

# Mindful Self-Compassion at Harvard Library

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## Abstract:

Harvard Library piloted a modified Mindful Self-Compassion course tailored to the workplace setting as part of its Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging programming. Program evaluation included a pre-post course survey with 125 questions from 11 validated survey instruments in addition to a post course evaluation. Nine of 11 pre-post course measures had statistically significant improvement with the greatest areas of change in improving internal body awareness, enhancing self-compassion, minimizing self-criticizing, and increasing workplace wellbeing. The post course evaluation indicated that the course had positive applications in the workplace and in coping with circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants reported an increase in recognizing common humanity (struggle is a universal human experience) and the ability to effectively counter self-criticism described as “the inner critic.”

## I. Introduction

Harvard Library piloted a workplace-oriented modification of the evidence based Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) program developed by Christopher K. Germer and Kristin Neff. Offered as part of the Harvard Library Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB) framework, the workplace-oriented class was offered to library staff and for the first time in an organizational setting. The course met for 2.5 hours per week, for 9 weeks. Staff who participated in the class were also offered a continuation program following the 9-week course, which met each week for 45 minutes for 16 weeks and every other week for 8 weeks. The results in this report pertain to the 9-week course only.

The course sought to teach:

- How self-compassion can strengthen inclusion, belonging, and allyship through bringing awareness to patterns of exclusion, bias, and judgement of oneself and one’s own story and culture; through cultivating compassion for and a sense of common humanity with others; through compassionate listening; and through development of skills related to advocacy and difficulties in relationships
- How to bring your inner ally rather than your inner critic to work
- How to motivate yourself with encouragement rather than criticism
- How to transform difficult relationships
- How to handle difficult emotions with greater ease
- How to find joy and meaning in everyday life

Self-compassion is an intrinsic skill that can be strengthened over time, and is associated with higher motivation to learn and grow,<sup>1</sup> less fear of failure and a higher likelihood to try again after failing,<sup>2</sup> reductions in stress, anxiety, and perfectionism, and increases in gratitude, curiosity, and connectedness with others.<sup>3</sup> Self-compassion can be thought of as treating yourself during both happy and difficult times as you would a dear, respected friend. Physiologically, self-compassion reduces the threat defense system (“fight, flight or freeze”) and activates the mammalian care-giving system and increases parasympathetic

tone,<sup>4</sup> supporting its role in more effective management of chronic illnesses like diabetes, depression, and pain.<sup>5</sup>

Self-compassion can be a key element in sustaining oneself and work. In pursuing excellence there is often a critical inner voice with demanding and counter-productive expectations to succeed. Self-compassion, unlike self-esteem or self-care, is about cultivating an attitude of self-respect and self-awareness in the midst of difficulty that can lead to more honest, joyful, healthy, and productive relationships with oneself, work, and others. In understanding and extending self-compassion it becomes easier to understand and extend compassion to others. This expansion of kind awareness in turn aids awareness of unconscious biases toward others. In these ways, mindful self-compassion can be a path to strengthening inclusion, belonging, and allyship.

Cultural conditioning and views about success and strength falsely lead to the belief that self-compassion is a form of self-indulgence, self-pity, or weakness. Research on the Mindful Self-Compassion program debunks these myths, showing that it actually increases motivation, performance, and resilience.<sup>6</sup> These benefits are important to individuals and organizations.

## **II. Methods**

### **II.1 Participants and Procedure**

Harvard Library contracted with the Center for Mindfulness & Compassion (CMC) at the Cambridge Health Alliance to teach the course and conduct the program evaluation. Drawing on the Center's research program capacity and expertise, a course evaluation was collaboratively designed to evaluate the impact and value of the class for participants and the organization.

A total of 27 Harvard Library staff participated in the MSC course. Staff were 89% women, 89% white, from a variety of library departments and a wide range of position levels, managerial responsibilities, and had 1–30+ years of library service.

Before the course, participants were asked about their experiences with mindfulness, meditation, or other contemplative practices. Self-compassion, emotion regulation, and internal body awareness measures were used to assess change related to the standard course. As a workplace program, Harvard Library also sought to know if organization goals related to inclusion and belonging would be positively impacted using measures such as acceptance of change, fear of failure, work group inclusion, group openness to diversity, perceived dissimilarity, perspective taking, self-criticizing, and workplace wellbeing.

Throughout the course, participants had the option to provide weekly feedback through an anonymous paper form and teachers regularly sought feedback during the class and adjusted accordingly.

The pre- and post-instrument had 125 validated items and the post course evaluation included 51 additional questions about program content, format, use of program materials, practices at work, whether participants would recommend the program to be offered again, and impact on coping with the coronavirus pandemic.

Completed pre- and post-test data was obtained from 17 participants and data analysis was conducted on those participants with full data. Post course evaluation survey was completed by 21 participants.

### **II.2 Measures**

125 questions were identified for the pre and post-test and those questions were drawn from 11 survey measures. Table II-1 presents the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of all survey

measures observed at each time point. Sample survey questions are included in the October 2020 Library Assessment Conference presentation.<sup>7</sup>

**Table II-1. Internal consistencies of survey measures**

Measure	Pre-test $\alpha$	Post-test $\alpha$
ACS	0.878	0.912
DERS-18	0.713	0.842
FOF	0.464	0.721
WGIS	0.922	0.875
MAIA-2	0.853	0.889
GOD	0.917	0.961
PD	0.818	0.801
PT	0.832	0.927
SCS-SF	0.809	0.907
FSCRS	0.895	0.916
WWQ	0.888	0.772

**Note.** ACS=Acceptance of Change; DERS-18=Emotion Regulation; FOF=Fear of Failure; WGIS=Work Group Inclusion; MAIA-2=Internal Interoception (Body) Awareness; GOD=Group Openness to Diversity; PD=Perceived Dissimilarity; PT=Perspective Taking; SCS-SF=Self-Compassion; FSCRS=Self-Criticizing; WWQ=Workplace Wellbeing.

#### Acceptance of Change (ACS)

The Acceptance of Change Scale was used to measure the tendency of participants to accept or move toward change.<sup>8</sup> It consists of 20 items in 5 subscales: predisposition to change (e.g., “I am able to take all the opportunities that occur to me”), support for change (e.g., “I can handle the changes in relationships with others”), change seeking (e.g., “I am always looking for changes in my everyday life”), positive reaction to change (e.g., “I am able to tolerate even the negative aspects of change”), and cognitive flexibility (e.g., “If necessary, it is not difficult for me to change my mind”). Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.88$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.91$  at post-test.

#### Emotion Regulation (DERS-18)

The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-18) measures multiple dimensions of emotion dysregulation.<sup>9</sup> It consists of 18 items in 6 subscales: awareness (e.g., “I pay attention to how I feel”), clarity (e.g., “I am confused about how I feel”), goals (e.g., “When I’m upset, I have difficulty getting work done”), impulse (e.g., “When I’m upset, I become out of control”), nonacceptance (e.g., “When I’m upset, I feel guilty for feeling that way”), and strategies (e.g., “When I’m upset, I believe that I’ll end up feeling very depressed”). Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.71$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.84$  at post-test.

### **Fear of Failure (FOF)**

The Fear of Failure scale consists of 10 items (e.g., “When I start doing poorly on a task, I feel like giving up”).<sup>10</sup> All items were negatively worded and total score was computed by reverse coding. Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.46$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.72$  at post-test.

### **Work Group Inclusion (WGIS)**

The Work Group Inclusion Scale was used to measure participants’ perception of relationships with their work group members and difference from others in their work group.<sup>11</sup> It comprises 10 items in 2 components: belongingness (e.g., “I am treated as a valuable member of my work group”) and uniqueness (e.g., “People in my work group listen to me even when my views are dissimilar”). Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.92$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.88$  at post-test.

### **Internal Interoception (Body) Awareness (MAIA-2)**

The Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness, Version 2 (MAIA-2) is an 8-scale state-trait questionnaire with 37 items to measure multiple dimensions of interoception by self-report 10 items in 3 subscales were used for pre- and post-test: self-regulation (e.g., “I can use my breath to reduce tension”), body listening (e.g., “I listen to my body to inform me about what to do”), and trusting (e.g., “I trust my body sensations”). Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.85$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.89$  at post-test.

### **Group Openness to Diversity (GOD)**

In the Group Openness to Diversity Scale,<sup>12</sup> two items were used to measure each type of perceived group openness to diversity: openness to visible diversity (e.g., “I enjoy doing jobs with people of different ethnicity, gender, and/or age”), openness to value diversity (e.g., “I am keen to learn from people who have different work values and/or motivations”), and openness to informational diversity (e.g., “I enjoy doing jobs with people from different professional backgrounds and/or work experiences”). Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.92$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.96$  at post-test.

### **Perceived Dissimilarity (PD)**

In the Perceived Dissimilarity Scale,<sup>13</sup> two items were used to measure each type of perceived dissimilarity: visible dissimilarity (e.g., “I feel I am visibly dissimilar to other group members”), value dissimilarity (e.g., “I feel my work values and/or motivations are dissimilar to other group members”), and informational dissimilarity (e.g., “I feel I am professionally and/or educationally dissimilar to other group members”). All items were negatively worded and total score was computed by reverse coding. Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.82$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.80$  at post-test.

### **Self-Compassion (SCS-SF)**

The 12-item Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form measures how participants tend to respond to themselves in difficult circumstances.<sup>14</sup> This survey measure has the same factor structure, good internal consistency, and a near perfect correlation with the long scale.<sup>15</sup> This measure consists of 6 subscales: self-kindness (e.g., “When I’m going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need”), common humanity (e.g., “I try to see my failings as part of the human condition”), mindfulness (e.g., “When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance”), self-judgment (e.g., “I’m disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies”), isolation (e.g., “When I fail at something that’s important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure”), and over-identification (e.g., “When I’m feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong”). Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.81$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.91$  at post-test.

### **Self-Criticizing (FSCRS)**

Self-criticizing was measured using the 22-item Forms of Self-Criticising/Attacking & Self-Reassuring Scale.<sup>16</sup> This scale measures different ways participants think and feel about themselves when things go

wrong for them. The measure consists of three components: inadequate self (e.g., “There is a part of me that feels I am not good enough”), hated self (e.g., “I do not like being me”), and reassured self (e.g., “I am gentle and supportive with myself”). Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.90$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.92$  at post-test.

### **Workplace Wellbeing (WWQ)**

Workplace Wellbeing Questionnaire is a self-report measure of workplace wellbeing in four areas: work satisfaction, organizational respect for the employee, employer care, and intrusion of work into private life.<sup>17</sup> Four items in inclusion of work into private life subscale (e.g., “After work, do you find it hard to wind down?”) were used for pre- and post-test. Internal consistency reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.89$  at pre-test and  $\alpha = 0.77$  at post-test.

## **II.3 Data Analyses**

A paired *t*-test was conducted to determine whether any significant changes occurred between pre- and post-test. A significant difference in the total score (at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  level) was explored through paired *t*-tests on all measures. All negatively worded item scores were computed by reverse coding and difference scores capturing change over time (pre/post % change) were calculated for all measures. Cohen’s *d* was computed to provide a metric for pre- and post-test comparisons. Pearson’s correlation was used to measure the strength and direction of associations between measures. All pre/post analyses were conducted using R packages.

## **III. Results**

Post test scores were improved for all survey measures with the greatest change seen on measure of self-compassion, internal body awareness, self-criticism, and workplace wellbeing.

### **III.1 Pre- and Post-Test Changes**

The participants’ mean scores prior to and after the MSC course on all survey measures and the results of pre- and post-test comparisons are summarized in Table III-1. The results indicated improvements in all measures, and most of the improvements were statistically significant.

Paired *t*-test indicated that participant showed significant improvement on acceptance of change (ACS), emotion regulation (DERS-18), work group inclusion (WGIS), internal interoception (body) awareness (MAIA-2), group openness to diversity (GOD), self-compassion (SCS-SF), self-criticizing (FSCRS), workplace wellbeing (WWQ), and fear of failure (FOF). Participant showed improvement on perceived dissimilarity (PD) and perspective taking (PT) but the changes were not statistically significant.

*Acceptance of Change (ACS)*. Significant increases were observed in total ACS score ( $t = 3.90, p = 0.00012$ , pre/post change = 6%). Although all five subscales showed an increase, the changes were significant on two subscales: positive reaction to change ( $t = 3.75, p = 0.0004$ , pre/post change = 13%) and support to change ( $t = 2.16, p = 0.035$ , pre/post change = 7%).

*Emotion Regulation (DERS-18)*. Significant improvements were observed in total DERS-18 score ( $t = 4.07, p < 0.0001$ , pre/post change = 6%). Within the DERS-18, changes were significant on two of the six subscales: impulse ( $t = 2.54, p = 0.015$ , pre/post change = 5%) and nonacceptance ( $t = 3.51, p = 0.001$ , pre/post change = 13%).

*Fear of Failure (FOF)*. A significant improvement was observed in total FOF score ( $t = 3.62, p = 0.00039$ , pre/post change = 9%).

**Table III-1. Pre- and post-test scores and effect-sizes on survey measures**

Measure	Pre-test <i>M</i> (SD)	Post-test <i>M</i> (SD)	Pre/Post % Change	Pre/Post <i>t</i> Statistic	Effect Size Cohen's <i>d</i>
ACS	3.10 (1.11)	3.29 (1.14)	6%	3.90***	0.22 (S)
DERS-18	3.86 (1.18)	4.07 (1.03)	6%	4.07****	0.24 (S)
FOF	3.29 (1.26)	3.58 (1.28)	9%	3.62***	0.29 (S)
WGIS	3.83 (0.99)	4.18 (1.00)	9%	4.63****	0.37 (S)
MAIA-2	3.31 (1.30)	4.36 (1.14)	32%	12.52****	0.99 (L)
GOD	4.04 (0.83)	4.26 (0.85)	5%	2.77**	0.29 (S)
PD	3.93 (1.16)	4.13 (0.97)	5%	1.89	0.21 (S)
PT	3.75 (1.10)	3.89 (1.20)	4%	1.51	0.14 (N)
SCS-SF	2.68 (1.09)	3.49 (1.00)	30%	10.14****	0.71 (M)
FSCRS	3.34 (1.22)	3.97 (1.00)	19%	13.64****	0.73 (M)
WWQ	2.94 (1.10)	3.50 (0.87)	19%	4.28****	0.54 (M)

**Note.** ACS=Acceptance of Change; DERS-18=Emotion Regulation; FOF=Fear of Failure; WGIS=Work Group Inclusion; MAIA-2=Internal Interoception (Body) Awareness; GOD=Group Openness to Diversity; PD=Perceived Dissimilarity; PT=Perspective Taking; SCS-SF=Self-Compassion; FSCRS=Self-Criticizing; WWQ=Workplace Wellbeing.

**M=mean; SD=standard deviation; (L)=large effect size; (M)=moderate effect size; (S)=small effect size; (N)=negligible effect size.**

**\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*\*\* $p < 0.0001$  for paired pre-post *t*-test.**

*Work Group Inclusion (WGIS).* Significant increases were observed in total WGIS score ( $t = 4.63, p < 0.0001$ , pre/post change = 9%). The changes were significant on all subscales: belongingness ( $t = 2.21, p = 0.0298$ , pre/post change = 4%) and uniqueness ( $t = 4.16, p < 0.0001$ , pre/post change = 14%).

*Internal Interoception (Body) Awareness (MAIA-2).* Significant increases were observed in total MAIA-2 score ( $t = 12.52, p < 0.0001$ , pre/post change = 32%). The changes were significant on all three subscales: body listening ( $t = 7.77, p < 0.0001$ , pre/post change = 39%), self-regulation ( $t = 9.63, p < 0.0001$ , pre/post change = 36%), and trusting ( $t = 4.51, p < 0.0001$ , pre/post change = 19%).

*Group Openness to Diversity (GOD).* Significant increases were observed in total GOD score ( $t = 2.77, p = 0.0069$ , pre/post change = 5%). Within the GOD, changes were significant on one subscale: openness to visible diversity ( $t = 3.0, p = 0.0053$ , pre/post change = 9%).

*Perceived Dissimilarity (PD).* Although no significant changes were observed in total PD score ( $t = 1.89, p = 0.0616$ , pre/post change = 5%), changes were significant on one subscale: informational dissimilarity ( $t = -2.38, p = 0.0249$ , pre/post change = 11%).

*Perspective Taking (PT)*. The increases were observed in total PT score, but the changes were not significant ( $t = 1.51, p = 0.135, \text{pre/post change} = 4\%$ ).

*Self-Compassion (SCS-SF)*. Significant increases were observed in total SCS-SF score ( $t = 10.14, p < 0.0001, \text{pre/post change} = 30\%$ ). The changes were significant on all six subscales: common humanity ( $t = 4.29, p = 0.00014, \text{pre/post change} = 34\%$ ), isolation ( $t = 4.29, p = 0.00015, \text{pre/post change} = 36\%$ ), mindfulness ( $t = 2.07, p = 0.046, \text{pre/post change} = 9\%$ ), over-identification ( $t = 4.12, p = 0.0002, \text{pre/post change} = 39\%$ ), self-judgement ( $t = 4.92, p < 0.0001, \text{pre/post change} = 29\%$ ), and self-kindness ( $t = 5.48, p < 0.0001, \text{pre/post change} = 39\%$ ).

*Self-Criticizing (FSCRS)*. Significant improvements were observed in total FSCRS score ( $t = 13.60, p < 0.0001, \text{pre/post change} = 19\%$ ). The changes were significant on all three subscales: hated self ( $t = 3.87, p = 0.0002, \text{pre/post change} = 6\%$ ), inadequate self ( $t = 9.71, p < 0.0001, \text{pre/post change} = 28\%$ ), and reassured self ( $t = 9.55, p < 0.0001, \text{pre/post change} = 20\%$ ).

*Workplace Wellbeing (WWQ)*. A significant increase was observed in total WWQ score ( $t = 4.28, p < 0.0001, \text{pre/post change} = 19\%$ ).

Using Cohen's  $d$ , effect sizes were calculated for the MSC course. A large effect size was obtained for the internal body awareness (0.99), moderate effect sizes for the self-compassion (0.71), self-criticizing (0.73), and workplace wellbeing (0.54), and small effect sizes for the acceptance of change (0.22), emotion regulation (0.24), fear of failure (0.29), work group inclusion (0.37), group openness to diversity (0.29), and perceived dissimilarity (0.21).

### III.2 Correlation

Pearson's correlation was used to measure the strength of linear association between measures. The correlations within each time point are summarized in Table III-2.

*Self-Compassion (SCS-SF)*. Increases in self-compassion from pre- to post-test were significantly associated with improved emotion regulation ( $r = 0.92, p < 0.01$ ), self-criticizing ( $r = 0.91, p < 0.01$ ), perspective taking ( $r = 0.85, p < 0.01$ ), internal interoception (body) awareness ( $r = 0.68, p < 0.05$ ), and reduced fear of failure ( $r = 0.75, p < 0.05$ ).

*Self-Criticizing (FSCRS)*. In addition to the very strong correlation with self-compassion, improvements in self-criticism were significantly associated with improved emotion regulation ( $r = 0.88, p < 0.01$ ), perspective taking ( $r = 0.78, p < 0.01$ ), internal interoception (body) awareness ( $r = 0.73, p < 0.05$ ), and reduced fear of failure ( $r = 0.63, p < 0.05$ ).

*Emotion Regulation (DERS-18)*. In addition to the very strong correlation with self-compassion and self-criticizing, increase in emotion regulation from pre- to post-test were significantly associated with perspective taking ( $r = 0.7, p < 0.05$ ), internal body awareness ( $r = 0.67, p < 0.05$ ), and reduced fear of failure ( $r = 0.88, p < 0.01$ ).

*Perspective Taking (PT)*. In addition to the very strong correlation with self-compassion, self-criticizing, and emotion regulation, increase in perspective taking from pre- to post-test were significantly associated with group openness to diversity ( $r = 0.73, p < 0.05$ ), acceptance to change ( $r = 0.64, p < 0.05$ ), and perceived dissimilarity ( $r = -0.65, p < 0.05$ ).

*Group Openness to Diversity (GOD)*. In addition to the very strong correlation with perspective taking, increase in group openness to diversity from pre- to post-test were significantly associated with increase in acceptance to change ( $r = 0.9, p < 0.01$ ).

**Table III-2. Correlations among survey measures**

	ACS	DERS-18	FOF	WGIS	MAIA-2	GOD	PD	PT	SCS-SF	FSCRS
<b>Pre-test</b>										
DERS-18	0.42									
FOF	0.03	0.32								
WGIS	-0.34	0.07	0.03							
MAIA-2	-0.11	-0.24	-0.07	0.28						
GOD	0.69*	-0.01	-0.26	-0.38	-0.20					
PD	-0.46	0.04	0	0.34	-0.64*	-0.34				
PT	0.68*	0.28	0.22	-0.53	-0.43	0.69*	-0.06			
SCS-SF	0.43	0.05	-0.37	0.02	0.26	0.47	-0.26	0.32		
FSCRS	0.63*	0.40	0.40	-0.54	0.11	0.47	-0.57	0.68*	0.17	
WWQ	-0.42	-0.37	-0.02	0.05	-0.23	-0.25	0.11	-0.54	-0.62	-0.58
<b>Post-test</b>										
DERS-18	0.54									
FOF	0.55	0.88**								
WGIS	0.11	0.07	0.42							
MAIA-2	0.29	0.67*	0.43	-0.13						
GOD	0.90**	0.57	0.40	-0.11	0.49					
PD	-0.15	-0.21	0.11	0.58	-0.43	-0.38				
PT	0.64*	0.70*	0.46	-0.34	0.47	0.73*	-0.65*			
SCS-SF	0.59	0.92**	0.75*	-0.14	0.68*	0.63	-0.34	0.85**		
FSCRS	0.42	0.88**	0.63*	-0.38	0.73*	0.55	-0.50	0.78**	0.91**	
WWQ	-0.48	-0.19	-0.05	0.40	-0.57	-0.55	0.61	-0.52	-0.37	-0.43

**Note.** ACS=Acceptance of Change; DERS-18=Emotion Regulation; FOF=Fear of Failure; WGIS=Work Group Inclusion; MAIA-2=Internal Interoception (Body) Awareness; GOD=Group Openness to Diversity; PD=Perceived Dissimilarity; PT=Perspective Taking; SCS-SF=Self-Compassion; FSCRS=Self-Criticizing; WWQ=Workplace Wellbeing.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

### III.3 Post Course Evaluation

Staff reported strong positive impact of the course on the inner critic and for increasing awareness of common humanity as shown in Table III-3.

Staff reflections included, *“I’m coming to an understanding that people generally aren’t as critical of me as I am of myself”* and *“I found it was really helpful to learn how common the inner critic is for all of us and how important it is for us to give ourselves positive feedback and encouragement instead.”*

Eight-five percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the curriculum was relevant and applied to work. Staff reported using MSC skills in meetings, with technology, to improve relationships, communication, and lessening the inner critic.

One hundred percent of respondents reported that the course positively impacted their ability to cope with the novel coronavirus pandemic. Skills were used to: manage emotions and uncertainty, increase patience with technology and learning new work-from-home tools, feel less isolated, identify individual needs and take care accordingly and to support wellbeing. One staff member reported, *“Being at home due to the pandemic is exhausting and stressful—the skills I learned are SO INCREDIBLY HELPFUL in dealing with the current reality that I can’t imagine how I could go through this without them.”* One hundred percent of respondents recommended the course be offered again.

**Table III-3. Common Humanity, Inner Critic, and Work Relevance Questions**

Question—how did the course impact your:	A great deal & Quite a bit	Moderately	Some	Not at all
ability to be aware of others' pain or struggle, especially those who may be different from you?	71%	10%	19%	
awareness of common humanity with others who may not be like you?	71%	10%	19%	
awareness of others' responding to or being empathetic to your own struggles?	76%	5%	14%	5%
relationship to your inner critic at work?	81%	14%	5%	
Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Disagree
I found that the curriculum was relevant and applied to my work life.	60%	25%	5%	10%

### IV. Discussion

There is significant evidence that the MSC course improved overall self-compassion in the participants ( $p < 0.0001$ ). On average, the scores in post-test were higher than pre-test and this increase was statistically significant at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  level. The results reflect the large impact of the MSC course for improving internal body awareness and the moderate impact on enhancing self-compassion and workplace wellbeing while minimizing self-criticism. Correlation analysis of post-test showed more significant and stronger positive correlations between survey measures, particularly self-compassion, self-criticism, perspective taking, internal body awareness, emotion regulation, and fear of failure. This indicates that higher increases in internal body awareness, self-compassion and self-criticism were significantly associated with enhanced emotion regulation and perspective taking and with reduced fear of failure.

Staff self-reported positive impact on coping during the pandemic and other desirable workplace outcomes including improving work relationships, increasing a sense of common humanity, coping with stress, and reducing self-judgment.

A limitation of the analysis is that there was limited gender and ethnic diversity among participants and the demographic characteristics of survey respondents for the pre- and post-test and course evaluation are unknown. It is not possible to draw conclusions about the experiences or impact for participants by ethnicity, gender, or other demographic categories and those results may not reflect the positive experiences reported.

Given that 100% of respondents recommended that the course be offered again and that all reported benefits related to coping during the pandemic, a modified spin-off pilot course (Skills for Inner and Outer Belonging (IOB): A Mindfulness and Compassion Introduction for Harvard Library Staff) was offered in the summer of 2020 with unlimited library staff enrollment. Formatted differently (3 times a week for 15 minutes for 8 weeks), the evaluation of this course included some of the same pre- and post-test measures and course evaluation questions. The IOB course also sought to more directly connect teaching to diversity, inclusion, belonging, and anti-racism topics. The course evaluation included questions on those as well.

This pilot was undertaken as an innovation endeavor, in part, to learn how MSC programming supported the diversity, inclusion, and belonging framework for Harvard Library, which aligns with university diversity, inclusion, and belonging goals. Results will be shared with colleagues in the Office of Human Resources, the Office of Work/Life, Harvard Medical School, and the Center for Wellness & Health Promotion. The data and analysis for this pilot will inform a decision about offering the course in other university contexts.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Kristin D. Neff, Ya-Ping Hsieh, and Kullaya Dejitterat, “Self-compassion, Achievement Goals, and Coping with Academic Failure,” *Self and Identity* 4, no. 3 (2005): 263–287, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576500444000317>.
- <sup>2</sup> Juliana G. Breines, and Serena Chen, “Self-Compassion Increases Self-Improvement Motivation,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38, no. 9 (2012): 1133–1143, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212445599>.
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- <sup>7</sup> Kyung-Im Noh, Rachel Lewellen, and Richa Gawande, “Mindful Self-Compassion at Harvard Library” (Presentation at the Library Assessment Conference, Online, October 29, 2020).
- <sup>8</sup> Annamaria Di Fabio, and Alessio Gori, “Developing a new instrument for assessing acceptance of change,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, article 802 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00802>.
- <sup>9</sup> Sarah E. Victor, and E. David Klonsky, “Validation of a Brief Version of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-18) in Five Samples,” *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* 38, no. 4 (2016): 582–589, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-016-9547-9>.
- <sup>10</sup> William E. Herman, “Fear of Failure as a distinctive personality trait measure of test anxiety,” *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 23, no. 3 (1990): 180–185, <http://pascal-francis.inist.fr/vibad/index.php?action=getRecordDetail&idt=11785761>.
- <sup>11</sup> Beth G. Chung, Karen H. Ehrhart, Lynn M. Shore, Amy E. Randel, Michelle A. Dean, and Uma Kedharnath, “Work Group Inclusion: Test of a Scale and Model,” *Group & Organization Management* 45, no.1 (2019): 75–102, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601119839858>.
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