

## SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

**Discipline: Psychology**

**Fall 2008**

**PSYC 300M-3/PSYC 300M-4: Positive Psychology (2 sections)**

**Upper Division**

**Faculty Name: John Zelenski**

Suggested Pre-requisites: Introduction to Psychology

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course explores the emerging field of positive psychology, or the scientific study of optimal human functioning. Topics will include how scientists define and measure happiness, personal characteristics and circumstances that promote happiness, and cultural similarities and differences in the ways happiness is pursued and experienced. In addition to considering scholarly works, students will undertake experiential exercises and reflection that will promote productive approaches to personal well-being.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. Understand the methods positive psychologists use to create knowledge.
2. Gain a familiarity with major theories and findings in positive psychology.
3. Explore similarities and differences in happiness across cultures.
4. Develop a better understanding of your own personal happiness.

## TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

1. Introduction to course and expectations; Peterson Ch. 1.
2. Personal engagement; Peterson Ch. 2.
3. Pleasure and positive experience; Peterson Ch. 3.  
(Brazil)
4. Assessing experience; Kahneman et al. (2004).
5. Happiness; Peterson, Ch. 4., Diener & Seligman (2002).
6. Folk views of the good life; King & Napa (1998)  
(Namibia)
7. Character strengths; Peterson Ch. 6.  
(South Africa)
8. Extraversion; Fleeson et al. (2002).
9. Values, Peterson Ch. 7.
10. Meaning; King et al. (2006).
11. Quiz #1
12. Interests, abilities, & accomplishments; Peterson Ch. 8.  
(India)
13. Needs; Sheldon et al. (2001).
14. Wellness; Peterson, Ch. 9.  
(Malaysia –possibly day earlier)
15. Positive thinking; Peterson Ch. 5.  
(Vietnam)
16. Chinese happiness; Wong (2008)  
(China)
17. Interdependent selves and SWB; Heine (2001), Suh & Oishi (2002).  
(Japan)
18. Positive interpersonal relationships; Peterson Ch. 10.
19. Positive institutions; Peterson Ch. 11.
20. Public policy; Diener (2000), Helliwell (2005).
21. Money; Dunn et al. (2008), Vohs et al. (2006).  
(Hawaii)
22. Looking forward; Peterson Ch. 12.

## 23. Quiz #2, wrapping-up

Final Exam: Personal project report

### **FIELD COMPONENT**

Students are required to participate in three field directed practica and report on their experiences. Practica must include at least two of those recommended below, and at least one lead by Dr. Zelenski. One practicum may be completed as an independent, or as part of another organized trip, but if not included in the list below, the practicum and student's plans must be discussed with Dr. Zelenski prior to the event. During practica, students are encouraged to interact with local people as much as possible, and to make observations of surroundings and behavior.

Evaluation:

Following each field experience, students must write a concise 2 to 3 page paper that integrates their experience with course material. Students are encouraged to select from one of the topics below, but alternatives will be considered with prior approval. Some practica will be more conducive to particular topics, but topics may be repeated with new observations/practica.

Consider hedonic and eudaimonic routes to happiness. How did your experience promote one or both? Did you observe others pursuing one or both, and how did you make this inference?

Consider the relationship between money/material goods and happiness. Compare your observations of happiness with research findings discussed in class.

Consider the relationship between physical environments (e.g., built vs. natural, population density, aspects of living or working space, etc.) and psychological well-being. Were some environmental features associated with your or others' emotions? What might this suggest about selecting or modifying environments to promote well-being?

After speaking with some local people about happiness, consider cultural similarities and differences in the importance placed on happiness, the kinds of pursuits assumed to promote happiness, and what it means to be happy.

Based on your observations, consider the role religion plays in daily life and happiness. Where do you observe religious behavior or symbols? Are these sources of happiness? How does religion promote (or detract from) happiness, and what kind of benefit/impediment does it seem to provide?

Clearly negative events such as warfare, discrimination, abuse, etc., provide challenges to personal and societal happiness; yet they also provide a context to learn about positive psychological processes (e.g., resilience, forgiveness, growth, and hope). Note such a challenge (perhaps historical) and consider recovery. What factors seem to facilitate benefit in the face of adversity? How might further recovery be promoted, or what lessons might be applied to other situations?

**SUGGESTED PRACTICA:**

BRAZIL: Service Project: Calabar Favela (FDP); Bicycling in Pitacu Park: Urban Ecology  
SOUTH AFRICA: Psychology in South Africa (FDP); Khayelitsha Township Visit; Township Music; Service Visit: Amy Biehl Foundation Trust  
INDIA: Welcome Reception; Service visit: Missionaries of Charity Orphanage; Yoga Demonstration; Service Visit: Disabled Children's Home  
MALAYSIA: Religions of Malaysia (FDP); Service Visit: St. Joseph Orphanage  
VIET NAM: Former UPI Photographer & the Museum of War Remnants; Service Visit: Da Thien School for Handicapped Children  
HONG KONG: International Student Exchange: Chinese University of Hong Kong  
JAPAN: Gardens of Kyoto

## **METHODS OF EVALUATION**

Two quizzes containing multiple choice and short answer questions will assess knowledge of readings and class material.

Each student will also complete a personal project that culminates in a written report of approximately 8-10 pages. There are three options for this project:

1. Read *Happier* (Ben-Shahar, on reserve) and complete three of the exercises he suggests.
2. Read *The Art of Happiness* (Dalai Lama & Cutler, on reserve), identify a piece of advice that you can implement in your daily life, and do it.
3. Complete a service-related field program (i.e., one that explicitly involves helping others). This option also requires finding three academic sources beyond the assigned readings (see below).

As you engage in these activities, be mindful of your personal well-being, and any changes you experience before, during, and after. (You are not required to become happier; be honest in your assessment.)

In a written report, clearly describe what you did and your personal observations during the process. In addition, link your project with academic readings and/or course content (this is where the outside readings come in for option 3). That is, identify and briefly describe an area of psychological theory and/or research that suggests your project could have an impact on well-being. Finally, think of people you met during the voyage (beyond other passengers). Speculate as to why their experiences of the project might be similar or different than your own.

Final grades will be calculated using the following weights:

Quizzes (30% each, total 60%)  
Personal project report (20%)  
Field work notes & report (20%)

Important note: Attendance at all classes and participation in activities and discussion are mandatory. Although not represented above, failure to meet these requirements will result in deductions from the final grade.

### **REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

AUTHOR: Chris Peterson  
TITLE: A Primer in Positive Psychology  
PUBLISHER: Oxford University Press  
ISBN #: 9780195188332  
DATE/EDITION: 2006  
COST: \$41.50

### **RESERVE LIBRARY LIST**

AUTHOR: Tal Ben-Shahar  
TITLE: Happier  
PUBLISHER: McGraw Hill  
ISBN #: 978-0-07-149239-3  
DATE/EDITION: 2007  
COST:

AUTHOR: The Dalai Lama & Howard C. Cutler  
TITLE: The Art of Happiness  
PUBLISHER: Riverhead Books  
ISBN #: 1-57322-111-2  
DATE/EDITION: 1998  
COST:

### **ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS**

Diener, E. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13, 81-84.

Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). Spending money on others promotes happiness. *Science*, 319, 1687-1688.

Fleeson, W., Malanos, A. B., & Achille, N. M. (2002). An intraindividual process approach to the relationship between extraversion and positive affect: Is acting extraverted as good as being extraverted? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1409-1422.

Heine, S. J. (2001). Self as cultural product: An examination of East Asian and North American selves. *Journal of Personality*, 69(6), 881-906.

- Helliwell, J. F. (2005). Well-being, social capital and public policy: What's new?, Paper presented at the special session on well-being at the Annual Meetings of the Royal Economic Society, Nottingham.
- Kahneman, D., Krueger, A. B., Schkade, D. A., Schwarz, N. & Stone, A. (2004). A survey method for characterizing daily life experience: The day reconstruction method. *Science*, 306, 1776-1780.
- 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.
- King, L. A. & Napa, C. K. (1998). What makes a life good?. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 156-165.
- Sheldon, K. M., Elliot, A. J., Kim, Y. & Kasser, T. (2001). What is satisfying about satisfying events? Testing 10 candidate psychological needs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 325-339.
- Suh, E. M., & Oishi, S. (2002). Subjective well-being across cultures. In W. J. Lonner, D. L. Dinnel, S. A. Hayes, & D. N. Sattler (Eds.), *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 7, Chapter 1), (<http://www.wvu.edu/~culture>), Center for Cross-Cultural Research, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington USA.
- Wong, P. T. P. (2008). A less traveled road to happiness.  
[http://www.meaning.ca/archives/archive/art\\_road\\_to\\_happiness\\_P\\_Wong.html](http://www.meaning.ca/archives/archive/art_road_to_happiness_P_Wong.html)