

Psychology 333: Positive Psychology

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 42 hours of classroom lectures / coursework

Course Description: Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life worth living, and well-being considered broadly is an indicator of the well-lived life. This course provides an overview of what positive psychologists have learned about well-being and especially how to achieve and sustain it in important domains of life.

Required Course Materials:

Zelenski, J. (2019). *Positive psychology: The science of well-being*. Sage.

The book may be ordered directly from Sage. There are numerous options: hardcover, paperback or an electronic version. An e-book is available for rent through Vital Source

<https://www.vitalsource.com/referral?term=97815264853110>.

Course Objectives:

After completing this course students should be:

1. Familiar with many of the key concepts and theories in positive psychology.
2. Capable of applying many of the basic principles of positive psychology to their daily lives.
3. Able to think critically and formulate independent opinions regarding issues relevant to positive psychology.

Course Requirements:

Quiz #1	25%
Quiz #2	25%
Quiz #3	25%
Assignment One: Identity Box	7.5%
Assignment Two: Mindful Photography	7.5%
Assignment Three: Well-Being Activity	10%

Quizzes: Three quizzes are scheduled for this course. The tentative dates of the quizzes are listed in the course timetable. Quizzes will consist of multiple choice, sentence answer and short answer (i.e., a paragraph or two) questions. Emphasis is on integration of the material from all sources (i.e., your text, videos you are required to view, etc.). The quizzes are **not** cumulative.

Please note: You are expected to take each quiz at its regularly scheduled time. The only acceptable excuses for missing a quiz are serious illness, family affliction, or University related travel. Each of these excuses must be accompanied by the appropriate documentation (e.g., a note from a physician) to be accepted as a legitimate reason for absence. If you fail to contact the instructor prior to the exam to provide a valid reason a score of zero will be assigned.

Final Grades:

A+	90-100%	B+	76-79%	C+	64-67%	D	50-54%
A	85-89%	B	72-75%	C	60-63%	F	Below 50%
A-	80-84%	B-	68-71%	C-	55-59%		

Tentative Course Timetable:

Class	Topic
#1	Introduction to the Course
#2	<p>Describing the Science of Positive Psychology?</p> <p>Text: Chapter 1</p> <p>Suggested reading:</p> <p>Canadian Positive Psychological Association. What is positive psychology? http://www.positivepsychologycanada.com/What-is-positive-psychology</p> <p>Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 55(1), 5-14. http://ezproxy.viu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthTyp e=ip,cookie&db=pdh&AN=2000-13324-001&site=ehost-live</p> <p>Seligman, Martin. (2002). <i>Authentic happiness</i>. Free Press. Seligman, Martin. (2011). <i>Flourish</i>. Free Press.</p>
#3	<p>Positive Emotions</p> <p>Text: Chapter 2</p> <p>Please watch: Barbara Fredrickson Positive Emotions Open Our Mind https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7dFDHzV36g</p>

Suggested reading:

Fredrickson, B.L. (2003). The value of positive emotions. *American Scientist*, 91, 330-335.

<http://ezproxy.viu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthTyp e=ip,cookie&db=aph&AN=10029857&site=ehost-live>

Fredrickson, B.L. (2009). *Positivity: The upward spiral that will change your life*. Penguin.

#4

Happiness

***Presentation of Identity Boxes via

Text: Chapter 3

Out-of-class exercise: well-being profile—complete at least one of the following: Satisfaction with Life Scale, Approaches to Happiness Scale, or Authentic Happiness Inventory at www.authentichappiness.com

Please watch: Daniel Gilbert The Surprising Science of Happiness

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4q1dgn_COAU

Suggested reading:

Lyubomirsky, Sonja (2007). *The how of happiness: The scientific approach to getting the life you want*. Penguin.

<http://thehowofhappiness.com/>

Lyubomirsky, Sonja (2014). *The myths of happiness: What should make you happy but doesn't, what shouldn't make you happy but does*. Penguin.

#5

QUIZ #1 Covers Chapters 1-3 and corresponding material

Personality

Text: Chapter 4

Out of class exercise: Take the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) at www.authentichappiness.com

Suggested reading:

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford.

#6

The Self: A conversation about the self

Text: Chapter 5

Suggested reading:

Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(2), 193-210

Endo, Y. Heine, S. J., & Lehman, D. R. (2000). Culture and positive illusions in closerelationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(12), 1571-1586.

#7

Thinking

Text: Chapter 6

Out-of-class exercise: take the multiple intelligences test at <http://psychologytoday.tests.psychtests.com/bin/transfer>

Please watch: Daniel Glibert's Why We Make Bad Decisions
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-4flnuxNV4>

Suggested reading:

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1999). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper Collins.

Gilbert, Daniel. (2006). *Stumbling on happiness*. Vintage Canada.

Kahneman, Daniel (2013). *Thinking fast and slow*. Anchor Canada.

#8

QUIZ #2 Covers Chapter 4-6 and corresponding material Social and Physical Environments

Text: Chapter 7

#9

Health and Wellness

*****Assignment #2 Mindful Photography is Due**

*****Presentation of your favourite place photo**

Cohen, S., & Pressman, S. D. (2006). Positive affect and health. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15, 122-125.

Watch: John Ratey author of Spark: The revolutionary new science of exercise and the brain <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBSVZdTQmDs>

Watch: Wendy Suzuki's TED Talk: The Brain Changing Benefits of Exercise (2018)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHYOFxzoKZE&t=608s>

Wendy Suzuki, PhD "Exercise is the most transformative thing that you can do for your brain today for the following reasons _____" Make note of what those reasons are.

Suggested reading:

Seligman, M. (2018). *The hope circuit: A psychologist's journey from helplessness to optimism*. NY: Public Affairs (Hachette).

#10 **Close Relationships**

Text: Chapter 8

Please watch: John Gottman's TED Talk The Science of Love (2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uazFBCDvVw>

Please watch: Sue Johnson's TED Talk The New Frontier of Sex and Intimacy (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiVijMLH2-k>

Suggested reading:

Gottman, J. (2015). *The seven principles of making marriage work*. Random House. Johnson, S. (2008). *Hold me tight: Seven conversations for a lifetime of love*. Little, Brown Spark.

Johnson, S. (2013). *Love sense: The revolutionary new science of romantic relationships*. Little, Brown Spark.

#11 **Stability and Change**

Text: Chapter 9

Looking Forward

Text: Chapter 10

#12 **Quiz #3 covers Chs. 8-10 + Health and Wellness and all corresponding material**

*****Final assignment due**

*Please note that the information provided in the course syllabus is **subject to change**. Any changes will be announced in class and included on the on-line version of the course syllabus.

Assignment #1 – The Identity Box Presentation

The idea for this assignment is credited to Mark Holder, PhD

Context:

The medical model has been adopted by several disciplines including psychology, psychiatry, medicine and neuroscience. This model emphasizes diagnosis and treatment. A relatively new approach, now commonly referred to as positive psychology, is concerned with understanding and promoting positive well-being as distinct from ill-being. Positive psychology is the scientific inquiry into the characteristics, strengths, virtues and behaviors that contribute to that which makes life worth living. Positive psychology acknowledges the importance of assessing and eliminating negative states. However, it recognizes that science should not be confined to only the study of these states. As such, positive psychology is not intended to supplant traditional fields. These other fields have made, and continue to make, valuable contributions to human well-being. Positive psychology is properly viewed as a compliment to the traditional approach which relies on the medical model. Therefore, if traditional science, and particularly psychology, has often asked, “what is wrong with you and how do we fix it?” positive psychology is now asking, “what is right with you and how do we promote it?”

Description of the activity:

Choose an appropriate box or container. The outside of the box is to be adorned with items that represent how others in your life perceive your strengths. The inside of the box contains items that represent how you see your own strengths. To understand how others see you, you are required to contact people who you think know you fairly well (e.g., family members, friends, and co-workers).

When the identity boxes are completed each student in turn presents their box to the class starting with an explanation of why they chose their particular container for their box. Then students describe the outside items and how they were determined, and then the inside contents.

A description of Mark Holder’s identity box:

I have my own box. The container itself is a model of a human skull because I have a research background in neuroscience and I was born on Halloween. To select items, I contacted three former girlfriends, explained the nature of the identity box, and asked them to suggest items. In fact, they sent me items. For the outside, items included smiley faces to represent my research program on happiness, and a wooden apple to represent my love of teaching. For the inside, I have a small globe that represents my love of learning and traveling (I have been to over 30 countries and this has changed my view of the world and increased my cultural sensitivity) and a kaleidoscope that represents my optimistic view of the world. I have a total 5 items on the outside and 5 on the inside.

Dr. Holden’s “box”

Things to make note of:

- The exercise is to focus exclusively on positive aspects of yourself.
- Some aspects of the inside of the box may be the same as those on the outside. This makes sense as others’ views of us are often accurate so there may be overlap.



Assignment #2 Mindful Photography

Take photographs of your everyday life OR if we are still self-isolating take a look through your phone and see what you've already taken photos of. As you do this exercise, think about the things in your life that bring you happiness or joy. What brings you positive feelings in your daily life? Although this is highly personal, some examples might include your favourite scenic view on campus, your closest friends, or your favourite book. Spend some time with this, savouring the process while you choose five photos. It is important to take the activity seriously and not rush through it.

According to Ansel Adams: Both the grand and the intimate aspects of nature can be revealed in the expressive photograph. Both can stir enduring affirmations and discoveries, and can surely help the spectator in his search for identification with the vast world of natural beauty and the wonder surrounding him. (Adams, 2012).

After completing the photography exercise, reflect on the thoughts and feelings you had when (a) searching for appropriate subject matter, (b) taking the photos, and (c) looking back at the photos or sharing them with others. Do you feel that it influenced your mood, emotions, and appreciation for things in your life? Why or why not? How long do you think the effects lasted? How could the activity be made more effective? Are there certain types of people who might benefit more or less from this activity? How sustainable are these changes? How can you ensure that the changes last?

Please prepare a 2-3 page summary of your responses to these questions to be submitted via email.

Presentation of your favourite place.

This is worth 10% of your final grade. Both the written portion and presentation must be completed to receive a grade on this assignment.

Assignment #3

Choose One of the Following Five Options

Note that the activity you choose might take up to three weeks to complete.

You will prepare a 400-500 word reflection on this exercise. Questions that you might address in your reflection include: How easy was it to complete the task? Could this become a regular part of your life? What impact does the behavior have on your energy, your thoughts, your feelings, your relationships? What would you change? (Do not structure your report as a simple question-answer format.)
Note: This assignment will be graded on writing/grammar/organization, accuracy, completeness and level of reflection.

1. **ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS** This is a writing activity. Every third day for three weeks, write down three things that happened over the previous three days that annoyed/upset you. For each one write down: (i) what happened, (ii) how you interpreted it, (iii) how you felt. Then for each one write down a fairly detailed alternative positive interpretation. Think about how this is actually a good thing, how it makes you stronger how it could be beneficial and helpful in your growth.
2. **ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS** Healthy relationships require many times more positive messages than negative (John Gottman's research). In your relationship, think of how you could incorporate 2 or 3 new examples of each of the following: expressions of gratitude, appropriate touch, capitalization (sharing in their excitement/enthusiasm), kindness, messages of affection, sharing your life/experiences with them, and active listening. Focus on the categories that you feel you are not frequently incorporating in your relationship at the moment.
3. **MEDITATION** Explore the web-site www.how-to-meditate.org Choose one of the different kinds of meditation e.g., breathing meditations, love and kindness meditation, etc. Meditate for 10 minutes the first day and progressively add a few minutes each day for three weeks. Journal on your experiences every three days.
4. **THREE BLESSINGS** We tend to spend more time thinking about what has gone wrong than we do basking in what has gone right. Ruminating on what goes wrong may lead to increased sadness. Focusing on your happiness may increase it.
Part one. Every night for the next week, right before you go to bed, write down three things (large or small) that went really well that day. Part two. Explain why they happened.
5. **GRATITUDE** Prepare a letter of gratitude. We will be discussing these further in class. I understand that the letter might be personal. You are not required to submit the letter, only the reflection. In addition to preparing the letter, I encourage you to send it.



Useful Links

Canadian Positive Psychology Association

<http://www.positivepsychologycanada.com/>International Positive Psychology Association <http://www.ippanetwork.org/>

Marty Seligman's Homepage www.authentichappiness.com

The Journal of Happiness Studies

The Journal of Positive Psychology