

The Science and Practice of Mindfulness at Work

Integrating mindfulness-based holistic education into a business school curriculum

Advocacy and Awareness Q&A

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POLICY INITIATIVES

- Establishment of the SMU Mindfulness Initiative (2013), supported by Dean Howard Thomas and led by Prof. Jochen Reb
- Transition from co-curricular offerings to a credit-bearing academic course with strong scientific foundation
- Ministry of Education (MOE) research funding provided credibility and resources for evaluation
- Integration into SMU's Core Curriculum expanded accessibility across all disciplines
- Influenced by global conversations on wellbeing, flourishing, and holistic education (e.g., Mind & Life Institute, UN SDGs)

PROGRAM ORIGINS: CRISIS OR SITUATION

- Student well-being crisis - rising stress, anxiety, and burnout among university students
- Attention crisis - digital distraction, information overload, and cognitive fragmentation
- Gap in higher education: professional preparation without developing attention, self-awareness, or resilience
- Designed to support wellbeing, leadership, learning effectiveness, and flourishing in a complex world

HOW RESEARCH INFORMED ADVOCACY

- Research guided every stage: development, design, implementation, and evaluation
- Curriculum draws on mindfulness research, positive psychology, neuroscience, and contemplative science
- A MOE-funded quasi-experimental study compared the course against an active-control group
- Findings showed significant improvements in: body awareness, resilience, self-compassion, stress reduction, positive affect, flourishing, and social connection
- Benefits maintained months after course completion
- Empirical evidence was critical for building institutional legitimacy and support

BIGGEST CHAMPIONS

- University leadership - strategic support, institutional backing, and legitimacy
- Faculty colleagues - curriculum development and evidence generation
- Students - personal testimonials and word-of-mouth on wellbeing, focus, and leadership growth
- Faculty champions - expansion across disciplines and long-term scaling

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

- Find allies in leadership early
- Frame mindfulness as key skill development (attention, self-awareness, resilience, ethical decision-making) - not as meditation or wellness
- Build a strong evidence base: document outcomes and seek funding for rigorous evaluation
- Build on established programs (e.g., MBSR, MBCT, MBSAT) rather than starting from scratch
- Invest in faculty development - skilled, authentic facilitators enable lasting impact
- Remember: students learn as much from how instructors listen, relate, and show up as from course content (embodying the practices and teaching is essential)

LINK TO PROJECT

www.profmindful.com/science-and-practice-of-mindfulness-at-work