Psych 612. Seminar in Advanced Social Psychology: Empirical Approaches to the Meaning of Life
Fall 2014; Wednesdays, 9am-11:50am; Leavey 3B

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Course Description:
This course covers empirical studies of the meaning(s) of life – sources of meaning, correlates of meaning, and consequences of meaning. Rather than try to cover the entirety of philosophy, religion, and social science, the class will focus on getting to know the current state of the science: ongoing debates and unanswered questions. We will explore scientific operationalizations and measures of meaning, studies of meaning as feeling, coherence, and compensation, and intersections of meaning with religion, time, the self, and the collective. The primary goal of the course is for students to develop research programs that bridge their existing interests with the methods and theories learned in the course readings.

Course Assignments:
(1) Discussion Questions: Each week students will submit a discussion question or critique on the week’s readings (10 total), to be submitted to session organizer (via Blackboard) by Monday at midnight. These should be between 300 and 600 words. These questions, plus class participation, make up 30% of the total grade.

(2) Leading Discussion: Each student in the class will be session organizer for one or two weeks. Session organizers will compile the week’s discussion questions, organize the questions to promote class discussion, and lead off class discussion. A word document with the organized questions should be sent out to the class by 3pm Tuesday. This task is worth 10% of the total grade.

(3) Research proposal and presentation: The research proposal should raise a question/problem inspired by the class content and propose an empirical study to address that question or problem. The paper should be presented as an empirical report in APA format, and be 15 pages or less (double-spaced; 1” margins; 11-12 point font). In addition to the introduction and methods, a brief results section should report the expected result (hypothetical data), and a discussion should present the implications of the expected finding. Proposals will be presented in class Weeks 12-15. Each student will give a 20-30-minute powerpoint presentation of the idea, methods, expected results, and implications, followed by feedback from the class. Feedback should be incorporated into the paper, which will be due at midnight December 12. The paper will count for 40% of the total grade, and the presentation will count for 20% of the total grade.
**Course Schedule:**
*Note: Readings not linked below (or linked with restricted access) will be available on Blackboard.*

**Week 1 (8/27): Introduction to Course and Researchers.**
No readings.

**Week 2 (9/3): Circumscribing the Question, Measuring the Construct.**


**Week 3 (9/10): Meaning vs. Happiness.**


**Week 4 (9/17): The Feeling of Meaning.**

Week 5 (9/24): Meaning as Coherence.


Week 6 (10/1): Meaning as Compensation.


Week 7 (10/8): The Meaning of Death.


**Week 8 (10/15): Holy Meaning.**


**Week 9 (10/22): Meaning and Time.**


**Week 10 (10/29): Navel-Gazing: Meaning and the Self.**


**Week 11 (11/5): Collective Meaning.**


**Week 12 (11/12): Research Project Presentations.**

Guest Stars:
A randomly-selected third of the class.
**Week 13 (11/19): Research Project Presentations.**  
Guest Stars:  
A randomly-selected third of the class.

**Week 14 (11/26): NO CLASS – HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**  
No reading.

**Week 15 (12/3): Research Project Presentations.**  
Guest Stars:  
A randomly-selected third of the class.