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“Health, learning and virtue will insure your happiness; they will give you quiet conscience, private esteem and public honor.”

-- Thomas Jefferson, 1788

Spring 2010

Seminar on Positive Psychology – PSYCH 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 wherein they design a project dealing with some aspect of positive psychology.

This class will meet on Monday and Wednesdays from 11:45am to 12:55pm.

Required books:

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford U Press. ISBN-13: 978-0195188332

Diener, E., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2008). *Happiness: Unlocking the mysteries of psychological wealth*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. ISBN-13: 978-1405146616

Todd, R. (2008). *The thing itself: On the search for authenticity*. New York: Riverhead Books. ISBN-13: 978-1594483844

Stegner, W. (2002). *Crossing to safety*. New York: Modern Library. ISBN-13: 978-0375759314

Recommended book (optional) for your research paper:

Dunn, D. S. (2011). *A Short Guide to Writing about Psychology* (3rd ed.). New York: Pearson Longman. (paper)

Course Requirements

Class participation and attendance. This class requires constant attendance, active participation, critical discussions of the readings, and appropriate and open-minded reactions to the opinions and experiences of class members. I expect that you will attend each and every class, and that you will come prepared to talk about—and question—what you read. I will be passing out a sign-in/attendance sheet at the beginning of every class. If you miss more than 3 classes, then your final course grade will be lowered accordingly.

Exam. Given the focus on reading, discussion, and writing in this class, there is only one exam, the final. The final exam will be a take-home exam comprised of essay questions dealing with course material. You will choose two questions to answer from a list of 8 or so questions (each question will be worth 50 pts). I expect that you will craft carefully written and thoughtful answers to each question (i.e., you should use and cite materials from course reading, discussion, and so on). The due date for submitting the exam will be announced later, once the final exam schedule is established.

Writing assignments. There are 9 short writing or paper assignments for this class. Due dates are noted in the class schedule. Late papers will drop a full letter grade immediately and an additional letter grade for each subsequent day. The assignments are described in detail later in this syllabus.

Research paper. You will write one final paper for this course. Your paper should be 10-15 pages in length. The paper should be written in APA style, as described in the new, 6th edition of the *Publication Manual*. I anticipate that although you will apply information we discussed in class, you will also need to do outside research and incorporate other sources—primarily recent journal articles—into your paper. Although the topics are more applied, that is, related to “real world” issues, I will be grading your work on how well you relate your chosen topic to empirical research from positive psychology and social psychology. **I will need to know your paper topic by Wednesday, March 3rd, the last class before spring break (of course, you may inform me earlier than that date). The paper is due in class on Wednesday, April 7th. Take careful note of this due date and plan your research and writing accordingly.** The first three topics were adapted from a course on positive psychology taught by Dr. Jamie Kurtz.

Topic 1: Throughout this course, we have discussed many topics that relate (or fail to relate) to people’s subjective well-being (SWB), or happiness. Both our reading and the research done to date is far from exhaustive, thus there are topics we will not have time to cover or have not been examined empirically. Examples include sports, exercise, creativity (e.g., art, music, writing, performance), meditation, religion, drugs, even food (e.g., chocolate). People may well have their own theories about how these activities or things influence their happiness, but are they correct? Design a study or a series of studies to examine the role of your chosen factor in the study of SWB.

Topic 2:

“I don’t know why we are here, but I’m pretty sure that it is not in order to enjoy ourselves.” – philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Is happiness really the ultimate goal and true sign of a life well-lived? What about good health, wisdom, meaning in life, spirituality, self-actualization, creativity, or even—from an evolutionary perspective—passing on your genes? Select one factor (it need not be from this list) that you believe is a marker of a well-lived life. Review the literature on this factor and how it has been measured in the past, and then propose a study or a series of studies that examine how this factor promotes “the good life.”

Topic 3: Is there a social trend or problem plaguing our society that could benefit from an application of research from positive psychology? Examples include the high divorce rate, job dissatisfaction, homophobia, and the obesity epidemic, among others (feel free to suggest one). Identify and describe a social problem, and then justify why you believe that research from positive psychology and/or social psychology related to happiness, well-being, and any related constructs 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 to apply “positive” research findings to begin to address the problem in their lives. Hypothesize how the treatment/intervention would affect not only people’s well-being and happiness, but also how it would help solve the specific problem or issue they face.

Topic 4: Read and react to the quote from Thomas Jefferson that appears on the first page of this syllabus. Given what you have read, learned, and discussed about positive psychology this semester, are the factors Mr. Jefferson cites (“Health, learning, and virtue”) actually related to our happiness? And are “quiet conscience, private esteem, and public honor” key parts of the good life? Perhaps Jefferson is on to something and the definition of subjective well-being might benefit from some expansion. In any case, design a study or two aimed at determining the empirical validity of Jefferson’s observations, focusing on how the development of our private selves can, in turn, be used to benefit the public welfare. Be sure to use research from positive and/or social psychology in the course of your answer and to support your research program.

Grading weights for final course grade. Final grades will be weighted as follows:

Writing assignments (total)	= 25%
Final exam (take home)	= 20%
Class participation	= 25%
Research paper	= 25%
<i>Waiting for Godot</i> attendance	= 5%

Office hours. My office hours at Moravian for Spring 2010 are:

Monday	10:15-11:15am
Wednesday	1:30-3:00pm
Friday	8:30-10:00am

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. You will note that there are days noted when class will not be meeting—this usually means that I will be out of town. I anticipate that you will use the time as suggested here in the syllabus, completing whatever assignments are indicated, including writing or submitting required papers.

Class Schedule

Week One – Overview of the Course and Definitions – January 18 (M) and 20 (W)

(M) Introductions, syllabus, and “About Me” Questionnaires
Complete writing assignment 1 for today’s class

(W) Defining positive psychology – *Peterson* chapter 1

Week Two – Learning about Positive Psychology – January 25 (M) and 27 (W)

(M) Learning about positive psychology – *Peterson* chapter 2
Complete writing assignment 2 for today’s class

(W) **No Class Meeting** – work ahead and do the writing assignment for next Monday

Week Three – Subjective Well-Being and Happiness – February 1 (M) and 3 (W)

(M) Understanding positive experiences – *Peterson* chapter 3
Complete writing assignment 3 for today’s class

(W) Happiness – Read *Diener & Diener* chapters 1 and 2

Week Four – Happiness – February 8 (M) and 10 (W)

(M) Happiness – Read *Peterson* chapter 4
Complete writing assignment 4 for today’s class

(W) Happiness – Read *Diener & Diener* chapters 3 and 4;
you may also wish to skim chapter 10 in *Peterson*, which is relevant to D&D’s
chapter 4

Week Five – Strengths and Virtues – February 15 (M) and 17 (W)

**Before coming to class on Monday the 15th, go to

<http://www.viacharacter.org/VIASurvey/VIASurvey/tabid/237/Default.aspx>

and complete the Values in Action (VIA) classification of strengths and virtues measure online. **Do option 1, which is free.** You will need to register and the survey takes approximately 45 minutes to complete, so be sure to allocate an appropriate amount of time to complete it. **Write down your scores before you leave the web site** and be prepared to discuss the nature of the online measure in terms of construct validity issues.

(M) Character strengths - *Peterson* chapter 6

(W) Being happy at work – *Diener & Diener* chapter 5
Complete writing assignment 5 for today's class

***** Class Outing: Attend Moravian College Theater Company's production of Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot*. This absurdist play deals with the themes of meaning and meaninglessness in life, and thus relates to our course. Our class will attend the Sunday, March 21st performance at 2pm. Student tickets are \$3. I will collect the money from you in advance and pass out tickets during class on Wednesday, February 17th.**

Week Six – Money and Spirituality – February 22 (M) and 24 (W)

(M) *Waiting for Godot*; Money and happiness – *Diener & Diener* chapter 6
Complete writing assignment 6 for today's class

(W) Spirituality, culture, and happiness – *Diener & Diener* chapters 7 and 8

Note: Midterm point of the semester – Friday, February 27th

Week Seven – Values and Research Paper – March 1 (M) and 3 (W)

(M) Values – Read *Peterson* chapter 7

(W) Research paper discussion – *your paper topic is due in class today* – please indicate your choice of topic (i.e., 1, 2, 3, or 4) on a piece of paper with your name on it.

Spring break Assignment: Do a Secret Good Deed (see writing assignment 7)

Have a safe and relaxing spring break!

Spring Break – (Sa) March 6 thru (Su) March 14

Week Eight – Set-Point and Forecasting Happiness – March 15 (M) and 17 (W)

(M) Set-point – Read *Diener & Diener* chapter 9

(W) Affective forecasting – Read *Diener & Diener* chapter 10
Complete writing assignment 7 for today's class

Week Nine – The Search for Authenticity in Life – March 22 (M) and 24 (W)

(M) No Class Meeting but Read *Todd* Foreword and Part 1 – The Things of this World

(W) Read *Todd* Part II – There, There

Week Ten – Authenticity continued – March 29 (M) and 31 (W)

(M) Read *Todd* Part III – Weeping Nation

(W) Read *Todd* Part IV – The Unicorn in the Looking Glass
Complete paper assignment 8 for today's class

Note: Thursday, April 1 is the Last Day for Course Withdrawal with a “W”

***Easter Recess – Begins April 2 (2) and ends April 5 (M) at 6pm**

Week Eleven – Self-Interests and Becoming Happy – April 7 (W)

(M) Interests, abilities, and accomplishments – Read *Peterson* chapter 8

(W) Becoming happy – read *Diener & Diener* chapters 11 and 12
****Your research paper is due today in class****

Week Twelve – A Positive Interpretation of Literature – April 12 (M) and 14 (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)
Note: Begin writing assignment 9, which is due next Wednesday in class.

Week Thirteen – Happiness Complete and Wellness – April 19 (M) and 21 (W)

(M) *No Class Meeting* – but read *Diener & Diener* chapter 13 and the Epilogue chapter
 ****You may complete optional/bonus writing assignment 10***, which is due on or
 before the last meeting of our class. Again, writing 10 is NOT required.

(W) Wellness – Read *Peterson* chapter 9
Complete writing assignment 9 for today's class

Note: I will handout the take-home final exam during this class

Week Fourteen – Whither Positive Psychology? – April 26 (M) and 28 (W)

(M) *No Class Meeting* – But read *Peterson* chapter 11

(W) Last Class: Positive psychology's future - Read *Peterson* chapter 12

Final Exams – May 3 (M) – May 8 (Sa)

***Final Examination (Take Home Test) is due during Finals Week. Due date and time:
 Thursday, May 6th at 1:30pm.***

Have a relaxing summer . . . if you are graduating, have a productive and meaningful life.

Writing Assignments

Don't be alarmed by the number of writing assignments. Most of these assignments are short—one page, single spaced reflections that are meant to be shared during class discussions.

You are responsible for writing and submitting 9 papers—a 10th assignment is offered as an optional bonus (i.e., an extra-credit writing assignment). The 9 papers are due on the date indicated in the syllabus. As these papers are brief, late papers will lose one full letter grade immediately and automatically (i.e., a B becomes a C, a C+ becomes a D+).

1. *About me questionnaire.* In an effort to get to know one another better, you will complete a questionnaire that discusses a variety of things about you. All the questionnaires will be collected at the start of class then distributed to other class members. A classmate will introduce you to the class and you, in turn, will introduce a classmate, and so on. The questionnaire was emailed to you in early January (a copy is attached to this syllabus).
2. *A good day.* Read the exercise on pages 43 and 44 in the Peterson text. You may not have time to actually carry out your “good day” before class meeting, but perhaps you can write about what for you constitutes a “good day.” Describe in one page or so (single spaced) what for you makes up a memorable and good, even great, day. Be sure to keep the parameters posed by positive psychology in mind as you describe your day.
3. *Savoring.* Review the exercise on pages 69 – 72 in the Peterson text. Write a one-page, single spaced or so paper on savoring. When was the last time you savored something? What was it? Describe it and what pleasure you received from it. Some people may feel (quite rightly) that they have little time to savor anything. If so, then write about what you believe you would like to have the opportunity to savor.
4. *Happiness in retrospect.* Write a candid one-page, single spaced or so paper describing your prior beliefs about happiness (i.e., before reading Diener and Diener, as well as Peterson, what factors did you believe made people happy). Have your views of happiness been challenged by data? How so? What do you believe makes you subjectively happy? How do you know?
5. *Character strengths and work.* What did you think of the results of the VIA survey? Did it describe you accurately? Why do you think so (or not)? Will your character strengths help you in your career? Reflect on your scores and your career plans—how will the two mesh? Write a one-page, single spaced response (be sure to include your scores!) and be prepared to share your thoughts with the class.
6. *Can money and material goods or wealth lead to happiness?* Write a one-page paper about *your* personal beliefs about whether money and material goods can lead to happiness. Do you agree with the Dieners' data Why or why not? If money doesn't buy happiness, what then does it buy us? Should we give up materialism? Can *you* give up materialism?

7. *Do a secret good deed.* (I suggest you complete the deed sometime over spring break, but you can wait until you return to campus—note, however, that your one-page paper is due on Wednesday, March 17th). This assignment is adapted from one developed by Chris Peterson: How you act when no one notices is important, and in this exercise, you are asked to do something kind for someone else without attracting any attention to yourself 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 you, as do-gooder, should fade away as quickly and quietly as possible. If done for a friend or a family member, the recipient should not know who performed the deed. If asked about the good deed, you should feign ignorance and discreetly change the subject. We are all pretty experienced at this vis-à-vis our bad deeds, so those skills can presumably be used to good effect here. Write a one-page paper wherein you describe the deed, your reason for choosing it, the recipient’s reaction (only if you witnessed it), and how you felt once you did the deed.
8. *What is authentic in your life?* What is authenticity? Are you leading and living an authentic life, which seems to be a challenge for Americans? Have Todd’s arguments changed the way you think about authenticity? Write a one-page reaction to the book, issues raised within it, or in our class discussion of the authentic.
9. *Crossing to safety.* Write a one or so page, single spaced paper about the what positive psychological ideas you saw in *Crossing to Safety*. Which characters exemplify positive psychological traits? Which characters, which traits? Did the two couples lead, respectively, the good life? Why or why not? Why did Stegner choose this title—what do you think it means to “cross to safety”?
10. *Optional BONUS writing assignment.* Read chapter 14 in Diener and Diener and complete one of the scales contained therein. Write a one page paper describing your reaction to your score as well as it is supposed to reveal about you on the dimension of concern. ***This bonus paper is due on or before the last day of class, Wednesday, April 28th.***

Dunn
 PS 375 – Seminar on Positive Psychology
 Spring 2010

All About ME Questionnaire

I look forward to meeting you in spring 2010. This questionnaire is your first writing assignment for PS 375. Please write clear answers to the following questions. Bring this *completed* questionnaire with you to our first class meeting on Monday, January 18th, 2010. Alternatively, you may type your answers to the questions and email the form back to me (dunn@moravian.edu) between now and our first class meeting.

What is your favorite book (fiction or nonfiction). Why?

What is your favorite movie (one could watch again and again)? Why?

_____ is the perfect food.

My favorite place is _____.

If I could visit one place in the world before I die, that place would be _____.

My favorite music is _____ and my favorite musician/singer/group/composer is _____.
 I love the song _____.

My hobbies are:

I don't have much time for hobbies, but if I did they would be:

I love my _____.

I am grateful for _____.

To me, beauty is _____.

In order to relax, I _____.

I am most proud of

_____.

I feel passionate about

_____.

Things that make me happy include:

In my life, I hope to
accomplish _____

_____.

I value _____

My hope for my future is

_____.

I wish you had asked me about _____

because I would have told you that _____

_____.

The best thing about getting older is: _____

The most important thing I've learned in my life so far is:

Please write anything else about yourself that you wish below:

Thank you.