

Title: Contemplating information in the pleasurable and the profound

Organizer: K.F. Latham, Associate Professor, School of Information, Kent State University, Kent, OH, USA

Key Participants:

K.F. Latham, Associate Professor, School of Information, Kent State University, Kent, OH. USA

Jenna Hartel, Associate Professor, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, Canada

Tim Gorichanaz, PhD Candidate, College of Computing & Informatics, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Anh Thu Nguyen, PhD Student, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, Canada

Abstract:

Mindfulness, meditation, atmospherics, well-being, flourishing, happiness, positivity, spirituality—all part of *contemplative studies*, an academic understanding of how contemplative practices are used to interpret the world. Where does contemplation fit into the digital worlds we now find all around us? Ten years ago, Kari and Hartel (2007) called for programmatic research efforts into *higher contexts* of information studies. Since the call, some movement forward in the sphere of positive information behavior has been made. But the link to the emerging, interdisciplinary field of contemplative studies has only briefly been mentioned. Reaching back to Kari and Hartel's call, we wonder how contemplative practices can be applied to information environments: What can information science learn from, and contribute to, contemplative studies? What aspects of information phenomena might we explore using contemplative skills?

Description:

- *Purpose and Intended Audience:* This panel will draw connections between contemplative studies and practices with information science research topics and methods. While our session is relevant to anyone conducting research in information science, it will be of particular interest to information behavior researchers, especially those using qualitative methods, but also those interested in self-reflection in their own research on any topic.
- *Proposed activities including agenda, ramp-up (development), and follow-through:* After introducing the emerging field of contemplative studies in information science, our panelists will bring examples of their own research involving contemplative studies in information contexts:
 - Tim will discuss ultrarunning as a contemplative practice, and how his research in ultrarunning provides a framework for the way people build understanding with information in other human domains (Gorichanaz, 2017).
 - Dr. Hartel will talk about mindfulness meditation in the classroom (Hartel, Nguyen, & Guzik, 2017). She will describe the disciplinary and cultural context

that precipitated the practice, the specific types of meditation that were used, the impact on the classroom experience, the student perspective, and more.

- Anh Thu will explore how the red thread of information (Bates, 1999) weaves together and shapes textual experiences of meditation. The relationships between learning the sacred language of Pali and practicing Buddhist meditation will be examined from different layers of information: pragmatic, embodied, and spiritual.
- Dr. Latham will discuss her research on numinous experiences with museum objects and review current contemplative practices and experiences in today's museums.

We hope that our examples will inspire the audience to make connections to their own work. To begin a dialogue on this topic, we will use the last third of the session to engage with the audience by:

- Asking for the audience to share their examples of contemplative information studies research;
- Discussing methodological implications in contemplative information studies;
- Considering together future applications of contemplative practices in research topics, research design, as well as self-care as a researcher;
- Inviting the audience to participate in a short, secular meditation together, and then reflect on the experience and its potential implications for pedagogy and research in information science.

Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field: Ten years ago, Kari and Hartel (2007) called for programmatic research efforts into *higher contexts* of information studies. Drawing from positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), this refers to “positive human phenomena, experiences, or activities that transcend the daily grind with its rationality and necessities,” (Kari & Hartel, 2007: 1133) Following Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Kari and Hartel further divide “higher things” into two basic categories, pleasurable and profound, which include innumerable life experiences that are often information-rich, yet have not been studied informationally. These inquiries address big questions such as “what makes life worth living?” (1131). Since the call for increased research in positive information behavior, some movement forward has been made. In the last decade, scholars have responded to this call to action by conducting original research into topics such as “happy information” (Tinto & Ruthven, 2017) and religious conversion (Guzik, 2013), among others. But the link to the emerging, interdisciplinary field of contemplative studies has only briefly been mentioned.

Mindfulness, meditation, atmospherics, well-being, flourishing, happiness, spirituality—all part of the movement in contemplative studies, an academic understanding of how contemplative practices are used to interpret the world. According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, contemplation can be defined as “the act of thinking deeply about something” or “the act of looking carefully at something” and may be expressed as reflection or introspection; it is the mode by which all human advances occur, from scientific inventions to artistic creations to athletic performances. As researchers, we do this all the time. Contemplative *practices* are any techniques that allow an individual or group to fully and deeply connect with an experience,

idea, or place with the purpose of creating a space for contemplation (West Virginia University, 2017). Meditation is a specific contemplative practice of interest to positive information studies (Hartel, Nguyen, & Guzik, 2017).

Where does contemplation fit into the digital worlds we now find all around us? Levy, in his recent book, *Mindful Tech: How to Bring Balance to Our Digital Lives* (2017), asks how *slow world* practices might fit into our otherwise busy and full digital worlds. He believes that digital worlds are easily fragmented and hurried, and so we should learn from ancient ways of contemplation as a way forward, citing current research ranging from neuroscience to phenomenology as sources to help us tap more deeply into these practices.

Like Levy, the members of our panel are interested in balancing our own research world—information science—and the many complex contexts in which we delve. Reaching back to Kari and Hartel's call, we wonder how contemplative practices can be applied in information environments. What can information science learn from and contribute to contemplative studies? What aspects of information worlds might we explore using contemplative skills? Additionally, awareness and application of contemplative practices can help us as researchers build skills in contemplation, which could lead to the purposeful cultivation of contemplative practices and thinking—compassion, focused attention, empathy—in information contexts. Our session is focused on one corner of these studies, namely, potential information sites and contents for contemplative practice, but our interest and hope is to have the audience connect this to their own work. Learning about contemplative practices means that you can apply it to your own research processes, your teaching, your work/life balance, and more. Ultimately, our reasoning is that understanding, applying, and creating a contemplative approach to life and learning could have far reaching effects on society, potentially improving physical and mental health and wellbeing.

References:

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Hartel, J., Nguyen, A. T. & Guzik, E. (2017). Mindfulness meditation in the classroom. *Journal for Education in Library and Information Science*, 58(2).

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Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive psychology: An introduction*. Philadelphia: Martin Seligman Research Alliance.

Tinto, F. & Ruthven, I. (2016). Sharing “happy” information. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 67(10), 2329–2343.

West Virginia University (2017). *Contemplative Studies and Practice*. Retrieved on September 17, 2017 at <http://libguides.wvu.edu/contemplation>

Duration: One 90-minute session

Special Requirements: Microphone to share stories/experiences. We would prefer a room that is comfortably arranged, and if possible, not set up in strict lecture style.