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# The Mindful Campus: Organizational Structure and Culture

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*This case study of a campus known to incorporate contemplative practices in the curriculum and co-curriculum explored how a mindful campus is operated as well as what organizational structures and cultures are in place to support the use of contemplative practices. Supportive structures include physical structures (i.e., a labyrinth and meditation room), non-physical structures (i.e., a faculty learning community and student meditation club), and financial structures (i.e., a special professorate and internal grants). Cultural themes that emerged from participants' description of the campus culture focused on embodiment of the liberal arts philosophy, community, and connection. All of Tierney's (2008) aspects of culture—organizational mission, environment, information sharing, socialization of members, strategy, and leadership—had some evidence of being supportive of contemplative education in this campus culture, albeit in varying degrees. However, contemplative education, in itself, does not appear to be adequate to raise consciousness of issues of privilege, social justice, and diversity without making these issues explicit aspects of a mindful campus.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The term “mindful campus” describes colleges and universities whose leaders use contemplative education in the curriculum and co-curriculum with the intention to engage students in an introspective way of knowing that contributes to the education of the whole person. In contemplative education, students are encouraged to engage directly in various techniques and then appraise their experience for meaning and significance (Bush, 2011a). Contemplative educational practices have the potential to enhance students' cognitive and academic performance through development of dispositions underlying independent critical thinking (Sable, 2014), improved meaning-making and motivation (Bach & Alexander, 2015), and engagement in deeper understandings of oppression (Berila, 2014).

Few organizational studies of specific institutions using contemplative education exist. Among the few is a descriptive article by DuFon and Christian (2013) that chronicles how a faculty group and a student group on the campus of California State University, Chico developed independently to promote mindfulness

and contemplative pedagogy on campus and later become a unified faculty/student group called The Mindful Campus. Three short organizational studies and historical accounts have been prepared on Naropa University (Burggraf, 2011; Goss, 1999; Simmer-Brown, 2009), which was founded on contemplative pedagogy by Chögyam Trungpa as the first accredited Buddhist-inspired college in the United States (Goss, 1999). The literature on organizational structures and cultures that support a mindful campus is clearly limited. The purpose of this research was to develop a case study of a mindful campus in order to help leaders in higher education better understand a mindful campus and what administrative structure and culture is necessary to help the phenomenon of contemplative education thrive.

## **METHODS**

This single-case study describes a public liberal arts university enrolling approximately 4,000 undergraduate students, with a student body that is 80% racially White and equally balanced by male/female. To maintain confidentiality of respondents, we will refer to the university as Contemplative State University. In addition to serving as the site for numerous contemplative activities inside and outside the classroom, the institution hosts an annual conference related to contemplative education. This conference attracts educators from other states. Despite its degrees of involvement in contemplative education, it does not have a designated center or director to coordinate mindfulness activities. Its ability to operate as a mindful campus relies on other attributes.

After researchers secured permission from the Institutional Review Board, the key individuals who lead and participate in activities that make the sample campus mindful were first identified (purposeful sampling) followed by network sampling (Glesne, 2011). In total, 15 participants (three students, five faculty, four administrators who are also teaching faculty, one student affairs administrator, and two staff) were interviewed. Given the limited literature on the organizational structure and culture of a mindful campus, the interview questions were original to this study. These questions were based on Tierney's (2008) six-factor cultural assessment framework, which has been used in other educational studies to describe particular aspects of culture. These six factors are environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership (Tierney, 2008). Each participant interviewed for the study gave written informed consent to participate in semi-structured hour-long interviews that were audiotaped and then transcribed.

Additional sources of data included documents related to the organizing and funding of mindful/contemplative activities, and observations of key events that could verify, support, or refute the reflections of the interviewees. Six events were observed, including a campus tour, classes, and organization meetings. More than 50 organizational documents were also collected and included in the data

analysis. Interviews and observations were conducted on the university campus approximately every two weeks for three months. Participants were sought for interviews until no new information was forthcoming (i.e., to the point of data saturation per Glesne, 2011).

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 1988) to allow questions that arose in the analysis to be addressed in subsequent interviews or observations. The transcripts, organizational documents, and field notes were color coded as the phrases, sentences, or paragraphs related to the emerging themes: “Structures in place,” “Structures needed,” “Cultures in place,” and “Cultures needed.” Themes were developed through use of visual representations such as flow charts and matrices to synthesize the information for greater understanding in creation of a descriptive narrative.

Respondent validation, which Maxwell (2013) calls “the single most important way” of ruling out misunderstanding (p. 126), was conducted by having interviewees review a summary of the findings and approve or recommend changes. Findings were presented in person during a meeting of key individuals involved in the contemplative education phenomenon on the campus. Three of these individuals had been previously interviewed. Other participants had conflicts and were not able to attend the presentation but received the summary via email and were invited to submit changes or confirm the narrative.

## RESULTS

Contemplative State University is operated as a mindful campus in that it has a key group of faculty, staff, students, and administrators committed to engaging themselves and their students inside and outside the classroom with contemplative practices found on the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s (CMind) Tree of Contemplative Practices (2012). The Tree is an illustrated depiction of 30 common practices—such as centering, meditation, yoga, journaling, and deep listening—that are used in secular organizational and academic settings. The use of activities on the Tree on this campus is supported by a loosely coupled, collaborative, bottom-up organizational system consisting of specific structural and cultural elements.

### Structures in place

Specific structural elements that supported the use of contemplative practices on this campus can be described as physical structures, non-physical structures, and financial structures.

**Physical structures:** There were two primary physical structures on campus: a walking labyrinth near the center of campus, and a multi-purpose building that housed health and wellness activities and a dedicated meditation/yoga room. A

student said the labyrinth “doesn’t necessarily get used a lot but it’s there and they have a little sign that says like ‘Take a moment to meditate.’ So, it’s there, it’s in your awareness.” When discussing this physical structure, one administrator added the campus is in “a lovely physical space ... and I don’t know why [but] I think of nature and contemplative learning going together.” The multi-purpose building housed an abundance of recreation, health, and exercise offerings, including yoga classes, as well as an academic department with faculty who use contemplative education. The building’s circular meditation room was frequently used by faculty and student groups and was pointed out during a campus tour for prospective students and their families as a notable and well-used physical structure on campus for yoga and meditation.

**Non-physical structures** that support the use of contemplative practices could be condensed into six themes: (1) faculty and student organizations, (2) professional development opportunities, (3) annual events, (4) academic and extracurricular courses, (5) a student affairs emphasis, and (6) various levels of administrative authority that support enhanced teaching and learning. Aside from a faculty/staff contemplative learning circle, a student mindfulness club, and two annual events related to mindfulness, “I don’t think any of [these structures] were designed to support contemplative education,” a faculty member said. Instead, the professor said that faculty “look at ways in which the practices we’re doing and the reasons we’re doing them align with [the institution’s] mission” and find ways to collaborate with existing structures. Another faculty member concurred, “There’s nothing happening at the highest levels to force us to do it right now.”

Two campus groups are critical to supporting contemplative education on this campus because of the social networking, collaboration, and awareness building they provide. These groups are the contemplative learning circle for faculty/staff and the students’ mindfulness club. One faculty member who participates in the learning circle, and who is relatively new to academia, said the group’s members “have been immensely helpful in that they have exhibited what it is to have these kinds of activities, this approach, and then do these activities in their classrooms and in their own personal practices.” A staff member said the learning circle “has a certain credibility associated with it” because it is formally recognized by the university as one of several learning circles offered each year through Contemplative State University’s teaching and learning center.

The student-led mindfulness club has been active for three years and was started by a student introduced to contemplative practices through a class taught by one of the faculty in the contemplative learning circle. As one of about 50 official student clubs and organizations on campus, the student mindfulness club receives financial support through the university’s student affairs division. The club’s constitution described the group as being committed to building a community of

self-aware individuals by providing structured time and space to practice mindfulness in various forms. A student said, “Every mindfulness club meeting, we bring in...different speakers and they share their way of contemplative education and how they bring mindfulness into their daily lives.”

In its ongoing effort to enhance teaching and learning, the university offers professional development to faculty. This is supported through two major existing structures: a teaching and learning center, and a campus-wide initiative to support students’ critical thinking. In addition to its sponsorship of a contemplative learning circle, the teaching and learning center also sponsors monthly guest lectures and one-on-one consultations. The center financially supports the university’s annual public conference that fosters the concept of a mindful campus which faculty described as another form of professional development.

Annual events supporting contemplative education on this campus consist of a student-organized mindfulness festival and a public conference on the mindful campus concept that attracts educators from surrounding states. The mindfulness festival is an outgrowth of the student mindfulness club and attracts between 800 and 1200 attendees. One student described the event as intergenerational, adding:

I think that the whole idea of [the event] is, rather than explain [mindfulness] to people in words, they can come and experience the whole day. This experience is us trying to relate to each other mindfully and to ourselves mindfully.

In addition, the university hosts a public conference related to the mindful campus concept. The conference attracts approximately 80 educators from many states.

The university’s for-credit academic courses as well as co-curricular courses in yoga also support contemplative education on this campus. Among the academic courses, most are traditional disciplinary courses in which faculty have woven in contemplative practices. Some are “how-to” courses focusing on service-learning. The university also offers contemplative practice-specific courses. Non-credit offerings through the campus recreation area include about 25 yoga classes per week in the university’s meditation room, with about 10 students attending each class.

Although the student affairs division does not use the term contemplative education, one administrator said this type of learning has been emphasized at the university for a long time. “Because we look at the whole development of the student, because we’re working with developmental, transitional levels on a traditional college-age student...that’s not a hard sell for me,” the administrator said. Elaborating further, the administrator said:

We've always believed in, always engaged in, experiential learning and reflective practice. Where we've really expanded in our understanding of that in recent years has really been around stillness, journaling, storytelling, and... our work in volunteering.

The student affairs division uses contemplative practices in not only yoga classes but also orientation events for incoming students, leadership programs and retreats for student leaders, multi-cultural programming, housing, counseling, service-learning activities, and student clubs. The practices typically include journaling, deep listening, storytelling, visualization, and bearing witness. One student said, "I feel like the orientation did place a lot of emphasis on reflection and getting to know the other students in our group and stuff, so that was achieved by discussing our lives." As to the vocabulary used to describe these activities, the administrator said, "If I were to use the word contemplative education, [my staff] would be like 'What?' But, if I were to say...self-awareness or reflection or experiential learning, they would be like 'Yeah, we do that.'"

Contemplative practices are well suited to student life outside the classroom, a staff member and administrator said, because this is where many stressors and opportunities to build resilience are found. Students may not "get the same kind of skill development in their classroom as they might be able to get outside the classroom when they're trying to work on how to be successful," the administrator said. It should be noted that the student affairs unit at Contemplative State University includes the counseling center. The director indicated that mindfulness is not taught at the counseling center, although the topic may be included in stress management programs.

While the university president may not start meetings with a silent meditation, as one administrator said, the majority of people interviewed felt supported by various levels of authority for their use of contemplative education. Many participants said they included their contemplative work in end-of-year reports and faculty evaluations and felt rewarded for their efforts. While this direct, tangible support was noted by some participants, others said they felt supported because no one was telling them not to use contemplative education. Not all the interviewees felt fully supported, however. While gratefully acknowledging support received from colleagues within the contemplative learning circle, one administrator indicated no support from peers within the home department. This was attributed to differing approaches to the academic discipline, as well as cultural differences. "My colleagues, they just make fun of me in a kind of a light way," this person said. "After their fourth joke about mindfulness, then it gets tired, right? ... So, I find I'm very lonely in my department." To cope, this person said they focus on their enjoyment in teaching a for-credit course on meditation and working to

publish mindfulness-related research because “I’m committed...to figure out how to articulate it...to these doubters.”

**Financial structures:** Like the non-physical structures mentioned above, Contemplative State University also has a number of existing financial structures for enhancing teaching and learning that have simultaneously supported contemplative education. These include a special professorship, internal and external grants, and academic funds that have been directed in support of hosting the annual conference on the mindful campus concept. There is, however, no separate budget line items designated for contemplative education.

The primary source of funding has been a new special professorship on campus. A member of the contemplative learning circle was the first person at the university to hold this position, which gives a tenured faculty member release time from teaching and money to support a special project of his or her choosing. This position seems to have been critical to the growth of classroom use of contemplative education at this university because it allowed someone to be a point person to dedicate time and money to promoting this form of pedagogy. The professorship is a three-year appointment and is renewable one time. The professor holding this special professorship was quick to explain that the next person selected to hold the position may likely have a different educational focus that he or she would want to pursue, which would mean the significant source of funding for contemplative education would end.

An additional financial support came from a grant sponsored by CMind, which the university received for fostering the use of contemplative practices throughout its curriculum. This grant resulted in support for the university’s learning circle and faculty members’ engagement in experiences to enhance their understanding of contemplative pedagogy: One faculty member attended CMind’s Summer Session on Contemplative Pedagogy, another presented at an ACMHE Conference, and two worked to integrate contemplative practices into their courses.

Financial support from seven units also supported the annual mindful campus event, including academic affairs, four academic departments, the special professorship, and the teaching and learning center. In addition, three faculty members interviewed said they had received stipends through internal grants to redesign an interdisciplinary course with another faculty member. These funds reportedly came from the academic affairs office to support interdisciplinary work among faculty to create or redesign a course. An administrator confirmed there are discretionary funds available for improving teaching, which could include developing new courses or redesigning a course with contemplative content. “We have liberty to do that,” the administrator said. “I would never turn anybody down if somebody comes to me and says ‘I need time to work this into my courses.’”



### **Cultures in place**

The operation of Contemplative State University as a mindful campus also included specific cultural elements. During interviews, participants were first asked open-ended questions about the culture of the university. Next, participants were asked to respond to Tierney's (2008) categories of culture.

**Open-ended responses:** Two themes emerged from the open-ended responses about the culture of their university: an embodiment of the liberal arts, and community/connection. Nine out of 15 respondents stated the university's liberal arts focus is an important aspect of its culture, which they also said was a natural fit for contemplative education. One student put it this way:

We're a liberal arts university, so we focus on an interdisciplinary approach, which makes the connection between many different subjects, and I think that provides an environment conducive to contemplative education because it's fluid and there's more room for exploration outside of the traditional classroom bounds.

An administrator said the liberal arts means a focus on "critical thinking but also the skills of well-rounded, politically active in some sense, socially engaged ... we bring in students who are really often genuinely interested in learning." A staff member described the university as having an overt "celebration of the liberal arts and integrative interdisciplinary education."

In this liberal arts culture, there is a focus on teaching. "Teaching is at the heart of it all," said a professor. Another professor said, "In a sense, it's a culture that is interested in promoting creativity and freedom of thought and freedom of expression within certain bounds."

Another emerging theme in participants' open-ended descriptions of the university culture was connection and community. This was echoed by staff, students, and faculty. A staff member said:

What makes us tick is that we're in such a rich, outdoor, beautiful place and we tend to get the students who want to do more of that connecting with nature, connecting with themselves, and they want a little more out of their college experience than just "I'm going to class and I'm learning this material and I'm graduating."

Students "care about what's going on in our community and the broader spectrum of the world... [and] really care about learning how to make a difference in what's going on and then going out and actually doing it," a student said, noting the university placed high in a recent national ranking for schools making a difference in their community.

Strengthening community and connection occurs within the classroom, too. An administrator indicated being more connected with students when teaching because:

...doing the contemplative practices in the classroom has, to my mind, helped me be authentic to my students. I'm not a sham, I'm not just producing, you know, I'm not just performing or doing a production. Yeah, I know I've learned these materials, but I care about it. And the one way I want to show that caring is by inviting you to engage with this practice.

Another professor said, "I didn't understand a thing about community when I started doing this. Some of my students alerted me to that when I started doing it." The professor recounted a classroom incident during meditation when one student began quietly crying and left the room. A fellow student soon left to check on her. The professor continued:

A number of the students told me later, not necessarily that day, including the one who cried and the one who went out to see if she was okay, they said, "You know by our doing this, you're creating a sense where we feel more deeply connected to each other," and I thought it was isolated—like you're doing your meditation, you're doing your meditation—and I didn't realize... She said, "We're all vulnerable, we're all closing our eyes in a room together and that's like really risky." So that was the first moment where I started to realize, Oh, this is not just about student A's experience or performance or whatever. This is about all of them in relation to each other as well as independently, individually. And I saw much more, much greater interest in the community aspects of this and looking for more and more ways to build a stronger community of whatever kind of community you can have in a class that's artificial (in that it only lasts 16 weeks).

**Tierney's elements of cultures:** After asking each participant to describe the university's culture in their own terms, Tierney's (2008) six elements of culture were described to participants. These elements are: (1) organization mission, (2) environment in which the organization operates, (3) socialization of new members, (4) information sharing among members, (5) strategy, and (6) leadership. All of these elements were in place, to some degree, at Contemplative State University, with strategy being the least-mentioned element.

**Organization mission:** The university's written mission statement indicated that the institution's liberal arts approach to education emphasizes life skills such

as critical thinking, open inquiry, thoughtful expression, personal growth, and civic engagement. All but two people interviewed said this statement, despite not specifying “contemplative,” set the tone for an environment supportive of contemplative education. That is, in a broad sense the mission statement’s language could be perceived as embracing contemplative education as part of a liberal arts mission. Combined in several people’s responses regarding mission was reference to the university’s new strategic plan. These responses indicated that mission and strategic plan can go hand in hand in people’s minds. The university’s strategic planning website contained reference to the mission statement being revised and said a mission is what leads the plans, strategies, programs, and culture of the university.

**Environment:** In addressing the environment in which the organization operates as an aspect of culture, the students immediately began describing the geographic location of the campus, saying the surrounding city is very open-minded and activist and social-justice oriented, just like the university. There was an even split among faculty, staff, and administrators regarding identifying “environment” as the surrounding metropolis, as opposed to the campus community, administration, or state politics. As with students’ comments, their comments about the city included: “The culture of this area beyond the campus...is supportive of these practices,” and “We are a place that totally supports alternative and complementary practices of all kinds.”

Among those faculty, staff, and administrators who identified environment as limited to campus, there were mixed comments regarding whether that environment was supportive. Two people noted the physical presence of a walking labyrinth as indicative of a supportive environment, with one professor saying, “That’s as important as the library to what we do. It’s a symbol of something. Basically, it says, ‘think and reflect, be mindful, contemplate.’ It’s what we do here.” An administrator said, “the environment, clearly, because we believe in educating the whole person and part of it is the mindfulness.” Another administrator narrowed environment to mean a specific division in which he/she worked, saying the division was supportive of contemplative education but questioned the rest of campus’s support of that division’s efforts:

If you’re treated like a second-class citizen, which many staff are on college campuses, then you can get that dynamic where you don’t feel you have a supportive environment, where your faculty could engage in this work as a partner.

Another administrator defined environment as the university’s administration and said it was not supportive of contemplative education since it did not include contemplative education in the university’s mission statement. A professor ref-

erenced environment as meaning all of higher education and said it does support contemplative education:

We're part, as you know, of a larger national movement with more and more schools going in this direction, so there's interest in that. In terms of emphasis on educating the whole student, that's an important part of higher education.

This same person further referenced the state's politics, saying contemplative practices "can offer some people an opportunity to find some comfort and strength in a very oppressive, unfriendly, and unsupportive political situation."

**Socialization:** In regard to the aspect of culture involving socialization of members, most participants seemed to perceive socialization of new members as supporting contemplative education on their campus—at least for faculty and students, and this was in large part substantiated in the documents review. The opportunities for socialization for faculty included orientation for new faculty members where all learning circles are explained, including the contemplative learning circle; the introduction of reflection and contemplation to cohorts in the university's campus-wide initiative to strengthen students' critical thinking abilities; and a faculty mentoring program where a more seasoned professor is paired with a newcomer to help them through their first year on campus. A professor said awareness of contemplative education "trickles in," depending on who serves as the mentor. One administrator said, "I do think that new faculty are attuned to having all these learning opportunities." One professor, however, said the campus's socialization around contemplative education is "very self-selective. I think people find out about it not necessarily through the hiring process. I think people fall into it later, when they realize other people are doing it."

For students, even though the terminology used by staff in student affairs differs from that of faculty, move-in day and orientation events were noted as opportunities for staff to learn the interests of students and align them with suitable activities. For example, a staff member who assists with move-in day said, "So, like, if they are really interested in X, Y, and Z, we're, like, 'Oh, we have these programs you might like' as we're helping them unload." An administrator said getting students socially engaged is a priority "so they feel like they belong here." This person continued, "If they feel they belong here then they're not going to the meditation class by themselves, or if they are, it's because they're going to meet new friends. That meditation group has become their friends, and that's exciting. We don't want them hanging out in their rooms and not doing anything."

There were mixed perceptions, however, regarding how new staff are socialized around contemplative education. A few faculty indicated they assumed the same socialization was held for staff as for them, but one administrator said

“probably not so much with staff.” A staff member addressed this disparity head on, saying,

It’s being established right from the beginning for new faculty as, like, this is something that we do here. It might not be something you choose to do but it’s something we do. ...Staff usually get forgotten in all this, but the fact that we open the mindful campus workshop, for example, to staff for them to participate—there’s not that many that choose to participate because they’ve been socialized to think those programs are not for them—but, we do open up the opportunity and the faculty learning circle, too, is open to staff and so that’s kind of important as well.

Student affairs staff are more socialized around this topic, even though, as noted earlier, the terminology used to describe it is different.

**Information sharing:** Email and personal communication were the primary means noted by faculty and staff for sharing of information on campus about contemplative education and related activities. One professor said, “Various emails, invitations, personal communication, interaction with people. They know who’s in the learning circle. I’ve had people come up to me and say ‘What do you do there?’ It really runs the whole gamut.” Students indicated social media as being the most used form of information sharing about contemplative education, particularly Facebook, although the mindfulness club does have a webpage, as do all student clubs, through the student activities website. A faculty member said the student organization was responsible for getting the word out about mindfulness, more so than faculty: “They’re at freshman orientations, they’re tabling at student work fairs. That is where a lot of that information is happening and for [name of mindfulness festival] they have huge posters on Facebook and they do all sorts of advertising.”

Despite these initiatives, one staff member indicated seeing very little information sharing about contemplative education on campus. An administrator said the campus community doesn’t always communicate well:

Our faculty/staff, I think there is a lot of good people and a lot of good work, and very little communication...you don’t know what the right hand is doing and the left hand is over here. I don’t know how to describe that culturally, but I think that is a piece of our culture where it’s like “Oh, they’re now saying that, too?” That happens a lot... “Are you doing that, too? Why are we both doing this?” I can’t think of the term for that, but that happens a lot.

Another administrator noted information “comes from different conferences, workshops, books people are reading.”

**Strategy:** The strategy aspect of culture garnered a variety of responses. One administrator said, “I can’t answer” whether institutional strategy supports contemplative education, adding “I guess that’s a no.” Another administrator said decisions at this university are made “bottom-up, they are not top-down. . . very few things are actually top-down, especially in terms of any techniques or what you do in your classroom. . . Decision-making comes from the faculty and is then brought up.” One professor mentioned shared governance in decision-making. Another professor said:

In so far as the strategy has been in service of the liberal arts, you know, then there’s strategic support for contemplative learning. Strategy evokes for me the idea of administrators, and I think sometimes there’s a bifurcation between administrators and their interests and faculty and students and their interests, and obviously faculty interests may be different from student interests and stuff. So there’s all sorts of different interests.

Other faculty, staff, and administrators mainly referenced three areas when discussing strategy at this university: the university’s strategic plan, operations of the learning circle, and the key person behind this campus’s contemplative activities. One administrator said the existence of learning circles was an effective strategy for contemplative education. One professor described the learning circle as “very egalitarian,” with members following through on what they say they will do. As to the leader of the learning circle, one administrator praised this person’s strategy as being inclusive of all people and also being “really good about not pushing people.” Another professor in describing strategy that supports contemplative education said:

I don’t think a mindful campus requires that everybody participates, right? So I think that’s actually central to the vision of this. . . It’s, you know, it’s an invitation. And it’s something that a lot of people have found useful and helpful and it has created communities on campus that cross faculty/staff and student lines. And I think there are very few places that that’s as fluid depending upon what people are interested in.

Students said they were unfamiliar with strategy employed by the university’s administration, but they said their student club and events strategies were based on small-group input or decision-making made in isolation.

**Leadership:** Asked whether leadership was a cultural aspect that supports contemplative education, most participants indicated leadership supports this initiative on campus, mainly in administrators’ awareness of it and no actions to stop

them from doing it. Participants seemed to agree that the top leadership, including the president, understands what contemplative education is. One administrator said of the president, “I know [the president] is open to it. I haven’t had any discussion just on that with [the president], but from what I understand [the president] is supportive of that.” A professor noted, “It’s helpful when the existing leaders have an idea of what contemplative practice and pedagogy are because they can then support it being used in our classrooms.” Students indicated liking the new top leader and other upper-level administrators, with one student saying, “I don’t think any administration leadership would shoot down contemplative education.”

Participants indicated that various levels of authority support contemplative practices as they would other methods of enhancing teaching and learning. “This administration basically says, ‘Do your thing, be creative,’” one professor said. Despite this support, though, “we haven’t really had anybody sit with us from the administration,” another professor noted about the learning circle.

The majority of research participants worked in academic affairs or student affairs where they indicated a supportive culture toward contemplative education in their work with students, but this was less so for one staff member who worked in another area of campus. This person said:

I wouldn’t say from my understanding of how senior leadership makes decisions or works through problems, that this is being incorporated at their level. ...I mean, I’ve thought about it... It’s funny, when I was at that [name of conference] a couple summers ago we talked about how we spend so much time talking about how to incorporate this into our classrooms, but who has the courage to incorporate this into a faculty meeting, you know? Who’s going to propose that it’s going to become part of our department gatherings, who’s going to bring this, I mean, am I going to bring this to the next meeting with my colleagues? We’re not really there yet. Not to say that anybody would have a meltdown or anything if we did propose it, but I don’t know if we’re at that level of cultural saturation.

### **Recommendations: Structures and Cultures Needed**

Participants had a variety of responses when asked about what additional structures and cultures were needed, if any, to better support their university as a mindful campus. Many seemed to think something more could be done, either structurally or culturally, to better support Contemplative State University as a mindful campus, while others said it was simply a matter of engaging more people in the structures and cultures that already existed. In explaining his response

of “maybe nothing” is needed, one professor said, “ I think the institution does its best when it gets out of people’s way.” Two staff members, a student, and a professor said more participation by others on campus is what is needed, with one staff member explaining more precisely: “There’s a lot and it becomes getting more people engaged in the opportunities that exist instead of, like, new structures.”

Nearly everyone interviewed recommended an established, ongoing funding line to continue existing initiatives, especially considering that the person holding the special professorship position can only do so for a certain number of years. When the person’s term expires, the position is given to someone else whose academic interests may be different. A comment heard from both faculty and staff was to make available more training on how to incorporate mindfulness into teaching, beyond just the annual conference and existing professional development opportunities. One professor remarked that contemplative education can’t be forced:

I think it has to be somewhat self-driven, the whole venture. It can’t be something that’s forced upon you and that’s where my issue comes up again with what other people think I’m doing or should be doing. You can’t all of a sudden impose mindfulness on somebody. They have to be coming from that place where they’re like I felt: “This is important for myself and because I realize that myself I can also share this with others.”

An administrator suggested greater communication and collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs to provide contemplative practices to students, drawing on the yoga expertise and other experience student affairs staff have with leading self-awareness and reflection exercises in developing the whole student. This might also include formalizing contemplative practices into the curriculum, as service-learning has been at Contemplative State University.

For cultures needed, again there was a desire by some for greater participation in the existing culture that supports contemplative education. Among more specific suggestions, most participants’ comments fit into three categories: administrative behaviors, language, and concepts of learning. A majority of participants indicated any cultural change must start at the top, by administration taking a more top-down approach such as inserting contemplative education more specifically into the strategic plan and university branding, endowing a full-time professorship in contemplative pedagogy, becoming a “personal champion” of contemplative practices, working to boost staff involvement, and demonstrating the practices in their meetings and strategies. The latter, especially, would go a long way in “anchoring it in the culture,” a staff member said.



As to language, three people mentioned expanding the conversation about contemplative education, which requires using the same vocabulary across campus, and remaining “open culturally,” as one staff member said, “so that there isn’t a kind of tendency to exclude students who might not be down with all the rest of the [identity] trappings...For students I think that’s a critical issue.”

Two professors seemed to resist top-down inclusion of contemplative education in the campus culture, with one instead saying:

I think we had a pretty good culture here before we started doing this stuff, and so I’m not sure what it would mean for us to be a mindful campus. ...Maybe we could be a mindful campus in the sense that we recognize and include in our toolbox of tools we use as part of the way we teach our students and the way we work with each other, that we draw on these techniques to help realize the deepest goals and vision and inspiration for the university. That’s how I would see it. It’s not like “Oh, a mindful campus where you encounter mindfulness practices everywhere you go”—yeah, you will encounter those in some places you go, you will encounter other things, but we’re all working toward the same goal.

To keep the number of contemplative education supporters in perspective, a staff member said when talking about culture, “There are many, many, many faculty who have zero interest in this whatsoever [laughs], so we shouldn’t overstate how pervasive the culture is, but again it’s more about openness to and tolerance of it than you would find on another campus.” As one professor said, however, “I keep hearing it more and more as a sort of mainstream idea that is intersecting with other important aspects on campus.”

One professor said greater diversity is a cultural change needed—not only for the general campus population but also to better support Contemplative State University as a mindful campus. Because the university is predominantly White, this professor said, its mindfulness community is, too. As the university has worked to increase its overall diversity, the professor said a leader of the student mindfulness club was wanting to diversify club membership, too, and together with faculty mentors was asking the question, What does it look like to create spaces where people feel invited in?

### **Social Justice and Diversity Perspectives**

The interview questions for this case study did not specifically address social justice or diversity, but in addition to the professor’s comments offered above in regards to improved culture, social justice-related information occasionally

emerged in comments made by faculty, administrators, and students. As stated earlier, Contemplative State University is majority White. When interviewees were asked why they incorporate contemplative activities into their teaching or events, their reasons focused mainly on students' personal growth, reflection, introspection, and self-awareness. These reasons were followed by strengthening students' connection to themselves, the material they are studying, and to each other; openness/awareness; stillness/slowing down; the opportunity to transition to the current class period; and to build a sense of community within the class. Social justice was not an explicit goal or stated outcome of using contemplative education on this campus. One professor, however, gave examples of how using contemplative practices can be used in exploring social or political systems or unpacking identity. An administrator mentioned self-reflection and deep listening skills as having been useful in assisting students as they look at social justice issues.

Despite a lack of expressed intention for using contemplative education to address social justice and diversity, students' comments seemed to indicate that being exposed to contemplative practices supported their own attention to social causes on a campus where people "really care about learning how to make a difference in what's going on," as one student said. For example, all students and one staff member interviewed noted the crossover among students who are active in the campus's environmental movement and the campus's mindfulness activities. A student recalled an environmental student group presentation on animal agriculture, which included time for self-reflection, open dialogue, and deep listening. "I definitely think that was contemplative, more contemplative than the other events I've been to," the student said. Another student said contemplative education fits into the campus culture that is already "very activist, social-justice oriented" in that it supports "knowing and being mindful of your place in society." The student continued,

That takes a contemplative education and a higher education to understand where you stand. I've learned so much about my privilege and where it's put me in society and how it indirectly impacts other people. That's, like, a whole different level of awareness, you know? Just walking around knowing the privilege that I've grown up in. That's how activism fits into being aware.

Contemplative State University has a diversity and inclusion initiative and defines diversity as a means of creating and supporting an inclusive and sustainable community, in which "people of all backgrounds interact respectfully and...each member is valued." However, one administrator said that, while students at the university are generally open and curious about diverse ideas and people, some

faculty are not: “That’s my sense of the culture... This place is so parochial that [after many years here] still I am an outsider.” A student shared that despite its open-mindedness Contemplative State University is “a very White school” with socioeconomic diversity but not racial diversity. This paradox mirrors the local community, which the student also described as “diverse” but “segregated.” The student added that some professors have used the local community as a teaching tool through service-learning to explore socioeconomic and race issues. “As a White person, I’ve appreciated that I’ve learned about that problem in [name of city] and I’ve learned about structural racism,” the student said.

## DISCUSSION

This case study adds to the small literature that already exists of specific institutions using contemplative education. What can be learned from this case study? Contemplative State University operates as a loosely coupled, collaborative, bottom-up organizational system in relation to contemplative education. This system confirms much of the literature surrounding organization theory and contemplative education. In particular, the findings fit well with descriptions of a loosely coupled system (Weick, 1976), collaborative systems (Kezar & Lester, 2009), and the quantum paradigm (Manning, 2013). In addition, the integral nature of teaching and learning centers as presented by Barbezat and Pingree (2012) was supported. Several models for how contemplative practices are incorporated into college and universities have been outlined by Wall (2014). These models include practice-specific courses, coursework of any discipline that weaves in the use of contemplative practices, and on-campus extracurricular activities, all of which were in use at Contemplative State University. Thurman (2006) encouraged the use of centers for contemplative education, and while the non-scholarly literature revealed that some institutions are changing their organizational structure to support contemplative education through centers (Barlow, 2016; Cannon, 2012; West Chester University, n.d.), this was not the case at Contemplative State University. Instead of having a center, the university utilized existing structures to support contemplative education.

The six aspects of Tierney’s (2008) cultural assessment framework were also present to varying degrees, although aspects of this framework were not foremost in the minds of the participants. Individuals at Contemplative State University working in academic affairs and those working in student affairs tended to use different terms for the application of activities within The Tree of Contemplative Practices (contemplative education versus self-awareness and reflection), so it may be possible that Tierney’s (2008) use of the words “socialization” and/or “information sharing” might be interchangeable with terms more frequently used by participants— “community” and “connection.” In the spirit of Wheatley (2006),

who suggested an organization can co-evolve as its participants interact with it, Contemplative State University demonstrates continued growth as new relationships and interconnectedness are forming and ideas for new initiatives, such as a possible contemplative minor, are being developed.

There are several limitations to the study. Results cannot generalize to all institutions—unless, perhaps, they have similar structures and cultures. Interviews were conducted with faculty, administrators, students, and staff, but additional perspectives might have surfaced with additional interviews. This case study is a snapshot of one public, liberal arts university with a majority White population during a particular period of time. Given the ongoing nature of change at the university, the current description of Contemplative State University may well be outdated in the near future. While this case study provides insight into how a mindful campus can operate organizationally, other possible narratives for explaining the observations could be developed given the inevitable biases present in the researchers' frames of reference.

The organization of Contemplative State University can inform leaders in higher education how to act in ways that support the development of contemplative education. Based on findings of this study, the researchers encourage administrative leaders to allow physical space for contemplative practices such as areas for outdoor labyrinths or meditation rooms. Further, the bottom-up organizational system in which contemplative education emerged at Contemplative State University suggests that administrators can encourage contemplative education in several ways: Emerging leaders in contemplative education need administrative support as well as financial resources. Professional development training in contemplative practices can be incorporated into the offerings of already existing centers for teaching excellence. Support for both credit and extracurricular courses that focus on contemplative methods can be provided. In addition, administrators can also support student-led initiatives that include the formation of clubs and organizing of special events. Leaders should also be aware that employees in academic affairs and student affairs may use different vocabulary to describe the same educational goals, and that aligning terminology may unify mindful campus initiatives.

In the interviews for this case study, issues of social justice and diversity surfaced but were not explicitly a focus of the interview questions. As such, these issues were not overtly addressed by most of the participants, although there was a consistent theme of the role of contemplative education in supporting the development of a classroom community, as well as civic and community involvement. The majority White demographic of the campus can help explain why the responses regarding awareness of white privilege were limited to a few of the

participants. While students did seem to be aware of social justice and diversity issues, contemplative education, in itself, does not appear to be adequate to raise consciousness of issues of privilege, social justice, and diversity without making these issues explicit aspects of a mindful campus. Future research might address this aspect more explicitly by including awareness of privilege, social justice, and diversity as part of the primary interview questions.

## CONCLUSION

Contemplative State University's operation as a mindful campus is based on its use of activities found on CMind's Tree of Contemplative practices inside and outside the classroom, which is supported by a loosely coupled, collaborative, bottom-up organizational system. This operation includes physical, non-physical, and financial structures; as well as a culture based on the embodiment of the liberal arts, community, and connection. For colleges and universities considering operation as a mindful campus or strengthening their existing initiatives in contemplative education, this study describes a mindful campus and the structures and cultures in place that support contemplative education and offers suggestions for leaders considering contemplative initiatives on their campuses. The inherent openness and curiosity associated with the liberal arts tradition makes the use of contemplative education at this university a natural fit and, through this educational approach, participants are strengthening their community and connection—with themselves, their peers, in the classroom and across campus, with populations nearby, and beyond. Explicit goals of social justice and diversity were not indicated in this campus's use of contemplative education, but students expressed a developing awareness of their place and possible privilege in the world due, in part, to having been exposed to contemplative practices.

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