Special Seminar in Psychology:
Positive Psychology
PSYC 401 (Section 001) – 3 credit hours
University of Michigan
Fall 2006
Monday 2:00-5:00
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Positive psychology calls for as much focus on strength as on weakness, as much interest in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst, and as much attention to fulfilling the lives of healthy people as to healing the wounds of the distressed. The concern of psychology with human problems is understandable. It will not and should not be abandoned. Positive psychologists are “merely” saying that the psychology of the past sixty years is incomplete. But as simple as this proposal sounds, it demands a sea change in perspective. Psychologists interested in promoting human potential need to start with different assumptions and to pose different questions from their peers who assume a disease model. This seminar will concern itself with the basics of positive psychology.

Requirements: attendance and participation in a weekly seminar, which will include viewing and discussing film clips ( ); completion of readings prior to class; in-class and out-of-class exercises; a one-page, single-spaced, 12 point font reaction paper per topic; and a seminar presentation (plus annotated bibliography). Further details will be provided in class and posted on CTools, where links to the assigned articles and chapters ( ) are also available.

Relevant Webpages

Positive Psychology Webpage:
www.positivepsychology.org

Positive Organizational Studies Webpage:
www.bus.umich.edu/positiveorganizationalscholarship/

Textbook (available in campus bookstores)


Reserve books (available in Shapiro Library)


**Schedule**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Textbook Chapter</th>
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<tr>
<td>9/11/06</td>
<td>what is positive psychology?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Introducing Positive Psychology (PBS Montana)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The Pursuit of Happiness (CBS Sunday Morning)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/18/06</td>
<td>serious introductions (pp. 25-28 in textbook)</td>
<td>Chapters 1, 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/25/06</td>
<td>pleasure</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
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<td>- Chocolate (ABC News)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Out-of-class exercise: secret good deed</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/2/06</td>
<td>happiness and life satisfaction</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
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<td>- Happiness (ABC Good Morning America)</td>
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<td>- Williams Syndrome (CBS 60 Minutes)</td>
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Out-of-class exercise: well-being profile—complete Satisfaction with Life Scale, Approaches to Happiness Scale, and Authentic Happiness Inventory at www.authentichappiness.org

10/9/06 optimism and character strengths Chapters 5, 6


Out of class exercise: take the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) at www.authentichappiness.com

10/23/06 values Chapter 7


Out-of-class exercise: take the Schwartz Value Inventory (document on CTools)

10/30/05 interests and talents Chapter 8
Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control

Emotional IQ (ABC News)

A&E Biography: Thomas Edison

The Streak


11/06/06 relationships Chapter 10

Partners of the Heart (PBS American Experience)


Out of class exercise: gratitude letter (pp. 31-34 in textbook)

11/06/06 institutions Chapter 11

Bhutan—Gross National Happiness (Chip Taylor)


Out of class exercise: being a good teammate (pp. 39-41 in textbook)

11/20/06 positive interventions Chapters 2 (again), 9, 12

Fair Fighting (ABC News)


Out of class exercise: active-constructive responding (pp. 271-272 in textbook)

11/27/06 student presentations

12/4/06 student presentations (continued)

12/11/06 student presentations (continued) and serious goodbyes

Exercises

Most of the exercises are described in the textbook or are self-explanatory. But here is some elaboration for two of the exercises.

*Secret Good Deed*

How you act when no one notices is important, and in this exercise, students are asked to do something kind for someone else without attracting any attention to themselves or taking any credit whatsoever. The good deed can be small—like picking up trash in a neighbor’s yard or putting a coin in an expired parking meter—but it should be done anonymously or secretly. If done for a stranger, the stranger may see the deed being done, but the do-gooder should fade away as quickly and quietly as possible. If done for a friend or family member, the recipient should not know who performed the deed. If asked about the good deed, the do-gooder should feign ignorance and change the subject. We are all pretty experienced at this vis-à-vis our bad deeds, so those skills can probably be used to good effect here.

*Serious Goodbyes*

During the first or second class meeting, have each of the students choose at random from a set of cards, each with the name of a classmate. Everyone is to take one card and not reveal to anyone else the name on the card. (If the card has the student’s own name, another one should be chosen.) The task of the student throughout the term is to pay special attention to the person named, so that during the last class period, the student can say goodbye by saying what it is that was most appreciated about that person and what will be most missed. Other students are invited to participate.

A compelling way to say goodbyes in this way is to bring to class a ball of yarn which is handed to the first student, who takes hold of one end and then passes the yarn to the person to whom they are saying goodbye, who says the next goodbye and passes the yarn accordingly, until the whole class is linked together.
Some topics worth considering for student presentations

Character education
Creativity
Cross-cultural approaches to happiness
Heroism and bravery
Hobbies
Humor and laughter
Materialism
Optimism training
Positive humanities
Positive psychology and psychopathology
Positive psychology goes to work
Positive psychology in schools
Positive psychology in the media
Religion
Resilience
Utopian communities
What would a “good news” show look like?
Wisdom