

## Psychology 403: The Psychology of Happiness

Summer Session I: June 13<sup>th</sup> - July 7<sup>th</sup>  
MTWThF – 1:00-3:15  
Gilmer 225

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### Course Objectives:

While there is no shortage of lay theories and self-help literature that offer advice on how to achieve “the good life,” this seminar will examine the nature of happiness from the viewpoint of experimental social psychology. Recent empirical research will be reviewed, and you will be asked to apply the information in several written assignments and in class discussion. While the main goal of this course is to extend your understanding of empirical research on the topic of happiness, it is also my hope that you will be able to apply some of the research findings on happiness to your own life.

### Materials:

Readings for this course will be empirical journal articles and book chapters that will be made available to you via the Instructional Toolkit web page. The class webpage is: [https://toolkit.itc.virginia.edu/cgi-local/tk/UVa\\_CLAS\\_2006\\_Summer\\_PSYC403-1/](https://toolkit.itc.virginia.edu/cgi-local/tk/UVa_CLAS_2006_Summer_PSYC403-1/)  
Readings will be posted on the Materials section of the webpage.

You must sign up for a free account at <http://www.authentichappiness.org>. Periodically, you will be asked to complete online surveys and questionnaires that are relevant to the day’s topic.

### Assignments:

Journal assignments: Some days, you will be asked to do a brief writing exercise on an assigned topic. Journal assignments are designed to help you apply the readings and class discussion to your own life. Length of the assignments will vary and should range from approximately 1-3 pages. Content is more important than length: be sure you are completing the exercises and answering the assigned questions clearly and concisely. You should be prepared to discuss your journal assignments in class, particularly in the context of the day’s readings. Remember to look ahead to future classes’ journal assignments. Some take need to be started a day or two in advance in order to be turned in on time.

Discussion leader: On the first day of class, you will sign up to lead a discussion on a day’s topic. This will require reading supplementary article(s), presenting them to the class, and leading discussion. This assignment will be explained further on the first day of class.

Final paper: Choose one topic from the list below, and write a 10-12 page paper. You should apply the information discussed in class, but you must also do outside research and incorporate other literature - primarily recent empirical journal articles - into your paper. Remember that , while some of these topics relate heavily to the “real world,” your paper will be graded largely on

your ability to clearly relate your chosen topic to empirical social psychological research. **You will be required to email me a brief summary of your specific paper topic by July 5<sup>th</sup>** (but preferably earlier). You are also strongly advised to meet with me to discuss your paper topic. References should be in APA format, and papers should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins. **This paper will be due by noon on Monday, July 10<sup>th</sup>.**

1. Throughout this course, we have discussed many topics that relate (or do not relate) to one's level of subjective well-being, or happiness. This list is far from exhaustive, and there are other topics that either we did not cover or have not been studied empirically. Some examples include exercise, sports, creative endeavors, meditation, religion, drugs, and chocolate. People may have their own theories on how these things influence their happiness, but are they correct? Design a study or series of studies to examine the role of your chosen factor in SWB.

2. "I don't know why we are here, but I'm pretty sure that it is not in order to enjoy ourselves."

- Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Is happiness really the ultimate goal and the true sign of a life well-lived? What about good health, wisdom, meaning in life, spirituality, self-actualization, creativity, or even – from an evolutionary standpoint – passing on your genes? Select one factor (not necessarily from the list above) that you see a marker of a well-lived life. Review the literature on this factor and how it has been measured in the past, and propose a study or series of studies that examines this factor.

3. Is there a social trend or problem plaguing our society that could benefit from an application of research on SWB/happiness? Examples include the high divorce rate, job dissatisfaction, and the obesity epidemic. Identify and describe this issue, and justify why you think social psychological research on happiness may be able to shed light on it. Design a research program to investigate the issue, and propose an intervention in which people can be taught how apply some of the SWB research findings to begin to address the problem in their lives. Hypothesize how the treatment/intervention would affect not only one's happiness level, but also how it would help him or her solve whatever the specific problem or issue is.

Extra credit option: Locate a popular self-help book, self-help website, magazine, television program, or other popular source that provides advice on how to live a happier life. Is the advice consistent with the findings of social psychology? Why or why not? Let me know at the beginning of class if you have something to present, and be prepared to make a brief presentation in class that day (less than 5 minutes) on what you found and how it does or does not fit with the research reviewed in class. This is worth 1 percentage point on your final grade.

Discussion questions: Everyday, you will be asked to submit two discussion questions to the Discussion Groups section of the toolkit webpage. In order to give me time to compile and organize the questions, they are **due by 10 am** the morning of class. These questions should help elicit thoughtful discussion. Therefore, do not ask yes/no questions or simply ask for clarification. Also, while I expect the readings to generate discussion about your personal experiences, remember that you will be asked to relate any personal experiences to the class readings. Good discussion questions raise questions about the research done by the authors, suggest how the research could be applied or extended, and relate the day's readings to readings or discussions from previous classes. Questions will be graded with a  $\sqrt{+}$  (excellent),  $\sqrt{\phantom{x}}$  (average), or  $\sqrt{-}$  (poor). If you turn your questions in after 10 am but before class, they will be deducted one grade step (e.g.,  $\sqrt{+}$  to  $\sqrt{\phantom{x}}$ ).

**Grading:**

Journal assignments	20% of final grade
Discussion leader	20%
Final paper	30%
Class participation	30%

(includes attendance, discussion questions, and participation in class discussions)

\*\* There are no exams

Final grades will be based on the following scale: A+=97-100%, A=94-96.9%, A-=90-93.9%, B+=87-89.9%, B=84-86.9%, B-=80-83.9%, C+=77-79.9%, C=74-76.9%, C-=70-73.9%, D+=67-69.9%, D=64-66.9%, D-=60-63.9%, F=below 60%

**Course Policies:**

Attendance: Since active discussion is a fundamental part of this course, your attendance is essential. Attendance will be counted as part of your discussion grade, and more than one unexcused absence will result in an automatic penalty of one grade step deduction in your discussion grade. Chronic lateness will also impact your discussion grade. Do not miss class on a day you do not have an assignment completed, because you will lose points for absence, discussion, and a late assignment. Journal assignments are still due on weeks you are absent, and should be emailed to me before the time that class starts. In order to pass this course, you must attend at least 75% of class meetings.

Late assignments: All assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will receive a penalty of one grade step (e.g., A to A-) if they are handed in less than one day (24 hours) late. Your assignments will receive an additional grade step deduction for each day they are late (assignments that are between 24 and 48 hours late will receive a penalty of two grade steps (e.g., A to B+)). This includes weekends and holidays. No assignments will be accepted after they are one week late. Hard copies of late assignments must be turned into my office. You should also email me a copy to verify the time at which it was completed.

Academic honesty: University policies on academic honesty apply to this course. All work is to be done on an individual basis, and collaboration is not permitted. You may have someone who is not enrolled in this course proofread your papers for clarity, but you may not seek outside help regarding your paper's content. You will be required to submit a signed copy of the University honor pledge with your short paper and your final paper.

Discussion: Since this course is discussion-based, your active participation is required. You should come to class prepared to thoughtfully and actively discuss the day's readings. In order to promote open and meaningful discussion, it is important to maintain an atmosphere in which everyone feels respected and comfortable sharing ideas and opinions. Remember to avoid interrupting your classmates and do not attack them personally. Be critical of arguments, not of individuals. If you ever are feeling uncomfortable in discussion, please come talk to me.

### Schedule

#### June 13<sup>th</sup> Introduction and overview (no discussion questions due!)

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Lykken, D. &amp; Tellegen, A. (1996). Happiness is a stochastic phenomenon. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 7, 186-189.</p> <p><b>Core:</b> Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., &amp; Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. <i>Review of General Psychology</i>, 9, 111-131.</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

#### June 14<sup>th</sup>: How is happiness measured?

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Schwarz, N. &amp; Strack, F. (1999). Reports of subjective well-being: Judgment processes and their methodological implications. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, &amp; N. Schwarz (Eds.), <i>Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology</i> (p. 61-84). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Kahneman, D., Krueger, A. B., Schkade, D., Schwarz, N., &amp; Stone, A. A. (2004). A survey method for characterizing daily life experiences: The day reconstruction method. <i>Science</i>, 306, 1776-1780.</p>
Journal Assignment:	Try to live a perfect day! (writing assignment due tomorrow – see below).

#### June 15<sup>th</sup>- Happiness across cultures – Guest lecturer: Patrick Seder

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Diener, E., Oishi, S., Lucas, R. E. (2003). Personality, culture, and subjective well-being: Emotional and cognitive evaluations of life. <i>Annual Review of Psychology</i>, pp. 403-425.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Oishi, S. (2002). The experiencing and remembering of well-being: A cross-cultural analysis. <i>Personality &amp; Social Psychology Bulletin</i>, 28(10), 1398-1406.</p>
Journal Assignment:	Design a perfect day that is possible for you to experience at this point in your life. Describe in detail what you would do and how you would allot your time. Attempt to live that day. How did you feel throughout the course of the day? Did you feel happy? How do you feel as you look back over your day? Would you have changed anything? Can you incorporate things that made you happy on that day into your daily life?

#### June 16<sup>th</sup> – Wealth and materialism - Guest lecturer: Patrick Seder

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Van Boven, L. &amp; Gilovich, T. (2003). To do or to have? That is the question. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 85 (6), 1193-1202.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Kasser, T. (2002). <i>The high price of materialism</i>. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Ch 2 &amp; 3 Personal well-being; psychological needs: pp. 4-28; Ch 7: The chains of materialism: pp. 73-86)</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

June 19 – NO CLASS!

June 20 Should we want to be happier? Pros & cons of positive affect.

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? <i>Review of General Psychology</i>, 2(3), 300-319.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Bless, H., et al (1996). Mood and the use of scripts: Does a happy mood really lead to mindlessness? <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 71, 665-679.</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

June 21 - Adaptation and the hedonic treadmill.

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Schkade, D. A. &amp; Kahneman, D. (1998). Does living in California make people happy? A focusing illusion in judgments of life satisfaction. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 9 (5), 340-346</p> <p><b>Core (skim):</b> Wilson, T. D., Gilbert, D. T., &amp; Centerbar, D. B. (2003). Making sense: The causes of emotional evanescence. In I. Brocas &amp; J. Carrillo (Eds.), <i>The psychology of economic decisions. Vol. 1: Rationality and well being</i> (pp. 209-233). New York: Oxford University</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Lucas, R. E., Clark, A. E., Georgellis, Y., &amp; Diener, E (2006). Unemployment alters the set-point for life satisfaction. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 15, 8-13.</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

June 22th: Affective forecasting: How well can we predict how happy something will make us?

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Dunn, E. W, Wilson, T. D; Gilbert, D. T. (2003). Location, location, location: The misprediction of satisfaction in housing lotteries. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i>, 29 (11), 1421-1432.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Gilbert, D. T; Ebert, J. E. (2002). Decisions and revisions: The affective forecasting of changeable outcomes. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 82(4), 503-514</p>
Journal Assignment:	Describe a time when you made an inaccurate affective forecast. Why do you think you were so inaccurate? Did you learn from the experience and avoid making a similar inaccurate forecast in the future? If yes, why? If no, why not?

June 23th: Memory

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Mitchell, T. R. &amp; Thompson, L. (1994). A theory of temporal adjustment of the evaluation of events: Rosy prediction and rosy retrospection. <i>Advances in Managerial Cognition and Organizational Information Processes</i>, 5, 85-114.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Wirtz, D., Kruger, J., Napa Scollon, C., Diener, E. (2003). What to do on spring break? The role of predicted, on-line, and remembered</p>
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	experience in future choice. <i>Psychological Science</i> 14(5), 520-524.
Journal Assignment:	None

#### June 26<sup>th</sup> Social Comparison

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Lyubomirsky, S., &amp; Ross, L. (1997). Hedonic consequences of social comparison: A contrast of happy and unhappy people. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 73, 1141-1157.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Diener, E., Wolsic, B., &amp; Fujita, F. (1995). Physical attractiveness and subjective well-being. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 69, 120-129.</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

#### June 27 – Tyranny of freedom

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Schwartz, B. (2004). <i>The paradox of choice: Why more is less</i>. New York: Ecco. (Chapter 1: Let's go shopping, &amp; Chapter 2: New choices)</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Iyengar, S. S., Wells, R. E., &amp; Schwartz, B. (2006). Doing better but feeling worse: Looking for the “best” job undermines satisfaction. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 17, 143-150.</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

#### June 28<sup>th</sup>: Enhancing pleasures vs. flow

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Nakamura, J. &amp; Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2003). The construction of meaning through vital engagement. In C. L. M. Keyes &amp; J. Haidt (Eds.), <i>Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived</i> (p. 83-104). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.</p> <p><b>Core (skim):</b> Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1998). The paradox of work &amp; The risks and opportunities of leisure. <i>Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life</i>. New York: Basic Books (pp. 49-77).</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Schooler, J. W., Ariely, D. &amp; Loewenstein, G. (2003). The pursuit and assessment of happiness can be self-defeating. In I. Brocas &amp; J. D. Carrillo (Eds.), <i>The psychology of economic decisions. Vol. 1: Rationality and well being</i>. (p. 41-70). New York: Oxford University Press. (**Read only pp. 53-61.)</p>
Journal Assignment:	Think of an activity you engage in that you consider a low-skill and low-challenge activity. How can you make this into a flow experience? During the next couple of days, experiment on how to do so. Answer the following: What activity did you engage in? What were the qualities of this situation that make it a non-flow experience for you? How did you make the activity challenging or engaging for you while you were doing it? How could you make it provide even more challenge in the future? Do you think you could use these techniques in other non-flow activities in your life?

June 29 The role of attention in happiness

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Kurtz, J. L. &amp; Wilson, T. D. When sadness leads to savoring: The function of bittersweet emotions. Manuscript in preparation.</p> <p><b>Core:</b> Brown, K. W. &amp; Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 84 (4), 822-848. (**read pp 822-825; 837-848)</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Emmons, R. A. &amp; McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessing versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 84 (2), 377-389.</p>
Journal Assignment:	<p>Look around your environment and take note of one (or more!) things that you often take for granted. Examples include parts of the UVA campus, your friends, a certain food you enjoy, or a favorite scenic view. Stop what you are doing and write down (either in prose or in a list) all the good things you can about this thing/experience. Also write anything else that you think will help you appreciate it more fully. Comment on this experience. Does this make you savor and appreciate it more? If so, how long does this effect last? If this does not help you savor, why not? How can you incorporate savoring techniques into your daily life more often?</p>

July 30: The importance of other people, part 1: Interpersonal relationships, civic engagement.

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Myers, D. (1999). Close relationships and the quality of life. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, &amp; N. Schwarz (Eds.), <i>Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology</i> (p. 376-393). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Putnam, R. D. (2000). <i>Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community</i>. New York: Simon &amp; Schuster. (Ch. 1: Thinking about social change in America: pp. 15-28; Ch. 20: Health and happiness: pp. 326-335.)</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

July 3 – The importance of other people, part 2: Altruism, elevation

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Piliavin, J. A. (2003). Doing well by doing good: Benefits for the benefactor. In C. L. M. Keyes &amp; J. Haidt (Eds.), <i>Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived</i>. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Haidt, J. (2003). Elevation and the positive psychology of morality. In C. L. M. Keyes &amp; J. Haidt (Eds.) <i>Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived</i>. (pp. 275-289). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.</p>
Journal Assignment:	<p>Reflect on how often you engage in philanthropic activities as compared to pleasurable ones. How do you feel after each type of activity? Engage in one act of philanthropy and one act of pleasure, and answer the following:</p>

	<p>What were the two activities you engaged in?          What were the specific differences in each type of activity?          What type of emotions did you feel during each type of activity?          How long did the generally positive emotions experienced during each type of activity remain with you afterward?</p>
	<b>Email me topics for your final paper by tonight.</b>

July 4- NO CLASS

July 5th: Strengths and virtues

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). <i>Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment</i>. New York: Free Press. (Ch. 8: Renewing strength and virtue, pp.125-140. Ch 10: Work and personal satisfaction, pp. 165-184).</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Peterson, C. &amp; Seligman, M. E. P. (2003). Character strengths before and after September 11. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 14 (4), 381-384.</p>
Journal Assignment:	Go to <a href="http://www.authentic-happiness.org">www.authentic-happiness.org</a> . Complete the VIA Signature Strengths Survey (~20 minutes). What are your signature strengths? Were they a surprise to you? How can you (or how do you) capitalize on them in your personal and professional life?

July 6th: Motivation, setting goals and finding meaning

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Ryan, R. M. &amp; Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation and well-being. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 55 (1), 68-78.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Emmons, R. A. (1999). <i>The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in psychology</i>. New York: The Guilford Press. (Ch. 3: Personal goals and subjective well-being).</p>
Journal Assignment:	Revisit your journal assignment from Week 3 (“describe your perfect day”). Based on what you learned in class, briefly comment on how and why you would change your idea of the perfect day.

July 7th – Public policy implications/wrap-up

Readings:	<p><b>Core:</b> Diener, E. &amp; Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Beyond money: Toward an economy of well-being. <i>Psychological Science in the Public Interest</i>, 5, 1-31.</p> <p><b>Supplement:</b> Keyes, C. L. M. (2003). Complete mental health: An agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In C. L. M. Keyes &amp; J. Haidt (Eds.), <i>Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived</i> (p. 293-312). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.</p>
Journal Assignment:	None

**FINAL PAPER DUE TO ROOM 323 BY NOON ON MONDAY, JULY 10TH**

**On how to read psychology journal articles (posted on toolkit):**

- Brewer, M. B. (2000). Research design and issues of validity. In H. T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology* (pp. 3-16). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyman, R. (1995). How to critique a published article. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118 (2), 178-182.
- Jordan, C. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1999). How to read a journal article in social psychology. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *The self in social psychology* (pp. 461-470). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Maxwell, S. E., Cole, D. A. (1995). Tips for writing (and reading) methodological articles. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(2), 193-198.

**Supplemental readings:**

- Aspinwall, L. G. & Staudinger, U. M. (Eds.). (2003). *A psychology of human strengths: Fundamental questions and future directions for a positive psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Diener, E. & Suh, E. M. (Eds.) (2000). *Culture and subjective well-being*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Easterbrook, G (2004).. *The progress paradox: How life gets better while people feel worse*. Random House.
- Gilbert, D. T. (2006). *Stumbling towards happiness*. Knopf.
- Haidt, J. (2005). *The happiness hypothesis*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books.
- Kahneman, D., Diener, E. & Schwarz, N. (Eds.) (1999). *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Myers, D. G. (1992). *The pursuit of happiness: Discovering the pathway to fulfillment, well-being, and enduring personal joy*. New York: Avon.
- Parducci, A. (1995). *Happiness, pleasure, and judgment: The contextual theory and its applications*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Pennebaker, J. W. (1990). *Opening up*. New York: Morrow.
- Schwartz, B. (2004). *The paradox of choice: Why more is less*. New York: Ecco.
- Snyder, C. R. & Lopez, S. J. (Eds). (2002). *Handbook of positive psychology*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, S. E. (1989). *Positive illusions*. New York: Basic Books.