

Spirituality Mind Body Institute at Teachers College, Columbia University

Spirituality in Higher Education

The Spirituality Mind Body Institute (SMBI) at Teachers College, Columbia University, founded by Lisa Miller, Ph.D., exists to integrate spiritual awareness into our society - in our institutions, in our boardrooms, our classrooms, and our homes. SMBI is committed to developing evidence-based practices and science that examines the effect of spirituality across the lifespan, including spirituality as a protective factor against mental illness, a source of resilience, as foundational in cultivating relationships, and as a gateway to a meaningful and fulfilling life. SMBI exists to support a more spiritually aware society, as foundational for a more peaceful, loving, and sustainable world.

Dr. Lisa Miller is a foremost scientist on spirituality across the human lifespan with over a hundred research articles published in leading research journals. She founded the Spirituality Mind Body Institute, the first Ivy League graduate program in spirituality and psychology. She is the author of *The Spiritual Child; The New Science of Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*.

We greatly appreciate the Living Peace Foundation for outstanding support of our pathbreaking Spiritual Mind Body Wellness Center at Teachers College, Columbia University. Four years of LPF support enabled the formation of our SMBI Wellness Center, training of multiple waves of new graduate student providers, and a multi-year scientific assessment of the need, use and helpfulness of foundationally spiritual work on a diverse United States college campus. We hope that our now published model and supporting data encourages fellow Universities to form Spiritual Mind Body Wellness Centers to serve the spiritual needs of college students.

National data on emerging adult college students in the U.S. reveal increasing rates of suffering and pathology. The percentage of college students who reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, self-harm, and PTSD have significantly increased over the past couple of decades. As students navigate the transition from adolescence to young adulthood during college years, they face risks to their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Three-quarters of lifetime mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders have the first onset by adolescence during college years; long-term prognosis is significantly improved by early treatment.

In response to the need for mental health and wellness services on college campuses, SMBI Mental Health and Wellness initiative includes Spirituality in Higher Education. This change project works to transform the culture of college life by promoting spiritual development on college campuses by contributing empirical science on spiritually integrated wellness centers and interventions to support the developmental task of spiritual individuation.

SMBI Mental Health and Wellness initiative includes the Spiritual Wellness Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, an approved IRB research site, and the foremost Ivy League spiritually integrated wellness center for graduate training. Our innovative spiritual wellness programs for college students are grounded in the science of spiritual life-promoting inner work for outer change. The first empirical study of “A Spirituality Mind-Body Wellness Center in a University Setting; A Pilot Service Assessment Study” conducted by the collaborative research team of advanced doctoral students, Suza Scalora (Project Director), Micheline Anderson, Abby Crete, Larissa Portnoff, and Jennifer Drapkin, can be viewed in the special issue “Spiritual Development over the Lifespan,” in the peer reviewed journal, *Religions*. Link to paper: <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/9/466/htm>