Recent scientific interest in understanding compassion and its uses coupled with centuries old Buddhist insight have led to the development of Buddhist based, largely secular, compassion centered contemplative programs in the United States. These programs develop self-compassion with the idea that the cultivation or unraveling of an individual's innate capacity for compassion helps in dealing with individuals' stress and suffering. This in turn has been shown to help in extending compassion to others.

Five leading kinds of Buddhist and Science based compassion trainings have emerged in North America for the American audience. They are: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Cognitively Based Compassion Training (CBCT), Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT), Sustainable Compassion Training (SCT), and Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC). In addition to explaining each program and its respective differences I will be assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the programs with regard to particular audiences.

The purpose of this paper is not to assess the validity or efficacy of the contemplative programs or argue that any such program has universal applicability. As this project is geared toward American undergraduates with no prior exposure to this field the first part of this project will focus on introducing the audience to compassion as both a scientific and
contemplative topic of study. Definitions of compassion contrasted with related words like empathy and altruism will be elucidated. Additionally, implications of leading research in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, biology, and primatology particular to the development of compassion based contemplative programs will be presented. A similar but brief explanation of compassion in the context of Mahayana Buddhism will also be explored. Finally, this section will address the particular kinds of human needs and problems compassion training has been developed to address.

The provision of extensive background serves to solidify the importance of cultivating compassion in a myriad of fields. In doing so it is hoped that the audience becomes informed enough to participate with their own thoughts particularly in the second half dedicated to the analysis of the five aforementioned programs.