RECIPES for Mindfulness in Your Library
Supporting Resilience and Community Engagement

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# Contents

*Acknowledgments* ix  
*Introduction* xi  

## PART I  ■ Library as Hub  

1. **Cultivating a “Mindful Medicine” Ethos**  
   Rebecca Snyder and Robin O’Hanlon  
   3  

2. **Accidentally Sustainable**  
   Building a Weekly Meditation Community  
   Laura Horwood-Benton  
   9  

3. **The Be Project**  
   Sparking a Quiet Revolution in Rural Kentucky  
   Katie Scherrer  
   17  

4. **Providing a Space to Rest**  
   Weaving Restorative Yoga into the Strategic Plan  
   Millie Jackson  
   23
PART II  ■  Innovative Services

5  Mindful McQuade  29
Mindfulness in the Heart of a Small College Campus
*Catherine Wong, Katherine LaFlamme, and Michaela Keating*

6  Mindfulness Experiences  37
The Library Brain Booth
*Katia G. Karadjova*

7  Craving Quiet  45
A Library’s Zen Zone
*Kellie Sparks and Hillary Fox*

PART III  ■  Personal Practice

8  Mindful and Reflective Writing as Strategy  55
How a Work Journal Can Help Make You Whole
*Michelle Reale*

9  Mindfulness Is Not a Life Hack  61
*Elizabeth Galoozis and Caro Pinto*

10  Outreach for Inreach  67
Using Digital Resources to Promote Mindfulness
*Jenn Carson*

11  Mindfully Managing Library Teams  75
*Jenny Colvin*
PART IV ■ Teaching/Research

12 Shifting the Pace 83
Contemplative Practices and the Research Process
Lisa Meléndez

13 A Persistent Praxis 91
Putting Mindfulness Scholarship into Action at Minneapolis College
Jennifer Sippel

14 Going with the Flow 99
Finding Flexible Functionality in Teaching and Mentoring
Anne Pemberton and Lisa Coats

15 Overcoming Research Anxiety 105
A Mindful Approach to Literature Review Searching
Elizabeth Galoozis and Kevin Michael Klipfel

Contributors 113
Index 119
Mindfulness (e.g., meditation, movement, reflective writing, engaged listening) is a powerful way to build personal and community resilience. In challenging times of rapid social change and uncertainty, mindfulness offers vital life skills that librarians can offer their users and harness for our own self-care and cultivation of joy. Mindfulness experiences can also be structured to support social justice efforts, nurturing community engagement and civil discourse.

This collection of stories—recipes, if you will—explore a wide range of approaches in which librarians integrate mindfulness into their teaching, collections, services, programming, spaces, partnerships, and professional development.

Not simply a set of techniques, mindfulness offered in libraries ideally stems from the personal practice of the librarian designing and implementing these offerings. Our hope is that this foundation also be present in administrators, who can then encourage mindfulness for their staff and patrons. From this place of authenticity, our shared leadership in this burgeoning movement will take root with credibility and lasting value.
As more librarians commit to individual and sustained reflection and practices, more of us can serve and be served from a well of abundance and clarity, now and over time. We are growing a much-needed movement to rekindle and soothe the soul of our society. While librarians’ expertise is not required, our commitment and curiosity to explore are a must.

The genesis of this book sprang from Richard’s mindfulness presentation (with colleagues) at the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in June 2016. Afterward, he and Madeleine created a Facebook group, Mindfulness for Librarians, with Jenny joining the project soon after. Two years later, membership has grown to more than eight hundred librarians around the world and from all types of libraries. The robust sharing has been complemented by the group’s “virtual hangouts,” which foster deeper discussions and forge new friendships. We even meditate together online! It became clear that the stories we were sharing deserved an even wider audience. Jamie Santoro, our wonderful editor at ALA, agreed. Our call for submissions was met with a remarkably strong response; our only regret is not being able to include all the excellent submissions.

You can read this book cover to cover or simply flip to whichever stories capture your attention. We hope the experience stirs up ideas for your own recipes for integrating mindfulness in your library. For nonlibrarians reading this book, we believe you’ll find a bevy of possibilities to adapt for your own needs. Get connected with us. Join the Mindfulness for Librarians Facebook group (www.facebook.com/groups/mindfulnessforlibrarians/). Academic librarians interested in incorporating mindfulness into their teaching can also join ACRL’s Contemplative Pedagogy Interest Group (www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/interestgroups/acr-igcp/).

We wish you well on this unique journey—including your personal practice—as you revisit and reflect on these stories and cook up something new in your library.
PART I

Library as Hub
Cultivating a “Mindful Medicine” Ethos

Rebecca Snyder and Robin O’Hanlon

In the middle of Manhattan and confronted with the disparities between privilege on the Mt. Sinai medical campus and that within the waiting rooms, Rebecca, a former doula and library technologist, and Robin, marketing director, wondered whether infusing mindfulness into innovative programming could stretch beyond exercises to create radically held space for transformational dialog in solidarity with a humanist medicine ethos. In recognition of our compatible interests, we co-organized a guided meditation workshop with our director as part of a new series she envisioned: “mindfulness for medicine.” During the workshop and while debriefing afterward, we surfaced the potential missed opportunity of solely offering contemplative library programming as meditation training. The workshop was popular. As educators with adequate space, a large urban academic medical center full of expertise, and a passion for storytelling, we began to think of our new Mindful Medicine program as a museum education program and identified ourselves as “curators.”

In medicine, issues of ethical concern are often labeled “medical humanities” and sandwiched between topics akin to contemplative practices such as visual literacy and creative expression. Interventional strategies to address the mental health of physicians and physicians-in-training are called “wellness,” “empathy,” “resilience” or, occasionally, “self-compassion.” While attention is given to the neurological benefits of mindfulness as a pillar of resilience or as a component of self-care, examining relationships between mindfulness practice and the taking of
ethical action is relatively new. In both respects, educators, administrators, and clinicians struggle to devote time to formation of a mindful ethos in the data-drowning, frenetic clinical environment.

As mindfulness becomes more widespread throughout our culture, many people use the label colloquially, as if everyone is in agreement about its meaning or purpose. In our story, we give attention to practices of mindfulness, like that of Linda Graham, as one of the pillars of resilience, or “bouncing back.” We also emphasize its relationship to awareness by making connections between the products of mindfulness and the potential action of an aware mind.

I See Trauma and Can Develop a Response

Early in our collaboration and planning, a series of traumatic events affected our campus climate. First, a student committed suicide on campus. Less than two weeks later, the dean of our medical school became a target for work-related gun violence. During these weeks, the student presence in the library swelled to almost beyond its physical capacity. Anguish, confusion, and sorrow within our space were palpable, and student groups actively vocalized concerns about everything from mental health to social justice in our local and adjacent communities. As our medical education dean described in his 2017 New England Journal of Medicine article, “Kathryn,” our partners in Medical Education sought to “significantly enhance mental health and well-being resources for our students.” We in the library considered how we could contribute to these efforts by offering a unique chance to stimulate dialog around charged topics.

We chose to join a groundswell of reactions taking place among our students, residents, and faculty after another series of disruptive events. A prominent educator’s dismissal following sexual abuse reports of patients was followed by a growing protest movement within our student and faculty communities in reaction to governmental threat aimed at our DACA students.

The focal point of our outreach programming was the development of Mindful Medicine, a series of engaging workshops focused on the humanistic emotional, ethical, and spiritual aspects of clinical practice and the patient experience. We listened
to skeptical remarks and confusion from our colleagues about the relevancy of the series to library operations and whether it reflected the library’s core mission. We were asked, “If this series is simply about bringing different groups and individuals together to engage in mindful discourse, how is this helping the library? If we are not leveraging the series to directly promote library services, resources, or expertise, how does it benefit us?” We were convinced, though, that this type of programming was an important form of community building, perhaps even a valve release, and would ultimately create positive associations about the library as a center for knowledge creation and contemplative practice. We wanted to move away from a purely transactional form of outreach—library “show and tell” of services has a tendency to limit our participation in activities that immediately and directly enhance usage of knowledge products or space.

The first program in the Mindful Medicine series, delivered in April 2016, was titled Narrative Medicine: A Workshop for Students and Providers. We partnered with a graduate medical educator and a physician faculty member from medical humanities. Both trained in narrative medicine, they helped us design an educational intervention in the form of a workshop to bring reflection techniques to our campus.

Where Is the Charge? What Are My Resources?

After this initial program, we formalized the program development process but intentionally left themes open to be shaped by “whatever may arise.” For each installment, we would first “listen” to the news: institutional newsletters, student groups, our partners, and academic medicine publications. Influenced by student concerns or emerging issues in medicine and medical education, we would focus on a theme. It was our desire to mirror current medical education initiatives and research activities already taking place within our community. However, we first had to acknowledge ourselves as culture observers and confront our biases. Then we needed to allow ourselves to address curricular gaps or topics that seemed to carry a notable charge, warranting more psychic space than we believed the classroom would provide. It was, to say the least, painful and scary, particularly in November 2016 America.
Nevertheless, we were spurred on by gratitude and feedback from participants who wanted to engage in contemplative learning in a more informal, interactive space than is offered in a classroom or a Grand Rounds presentation.

Once the theme was imagined, we would identify potential facilitators to participate in the program. These speakers, educators, activists, and community members were primarily recruited from our home institution based on our knowledge of their work or reputation. We frequently leveraged our collaborators’ networks for recommendations, whether from in-house or from another institution. We met with the team to discuss the approach, chose target audiences, and created the learning objectives that were most appropriate. Format types combined in each session included brief presentations, panel discussions, case-based/problem-solving discussions, small group discussions, and hands-on practice workshops.

After the first program, we had enough documentation to seek continuing medical education credit for participants in the series. In September 2016, the Mindful Medicine series was accredited through our institution’s postgraduate school for up to two American Medical Association Physician’s Recognition Award Category 1 credits for participants, which incentivized attendance and demonstrated the value of the series’ content to key stakeholders. The Continuing Medical Education (CME) application was extensive and required that we identify specific clinical gaps that our programming would work to fill. The application also required the identification of specific learning outcomes/objectives, target audiences, tools/strategies to reinforce learning results, professional competencies (i.e., patient-centered care, interdisciplinary and communication skills, performance in practice), and patient safety considerations.

**Options to Change Perspective Are Available to Me**

By the time our November 2016 program went live, we were actively integrating our contemplative approach with critical pedagogy and social justice librarianship. We reached out to Mount Sinai’s Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery,
which then actualized Turn Up the Mic: Reflections on Experiences with Transgender Medicine, a storytelling event with the central theme of “amplification of the patient voice.” In this program, a panel of individuals who had undergone gender reassignment surgery discussed perspectives on their care, including the conflicted nuances of communicating with providers. The ensuing discussion was sensitively moderated by Barbara Warren, PsyD, director for LGBT Programs and Policies in the Mount Sinai Office for Diversity and Inclusion and local activist for NYC trans communities. Offering the microphone to patients to tell their stories, their voices were literally amplified. Their stories also allowed the clinicians and medical students in the room to mindfully reflect on their own current or future practice, consider shared decision-making with their patients, and engage with the patients to learn more about their experiences.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics explored and the intention to create a boundary between participants and the “presence” of academic medicine hierarchy in the space, we selected experienced educators and interactive methods for the program. Beneficial relationships with our social work and spiritual care communities ensured mindful in-room engagement between participants and influenced the themes and content developed going forward. As the program and our relationships with staff from the medical school and health system matured, we were able to approach increasingly complex topics like spiritual dimensions of LBGTQQ geriatric care and trauma in health care.

**This May Be Rhizomatic Rather Than Mechanical**

Typically, in library literature, we report on “what we did” and how it could be a blueprint for actualizing a similar project or program. In the spirit of contemplative practice, though, designing an intervention or experience can be more of an art than a replicable scientific process. Like bricolage, we made choices somewhat intuitively and with materials not traditionally central to a librarian praxis. Translating this program to our new institutions would require significant transformation and, in the end, would likely look nothing like the original.
However, mindful awareness can radically influence our experiments with pedagogy by disrupting the default professional scripts or biases in one’s head that may arise when considering how, or even whether, to design an intervention. As educators, we may be situated between potential connections while possessing insight or resources to make them happen. Sometimes, we don’t see them. Other times, we may be underresourced internally or environmentally and thus unable to act. Occasionally, awareness, collectivity, and privilege may align and an opportunity comes to fruition. Envisioning our institutional repository as an ethics human library was bold for a couple of library educators in a large academic medical center. Yet as we pitched the connection between mindfulness and the potential for improved awareness in clinical decision-making and patient care, we discovered that our institution had ample resources and a community ready to gather. The initial idea may, on the surface, have arisen from environmental scanning, but the manifestation and evolution of the program came from seeing beyond strategic opportunities and threats to the heart of the matter. Our community members wanted to be connected.

In the end, we were rewarded many times over with gratitude from participants and the proliferation of a community. But in sharing the experience, its nature as a watery memory, a blip, reveals itself. Equanimity needed to acknowledge continued suffering within our medical education communities while also celebrating this story remains difficult. Mindful reflection is essential to stabilize our state of being, manage our own states of overwhelm, and avoid reverting to numbness or “business as usual.” The reconciliation of our limitations as librarians is itself a target of our contemplative practice now as we ground, resource, and move forward.
Index

A
“Accidentally Sustainable: Building a Weekly Meditation Community” (Horwood-Benton), 9–15
advertisement, 71
Akombo, David, 47
Albers, Susan, 104
“All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes” (Puddicombe), 73
anger, 102
anxiety
  mindfulness workshop for, 105–111
  writing in journal about, 58
See also research anxiety
apps
  mindfulness apps, 70
  recommended mindfulness resources, 72
aromatherapy, 47
Association for the Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, 84
Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), Contemplative Pedagogy Interest Group, xii
attendees
  of Restorative Yoga sessions, 25, 26
  of Weekly Meditation program, 11–12
attitudes, 106–107
Aura app, 72
awareness
  about research anxiety, 107
  journal, effects on, 59
  relationship to mindfulness, 4
  sharing failure and, 70
  silent technology-free walk and, 87
  of thoughts/interactions, 61–62

B
Be Club, 20
Be Mindful Online Mindfulness Course, 69–70
Be Project
  community, ripples in, 21
  funding for, 19
  idea for, 17–18
  implementation of, 19–20
  lessons for libraries, 22
  results of, 20–21
  team for, 18–19
“The Be Project: Sparking A Quiet Revolution in Rural Kentucky” (Scherrer), 17–22
Beck, Charlotte Joko, 102, 104
beginners, 12
beginner’s mind, 61, 62
“Beliefs about Meditating among University Students, Faculty, and Staff: A Theory-Based Salient Belief Elicitation” (Lederer & Middlestadt), 47
Bell, Taunja, 47
Benson, Herbert, 25
Berila, Beth, 94
bicycles, exercise, 33–34
biofeedback machine for Library Brain Booth, 38–39, 40
popularity of, 41
bird watching kit, 32
blogs, 72
bodhisattvas, 68–69
bookmark, 71
books
mandala coloring pages for Zen Zone, 47
Mindful McQuade Kit, 31, 32
on mindfulness, library provision of, 68
recommended mindfulness reads, 104
boundaries, 65
Bowling, April, 33, 34
brain
intentional brain breaks, 38, 39
Library Brain Booth, 37–43
mindfulness practice and, 19
Muse meditation headband and, 45
physical activity for study, 34
Brain Booth (BB) Initiative, 37–43
Brain Booth Designated Open Space (BBDOS), 41
Brain Booth LibGuide, 39
breath/breathing
breathing exercises/visualizations, 64
contemplative practices for research students, 88–89
impact of Be Project, 20–21
in meditation, 109
reflective journaling and, 59
writing in journal and, 56, 57
Brewer, Judson, 73
Brown, Brené, 18
Brown, Christina, 32
burnout, 78
C
capitalism, 62
Carson, Jenn
about, 113
mindfulness video by, 71
on outreach programs, 67–73
CDs
library provision of, 68
Mindful McQuade Kit, 31, 32
celebration, 78–80
Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), 91, 92–93
Chade-Meng Tan, 92
chakra kit, 32
Charney, Madeleine, xii, 113
circulation, of Zen Zone tools, 51
Clark County Public Schools, Kentucky, 17–22
Clifton StrengthsFinder®, 75–76
Coats, Lisa
about, 113–114
on flexible functionality in teaching/mentoring, 99–104
role of, 100
story of, 101–103
coherence, 38–39
collaboration
Be Project, lesson from, 22
for Mindful McQuade initiative, 29–30, 34–35
for Weekly Meditation program, 12
“College Seminar” course, 84
coloring books, 47–48
Color-Relax station, 41
Colvin, Jenny
about, 114
on mindfully managing library teams, 75–80
Mindfulness for Librarians
Facebook group, xii
community
connection with, 22
impact of Be Project on, 21
interest in Weekly Meditation program, 14
sangha of library, 13
sense of belonging with, 69
compassion
instruction of students and, 62
in interactions, 61
contemplative practices
breathing/listening exercise, 89
childhood exposure to, 92
contemplative tools in LIB 101 course, 83–84
intentional brain breaks, value of, 39
journaling, 84–86
Library Brain Booth, goal of, 37–38
Mindful Medicine program, 3–8
putting it all together, 89–90
silent technology-free walk, 86–88
student feedback on contemplative tools, 88
Continuing Medical Education (CME), 6
Coover, Robert, 55
cost, 69
“Craving Quiet: A Library’s Zen Zone” (Sparks & Fox), 45–52
The Creative Habit (Tharp), 110
creative healing kit, 32
critical thinking, 62–63
“Cultivating a ‘Mindful Medicine’ Ethos” (Snyder & O’Hanlon), 3–8
curiosity, 66

Depression, 70–71
Destress Fest program, 34–35
Dewey, John, 60
diet, 102
digital resources
benefits/drawbacks of, 69–70
list of mindfulness resources, 71–73
discomfort
in classroom, acknowledging, 64–65
instruction around learners’ emotions, 111
reading students’ level of, 63
diversity, 94
Doraswamy, Vasundhara, 24
drop-in hours, 41
Dweck, Carol, 106–107, 108

Eating Mindfully: How to End Mindless Eating & Enjoy a Balanced Relationship with Food (Albers), 104
“The Effects of Lavender and Rosemary Essential Oils on Test-Taking Anxiety among Graduate Nursing Students” (McCaffrey, Thomas, & Kinzelmann), 47

Elephant Journal, 72
emotions
emotional self-regulation, 38
focusing instruction around, 110–111
mindfulness in daily life, 102
noticing/naming feelings, 108
Empowered Breathing and Meditation for Anxiety and Stress Reduction course, 31
English Composition IL program, 101–103
environment
meditation space for Mindful McQuade, 30–31
for reflective journaling, 60
environment (cont.)
  Room to Breathe: A Space for Mindfulness Practice, 92–93, 95–96
  Zen Zone, designated space for, 51
eportfolios, 63
equipment
  of BBDOS, 41
  for Library Brain Booth, 38–39, 40
  for meditation space, 31
  Mindful McQuade Kits, 31–32
  VR, popularity of, 50–51
  for Zen Zone, 46–48, 49–50
equity
  A Mindful Path Toward Equity project, 91
  mindfulness scholarship at Minneapolis College, 93–96
essential oils, 47
ethics
  library as ethics human library, 8
  mindfulness in medicine, 3–4
events, 14
  *Everyday Zen: Love and Work* (Beck), 104
  exercise bicycles, 33–34
  exercises, 102

**F**
  failures, celebration of, 78–80
  Farber, Don, 104
  Federico, Danielle, 31
  feedback, 48–49
  feelings, 108
  *See also* emotions
  fixed mind-set, 106–107
  focus, 38
  Fox, Hillary
    about, 114
    on library Zen Zone project, 45–52
  fraudulence, 105
  functionality, 99–104
  funding
    applying for, 97
    for Be Project, 19, 21
    VR, saving funding for, 50–51
  *See also* grants
  Fung Feng, Caroline, 89
  Furman University Libraries
    failures/successes, celebration of, 78–80
    strengths enhanced through reflection, 76–78
    team building, 75–76

**G**
  Galoozis, Elizabeth
    about, 114
    on mindfulness, 61–66
    on research anxiety, overcoming, 105–111
  Game-Relax station, 41
  gardening kit, 32
  gender reassignment, 7
  Giannou, Kyriaki, 47–48
  “Going with the Flow: Finding Flexible Functionality in Teaching and Mentoring” (Pemberton & Coats), 99–104
  Graham, Linda, 4
  grants
    for Library Brain Booth, 38, 41
    for Mindful McQuade initiative, 31, 34
    for A Mindful Path Toward Equity project, 94
    *What’s Your Ambition?!* grant, 19
    *See also* funding
  Greater Clark Foundation, 19
  grounding, 109
  growth mind-set, 107

**H**
  Hall, Kamerin, 20–21
  HALTS (hungry, angry, lonely, tired, and sick) acronym, 102
  Hamel Health and Counseling Center (HHCC), 29–30
  Happify, 73
  Harris, Dan, 69, 70–71
  headphones, noise-canceling, 47
Headspace app, 69

health
  Mindful McQuade initiative, 29–36
  mindfulness in daily life, 102–103
Hello Humans (podcast), 72
herbal remedies, 103
“Here I Sit . . . By An Open Window” (Papoleto), 89
Hey Yo! Yo Soy! Forty Years of Nuyorican Street Poetry (Papoleto), 89
homeopathic remedies, 103
Horwood-Benton, Laura
  about, 114
  on Portsmouth Public Library’s Weekly Meditation program, 9–15
houseplants, 32–33
Howland, Jim, 31
HSU Sponsored Programs Foundation, 38
Humboldt State University (HSU), 37–43

I
imposter syndrome
  concept of, 105–106
  mindfulness workshop, design of, 106–107
Information Literacy in the Workplace (Kurbanoglu et al.), 39
information literacy instruction
  flexible functionality in teaching/mentoring, 99–104
  journal writing about, 57–59
  research anxiety, mindfulness workshop for, 105–111
INFS 1000: Information Literacy & Research Skills course, 93
innovative services
  Library Brain Booth, 37–43
  Mindful McQuade initiative, 29–36
  Zen Zone, 45–52
Innovative Shark Tank Grant, 94
Insight Timer app, 72

Integrating Mindfulness into Anti-oppression Pedagogy: Social Justice in Higher Education (Berila), 94
intelligence, 106–107
intentional brain breaks, 38, 39
intentionality of practice, 56
Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) coaches, 95
interest, 46
International Conference on Higher Education Advances, 42–43
Internet access, 70
iPad minis, 47

J
Jackson, Millie
  about, 114–115
  on Restorative Yoga, 23–26
job demands-resources model, 77
John C. Pace Library, 45–52
journal
  effects of, 59–60
  intentionality of practice, 56
  for mindfulness, 55
  on teaching, 57–59
  time for journaling, 57
  Tree Observation Journal, 84–86
“Just like Me” compassion meditation, 88

K
Karadjova, Katia G.
  about, 115
  on the Library Brain Booth, 37–43
Keating, Michaela
  about, 115
  on Mindful McQuade initiative, 29–36
Kentucky, Be Project in, 17–22
Ketcham, Katherine, 102, 104
Kinzelmann, Ann, 47
kits, Mindful McQuade, 31–32
Klipfel, Kevin Michael
about, 115
on research anxiety/mindfulness, 105–111
Kurtz, Ernest, 102, 104

L
LaFlamme, Katherine
about, 115
on Mindful McQuade initiative, 29–36
Lao Tzu, 102, 104
Lasater, Judith Hanson, 25
Lederer, Alyssa, 47
LGBTQQ, 7
LIB 101: Introduction to College Research, 83–84
librarians
library teams, mindfully managing, 75–80
mindfulness scholarship at Minneapolis College, 91–97
mindfulness workshop at USC, 105–111
teaching lifelong skills, 90
library
community of, 13
mindfulness outreach program, 67–73
mindfulness scholarship at Minneapolis College, 96
Weekly Meditation program, elements of, 14–15
Zen Zone, 45–52
library as hub
Be Project, 17–22
mindful medicine ethos, 3–8
Restorative Yoga sessions, 23–26
Weekly Meditation program, 9–15
Library Brain Booth
creation of, 38–39
mission of/goal of, 37–38
open space, creation of, 39–40
research study, 39
students, impact on, 40–43
library teams
failures/successes, celebration of, 78–80
managing with mindfulness, 80
strengths, using to build team, 75–76
strengths enhance through reflection, 76–78
Lion’s Roar: Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time (website), 72
literature review searching, 105–111
Living Wisdom with His Holiness the Dalai Lama (Farber), 104
“Long-Term Music-Listenings’ Effects on Blood Pressure, Heart Rate, Anxiety, and Depression” (Bell & Akombo), 47
loving-kindness meditation, 70–71
Lumberjack (student newspaper), 39
Luminosity (brain-training game), 69

M
Madrigal, Justina, 43
management, of library teams, 75–80
mandala coloring pages, 47–48
Manzios, Michail, 47–48
Mason, Jennifer, 95
massage therapy, 67
McCaffrey, Ruth, 47
MCCC (Mountain Comprehensive Care Center), 21
McQuade Library, 29–36
medicine, 3–8
See also Mindful Medicine program
meditation
Anne Pemberton’s practice of, 100–101
“Just like Me” compassion meditation, 88
Library Brain Booth for, 38
mediation/mindfulness programs, delivery options, 68–70
outreach program, interest in, 67–68
Portsmouth Public Library’s Weekly Meditation program, 9–15
Zen Zone, 45–52
“Meditation 101: A Beginner’s Guide” (Happify), 73
“Meditation Experts Try Virtual Reality Mindfulness: A Pilot Study Evaluation of the Feasibility and Acceptability of Virtual Reality to Facilitate Mindfulness Practice in People Attending a Mindfulness Conference” (Navarro-Haro), 46
meditation kit, 32
meditation space for Mindful McQuade initiative, 30–31
promotion of, 34
Zen Zone, designated space for, 51
meditation tools VR, popularity of, 50–51 for Zen Zone, 46–48
meetings, 65
Meléndez, Lisa about, 116
on contemplative practices/research process, 83–90
mental health, 29–36
Mental Health Foundation (UK), 70
mentoring, 99–104
Merrimack College, 29–36
metacognitive mindfulness, 108–109
“middle way,” 103
Middlestadt, Susan, 47
“Mindful and Reflective Writing as a Strategy: How a Work Journal Can Help Make You Whole” (Reale), 55–60
Mindful Campus Thriving Campus online course, 95
Mindful: Healthy Mind, Healthy Life (website), 72
Mindful McQuade Kits, 31–32
“Mindful McQuade: Mindfulness in the Heart of a Small College Campus” (Wong, LaFlamme, & Keating), 29–36
Mindful Medicine program accreditation of, 6 conclusion about, 7–8 creation of, 3 theme of/resources for, 5–6 traumatic events, response to, 4–5
Mindful Mood Balance course cost of, 69
Zindel Seigal as developer of, 70
“Mindful of Equity: Practices That Help Students Control Their Impulses Can Also Mask Systemic Failures” (Pettaway), 95
A Mindful Path Toward Equity project, 91–92, 94
“Mindfully Managing Library Teams” (Colvin), 75–80
mindfulness (cont.)
Mindfulness for Librarians
Facebook group, xi
at Minneapolis College, 91–97
online mindfulness resources, 71–73
outreach program using digital resources, 67–73
present moment, staying in, 100–101
recommended reads, 104
reflection/critical thinking, 62–63
research anxiety, overcoming, 105–111
vulnerability and, 63–64
Weekly Meditation program, 9–15
at work, 65–66
workshop for RIS department, 103–104
Zen Zone, 45–52
“Mindfulness Animated in 3 Minutes”
(AnimateEducate), 73
Mindfulness app, 69
“Mindfulness Experiences: The Library Brain Booth”
(Karadjova), 37–43
Mindfulness for Librarians Facebook group, xii
Mindfulness for the Academic workshop, 24
“Mindfulness Is Not a Life Hack”
(Galoozis & Pinto), 61–66
mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)
class at Minneapolis College, 95
with Mindful McQuade initiative, 29, 30
mind-set
fixed mind-set/growth mind-set, 106–107
noticing/naming feelings, 108
for teaching, 63
Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (Dweck), 106
“Mind-Sets toward Learning”
(Dweck), 108
Minneapolis Community & Technical College (Minneapolis College), 91–97
mission, 37
Moniz, Richard, xii, 116
Mount Sinai medical campus, 3–8
Mount Sinai’s Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery, 6–7
Mountain Comprehensive Care Center (MCCC), 21
Mourer, Marissa, 38
multitasking, 68
Muse meditation headband for Zen Zone, 45, 46, 47
Zen Zone survey results, 49
music
Mindful McQuade Kit, 31, 32
for sound therapy for Zen Zone, 47

N
Narrative Medicine: A Workshop for Students and Providers, 5
National Center for Health Statistics, 67
Navarro-Haro, Maria, 46
Ndosi, Rebeka, 94
Nelson, Allison, 18–19
New England Journal of Medicine, 4
noise-canceling headphones, 47
nonattachment, 14–15
Nothing Special: Living Zen (Beck & Smith), 104
nyasam (gesture), 88, 89

O
Office of Wellness Education (OWE), 34–35
O’Hanlon, Robin
about, 116
“Cultivating a “Mindful Medicine” Ethos,” 3–8
The Om Place (yoga studio), 18
The On Being Blog, 72
The One You Feed (podcast), 72
one-on-one interactions, 61–62
online resources
  list of mindfulness resources, 71–73
  on mindfulness, benefits/drawbacks of, 69–70
online support, for Be Project, 20
“Outreach for Inreach: Using Digital Resources to Promote Mindfulness” (Carson), 67–73
outreach program
delivery options, 68–69
interest in, 67–68
list of online mindfulness resources, 71–73
online mindfulness resources, benefits/drawbacks of, 69–70
online mindfulness resources, promotion of, 71
Outreach Services
failures/successes, celebration of, 78–80
strengths enhanced through reflection, 76–78
strengths for team building, 75–76
“Overcoming Research Anxiety: A Mindful Approach to Literature Review Searching” (Galoozis & Klipfel), 105–111

P
Palmer, Parker, 57–58
Papoleti Meléndez, Jesús, 89
partnerships
  for Mindful McQuade initiative, 34–35
  strengths for team building, 75–76
  See also collaboration
Pemberton, Anne
  about, 116–117
  on flexible functionality in teaching/mentoring, 99–104
  story of, 100–101
“A Persistent Praxis: Putting Mindfulness Scholarship into Action at Minneapolis College” (Sippel), 91–97
personal practice
  library teams, mindfully managing, 75–80
  mindfulness as not life hack, 61–66
  mindful/reflective journaling, 55–60
  outreach program using digital resources, 67–73
Pettaway, Alice, 95
Pew Research Center, 70
physical activity, 23–26
physical health, 29–36
Pinto, Caro
  about, 117
  on mindfulness, 61–66
plants, 32–33
podcast, 71, 72
Portsmouth Public Library, 9–15
practice, 22
  See also personal practice
Pransky, Jillian, 25
precarity, 66
pre-existing conditions, 70
Present in the Hard Work: A Mindful Path toward Equity, 95
present moment
  finding ways to be present, 102
  staying in, 100–101
productivity, 66
professional development
  workshops, 19–20
promotion
  of Mindful McQuade initiative, 34–35
  of online mindfulness resources, 71
“Providing a Space to Rest: Weaving Restorative Yoga into the Strategic Plan” (Jackson), 23–26
Provost Innovation Grant, 31, 34
 Provost’s Briefing (campus e-mail), 34
 publishing, 12–13
 Puddicombe, Andy, 73

 Q
 questions
 about Zen Zone, 51
 Be Project idea and, 18
 reflection questions for Outreach
 Services, 76–78
 space for students to ask, 62–63
 for students about research, 111
 for work journal, 57, 59
 quiet
 noise-canceling headphones, 47
 Zen Zone for, 45, 51

 R
 Randall Library of the University of
 North Carolina Wilmington
 (UNCW), 99–104
 Reale, Michelle
 about, 117
 on mindful/reflective journaling,
 55–60
 Recharge @ Randall, 104
 Reed, Cindy
 on Be Project team, 18–19
 training for Be Project, 21
 reflection
 for critical thinking, 62–63
 reflective journaling, 55–60
 strengths enhanced through,
 76–78
 of students on Library Brain
 Booth, 41
 relationships, 29–30
 “Relax VR” mindfulness app, 46
 relaxation
 Brain Booth stations, 38–39, 41
 contemplative practices, student
 feedback on, 87, 88
 Mindful McQuade and, 31, 32
 reflective journaling and, 60
 “Relax VR” mindfulness app, 46
 Restorative Yoga sessions for,
 23–26
 Research and Instructional Services
 (RIS) department
 mindfulness workshop for,
 103–104
 of Randall Library, 99–100
 research anxiety
 future directions/transferable
 elements of workshop,
 110–111
 problem context, 105–106
 workshop, design of, 106–107
 workshop, details of, 108–110
 research process
 breathing/listening exercise, 89
 contemplative tools in LIB 101
 course, 83–84
 journaling, 84–86
 putting it all together, 89–90
 silent technology-free walk, 86–88
 student feedback on
 contemplative tools, 88
 resentment, 102
 resources
 list of online mindfulness
 resources, 71–73
 for Mindful Medicine program,
 5–6
 recommended mindfulness reads,
 104
 Restorative Yoga
 description of, 24–26
 idea for, 23–24
 reflections on, 26
 results
 of Be Project, 20–21
 of Zen Zone, 49–50
 ripple effect, 99
 risks, 78–80
 Room to Breathe: A Space for
 Mindfulness Practice
 creation of, 92–93
 guided practice sessions in, 95
 photo of, 96

 S
 Samsung Gear VR, 46
 San Francisco Zen Center, 109
sangha
  meaning of, 13
  sense of belonging with, 69
  of Weekly Meditation program, 13
  See also community
Santoro, Jamie, xii
schedule
  publishing schedule for Weekly Meditation program, 12–13
  for Restorative Yoga sessions, 25, 26
  session timing for Weekly Meditation program, 11–12
  for Zen Zone, 50
Scherrer, Katie
  about, 117
  on the Be Project, 17–22
  on Be Project team, 19
  training for Be Project, 21
“Search Inside Yourself” Google talk (Chade-Meng Tan), 92
Seigal, Zindel, 70
self-doubt, 56
self-regulation, 38
“Self-Transformation through Mindfulness” (Vago), 73
Seminar and Field Services Practicum course, 84, 86–87
setup, for Weekly Meditation program, 11
“Shifting the Pace: Contemplative Practices and the Research Process” (Meléndez), 83–90
Shunryu Suzuki, Roshi, 66
signage, 34
silent technology-free walk, 86–88
“A Simple Way to Break a Bad Habit” (Brewer), 73
singular thoughtful focus, 38
Sippel, Jennifer
  about, 117
  on mindfulness practice at Minneapolis College, 91–97
sleep
  deprivation, causes of, 23
  getting enough, 102–103
  smiling, 101
Smith, Erin, 18–19
Smith, Steve, 104
Snyder, Rebecca
  about, 118
  “Cultivating a ‘Mindful Medicine’ Ethos,” 3–8
sound, 89
sound healing kit, 32, 36
sources
  grounding in core research concepts, 109
  research as iterative, 109–110
Sparks, Kellie
  about, 118
  on library Zen Zone project, 45–52
speakers, 6, 7
The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning (Kurtz & Ketcham), 102, 104
stillness, 87
Stop, Breathe, Think app, 72
storytelling
  intentional journal, choice to use, 56
  power of, 55
  Turn Up the Mic: Reflections on Experiences with Transgender Medicine event, 7
strengths
  to build team, 75–76
  enhancing through reflection, 76–78
stress
  MBSR class at Minneapolis College, 95
  of students with research, 83
  user surveys for Zen Zone, 48–49
  Zen Zone creation, 45–46
  Zen Zone, impact of, 49
  Zen Zone timing and, 50
Stress Reduction and Mindfulness course, 31
students
  assistants for Library Brain Booth, 41
  Be Project for, 17–22
students (cont.)
contemplative practices, benefits of, 89–90
contemplative practices, response to, 88
discomfort in classroom, 64–65
emotions of, focusing instruction around, 110–111
journaling, Tree Observation Journal, 84–86
Library Brain Booth, impact of, 40–43
mindful approach of teacher and, 62–63
Mindful McQuade initiative for, 29–36
mindfulness of librarian teachers and, 103
mindfulness workshop at USC, 105–111
of Minneapolis College, 94
research process, stress and, 83
silent technology-free walk and, 86–88
user surveys for Zen Zone, 48–49
vulnerability, teaching about, 63–64
Zen Zone and, 46–52
success, 78–80
supervisor, 101
supplies
See equipment
survey
for Zen Zone, 45, 46, 48–49
for Zen Zone, review of results, 49–50

T
Tao Te Ching (Lao Tzu), 102, 104
task shifting, 77–78
teachers
Be Project for, 17–22
for Mindful McQuade initiative, 31
for Weekly Meditation program, 12, 14, 15
teaching
contemplative practices/research process, 83–90
flexible functionality in teaching/mentoring, 99–104
mindfulness, coming to, 61–62
mindfulness scholarship at Minneapolis College, 91–97
mindfulness workshop at USC, 105–111
reflection/critical thinking, 62–63
vulnerability in instructional situation, 63–64
Teaching Tolerance, 95
Team Strengths Grid, 76
teachers
Be Project for, 17–22
for Mindful McQuade initiative, 31
for Weekly Meditation program, 12, 14, 15

10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works—a True Story (Harris), 70–71
Tharp, Twyla, 110
theme, 5–6
Thich Nhat Hanh, 101, 104
Thomas, Debra, 47
thoughts, 61
time
for journal writing, 59
session timing for Weekly Meditation program, 11–12
timing for Zen Zone, 50
for writing in journal, 57
ToDo Institute, 69
training, for Be Project, 21
trauma, 19–20
Tree Observation Journal, 84–86
Tricycle Review, 66
INDEX

Tricycle: The Buddhist Review (website), 72
trust, 79, 109
Turn Up the Mic: Reflections on Experiences with Transgender Medicine event, 7

U
ujjayi breathing technique, 89
University Libraries (University of Alabama), 23–26
University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW), 99–104
University of Oxford, 70
University of Southern California (USC), 105–111
University of West Florida’s John C. Pace Library, 45–52

V
Vago, David, 73
video, 71, 73
virtual reality (VR) goggles popularity of, 49, 50–51
for Zen Zone, 46
visualizations, 64, 89
volunteers connection to, 15
for Weekly Meditation program, 10–11, 12, 14
vulnerability failure/success, sharing by team members, 79, 80
imposter syndrome and, 105
in instructional situation, 63–64
for mindfulness workshop, 109

W
Waking Up (podcast), 72
walk, silent, 86–88
Warren, Barbara, 7
websites, 72
Weekly Meditation program for community, 9
demand for, 10
details about, 11
ideas for future, 14
lessons learned, 12–13
replicable elements of program, 14–15
volunteers for, 10–11
what worked, 11–12
WellBAMA, 23, 24
What’s Your Ambition?! grant, 19
“When Did Coloring Books Become Mindful? Exploring the Effectiveness of a Novel Method of Mindfulness-Guided Instructions for Coloring Books to Increase Mindfulness and Decrease Anxiety” (Manzios & Giannou), 47–48
“When Why Mindfulness Is a Superpower: An Animation” (Happily), 73
Williams, Jay, 94
Wong, Catherine about, 118
on Mindful McQuade initiative, 29–36
Work: How to Find Joy and Meaning in Each Hour of the Day (Thich Nhat Hanh), 104
writing after silent technology-free walk, 87
mindful/reflective journaling, 55–60
Tree Observation Journal, 84–86

Y
yoga
Be project team’s experience with, 18–19
community interest in, 14
contemplative practices/research process, 83, 89–90
Jennifer Sippel’s practice of, 91
in Mindful McQuade initiative, 31, 32
mindfulness and, 68
yoga (cont.)
  people practicing, 67
  Restorative Yoga sessions, 23–26
Yoga and Meditation at the Library: 
  A Practical Guide for Librarians 
  (Carson), 68
The Yoga Bible (Brown), 32
Yoga in the Library (website), 72
yoga kit, 32
YogaFit-based classes, 24

Z
Zen Zone
  baking times for, 48–49
  creation of, 45–46
  future of, 51–52
  lessons learned, 50
  meditation tools for, 46–48,  
  50–51
  survey results, 49–50