Psychologists have traditionally treated mental illness from a perspective of repairing damaged habits, damaged drives, damaged childhoods and damaged brains. Psychology is not only the study of human weakness and damage. It is also a study of strengths, optimism, happiness, hope and resiliency. This introductory course will surveys core human character strengths and virtues. The course is largely experiential and includes a lot of classroom activities. It presents practical ways of using one’s character strengths, in promoting and maintaining well-being and happiness. There are no traditional exams. Grade will be based on class participation, watching movies on character strengths and writing weekly reaction papers and a personal signature enhancing project.

Primary Source of Readings

Learned Optimism (Seligman, 1990)
Handbook of Positive Psychology, 2002 Snyder & Lopez (Eds.): Oxford
# Course Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic/Readings, Films and Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Each Class begins with a brief five minute relaxation exercise and ends with a 5-10 minute meditation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class One</td>
<td>Positive Psychology: An Introduction</td>
<td>AP 5-14 &lt;br&gt; Activities: VIA-Pre-test,</td>
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<td>Class Two</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>AP 15-23, 56-67 &lt;br&gt;Film: Fried Green Tomatoes (1991) &lt;br&gt;Activity: VIA-Pre-test Feedback and Strength Building Project explained.</td>
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<td>Class Three</td>
<td>Flow</td>
<td>The Concept of Flow, Nakamura &amp; Csikszentmihalyi- HBPP (89-105) &lt;br&gt;Films: Billy Elliot (2000), Legend of Vance Bgger (2000) &lt;br&gt;Activity: Write your previous Flow Experiences, Write factors which impede your flow currently and how to eliminate them.</td>
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<td>Class Four</td>
<td>Subjective Well-being</td>
<td>AP: 34-43 &lt;br&gt;Films: Forest Gump (1994), Dr. Zhivago (1965), Out of Africa (1985, Fanny and Alexander (1983) &lt;br&gt;Activities: Completing Satisfaction with Life Scale and Discussion on assigning importance to what variable which really matter in life satisfaction, discuss hedonic treadmill and Kaheman’s notion of remembering vs experiencing happiness. &lt;br&gt;Watching clips from Forest Gump</td>
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<td>Class Five</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Hope Theory, Snyder, Rand &amp; Sigmon-HBPP, 257-276 &lt;br&gt;Films: Gone with the With the Wind (1939), Life is beautiful (1998-Italian), Good Will Hunting (1997) &lt;br&gt;Activities: Snyder’s Hope Scale and Discussion &lt;br&gt;Watching clips from Gone with the Wind, One Door Closes, One Door Opens activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Seven</td>
<td>Positive Illusions and Playfulness</td>
<td>AP: 99-109 &lt;br&gt;Film: Life is beautiful (1998-Italian), Patch Adams (1999) &lt;br&gt;Activities: Charting Positive Illusion about Distressing Events and discussion, Devising a list of playful activities you always wanted to do, but has not done.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Class Eight  
*Creativity, Giftedness & Industry*
AP: 137-158
**Films:** Shine (1996), Amadeus (1984), Awakenings (1990)
**Activity:** Critical Thinking Exercise

**Book review on The Learned Optimism due**

Class Nine-a  
*Judgment, Wisdom & Fairness*
AP: 122-136
**Films:** Little Buddha, The Devil’s Advocate (1997), The Emperor’s Club (2002), Philadelphia (1993)
**Activity:** Brainstorming ways to keep perspective constant through daily joys and hassles.

Class Nine-b  
*Emotional Intelligence & Prudence*
The Positive Psychology of Emotional Intelligence, Salovey, Mayer & Caruso - HBPP, 159-171
**Activities:** Watching muted clips from movies depicting E.I
Withholding powerful and decisive argument that win the discussion but hurt someone

Class Ten  
*Spirituality*
Spirituality, Pargament & Mohoney-HBPP, 646-659
**Activity:** Watching Wyne Dyer’s Video *There is a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem*

Class Eleven-a  
*Love & Kindness*
Love, Hendrick & Hendrick, HBPP, 472-484,
**Films:** The English Patient (1996), Sophie’s Choice (1982), Bridges of the Madison County (1995), Iris (2001), My Fair Lady (1964)
**Activity:** Explore Character Strengths of your significant other (have them take VIA)
Write five small but meaningful gestures of your loved one

Class Eleven-b  
*Gratitude & Zest*
Gratitude and the Science of Positive Psychology, Emmons & Shelton, HBPP, 459-471
**Film:** Sunshine (2000), My Left Foot (1993)
**Activity:** Write a letter of gratitude to someone whom you have never properly thanked

Class Twelve  
*Modesty & Forgiveness*
The Psychology of Forgiveness, McCullough & Witvliet, HBPP, 446-458
**Activity:** Write three bad memories, anger associated with them and their impact in maintaining resentment and then write about possibility of forgiveness.

Class Thirteen  
*Altruism & Empathy & Social Intelligence*
Empathy and Altruism, Batson, Ahmed, Lishner & Tsang, HBPP, 485-498
**Films:** Children of a Lesser God (1986), As Good As it gets (1997)
**Activity:** Gift of Time (Using your Character Strengths in serving community)

Class Fourteen  
*Positive Psychology at Work – Leadership, & Teamwork*
Positive Psychology at Work, Turner, Barling & Zacharatos, HBPP 715-730,
Activity: Explore Character Strengths of your colleagues, Clips from Lawrence of Arabia and class Discussion.

Class Fifteen  
**Curiosity, Self-Regulation & Positive Youth Development**  
AP: 170-183  
Activity: Design a Community Based Positive Youth Development Project

**Cross-cultural Positive Psychology**  
Putting Positive Psychology in a Multicultural Context, Lopez et al., 700-714, HBPP  
Activities: Strength Presentations,

*Meditation*  
Putting it together

**Readings**  
*The American Psychologist*, 2000, 55, Number 1. (AP)  
*Learned Optimism* (LO)  
Martin Seligman. Pocket Books, 1992  
*Handbook of Positive Psychology*, (HBPP)  

**Where to Get More Information**  
[www.positivepsychology.org](http://www.positivepsychology.org)

**Grading**  
30 points for class participation. Two points per class.  
1 point for attendance, 1 for active participation per week  
30 points for 15 reaction/review papers. 1 point for submitting review on time, 1 point for quality of reaction/review paper should reflect integration of readings and film critique regarding the assigned topic. No points for late submissions.  
20 points for the book review on *The Learned Optimism*  
20 points for polishing one of your character strengths, brief presentation in the final class.

90-100= A, 89-85= A-, 84-80=B+, 79-75=B, 74-70=B-, 69-65=C, Below 65= F

The Course was part of my dissertation and was first taught at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, NJ in the Spring 2002. It won Outstanding Syllabus Contest in 2002 organized by Positive Psychology Teaching Task Force and New Jersey Psychological Foundation’s Minority Scholarship Award (2002).