

Course Syllabus
PY 420/791-2A, Psychology of Strengths and Virtues
Spring 2003

Instructor: Gitendra Uswatte, Ph.D.

Class time: T, Th 8-9:15 am

Class location: CH157

Office: Center for Psychiatric Medicine (CPM), Rm. 722, 1713 6th Ave. S.

(My office is located in the Taub Training Clinic on the 7th fl. of CPM. CPM is at the corner of 6th Ave S. and 17th St.)

Office hours: W, F 1-3:30 pm

Email: guswatte@uab.edu

Telephone: (205) 975-5089

Books:

Required-

Seligman, M. E. P. (1998). Learned Optimism. New York: Pocket Books.

Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (2002). Handbook of Positive Psychology. New York: Oxford University Press.

Other assigned readings will be on reserve at Sterne Library.

Course Overview:

What makes people happy?

How do you foster hope?

Is being curious adaptive or maladaptive?

Is studying “positive” psychology scientific?

Psychology, in the last half-century, has developed a rich body of knowledge about human frailties such as depression, anxiety, and other maladaptive mental states. Although humanistic psychologists and others have addressed human strengths, such as spirituality and a drive for self-actualization, “positive” aspects of human psychology have not, until relatively recently, been studied using empirical methods.

This course will provide an introduction to “Positive Psychology,” the empirical study of what permits humans to flourish or, as described by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), “[the] science of positive subjective experience, positive traits, and positive institutions.” We will concentrate on studying positive traits or virtues but will also touch on research on positive subjective experience and positive institutions. We will begin with an overview of the agenda of this new movement in psychology and discussion of a framework for studying virtues. We will next sample philosophical and religious approaches to cultivating virtues so that you will be able to compare these approaches to scientific approaches. The next section of the course will be a survey of scientific studies of several different virtues, including a two-week section on optimism so that you have an in-depth exposure to at least one program of research in this area.

We will end by studying the application of positive psychology to several important areas such as health and youth development.

The overall goals of this course are to give you an understanding of this growing area of psychology and provide a basis for you to pursue further study in this area, including possibly launching investigations of your own. Specific goals are to enable you to: a) understand the aims and scope of positive psychology, b) discuss the Virtues in Action approach to classifying virtues, c) compare and contrast philosophical, religious, and scientific approaches to analyzing and cultivating virtues, d) appreciate Martin Seligman’s program of research on optimism as a paradigm for a program of research on a human strength, and e) know research on several different virtues and the application of positive psychology to a few important areas of human endeavor.

The course will be taught as a seminar, and therefore its success will depend as much on your input, intellect, and energy as on the quality of the readings and my contributions.

Class Schedule:

Date	Topics, Readings, and Assignments
Tuesday, 1/7	Introduction to Class
Thursday, 1/9	<p>Overview of Positive Psychology: Studying Well-being Readings: Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Oishi, S., “Subjective Well-Being: The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction,” in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u> Myers, D. G., “The Funds, Friends, and Faith of Happy People,” on reserve</p> <p>Note: Last day to drop class 1/13</p>
Tuesday, 1/14	<p>Overview of Positive Psychology: Agenda for a Science of Human Strengths Readings: Seligman, M., “Positive Psychology, Positive Prevention, and Positive Therapy,” Chapter 1 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u> Seligman, M., “Flexible Optimism,” Chapter 15 in <u>Learned Optimism</u></p>
Thursday, 1/16	<p>Overview of Positive Psychology: Creating an Atlas of Virtues Readings: Seligman et al., “Values in Action” on reserve McCullough M. E. & Snyder, C. R., “Classical Sources of Human Strength” on reserve</p>
Tuesday, 1/21	<p>Philosophical Approaches to Virtues Readings: Crisp, Introduction to <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>, pp. viii-vxiii on reserve Aristotle, “Book I” in <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>, pp. 3-22, on reserve</p> <p>Note: Last day to add class</p>

Thursday, 1/23	<p>Religious Approaches to Virtues: A Christian View Guest lecturer: TBA</p> <p>Readings: Holy Bible King James Version, New Testament, Book of Matthew, The Sermon on the Mount, Chapters 5, 6, 7</p>
Tuesday, 1/28	<p>Religious Approaches to Virtues: A Buddhist View Readings: Rahula, W. "The Path," Chapter 5 in <u>What the Buddha Taught</u> on reserve Sole-Leris, A. "The Buddha's Teaching," Chapter 2 in <u>Tranquility and Insight</u> on reserve</p>
Thursday, 1/30	<p>Humanistic Psychology's Approach to Virtues Guest lecturer: TBA</p> <p>Readings: TBA</p>
Tuesday, 2/4	<p>Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Optimism Readings: Seligman, M., Chapters 1-3 in <u>Learned Optimism</u></p>
Thursday, 2/6	<p>Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Optimism Readings: Seligman, M., Chapters 6,7 in <u>Learned Optimism</u></p>
Tuesday, 2/11	<p>Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Optimism Readings: Seligman, M., Chapters 8,9 in <u>Learned Optimism</u></p>
Thursday, 2/13	<p>Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Optimism Readings: Seligman, M., Chapter 12 in <u>Learned Optimism</u></p>
Tuesday, 2/18	<p>Review for Midterm</p>
Thursday, 2/20	<p>MIDTERM EXAM</p>
Tuesday, 2/25	<p>Review of Midterm</p> <p>Note: Last to day to withdraw with a W is 2/26.</p>
Thursday, 2/27	<p>Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Perspective- Wisdom Readings: Baltes, P., Gluck, J., & Kunzman, U., Chapter 24 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u></p>
Tuesday, 3/4	<p>Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Perspective- Mindfulness Readings: Shapiro, S. L., Schwartz, G. E. R., Santerre, C., "Meditation and Positive Psychology," Chapter 46 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u> Langer, E., "Well-Being: Mindfulness versus Positive Evaluation," Chapter</p>

	16 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Thursday, 3/6	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Knowledge- Curiosity Readings: Schulman, M. "The Passion to Know: A Developmental Perspective" Chapter 23 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u> Kashdan, T. TBA
Tuesday, 3/11	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Knowledge- Flow Readings: Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M., "The Concept of Flow," Chapter 7 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Thursday, 3/13	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Love Readings: Hendrick, S., & Hendrick, C. "Love," Chapter 34 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Tuesday, 3/18	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Love- Empathy & Compassion Readings: Batson, C. D., Ahmad, N., Lishner, D. A., & Tsang, J., "Empathy and Altruism," Chapter 35 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u> Cassell, E. J., "Compassion" Chapter 31 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Thursday, 3/20	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Temperance- Forgiveness Readings: McCullough, M. E., & vanOyen Witvliet, C., "The Psychology of Forgiveness" Chapter 32 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Tuesday, 3/25	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Temperance- Self-Control Readings: Baumeister, R. F., & Exline, J. J., "Self-control, morality, and human strength" on reserve Thompson, S., "The Role of Personal Control in Adaptive Functioning," in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Thursday, 3/27	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Transcendence- Hope Readings: Snyder, C. R., Rand, K. L., & Sigman, D. R., "Hope Theory: A Member of the Positive Psychology Family," Chapter 19 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Tuesday, 4/1	Positive Psychology's Approach to Virtues: Transcendence- Gratitude Readings: Emmons, R. A., & Shelton, C. M., "Gratitude and the Science of Positive Psychology," Chapter 33 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Thursday, 4/3	No class- Spring Break
Tuesday, 4/8	No class- Spring Break
Thursday,	Virtues and Positive Youth Development

4/10	Azor Hui, M.S., Graduate Student, Medical Psychology Program, UAB Readings: TBA
Tuesday, 4/15	Virtues and Physical Health Readings: Seligman, M., Chapter 10 in <u>Learned Optimism</u> Taylor, S. E., Kemeny, M. E., Reed, G. M., Bower, J. E., & Gruenewald, T. L., “Psychological Resources, Positive Illusions, and Health” on reserve
Thursday, 4/17	Virtues and Rehabilitation Psychology Guest Lecturer: Timothy Elliott, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, UAB Readings: Elliott, T. R., Kurylo, M., & Rivera, P., “Positive Growth Following Acquired Physical Disability,” Chapter 50 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Tuesday, 4/22	Virtues and Work Readings: Turner, N., Barling, J., and Zacharatos, A., “Positive Psychology at Work” Chapter 52 in <u>Handbook of Positive Psychology</u>
Thursday, 4/24	Review for Final Exam
Tuesday, 4/29	FINAL EXAM CH157, 8:00-10:30 am

Assignments and Grading

To learn the material in this class, you will need to read and understand the assigned texts, as well as attend and participate in class discussions. There will be midterm and final exams, which will consist of essay questions and will be open book. Your answers will be graded for knowledge and understanding of the reading materials and class discussions, as well as the strength of your logic and clarity of writing. A 15-minute class presentation related to the assigned readings will be required. The presentation should include: a) a concise summary of the assigned readings (approx. 5 min), and b) raise questions about the readings and make arguments against the positions taken by the authors or present some aspect of the week’s topic in more detail (approx. 10 min). You will be required to read at least two additional articles/book chapters to inform your presentation and hand in copies of these readings to me. Please see me at least two weeks before your presentation date to review the articles you have selected and discuss what you will talk about. Presentations will be graded on demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the material, logic of the presentation, and quality of the presentation itself. The first two presenters will receive a bonus of 10 points (out of 100) and the third and fourth presenters will receive a bonus of 5 points. Class participation will count towards your overall grade. The grade for participation will depend on attendance,

demonstrated knowledge of the readings, and the quality of your input (i.e., logic, creativity). Your final grade will be a weighted average of the above components: midterm exam (20%), final exam (40%), class presentation (20%), and class participation (20%). Opportunities for extra credit may be offered. Interested students should approach the instructor well in advance of the end of the term. Scores on individual examinations and the overall course may be curved to ensure a fair distribution of grades in the course based on UAB and psychology department guidelines.

Readings

Your success in this class will mostly depend on how you engage the assigned texts. Simply reading the articles and book chapters once through will not prepare you adequately for the class discussions or exams. I expect that you will have an intimate understanding of the readings. This means that you need to actively engage the texts by questioning the arguments made and analyzing the logic of the arguments. It might be helpful, in this respect, to make notes while you are doing the readings or write a short summary of each reading. (This will be of great value come exam time.) You should come to class with at least two questions for discussion.

Absences

There are very few reasons a student should miss an examination. If you know you are going to miss a test in advance of the exam date, please contact me as far ahead of the date as possible to arrange a make-up examination or complete an alternative assignment. If some emergency or accident prevents you from attending an exam and you are not able to give me advance notice (i.e., at least 24 hrs), you will automatically receive a 5% reduction in your grade on that exam for each day of delay in making up the exam. Upon proof of a valid reason for the absence (e.g., doctor's note, car repair receipt), I may reduce the penalty for the delay in taking the exam. There will be no exceptions to these rules. As noted, attendance will be recorded and count towards your overall grade.

Cheating

Cheating hurts you and your fellow students. It does not benefit your education. I will monitor students carefully for any evidence of cheating and all offenses will be penalized according to university policy. Cheating is defined not just as copying other people's work on an examination, but also lying about absences, plagiarism, and other such dishonest acts.

Cancellation of Class

It is a very, very rare occasion that class is cancelled due to dangerous weather conditions. If you are unsure whether class will be cancelled due to the university being closed, please listen to WBHM (90.3 FM). This radio station is the only official information source for UAB. If the university is closed, class will not meet.

Appointments

I am available to meet during my office hours. If you are unable to meet during my office hours, email or call me or contact me after class to set up an appointment.

Disabilities

If you have a disability and require special accommodations in this class, please talk to me within the first two weeks of the class to discuss reasonable accommodations.

Accommodations will not be made after the first examination unless a disability is diagnosed during the semester.

References

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- Baumeister, R. F., & Exline, J. J. (2002). Self-control, morality, and human strength. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), Handbook of Positive Psychology (pp. 446-458). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2001). Values in Action (VIA). Retrieved January 3, 2003, from the World Wide Web: www.positivepsychology.org/taxonomy.htm
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Schulman, M. (2002). The Passion to Know: A Developmental Perspective. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), Handbook of Positive Psychology (pp. 313-326). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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