ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AND SELF-CARE THROUGH STUDENT MINDFULNESS TRAINING: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF LAW

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AND SELF-CARE THROUGH STUDENT

MINDFULNESS TRAINING: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

SCHOOL OF LAW

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Educational organizations are being impacted by the growing need for sustained student mental wellness support. Student populations are increasingly diverse and bring varied life experiences, challenges outside of the classroom, and additional stressors to their academic programs. In some educational contexts, such as legal education, the nature and course of study seem to elevate or accentuate some of these needs. Most educators are ill-prepared or unwilling to handle concerns beyond academic instruction and may unknowingly contribute to student stress instead of intervening and mitigating student concerns. In this study, I aimed to address student mental health among those suffering from high levels of stress or anxiety in a legal education setting by improving their stress management, self-compassion, general mental health, and self-care practices. The goal was to teach students mindfulness techniques and appropriate coping skills to benefit them in their course of study and careers.

Keywords: law school, mental health, mindfulness, self-compassion, self-care

The Disquisition

The disquisition is formal, problem-based discourse. The disquisition is closely aligned with the scholar-practitioner role of Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) students and thus takes on a practical focus rather than the theoretical focus of traditional Ph.D. dissertations. The purpose of the disquisition is "to document the scholarly development of leadership expertise in organizational improvement" (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5). The Ed.D. program at WCU nurtures and matures students as both scholars and practitioners who are trained to understand systems and institutional challenges and opportunities through a lens of research and scholarship. Students apply their knowledge, using their institutional access and positionality, directly to the educational institutions where they lead. The Ed.D. is an applied degree, and the disquisition is similarly an applied capstone experience for doctoral work. The disquisition at WCU specifically utilizes an Improvement Science methodology, is shaped by critical theory and scholarly research, and engages the candidate in the application of the concepts in an applied manner through the development and implementation of an intervention within their local institution, focused on improvement of equity within that system. Ultimately, the disquisition serves as documentation and assessment of an improvement initiative that "contributes to a concrete good to the larger community and the dissemination of new relevant knowledge" (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5).

ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AND SELF-CARE THROUGH STUDENT MINDFULNESS TRAINING: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF LAW

This first section will provide an overview of the problem in the larger educational community and will define the problem of practice in a particular context. Furthermore, through a literature review and examination of causal analysis, the problem of practice is addressed. Finally, with an eye toward social justice, the problem of practice is examined to determine the impact on a variety of communities.

Introduction of the Problem of Practice

Educational organizations are being impacted by the growing need for sustained student wellness support. Student populations are increasingly diverse and bring varied life experiences, challenges outside of the classroom, and additional stressors to their academic settings. In some educational contexts, such as legal education, the nature and course of study seem to elevate or accentuate some of these needs. Often, educators are ill-prepared or unwilling to handle concerns beyond academic instruction and may unknowingly contribute to student stress instead of intervening and mitigating student concerns (Organ et al., 2016). This study aimed to address student mental health among those who were suffering from elevated levels of stress or anxiety in a legal education setting by improving their stress management, self-compassion, general mental health, and self-care practices. The goal was to teach students mindfulness techniques to mitigate stress and appropriate coping skills that could benefit them in their course of study and future careers.

Review of the Literature

In law schools, student struggles with wellness and mental health have been studied for decades. While the existence of the problem is well-known, there is limited research on actual interventions that work with this unique population of students. National and local media have recently focused on lawyer wellness, mental health, substance use, and a recent trend of lawyers who die by suicide (Flores & Arce, 2014). Issues involving lawyer wellness and the rate of law students with declining mental health has been well known to law schools and the practicing bar for quite some time (Shanfield & Benjamin, 1985). While the development of depression, anxiety, substance use, and other mental health issues in law students and lawyers has been a challenge for decades, a recent study with recommendations has shed new light on law student wellness and has reinvigorated efforts to improve response and services.

Law students continue to report a greater frequency of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse issues than other graduate students (Organ et al., 2016). The authors indicated that although previous studies and reports "included numerous recommendations to improve the situation for law students … law school officials tasked with assisting law students" failed to implement appropriate measures (p. 145 - 146). The current generation of law students is more open than their predecessors in talking about their struggles and seeking help when necessary (Marie, 2017). These students have also been requesting more mental health services at their institutions (Ward, 2018).

Published results from the *Survey of Law Student Well Being* have again called on law schools, law school faculty, and law school administrators to address the mental health, substance use, and wellness concerns that have continually been examined around the country (Organ et al., 2016). However, while the *Survey of Law Student Well Being* is new, and some of

the methodology and implications of the research are broader than those within studies of the past, law student mental health, substance use, and wellness have been areas of research for decades (Silver, 1968). While many of these studies, including the recent work by Organ et al. (2016) inform the field regarding the student experience and the stressors that students experience, each study continues to leave holes in the research, particularly as it relates to interventions that will lead to success with law student populations.

In one of the seminal studies, a second-year law student interviewed first year law students at the University of Wisconsin School of Law about the stress and anxiety they experienced as students (Silver, 1968). Through these interviews, Silver determined that some of the causes for anxiety in the first semester of law school include: (a) high expectations, (b) methods employed in law school instruction, (c) the unfamiliarity that students have with the method of study, and (d) the value placed on first semester grades (Silver, 1968). Hedegard (1979) in a study on career related interests, attitudes, and personality traits provided interesting results on changes in students during the first year of law school. Hedegard focused on intellectual introversion, social extroversion, impulse expression, and anxiety. However, this study only examined students in the entering law school class at Brigham Young University. Due to the demographics at that school at the time of the study, the participants were not necessarily representative of law school entering classes around the country. For example, 98% of the participants were male, 60% were married, 35% had children, and 98% were members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. As a result, the ability to generalize the results of this study to other populations around the country is limited.

Other research has compared the relative stress of law students to the stress felt by students in other professional schools. For example, in a study published in 1983, researchers

indicated a level of surprise that law students reported experiencing greater stress levels than that of similarly situated medical students (Heins et al., 1983). While this study did reference some potential causes for the differences in the experiences of the two groups of students, there was not much in the way of making strong recommendations or testing interventions. Subsequent studies and publications inspired, at least partially, by the work of Heins, et al. (1983) reported similar findings of law students reporting greater levels of stress than medical students or the public (Benjamin et al., 1986; Shanfield & Benjamin, 1985). These articles did not list any outcomes regarding interventions that were tested and the recommendations that were made by the authors were limited in scope.

Research that compared the relative stress of law students and medical students continued into the mid-1980s (Kellner et al., 1986). Again, the level of stress reported by law students was greater than that reported by medical students. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, these studies continued to be silent on any changes that law schools attempted to make to their programs, services, or culture. The size of the sample and its locality may limit the generalizability of the results. In the study by Kellner et al. (1986) only 30 law students and 30 medical students were surveyed, and all were students at the University of New Mexico.

After several decades of research in various contexts and on a variety of participants, in 1999, researchers at the University of Wyoming evaluated this research and recommended that future studies attempt to use hypothesis testing to study law school culture and student distress, to evaluate depression and anxiety within the law school population, and to test theories of what causes law student distress (Dammeyer & Nunez, 1999).

Taking the recommendation from Dammeyer and Nunez (1999), other researchers have reviewed the anecdotal and empirical research of others and made their own observations and

recommendations from where they sit in the academy (Krieger, 2002). While Krieger's article added to the growing literature in the field of law student wellness, his attempt to utilize survey results from the general population and apply them to the law context might not easily translate to the research in this area. Additionally, like previous researchers, he made limited recommendations to help improve the law school experience. These recommendations are problematic for multiple reasons. At the outset, as he admits, law schools and their faculties are historically slow to make significant changes. Also, as noted with earlier studies, his recommendations are not interventions tested and accepted as productive with this population. Following up on this article, Krieger was again involved in a study that is one of the more recently relevant pieces that support the movement to improve student wellness (Sheldon & Krieger, 2004). In the study, law students from Florida State University and, to promote diversity of law student experience, a different law school that was situated differently (i.e. not public, not regionally in Florida, etc.) were surveyed about their wellbeing, values, and motivation. Once again, the results painted a bleak picture of the law school experience. While this study is helpful in restating the issues that law students face, it would have been more powerful if it had included participants from a greater number and variety of schools. Also, the results related to well-being, values, and motivation might not resonate with law school faculty who can implement changes in legal education. Sheldon and Krieger (2007) followed this study with a longitudinal review of law student distress measured in the same groups over three years. As a result of this study, the authors recommended that increasing a law student's feeling of autonomy would enhance learning and emotional adjustment, and eventually improve the mental health of the student (Sheldon & Krieger, 2007).

For decades, while researchers and law school faculty and administrators studied student wellbeing, students were somewhat silent in the literature. They were study participants and would be willing to anecdotally share their struggles with members of their community. However, in 2014, students at Yale Law School took on some of the responsibility of this movement (Yale Law School Mental Health Alliance, 2014). While the methodology and results of this study are like the ones that preceded it, the Yale study is meaningful for other significant reasons. First, it demonstrates that students at Yale Law School, one of the top schools in the country, experienced the same difficulties that have been studied and reported on for decades at other schools. Harnessing this energy and urgency will be important for those who research and work in this area.

The most recent study by Organ et al. (2016) continued to stoke the fire of this decades-long discussion. While again reestablishing that law students have a difficult experience in school, this study bears the most relevance because of the number of schools that participated and the inclusion of questions in the survey instrument regarding substance use (Organ et al., 2016). The survey results indicated that alcohol abuse and binge drinking continued to be a problem for law students, the use of illegal drugs or misuse of prescription drugs was common (32% admitted drug use within the last year), and a significant number of law students screened positive for anxiety (over 33% of respondents) (Organ et al., 2016). Compounding these concerns was the response that most of the students who need help for mental health or substance use issues were not likely to seek help (Organ et al., 2016).

Overall, the depth and breadth of the research on law student mental wellness does a thorough job in identifying the issue that exist within the academy. While many of the studies detailed above have made recommendations, there is limited research on what sort of

interventions will be successful in this area. Utilizing a community approach, integrating wellness activities into parts of the curriculum, and getting participation and support from faculty and staff should make a difference in the lives of law students. The work that needs to be done to address these issues in the law school experience and in the legal profession can be overwhelming. However, as these studies have shown, without taking the time and making the effort to create a change, the problems will continue to occur, and students will continue to suffer.

Causal Analysis

At the start of any improvement initiative, researchers must do a causal analysis. By engaging in a causal analysis process, researchers help to ensure that the that the intervention addressed the root cause or causes of the problem being studied. The causal analysis attempts to identify causes of the problem and why results are occurring. By doing so, researchers are forced to identify the multiple factors that can lead to a result and how those factors can, at times, engage with each other.

When engaging in a causal analysis of the problems that law students have with self-care, self-compassion, and mental health, several areas for intervention were identified (see Figure 1). A Fishbone, or Ishikawa diagram was used to identify potential areas to target with this law school population. The Fishbone Diagram was developed in the 1960s to enhance quality control in Japanese shipyards (Jayswal et al., 2011). Used in the context of my problem of practice, I was able to identify potential causes to the problem of "Poor Law Student Mental Health". The large bones on the diagram represent one of the primary causes of the problem being addressed, while the smaller bones help to identify some of the smaller points that add to the primary cause.

7

Figure 1

Fishbone Diagram

Fishbone Diagram

Community Factors

Historical Factors

Self determination

Biological

Time management

Societeal

Cultural

Poor Student Mental Health

Overcomntment to work and extracurriculars

High stakes assessments

Marketability for post-graduate opportunites

Adjustment to new workload

Post-graduate finances.

Limited amount of feedback

Post-grad pressures

Academic Environment

When considering the causes that lead to "Poor Student Mental Health", primary factors of history, the academic environment, community pressure, and post-graduate pressure were considered.

With regard to an individual student's history or family history with mental health challenges, researchers have consistently found that "law students were as psychologically healthy as the general population when they enter law school" (Reich, 2020, p. 378). With that in mind, two things come to the forefront. First, that law students, as a population, are not immune

8

to mental health challenges. Next, it stands to reason that we should consider what happens during law school that increases the mental health challenges.

As early as 1968, the research done at the University of Wisconsin School of Law demonstrated that students experienced anxiety due to the academic environment of law schools that maintain high expectations even while students adjust to a new method of study with which they have little familiarity (Silver, 1968). Even recently, commenters have noted that "comparative grading measure has a significant impact on the mental health of students as the grades become a direct reflection of their ability compared to their peers" (Cavanaugh, 2023, p. 807).

Regarding community factors and post-graduate pressures, researchers have found that extrinsic rewards such as powerful jobs and lucrative salaries are not supportive of student well-being, while autonomy, relatedness, and competence lead to better student well-being (Kreiger & Sheldon, 2014). Unfortunately, during law school, especially during the formative first year, students are often focused on these external rewards and are not provided time to fill their cups with other, more self-rewarding endeavors.

For this study, it was determined that academics and post-graduate pressures were too far out of the zone of my influence to be considered. For similar reasons, historical factors were not addressed. In hindsight, however, based on the global context (pandemic and racial unrest within the country) in which this study was completed, it is hard to imagine that historical factors did not have an impact.

Community factors were settled on as an area of influence. Once again, while I could not necessarily impact how law school, particularly during the first year of study, impacts an individual student's feelings of self-determination or pressure of time management, I theorized

that, through *Koru Mindfulness*, I could impact a student's ability to respond effectively to these stressors.[1]

Social Justice and Equity Implications

When examining concerns regarding poor student mental health in the law school context, there are a series of connections that can be made with both social justice and equity implications. Regarding an overarching issue, due to the nature of law school and the limited number of academic assessments used with students, the impact on students without an external resource to help explain the process, students can be at a disadvantage when it comes to achievement. Additionally, while there are mental health services available to all students through campus offices and programs initiated through the law school or law school partners, it is possible that students with greater resources will already have established or can more easily establish a relationship with a mental health care provider.

While there are programs in place at the law school level and within certain affinity groups at the school, enrollment data demonstrates that the law school still has work to do to ensure that the make-up of its student body is more representative of society. With limited access to peers, it is possible that the causes of stress on students could have a disproportionate impact on students who are not as thoroughly represented within the school. For example, students from traditionally underrepresented groups including BIPOC students, first generation students, or LGBTQIA students may have a harder time finding mentorship from upper-level students, staff, or faculty with shared life experiences. These mental health challenges can be compounded by a curriculum that does not always address the inequities that are inherent in our legal system. For

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[1] Since the implementation of this intervention, Koru Mindfulness has rebranded as the Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults (https://mindfulnessinstituteforemergingadults.com/). While the name has changed, the program, efforts, and intended results remain consistent.

example, during the mental health crisis experienced during the COVID pandemic that intersected with the social unrest caused by police shootings of people of color, one study noted that students who claim multiple intersecting identities that have traditionally been marginalized can have these disparities amplified (Schendel, 2021).

Finally, when thinking about the professional activities and careers that law school graduates participate in, it is important to consider the different level of resources that are available to public interest lawyers when compared to lawyers who work in private practice. Public interest lawyers, some of whom provide representation and legal services to traditionally marginalized populations typically have fewer financial resources available to them to support their mental health. That is, because they are paid at a lower rate than some attorneys in private practice, the public interest attorneys do not have the same expendable capital to support some of their mental health needs. This can lead to less robust legal representation of their clients or lawyers moving on quickly from some of these public interest jobs, both of which lead to the clients from marginalized populations receiving services that are less consistent or sustainable than members of the community who hire a private attorney.

The Local Context

Understanding the systems in educational programs that contribute to student stress is imperative to be able to properly address the issue of poor student mental wellness. Knowledge of organizational theory helps develop awareness regarding the potential impact of change ideas. Understanding multiple organizational theories allows one to fully understand the formal and informal attributes of an organization and the barriers faced when working to implement changes in academic settings. Institutional theory provides a framework for looking at social institutions by studying "social processes, obligations, or actualities that come to take on rule-like status in

11

social thought or action" (Kite, 2013, 0:27). Institutions can be social, political, or organizational and operate to drive behavior, perceptions, and choices (Kite, 2013). Viewing education as an institution, the institution provides people with early exposure to others regarding social norms and ways of thinking.

The University of North Carolina (UNC) School of Law, particularly as it sits in relation to the greater University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill community, is an open system with complex relationships and operations (Scott & Davis, 2007). For example, there are many decision makers outside of the organization, such as state or federal legislators, who can impact the community. Moreover, through some of the work of the faculty, staff, and students, the law school seeks to impact the world outside the organization's walls.

The School of Law is a professional school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) thus its proximity to the main campus makes many resources and opportunities available to students. For example, there are athletic and exercise facilities available through the Campus Recreation Office, excellent medical and psychological services offered through Student Health, and other cultural activities that are available to all students at the University. Some of these resources are not available at other law schools that are not connected to a larger university or at law schools connected to larger universities that do not have the breadth or depth of services offered by UNC-CH.

At UNC School of Law there are three distinct groups internal to the community that can address the problem. First, the faculty of the School, both full-time and adjunct, is made up of world class scholars and practitioners at an institution that is considered Research Doctoral - Comprehensive (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). The faculty view their role primarily as researchers and teachers. If a student is struggling with something not directly

related to course content, faculty members want to make sure that the student is getting the necessary help, but they do not necessarily want to be a part of that process. Secondly, the school staff (both administrative and clerical) have specific roles to fill to ensure the organization functions properly. Since the staff work with students while they are enrolled in school, as opposed to having them in a class during one semester, the staff can be more holistically invested than the faculty in the general welfare of the student body. The student body is comprised of students who have a healthy competitive nature about them. That is, they know that they are graded against their classmates, as is the case in most law schools, and want to do well. However, they do not want to do well at the expense of the welfare of another student.

Historically, faculty and staff at the School of Law have stressed to students that once they enroll at UNC School of Law, they become part of the "Carolina Law Family" and that the school will work with them and do what it can to help them be successful as students and in the practice of law. However, when it comes to stress, anxiety, or depression that students might experience in law school, or their general wellness, the school has tended to be more reactive than proactive. That is, once a student is in distress, members of the community are available to counsel them, provide them with the tools to get back on track academically, and to direct them to resources on campus or in the community to address the stressors. However, except for a few times a year, there is not a great deal that the faculty, staff, or students do to proactively address the mental health of students. On the contrary, it could be argued that some of the activities or habits of the individual groups could lead to some of the struggles that students have with maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Organ et al., 2016). For example, the isolating nature of the study of law, the high stakes testing environment, and the class ranking system all can play into student stress and anxiety, causing a decline in student mental health. While we must provide activities

that enhance student wellness, we must also tackle the parts of legal study that inherently lead to unhealthy practices that students might adopt. While the former is a challenge, the latter can often be met with skepticism from some in the community. There is concern from certain faculty about changing the culture of legal study too much because some faculty believe that students who cannot be successful and healthy while in law school will have a similarly difficult time in the practice of law.

When considering how to address the problem of poor student mental wellness, there are numerous resources available through main campus offices that will allow students to develop or maintain positive habits aimed at improving their mental health. There are several groups within the local legal community that can be utilized to provide support or guidance to students as they encounter problems while in school or as they enter legal practice. For example, through the North Carolina Bar Association, the BarCARES program is able to provide information and counseling to students and through the State Bar; staff and volunteers from the North Carolina Lawyers Assistance Program can do the same. More importantly, there is a very strong and supportive alumni network that is continually looking to engage with current students. Being able to tap into the alumni base as a resource moving forward will allow students to see that positive habits developed in law school will lead to success in the classroom and in practice.

For the last several years, the Office of Student Services (now the Office of Student Development) has offered a week of programming in the fall aimed at addressing some of these issues facing the community. This "Wellness Week" provides students with information about – and opportunities to take advantage of – resources to maintain positive health while enrolled in law school. The school has held programs on mental and physical health, managing stress, financial wellness, and other activities aimed at getting students out

of any unhealthy law school routine. While these programs have been a step in the right direction, a more comprehensive and ongoing strategy needs to be employed. To that end, after this improvement initiative, School of Law hired an embedded counselor to be available to provide triage and short-term therapy to students.

In the local environment, through my role as the assistant dean for student development, I became aware of mental health concerns at the institution through individual student disclosures made through support seeking, community reports when students were exhibiting concerning behaviors or were in crisis, student disclosure through the bar application process, and group disclosures when those disclosing believed that they could point to a reason for their mental health concerns and were asking for my assistance in addressing the cause. The information received ranged from gentle nudges from classmates to reach out to an individual because they were not in class, to students experiencing panic attacks in my office, to calls from family members informing me that a student had been admitted to the hospital due to mental health concerns.

As a community of advocates, in Fall 2017 the students rallied and worked together on a proposal to the law school administration in which they raised their concerns about student mental health at the institution. The proposal was submitted to the administration in January 2018 and requested that the law school hire an on-site counselor. This proposal and the advocacy on the part of the students was instrumental in the law school hiring an embedded counselor for the beginning of the fall 2021 semester.

While the presence of an embedded counselor at the school will help students who the counselor can see for brief treatment, a broader program that teaches students skills could be better positioned to help students become more mindful, reduce their stress, and

practice better self-care.

Theory of Improvement and Improvement Initiative

This section addresses the improvement initiative as it related to the problem of practice and the theory of improvement. Both short-term and long-term aims of the initiative are discussed. For illustrative purposes, a driver diagram is used to demonstrate how the change ideas were narrowed to support the development of the improvement initiative. Finally, a review of the literature on the change idea and improvement plan supports the actions undertaken.

Theory of Improvement

At the start of my disquisition, my theory of improvement held that: *Providing students with mindfulness training will increase their capacity to manage their own stress and anxiety levels in the short term, which will lead to improved stress management and self-compassion and improved student outcomes in the long term. Outcomes may include enhanced levels of student stress management and self-compassion that will lead to a reduction in stress and anxiety, an increase in self-care practices, and an overall improvement in student mental wellness.*

Proposed Improvement Initiative

Schools are complex and open systems, impacted by many environmental factors simultaneously at play. The way students learn and their ability to handle the academic program and their cocurricular responsibilities can be impacted by many factors, both internal and external to the academic organization. Due to these challenges, it is important that schools implement strategies to mitigate these challenges and enhance each student's ability to succeed. Bryk et al. (2010) offered evidence that:

16

trust formation in a school community is a key mechanism in advancing meaningful

improvement initiatives. Returning to our 'baking a cake' metaphor…if the five essential

supports are the core ingredients for school improvement, then trust represents the social

energy, or the 'oven's heat,' necessary for transforming these basic ingredients into

comprehensive school change. (p. 157)

The importance of relationships and trust building is frequently overlooked by school leadership

and central offices. If leaders and organizations are serious about bringing about significant

change, relationship building between students and professional members of the institution is

key. One way to help develop these important relationships is for the institution to provide

meaningful opportunities to develop and increase students' chances of success.

Resiliency has been defined "as a developmental process, reflecting the capacity for

positive adjustment in difficult life circumstances as opposed to a trait" (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013,

p. 1). As a process, rather than a trait, it stands to reason that resilience, or the capacity to adjust

should be able to be developed. At its heart, mindfulness is "general receptivity and full

engagement with the present moment. To further grasp the definition of mindfulness, the term

can be contrasted with experiences of mindlessness that occur when attention and awareness

capacities are scattered due to preoccupation with past memories or future plans and worries"

(Black, 2011, p. 1). Mindfulness training for adults has been shown to improve the social and

emotional wellness of the adults, making them better prepared to handle their professional or

educational responsibilities. Within the law school context, experts have theorized that

supporting an "emotionally intelligent culture that pervades the school, including the attitudes of

key staff" and faculty will have a positive impact on the experience and wellbeing of students

(James, 2011, p. 231). That is, creating a community where students are encouraged to reflect on

their educational experience will have a "significant advantage – not only in the effectiveness of their learning strategies, but also in coping with the frustrations and demands of law school and their later experiences in legal practice" (James, 2011, p. 223). Because "legal academics have significant influence on the development of values and attitudes in their students," it is imperative that the law school faculties and staffs support these initiatives (James, 2011, p. 232). A program developed and tested at Duke University has shown promise in improving student mindfulness, perceived stress, and self-compassion (Greeson et al., 2014). Enhancing these factors will lead to an improvement of student self-care and well-being in my context.

<center>Review of Literature Related to the Improvement Initiative</center>

In a study of first year undergraduate and first year law students, researchers found that a short-term intervention that included "acceptance, mindfulness, and values articulation" resulted in lower depression and higher acceptance (observing, rather than judging) rates among participants (Danitz & Orsillo, 2014). In this study, researchers provided a single 90-minute acceptance-based behavioral therapy session for first year students (undergraduate students and law students) at Suffolk University, a private school in Boston, Massachusetts (Danitz & Orsillo, 2014). The training and follow-up correspondence with participants included some mindfulness-based modalities (Danitz & Orsillo, 2014). While this study is encouraging for the mindfulness-based intervention, the results might not be readily transferable based on the nature of the intervention involved in the study (an intervention that included mindfulness modalities as part of the program vs. an intervention that will be based completely in mindfulness). In examining the effects on other professional school students, when mindfulness sessions have been introduced to dental students, most of the students indicated that the sessions impacted their professional engagement positively (Lovas et al., 2008). Again, the work by Lovas et al. (2008)

<center>18</center>

has limitations when compared to this law school intervention. First, in the Lovas study, students were recruited during orientation to their program and were exposed to some mindfulness practices and discussion during orientation sessions. Furthermore, having an intervention significantly supported by a senior member of the faculty could have a more substantial impact on student participation than one that is organized by a member of the administration. That is, having a member of the faculty support such a program could allow mindfulness to be seen as a beneficial part of the curriculum, as opposed to something that is tangentially related to student success.

Researchers found that training that included *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* increased empathy and reduced anxiety in graduate healthcare students (Barbosa et al., 2014). This reduction in anxiety and increase in empathy would lead to enhanced stress management and self-compassion. For pre-medical and medical students, researchers found that participating in a *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* program reduced reports of depression and anxiety, and increased empathy levels (Shapiro et al., 1998). My design team and I made choices for this Improvement Initiative based on the findings from the literature reviewed above.

Improvement Methodologies and Design

This section sets out the design and methodology utilized for this improvement initiative. The membership and roles of the design team are provided to demonstrate various perspectives that were utilized throughout the initiative. Finally, the process used during the improvement initiative and timelines for the implementation are detailed.

Design team

The design team included me, the associate dean for student affairs, the associate dean for academic affairs, and the mindfulness facilitator. The associate dean for student affairs had been at the school of law for more than five years, previously served as the assistant dean for student services, and worked in professional development at a law firm in Raleigh, North Carolina. The associate dean for academic affairs was in her fifth year in that role at the law school and had worked in similar capacities at other law schools. The mindfulness facilitator had been trained through the Center for Koru Mindfulness. I met with each member of the design team to discuss best practices for implementing student training, timeline of implementation, and obstacles/concerns to be addressed throughout the intervention process. During the development of the intervention idea, I made the decision to leave students off the design team. This decision was made for a variety of reasons. First, during the planning process of summer 2020, students were away from campus doing summer internships, which traditionally have their full attention. Next, with the students having to shift their academic modality during the Spring 2020 semester, I already experienced students reporting a higher level of stress. I did not want to increase the stress load on a student or group of students by asking them to engage as part of the design team. Finally, with the modality of instruction for the Fall 2020 semester uncertain during the design process, I did not want to include students on the design team and confuse the decision regarding in-person or remote Koru and in-person or remote classes.

Improvement Initiative

Improvement Initiative Procedures

As scholar practitioner, I met with each member of the design team during the summer of 2020 via Zoom. In September and again in November, all students pursuing a Juris Doctor

degree at the School of Law were invited to participate in this program via class listserv email solicitation (see Appendices A and B). Students who responded to the email and indicated that they wanted to participate in the Improvement Initiative were asked to complete an electronic informed consent form (see Appendix C) and the three pre-Koru surveys (see Appendices D, E, and F). Once the participants completed the informed consent, they were sent the link to sign up for the weekly Koru classes and the Zoom link for participating. At the end of each 4-week cycle and again 6-weeks post cycle, participants were prompted via email to complete surveys.

Implementation Timeline

The timeline utilized during this improvement initiative allowed for one complete four week-long PDSA implementation cycle for two separate groups of students. The program was implemented during the Fall 2020 semester from September 29 to October 20 and again at the end of the fall 2020 semester from November 30 to December 21 (see Figures 2 and 3). At the beginning of the improvement initiative, the program was designed to go through one complete cycle, with a single group of students. However, when the original timeline changed, and student participation was lower than expected, the decision was made to enroll a second group in the program between semesters.

I suspect that enrollment numbers were low due to the lack of student engagement during the COVID pandemic, student attention being focused elsewhere (academics or family obligations), and students experiencing Zoom fatigue. To help recruit students, I reached out individually to other staff and faculty at the school who have interests that align with Koru or my expected outcomes hoping that they would be interested in the program and encourage student participation. For example, other student affairs staff, writing faculty, chairs or members of faculty committees that focus on student wellness or diversity. Through my outreach, I received

little to no response from members of the school community that I contacted. This result seems to support my theory of overwhelm or engagement on the most pressing things. That is, if faculty and staff did not show enough interest to respond, it would stand that it would be difficult to expect students to engage in the program.
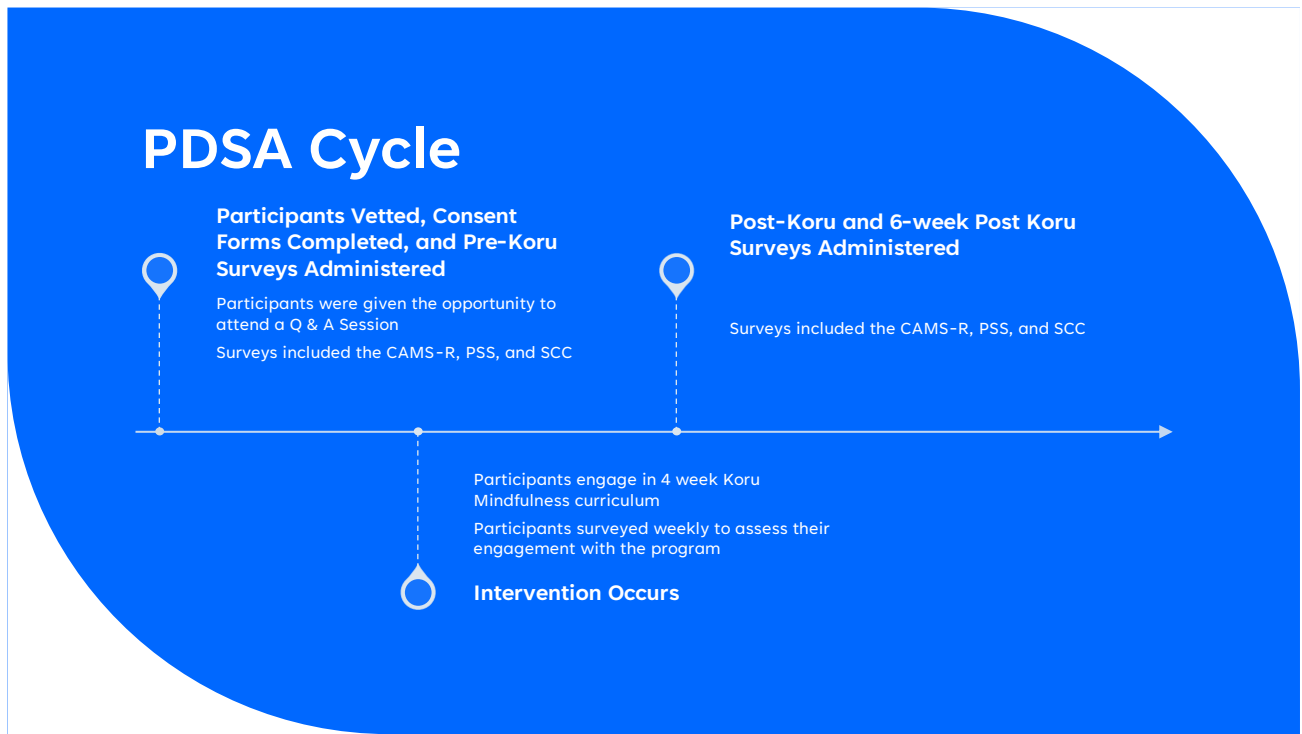
Figure 2

Implementation Timeline

Figure 3

PDSA Cycle

PDSA Cycle

Participants Vetted, Consent Forms Completed, and Pre-Koru Surveys Administered

Participants were given the opportunity to attend a Q & A Session

Surveys included the CAMS-R, PSS, and SCC

Post-Koru and 6-week Post Koru Surveys Administered

Surveys included the CAMS-R, PSS, and SCC

Participants engage in 4 week Koru Mindfulness curriculum

Participants surveyed weekly to assess their engagement with the program

Intervention Occurs

Expected Outcomes

In the short-term, results were expected to demonstrate an increase in mindfulness qualities and self-compassion (self-kindness vs. self-judgment, community humanity vs. isolation, and mindfulness vs. identification) as measured through pre, post, and 6 weeks post survey data. The short-term results were also expected to demonstrate a decrease in the stress that participants felt as measured through pre, post, and 6-week post survey data. In the long term, this intervention has the desired goal of students having an increase in law school success, bar passage, and job placement. Data regarding law school success, bar passage, and job placement was not collected as part of this study.

Formative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology

The improvement initiative was planned by using the framework of Improvement Science developed by Langley et al. (2009). Using this framework, responses were collected every week to measure participant engagement in the program (session attendance, mindfulness practice, and mindfulness integration). The short survey, which I developed, was used to inform areas of focus for the following week's class to encourage more engagement in the process.

Formative Evaluation of Improvement Initiative

The plan for formative assessment of this intervention was to use weekly surveys to measure participant engagement in the intervention and address any questions or concerns they had with the Mindfulness program (see Appendix G). During each 4-week program, the weekly surveys were reviewed, and I met with the Mindfulness program facilitator to discuss any issues raised in the surveys so that she could address them in the group session the following week. Through weekly surveys, participants were asked about their attendance at the previous week's training session, how regularly they completed a 10-minute daily mindfulness practice, and how regularly they utilized manfulness techniques outside of their daily 10-minute mindfulness practice sessions. Through the surveys, over the course of both cohorts, participants reported attending each session, that they engaged in a 10-minute daily mindfulness practice an average of 3.5 days per week, and that they used mindfulness techniques outside of their 10-minute practice session an average of 3.32 days per week.

Balancing measures are used to monitor and address any unintended consequences that result from the implementation of a change idea (Langley et al., 2009). As a balancing measure, on a weekly basis the first cohort of participants were asked to report their academic class preparation and attendance. Since the second cohort of participants engaged in the program

between semesters, their class preparation and attendance were not monitored. As the scholar practitioner, I monitored the responses to ensure that the program was not having any unintended negative impact on the educational program of participants. Since the second cohort of students participated in the intervention at a time when classes were not in session, these balancing questions were removed from the formative assessments. At no point during the intervention did any participant report that engaging in the program had negatively impacted their class attendance or class preparation.

Formative Evaluation Results and Response

With one PDSA cycle run with each cohort and with session attendance consistent from the participants, there were not many substantive changes to the delivery of the program. However, as scholar practitioner, I continued to meet weekly with the mindfulness facilitator to discuss ways to encourage mindfulness practice and daily integration of mindfulness techniques from participants.

<p align="center">**Summative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology**</p>

Summative data were collected from participants using a variety of tools that have previously been used to study or similar programs. These tools were the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale Revised (CAMS-R), the Perceived Stress Scale, and the Self-Compassion Scale.

In the summative evaluation process, all items from all surveys were used and the participants were asked to complete each survey separately. The surveys were distributed via email and the results were collected using Qualtrics survey software. Participants were asked to complete the surveys pre-Koru, post-Koru, and again, six-weeks post-Koru. While there were two separate cohorts of participants and the mindfulness programs occurred at different times

25

(fall 2020 semester and during winter break 2020), for purposes of data analysis, the survey results were combined within each assessment tool.

Summative Evaluation Analyses and Results

Participants

Participants included students at UNC School of Law who were pursuing a Juris Doctor degree. Participants were solicited via email sent from a generic alias email account, to limit any institutional pressure that students might have felt to participate. Once students indicated an interest in participating in the study, they were invited to a question-and-answer session where they could inquire about additional details of the initiative. The email solicitation was sent to school organized and monitored class listservs (e.g. classof2023lawstudents@listserv.unc.edu). Of all the students contacted via email listserv, 10 participants completed the informed consent and the pre-Koru surveys. One participant withdrew from the first cohort and one student participated in the first and second cohorts. Demographic or other school-related information (e.g. 1L, 2L, 3L) was not collected.

Quantitative Results and Analysis. When the intervention was planned, it was anticipated that the survey results from pre-Koru, post-Koru, and six weeks post-Koru would be compared using a t-test. The t-test would allow the means of the survey results to be compared to see if there was any significant change in the means resulting from the improvement initiative. However, when only four participants stayed engaged with the fall 2020 program and only an additional five signed up for the winter 2020 program, the lower sample size forced a reevaluation of the analysis. With only nine total participants the data were evaluated using descriptive statistics.

CAMSR

The Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale Revised (CAMS-R), developed by

Feldman et al. (2007), is used to evaluate mindfulness qualities among subjects (see Appendix

D). This tool measures a participant by totaling the score on 12 questions (with one question

reverse scored). The greater the score, the more mindful the participant.

Table 1

CAMS-R Results

CAMS-R Question	Pre-Koru Average	Post-Koru Average	6 weeks Post-Koru Average
1	2	2.25	2
2	2.9	3	1
3	2.4	1.75	2
4	2.1	1.5	2
5	2.5	2.5	3
6	1.8	2	2
7	2.6	2.25	2
8	2	2	2
9	1.8	2.5	3
10	2.3	.25	3
11	2.2	2.25	3
12	1.9	2	1
Total	26.5	26.25	26

As a group, participant scores on the CAMS-R stayed consistent when evaluated pre-

Koru, post-Koru, and 6-weeks post-Koru, with the mindfulness score dropping .25 points at each

assessment, meaning that participants were measuring as being less mindful post-Koru and six

weeks post-Koru (see Table 1).

Perceived Stress Scale

The Perceived Stress Scale, developed by Cohen et al. (1983), quantifies an individual's perceived stress over the previous month (see Appendix E). This scale is scored by totaling the scores on the scale (with four questions reverse scored). The greater the total, the more perceived stress the participant is reporting.

Table 2
PSS Results

PSS Question	Pre-Koru Average	Post-Koru Average	6 weeks Post-Koru Average
1	1.8	1.6	1
2	2.1	1.6	2
3	2.7	1.8	2
4	1.4	1.4	1
5	1.6	1.2	2
6	1.6	1.2	2
7	1.5	1.4	2
8	1.9	1.4	2
9	2.2	1.4	2
10	1.8	1.4	2
Total	18.6	15	17

Over the intervention, participants showed a reduction in perceived stress with an initial reduction in perceived stress of 19% (3.6 on the scale) and the perceived stress remaining at 8.6% (1.6 on the scale) below the Pre-Koru average when measured six weeks after the Koru intervention (see Table 2).

Self-compassion Scale

The Self-Compassion Scale, developed by Neff (2003), scores self-compassion as measured through Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-identification (see Appendix F). In this scale, to determine an individual's self-

compassion score, their responses (grouped into the six categories outlined above) are averaged to determine the participant's self-compassion score. The greater the average, the more self-compassion an individual is demonstrating.

Table 3

SCC Results

SCC Category	Pre-Koru	Post-Koru	6 weeks Post Koru
Self Kindness	2.8	3.55	3.6
Self Judgment	2.855	3.25	4.2
Common Humanity	2.89	3.625	3.5
Isolation	2.75	3	3.25
Mindfulness	3.25	3.625	3.5
Over Identification	2.91	3.06	3
Average	2.91	3.35	3.51

As a group, participant scores on the on the self-compassion scale improved, indicating an increase in self-compassion, both when measured post-Koru and when evaluated six weeks post-Koru (see Table 3).

Discussion

For this improvement initiative, the theory of improvement held that: *Providing students with mindfulness training will increase their capacity to manage their own stress and anxiety levels in the short term, which will lead to improved stress management and self-compassion and improved student outcomes in the long term. Outcomes may include enhanced levels of student stress management and self-compassion that will lead to a reduction in stress and anxiety, an increase in self-care practices, and an overall improvement in student mental wellness.* Here, a review of the evidence indicates that there are both short-term and longer-term improvements in two of the three measures evaluating participants.

29

Specifically, participants reported improvement in their perceived stress and their self-compassion. However, participants indicated they became less mindful over the course of the intervention. While these results are somewhat encouraging, it is important to note the cyclical nature of law school and the stress that students feel at a particular time of the year should be considered when these results are examined. For example, the first cohort of participants were asked to complete their pre-Koru surveys in late September (approximately 5 weeks into the academic year), their post-Koru surveys in late October (after fall break and approximately one month before final exams – the assessments that make up the majority of their grades), and their 6-week post-Koru surveys in mid-December (approximately two weeks after finishing the semester). Similarly, the second cohort of students were asked to complete their pre-Koru surveys in late November (soon after finishing exams from the fall 2020 semester), their post-Koru surveys in late December (as they were finishing break and preparing to return for the Spring 2021 semester), and their 6-week post-Koru surveys in mid-February.

Overall, however, the results are consistent with those produced with the original study of Koru as an intervention. While this Koru study included participants other than law students, with a population of undergraduate and graduate students, it showed that students who participated in Koru had a decrease in perceived stress and increases in mindfulness, and self-compassion when surveyed prior to a Koru course and after a Koru course (Greeson et al., 2014).

Limitations

The small sample size and the lower response rates for post-Koru and six weeks post-Koru make the results of the improvement initiative less generalizable to the entire community. While all participants responded to the initial survey request, those numbers dropped significantly by the time the 6-week post-Koru surveys were shared.

Additionally, when examining participant mindfulness, self-compassion, and perceived stress, it is important to note that this improvement initiative was implemented during fall 2020, during the beginning of UNC's first full academic year dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Koru Mindfulness program was offered via Zoom, when it has traditionally been an in-person activity. Furthermore, at the start of the fall 2020 semester, after planning for in-person instruction, the decision was made to move all classes to remote instruction, a decision with split popularity among students. Regardless of an individual student's support for or disagreement with moving to remote instruction, the impact on a student's well-being because of the pandemic should be considered when evaluating the results of this improvement initiative.

Recommendation for Campus Leaders

Institutional Supports

Since this intervention showed promising results and deserves continued study, there are several areas where support on an institutional level would be warranted. First, as the literature demonstrated, mindfulness programs have been studied at other universities in different academic programs. With the breadth of programs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, it would be helpful for colleagues in different departments or in different schools to implement similar programs with their students. For example, there are opportunities for implementation at the School of Medicine, the Dental School, the School of Pharmacy, or the School of Public Health where students face similar challenges in terms of academic rigor, will be entering into demanding professions, and will be put into situations where they will be expected to support clients or patients. Expanding into these areas will also provide an opportunity for individual schools to share resources, collaborate, and support each other.

31

Additionally, giving students the opportunity to join programs between departments will allow students to expand their support network beyond this academic program and into different professional areas.

A second area for institutional support would be to provide the time and resources to allow staff or faculty members to become trained Koru facilitators. This could impact several areas within the institution. First, allowing faculty or staff time and spending professional development funding on this training demonstrates to the community that the intuition supports student growth through opportunities beyond traditional classroom instruction and support their well-being by providing resources other than what is contained through counseling and programming offered by Counseling and Psychological Services. Next, developing a cohort of trained facilitators on campus will expand the ability of the institution or individual schools to offer programming in this area.

Program-level Supports

On a program level, the results of this intervention demonstrate hope for continued support. This support can come from an increased awareness on behalf of the faculty and staff at the school that this type of programming is offered and has been shown to provide students with an opportunity to improve their well-being. This awareness could also encourage faculty and staff members to incorporate some mindfulness concepts into their programming or refer students to a Koru specific program.

On a broader scale, the program should consider allowing a staff or faculty member to become a trained facilitator to be able to continue engaging students in these concepts. Additionally, the program could incorporate introductory mindfulness sessions into their summer pre-orientation programs or during the formal first-year orientation that happens every August.

Allowing students to become aware of these offerings during a time when they are not already feeling overwhelmed by the rigor of the academic would enable students to sign up to participate in the program.

On a curricular level, there are opportunities to incorporate recruitment efforts or formal programming into some of the newer developing academic offerings for first-year or upper-level students. For example, building Koru or mindfulness practices into the optional First-Year Transition to the Profession course or doing so and making the Transition to the Profession course a mandatory part of the curriculum would increase student exposure to these concepts. There are similar opportunities to incorporate ideas or concepts into the mandatory Professional Responsibility course that students take after they complete their first year of study. Finally, some schools already include or are developing wellness or mindfulness courses as upper-level electives. Making this curricular change will enable more students to become exposed to mindfulness concepts and will demonstrate to the students that the institution supports their intellectual development and the nurturing of their well-being.

Opportunities for Continued Research

Regarding continued research, the results of this study can lead researchers to examine two different, yet related areas regarding law student mental health. On the outcome end on the effectiveness of Koru Mindfulness training, it would be helpful to consider the timing of the training (pre-law school, in-between semesters, in-between years) and the way to organize participants into groups (all first-year students, students going into practice areas). Additionally, the lack of participants in the intervention should also be examined. For example, would there be an increase in participation if the training were held at a particular point of the year or at a particular point in the education program? Moreover, examining the impact that faculty and staff

support has on student participation in mental health programming would be illustrative. Finally, there are opportunities, through curricular development, for some of these concepts to be incorporated into formal classroom structure. If this were done, researchers could examine the effectiveness of a mandatory classroom intervention versus voluntary participation in a co-curricular activity.

After the intervention was complete, it did not continue at the school for a variety of reasons. First, with the COVID pandemic continuing, staff at the school had to focus their resources on other programs that were more directly linked to the academic program. Next, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs who served on the design team moved to a different position in the school and a new Associate Dean with slightly different responsibilities replaced her. Additionally, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs who was on the design team and very supportive of the program transitioned out of her role and back to the faculty. With the transition to a new Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, time resources were allocated elsewhere. These changes, combined with the on-going changes due to COVID made continuing the program impractical. Next, over the course of the next two years, staff from the Office of Student Development who were present during the intervention left the school to take other positions. This initial reduction in staff (due to open positions) made the continued implementation of the intervention difficult and other staff at the school did not indicate interest in taking the baton.

Regarding restarting the program, with campus activities returning to pre-COVID norms, I would anticipate greater student engagement in the program. This engagement could be reinforced through collaborating with school faculty and staff who have interests in proactive student well-being and the positive development of lawyers. Furthermore, are opportunity

existing to engage main campus Counseling and Psychological Staff who are trained in this modality to begin a Koru group.

Conclusion

Over time, research has demonstrated that, for a variety of reasons, law students struggle with mental health challenges and poor wellness during school. These challenges can, many times, follow them into practice. While this is a known challenge facing law school communities (students, faculty, staff, and administrators) there has been a recent movement developing regarding the use of mindfulness programs to help students develop positive habits and support their mental health.

While these programs have not been thoroughly evaluated at the law school level, improvements in similar contexts, such as medical or dental programs, have provided hope. The Koru-Mindfulness program implemented at UNC School of Law, although limited, has continued the trend of skill building for students and lawyers to improve their mental health and overall wellness. Continued research is needed but continued positive results and tweaks to the implementation of the program can continue to improve a student's ability to better manage their mental health and wellness, resulting in a better law school experience.

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APPENDIX A: SEPTEMBER STUDENT SOLICITATION

Are you a law student interested in learning Mindfulness?

Then we would like <u>you</u> to be part of a research study @ UNC

What is the purpose of this study?

- To learn about the relationship between mindfulness training and student mental health and self-care.

Who is eligible?

- Any UNC Law Student who is pursuing their J.D. degree.

What will I have to do?

- Participate in a Koru Mindfulness Program (4 weekly sessions) that will be held via Zoom.
- Complete pre, post, and 6-weeks post Mindfulness program questionnaires regarding your mindfulness, stress, and self-compassion.
- Complete weekly surveys regarding your participation in the Mindfulness program and your engagement with law school.

How much time will this take?
- Each weekly Koru Mindfulness session will last around 75 minutes.
- Pre, post, and six-weeks post Mindfulness program questionnaires should take, on average, twenty (20) minutes.
- Weekly surveys should take, on average ten (10) minutes.

Do I get anything for my time?
- Help add to our knowledge about the mindfulness practices and law students.
- Learn mindfulness practices, how to manage your stress and practice self-compassion.

How can I sign up?
Call John Kasprzak at 919-943-8084 or
E-mail at jbkasprzak2@catamount.wcu.edu

APPENDIX B: NOVEMBER STUDENT SOLICITATION

Are you a law student interested in learning Mindfulness?

Then we would like <u>you</u> to be part of a research study @ UNC

<u>What is the purpose of this study?</u>

- To learn about the relationship between mindfulness training and student mental health and self-care.

<u>Who is eligible?</u>

- Any UNC Law Student who is pursuing their J.D. degree.

<u>What will I have to do?</u>

- Participate in a Koru Mindfulness Program (4 weekly sessions) that will be held via Zoom on November 30, December 7, December 14, and December 21. All sessions will be held beginning at 4:00 pm.
- Complete pre, post, and 6-weeks post Mindfulness program questionnaires regarding your mindfulness, stress, and self-compassion.
- Complete weekly surveys regarding your participation in the Mindfulness program and your engagement with law school.

<u>How much time will this take?</u>
- Each weekly Koru Mindfulness session will last around 75 minutes.
- Pre, post, and six-weeks post Mindfulness program questionnaires should take, on average, twenty (20) minutes.
- Weekly surveys should take, on average ten (10) minutes.

<u>Do I get anything for my time?</u>
- Help add to our knowledge about the mindfulness practices and law students.
- Learn mindfulness practices, how to manage your stress and practice self-compassion.

<u>How can I sign up?</u>
Call John Kasprzak at 919-943-8084 or
E-mail at jbkasprzak2@catamount.wcu.edu

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please read below and sign your consent to participate in this study
Western Carolina University
Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Enhancing Mental Health and Self-Care through Student Mindfulness Training: The Case of the University of North Carolina School of Law

This study is being conducted by: John Kasprzak, an Ed. D. student under the supervision of Dr. Kofi Lomotey.

Description and Purpose of the Research: You are invited to participate in a research study about mindfulness training. By doing this study we hope to learn about the relationship between mindfulness training and student mental health and self-care.

What you will be asked to do: Participants in the study will be asked to engage in four (4) weekly group Koru Mindfulness Sessions that will be facilitated via Zoom. Each session will last approximately seventy-five (75) minutes.
The mindfulness sessions are being conducted synchronously via the web using Zoom. A facilitator that has been trained in teaching Koru Mindfulness will be conducting the sessions. Other than facilitating these sessions, the facilitator does not oversee any functions or activities at the law school. Due to the class schedule, it is not truly possible to conduct these sessions at a time when there are no classes and when students (and the facilitator) would be available. However, every effort will be made to host the sessions at a time when most students are available.
Prior to the first session, participants will be asked to complete questionnaires on mindfulness, stress, and self-compassion. At the completion of the four (4) weekly sessions, participants will be asked to complete these questionnaires again. Finally, participants will be asked to complete the same set of questionnaires six (6) weeks after the last weekly session. Each set of questionnaires should take, on average, twenty (20) minutes to complete.
In addition to the pre, post, and six weeks post Koru questionnaires, participants will be sent a weekly questionnaire soliciting information on their mindfulness practices and their engagement in law school. Weekly questionnaires should take, on average, ten (10) minutes to complete.
All questionnaires will be completed via Qualtrics.

Risks and Discomforts: There are some risks from participating in this research.
Since the Koru Mindfulness sessions will be held via group, there is some social risk involved in participating in a group study. Participants will be asked to keep all information shared confidential but will not be permitted to use pseudonyms or to mute their cameras (unless directed to by the facilitator) during the weekly sessions.

Some of the questions we will ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, take a break or stop your participation in this study at any time.

Benefits: Participants of the study may directly benefit by improving their self-compassion and their ability to manage stress. The study may help us better understand the relationship between mindfulness training and student mental health and self-care.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security:
The data collected in this research study will be kept confidential. Participation in research may involve some loss of privacy. We will do our best to make sure that the information about you is kept confidential, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your personal information may be viewed by individuals involved in the research and may be seen by people including those collaborating, funding, and regulating the study. We will share only the minimum necessary information in order to conduct the research. Your personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order. While the information and data resulting from this study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in a scientific journal, your name or other personal information will not be revealed.
We will collect your information through Qualtrics survey. This information will be stored in an encrypted cloud-based system.
A coding system will be used for individual data, and summary data from the whole group will be used when possible. Finally, if any direct quotes are to be used pseudonyms will be used to attribute the quote.
There are two circumstances where we would be required to break confidentiality and share your information with local authorities. The first is if we become aware or have a reason to believe that a child, an elder, or a disabled individual is being abused or neglected. The second is if you make a serious threat to harm yourself or others.

The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that an unauthorized individual could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. This risk is similar to your everyday use of the internet.
Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on your grades/academic standing. To withdraw from the study, please email John Kasprzak at jbkasprzak2@catamount.wcu.edu

Compensation for Participation: Participants will not receive compensation for participating in the study.

Contact Information: For questions about this study, please contact John Kasprzak at [(919) 943-8084 and/or jbkasprzak2@catamount.wcu.edu]. You may also contact Dr. Kofi Lomotey the principal investigator and faculty advisor for this project, at klomotey@email.wcu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you may contact the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Administration by calling 828-227-7212 or emailing irb@wcu.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential to the extent possible.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

I understand what is expected of me if I participate in this research study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and understand that participation is voluntary. My electronic consent shows that I agree to participate and am at least 18 years old.

Please provide your preferred email address.

Please sign to consent to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D: COGNITIVE AND MINDFULNESS SCALE REVISED

People have a variety of ways of relating to their thoughts and feelings. For each of the items below, rate how much each of these ways applies to *you*.

1: Rarely/Not at All   2: Sometimes   3: Often   4: Almost Always

1. It is easy for me to concentrate on what I am doing.
2. I am preoccupied by the future.
3. I can tolerate emotional pain.
4. I can accept things I cannot change.
5. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail.
6. I am easily distracted.
7. I am preoccupied by the past.
8. It's easy for me to keep track of my thoughts and feelings.
9. I try to notice my thoughts without judging them.
10. I am able to accept the thoughts and feelings I have.
11. I am able to focus on the present moment.
12. I am able to pay close attention to one thing for a long period of time.

APPENDIX E: PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month**.** In each case, you will be asked to indicate *how often* you felt or thought a certain way.

0 = Never   1= Almost Never   2 = Sometimes   3 = Fairly Often
      4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

APPENDIX F: SELF-COMPASSION SCALE

How I typically act toward myself in difficult times.

Please read each statement carefully before answering. For each item, indicate how often you behave in the state manner using the scale provided (only 1 and 5 have descriptors)

Almost Never: 1   2   3   4   Almost Always: 5

1. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
2. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.
4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.
5. I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain.
6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.
7. When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.
8. When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.
9. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.
10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
11. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.
12. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
13. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am
14. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.
16. When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself.
17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.
18. When I'm really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it.
19. I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
20. When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.
21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
22. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.
23. I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.
24. When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion.
25. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
26. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

APPENDIX G: WEEKLY SURVEY (FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT)

1. Did you attend the Koru Mindfulness session during the past week?
   a. (answered Yes//No)
2. Did you attend the Koru Mindfulness session during the past week?
   a. (answered 0 – 7)
3. Over the course of the last week, how many days did you use Mindfulness techniques outside of your 10 minutes of mindfulness practice?
   a. (answered 0 – 7)
4. Over the course of the last week, how many law school class sessions did you miss?
   a. Open ended response
5. Over the course of the last week, how many law school class sessions did you attend?
   a. Open ended response
6. Over the course of the last week, how many law school classes were you scheduled to attend?
   a. Open ended response
7. Over the course of the last week, how many times were you unprepared for law school class?
   a. Open ended response
8. Over the course of the last week, how many times were you prepared for law school class?
   a. Open ended response
9. Are there are other comments or thoughts that you would like to share with the researchers?
   a. Open ended response