

Counseling & Testing

News and Notes

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ISU Counseling and Testing Center
Idaho Falls Campus
1784 Science Center Drive
Rm 223, Bennion SUB, Stop 8150
Idaho Falls, ID 83402

(208) 282- 7750

Taming Our Worried Minds

Paula Seikel, Ph.D.

How many times have you wished you could find the off switch, or at least the volume control, to your worrying mind? For many of us, there is a nearly constant commentary in our heads judging us and others, second-guessing our decisions, rehearsing conversations that may never happen, or reliving previous interactions. We often don't enjoy what is happening now because we are ruminating about the past or anticipating the future. Our amazing minds can create novels, develop theories, or invent solutions to problems, but they also can think us right into despair.

Mindfulness is a very old practice that can help us tame our out-of-control minds. There are many definitions of mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., author of several books on mindfulness and creator of a mindfulness based stress reduction program, has defined mindfulness as "paying attention, in the present moment, on purpose, non-judgmentally, as if your life depended on it." He and his colleagues have been using mindfulness meditation and yoga to help people suffering from serious disease, chronic pain, and anxiety to regain joy and hope in their lives. Although we all have physical and mental pain in our lives, we can use mindfulness to minimize the additional suffering our own minds produce in reaction to the pain.

To get a brief taste of how mindful awareness can work, here is an experiment with mindful eating. Give yourself five minutes of uninterrupted time by turning off the phone and sitting in a quiet place by yourself. Pick up a

piece of fruit. Use your senses of sight, smell, hearing, and touch to explore the fruit slowly. Focus in turn on the color, texture, aroma, weight, and sound of the fruit as you hold it in your hand. Pay attention to your judgment of the fruit. Do you like it? Are you anticipating eating it? Does it have memories associated with it? Watch your mind take you away from the present moment of pure experience of the fruit, and when you become aware of straying away, gently bring your awareness back to the simple experience of the fruit. Begin to eat the fruit slowly and with awareness of each step. Notice the taste, texture, and temperature of the fruit in your mouth. Notice what your tongue and lips do automatically. When your mind takes you away from the simple experience of eating the fruit, gently bring your focus back to the present moment as it unfolds.

When you have eaten the fruit, reflect on the difference between how you usually eat and how you ate this fruit. Was it difficult? How would things be different if you ate all your meals with conscious awareness? How could you apply this level of awareness to other areas of your life, such as communication with family and friends, studying, working, driving, or shopping? What would happen if you did? The next time you find yourself worrying about the future, try gently bringing your focus back to what is happening now. It takes practice to do this, but it is worth the effort.

If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness, there are many books and internet sites available. A good place to start is Jon Kabat-Zinn's books, *Wherever You Go, There You Are* and *Full Catastrophe Living*.

*The highest ecstasy is the
attention at its fullest.*

-- Simone Weil

The Pursuit of Happiness

Julie Thompson, LPC

The author Eric Hoffer made the statement, "The search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness." Books abound on ways to obtain happiness, magazines tout proven strategies to increase our happiness factor, and talk shows bring in experts educating us on ways to achieve happiness. The question begs, is happiness something we can mindfully acquire or, as Hoffer suggests, is pursuing happiness like a dog chasing its tail?

Considering that studies show happy people as thrivers, being more creative, productive, attracting more friends, staying healthier and living longer, it is not surprising that one of the central themes that comes up for clients is their desire to be happier.

In Eric Weiner's book, The Geography of Bliss, he points out that "not only is happiness considered possible for anyone to attain, it's expected." If happiness is an expectation then defining it beyond relative terms becomes one of the important goals in counseling. Questions asked might be, "How does an individual recognize when they have arrived at happiness or what obstacles might be getting in the way of achieving a state of happiness?" Happiness is just one part of a whole spectrum of emotions, including sadness, anger, and fear, all which provide contrast to those desired moments we define as happy. Without the less comfortable emotions happiness loses its edge. In other words, a mountain is only a mountain in the company of the valleys.

Is happiness about having more choice? Author Barry Schwartz refers to something known as the Paradox of Choice, pointing out that having a surplus of options does not result in more happiness but rather feeling confused, overwhelmed and generally


less content. In contrast, my 88-year-old grandmother when compared to younger generations has had a life of limited options. Despite this she exhibits an ability to appreciate the simple things. She has no sense of entitlement, no belief that life should be fair, easy or happy, having an incredible ability to appreciate the happy times while being at peace when times prove to be less happy.

Recent data shows genetics as being responsible for 50% of a person's happiness quotient. Life circumstances are accountable for 10% of happiness and 40% is shown to be within our control. Control equates to using strategies that sustain an attitude of happiness. For example, finding ways to spend one hour a day practicing positive thinking has been proven to increase a person's sense of wellbeing. Ways to achieve this might include keeping a daily gratitude journal, performing acts of kindness, meditation, prayer or writing a thank you letter.

Also, investing in memorable as opposed to material, seeing the glass half full, volunteering for people less fortunate, finding ways to express your creativity, telling those you love how happy you are to have them in your life, are all potential routes to increased bliss. Most importantly, don't forget to smile. As my grandma says.... "Life is short, might as well be happy!"

Happiness is as a butterfly which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but which if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you.

Nathaniel Hawthorne



ANNOUNCING A NEW CLASS: **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (COUN 491 & 591)**

Course description: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was originally developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine as a "last resort" treatment program for people with chronic pain and serious illness who had not found relief with traditional medicine. Over the last 30 years, MBSR has helped thousands of people worldwide to live life with greater ease, peace of mind, and physical and mental wellness. MBSR combines guided meditation, gentle yoga and stretching, and other activities in an intensive, life-changing course.

In this 8-week course, students will learn new ways to perceive and manage the inevitable stresses of their lives. Classes will include sitting and walking meditation, yoga, moment-to-moment awareness, breathing exercises, and group discussion. In addition to the weekly 90 minute class period, students will commit to a daily 45 minute period of practice at home.

Before registering for the class, students will need to meet briefly with one of the instructors to assure that the class will meet their needs.

Time and Day: Thursdays 3:30-5:00; first 8-week period of the fall 2009 semester.

Place: To be announced, on the Pocatello Campus.

Instructors: Paula Seikel, Ph.D., Psychologist at University Counseling and Testing Service; and Marlene Darling, LPC, NCC, Counselor at the Center for New Directions. The course is cross-listed for undergraduate or graduate credit, and students, staff, and faculty are welcome to register.

NOTE: The class is listed as "closed" in order to set up the brief pre-class meeting with the instructor, and students will be given an add card at the meeting.

For information or to schedule a pre-class meeting: Call or email Paula Seikel at seikpaul@isu.edu or 208-282-2130.

**Idaho State
UNIVERSITY**

**What services
can the Career
Center offer you:**

- Career and Life Planning course (Coun 150)
- Choosing a Major
- Assessment Testing
- Career Counseling
- Career Library
 - Computers
 - Print Materials
- Internship Program
- Resume/Cover Letter development and review
- Practice Interviews
- Full-time Job Search tools
 - Bengal Jobs
- Part-time Job Search tools
 - On and Off-Campus
 - Bengal Jobs
- Fall and Spring Career Fairs

Come visit us at:

Pocatello Office
Museum Building, Room 440
208-282-2380

Idaho Falls Office
Bennion Student Union Bldg., Rm. 223
208-282-7750

www.isu.edu/career

Communication Etiquette:

Post-Interview Correspondence with an Employer

Jordan Doman

Throughout our collegiate careers we are given multiple opportunities to practice writing a resume and a cover letter. It seems that those two items are covered numerous times throughout college. I myself have written 3-4 cover letter/resume combinations for class assignments, and while I enjoyed the

opportunity to practice writing cover letters and resumes, there are other areas that I wish had been covered. Often I have wondered what the proper etiquette is for communicating with an employer after you have had an interview or made an initial contact. For this article I will cover the types of communication that you may experience participating in throughout the course of searching for a job.

There are several types of correspondence that take place during the post-interview communication with an employer. Some of those include thank-you letters, acceptance letters, withdrawal letters and rejection letters. Each of these communication areas, if handled appropriately, can increase your credibility with the employer. Following are a few tips from the Career Center for how to communicate in the most appropriate manner with an employer.

Thank-you letters:

Thank you letters are an excellent way to show your appreciation and gratitude for an interview with an employer, and they provide an additional opportunity to connect with your interviewer(s). While they are often underutilized in the job search process, they can be a good way of solidifying you as a serious candidate for the job you are applying for. Make sure that if you send a thank you letter or note that you send them within 24 hours of your interview, and that you also include all individuals that helped you throughout your application and interview process.

Acceptance letters:

Some companies may require an acceptance letter from you prior to finalizing the hiring process. In this letter you have the ability to not only accept the position, but to also confirm the terms of your employment (i.e., starting date, salary, benefits, etc.). While this type of letter may seem standard and just part of the process, don't forget that you have the ability to communicate to the employer your continued excitement and dedication to the position you have been offered.

Withdrawal letters:

When you do find employment it is your obligation to inform all employers that you applied with that you are no longer available. A withdrawal letter should express your appreciation for the opportunity to apply for a position within their organization, but that you are no longer available. It is appropriate to tell the employer that you have accepted a position with another company, but under no circumstances should you write that you "got a better job." Doing so could prevent you from being able to apply with that employer at a later date if the need arises.

Rejection letters:

There may be times when you have to decline a position that has been offered to you. If you find yourself in a position of declining a job offer, do so in a thoughtful manner. Make sure that you indicate that you have thoroughly considered the position offered, but that you have decided not to accept it. As with the above letters, make sure to thank the employer for the opportunity to be considered for their organization.

Rejection thank-you letters:

If you find yourself being rejected for a position it is within your best interest to send the employer a thank-you letter expressing your gratitude for the opportunity of being considered for their organization. In this type of letter may sure to thank the employer for their time, and when applicable indicate that you may be interested in additional opportunities with their company should positions arise. A gesture such as this shows the employer that you are serious about their organization, and just may land you a position if a newly hired employee doesn't work out.

No matter what type of letter you may be sending, make sure you do it in an appropriate manner, free from grammatical and unethical mistakes. An organized and appropriate letter of any type will communicate to the employer what type of employee you could be.

Testing Center Hours Expanded During Freshman Registration Week

April 6th thru 10th

The Testing Center in Pocatello will be open for Compass testing until 6:00 pm Monday, April 6th through Friday, April 10th to accommodate freshman registration.

The Idaho Falls Testing Center is always open for Compass testing from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

Mindfulness works like an electron microscope. That is, it operates on so fine a level that one can actually see directly those realities which are at best theoretical constructs to the conscious thought process. Mindfulness actually sees the impermanent character of every perception. It sees the transitory and passing nature of everything that is perceived. It also sees the inherently unsatisfactory nature of all conditioned things. It sees that there is no sense grabbing onto any of these passing shows. Peace and happiness just cannot be found that way. And finally, Mindfulness sees the inherent selflessness of all phenomena. It sees the way we have arbitrarily selected a certain bundle of perceptions, chopped them off from the rest of the surging flow of experience and then conceptualized them as separate, enduring, entities. Mindfulness actually sees these things. It does not think about them, it sees them directly.

— Henepola Gunaratana
Mindfulness in Plain English

Mindfulness in a way is the opposite of grasping, or attachment, or identification. And it can go very, very deep when we allow ourselves, because what we start to see—if we slow down a little bit and pay attention—is how it is a kind of conditioned phenomenon, like a machine, the mind spins this stuff out in a very orderly way by habit - thoughts, fantasies and memories. The world works in certain conditioned patterns, and that's its nature, and it's all impermanent and quite ungraspable. Where is yesterday? What happened to your weekend? Where is it? What happened to 1984, your 20's, or whatever it was—where did they go? They all disappeared, gone. Isn't that an amazing thing?

It's a very profound thing to start to be aware of life coming out of nothing and disappearing into nothing. A day appears for awhile, and then it's gone. It can't be grasped, it's like a bird flying. You cannot hold time and fundamentally you can't hold yourself.

— Jack Kornfield

Counseling Q&A

Q: Why do people go to counseling?

A: Some common concerns are:

- confusing and distressing feelings
- low self-confidence
- depression
- anxiety
- stress
- substance abuse
- problems with eating and body image
- relationship issues
- academic performance
- adapting to college life and stressors

Q: What kind of counseling is available?

A: Counseling, Testing, and Career Services in Idaho Falls offers both personal counseling and couples counseling. We also offer career counseling; including career

exploration, resume review, and mock job interviews. The Counseling and Testing Center and the Career Center in Pocatello offer the same types of services.

Q: Who are the counselors?

A: Our counselors have had training and experience specific to working with college students.

Q: How do I make an appointment?

A: Come to Counseling, Testing, and Career Services in Idaho Falls (Room 223, Bennion SUB), or to the Counseling and Testing Center (Gravelly Hall, Top Floor) or the Career Center (Museum Building, Room 440) in Pocatello between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm to schedule an appointment and fill out some paperwork that will acquaint the counselor with your specific needs. Students requiring immediate help

can be seen on an emergency basis.

Q: If ongoing counseling is recommended, does that mean there is something wrong with me?

A: NO! The college years are an exciting but sometimes stressful time. Many students encounter situations that are challenging and confusing, or their usual ways of handling problems may not be working well. Everyone needs some extra help sometimes.

Q: Will anyone tell my professors that I am going to counseling?

A: No! Counseling records are not a part of your educational records. Only you can give consent for us to release any information about you. The information that you provide and your counseling records are strictly confidential within the limits of the law.