

# **SW 363 The Science of Yoga – Winter Term 2009**

## **DePaul University School for New Learning**

**Location: O'Hare Campus**

**Day: Thursday**

**Dates: 1/8, 1/16, 1/22, 1/29, 2/5, 2/12, 2/19, 2/26, 3/5, 3/12, 3/19. 3/26**

**6:30 PM to 9:30 PM**

**Faculty:** Yirser Ra Hotep (Elvrid Lawrence), MSW; 4507 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago IL. 60653; Cell: 773 396-6613 <http://www.yogaskills.com>; E-mail: [yogaskills@msn.com](mailto:yogaskills@msn.com)

**Course Description:** Yoga is an ancient system of spiritual development and transformation. In the process of spiritual development the practitioner of Yoga acquires a wide array of physical and psychological benefits that improves health and well being. Yoga and meditation (meditation is a branch of Yoga) has been demonstrated to be effective in relieving stress, treating anxiety and depression, preventing and healing injuries and improving the functioning of children with special needs. Yoga and meditation has been demonstrated to treat alcoholism and substance abuse. World-class amateur and professional athletes have made Yoga an integral part of their physical and mental training regimes. Yoga has become one of the most popular classes offered by health clubs and according to TIME magazine is the most popular exercise system in the world.

The Science of Yoga will explore the positive physical and psychological benefits of Yoga from a scientific perspective. We will examine scientific studies that have been done on the effects of Yoga and meditation to gain an understanding of why this system of spirituality has become an increasingly integral part of modern health and fitness practice. The ancient origins and philosophical foundations of Yoga will be evaluated in the context of modern understanding of physiological and psychological processes.

Students in this class will practice Yoga and meditation techniques and keep a journal of the effects that they experience. They will compare their experiences with the data from scientific studies. Students will also share and compare their experiences from practicing Yoga and meditation with their classmates. The majority of the Yoga practice will be done through self-study with the YogaSkills Instructional DVD. This will be supplemented with some in class practice and meditation. Though there is no text for this course there will be handouts and video presentations to supplement the learning experience.

**Biography:**

Yirser Ra Hotep (Elvrid Lawrence) has over 30 years of experience as a master practitioner and instructor of Yoga. He has developed a practice as a stress management consultant through his company, YogaSkills Stress Management and Wellness Consultants. Through YogaSkills he provides stress reduction and wellness services for a variety of corporate and public sector clients and individuals. He has presented workshops, lectures and demonstrations through out the U.S., in Cuba, the Caribbean and Africa. He has been featured in Ebony magazine, Chicago Parent Magazine, the Chicago Tribune Newspaper, WGN Television and ABC Television for his work with Yoga in the African American community and for pre-school children and those with special needs. He has produced a set of instructional Yoga DVDs, meditation CDs and is the author of a soon to be released book on Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) Yoga.

Yirser holds a Masters degree in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Illinois at Chicago. In his teaching he seeks to meld ancient spiritual practices with academic research and rigor.

### **Course Requirements and Assignments:**

- **Journals:** The journal should be one typed page and turned in starting with the second class. Your journal should simply document your practice of the Yoga techniques, the effects you perceive and whatever other impressions you gather.  
30% of grade
- **Research Paper:** Write a 5-page paper examining an aspect of Yoga of your choosing. The guidelines for this paper is loose except that you need to address Yoga from a scientific perspective and demonstrate an understanding of the Yogic connection with physical and mental health and well being or other aspects of Yoga being rooted in scientific theory.  
30% of grade
- **Class Presentation:** Prepare a 10-minute oral synopsis of your paper and any other impressions, insights of factual data that you deem important to your understanding of Yoga from a scientific perspective.  
10% of grade
- **Class Attendance:** In order to receive an “A” for this class you must attend every class. Missing two classes might cause you to have to drop the course or take an incomplete.  
30% of grade

All DePaul standards covering integrity and plagiarism will apply to this class.

**Class Schedule: Workout clothing and Yoga Mats should be available for each class.**

### **Class 1:**

The History and origins of Yoga: In this class we will explore the ancient origins of Yoga in India, Egypt and other cultures from around the world. How Yoga has changed during the modern era will be contrasted with the ancient origins. What is Yoga? Is

Yoga a religion? What are the benefits of Yoga? Did the ancient Egyptians really practice Yoga? Why is Yoga called a science? In this class emphasis will be placed on understanding Yoga in the context of a natural healing system, holistic health, alternative medicine and complementary medicine. In this context we will view a video entitled “Medical Mysteries: Did Ancient Doctors Know More”. This DVD helps to define the terms mentioned above and provides a context from which to view Yoga from both as a philosophy and as a science. We will also be introduced to the basic breathing, relaxation and meditation techniques of Yoga. **S-1-X, S-4, S-1-C, S-2-C**

### **Class 2:**

In this class we will practice Yoga and meditation in order to experience the physiological effects. Be prepared to share and discuss your experiences with your classmates. Begin practice of the techniques in Volume 1 of the YogaSkills DVD series. Include in your practice the Cleansing Breath, Mummy Pose, Forward Bending Pose, Cobra and Spinal Twist. Reflect on the effects you experience from your practice in your first journal. Competencies: **S-1-C, S-2-C**

### **Class 3:**

The Scientific background of Yoga. In this class we will examine the scientific data that indicates the physiological and psychological effects of Yoga on health and well-being. We will examine scientific studies on the health effects of Yoga and Meditation as compiled in various scientific studies and by the International Association of Yoga Therapists. Continue to practice the Cleansing Breath, Mummy Pose, Forward Bending Poses, Backward Bending Poses and Spinal Twists from Volume 1 of the YogaSkills DVD series. Review the PowerPoint presentation, Kemeti Yoga and Healing that is posted on blackboard prior to this class. Focus especially on the section that deals with meditation and the brain. **S-1-C, S-2-C**

### **Class 4:**

In this class we will examine the philosophy that underpins Yoga as both an art and a scientific mode of objective and subjective inquiry. We will compare Yogic philosophy with current quantum theory about the nature of reality. We will supplement our learning with a viewing of “What the Bleep Do We Know” video. This video explores the theories of quantum physics and how they connect to ancient systems of knowing such as Yogic philosophy. **S-4, S-1-C and S-2-C**

### **Class 5:**

In this class students will continue to practice Yoga and meditation techniques. We will also explore the role of Yoga as tool for stress management. In addition we will explore the importance of nutritional science in the practice of Yoga and why it is imperative for health. In this session we will explore the physiology of stress, the psychological dimensions of stress, stress and personality types. A scientific approach to understanding

the role of key nutrients in the management of stress and creating mental balance will be explored. Guest Speaker Rahpre Newberry will lead the discussion on stress and share a variety of techniques from the sciences of Yoga, meditation and Tai Chi. Tai Chi is a Yoga like system that evolved from Yoga but has also has a martial arts aspect. Review the PowerPoint presentation on the physiology of stress and the one on Nutrition and Stress on the Blackboard prior to class. **S-1-C, S-2-C**

**Class 6:**

Melding Practice with Theory: In this class we will begin the process of getting deeper into our practice of Yoga and trying to acquire the experience of the theory that underpins the practice. Students should practice the Sun Salutation from DVD # of the YogaSkills required DVD set. Students should identify the physical, biological and psychological effects that they are experiencing from the practice. Students should record their experiences in their reflective journal and compare and contrast their experiences with the scientific articles posted on Blackboard. **S-4, S-1-C, S-2-C**

**Class 7:**

Students will continue their practice of Yoga from the required YogaSkills DVD set. In addition to the Sun Salutation on DVD # 2, students will practice the cleansing breath, mummy pose, forward bending pose, spider, spinal twist and triangle pose on from DVD #1. Students should record their observations of the variety of physical, physiological and psychological effects of their practice. Students should use their experiences to extrapolate as to the medical or complimentary uses of the practices. Students should compare the effects they experience with the article on the “Health Benefits of Yoga”. Students should reflect on these effects and the implications for Yoga a compliment to traditional western medicine. **S-1-C, S-2-C**

**Class 8:**

Students should continue to practice the Yoga techniques from Volumes I and II of the YogaSkills DVD series. They should also incorporate the meditation and pranayama (breath control) techniques learned in this class and previous sessions. Students should reflect on any increase in their ability to manage stress, control their emotions, focus and concentrate as a result of their cumulative practice. Students should also reflect on any insights they have gained into Yoga from a cosmological perspective. These insights include but are not limited to: a quantum understanding of reality as elucidated in the video “What the Bleep Do We Know”, insight into the interconnectedness of natural environment and changes in individual and group perceptions of respect for nature and life in general. **S-4, S-1-C, S-2-C**

**Class 9:**

Evolution, Change and Adaptation: In this class students will explore the role of the practice of Yogic science as it relates to the potential of humans to evolve and adapt

positively to the natural environment. Can Yoga from both a practice perspective and its adoption from a philosophical perspective create conditions by which humans can survive threats such as global warming and other supposed environmental “catastrophes”? Can Yoga create a more conscious world community? What does Yoga teach us about the world, nature and the interconnectedness of the ecosystems and human beings? Read the article “Just Say Om” on the blackboard in order to reflect on this topic prior to class. Also do a search on Yogic philosophy on the internet and find 2 to 3 articles that informs your opinion on this topic. **S-4**

### **Class 10:**

In this final class students will participate in a meditation session followed by presentation of their research and impressions garnered from their practice of Yoga and Meditation. The presentations will be 10 minutes long. More information on the presentation guidelines will be given in class. **S-1-X, S-4, S-1-C, S-2-C**

### **Class 11:**

Wrap up and conclusion. Students will turn in their final projects. Students will break into groups to discuss lessons learned in the course and how they relate to the class objectives. **S-1-X, S-4, S-1-C, S-2-C**

### **Competencies:**

**S-1-X:** Written by student and Instructor

**S-1-C:** Can explain personal interactions with the physical environment using scientific principles. Students will be able to use scientific principles to analyze the positive effects of Yoga and meditation on health, physical performance and well being.

**S-2-C:** Can describe, categorize and explain development or change within physical or biological systems. Students will be able to track, categorize and explain physiological and psychological changes taking place within them as the result of their practice of Yoga and meditation.

**S-4:** Can describe and explain connections among diverse aspects of nature.

Students will be able to understand and explain the function of Yoga and meditation in the context of natural healing systems that help humans to positively adjust and adapt to changes in the physical environment over time. Students will see Yoga in the context of a scientific and philosophical approach to understanding ecological systems and the need for balance in all aspects of nature from the individual to the greater populations. Students will see in Yogic philosophy the foundation of modern ecology as a science and as a movement.

### **Required Course Materials:**

**Text: Yoga as Medicine: The Yogic Prescription for Health and Healing by Timothy McCall, ISBN: 978-0-553-38406-2 (0-553-38406-6), Bantam Books**

## **YogaSkills KemetiC Yoga DVD Series (3 part set)**

### **Recommended Texts:**

- 1. Light on Yoga, BKS Inyengar**
- 2. The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga, Swami Vishnudevananda**
- 3. Science Studies Yoga, Ballentine**
- 4. The Yoga of Time Travel, Wolfe**
- 5. Way of The Chakras, Caroline Shola Arewa**
- 6. Ancient Future, Wayne B. Chandler**

### **Videos/DVDs:**

- 1. What the Bleep Do We Know**
- 2. Medical Mysteries: Did Ancient Doctors Know More?**
- 3. Magical Egypt, John Anthony West**