



CONTEMPLATIVE SCIENCES CENTER
UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA



[Pictured: Students at *Camping and Contemplation Under the Stars*, the annual CSC-UVA Rec *event* held in Shenandoah National Park. Register for the July 2026 event, [here](#). Open to all]

Encouraging a Deeper Sense of Purpose

It's hard to believe we are one summer break away from celebrating our two-year anniversary—we opened the Contemplative Commons to the public on the first day of classes in 2024, on August 26. We've come a long way in our work together!

As we reflect on the semester here at the Contemplative Sciences Center, we are grateful for UVA partners, community members, and dedicated staff and leadership who have helped lead us into a new phase of increased and sustained growth, robust research endeavors, and varied programmatic activities.

While most of our programming is publicized, another large portion of our work goes less noticed. Here is a brief overview of some of those in depth efforts along with a few semester milestones.

During the Spring 2026 semester, we welcomed **4,388** students to the Contemplative Commons for specific programming— double the amount from Spring 2025. In total, we saw **10,186** participants come through the doors to engage in curated programming.

Following are some of the ways we connected with UVA and the community this semester.



[Pictured: Mia Tesoriero in front her art on display at the Student Art Showcase. Mia planned the event that featured over a dozen original works.]

Connecting in Different Ways

When we create programs and events, or deliver trainings and talks, we connect with different segments of our community and do so in different ways.

In every case, we aim to deepen people's sense of purpose, helping define worth by engaging in that purpose, and encouraging deeper ways to experience joy, health, and connection—whether that is through the myriad integrative practices we offer; special events and symposia; our restorative work within the community; or creating programming to support youth mental health.

INTEGRATIVE PRACTICE AND COMMUNITY

In addition to offering new classes focused on movement and mindfulness, we held speaker series, special student conversations with experts, concerts, symposia, and artist talks.

Highlights included:

- The Compassionate Care Research Symposium
- Artist Asa Jackson, Dawn of Consciousness
- Mountainfilm on Tour
- Therapeutic Yoga
- Talk: AI, Agency, and Alignment
- Sound Bath
- Marc Brackett: "Power of Feeling"
- Ayurveda workshop
- Research Salons
- T'ai Chi
- Introduction to Iyengar Yoga
- Capoeira
- The 360 Emergence-Conscious Dance and Embodiment Practice, and **much more.**

PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAMMING

During the spring semester, 4,388 students participated in events and other curated programming. Highlights include the Student Art Showcase; Music by the Dell; Peer-led Yoga Nidra; Acoustic Jam; Self Love and Valentine Crafts; and more.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Our research team achieved milestones in several spheres including publications, research studies, academic offerings, and symposia. Here are a few highlights. ***You can find additional work and details in a separate section below.***

New and on-going studies:

- [Focusing the Mind Study](#)
- [Meditation & Environments Study](#)
- [Sleep, Dreams, and Virtual Reality Study](#)

The [Journal of Contemplative Studies](#) and our research magazine, [Contemplative Currents](#), provide an academic forum for specialists to publish rigorous, innovative, humanities-based scholarship in Contemplative Studies. [Learn more.](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We are deeply engaged with external groups and organizations offering workshops and retreats including Burnout & Workforce Readiness; Postvention Healing & Restoration; Art & Mental Health; UVA Life Transition Retreats.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Our work with compassionate K-12 education continued and broadened with local implementation of the Compassionate Schools Project's K-5 curriculum, *Flourish*, in Charlottesville City Schools and small groups in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Virginia. The Compassionate Schools Project in Louisville, Kentucky and expansion to new districts continue, as we assist schools and community partners in integrating skills and practices to support student flourishing and a compassionate school culture. Other work with youth includes partnerships with [Elements of Peace](#) and [Star Hill Pathways](#).

EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP, & CAPACITY BUILDING

We help students and others cultivate a sense of wellbeing and engage in collaborative work to deepen their sense of purpose. This spring we co-led the [Student Happiness Retreat](#) and supported the integration of mindfulness-based practices for the Karsh Institute's Civic Cornerstone Fellowship and the Jeffersonian Dialogue Dinners with Batten. We also helped develop contemplative capacity and facilitator training through CARELab and engaged with Professors of Practice & Faculty Affiliates (the Faculty Research Council).

We also lead the [Dalai Lama Fellows](#) and [Citizen Leaders Fellowship](#) programs which center contemplative leadership as a core pillar. Read more about the Dalai Lama Fellows' May, 2026 visit to Dharamsala, India below in a separate section of this newsletter.

STUDENT STAFF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Student staff at the Contemplative Sciences Center support key functions within the center and play a significant role in the areas of research, programming, communications, as well as day-to-day building operations. In these paid positions students receive mentoring and guidance from center staff.



[Pictured: Yiyang Tang, Citizen Leaders Fellow, delivering her final presentation]

Citizen Leaders Fellows Build Community One Project at a Time

Seventeen student leaders presented their final projects on April 29, the culmination of a year-long fellowship focused on leadership, values identification, and community impact. The following article by student staff member [Malaika Rehman](#), highlights the work of three fellows, Nkosi Ndebele, Itzal Terrazas, and Lillian Barnes.

The Citizen Leaders Fellows program empowers students to turn personal experience into lasting community change.

A partnership with UVA's Contemplative Sciences Center, International Studies Office, Athletics, and Commonwealth Partnerships, the fellowship offers students interested in creating a social impact project for communities involving international students, student athletes, and/or transfer students.

Centered on the concept of flourishing, the program aims to equip students with the tools they need to bring community-oriented ideas to life. Some fellows arrive with fully formed projects, while others begin with only a sense of direction. In both cases, the program emphasizes not just what students create, but how and why they create it. [Read the full story.](#)



[This photo is a simulation of a research study and was staged to protect the fidelity of the study and the privacy of the participants.]

Robust Research Studies, Practicums, and Journal Milestones

Research Highlights:

- We completed the first two cycles of our **Meditation and Environments Study** examining how different environments affect meditation. Two more cycles are forthcoming in the Fall. We also completed wave one of a multi-site study in collaboration with Northwestern University, the **Sleep, Dreams, and Virtual Reality Study**. We are **recruiting** participants now for both studies which will take place in Fall 2026.
- We published seven articles and four book reviews in the **Journal of Contemplative Studies**. We also extended the discussion from **SENSEmaking**, the seminal symposium held last fall, in a series of **dialogues** with experts in the field on **Contemplative Currents**.
- In partnership with the School of Nursing and the School of Education and Human Development, we co-hosted a half day pan-University **Compassionate Care Research Symposium** related to compassion research and scholarship across Grounds.
- We offered practicums for three UVA courses, providing tailored contemplative and research experiences for 98 students.

Opportunities to Participate in Paid Research Studies

Focusing the Mind Study

Join a three-week study, a summer 2026 meditation program at the Contemplative Commons studying the potential effects of visualization meditation and meditation in Virtual Reality. Eligibility: 20-65 years old. Two plus years of meditation experience. Sessions will meet two times per week for 1 to 2.5 hours per session for six sessions, a total of 9 hours. This is a paid opportunity starting at \$120 up to \$180. For questions contact circl@virginia.edu. [Apply here](#).

Meditation & Environments Study

This is an ongoing study: CSC's research team seeks adults aged 18-24 with little to no meditation experience to participate in a study exploring the link between meditation and environment. This is a paid opportunity. [Learn more and apply.](#)

Sleep, Dreams, and Virtual Reality Study

This is an ongoing study: CSC's research team is seeking participants for a research study exploring experiences in Virtual Reality, sleep health, and dreaming. Individuals should have no established contemplative or meditative practice; with some ability to recall dreams. This is a paid opportunity. [Learn more and apply.](#)

Paid Open Positions in Research at the Contemplative Sciences Center

- [CIRCL Laboratory Coordinator](#)
 - [CIRCL Laboratory Technician](#)
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Dalai Lama Fellows Meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India

Fellows Gathered for the Contemplative Leadership Assembly

Fifty-two young leaders from over twenty countries convened in Dharamsala, for an in-person learning experience and a meeting with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. The trip provided a unique opportunity for the young changemakers to assemble with their peers from around the world and deepen their work together. Fellows' projects include organizing community-led climate initiatives in the Philippines, enhancing healthcare accessibility in Palestine, and building rural food security in Uganda.

Dalai Lama Fellows is a unique one-year leadership program for emerging social changemakers designed to be rigorous, interdisciplinary, and deeply contemplative. The curriculum and coaching they receive helps fellows reimagine leadership as incorporating self-awareness, personal sustainability, genuine compassion for others, and the capacity to skillfully navigate complex systems.

Dalai Lama Fellows is co-stewarded by UVA's Contemplative Sciences Center and the



From the Salon: Nature A Lived Reference Point for Contemplation

Reflections by [Michael Overstreet](#)

Have you ever stopped to ponder what nature *is*? When we say that we love being *out in* nature, does this mean that it is something distinct from us? The word “environment” would have us think that nature is what surrounds or environs us—but does this then mean that we are at its center? We have a tendency to believe that we are separate from the wilderness beyond our doors, and it is fundamental to the ways we inhabit our planet. This tendency to think of the national parks and nature reserves as being disparate from our homes is so fundamental to the experience of the modern world that it’s in our very grammar. How, indeed, does the way we conceive of being out in nature shape how we relate to it?

These were some of the questions that professor of eco-psychology and scholar-practitioner of philosophy and religion [Adam Lobel](#) brought to the Contemplative Sciences Center [Research Salon](#) on the subject of “nature” on March 19, 2026.
[Read the full piece.](#)

[Michael Overstreet](#) is a graduate research assistant at the Contemplative Sciences Center.



Spring 2026 Micro-residencies

Micro-residencies provide immersive opportunities for connection, learning, and engagement with experts in diverse areas of contemplative sciences. Micro-residents are invited to spend an intensive period of time with UVA or the community in order to share their knowledge, practice, and wisdom. Sessions also give our micro-residents the opportunity to learn from our students, faculty, staff, and community and inform them in their work. Following are micro-residencies we hosted this spring.

- **Adam Lobel** joined us to offer wisdom on the practices at the threshold of ecologies, Buddhist-inspired meditation and philosophy, contemplative education, and psycho-social political change. He facilitated the Salon on "Nature," highlighted in this newsletter, and held a [climate confession booth](#) for participants to express, explore, and receive support for climate distress. Read our interview with Adam posted on [Contemplative Currents](#).
 - **Jan Swartz** (UVA '92) - In an intimate talk with students entitled "What Breaks my Heart? Using Our Sorrow as the Spark for Systems Change," Jan shared her path from head of Princess Cruises to founding The Goodness Web, helping to drive systems change in the area of youth mental health.
 - **Gaillee Fitzpatrick** - Professional educator and experienced Mahjong instructor, Gaillee Fitzpatrick taught several sessions of American Mahjong (NMJL) throughout the week in late March. Open to the public, her expertise, dedication, and teaching skills captivated participants of all levels in this moving meditation that engages the mind while creating opportunities for connection with others. [Learn more](#).
 - **Lara Merriken** - "From My Kitchen to the Boardroom to What Matters Most." The founder of LÄRABAR shared her trials, successes, and stories of resilience with students; and demonstrated how to make a Lärabar.
 - **Monica Gullickson** - A level 2 authorized teacher of Ashtanga Yoga since 2011 and an authorized teacher of the Active Series since 2025, Monica shared her love of the Active series with the UVA community during the month of April. She studied with her teacher, R. Sharath Jois, in India over a period of 17 years before his passing.
 - **Shraddha Jois** - We were honored to welcome Sharath Jois' daughter, Shraddha Jois to the center for a special evening Active Series class and a [KLPA](#) Ashtanga class.
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Summer Community Partnerships Programs Opportunities for Educators, UVA Students, and Local Youth

CARELab™ Mayor's Challenge for Community Change

June 22-27, 2026

CARELab™ is a community-based six-day Leadership/AI accelerator. Geared toward college students as well as motivated juniors and seniors in high school, the program equips emerging leaders with the skills, mindset, and ethical foundation to work with on an existing local challenge. Students pitch ideas to the Mayor and other leaders. Several need-based scholarships still available! [Learn more and apply.](#)

Compassionate Schools Project Educator Retreat

July 22, 2026

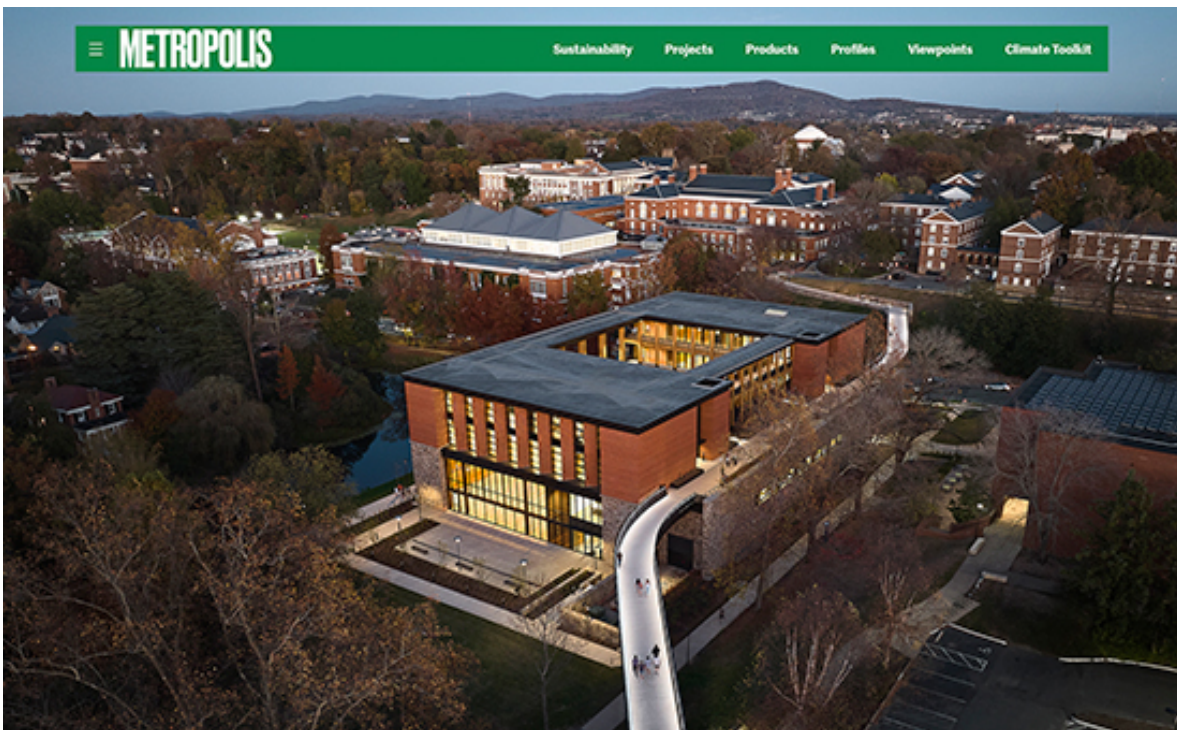
For Charlottesville City Schools, Albemarle County Public Schools, and Community Partner Educators. (Registration required)

Join colleagues for a day of community; connection; joy in creative and contemplative practices; and celebration of educators. Offerings include meditation, yoga, contemplative music and crafts, nature practices, sound bath, lunch, snacks, and more. [Learn more and register.](#)

Elements of Peace: Youth Summer Program

August 3-7, 2026

This program offers youth, from 11-15 years old, an opportunity to unplug and hit the “reset” button with a week of rest, reflection, and connection before the new school year. This program is rooted in eco-awareness and contemplative, creative, and expressive arts. Scholarships available. [Learn more and apply.](#)



In The News

Metropolis feature; Civic Trust Award; Interfaith Coalition; LEED Certification

- *Metropolis*, an architecture publication committed to sustainable, just, and nurturing built environments featured the Contemplative Commons: “a cross-disciplinary hub where calm, clarity, and connection are embedded in the architecture itself.” Read the article: [This UVA Campus Building Asks Students to Slow Down](#)
- The Contemplative Commons received the distinction of Highly Commended by the Civic Trust Awards, a United Kingdom organization which recognizes outstanding architecture, planning and design in the built environment [photos by Matthew Millman]. [Read more.](#)
- *The Cavalier Daily* highlighted a gathering of over 100 students of different faiths and backgrounds in an event supported and hosted by the Contemplative Sciences Center. Read the article, [Virginia Interfaith Coalition dinner brings religious unity in a time of tension](#), and;
- *The Cavalier Daily* featured center achievements and milestones in the article, [The Contemplative Sciences Center reports successful academic year.](#)
- The Contemplative Commons was awarded LEED® certification-Gold. LEED certification is a symbol of sustainability achievement and leadership and the award recognizes the building has excelled in its sustainable design and operation. [Learn more.](#)

In case you missed it:

- *UVA Today* featured the student Happiness Retreat led by the Contemplative Sciences Center and UVA's Department of Student Health and Wellness: [UVA retreat helps students redefine happiness.](#)
- *Architectural Record* featured the Contemplative Commons in the January special Health and Wellness-themed issue: [A building and site for contemplative practice takes shape at the University of Virginia.](#)

- UVA Today highlighted the research of the Contemplative Sciences Center's Julianna Mollica: [From South Dakota to France, UVA students put their studies into practice.](#)

Find more Contemplative Sciences Center [news here.](#)

Summer Hours

Effective May 18- August 14, 2026.

Contemplative Commons Building Hours

Monday-Friday: 7:00am-3:00pm

Willow Hours

Monday-Friday 7:00am-2:30pm

Conservatory Hours

Monday-Friday 9:00am-2:00pm

SUMMER 2026 EVENTS

June 22-27: CARELab™

July 22: Compassionate Schools Project Educator Retreat

July 24-25: Camping and Contemplation

August 3-7: Elements of Peace

REGULAR SUMMER PROGRAMMING

Mondays-Wednesdays: Mindfulness & Meditation

Mondays-Thursdays: Ashtanga Yoga-Mysore

Fridays: Ashtanga Yoga-Led Primary

Fridays - REST FEST
Sound Bath, All-level Yoga

[VIEW ALL EVENTS](#)

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