

**Psychology Capstone (492)**  
**Personal Well-being and Social Responsibility**  
**Fall 2020**  
**Dr. Donna Henderson-King**

**Class time**

Section 07 T/TH 11:30 – 12:45

**Contact information**

[hendersd@gvsu.edu](mailto:hendersd@gvsu.edu)

**Office Hours**

Tuesdays 10:00 – 11:00 and by appointment

**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 those from 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 provides 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 and how we might increase our well-being, 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 own subjective 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. Are values such as materialism, honoring diversity, and caring for the environment, connected to our well-being? To our tendency to live socially responsible lives? In this course, we will entertain these questions, as well as the overarching question of what it means to live well.

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.

## Learning Objectives

Capstone provides students with opportunities to put into practice and integrate the skills they have been learning and developing through the courses in the major. 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.

In this class we'll be working with concepts and findings related primarily to well-being, social responsibility, and values. We will be examining and synthesizing material from across a variety of sources, perspectives and disciplines, and thinking critically about how various approaches help us to analyze and respond to big and important questions. You will be reading from a wide variety of sources and will also have the opportunity to practice thinking and writing effectively.

### **This is an online course**

Most of you have likely taken online courses before and have some idea about what to expect from an online learning experience. If you haven't taken an online course previously, you need to think about whether or not this is a good fit for you. Grand Valley has online resources to a) help you figure whether online learning is something that you should consider; b) help you determine whether your current technology fits requirements for online courses; and c) provide you with advice for how to do well in online courses. The following links will take you to some of the resources that are provided on the Grand Valley website.

<https://www.gvsu.edu/sasc/online-learning-tips-140.htm>

<https://www.gvsu.edu/online/technology-requirements-for-onlinehybrid-courses-8.htm>

Although it is online, this course is synchronous because it is discussion based. We won't be meeting face-to-face, but we will be engaging in group discussion Tuesdays and Thursdays during regular class time either in zoom sessions or on Discussion Board on BB.

## What will we be doing in this course?

### Reading/viewing/listening

Most of the course materials are posted on Blackboard (BB) or are available online. In addition to the posted readings, 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.

Downloading and printing all online readings from BB is strongly recommended. This is best done at the beginning of the semester so you don't run into any difficulties gaining access to materials at the last minute. Having hard copies of readings makes it easy to take notes within the 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, it is best to have hard copies of the readings at hand, to take notes in margins, and to frequently 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"). I also strongly recommend that you order **hard copies of the books**; many former students have wanted to keep them after the course has ended and/or pass them on to other people. What you achieve in this course, and what you take from it, will depend heavily on your **close reading** of the material. 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.

### Engaging in discussion

A key component of this class is group discussion. During each class session (Tuesdays and Thursdays at our regular class time) we will be discussing the assigned reading for that particular class; and, as the semester unfolds, 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, it will be useful to keep in mind, and take notes on, questions such as the following:

- What are the key 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 evidence is presented by the authors?
- What are the implications of the arguments/findings?
- What are your thoughtful 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 previous 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 discussions will sometimes be online using Discussion Board on BB and sometimes on Zoom. When discussions are primarily on Discussion Board, you are required to post a thoughtful response to at least one of the discussion questions **before** class begins and to be present and engaged in discussion throughout class time. 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. Your online presence during class time is necessary, but it 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 seldom contribute or by those who dominate the discussion. Having a positive online presence means 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**, and you can learn more about how to do this successfully on BB under Success in This Course (see *Engaging in Class Discussion and Writing Commentaries*).

### **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 brief 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 syllabus 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**

Another component of this class is writing. Your writing will take several forms including: reflections on course material; posts to the BB discussion board; post-discussion commentaries; and the 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*).

Reflections: You will be writing brief reflections on all course materials. These reflections should do two things. First, they 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 an abstract. This should be done in one paragraph, about a half a page, double-spaced. Second, they should include a second paragraph that comprises your own thinking about the source; this 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. In other words, this second paragraph should be your response to the material that will help you recall what arose for you as you actively read and considered the material. You should also feel free to add notes that will help you to remember especially interesting or helpful ideas from the material. Think of these summaries 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 be invaluable at the end of the semester as you write your final essay. To get points for these reflections, they must be posted by 6:00 pm the day **before** the relevant class discussion. Please note that your reflections 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 reflection will be worth. Thus, throughout the semester I will note a 0 if you have not submitted a reflection by 6:00 pm on the day it is due and a 1 if you have made a submission (or some fraction of that if you've done an incomplete or poor job of it). At the end of the semester those points will be multiplied by 3 or 4 or whatever factor is necessary to arrive at a score out of 150.

Online class discussion participation: While some of your Discussion Board participation will surely be spontaneous, it also will be possible to carefully compose some of your discussion comments before posting them. While it is always important to write as clearly as you can, you should aim to be especially thoughtful and articulate in the comments you make in our online discussions so that we are all able to fully understand each other. In particular, it is strongly advised that the comments you post before class are thoughtful and carefully edited for accuracy and clarity before posting. Make sure your posts say what you're thinking. Always aim for coherence and clarity. More information is available for successfully engaging in online discussion, using Discussion Board as well as participating on zoom, under Success in This Course on BB (*see Engaging in Class Discussion and Writing Commentaries*).

Discussion Commentaries: A couple of times throughout the semester you will be asked to provide a commentary on our class discussion. Each commentary should be based on your **analysis** of what was said during the day's discussion. This is your opportunity to pull things together for your classmates, pointing to important themes and ideas, perhaps making clear any points of confusion that were clarified during discussion, and/or pointing out questions that still need to be pursued. These commentaries should be posted on BB (on the forum for this in Discussion Board) within 48 hours the relevant class and will be available to everyone throughout the semester. Post-discussion commentaries should be about 2 double-spaced pages; they should be exceptionally clear and well-written. Additional information about the commentaries is included in *Engaging in Class Discussion and Writing Commentaries* under Success in This Course on BB. Make absolutely sure to read this before writing a commentary.

Final essay: There will also be a final essay exam for the class. This will be a take-home essay 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. Your final essay (4½ - 5 pages) will be due during final exam week. **You will find it extremely helpful to write good reflections and take your own notes on the readings and discussion throughout the semester so that you will be well prepared for the final essay.** Full instructions for the final essay and the prompts will be made available by the Monday of the last week of classes. But you should know from the outset that a key factor in doing well on the final essay is to be actively engaged in thinking about the course material throughout the semester. Note that this final essay is worth 300 points. If you are interested in achieving the highest grade you can, you need to take this assignment seriously. This requires a) being engaged in the class throughout the semester and b) applying the necessary time and effort in constructing a coherent, organized, well-written essay that demonstrates and understanding of the course material and an ability to integrate ideas from across a variety of sources.

## Grades

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

	<u>Points</u>
Reflections on course material	150
Selecting material and facilitating class discussion	150
Post-discussion commentaries	200
Ongoing participation in discussion	200
Final essay exam	<u>300</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 discussion. Differences of opinion are very welcome, but should be expressed in a civil and respectful way. Please use best netiquette practices in all aspects of this online course (e.g., muting yourself except while you're speaking during zoom sessions). There are lots of websites that offer information and suggestions for good netiquette practices. Here are a few:

<https://asuonline.asu.edu/newsroom/online-learning-tips/netiquette-online-students/>

<https://www.educatorstechnology.com/2014/06/15-essential-netiquette-guidelines-to.html>

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

<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>

During discussion, we will mostly be focusing on materials assigned for a particular day and in that case, it is important to make clear what material you're referring to (e.g., Solnit argues on page 217 that...). If you are referring to material from previous days or weeks, you should also follow the same practice. If you are referring to material that has not been assigned to the class, you should make it clear what the source is. For the final essay, you must both cite all course and external sources and provide a References section including all sources used in the essay. For all writing in this course, if you use a direct quote, you must use **quotation marks** and **cite the source**.

**Plagiarism of any kind will result in a score of zero for the assignment (or class of assignments, such as all reflection papers), and thus possible failure of the course. Incidents of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students.**

If you have any questions related directly to the class, before contacting me or your classmates, please check the syllabus. More than likely the syllabus will contain the information you need or it will provide a link or reference to a document that will have that information. You could also check the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on BB. Should you have any technological difficulties you can find information about who to contact in the FAQ document.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ACTIVITIES

**Tuesday, January 19: Introduction to Capstone; class will meet on Zoom (no reading)**

**Thursday, January 21:**

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

**Tuesday, January 26:**

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.

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.

**Thursday, January 28:**

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

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.

**Tuesday, February 2:**

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.

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

**Thursday, February 4:**

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.)

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.)

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.

Helman, 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.



**Tuesday, February 9:**

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

**Thursday, February 11:**

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

**Tuesday, February 16: *Material selections must be turned in via e-mail by 5:00 pm, Wednesday, Feb. 17. PLEASE CHECK YOUR E-MAIL REGULARLY FOR THE FOLLOWING WEEK.***

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

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.

**Thursday, February 18:**

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

**Tuesday, February 23:**

Belic, R., Director (2011). *Happy* (Motion Picture). United States: Wadi Rum Productions. (available streaming via Tubi)

**Thursday, February 25:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**March 2 and 4:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**March 9 and 11:** Student-led discussion Thursday; reading TBA

**March 16 and 18:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**March 23 and 25:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**March 30: (No class on Thursday, April 1)**

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

**Tuesday, April 6:**

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

**Thursday, April 8:**

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

**Tuesday, April 13:**

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

**Thursday, April 15:**

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

**Tuesday, April 20:** *Instructions for final essay will be provided by Monday of this week* (No readings for today; student questions regarding final essay and general discussion)

**Thursday, April 22:** Last day (Discussion about class, no additional reading required)

**FINAL ESSAY DUE TUESDAY, APRIL 27, BY 10:00 AM**