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Maharishi U. curriculum includes study of meditation

Offers students ‘Brain Integration Report Card’

By Tina Hesman, St. Louis Post-Dispatch staff writer

FAIRFIELD, Iowa - (KRT) - Damian Lodge sat in front of an audience Friday at Maharishi University of Management.

Lodge was wired for thought. On his head he wore a wired device resembling a blue swim cap. The electroencephalogram, or EEG, measured electrical activity in his brain.

A rainbow of squiggly lines on a computer screen rose and fell as different parts of his brain became active or quieted.

Lodge blinked his eyes three times. The crowd gasped and tittered as the movement caused three bumps to appear in the pattern. Neuroscientist Fred Travis pointed out peaks and troughs of brain activity as Lodge meditated and then did simple mental tasks on a computer.

The university hopes to wire all of its 750 students and issue them “Brain Integration Report Cards” - purportedly a new way of determining how their college experience changes the brain.

While this is an unconventional idea, this is an unconventional school.

Researchers at Maharishi University hope to prove that the technique of Transcendental Meditation can increase academic performance, improve judgment and decision-making skills.

Fairfield looks much like any other small, Midwestern city with rows of tidy houses and a gazebo in the town square.

But at the northern edge of town is a place not usually encountered in the midst of corn and soybean fields. At the university and nearby Maharishi Vedic City, a community planned according to ancient mathematical principals, new symmetrical buildings with sculpted urns on the roofs stand facing east. Two gleaming golden domes house hundreds of meditators - men in one dome, women in the other - twice each day.



Brain researcher Dr. Fred Travis confers with Damian Lodge about the effect of Transcendental Meditation on brain functioning during a national brain conference held at Maharishi University of Management.

College life at Maharishi U. in southeastern Iowa is decidedly different, too. It includes eating organic vegetarian meals in the cafeteria, taking one course at a time in month-long blocks, hitting the hay at 10 p.m. and meditating twice a day.

TM, as most people here call Transcendental Meditation, allows practitioners to reach a fourth state of consciousness that can be detected with brain wave patterns and changes in metabolism, said Dr. Robert Schneider, director of the Institute for Natural Medicine and Prevention at Maharishi U. (The other three states are unconsciousness, wakefulness and sleep.)

Schneider listed benefits of Transcendental Meditation: reduction in stress hormones, lower blood pressure, slowing or reversal of hardening of the arteries, lower rates of smoking and alcohol abuse, reduced death rate from heart disease, lower hospitalization rates for cancer and psychiatric diseases, and reduced rates of infectious diseases.

But the biggest benefit of this type of meditation is its effect on the brain, Travis said.

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