

**Psychology Capstone (492)**  
**Personal Well-being and Social Responsibility**  
**Fall 2017**

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:45 – 10:45 and Thursdays 12:45 – 1:45, or by appointment

**What is this course about?**

This course is designed to address research findings in contemporary scientific psychology, to integrate varying perspectives on psychological questions, and potentially to make links between psychological perspectives and other disciplines. Having had several years of a liberal education, and now on the brink of completing your major in psychology, you will have an opportunity to read in selected areas of psychology and to contemplate some of life's "big questions." The skills you've been developing throughout your undergraduate education (e.g., critical thinking, the ability to engage in dialogue, the written expression of your ideas, and the capacity to entertain diverse perspectives) will continue to be honed in this class.

An underlying question in this Capstone seminar is "What does it mean to live well?" Throughout this semester we will be thinking about the importance of personal well-being and social responsibility and how each of these figures in living well. A large and growing literature from the fields of social, personality, health, and positive psychology focusses on personal well-being, its correlates and its outcomes. Recent evidence suggests that the previously accepted notion of the hedonic treadmill may offer an incomplete picture of well-being, and indicates that happiness, in particular, is subject to change. In this course we will be reading and discussing the well-being literature, but we will also consider what might be thought of as the other end of the psychological spectrum: social responsibility. If it is clear that there are advantages to increasing our personal well-being, why should we, as individuals, behave in ways that are meant to benefit others and that could have the effect of reducing our personal well-being? What might motivate us to engage in behaviors that are not obviously self-interested? Are the pursuit of happiness and living "the good life" compatible with a concern for the welfare and well-being of others? An important link between well-being and social responsibility is the issue of values. In this course, we will focus on materialism and on the links between the pursuit of material goods, personal well-being, and social responsibility.

I hope that you will find this course intellectually challenging, and I expect you to meet the challenge. I am committed to making this an interesting class that will feed your interest in psychology and that will stimulate all of us to think and to question and, as a group, to have interesting and productive discussions.

## What will we be doing in this course?

### Reading

Many of the course readings will be on reserve in the library. In addition to the reserve readings, the two following books (**HARD COPIES**, which can be purchased inexpensively online) are required:

Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell: The extraordinary communities that arise in disaster*. Viking Penguin, New York.

What you achieve in this course, and what you take from it, will depend heavily on your close reading of the material. It is crucial that you obtain the necessary readings for each week well ahead of time to ensure you have no difficulty completing the reading before coming to class. A reading list for the first and last several weeks of class is available at the end of this syllabus. Material for the middle of the semester will be chosen by students in the class. **Hard copies of readings should be brought to class.** Your experience in the class will be best if you get into the habit of reading ahead for the whole week; that way, you'll be in a much better position to decide which readings you'd like to address in thought papers (see Writing below).

### Engaging in discussion

A key component of this class is group discussion. During each class session we will be discussing the assigned reading for that particular class; however, as the semester progresses we will also be making connections between readings assigned for a given class and those from earlier in the semester. In order to adequately prepare for each class session, you should make sure you have **thoroughly** read the appropriate material and that you have **thought carefully** about what you have read. As you read, you will find it useful to keep in mind questions such as the following:

- What are the points the authors are trying to make?
- What is the evidence that is presented?
- Are the arguments sound?
- What are the implications of the arguments/findings?
- What are the authors' underlying assumptions?
- What are your reactions to what you are reading?
- Does the reading raise questions for you? If so, how would you respond to them?
- Are there interesting connections between this reading and past readings?
- Are there inconsistencies across readings? If so, how might you explain them?
- If readings suggest, or cause you to entertain, particular hypotheses, can you think of studies that might be designed to test them?

Part of your grade will be based on participation. Our goal as a group will be to engage with each other in meaningful conversations about questions and issues related to well-being and social responsibility. Being in the room is necessary, but attendance is **far from sufficient to earn a passing grade**. Higher grades are likely to be achieved by students who consistently participate in our discussions by **making substantive contributions** and **promoting dialogue**, not by those who simply attend without contributing or by those who dominate the discussion. Being here means being fully present. Since cell phone usage, leaving the room to use your cell phone, texting, etc., pull your attention from the discussion, doing these things will result in your being considered absent. Moreover, frequent engagement in these or other activities (e.g., coming in late, packing up

to leave early) that actually detract from class discussion may result in a **negative** participation grade (e.g., - 50/250).

## Writing

A third component of this class involves writing that will take several forms. First, you will be writing thought papers. It is a good idea to write thought papers on a regular basis, but you need to turn in only seven thought papers. Of those, I will count your six highest grades. Thought papers should not be a summary of the reading, but should include your deep reflections on the reading. You may find it useful to review the questions in the previous section of the syllabus as you think about the reading. You may choose to focus on one or more readings for a given week, but you may turn in only one paper each week. Thus, it is best for you if you adhere to a reading schedule whereby you have all the week's readings done in time to make an informed decision about what to write. Each thought paper should be about 2 double-spaced pages in length and a **hard copy** will be due, without exception, by the beginning of class on Tuesdays as we embark on discussion of that week's reading. **Papers turned in after that time will not be accepted, and papers will not be accepted on days you don't attend class. No papers will be accepted electronically. Please put the number of each thought paper at the top of the page and make sure to keep all your thought papers until the end of the semester.**

Thought papers will be graded on a check/check+/check-/no credit basis. At least three of these papers must be turned in by the date noted in the schedule at the end of the syllabus, and all of them must be turned in by second to last Tuesday of the regular semester (not counting exam week).

Six times at random points during the semester, you will be asked to write a summary of one of the day's sources at the beginning of class. Five of these summaries will count toward your final grade.

There will also be a final essay exam for the class. This will be a take-home exam that requires you to use **at least** 75% of the course readings/materials, including all material assigned by students. You will receive two prompts from which to choose as the basis for your essay. A hard copy of your final essay (4-5 pages) will be due on the day of the scheduled final exam. *You will find it extremely helpful to take notes on the readings and discussion throughout the semester so that you will be better prepared for the final essay.*

## Grades

Your grade in this class will be based on the following:

|   | <u>Points</u> |
|---|---------------|
| Thought papers: 6 (of 7) papers worth 50 points each    | 300           |
| In-class writing: 5 (of 6) summaries of course material | 50            |
| Ongoing participation                                   | 250           |
| Selecting reading and facilitating class discussion     | 150           |
| Final essay exam  | 250           |

A standard grading scale will be used to calculate your final grades:

| <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Final Grade</u> | <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Final Grade</u> | <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Final Grade</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 93 - 100          | A                  | 80 – 82           | B-                 | 68 – 69           | D+                 |
| 90 - 92           | A-                 | 78 – 79           | C+                 | 60 – 67           | D                  |
| 88 - 89           | B+                 | 73 – 77           | C                  | below 60          | F                  |
| 83 - 87           | B                  | 70 – 72           | C-                 |                   |                    |

### **Plagiarism policy**

Any sources on which you base your ideas should be **cited in the text of your papers**. For thought papers, it is not necessary to supply references for assigned course readings or other materials; however, if you choose to use any other sources, you must include a References page with your paper. For the final essay, you must both cite all sources and provide a References section including all sources used in the essay. For both types of assignments, if you use a direct quote, you must use **quotation marks** and cite the source. **Plagiarism will result in a score of zero for the assignment and likely failure of the course. Any and all incidents of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students.**

### **Classroom Etiquette**

I expect that you will demonstrate respect for one another during class. Differences of opinion are welcome, but please express them in a civil and respectful way. Out of consideration for everyone who is part of this class, please do everything in your power to arrive at class on time. Also, please do not begin packing up to go until it's clear that we are done for the day. If you bring your cell phone to class, please make sure it is **turned off** before class begins. **Under no circumstances should laptops, tablets, or phones be used during class.** Leaving the room to use your phone will also negatively affect your participation grade.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ACTIVITIES

### August 29: Introduction to Capstone; first possible thought paper due Thursday

**TH** Kesebir, P., & Diener, E. (2008). In pursuit of happiness: Empirical answers to philosophical questions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 117-125.

**TH** Lucas, R. E. (2007). Personality and the pursuit of happiness. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 1, 168-182.

### September 5: Second possible thought paper due Thursday (Tuesdays every subsequent week)

**TH** Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Scollon, C. N. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: Revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American Psychologist*, 61, 305-314.

**TH** Inglehart, R., Foa, R., Peterson, C., & Welzel (2008). Development, freedom, and rising happiness: A global perspective (1981-2007). *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 264-285.

### September 12: *Material selections must be turned in via e-mail by midnight on Sunday, September 17*

**T** Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855.

**T** O'Connor, T. (1995). Therapy for a dying planet. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind* (pp. 149-155). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

**TH** Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995, May). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529.

**TH** Forster, E. M. (1909). *The Machine Stops*. England: The Oxford and Cambridge Review.

### September 19:

**T** Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. (chapters 1-4)

**TH** Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. (chapters 5-9)

### September 26:

**T** Bennick, G., & Shen, P. (2005). *Flight from death: The quest for immortality*. Transcendental Media. (optional reading for those unfamiliar with terror management theory; available online)

**T** Arndt, J., Solomon, S., Kasser, T., & Sheldon, K. M. (2004). The urge to splurge: A terror management account of materialism and consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14, 198-212.

**TH** O'Brien, C. (2008). Sustainable happiness: How happiness studies can lead to a sustainable future. *Canadian Psychology* (49)4:289-295. Doi: 10.1037/a0013235

**TH** Frantz, C. M., & Mayer, F. S. (2009). The emergency of climate change: Why are we failing to take action? *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 9, 205-222.

**October 3:** At least three thought papers must be turned in by this Tuesday

Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**October 10:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**October 17:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**October 24:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**October 31:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**November 7:**

**T** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**TH** Belic, R., Director (2011). *Happy* (Motion Picture). United States: Wadi Rum Productions. (to be viewed before class; available streaming via Netflix.com)

**November 14:**

**T** Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell: The extraordinary communities that arise in disaster*. Viking Penguin, New York. (pp. 1 – 70)

**TH** Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 73 – 132)

**November 21:** (no class on Thursday due to Thanksgiving)

**T** Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 135 – 180)

**November 28:** All seven thought papers must be turned in by this Tuesday

**T** Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 183 – 227)

**TH** Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 231 – 304)

**December 5:** Take-home final exam questions available on Thursday

**T** Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 305 – 313)

**TH** Culminating discussion

**WHEN IS THE FINAL ESSAY DUE?**

**Wednesday, December 13, by noon**