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Cross-Cultural Mindfulness: Examining the Processes and Outcomes of a Multidisciplinary Study Abroad Experience

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Abstract in English

Mindfulness has become a popular topic of intellectual and experiential study in multiple disciplines, including healthcare, business, education, and various human service professions. We designed a study abroad experience where undergraduate and graduate students from various human service disciplines engaged in academic study, personal practices, and cross-cultural learning experiences related to mindfulness. A mixed-methods design was used in this study. Participants reported a significantly greater sense of mindful awareness after completing their study abroad. Experiences that allowed for internal processing of mindfulness (e.g., meditation, journaling, readings, and non-doing) and experiences that allowed for external engagement with mindfulness (e.g., learning about the brain and science, visiting schools that integrate mindfulness, participating in a Buddhist retreat) emerged as crucial to the embodiment of mindfulness in participants' personal lives. Based on these findings, we note the potential relevance of mindfulness to intercultural learning, and we conclude by offering suggestions to support human service professionals in developing learning activities that cultivate mindfulness through experiential and immersive experiences.

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1. Introduction

Students enrolled in higher education, in the United States and across the globe, have reported escalating stressors. The American College Health Association's (AHCA, 2022) latest annual survey reported that students had experienced multiple mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. University life, for both domestic and international students, can be very stressful and involve mental health and social challenges (Altinyelken, 2018). Additionally, students in pre-service training programs, such as teacher education, occupational therapy, and school counseling must be prepared to encounter stressors in their careers that can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue (Tucker et al., 2017).

Students and faculty alike often report transformative impacts of short-term study abroad programs, including increased self-efficacy and self-confidence. Although research indicates that study abroad programs can often provide benefits such as increased cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence (Starr-Glass, 2020), Vande Berg et al. (2023) assert the importance of utilizing intentional pedagogy for specific intercultural learning outcomes to be achieved. Throughout our study abroad course, students engaged in academic learning, evidence-based mindfulness practices, and immersion in cultural experiences in the countries of Germany, the Netherlands, and France.

Exposure to mindfulness practices can be supportive and preventative across the lifespan of many individuals who are dealing with a variety of life challenges. Multiple sources point to the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions in ameliorating the effects of stress and overwhelm (Williams & Penman, 2011). Additionally, approaches that incorporate mindfulness have shown efficacy in the treatment of anxiety and depression, two of the most common mental health disorders worldwide (Segal, 2020). According to an often-cited model, mindfulness practices can support mental health by improving mindful attention, increasing acceptance, and decentering from distressing thoughts and/or feelings (Coffey et al., 2010; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Well-known programs that reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression

are Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). These approaches perform comparably to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and their treatment principles for anxiety and depression are on par with those of CBT (Hofmann et al., 2010). Because anxiety and depression are common mental health concerns in college age students, incorporating the study and practice of mindfulness for college students could possibly support positive development and well-being.

Students enrolled in the summer course experience, co-taught by the authors, were of college age, and they were enrolled in majors that reflected future human service professions. The course was designed to be relevant for this population of students, both personally and professionally. The cross-cultural study abroad experience referred to in this article was titled, "Cross-Cultural Mindfulness for School-Based or Child and Adolescent Wellness Providers." The endeavor was both an academic course and a 2.5-week study abroad program, totaling a four-week intensive experience.

This article will cover basic concepts related to mindfulness, mindfulness in higher education, cross-cultural considerations, and the unique needs of future human service professionals that make the study of mindfulness particularly salient. The study abroad experience, constructed by us, will be described. Outcomes of the study abroad experience are explored, which include a greater sense of mindful awareness for participants as well as appreciation for internal processing and active engagement in mindfulness-related activities.

1.1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be understood as the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of our moment-to-moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness can be seen as a relatable practice during which one focuses on one's current experiences, rather than operating on "auto-pilot" or dwelling on the past or future. Essentially, practicing mindfulness involves enhanced awareness and attention to the present reality or current activity (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). The three components of *intention*, *attention* and *attitude* have often been used to describe mindfulness (Shapiro et al., 2006).

The practice of mindfulness has gained attention as a powerful means to promote psychological health and well-being (Burke, 2010). In fact, mindfulness

practices have shown positive effects such as reduced stress, better emotional balance, more positive affect, and stronger interpersonal relationship skills (Shapiro et al., 2011). Being present with mindfulness may help individuals stop dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. This present focus can ameliorate mental health concerns like depression by keeping individuals out of a "downward spiral" and thus poised for contentment in the now (Williams & Penman, 2011). Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003), a well-known contributor to the field of mindfulness studies, advocates for the need for practical experiences with mindfulness, using mindfulness techniques for present focus as well as a non-judgmental acceptance of the now.

A plethora of studies examine the impacts of mindfulness practices on health and well-being in individuals across the lifespan. According to Tan (2016), "Mindfulness programmes have been widely disseminated and accepted in the adult population in clinical and non-clinical settings (e.g. workplaces)" (p. 194). Such programs have suggested improvement in areas such as mental and physical well-being. Positive impacts of mindfulness practices have been documented in the areas of health and pain tolerance (Arch & Craske, 2006), empathy, affective forecasting, and other psychological phenomena (Tan, 2016). Mechanisms of mindfulness that have helped create change in adult populations include emotional regulation, decentering, and focused attention (Grabovac et al., 2011).

In a meta-analysis relevant to mindfulness and children and adolescents, Kallapiran et al. (2015) found that mindfulness-based interventions were associated with decreased anxiety, depression, and stress. In their meta-analysis, reflecting only on mindfulness-based interventions provided in K-12 settings, Carsley et al. (2018) discovered that overall, mindfulness interventions were helpful for youth. Specifically, those interventions delivered during late adolescence had the largest positive impact on mental health and overall well-being. Zoogman et al.'s (2014) findings from their study, which included youth and young adult populations, supported the use of mindfulness interventions as one part of a well-rounded approach to overall well-being.

1.2. Mindfulness in Higher Education

Many universities have begun to incorporate mindfulness into their programming (and in some cases curriculum) to promote contemplative learning and strengthen mental health of students (Altinyelken, 2018). Some skills related to learning processes that can be improved and supported by mindfulness

practices in college-age youth include attention, awareness, focus and concentration, information processing, and open-mindedness (Altinyelken, 2018).

There are innumerable mindfulness-based higher education programs offered nationally and internationally. Mindfulness practices taught in these programs are often incorporated into pedagogy and curriculum content (Rechtschaffen, 2014). For the purposes of this article, only a few examples of such programs are mentioned. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) are popular programs offered by universities. MBSR originated at the Stress Reduction Clinic at the UMass Medica Center by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979. It started as an eight-week program and is now taught in various formats and timeframes. According to the website (https://www.ummhealth.org/center-mindfulness), more than 25,000 people have completed the MBSR training program. MBCT (mbct.com) is a program that uses a combination of cognitive therapy and mindfulness and meditative practices to address recurring depression and chronic unhappiness. It was developed by Zindel Segal, John Teasdale and Mark Williams.

Additionally, the Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults (MIEA) mindfulness program is offered to college age students at many institutions of higher learning. It was developed by two psychiatrists at Duke University and focuses on practical skills that can be applied to the everyday concerns of college age students. Inspired by the work on flourishing at Stanford University, the University of Virginia Contemplative Sciences Center provides programming on student flourishing, which incorporates mindfulness practices into its offerings.

Many studies support the efficacy of mindfulness interventions in institutions of higher education. In their review of over 80 controlled studies in the field of higher education, with foci on social-emotional skills, self-perceptions, and emotional distress, Conley et al. (2013) concluded that mindfulness training was the most effective intervention overall, and that social-emotional skills, self-perceptions and levels of anxiety and depression were all improved via mindfulness training. In a study conducted by de Bruin et al. (2015), a seven-week low-intensity mindfulness program was administered to an international undergraduate population. Results showed an increase in overall mindfulness levels and improvements with emotional regulation, such as being less judgmental and less reactive to thoughts, feeling and emotions of self and others. In their study about the relationship between resilience, mindfulness and psychological well-being in a sample of 141 university

students, Pidgeon and Keye (2014) found that there was a significant positive relationship between mindfulness and resilience. Specifically, a regression analysis revealed that mindfulness and resilience predicted over 50% of variance in participants' psychological well-being scores. Pidgeon and Keye (2014) noted, "Findings from this study show support for developing programs for university students that target cultivating resilience and mindfulness to increase their ability to effectively manage the complex challenges and competing demands of university life" (p. 27).

In summary, as explored above, institutions of higher education have thoughtfully integrated many aspects of mindfulness as a part of student well-being into campus life. Universities may want to consider supporting students through innovative mindfulness programming, including on campus and study abroad experiences.

1.3. Cross-Cultural Considerations and Mindfulness

Cross-cultural experiences, including short-term and full-term programs and study abroad visits are helpful in increasing cultural competence for students (Eisenberg, 2018). As remote work grows and the internationalization of the workplace continues, cross-cultural skills are important and often necessary. For example, cultural competence directly impacts managerial effectiveness when working with culturally diverse populations (Eisenberg, 2018). In their study related to a short-term study abroad experience in China, Tuleja (2014) noted that mindful awareness influenced intercultural competence. In their work developing international guidelines for the field of education, Kenny et al. (2020) concluded, "Creating an environment that cultivates deep listening, openness and respect for what is possible in diverse and underrepresented regions is critical to realizing the full potential of human flourishing through mindfulness practices" (p. 9).

While there are mindfulness programs for stressed students, both nationally and internationally, there are very few preventive mindfulness programs designed to support overall wellness as a proactive measure (de Bruin et al., 2015). We, the authors of this article, frame mindfulness practices as both "vitamins" and "medicine". While the foundational practices of mindfulness related to awareness of body, mind and emotion are often used like medicine when urgent needs arise, we believe that helping students implement these practices more like vitamins is more conducive to consistent and lasting well-being.

Understanding how culture impacts the study and practice of mindfulness is important to our students' development. This study abroad experience offered students the opportunity to engage deeply with mindfulness as both a personal practice and a tool for intercultural understanding. By combining mindfulness techniques with cultural sensitivity and local traditions, students could develop a more nuanced, global perspective on well-being and consciousness. This approach encouraged not only a deeper understanding of mindfulness, but also an appreciation for cultural diversity and a respectful engagement with global traditions.

1.4. Needs of Human Service Professionals in Training

Human service professionals are often under a great deal of stress and lack the level of support needed to sustain demanding careers (Hricova et al., 2020). They often deal with burnout and secondary traumatic stress, both of which are components of compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue can include physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion caused by attending to the serious needs of those whom they serve (Tucker et al., 2017). Although compassion fatigue is prevalent among human service professionals, it can be mitigated by resilience-related activities that address self-awareness, self-care, and mindfulness (Tucker et al., 2017). Our aim was to help prepare our students for high intensity careers by introducing sustainable mindfulness practices that support well-being.

In a study by Hepburn et al (2021), pre-service teachers (PST's), who reported that stress levels were high throughout their academic year, found an integrative mindfulness-based yoga program to support stress management and mindful attention awareness: "[S]tress has been identified as creating a deleterious effect on PST's performance and erode confidence, professional identity, and morale" (p. 1). Most pre-service programs spend little time helping students learn how to proactively manage stress, which is a skill that is learned over time and can be more challenging for students and early career professionals. Hepburn et al. asserted that universities should support pre-service professionals who are about to enter demanding careers, rather than expecting early professionals to support their well-being on their own.

Tucker et al. (2017) concluded that compassion fatigue prevention strategies should be actively taught during the third year of the medical school curriculum to help students navigate distress and high-level challenges not previously encountered. While students in Tucker et al.'s study did not achieve

lower levels of burnout or compassion fatigue during the study, students did report usefulness about learning how to recognize and address stress. They also noted the importance of buildings toolbox of manageable strategies to help mitigate stressors.

Once professionals are in the field, continued support is needed. In a study by Kuyken et al. (2022), involving 85 schools and 679 teachers in the UK, a universal school-based mindfulness training (SBMT) program intervention was found to provide short term relief from teacher burnout. The SBMT also temporarily improved school climate. While further work is needed to determine how to create sustained improvements, mindfulness interventions have proven to be helpful to support teachers who are often overburdened, over stressed and under compensated.

Also related to human service professionals in the field, Pigeon et al (2014) completed a study focused on using a brief Mindfulness with Metta Training Program (MMTP) with 44 human service professionals who worked with socially disadvantaged youth. Participants were assigned to a retreat group or a control group. The retreat experience included education about mindfulness and working with disturbing emotions using CBT. It also involved experiential exercises which utilized mindfulness tools and practices. While no immediate differences were found between the retreat and control group on resilience, mindfulness and self-compassion variables, there were significant differences found over time. Specifically, after one month there were significant differences for mindfulness, with the retreat group having higher scores. After four months, the retreat group demonstrated higher scores than the control group on self-compassion and resilience. The authors concluded that the practices took time before results could be seen, and that perhaps a retreat format allows for a deeper integration of the material taught. They also noted the importance of working to increase resilience and prevent burnout and compassion fatigue in human service professions.

2. Study Abroad Experience

We have taught university students enrolled in professional graduate programs designed to train school-based mental health providers for over 20 years each. In these roles, we have integrated social-emotional learning curriculum and mindfulness into their training programs. We also have worked with K-12 students, teachers, and administrators, as well as community agency

front-line workers and leaders to incorporate meaningful and manageable mindfulness practices into their daily lives, both at home and school/work.

We attended the International Conference on Mindfulness (ICM) in 2018. At that conference, we were placed on a panel with other international researchers who focused their studies on K-12 education. Three of the panel members were practitioners and authors from Germany. We learned about their cutting-edge mindfulness practices in primary education and found out that the German schools invite and welcome integration of the whole-child via tactile and experiential education (including an outdoor component.) This is not the case in the United States as mindfulness typically must be approached from a more "neuroscience perspective" to be integrated into schools. In discussing and reading our new colleagues' works (Altner et al, 2018) we became aware that our students could learn more about how to thoughtfully practice mindfulness in schools, while making important linkages to the surrounding community, while gaining exposure to intercultural experiences by taking part in the German schools' mindfulness classroom experiences. Altner and Adler (2021) subsequently published more work on mindful teaching and cultural shifts. We were fortunate to be invited into the German schools and communities as we planned our study abroad. While we were at the ICM, we also met some impressive researchers from the Donders Institute for the Brain, who were collaborating with other researchers to implement and study MindChamp (a mindfulness program for children with ADHD and their families). Again, we were fortunate to receive an invitation to visit the Donders Institute for the Brain as we planned this study abroad.

As a result of our experiences as researchers, teachers, and trainers, we sought to create a meaningful study abroad experience, designed to teach future human service professionals (i.e., teachers, medical professionals, mental health providers) how to resource themselves with mindfulness practices. Ideally, students could bring these practices into their work with others as they developed throughout their professional careers. We designed a course titled *Cross-Cultural Mindfulness for School-Based or Child and Adolescent Wellness Providers.* The course was approved at the undergraduate and graduate levels at our university, which is considered a moderately large public university in the South in the United States.

The course had five objectives. These objectives were: to examine varied disciplines' cross-cultural practices for mindfulness interventions in youth

populations; to interface with K-12 personnel across cultures through mindfulness training experiences; to gain personal experience with the different wellness domains of mindfulness and meditation; and to implement interprofessional collaboration strategies to support peers and other professionals in mindfulness program implementation.

The course was advertised across campus through the Center for Global Engagement at the university. Twelve students signed up for the course, coming from majors such as education, occupational therapy, psychology, sociology, nursing, and counseling. One of the twelve students was enrolled in a graduate program and all others were junior or senior undergraduate students.

The course description shared with students before the class began included details about the course as well as basic information about mindfulness. The course description was as follows (Kielty & Gilligan, 2019, p. 1):

> This course is designed for upper-undergraduate as well as graduate students who intend to work with children and adolescents in school-based, healthcare, therapeutic, or related fields. This course will start with a one-week on-campus classroom experience where you will learn about mindfulness and the important principles of neuroscience, personal practice, and how to work with children and adolescents using evidence-based mindfulness strategies. Then, we will travel for approximately three weeks through Germany, the Netherlands, and France for advanced training and collaboration with professionals who implement mindfulness into school and community settings. We will receive training from renowned experts as we traverse the beautiful landscape of Western Europe from Cologne to Paris.

Basic information about mindfulness that was shared with students prior to the beginning of the course follows (Kielty & Gilligan, 2019, p. 1):

> Mindfulness is about being in the present moment, slowing down to become attuned with ourselves and with others, and acknowledging the experiences of ourselves and others with a spirit of curiosity and compassion. Neuroscience supports the health and mental health benefits of mindfulness as well as regulation of the stress response in the body. A wealth of research indicates the benefits of mindfulness for personal and professional well-being. Mindfulness practices enhance the lives of children, adolescents, and adults around the world and assist in greater levels of happiness, well-being, more positive health outcomes, and less professional burnout.

The course offered was the first of its kind at our university as it blended both graduate and undergraduate majors related to helping professions.

2.1. Course Themes and Assignments

Because we had networked with professionals at several international conferences on mindfulness, we were able to create an experience which incorporated principles of neuroscience, working with youth, and experiencing culturally diverse practices. Modules created for and covered in the class portion of this experience included: resilience and mindfulness; assessment of mindfulness; the intersection of mindfulness and meditation; mindfulness and youth interventions; mindfulness and trauma; mindfulness and neuroscience; mindfulness, and self-care and burnout prevention.

Assignments included readings and article summaries from professions about the topics, journals detailing personal mindfulness practices and daily reflections from travel abroad; evidence-based intervention plans for chosen population (i.e., psychoeducation prevention group for adolescents at risk for substance abuse) and a final paper investigating a topic related to mindfulness and its application to a future career.

2.2. Study Abroad Component

The study abroad educational experience occurred after three on-campus class meetings at the US-based institution, each lasting for three hours. The study abroad aspect of the course took place in three segments, which included: visiting schools and local religious spaces in Germany; practicing meditation at a hostel in Amsterdam and visiting Donders Institute for the Brain in the Netherlands; and, finally, touring religious spaces in France as well as spending a retreat day at a Buddhist monastery outside of Paris.

Beginning with the first leg of the educational journey in Germany, we worked directly with children and their teachers in school settings. As mentioned previously, two years prior, we were on a research panel at the International Conference on Mindfulness that included researchers from Germany who were integrating mindfulness into K-12 education. Subsequently, we collaborated with two of these educators to create site visits with three different schools. Students were split into three groups and traveled to the schools where they observed teaching strategies and mindfulness practices used by the teachers such as body scan, mindful breathing, mindful walking in a park and talking about the connection between physical and emotional regulation.

The second portion of the educational study abroad experience involved visiting the Netherlands. While in Amsterdam, the group took a guided tour of the Anne Frank House where they reflected on aspects of the emotional, physical, and spiritual elements of the Holocaust. The group also participated in structured meditation sessions organized in collaboration with the hostel. When we visited Donders Institute for the Brain with our students (having been invited there by colleagues we met at ICM), we were exposed to the MindChamp study (Siebelink et al., 2018) and introduced to cutting-edge technology. Specifically, the Donders Centre for Cognitive Neuroimaging had an imaging machine that could access the insula part of the brain, which is incredibly rare. The Donders institute also housed psychiatric patients and maintained a non-pathological view of psychiatric patients, which was important for our students to witness. As Americans who can be impressed by our own technology, it was an important experience in cultural humility to engage in technology that likely only exists in the Netherlands.

After a long day of being immersed in the science of mindfulness, students took a day off and many visited Body Worlds: The Happiness Project Amsterdam. According to their website, Body Worlds displays over 200 plastinates that demonstrate the impact of lifestyle choices and wellness practices, including mindfulness and meditation, on various bodies. Many students were deeply impacted by this experience as they were able to see the firsthand evidence of lifestyle and wellness.

Finally, the third and final part of the educational study abroad journey included a visit to Paris, France, the grand cathedrals of Notre Dame and Sacre Coeur, and a nature-based bike ride to Giverny, the home of famous French impressionist painter, Claude Monet. Arguably, the most impactful day of our time in France was a day-long retreat at la Maison de L'Inspir, a plant of Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village, run by Buddhist nuns. The nuns orchestrated a day of silent meditation, chanting, mindful eating, mindful walking by a river, and a teaching (via video) by Thich Nhat Hanh that we watched and discussed. The nuns' embodiment of mindfulness created a sense of quiet, peace, and equanimity, which was a contrast to the crowded streets of Paris at the height of a heat wave.

3. Methods

We were the teachers of the course as well as the researchers. In many ways, these multiple roles are typical of our university culture. To understand the effectiveness of the course and its associated learning experiences, we felt it important to build-in a voluntary research component. Thus, we designed a study and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study before the course began. A mixed-methods approach included qualitative data from reflection questions, collected throughout the study abroad experience, as well as quantitative pre and post inventories.

3.1. Research Questions and Design

The primary research questions were: (1) Do students in training report an increase in mindful awareness and embodiment after participation in a cross-cultural mindfulness study abroad as measured by pre and post mindfulness self-report inventories? (2) How do the various components of the course and study abroad experience, including workshops with international professionals, impact students' learning and practice of mindfulness and embodiment of mindful awareness?

3.2. Participants

All 12 students enrolled in the course were asked to provide consent to participate in the study and agreed to participate. Data from 10 participants was used in the quantitative analysis due to missing data. Data from 12 participants was used in the qualitative analysis from journal entries. One participant was in a graduate program in school counseling and eleven were advanced undergraduate students. All participants were enrolled in pre-service helping professional majors including General Education, Special Education, Speech/Language and Communication, Pre-Occupational Therapy, Social Work, Health Sciences, Psychology, and School Counseling. Two students had considerable prior experiences with mindfulness. One was a former middle school principal who had training through Mindful Schools, and one had a personal mindfulness practice.

3.3. Materials

Pre- and post-course assessments were collected using two self-report measures and journal entries completed by students during the study abroad experience and immediately following the completion of the study abroad

experience. Two self-report measures were utilized because of their varying conceptual framework and intended use. The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) is a 15-item scale designed to "assess a core characteristic of dispositional mindfulness, namely, open or receptive awareness of and attention to what is taking place in the present." This instrument was designed to measure general mindfulness in everyday life. The scale shows strong psychometric properties and has been validated with college, community, and cancer patient samples. Respondents are asked to indicate how frequently or infrequently they currently have each experience. Partial examples of items include "I find it difficult to stay focused… and I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension."

The Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI; Walach et al., 2006), is a 14-item measure of mindfulness for use in generalized contexts with participants without prior meditation experience. This instrument was designed to capture more experiential aspects of mindfulness such as acceptance and presence. Walach and colleagues (2006) report a stable Cronbach Alpha of .86 and expected correlations with relevant constructs such as self-awareness. This measure has been indicated to be sensitive to change in participants' mindfulness tendencies. Respondents are asked to use a four-point Likert scale ranging from rarely to almost always as they consider items such as: "I sense my body, whether eating, cooking, cleaning, or talking" and "in difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting."

A final journal entry was collected at the end of the study abroad experience and was used for the qualitative analyses. The prompt for all participants was: Which specific activities, readings, and/or experiences promoted learning of mindfulness concepts for you and in what manner? Which promoted the integration of mindfulness techniques in your personal life and in what manner?

A descriptive phenomenological approach was used to analyze the journal entry data. According to Chamberlain (2009), "phenomenology is a qualitative method of inquiry in which researchers attempt to discover the meaning of lived experiences by human beings as they exist in the world" (p. 52). This approach allowed participants to write about their experiences, as they perceived them. We independently analyzed the final journal entries from each participant to find common themes about the impact of various experiences on the participants and their embodiment of mindful awareness.

The "cutting and sorting" method of data analysis as described by Ryan and Bernard (2003) was used to identify overarching themes that arose through the students' journal entries. Steps in the cutting and sorting method of data analysis included highlighting written passages, cutting and pasting the quotes into a word document, creating groups of quotes based on perceived themes related to research questions, and naming each group based on the perceived themes.

3.4. Procedure

Because this project served as an intervention and included self-report measures and a review of journal entries, confidentiality but not anonymity of responses was possible. We were the only persons to have access to responses and to information linking responses to individual students. For anonymity during data analysis to be maintained for the participants, we maintained a list of participant names and corresponding research number which was used to link pre and post surveys. Each participant selected a number only for the purpose of connecting the post-test to their pre-test results. Once all assessments were gathered, only the identification numbers were used to connect the two pre and post measures together.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Findings

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine the effects of the study abroad program on participants' self-reported experience of mindfulness as measured by the FMI prior to and after completion of the program. There was a significant difference in pre-test scores (M = 35.7; SD = 4.32) and post test scores (M = 40.4; SD = 5.05); t (18) = 2.10, p = 0.038. Participants reported greater experiences of mindfulness following the completion of the program.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine the effects of the study abroad program on participants' self-reported dispositional mindfulness as measured by the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale prior to and after completion of the program. There was not a significant difference in pre-test scores (M = 3.25; SD = .65) and post test scores (M = 3.77; SD = .32); t (15) = 2.144, p = 0.067. Although approaching significance, there were missing data points for this measure leading to a cautious interpretation.

TABLE (1)

ONE SAMPLE T-TEST DATA FROM PRE- AND POST-SURVEYS

Scale	t	df	Significance (two-sided)	Mean Difference
Mindful Attention Awareness Scale	-1.97	15	0.0675	.526
Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory	-2.23	18	0.0384	4.7

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Two main themes, each with several categories, were determined in the analysis of the students' final journal entries. We conceptualized the two major themes as those experiences that allowed space for Internal Processing of mindfulness, and those experiences that allowed space for External Engagement with mindfulness. Internal Processing included experiences that allowed for individualized exposure and absorption through journaling, non-doing, and readings. External Engagement were those experiences that were more action oriented with accompanying shifts in the immediate environment. These included visiting schools with mindfulness programs in three different German communities, participating in a retreat outside of Paris at a monastery run by Buddhist Nuns, learning about brain science and mindfulness at the Donders Institute for the Brain in the Netherlands, and engaging with cross-cultural experiences. Themes, categories, and illustrative quotes are shown in Table (2).

TABLE (2.1.)

QUALITATIVE THEMES FROM STUDENTS' JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Theme: Internal Processing	
Categories	**Quotes from Journal Entries**
Journaling	**"**Another technique I greatly enjoyed was journaling. I have always enjoyed writing to reflect and release, but to do it often is at times a struggle. Finding time to journal every day completely benefits my day."

Meditation	"Morning meditation each day was a very positive experience for me. I had time to think about what I wanted out of the day, and create intentions. I thought about them throughout the day, and since I had them in mind, it made me more aware of the day." "I really loved when we would take a few moments as a group in the morning or during the day to come together and center ourselves as a group. Despite those moments being relatively quiet and individualized, I felt a connection and a bond growing between the group every time we did it."
Non doing	"I loved the reading about non-doing, and applied it the day that we were on the Rhine River Cruise. It was a time for me to sit and accept that I could just do nothing, and not feel guilty about it. I loved it, and enjoyed getting to do nothing on the river."
Readings	"Some of Kabat-Zinn's excerpts from Wherever You Go, There You Are have stuck with me. For example, seizing the moments and living by "this is it" helped me to take advantage of opportunities on our trip, and have helped me apply that mindset to life back in the States. Similarly, Kabat-Zinn's chapter on Waking Up Early have also inspired me to make the most of my mornings, and begin my days with a present attitude."

TABLE (2.2.)
QUALITATIVE THEMES FROM STUDENTS' JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Theme: External Engagement	
Categories	**Quotes from Journal Entries**
Visiting school with mindfulness program	"Reading *Happy Teachers Change the World* and *The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* opened up my eyes to the trauma kids are facing each day, and the challenges teachers experience. I learned that mindfulness is not just a tool, but a way of life. Going to the school entirely reinforced these concepts and it's wonderful to see them being practically applied, transforming the lives of children. When the children went to the park and gave each other massages, they were learning so many things in one activity. They were learning respect to nature, to themselves, to others. They were learning how to be connected with the earth and enjoy their days. This gave me immense joy and hope that these concepts can become a reality."

Participation in Buddhist retreat	"The experience that most promoted my learning of mindfulness was, without a doubt, the day at the monastery among the Buddhist nuns. Being immersed in what they do every day was so unlike anything I have ever experienced. I think that seeing the commitment they have made to practicing mindfulness in everything they do opened my eyes to all the different ways that there is to practice mindfulness." "This was a time where I sat back and learned about mindfulness concepts from people who lived a very different life from me. I enjoyed learning about the meaning behind mindfulness for them and found the dharma talk to be extremely informative and interesting to get a new view on mindfulness."
Learning about the brain science and mindfulness	**"**Lastly, going to the Donders Institute really reaffirmed that mindfulness can aid mental illness and challenges. Understanding non-judgment and compassion can completely alter one's experience of themselves or another." **"**Our discussion about MindChamp and how they integrated it into childrens' and their parents' lives really hit home for me because I have a brother with ADHD"
Cultural experiences	"The last experience I will write about is the morning at the Montmatre. We took our time at the basilica and other churches as well as enjoyed the artists and their work. The experience of taking our time and exploring all things the group wanted to explore was different for me. I am more used to rushing through an experience or not paying full attention to the moment. I enjoyed conversations, walking and looking at so many new things – churches, cafes, art, etc."

5. Discussion

Table (2) is organized into two major themes that were determined from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The first theme, internal processing, represents individually interpreted experiences whereby students reflected on the content and meaning of course readings and mindfulness practices. For example, students commented on the benefits of reading, quiet reflection, and meditating to help them learn and integrate mindfulness into their lives. A second theme of external engagement emerged. Witnessing mindfulness practices in others (i.e., Buddhist nuns leading a mindful walk, German teachers leading mindfulness exercises in their classrooms) and experiencing mindfulness in the "outside world" like going to churches (i.e.,

Montmartre), and organizations (i.e., Donders Institute for the Brain) were indicators of external engagement.

Creating a meaningful cross-cultural mindfulness course and experience was a challenging and rewarding learning experience for us, as we were also the instructors and traveling companions on the journey. This study abroad endeavor blended various experiences designed to introduce mindfulness as both a science and a way of being to college students through a cross-cultural lens. Vande Berge's (2016) work, which has been pivotal in scholarship related to study abroad, provides a four-phase framework related to intercultural learning. The framework includes four competencies of self-awareness, awareness of others, tuning into and attending to emotions, and cultural bridging. Our personal practices of mindfulness, as well as those techniques demonstrated and practiced with students, involve many aspects of this framework. For example, tuning into one's body, thoughts and emotions are all self-awareness practices used personally by the authors and shared as part of mindfulness training. As awareness of self grows, awareness of others is possible (which connects with concepts of mindful relationships). Recognizing and attending to emotions are part of the curriculum we practice and teach, were highlighted at the Donders Institute for the Brain where students spent a day touring and in lectures provided by the researchers. During this visit, students learned that the insula part of the brain processes challenging emotions more effectively when we can name them. Finally, Vande Berge's (2016) competency of cultural bridging was touched on in this course as students learned to interface in ways that were congruent with people around them who were different from them. There are potential links between Vande Berge's model (2016) and our qualitative findings, as internal processing seemed to include elements of self-awareness and tuning into and attending to emotions, whereas external processing seemed to involve aspects of awareness of others and cultural bridging.

In reviewing the research findings associated with the course and experience, we were able to answer the first research question to a cursory degree, and the second question with more depth. The quantitative measures allowed us to answer the question, "Do students in training report an increase in mindful awareness and embodiment after participation in a cross-cultural mindfulness study abroad as measured by pre and post mindfulness self-report inventories?" with a "yes", and "approaching yes," respectively. We also recognize that a global theme of learning via interacting with culturally

different others and engaging in new settings could be gleaned from student comments. For example, one student commented, "There was a time when I sat back and learned about mindfulness concepts from people who lived a very different life from me. I enjoyed learning about the meaning behind mindfulness for them…"

As reported in this article, students' scores on the FMI (Walach, et al., 2006) indicated a significant increase in mindfulness from the beginning to the end of the course. The MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) scores were higher at the end of the course, but they were not statistically significantly higher. While the FMI measures a general state of mindfulness, the MASS measures a more lasting core characteristic of a person's dispositional mindfulness. In alignment with Pidgeon et al.'s (2014) findings, we would likely not expect to see lasting core characteristic changes in a short period of time (i.e., one month) and perhaps measuring this construct several months to a year down the road may have produced more meaningful results.

The question, "How do the various components of the course and study abroad experience, including workshops with international professionals, impact students' learning and practice of mindfulness and embodiment of mindful awareness?" was examined by analyzing the qualitative responses from students' journals. We found that students' learning, practice, and embodiment of mindful awareness was reported via themes of internal processing and external engagement. While internal processing was cultivated through journaling, meditation, non-doing and readings, external engagement was experienced through the events built into our travels. Specifically, students noted that they were most impacted by visiting mindful schools, visiting a neuroscience center, attending a retreat day, and generally interacting with diverse cultures. Aspects of "quiet" and "the value of pausing," whether they be in nature or meditative moments, can be seen sprinkled throughout the student's quotes.

Specific examples of culturally-informed mindfulness study and practice included visiting German public schools, where nature and touch were a part of the children's experiences. For example, school children walked through the town to the local park and laid on the ground to practice mindful breathing. They also incorporated peer massage in their classrooms. These practices are not present in US K-12 educational culture. Additionally, the Netherlands presented a scientific view of mindfulness as students learned about the brain

and many attended the Body Worlds exhibit related to the physical effects of health habits and environmental factors. Finally, engaging in a culturally immersive experience by following the Buddhist Nun's daily regimen—which included silence, chanting, rest, and mindful walking—allowed for intercultural growth and awareness as students were deeply engaged in an unfamiliar setting related to cultural and religious diversity.

Engaging with various cultures potentially increased cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence as noted by Starr-Glass (2020) regarding outcomes of study abroad programs. The added component of engaging in mindfulness practices possibly mitigated the stressful aspects of studying abroad, including liminality, which is a state of transition between a familiar life back home and a new culture that can be marked by uncertainty and disorientation and often is present in short-term study abroad programs (Barkin, 2020). We did not observe students managing extreme stress during the study abroad experience, and we cannot claim causality between mindfulness practices and low levels of stress. At the same time, perhaps the mindfulness practices mitigated more challenging internal experiences for the students. Anecdotally, about 50 percent of students whom we interviewed before accepting them into our program disclosed that that struggled with anxiety. In the future, perhaps including an anxiety measure could be informative. Perhaps incorporating mindfulness and other self-care and self-management supports in study abroad programs could be an important contribution to the study abroad literature, especially when it comes to studying the impact on student mental health and well-being.

6. Concluding Summary and Future Directions

The role of cultural context is important to a study abroad experience aiming to teach the theory and practice of mindfulness. In the study abroad experience reviewed in this article, the ways in which mindfulness practices differed across cultural settings (i.e., German schools versus Buddhist monastery) contributed to students' learning about how cultural specificity can enrich and diversify mindfulness experiences. While much of the existing literature is rooted in universal frameworks such (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Williams & Penman, 2011), cultural adaptations and cross-cultural comparisons have been less explored.

From a theoretical perspective, the outcomes of this study point to the possibility that incorporating mindfulness practices into study abroad programs

could act as a potential resilience-building prevention and offer intervention tools to support the well-being of students who are engaging in new and sometimes anxiety-producing endeavors. We tend to use a theory of mindfulness practices as "vitamins" and "medicine" to distinguish practices that are preventative and strengthening for body and mind in nature versus those that can be effective for emergent issues such as emotional regulation needs on the spot. Our contributions include incorporating pre-professional issues and training for burnout prevention, which are often not incorporated into study abroad programs. Concepts related to mindfulness such as enhancing openness, increasing nonjudgment, and increasing presence intersect well with cultural self-awareness, awareness of others, tuning into and attending to emotions and cultural bridging, which were identified by Berge (2016) in his four-phase framework of intercultural learning. Further exploration of this theoretic intersection could be helpful to study in the future.

In summary, while we found that mindfulness was cultivated throughout the course, we cannot know how deep and lasting the impacts have been. As Pidgeon et al. (2014) noted perhaps a retreat format would allow for a deeper integration of mindfulness materials. We wonder how deeper and more contemplative spaces both before and throughout the study abroad experience could have facilitated a lasting integration of the mindfulness learnings and practices. When designing future offerings of this study abroad, we plan to more intentionally highlight intercultural learning for our students using a more integrated model of learning as supported by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009). Spitzberg and Changnon explore various models and frameworks that define and assess intercultural competence. They emphasize that intercultural competence is multifaceted, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Pillars of intercultural learning include knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflection. While elements of each pillar were embedded throughout our current program, explicit integration would support development of global competence, helping individuals thrive in diverse environments and foster cross-cultural understanding

There are a few changes we would like to make moving forward. First, as mentioned, creating at least one additional retreat-like experience could strengthen internal integration for students. Ideally, we would build in one pre-travel retreat and then another retreat 6 months to a year after the experience. We would also like to find ways to support students as they graduate and move into their disciplines with continued focus on embodied professional self-care.

Second, we would create more focus with the readings and topics. We integrated a great deal of varied content and wonder if the students could have brought in their own professional literature to a final, seminal project, rather than instructor efforts to integrate concepts throughout the class. For example, in the future we may remove readings about trauma informed classrooms and allow students who want to focus on K-12 education to bring those readings into their final projects. This would give us more time to allow the class to focus intentionally on personal and internal development before moving into professional application. Additionally, as we reviewed some of the journal comments, we noted that connecting with nature seemed to support the mindful awareness of many students. In the future, we may slow down the experience, in favor of more deeply exploring mindful awareness, connections with nature, and mindful practices that allow for more internal integration of many of the practices learned throughout the course. Finally, in the future, we may more intentionally structure journal prompts around themes of mindful awareness, including intention, attention, and attitude to focus on particular components of change.

We concur with Kenny et al.'s (2020) view that an environment which fosters deep listening, openness to others, a willingness to engage in new experiences, and a respect for diversity in both place and approach allows for potential and flourishing to unfold. We believe we created a unique space to learn, grow, and contemplate. We hope to learn from and improve upon our experiences as we design and plan our next study abroad.

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