

Post-Baccalaureate Program in Applied Psychology

FINDING FOCUS

A UT Austin & UC Santa Barbara Initiative



Overview

We're a team of scientists, educators, designers, and software engineers. We use rigorous research to discover the best ways to provide mindfulness-based attention training to high school students. Our online course—called *Finding Focus*—has been used by 100+ schools across the country. We're inviting diverse applicants for a one-year volunteer position to help us further develop, evaluate, and scale our course. The position begins with an optional 3-week retreat in Costa Rica. Come join a fast-paced, mission-driven effort to help teens focus their minds and cultivate their mental health.



Roles & Responsibilities

All post-bacs participate in the conceptual development and execution of research funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education. Post-bacs co-author at least one scientific article or chapter. Most post-bacs also develop leadership skills by managing undergraduate assistants that report directly to them. Each post-bac also has specific responsibilities tailored to their abilities and career aspirations. Examples of common specializations include:

Director of School Partnerships:

Develop your interpersonal and project management skills by facilitating the implementation of Finding Focus—as well as its empirical evaluation—at schools across the country. This role has often appealed to students with interests in Experimental Psychology, Educational Psychology, School Psychology, Clinical Psychology, and related fields.

Director of Strategic Partnerships:

Learn how to turn a mission into a movement. Develop your interpersonal and communication skills by building strategic partnerships that expand our user base. This role has appealed to students with interests in the fields of Social Psychology, Applied Psychology, Communication, Marketing Psychology, or related fields.

Lead UX Designer:

Learn how to unite form and function by creating beautiful and user-friendly designs. Develop a portfolio of pixel-perfect designs across both mobile and web. This role often appeals to students with interests in Behavioral & Organizational Psychology, Human-Computer Interaction, or industry jobs in UX or design.

Front-end Software Developer:

Develop your React and/or React Native chops under the guidance of a small team of veteran software engineers. This role is appropriate for those with an existing proficiency in Javascript and an interest in pursuing either graduate school in Computer Science or industry jobs in software development.



Time Commitment

This volunteer position is 20 hours per week and entails a one-year commitment to ensure that everyone involved benefits from the collaboration. This also allows us to provide strong letters of recommendation. The position begins on July 25, 2022 for those who choose to participate in the *Summer Institute in Applied Psychology* or August 22, 2022 for those who do not. Alternate start dates can also be considered.



Culture

The working environment is highly collaborative. It feels like a mixture between a scientific lab, a creative studio, and a tech startup. Our mission is to provide every high school student in the U.S. with evidence-based mindfulness training. With a goal this ambitious, we need a team of talented and motivated individuals who work together well as a team. We place a strong emphasis on team building as well as supporting post-bacs' personal and professional development. We also provide substantial mentorship in applying for graduate school or industry jobs.

We welcome and encourage applicants from all walks of life, and we believe that creating a diverse and inclusive environment is essential for fulfilling our organization's mission.



Location

Finding Focus is a collaboration between UT Austin's [Applied Psychology Research Lab](#) and UC Santa Barbara's [Center for Mindfulness & Human Potential](#). The core team—including all post-bacs—operates out of the Department of Psychology at UT Austin.

Although this is a volunteer position, post-bacs have found it manageable to pay for living expenses by taking on a part-time job. In Austin, post-bacs typically pay \$600 to \$1,000 per month for a single room in a shared apartment.

The optional *Summer Institute in Applied Psychology* is an academic retreat that takes place in Costa Rica. It's a great way to kick-off the year, and it's described in detail below.



Meet Your Mentors



Alissa Mrazek, Ph.D.

Alissa completed her B.A. at Cornell University, her Ph.D. in Psychology at Northwestern University, and her post-doctoral fellowship at the UC Santa Barbara. She is a Research Assistant Professor in UT Austin's Department of Psychology, where she teaches a course on Positive Psychology. Her research has been funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation.



Michael Mrazek, Ph.D.

Michael received his B.A. from Rice University and his Ph.D. in Cognitive Neuroscience from UC Santa Barbara. He is the co-founder and Director of Research at UCSB's Center for Mindfulness & Human Potential. He is also a research scientist at UT Austin. Michael has published more than 40 peer-reviewed scientific publications, and he is the author of *Presence of Mind: A Practical Introduction to Mindfulness & Meditation*.



The Summer Institute in Applied Psychology

JULY 25, 2022 TO AUGUST 15, 2022

After being accepted as a post-bac, you can decide whether you want to start your year at Finding Focus by joining us at the *Summer Institute in Applied Psychology*. This 3-week academic retreat will empower you to not only succeed as a post-bac but also as a graduate student and professional. Post-bacs can attend the summer institute free of charge, though they must cover their own travel expenses (e.g. flights, travel insurance).

For three weeks, students live at an all-inclusive resort in Costa Rica. Each day, they participate in classes that teach them about the latest scientific discoveries in the field of Positive Psychology. These classes are highly experiential and specially designed to equip students with practical tools for improving their health and happiness. Every day also includes mindfulness classes, expert-led workouts, and great conversations.

The summer institute cultivates three essential ingredients that lay the foundation for both enduring success and lasting happiness:

VITALITY: Feel great and perform your best by optimizing your health and wellness.

MINDFULNESS: Cultivate your state of mind to access new levels of focus, clarity, and joy.

SELF-REGULATION: Learn how to consistently do the things you know are good for you.

Feedback from prior participants of the Summer Institute:

"By the end, I felt stronger, happier, more energetic, more focused, and more confident than I have in my entire life."

"This is the most supportive and motivating environment I have ever witnessed in my life."

Learn more about the Summer Institute at www.empiricalwisdom.com



Experience the Finding Focus Course

If you'd like to try out the Finding Focus course before applying, simply request an account at <https://findingfocus.app/>. Click "SIGN UP", select "SCHOOL STAFF", fill out all the fields, and list your job title as "Potential Post-Bac".



How to Apply to Finding Focus

Please send a single email to support@findingfocus.app with (1) a 1-page single-spaced statement of interest, (2) your resume, and (3) a copy of your unofficial transcript. We will begin reviewing applications on January 5, 2022, and we will interview eligible candidates on a rolling basis as long as positions remain unfilled. We will indicate on our websites (linked above) when applications are closed. We do accept applications from students who are applying to graduate school and wanting a plan B, but you must indicate this in your statement of interest.

Feedback from Prior Finding Focus Post-Bacs:

“Working as a post-bac researcher was an immensely useful experience for me as I was applying to graduate school in School Psychology. I was able to work directly with high school teachers in a support role that helped me hone many skills that are required of a school psychologist, such as professionalism, empathy, and organization. On top of my practical work with schools and teachers, I also appreciated the opportunity to grow in my research abilities, including data analysis, literature review, and manuscript writing. As a current PhD student, I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to develop these critical research skills before I started graduate school. Lastly, Finding Focus was an amazing team to be a part of. I greatly enjoyed working with my fellow post-bacs, and I received incredible guidance and mentorship from both Mike and Alissa in my day-to-day work as well as in my applications for graduate school.”



Jennie

Graduate Student in School Psychology, UC Berkeley



“My experience with Finding Focus set me up for success on a number of fronts including two critical and less obvious ones: career exposure and portfolio development. When I started, I was deciding between pursuing a career in “industry” as a UX researcher/designer or “academia” as a Ph.D. candidate in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. Finding Focus let me wear both hats simultaneously: I ran UX studies while contributing to a peer-reviewed article in a reputed journal. The dual exposure allowed me to make the best choice I possibly could. Although I was fortunate to get a Ph.D. offer, I ultimately decided to go into industry. Finding Focus afforded me the opportunity to grow my UX skills on real projects. When competing against a sea of UX professionals for jobs thereafter, having real, living work in my portfolio set me apart—and helped me secure a job before I left.”

David

User Research Lead, McKinsey & Company

“Coming into Finding Focus, I had a broad background in research methods and statistics. However, as an undergrad, I was not trained on how to take my research interests from theory to practice. From the moment I arrived, I was given an opportunity to apply my research skills in a real-world setting. As a person of color and first-generation college student, I was intimidated to come into such an unfamiliar space. But Mike and Alissa have cultivated an environment that uplifts people from all walks of life. In this lab, everyone is encouraged to contribute ideas and to speak up. Mike and Alissa don’t treat everyone the same. They understand that everyone has unique challenges. So they gave me extra help where I needed it, while also providing me room to grow. Thanks to their support, I am pursuing a career in experimental psychology and well on my way to designing my own research-informed intervention.”



Daniel

Graduate Student in Psychological Science, CSU Northridge



“My time as a post-bac with Finding Focus was an incredibly fulfilling experience. It allowed me to fully explore and gain experience in aspects of graphic design, UX/UI design, user research, and psychological research methods, which was instrumental in getting me to where I am today. I arrived at Finding Focus with the life goal of becoming a clinical psychologist and left with the plan to become a UX designer. My range of experiences as a post-bac and ability to explore my interests prepared me to land a Junior UX Designer role at Electronic Arts, where I am now an Experience Designer and loving every minute. The ability to work on a real-world project at Finding Focus as a UX/UI designer not only helped me secure a job but also set me up to progress early on in my role. On top of the professional growth, the experience of working for such an incredible cause with a passionate team was fulfilling in itself.”

Jordan

Experience Designer, Electronic Arts

“When I joined Finding Focus, I was really only looking to improve my research skills and learn a bit more about mindfulness, but what I got was much more. Mike and Alissa made a point to always personalize the experience with my preferences in mind, periodically checking in with me to make sure I was getting everything I could out of it. They always fostered a strong community within the lab. There were weekly lunches where we could openly discuss topics within the realm of meditation, morality, and even philosophy. My eyes were always being opened to new ideas and perspectives. These conversations pushed me to further my meditation practice and now I teach meditation in the Los Angeles area. My year with Finding Focus will always be one that I hold dear!”



Lefeba

Meditation Teacher



Mike and Alissa are the most kind and intelligent people I have ever worked with, and the culture of Finding Focus lends itself to exponential personal and professional growth. I learned so much from the team's in-depth discussions on morality, consciousness, and mindfulness. Perhaps the largest lesson that I took away was how to train my own attention and stay focused in every area of my life. Besides the benefit of personal growth, I was able to immerse myself in research from data analysis and manuscript preparation all the way to submission to a scientific journal. Mike also offered amazing mentorship, advice, and empathy during the application process to doctoral clinical psychology programs. I developed both as a person and as a professional during my year at Finding Focus, and I am incredibly grateful for all I learned."

Chelsea

Product Manager, SingFit Research

"I studied economics as an undergraduate, and so I entered Finding Focus knowing very little about psychological research. However, by the time I finished my time as a post-bac, I felt both excited and well-prepared to pursue a graduate degree in experimental psychology. I attribute the immense amount of growth I experienced to the amazing mentorship I received from Mike and Alissa; They lead in a way that provides guidance and direction without stifling learning or independence. My favorite part of Finding Focus was the community. Finding Focus attracts individuals who are thoughtful, inquisitive, and passionate about impacting the world. I hope to find similar communities in all my future endeavors."



Josh

Research Associate, UCSB



"Joining the team at Finding Focus proved to be one of the most memorable years of my life! After college, I found myself weighing a career in research vs. a career in something more applied like counseling. Through hands-on experience at Finding Focus and weekly one-on-one mentoring, I eventually learned that the nuts and bolts of research were not for me, but I found that I loved directly communicating with our teachers and students. Mike and Alissa provided lots of guidance and encouragement, and they found ways to support me in developing the skills I would need for my evolving career path. In the end, my experience working at Finding Focus allowed me to move into a position as an undergraduate advisor in UCSB's Department of Psychology. Overall, I learned so many invaluable things during my time at Finding Focus that I still carry with me today."

Sana

Undergrad Advisor, UCSB