This report features:
1. Description
2. Participation and impact
3. Overarching goals across courses, “Contemplative Pathway” hallmarks
4. Course-specific Goals/Outcomes, Faculty Reflection, and Student Feedback
5. Incubator-specific Goals, Faculty Reflection, and Student Feedback
6. Ideas for future offerings of this experience
7. Recommendations and closing thoughts
8. CourseEval data

1. Description:
To advance the vision of Integrated Clusters using one of President Birx’s “Four Pillars,” the unfunded Contemplative Communities Cluster Project developed and offered four themed General Education courses Spring 2018. Courses met face to face as separate units with the addition of a 50-minute once a week “incubator” or lab session where all four courses met together to share perspectives on curiosity and contemplation and to collaborate on projects related to these course offerings.

As illustrated below, this offering helped students see connections among General Education courses and demonstrated the direct relevance of the General Education experience to their lives. The experience also enriched the professional development of the instructors.

We intend to offer these courses and the incubator again as scheduling permits and if approved by Curriculum Committee and General Education Committee.

Should the university move forward with themed General Education, we can envision students who complete all four contemplative courses earning a “Contemplative Pathway”.

2. Participants and Impact:
Three faculty, four courses, 55 students
Annette Holba (Communication and Media Studies): SSDI CMDI2300 Curiosity, Ethics, and the Public Good
Brigid O-Donnell (Biology): SIDI BIDI 1080 Curiosity, Observation, and the Scientific Process
Karolyn Kinane (English) PPDI ENDI 1700 Curiosity, Perspective, and Shakespeare
ENDI 1650 Curiosity, Playfulness and Creativity
Breakdown of students by programs/majors/disciplines:

Undeclared – 10
Communication and Media Studies – 6
English -- 6
Social Work – 4
Environmental Science and Policy – 1
Elementary Ed --3
Physical Education -- 3
Criminal Justice -- 3
Interdisciplinary – 3
Early Childhood Ed -- 2
Psychology -- 2
Computer Science -- 2
Social Studies Ed -- 1
Biology -- 1
Information Technology --1
Mathematics --1
Marketing --1
Youth Dev & Ed --1
Music --1
Athletic Training – 1
Exercise Physiology - 1
Adventure Ed -- 1

3. **Overarching goals across courses**
   - Broaden student perspectives on learning through contemplative practices
   - Demonstrate disciplinary differences and similarities
   - Foster engagement and connection across disciplines/course content
   - Engage student responsibility/accountability by having them lead Incubator Labs and teach others what they are learning in their own course(s)
   - Challenge students' assumptions by engaging across disciplines, content, and contemplative practices

We aimed to cultivate curiosity across multiple disciplines by exposing students to a diversity of contemplative practices employed across the four courses (e.g. focused observation, close reading, appreciative interviewing/conscious listening, play, etc.). In this experimental Themed General Education experience, we foreground *approaches* as the connecting thread rather than course content or a "wicked problem." What links these courses is a disposition, an attitude, a way of perceiving and working in the world. Students practice cultivating curiosity about others and practice cultivating agency (sense of ownership of reactions and responses) over themselves. Contemplative approaches offer students an experience of their personal responsibility for thoughts and actions—mindful awareness of the self. It further highlights how that internal state impacts/shapes their interaction with texts, society, one another, difficult situations, the natural world.
**Shared language from course syllabi:**

“Contemplative Pathway”
This course takes a contemplative approach to [DIRECTION].
- This course is learner-driven
- This class values process and product
- This course is a community
- This course values first-person knowing and ethical service

4. **Course Goals/Outcomes, Faculty Reflection, and Student Feedback**

**CTDI Goals and Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Outcome/Assessment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will develop an appreciation for creative endeavors</td>
<td>Students will write, talk, think, read, and act from a creative process</td>
<td>Class participation</td>
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<td>Writing responses</td>
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<td>Journal</td>
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<td>Reflection Prompts</td>
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<td>Students will develop practices to help them (one or more of the</td>
<td>Students will engage in contemplative practices in and out of class.</td>
<td>Class participation</td>
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<td>following):</td>
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<td>Reflection Prompts</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Explore questions of meaning</td>
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<td>- Reduce stress</td>
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<td>- Improve focus</td>
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<td>- Increase a sense of agency and/or resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will develop a set of skills, dispositions, and habits to</td>
<td>Students will wonder, ponder, play, and experiment without fear of</td>
<td>Class participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>creatively approach tasks and/or situations.</td>
<td>fear of failure or grasping for outcomes.</td>
<td>Writing responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students will practice introspection, data collection, synthesis,</td>
<td>Journal</td>
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<td>Action Plan</td>
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### Faculty Reflection on CTDI

For their first course reflection, students read and responded to the syllabus, specifically quoting from the “goals and outcomes” section to express what that were excited for and curious about. Many students expressed great fear around sharing their creative work as well as skepticism about a course’s ability to reduce stress, improve focus, and build a sense of agency. This first assignment was very successful for me to understand where students were prepared to struggle or check-out due to emotional or intellectual challenges.

Emphasis at the start of the semester on community building exercises (sometimes rooted in contemplative practices) was very successful. Activities such as the human knot, drum circle, mandala coloring and destroying, beholding, "exquisite corpse," and other writing games provoked some students to drop the course and others to begin to fully engage. By week five students were in a group chat together, had come up with a course family name (The Flightless Birds), and even developed community hand signs. They began to form a supportive and playful community of fellow explorers who demonstrated more and more ease with sharing creative work and taking intellectual risks. Their creative writing improved—it got weirder, funnier, more imaginative.

For their third reflection, students choose three course terms (anything that stood out to them as something they learned about in this course) to write about in detail. Some were directly related to the course goals I had envisioned. Students wrote extensively about agency and receptivity, freedom to fail, self-compassion, observation, experimentation,
playfulness, uselessness, and mindfulness as concepts and as related to their lived experiences.

Overall, we succeeded in crafting a course where students trusted me enough to take creative risks and also express accountability for their own “failures,” which were simply lack of attempt. The journals, creative writing prompts, action plans, and reflections all fulfilled course goals better than I could have anticipated. “The Mindful Twenty-Something” by Holly Rogers worked exceptionally well as a foundational text for our mindful and contemplative practices.

Student Feedback on CTDI

What have been some of the most interesting, useful, and positively challenging experiences of this course?

Being forced out of my comfort zone in a safe and encouraging way, making friends with people in very different majors and of different ages than me, valuing uselessness/playfulness/silliness, emphasis on the creative process, sharing creative processes, being forced to write in new and different voices (that I wouldn't have chosen on my own), being assigned to journal every so often, reflecting on the past, present, and future multiple times over the course, activities that were both stimulating and fun.

I think the whole course was very interesting to me, being able to create work that I appreciated and be able to share that work with my fellow peers was a great positive challenge for me in this course. I also really liked being able to read the mindful 20 something. I think that's a book that's going to be very useful to me just looking back.

The most interesting, useful and positively challenging experiences of this course would be all of the above! I really think that this course changed me as a student and individual...I learned so much throughout this course that I will continue to use throughout my life and I feel like I can't really say that about a lot of classes. For positively challenging I think it was the initial days of class when I wasn't sure if I was creative enough or going to be able to let go of the fear of failing, or just really get something out of it. I felt like the creative writing was challenging at first but as we got further into class it got way better and was a fun learning experience. Useful was probably the meditating and action plan as it opened me up to new things and kind of gave me a sense of self, confidence and freedom that I never had before. As for interesting it all was for me...so thank you!

What kinds of negative experiences would you like to share with me?

It took a little while to break out of my shell in the class. It could be useful to try activities like the beholding one earlier in the year.

Honestly, I didn't have any negative experience in this course. Between dealing with you, my peers, and the material, my experiences in this class were all positive.

I had no negative experiences. I was pushed outside of my comfort zone, but in a way to make me feel safe doing it.

What constructive recommendations do you have for me if I teach this course again?
I honestly don't have any recommendations. I'm sorry; I know that doesn't help. I suppose I would just continue the focus on writing and learning that's balanced with a focus on happiness and personal wellbeing. It's a very cool and important blend!
More creative writing.
I think you can cut down on how many times we meet for the incubator, but the class I believed was very beneficial! I loved being in this class and want to thank you for all you have taught me!
Maybe more meditation, but that's about it.
I can't say I have any recommendations as I think you were fabulous and gave the "Flightless Birds" their wings and so many other things to succeed as a person and community. Thank you for bringing us together and being an absolute blessing and a mentor that I will never forget! Thank you KK

**PPDI Goals and Outcomes:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Outcome/Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will learn how understanding the past is essential to understanding and acting in the present and future.</td>
<td>Students will use literature from the past and present to provoke ethical reflections on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.</td>
<td>Class participation, Writing prompts, Personal-critical explications, Research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will gain familiarity with Shakespearean materials from the Renaissance to the present.</td>
<td>Students will read, write and research about a variety of plays and poems by William Shakespeare</td>
<td>Class participation, Reading quizzes, Writing prompts, Research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will understand how reflection enriches the writing and research process.</td>
<td>Students will engage in appreciative inquiry and contemplative approaches to reading, writing and thinking.</td>
<td>Class participation, Writing prompts, Research project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Students earn how to ask interesting and significant questions about texts, ideas, and situations. | Students will practice curiosity as well as critical, contemplative, and creative reading practices | Class participation  
Writing prompts  
Personal-critical explications  
Research project |
|---|---|---|
| Students will understand how language changes over time and space and the impact of such changes. | Students will practice close and slow reading to determine how language functions dramatically, poetically and/or rhetorically, and to what effect. | Class participation  
Writing prompts  
Personal-critical explications |

**Faculty Reflection on PPDI**

Overall this class was similarly successful in terms of meeting course goals. My old habits returned and at some point I started teaching this course as I used to teach Shakespeare and neglected the mindful aspects. Students called me out on this in person and in formal surveys! Students’ explications—where they play close attention to the language of a text and draw out themes to connect to their lives—improved in depth and breadth of analysis over the course of the term.

Acting, watching different media, and doing *Lectio Divina* exercises were particularly useful for developing community and loosening the group up a bit early in the term. Peer workshopping of major assignments helped the less analytical students learn from the seasoned English majors how to read closely and deeply in ways I could not have taught them. Peer review—the metaphors they use and the learning they model-- is irreplaceable.

**Student Feedback on PPDI**

What kinds of things were really successful this semester? What was useful and/or interesting? What was challenging in a positive way?

Class participation (student involvement and community) was quite high in this class in particular. Using moodle as a resource for grading/project submission was also useful for keeping track of events and academic information (as well as having the schedule and syllabus easily accessible). Something that was challenging in a positive way was writing the passage explications for each book - it forced students to think more deeply and intelligently about the content and meaning of certain aspects of Shakespeare.
Starting with the very beginning of the semester, I think it was a great idea to ask what our goals were for you and for each other. We all communicated and agreed on what we wanted, which made this environment much more comfortable to work in. It was also amazing of you to always have us go around in a circle and say names. That eliminated the anxious feeling of not knowing how to address someone. I know this sounds kind of weird, but it also humanized us to each other. In every other class I have, I don't know anybody's names, and I don't have relationships with them. To me, they're just students rather than peers. This class is so much different. Jumping right into explications was a great challenge. It's a thing you just have to feel out for yourself. After we sort of practiced in class the first time, I saw myself getting better and better at it. It was good to make us understand something for ourselves rather than holding our hand through it. The whole class was kind of like that. You provide a space where we can grow as individuals. You teach very well and I think of your type of teaching as almost a facilitation because of the way you provoke our responses and allow us to figure things out in the way they click for us.

The connection with Shakespeare's plays was very deep and rich and has sparked an enthusiasm for the genre that I have never felt before. The coverage of the material makes it really accessible to those of us who don't notice primary themes or metaphors or any kind of literary devices. I only wish we had time to cover more plays because our discussions were enlightening and entertaining and helps us realize that all the plays are timeless because they are stories about humans.

I thought that coming together and discussing personal thoughts about passages was successful because it allowed us to build off each other's ideas. The explications were challenging however it forced me to think a lot deeper than I normally would by just reading the play. I think the discussion of the different plays went really well this semester. We were brought in depth into the world of Shakespeare, and we given a lot of contextual reference. A lot of the connections (regarding themes) that we made to the present and the analysis of present media reincarnations were really useful. Lastly, I thought the explications we had to do were challenging, but in a good way- we had to apply terms and understanding from what we got in the class, and correctly apply it to a piece of text. The class discussions were really useful to understand what was happening in the books because it was not always clear when I was reading them so I liked hearing others interpretations.

Thinking about the class in a different aspect in terms of curiosity
(Negative comments were about the incubator, included elsewhere)

What constructive ideas do you have for me to revise this course for next year?
The format of the class for roughly the second half of the semester felt a lot better than the beginning. Maybe it was the class size or people, but the sense of community that was built later on helped the class greatly. I suppose emphasize that aspect more early on? The class worked out pretty well as it is, I believe.
I don't really have anything for you, honestly. This is the best class. It's my favorite class I had right now, and even considering high school, maybe my favorite class ever. You care so much about us as people. You are so warm and open in a comfortable, not boundary-breaking, way. I'm sorry, but I really don't have anything I feel like you should work on. Thank you so much!!

If more movies similar to the plays we read could be found I think the ones we watched were very useful and gave me a better understanding about the plays. I would just switch up to type of projects so that it applies to students with different learning styles. More meditation and constructive mindful thinking sessions.

Like I stated I'd want to cover more plays if there is time. Maybe consider the order that plays go in; I like how more of the lighthearted plays were the ones we read first and more of the dramatic ones read later. That way the class doesn't plateau at a point where the material sort of stagnates, if that makes since. I think overall Macbeth was the best play to end with because it was the most dynamic and everybody enjoyed it a lot.

Maybe incorporating a little more meditation into the experience. I remember we did meditations and mindfulness towards the beginning but began to drop it later on.

**SIDI Goals and Outcomes**

Biological investigations have a rich history of integrating focused/repeated observations of natural phenomena as the first step in the scientific process. As such, COSP sought to introduce students to the workings of the scientific process with repeated observations of the natural world from February through May as a source of curiosity-based questions. In doing so, this course also aimed to cultivate skills of contemplation and stillness in service of keen and careful observations. A central component of the course (ca. 35% of the total course grade) was to conduct an observational study of a local species based upon questions generated from observations. Over a five-week study period (April – May), students amassed a rich dataset of observations augmented with readings/background research into the basic biology of their focal species, culminating in an oral presentation during finals.

Overall, this course sought to help students to:

- **understand** the scientific process both conceptually and in practice
- **appreciate** the use of focused observation in the generation of robust biological questions
- **use** the scientific process to pose questions, collect data, and assess support for proposed hypotheses
- **integrate** and **appreciate** contemplative practices in your understanding of yourself and the world
- **link** contemplative observation with curiosity, creativity, and wonder

**Faculty Reflection on SIDI**
I primarily reflect on COSP’s success by examining how well I did in connecting across three distinct components of the course. First, in February, we began with weekly readings and discussion stemming from the book, *The Forest Unseen*, by GK Haskell, which functioned as a template for focused observations to begin that month. Haskell visits and sits to observe a 3-meter by 3-meter patch of an east Tennessee forest (which he deems a mandala) each week of an entire year. His weekly accounts chronicle the myriad of things he observes, ranging from minutiae like the small footprints of voles in the snow to large-scale nutrient cycling taking place in the forest around him. Each vignette is accompanied by questions and musings on the why’s and how’s of nature’s workings. Interwoven in to the book reading/discussion were the first monthly 1-hour observations in nature and reflections on the challenges and opportunities in doing this type of exercise. These two components felt quite synergistic and interconnected, and allowed us to segue into the next component of the course: several brainstorming sessions where questions were coupled to testable hypotheses. This portion of the course was less successful, as students struggled with converting questions into a plan for data collection to address their questions, and required more time and work than I had anticipated. This second component was largely a struggle because of the structuring of the course as meeting only once weekly (outside of the Incubator) such that I had less opportunity to work one on one with students struggling with determining their plan of action for the third component of the course. Even so, by the end of the second portion of the course, the majority of students had plans in place that entailed a minimum of 1-hr of observations of their focal species outside of class time, and for the remainder of the semester, students reported each week (in written and oral formats) on the progress of their studies. Focal species for student studies included red fox, American robins, red and gray squirrels, eastern chipmunks, wood frogs, red maples, Boston ivy, etc. I regularly sought to make connections back to earlier content in the course (Haskell’s patient approach, the scientific process, etc.) to bridge newer work with where the course had originated. During finals week, students delivered an 8-minute oral presentation of their findings. I was impressed and proud of the work that each student achieved, and for many students, it was clear they had become well versed in the natural history and biology of their focal species.

**Student Feedback on SIDI**

“My interest for science, biology and nature has greatly improved…now I am invested and curious.” “I’ve found myself asking questions about more and more things surrounding nature and the outdoors.” “I’ve been paying a little more attention to the outside world.” “Every good question begins with a curious thinker.” “Humans are natural born questioners. We crave knowledge and science is a wonderful outlet for this. We get to learn about things we can see smell feel and touch.” “I have come to realize just how much nature has to offer. I find myself stepping outside of my dorm and seeing some sort of natural occurrence, and wanting to know more about it.”

**SSDI Goals and Outcomes**

<table>
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<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking &amp; Listening</th>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
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This course engages students in a variety of kinds of readings, scholarly, popular, and trade-focused readings. This course addresses this skill by assigning different kinds of reflective writing experiences.

This course addresses these skills in this course through assignments that require collaboration in leading conversations and “teaching” concepts.

This course engages critical thinking skills by exposing students to various kinds of readings and through workshops focused upon curiosity.

This course focuses students on contemplative inquiry which is a form of first person inquiry/research.

This course addresses this skill by engaging in team work during regular class meetings, assigning student-led facilitation teams AND by bringing students into the larger incubator lab experience working with three other directions sections focusing on contemplative inquiry.

Students will:
1. experience a practice of contemplative approaches to expand mindfulness of the present moment and participate in compassion meditation.
2. maintain a contemplation journal.
3. collaborate with students in other general education courses that take a contemplative approach to course content on activities such as discussions, creating open education course resources, or project engagement.
4. engage incubator experiences and maintain an incubator log.

Faculty Reflection on SSDI
I focused on connecting curiosity, ethics, and the public good to the student's own awareness of self and agency. I used various approaches within contemplative pedagogy to try to make these connections. I focused on the Other and cultivating empathy, both of which are central to the contemplative practice of appreciative inquiry through appreciative interviewing exercises within the framework of conscious listening. I tried to expose students to their own listening practices and give them tools that can help them be a better listener in a way that honors the other, which can enhance understanding and lead to dialogic collaboration and co-construction of meaning. In the communication discipline, this is a key to dialogic ethics, which has fundamental roots in eastern philosophy and western dialogic philosophy. After reading about the science of curiosity, we have multiple lenses from which we discussed curiosity in general AND our own levels of and experience with curiosity. I tried to link curiosity to conscious listening and what the skill of conscious listening would mean related to the "public good" and in this case, the public good we studied was Engaged Buddhism. Students maintained a journal on the fourteen guidelines of engaged Buddhism and we explored them, connecting them to contemplative inquiry/practices, and in particular, to the importance of conscious listening from an ethical dialogic perspective. We used various contemplative approaches throughout the semester and one that students found very interesting was walking the labyrinth with either a complete openness or an
intention about something related to their public engagement. Students did appreciate knowing the history and practice of labyrinth walking (something we covered in class) and how it can encourage reflection, perspective broadening, and agency in our public communicative actions. In discussions with students near the end of the semester, I asked them about how the course can connect with the community more and some of their ideas involved holding an event on campus about a local issue/problem and facilitate a campus conversation by using different conscious listening approaches. Another suggestion was to have an assignment that is an engaged community service practice throughout the semester somewhere in the local community. From their suggestion, I offered an example, such as maintaining a conscious listening journal as they visit with older adults at the senior center and have sustained dialogue. When I move this to a four credit directions course, I plan to incorporate some kind of larger extension service project in the local community so students actually practice conscious listening while engaging in a service component, both of which are connected to engaged Buddhism.

**Student Feedback on SSDI**

I mentioned some of the feedback from students above but in general students anecdotally (in conversation) said that they appreciate being able to slow down a bit. They admitted they rarely paid attention to how they listen and this course focused on a practice of listening. They also stated how they never thought about curiosity and that it had a science behind it. Most of the students told me they do not think they are curious enough. They also said that they take too much for granted, included people in their lives. Another comment I heard from several students in my class is that they initially felt uncomfortable with the various kinds of contemplative practice we used to frame each class meeting but before midterms, they felt a sense of wonder before class (as they were walking to class), wondering what approach we would do that day. (Thank goodness for the contemplative pedagogy handbook!).

I feel a little awkward about saying this but here goes...I have never had a class where 95% of the students hugged me and thanked me for a special semester after a final exam. The hugs were intense and personal (and very different from other kinds of end of the semester experiences that were more phatic in nature). I guess the saying of goodbye felt intensely dialogic (something Buber talks about that occurs in "the between"). By the end of the semester, there was certainly a sense of community that emerged (which usually does happen in my courses—but this sentiment of community was different). Christopher Bache (in his book, *The Living Classroom*, 2008) talks about how the felt-sense of energy (energy fields) in a classroom changes when contemplative inquiry is practiced in a particular space. This felt-sense impacts relationships and agency for both students and teacher. I think the use of the Bradford Room and the unconventional use of contemplative pedagogy and practice, AND being in a community that is attached to a larger community (a Sangha) that shared the same practices, created a unique sentiment for the students and for me. I think my relationships with those students is very different from my relationship with other students. I think I need to re-read Bache's work on the living classroom to understand more about classroom energy.

5. **Incubator Specific Goals, Faculty Reflection, and Student Feedback**
Incubator Goals

For students:
- To extend their sense of community beyond “home” courses
- To make connections between and across Gen Ed experiences – to see a constellation rather than a smattering of random courses
- To practice articulating the relevance of General Education experiences
- To gather multiple disciplines together
- To allow students to co-create incubator experiences
- To encourage students to take ownership of their own learning as well as share what they are learning in their individual courses
- To model interdisciplinary and integrative collaboration for the students in our own (instructors) engagement

Faculty Focus on Incubator

The incubator session (50mins/week) brought all enrolled students together to discuss the meaning of curiosity and contemplative practices and to engage in types of these practices as led by members of each class in succession.
The four student-led sessions were conceived of and led entirely by students and challenged students to gain experiential knowledge of a variety of contemplative practices and to engage in conversation with peers from across disciplines, year classes, and backgrounds.
Students then worked in small groups with representation from each course on a series of projects.

Student Feedback on Incubator

“Curiosity can make things more fun”
“Curiosity can help you be more tuned in to new things”
“I have a new respect for curiosity”
“I originally related all of curiosity to English and my career as a teacher but now I got to learn from other curious individuals at the Incubator”
“Without curiosity I am unable to grow as a person.”
“I appreciate learning how to look at things from a different perspective”
“Sometimes sitting and being quiet may seem boring but boredom can spark curiosity, which helps you ask questions and eventually learn.”
I appreciated “…working together to educate one another…through the contexts of our similar and different courses”
“Hearing what different kids from different classes had to say really opened up your mind to different concepts…”

There was confusion initially about a 3 credit course meeting for the usual amount of time for a 4 credit course (4-5 students dropped the course in the first week)
They loved that it was an experimental course and that they are able to make recommendations
They loved that it was experimental and different from other courses (and suggested more courses be experimental)
The Incubator not only was an “out-of-the-box class environment” but also allowed people to be creative, express creatively, and also stretched people without them really fearing it or maybe even knowing it.

It was challenging to miss several lab at the beginning of the semester due to snow, this made it hard for students to get to know each other and feel comfortable talking with each other.

Instead of privileging one way of doing things, the incubator showed students that there are multiple ways of getting at the same or similar things – there is value in multiple approaches and perspectives.

“This incubator gave us an incredible opportunity to learn from others. I personally felt the same sense of community in the drum circle when we were all playing our own beat while bringing them all together actually formed the music. This metaphorically showed that we are all learning our own discipline, but they are incorporated in something bigger”

"Through this year the incubators have been very useful and interesting. Early in the year meeting classmates from other classes was very beneficial to get to know new people. Meeting people from the beginning helped me work well with my classmates for the rest of the incubator labs. It was useful to collaborate and work with classmates from different classes who bring their own ideas from each of the other three classes. Learning from each of the three classes was another interesting factor of the incubator labs. We thought learning to meditate at the start of the incubator labs was useful to get ready to work. The incubators were also useful to build our public speaking and group working skills.”

"It is greatly beneficial to have several courses that use the same approach to a topic. Each course has gone through its own process of learning. When all four courses are brought together Everyone learns something new because the classes are learning in their own unique style. Having similar approaches in more classes like this would build more of a community between students who otherwise wouldn’t ever get to work with each other. This is one of the reasons why the incubators are great. Having theses labs allows us to meet and work with classmates we may not have ever met before.”

"There are a few ways that the incubators could develop and grow for future years. First, it was unanimous that having student teach from each of the classes should stay for the future incubators. We had a few suggestions for the way the incubators should develop for the future. One way we thought of was have more readings. This could be articles or books. Another way we thought of was to practice more strategies for meditation and mindfulness. More teambuilding exercises is something we also thought is a very important activity for the future of the incubator labs. As to our opinions we feel the incubator labs were successful and a fun environment. We do think that with our suggestions and feedback the incubator labs will only get better in the future.”

"These classes are all so different but are alike in the fact that they all apply the fundamentals of being a mindful person. Through the use of curiosity we are able to
connect biological inquiry, communications & media studies, and reading & writing. All of these things demonstrate contemplative approach will make you a more mindful individual.”

“For the future, I think people shouldn’t take this class for granted because it’s really an amazing class and you are able to learn so much from the other classes”

“I think the content of the incubator lab was really good with different classes [sections] taking turns leading the lab for the day. I learned a lot from those experiences and got to meet more people from different classes”

“The incubator built a sense of community for me”

“The lab, I feel, needs to meet up for a longer period of time”

“The incubator should meet twice a week”

“The major benefit [of the incubator] is having several courses use the same approach to a topic/learning. The major benefit to learning by the same approach is that everybody can relate to what they are learning and can be mindful about the other class’s point of view”

Students appreciated the opportunity to teach their peers in the incubator stating that it solidified course material and offered them professional development.

"This offered me a chance to sample classes you don’t get to take. There were surprising connections among disciplines. Who would have thought that Shakespeare and Biology could be connected? "

Students enjoyed "getting lessons from classes you might not be able to take." Students appreciated getting "practice talking with a variety of people about a topic from multiple angles, but then also taking a similar angle to a bunch of topics."

One students noted that they learned "no one way is “best” but collaboration and sharing" is the way to go.

One student explained: "What did you learn about from Shakespeare course. Now, do that to nature. What did you learn about observation in science? Now do that with Shakespeare. Creative writing, etc. Neat idea! "

"There are multiple benefits to having several courses that use the same “approach” to a topic. Having several courses use the same “approach” to a topic, and then come together, teaches students that there are multiple ways to approach a situation or problem. It encourages students to further explore, and think contemplatively, about “approaches” to topics, and situations, that they encounter in their lives. In this way, this approach helps students to collaborate and learn from those that are from different backgrounds or
disciplines than their own. This helps students to develop greater respect and compassion for those of other disciplines, as they learn that, in a group, each individual is capable of providing a fruitful contribution to the group. In this way, students are able to work with individuals who have different than they do, which helps them to develop trust with those who have different experiences than they do. In this way, the approach of the Incubator sessions fulfill the cluster initiative that Plymouth State University is implementing, as students from similar and different disciplines are able to communicate, collaborate, and achieve goals, with one another. "

"I have specific creative suggestions for the way this experience is developed and offered in the future. I suggest that, from the beginning of the Incubator Lab meetings, students form groups, with at least one member from each course in each group. I recommend that groups be encouraged to use social media and group messages to communicate with one another outside of the Incubator Lab about experiences related to their explorations of their topic that may occur outside of the Incubator Lab time. I suggest that students then share these experiences aloud with the rest of the students during the Incubator Lab meetings. I also recommend that, from the beginning of the Incubator Lab sessions, students work with their groups to plan, design, and create, a creative piece illustrating what they have learned in the Incubator Lab meetings. I recommend that students share the process for creating these projects aloud. I also recommend that the final products, themselves, be shared, at the end of the Incubator Lab meetings."

Students also recommended that we put the incubator in class description. They recommended general ice breakers in the beginning of each class and a closing meditation. They asked us to give people the course descriptions of each class.

"I would suggest again a fun game or super creative element to incorporate. For instance, if we were to be broken up into random, pre-selected groups at the beginning of the semester with at least one person from each class in it, we can give them team names. From there, set an end goal that requires activities that, if done well, earns a given team a certain amount of points. In this way, projects, reading assignments, basically anything can be graded in this way. At the beginning of the semester, explain this process to the groups and tell them that, whatever team earns the most points at the end of a season, gets a pizza party (or some reward of that level) and they can pick one other team to join them. This makes it all really exciting, as it will motivate each and every student to fully participate each and every class/assignment, guaranteed. The reason I also suggest that they can also select one other team to join them is so that, no matter what, the teams will all also be super friendly and interactive with one another. Also, don’t reveal a board with who is where in terms of “point” accumulation-- leave that completely a secret until the last incubator session, for a big reveal. This is just an initial idea, but something like this would really garner excitement and a positive association with the Incubator, and would probably achieve much more success with a obtaining a holistic understanding and successful team bonding."

"Promote this experiment. Hold discussions on how this Incubator affected the way that people learn, and explicitly show just what this course has to offer. Write the connection
between classes so students can know which courses will be included also in the Incubator. I think the incubators/clusters could be improved by a longer time period. Ours is just 50 minutes and if it were an hour and 15 minute or longer i believe the students will be more productive and eventually come up with more connections between all of the classes. Encouraging creative thinking and project building would also help engage students in the learning process, keeping them interested in the content, and promote learning through multiple approaches. I think that also having more of a mix between the students every week would lead to lots of different creative approaches because during the incubator, we tend to sit with our friends every week or people that we feel comfortable around instead of expanding our horizons with new people."

"I think that one benefit to having multiple different approaches to a topic is that so much information gets drawn in, and people can learn so much more outside of the exact topic they are on. I wasn’t expecting to learn about creativity, ethics or science when I signed up for this class, and at first I resisted. But contemplative approaches helped me look at my own intolerance—which was also surprising because I think I am a tolerant person, but I am not as open minded as I think I am. I actually had to practice curiosity, without it, in all things, life gets boring because I am boring, and I see the world in a new light. It is very useful to be well-rounded, and this course provides that possibility. Having several courses that traditionally are very different use the same approach to topics helps build the understanding that multiple problems can be resolved from multiple different perspectives, and together, a common goal can be established. It builds common ground and understanding. Outside of the classroom, this idea translates well to the real world when trying to solve other problems. A contemplative approach makes problem solving easier."

“Through this year the incubators have been very useful and interesting. Early in the year meeting classmates from other classes was very beneficial to get to know new people. Meeting people from the beginning helped me work well with my classmates for the rest of the incubator labs. It was useful to collaborate and work with classmates from different classes who bring their own ideas from each of the three classes. Learning from each of the three classes was also another interesting factor of the incubator labs. We thought learning to meditate at the start of the incubator labs was useful to get ready to work. The incubators were also useful to build our public speaking and group working skills.”

“It is greatly beneficial to have several courses that use the same approach to a topic. Each course has gone through its own process of learning. When all three courses are brought together Everyone learns something new because the three classes are learning in their own unique style. Having similar approaches in more classes like this would build more of a community between students who otherwise wouldn’t ever get to work with each other. This is one of the reasons why the incubators are great. Having theses labs allows us to meet and work with classmates we may not have ever met before.”

“There are a few ways that the incubators could develop and grow for future years. First, it was unanimous that having student teach from each of the classes should
stay for the future incubators. We had a few suggestions for the way the incubators should develop for the future. One way we thought of was have more readings. This could be articles or books. Another way we thought of was to practice more strategies for meditation and mindfulness. More teambuilding exercises is something we also thought is a very important activity for the future of the incubator labs. As to our opinions we feel the incubator labs were successful and a fun environment. We do think that with our suggestions and feedback the incubator labs will only get better in the future.”

“These three classes are all so different but are alike in the fact that they all apply the fundamentals of being a mindful person. Through the use of curiosity we are able to connect biological inquiry, communications & media studies, and reading & writing. All of these things demonstrate contemplative approach will make you a more mindful individual.”

“I think the content of the incubator lab was really good with different classes [sections] taking turns leading the lab for the day. I learned a lot from those experiences and got to meet more people from different classes”
“The incubator built a sense of community for me”
“The lab, I feel, needs to meet up for a longer period of time”
“The incubator should meet twice a week”
“The major benefit [of the incubator] is having several courses use the same approach to a topic/learning. The major benefit to learning by the same approach is that everybody can relate to what they are learning and can be mindful about the other class’s point of view”

Students reported that this 50min session was often challenging, due to lack of participation/“buy-in” from some class members or due to confusion about expectations from faculty leading the session.

Students expressed a desire to have more hands-on work in this session as opposed to small group discussions. However, many students responded about the unique nature of this experience and how the challenges of communicating across disciplines and content was a worthy and engaging experience.

Faculty Reflection on Incubator
We enjoyed the collaborative environment of the incubator lab. We learned from each other how to facilitate contemplative pedagogy to how to bring together multiple disciplines around a common theme. We also stretched ourselves as we allowed students to lead these sessions and we became the students. We worked together to navigate these new ways of engaging with our students.

6. Ideas for future offerings of this experience
Avoid “divide and conquer” approach to collaboration among students by explicitly teaching and making room in class for collaboration. Perhaps even have students do the work for these assignments in their home classes so that they are all bringing ideas to the incubator to then share and synthesize.

- Snow day cancellations were a problem.
- Assign groups at the start of the semester and have them build social media connections.
- Maybe work with other small groups.
  - Find ways to get to know people in smaller groups
- Work on more ways for students to get to know one another
- Work in smaller groups more often (more station-based activities) so students have richer experiences in small group interaction
- Have longer incubator sessions

7. **Recommendations and closing thoughts**

**Benefits to Faculty Professional development:**
- Karolyn Kinane has an article under review for the journal “Across the Disciplines” on contemplative writing, explicitly informed by this experience.
- The experience helped all faculty expand the boundaries of their field. Faculty helped each other learn what contemplative approaches to each discipline could look like. We taught each other about the scientific process of focused observation, the literary practice of close-reading, the role of collaboration in the creative process, and how a philosophy of communication undergirds contemplative interactions among people.
- Pedagogically, faculty learned how to collaborate beyond team-teaching.

**Scaling up:**
- We recommend faculty choose who to work with and choose the topic(s) or approaches.
- The university could offer professional development to help faculty develop specific outcomes with timelines, etc. for developing an approach to our work that goes beyond content and also is different from/complementary to problem solving.
- General Education focuses on habits of mind. Faculty require training in what this means.

**Final Reflection on the Incubator Lab:**
- There can be multiple ways of "theming" General Education. What made this approach unique is that both content (curiosity) and approach (contemplative inquiry/pedagogy) was fairly consistent across sections.
- The incubator lab was the strongest component of the course. In addition to articulating the connections among General Education experiences and their relevance to students’ lives, this incubator helped students feel part of something larger than themselves. We might (as a campus conversation)
identify different ways of bringing students together to develop the sense of being part of something bigger.

8. **CourseEval Data**

Provided as separate PDFs