

Psychology 461: Science of Well-Being/Character Strengths

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Day: T R
Time: 12:00 - 1:15pm
Place: Innovation 131

Course Description: What are the components of satisfying, engaging, and meaningful living? What are the conditions that allow people to flourish? We will try to answer these questions by examining and interpreting the latest research in social, personality, and clinical psychology on well-being, character strengths, and personal growth. This course will not simply present a list of "facts" about positive health. Emphasis will be placed on the ways in which scientists generate hypotheses regarding the nature of positive psychological traits and processes and the methods by which these ideas are tested.

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH: We will approach every topic in this class as scientists. The application of science to questions regarding well-being and character strengths carries with it the implicit assumption that these areas of human functioning can be empirically examined to develop a systematic body of knowledge. Social scientists adopt an attitude of open-minded skepticism, tempered by attempts to develop the most optimal methods to test specific questions. We are going to discuss several challenging topics, including definitions and theoretical models of happiness, the nature of love and creativity, personal growth through adversity, the value of spirituality and religiosity, etc. To get the most out of this class, you will have to balance 1) the personal beliefs you have already acquired about positive experiences, traits, and institutions and 2) the willingness to be open, explore, and experiment with new approaches, ideas, and experiences.

Course Requirements: About 20% of the grade will be based on your level of involvement with and contribution to class. You are expected to attend every lecture and be an *active participant* in class discussions. You will not be able to get a good grade in this class if you do not attend regularly (especially since there is only one class per week).

You will be asked to write a number of papers, none of them ordinary research papers. These will include: 1) Several short papers after doing positive psychological activities (worth 40% of your grade) and 3) A substantial final paper: Attempting to improve yourself with careful attention to developing appropriate methods, collecting data, and interpreting the results (worth 40% of your final grade). **For short papers, do not email them to me. Please single-space your papers, print them out, and bring them to class the day they are due.** Late assignments within one day of the due date will lose one letter grade. No assignments will be accepted beyond one day following the due date.

Research Participation. As a course requirement, you will need to participate in 3 credits of research conducted in the psychology department. For extra credit, you will have the opportunity to participate in an additional 3 credits for 2 points on your final grade.

Assigned Readings and Lectures: To get the most out of the lectures and succeed in this course, it is imperative that you complete the assigned readings. It is critically important you attend lectures. Class participation is strongly encouraged. By participating in class, students are able to be engaged in the learning process, critically assessing the ideas presented, and shaping the focus of the class so that it meets their needs. Class will become more dynamic, interesting and rewarding as more students actively share their ideas, objections, critiques, and questions. You are expected to come to class having already read the assigned material and be prepared to make comments, raise questions, and offer opinions on the comments and questions of others. *Quality is far more important than quantity.* I welcome questions as I lecture, although at times I may need to keep us moving. Although I will lecture at each meeting, a large portion of time will be devoted to discussion.

Of note, I will expect you to have the articles that are due for that day in class. I will periodically check to see whether the articles have been read. Failure to read the articles will adversely affect your course grade.

Listserv: All students should join the class listserv to obtain course related information and participate in dialogue about the course and topics related to positive psychological experiences. The listserv provides a method to continue discussions and is a different medium to communicate in terms of threat, quality/depth of discussions, and community. Similar to class discussions, quality is important (not quantity). Despite the medium, it is still an academic environment (e.g., be mindful of what and how you post, whether you

want to send it to 30 people or backchannel). Spam and solicitations, *ad hominem* attacks, disclosure of personal emails without permission, unrelated topics, etc. are not acceptable (unless you receive approval from me). Failure to consistently follow guidelines will lead to removal from the listserv. Information about subscribing, posting messages, reading archives, etc. is available at the listserv website: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/gmupp/>

You should receive regular emails and not the digest feature (as the digest feature will prevent you from getting attachments). It is suggested that you have emails sent to the email account you check most regularly. To join, send e-mail to: gmupp@yahoogleroups.com

Exams: I believe the best way to learn in this class is to actively work with course material as opposed to memorizing information for the sole reason of passing an exam. Thus, I have little inclination to have formal exams. However, I reserve the right to employ either unannounced evaluations of your knowledge of the readings or to require brief position papers in which you summarize and react to the readings for a particular class period or topic.

You can expect a minimum of 3 surprise quizzes during the course of the semester. When there are unannounced quizzes/evaluations, there will be no makeup exams. If there are prominent extenuating circumstances, discuss this with me during my office hours.

Grades: Your grade will be determined by your performance on all of the above, although improvement over the semester and class attendance and participation will help determine borderline cases. It would be foolish not to take advantage of extra credit opportunities.

DEMONSTRATED MASTERY GRADING SYSTEM: The *quality* of participation will be looked at favorably when there are questions concerning whether grades adequately reflect a student's knowledge of the material, or when an average falls just below a grade cut-off. Please be aware that this can only work in your favor. Please do not ask me to alter your grades, as I will immediately refrain from acknowledging your request (i.e., I will not devote my efforts to gauging your knowledge base). This process was created as a consequence of watching many of my students and colleagues over the years perform poorly on tests despite class engagement, general mastery of material, and intense efforts above and beyond requirements. Please respect the positive potentiality of this process by not asking me for preferential treatment. Deserving individuals will be acknowledged.

The grading scale is as follows (I reserve the right to make it less stringent if necessary):

A	=	93-100
A-	=	90-92
B+	=	87-89
B	=	83-86
B-	=	80-82
C+	=	77-79
C	=	73-76
C-	=	70-72
D+	=	67-69
D	=	60-66
F	=	less than 60

Last Day to Add (Full-Semester Course)	September 12, 2006
Last Day to Drop (Full-Semester Course)	September 29, 2006
Elective Withdrawal Period (Full-Semester Course)	September 30 – October 27, 2006

Additional Course Policies

Students with Special Concerns

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Statement of Academic Integrity

In accordance with University guidelines, I will take vigorous action against students who engage in cheating, misrepresentation, or other dishonest practices. Penalties for students found guilty of academic dishonesty will be determined on a case by case basis, in accordance with university guidelines. If you have any concerns about matters of academic dishonesty please see me immediately.

Readings: Articles will be available on the class listserv webpage (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/gmupp/>)

under "Files" or through the GMU library. To obtain articles, go to [e-journals at GMU](#) (the articles below are available as PDF files in the electronic library at GMU) and write in the title of the journal article (e.g., Journal of Personality and Social Psychology), find the article, and download the PDF file.

August 29) C1: Orientation

Class: 1. "strengths" introductions and discussion of class and syllabus. 2. assign exercise for next class

August 31) C2: Introduction to Positive Psychology (PP)

Read:

1. Seligman, M.E.P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14.
2. Gable, S., & Haidt, J. (2005). Positive Psychology. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 103-110.
[Introduction to special issue on PP]

Do: Take the **VIA Signature Strengths Survey** and print out your profile. The questionnaire can be completed after you register at the following website: www.authentichappiness.com. Write a brief interpretation of strengths profile (1-2 pages), with special attention to your signature strengths (top five). Discuss what it means, the level of accuracy, how you use them in your life, and perhaps you may want to discuss your weaknesses, etc.

Class: 1. Discuss results of strengths profile. 2. Assign exercise for next class

September 5) C3: Self-Acceptance and Self-Change

Read:

1. Markland, D., Ryan, R. M., Tobin, V. J., & Rollnick, S. (2005). Motivational interviewing and self-determination theory. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 811-831.
[print abbreviated version from web, here is the link:
http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/publications/pub_hlth.html]
2. Aarts, H., & Dijksterhuis, A. (2000). Habits as knowledge structures: Automaticity in goal directed behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 53-63.

Do: Imagine your ideal self. Write overview of your own self-improvement plan (see final project handout for how it will be applied this semester).

Class: Receive mood tracking form to begin self-monitoring for next two weeks.

September 7) C4: Positive Emotions

Read:

1. Fredrickson, B.L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218-226.
2. Fredrickson, B.L., Tugade, M.M., Waugh, C.E., & Larkin, G.R. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crises?: A prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 11, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 365-376.
3. Carver, C. S. (2003). Pleasure as a sign you can attend to something else: Placing positive feelings within a general model of affect. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, 241-261.

Do: track daily mood on form. Look for and try to make sense of patterns.

Class: assign exercise for next class

September 12) C5: Flow and optimal experiences

Read:

1. Massimini, F., & Fave, A.D. (2000). Individual development in a bio-cultural perspective. *American Psychologist*, 55, 24-34.
2. Rathunde, K., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). Undivided interest and the growth of talent: A longitudinal study of adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 22, 385-405.
3. Csikszentmihalyi, M., & LeFevre, J. (1989). Optimal experience in work and leisure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 815-822.

Class: 1. Discuss thoughts about ideal self and personal attempts at flow. 2. Assign exercise for next class

Do: Deliberately engage in a new activity that involves your signature strengths in an attempt to experience flow. Write up your experiences (before, during, and after)...including factors that you think enabled or inhibited the experience of flow (1-2 pages). Discuss the role of personal strengths in this process.

September 14) C6: Additional coverage of positive emotions and flow...

No readings

Class: what is the optimal psychological state? What about individual differences in the quantity, quality, and enabling and inhibiting factors? We will critically discuss and examine the constructs, theories, and data from

last few classes.
- assign exercise for next class

September 19) C7: Happiness: what is it, how do we measure it, what causes it?

Read:

1. Buss, D.M. (2000). The evolution of happiness. *American Psychologist*, 55, 15-23.
2. Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Beyond money: Toward an economy of well-being.. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5, 1-31.
3. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). If we are so rich, why aren't we happy? *American Psychologist*, 54, 821-827.

Do: philanthropy vs. pleasure exercise. Write up experiences. **CONSIDER PLANNING FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT WELL IN ADVANCE TO DO SOMETHING REALLY MEANINGFUL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

September 21) C8: Happiness II –Why Are Some People Happier Than Others?

1. Lyubomirsky, S. (2001). Why are some people happier than others?: The role of cognitive and motivational processes in well-being. *American Psychologist*, 56, 239-249.
2. Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13, 80 - 83.

Class: 1. discuss thoughts on the assessment of happiness. 2. assign exercise for next class

September 26) C9: Benefits of Happiness

Read:

1. Lyubomirsky, S., King, L. A., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855.

Do: "gift of time" exercise.

September 28) C10: Increasing Happiness

Read:

1. Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 111-131.

Class: 1. discuss last assignment. 2. assign exercise options for next class

October 3) C11: Calming the mind, meditation, drugs, and other methods...

Read:

1. Bishop, S.R. et al. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 11, 230-242. Obtain PDF from: <http://www.personal.kent.edu/~dfresco/>
2. Brown, K.W., Ryan, R.M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 822-848.

Do: selected behavior change exercise. Write up experiences (1-2 pages; include copy of letter or plan).

Class:

1. discuss behavior change exercises.
2. assign meditation/yoga/mindfulness exercise (due 3/6 but start practice when assigned)
 - a. spend at least 40 minutes on websites about meditation, e.g., www.shinzen.com or www.mkzc.org/beginzen.html or www.how-to-meditate.org. Read about meditation/mindfulness techniques.
 - b. Meditate for at least 15 minutes, three days in a row.
 - c. Attend a free yoga class.
 - d. Keep a log of attempts to be mindful during 2 everyday activities per day for at least one week (besides meditation practice) and daily mood.
 - e. Write-up about what happened----2-3 pages and include log as appendix!!!

October 5) C12: Mindfulness and experiential acceptance part II

Read:

1. Hayes, S.C., Luoma, J., Bond, F., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Model, processes, and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44, 1-25.

Do: continue with meditation/yoga/mindfulness exercise

October 10) NO CLASS FOR COLUMBUS DAY.....ENJOY

10/12) C13: Growth by spirituality, awe, and beauty

Read:

1. Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, 297-314.

No readings

Do: meditation/yoga/mindfulness exercises. Write up experiences (1-3 pages). Bring in log.

Class: 1. discuss responses to meditation/yoga/mindfulness. 2. discuss other avenues of growth (e.g., music, great works of art and literature, elevation). 3. assign exercise for next class

October 17) C14: Love and social support: Why we need others to flourish

Read:

1. Taylor, S.E., Klein, L.C., Lewis, B.P., Gruenewald, T.L., Gurung, R.A., & Updegraff, J.A. (2000). Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight. *Psychological Review*, 107, 411-429.

2. Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87, 228-245.

Do: Watch two movies: 1) Before Sunset, and then see the sequel 2) Before Sunrise. Write about the first time you fell in love (autobiographical memory) and how it relates to your thoughts and experiences with love in the present, and theory and research on relationships and love.

Class: assign exercise for next class

October 19) C15: Love and social support (continued)

No readings

Do: two writing exercises on love. **Class:** assign exercise for next class

October 24) C16: Developing a taxonomy of character strengths

Optional Reading:

1. read about the development of this taxonomy, download the document:

<http://www.positivepsychology.org/viamanualintro.pdf>

Do: Based on the signature strengths you discovered in your personal profile (**VIA Signature Strengths Survey**), use one of these strengths in a new and different way every day for one week. Monitor your daily experiences and the impact on your mood (create daily score from 1-10 for PA and NA). Write-up about what happened (1- 2 pages).

Class: assign exercise for next class

October 26) C18: Strengths- Humor

Read:

1. Martin, R.A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 48-75.

2. Martin, R. A. (2001). Humor, laughter and physical health: Methodological issues and research findings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 504-519.

DO: Gratitude letter and/or visit. Write and deliver letter of gratitude and complete write-up of experience. **CONSIDER PLANNING FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT WELL IN ADVANCE TO DO SOMETHING REALLY MEANINGFUL!!!!!! Not due until 11/2.** Write no more than 1 page on the process and outcome. Include a copy of the letter that you read to them.

October 31) C17: Strengths- Gratitude

Read:

1. McCullough, M.E., Emmons, R.A., & Tsang, J. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 112-127.

2. McCullough, M.E., Kilpatrick, S., Emmons, R.A., & Larson, D. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 249-266.

November 2) C19: Strengths- Curiosity and Intrinsic Motivation

Read:

1. Silvia, P.J. (2005). What is interesting? Exploring the appraisal structure of interest. *Emotion*, 5, 89-102.

2. Elliot, A.J., & Reis, H.T. (2003). Attachment and exploration in adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 317-331.

Class: assign exercise for next class

November 7) C20: Strengths- Curiosity and Intrinsic Motivation II

Read:

1. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227-268. Obtain PDF from:

http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/publications/pub_thry.html

DO: do something novel, complex, and uncertain. Pick activities that are outside of your normal habitual, pattern. Select three activities, one in each of the following domains: epistemic, sensory, and social (e.g., pick up an interesting book and a topic you have never investigated and spend 30 minutes reading it, eat something new that you never otherwise would have tried, go to a meeting or hear a speaker) & write about experiences.

November 9) C21: Strengths- Creativity

Read:

1. Simonton, D. K. (2003). Scientific creativity as constrained stochastic behavior: The integration of product, process, and person perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 475-494.

Class: assign exercise for next class

November 14) C22: Strengths- Hope and Optimism I

Read:

1. Peterson, C. (2000). The future of optimism. *American Psychologist*, 55, 44-55.

2. Srivastava, S., McGonigal, K. M., Richards, J. M., Butler, E. A., & Gross, J. J. (2006). Optimism in close relationships: How seeing things in a positive light makes them so. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91, 143-153.

Do: TBA

November 16) NO CLASS---PROFESSOR WILL BE OUT OF TOWN

November 21) C23: Strengths- Hope and Optimism II

Read:

1. Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope theory: Rainbows of the mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13, 249-275.

Class: assign exercise for next class

November 22-26----Thanksgiving Break

November 28) C24: Adversity and trauma---growth and resilience

Read:

1. Tedeschi, R.G., & Calhoun, L.G. (2005). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15, 1-18.

2. Keltner, D., & Bonanno, G.A. (1997). A study of laughter and dissociation: Distinct correlates of laughter and smiling in bereavement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 687-702.

3. go to www.greatfailure.com, look around, and read the "commencement speech"

Do: "Being a good teammate" exercise.

November 30) C25: Meaning and purpose in life

Read:

1. Heine, S. J., Proulx, T., & Vohs, K. D. (2006). Meaning maintenance model: On the coherence of human motivations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10, 88-110. (get from: <http://www.psych.ubc.ca/~heine/publications.html>)

2. Wilson, K. G. & Murrell, A. R. (2004). Values work in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Setting a course for behavioral treatment. In Hayes, S.C., Follette, V.M., & Linehan, M. (Eds.), *Mindfulness and acceptance: Expanding the cognitive-behavioral tradition* (pp. 120-151). New York: Guilford Press.

3. King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J. L., & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 179-196.

Do: Watch movie: After Life (1998 Japanese film....consider finding or buying it on half.com or ebay.com or amazon.com ahead of time). Thinking of the movie, write about the memory you would choose....and why.

December 5) C26: Class presentations. How have you changed? [Final paper due on 12/11]

No Reading; Student reports on final projects.

December 7) C27: Human Flourishing X---- discuss the entire semester, the future of this discipline, self-improvement assignments, and any other topics you want to play with. Also, ask any questions you want about topics that were not covered sufficiently or anything else related to well-being, positive psychological processes, positive relationships, and positive institutions....

NOTE: FINAL PAPER DUE ON DECEMBER 11TH!!!!!!!