

Fall 2021 University Honors 101 Section 001 Honors Observation

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OBSERVATION



Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy (HBC)

Room #118

Mondays 11:45-12:35

Instructor: Dr Chad Hellwinckel

Office Hours: Monday 8-12

Email: chellwin@utk.edu

Telephone: 865-206-3864

Course Website:

<https://utk.instructure.com/courses/135625>

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

Stated simply, this class is about resting in awareness of the present moment.

Living can be busy – Between school, work, and endless amounts of entertainment we have little time for unrushed observation of the mysterious situation of simply being conscious. In this course we explore our situation not through thought and effort, but by relaxing back into what is already going on around and within us. Resting in the present is essential to open creative space.

For example, in my work designing sustainable environments/farms/yards, it is easy to come with pre-conceived ideas, but to design well these must be dropped and instead time must be taken to observe the natural forces on a piece of land as they exist; It expands the possibilities of what can be done to grow food and increase diversity.

How will this class help you? Observation of the present can expand the possibilities of any endeavor or situation. Learning to relax into the present moment can also be very grounding and if practiced daily can bring peace and clarity.

In this class we will review a few observation techniques, allow you time to practice observing your surrounding reality, and then reflect upon your observation sessions in journal. Most classes will be held outside on campus.

This class emphasizes Experience Learning in the form of *field work*. Each class we will go outside to observe different parts of our surroundings using various techniques. Each observation session will be 20 minutes.

REFLECTION WRITING: This UNHO 101 course fulfills the Academic Engagement pillar of your 1794 Scholars Program this semester. We will learn about reflective writing and how to construct a good reflective writing piece through *weekly journal entries after each observation session*. Additionally, you will use these concepts to complete your end-of-semester reflections for each of the 4 pillars in the 1794 Scholars Program on your Honors e-portfolio. See the 1794 Scholars Program information on the Honors & Scholars Canvas site for more information about end-of-semester reflections.

ITEMS NEEDED FOR CLASS:

1. **A paper binded notepad** to write your journal entries.
2. **A timer** to alert you when observation session reaches 20 minutes. You can use your cell phone for this (the only purpose to use your phone during this class), or another timer.
3. **Something to sit on**, a mat, towel, or blanket.
4. **Rain protection**, preferably an umbrella for days it might rain.
5. **Adequate clothes** to keep you warm in cooler fall weather.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

Final grade percentage weights are as follows:

- Attendance and participation - 50% of grade
- Journal reflections - 40% of grade
- Final presentation to class – 10% of grade

Participation - The effort you put into it is personal; I cannot see it or grade it besides you being present.

Journal Reflections

- Must write a journal reflection immediately after every observation session
- Must have a bound paper notebook to journal
- I will have ‘prompt’ questions to help get you writing if needed (but not necessary)
- Write for at least 5 minutes
- I’m looking for ½ to 1 page on average
- IMPORTANT!: I don’t want you to think about what you will write during the 20 minute observation session. Only begin to thinking about writing when you pick up the pen. I’m not looking for amazing proeses, just simple honest reflection.
- I will collect journals three times.
 - Sept 13
 - Oct 18
 - Nov 22

Final Presentation – everyone will share one memorable moment of observation you had during the semester. This can be a simple explanation, a drawing, a poem, or other creative way to express your experience.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: This is a field work class, ***attendance of every class is necessary***. If you must be absent due to sickness, please contact me to discuss at-home observation sessions. Do not just disappear - keep me informed! I want to know how/what you're doing!

CELL PHONE AND LAP TOP POLICY: Cell phones need to be turned to silent and put away for the duration of each class. Please inform me if there is an emergency situation where you need your phone to be within quick reach (we’re talking a life or death situation, here). You will not need your laptop for this class.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY: Because this UNHO 101 course is a requirement of the 1794 Scholars Program, students are not permitted to drop/withdraw from this course without risk of dismissal from the 1794 Scholars Program. However, if you must withdraw from the course, please talk to me about it.

DISABILITY ACCOMODATIONS: If you have a documented disability, the Office of Disability Services (ODS) can assist you by first determining your eligibility and then working collaboratively to determine reasonable accommodations and services to give you equal access to the University. *In the college setting, it is your responsibility to request disability services.* You

must self-register with ODS before any accommodations can be provided. Visit ods.utk.edu for more information or call 974-6087.

UNIVERSITY HONOR STATEMENT: *“As a student of the University, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity.”* See <https://hilltopics.utk.edu/student-code-of-conduct/> for more information.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Most classes will meet outside.** Currently masks are not required when outside.
- When meeting inside, students are required to wear face masks and maintain social distancing of 6 feet.
- Students who are feeling ill or experiencing symptoms such as sneezing, coughing, or a higher than normal temperature will be excused from class and should stay at home.

HONORS & SCHOLARS VALUE STATEMENT: As defined by the National Collegiate Honors Council, honors courses are characterized by activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable courses. Honors experiences include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy. As a student at the University of Tennessee, you should understand that grades are earned not given.

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Mon Aug 30, 2021	Assignment Sitting and Breathing	due by 11:50am
Mon Sep 13, 2021	Assignment Plants	due by 11:50am
Mon Sep 20, 2021	Assignment Water	due by 11:50am
Mon Sep 27, 2021	Assignment Sounds	due by 11:50am
Mon Oct 4, 2021	Assignment Walking	due by 11:50am
Mon Oct 11, 2021	Assignment The Whole	due by 11:50am
Mon Oct 18, 2021	Assignment The Small	due by 11:50am
Mon Nov 1, 2021	Assignment Drawing	due by 11:50am
Mon Nov 8, 2021	Assignment Wandering	due by 11:50am
Mon Nov 15, 2021	Assignment Camera	due by 11:50am
Mon Nov 22, 2021	Assignment No Method	due by 11:50am
Mon Nov 29, 2021	Assignment Permaculture and Observation	due by 11:50am

1. Sitting and Breathing

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavillion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7> (Links to an external site.)

We will quickly review the technique of focusing on your in and out breath.

Readings due before class:

[Thich Nat Hahn, "How to Sit", pp. 12, 27, 30, 42, 47](#)

[Thich Nat Hahn, "How to Sit", pp. 68, 69](#)

[Sylvia Boorstein, "Don't just do something, sit there", pp 32-35.](#)

Also watch this video on 'reflective writing': [Reflection in Honors & Scholars: 1794](#)



[Scholars \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

20 minute observation session: For this session we will observe our breath together as a group. We will find a nice spot to sit comfortably in a chair or on the ground. Set timer. Do not lay down. Sit upright. Close your eyes, take a couple of deep breathes, and bring your attention to your breathing. Focus on one spot (tip of nose, chest, or abdomen). Cover the movement of your breath with your attention. Do not try to control your breath, let it move as it will. If you become lost in thought, just kindly 'loosen your grip' and return your attention to your breath. Begin again. If thoughts/feelings hang around that's fine, but just remain with the breath too. If you want, try one of these techniques: (1) counting every out-breath up to 10, then start over, or (2) put light internal words to the breaths like "I breathe in, I breath out".

Write your journal entry

2. Plants

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavillion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7>

We will spend today's session observing plants.

Reading due before class:

[Kimmerer "Braiding Sweetgrass", Asters and Goldenrod, pp39-47.](#)

[Pema Chodron "When things fall apart" pp. 24-31.](#)

[Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness, page 58.](#)

Observation session: Sit comfortably alone beside a plant, tree, or group of plants. Set timer. Now relax and begin to place attention upon the plant. We are sitting with the plant for these 20 minutes, noticing what you notice about them. We are not 'trying' to intensely notice everything about the plant. In a relaxed and easy manner we are just noticing what we notice -- Look at the colors, the shapes, the textures, the veins in the leaves, maybe a breeze will make the plants move. Maybe you'll notice the larger context of where the plant is growing. Boil your perceptions down to the raw sense data.

You may notice yourself getting lost in thoughts of other things. Maybe trying to solve problems. Just notice this, and (with kindness), bring your attention back to the plant. Do this whenever you become lost in thought (over and over). Remember its only 20 minutes, solving problems can wait. Just give up (over and over). Loosen your grip on the thoughts (over and over), if they stick around, well that's fine; You loosened your grip and that is all you need to do.

If you want to, try lightly paying attention to your out-breathes (like the Chodron reading said); be 25% mindful of your every out-breathe, and the rest of the time just be with what you notice. Sometimes light attention to breath keeps our attention more in the moment.

When your timer goes off, write a journal entry.

3. Water

We will meet in Tyson Park. Here is the location map:

<https://goo.gl/maps/MBHbavQJ66rpAS898> (Links to an external site.) (35.953548828768774, -83.9415629562521)

We will be letting our observation focus loose a bit more. We will be sitting by water and observing water in the present moment.

Reading due before class:

[Dean Sluyter, Natural Meditation, pp 32-34.](#)

I'm also including the Lindbergh reading as an example of how great reflective writing can come out of time observing the world. She writes on the necessity of solitude. Written from her perspective in the 1940's but still relevant to us all today:

[Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Gift from the Sea, Chapter 3 Moonshell, pp. 33-52.](#)

Observation session: Find a spot by the water (creek). Set timer. Sit upright and comfortably. Set your intention to put things aside for these minutes and be in the present moment. Now bring your attention to the water, its movement, sounds, reflections, insects, fish...anything that grabs your attention. Don't be concerned with paying attention to it all, just relax and notice what you notice -- see/hear/feel the raw data of the senses. Dive below the 'names' of things or the concepts of things and notice the sense-data. If you become lost in thought, kindly bring your attention back to your breath or the water, whatever captures your attention. If it helps, continue noticing 25% of every out breath like we did last time while observing water (this may help anchor you to the present moment).

Write a journal entry.

Turn in your journal with the past 3 journal entries.

4. Sounds

We will meet at the UT Gardens AT THE BRICK FRONT ENTRY THIS TIME (and not the Pavilion) on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7> (Links to an external site.)

We will spend today's session observing sounds.

Reading due before class:

[Diana Winston, Little Book of Being, What is Natural Awareness? pages 12-14.](#)

[Diana Winston, Little Book of Being, Listening Expansion. page 102.](#)

Also make sure you've read the readings from the 'water' observation assignment.

Observation session: We will practice Natural Awareness by observing sounds together as a group.

Write journal entry.

5. Walking

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavillion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7> (Links to an external site.)

Reading due before class:

[Thich Nhat Hanh, How to Walk, pp 19, 20, 26, 33,46,75,79,100,108,110](#)

Also watch this short video on letting things settle (Dean Sluyter):

- [Explanation of wide open effortless method:](#)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlfRyqBujbw> (Links to an external site.)



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Observation session: In this session we are going to observe while walking. To get in the right mode (ease in) start off by either 1) counting your steps up to some number (like 8 or 10), then start over, 2) breathe as if through the soles of your feet, or 3) say 'breathe in' when breathing in and 'breathe out' when breathing out. While doing one of these place your attention on your legs/feet as you walk. Don't necessarily think about your legs/feet just place your attention down there. If thoughts/feelings are there that's fine, just remain with one of the three modes too. After 10 minutes of walking doing one of the three modes above, try dropping the mode and just walk. Notice what you notice and don't try to change anything. Just keep walking and let sites, sensations, feelings, and thoughts come and go. After 10 more minutes you are done! Then write some reflections on your walk.

6. The Whole

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavillion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7>

Read before class:

[Douglas Harding, "On Having No Head"](#)

We will do a few experiments together developed by Douglas Harding to observe from the first person perspective. This can lead to a powerful perspective from which to observe the world.

Please watch this short video reviewing the pointing experiment we will try:



[Pointing Experiment \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Write journal entry.

7. The Small

Be sure to bring something to sit on and rain gear.

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavillion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7>

Today we will take time to observe the small.

Read before class:

[Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, Epiphany in the Beans, pp. 121-127.](#)

Observation Session:

In today's reading Kimmerer had an epiphany in the garden. In a similar fashion we will 'prepare the garden' for epiphanies.

For observation we will each find a spot to sit by flowers, leaves, grass, or insects. First set an intention to be present for the session, then begin observing the small. What is the smallest detail you can see on a flower, an insect, a leaf? Cover the object with your attention. Just like the week with sound observation, notice how seeing can happen at the location of the object (and not in your head). If beauty emerges, notice its arising. Is it a product of thought? What kind of state is your mind in when beauty is noticed? If lost in thought, just notice and with the lightest touch bring your attention back to small details of observation in this moment.

Write reflections in journal.

8. Drawing

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavillion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7>

Make sure to bring a drawing implement of some kind...like a pencil!

Read before class: <http://yourcreativeconnection.org/2018/10/03/1198/> (Links to an external site.)

Observation session: Today we will draw. Walk around the garden and find something you'd like to draw. Maybe a leaf, or a flower, or a fence. It can be anything. Set timer. Now try to replicate what you see on paper. Look carefully at the lines, the shapes, the shading. Try to get it down on paper. Don't worry about how 'well' you are doing. Its the process of looking deeply at the object that is key. If you are shy about drawing, try 'freehanding' where you don't look at page and just keep looking at the object while you draw.

After the 20 minutes, you can either write a journey entry about the experience, or keep on drawing for the remainder of the time. Please turn in your drawing as the journey entry.

9. Wandering

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavilion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7>

Read before class:

[Rikki Hall, Six Legs and a Buzz, On the being of bugs, pp 5-6.](#)

Observation session

Today we will have an open-ended observation. We will set out alone to wander the garden. The only rule is to be aware and not to talk. Drop all expectations and plans. Do not try to solve anything. If you board a 'thought train' just disembark to the present reality when you notice. Follow your intuition in directing your wander, i.e. don't concern yourself with where you go. Will you walk the whole 20 minutes? Sit and look at plants or insects? close your eyes? lay back for awhile? Anything goes. Relax and be in the present however the moment directs you.

Write journal entry.

10. Camera

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavilion on the Agricultural Campus again:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7>

Please read these short articles on 'slow photography'.

<https://www.mindful.org/re-photography-slow-down/> (Links to an external site.)

<https://www.slowphotographymovement.com/home/2019/11/18/rewards-and-revelations> (Links to an external site.)

Today we will set timers for 20 minutes and practice slow photography. The goal is to use the practice of photography to deepen our observation of the moment. With camera in hand, slow down, walk around the garden and look at things. If you see something beautiful, take a few moments to observe the object before taking photographs. Stay in the photographers mind for the 20 minutes, searching and observing.

Afterwards, choose one photograph to email me (chellwin@utk.edu). Write a journal entry about the experience and/or your photograph.

Also turn in journal entries. You should have 5 including today's entry.

11. No Method

We will meet at the UT Gardens Pavillion on the Agricultural Campus. Here is the location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/GsXTU4AQRgE2dtzL7>

Listen before class (Rupert Spira):



[The Highest Meditation \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Observation session.

We will have another group guided meditation resting in our own simple natural awareness.

Write journal entry.

12. Permaculture and Observation

We will meet back in our original classroom this week (Haslam Business Building #113)

I will give an introduction to permaculture and how observation is the first 'principle' of permaculture.

[Here is the presentation:](#)

We will go over journals questions.

Readings before class:

[Mollison, Intro do Permaculture, pp 1-2.](#)

[Bane, Permaculture Handbook, pp 29-40.](#)