ANN ARBOR, Mich., Dec. 23 (UPI) --

Smartphones, sometimes seen as a
distraction, could be the opposite by helping
users stay attentive to achieve goals, a U.S.
researcher says.

They could act as mentors in mindfulness,
University of Michigan engineering Professor
Jasprit Singh says.
"In our culture today, we often don't have scarcity of food or gadgets or knowledge. The scarcity has shifted to mindfulness," Singh said. "We may know we should do something, but we are not always able to do it."

Singh challenged students in one of his courses to design mobile apps to help users set and meet wellness milestones, with "wellness" defined as encompassing creativity and learning in addition to physical and mental health.

Some examples of student-designed apps were Balance, targeted at senior citizens with easy and routine access to short exercise videos that could improve coordination and prevent falls; WeeAddition, to guide women through pregnancy; and College Granny, aimed at helping students balance studying and socializing.

"The goal of this course was to bring harmony between what we know and what we do," Singh said in a university release Friday.

While humans forget and under stress fail to take intended steps, smartphones don't operate that way, he said.

"And there are a billion of them in use today worldwide," he said. "They could deliver reminder technologies, or they could observe, teach, anticipate or help users perform best practices on a regular basis."

"Technology," Singh said, "can be a great behavior changer."