoga to Develop Interoception, Amy Cowan (Rehearsal & Performance Room) ● Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga, Kelsey Dietrich (Multipurpose Library) ● Qigong for Stress-relief and Wellbeing, Matthew Komelski (Community Assembly) ● Zen Meditation Sampler, Galen Talis (Seminar Room)
9:15 – 10:15 am	<p>General Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contemplative Music for the Viola, Works by Eric Lyon, Molly Wilkens-Reed & Eric Lyon (Rehearsal & Performance Room) ● Taking Your Tush off the Cush: Making Mindfulness Inclusive and Accessible, Jamie Reygle (Multipurpose Library) ● Dis-Solving Conflict from Within: Introduction to Mindfulness Based Conflict Coaching, Henry Yampolsky (Community Assembly) <p>Roundtable Conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Virtue of Non-Hurrying: Cultivating Human Flourishing & Contemplative Presence in an Age of Haste and Hyperactivity, Tay Keong Tan & Jason Clemons (Seminar Room)
10:30 – 11:30 am	<p>Contemplative Practice Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● R.E.A.L. Method: A Collaborative Dance-Based Practice, Jillian Harris (Rehearsal & Performance Room) <p>General Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mutual Inquiry: What Artists and Monks Teach Us About the Art of Understanding, Clark Valentine (Multipurpose Library) ● The Flow Campus: Embodiment, Belonging, and the Practice of Co-Regulation, Jon Dance & Erica Coates (Seminar Room)

11:30 am–12:00pm	Poster Session in Community Assembly Room, Posters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Contemplative Classroom: Building Empathy, Belonging, and Connection in a Large-Enrollment Biology Course, Erin Richard • The Role of Dispositional Mindfulness in Buffering Trauma Symptoms of Marginalized Sexual and Gender Identities at a Southeastern United States University, Maeve Schumacher, Lou Sutherland, Kaylee R. Meer, Alia R. Simon, Kelsey Dietrich, Christyn Dolbier
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Lunch On Your Own (many restaurants are located a short walking distance from CID)
1:00 – 2:00 pm	General Sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching from Within: Restoring Faculty Passion and Transforming Institutional Culture Through Contemplative Practice, Corinne Weisgerber (Rehearsal & Performance Room) • Community Resilience Model: Finding your Flow in Glitter Jars, Colleen Driscoll & (FNU) Neha (Multipurpose Library) • From Mind to Movement: The Neuroscience of Embodied Contemplative Practice, Julia Basso (Community Assembly) Contemplative Practice Session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivating Calm: Mindfulness Practices to Begin Class, Kristyn DeMarco (Seminar Rm)
2:15 – 3:15 pm	General Sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dharma of Teaching and Pedagogy of Service: Lessons from Bhakti and Socrates, Joshua Anderson (Rehearsal & Performance Room) • Teaching with Intention: Contemplative Collaboration in the First-Year Classroom, Kristyn DeMarco & Erin Wynn (Multipurpose Library) • Implementing Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Programs on Campus: Research and Reflections, Kelsey Dietrich & Christyn Dolbier (Community Assembly) Contemplative Practice Session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassion Revolution: Transforming the World from the Inside-Out, Juliet Trail (Seminar Room)
3:30 – 4:30 pm	General Sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Science and Spirituality in STEM Higher Education, Roel Snieder & Cynthia James (Rehearsal & Performance Room) • The Creative Mindset: Using Mindfulness to Foster Growth and Engagement in Writing, Rebekah L. Pierce (Multipurpose Library) • Teaching Contemplative Techniques for Leadership and Team Development in Graduate Professional Education, Theresa Rieke-Kiely (Seminar Room)
4:45 – 5:00 pm	C-HEARTS Announcements , Matthew Komelski, Samantha Harden, Juliet Trail (Rehearsal & Performance Space)
5:00 – 6:30 pm	Keynote Address by Gaylon Ferguson: "Courageous Teaching as Compassionate Leadership." Room: Rehearsal & Performance Space. <i>(See full details, p.7.)</i>

Saturday, March 14 Schedule

Retreat location: Creativity and Innovation District (CID), Rehearsal & Performance Room	
8:00 – 9:00 am	Light Breakfast Available
9:00 am – 1:00 pm	Retreat: Nawungmé (Tahitia) Woods, “Dynamic Stillness: A Somatic InterWeave of Spirit, Body, & Mind.” <i>This retreat welcomes all bodies and ways of being—accommodating all experience levels, forms of mobility, and neurotypes. See full details, p7.</i>
1:00 pm	Lunch and final announcements in the Community Assembly

2026 Keynote Speaker



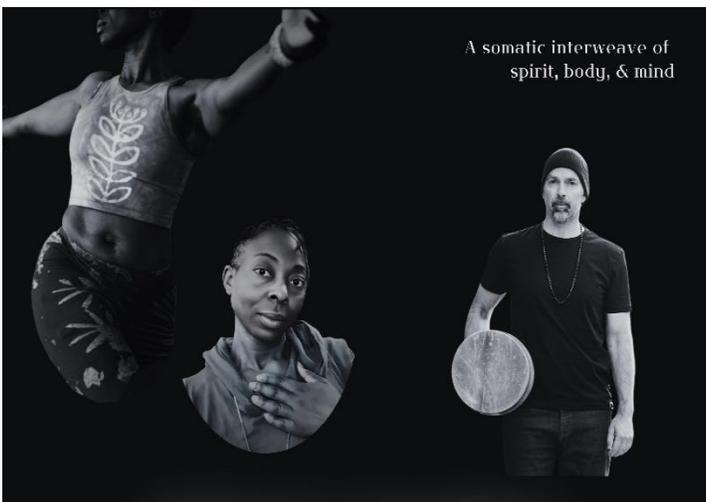
Gaylon Ferguson Keynote Address, "Courageous Teaching as Compassionate Leadership"

We are the ones called to the challenge of healing our learning communities. In these times of increasing fearfulness, contemplative education illuminates paths to creating and sustaining communities of courage. Bravery is innate to all of us, a natural aspect of our basic humanity. As teachers, students, and life-long learners, we gather to resist dehumanization and to cultivate courageous compassion. All of us are needed: students, teachers, administrators, coaches, mentors, colleagues. Our challenging times call upon us to strengthen our inner resources of bravery, kindness,

mindfulness, and compassion. Contemplative education offers us many methods for joining cognitive, emotional, and somatic dimensions of being human. Our innate humanity is our greatest resource.

Gaylon Ferguson, PhD, has led mindfulness meditation retreats since 1976. He has taught at Stanford, the University of Washington, and Naropa University--where he was a Core Faculty Member for 15 years.

2026 Retreat Facilitators



Contemplative Retreat: "Dynamic Stillness: A Somatic InterWeave of Spirit, Body, & Mind"

The retreat will be a playful exploration of a pathway toward wholeness, translating contemplative insights into vibrant, sustainable practice. As scholars, professionals, or students, we will invite participants to embrace all aspects of ourselves and to explore ways move between them fluidly, giving due attention to those areas of our lives that keep us centered, pour into us, & feed our purpose.

Lead Facilitator Nawungmé (Tahitia) Woods is a licensed Clinical Nurse Specialist, certified diabetes care & education specialist, and Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy practitioner. They are pursuing Lifestyle Medicine and YTT-200 certification, and currently offer Whole Person Health consults & collaborative coaching. Facilitation Support by Brad Ellsworth of Druminyasa®. Brad has been playing drums and percussion for over 25 years. He is a yoga teacher and founded Druminyasa by connecting his love for rhythm, drums and movement.

2026 Community Choir Workshop



Community Choir Workshop with ‘The Beat Goes On,’ led by Choir Director Jo Culligan:

In this very special offering, conference attendees will be invited to sing with (or observe) this intergenerational community choir that welcomes all and is specifically designed to support persons living with dementia and their caregivers.

Director Jo Culligan adds: "This community program is part of the Engagement Center for Creative Aging's Caregiver Wellness program and is in its third season. With us, it doesn't matter if you "don't sing" or "aren't a musician." We want to hear YOUR voice! Whatever preconceived

notions you have about what singing in a choir is like, let that go and take a chance. Join us and you won't regret it! Our choir is focused on creating opportunities for all to benefit from the awesome power of making music in a group. Attendees will be invited to engage in vocal warm-ups, sing some pop songs from throughout the decades and groove and shake to unwind after a long day of conferencing!"

THURSDAY, MARCH 12

REGISTRATION OPEN: 8:30 am – 1:30 PM (CID Lobby)

Light Breakfast Available 8:30 – 10:30 AM (CID Lobby)

Welcome and Arriving Practice 9:00-9:20 AM, Matthew Komelski & Samantha Harden (CID Rehearsal & Performance Room)

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 9:30 - 10:30 AM

General Session: **The Connection Project: Finding Connection and Belonging at Virginia Tech (Rehearsal & Performance Room).** The Connection Project (TCP) is a one-credit class now being offered at Virginia Tech that decreases loneliness and depression while increasing a sense of belonging. In this session participants will learn about the research behind TCP, course structure, and implementation and reception at Virginia Tech as well as have the opportunity engage in some of the activities that students participate in during the TCP class. The goal of this session is to allow participants to learn more about TCP so that they have a better understanding of classes that can be offered to support student well-being and promote meaningful connection.

BIOS: Colleen Driscoll is the Assistant Director of Mental Health Initiatives in Hokie Wellness at Virginia Tech where she develops and oversees prevention and education programs. Programs include peer support groups, mindfulness-based interventions, brief outreach, large scale events, and workshops. The goal of her work is to increase students' resilience, decrease the stigma around mental health, and provide safe spaces to seek help and learn skills to manage challenges. Colleen is also a Certified Mental Performance Coach through the Association for Applied Sport Psychology and works with athletes of all ages outside of her work at VT. **Jazmin Jurkiewicz** (she/they) is the Assistant Director of Inclusive Well-being in Hokie Wellness at Virginia Tech. They work with both the Mental Health Initiatives team within Hokie Wellness and with Residential Well-Being as a Content Expert for Belonging & Community Well-Being. Jazmin believes that working with students to develop their mental health skills, to reduce the stigma around asking for help, and to build community and healthy relationships helps to prepare them for a lifetime of wellness. Jazmin is also working towards a PhD in Engineering Education where they study emotions in engineering, faculty development, mental health and mindfulness, and asset-based pedagogy.

General Session: **Land-based Literacy: An Invitation Outside Human Relating (Multipurpose Library).** The moving body is currently isolated into health and fitness industries. It is our birth right to be in reciprocity with the land around us. With an ever-growing remote working reality alongside an endangered global climate, habit formation and maintenance is a priority. How do we enact the felt senses into conscious action? Learn how to cultivate a pace etched in curiosity for what surrounds us all. Engage in the art of beholding. Investigate introductions beyond verbal communication. Experience story telling through the lens of Virginia's landscapes across the seasons. We will move through the relational dynamics of maintenance, management, and stewardship together. Let us gaze into the inextricable environment we all share.

BIO: Megan McGee is a gardener. She is currently growing a landscaping business called Mantis Movement. The synergy of her character sees inspector gadget marrying an expressive arts teacher that was a wanna-be defense against the dark arts professor. The momentum that informs her work are 6 years of movement facilitation and 8 years of landscaping. The journeys that ignite her cadence are hiking through Virginia on the Appalachian Trail and El Camino del Norte in Spain. She believes in intergenerational community building, narrative medicine, and body mechanics. You can find her nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Roundtable Conversation: **In the Sky of Mind: Building a Contemplative Arts Curriculum Integrating Buddhist Attentional Cultivation & Imaginal Practice (Seminar Room).** This is a discussion surrounding the questions of setting up a contemplative arts curriculum inspired by Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist concepts and practices. The central idea is to utilize the overlapping characteristics of concentration and imagination between embodied art-making and contemplative practice. This session will explore considerations such as: When does contemplative art pedagogy risk aestheticizing contemplative practice rather than deepening it? What are the ethics involved in taking inspiration from these traditions and applying them to a broader community? What are the risks of emotional dysregulation in contemplative curriculums? How can we build safety nets into project delivery and structure? What is the best structure for delivering a successful contemplative arts curriculum. Should contemplative practice be front-loaded, interwoven daily, or modular? For example, should attentional training precede studio production? What imaginal practices are you currently engaging in, and how do they shape your contemplative life?

BIO: Steven Baldino is a multidisciplinary artist and art educator whose art practice is grounded in Buddhist contemplative approaches to imagination and its relationship to consciousness. He has taught art in national and international K-12 schools and currently teaches a virtual high school art course he developed, emphasizing a range of historical and contemporary perspectives in art and art history. Alongside his teaching, Baldino has participated in national and international group exhibitions and is currently completing his MFA in Painting at Boston University's School of Visual Arts.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 10:45-11:15 AM

Research Talks: **Writing While in Nature as a Contemplative Practice (Rehearsal & Performance Room).** We live in a world where we do not spend much time outdoors anymore, and we have many demands on our time. Research shows that we, including college students, are more depressed, anxious, and stressed than ever before (Cook, 2023; Williams, 2017; Selhub & Logan, 2012). However, research also shows that exposure to the natural environment helps us improve our physical health, cognitive performance, and psychological wellbeing (Fattal, 2023; Bentley et al, 2022; Weir, 2020; Keniger et al, 2013; Bowler et al, 2010; Pretty, 2004; Wells, 2000). Therefore, we need to connect regularly with nature to

benefit from its restorative and therapeutic effects. Combining that connection with a writing activity (as a contemplative practice) allows for creative expression of how we are feeling and provides evidence that our wellbeing is improving. One way to combine nature's healing power with writing is to spend 30 minutes outside each week and write about what we see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. Writing about these healing experiences in nature can be shared, for example, in a "Sense of Wonder" (from Rachel Carson's work) blog where communities and classrooms can emerge to join others on the path to wellbeing. Likewise, it can be a personal practice using a digital journal for self-regulation of emotions or for clinical purposes such as at a student mental health center on campus or as ecotherapy. My proposed presentation will describe how I have used this semester-long contemplative practice in a college setting and will outline the results of my IRB-approved study that shows improved student wellbeing. In addition to explaining how the "writing while in nature" contemplative practice can benefit students, the presenter will suggest ways this practice can be done in other settings. The presenter will also engage attendees in several nature-focused writing activities that can enhance their teaching approach on this topic.

BIO: Laura Vernon is a professor in the School of Writing, Language, and Literature at Radford University (Virginia) where she teaches undergraduate and graduate professional and business writing courses and produces scholarship in environmental rhetoric and in teaching and learning. Before earning her PhD in professional communication, she had a successful career as a newspaper editor, public relations practitioner, and environmental health writer. A native of Salt Lake City, Utah, she loves spending time outdoors with her husband; reading books about environmental changemakers, flourishing and hope, and alternative grading approaches; and keeping a journal that she hopes to turn into a memoir one day.

Research Talks: Taming the Amygdala: The Neuroscience of Contemplative Practice in Education (Multipurpose Library). Inside a classroom, the emotional state of a student is not just a secondary factor—it is the gatekeeper of cognitive performance. This section explores the neurobiological mechanisms through which the amygdala modulates learning and memory, specifically highlighting the "inverted U" relationship between stress and academic efficiency. Drawing on foundational research, we will examine how the amygdala acts as a central hub that can either facilitate or severely impair the consolidation of new information. While moderate arousal can mark experiences as significant, excessive activation triggered by fear, high-stakes pressure, or "uncontrollable" stress can lead to an "amygdala hijack." This state directly inhibits hippocampal Long-Term Potentiation—the cellular basis of learning—effectively shutting down the brain's ability to record new data. Furthermore, high amygdala activation creates a competitive environment that disrupts the prefrontal cortex's capacity for cognitive control and working memory. Participants will learn why traditional fear-based motivators often backfire, leading to "peripheral narrowing" where students recall the stressor but fail to retain the curriculum. We will discuss practical, evidence-based strategies for creating a "brain-friendly" environment that maintains optimal arousal levels, ensuring that the amygdala facilitates rather than frustrates the learning process.

BIO: Zhuo "April" Fu is an Instructor in the School of Neuroscience at Virginia Tech. She earned her Ph.D. in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise from Virginia Tech and previously served as research faculty at the University of Virginia. Her expertise spans nutrition, neuroscience, and pedagogical innovation, with a focus on using research-based motivation strategies and AI to enhance higher education. Beyond the lab and teaching, Dr. Fu is a dedicated community outreach programs like the Virginia Tech Science Fair and Roanoke STEAM Day to make neuroscience accessible to diverse audiences.

Student-led/Student-focused Session: Instilling Purpose in the Engineering Classroom... Does it Matter? (Seminar room). "There is no personality to what you're learning!" With this student observation as a starting point, this student-focused session aims at exploring how much students need to bring their whole selves into the classroom, especially in an engineering discipline. Informed by the diverse experiences of the facilitators, we will attempt to engage the student audience in a dialogue regarding their affective concerns and aspirations, beyond the intellectual engagement needed to succeed in a college classroom. Although we know college graduates thrive due to meaningful, caring interactions with a mentor [1], such interactions are becoming ever more difficult due to the mechanization of education. "AI is artificial. It cannot understand, care, or co-create meaning with students." [2] In our effort to change this painful observation that human connection is a diminished value—esp. in the technical CS curriculum—as we move into the post-COVID AI era [3], we will explore together with our student audience the prospect of a course grounded on value-based design. Bringing the know-how of teaching technological topics in a CS department, while running retreats "on the side" to help students discover their values, our goal to explore how/if these approaches can be combined in a formal classroom. We want to investigate if there is a conscious need from current college students to move beyond the 'portfolio-building' culture that deprives them of purposeful learning [4], and what factors might contribute to their flourishing in the current technocentric environment. We don't have the answers, but we have lots of questions!

BIOS: Panagiotis Apostolellis is an Associate Professor of Computer Science, at the teaching track. He designs and teaches Human-Centered Design courses and tries to bring his expertise into his teaching practice, considering his classes as a product with students as the main users. He holds an MSc in Human-Centered Computer Systems from Sussex University and a PhD in Computer Science and Applications from Virginia Tech, with a graduate certificate in Human-Computer Interaction. He previously worked for more than a decade as an Interaction Designer and Developer for a non-profit cultural organization in his home country, Greece. **Heba Ahmed** is a fourth-year B.S. Computer Science student at the University of Virginia, minoring in Data Science and Technology Ethics. She previously earned an Associate of Science in Computer Science from Northern Virginia Community College. Her academic and research interests center on Human-Computer Interaction, Machine Learning, and Artificial Intelligence, particularly their applications in higher education. Through the Citizen Leaders Fellowship, Heba is exploring how international transfer students' diverse cultural and academic experiences shape their values and engagement with learning. She is passionate about helping students find personal

meaning in their work through creativity and reflection and strives to inspire active engagement with technology as a medium for expression and connection. **Tugu Baterdene** is a fourth-year Computer Science student at the University of Virginia with a strong interest in cybersecurity, data science, and the human side of technology. His academic and project experience has focused on developing efficient, user-centered solutions through programming, algorithm design, and collaborative problem-solving. Tugu's most rewarding college experience was participating and now facilitating the Hoo's Connected program through UVA's Psychology department. The goal is simply to learn how to be human, how to interact, and how to be a part of a bigger thing. Students learn how to connect deeply despite having different beliefs, upbringings, and lives.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 11:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Research Talk: **From Pathology to Ecology: Rethinking Student Wellbeing Through Consciousness-Centered Education (Rehearsal & Performance Room)**. This presentation revisits a five-year mixed-methods study (2012–2018; n=207) of an undergraduate sociology course—Consciousness, Creativity, and Identity—that integrated group meditation and mindfulness into a standard curriculum. Early analyses framed consciousness-centered education as a response to the student mental health crisis: the course “worked” because it reduced stress and improved focus. I now see this framing as problematic, as it implies the dysfunction lies within students rather than in the cultural environments they inhabit. This talk reframes the findings by shifting attention from “students in need of fixing” to “ecologies in need of redesign.” Surveys, reflections, and interviews documented not only intrapsychic changes (e.g., affect, attention) but also social relatedness. In one cohort (n=98), over half reported feeling more peaceful, and meditation frequency correlated with reduced peer disconnection ($p < .05$); notably, 77% preferred group meditation to solitary practice. These results suggest students were not “treated” individually but experienced collective healing when the classroom itself became a commons. Shared quiet, collective rhythm, and explicit norms of attention transformed relationships—with self and others—and distress receded. This interpretation rests on two premises: that much of what appears as individual pathology is a reasonable response to hostile, isolating environments; and that identity is ecological—emerging through relations with others, practices, and place. The question for higher education, then, is not how to optimize students for a broken ecology, but how to design ecologies that enable human flourishing.

BIO: Molly Beauregard is a graduate of the University of Michigan, Loyola University of Chicago, and the University of Pittsburgh, holding master's degrees in both public administration and sociology. I have been a professor of sociology for twenty-two years at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan, a visiting instructor at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, and I currently serve as the co-director of the University of Michigan's Program in Creativity and Consciousness. A long-time meditator in the Vedanta tradition, I am also a certified instructor of Primordial Sound Meditation as well as a member of The Society for Consciousness Studies.

Research Talk: **Entelechy: The Actualization of Human Potential through Mindfulness (Multipurpose Library)**. Richard Davidson, Director of the Center for Healthy Minds, has speculated that all human beings contain the potential for compassion and prosocial behavior, but require a compassionate community to realize this potential, in much the same way as infants require a linguistic community to learn language (Jacobs 2020). Building on this concept of human entelechy, we would like to explore the ways in which mindfulness practices shared with both students and teachers in an educational setting contribute to the development of prosocial persons. Jon Kabat-Zinn, originator of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) one of the most rigorously studied mind-body interventions, has described “mindfulness” as an aspect of human development, a “development through mental training.” In the section of *Wherever You Go, There You Are* titled ‘Meditation Develops Full Human Beings’ he writes, “Meditation really is about human development” (Kabat-Zinn *Wherever You Go, There You Are*: 50). He sees the capacity for mindful awareness as a universal human potential, available to anyone who is taught how to cultivate it and is willing to practice. His lifework has been to study and promote mindfulness both to address human suffering and to advance human potentiality so that we can fulfill our capacity to be “wise humans” (*homo sapiens*). While there have been numerous studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness and related contemplative practices on addressing individual suffering (improvements to physical and mental health, e.g.) fewer studies have explored how these practices can help us actualize the human potential for compassionate, virtuous, ethical, and prosocial behavior, thereby helping people gain agency in addressing the suffering of others. What happens when students are invited to practice mindful awareness in classrooms led by teachers who are also exposed to contemplative training? In what ways do these experiences influence their development? How does the experience shape the development of their character and behavior? What is the role of cultivating self-compassion and self-awareness in promoting wellbeing? What are the implications for individual behavior to impact collective wellbeing? Does mindfulness help to develop full human beings?

BIO: Elizabeth Mackenzie's areas of expertise include contemplative sciences, mindfulness meditation, mind-body medicine, and healthy development. For five years she was a Research Assistant Professor in the division of Geriatric Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine, where she conducted research on mental health and spirituality. Following that, she was a Lecturer in the Critical Writing Program, School of Arts and Sciences, teaching courses in humanistic and integrative medicine with a focus on learning writing skills. Currently, her main areas of academic interest are contemplative education and mindfulness meditation. With colleagues from Penn GSE, Dr. Mackenzie has conducted pilot evaluations of mindfulness-based teacher training as well as a qualitative study of contemplative practices in higher education. Dr. Mackenzie is a certified to teach mindfulness by the Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults (MIEA)

Student-led/Student-focused Session: **Bringing Mindfulness to Campus: Helping Students Integrate Practice into Daily Life through Free and Accessible Programs (Seminar Room)**. Establishing a stable sense of community during the early years of college can be challenging and fostering one grounded in mindfulness presents a unique opportunity for

personal and collective growth. Over the past several weeks, we have had the privilege of engaging with the Adaptive Brain and Behavior senior capstone course, Mind Body Flow. This program emphasizes student-led mindfulness practices and explores a wide range of topics, from mindful walking to Taiji. Through these sessions, student facilitators not only strengthen their leadership and communication skills but also help create an inclusive, supportive environment that welcomes participants from across campus. Survey data collected after each session reveal a diverse range of student experiences and emotional responses to the program. In this presentation, we will share key findings that highlight how mindfulness intersects with student life and well-being, demonstrating the value of accessible, community-based wellness initiatives on college campuses.

BIOS: Trenton Matthews recently earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Development and is taking time to further explore his interests in advocacy, mindfulness, and community engagement before pursuing graduate studies. Over the past several months, he served as a peer mentor for the Mind Body Flow program, where he supported and guided student facilitators in fostering mindfulness practices across campus. Trenton is passionate about promoting personal growth, resilience, and community connection, and he looks forward to seeing how programs like Mind Body Flow continue to make a positive impact on college campuses. **Sara Hassanpour** earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and her master's degree in clinical psychology from Mashhad University of Medical Sciences. She is currently in her second year of a marriage and family therapy program of Virginia Tech, where her research focuses on intercultural relationships. Alongside her research, Sara works as a clinician providing therapy for individuals, couples, and families at Family Therapy Center of Virginia Tech.

LUNCH ON YOUR OWN 1:00 - 2:00 PM

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 1:30 – 2:30 PM

General Sessions: **Well-Being Through the Integration of Qigong, Sound, and Brainwave Analysis (Rehearsal & Performance Room)**. The session introduces a workshop methodology whereby students experience contemplative practices of mind-body healthcare at the integration of sound, Qigong, and brainwave analysis. A fifteen-minute discussion of brain-body coherence produced by musical instruments that reinforce harmonic patterns in the bio-field will be followed by fifteen minutes of Qigong practice to rejuvenate and enliven the body's energetic nature. The last twenty minutes will present an interactive sound healing performance using musical instruments, crystal bowls, drums and bells. George Mason University's Healing Arts Ensemble will invite the audience to join them to experience this sound healing performance. The presentation introduces an experiential educational environment that provides an integrative experience for health and well-being by combining multiple contemplative modalities. This presentation furthers research, education and awareness of body, mind and brain health and establishes the efficacy of integrative, energetic healthcare practices. Through experiencing integrated contemplative practices, students build resilience, reduce stress, and discover a profound connection between music and Qigong for emotional and physical well-being. They learn to reset their nervous systems by understanding how negative emotions block energy, and they learn practices to transform those emotions to positive energetic forces for well-being. The goal is to augment allopathic medicine to include energy-based practices and to provide a workshop model for experiential education adaptable for K-12 and higher education. The potential exists to move healthcare forward to include contemplative practices in the twenty-first century.

BIOS: Paras Kaul composes brainwave music with healing intention. She is Chair of the National Qigong Association and received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with Bachelor's degrees in English, art, and photography at California State University, Sacramento and James Madison University. An adjunct Assistant Professor at Cal State LA and George Mason University and Assistant Professor at MSU, Kaul analyzes brainwaves before and after contemplative healing modalities, including Qigong. She has published peer-reviewed articles and was invited to speak in France, Australia, and at London's Dana Centre's Museum of Science. **Rita Gigliotti** holds both Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Music Education with a concentration in Voice. She received a Music for Well-Being Graduate Certificate at George Mason University where she is completing her dissertation for a PhD in Music Education. She explains that music and contemplative practices restored her health from a severe case of Cushing's Disease. Upon her recovery, she received Pranayama and Healing Touch Certifications, which influence her teaching methodologies. For 2+ decades she taught K-12 music education and served as Choral Director, producing, chairing and hosting county, state, and international music events, concerts, and musical theater productions. **Glenn Smith**, Professor Emeritus, Dewberry School of Music, George Mason University received his Doctorate in Music from Indiana University. He founded George Mason University's Music for Well-Being Program and created an Undergraduate Minor and Graduate Certificate in this program. He also founded GMU's Healing Arts Ensemble. A certified Reiki Master Practitioner, he has dedicated his life work to music composition, sound healing, and teaching. In addition to being a prolific composer, Smith has more than 55 years' experience as a university professor and frequently gave lectures, seminars and workshops on music and sound healing.

General Sessions: **Enhancing Communication through Active Listening and Motivational Interviewing (Multipurpose Library)**. To emphasize the importance of Active listening as a communication skill by introducing motivational interviewing (OARS), that can be utilized to have an empathetic conversation with people who might be going through challenging or stressful moments. Tool to strengthen rapport in an education setting. Goal- To enhance the understanding about Active listening. To equip participants with practical tools to integrate active listening into their daily interactions, improve their ability to engage in conversations that can support individuals towards positive mental health outcomes. Expected learning outcomes: Explain the definition and signs of active listening, Demonstrate effective use of OARS in conversation, Reflect on their own communication style and the areas for growth in OARS.

BIO: Neha is the Mental Health Initiatives Coordinator at Hokie Wellness. She is passionate about raising awareness, promoting education, and reducing stigma around mental health through holistic and meaningful outreach. Neha earned her Master of Public Health with a concentration in Population Mental Health from Rutgers University in New Jersey. She strives to create lasting, positive change in people's lives by equipping students with tools to support their well-being and connecting them to appropriate resources. In her free time, Neha enjoys painting, dancing, and exploring new places.

Roundtable Conversation: **Cross-Cultural Mindfulness: Examining the Process and Outcomes of Study Abroad Experiences Centered on Mindfulness (Seminar Room)**. This roundtable will explore the intersections of mindfulness, cultural immersion, and professional preparation for students in helping fields such as education, counseling, health sciences, and social work. Drawing on the study "Cross-Cultural Mindfulness: Examining the Processes and Outcomes of a Multidisciplinary Study Abroad Experience," presenters will share insights from an innovative course and international study abroad program designed to cultivate mindfulness both as a personal contemplative practice and as a professional competency. The discussion will highlight findings from a mixed-methods study demonstrating that cross-cultural, experiential learning can deepen students' mindful awareness, enhance resilience, and promote empathy. Participants will address key themes that emerged from student reflections—internal processing (e.g., journaling, meditation, non-doing) and external engagement (e.g., observing mindfulness in schools, attending a Buddhist retreat, and exploring neuroscientific perspectives on mindfulness). These dual dimensions illustrate how contemplative learning environments foster holistic self-awareness and intercultural understanding. This session centers on contemplative pedagogy as both personal transformation and cross-cultural engagement. The project's foundation in mindfulness-based practices—anchored in attention, intention, and attitude—mirrors the essence of contemplative inquiry: cultivating presence, compassion, and awareness in oneself and others. By situating mindfulness within intercultural experiences, this roundtable illustrates how contemplative education can expand beyond self-regulation to include empathy, ethical awareness, and global citizenship. Attendees will: Gain insights into designing experiential learning that integrates contemplative and cross-cultural elements. Learn practical ways to incorporate mindfulness into curricula, including ideas from past and future study abroad experiences led by the presenters. Reflect on how immersive experiences can deepen compassion, cultural competence, and well-being among students and practitioners.

BIOS: Michele Kielty is a Professor of Counseling at James Madison University and a Licensed Professional Counselor. She is also a licensed school counselor and she directs the School Counseling program at JMU. Dr. Kielty's work as a scholar and practitioner revolves around well-being, mindfulness, strength-based personal and professional development, and cross-cultural programs. She provides trainings for schools and organizations on contemplative approaches to well-being. **Tammy Gilligan** is a Professor in the Department of Graduate Psychology and faculty in the School Psychology Program at James Madison University. She has supervised numerous thesis and research projects in her 25 years as a faculty member. Dr. Gilligan has published in peer reviewed journals and presented research at state, regional, national and international conferences. She has received training in the MindUp and Mindful Schools curriculum. She has provided classroom-based mindfulness programming in middle schools and has professional development for school-based personnel in the integration of mindfulness techniques in schools. Dr. Gilligan is a licensed clinical psychologist in Virginia. **A. Renee Staton** is a Professor of Counseling at James Madison University and a Licensed Professional Counselor. She directs the Clinical Mental Health program at JMU. Dr. Staton's work as a scholar and practitioner revolves around multicultural issues in counseling, nature-based interventions, mindfulness, and cross-cultural programs and competencies.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2:45 – 3:45 PM

Panel: **Compassionate STEM Education in the Age of AI: Classroom Culture, Faculty-Student Relationships, and Student Wellbeing (Rehearsal & Performance Room)**. This panel examines how the growing presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning challenges the cultivation of compassion, care, and authentic relationships in STEM education. As AI tools increasingly assist with STEM teaching and learning including writing, problem-solving, and assessment, STEM faculty encounter emerging challenges regarding how to sustain meaningful connection and engaging learning environments in classrooms mediated by AI. The panel will feature a facilitated group conversation among three STEM faculty members who have participated in the Compassionate STEM Education program, along with two facilitators, Dr. Qin Zhu and Dr. Roel Snieder, who are two leaders of this initiative. The session is designed as both a reflective dialogue and a method of qualitative inquiry, collecting data on how STEM educators experience and interpret compassion and care in the STEM classroom mediated by AI. Through shared storytelling and collective reflection, the panelists will explore how compassion can continue to guide ethical and relational dimensions of STEM teaching and learning amid **techno moral** change induced by AI. The panel discussion will be guided by the following questions: How does AI reshape the culture of compassion, trust, and mutual respect within the STEM classroom? How can faculty sustain authentic and caring relationships with students as technological mediation becomes more prevalent? In what ways does students' use of AI affect their wellbeing and sense of connection with their instructors and peers? How can faculty intentionally cultivate compassionate learning environments that acknowledge and engage students' use of AI in constructive ways?

BIOS: Qin Zhu is an Associate Professor in the Department of Engineering Education at Virginia Tech, with additional affiliations in the Center for Human-Computer Interaction, and the Center for Future Workplaces and Practices. Qin is a member of the Board of Directors for the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE). His research investigates how culture both shapes and is shaped by the formation of socially responsible engineers; the ethical design and deployment of emerging technologies such as AI, robotics, and quantum computing; and innovative approaches to teaching responsible AI and robot literacy in K–12 education. **Roel Snieder**, Emeritus Professor of Professional Development Education at the Colorado School of Mines. He worked in geophysical research for 40 years, publishing 300 technical papers and 3 textbooks. Roel received the 2020 the Ange Melagro Prize for his

outstanding class, Science and Spirituality. In 2023 Roel received the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Colorado School of Mines Board of Trustees. From 2000-2014, he was a firefighter in Genesee Fire Rescue where he served for two years as Fire Chief. He now focuses on transformational coaching and teaching (<https://roelcoaching.com>).

General Session: Healing Out Loud Through Mindful Librarianship (Multipurpose Library). This session showcases the integration of mindfulness practices within academic library programming and instruction. Presenters share their personal and professional journeys, emphasizing vulnerability as a pathway to deeper connections with colleagues and patrons. Participants will learn to critically examine emotions as a measurable aspect in assessing effectiveness of mindful instruction and in programs. Through interactive sessions and shared experiences, attendees gain insights into the significance of mindful interventions and programming, receive practical examples for implementation, and explore the transformative power of emotions and healing, for both themselves and their participants, in fostering community engagement and personal growth.

BIOS: Jenneffer Sixkiller (she/her) is a Health and Human Services Librarian at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, and she grew up in the Tulsa, OK. She holds a BFA, studio concentration, from Oklahoma State University, and a MLIS graduate degree from the University of Oklahoma. Mental health, mindfulness, student stress and neurodiversity are her research areas of interest. She is a QPR Gatekeeper, Mental Health First Aider for Youth and Adults, a certified GUIDE Empathetic Communicator, a member of the Cherokee Nation (Oklahoma) and a mindfulness practitioner and facilitator. **Chris Robinson** (he/him) is the Outreach & Engagement Librarian at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. He holds degrees in business administration and marketing from Methodist University and an MLIS from UNC Greensboro. His work focuses on mindfulness, neurodiversity, outreach, and enhancing user experiences. At UNCW, he helped create the Sensory Friendly Study Space and the Retreat at Randall, spaces that promote wellness, reflection, and belonging. Each semester, he leads mindfulness programs that foster focus, growth, and community. Robinson combines professional expertise with a passion for creating inclusive and supportive library environments.

Roundtable Conversation: Contemplative Responses to Criticisms of Higher Education (Seminar Room). There is compelling evidence that contemplative practices enhance learning and have the potential of creating safe and brave spaces in our classrooms for all students (Chatman, Costa & Robinson-Morris, 2024; Magee, 2017). However, learning spaces are being challenged as higher education is being attacked for “wokeness” and lack of viewpoint diversity, inherently limiting student and faculty engagement. How can we leverage contemplative work to counteract these attacks? How might we elevate contemplative modes of listening and engage students in deeper reflection so that they may have more constructive conversations with people who may hold different views? In this session, the roundtable conveners -- three faculty and educational developers from a community college and R1 institutions -- will briefly share the ways that they are meeting this current moment by enhancing and contextualizing our contemplative practice work with students. The majority of the session will be spent engaging roundtable participants in sharing their own ideas and methods for doing this work at a very challenging time for our colleges and universities. Participants will leave this discussion with fresh ideas and perspectives but, even more importantly, with a sense of connection with others and a way to continue the conversation.

BIOS: Rebecca Vidra is a Senior Lecturer of Marine Conservation and Ethics at the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University and a Senior Faculty Fellow at the Kenan Institute for Ethics. Her work examines the interstitial spaces between ecological and cultural restoration, science and ethics, and hope and despair. Rebecca teaches a range of courses for undergraduate and graduate students and writes about teaching challenges for Inside Higher Ed. Her classes aim to prepare students to be resilient environmental professionals with curiosity, humility, resilience, and the ability to have constructive dialogue across difference. **Reneé Hosang-Alleyne** is a teaching sociologist whose philosophy is that we are each other’s teachers, in learning from and teaching each other, we can reach a state of harmony and shared responsibility for the learning experience and by extension, the human experience. Reneé is currently campus chair of sociology and teaching faculty of sociology at Tidewater Community College, has been teaching in higher education for 17 years and her professional and academic interests are cultural awareness, critical awareness, purpose building, and social wellbeing. She is a contributing author of a chapter entitled Accessing the Self: A Journey to Healing in the book “Healing in While Studying: Reflections and Strategies for Healing, Coping, and Liberation of Graduate Students of Minoritized Identities”. **Dorothe Bach** is Associate Director & Professor, Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Virginia where she also teaches in the Environmental Thought and Practice Program. Dorothe’s pedagogical interests focus on inclusive teaching practices, contemplative pedagogy, generative listening, and embodied cognition. Her published work has appeared in a variety of teaching and educational development journals. Dorothe regularly presents at national and international conferences and has been an invited workshop leader and consultant on four continents. For her teaching and educational development work, she has received several awards.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Plenary Session, Panel: **Sustaining Contemplative Arts Outreach and Engagement (Rehearsal & Performance Room).** This Panel Session will feature program leaders and other key facilitators from two community engagement programs led by faculty at Virginia Tech: The Beat Goes On (TBGO), led by Joanna Culligan and Mind-Body Flow (TBGO) led by Matthew Komelski. TBGO is a community choir specifically designed for persons experiencing cognitive change (usually due to a form of dementia) and their caregivers who sing together with students, faculty and staff from VT, along with other members of the community. MBF is a mindfulness-based community resiliency program for VT students that is led by Senior Capstone students in the Adaptive Brain and Behavior Minor. The panel will include a brief overview of the programs and additional details on strategies for collaboration across units and divisions that create sustainability, followed by a question and answer session that elucidates the roles, challenges and solutions needed to sustain these programs and answers audience questions.

BIOS: **Matthew F. Komelski (Dr. K)** is the Director of the Adaptive Brain and Behavior Minor and an Advanced Instructor in the Department of Human Development and Family Science. He teaches courses on mind-body health, aging, leadership and evaluation. His research interests include the use of MBPs to build resilience, support recovery and wellbeing across the lifespan. routinely collaborates with researchers developing mindfulness-based experimental protocol and clinicians developing community-based mindfulness programs. **Joanna Culligan (Jo)** is a parent, partner, music therapist, instructor and researcher at Virginia Tech. As a collaborative and creative creature, her main goal is to create opportunities for and encourage connection between people. She specializes in working with persons who are experiencing dementia and their care-partners using evidence-based musical approaches through human centered design research and practice to improve their communication and engagement. She is passionate about breaking down stigmas associated with aging and dementia. As an instructor, She emphasizes being present as a cornerstone of guidance with the hopes of creating the next generation of gerontology enthusiasts. **Trenton Matthews** is an MS Student in the Department of Human Development and Family Science. He is also the Lead Program Mentor for the Mind-Body Flow Program and has enjoyed the work of supporting and guiding student facilitators. He plans to further explore the fields of advocacy, mindfulness, and community engagement, and is excited to see how the Mind-Body Flow program continues to evolve and make a positive impact on college campuses.

Reception & Community Connection Time 5:00-6:00 PM (CID Lobby)

Community Choir Workshop with “The Beat Goes On” 6:00-7:00 PM in the Rehearsal & Performance Room
(see p.8 for further details)

Adjourn & Dinner on Your Own 7:00 PM

FRIDAY, MARCH 13

REGISTRATION OPEN: 8:00 AM - 1:30 PM (CID Lobby)

Light Breakfast Available 8:00 – 9:30 AM (CID Lobby)

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 8 - 9 AM

Contemplative Practice Sessions: **No-Mat-Needed-Yoga to Develop Interoception (Rehearsal & Performance Room).** We will begin with a brief introduction of the word "interoception" as a sense of how one is feeling internally, and its importance in any pursuit or endeavor, and how yoga helps develop it. Then we will practice a gentle seated yoga class together, with some optional standing, with the invitation at all times to honor the unique body and its feelings in each moment- interoception. We will consistently re-think what yoga "looks like" and offer this inward-focused practice to notice what is happening in the body and respond with compassion and care. After stretching and breathing together, we will have the chance to scan the body and notice what, if anything, has shifted. We can apply these gentle movements, breathing, or conscious stillness into everyday life, as we all spend time sitting in chairs, and may lack a yoga mat or time to do a full yoga class. Time for questions or responses at the end, as well as provided resources for continued practice through free local classes and online options.

BIO: Amy Cowan is an Assistant Professor of Practice Voice instructor at Virginia Tech, and certified yoga teacher. In addition to her extensive work throughout the years helping singers of all ages build confidence and gain skill, she earned a Certificate of Merit as a Trauma-Informed Voice Professional with Dr. Elissa Monti through the Voice Study Center. Amy is a practitioner of qigong and meditation, and enjoys this whole-person approach to work with singers, especially around Performance Anxiety. She serves as a Hokie Wellness Champion at VT and has enjoyed offering no-mat-needed-yoga to music students as well as seated "pew yoga" classes at Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, where she also conducts the choir. She holds degrees in Voice from Rice University and Longy School of Music, of Bard College.

Contemplative Practice Sessions: **Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (Multipurpose Library).** To date, Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TCTSY) is the only yoga-based clinical intervention for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) designed as a form of adjunctive body-based trauma care. TCTSY is based on hatha yoga and trauma psychology research with modifications that promote psychological safety for trauma survivors (Emerson et al., 2009; Emerson & Hopper, 2011). TCTSY increases the accessibility of mind-body practices for trauma survivors through the use of invitational language, no hands-on assists/adjustments, non-coercive facilitation style, mindfulness strategies, and embodiment (Emerson, 2015). Research shows that TCTSY is a feasible form of trauma care in a variety of settings (Cattie et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2014; Nguyen-Feng et al., 2019; Owen-Smith et al., 2021; Wehrmann et al., 2024; Zaccari et al., 2022) and improves anxiety, depression, PTSD, and interoception (Dietrich et al., 2024; Kelly et al., 2021; Neukirch et al., 2018; Price et al., 2017; Zaccari et al., 2023). In this session, participants will be guided through a TCTSY practice. Opportunities to practice gentle movement in seated and standing forms will be offered. TCTSY focuses on what it feels like to practice rather than alignment or achievement of poses. The movement portion will end with a 5-minute unguided meditation, followed by group discussion. TCTSY resources will be provided. Expected learning outcomes include: 1) Defining TCTSY, 2) Practicing TCTSY, and 3) Reflecting on the role of embodiment in trauma care. Participants will benefit from the opportunity to check in with themselves and practice making choices that enhance the mind-body connection.

BIO: Kelsey Dietrich is a 500-hour Registered Yoga Teacher and Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Facilitator with additional certifications in trauma-informed mindfulness and meditation. In 2024, she published the book "Mindfulness for Type 1 Diabetes."

Kelsey earned her BA in English and Psychology from Bowling Green State University and MA in Psychological Sciences from the University of Minnesota Duluth where she was the Research Team Coordinator for the Mind-Body Trauma Care Lab. Currently, she is a third-year PhD student studying Clinical Health Psychology at East Carolina University and researches trauma-sensitive yoga and mindfulness-based interventions in the Stress and Health Lab.

Contemplative Practice Sessions: **Qigong for Stress-relief and Wellbeing (Community Assembly)**. This practice session will introduce attendees to the practice of Hunyuan Qigong (Fundamental Energy-work). This qigong method was developed by the late Grandmaster Feng Zhiqiang (1928-2012), a leading disciple of Grandmasters Chen Fake (1887-1957) and Hu Yaozhen (1897-1973). This gentle, adaptive style of qigong combines elements of Chen style taiji with moving meditations from the Heart-Intention (Xin Yi) method of practice. Dr. Komelski studied these practices at the Hunyuan Taiji Academy in Beijing, China and has adapted them for use on college campuses, clinical settings and community centers. Participants attending this session will: Learn about qi as an everyday, ordinary, but often neglected phenomenon, Experience a set of gentle, whole-body moving meditations that can be engaged in while sitting or standing, Discuss opportunities for formal and informal practice of qigong

BIOS: Matthew F. Komelski (Dr. K) is the Director of the Adaptive Brain and Behavior Minor and an Advanced Instructor in the Department of Human Development and Family Science. He teaches courses on mind-body health, aging, leadership and evaluation. His research interests include the use of MBPs to build resilience, support recovery and wellbeing across the lifespan. routinely collaborates with researchers developing mindfulness-based experimental protocol and clinicians developing community-based mindfulness programs.

Contemplative Practice Sessions: **Zen Meditation Sampler (Seminar Room)**. Zen meditation usually features sitting in silence and “letting body and mind fall away,” (Dogen, Genjokoan) teachers have offered a variety of guidance to get started. This peer learning session will begin with brief remarks describing zazen, followed by a series of short, guided meditations involving posture, counting, breathing, slow walking (if space permits), and embodying experiencing (Guo Gu, 2021, <https://thedewdrop.org/2021/08/02/guo-gus-guide-to-silent-illumination/>). Practices are drawn from the facilitator’s experiences with the online sangha of Upaya Zen Center (rooted in Maezumi Roshi’s lineage, which includes White Plum Asanga and Zen Peacemaker Order) and in-person practice at Blacks Run Zen Center, Harrisonburg, Virginia (rooted in the Myoshin-ji temple lineage of the Rinzai Zen tradition as introduced to America by Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi). After each offering, participants will be invited to reflect on their experiences, share, and ask questions. The session will conclude with ideas for integrating this style of meditation into your daily work and life. Potential benefits and learning outcomes of attendance include 1) expressing the self through Zen meditation; 2) direct experiencing of the body and mind; 3) engagement with colleagues on a similar journey of exploration; and 4) being able to list and describe a few principles of Zen practice. Reference materials include Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind, by Shunryu Suzuki, Opening the Hand of Thought, by Kosho Uchiyama, and Dharma, Color, and Culture, edited by Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín.

BIO: Galen Jay Talis (they/them) is a librarian, leadership studies scholar, and professor at James Madison University. They practice Zen meditation with Blacks Run Zen Center in Harrisonburg, VA, and All Beings Zen Sangha and Upaya Zen Center via Zoom.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 9:15 – 10:15 AM

General Session: **Contemplative Music for the Viola (Rehearsal & Performance Room)**. This interactive presentation will feature two works of contemplative nature for viola by composer Eric Lyon. Participants will listen to a live performance of Viola Rhizome and a world premiere of a new work for viola and electronics commissioned for this session at the Contemplative Practices for Higher Education 2026 Conference! The presenters, Molly Wilkens-Reed, viola, and Eric Lyon, composer, will discuss the artistic composition and performance preparation process, particularly as it relates to contemplative and meditative style music. Participants will be invited to meditate during the world premiere of the new viola and electronics piece. This experience will explore the realm of performer and audience meditation through live music. The program notes for Viola Rhizome describe how repetition, often used in meditation, brings this piece to life: The rhizome is a subterranean stem of a plant that sends roots and shoots from its nodes. A new rhizome can be formed from a segment of an existing rhizome. Ginger and turmeric are examples of rhizomes. The musical rhizome is a technique Eric developed in which repeated materials gradually send out musical roots and shoots, becoming nearly unrecognizable in the process. Viola Rhizome opens with a somber melody that is characteristic of the instrument. As this short piece develops, rhizomic procedures gradually open space for unexpected and dramatic outbursts.

BIOS: Molly Wilkens-Reed is Collegiate Assistant Professor of viola at Virginia Tech and the director of the VT String Project, as well as summer faculty at Interlochen Arts Camp. Wilkens-Reed earned Bachelor of Music degrees in Music Education and Viola Performance from the University of Memphis; a Master of Music degree in Viola Performance with a concentration in String Pedagogy at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University; and is a certified Suzuki violin and viola teacher. Molly performs with a 2009 Stanley Kiernoziak viola and bow by David Samuels. She resides in Blacksburg, VA with her husband and three sons. **Eric Lyon** is a composer and audio researcher. His audio software includes “FFTease” and “LyonPotpourri.” He has written two books, “Designing Audio Objects for Max/MSP and Pd,” and “Automated Sound Design.” Lyon architected both the Spatial Music Workshop and Cube Fest at Virginia Tech to support the work of other artists working with high-density loudspeaker arrays (HDLAs). Lyon co-created the Spatial Audio Tidepool to provide technical instruction for creative uses of HDLAs. His work has been recognized with a ZKM Giga-Hertz prize, MUSLAB award, the League ISCM World Music Days competition, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Lyon teaches at Virginia Tech.

General Sessions: **Taking Your Tush off the Cush: Making Mindfulness Inclusive and Accessible (Multipurpose Library).** "This practice is about seeing, but what's the point of seeing if you don't act." –Thich Nhat Hanh. Mindfulness is supposed to be inclusive. It is for everybody. But if you looked at the mindfulness movement in America today you wouldn't know it. Throughout much of rural America, in many inner urban and suburban areas, and much of red state America, contemplative practice and mindfulness are largely foreign concepts. So how do you promote contemplative practice to people and communities who have had limited access to it? In this interactive presentation, Reyle will speak about the importance of 'taking your tush off the cushion' and using your practice to engage with and serve your community—at school, at work, and at home. He will also provide some insights into how this can be done in places where resistance to contemplative practice is likely to be present, and will give participants the opportunity to share how they are either already using the practice to serve their own communities or how they might do so in the future.

BIO: Jamie Reyle, CMT-P is the founder and executive director of InStill Mindfulness. He has been practicing mindfulness since 2003, and has taught the practice in many settings, including schools, businesses, workshops, retreats, and music festivals, authored an eBook entitled *The Unenlightened Buddha*. Jamie has served on the boards of The Wilderness Society, the Queensland Music Industry Association, radio station 2NCR, Community Educational Resource Coalition, and Blue Mountain School. He holds a BA in Psychology, is an IMTA Certified Mindfulness Teacher, a graduate of The School for the Work with Byron Katie, and has completed Level I Focusing training.

General Sessions: **Dis-Solving Conflict from Within: Introduction to Mindfulness Based Conflict Coaching (Community Assembly).** This session will introduce the participants to unique, mindfulness-based conflict coaching methodology, called Dis-Solving Conflict from Within(tm). This introspective methodology integrates Eastern teachings and contemplative practices to empower one to respond to conflict with strength, clarity, and compassion as opposed to reacting to it with fear, avoidance, or aggression. This session will include a demonstration of conflict coaching session and will discuss specifically how this methodology can be used in academic settings. This session will also discuss how generally contemplative approach to conflict can transform even the most difficult interactions into opportunities for growth, connection, and dialogue.

BIO: Henry Yampolsky is an organizational ombudsman, internationally recognized conflict resolution expert, educator, lawyer, yogi, and a multi-time TEDx speaker. He is the author of *Dis-Solving Conflict from Within: An Inner Path for Conflict Transformation*. Henry serves as the inaugural Ombuds for the University of Virginia Health. He has taught and lectured around the world. Henry has spent extensive time in India, studying the Vedanta tradition and is a master-level instructor of Sattva Yoga.

Roundtable Conversations: **The Virtue of Non-Hurrying: Cultivating Human Flourishing & Contemplative Presence in an Age of Haste and Hyperactivity (Seminar Room).** Contemporary higher education operates within what sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2013) identifies as "social acceleration," a relentless pace that fragments attention, elevates anxiety, and undermines the deep learning that universities aspire to cultivate. Research consistently demonstrates that chronic time pressure impairs cognitive function, creative thinking, and ethical decision-making (Darley & Batson, 1973; Amabile et al., 2002), while contemplative practices enhance focus, emotional regulation, and academic performance (Goleman & Davidson, 2017). This workshop introduces non-hurrying as a learnable virtue; a disposition to think, feel, and act with wisdom and intentionality rather than haste. Drawing from both Eastern contemplative traditions (yogic principles of aparigraha and Buddhist concepts of sati or mindfulness and upadana or non-attachment) and Western philosophical frameworks (Stoic concepts of ataraxia and Aristotelian phronesis), non-hurrying emerges as what philosopher Carl Honoré (2004) terms "the art of living well in a fast world." This virtue enables us to have mindfulness and presence at work and in school that can transform learning and life satisfaction. The session offers evidence-based pedagogical strategies for integrating the virtue and its practices into an academic environment. Participants will explore contemplative approaches that enable transformative educational moments and human flourishing that require unhurried attention and full presence.

BIOS: Tay Keong Tan is the Director of International Studies and Leadership Studies and Professor of Political Science at Radford University. He teaches leadership, international studies, and public administration. He is the author and editor of five recent books on sustainable development and anti-corruption. He has led organizations in Singapore, Israel, the United Nations, and the United States. He has worked in more than two dozen countries. Dr. Tan has a doctorate in Public Policy from Harvard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and a Master's in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School. **Jason Clemons** is a native of the New River Valley. He completed his 200-hour yoga teacher training with the Kunga Yoga School based in Wilmington, NC and Blacksburg, VA. His home yoga studio is In Balance Yoga in Blacksburg, VA. He's the proud father of an eleven-year-old son. Their family also includes four cats and two dogs. When not practicing and teaching yoga, Jason is a cloud engineer for Virginia Tech.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 10:30 – 11:30 AM

Contemplative Practice Session: **R.E.A.L. Method: A Collaborative Dance-Based Practice (Rehearsal & Performance Room).** This experiential workshop introduces a visual model and method for generating and transforming movement material. R.E.A.L. represents Relational Embodied Active Learning. Informed by research in interpersonal neurobiology, cognitive science, and learning theory, this model comes to life through a process that involves improvisation and collaborative choreography. The approach is highly adaptable to a wide range of populations and settings. It is grounded in the belief that learning is a creative act, involving problem-solving, choice-making, and enhanced awareness. Focused upon challenging habitual movement behaviors and expanding personal agency, the method illuminates the enactive nature of consciousness. R.E.A.L. also uncovers our capacity for change, within our own

bodies, our lives and our interactions with others. Imagination is central to harnessing our ability to manifest what does not yet exist. Session Goals: Disrupt ingrained, habitual movement patterns and awaken one's awareness to new ways of experiencing one's body. Provide a sense of agency for all participants within a choreographic creative process, despite their experience or ability level, as well as a path upon which they can direct their attention. Make visible the enactive nature of consciousness, reflecting the evolution of thinking about "mind" particularly within the field of interpersonal neurobiology that proposes "mind" extends beyond our own bodies, beyond our own brains.

BIO: Jillian Harris, Associate Professor of Dance at Temple University, researches new models and platforms for dance-based collaborations. Recently, she became a co-recipient of an Asian Cultural Council Individual Fellowship for a cross-cultural exchange project with Xiang Xu. Other projects include Mud: Bodies of History, an interactive web dance experience (www.mudbodies.com), and the award-winning short dance film Red Earth Calling. She has had a distinguished performance career, working with the Metropolitan Opera and collaborating with notable artists like composer Ola Gjeilo. Jillian continues to explore what animates and connects us across time and space—real, imagined, and digital.

General Sessions: **Mutual Inquiry: What Artists and Monks Teach Us About the Art of Understanding (Multipurpose Library)**. This session explores how educators can better serve students by developing assessment strategies that champion a mutual uncovering of knowledge and wisdom for all parties involved. Participants will look to construct spaces of assessment that both gauge student understanding and cultivate self-awareness as a foundation for mindful and ethical living. This framework emerges from Professor Clark Valentine's new research linking Contemporary Art Critique with the Nalanda tradition of Tibetan Buddhist debate — a contemplative practice that refines insight and critical thinking through disciplined, relational inquiry. Valentine's current structure of critique is informed by best practices in art education as well as his work with Tibetan teachers in Kathmandu, Nepal, and Pisa, Italy. His goal is to challenge Western models of assessment and create classroom environments where all participants can safely question assumptions and develop wisdom that extends beyond academic contexts. During the session, participants will learn about Nalanda Debate as well as how art critique is performed in a university classroom. They will engage in a guided critique using mindful observation and contemplative listening practices drawn from both traditions, emphasizing curiosity over evaluation. Participants will then collaboratively brainstorm how their own assessment strategies can become tools for wisdom development for their students. By the end of the session, participants will be able to articulate the overlaps between contemplative practices and Contemporary Art Critique and identify ways similar strategies can be implemented in their own classrooms. This approach invites educators to reimagine assessment as a contemplative dialogue — cultivating compassion, critical inquiry, and intercultural understanding in higher education.

BIO: Clark Valentine (b. 1997) is an internationally exhibiting artist based in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA. His drawings explore spiritual practice and phenomenology through repetition, balancing movement and stillness as meditations on presence. Valentine's work has been shown in museums and universities on five continents, and is in public collections including King's College, Cambridge (UK) and the Heintzman Collection. Solo exhibitions include the Patan Museum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Nepal, and the Department of Culture in Uruguay. He is a founding member of the I Found U Collective - a collective of artists working across three continents. Currently, he serves as Assistant Professor and Drawing Area Head at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

General Sessions: **The Flow Campus: Embodiment, Belonging, and the Practice of Co-Regulation (Seminar Room)**. We re-imagine higher education as a system of relational care and embodied awareness. Grounded in the Community Resiliency Model (CRM) and the Flow Zone framework, this session bridges contemplative pedagogy and trauma-informed neuroscience to show how nervous-system literacy can transform classrooms, leadership, and student life. Drawing from "high-dose" CRM research and lived implementation experience, presenters guide participants through three core skills—Tracking, Resourcing, and Help Now—to illustrate how embodied practice supports both individual and collective well-being. Participants will explore how regulation and co-regulation build empathy, connection, and a shared language for care across diverse campus settings. The session blends data storytelling, experiential practice, and reflective dialogue, encouraging participants to see the nervous system as a contemplative teacher and regulation as a shared act of compassion. Attendees will leave with concrete skills and strategies for fostering a "Flow Campus" culture where connection, not correction, becomes the foundation of belonging and resilience—one nervous system at a time.

BIOS: Jon Dance is a PhD student in the Foundations of Education program and Graduate Assistant for the Center for Rural Education at Virginia Tech. A Certified Peer Recovery Specialist and 2024 CRM Ambassador of the Year, his work focuses on recovery, resilience, and trauma-informed education in rural and higher-education communities. Jon integrates the Community Resiliency Model (CRM) into schools and universities to promote relational, embodied approaches to learning and well-being. **Erica Berry Coates** is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and 2024 CRM Ambassador of the Year with over 20 years of experience in trauma-informed practice and community training. Certified in the Community Resiliency Model (CRM) and completing certification in the Trauma Resiliency Model (TRM), she partners with educators, clinicians, and organizations to integrate embodied resilience and co-regulation into daily practice and leadership.

SESSION DESCRIPTION: FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM Poster Session in Community Assembly Room

Posters: **The Contemplative Classroom: Building Empathy, Belonging, and Connection in a Large-Enrollment Biology Course (Community Assembly)**. Focus: Description of using contemplative pedagogy and practice
Goals/Objectives: Demonstrate cultivating empathy, belonging, and connection in a large science course

Large-enrollment science courses can unintentionally foster anonymity and disengagement, leaving students feeling isolated and disconnected from both their peers and their learning. In this work, contemplative pedagogy and practice were used to cultivate empathy, belonging, and authentic connection in students enrolled in a 300-person introductory microbiology course. Before the semester, course policies were created that emphasize flexibility and trust, consider student circumstances, and allow for diverse learning preferences. At the start of the semester, students connect with each other by participating in community-building group activities and taking shared responsibility in co-authoring course policies. Throughout the semester, students demonstrate knowledge through varied assignments and participate in reflective thinking that invites mindfulness and empathy. Students also learn to become real-world problem-solvers by completing group projects on relevant public health topics enabling them to apply their knowledge of microbiology to helping their communities. Together, these practices reshape the large lecture course to be a contemplative community that balances academics with human connection. The adaptable strategies described are useful for scaling belonging-centered pedagogy and fostering compassion, collaboration, and purpose in large university courses.

BIO: Erin Richard is an Assistant Professor of Pedagogical Development and Student Learning Assessment in the Department of Biology at the University of Kentucky. Trained as a molecular and cellular biologist at the Medical University of South Carolina, her research now bridges STEM education, inclusive pedagogy, and microbiology. She leads initiatives to improve evidence-based teaching and student belonging in biology, co-investigates an NSF S-STEM grant on science identity and self-efficacy, and mentors faculty and graduate instructors in equitable instructional practice. Her publications span immunology, microbial ecology, and biology education, advancing innovation in undergraduate science learning.

Posters: The Role of Dispositional Mindfulness in Buffering Trauma Symptoms of Marginalized Sexual and Gender Identities at a Southeastern United States University (Community Assembly). Dispositional mindfulness (DM), or the tendency towards mindful daily living, is important for emotional regulation following traumatic experiences. According to the minority stress model, individuals from historically marginalized groups (e.g. people of color, sexual and gender minorities) are particularly vulnerable to trauma exposure and negative mental health outcomes. Previous studies found that DM buffered against psychological distress in minoritized groups following adverse discriminatory experiences. However, continued exploration of this minority stress model among DM subscales is needed, particularly for recovery from traumatic experiences. Our study aims to address these gaps by studying DM, trauma exposure, and mental health outcomes across demographic groups in 646 undergraduates (aged 18-26) from a Southeastern U.S. university. Participants (Mage = 19.09, SD = 1.60) were majority white (59.9%) and women (67.0%), with 18.9% identifying as sexual or gender minorities. Participants completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire alongside trauma and mental health measures. 95.4% of participants reported trauma exposure and 50.6% exceeded clinical cutoffs for anxiety, PTSD, or depression. Overarching DM levels were consistent across demographic groups. However, sexual minority participants scored higher than heterosexual peers on total DM scores and most subscales (p s = .017–.002), and women and nonbinary/transgender participants scored higher on Acting with Awareness than men (p = .002). Among women, Describe and Nonreactivity weakened the trauma-anxiety association (p = .045), while Nonjudging weakened the trauma-depression association (p = .011). Findings highlight that specific facets of DM may buffer trauma-related mental health symptoms, with subscale-level differences varying across sexual and gender identities.

BIOS: Maeve Schumacher (she/her/hers) is a Clinical Health Psychology PhD student at East Carolina University. She earned a BS in Cognitive and Behavioral Neuroscience from Villanova University in 2022, then worked as a clinical research assistant at the Johns Hopkins Schizophrenia Center before beginning graduate school. Maeve's research interests broadly involve modifying mindfulness intervention protocols to best suit the needs of diverse social, demographic, and clinical groups. In particular, Maeve is interested in working with women's reproductive health populations—such as miscarriage, pregnancy loss, infertility, PCOS, and endometriosis—and adapting mindfulness protocols for these groups.

Additional Authors: Lou Sutherland (she/they) is a 1st year Clinical Health Psychology PhD student at East Carolina University. She earned her BS/BA in Psychology and Creative Writing from Mercer University, and worked for two years researching psychosocial interventions for orthopedic trauma patients. She is broadly interested in researching the adaptation and development of mindfulness- and self-compassion-based interventions to meet the unique needs of patients with cancer and/or other complex illnesses. In particular, Lou seeks to explore and address the interplay between identity, body image, and existential issues in advanced gynecological cancer patients. **Kaylee R. Meer** is an undergraduate student at East Carolina University pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience and Psychology. Kaylee's ongoing research interests focus on stress and mental health outcomes in emerging adults, with the goal of informing tailored and accessible support services, particularly for college students. She is also interested in mindfulness and mindfulness-based programs as a potential moderators of stress-related psychological outcomes. **Alia R. Simon** is a Clinical Health Psychology Doctoral candidate at East Carolina University. She earned her BA from the University of Tampa and her MA from East Carolina University. Alia's ongoing research interests include examining the impact of cumulative life stress, interoceptive processes, and psychological disorders with somatic features, and exploring racial/ethnic considerations to inform adaptations of mindfulness-based programs for emerging adults. She is also passionate about tailoring mindfulness-based programs for coping with specific health conditions, such as epilepsy. **Kelsey Dietrich** is a 500-hour Registered Yoga Teacher and Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Facilitator with additional certifications in trauma-informed mindfulness and meditation. In 2024, she published the book "Mindfulness for Type 1 Diabetes." Kelsey earned her BA in English and Psychology from Bowling Green State University and MA in Psychological Sciences from the University of Minnesota Duluth where she was the Research Team Coordinator for the Mind-Body Trauma Care Lab. Currently, she is a third-year PhD student studying Clinical Health Psychology at East Carolina University and researches trauma-sensitive yoga and mindfulness-based interventions in the Stress and Health Lab. **Christyn Dolbier** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at East Carolina University. She earned a BS from Eckerd College, MS from the University of Florida, PhD from the University of Texas at Austin, and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California at San Francisco. She is a health psychologist specializing in stress reduction interventions and biopsychosocial pathways between stress and health. She teaches, advises, and mentors psychology graduate and undergraduate students; conducts research on mindfulness, mindfulness-based and mindfulness-integrated programs, and stress and its relationship to health; and facilitates mindfulness-based programs with various populations.

LUNCH ON YOUR OWN 12:00 – 1:00 PM

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 1:00 – 2:00 PM

General Sessions: **Teaching from Within: Restoring Faculty Passion and Transforming Institutional Culture Through Contemplative Practice (Rehearsal & Performance Room).** The "Teaching from Within" program at Concordia University Texas (CTX) was a 12-week contemplative practice initiative addressing educator burnout and restoring participant passion. Funded by the Lilly Faculty Fellows Grant and framed as a restorative "gift to faculty," the program engaged twelve faculty members in practices including breathing meditation, body awareness, and nature observation within CTX's campus nature preserve. Survey results showed exceptional success. All participants reported significant personal and professional transformation, becoming calmer educators with improved connection to self and others. The project revitalized community building, revived campus traditions, sparked interdepartmental collaboration, and influenced CTX administration to shift annual faculty professional development emphasis toward outdoor, contemplative, and community-focused activities. This session details the model's design, presents key findings, and explores how restorative approaches to faculty wellness create sustainable ripple effects on pedagogy and institutional culture. Session's Purpose: Share the CTX model and transformational results, demonstrating how contemplative faculty programming can effectively combat burnout, foster genuine community, and influence institutional culture and pedagogical innovation in higher education. Session Goals: Detail the 12-week program's structure and nature preserve integration, Present evidence of success, including survey data on enhanced self-awareness and improved classroom environments, Analyze institutional ripple effects on organizational priorities, Engage attendees in contemplative practice and discussion for personal well-being and classroom application. Expected Learning Outcomes: Participants will describe the program model, assess its impact on faculty wellness and institutional culture, and apply contemplative practices personally and professionally.

BIO: Corinne Weisgerber is a Professor of Communication at Concordia University Texas with over 20 years of experience in higher education. Her research focuses on digital media, pedagogy, and technology's influence on identity. As a recent Lilly faculty fellow, she co-led the "Teaching from Within" mindfulness initiative to promote contemplative practices on campus. She is now developing a degree program featuring a 6-credit contemplative practices module that helps students build sustained focus and resilience; all essential skills for navigating today's complex digital landscape.

General Sessions: **Community Resilience Model: Finding your Flow in Glitter Jars (Multipurpose Library).** The purpose of this session is to introduce participants to the Community Resilience Model (CRM) and how it is being utilized at Virginia Tech to give students a shared language surrounding stress, resilience, and mental health along with skills to manage stress. During this session, participants will engage in a program designed to teach students about CRM while also making a glitter jar to help them engage in breathing exercises to support their well-being. Participants will learn what CRM is, a few CRM skills, and how to implement CRM into their lives using their newly made glitter jar. The goal of this session is to help participants think creatively about how to incorporate well-being into their work with students.

BIOS: Colleen Driscoll is the Assistant Director of Mental Health Initiatives in Hokie Wellness at Virginia Tech where she develops and oversees prevention and education programs. Programs include peer support groups, mindfulness-based interventions, brief outreach, large scale events, and workshops. The goal of her work is to increase students' resilience, decrease the stigma around mental health, and provide safe spaces to seek help and learn skills to manage challenges. Colleen is also a Certified Mental Performance Coach through the Association for Applied Sport Psychology and works with athletes of all ages outside of her work at VT. **Neha** is the Mental Health Initiatives Coordinator at Hokie Wellness. She is passionate about raising awareness, promoting education, and reducing stigma around mental health through holistic and meaningful outreach. Neha earned her Master of Public Health with a concentration in Population Mental Health from Rutgers University in New Jersey. She strives to create lasting, positive change in people's lives by equipping students with tools to support their well-being and connecting them to appropriate resources. In her free time, Neha enjoys painting, dancing, and exploring new places.

General Sessions: **From Mind to Movement: The Neuroscience of Embodied Contemplative Practice (Community Assembly).** This talk explores the cutting-edge neuroscience underlying embodied contemplative practices, including meditation, yoga, and dance, and their impact on brain function and behavior. Drawing from research at the Embodied Brain Lab, Dr. Basso will discuss how movement-based interventions engage neural mechanisms that support mood regulation, memory enhancement, and social connection. The presentation bridges fundamental neuroscience with practical applications, demonstrating how understanding the body-brain connection can inform the development of embodied interventions that promote mental health and well-being. Attendees will gain insight into the neural and behavioral mechanisms through which contemplative movement practices transform both brain and behavior.

BIOS: Julia C. Basso is an Assistant Professor in the Virginia Tech Department of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise, Director of The Embodied Brain Laboratory, and Co-Director of The Science & Art of Movement Lab. She holds a PhD in Behavioral and Neural Science, a BA in dance, and is a certified yoga teacher. Her work at the intersection of arts and science investigates how mind-body-movement and creative practices, such as dance and music, affect brain function and physiology. Her research has been published in Cell Reports, Brain Plasticity, Behavioral Neuroscience, and the Journal of Neuroscience Methods, and featured in the New York Times, Dance Magazine, Psychology Today, NPR, and the BBC.

Contemplative Practice Session: **Cultivating Calm: Mindfulness Practices to Begin Class (Seminar Room).** In today's fast-paced world, both students and educators face constant stress and distraction. Beginning class with a brief mindfulness activity can foster a sense of calm, presence, and connection. This practice session introduces several short, adaptable mindfulness exercises designed to center the mind and body, promote a sense of belonging, and prepare participants for deeper engagement in learning. Grounded in contemplative pedagogy and supported by research,

mindfulness in the classroom has been shown to reduce stress, improve focus, and enhance emotional regulation. Studies demonstrate that even brief mindfulness practices can significantly improve student well-being and academic performance (Das et al., 2025; Bala, 2024; Serrao et al., 2022). Faculty-led mindfulness activities also strengthen faculty-student relationships and improve teaching practices (Schwind et al., 2020). Participants will experience a series of guided practices, each a creative variation on traditional techniques such as breath awareness, sensory grounding, and silent reflection. These exercises are designed to be inclusive, accessible, and easily integrated into diverse classroom settings. By the end of the session, participants will be able to: describe the benefits of mindfulness for both students and educators; perform several brief mindfulness activities suitable for classroom use; adapt a mindfulness practice to fit their own teaching context; and, reflect on the personal and pedagogical impact of these practices. This session offers not only practical tools but also a moment of stillness within the busy conference environment and an opportunity to experience firsthand the power of mindful presence.

BIO: Kristyn DeMarco has been teaching in higher education for over 15 years and has been at Johnson & Wales University for the past 5 years. Her research is focused in two areas, one pedagogical and the other scientific in nature. Her pedagogical research involves weaving best practices from the holistic education movement into teaching and learning. Her specialization is in contemplative education with a specific focus on the role of mindfulness practices in the classroom. Her scientific research is in freshwater ecology with a focus on the urban stream syndrome. Through her involvement in undergraduate research, she and her students investigate the impact of channelization on a small urban stream near Providence, RI.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2:15 – 3:15 PM

General Sessions: **Dharma of Teaching and Pedagogy of Service: Lessons from Bhakti and Socrates (Rehearsal & Performance Room)**. In this general session, I will discuss my general contemplative approach to teaching drawing on the teachings of Socrates and Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy. This approach which for convenience can be called a pedagogy of service, has various applications throughout course design, in-classroom instruction, and student-student, student-teacher and teacher-self interactions. The main focus will be on how a pedagogy of service addresses teacher frustration and burnout. Purpose: To introduce the audience to skills, approaches, and ideas for reconceiving their relationship to themselves and their students in order to address frustrations that can lead to burnout, particularly in light of the prevalence of AI use in the classroom. Goals: (1) Familiarizing others with a novel approach to contemplative pedagogy; (2) Deepening my own understanding a pedagogy of service through discussion and criticism. Learning outcomes: Participants will (1) have an understanding of a pedagogy of service and the thinking and philosophy that underwrites it; (2) identify two practices they could bring to their own teaching; (3) an appreciation of how less familiar contemplative philosophy can expand or supplement contemplative practices with which they are already engaged – e.g. mindfulness, et cetera.

BIO: Joshua Anderson is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Virginia State University. Their primary areas of research are in Social/Political Philosophy and Ethics, with additional interests in both African American Philosophy and Eastern Philosophy especially as these overlap with the former two. Anderson was the recipient of 2022-23 Outstanding Faculty Award Rising Star Award for Teaching and is actively engaged in the philosophy and praxis of pedagogy with a particular focus on contemplative pedagogy. To that end, they are a certified Compassion Cultivation Training teacher and 200-hour yoga teacher registered with the Yoga Alliance.

General Sessions: **Teaching with Intention: Contemplative Collaboration in the First-Year Classroom (Multipurpose Library)**. In this workshop, presenters will overview their unique collaborative learning partnership (CLP) that is at the core of Johnson & Wales University's progressive andragogical philosophy. The presenters have created a collaborative learning experience for first-year students who are taking both an Environmental Science and a Rhetoric and Composition class during the same semester. This workshop will highlight several of the presenters' initiatives that focus on providing support for their students both in and out of their classes. This teaching collaboration lends itself to interactive learning, which in turn provides opportunity for students to grow as college students, to be motivated intrinsically, and to grasp the concept of metacognition as they experience these two classes taught in collaboration. The presenters will introduce activities that are grounded in contemplative, interdisciplinary, and experiential learning models designed for college classes that are adaptable for other courses and collaborations. In addition to classroom activities and connections, the presenters will share an experiential-learning opportunity they designed utilizing Rhode Island's coastal communities, so students can interact with natural environments. Through this experience, students engage in robust discussions that directly affect what they are learning in the classroom. Throughout this workshop, participants will analyze several assignments where the presenters have used strategies of andragogy practices to enhance academic and reflective writing that allows for more in-depth understanding of environmental science concepts and themes. Lastly, in this hour-long presentation, the presenters will provide a space for attendees to create potential collaborative learning opportunities and assignments for their educational settings.

BIOS: Kristyn DeMarco has been teaching in higher education for over 15 years and has been at Johnson & Wales University for the past 5 years. Her research is focused in two areas, one pedagogical and the other scientific in nature. Her pedagogical research involves weaving best practices from the holistic education movement into teaching and learning. Her specialization is in contemplative education with a specific focus on the role of mindfulness practices in the classroom. Her scientific research is in freshwater ecology with a focus on the urban stream syndrome. Through her involvement in undergraduate research, she and her students investigate the impact of channelization on a small urban stream near Providence, RI. **Erin Wynn**, MA in TESOL, Hunter College; BS in English Education, NYU is an Associate Professor of English at Johnson & Wales University. Wynn is in her 19th year teaching at Johnson &

Wales. Throughout her tenure as faculty, she has developed several academic programs and English courses. Wynn works closely with colleagues to ensure consistency in first-year English courses providing essential support in first-year college courses. Wynn is dedicated to creating a safe and interactive classroom environment, so students are engaged with content they are learning in classes. Whether she is teaching her first-year rhetoric and composition classes or upper-level writing classes, Erin continually facilitates a collaborative and supportive environment for her students.

General Sessions: Implementing Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Programs on Campus: Research and Reflections (Community Assembly). Trauma is an experience that threatens one's life, safety, or bodily integrity and can cause posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition characterized by symptoms of negative change in mood/cognition, increased arousal/reactivity, intrusive thoughts/emotions/memories of trauma, and avoidance of trauma-related stimuli (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). PTSD rates have increased in college students (Idoiaga et al., 2022) underscoring the importance of effective and accessible trauma care options. Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TCTSY) is an adjunctive PTSD treatment that fills an intervention gap by providing strategies to manage the effects of trauma on the body (Emerson et al., 2009; Zaccari et al., 2023). Yoga has been identified as a popular form of mind-body medicine used by college students (Nowak et al., 2024); however, no research has examined TCTSY with college students. The purpose of the session is to describe our preparation for launching a campus TCTSY program. Session goals include: 1) provide rationale for using a trauma-sensitive approach for mind-body practices; 2) summarize process for conducting a TCTSY program needs assessment; 3) describe approach to disseminating TCTSY background and program information to student affairs professionals; 4) share plans for campus TCTSY program implementation; 5) offer a brief TSY practice opportunity. Participant learning outcomes include: 1) understand the biopsychosocial implications of trauma for college student wellbeing; 2) gain practical strategies for how to facilitate mind-body practices using a trauma-sensitive approach; 3) recognize the importance of research and needs assessments prior to program implementation; 4) engage in a TSY practice opportunity.

BIOS: Kelsey Dietrich is a 500-hour Registered Yoga Teacher and Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Facilitator with additional certifications in trauma-informed mindfulness and meditation. In 2024, she published the book "Mindfulness for Type 1 Diabetes." Kelsey earned her BA in English and Psychology from Bowling Green State University and MA in Psychological Sciences from the University of Minnesota Duluth where she was the Research Team Coordinator for the Mind-Body Trauma Care Lab. Currently, she is a third-year PhD student studying Clinical Health Psychology at East Carolina University and researches trauma-sensitive yoga and mindfulness-based interventions in the Stress and Health Lab. **Christyn Dolbier** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at East Carolina University. She earned a BS from Eckerd College, MS from the University of Florida, PhD from the University of Texas at Austin, and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California at San Francisco. She is a health psychologist specializing in stress reduction interventions and biopsychosocial pathways between stress and health. She teaches, advises, and mentors psychology graduate and undergraduate students; conducts research on mindfulness, mindfulness-based and mindfulness-integrated programs, and stress and its relationship to health; and facilitates mindfulness-based programs with various populations.

Contemplative Practice Session: Compassion Revolution: Transforming the World from the Inside-Out (Seminar Room). Everywhere we turn, there is suffering and distress in the world. There are challenges, complexities, and relentless busy-ness. In the midst of that, how do we find and maintain our inner peace? How do we build healthy, loving and kind relationships? And how do we organize ourselves into larger groups and efforts that can continue to hold the values of mindfulness and compassion for positive global transformation? In this practice session, we will experience 3 meditation practices: for self-compassion, then cultivating compassion with others, and finally as a collective group. By moving from Self to Others to Society (S.O.S.), this session will model a pathway for a holistic Compassion Revolution, to transform our presence and our impact in the world. This session has implications for who we are in the higher education setting and who we are in the wider world beyond the walls of education.

BIO: Juliet Trail is an award-winning leader, teacher, author, speaker, & facilitator with 25+ years' experience across five continents, presently serving as Co-Chair of the C-HEARTS Executive Committee. She is a facilitator of transformation focused on compassion, connection to nature, mindfulness, empowerment, and resilience. Dr. Trail is Founding Director of Courageous Compassion Connection, building a sustainable world for all beings through human awakening, courageous connection and compassionate action. She is the author of *Compassion and Coincidence: How Synchronicity Awakens the Heart and Reveals Our Interconnectedness*. As Co-Founder of Dancing Phoenix, she offers contemplative coaching and healing to artists, authors, and creatives.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 3:30 – 4:30 PM

General Sessions: Teaching Science and Spirituality in STEM Higher Education (Rehearsal & Performance Room). We have developed a course Science and Spirituality that we taught as an elective at an engineering college. We have taught this 3-credit course for 14 semesters to a total of more than 500 students. The class was extremely popular among students. In the class we go beyond the worldview of materialism and scientism that is taught in other classes. We discuss topics such as a sense of wonder, determinism vs. free will, the quantum universe, the biology of transcendence, the mind-body connection, consciousness, and the power of mind. We help students move out their analytical mind through exercises that include meditation, listening to music, personal sharing, and walking the labyrinth. The class serves a need among student for a variety of reasons. Some students yearn to discuss religion or spirituality and dive into a word view beyond materialism and scientism. Others have experienced religion in their upbringing as a traumatic event, but they are still interested to explore. Because of stress or a traumatic past, many students are not doing well, they love the tools that we offer them to deal with their challenge. In our session we present the class, the importance of experiential teaching, a description of what it took to get the class on the roster, and how popular this class was among

students. We will use group conversations, and we will do an exercise in which we use the language of the body to connect with our emotional selves.

BIOS: Roel Snieder emeritus Professor of Professional Development Education at the Colorado School of Mines. He worked in geophysical research for 40 years publishing 300 technical papers and 3 textbooks. Roel received the 2020 the Ange Melagro Prize for his outstanding class Science and Spirituality. In 2023 Roel received the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Colorado School of Mines Board of Trustees. From 2000-2014 he was a firefighter in Genesee Fire Rescue where he served for two years as Fire Chief. He now focuses on transformational coaching and teaching (<https://roelcoaching.com>). **Cynthia James** is a transformational coach and inspirational leader, guiding people to make changes at a deep level for lasting healing (<https://www.cynthiajames.net>). Cynthia excels as a speaker, coach, singer, and multiple award-winning author of several books. Her newest book *Does My Voice Matter?* was released in 2022. Cynthia's life was transformed as she transcended a violent and abusive childhood. Through education and personal healing, she created the foundation for all her programs. Her work in self-care strategies and emotional integration support leaders, women and organizations internationally.

General Sessions: The Creative Mindset: Using Mindfulness to Foster Growth and Engagement in Writing

(Multipurpose Library). This interactive presentation introduces a holistic classroom practice that integrates breath work, freewriting, and affirmations to help students prepare for writing in English courses. Beginning with guided breathing exercises to cultivate calm and focus, students then engage in freewriting to encourage authentic self-expression and reduce writing anxiety. The session concludes with affirmations that foster resilience and a growth mindset, reframing mistakes and challenges as opportunities for learning and development. Participants will actively engage in each stage of the process through short demonstrations, reflective discussion, and group participation, mirroring how students would experience these practices in the classroom. This hands-on approach allows attendees to feel the immediate impact of mindfulness-based techniques that lower affective barriers to writing while deepening literary engagement and critical thinking. **Purpose and Goals:** The purpose of this session is to demonstrate how intentional practices of breath, reflection, and affirmation can transform writing instruction into a more inclusive and empowering experience. These techniques invite students to enter the classroom with focus, confidence, and emotional readiness to learn. **Expected Learning Outcomes:** By the end of the session, participants will: Learn how to integrate breath work, freewriting, and affirmations into writing instruction to reduce anxiety and promote focus. Understand how affirmations support the development of a growth mindset and resilience. Discover how mindfulness-based writing practices enhance students' engagement with literature, critical analysis, and reflective writing.

BIO: Rebekah L. Pierce is an author, professor, playwright, veteran, and mindset strategist dedicated to empowering women to live in their purpose through the arts and advocacy. A Professor of English Literature and Composition, she uses storytelling as a tool for healing, reflection, and transformation. Rebekah is the author of two bestselling historical fiction novels: *Murder on Second Street: The Jackson Ward Murders* and *The Secret Life of Lucy Bosman*, and the forthcoming nonfiction book *Before the Lesson Begins: Using Breath, Reflection, and Affirmations to Inspire Student Learning*. Represented by Lisa Hagan Literary, she continues to champion truth, creativity, and women's voices worldwide.

General Sessions: Teaching Contemplative Techniques for Leadership and Team Development in Graduate Professional Education (Seminar Room).

This session will review techniques for teaching graduate students contemplative methods for self-care, leadership, and teambuilding. The program will cover how to teach students about mindful leadership in these areas: the importance of self-awareness and the body and mind connection, contemplative techniques for self-care, how contemplative techniques help improve leadership, and how they can support team development. The instructor will share effective techniques to use at the beginning of every class and tips for convincing students critical of contemplative practices. **Purpose:** This session introduces educators to practical methods for incorporating contemplative practices into professional curricula to enhance student leadership capabilities, self-awareness, and teambuilding skills. **Goals:** To equip faculty with concrete strategies for teaching mindful leadership in the classroom, to demonstrate how contemplative techniques support both individual development and team dynamics, and to provide approaches for engaging students who may be skeptical of these practices. **Learning Outcomes:** Participants will identify and apply contemplative techniques for graduate settings, understand how self-awareness enhances effective leadership, implement contemplative exercises in their classes, and respond effectively to student skepticism about contemplative practices. **Format:** This session will include an experiential contemplative practice and practical teaching methods. The session will begin with an overview and a short reflection practice. The presenter will share teaching methods, classroom examples, and strategies for introducing these practices to students. The session will include time for discussion and Q&A, and will conclude with a final reflective journaling practice to integrate insights from the session.

BIO: Theresa Ricke-Kiely is an expert in nonprofit leadership, management, and mindfulness with over 25 years of experience. Before moving into academia, she directed nonprofit human service programs. She served at the University of South Carolina Upstate, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of St Thomas. Now a faculty member at the University of Arizona's School of Government and Public Policy, she focuses on mindful public and nonprofit leadership. She is a mindful leadership coach-sultant serving small nonprofits. She wrote *The Path to Mindful Leadership: Practices for Nonprofit Success* (2024) and is writing her second book on mindfulness.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 4:45 – 6:30 PM

C-HEARTS Announcements, Matthew Komelski, Samantha Harden, Juliet Trail (Rehearsal & Performance Space)

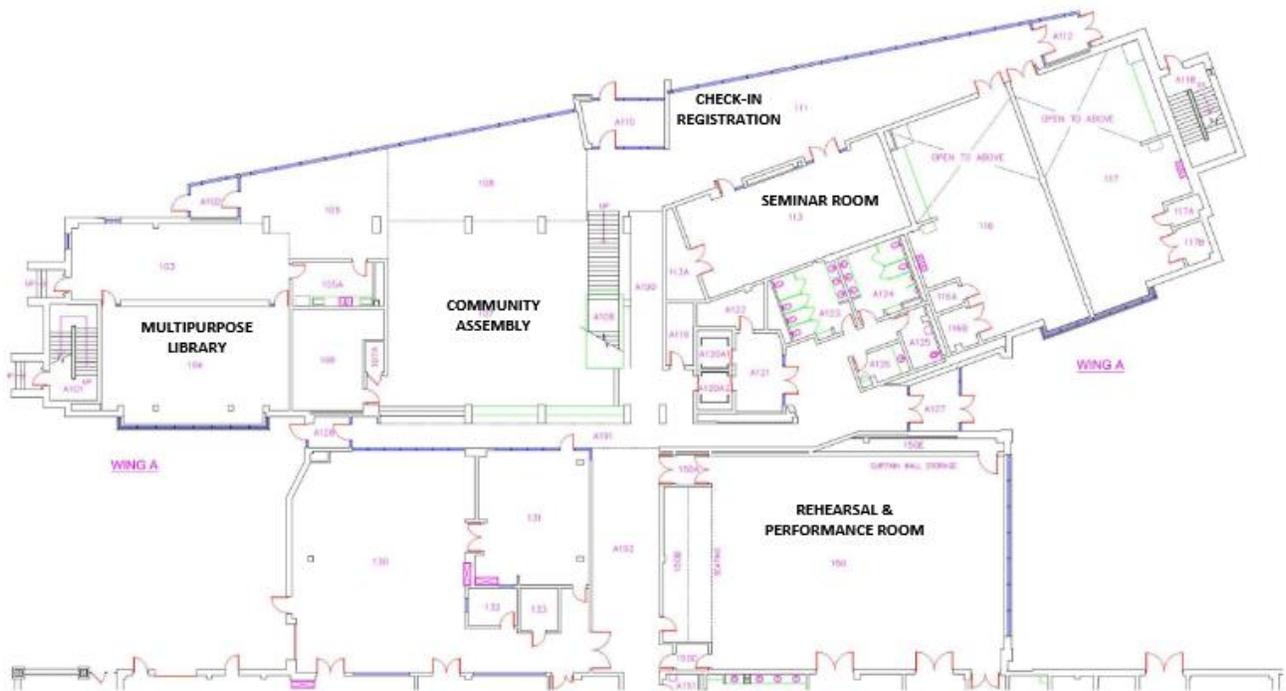
Keynote Address by Gaylon Ferguson: “Courageous Teaching as Compassionate Leadership”
Room: Rehearsal & Performance Room
(Full details on p.7)

HALF-DAY RETREAT
SATURDAY, MARCH 14

Breakfast available, 8:00 – 9:00 AM
Retreat led by Nawungmé (Tahitia) Woods, “Dynamic Stillness: A Somatic Interweave of Spirit, Body, & Mind,”
9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Room: Rehearsal and Performance Room
(Full details on p.7)

Lunch and final announcements in the Community Assembly, 1:00 – 2:00 pm

CONFERENCE LOCATIONS



THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING
THE 2026 CONFERENCE!