

BI170 HAPPINESS: A NEUROSCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

Welcome to the Neuroscience/Psychology of Happiness (positive life engagement)!

Brief Course Description: Examination of studies in neuroscience and positive psychology that explore the mental and behavioral actions leading to the self-reporting of a well-lived and fulfilling life. Exploration of the interaction of multiple variables in behavior and mental state, and the underlying neural circuits and mechanisms, that lead to increases in positive affect, and decreases in negative affect, respectively.

Expanded Course Description: Welcome to happiness: a neuroscience and psychology perspective! This course examines research in positive psychology and neuroscience that reveals the behavioral activities and mindsets that promote positive life engagement and the neural circuits that influence this. The course will examine the evidence that happiness is significantly influenced by genetics and mindset, with only a small component arising from life circumstances. Studies in positive psychology that reveal important factors in mental mindsets, such as the quality of interpersonal relationships, resilience, growth vs. fixed mindset, self-esteem formation, etc. will be critically evaluated and discussed. The neural pathways underlying the fight/flight/freeze response, stress/anxiety, attention, reward/pleasure/addiction, conditioned fear, learning and memory, parent/child and romantic relationship bonding, compassion/empathy, and habit formation will be reviewed and critically evaluated. Methods for altering these neural pathways and their associated cognitive states, such as pharmacological, behavioral, meditative, cognitive behavioral therapy, and mindfulness-based stress reduction, will be demonstrated and discussed. The course will encourage students to critically evaluate and assess their assumptions about positive life engagement in their own situations and to explore, through critical discussion and final projects/papers, mechanisms that may facilitate their own understanding of the psychological/neuroscience factors involved in their unique situation and how to put practices into place that provide positive growth potential.

The goals for this course are:

- Learn what scientific studies in positive psychology tell us about happiness, fulfillment, gratitude, relationships, connectedness, internal narrative and biases, and stress/anxiety and depression.
- Learn the neural pathways involved in bonding with others, empathy, compassion, stress/anxiety, learning and memory, and personal worldview construction.
- Learn both the theory and practice of methods that enhance positive life engagement and fulfillment.

Course Description

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe the factors that scientific studies in positive psychology have determined to influence a person's sense of well-being.
- Describe the influence and interactions of relationships, community, career, income, health, exercise, and conditioning on long-term mental and physical well-being.
- Describe the neural pathways and mechanisms involved in the stress response, pair-mate and parent-child bonding, empathy and compassion, learning, and memory, conditioned fear/anxiety, and belief systems concerning the nature of the sensory and cognitive world.
- Describe the practice and potential mechanisms by which various therapies (cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, meditation) may reduce anxiety/stress in the nervous system and how it may promote a more fulfilling life.
- Explain the usefulness of various behavioral practices on the development of a sense of personal well-being and the neural mechanisms that may underlie this.
- Understand how to critically evaluate and discuss experiments that claim to examine the relationship between lifestyle, behavior, psychological factors, and sense of well-being.
- Exhibit an in-depth understanding of how the various influences/factors discussed in class influence the student's own sense of well-being and learn how to effectively communicate this both orally and in writing.

Course Policies

Respect for Diversity

This course is a place where you will be treated with respect and we welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, abilities, and other visible and non-visible

differences. All students are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class.

Class rosters are provided to instructors with students' legal names. We will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise us of this preference early in the quarter (or before) so we may address you properly.

Academic Integrity

Since this course is both online and in-person, all quizzes and tests are open-book. While we fully support discussion and collaboration between students on the course materials, you are expected to take the quizzes and online tests without help from others. While vigorous discussion of your final research paper/project with others is encouraged, the final/paper project should be performed by you alone and in your own voice. Any material that is quoted from another source needs to be clearly identified as a quote. If you choose a research project, as opposed to a research paper, for your final, you may do the research project with up to 3 other classmates. Everyone, however, will be required to write their own report on the research project.

Late and Make-up Policy

It is very important that you keep pace with the weekly assignments since we will be discussing these in detail during discussion sections. The weekly quizzes are meant to provide an impetus for you to complete the materials in a timely manner. You may read and work ahead of schedule if you desire, but late quizzes will not be given. At the end of each week, the online quizzes for that week will no longer be available. There is a quiz for each of the 17 lectures. Only your top 14 scores will be counted toward your quiz grade.

The midterm exam will be available on one day only during the course. Written requests for alternative testing arrangements for this midterm due to conflicts with authorized and unavoidable university events must be made during the first two weeks of the term. Documentation must be included with all requests. A makeup midterm will be essay/short answer questions. The final paper/project at the end of the term will be accepted for up to 5 days after the due date, with a 5% deduction to the score per day. **Because these policies are firm, it is important you mark due dates on your calendar and plan your schedule accordingly.**

Expectations

Time Management

In a typical week, the student should expect to spend an average of about 12-15 hours working on this course. This includes interacting with the read and viewing materials, watching or attending lectures, completing assignments and activities, posting in discussions online, participating in discussion sections, and working on the final project (work on this will begin early in the course). The student should try to make practice of breaking big tasks into smaller chunks by doing a little every day.

The lectures are recorded in 20-30 minute segments to make it easier for the student to view. PDFs of the lectures, with some basic notes, are provided so the student can follow along and take their own notes during the lecture. The student should read the material associated with each lecture and watch the associated TED talks or other videos. The student should take notes on the lectures, readings, and videos so that we can discuss them during discussion section. The student should note any questions they may have and attend drop-in office hours for help.

To help inspire the student to keep pace with the course, there is a short quiz associated with each lecture and readings/videos. The student should make sure to take the two quizzes per week before the end of the week. Quizzes will be closed to access at the end of each week. Learning in this manner, rather than cramming during the week of exams, will make studying much more efficient and enhance the enjoyment of the course!



Net-etiquette Guidelines

When participating in online course activities, please use good “netiquette.”

Identify yourself with your real name and use a subject line that clearly relates to your contribution. Write or speak in the first person when sharing your opinions and ideas but when addressing other students or discussing their ideas, use their names. Respect the privacy of your classmates and what they share in class. Understand that we may disagree and that exposure to other people’s opinions is part of the learning experience. Good netiquette also means using humor or sarcasm carefully, and remembering that non-verbal cues (such as facial expressions) is not always possible or clear in a remote or masked context.

In addition, your language should be free of profanity, appropriate for an academic context, and exhibit interest in, and courtesy for, others’ contributions. Be aware that typing in all capital letters indicates shouting. Certain breaches of netiquette can be considered disruptive behavior.

Course Structure

Introductory and course navigation videos are available on the Canvas website for this course. Make sure to watch these short videos so that you can become oriented with the course. If you have any questions, email the instructor or TAs.

Course Materials

All course materials, including lectures, readings, and videos, are available free of charge on the canvas website.

Course Activities

- Each week there are two lectures to view or attend. Each lecture is divided into 2 or 3 videos of approximately 20-30 minutes.
- There are book chapters, articles, or scientific papers to read for each lecture.
- There are videos to watch for each lecture – these are typically TED talks.
- The student is required to post to the discussion sections online for each lecture and to respectfully comment on another student's post.
- There is a quiz for each lecture, that is due by the start of the discussion section each week. The quizzes are open-book.
- There are suggested activities, such as meditation, exercise, and gratitude, to perform each week to help with building a healthy mindset. These are not graded – do them for your own benefit and to learn more from the class! 😊
- Each Friday we will meet in discussion section and discuss the week's materials.

Grading

- 20% Lecture Preparation Quizzes (best 14 out of 17)
- 30% Midterm Exam
- 10% Final Research Paper proposal (1-2 pages double spaced)
- 30% Final Research Project or Research paper (Project, plus 3-4 page description of project and relevance to the science and practice of happiness and 1-page time journal; **OR** Final Research Paper, 6-8 pages, written on a topic of the student's choice about the Neuroscience/Psychology of Happiness)
- 10% Classroom Participation. This will be mainly quantified by participation in discussion sections and online discussions. You are allowed 3 misses before it affects your score.
- 5% Extra credit – The student may earn 5% extra credit by taking notes on the readings, videos, and/or activities that are assigned for each lecture. Extra credit is also given for submitting the gratitude letter during the week in which this is an activity, and for submitting a well-thought-out letter to your future self at the end of the course. An example note-taking form is provided below. (0.5% extra credit available per week.)

Weekly activities (such as meditation, exercise, etc.) are suggested for the student's benefit and are not graded. The student may earn extra credit by taking notes on their activities and associated thoughts/experiences.

Course grades and percentiles: A+: 97-100%; A: 93-96; 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: 63-66; D-: 60-62 F: <60%.

A range: Superior mastery of the material, as evidenced by midterm and quiz test scores. Active participation in lecture and discussion section. Thoughtful and effective analysis of the topic of the course as evidenced through the final research project or paper and proposal.

B range: Good mastery of the material, as evidenced by midterm and quiz test scores. Active participation in lecture and discussion sections. Mostly clear analysis of the topic of the course as evidenced through the final research project or paper and proposal.

C range: Adequate mastery of the material, as evidenced by midterm and quiz test scores. Adequate participation in the lecture and discussion sections. Good, but with some gaps, analysis of the topic of the course as evidenced through the final research project or paper and proposal.

D range: Poor mastery of the material, as evidenced by midterm and quiz test scores. Relatively little participation in lecture and discussion sections. Important gaps or errors in the analysis of the topic of the course as evidenced through the final research project or paper and proposal.

F: Inadequate mastery of the material, as evidenced by midterm and quiz test scores. Little to no participation in the lecture and discussion section. No evidence of significant effort in the analysis of the topic of the course as indicated by the final research project or paper and proposal.

P/NP OPTION

The student must receive a grade of C- or better (70/100) to receive a P.

Course Schedule

Modules – Lectures, Reading, Viewing, Activities

Each module contains 5 components:

- 1) Lecture videos (2-3)
- 2) Readings
- 3) Videos (typically TED talks)
- 4) Activities
- 5) Quizzes

To advance to the next module, it is required to have completed the previous module including the quiz. Make sure to stay up to date on the material. Procrastinating is one of the problems that we will talk about in class.

Course Dates and Topics of Discussion

Week 1:

Module/Lecture 1: Introduction: Overview of Course; What is Happiness and Why Study It?

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: Meet and Greet. The meaning of happiness and impediments to being happy – a deeper look. Discussion of our song/playlists.

Week 2:

Module/Lecture 2: What increases long-term happiness

Module/Lecture 3: Impediments to happiness

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: What increases long-term happiness and impediments to this.

Week 3:

Module/Lecture 4: The Brain – an organ for creating the mind

Module/Lecture 5: What causes stress and anxiety and how to overcome them

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: The Human Brain and How it works.

Week 4:

Module/Lecture 6: Neural pathways of stress and anxiety

Module/Lecture 7: How to change your internal narrative

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: Meditation – Body Scan/Loving-Kindness/Mindfulness and Virtual Reality. Practices to reduce your stress, anxiety, and unskillful habits

Week 5:

Module/Lecture 8: Neural pathways of reward, habit, addiction and how they affect our happiness

Module/Lecture 9: Building better habits and reducing addictive behaviors

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: Meditation – Body Scan/Loving-Kindness/Mindfulness and Virtual Reality. Practices to reduce your stress, anxiety, and unskillful habits

Week 6:

Midterm Exam on Canvas. 40-50 questions, mostly multiple-choice, on Modules 1-9.

Module/Lecture 10: Neural pathways for empathy, compassion, and connection

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: Midterm review and Final Project Discussion.

Week 7:

Module/Lecture 11: What does lead to happiness I: gratitude and generosity

Module/Lecture 12: What does lead to happiness II: the importance of healthy social connections and relationships

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: In Person: Taste/Touch/Visual experiments. Online: Discussion on gratitude/gratitude/generosity/healthy relationships

Week 8:

Module/Lecture 13: Neural pathways for bonding and relationships

Module/Lecture 14: Achieving better goals I: the right mindset

Discussion Sections: Discussion/Experiential Section: Discussion of favorite love/break up song and lyrics. Sexual health in relationships

Week 9:

Module/Lecture 15: Achieving Better Goals II: harnessing our biases

Discussion section – None – Thanksgiving break

Week 10:

Module/Lecture 16: Achieving Better Goals III: implementing intention and ending procrastination

Module/Lecture 17: Strategies in practice: helping others and helping the planet.

Discussion Sections: Final Project Discussion; We vs. Me – an action plan

Arrange Individual Sessions with your TA and/or Dr. McCormick to work on your final projects.

Week 11:

Final Paper or Final Project. Check Canvas for due date.

Detailed Course Schedule – Readings, Videos, and Activities

Week 1

Module/Lecture 1: Welcome, Course Introduction, and “What is Happiness and Why Study It?”:

At the beginning of the course, we will take a measure of your levels of happiness. Go to <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/authentic-happiness-inventory> and take the “Authentic Happiness Inventory.” You will need to register to take the questionnaire. Keep track of your score – we will refer back to it at the end of the course, and see if we were successful in changing your levels of happiness! Be honest in your answers on the inventory. There is no grade and only you will know your score.

Read: No reading for 1st day of class. You have enough to do already!

Watch these videos and write down your thoughts. Do you agree or disagree with their main points? Do you resonate with the speaker’s statements?

Emily Esfahani Smith - There's more to life than being happy
https://www.ted.com/talks/emily_esfahani_smith_there_s_more_to_life_than_being_happy

Dan Gilbert - The surprising science of happiness
https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_the_surprising_science_of_happiness

Activity (week 1): *Connect with other people.* We will see that, for many of us, as goes the quality of our social connections, so goes the feelings of the quality of our life. So, for your first week in class, I want you to make new social connections. First, meet someone from this class that you don’t know. Find out something interesting about that person, and share something interesting about yourself. Since everyone in class has this assignment, it should be easy to strike up a conversation with a new person! Following this example of social connection, now make some new connections this week outside class. Perhaps the person that serves you coffee at Starbucks, or the person that serves you lunch in the dining facilities. Or someone at the grocery store, or a professor! Make at least one new social connection each day this week. Sometime during the week, spend an hour or more connecting with someone meaningful in your life. A friend, family member, or loved one. The important point is that it needs to be quality time. Quality over quantity. Go for coffee, or a walk, or just skype. Keep track of your new social connections in your journal and how they made you feel (from positive to negative aspects). At the end of the quarter, we will see if you are more or less at ease with social connections following all of our practices.

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: Meet and Greet. The meaning of happiness and impediments to being happy – a deeper look. Discussion of our song/playlists.

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Week 2

Module/Lecture 2: What increases long-term happiness

Read:

Ben-Shahar (2007) Happier: Chapters 1-3. Pp.3-49. What is happiness?

Read this online report: <https://ourworldindata.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction>

Watch:

Robert Waldinger - What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness

https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness?language=en

Matt Killingsworth Want to be happier? Stay in the moment

https://www.ted.com/talks/matt_killingsworth_want_to_be_happier_stay_in_the_moment

Module/Lecture 3: Impediments to Happiness

Read:

[Anthony de Mello \(1992\) "The way to love" Chapters 1, 3, 4. Pp. 1-4; 13-25.](#)

[Don Miguel Ruiz \(1997\) The Four Agreements - Chapter 1](#)

Read these online:

Steven Pinker: The world is an amazing place so why aren't we happier

<https://ideas.ted.com/the-world-is-an-amazing-place-so-why-arent-we-happier/> (Links to an external site.)

Lisa Varvogli: 7 Obstacles to Happiness and How to Overcome them

https://medium.com/@liza_98826/7-obstacles-to-happiness-and-how-to-overcome-them-6ecc04a366ae

Watch:

Brene Brown – The power of vulnerability

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability?language=en

Interview with Kalpana Pot – available in Canvas

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Activity (week 2): Spreading Kindness. Every day this week do something kind for someone else, above and beyond what you normally do. Pay it forward by buying someone a cup of coffee at Starbucks (maybe the person behind you in line?). Pay for your friend's lunch. Tell someone how much you appreciate a characteristic that you have always admired about them. Also, do some larger activities over the quarter. Volunteer to plant trees in Eugene <https://friendsoftrees.org/eugene/>. Participate in a UO sustainability project <https://emu.uoregon.edu/sustainability>. Volunteer to take leftover food to a homeless shelter <https://foodforlanecounty.org/>. Give blood. Whatever you do, make sure it is about being kind, and not about rewarding yourself. Put in your journal what you did, how you felt, and how it relates to happiness.

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: What increases long-term happiness and impediments to this

Week 3

Module/Lecture 4: The Structure of the Brain – An Organ for Creating a Model of the World Including Biases and Best Guesses

Read:

[Purves “Neuroscience” Chapter 1: Studying the Nervous Systems of Humans and Other Animals. pp. 1-28.](#)

[Burnett, D. \(2018\) Happy Brain: Chapter 1 “Happiness in the Brain”](#)

Watch:

The Brain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMKc8nfPATI>

Anil Seth - Your brain hallucinates your conscious reality

https://www.ted.com/talks/anil_seth_your_brain_hallucinates_your_conscious_reality?referrer=playlist-how_your_brain_constructs_real

Isaac Lidsky - What reality are you creating for yourself?

https://www.ted.com/talks/isaac_lidsky_what_reality_are_you_creating_for_yourself?referrer=playlist-how_your_brain_constructs_real

Jill Bolte Taylor - My stroke of insight

https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_my_stroke_of_insight

Module/Lecture 5: What causes stress and anxiety and how to overcome it.

Watch:

Olivia Remes: How to cope with anxiety

https://www.ted.com/talks/olivia_remes_how_to_cope_with_anxiety?language=en (Links to an external site.)

Johann Hari: This could be why you are depressed or anxious

https://www.ted.com/talks/johann_hari_this_could_be_why_you_re_depressed_or_anxious?language=en

Read:

Student's Guide to Dealing with College Stress

<https://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/balancing-student-stress/>

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Activity (week 3): *Discover Your Inner Strengths.* Making the best of your talents and inner strengths facilitates people's life satisfaction and feelings of useful engagement in work/school.

Go to <http://www.viasurvey.org/>) and take the inner strength survey. Answer the 240 questions (about 30 minutes) honestly and accurately. It is important in order to get an accurate assessment of your strengths. Write down in your journal your top strengths and use at least one of them each day over the next week. Write in your journal how you used your inner strengths and how you may help them grow.

Also, consider what strengths you would like to grow. Try to push yourself each week to strengthen an area in which you are not strong by doing something each day that isn't a great strength. Rapid development occurs often at the boundary of what you are comfortable with/capable of. Push the boundaries a bit! Note in your journal your experiences.

Read:

[Seligman, M. \(2002\) Authentic Happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment. Chapter 9: Your Signature Strengths.](#)

Watch:

Dan Ariely What makes us feel good about our work?

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-makes-us-feel-good-about-our-work-dan-ariely#:~:text=It%20seems%20that%20most%20of,toward%20meaning%20in%20our%20work.>

Angela Lee Duckworth Grit: The power of passion and perseverance

https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance?language=en

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: The Human Brain and How it works.

Week 4

Module/Lecture 6: Neural pathways of stress and anxiety

Read:

[Pittman, C.M., Karle, E.M. \(2015\) Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry Introduction and Chapters 1-3. pp. 1-63](#)

Read online: Brainfacts.org - The neuroscience of stress

https://www.brainfacts.org/thinking-sensing-and-behaving/emotions-stress-and-anxiety/2018/the-neuroscience-of-stress-061918?gclid=CjwKCAiArJjvBRACEiwA-Wiqq2mdX7CEQbStco0t_jp0-Ymryi2mHW-H1HI0iT8baJTBLxUbEb9pWBoCPgEQAvD_BwE&gclid=CjwKCAiArJjvBRACEiwA-Wiqq2mdX7CEQbStco0t_jp0-Ymryi2mHW-H1HI0iT8baJTBLxUbEb9pWBoCPgEQAvD_BwE

Watch:

Neuroscience of Anxiety

<https://youtu.be/2wCbwpnIJsA>

Stress, Portrait of a Killer - Robert Sapolsky

<https://youtu.be/a58RrLUs4YE>

Take the online quiz on the above material

Module/Lecture 7: How to change your internal narrative

Activity (week 4): Meditate! Every day this week, meditate for 15 minutes or more. Download the Headspace or Calm apps (no need to sign up for the service). Find a quiet place and meditate each day for 15 minutes or more. Keep notes in your journal about your experiences. There are groups available on campus for meditation as well. Weekly, I teach meditation for the course. See the front page of Canvas for details.

There are also meditation groups that meet in the Duck's Nest <https://health.uoregon.edu/ducknest>.

For the Activity - Read: [Mindfulness in Plain English. Chapter 5 "The Practice": pp. 29-38 and "Universal Loving Kindness", pages 54-58.](#)

For the Activity - Watch: Shauna Shapiro - The Power of Mindfulness: What you Practice Grows Stronger

<https://youtu.be/lelJdB2-Vo>

For the Module - Read:

[James Carmody and Ruth A. Baer \(2008\) Relationships between mindfulness practice and levels of mindfulness, medical and psychological symptoms and well-being in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program J Behav Med \(2008\) 31:23–33](#)

For the Module - Watch:

Kati Morton - What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

<https://youtu.be/g7B3n9jobus>

Zindel Segal - The Mindful Way Through Depression

<https://youtu.be/1A4w3W94ygA>

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's TED talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_flow_the_secret_to_happiness?language=en

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: Meditation – Body Scan/Loving-Kindness/Mindfulness and Virtual Reality. Practices to reduce your stress, anxiety, and unskillful habits

Week 5

Module/Lecture 8: Neural Pathways – Reward, Habit, Addiction, and how they affect our happiness

Watch:

Reward pathway in the brain

<https://youtu.be/YzCYuKX6zp8>

Judson Brewer - A Simple Way To Break a Bad Habit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-moW9jvvMr4>

Read:

[Linden, D.J. \(2011\) The Compass of Pleasure. How our brains make fatty foods, orgasm, exercise, marijuana, generosity, vodka, learning, and gambling feel so good. Chapter 1.](#)

[Linden, D.J. \(2011\) The Compass of Pleasure. How our brains make fatty foods, orgasm, exercise, marijuana, generosity, vodka, learning, and gambling feel so good. Chapter 2.](#)

[Neal, D. T., Wood, W., & Quinn, J. M. \(2006\). Habits—A repeat performance. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 15\(4\), 198-202.](#)

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Module/Lecture 9: Building better habits and reducing addictive behaviors

Read:

[Atomic Habits. James Clearly Introduction.](#)

[Atomic Habits. James Clearly Chapter 3.](#)

[The following is extra reading and not required:](#)

[Duckworth, A. L., Gendler, T. S., & Gross, J. J. \(2016\). Situational strategies for self-control. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 11\(1\), 35-55.](#)

Watch:

James Clear - Atomic Habits: How to get 1% better every day.

https://youtu.be/U_nzqnXWvSo

The Social Dilemma – available on Netflix. We will have a watch party and discussion of this interesting movie about the power of social networks to shape your mind and behavior. Here is a trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaaC57tcci0>

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Activity (week 5): *Gratitude – a daily exercise.* During this week, write in your journal (before bed is a good time) all of the things you were grateful for during the day. Think of at least 5 items. Write a little as to why you are grateful for these things that occurred in your daily life. Savor those things for which you are grateful. Look for them in your daily life and see if you notice more each day. Gratitude has a way of growing if you just give it a little water.

Week 6

Midterm Exam online.

Module/Lecture 10: Neural pathways for empathy, compassion, and connection

Read:

[Pfaff D. W. The Altruistic Brain - Chapters 2.](#)

[Pfaff D.W. The Altruistic Brain - Chapter 3.](#)

Watch:

(Please Note: These talks contain discussion of sexual abuse, genocide, and other difficult topics; You may skip watching them if you choose. If you do watch, I recommend you watch with a friend and discuss the movies after)

Eve Ensler: Embrace your inner girl

<https://youtu.be/YhG1Bgbsj2w>

Clemantine Wamariya: War and what comes after.

Note: Clemantine Wamariya was a student and friend that I knew at Yale. She and I lived in the same residential college.

When Clemantine was six years old, the Rwandan Civil War forced her and her sister to flee their home in Kigali, leaving their parents and everything they knew behind. In this deeply personal talk, she tells the story of how she became a refugee, living in camps in seven countries over the next six years -- and how she's tried to make sense of what came after. (Note: Clemantine was one of the students in the college that I lived in at Yale and I came to know her from that connection.)

https://youtu.be/U4gR_cd6xOc

Watch: the documentary movie “*Buck*” (2011) about Buck Brannaman - the original horse whisperer, who has an amazing ability to connect emotionally with horses owing to his difficult childhood.

We will have a watch party (details to be announced)

Or - you can rent it for a small fee (e.g. \$3.99) from amazon:

https://www.amazon.com/Buck-Brannaman/dp/B005S6VD70/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=buck+movie&qid=1583760718&sr=8-2 (Links to an external site.)

or on Youtube:

https://youtu.be/3eB263Go2_4

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: Midterm Review

Activity (week 6): *The Gratitude Letter/Visit.* Think of one person, still living, who made a big difference in your life but whom you never properly thanked. Find a quiet spot when you have a half-hour and write a 300-word, heartfelt testimony to that person, explaining how he or she touched your life and why he or she is meaningful to you. If you’d like to take it to the next level, schedule a time to visit this person and share your letter. Call the person and say you want to visit without explaining why. At the visit, read the letter aloud. Gratitude is a powerful tool for increasing happiness because it intensifies positive memories and forges social bonds. For this reason, this is likely to be one of the most intense exercises of the entire quarter. *Submit your gratitude letter in Canvas for extra credit.*

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: Midterm review and Final Project Discussion.

Week 7

Module/Lecture 11: May 3 – May 9 What does lead to happiness I: gratitude and generosity

Read:

[Marina Keegan. The opposite of loneliness. Yale Daily News. May 27, 2012.](#)

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

[Piliavin \(2003\). Doing well by doing good. In L. C. M. Keyes & J. Haidt \(Eds.\) Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. 227- 247.](#)

You can also read this - but it isn't required (you won't be quizzed or tested on it)!

[Myers, D. G. \(2000\). The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. American Psychologist, 55, 56-67.](#)

Watch:

Elizabeth Dunn Helping Others Makes Us Happier – But It Matters How We Do It.

https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_dunn_helping_others_makes_us_happier_but_it_matters_how_we_do_it?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

Louie Schwartzberg Nature, Beauty, Gratitude

https://www.ted.com/talks/louie_schwartzberg_nature_beauty_gratitude?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

David Steindl-Rast Want to be happy? Be grateful.

<https://youtu.be/UtBsl3j0YRQ>

Take the online on the above material.

Module/Lecture 12: What does lead to happiness II: The importance of healthy social connections and relationships.

Activity (week 7): *Savor a Beautiful Day.* During this week, your assignment is to spend time outdoors. Hike up Spencer Butte or to Hendricks Park (which is within walking distance of campus). If you can't do that, go for a walk in the wooded areas of campus. Do it by yourself, or with friends, but however you do it, walk quietly, in silence, and savor the beauty around you. Our minds are always so busy, immersed in our human world, we don't recognize the beauty around us. Make sure you spend at least one hour this week savoring, in silence, that natural beauty. Try and use the meditative skills you learned in a previous exercise to quiet your mind and be present during your walk. Write about your experience in your journal.

Read:

[Lerner, D., and Schlecter, A. \(2017\) Uthrive - How to succeed in college Chapter 2 - Relationships: Getting Connected](#)

Watch: Katie Hood. The difference between healthy and unhealthy love.

https://www.ted.com/talks/katie_hood_the_difference_between_healthy_and_unhealthy_love?language=en

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: In Person: Taste/Touch/Visual experiments. Online: Discussion on gratitude/generosity/healthy relationships

Week 8

Module/Lecture 13: Neural pathways of bonding and relationships

Read:

[Feldman, R. The Neurobiology of Human Attachments. Trends in Cognitive Science](#)

[Pfaff D.W. The Altruistic Brain - Neural and Hormonal Mechanisms that Promote Prosocial Behavior - Chapter 4 101-130](#)

Watch:

Helen Fisher – The brain in love

https://www.ted.com/talks/helen_fisher_the_brain_in_love?language=en

Helen Fisher – Technology hasn't changed love; here's why

https://www.ted.com/talks/helen_fisher_technology_hasn_t_changed_love_here_s_why

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Module/Lecture 14: Achieving Better Goals I: The right mindset

Activity (week 8): *Exercise!* The mind and body are intimately connected together. Exercise not only affects the state of your body, but also the state of your mind. It is a great stress reliever, and with time can increase your mood and even lessen depression. This week, exercise every day. Go to the rec, join a yoga class, dance alone or with friends, or simply go for a walk. Note in your journal how you feel after each round of exercise, and over the course of the week.

Read:

[Dweck, C. S. \(2007\). The secret to raising smart kids. Scientific American Mind, 18\(6\), 36-43.](#)



I also recommend the book (not required reading):

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol Dweck

Watch:

Anindya Kundu The boost students need to overcome obstacles

https://www.ted.com/talks/anindya_kundu_the_boost_students_need_to_overcome_obstacles?language=en

Sarah Kay If I should have a daughter

https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kay_if_i_should_have_a_daughter/transcript?language=en

Fixed mindset vs. growth mindset

<https://youtu.be/Xv2ar6AKvGc>


Take the online quiz on the above material.

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: Discussion of favorite love/break-up song and lyrics. Sexual health in relationships

Week 9

Module/Lecture 15: Achieving Better Goals II: Harnessing Our Biases

Read:

[Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. \(2009\) Chapter 1. Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness \(updated edition\). New York: Penguin. \(pp. 17-39\).](#) 

Watch:

12 Cognitive Biases Explained

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEwGBlr_Rlw&feature=youtu.be

Cognitive Bias Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RsbmjNLQkc&feature=youtu.be>

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Module/Lecture 16: Achieving Better Goals III: Implementing Intention and Ending Procrastination

Activity (week 9): *Sleep!* The average college student is about 14 hours sleep deprived. That means that if the student is put in a room with nothing to do, no cell phones, computers, or games, they will sleep an extra 14 hours! Have you ever noticed how much you sleep when you have time off or go home for the weekend? Sleep is a critical function for the body, brain, and mind. Contrary to cultural bias, less sleep is NOT better. For this week's activity, go to bed early, sleep in, and get an extra hour of sleep each day. Keep notes in your journal as to how you feel each night and relate them to how much sleep you were able to get. It could take you many days to pay back your sleep debt, but it is worth it!

Here are some tips for good sleep: Don't drink caffeine after mid-day; Don't use your phone or iPad or other electronics in bed; Don't exercise just before sleep (it tends to jazz up your mind and makes sleep less deep); Don't drink alcohol before sleep; Don't get into intense discussions or arguments (yikes!) before going to bed. Do loving-kindness meditation in your mind as you fall asleep. Treat yourself well and relax. It's an assignment from your happiness professor!

Read:

[Gollwitzer, P. M. \(1999\). Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans. American Psychologist, 54, 493-503.](#)

[Marano, H. E. \(2003\). Ending Procrastination. Psychology Today. Basco, M. R. \(1999\). The perfect trap. Psychology Today, 32\(3\), 30-4.](#)

[Ariely, D., & Wertenbroch, K. \(2002\). Procrastination, deadlines, and performance: Self-control by precommitment. Psychological Science, 13, 219-224.](#)

Watch:

Tim Urban's TED Talk "Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arj7oStGLkU>

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Thursday and Friday Discussion/Experiential Section: None – Thanksgiving break

Week 10

Module/Lecture 17: Strategies in practice: Helping others and helping the planet

Read:

Why we need to be more emotional to save the world

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200228-how-our-emotions-could-help-save-the-world> ([Links to an external site.](#))

[Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. \(2009\) Chapter 12. Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness \(updated edition\). New York: Penguin.](#)

You might also want to read (but not required!)

[Magnan, S. \(2017\) Social determinants of health 101 for health care. National Academy of Medicine.](#)

[Walton, G. M. \(2014\). The new science of wise psychological interventions. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23, 73-82.](#)

[Lehner, M., Mont, O., & Heiskanen, E. \(2016\). Nudging—A promising tool for sustainable consumption behaviour? Journal of Cleaner Production, 134, 166-177.](#)

Watch:

Nick Marks - The Happy Planet Index

https://www.ted.com/talks/nic_marks_the_happy_planet_index?language=en

Take the online quiz on the above material.

Discussion Sections: Final Project Discussion; We vs. Me – an action plan

Activity (week 10):

How Has Your Authentic Happiness Changed? Re-take the “Authentic Happiness Inventory”. <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/authentic-happiness-inventory>. Did your score change? How did it change? Even if it didn’t change, do you feel you now have the skills to develop more happiness, less stress, and more fulfillment in your life?

Write your future self a letter. Submit it online in canvas and I will make sure to forward it to you in exactly a year!

What was your experience during this year or in past years? What have you learned that you want to remind your future self? How do you feel at this time and how do you feel about the future? What are your goals for the year, and what will you do that is different over the next 12 months? And finally, what would you like to tell your future self?

Have fun and in a year, you can reread your letter and remember this unique time in your history.

Final Paper or Project

Final Project or Research Paper (30% of grade.) The student may select to do a final project of their choosing or write a final paper. Either way, the project or paper should be about the course material. The project could be, for example, a video, an “experiment” on how the student’s actions affect their happiness, an interview with siblings, parents, and grandparents about happiness, a blog or webpage that the student maintained throughout the quarter, etc. Either way, the project will need to be accompanied by a short journal of time spent (1 page; be realistic – remember confabulation leads to unhappiness!) spent on the project (e.g. planning, designing, implementing, finishing, etc.) and a 3-4 page paper that introduces the project, tells the results, and discusses it with what was learned in class and with scientific studies the student read. The student should provide at least 3-5 references for their paper (at least 2-3 from outside materials)

Guidelines for Writing and Submitting the Final Project

Guidelines for a traditional or non-traditional project and how we will grade it!!

Check Canvas for due date and submission mechanism. Please submit the final project as a word document or PDF with your last name as the first word in the title of the saved document: such as mccormick_final_project.pdf. It will help us organize the proposals and respond to them.

Traditional path - Final paper: 6-8 pages double spaced traditional research paper on an area of interest relating to the topic of the course including an insightful synthesis of literature (books or primary research literature, or online talks/webpages that are scientific in content; meaning NOT pop culture) that interests the student, complete with references.

A basic science-oriented paper has these parts:

- The student’s name and date
- Title
- Hypothesis – what is your theory? Make an explicit hypothesis.
- Introduction (background)
- Findings in, and synthesis of, literature you read for your paper
- Possible: Include your own personal experiences
- Discussion (bring together everything you read with what you know from personal experience and what we learned in class – give us your opinion and add your voice to the paper)
- At least 5 references

Grading Rubric: Final Paper

The traditional paper will be graded based on the following (30 pts total):

Is the topic relevant to the material in the class? 1 pt

How clear is the hypothesis? 2 pts

How well did the introduction set the stage for the project? 5 pts

How well is the material read for the paper presented? 6 pts

How well is the topic discussed? Is there evidence of a clear synthesis of what was read/learned in class and in the material referenced, along with the student's own experience/opinions? 10 pts

Writing mechanics – are there spelling and grammatical errors and are the sentences complete?
Is the structure of the paper logical and do paragraphs follow each other appropriately? 5 pts

Are references (at least 5) provided that are clearly relevant to the project? 1 pt

Non-traditional path –

Project: This project could be doing something that promotes deep thinking about long-term happiness and how to achieve it. Perhaps the student could do a daily journal, try out meditation, practice yoga, eat healthy meals, write some poetry or song lyrics, put together a play, do some artwork, make a “Happiness” webpage or blog, interview relatives or friends about happiness (like in “StoryCorps” on NPR) – there are many, many possibilities. Be creative. The student should explore something meaningful to them, while also relevant to the class material.

Written component: Since this is an academic class about happiness, the project will need to include a 3-4 page paper on how the alternative project relates to the subject material in the class and scientific/research literature in the field, including references to studies, books, educational videos, etc. A traditional science-oriented paper would have these sections:

- Name and Date
- Title of the Project
- Hypothesis What is your theory? Make an explicit hypothesis.
- Introduction (background)
- Results (what are the findings in this non-traditional project)
- Discussion (what do the findings mean to the author and, potentially others, in light of the topic, material in class, and what was read/learned in class and in association with this project).
- References

We will look for the same basic elements in the 3-4 page paper on the non-traditional project as we would for a traditional paper, only more succinct. There is no need to title each section with these titles, but we will look for these elements even if the project is a painting, poem, or dance performance, etc.

Timesheet:

For a non-traditional project, the student should fill out the following timesheet, detailing how much time they spent on the project. An optimal number of hours on this project would be between 15 and 20 hours. This is the chance for the student to do something meaningful, that will help them look deeper into their own feelings and understanding, and get class credit for doing it!

TIME and METHODS SHEET for NON-TRADITIONAL PROJECTS (5 pts)

Name:

Name of Project:

What was done for the project?

For example – I compared and contrasted three different types of meditation and their effects on my level of stress/anxiety and internal state of mind.

How much time was spent preparing the project?

For example: I spent 4 hours reading about and learning different meditation techniques online at the following websites: headspace; calm; etc. and in reading the book *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Henapola Gunaratana (reference #).

How much time and what methods were used for the project?

For example: 7 hours of meditating according to the following schedule:

I meditated 30 minutes a day for 14 days, using the Headspace app.

On days 1-4, I did mindfulness meditation by listening to xxxxxxxxxx.

On days 5-10, I did loving-kindness meditation on my own using the following phrases:

(Phrases here)

Finally, on days 6-14, I did body scan meditation, progressively paying attention to each part of my body.

Each meditation was done in my own room, on a chair, with my eyes closed, just before I went to sleep. I chose this location because it is quiet, especially at that time of day, resulting in fewer distractions. With each meditation, I took three deep breaths to begin, sat in an attentive but comfortable posture, and closed my eyes, with my arms relaxed and hands folded in my lap. With mindfulness meditation, I focused on my breath as the rising and falling of my chest with each in-breath and out-breath. If my mind wandered, I gently brought my mind back to my breath. (and so on for other types of meditation.)

Both before and after meditation I attempted to measure my feelings and emotional state (see attached notes and quantitative scorecards).

How much time was spent researching material for the project and writing the 3-4 page description?

Was other time spent on the project and how?

Grading Rubric: Project

The non-traditional project will be graded based on the following (30 pts total):

Is the project relevant to the material in the class? 1 pt

How clear is the hypothesis/goal? 2 pts

How well did the project reflect the goal/hypothesis? 3 pts

Was the time spent on the project and the methods appropriate and clearly stated? 8 pts

How well is the project discussed? Is there evidence of a clear synthesis of the project with what was read/learned? 10 pts

Writing mechanics – are there spelling and grammatical errors? 5 pts

Are there references (at least 3) that are clearly relevant to the project? 1 pt

For a non-traditional project. Please submit pictures or videos or weblinks or such of the product (e.g. poem, lyrics, painting, blog, questionnaire, etc.), along with the paper and timesheet, so that we can examine the product of the project.

Non-traditional project should include in the submission (as one file would be best!):

- 3-4 page paper exploring the project
- Timesheet

Final Paper/Project Proposal Template

Cut and paste in a word document the appropriate outline below – your proposal should be 1-2 pages – show us that you have put some careful thought into it!

Final Project - Traditional paper/research paper proposal:

Bi170 Happiness: a Neuroscience and Psychology Perspective – Research Paper Proposal

Name:

Date:

- Topic to be explored
- Hypothesis
- Reason for exploring this topic?
- What are your initial thoughts or plans for this paper
- How does it relate to what was or will be discussed in class: neural and psychological mechanisms of happiness, life fulfillment, skillful engagement, etc.
- Reading/videos or other materials that will be used as a reference. List at least 5.

Non-Traditional Project proposal – your proposal should be 1-2 pages – show us that you have put some careful thought into it!

Bi170 Happiness: a Neuroscience and Psychology Perspective – non-traditional project proposal

Name:

Date:

Non-traditional (e.g. blog, webpage, interviews, questionnaire, art project, etc.).

- Topic to be explored
- Hypothesis
- What is the reason to explore it?
- How does it relate to what we have or will discuss in class: neural and psychological mechanisms of happiness, life fulfillment, skillful engagement, etc.
- How will the project be explored? Give an example of detailed methods to be followed.
- Why would it be meaningful to you and others?
- The student will be asked to write a 3-4 page report on their non-traditional project and how it relates to the class. The student should explain here what they will write about in this report on their project.

- Reading/videos or other materials that are planned to be used as a reference. List at least 3.

Final Project Proposal Grading Rubric

Is the project on a topic that will increase the student's understanding of well-being/happiness in themselves and/or others? 1 point

If the project is traditional, is the topic well thought out and appropriate for the course and explained clearly? 4 points

If the project is non-traditional, is the project well thought out and well planned? 4 points

Is it clearly communicated how the project will lead to greater insight into the psychology or neuroscience of happiness? 2 points

Is it clear how the project relates to material in the class? 2 points

Does the student give at least 3 good quality references to material that will help inform the project? 1 point

Example Note Taking/Journal Entry

My Notes – Bi170 – Happiness: a Neuroscience and Psychology Perspective

Date:

Video/Reading/Activity:

What were the main points of this video/reading/activity?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Do I agree or disagree with these main points?

Why or why not?

Do the main points resonate with my own experience?

What did I learn from this that may help me with my life if I implemented it?

How did the reading/video make me feel (beyond a factual/intellectual level)?

What questions/topics do I have after reading/watching this material?