

Fall 2009—Psychology 461 (006): Science of Well-Being

Instructor: Todd B. Kashdan, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: 9am on Tuesday

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Day: T R

Time: 3:00-4:15pm

Place: Engineering 1108

Course Description: What contributes to satisfying, engaging, and meaningful living? What conditions allow people to flourish? We will address these questions by examining and interpreting the latest research in psychology and neuroscience on well-being, character strengths, and relationships. Emphasis will be placed on the ways that scientists generate hypotheses regarding the nature of positive psychological processes and the methods by which these ideas are tested.

SCIENTIFIC APPROACH: We approach each 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. We are going to discuss challenging topics including definitions and theoretical models of happiness, the nature of love and creativity, personal growth through adversity, the value of religiosity, etc. To benefit from this class, you will have to balance 1) personal beliefs you already acquired about positive experiences, traits, and institutions and 2) the willingness to be open, explore, and experiment with new ideas and experiences.

Course Requirements: About 20% of your grade will be based on your involvement and contributions to class. You are expected to attend every lecture and be an *active participant* in class discussions. You will not get a good grade in this class without regular attendance. You will be asked to write 1) papers after doing positive psychological activities (worth 40% of your grade) and 3) a final paper focusing on the creation and implementation of a positive intervention on yourself (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 on the due date. Late assignments within one day will lose a letter grade. No assignments will be accepted beyond one day following the due date.

Research. For 3% of grade, students are required to serve for 3 hours as participants in psychology studies.

Assigned Readings and Lectures: Class participation is critical. By participating in class, you are engaged in the learning process, assessing the ideas presented, and shaping the focus of the class. Class becomes more dynamic, interesting and rewarding when students actively share their ideas, objections, critiques, and questions. You are expected to come to class having read the assigned material and be prepared to make comments, raise questions, and offer opinions on the comments 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, a large portion of time will be devoted to discussion. I will periodically check to see whether articles have been read. Failure to read them will affect your grade.

Listserv: All students should join the class listserv to obtain course related information and participate in dialogue about topics related to positive psychology. The listserv provides a method to continue discussions and is a different medium to communicate in terms of threat, quality of discussions, and community. Similar to class, 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. 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 (the digest feature will prevent you from getting attachments). Have emails sent to the account you check regularly. To join, send e-mail to: gmupp@yahogroups.com

Exams: I believe the best way to learn is to actively work with course material as opposed to memorizing information to pass exams. Thus, I have little inclination to have formal exams. However, I reserve the right to employ unannounced evaluations of your knowledge of readings or require brief position papers in which you summarize and react to readings for a particular class period or topic. Expect a minimum of 3 surprise quizzes during the semester. When there are unannounced quizzes, there will be no make-ups. If

there are prominent extenuating circumstances, discuss this with me during 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 in borderline cases.

DEMONSTRATED MASTERY GRADING SYSTEM: The *quality* of participation will be looked at favorably when there are questions of whether grades adequately reflect a student's knowledge, or when an average falls just below a cut-off. This can only work in your favor. 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 beyond requirements. Please respect this process by not asking 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)
Last Day to Drop (Full-Semester Course)

September 15
October 2

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.

Book and Readings: Purchase the following from Amazon.com (for cheapest price):

Kashdan, T.B. (2009). *Curious? Discover the missing ingredient to a fulfilling life*. New York, NY: William Morrow.

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.

Assignments. Single-space all assignments to save paper and write in a font no bigger than Arial 11.

September 1: Orientation

Class: 1. discussion of class and syllabus. **2.** assign exercise for Tuesday 8/8 (assessing happiness and interviewing people). Plan for 2/10 assignment. **DO NOT MISS THIS CLASS AS IT'S THE ONLY ONE ON A COMPLEX SYLLABUS AND FINAL PROJECT.**

September 3: What Does Positive Psychology (PP) Offer?

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.

3. Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2009). Achieving and sustaining a good life. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4, 422-428.

class: "strengths" introductions

Due Today: Happiness interviews and 1-page write-up.

September 8: 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. Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2, 141-166.
3. Curious?- Chapters 1 & 3

class: Discuss results of happiness interviews;

September 10: Benefits of Happiness

Read:

1. Oishi, S., Diener, E., & Lucas, R. E. (2007). The optimal level of well-being: Can we be too happy? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2, 346-360.

2. Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13, 80-83.

Class: Assign exercise-- philanthropy vs. pleasure exercise. Write up experiences. **PLAN IN ADVANCE TO DO SOMETHING MEANINGFUL!**

September 15: 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. Wirtz, D., Kruger, J., Scollon, C. N., & Diener, E. (2003). What to do on spring break? The role of predicted, on-line, and remembered experience in future choice. *Psychological Science*, 14, 520-524.

3. Biswas-Diener, R., & Diener, E. (2006). The subjective well-being of the homeless, and lessons for happiness. *Social Indicators Research*, 76, 185- 205.

Due Today: philanthropy vs. pleasure exercise and write-up.

Class: assignment- write overview of your self-enhancement plan (see final project handout). Due 9/24.

September 17: Happiness Interventions

Read:

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

2. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2008). From ego-depletion to vitality: Theory and findings concerning the facilitation of energy available to the self. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2, 702-717.

Class: Assignment—kindness exercise and log.

September 22: 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. Ashby, F. G., Isen, A. M., & Turken, A. U. (1999). A neuropsychological theory of affect and its influence on cognition. *Psychological Review*, 106, 529-550.

3. Curious?- Chapter 4

Due Today: write-up of kindness exercise. Attach log.

September 24: Additional coverage of positive emotions....

No readings

Due Today: 1-page overview of self-enhancement plan for feedback and approval to begin.

September 29: Flow

Read:

1. 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.

2. Csikszentmihalyi, M., & LeFevre, J. (1989). Optimal experience in work and leisure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 815-822.

Class: assignment

1. meditation/yoga/mindfulness exercise (due 10/6 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 1: Calming the mind, meditation, drugs, and other methods...

Read:

1. Brown, K. W., Ryan, R. M., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychological Inquiry, 18*, 211-237.
2. Mitmansgruber, H., Beck, T. N., & Schüßler, G. (2008). "Mindful helpers": Experiential avoidance, meta-emotions, and emotion regulation in paramedics. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*, 1358-1363.

October 6: 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.

Due Today: meditation/yoga/mindfulness exercises. Write up experiences (2-3 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).

October 8: Mindfulness part III

Read:

1. Creswell, J.D., Way, B.M., Eisenberger, N.I., & Lieberman, M.D. (2007). Neural correlates of dispositional mindfulness during affect labeling. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 69*, 560-565.

Class: assign exercise for next class (one of three possible relationship exercises)

NO CLASS on OCTOBER 13 (LABOR DAY)

October 15: Love and social support: Why we need others to flourish

Read:

1. La Guardia, J. G., & Patrick, H. (2008). Self-determination theory as a fundamental theory of close relationships. *Canadian Psychology, 49*, 201-209.
2. Curious- chapter 6

Due Today: Relationship exercise (a few options) and write-up. Plan for gratitude visit due in a week.

October 22: Love and social support (continued)

No readings

Assign: Gratitude letter and visit

October 27: Gratitude

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.

DUE TODAY: Gratitude letter and 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!!!!!! Write no more than 1 page on the process and outcome. Include a copy of the letter that you read to them.

October 29: Strengths in a nutshell

1. Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Character strengths and wellbeing. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 23*, 603-619.

Class: assign curiosity exercise.

November 3: Curiosity

Read:

1. Curious- chapters 2 & 7

2. Wilson, T.D., Centerbar, D.B., Kermer, D.A., & Gilbert, D.T. (2005). The pleasures of uncertainty: Prolonging positive moods in ways people do not anticipate. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*, 5-21.

DUE TODAY: write-up of curiosity exercise.

November 5: Curiosity Part II

Read:

1. Curious- chapter 8
2. Silvia, P. J. (in press). Confusion and interest: The role of knowledge emotions in aesthetic experience. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*.

Class: assign meaning exercise for 4/14 TBA. Benefit finding and creating meaning from difficult events using purposeful exploration? Identifying strengths? One door closes, another opens?

November 10: 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. Curious- chapters 5 & 9

Due Today: Assignment on meaning.

November 12: Meaning and purpose in life Part II

1. King, L. A., & Hicks, J. A. (2007). Whatever happened to “what might have been”? Regret, happiness, and maturity. *American Psychologist*, 62, 625-636.
2. Steger, M. F. (2009). Meaning in life. In S. J. Lopez (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 679-687). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

November 17: Adversity, 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. Bonanno, G. A., Galea, S., Bucciarelli, A., & Vlahov, D. (2007). What predicts psychological resilience after disaster? The role of demographics, resources, and life stress. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 75, 671-682.

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

Assign for 11/24: Admiration project? One door opens? Write out how you have grown from setbacks? “Being a good teammate” exercise?

November 19: Creativity

Read:

1. Sternberg, R.J. (2006). The nature of creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 18, 87-98.

Class: assign exercise for next class- Creativity or Humor exercise?

Due today: assignment.

November 24: Creativity continued...

Readings TBA

Work on final paper!!!!

Due today: assignment

NO CLASS---THANKSGIVING BREAK----work on final project!!!

December 1: Self-Control

Read:

1. Baumeister, R. F., Gailliot, M. T., DeWall, C. N. & Oaten, M. (2006). Self-regulation and personality: Strength-boosting interventions and trait moderators of ego depletion. *Journal of Personality*, 74, 1773-1802.
2. DeWall, C. N., Baumeister, R. F., Gailliot, M. T., & Maner, J. K. (2008). Depletion makes the heart grow less helpful: Helping as a function of self-regulatory energy and genetic relatedness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34, 1653-1662.

December 3: Self-Control continued...Readings TBA

December 8: Wisdom or Humor or Emotional Intelligence or Other? Readings TBA

December 10: Human Flourishing X—discuss the future of discipline, self-improvement assignments, and other topics. Ask about topics that were covered insufficiently or anything else.

NOTE: FINAL PAPER DUE ON December 15TH!!!!!!!