PSYC 550: Perspectives on Happiness and Human Flourishing (Positive Psychology)  
Fall 2017

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Location: SBSB 4119  
Time: 2:30 – 5:20pm

Course Tools:

Course Overview

Happiness and human flourishing has been a central human concern for centuries. Poets, philosophers, and other thinkers blazed a trail that contemporary behavioral scientists have followed in investigating the nature of happiness and the factors that help to support and maintain it. The science of happiness is rapidly evolving, and we will engage the topics in this course as a series of questions rather than discussing firm conclusions. Primarily, we will read and evaluate contemporary research on happiness conducted by a growing group of scientists with interests in positive psychology. We will also put this research to practice by engaging in weekly activities outside of classroom discussion.

Programmatic Student Learning Outcomes and Goals

PSLO 1: Explain and contrast important empirical and theoretical foundations of psychology, and identify unanswered questions stemming from those bodies of knowledge, with particular attention given to areas of psychology related to the thesis.

PSLO 3: Demonstrate proficiency in the written and oral presentation of scientific content in psychology, including the appropriate use of APA style.

I have the following overarching and intertwined goals for us in this seminar:

- to encourage a greater appreciation for the breadth of human experience, particularly that which lies beyond the pathological and even the “normal”

- to build our knowledge and understanding of the aims and scope of the rapidly growing field of positive psychology and its implications for well-being enhancement

- to demonstrate the role of positive psychological science in the study of biological, cognitive, emotional, and social functioning
to improve your ability to critique published research and theory and to enhance your ability to think creatively about the study of (positive) psychological phenomena

to critically evaluate societal myths related to happiness and how they can impact decision-making related to health and well-being

to integrate and apply concepts in positive psychology to the benefit of our own lives

to develop a toolkit of methods for putting positive psychology theories and findings into research and educational practice.

to practice the art and science of effective communication in the presentation of ideas to other individuals and to groups

**Course Structure**

This course has three major, interrelated components: weekly classes, discussion question journals, and a term project + presentation. These are outlined as follows:

1. **Weekly classes**

   The format of the course is interactive and experiential. At most class meetings I will give "interrupted lectures" for 10-20 minutes, and the remaining time will be reserved for discussion, using course readings and out-of-class exercises as jumping-off points. The primary focus of this seminar will be on class discussion. Evidence suggests that students learn material more thoroughly and retain it longer if they are actively engaged in the learning process. Getting involved in the class will not only benefit you, it will also contribute to the learning of your classmates. I want you to complete all readings before class, and to come to each class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that class. To help you do so, I ask you to generate discussion questions each week. These questions will serve as the starting point for our class discussions. Other areas of discussion will likely emerge as we go through the course.

   **Weekly readings:** Each week I ask you to read usually 2-3 articles and/or chapters related to that week’s topic. These readings will be placed on the Cougar Courses site. Please read each article/chapter carefully and critically. Class time will be spent in discussion of these readings and the issues and questions they raise.

   **Weekly exercises:** Each week I will ask you to complete an out-of-class exercise to help you get first-hand or inside experience with each topic under study and also to foster your own well-being. These exercises will, I hope, be fun, interesting, or positively challenging for you. Each week I will announce the exercise to be completed before the next class.

   **Class Participation** (600 points): Your participation in class discussions throughout the semester will constitute 38% of your grade for this course. I will give you feedback on
your class participation about halfway through the semester. Quality participation in class does not just mean talking. Good class participation involves coming to class on time with questions on issues that are unclear in the readings, raising questions that you think we should cover, constructively criticizing, and commenting on ideas you think are interesting. Class discussion also means volunteering insightful answers to questions that provide contrasts and integration of ideas, actively listening to others’ contributions to discussion, and moving the discussion along toward a shared understanding.

Comments about personal experiences can be helpful in class discussions as long as a connection is made between your experience and the class topic and readings. In sum, what I am looking for is evidence that you have done the readings and thought about the relevant issues. I especially value comments that contribute to our collective learning. The criteria I will use in assigning points for class participation are as follows:

600 points: Actively and consistently contributes to the class discussions and exercises well beyond expectations (e.g., raises important issues based on class readings, clarifies questions raised by other participants, and consistently makes comments that display a sophisticated grasp of the relevant material).

550 points: Actively and consistently contributes to the class discussions and exercises beyond expectations (e.g., makes substantial contributions to class discussions).

500 points: Actively and consistently participates in class discussions and in the exercises.

450 points: Meets minimum standards for participation in class discussions and exercises.

<450 points: Problems with class attendance, minimal participation in discussions and exercises, and/or does not appear prepared for class.

2. Discussion question journals (320 points):

As noted in the Class Participation section above, each student is asked to contribute discussion questions based on each set of weekly readings. These questions are meant to focus your thinking and guide our in-class discussions. Here are some possible topics for discussion questions: topics or issues you did not understand about the articles/chapters; challenges to the conclusions drawn by the authors, consideration of the implications of the findings, relating one or more readings to other readings or topics, and connections between the ideas articulated in the readings and your own research ideas. Please stay away from rhetorical questions – those that simply test your classmates’ understanding of the material.

Here are the specifics of question submission: Please post 2 discussion questions on the Cougar Courses message board by #TBD before each class. To best prepare for each class, you are also asked to review everyone’s questions before we meet. The discussion questions will be graded each week on the following scale:
20 = excellent; questions were highly relevant and insightful
18 = very good; questions were very relevant and insightful
16 = good; questions were very relevant
14 = marginal; questions were somewhat relevant
≤12 = yikes; questions were not relevant or were incomplete
0 = did not hand in two questions by the deadline

3. Behavior Change Project or Research Proposal plus Presentation (600 points)

In this seminar you have the option to conduct a personal behavior change project or complete an empirical research proposal. For both, a written product will be due at the end of the term (Wednesday Dec 16th). See the “Behavior Change Project” and the “Research Proposal” documents for more details on preparing these. Toward the end of the term, each student will present their project or proposal to the class. The presentation has two purposes: One is to generate discussion with the class that may aid in developing your behavior change report or your final research proposal; the other is to give you practice in communicating your ideas – presenting to a live audience is a primary way in which scientists do this. Good presentations will have a clearly defined purpose, outline the major problem and the questions or hypotheses following from it, map out an integrated method, outline the data analytic approach (as appropriate), and suggest implications of the project/research. Please use visual aids (slides, etc) and adhere to the time limit (30 minutes). Presentations should be organized well and not simply be read from the page. Practicing your presentation is the best way to prepare. The project or proposal on which the presentation is based will be critiqued by classmate "reviewers." Student reviewers will be asked to hand in a written review of the project or proposal.

**Grades**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project/proposal and presentation</td>
<td>600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project/proposal critiques</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1600</strong></td>
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**Course Policies**

Academic integrity: Academic dishonesty is a bad scene; don't go there. All assignments must represent your own work. However, in doing journals and projects you may find it useful to confirm your logic, phrasing, and formatting with classmates –
just make sure you write your assignments individually. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism), please ask me.

Meeting course requirements: Generally, the only reasons I consider legitimate for missing a class or assignment deadline are: conference attendance, medical illness (appropriate documentation required), or personal/family emergencies that require you to leave school. Oversleeping, heavy work load, forgetfulness, assignment disappearance (e.g., computer meltdowns), and alien abduction will not be considered legitimate failures to meet course requirements.

Student Accommodations

Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations must be approved for services by providing appropriate and recent documentation to the Office of Disabled Student Services (DDS). This office is located in Craven Hall 4300, and can be contacted by phone at (760) 750-4905, or TTY (760) 750-4909. Students authorized by DSS to receive reasonable accommodations should meet with me during my office hours in order to ensure confidentiality. Should you have any questions about services provided through Disabled Student Services, please call 760-750-4905 or go to http://www.csusm.edu/dss/handbooks/student_book.html

Writing Requirement

As stated in the course catalog, all CSU students must demonstrate competency in writing skills as a requirement for graduation. This requirement mandates that every course at the university must have a writing component of a least 2500 words (approximately 10 pages). The writing requirement in this course will be satisfied through discussion questions and your term project.

Class Topics and Readings

**SECTION 1: Historical, Evolutionary, and Scientific Roots of the Study of Happiness and Human Flourishing**

1. **August 28.** Orientation to the course.

   **September 4:** Labor Day. Class does not meet.

2. **September 11.** The history and science of happiness.

**Class.** Discussion of Western and Eastern historical perspectives on happiness and the good life, and an introduction to contemporary behavioral scientific theories and methods of investigating happiness.

**Required readings.**


**Optional readings:**


**3. September 18.** The intra- and inter-personal roots of happiness

**Class.** Discussion of evolutionary forces, genetic influences, and childhood vulnerability and resilience.

**Required readings.**

Read the commencement speech at:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-young/the-class-of-07-must-be-w_b_50447.html


**Optional readings.**


**SECTION 2: Internal Factors in Happiness and Human Flourishing**

4. **September 25.** Internal factors in happiness, Part 1: Attention and appraisals

**Class.** Discussion of quality of attention to, and cognitive appraisals of day-to-day stimuli.

**Required readings.**


**Optional readings.**


**6. October 2.** Internal factors in happiness, Part 2: Motivation and Emotions

**Class.** Discussion of motivational and emotional states and traits, including their characteristics and malleability.

**Required readings.**


**Optional readings.**


Class. Discussion of character and beliefs.

Final Project Proposal (one to two paragraphs) Due

Required readings.


Optional readings.


SECTION III: External Factors in Happiness and Human Flourishing


Class. Discussion of prosociality, empathy, altruism, kindness, gratitude, forgiveness

Required readings.


Optional readings.


Class. Discussion of friendship, love, family, and children.

Required readings.


Optional readings.


Class. Discussion of the quality of work experience and one of its key outcomes – material wealth.

Required readings.


Optional readings.


10. November 6. Correlates of happiness in societies

Class. Discussion of societal characteristics related to national happiness.

Required readings


Optional readings.


Class. Discussion of positive psychological programs and interventions to enhance well-being.

First Draft of Term Project Due

Required readings.


Optional readings.


**12. November 20.** The future of positive psychology

**Class.** Discussion of the recent positive psychology backlash and avenues for moving the science forward.

**Required readings.**


**Optional readings.**


13. **November 27** Presentations

14. **December 4.** Presentations

15. **December 11.** Last chance final paper meetings. You can come in and discuss rough draft feedback.

Note. There may be some minor changes to this syllabus as the semester unfolds.