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Spring 2006

***Social/Personality Seminar: Positive Psychology PS 375***

Positive psychology is the science of understanding human strengths and the practice of promoting these strengths to help people psychologically and physically. Psychology has grown to accept the view that stressful circumstances do not inexorably lead to negative prognoses. Positive psychology explores factors that make life worth living and the human strengths that enable individuals to confront challenges, appreciate others, and regard daily experiences as meaningful. As a new subfield of psychology, positive psychology provides a distinct contrast to the negative focus of the disease-model approach that traditionally dominated much of the discipline. We will read, discuss, and critique books and articles dealing with current issues in positive psychology, including defining happiness and the nature of the good life, subjective well-being, human strengths and virtues, finding meaning, emotions, flow, and optimism. Regular attendance and active class participation are essential aspects of the seminar. Students will write reaction/thought papers, do a research review paper, and design a project dealing with some aspect of positive psychology.

This class will meet on Monday and Wednesday 11:25am-12:40pm.

*Required Books:*

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1998). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.

Lazare, A.(2000). *On apology*. New York: Oxford.

Compton, W. C. (2005). *An Introduction to positive psychology*. Belmont, CA: Thompson

Stegner, W. (2002). *Crossing to safety*. New York: Modern Library.

*Additional readings are on reserve in Reeves Library.* Complete references for these readings are noted in this syllabus.

### *Course Requirements*

*Class participation and attendance.* This class requires constant attendance, active participation, and critical discussions of the readings. I expect that you will attend each and every class, and that you will come prepared to talk about—and question—what you read. To that end, you will rate your participation at the end of each class meeting and I will review these ratings (which will be factored into my ratings of your participation).

*Exams.* There will be two exams, a mid-term and a final. Each exam will be comprised of essay questions based upon class readings and discussions. We will discuss exam formats in some detail during class. The midterm exam date is noted in the course schedule—Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>—in class. The final exam will be a take-home exam—the date will be announced later. A missed exam will be recorded as a zero (0) grade. Make-up exams will be given at my discretion, and valid evidence for the absence will be required (e.g., emergency, documented medical excuse).

*Short papers.* Three short (3 to 5 pages each) paper assignments are noted in the syllabus. These papers are meant to reflect your beliefs about the subject matter *prior* to completing the readings.

*Research paper.* You will write a 15 to 20 page (double-spaced, APA style) research paper on some positive psychological construct, measure, or idea. You may, for example, further explore a topic discussed in class or you may search the literature for one that interests you. Your topic need not already be identified as in the ken of positive psychology (though you must explain in detail why you believe that it fits the course definitions and scope). There are two steps to this project.

*Step 1.* Create a “Reader’s Guide” for your research topic (Henderson, 2000), a synopsis that provides a (1) a content outline (e.g., historical background, theoretical and methodological issues, major issues and research areas), (2) theorists and contributors (a list of the main workers in an area, accompanied by brief, 3 sentence characterizations explaining their role and importance), (3) central concepts (a list of the essential 10 or so concepts in an area), (4) hot or current topics (what topics recur, what cause debate), (5) major resources (important chapters, handbooks, chapters in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, main journals, Internet sources). Creating this 5 to 8 page or so guide will help you narrow your focus and to prepare to write your research paper. The Reader’s Guide portion of the assignment is due at the start of class on Wednesday, February 15<sup>th</sup>.

*Step 2.* Write a detailed literature review paper (following *Psychological Bulletin* style, for example) wherein you review what is known, critique the literature, and indicate fruitful avenues for future work. This research paper is due on Wednesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

*Project report and presentation.* Based on your research paper topic, write a short (no more than 5 pages) paper describing a positive psychology project. Such projects might

be but are not limited to a proposed piece of empirical research (e.g., something you might do next year as an independent study or honors project), an intervention aimed at helping a particular group (e.g., children, older adults), a workshop, a class, or a performance piece. The goal here is to go beyond your research and do something with the knowledge you have obtained about your topic. During week fourteen of the class, you will give a brief presentation to the class on your proposed project.

*Grading weights.* Final grades will be weighted as follows:

Midterm exam (in class)	= 20%
Final exam (take home)	= 20%
Class participation	= 15%
Reader's Guide & Research paper	= 20%
Short papers (3)	= 15%
Project report and presentation	= 10%

*Office hours.* My office hours at Moravian for Spring 2006 are:

Monday	10:15-11:15am
Wednesday	2-3pm
Friday	8:30-10:30am

When necessary appointments for other times may be scheduled.

*Note about the syllabus.* Readings should be completed before class on the dates noted herein. I reserve the right to alter the syllabus should the need arise.

*Class Schedule*

**Week One – Overview of the Course and Definitions – January 16 (M) and 18 (W)**

(M) Introductions and syllabus

(W) Compton chapter 1

**Week Two – Positive Emotions – January 23 (M) and 25 (W)**

(M) Compton chapter 2

(W) Fredrikson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology*, 2, 300-319.

**Week Three – Subjective Well-Being and Happiness – January 30 (M) and Feb 1 (W)**

\*\*\**Paper One*: Before doing the readings, write a short paper (3 or so pages) about *your* personal beliefs and definition of *happiness*. This short paper is due in class on Monday of this week.

(M) Compton chapters 3 and 4

(W) Myers, D. G., & Diener, E. (1995). Who is happy? *Psychological Science*, 6, 10-19.

Kahneman, D. (1999). Objective happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwartz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 3-25). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

**Week Four – Flow – February 6 (M) and 8 (W)**

(M) *Flow* chapters 1 - 5

(W) Finish *Flow*

**Week Five – Love, Well-being, and Health – February 13 (M) and 15 (W)**

\*\*\*\* Your Reader's Guide is due at the start of class on Wednesday, February 15<sup>th</sup>.

(M) Compton chapter 5

(W) Compton chapter 6

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2003). Character strengths before and after 9/11. *Psychological Science*, 14, 381-384.

**Week Six – Happiness and Economics and Work – February 20 (M) and 22 (W)**

\*\*\**Paper Two*: Before doing the readings, write a short paper (3 or so pages) about *your* personal beliefs about whether money and material goods can lead to happiness *or* describe your ideal future workplace. This short paper is due in class on Wednesday of this week.

**(M) In Class Midterm Exam**

(W) Read:

Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Read chapters 1 & 2)

Frey & Stutzer (2002). *Happiness and economics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (Read chapter 5).

Warr, P. (1999). Well-being and the workplace. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwartz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 392-412). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

**Week Seven – Aesthetics and Seeing Our Surroundings – Feb 17 (M) and March 1 (W)**

(M) Compton chapter 7 and *Gardenscapes* video

(W) *Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working with Time* video

**Spring Break – March 4 (Sat) thru 12 (Sun)**

**Week Eight – Flourishing, Elevation, and Awe – March 13 (M) and 15 (W)**

(M) Fredrickson, B. L., & Losada, M. F. (2005). Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist*, 60, 678-686.

(W) Haidt, J. (2000). The positive emotion of elevation. *Prevention & Treatment*, 3, n.p.

Dachler, K., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition & Emotion*, 17, 297-314.

**Week Nine –The Importance of Apologies– March 20 (M) and 22 (W)**

(M) Lazare chapters 1 - 6

(W) Finish Lazare

**Week Ten – Finding Meaning – March 27 (M) and March 29 (W)**

\*\*\*Your research paper is due in class on Wednesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>.

(M) Compton chapter 9

(W) Dunn, D. S. (1996). Well-being following amputation: Salutary effects of positive meaning, optimism, and control. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 41*, 285–302.

Niederhoffer, K. G., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2002). Sharing one's story: On the benefits of writing or talking about emotional experience. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 573-583). New York: Oxford.

**Week Eleven – Affective Forecasting – April 3 (M) and 5 (W)**

(M) Read Brickman, P., Coates, D., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (1978). Lottery winners and accident victims: Is happiness relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*, 917-927.

(W) Read Wilson, T. D., Wheatley, T., Meyers, J. M., Gilbert, D. T., & Axsom, D. (2000). Focalism: A source of durability bias in affective forecasting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*, 821-836.

Schkade, D. A., & Kahneman, D. (1998). Does living in California make people happy? A focusing illusion in judgments of life satisfaction. *Psychological Science, 9*, 340-346.

**Week Twelve – A Positive Interpretation of Literature – April 10 (M) and 12 (W)**

\*As you read Stegner's novel, analyze the characters and situations from a positive psychological perspective.

(M) Read *Crossing to Safety* (Book I, chapters 1 – 11)

(W) Finish *Crossing to Safety* (finish the novel)

**Easter Recess – April 14 thru April 17 (M)**

**Week Thirteen – Positivity, Resilience and Spirituality – April 19 (W)**

\*\*\**Paper Three*: Write a short paper (3 or so pages) about the what positive psychological ideas, if any, you saw in *Crossing to Safety*. This paper is due on Tuesday, April 20.

(W) Compton chapter 10

**Week Fourteen – Project Reports – April 24 (M) and 26 (W)**

\*\*\*Your project report is due in class on the day you present.

(M) Short presentations will be assigned in advance.

(W) Short presentations will be assigned in advance.

***Final Examination (Take Home Test) is due during Finals Week. Due date and time to be announced.***

**Write the announced date and time here: \_\_\_\_\_**

Have a relaxing summer . . .