

C. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY: THE SCIENCE OF WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS

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Thursdays, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m. Norris University Center

Apr. 9 Eudaimonic Well-being (Meaning)

We will start with an outline and roadmap for the course, introduce the three foundations for human well-being, and then jump right into the first one, eudaimonic well-being. Eudaimonic well-being was Aristotle's definition of the "good life." We will discuss how it differs from more 'modern' perspectives on happiness, as well as how it has fared when examined through the lens of modern human psychology studies.

Apr. 16 Hedonic Well-Being (Pleasure)

In this class we will discuss the functions of positive emotions like joy, wonder, and contentment, as well as present research showcasing the importance of emotional well-being to physical health and even mortality. We will discuss the robust scientific evidence of psychological biases that lead us to be poor at predicting what will make us happy in the future, as well as remembering what has made us happy in the past. We will wrap up the class by presenting some simple psychological practices that can increase emotional well-being on a day-to-day basis.

Apr. 23 Flow and Mindfulness (Cognitive Engagement)

Ever get so enthralled with a project that you lost all sense of time? Today we will discuss what we know about these types of "flow" states, and why flow, mindfulness and cognitive engagement more generally are considered the third foundation of human well-being. How can we fight the distractions of media and multi-tasking to develop greater cognitive "presence" in our own lives?

Apr. 30 The Role of Wealth in Well-being

In this class we will discuss the evidence (largely from economists, but from some psychologists as well) examining both how and why our material/monetary well-being influences our emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction. We will examine the studies that imply there is a ceiling above which increased wealth no longer contributes to emotional well-being and explore where this ceiling may be. The ways in which materialism has been shown to degrade well-being will be presented, and, finally, we will discuss the few ways in which money **can** buy happiness, as well as present some rules for spending wisely when it comes to boosting emotional well-being.

May 7 Kindness & Compassion

Were humans born to be kind? We will discuss the scientific evidence that our species appears wired to be prosocial, as well as the biological underpinnings of empathy and compassion. We will also discuss why so many of us find it easy to feel compassion for others and much harder to find compassion for ourselves when we fail. A brief but powerful compassion exercise will be introduced during the second part of class.

May 14 Social Connections

Today the class will talk about all forms of social connections and their importance to well-being. We will also discuss the ways in which men and women may differ in the types of social connections they most benefit from. Finally, the science-backed benefits of romantic partners, broader social networks and even shallow social connections will be reviewed.

May 21 Resilience and "Grit"

Today's class will discuss the compelling evidence that humans typically bounce back from even the most terrible of traumas. The factors that lead to emotional resilience will be reviewed. In the second part of class we will discuss "Grit" — or passion and perseverance in the pursuit of goals. I also will present some science-backed strategies that make pursuing any goal feel psychologically easier.

May 28 Successful Aging

What is the trajectory of happiness across the lifespan? What are some relationships between aging and happiness that appear universal across people (and can even be seen in apes)? Today we discuss what is known about thriving at every age, from childhood to elderhood. We will end the class with some science-backed suggestions for ensuring emotional and social flourishing, in older ages in particular.

Jun. 4 Positive Communities

Up until now the class has focused on the individual level of well-being. The first part of this class will briefly discuss the characteristics of positive communities (those in which people have the greatest chance of thriving). What can we learn from the happiest cultures? What can be done in communities (broadly defined) that would benefit the well-being of all? In the second part of class, we will review some of the biggest take-home points from the class as a whole to remind us of small steps we can each take to create greater well-being for ourselves (at the individual level) and for others within our communities.