

Psychology Capstone (492)
Personal Well-being and Social Responsibility
Fall 2021

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00 – 3:00, Thursdays 1:00 – 2:00, or by appointment

All office hours will be held online; please let me know in advance if you plan to attend.

What is this course about?

The Capstone 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.

A key underlying question that drives 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 will 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. One of my primary goals in this course is to facilitate the development of intellectual community and our class discussions are the main vehicle for achieving this goal.

Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for the Capstone are as follows. Upon completion of the course students should be able to:

1. Identify concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the discipline
2. Apply major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the discipline.
3. Describe alternative theoretical perspectives within the discipline
4. Synthesize where possible alternative theoretical perspectives within the discipline
5. Recognize various sources of bias in psychological research, and how these can affect the interpretation or usefulness of research findings
6. Analyze interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions
7. Explain interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions
8. Recognize an appropriate level of professional style writing
9. Produce an appropriate level of professional-style writing

What will we be doing in this course?

Reading

Many of the course readings will be on reserve in the library. You will need to bring **HARD COPIES** of the readings to class. In addition to the reserve readings, **HARD COPIES** of the two following books (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. Downloading and printing all online readings from BB is necessary and it is strongly recommended that you do this at the beginning of the semester so you never run into any difficulties gaining access to materials at the last minute. Having hard copies of readings makes it easy to take notes within each reading and means you will have the same pagination as other people in the class. Because we will be discussing the readings and referring to specific passages, you will need to bring hard copies of the readings to class and you should plan to incorporate references to the readings in your discussion comments (e.g., “In the second paragraph on page 341 the author says something that really helps me understand the importance of this research”).

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 and will be added to an updated syllabus once all additional materials are submitted by students.

Engaging in discussion

A key component of this class is group discussion. The discussion fosters deeper understanding of the course material and allows for varying interpretations and perspectives to be entertained. As noted above, this is the main way we work towards a sense of intellectual community. 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 or viewed** the relevant material and that you have **thought carefully** about it. As you read/view, you will find it useful to keep in mind and take notes on questions that help to foster critical thinking, such as the following:

- What are the points the authors are trying to make?
- What are the authors' underlying assumptions?
- Are their arguments sound?
- What have you already learned about concepts referred to in the reading?
- What theoretical frameworks are the authors relying on?
- What other theoretical frameworks might fruitfully be applied here?
- What is the evidence that is presented?
- What are the implications of the arguments/findings?
- 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, what kind of studies might be designed to test these hypotheses?

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, values, and social responsibility. Being in the room is necessary, but **attendance is not 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. Discussion is a group activity and the more you can do to help foster meaningful discussion about the course material, the higher your participation grade is likely to be. Having a positive impact on discussion involves making your views known, attending to what others are saying, and responding with substantive comments. The goal of our online discussions is to engage in **productive dialogue**. You can find tips about how to do this successfully under Success in This Course on BB (see *Preparing for and Engaging in Class 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).

Finally, an additional way to participate in discussion is to post comments about course materials on Discussion Board on BB. Note that this is an **additional** way to participate; it does not substitute for participating in class, but it can be a good way to initiate conversation about something you find interesting. In order for this to be a useful way of contributing to class discussion, any such comments must be posted by 6:00 pm the day before the relevant discussion. Just as in classroom discussion, any Discussion Board comments should be substantive and geared toward promoting dialogue.

Facilitating discussion

For the first few weeks of class I will be facilitating discussion on the assigned course material (see Schedule of Readings at the end of the syllabus). My goal in Capstone is not to lecture; I may occasionally offer explanations of ideas, but these will be brief and infrequent. My primary goal is to promote good discussions among students, to challenge you to think deeply about psychological

issues and to engage with the material, with me, and with each other. After the first few weeks of the semester (see schedule of readings below for exact dates) we will switch for several weeks to student-led discussions of the material you choose to assign. At the end of the semester, I will facilitate again for our discussions of Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell*. Because you will be submitting course materials fairly early in the semester, you need to start looking ahead soon at the syllabus to get a good sense of the range of possible topics. Further information regarding your choice of materials and facilitation of discussion is available on BB under Success in This Course. You should see two files: 1) *Information about Choosing Material and Facilitating Discussion* and 2) *Ideas to Stimulate Your Choice of Material*).

Writing

A third component of this class involves writing. Your writing will take several forms: summaries of the course material, analytical papers, and a final essay. Whatever the form, it is always important to write as clearly and effectively as possible. I will be providing feedback about what you need to work on in your writing throughout the first few weeks of class, but it is up to you to do the necessary work of making improvements. Advice and links to websites that can support you in improving your writing are available on BB under Success in This Course (see *Tips for Writing Successfully*).

Summaries: You will be writing brief summaries of all course materials. Each summary should succinctly outline the purpose and key points of the particular source (e.g., empirical article, film). This information should be **clearly stated in your own words**, definitely not copied from a source or its abstract. Depending on the source, your summaries will likely range from about half a page to a page each. **These summaries are required.**

You also have the option of jotting down notes on your own thinking regarding each source. These notes could be in a separate file, but I encourage you to keep notes on a particular source in the same file as your summary. Your notes could include your analysis of a researcher's findings, questions that the source raises for you, attempts at addressing your questions, connections between this and earlier sources, etc. They could also include your thoughts about things you found especially interesting or helpful. In other words, your notes could help you recall what arose for you as you actively read and considered the material. Think of these summaries (and the optional notes) as your own personal record of what you've read/viewed across the semester. If you do a decent job of them throughout the semester, they will likely be useful in writing analytical papers and invaluable at the end of the semester as you write your final essay.

To get points for your summaries, they must be posted on BB by midnight of the night before the relevant class discussion. Please note that summaries are worth 150 points toward your final grade. Because we won't know how many sources there are in total until after students have assigned materials, I cannot say exactly how many points each summary will be worth. Thus, throughout the semester, if you do not submit a summary on time you will get a score of 0 for that summary; if you submit a thorough and well written summary, you will get a score of 1 (or some fraction of that if I need to alert you to the fact that your summaries are falling short of expectations and, therefore, less likely to be useful to you in writing papers). At the end of the semester your earned points will be multiplied by whatever factor is necessary to arrive at a score out of 150 (probably between 3 and 4).

Analytical Papers: These papers **should not be a summary** of the reading, but should instead be your **deep reflections** on the reading. You might find it useful to review the critical thinking questions in the previous section of the syllabus as you think about your approach to each analytical paper. In each paper you should incorporate multiple sources and tackle ideas and issues that cut across numerous readings. Each paper should provide a thoughtful analysis of the material for a

given section of the course. You should be engaging in critical thinking about each of the sources and making connections across, or important distinctions between, different sources. These papers should be good preparation for writing the final essay.

Each analytical paper should be about 3 double-spaced pages in length (with standard margins and font). A hard copy of each paper must be turned at the beginning of class on the dates shown at the end of this syllabus. **Points will be lost if papers are turned in after the beginning of class (so it is a very good idea to print your paper the night before it is due); no papers will be accepted after class ends; and no papers will be accepted electronically.** Please put the number of each analytical paper at the top of the first page and make sure to keep all your analytical papers until the end of the semester.

Final Essay: 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 (4½ to 5 pages) will be due during final exam week. ***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.*** It is recommended that this be done at the end of your summaries, but it can also be done in a separate electronic or paper document.

Grades

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

	<u>Points</u>
Summaries	150
Analytical papers: 2 best (of 3), 100 points each	200
Ongoing participation	250
Selecting material and facilitating class discussion	150
Final essay exam	<u>250</u>
	1000

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-		

Classroom policies

This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies>.

I expect that you will demonstrate respect for one another during class. Differences of opinion are welcome, but please make sure to 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.

Any sources on which you base your ideas should be **cited in the text of your papers** for this class. For both analytical papers and the final essay, it is necessary to cite and supply references for all materials used. It is not necessary to use any additional sources beyond those required for the class but, if you choose to do so, you must appropriately cite and include a reference for these sources as well. For all assignments in this class, if you use a direct quote, you must **use quotation marks and cite the source**. Academic integrity is fundamental to a liberal education and is a basic responsibility of each student. All forms of academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating and plagiarism) are unacceptable and will result in serious repercussions.

Responding to the Changing COVID Landscape

Grand Valley staff, students and faculty are required to be vaccinated by September 30. Now that the FDA has officially approved one of the vaccines, we hopefully will see an increase in vaccination rates immediately. As a result, all of us will be less likely to be infected and transmit the virus; and, the likelihood of additional variants will also be reduced.

The following is a general GVSU statement regarding masks:

Face coverings, such as masks, are required to be worn in the classroom. Students who have forgotten their face coverings may get a disposable mask at a campus office. The evidence is clear that [face coverings are a crucial part of keeping coronavirus at bay](#) and [support the university's commitment to providing all members of its community with an inclusive living and learning environment with equitable opportunities for success](#). [GVSU's policy on face coverings](#) is posted on the Lakers Together web site. Students who are not able to wear a face covering due to a medical condition should [contact Disability Support Services \(DSR\)](#) to discuss their individual situation.

Regarding our course specifically, this syllabus describes the ideal situation of a normal semester in which we can hold in-person classes and in which social distancing is not a necessary part of our daily lives. However, as we all know from recent experience, the COVID landscape is unpredictable and in flux. It may be the case that we will need to alter our plans somewhat due to COVID, particularly if the Delta variant, or some other variant, becomes increasingly problematic. For example, should it be necessary to shift to an online format, this course is designed to continue functioning with as little disruption as possible. In that case, we would continue to meet for discussions using Discussion Board, Zoom meetings, or some combination of the two. All assignments would be submitted online rather than in hard copy format. Whatever comes our way, we will adjust accordingly.

One thing we have all learned from the COVID experience is that we are resilient and able to respond to change in ways that would have once seemed impossible. Rest assured that I will have our collective health and safety in mind throughout the semester and that we will be able to respond effectively together to whatever this semester brings.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Week of:

August 30: Introduction to Capstone

T Introduction to the class (no reading)

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

September 6:

T 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.

T 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.

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

TH 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.

September 13:

T 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.

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

TH Leonhardt, D. (2020, June 1). The Minnesota paradox. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/01/briefing/minneapolis-coronavirus-tara-reader-your-monday-briefing.html?smid=em-share> (This link will bring you to several articles in the New York Times, but the one you need to read is the first one, *The Minnesota Paradox*. Pay special attention to the chart that shows median incomes in various U.S. cities.)

TH Sharkey, P., Taylor, K., & Serkez, Y. (2020, June 19). The gaps between White and Black America, in charts. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/19/opinion/politics/opportunity-gaps-race-inequality.html?smid=em-share> (There are numerous interactive charts in this article that allow you to examine race-based inequities in many U.S. cities.)

TH Orchard, J., & Price, J. (2017). County-level racial prejudice and the black-white gap in infant health outcomes. *Social Science and Medicine*, 181, 191-198.

TH Hehman, E., Flake, J. K., & Calanchini, J. (2018). Disproportionate use of lethal force in policing is associated with regional racial biases of residents. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9, 393-401.

September 20: First analytical paper due beginning of class on Tuesday, Sept 21.

Material selections must be turned in via e-mail by midnight Saturday, Sept 25;
CHECK YOUR E-MAIL REGULARLY FOR THE FOLLOWING WEEK.

T Taylor, C. J. (2019). Health consequences of laws and public policies that target, or protect, marginalized populations. *Sociology Compass*, 14, 1-13.

Vedantam, S. (Host). (2021, July 5). You, But Better. (Audio podcast episode). In *The Hidden Brain*. Hidden Brain Media. <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/you-but-better>.

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

September 27:

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

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 4:

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

TH Student-led discussions; reading TBA

October 11: Student-led discussions; reading TBA; **second analytical paper due beginning of class on Tuesday, Oct 12**

October 18: Student-led discussions; reading TBA

October 25: Drop with W Deadline October 29

T No class (Fall Break)

TH Student-led discussions; reading TBA

November 1: Student-led discussions; reading TBA

November 8:

T Student-led discussions; reading TBA

TH General Discussion; **third analytical paper due beginning of class on Thursday, November 11**

November 15:

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

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

November 22: No class on Thursday (Thanksgiving)

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

November 29:

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

TH Solnit, R. (2009e). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 231 – 313)

December 6: Instructions for final essay will be provided in class on Tuesday

T General discussion and questions about final exam

TH Wrapping up the course

FINAL ESSAY DUE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, BY 5:00 PM