



CONTEMPLATIVE SCIENCES CENTER
UNIVERSITY *of* VIRGINIA



A Message from Kelly Grace

Pushing Back against Stress Glorification Culture

Reflecting on my first year with the Contemplative Sciences Center, I am deeply grateful to those who have contributed to an exemplary year and am eager for 2026.

The themes that have defined our work this year have been **connection** and **engagement**. The diverse opportunities for engagement were plentiful. On many days this year our building was at capacity – every seat was occupied and every room was being used for an array of contemplative practices. Engagement varied from restoration to learning to movement to celebration to reflection. While most are drawn to the serene beauty and calm vibe of the building, they are managing pressures that are anything but serene and calm. They are firmly entrenched in the stress glorification culture of our times.

What is stress glorification culture? Our students come to UVA having received recognition for their talent and intelligence. When they come here, everyone is talented

and intelligent, so they conclude that the only way they can find distinction is through effort. This creates a culture where success becomes defined by the misery index. “*I stayed up 2 nights,*” “*Well, I stayed up 3.*” “*I had 3 exams this week,*” “*Well, I had 4.*” It becomes about one-upping each other instead of supporting each other. Being overwhelmed and burned out becomes the norm, which also means that the only time something stands out enough to get attention and support is when it rises to a level of crisis. Stress glorification culture creates a model of fear-based excellence that stokes imposter syndrome and critical self-judgment.

We are here to disrupt and push back against stress glorification culture. We don't shy away from stress; stress is a function of importance. We want our students stressed because we want them engaged in the things that matter most to them. Everything that we care about has uncertainty attached to it; hence, the experience of stress. We just want our students to hold that stress in a healthy way. We want to cultivate a flourishing culture.

At the Contemplative Sciences Center, we're providing opportunities for students to deepen their sense of purpose, advance their wellbeing and resilience, and develop an accurate and compassionate self-narrative. While we acknowledge that flourishing requires work, we're here to support and guide them through that work. Connection and engagement—it's what makes the work seem possible and makes us feel less alone in it. While disrupting stress glorification culture is at the heart of our programs and events, our research continually informs that work and keeps us attuned to the dynamics of an everchanging ecology.

Through our newsletter, we will continue to describe our efforts and seek your input. Please know that I deeply value your wisdom and feedback. Truthfully, we are still in our adolescence in this work but are excited about growing and maturing to have a lasting impact.

With deep gratitude, Kelly

[Pictured above: Acoustic Music Jam]



CONTEMPLATIVE COMMONS: From Vision to Vibrancy

An intentional space of respite

The Contemplative Commons has blossomed from the inspiration of early planners to a resource filled with seekers of awe, connection, and respite. Whether filled with lively activities like symposiums and music jams; calming practice-based programming, such as T'ai Chi and Midday Mindfulness; or curiosity-inspired tours and hosted academic classes, the building brims with life.

- We welcomed more than 4,600 participants to programming at the Contemplative Commons this past semester alone. Most of the activities we held were open to the public.
- We now employ 54 student staff across the Contemplative Sciences Center, helping facilitate building operations and allowing us to engage more students across Grounds (read more about student staff below).
- Expanded Hours: In the coming year, we will be extending our hours on the weekdays and adding weekend programming. Stay tuned for updates on our [website](#).

We are grateful to partners on and off Grounds, our own student leaders, and devoted staff; generous donors, and many, many others for helping to make this year so fruitful for our communities. To learn more about us—our programs, fellowships, research, and more, please visit our [website](#).

[Pictured above: Introduction to Capoeira Workshop]



STUDENT STAFF INFUSE COMMONS WITH ENERGY AND SUPPORT

By **Malaika Rehman**, *Communications Student Staff*

For third-year Global Public Health major Alena Johnson, working as an Operations Assistant for the Contemplative Sciences Center has reshaped what she expects from a student job.

Johnson remembers her interview for the Operations role as the first sign that the CSC treated student staff as valued members of the community. Instead of simply filling open slots, staff asked about her interests and possible paths across departments.

“They made it clear it wasn’t just a job,” Johnson said. “They wanted to make sure I felt welcome in the space and that I was in a role that fit me.”

[Read the full story.](#)



SENSEmaking: A Symposium on Contemplative Technologies

CSC RESEARCH IS ABUZZ

Events, Studies, Scholarship, and More.

Research activity at the Contemplative Sciences Center continues to flourish. From public symposiums and other events to student practicums and journal publications, the Contemplative Sciences Center research team is buzzing with cutting-edge research activity.

Journal of Contemplative Studies

The Journal has expanded its reach and access, publishing 12 articles, 2 book reviews and over 20 public scholarship pieces on *Contemplative Currents*, the online magazine.

- The Journal is now included in the **Directory of Open Access**, improving content visibility. Readership increased 58% from last year to 14,000.
- We announced **four new special issues**: *Confucian Contemplation*; *Micro-Phenomenology, Heart Openings, and Contemplative Practice*; *Contemplation in Education and Human Development*; and *Contemplative Computing*.
- We launched an improved Journal website for better article readability, findability, and connection to *Contemplative Currents* public scholarship.

CIRCL, Contemplative Innovation + Research Co-Lab

Here are a few highlights from 2025:

We convened a dazzling array of experts for **SENSEmaking: A Symposium of Contemplative Technologies**. Artists, scholars of religion, philosophers, social scientists, engineers, astronomers, medical researchers, and contemplative practitioners came together to discuss cutting-edge research on technology, contemplative practices, and the

human senses. We hosted presenters from 15 institutions; and 328 participants attended, from the UVA community and the public.

[Watch the sessions](#), [view a sizzle reel](#), and [read an overview](#).

We are leading the following research studies:

- *Meditation in Nature Dimensions (MIND)*: Fourteen student-participants across eight weeks.
- *Sleep, Dreaming, and Virtual Reality*: Seven adult-participants across seven weeks. Collaboration with Northwestern University.

The monthly public Salon brings together UVA and community members for open dialogues on cutting-edge research related to contemplation and flourishing.

- Here's a look at our fall Salon series: [Frequency](#); [Stories](#); [Time](#); [Sensory Overload](#); [Grief](#); and [Grit & Grace](#). Stay tuned for details about the [Spring 2026 Salon series](#) in January.

We engaged 75 students in the following practicums:

- *Engaging Aesthetics Seminar: Making Sense*, Associate Professor Gregory Schmidt Goering, 40 students.
- *Empirical Engagements Lecture: Wonder and Awe*, Dr. Caleb Hendrickson, 25 students.
- *PHIL 4010: Philosophy Seminar for Majors*, Associate Professor Zachary Irving, 10 students.

Save the Date: We will be holding a pan-University *Compassionate Care Research Symposium* on April 17, 2026. [Details to come!](#)

[Pictured above: Media Artist, Jesse Fleming speaking at the SENSEmaking symposium]



During the year, the building was often filled to capacity for events; research activities and studies; tours; hosted academic classes; and student-facing programming.

Programming highlights include:

- Flourish: A Weekend of Wellbeing
 - [A Special Meditation from the Dell](#)
 - CSC Benefit Concert: [Zac Brown Band with Special Guest Maggie Rogers](#)
- Concert: [An Evening of Sufi Music with the Al Firdaus Ensemble](#) (plus an accompanying [workshop](#))
- [Salons](#): Frequency; Stories; Time; Sensory Overload, Grief, Grit & Grace
- Talk: [Engaging with Eco-anxiety between Academia and Society - European and Interdisciplinary Perspectives](#), by Panu Pihkala
- Student-led Acoustic Jam
- Citizen Leader Fellows Final Presentation
- Tom Tom Talks: Virtual Reality Meditation
- Dalai Lama Fellows Contemplative Leadership Assembly
- Kelly Crace Presentation: [Beyond the Noise: Flourishing Through Life's Uncertainties](#)
- Artist Talk: [Exploring Contemplation and Art with Meg Hitchcock](#)
- Introduction to Capoeira
- [Golden Hour](#): An immersive live music experience
- [Fully Being](#): Meditation Course
- Special and Ongoing Exhibits:
 - [Art of the Commons](#)
 - [NINFEO](#)
 - [Conservatory](#):
 - [Contemplative Listening In Sonic Immersion](#)
 - [Morven Resounding](#)
 - [Reef Resounding](#)

Curated community-facing program highlights:

- [CARELab-Conscious AI Leadership Program](#)
- [Elements of Peace Summer Program for Youth](#)
- High School Diplomats Program
- [Civic Cornerstone Fellowship](#) - Including curriculum creation (*The Spring 2026 application is open*)

We continue to offer numerous **public-facing mind-body classes** such as T'ai Chi; Ashtanga Yoga, including the Active Series; Midday Mindfulness; Sound Baths, and various restorative yoga classes; plus a chance to [Chai & Chat](#) about all things yoga. [View past events](#); and [stay tuned](#) for upcoming ones!

[Pictured above: Citizen Leader Fellows Presentation]

Looking to 2026...

In the new year, we look forward to welcoming more of you to the Contemplative Commons as we expand our schedule of programmatic and research activities, including **extended building hours**. Check for updates on our [website](#) and social media: We are now on [LinkedIn](#), in addition to [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).

Give here to support the Contemplative Sciences Center at UVA and programming opportunities at the Contemplative Commons.

GIVE



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