

Psychedelics Advance in Higher Education

Adapted from *The Psychedelic Future of the Mind*

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THE MAPS WEBSITE'S RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS (maps.org/resources/students) lists 13 institutions of higher education which offer instruction about psychedelics. This article alerts readers to the new listing of Northern Illinois University and 3 others not yet listed as of the time this article was written.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

One reason I started my course in 1981 was my hope that if I could teach it at Northern Illinois University, it would serve as an icebreaker for professors elsewhere. Until the last three or four years, I was disappointed, but now that a more rational, evidence-based approach to psychedelics is spreading in both science and society, hope for higher education blooms again. "Foundations of Psychedelic Studies" is currently taught once a year as a seminar limited to Honors Program students. Its syllabus and related materials and PowerPoints are available at niu.academia.edu/ThomasRoberts.

COLLEGE OF DUPAGE

At the College of DuPage, a community college in suburban Chicago, "Psychedelic Mindview" is geared toward people in the human services field like mental health professionals and addiction counselors as well as others with an interest in the topic. In addition to being taught live, starting in mid-March 2013 it will be taught online and available to students worldwide.

SOFIA UNIVERSITY

"Psychedelics: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications" at Sofia University in Palo Alto, California (formerly the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology), is primarily for graduate students who plan to become mental health professionals. According to its catalog description, "This course explores therapeutic issues involving the use of psychedelic substances. It covers clinical research on psychedelic drugs as adjuncts to psychotherapy for the treatment of addiction, PTSD, and existential distress at the end of life, as well as how to address psychedelic experiences that clients bring into psychotherapy. Ancient, shamanic, and modern uses of psychedelics will be examined to provide broad cultural perspectives."

NYU LANGONE MEDICAL SCHOOL BELLEVUE HOSPITAL

NYU-Bellevue is the world leader in psychedelic medical education. There, doctors Stephen Ross and Jeffrey Guss teach “Psychedelics in Psychiatry.” In case there is any doubt about the range of professionals who are interested in psychedelics, Dr. Guss describes their students this way:

The class was open to a broad variety of individuals. We invited the Fellows in Addiction Psychiatry in the NYU Department of Psychiatry, and there was one senior resident (PGY-IV) who was doing a selective in PRG (the Psychedelic Research Group, the psilocybin/cancer anxiety research program). In addition we invited people from a diverse group of professional categories who had expressed an interest in our research. There were doctoral students in psychology from the New School, as well as NYU, doctoral students in Cognitive Neuroscience, research associates from Ken Alper’s ibogaine program, nursing students, social workers involved with addiction treatment and addiction program development, as well as numerous non-clinical individuals (meditation enthusiasts with degrees in consciousness studies), researchers from the Manhattan Veterans Administration, and so forth.

In addition to providing psychotherapy for their patients and testing their hypotheses, the NYU-Bellevue course enriches the general discourse. As a center for bringing together knowledge from the participants’ own academic areas and alternative medicine, the course helps students and instructors meet with other like-minded medical and academic professionals to share ideas; ideas about meditation, Buddhism, drumming, and similar mind/body topics cross-fertilize discussions. From an institutional perspective, in addition to familiarizing the participants with the specific treatment protocols and staff, the course is a forum for graduate students at NYU to discuss their personal ideas for research in a supportive environment.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH

Professor Nicholas Cozzi includes a one-hour lecture on psychedelics in his “Integrated Neurosciences” course primarily for second-year medical students.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA’S CENTER FOR SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING

U of M offers a course by Dennis McKenna which includes components on psychedelics: “People, Plants and Drugs: An Introduction to Ethnopharmacology.” Ethnopharmacology is the scientific investigation of biologically active substances utilized by humans. Its focus is usually, but not always, on indigenous, traditional, historic, or non-Western cultures. By definition, ethnopharmacology is interdisciplinary and eclectic;

the scope and tools of ethnopharmacological studies are derived from pharmacology and toxicology, pharmacognosy, chemistry, medicine, botany and ethnobotany, medical and cultural anthropology, and other disciplines.

PROPOSAL FOR PSYCHEDELIC COURSE DEVELOPMENT AWARDS

How can more colleges and universities be encouraged to offer courses in psychedelic medicine and research? A high-benefit funding opportunity exists for foundations and wealthy individuals. Colleges and universities take an academic field seriously if grants are available in that field. While funders have been generous in their donations to support research, funding new courses on psychedelics would be relatively cheap and long-lasting. Unlike a research study, once a course is established, it can continue for decades. More than that, it lends legitimacy to its topic. Of course this might be done various ways, but the way to have the biggest impact may be a three-round award contest system.

In Round One, instructors who want to design and establish such a course would be invited—such as with an announcement in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*—to submit letters of intent to establish such courses, with brief descriptions of their qualifications and their institution’s willingness to support it.

Round Two would invite winners of the first round to submit a course design grant. The selected instructors would design their courses and submit their syllabi accompanied by a letter from their department chairs or someone similar confirming that, if funded, the course would be offered and otherwise supported. Winners would be awarded a sum (e.g., \$2,000) to assist with proposal development for Round Three.

In Round Three, several proposals would be selected and the writers would be awarded with a larger sum (e.g., \$15,000) with co-awards to their departments of a similar amount to help pay for the instructor’s salary while teaching the course and for overhead expenses. To increase the impact, Round Three awards might be extended for two or three years, or longer. Besides colleges and universities, specialized institutions of higher education such as medical schools and other professional schools, seminaries, and theological schools, law schools, and similar organizations could be eligible to apply for psychedelic course development prize awards too.

As psychedelics return to respectability, I expect we’ll see more courses throughout the systems of higher education. Research on psychedelics’ clinical uses are taking the lead. Now we need courses that broaden psychedelic studies to consider their academic implications and uses throughout the humanities, arts, religion, sciences, and social sciences. 🌐

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