

MINDFULNESS IN LAW (5397/26143)

FALL 2026

PROFESSOR LONNY HOFFMAN

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Course satisfies UHLC's experiential course requirement. If you do not need the experiential credit, the course can be taken pass-fail

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NOTE ABOUT THE PASS/FAIL (SATISFACTORY/UNSATISFACTORY) GRADE OPTION

This course satisfies UHLC's experiential course requirement. If you do not need the experiential credit because you have taken or plan to earn the required credits in other ways, then this course may be taken on a pass/fail basis. Because this course is highly experiential and emphasizes personal engagement over performance, many students find that a pass/fail grading structure better supports the kind of openness, curiosity, and self-exploration that the course invites.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES, AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course explores the challenges to well-being facing law students and legal professionals and examines sustainable ways of responding to those challenges. The exploration primarily involves practicing several complementary mindfulness techniques. One of those approaches is what I call **mindful communication**, a practice inspired by Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication. We will also engage in a range of **mindful embodiment practices**, including guided mindfulness exercises both in and outside the classroom, weekly slow-movement practices, and a field engagement project in which, near the end of the semester, you will teach what you have learned to others.

Collectively, these mindfulness practices are meant to advance the class's primary objective: to help students develop greater awareness of how their minds and bodies work, with the aim of discovering for themselves how clearer awareness can support more durable well-being.

As should be clear from this description, this is a highly experiential course. The benefits students gain depend in significant part on a shared willingness to participate with openness, care, and attention. Students are therefore expected to help co-create a learning environment that supports trust and appropriate vulnerability. If you are not willing to make that commitment, this course is unlikely to be a good fit for you.

The course is open to students of all physical abilities, and no prior experience with mindfulness practices is required. Before enrolling, however, you should consult with the instructors if you:

- have experienced a recent significant trauma or have been diagnosed with a serious mental health condition, such as schizophrenia, psychosis, or obsessive-compulsive disorder, and are not currently receiving professional support;
- are in active recovery from substance use; or

- experience chronic pain and are not currently working with a health-care professional to address it.

This course is not a substitute for therapy.

If you are open to a different way of learning and curious about practices that may help you cultivate greater steadiness and well-being in a demanding profession, read on.

GRADING

As noted above, if you do not need the experiential credit, I encourage you to consider taking this course on a pass/fail basis. As for assessment, the course uses several different components that apply to all students:

Constructive Engagement (15%)

Part of your grade will be based on your constructive engagement with the class. Although this element is often described as class *participation*, engagement reflects the more dynamic and interactive nature of the in-class work you will be doing. The modifier is also important.

Constructive engagement does not depend on how often a student speaks. Active listening is just as important as speaking, and what ultimately matters is both the intention behind and quality of your engagement with the class.

Short Reflective Papers (15%)

You will write three short, non-anonymous reflective papers, typically two to four typed, double-spaced pages each. Assignments are noted in the daily syllabus, and you will receive more detailed guidance about expectations and evaluation criteria. Taken together, the short papers account for 15% of the final grade.

Presentation and Longer Paper (70%)

Near the end of the semester, students will complete a field assignment in which they teach some aspect of what they have learned in the course to others. Students will then give a presentation to the class reflecting on that teaching experience. The presentation is worth 20% of the final grade.

In addition, students will write one longer, non-anonymous paper based on the topic chosen for the field assignment. The paper should be 8–10 typed, double-spaced pages and is due no later than Monday, December 6 at 5:00 pm. More detailed guidance regarding content and evaluation will be provided. The long paper is worth 50% of the final grade.

CLASS MEETING TIME AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

This class meets in-person twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays, from 2:00-3:45pm. As required by UHLC rules and by this syllabus, you must attend at least 80% of the scheduled classes. If you are absent for more than 20% of the classes, you may receive a lower grade (in extreme cases, that may even include a failing grade for the class). Finally, note that virtual participation through Zoom is not an option for this class.

COURSE MATERIALS

There is no required text to buy for this class. I will provide the course reading materials for you without charge.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND OFFICE HOURS

My office (340A) is in the faculty suites on the third floor. My office hours are Mondays from 12-2 pm. Let me know by at least 9 am that morning if you would like to attend office hours in person, both as a courtesy and to help me anticipate potential timing conflicts with other student meetings. You can also let me know if you'd prefer to meet by Zoom. Finally, you are also welcome to meet with me outside of my regularly scheduled office hours; just call or email in advance to schedule an appointment. My office phone is (713) 743-5206; email is lhoffman@uh.edu. My assistant is Mariam Zanjani. Her phone is (713) 743-4590; email is nhajazi3@central.uh.edu.

USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PROGRAMS LIKE CHATGPT

You may use generative AI tools for any purpose in this course. Any work you submit, however, will be evaluated exactly as if you had produced it yourself, and any errors, omissions, or lack of depth or engagement will be treated as your own.

That said, you are certainly not expected to use AI, and I want to stress that any short-term efficiency you think you may gain by relying on AI is likely to be outweighed by what you lose. The assignments for this class are designed to help you notice your own internal habits, patterns, and reactions. That learning cannot be outsourced. Using AI to shortcut reflection is likely to diminish the self-awareness, insight, and long-term benefits the course is meant to cultivate. Indeed, prior students consistently report that the value of the course comes not from the final product, but from the experience of slowing down, engaging honestly, and discovering things about themselves that no external tool could generate. For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to do the work yourself.

SUPPORT

At the Law Center, in the broader university, and through the State Bar, there are a number of different sources of support if you need it.

1. Of course, you are always welcome to come see either of the course instructors. But, if you'd rather talk to someone else, Dean Monica Mensah in Student Services is another resource. She's been helping students for many years. She is in the Office of Student Services. Her email is mebuckne@central.uh.edu; her phone is (713) 743-6247.
2. The university's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to the demands of a professional program, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling (713) 743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. Their webpage can be accessed here: http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html.

3. The State Bar runs Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (web address is <https://www.tlaphelps.org/>). TLAP "provides confidential help for lawyers, law students and judges who have problems with substance abuse and/or mental health issues." Students can call (24/7) to get help with mental health and substance abuse issues. The number is (800) 343-8527.

In addition, there are three other resources that I know less about. The university asks that I share this information with you (the language below is required to be included in the syllabus by the university):

1. *The Student Health Center offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.*
2. *The A.D. Bruce Religion Center offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.*
3. *The Center for Student Advocacy and Community (CSAC) is where you can go if you need help but don't know where to start. CSAC is a "home away from home" and serves as a resource hub to help you get the resources needed to support academic and personal success. Through our Cougar Cupboard, all students can get up to 30 lbs of FREE groceries a week. Additionally, we provide 1:1 appointments to get you connected to on- and off-campus resources related to essential needs, safety and advocacy, and more. The Cougar Closet is a registered student organization advised by our office and offers free clothes to students so that all Coogs can feel good in their fit. We also host a series of cultural and community-based events that fosters social connection and helps the cougar community come closer together. Visit the CSAC homepage or follow us on Instagram: @uh_CSAC and @uhcupbrd. YOU belong here.*

CHOSEN NAMES AND PREFERRED PRONOUNS

In our classroom, I'll address you however you'd like me to. Rosters do not list gender or pronouns so if you have specific preferences, just let us know.

INCLUSION

This is an inclusive learning space: all are welcome. If you ever feel that the classroom experience is not comfortable, please reach out to me and I'll try to address your concerns. If you feel more comfortable speaking with someone else, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Student Services Monica Mensah is an excellent resource (contact info above). Finally, you can also bring any issues relating to the Law Center's openness to inclusion to the Law Center's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. You can contact the committee directly at UHLCD&I@uh.edu.

RECORDING OF CLASS

[THE PARAGRAPH BELOW IS UNIVERSITY-REQUIRED LANGUAGE]

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center. If you have an accommodation to record class related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOMMODATIONS

[THE FIRST PARAGRAPH BELOW IS UNIVERSITY-REQUIRED LANGUAGE]

The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website: <https://uh.edu/accessibility/> calling (713) 743-5400 or emailing jdcenter@Central.UH.EDU.

If you require any support services, you may contact Ms. Samantha Ary, Academic Records Coordinator. Ms. Ary is located in in the Office of Student Services suite, and she can be reached at sary@central.uh.edu or (713) 743-7466. Requests for accommodation that involve graded assignments must be directed to Ms. Ary and should be made as soon as possible to allow adequate time to document and to process the request. If you observe religious or cultural holidays that will coincide with synchronous class sessions or conferences, please let me know as soon as possible, so that I may make arrangements.

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICIES

[THE PARAGRAPH BELOW IS UNIVERSITY-REQUIRED LANGUAGE]

UHLC and the University of Houston are committed to maintaining and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment in which students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from discrimination and sexual misconduct. If you have experienced an incident of discrimination or sexual misconduct, a confidential reporting process is available to you. For more information, please refer to the University system's Anti-Discrimination Policy webpage, Anti-Discrimination Policy, Sexual Misconduct Policy webpage, and Sexual Misconduct Policy. Under the University Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a "responsible employee" for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report

in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

HONOR CODE

[THE PARAGRAPH BELOW IS UHLC-REQUIRED LANGUAGE]

The UHLC Honor Code applies to all aspects of this course. You are responsible for knowing all Honor Code provisions and for complying with the Honor Code. Please inquire if you have any questions regarding how the Honor Code's provisions apply to specific activities or situations related to this course. Your continuing enrollment in this course is deemed to be a pledge by you under the Honor Code to comply with the Honor Code in relation to this course and to comply with the instructions in the course syllabus.

The course syllabus follows on the next page.

DAILY COURSE SYLLABUS

<p>Class 1 and 2: Mon., Aug. 24 and Wed., Aug. 26</p> <p>Introduction to Course: class goals, learning objectives, expectations and requirements</p> <p>Introduction to somatic exercises</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class, read:</p> <p>(1) <i>An Essay on Teaching Well-Being in the Law</i> available here; and</p> <p>(2) <i>The Self-Transforming Brain</i> by Rick Hanson, available here</p> <p>Although I am not requiring that you prepare or submit anything after doing this reading assignment, you might get more out of our first week of classes if you constructively reflect on what you've read. One way to do that might be to talk with a family member or friend about what these assignments suggest you might be learning in the course.</p> <p>Homework- due by email to me before Class #3: <i>Noticing Habits</i> (on course page, here).</p>
<p>Class 3 and 4: Mon., Aug. 31 and Wed., Sept. 2</p> <p>Stage setting conversations on recurring thematic issues relating to well-being challenges in the law</p> <p>Slow movement practice.</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class:</p> <p>Read Levin, The Kids Aren't Alright, (read only pages 10-30)</p>
<p>Class 5: Wed., Sept. 9</p> <p>(no class on Mon., Sept. 6 – national holiday)</p> <p>Introduction to Mindful Communication</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class:</p> <p>Watch this 12-minute video, Short Introduction to NVC, available here</p> <p>Watch this four-minute video, <i>Start With an Observation</i>, available here</p> <p>Watch this four-minute video, <i>NVC Pseudo Feelings</i>, available here</p> <p>Review <i>Feelings and Needs List</i> (from Yoram Mosenzon) (hard copy to be provided; also available here)</p> <p>Review <i>Thoughts-Disguised-as-Feelings</i> (hard copy to be provided; also available here)</p>

<p>Class 6 and 7: Mon., Sept. 14 and Wed., Sept. 16</p> <p>Continue Mindful Communication</p> <p>Slow movement practice</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class:</p> <p>Read <i>Basics of Nonviolent Communication</i> (from Inbal Kashtan and Miki Kashtan, BayNVC) (hard copy to be provided; also available here: here)</p> <p>Homework for the week before Class #4: <i>Beginning to Practice Mindful Communication</i> (assigned to be distributed in class)</p> <p>Homework for the week before Class #5: <i>Continuing to Practice Mindful Communication</i> (assigned to be distributed in class)</p> <p>First short reflection paper on early practice with mindful communications techniques due by email to me before Class #10. Assignment posted on course page.</p>
<p>Class 9 Wed., Sept. 23</p> <p>(no class on Mon., Sept. 21 – religious holiday)</p> <p>Continue Mindful Communication</p> <p>Slow movement practice</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class, read:</p> <p>Read <i>The Practice of Mindful Communication</i>, by Oren Jay Sofer, available here: https://www.orenjaysofer.com/blog/mindful-communication</p> <p>Read (though you can mostly skim through) <i>The Complete Guide to Nonviolent Communication for Purpose-Driven Leaders</i> by Nati Beltran, available here: https://www.natibeltran.com/the-complete-guide-to-nonviolent-communication-for-purpose-driven-leaders/</p> <p><i>The Three Most Common Pitfalls in Nonviolent Communication</i>, by Oren Jay Sofer, available here: https://www.orenjaysofer.com/blog/2017/6/30/when-communication-backfires</p>

<p>Class 10 and 11 Mon., Sept. 28 and Wed., Sept. 30</p> <p>Daily Mindfulness Practices</p> <p>Slow movement practice</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class, read:</p> <p>(1) <i>What Olympians Can Teach Us About Disappointment</i> (available on course page);</p> <p>(2) <i>Future Perfect</i> (available on course page)</p>
<p>Class 12 and 13 Mon. Oct. 5 and Wed., Oct. 7</p> <p>Daily Mindfulness Practices continued</p> <p>Slow movement practice</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class:</p> <p>Continue practicing mindful communication; and</p> <p>Listen to the Radiolab Podcast <i>You and Me and Mr. Self-Esteem</i>, available here: https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/radiolab/id152249110?i=1000746283459</p> <p>For anyone who wants it, the written transcript is available here: https://radiolab.org/podcast/you-and-me-and-mr-selfesteem/transcript.</p>
<p>Class 14 and 15 Mon. Oct. 12 and Wed., Oct. 14</p> <p>Daily Mindfulness Practices continued</p> <p>Slow movement practice</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class:</p> <p>(1) <i>Mindfulness as a Way of Life</i>, by Oren Jay Sofer, available here: https://www.orenjaysofer.com/blog/mindfulness-way-of-life; and</p> <p>(2) <i>The Key to Strengthening Mindfulness</i>, by Oren Jay Sofer, available here: https://www.orenjaysofer.com/blog/strengthening-mindfulness</p> <p>(3) Read <i>Here, Now, Aware: The Power of Mindfulness</i> by Joseph Goldstein, available here: https://www.lionsroar.com/here-now-aware-the-power-of-mindfulness/</p> <p>Second short reflection paper on continued mindful communication practices due by email to me before Class #16. Assignment posted on course page.</p>

<p>Class 16 and 17 Mon. Oct. 19 and Wed., Oct. 21</p> <p>Daily Mindfulness Practices continued</p> <p>Slow movement practice</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>In advance of this class:</p> <p>Read <i>Finding Time to Practice</i>, by Oren Jay Sofer, available here: https://www.orenjaysofer.com/blog/finding-time-to-practice</p>
<p>Class 18 and 19 Mon. Oct. 26 and Wed., Oct. 28</p> <p>Prep for Service Week</p> <p>Slow movement practice</p> <p>Reflections on experience</p>	<p>More details about service week to be provided.</p>
<p>Class 20 and 21 Mon. Nov. 2 and Wed., Nov. 4</p> <p>(we do not meet in person this week)</p>	<p>Service week</p>
<p>Class 22 and 23 Mon. Nov. 9 and Wed., Nov. 11</p>	<p>Student presentations.</p> <p>Students will give presentations describing their teaching experience in the field. More details about this assignment to be provided.</p>
<p>Class 24 and 25 Mon. Nov. 16 and Wed., Nov. 18</p>	<p>Complete student presentations.</p>
<p>No classes Mon., Nov 23. and Wed., Nov. 25 (for Thanksgiving)</p>	
<p>Class 26 Mon., Nov. 30</p> <p>Wrap up: lessons learned.</p> <p>Restorative yoga/sound bath</p>	<p>Final paper due by email to me by Monday, Dec. 7 at 5:00 pm</p> <p>Details about paper to be provided</p>