To: Faculty Development Board  
From: Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, Religion and East Asian Studies  
Date: February 23, 2009  
In Re: Matthies Award

To the Members of FDB:

This is a proposal for the 2008-2009 Matthies Award. I would like to have the opportunity to further my exploration of contemplative education by attending one, or possibly a few, seminars and workshops offered this spring, summer and fall in this rapidly growing pedagogy which has applications for the particular course content of my field, is a resource for teaching and learning in general, and can be applied to co-curricular activities in which I have been involved at Wittenberg.

**Background: The Field of Contemplative Education**  
Contemplative education is a field that integrates meditation and contemplative practices into academic settings. The field is based on decades of experience and research into the way that contemplative practice integrated into more traditional pedagogies enhances the student’s ability to absorb information. In addition to facilitating the achievement of traditional educational goals, contemplative education enhances student mental health, giving strategies for relaxation, and contributes to development of the whole person.¹ I have read several articles to familiarize myself with this pedagogy, many of which give widely varied examples from professors in various disciplines that have used contemplative education in their classrooms.

**Specific Interests and Applications**  
I have only just begun to delve into this pedagogy, which connects to several interests and initiatives I have taken in my teaching and research.

**Teaching**  
I have integrated experiential learning in Religion 134, Introduction to Chinese and Japanese Religion, and Religion 333, Buddhist Thought and Scriptures by incorporating the Monastic Project of which one part is meditation. My rationale for using meditation is to help students

know experientially something they’ve only heard described, although it has been abundantly clear that students are deeply affected personally by engaging in the practice. Inspired by the results of this on-campus experience, in 2006 I proposed and was awarded a grant for student-teacher research that took place on a Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage circuit and integrated experiential/performative pedagogies with academic research. In both of these contexts, I have used a traditional and rigorous academic approach to the material combined with practice that has helped students both understand better the intellectual content of our study even while it presents resources and challenges relating to deeply held beliefs and questions. Teaching Theology and Religion (published through the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion) will publish my article on these pedagogical efforts in their April 2009 issue. One of the reviewers suggested that I include reference to contemplative learning and its relationship to experiential learning; this is when I began to look into contemplative education.

Co-curricular Resource  Pastor Rachel Tune and I have developed a Lenten series that incorporates some of the strategies and practices from the Monastic Project as they pertain to the Christian tradition. In the comparative study of religion it is clear that there is a great deal of overlap in the practices, concerns, and goals of virtually all monastic communities; moreover meditation is an established and growing practice in Christian communities today. From Pastor Tune’s work on campus, and from the response from students who participate in the Monastic Project, we can attest to a deep interest and desire for contemplative practices introduced into a structured, community setting.

Research  The use and transformative effect of experiential learning, and of the value of the contemplative and ritualized components also informs my research on the reconfiguration and reinterpretation of Confucianism in China in the 1930s, and the importance of ritual in moral formation. While I realize that the Matthies Award is to improve teaching and pedagogy, I add this component to my application as research, teaching, and personal experience have been mutually reinforcing in an exciting way during the last five years. I have been reading materials to broaden my understanding of the effects of this practice; this in turn has made me more nuanced in my presentation and explanation of Confucianism in introductory and advanced courses.
Potential Individual and University Benefits
My point of entry into the pedagogy is the Monastic Project I offer to students at least twice a year. Enhancing the objective components and effects of meditation in the Monastic Project, contemplative education uses the practices of that project as a means to increase student focus, learning abilities, and also as an opportunity to contextualize broader meaning and applications beyond the university setting. I hope, over the long term, to learn how to apply approaches to contemplative education to all my courses. I should note that the majority of works I read about using contemplative education in the undergraduate context were NOT by professors of religion, but spanned natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and the fine arts. There may be other Wittenberg faculty interested in this pedagogy, and I could be at least an initial resource. Finally, I am hopeful that the pilot Lenten series run by the Chapel will demonstrate the student interest and another application for other contemplative practices at Wittenberg that are outside the classroom.

Resources for Training
Since I am just beginning in this field, there are a number of conferences and training sessions that I would like to attend. The bulk of these occur through the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, Mindfulness in Education Network, Association for Contemplative Mind in Education (ACHME), and Naropa University.

I have already participated in a webinar hosted by ACHME president Arthur Zajonc (Amherst College) and Mirabai Bush, Senior Fellow of Center for Contemplative Mind. In March I will participate in a second webinar; and I plan in April to attend a day long seminar in NYC in April on mindful learning and the integration of this pedagogy in higher education; I am hoping that I can attend a faculty retreat in November on the subject. There is also a weekend introduction to contemplative education at Naropa University in Colorado that I would like to attend during the summer.

A Note on Pedagogical Validity
I think that this pedagogy has a number of obvious applications given my field of East Asian religion: at the very least students who have experience meditation have a different understanding of what is described in our textbooks. I am aware, however, that contemplative education used across the curriculum in the academic classroom may seem like a soft touchy-feely hippie-style phenomenologically-trained-historians-of-religion-
go-native sort of method. Because this pedagogy is unusual, and probably suspect to many in the academy, I wanted to include a short note about studies that support this pedagogy, and mention a few of the institutions that have embraced it and are expanding its application.

In addition to the work done by Zajonc who uses contemplative education in physics classes he teaches at Amherst, Harold Roth at Brown University has established a Center for Contemplative Studies that studies and reports on contemplative education and is a resource for the community. CUNY has a group of faculty from a range of departments who provide resources to those who wish to introduce contemplative education into their courses; Smith College hosts a week long seminar on contemplative education each week in the summer. Finally, the professional affiliations of dozens if not hundred of faculty engaged in this pedagogy indicate that this is a serious and effective mode of teaching and learning.

For those who prefer their evidence presented via scientific studies, there has been increasing research in the social sciences and neuroscience that shows that the practice of contemplation enhances and transforms the ability to learn. Contemplative education training, in which the student learns how to focus and then practices attaining focus, increases neuroplasticity, changing the very pathways of thought and association of the brain. There are many relevant studies to support this; here I will cite work done by Alvaro Pascual-Leone at Harvard University. Pascual-Leone has shown that the brain is changed by mental repetition (as brought about by the practice of focus in meditation) in the same way that it is changed by being physically performed. His example involved brain imaging in subjects playing a piano drill repeatedly, first with their hands, and then in their minds. The point here is that approaching material in a way that is parallel that in contemplative pedagogies is shown to activate and develop parts of the brain that lead to increased capacity and abilities in performance, memory, and overall learning.

**Conclusion**
That’s enough from me. Thanks for considering this application; let me know if you have any questions; and I look forward to hearing from you.

---