



**FINDING AID TO
THE HARVARD PSILOCYBIN PROJECT
MEMOS, REPORTS, AND MEETING MINUTES**

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Processed by: Kristin Leaman, November 4, 2011

Descriptive Summary

Title	Harvard Psilocybin Project memos, reports, and meeting minutes
Collection Identifier	MSP 98
Date Span	1961-1962
Abstract	The Harvard Psilocybin Project memos, reports and meeting minutes (1 folder; circa 1961-1962) documents the therapeutic use of psilocybin on inmates at the Concord Prison with Ralph Metzner, Richard Alpert, George Litwin, James Ciarlo, Mike Kahn, Gunther Weil, and Timothy Leary.
Extent	1 Folder
Finding Aid Author	Kristin Leaman, 2011
Languages	English
Repository	Virginia Kelly Karnes Archives and Special Collections Research Center, Purdue University Libraries

Administrative Information

Location Information:	ASC
Access Restrictions:	Collection is open for research.
Acquisition Information:	October 21, 2011; Flashback Books Canada; Purchase
Custodial History:	This collection of mimeographed papers are from the Timothy Leary Archives and were given by the Executors of the Leary Estate (Futique) to Michael Horowitz in partial payment for his performing an appraisal of the Leary Archives in 2008.
Accession Number:	20111021
Preferred Citation:	MSP 98, Harvard Psilocybin Project memos, reports, and meeting minutes, Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries
Copyright Notice:	Copyright restrictions may apply.

Subjects and Genres

Persons

Leary, Timothy, 1920-1996
Metzner, Ralph
Litwin, George H.
Weil, Gunther Martin
Ciarlo, James A.
Alpert, Richard
Maher, Brendan A. (Brendan Arnold), 1924-
Kahn, Michael, 1924-

Organizations

Concord Prison (Concord, Mass.)
Harvard University

Topics

Psilocybin-Analysis
Hallucinogenic drugs--Therapeutic use.
Psychotropic Drugs

Form and Genre Types

Memorandums
Minutes
Reports

Occupations

Psychology
Psychiatry

History of Harvard Psilocybin Project

The Harvard Psilocybin Project was started by Timothy Leary at Harvard University in the early 1960s. Leary began working with graduate students on this project at Harvard before working with prisoners at the Concord Prison in Concord, Massachusetts. Leary urged many of the students to participate in his study. He was breaking an unwritten rule that faculty were able to have no more than two graduate students for research assistance. The project had approximately two dozen people, mostly graduate students and junior faculty with a few non-academics. In the first experiment, 175 different people were given psilocybin, most were young males with the average age being 29.5 years. Over half claimed they had learned a great deal about themselves, while the same amount said psilocybin had changed their lives for the better, and 90 percent wanted to take it again. Each time a session was held, Leary and his researchers learned more about the calibration between set, setting, and psilocybin.

Ralph Metzner was resistant to Leary's project; however, he researched psilocybin and other drugs concluded that the drugs were not completely dangerous. Metzner approached Leary to be part of his project and was almost denied for being "too academic, too dainty-British, too ivory tower." Metzner was accepted into the program and proved to be a "natural." Leary then contacted Aldous Huxley to get him on board with the project. Eventually, Leary met with Allen Ginsberg who had a very different approach to the use of the drug than did Huxley. Ginsberg believed the drugs should be made available to all. By March 1961, Leary had been taking psilocybin roughly once every three days, which created less concern about the scientific aspects of the drug and more controversy for the project. Frank Barron began distancing himself from the project around this time, and Richard Alpert replaced him as the senior advisor of the project.

In 1961, Leary along with Gunther Weil, Ralph Metzner, and George Litwin began psilocybin therapy treatments with inmates at the Concord Prison in Concord, Massachusetts. "The early results of the prison study were so promising that Leary flew to Washington to discuss the possibility of introducing psilocybin therapy throughout the penal system. But the prison study also highlighted one of psilocybin's main sticking points. The prisoners were changing, true enough, but they were changing in a way that made science uncomfortable: they were getting religion" (158).

Source:

Sigel, Efrem. "Psilocybin, Senate Race Highlight Harvard Year." *The Harvard Crimson*. July 9, 1963.

Stevens, Jay. *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*. First edition. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987.

Collection Description

Processing Information

Materials have been stored in archival housing.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Folder 1 Harvard Psilocybin Project memos, reports, and meeting minutes, 1961-1962

Item

1. Programs for Research with Hallucinogenic Drugs, circa 1961
2. Predicting Recidivism: Base Rates for Massachusetts Correctional Institution-Concord, circa 1961
3. Memo from Richard Alpert to the Executive Committee of the Laboratory of Social Relations, circa 1961.
4. Memo from George Litwin on Current Psilocybin Projects at Harvard, 1961
5. Psilocybin Research Project report on a psilocybin and creativity experiment, 1961
6. Psilocybin Research Project meeting minutes, 1961
7. Memo from George Litwin and Ralph Metzner to Leary, Alpert, Weil, and Kahn, 1961
8. Research with Consciousness-Altering Substances: An Outline of Work in Progress, circa 1961
9. Brendan Maher correspondence with Dr. Norman Neiburg, 1961