

## **Positive Psychology Fall 2017**

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### **Course Description**

What can psychology tell us about how to live a happy, meaningful life? Some argue that is not the role of psychology or any other academic discipline, but clinical psychologists have long believed otherwise. No one questions the importance of understanding and relieving anxiety, depression, and other negative emotional states. Positive psychology takes this focus one step farther, and asks if we have any scientific knowledge regarding positive states and how to promote them. Our goal in this seminar class is to take an in-depth look at the field of positive psychology; the study of emotions, traits, and institutions that have been identified as promoting adaptive and/or positive psychological functioning. We will explore emerging research on the psychological and physiological effects of positive emotions, and on attempts to improve existing mood states. As part of that discussion we will address debates about: 1) the relative role of individual psychological vs. larger societal and cultural factors in promoting positive functioning; and, 2) what exactly constitutes positive functioning – happiness, engagement, and/or meaning? We will also examine some of the specific techniques used to modify emotional states and traits, including meditation, physical exercise, yoga, etc. Finally, each student will be helped to identify some experiential positive psychological technique that he or she will pursue during the course of the semester.

### **Course Objectives/Goals**

Upon completion of this class, students will be able to:

- a) Describe some of the major biological and social-cultural factors that influence life satisfaction and positive emotionality.
- b) Describe the nature of the “hedonic treadmill,” including research that both supports and contradicts the theory.
- c) Describe and be able to employ one or more of the empirically supported techniques for increasing positive emotionality.

### **Course Processes**

This course utilizes a graduate seminar format in which students discuss, analyze, interpret, and critique weekly readings on a central theme. Discussions are guided by the professor with the assistance of weekly class facilitators (see below for more details).

### **Course Requirements & Evaluation of Competency**

Each student will assist Professor Arsenio by acting as a discussion facilitator for one class (depending

on class size). Discussion leaders are expected to read everything for their week very carefully and to have copies of some questions and comments to help guide group discussion. In addition there will be 4 other graded projects: a) weekly response paragraphs to the readings (graded pass/fail); b) a short report (4 pages) on an exploration of a technique used in positive psychology is due at 11<sup>th</sup> class (details regarding this experiential component will be distributed at the first class); c) a brief, organized talk (no more than 10 minutes) during one of the last 2 classes, either on your emerging paper topic or a summary/description of your positive psychology technique; and, finally, d) a 7-8 page paper on a topic appropriate to the class content. On-going feedback will be provided regarding possible topics, guidelines on how to write Psychology papers, how to use available library resources at Wesleyan, etc. The paper is due one week after the last class, and it should be mailed to me at 335 Ridge Rd., Middletown, CT 06457.

Class discussion, response paragraphs, and group facilitation will count for 30% of your final grade, the short class paper and presentation for 30%, and the final paper for 40%.

## Course Textbook & Readings

### Required Books & Readings:

Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology*. New York: Oxford Press.

Carr, A. (2011). *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. New York: Routledge Press.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, & Illness*. New York: Bantam Books.

Remaining readings will be posted on Moodle or its equivalent.

## Course Sequence

### Week 1 - Introduction & Course Overview - What is Positive Psychology?

Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology*, Chapters 1 & 2.

Carr, A. (2011). Chapter 1, *Happiness* (pp. 1-47) in *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. New York: Routledge Press.

### Week 2 – Pleasure, Happiness, & Positive Thinking – the Basics.

Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology*, Chapters 3 - 5.

Carr, A. (2011). Chapter 2, *Positive Traits* (pp. 48-82) in *Positive Psychology: The*

*Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. New York: Routledge Press.

Week 3 – Biological Aspects of Positive Psychology

Kubzansky, L., & Boehm, J. (2016). Positive psychological functioning: An enduring asset for health aging. In A. Ong & C. Lockenhoff (Eds.), *Emotion, Aging and Health* (pp. 163-183). Washington DC: American Psychological Association Press.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). Section III of the book, *Stress* (pp. 287-349). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, & illness*. New York: Bantam Books.

OPTIONAL - Kok, B., Waugh, C., & Fredrickson, B. (2013). Meditation and health: The search for mechanisms of action. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7/1, 27-39.

Week 4 – Flow, Self-Determination, & Happiness

Carr, A. (2011). Chapter 4, *Flow* (pp. 112-136) in *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. New York: Routledge Press.

Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78.

Ryan, R., Curren, R., & Deci, E. (2013). What humans need: Flourishing in Aristotelian philosophy and Self-determination theory. In A. Waterman (Ed.), *The Best Within Us: Perspective in Eudaimonia* (pp. 56-75). Washington DC: American Psychological Association Press.

OPTIONAL - Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111-131.

Week 5 – The Broaden & Build Theory

Fredrickson, B. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218-226.

Tugade, M., & Fredrickson, B. (2004). Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative experiences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(2), 320-333.

Cohn, M., Fredrickson, B., Brown, S., Mikels, J., & Conway, A. (2009). Happiness unpacked: Positive emotions increase life satisfaction by building resilience. *Emotion*, 9(3), 361-368.

Catalino, L., Algoe, S., & Fredrickson, B. (2014). Prioritizing positivity: An effective approach to pursuing happiness? *Emotion*, 14(6), 1155–1161.

Week 6 – Subjective Well-being

Diener, E., Lucas, R., & Scollon, C. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American Psychologist*, *61*, 305-314.

Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Lucas, R. (2009). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and life satisfaction. In C. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 187-194). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oishi, S., Kesebir, S., & Diener, E. (2011). Income inequality and happiness. *Psychological Science*, *22*(9), 1095-1100.

Diener, E. (2012). New findings and future directions for subjective well-being research. *American Psychologist*, 590-597.

OPTIONAL - Diener, E., Tay, L., & Oishi, S. (2013). Rising income and the subjective well-being of nations. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *104*(2), 267-276.

Week 7 – Hope & Optimism

Carr, A. (2011). Chapter 3, Hope & Optimism (pp. 83-111) in *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. New York: Routledge Press.

SKIM - Seligman, M. (1990). *Learned Optimism*, pp. 207-292. New York: Knopf.

Danner, D., Snowdon, D., & Friesen, W. (2001). Positive emotions early in life and longevity: Findings from the nun study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *80*, 804-813.

Week 8 – Mindfulness & Meditation

Davidson, R., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., Rosenkrantz, M., Muller, D., Santorelli, S., et al. (2003). Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *65*, 564-570.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). Chapters 1 – 4 of the book, *Stress* (pp. 3-74). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, & illness*. New York: Bantam Books.

OPTIONAL - Holzel, B., Lazar, S., Gard, T., Schuman-Olivier, Z., & Vago, D., & Ott, U. (2011). How does mindfulness meditation work?: Proposing mechanisms of action from a conceptual and neural perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* *6*(6), 537-559.

Week 9 – Exercise, Yoga, & Other Contributors to Well Being

Hogan, C., Catalino, L., Mata, J., & Fredrickson, B. (2015). Beyond emotional benefits: Physical activity and sedentary behaviour affect psychosocial resources through emotions. *Psychology & Health, 30*:3, 354-369.

Bernstein, E., & McNally, R. (2017). Acute aerobic exercise hastens emotional recovery from a subsequent stressor. *Health Psychology, 36*(6), 560-567.

Barnett, J., Shale, A, Elkins, G., & Fisher, W. (2014). Chapter 7, Yoga, in *Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Psychologists: An Essential Resource*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.

Week 10 – Positive Relationships & Institutions

Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology*, Chapters 10 & 11.

Carr, A. (2011). Chapter 8, Positive Relationships (pp. 278-327) in *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. New York: Routledge Press.

Week 11 – Positive Psychology and Mental Health: Research & Future Directions – class presentations

Seligman, M, Steen, T., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions, *American Psychologist, 60*, 410-421.

Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology*, Chapter 9.

Carr, A. (2011). Chapter 9, Positive Psychological Therapy (pp. 328-357 ) in *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. New York: Routledge Press.

Week 12 – Summary & Celebration - class presentations