

## **MINDFUL MINUTES**

### **Professor Nicky Boothe**

Mindful Minutes began as an elementary attempt to provide a “minute” for students to breathe before taking a midterm exam. The positive reaction from students encouraged more frequent practices of mindful minutes, moving the practice into regularly scheduled classes. Research indicates that being mindful increases the serotonin and dopamine levels which reduces stress and distractions allowing for more intent focus. And what law student can’t benefit from reducing distractions and focusing more intently during class? From this premise the Mindful Minutes has become a regular component over the past decade in my doctrinal classes. I have also led Mindful Minutes at the request of groups of graduates preparing for the bar.

Lasting approximately 45 – 120 seconds, Mindful Minutes are utilized mainly at the beginning of some classes but can also be used at any time during class if the students seem particularly unfocused or restless (for instance during midterm week, or when the 1L high-stakes legal writing assignments are due.) Students are given minimal introductory information about the Mindful Minute before commencing. I simply advise them that we (me included!) are going to take a minute to clear our minds to prepare to receive all the fun knowledge Torts (or whatever class is being taught) has to offer. They are invited to stand, stretch, do a couple neck and shoulder rolls, and take a deep inhale and loud exhale. The first time many students chuckle self-consciously, but there is usually 100% participation for this portion of the exercise. Once they are seated, they are invited to participate in the Mindful Minute by closing their eyes or keeping a soft gaze ahead. If appropriate, I dim the lights. Inevitably there are a couple students who choose not to participate the first time we conduct a Mindful Minute (perhaps from the uncertainty of the unknown.) My experience has been that after a few classes and opportunities to have a few mindful minutes there is 99 – 100% participation. For the participating students, I talk them through a series of breathing focused exercises - breathing in through the nose, out through the mouth. After a few focused breaths, I invite the students to breathe normally. During this time, I talk the students through a few breaths with comments focused on gratitude. For example, I advise students to think of current circumstances that are “renting space” in their heads (e.g., workload, relationships, etc.). I request that they envision balling those circumstances up and pushing them out with the exhale. I then remind the students that they have faced other challenges before (all of which they overcame in order to be where they presently are); and are therefore fully equipped to conquer any current challenges. Comments give them space to focus on gratitude for example, for making it through the week, day, etc.; for matriculating to law school; for the ability to persevere over any obstacles or challenges they may be experiencing in their personal lives; and for the opportunity to learn something new for the day. The remaining seconds provide space for the students to take a few additional breaths in silence focusing on this gratitude and clearing their mind of distractors. At the end of the minute or so, the lights come on and we are ready to have a productive class!

Students are encouraged to incorporate Mindful Minutes throughout their days (not just in class) to help manage or regulate the inherent stressors of law school. Research indicates that a mindfulness practice can enable students to perform better in law school by creating increased concentration levels; and developing and sustaining higher energy levels. As a result, they can learn more, study more efficiently and perform better in class, clinics and law practice settings. The hope is that students create a habit of taking a few mindful minutes throughout the day long-term/beyond law school which will contribute to their overall well-being and success in the legal community.