

New study shows meditating before lecture leads to better grades

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Meditation may work especially well for freshmen. Creative Services photo

(Medical Xpress)—Practicing a little Zen before class can lead to better grades, according to a new experimental study by George Mason University professor Robert Youmans and University of Illinois doctoral student Jared Ramsburg.

The pair of researchers conducted three classroom experiments at a

California university to see if [meditation](#) might help students focus better and retain information. A [random selection](#) of students followed basic meditation instructions before a lecture, and the students who meditated before the lecture scored better on a quiz that followed than students who did not meditate. In one experiment, the meditation even predicted which students passed and which students failed the quiz.

The study was published last month in the journal *Mindfulness*.

Interestingly, the researchers also showed that the effect of the meditation was stronger in classes where more freshmen students were enrolled, showing that meditation might have a bigger effect on freshmen students. The researchers speculate that freshmen courses likely contain the types of students who stand to benefit the most from [meditation training](#).

"One difficulty for researchers who study meditation is that the supposed benefits of meditation do not always replicate across different studies or populations, and so we have been trying to figure out why. This data from this study suggest that meditation may help students who might have trouble paying attention or focusing. Sadly, freshmen classes probably contain more of these types of [students](#) than senior courses because student populations who have difficulty self-regulating are also more likely to leave the university," says Youmans, an assistant professor of psychology.

Youmans believes that [self-reflection](#) might therefore have an important place in freshmen seminars or institutions with high attrition rates. Their study showed a significant improvement with only six minutes of written meditation exercises—and the researchers believe with more extensive training and coaching that the results could improve.

"Personally, I have found meditation to be helpful for mental clarity,

focus and self-discipline," says Ramsburg, lead author of the study and a practicing Buddhist. "I think that if [mindfulness](#) can improve mental clarity, focus and self-discipline, then it might be useful in a variety of settings and for a variety of goals."

Youmans also suggests that, in theory, other forms of active self-reflection such as prayer, taking long walks or even just taking the time to mindfully plan out your day in the morning could have some of the same positive effects as meditation. "Basically, becoming just a little bit more mindful about yourself and your place in the world might have a very important, practical benefit—in this case, doing better in college."

Provided by George Mason University

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