

Psychology 455 – Positive Psychology

Professor: Joseph R. Cohen
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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-4:00
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Class Time: Monday-Thursday: 10:05-11:55
Room: Tillett 116

Required Textbook:

Articles Posted on Sakai.

Content:

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. This field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.

Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Understanding positive emotions entails the study of contentment with the past, happiness in the present, and hope for the future. Understanding positive individual traits consists of the study of the strengths and virtues, such as the capacity for love and work, courage, compassion, resilience, creativity, curiosity, integrity, self-knowledge, moderation, self-control, and wisdom. Understanding positive institutions entails the study of the strengths that foster better communities, such as justice, responsibility, civility, parenting, nurturance, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose, and tolerance. This course combines didactic instruction and experiential learning in its coverage of each of these three issues central to this field

Syllabus

Week 1: Introduction to Positive Psychology/ 3 Paths to Happiness

July 9: Lecture: Introduction to Positive Psychology

July 10: Lecture: 3 Paths to Happiness

July 11: Lecture: Positive Emotions/Applying Positive Psychology

July 12: Presentation 1: Class Introductions (3 paths to happiness)

Readings:

- Diener, E. & Diener, C. (1996). Most people are happy. *Psychological Science*, 3, 181-185.
- 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.
- Lyubomirsky, S., Dickeerhoof, R., Boehm, J. K., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011). Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way: An experimental longitudinal intervention to boost well-being. *Emotion*, 11, 391-402.

Week 2: Prevention: An Example of Applied Positive Psychology

July 16: ABC Model of Prevention

July 17: ABC Model of Prevention

July 18: No Class

July 19: Applications of PRP

Readings:

- Gillham, J. E. et al. (2007). School-based prevention of depressive symptoms: A randomized controlled study of the effectiveness and specificity of the Penn Resiliency Program. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 75*, 9-19.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist, 60*, 410-421.

Week 3: Resilience/Character Strengths/Gratitude

July 23: Lecture 3: Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth

July 24: Lecture 4: Character Strengths

July 24 (1:00-4:00; Optional): Movie: Shine

July 25: In-Class Activity Strengths Exercise

July 26: Lecture 5: The Importance of Expressing Gratitude

Readings:

- Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*, 213-233.
- Janoff-Bulman, R. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Three explanatory models. *Psychological Inquiry, 15*, 30-34.
- Meyerson, D.A., Grant, K.E., Smith-Carter, J. & Kilmer, R.P. (2011). Posttraumatic growth among children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 31*, 949-964.
- Proctor, C., Maltby, J., & Linley, P. A. (2011). Strengths use as a predictor of well-being and health-related quality of life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 12*, 153-169.

Week 4: Creativity

July 30: Lecture: Creativity: Meaning and Measurement

July 31: Lecture: Creativity and its Relation to Well Being

July 31 (1:00-4:00; Optional): Movie: Pay it Forward

August 1: Presentation 2: Gratitude Letter

August 2: Presentation: 3: Creativity Presentations

Readings:

- Baas, M., De Dreu, C. K. W., & Nijstad, B. A. (2008). A meta-analysis of 25 years of mood-creativity research: Hedonic tone, activation, or regulatory focus? *Psychological Bulletin, 134*, 779-806

- De Dreu, C.K.W., Baas, M., & Nijstad, B.A. (2008). Hedonic tone and activation level in the mood-creativity link: Toward a dual pathway to creativity model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94, 739-756.
- Verhaeghen, P., Joormann, J., Khan, R. (2005). Why we sing the blues: The relation between self-reflective rumination, mood, and creativity. *Emotion*, 5, 226-232.

Week 5: Savoring

August 8: Lecture: Countering the Negativity Bias

August 9: Lecture: Sensory Savoring/Mindfulness

August 9 (1:00-4:00; Optional): Movie: TBD

August 10: Lecture: Positive Psychology Approach to Mental Illness

August 11: Presentation 4: Sensory Savoring

Readings:

- Baumeister, R., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 323-370
- Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5, 296-320.
- Savitsky, K., Medvic, V. H., & Gilovich, T. (1997). Remembering and regretting: The Zeigarnik effect and the cognitive availability of regrettable actions and inactions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 248-258.

Week 6: Resilience and Final Project

August 15: Final Class Presentations

August 16: Final Class Presentations

August 17: Final Class Presentations/Closing Thoughts

Requirements

4 Presentations: 5% Each (20% Total)
 1 Out of Class Assignment: 15% (15% Total)
 5 Article/Movie Responses: 5% Each (25% Total)
 Final Project: 20% (20% Total)
 Class Participation: 20% (20% Total)