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## Nicholas Berardelli '16 Connects East and West

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## Nicholas Berardelli '16 Connects East and West

Aug. 27, 2015

Aimed at the cultivation of the mind, Asian practices such as yoga and zen were introduced in the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With their increasing popularity in the last 50 years, these practices played an extremely important role in the development of the spiritual, artistic and even scientific life in the West, according to Associate Professor of Religion Tao Jin.

More than 1,000 English-language studies of meditation have been reported since the 1970s. Yet the exact mechanism at work in meditation is still unclear, and the extent and nature of the Western reception of Asian meditative practices remains largely unexplored.

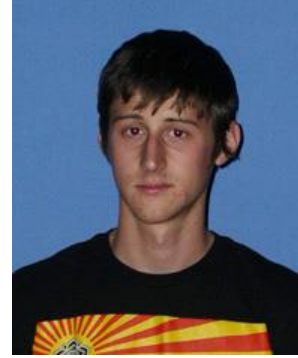
Nick Berardelli's **Mellon project** proposes to help fill that void.

In his Mellon proposal, **philosophy** and **religion** double major, Berardelli (Orland Park, Illinois) said researchers are confirming that regular practice of mindfulness meditation can cause profound changes in the structure of the brain and in subjective experience.

"These results have come as no surprise to longtime meditators in the Buddhist community," said Berardelli. "In fact, Buddhist philosophical systems have ancient psychological 'maps' that detail the changes in the structure of consciousness that a practitioner experiences on their meditative journey. The recent scientific research in the West has, in many ways, been confirming the reports of ancient and modern Buddhist meditators."

Comparing analysis of mental states from both Western and Asian traditions, Berardelli's project promises to offer a unique and effective approach to examining and assessing the Western reception of meditation, said Jin, who is serving as Berardelli's faculty mentor.

Jin observed that Berardelli's Mellon project was a logical next step in his long-held interest in Asian philosophy. "I came to know Nick when he took my course 'Asian Religious Literature' as a freshman," Jin recalled. "I was deeply impressed on the first day when, during the self-introduction session, he discussed his interest in the Buddhist philosophy of mind. Such an unequivocal statement about a very specific topic is remarkable for someone who had just embarked on an academic career."



Nicholas Berardelli '16