

Psychology 461/892: Science of Human Flourishing

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Day: M
Time: 4:30 - 7:10pm
Place: Innovation 338

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. 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.

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. Quantity is far less important than quality. 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.

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 25 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@yahoogroups.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 Feb. 7th
Last day to drop Feb. 24th.

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.

1/23) Orientation and Introduction

Class: "strengths" introductions, discussion of class and syllabus, and introductions to positive psychology and self-change

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.authentic happiness.com

Read:

1. Seligman, M.E.P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14.
2. Self-change PDF file on course website
3. Aarts, H., & Dijksterhuis, A. (2000). Habits as knowledge structures: Automaticity in goal directed behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 53-63.

Do:

1. Write a brief interpretation of strengths profile (~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 the relation between your strengths and weaknesses, etc.

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

1/30) NO CLASS---INSTRUCTOR WILL BE OUT OF TOWN**2/6) Positive Emotions and Flow****Read:**

1. Fredrickson, B.L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology*, 2, 300-319.
2. Lyubomirsky, S., King, L. A., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855.
3. Massimini, F., & Fave, A.D. (2000). Individual development in a bio-cultural perspective. *American Psychologist*, 55, 24-34.

Optional article: 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:

1. Deliberately engage in a new activity that involves your signature strengths and pursue the experience of flow. Write up your experiences (before, during, and after)...including factors that you think worked to enable or inhibit the experience of flow. Discuss the role of personal strengths in this process.
2. Imagine your ideal self. Write overview of your self-improvement plan (see final project handout for how it will be applied this semester).

2/13) C7: Happiness: what is it, how do we measure it, what causes it?**Read:**

1. Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, 55, 34-43.
2. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). If we are so rich, why aren't we happy? *American Psychologist*, 54, 821-827.
3. 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.
4. Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13, 80 - 83.

Optional article: Buss, D.M. (2000). The evolution of happiness. *American Psychologist*, 55, 15-23.

Class: 1. Discuss well-being assignments. 2. Assign exercise for next class

Do: take measures of subjective well-being (i.e., **General Happiness Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Approaches to Happiness Questionnaire**) on <http://www.authentichappiness.org/Questionnaires.html> (you should have registered when you completed the strengths survey). Examine your scores in comparison to people of your sex, age, region of the country, etc. Write a 2-3 page brief description of your current level of happiness and the factors you believe are influencing it. Also write about your thoughts and ideas about the measurement and general study of happiness (go anywhere you want with this as I am interested in YOUR original ideas).

2/20) C9: Happiness: Benefits and Ways to Increase It**Read:**

1. Danner, D.D., Snowdon, D.A., & Friesen, W.V. (2001). Positive emotions in early life and longevity: Findings from the nun study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 804-813.
2. Harker, L., & Keltner, D. (2001). Expressions of positive emotions in women's college yearbook pictures and their relationship to personality and life outcomes across adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 112-124.
3. Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 111-131.

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

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

2/27) C11: Mindfulness, Experiential Acceptance, and Attempts to Calm the Mind

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.
3. 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: 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----3-5 pages and include log as appendix!!!

3/6) C13: 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.

Optional reading: Sternberg, R.J. (1988). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93, 119-135.

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 love.

NOTE: Mindfulness exercise write-up is due!!!!

Class: 1. continue to go over mindfulness assignments. 2. assign exercise for next class

3/13) NO CLASS---SPRING BREAK

3/20) Developing a taxonomy of character strengths and growth by spirituality, awe, and beauty

Optional Reading:

1. read about the development of this taxonomy, download the document: <http://www.positivepsychology.org/viamanualintro.pdf>
2. Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, 297-314.

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 (at least 2 pages).

Class: assign exercise for next class

3/27) Strengths- Gratitude and Humor

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.

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!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

4/3) Strengths- Curiosity and Intrinsic Motivation

Read:

1. Kashdan, T.B. (2004). Curiosity. In C. Peterson and M.E.P. Seligman, (Ed.), *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (pp. 125-141). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and Oxford University Press.
2. Kashdan, T.B., & Fincham, F.D. (2004). Facilitating curiosity: A social and self-regulatory perspective for scientifically based interventions. In P.A. Linley & S. Joseph, (Ed.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 482-503). New Jersey: Wiley.
3. Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.

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)...and write about experiences.

Class: assign exercise for next class

4/10) Strengths- Hope and Optimism I

Read:

1. Peterson, C. (2000). The future of optimism. *American Psychologist*, 55, 44-55.
2. Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1993). On the power of positive thinking: The benefits of being optimistic. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 2, 26-30.
3. Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope theory: Rainbows of the mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13, 249-275.

DO: take measures of hope and optimism (i.e., **Optimism Test,)** on <http://www.authentichappiness.org/Questionnaires.html> . Examine your scores in comparison to people of your sex, age, region of the country, etc. Write a 1-2 page brief discussion.

4/17) Meaning in life--the presence and search

Read:

1. **TBA**

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). Based on the concept underlying the movie, write about the memory you would choose....and why. Also write about your own autobiographical narrative of where you derive meaning in life and what you are searching for...

4/24) Adversity and trauma---growth and resilience

Read:

1. Bonanno, G. A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events. *American Psychologist*, 59, 20-28.
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: Admiration project? One door opens? Write out how you have grown from setbacks? Write your GMU narrative, make sense of your time here?

5/1) Human Flourishing X---discuss the entire semester, the future of this discipline, self-improvement assignments, and any other topics you want to play with...

NOTE: FINAL PAPER DUE ON 5/10!!!!!!!!!!