

Psych 201. The Science of Happiness

Fall 2011; Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00pm-3:20pm; SGM 123

Professor: Jesse Graham

TAs: Rachel Beattie, Vanessa, Alexandra Cram, Eustace Hsu

In this class, we'll seek to understand human happiness. The class is not meant as a recipe for happiness, but as an analytical study of how scholars struggle to define and study it. We'll read some of the best contemporary writing on happiness, and in lecture we will analyze the research conducted by psychologists, economists, and neuroscientists that forms the basis for that writing. Outside of lecture, you will do exercises that will connect you to the research we discuss. Ultimately, besides learning about happiness, I hope you will learn how to critically evaluate scientific research and the benefits (and dangers) of using this research to inform personal choices and public policy.

Readings

Haidt, Jonathan (2006). *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Basic Books.

Gilbert, Daniel (2006) *Stumbling on Happiness*. Knopf Press.

Schwartz, Barry (2004) *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*. Harper.

Frankl, Victor (1959 / 2006) *Man's Search for Meaning*. Beacon Press.

** Readings are indicated by initials of the author, followed by chapter(s) unless otherwise specified: e.g., "JH 2&3" indicates chapters 2 and 3 of Jonathan Haidt's *Happiness Hypothesis*.

Schedule of Classes and Topics

8/23: Introduction: Logistics, goals, themes {No Reading}

PART 1: Foundations

8/25: Emotion and the brain {JH 1}

8/30: Divisions of the mind {JH 2}

9/1: Prospection: Thinking about the future {DG 1}

9/6: Natural selection and human nature {JH 3}

9/8: Social dilemmas and happiness {short reading at

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/02/opinion/02kristof.html?_r=1}

9/13: Subjectivity + Measurement of happiness {DG 2&3}

9/15: Naïve realism and self-serving bias {JH 4, DG 4&5}

9/20: Review for exam

9/22: Exam #1

PART 2: Barriers to happiness

9/27: Heritability, Adaptation and Hedonic Treadmill {JH 5, up to page 90}

9/29: Money and happiness {No reading}

10/4: Cognitive failures: Barriers to getting what you want {BS 3}

10/6: Hedonic (mis)forecasting {DG 6, 7} **Skype Guest Star: Dan Gilbert**

10/11: Too much choice? {BS Prologue, BS 4}

10/13: Regrets, rumination, and social comparison {BS 6&7} **Skype Guest Star: Barry Schwartz**

10/18: Clinical depression {Reading posted on Blackboard}

10/20: Weakness of will {Reading on Blackboard or at

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/18/090518fa_fact_lehrer?currentPage=all}

10/25: Review

10/27: Exam #2

PART 3: What makes people happy?

11/1: Optimism and CBT {Reading Posted – Peterson Chapter}

11/3: Happiness from within: Meditation & Mindfulness {JH 5, pp. 90-106}

11/8: Happiness from without: The value of work and play {No Reading}

11/10: Love and Attachments {JH 6&7} (Guest lecture by Sena Koleva)

11/15: Adversity, gratitude and meaning {JH 8 + VF Part I} **Skype Guest Star: Jon Haidt**

11/17: Virtue and divinity: {JH 9 & 10}

11/22: What is Your Happiness Movie (Lisa Kamen to present) {VF Part II}

11/24: HOLIDAY – HAPPY THANKSGIVING

11/29: What should government do, if anything? {Sunstein & Thaler article posted on Blackboard}

12/1: Review

Final Exam: Thursday, December 8, 2-4 p.m

Evaluation

There are four components to evaluation in this class:

- 1. Discussion Section Activities: 20%**
- 2. Presentation/Debate: 5%**
- 3. Three Exams: 60% (20% each exam)**
- 4. Paper: 15%**

Discussion Section Activities: The exercises that you will do in section are meant to connect you, as an individual, to the research that we discuss. Most of these exercises will be done in discussion section, and some of them may be done via the class website (go to the link labeled *Course Exercises*). The books and lectures we will discuss in this course are based on research similar to what you will do in the exercises. Our goal is to not just accept past research at face value, but instead to evaluate it critically and only use it to inform our personal lives (and the public policies we support) if we think it is sound.

Presentation and Debate: You will be assigned to a team of people in your discussion section and assigned a debate position (on whether or not happiness can easily be changed). Your team's overall grade on the presentation and debate will be determined by your discussion section TA. Members of the team will also evaluate each other and these team evaluations will increase or decrease each person's grade by up to one letter grade. So, for example, if your team got a "B" and most of your team members rated you as a poor team member, you would get a "C." If you were rated as a great team member, you would get an "A." And, if you are rated as average, or have a mix of ratings, you would get a "B."

If you do not show up for the presentation and debate, you will receive a ZERO, regardless of your team's grade and how they rate you.

Exams: The exams will be multiple choice and essay format (about 70% multiple choice, 30% essay). The content of the exams will be drawn from the reading and the lecture material (mostly on areas where the lecture and readings overlap).

Paper: The final paper is due the last day of class. We are looking for a concise essay on your view of how happiness should be defined and the key conclusions to be drawn about how individuals should structure their lives. Please reference your initial views on defining happiness and how those views may have changed during the semester. If you wish, you can include an argument about how nations and communities should structure their public policies to maximize happiness (as you define it). But you don't need to include this to write an "A" essay, so it is up to you what you want to focus on.

Your essay will be graded on the strength of your argument, the amount of relevant evidence you cite for your position, and the clarity and persuasiveness of your writing. **The paper may not be more than 1000 words.** If your paper is 1001, we will only read the first thousand words, and you will be penalized for not following directions. That might seem Draconian, but we want to be able to read every paper carefully in the short time there is to get grades in.

Grading Philosophy and Structure: The grading in this class will use standard percent criteria, listed below.

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|----------------|----|----------------|----|
| 93% - 100% | A | 73% - 76.9999% | C |
| 90% - 92.9999% | A- | 70% - 72.9999% | C- |
| 87% - 89.9999% | B+ | 67% - 69.9999% | D+ |
| 83% - 86.9999% | B | 63% - 66.9999% | D |
| 80% - 82.9999% | B- | 60% - 62.9999% | D- |
| 77% - 79.9999% | C+ | Below 60% | F |

There may be a curve. After everything is graded, we will compute each student's overall course percentage and examine the grade distribution for the class. If the average grade (the median) is below 83%, I will add points to everyone's score to bring the average up to 83%. Thus, at a minimum, half of the class will get a B or higher. If the class average is above 83%, I will not curve down.

Other than the curve, I will not be rounding up anyone's grade or applying any subjective criteria to the grade cut-offs or to anyone's grades. If you get a 79.9999%, that will be a C+, not a B-.

Extra Credit: There will be three opportunities for extra credit in this class. You are welcome to do any combination of these you like (maximum of 7 extra percentage points possible, added after any curving): 1. You have the opportunity to receive extra credit for participating in research going on at USC. This will be done through the "Experimetrix" system, and someone will make a presentation in class to explain the system. You will receive .5 extra percentage points for each hour of extra credit, up to a maximum of 4 hours (2 points max). 2. You can participate in the Project Happiness project, which is a several-week online study. This will be explained in class in late September (2 points max). 3. You can participate in the Joint Educational Project service learning organization, teaching K-12 students about the science of happiness. Someone from the JEP program will explain this option in class; the contact person for any JEP-related questions is Anna Lindtjorn <jep.anna@gmail.com> (3 points max).

Illness, Vacations, etc. If you are seriously ill, you must keep me and your discussion section TA informed of your emergency and provide documentation so that we can contact your doctor to verify your illness. Likewise, if you have a death in your family and must miss an exam because of this, inform us immediately and on your return provide us with documentation so that we can verify the validity of your absence.

If you are an athlete and will miss class because of a race, match, meet, or game you must inform me of that at the start of the semester. Likewise, if you must travel for another reason (academic conference, family wedding, etc.), you must inform me of that at the start of the semester. There will be no make-up exams for missed exams for reasons other than illness or death in the family if I am not informed of the date of the absence in the first two weeks of classes.

The date of the final is set by the Registrar and I may not change a student's final date/time except for the reasons set out by the Registrar.

Other Issues

Attendance. I hope you will regularly come to lecture. However, I won't be taking attendance. If you come late to class, try to be as quiet as possible when entering the room. Slides will be posted on Blackboard after each class, but as these will not contain all the material covered in lecture it is in your interest to attend regularly.

Attendance at discussion section is mandatory and counts towards roughly half of your Discussion Section Activities grade. Please do not ask your TA to make an exception for you. Your TA will be in serious trouble with me if he or she does, so don't ask. If you have a legitimate reason for missing discussion (illness, death in the family), contact me and we will work it out.

Reaching me: The best way to contact me is via email (jesse.graham@usc.edu) I do not check phone messages left at my campus number when I am away from campus. When emailing me, please put Psych-201 in the subject line – I will be more likely to read your email immediately if I know it is about our class.

DSP: Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to your TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00. The office is in the Student Union 301 and their phone is (213) 740-0776.

Academic integrity: Students should be familiar with university policies regarding academic honesty. Failure to adhere to these policies will result in an F for the course and the matter will be forwarded to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for possible further action. **We will be using “Turn it in” to detect plagiarism (including self-plagiarism of turning in work done for other classes).** For more info about grading policies and procedures, including policies covering cheating and plagiarism, see http://www.usc.edu/dept/ARR/private/forms/Handbooks/Grade_Handbook_rev042010.pdf.

Office Hours and Contact Information

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|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Jesse Graham | SGM 804: Tuesdays 10-12 | jesse.graham@usc.edu |
| Rachel Beattie | SGM 718: T 11-12, Th 12-1 | rachel.beattie@gmail.com |
| Vanessa | HNB B28: Mondays 2-4 | vanessa.jmc@gmail.com |
| Alexandra Cram | SGM 625: Tue 10:30-12:30 | acram@usc.edu |
| Eustace Hsu | HNB 115: Thursdays 11-1 | eustaceh@usc.edu |

Section Times, Locations, and TAs

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|-------|---------------------|---------|----------------|
| 52421 | M 8:00am - 9:50am | KAP 137 | Alexandra Cram |
| 52422 | M 8:00am - 9:50am | KAP 138 | Vanessa |
| 52423 | Th 8:00am - 9:50am | THH 118 | Alexandra Cram |
| 52424 | Th 8:00am - 9:50am | KAP 138 | Eustace Hsu |
| 52425 | M 10:00am - 11:50am | VHE 214 | Rachel Beattie |
| 52426 | M 10:00am - 11:50am | KAP 166 | Vanessa |
| 52427 | F 10:00am - 11:50am | VHE 214 | Rachel Beattie |
| 52428 | F 10:00am - 11:50am | KAP 166 | Eustace Hsu |
| 52429 | M 12:00pm - 1:50pm | THH 106 | Vanessa |
| 52430 | M 12:00pm - 1:50pm | THH 121 | Eustace Hsu |
| 52431 | F 2:00pm - 3:50pm | VHE 214 | Rachel Beattie |
| 52432 | F 2:00pm - 3:50pm | VHE 210 | Alexandra Cram |

Section Schedule

Week of 8/22 – No section.

Week of 8/29 – Prisoner's Dilemma lab + Happiness discussion. This lab will be some introductory discussion.

Week of 9/5 – No section.

Week of 9/12 – Measurement section.

Week of 9/19 – OPTIONAL review session. Students in Thursday and Friday sections are welcome to attend a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday section.

Week of 9/26 – Gender differences and gender trends in happiness.

Week of 10/3 – No section.

Week of 10/10 – Maximizing vs satisficing lab. Schwartz video.

Week of 10/17 – Self-control/ behavioral change lab.

Week of 10/24 – OPTIONAL review session. Students in Thursday and Friday sections are welcome to attend a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday section.

Week of 10/31 – Mindfulness meditation lab.

Week of 11/7 – No section.

Week of 11/14 – Morality and happiness lab.

Week of 11/21 – No section; meet with your group for debate prep.

Week of 11/28 – Debate.

Additional readings that might be of interest (not required!)

How Pleasure Works by Paul Bloom (Very entertaining and provocative take on human pleasure – and how it's so much weirder than animal pleasure – by a developmental psychologist)

Happiness, A History by Darrin McMahon (Philosopher's synthesis of the diverse ways happiness has been conceptualized in Western civilization)

The How of Happiness by Sonja Lyubomirsky (Practical guide to application of psychology research to improve your happiness)

Breakdown of Will by George Ainslie (Expansive theory of motivation emphasizing temptation and willpower)

Passions within Reason by Robert Frank (Prominent behavioral economist considers the evolutionary basis of irrationality)

Authentic Happiness and *Flourish* by Martin Seligman (Popular research-based guides to happiness interventions from the founder of positive psychology)

Flow and *Finding Flow* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Practical guide to the joys of losing oneself in a task, from the other founder of positive psychology)