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Spring 2007

### ***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:*

Bryant, F. B., & Veroff, J. (2007). *Savoring: A new model of positive experience*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Seneca. (2005). *On the shortness of life* (C. D. N. Costa, Trans.). New York: Penguin.

Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (2007). *Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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).

*Notebook.* Please obtain a notebook wherein you can complete some of the thought exercises that appear throughout the Snyder and Lopez book (the *personal mini-experiments*; PME). I will ask you to complete some of these before coming to class; others we may do in class. Once you complete a PME, write a short, reflective paragraph regarding what you learned (if anything), what worked (or did not), and if the exercise changed you in any way or made you consider how you live your life. At the end of the semester, you may submit your notebook to me for extra-credit. If most of the exercises in the book have been done satisfactorily, then you will receive bonus points toward your final grade.

*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 14<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 28<sup>th</sup>.

*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          | = 10% |
| Short papers (3)        | = 15% |
| Research Paper          | = 20% |

Notebook = extra credit

*Office hours.* My office hours at Moravian for Spring 2007 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 the Art of Living – January 15 (M) and 17 (W)**

(M) Introductions and syllabus

(W) Seneca *On the Shortness of Life* (pp. 1-33).

**Week Two – Defining Positive Psychology – January 22 (M) and 24 (W)**

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 1 – do PME p. 13-14

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 2 (Western views)

\*\*\**Paper One*: In your opinion, what does it mean to “live well”? Write a short paper (3 or so pages) describing your personal beliefs about what makes a good life or one that is lived well. Do you live such a life? What might you do to lead such a life? Due on Wednesday, January 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Week Three – Definitions continued and Classifying Human Strengths – January 29 (M) and 31 (W)**

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 3 (Eastern views)

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 4 (Classifying human strengths) – do PME p. 67

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

**Week Four – Living Well – February 5 (M) and 7 (W)**

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 5 (Developing strengths and living well) – do PME p. 87  
Film: *Life as a House*

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 6 (Living well across life) – do PME p. 121

**Week Five – Positive Emotions – February 12 (M) and 14 (W)**

\*\*\*\* Your Reader’s Guide is due at the start of class on Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>.

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 7 (Pleasure, happiness, and well-being) – do PME p. 132

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

**Week Six – Emotion continued – February 19 (M) and 21 (W)**

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 8 (Coping, emotional intelligence, and related topics) – do PME p. 165

(W) **In Class Midterm Exam**

**Week Seven – Aesthetics and Seeing Our Surroundings – Feb 26 (M) and 28 (W)**

(M) *Gardenscapes* video

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

**Spring Break – March 3 (Sat) thru 11 (Sun)****Week Eight – Positive Cognition – March 12 (M) and 14 (W)**

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 9 (Self-efficacy, optimism, and hope) – do PME p. 197-198

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 10 (Positive virtues: wisdom and courage) – do PME p. 238-239

**Week Nine –The Importance of Savoring – March 19 (M) and 21 (W)**

(M) Bryant & Veroff chapters 1 – 4

\*\*\**Paper Two*: After reading the first set of chapters in *Savoring*, write about an experience that you savored. Describe it using ideas from the book. Alternatively, write about an experience you hope to have that you intend to savor (using ideas from the book to explain your point of view). Due on Monday, March 19<sup>th</sup>.

(W) Finish Bryant & Veroff chapters 5 - 8

**Week Ten – Optimal Experiences and Prosocial Behavior – March 26 (M) and March 28 (W); last day for Withdrawal with a W is Friday, March 30<sup>th</sup>.**

\*\*\*Your research paper is due in class on Wednesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>.

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 11 (Mindfulness, flow, and spirituality) – do PME p. 253

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 12 (Empathy and egotism) – do PME p. 271-272

**Week Eleven – Love and Mental Health – April 2 (M) and 4 (W)**

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 13 (Attachment and love) – do PME p. 302

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 14 (Mental health and behavior)

**Easter Break – April 6 (F) thru 8 (Sun)**

**Week Twelve – A Positive Interpretation of Literature – April 9 (M) and 11 (W)**

\*As you read Stegner’s novel, analyze the characters and situations from a positive psychological perspective (e.g., what are their character strengths, how do they respond to personal and situational adversity).

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

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

**Week Thirteen – Positivity – April 16 (M) and 18 (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 Wednesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>.

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 15 (Promoting the good) – do PME p. 370

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 16 (Positive schooling) – do PME p. 382 – 383

**\*\*\*April 20-23 – Inauguration of Dr. Thomforde**

**Week Fourteen – Your Future – April 23 (M) and 25 (W)**

(M) Snyder & Lopez chapter 17 (Good work) – do PME p. 437 - 438

(W) Snyder & Lopez chapter 18 (Seeking balance between self and others) – do PME p. 450 - 451

\*submit your completed Notebook this day only

**Last Day of Classes is Friday, April 27<sup>th</sup>**

***Final Examination (Take Home Test) is due during Finals Week, April 30 (M) thru May 4 (F). Due date and time to be announced.***

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

Have a relaxing summer . . .