





A note from the inaugural Director of the Contemplative Studies Centre



With the very generous support of Martin and Loreto Hosking through the Three Springs Foundation we have established a truly transformational Centre at the University of Melbourne. Our work is now fulfilling our vision of promoting authentic, tradition-backed, and evidence-based contemplative practices on campus, in the community, and to the world. In our work to date, we have not only planted the seeds, but are also beginning to see the flowers of cutting-edge research, truly inclusive interdisciplinary dialogue, novel and forward-thinking education, and community interaction.

Contemplative practices can help people to understand themselves, the world, and each other better. Through interdisciplinary, evidence-based research, the Centre is working to determine what authentic and effective contemplation-based offerings should look like. Thank you for supporting our investigation of age-old traditions and new insights gained through the latest science, to define and implement this future-focused work.

Support from the Three Springs Foundation has meant we have been able to appoint exceptional staff, host many public events, and set the stage for some very exciting work focused on contemplative practices. This will shape the way the University community, the people of Melbourne, and increasingly, the entirety of Australia, engage with and think about these important practices.

The Contemplative Studies Centre acts as a conduit between the University and the wider community as well as an intersection point for researchers, academics, contemplative practitioners, and tradition-bearers. By bringing together these important perspectives we can engage in respectful dialogue to consider ways to help society address our modern problems and think about what will be required for us to flourish long into the future. Support from the Three Springs Foundation means that we can challenge ourselves, the academy, and society to ask hard questions, search for meaningful answers, and to really contemplate what our lives are about. The result is meaningful to so many on so many levels.

We are so grateful to Martin and Loreto Hosking through the Three Springs Foundation for making this work possible!

Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam

2021 and 2022 in numbers



4186

People engaged







PhD student supported





Collaborators





Contemplative Studies Centre

Key values

Compassion

We seek to nurture the potential of all by bringing a boundless humanity and kindness to our work.

Inclusivity

We warmly embrace diversity of thought, experience, perspective, and tradition and are committed to the principles of true accessibility.

Authenticity

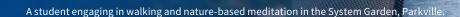
We embody trustworthiness, transparency, and genuinely seek positive change for the world. We will stay true to our vision and take responsibility for our actions.

Integrity

Our values, ideals, and actions align. We are committed to honesty and accountability.

Transformational change

Our unwavering commitment to excellence in research, education and practice will help to reduce the world's suffering and improve wellbeing.



Education

Commencing in Semester 2, 2023, our undergraduate University breadth subject The Art and Science of Meditation is a core offering aimed at fulfilling a critical objective of the Centre.

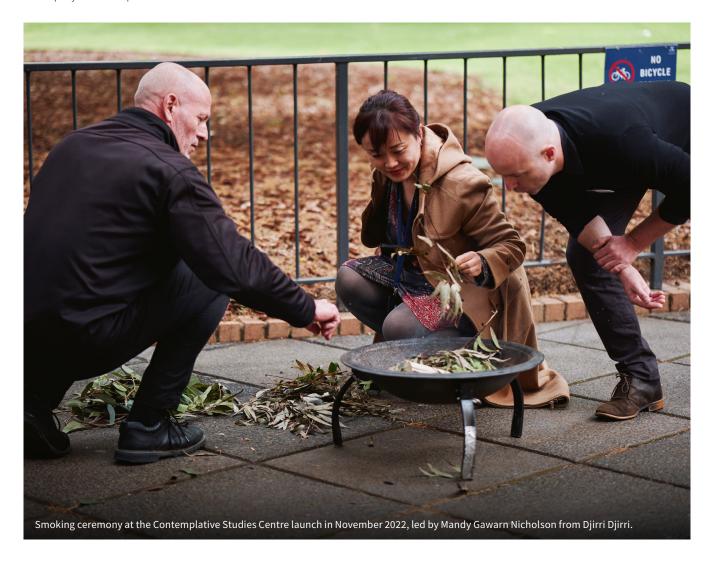
The subject draws on history, philosophy, anthropology, education, and psychology to explore the traditional context and contemporary application of meditation practices in day-to-day life with an emphasis on scientific evidence for how such practices may help to achieve individual and societal goals.

Meditation is among the fastest growing forms of alternative medical approaches, widely integrated into education at all levels, and is a widely condoned practice across historical wisdom traditions. No other subject at the University of Melbourne (breadth or otherwise) offers students a means to explore the historical and contemporary context of contemplative practices, the evidence base behind them, how to actually use these practices, nor the ways in which they are used to explore meaning-making and the pursuit of uniquely human capacities.

During the subject, students will develop insight into the history and contemporary practice of meditation, how it can be used towards health, wellbeing and spiritual goals, and what we know about certain modern implementations of meditation (e.g. smartphone apps, online programs, healthcare-based courses, educational offerings).

Combined with opportunities to practice types of meditation from varying religious and secular traditions, students will gain both academic and practical insight into how meditation works and what it can offer.

The subject will touch on individual and societal issues regarding ethics, a life well-lived, finding meaning, and making the world a better place with reference to historical and contemporary figures that have championed meditation to these and other ends. The subject will draw on traditional wisdom, logical arguments, cultural considerations, and empirical evidence to answer key questions about how best to use these ancient practices in modern contexts.



Research

The Contemplative Studies Centre (CSC) has been making great strides in its flagship research projects, which focus on mapping contemplative experiences and personalisation of contemplative practice in the modern era.

These projects are aimed at advancing our understanding of the inner workings of the human mind and exploring the potential benefits of contemplative practices in modern society. With ongoing support and collaboration from the wider research community, these projects are set to make a lasting impact on the field of contemplative studies and beyond.

Mapping contemplative experiences across and within meditation traditions

Dr Julieta Galante (Research Fellow, CSC), Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam (Director, CSC), Associate Professor Ana Dragojlovic (Research Associate, CSC), Dr Cullan Joyce (Insight Fellow, CSC).

By working closely with practitioners and teachers of different established practice traditions, we can observe how people practice over a prolonged period. By gathering and comparing accounts of how practitioners and teachers navigate their experience of contemplative practice, we will be able to understand better how to help practitioners prepare for, and successfully navigate, these experiences as they arise.

This critical work will provide fundamental information for practitioners of contemplative practices regarding what to expect (positive, negative, and neutral experiences) and how practices are similar and different. We aim to help practitioners choose the practice that suits their goals and understand how to most effectively pursue that practice.

For more information, please see the CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/22js

Understanding trends, patterns and issues in contemplative practices

Dr Jonathan Davies (Research Trials Manager, CSC), Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam, Dr Julieta Galante, Professor Nicola Reavley (Deputy Director, Centre for Mental Health, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health), Dr Jemimah Ride (Research Fellow, Health Economics Unit, Centre for Health

Meditation is seemingly everywhere, but beneath the hype, what is the real story? Who is engaging with meditation and how? Who is not engaging with it and why not? Importantly, who would like to engage with it but cannot? This program of research will take snapshots of meditation in Australia and worldwide. We will conduct nationally representative surveys to understand the prevalence and predictors of meditation practice in our region. These results will identify issues and opportunities for making these practices more beneficial and more accessible for those who are interested in them. Results will also inform government, health providers, educators and meditation providers about where to invest resources.

For more information, please see the CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/p2js



Towards personalisation of contemplative practice in the modern era

Dr Jonathan Davies, Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam, Dr Julieta Galante.

The past two decades have witnessed an explosion of courses and apps that harness contemplative practices to facilitate the selfmanagement of personal growth, health and wellbeing. However, little is known about the amount of practice, or what types of practice might actually work for an individual. This program of research aims to go beyond the hype, in order to understand different types of meditation training and how their delivery may (or may not) lead to improvements in various health and wellbeing outcomes.

The research will provide critical knowledge about the optimal amount of practice needed for achieving a given goal and whether different meditation programs are living up to the promises that they make. The results will provide pivotal information to guide the delivery of contemplative training, helping governments, organisations, and individuals to see how best to undertake contemplative practice to achieve specific goals.

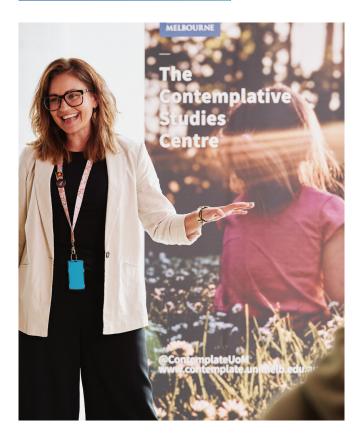
For more information, please see the CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/h2js

Contemplative practices and social change

Associate Professor Ana Dragojlovic, Dr Julieta Galante, Dr Cullan Joyce, Associate Professor Nicholas van Dam.

The Contemplative Practices and Social Change research network is an interdisciplinary initiative that seeks to explore a range of questions related to social change and contemplative practices. For instance, how do individuals and communities use contemplative practices to seek social change? What are the perceived benefits and values of using contemplative practices to address issues related to racial, genderqueer, the environment, and economic inequality? And conversely, what are the limitations of incorporating contemplative practices into these areas of social change? How do ongoing debates about social justice impact teachers and practitioners? Finally, how could contemplative practices be harnessed to benefit communities and individuals seeking social change?

For more information, please see the CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/8tjs



Research news articles 2021 and 2022:

Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam reflects on seeking authentic mindfulness in this era of wellness:

pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/seeking-authenticmindfulness-in-this-era-of-wellness

Brett Henebery from The Educator Magazine, a print and online website for education professionals, interviews Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam about mindfulness for students:

theeducatoronline.com/k12/news/deep-dive-mindfulnesseducation-could-be-doing-more-harm-than-good/281527

Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam discusses the efficacy of mindfulness and digital apps for treating mental ill-health:

theconversation.com/how-effective-is-mindfulness-fortreating-mental-ill-health-and-what-about-the-apps-182436

Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam reflects on approaching meditation with caution:

psyche.co/ideas/meditation-is-like-mountaineeringapproach-it-with-care

Academic Seed Funding Program

The Contemplative Studies Centre Academic Seed Funding Program is aimed at small to medium sized academic projects of all kinds that advance the interest, capacity, and impact of contemplative studies and practice at the University of Melbourne and in the broader community.

It is open to all academics across the University of Melbourne and funding ranges between \$2000 and \$20,000.

Six projects spanning the Faculty of Arts (FA), the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS), the Faculty of Science (FFAS), the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology (FEIT), and the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music (FFAM) each received 12 months of funding in mid 2022 through a competitive process. These projects include collaborations with people from 23 community organisations.

Qualities

The Contemplative Studies Centre Academic Seed Funding Program focuses on projects that have the following qualities:

- Are interdisciplinary, creative, collaborative, and impactful.
- Are led by early and mid-career researchers (EMCRs).
- Partner with contemplative practice communities, networks or individuals including practitioners, students or providers.
- Have a clear and effective knowledge translation strategy.
- Have a feasible scope and budget, and a rigorous method.
- For proposals over \$10,000: Are able to scale and likely to obtain future funding.

Projects

Types of projects can include:

- Research projects.
- Developing/finishing academic works including performing or fine arts projects.
- Developing/undertaking community outreach or engagement.
- Participating in and/or developing academic workshops or events.
- Undertaking field work (e.g. sociological, anthropological, qualitative interviews).
- Developing novel educational offerings.

Academic Seed Funding Program 2022 recipients



CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/a2rs

Dying 'Buddhish' in Australia

Project Lead – Dr Hannah Gould (Research Associate, School of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Arts).

The support I received from the Contemplative Studies Centre has been vital to launching a new research project, "Dying 'Buddhish' in Australia", which investigates the current state and future potential of contemplative practice within Australia's end-of-life and deathcare systems.

Thank you for the generous funding, it has enabled me to build a collaborative research team, including representatives from community/religious groups, industry professionals, healthcare professionals and academics, and it has facilitated the collection of our first tranche of empirical data.

This data speaks to the impact of practicing contemplation, both for those facing the end of their lives, and for those caring for these people. It will lead to a more robust assessment of how contemplation can be integrated into Australia's healthcare system, with the goal of implementation in coming years.



Project Lead – Professor Kathryn Williams (Environmental Psychology, School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences, Faculty of Science).

We are researching how contemplative and nature engagement practices might be combined to support people who are experiencing challenging feelings about ecological crises such as climate change.

We want to develop strategies that will help people understand and work with these emotions and to act collectively on environmental issues. The research team have strong backgrounds in studying nature engagement and environmental emotions and actions, but most of us have not been involved in studies of contemplative practices previously.

We are grateful for the gifts that have allowed us to step into this new area of work.

During 2022, the Seed Funding has helped us in two critical ways:

- 1. We have been able to employ a research assistant to help us review academic literature. This has been essential as we try to get our heads around this complex field of study.
- 2. It has allowed us to tap into the expertise of teachers and leaders of diverse contemplative practices in Australia from Buddhist, Christian, eco-feminist, and First Nation traditions. That input has stretched the way we think about the project and challenged us to find ways to bridge scientific and spiritual ways of knowing the world.

In 2023 the funding will support us to conduct interviews with teachers and leaders of contemplative nature-engagement practices, followed by co-design workshops that will result in guidelines for designing practices specifically oriented toward ecological crises.



For more information, please see the CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/j2rs

Academic Seed Funding Program 2022 recipients



For more information, please see the CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/x2rs

Enhancing meditation training for beginner meditators using functional MRI neurofeedback

Project Lead - Saampras Ganesan (PhD Candidate, School of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology).

I feel very fortunate to be awarded this funding, especially for work in contemplative research that has begun flourishing in Australia. I feel honoured to receive my first academic grant funding and I am grateful to the donors for their generosity and altruism.

We are using this funding to gather novel insights about the utility of advanced brain-based technologies in supporting and learning contemplative meditation practices, especially among beginners.

The advanced research infrastructure necessary (real-time functional MRI neurofeedback) for this study has been set up for the first time in Australia by our group.

We are using the funding to collect human data using the advanced infrastructure. Findings from this study will also improve our understanding about the neurobiology of meditation and potentially lay the technological foundation to drive large-scale mental-health impact through contemplative practices.



Project Lead - Dr Tara Hickey (Honorary Fellow, Centre for Youth Mental Health, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences).

I developed the MAC-P program for youth with psychotic experiences. A pilot study found it was feasible, acceptable, and had good outcomes related to mental health, and social and occupational functioning for the young participants. The primary aim of this study is to repurpose the MAC-P program using co-design, creating an online group intervention that improves access to support for youth with a range of mental health difficulties living rurally and regionally.

The research team was delighted to hear that their project was awarded funding from the Academic Seed Funding Program. We very much appreciate the support of the Contemplative Studies Centre, and the generous donors who make this possible, as we get this project up and running so that we can contribute to developing a stronger mental health research culture in the Wimmera.

Following ethical approval, young people attending Grampians Mental Health Service in Horsham were recruited in December 2022 and a further ethics approval is in process to recruit additional attendees from the local Headspace service.

The research team is now keen to get this project up and running. There is a high need for mental health research in the Wimmera area, and we hope our work will pave the way for more research in the future. We plan to put in an application for further funding and truly believe it can be put to very good use in this area.





For more information, please see the

CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/i2rs

Contemplating time and trust: Encounters with ancient standing stones and swarm robotics in performance artwork 'Sacrifice'

Project Co-Leads – Dr Robert Walton (Senior Lecturer in Theatre (Acting), Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music) and Dr Airlie Chapman (Senior Lecturer in Mechatronics, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology).

With team members Dr Aleks Michalewicz (MDAP) and PhD Candidates Elena Marie Vella (FEIT), Goran Đurić (FFAM), Daniel Williams (FEIT) and Thomas Keep (FA).

With support from the Contemplative Studies Centre, we presented a workshop at the Australian Network for Art and Technology Spectra Conference 2022, in which 30 participants engaged with a demonstration of robotic swarm behaviours both in-person and in a virtual reality environment. Through this event we introduced the project to peers in the technological art community and received immediate feedback by observing and discussing their individual user experiences. A paper discussing our project's conceptual development was presented at the British Computer Society's EVA London conference, preparations for which provided us with the impetus to solidify plans for a November residency at Science Gallery Melbourne (SGM).

At SGM, we staged 'Sacrifice' as a pop-up installation in the Black Box Studio over two weeks, opening to the public for three days as both an artwork and science experiment. Our goal was to record responses to the stone-swarm, offering a rich resource for ongoing investigations into trust, contemplation, art, and engagement in human-swarm robotic interactions, for which our roboticists have been collaborating with Master of Engineering students at the University of Melbourne to analyse trends in visitors' physical and emotional responses.

Without the generous support of the Contemplative Studies Centre, we would not have been able to secure the critical hardware and expertise necessary for our first gallery experience.

We are eager to see the project unfold over the coming months as we refine the robotic platforms' capabilities and conduct further studies of human responses to changes in the swarm's morphological and behavioural characteristics.

For more information, please see the CSC website: go.unimelb.edu.au/r2rs

Informing decisions to implement mindfulness-based programs at work

Project Lead - Dr Caitlin Hitchcock (Senior Research Fellow, Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences).

We have been working on how best to communicate the effectiveness (or lack of effect) of mindfulness for improving workplace wellbeing.

Support from the Contemplative Studies Centre Academic Seed Funding program has allowed us to bring Maris Vainre, a PhD student from the University of Cambridge, to Australia.

While Maris is here, we have been planning a research study, along with a white paper to be published together with mental health charities which will guide consumers in their decision to purchase mindfulness programmes.

Engagement Events held over 2021 and 2022

The Contemplative Studies Centre successfully engaged students, staff and members of the broader University of Melbourne community over 2021 and 2022. Most events were held over Zoom to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all participants. Session recordings of Guided Meditations and upcoming events can be found at psychologicalsciences.unimelb.edu.au/CSC/engage.



Over 4100 event registrations

The Contemplation Conversations

These conversations are generally a moderated panel discussion featuring an array of thinkers, meditators, researchers and people from all over the life spectrum, discussing big topics related to the world of contemplative wisdom. Contemplative studies are incredibly multi-faceted, with topics ranging from contemplative practice for climate anxiety, through to feminism and queerness in modern religion. At each event, attendees are welcomed to engage with the host and panellists with questions and comments. Conversations held:

- Plugged in or Unplugged? Exploring technology in meditation practices.
- Presence of Mind: Mindfulness and the creative process.
- Climate anxiety and the impact of a burning planet.
- Broad church: Feminism and queerness in modern religion.
- Immersive mindfulness: Can real life compare with digital worlds?
- · Schools of life and death.
- · Spiritual matters.

"The interviewer was exceptional and posed thought-provoking questions for the panellists. The representation of diverse perspectives, including and especially Indigenous voices on the importance of connection to country, made the event all the richer."



More than 72,000 YouTube views

Tradition Deep Dive

This series provides a platform for teachers to present a on a topic that can range from an exploration of a single concept within a wisdom tradition, to a method of meditation. These sessions take place in varying formats including workshops, walking tours and conversations:

- Understanding Tonglen: The practice of giving and receiving.
- · Coming home to the alive world: Animism, embodiment, belonging.
- Experience the Bahá'í faith.
- Being on the edge of mystery: An appreciation of the physical world.
- · Our country our bodies.
- Zen: A healing practice for difficult times.

"The joy of the presenters in sharing their faith tradition was an enriching experience."



Wise Words

Wise Words is a lecture-style series targeting academics and students, aimed at advancing the field of contemplative science. Wise Words held:

- Conceptions of contemplation in Greek and Roman philosophies.
- · Being spiritual in Australia: Complexity, contemplation and controversy.
- · Vipassana meditation as a rigorous phenomenology.
- Deliberating contemplative practice's potential and actual impacts on society.
- · What is meditation and how does it work?
- The MYRIAD (MY Resilience in ADolescence) Study.

"Thank you so very much for the great gift and blessing of these inspiring presentations "

Meditation for Lockdown

These sessions were begun during the lockdowns of COVID-19, as the timely establishment of the Contemplative Studies Centre, allowed for guided meditation sessions for University of Melbourne staff and students during these challenging periods. Throughout the years of lockdown, 882 participants attended 27 Meditation for Lockdown sessions facilitated by expert teachers from four different faith and wisdom traditions. These sessions continued in 2022, to meet the continuing demand across the University community, now known as the Guided Meditation Series.

- Finding Solace in Solitude: Meditation for Lockdown.
- Alone but not lonely: Meditation in Lockdown.
- Uncertain but not Unsettled: Meditation for Lockdown.

"My sincere thanks to the organisers and presenters for this opportunity. I believe it has set me on the path to continuing meditation for the rest of my life."



Guided Meditation Series (5 – 9 Sessions per series)

Guided meditation sessions are led by expert teachers from a range of faith, secular and wisdom traditions and are aimed at beginner, intermediate or advanced meditators.

Buddhist | Korean Seon (Zen) Wayapa Wuurrk Secular - Contemporary Insight Tradition **Contemporary Christian Contemporary Insight Tradition** Buddhist | Tibetan Buddhist | Theravada Zen Koans MBSR inspired mindfulness

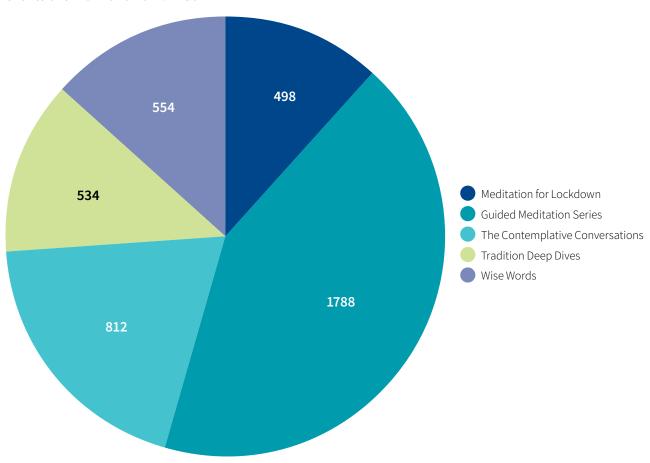
"Very grateful to have this opportunity to share. Virtual sanghas are so rare and this is a fantastic offering." - Buddhist | Tibetan

"Beautiful and gentle emphasis on connecting to country as a source of energy. Enjoyed guided meditations and music. Loved learning about Wayapa." - Wayapa Wuurrk

"Ven. Munissara's insights make me think about my approach to life. The sessions inspire me to practise meditation and mindfulness." - Buddhist | Theravada

"Thank you for your generous introduction to Zen & the concept of koans. Something I thought totally alien and beyond reach has suddenly become approachable. I look forward to further discussions and sharing." - Zen Koans

Total number of registrants at Contemplative Studies Centre events over 2021 and 2022: 4186



Thank you, Martin and Loreto, for supporting the Contemplative Studies Centre



\$508K

Support for research, including Academic Seed **Funding Program**



\$221.7K

Support for education, including PhD student support



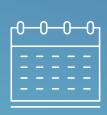
\$135.7K

Support for practise



\$158.9K

Support for scholarships



\$284.9K



\$137.8K

Support for governance



\$105.4K



\$131.5K

assets and services



Contact us

Associate Professor Nicholas Van Dam

Director, Contemplative Studies Centre Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences The University of Melbourne

nicholas.vandam@unimelb.edu.au

Nick Blinco

Vice-President
Advancement
The University of Melbourne
n.blinco@unimelb.edu.au