

Therapeutic stress reduction method may guide student success

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As universities around the world look for ways to guide student success, one Northern Arizona University professor has a novel approach.

Heidi Wayment, professor of psychological sciences, calls her approach "the quiet ego," the introspective idea of living in the present moment, remembering we are all interconnected, being open-hearted and striving to grow and learn.

She says that by focusing on each of these ideas and taking the time to contemplate and reflect on what really quiets the ego, students will benefit. Wayment believes this technique will reduce the stress of incoming NAU students, making the transition into college an easier one.

"You know, you don't have to judge yourself so much; you don't need to judge others," Wayment said. "Everyone can relate to the chatter in one's head sometimes being overwhelming, and it's not always positive. The quiet ego is a place of quiet."

Last fall, Wayment performed a study on a group of first-year students interested in learning a stress-reduction method. The 38 students were divided into three groups: one listened to a therapeutic audio recording of quiet ego philosophies, another viewed images through virtual reality glasses and the third group flipped through National Geographic magazines. With one 10-minute session every week, after the nine-week study, the results were analyzed.

"After running tests before and after the study, we found that the stress went down significantly in the group that heard the quiet ego, while it increased in the other two groups... which is normal in the first stress-filled semester of college," Wayment explained.

Wayment is hoping her approach will eventually include brief versions of the quiet ego contemplation recording in an easy-to-do online exercise as a part of Northern Arizona University's First Year Learning Initiative. The initiative is a locally developed faculty-driven program for building academic success in the early college career.

Through the First Year Learning Initiative, incoming freshmen can choose from more than 75 certified courses designed to improve student study skills and develop a better understanding of cultural issues.

In 2013-14, 98 percent of the incoming student population was enrolled in at least one course, a population Wayment thinks could benefit from the quiet ego teachings.

While further studies are being conducted, Wayment is excited at the possibilities of the quiet ego, and how it will help reduce the stress of incoming NAU students, ultimately leading to their graduation and future success.

Provided by Northern Arizona University

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