



**Maastricht University**

Center for European Studies



**CISAustralia**

Study | Intern | Volunteer Abroad

# **POS2003**

# **Positive Psychology**

**Course Manual**

January



# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Opening

The question “what is wrong with people” has guided the thinking of many psychologists and dominated countless scientific studies during the 20th century. It is hard to deny that this entails an important question. In our attempts to answer the question, we have gained more understanding of many illnesses and have developed effective treatments for a wide range of problems. However, as an inevitable consequence of our focus on the negative aspects of well-being and health, such as distress and disease, we developed an almost exclusive attention to pathology. Scientific psychology focused disproportionately on pathology and repair, and devoted relatively little attention to factors that “make life worth living.”

As the 21st century unfolds, however, we are beginning to ask a different question: “What is right about people?” This question is at the heart of positive psychology, which is the scientific and applied approach to uncovering people's strengths and promoting their positive functioning. Positive psychology is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); mindfulness, flow and happiness (in the present); and hope and optimism (for the future). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skills, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. Note, however, that positive psychology is not the focus of the positive at the expense of the negative. Positive psychologists recognize negative emotions, failure, problems, and other un-pleasantries as natural and important aspects of life.

Research on positive psychology aims to investigate what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities. For instance, scientific studies attempt to gain more insight in what families’ factors contribute to children who flourish, what work settings lead to the greatest satisfaction among workers, what policies result in the strongest civic engagement, and how people's lives can be most worth living. In addition, research in the field of positive psychology seeks to unveil factors that contribute to the prevention of problems, such as depression, substance abuse or violence. What we have learned over 50 years is that the aforementioned pathology-based view on human functioning does not move us closer to the prevention of these serious problems. Indeed, the major strides in prevention have largely come from a perspective focused on systematically building competency, not correcting weakness. We have discovered that there are human strengths, such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, and interpersonal skill that act as buffers against mental illness. An important mission of positive psychology is therefore to understand and learn how to build these positive qualities. With this knowledge, interventions can be designed that improve people’s wellbeing and help to promote the so-called “good life”.

## Welcoming message

Welcome to Positive Psychology!

This course will provide you with valuable insights from the field of positive psychology to help you boost your resilience and lead a fulfilling and meaningful life. In the following three weeks, you will take a scientific and personal deep dive into topics such as autonomy, self-compassion, meditation, mindfulness, happiness, character strengths, optimism, post-traumatic growth, and resilience.

According to Positive Psychologists, every individual has the potential to be the “captain of their own sailboat”. Every single individual has unique strengths and an innate ability to face difficult weather circumstances.

In this course, we will unlock your character strengths and focus on helpful ways to support yourself in difficult times. We will cover the most important theories in Positive Psychology and you will be encouraged to go search for scientific literature to apply the topics we will cover to your specific areas of interest.

Autonomy is key in this course, so you will be encouraged every step of the way to be your own best guide in exploring the field.

In terms of assessment, you will be invited to write short blog posts about recent research findings, write a research proposal, personal growth paper, or literature review.

There will be ample room to gain hands-on experience with evidence-based positive psychological techniques ranging from simple journaling exercises to mindfulness meditation.

Looking forward to guiding, inspiring, and witnessing your growth this January,

Elke

## Course structure

In this course, you will get acquainted with the field of positive psychology. In 3 weeks, you will take part in an intensive educational program that covers the most important topics of this field. Your positive psychology January course is a combination of lectures, experiential workshops, group meetings, and self-study.

Positive psychology is, first and foremost, a science and is principally concerned with evidence, measurement, and testing. Therefore, during this course, you will gain more insight in different theories, scientific findings, experiments and measurement tools. Interestingly, positive psychology is also an applied science, meaning that many of the scientific results lead to the creation of real-world interventions that can improve schools, businesses, governments, and other aspects of individual and social life. This practical side will also be part of the course. You will experience what it is like to participate in positive psychology interventions and learn how to apply different techniques to enhance subjective wellbeing.

During the course the following topics will be addressed:

1. General introduction to positive psychology
2. Mindfulness
3. Positive Emotions
4. Resilience
5. Self-determination theory
6. Positive psychology and health
7. Designing and conducting research in positive psychology
8. Applied positive psychology
9. Self-compassion
10. Positive psychology interventions
11. Positive psychology-based coaching
12. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Perhaps, some of the above listed topics may seem “soft” or maybe even “vague” at first glance and you may wonder how they fit in mainstream scientific psychology. As you will see, positive psychology researchers are very well able to study these “soft” themes with “hard” experimental methods. In addition, although the topics of positive psychology, such as happiness, may appear to be straightforward concerns, the scientific exploration of them is far from simple. A technical understanding of positive psychology, including the ability to critically consume the research literature and create studies and interventions that are within the bounds of the field, is a critical component in this course.

We selected these topics not only because they are at the core of positive psychology, but also because they concern relatively broad research areas. Within these topics, students are free to select their own sub themes and follow their own interests. In fact, we strongly encourage students to choose their own subtopics and search for their own literature. The topics will be addressed by means of lectures, tutorial group meetings, and workshops and assignments. See below for an overview.

## Prerequisites

Some background in Psychology. Knowledge on designing a research study is helpful but not mandatory.

## Class hours and credits

The course consists of 36 class hours divided over 2 weeks.

These hours consist of meetings, assignments, lectures, and practising positive psychology techniques throughout the course. In addition, write an extensive paper after classes are done.

Students earn 7.5 ECTS credits when they obtain a passing grade.

## Chapter 2 Objectives

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate knowledge about/the ability to:

### Learning objectives & Skills development

Once you have completed this course, we wish for you to:

- Have a clear understanding of the goals and viewpoints of positive psychology.
- Have good overview of the different topics that are covered by the field of positive psychology.
- Be able to apply the knowledge that you gained during the course to “real life” situations.
- Have a clear overview of several practical techniques that can be used to uncover people’s strengths and promote their positive functioning.
- Be acquainted with various research designs to test positive psychology related research questions.
- Be able to critically examine scientific evidence.
- Know the ins and outs of prevailing theories in the field of positive psychology.

- Write about your (research) ideas and experiences clearly.
- Be able to apply basic positive psychology coaching techniques.

## Chapter 4 Assessment

The examination rules for this course are specified in the CES Academic Guide 2023-2024. It is the responsibility of the student to carefully read this document and comply with all rules and regulations.

### Course specific assessment overview

For the attendance regulations see Chapter 5 "attendance rules".

When	Type of assessment	% Final grade
Throughout course	Attendance	<b>Pass/fail*</b>
1) 3x Popular scientific writing (DYKT's)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DYKT1: Fri 12 Jan</li> <li>• DYKT2: Fri 19 Jan</li> <li>• DYKT3: Fri 19 Jan</li> </ul>	40%
2) Oral presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation: Fri 19 Jan</li> </ul>	15%
3) Final paper (research proposal, literature review or personal development paper)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun 18 Feb</li> </ul>	45%

## Chapter 5 Attendance rules

The attendance rules for this course are specified in the CES Student Handbook 2023 - 2024.

### Course specific attendance rules

At CES, students are expected to attend all meetings. If circumstances prevent students from complying with this rule, **they are permitted to miss one meeting per course.** For a second missed meeting, or a missed double session or fieldtrip (4 hours), students need to complete a make-up assignment to comply with CES attendance requirements. **Students who miss more than 4 hours of class automatically fail the course.**

CES courses may include field trips. Field trips may contribute to the overall grade of a course and are always mandatory. Students can compensate for a missed field trip by completing a make-up assignment. Please note that often field trips count as two meetings (4 hours).

The professor/tutor notes attendance at the start of each meeting. In order to be registered as "present" students need to be on time and participate in an active manner. Students who are more than 15 minutes late or who leave before the meeting has officially ended will be registered as absent.

In case of absence due to illness or other personal circumstances, students are required to email the course coordinator and the education office **before the start of the meeting.** The written notification should include the students name and a brief description of the reason or cause and the expected duration of the absence.

In case of longer absence, the programme coordinator may require additional proof of the cause of the absence, for example a doctor's note. When the student returns, they must report to the programme coordinator on the first day of their return. CES cannot be held responsible if a student fails a course due to long-term absence, even if this absence is due to illness or other exceptional personal circumstances.

### Make up assignment

Students who miss 4 hours of class will not have met the attendance requirements of a CES course and can apply for a make-up assignment to comply with the CES attendance requirements. Students who miss more than 4 hours of class automatically fail the course.

The student is required to submit a written request to [ces-educationoffice@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:ces-educationoffice@maastrichtuniversity.nl) within 3 days after the missed meeting. The CES Board of Examiners will decide upon the validity of the reasons given. The CES course coordinator determines the nature and volume of the assignment, which will be proportional to the number of missed meetings and the topics discussed. Make up assignments related to missed field trips may require students to do the excursion independently and at their own expense. The assignment must be completed and submitted to the CES course coordinator via email within 10 working days.

The responsible CES course coordinator will grade the make-up assignment with a pass or fail. Students who receive a pass for the make-up assignment will have met the attendance requirement. No final grade can be awarded for courses in which students have not met the attendance requirement. This will result in a "No Grade (NG)" on the transcript. An "NG" automatically constitutes a "fail" and no credit is awarded.

## Electronic devices

Please be mindful about the use of smartphones and laptops during this class. They are only allowed to take notes or to look up notes for the tutorial meetings. Students will be asked to close their laptops at times when it poses a distraction to the teachings and discussions. Make sure to also bring a notebook to class so you can make handwritten notes.