

Exploring Happiness and Health

Pediatrics 106/206, Winter 2018

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30-5:05 PM

Vaden Health Center, Education Center Conference Room, 2nd Floor

Faculty

Frederic Luskin, Ph.D.
fredl@stanford.edu

Director, Stanford Forgiveness Project
Senior Consultant, Vaden Health Center
Researcher and Author: Stress, Forgiveness, Health

Carole Pertofsky, M.Ed.
perto@stanford.edu

Director, Wellness and Health Promotion Services
iThrive at Stanford, Vaden Health Center
Co-founder, "Spiritual Tools for Healing"

Donnovan S. Yisrael, MA ('89)
donnovan@stanford.edu

Manager, Sexual and Emotional Health Education
iThrive at Stanford, Vaden Health Center

Course Assistants

Farshid Oshidari
farshid.oshidari@stanford.edu

Shanelle Afcan '19
shanelle@stanford.edu

Major: Public Policy

Graduate Student Wellness Coach

Sanne Lim
sannelim@stanford.edu

Educator, Certified Life Coach
New Ventures West

OFFICE HOURS: We are available for one-to-one sessions for customized support. Please email us to schedule.

COURSE SUMMARY

What is happiness? Do we really know what will make us happy? In this course we will question and then inform our "happiness hypotheses." We will discuss how meaning, compassion, fulfillment, well-being and resilience relate to happiness.

Course lecture and discussion will be based on research findings from positive psychology, neuroscience, sociology, philosophical concepts and applied practice/live experience. We will cover issues relevant to all as well as issues primarily relevant to high-achieving young adults.

Class sessions will include experiential learning, including mindfulness practice and other evidence-based strategies that cultivate positive emotion, and increase stress coping, optimism, meaning, resilience, compassion and fulfillment. Our intention is that students leave the course with knowledge, skills (that ideally become habits) and perspectives on how to thrive personally, sustain passion for learning, and compassionately tackle real-world problems that advance the greater good.

REQUIREMENTS:

25% CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: Attendance will be recorded for each class session. Also, we ask for your thoughtful contributions during class discussions, as this helps to make each session dynamic and rewarding. It is equally important that you ask questions that help you apply course theories and concepts to your real-life issues. Our purpose in teaching this course is to help you thrive. This means taking risks, asking tough questions and sharing your thoughts. We know for some students this is easy but it is harder for others. We strongly encourage you to step up to the challenge. Students may have **one unexcused absence**. If unexpected circumstances arise, please contact course TA.

25% FINAL: The final will be open course materials (book, video, presentations) and composed of a case study that integrates lectures, readings, and applications. **Due Sunday, March 11th at 11:59pm.**

50% JOURNAL: Your journal writing integrates the course concepts into your life. We offer prompts to facilitate constructive exploration into your beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. With the exception of the final, ALL writing for this course will be captured in your journal. Please label each entry appropriately and compile into an electronic word document. Journals are submitted will be submitted via Canvas.. **Due Dates: 5:00pm on the Fridays of weeks 5 and 9 (Feb. 9th and March 9th).**

WEEKLY JOURNAL ENTRIES (note: ALL work for this course, other than your Final, will be submitted in the form of a journal. Please label each entry with a date and type of journal entry):

1. **Course Material Reflections:** Each week, please select two (2) or more research findings, theories or practices that piqued your interest from the videos, readings, lectures, and/or in-class experiences. Consider the following questions: How do you personally relate to this material? What research-based strategies do you already

practice and benefit from? What new intentions can you set or changes can you make to begin to stress less, be more resilient, and feel more fulfilled? Notice what comes easily, that which is more challenging, and how you are coping with meeting new challenges.

2. **Weekly Home Practice Reflections:** The syllabus includes weekly assignments, including some from *The How of Happiness*. Please use your journal to follow the guidelines as noted in the book. Describe and reflect upon your experiences, new perspectives and insights and how they do or do not reflect the research findings.

QUARTER-LONG PRACTICE JOURNAL ENTRIES (Choose one of the three options and practice 2-3 times per week):

1. **Gratitude Journal**

- An introduction to beginning a gratitude journal is described in *The How of Happiness*, Activity No. 1. Please also read:
http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/tips_for_keeping_a_gratitude_journal
- Record entries **2-3 times a week**, optimally before going to bed or first thing in the morning. Research indicates that gratitude journaling is most effective when done at approximately three times per week.
- Gratitude Practice: Begin by calming your mind and body through deep breathing for a few minutes. Then call to mind 3 good things for which you feel grateful. Savor the experience and see if you can't go from just thinking gratitude to also feeling gratitude.
- Reflection: Journal about any thoughts and feelings that may arise as you become aware of your gratitude. What benefits could you gain from developing this habit of mind, short and long term? Do you hear/feel any resistance to focusing on the good in your life? Observe even this (without judgement) and describe your process in your journal. Be aware of any shifts from stress/anxiety to enhanced well-being and calm.

2. **Befriending Self Journal**

- If you learn only one thing from this course, we hope it is that **HOW** you treat yourself, especially in times of failure, loss and suffering is a crucial component of happiness. Self-Compassion will be covered in-depth during this course. Your guiding question: "Am I treating myself the way I would treat someone I care about?"
- Self-Compassion Practice: During this course, we will be sharing (As a handout or posted on Canvas) a number of meditation/visualization practices that are meant to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion for oneself. You may choose one practice to employ repeatedly or alternate between the various practices. Set aside time at least **2-3 times per week** to reflect and write about how you treat yourself in times of challenge/struggle.
- Reflection: Please write about what you experience when you practice giving kindness and affection to yourself in the same way that you would give it to a friend, family member or

even pet? Welcome all feelings (e.g. warmth, resistance, awkwardness, numbness, etc.) and explore with curiosity. (If feelings arise that you feel are overwhelming please contact us to schedule some time to meet.)

3. Wellbeing in Activism Journal

- Well-being and activism are closely related. Serving others is important for its own sake, AND it gives our life meaning by enabling us to act with a deep sense of purpose and live our values. Research indicates that people who seek meaningful lives often become more open to compassion for suffering of others, global eco-problems, and social injustice. They use constructive energy as a force for positive change. Without compassion the fire of our anger about injustice can become destructive. As the Dalai Lama reminds us, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”
- Reflection: How can you mindfully integrate emotional intelligence, compassion, wise goals and other themes from this course into your work in activism, social change and/or community service. Feel free to write about global events, national issues or local/Stanford campus issues. At least **2-3 times per week**, please record, in your journal, your thoughts about how compassion, empathy and intentions support your motivation to be a change agent. How does your advocacy work intersect with your sense of well-being and mental health? When and how is it difficult to take time to care for yourself in a world with so many needs.

Journal Entry Length: We are looking for thoughtful, meaningful and/or heartfelt observation of your experiences and how they relate to core teaching concepts. Please sufficiently explore a topic but filling pages is not the point. When you find yourself treating your journal as “busy work”, pause, and attempt to cultivate curiosity about how the topics are relevant to your everyday life.

Due Dates: Please submit journal assignments via Canvas.. Journals are due **Friday at 5:00pm on weeks 5 and 9 (Feb. 9th and March 9th)**. Points will be deducted for late assignments. If extenuating circumstances arise, please email the TA as soon as you can to discuss an extension.

REQUIRED TEXTS (other material will be posted on Canvas)

- Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. The Penguin Press, 2008.
- Tan, Chade-Meng. *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness, (and World Peace)*. HarperCollins: New York, 2012.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Understanding Happiness and Self-compassion

CORE CONCEPTS

- Introduction to Positive Psychology
- The Science of Happiness and Your “Happiness Hypothesis”
- Introduction to Self-compassion: The Antidote to Shame and Procrastination

SELECTED READINGS

Lyubomirsky, Chapters 1 and 2

VIDEOS

Nat Ware: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KiUq8i9pbE>

Kristin Neff: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvtZBUSplr4>

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION

1. *Just Sit, Just Breathe* - At least once a day, simply sit quietly and breathe. Start with just 3 minutes and work your way up to 10 or more. Calm your nervous system by becoming aware of your breath and maybe generate a positive emotion by imagining a pet or loved one or by recalling a positive memory. Remember that the mind is likely to wander. We develop focus by noticing when our mind wanders, and gently bringing it back to the present through mindfulness. If having a guided meditation would be helpful, download a meditation or relaxation app (ex: Headspace) or YouTube video (ex: Jon Kabat-Zinn). Journal after each session of sitting and describe what you observed. If you find this practice challenging, write about that also. Rather than ask “Am I doing it right?” simply approach the whole experience with curiosity.

2. *Growth Mindset* - Meng discusses emotional intelligence as “enabling the skills that help us create conditions for our own sustainable happiness.” Dweck suggests that cultivating a growth mindset enables us to learn and grow without preconceived limitations. Where in your own life have you demonstrated a growth mindset and how has that perspective benefitted you? Conversely, are you aware of areas in which a fixed mindset or belief holds you back from being more capable, fulfilled, successful or at ease?

Week 2: Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence

CORE CONCEPTS

- Practice: Focused Attention on the Breath to Calm and Integrate the Central Nervous System
- Recognizing the Interaction between Cognition (Thoughts), Affect (Feelings) and Behavior (Actions)
- Shame is Normal BUT the Inner Critic is NOT your friend: Cognitive Distortions and Automatic Negative Thoughts

SELECTED READINGS

Tan, Chapters 1, 2 and 4

Scott Barry Kaufman:

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/beautiful-minds/my-mindfulness-journey/>

VIDEOS

Andy Puddicombe:

http://www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes

Brene Brown: http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame?language=en

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION

Monitoring Your Internal Monologue - As you go about your day, begin to pay attention to your self-talk (how you speak to yourself internally) especially when things are not going your way. Is this how you would express yourself to someone you care about? If not, first try to simply observe this habit of mind with curiosity and WITHOUT judgement. That is, see if you can refrain from judging the “judgy mind.”

Examine your beliefs and assumptions about these judgments. Where did they come from? Do you believe that they offer you some benefit and if so, what? (For example, do you believe that if you are not suffering then you are not working hard enough?)

What self-compassion practices or other strategies can you mobilize to replace harsh, highly critical, perfectionistic and self-defeating thoughts and fixed mindsets with more realistic, constructive and encouraging patterns of thought?

If you are among the fortunate minority and are naturally kind to yourself, how can you model this for others who are harshly self-critical?

Week 3: Noticing and Savoring the Good: Gratitude, Optimism and Awe

Note: **Guest Presenter**(on Thurs. 01/25/18) - Lonner Holden, Nature Connection
Mentor/Bodywork Practitioner/Health and Wellness Coach
Presentation Title: *"Nature as Healer: Sensory Awareness and the "Mini-Vision Quest"*

CORE CONCEPTS

- Gratitude: A Perspective on Life
- Benefit Finding: Noticing and Savoring the good
- Optimism, Well-being and Health Outcomes

SELECTED READINGS

Lyubomirsky, Chapter 4 (Happiness Activities No. 1-3)

How Nature Resets Our Minds and Bodies:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/03/how-nature-resets-our-minds-and-bodies/274455/>

Debunking Myths About Awe:

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/debunking_myths_about_awe

VIDEOS

Robert Emmons: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRrnfGf5aWE>Home Practice

Carol Dweck

http://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve

Laura Trice: http://www.ted.com/talks/laura_trice_suggests_we_all_say_thank_you?language=en

NOTE: For your reference, the video we viewed in class by Brother Stendl-Rast is at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj2ofrX7jA>

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION: (Do #1 and choose EITHER #2 or #3))

- 1) *Gratitude For Those of Service* - Take a moment to express heartfelt gratitude to one of the people who cleans your residence, prepares your food, etc. Notice what happens within you as well as between the two of you. Notice any hesitation/resistance to this practice. Afterward, take a moment to "let in" any good that came of this interaction. Write about this experience.
- 2) *Gratitude Letter* - Settle in and breathe for a few minutes. Then consider all those who have helped you be who you are/get to where you have come. Choose one person and really feel into your gratitude for them and what they've done for you. Translate the feelings in your

heart into words through a letter. If possible, deliver this letter through (snail) mail or even in person. Write about this experience.

- 3) *Best Possible Self* - The latest research on optimism is somewhat controversial. Dr. Christine Carter elaborates on Dr. Lyubormirsky's perspective here: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising_happiness/post/rethinking_optimism. When you complete the reading, do the "Best Possible Self" exercise as described. Please discuss whether this exercise in optimism offered you new perspectives, challenges or insights?

Week 4: Compassion

CORE CONCEPTS

- Why and How to Cultivate Compassion for Others
- Comparing Compassion to Empathy, Sympathy and Pity
- Compassion is NOT Weak: Misperceptions of Compassion

SELECTED READINGS

Tan, Chapter 8 and 9

VIDEOS

Zak Ebrahim:

http://www.ted.com/talks/zak_ebrahim_i_am_the_son_of_a_terrorist_here_s_how_i_chose_peace

Krista Tippett: https://www.ted.com/talks/krista_tippett_reconnecting_with_compassion

Donnovan Somera Yisrael: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p54LL1p5CpC>

(optional) James Forbes: http://www.ted.com/talks/james_forbes

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION

"Just Like Me..." - Walk around campus or find a good place to "people watch". For people you see take a deep breath and bring to mind the following thought: "Just like me this person has faced struggles, suffering and disappointments" and "Just like me this person wants to be content and happy." Observe what gets stirred up in you or how this guided attention changes your emotional state. Note these observations in your journal.

Compassionate Noticing - Three times this week, smile, greet and engage (as authentically as you can) with a student or staff who appears isolated, lonely, tired or overlooked. Record any observations, thoughts, and feelings that arise during this practice in your journal. Was anything surprising? What did you learn?

Week 5A: Playing to Your Strengths

Note: **Guest Presenters** (on Tues. 02/06/18) - Rick Foster and Greg Hicks, Authors of “*How We Choose to Be Happy: The 9 Choices of Extremely Happy People--Their Secrets, Their Stories*”

Week 5B: Romantic Love and Happiness

CORE CONCEPTS OF LECTURE

- Myths and unrealistic expectations can lead to unhappiness in romantic relationships
- Developing and maintaining healthy relationships
- Recognizing “red flags” of unhealthy relationship patterns

SELECTED READINGS

The Expectations Trap:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201003/the-expectations-trap>

Donnovan Somera Yisrael: "Studs, Sluts, Virgins and Wimps: What's Missing From Sexual Health Education" (PDF will be posted to Canvas)

The Myth of Romantic Expectations:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/rediscovering-love/201603/the-myth-romantic-expectations>

VIDEOS

Esther Perel:

http://www.ted.com/talks/esther_perel_the_secret_to_desire_in_a_long_term_relationship

TED Talks offers many other great talks about relationships. Choose another one that appeals to you from the playlist: <https://www.ted.com/topics/relationships>

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION

Valentine's Day Special: This day is NOT just about romantic love, it is about reminding people in our lives that they matter to us. Susan Jeffers (author of *Embracing Uncertainty*) said, “to know we **really count** is the most powerful and vital piece of information we can ever have” WITHOUT spending a lot of money find a unique way (may not even be an object) to remind someone in your life that they really count to YOU. As you go through the gift-giving process (planning to implementation to feedback), notice what thoughts, feelings, resistance, etc. get stirred up inside you.

“Love Literacy?” - Watch your favorite romantic comedy or Disney princess movie with friends and take note of the explicit and implicit messages about love, romance, dating and attraction. Write in your journal about how these powerful messages affect our expectations and thus our happiness.

Week 6: Forgiveness

Note: **Special Presentation** (on Thurs. 02/15/18) - Carole's Post Valentine's Day Happiness Activity

CORE CONCEPTS

- Drinking Poison and Hoping the Other will Die: Forgiveness and Well-being
- The Power of Forgiveness: What it is. What it isn't. Why one should practice.
- Grudges and Grief: At the Bottom of Anger and Resentment is Sadness

SELECTED READINGS

Lyubomirsky, Happiness Activity No.7, pgs 169-179

(For a quick primer on Forgiveness see #5 in the following article which is also assigned Week 8):
http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_science_backed_strategies_to_build_resilience

VIDEOS

Fred Luskin: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSGfMVRVWZw>

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION

Practicing Forgiveness for Others - Click on this link:

http://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/letting_go_of_anger_through_compassion

and do the Forgiveness practice as described. Describe your process and what you learned in your journal.

Practicing Forgiveness for Self - Call up a situation from your past that is long since resolved but for which you continue to hold a grudge against yourself. (Note: This activity does not call for a situation in which you hurt another person but for one in which you feel that you made an “unforgivable mistake.” Write a letter to yourself letting go of this grudge, as you would a good friend. Describe your process and what you learned in your journal.

Week 7: Relationships and Connection

CORE CONCEPTS

- The Value of Social Support and Relationships in a Fulfilling and Meaningful Life
- Connection is the Opposite of Loneliness and the Key to Spirituality
- Shared Vulnerability and Connection

SELECTED READINGS

Lyubomirsky, Chap. 5 (Happiness Activity No. 4 and 5), “The Third How: Social Support” (pgs. 270-273),

Guy Winch: <http://ideas.ted.com/how-to-beat-loneliness/>

VIDEOS

Sherry Turkle

http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together?language=en

Julian Treasure

http://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_how_to_speak_so_that_people_want_to_listen?language=en

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION

Re-investing in Your “Social Capital”: Is there a friend or family member who has played an important role in your support system over the year but with whom your connection has waned recently? Set the intention to strengthen that connection by “investing” in that relationship and then make a plan: How? When? Where? Why? What will be the benefit?

Week 8: Adversity, Vulnerability, Resilience

CORE CONCEPTS

- Stress : Eustress (your friend) and Distress (your “frenemy”)
- Resilience: Bouncing back from Emotional wounds, Disappointments, and Adversity
- The Value of Vulnerability

SELECTED READINGS

Lyubomirsky, Happiness Activity No. 6

Five Science-Backed Strategies to Build Resilience:

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_science_backed_strategies_to_build_resilience

Richard Davidson: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_four_keys_to_well_being

VIDEOS

Kelly McGonigal:

http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend?language=en

Karim Sulayman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICy8Cfvoe6g>

Brene Brown: http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en

Stanford Resilience Project: Choose 2 of these ~3 minute videos:

<https://undergrad.stanford.edu/resilience>

Optional: Jane McGonigal (Kelly McGonigal’s twin!):

http://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION (Choose 1)

1) *Scheduling Resilience* - Up your “de-stress” game by being intentional about your well-being. Block out time in your calendar for some of Jane McGonigal’s suggestions for resilience-building: physical exercise, sitting quietly and checking in with yourself, meaningful and supportive connections with friends, sleeping, calming your CNS between meetings, etc. Write about what it feels like to deliberately schedule time for these activities of personal rejuvenation in the same way you schedule for classes, meetings, appointments and parties.

2) *Upping Your Failure Tolerance* - The theme of the Stanford Resilience Project videos is transforming failure into strength and possibility. Journal about a time when you really had to stretch yourself to be resilient and were successful. What internal resources helped you bounce back? What perspectives about failure contributed to your constructive actions?

Assignment for NEXT week:

Discovering Your Strengths - Please go to <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/The-Survey>.

→ First screen: Register (upper right corner tab).

→ Second screen: Click “I want to take the VIA Survey (Adult)”. The survey contains 120 items but hang in there. It should take approximately 15 minutes. Don’t overthink; go with your first response.

Week 9: Making Meaningful in Life

CORE CONCEPTS

- Contemplating Meaning, Purpose and Fulfillment
- What are my Gifts (Strengths + Interest)? How do I Discover them?
- Flow States and “Wise Goals”

SELECTED READINGS

Lyubomirsky, Happiness Activity No. 10

Tan, Chapter 6 and Epilogue

VIDEOS

Dave Evans and Bill Burnett: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKEq5iEmMSo>

Shawn Achor:

http://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work?language=en

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION

Reflect on your life and take note of the following “searches” in the form of lists and elaborate with descriptive language if that revives pleasurable memories:

- *A Sense of Flow*: “Search” for times when you were involved in an activity so engrossing and engaging that you lost track of time.
- *A Sense of Purpose*: “Search” for times when you acted with or were “fueled” by a powerful sense of what you were doing really mattered and had an important reason behind it. Often this involves being of service to others.
- *A Sense of Fulfillment* – “Search” for events in which you participated and after which you felt a powerful sense of being satisfied or fulfilled.

Meng seeks to “create the conditions for world peace” in his lifetime. How might you begin to create the conditions for flow, purpose and fulfillment (personal and work life) now and throughout your lifetime?

Week 10: Practicing Happiness Now and Over a Lifetime

CORE CONCEPTS

- What Have You Learned?
- How Have You Changed?
- How Will These Practices Inform and Infuse your Life in the Future?

SELECTED READINGS

Lyubomirsky, Happiness Activities No. 11 and No. 12 , Chapter 10 (unread portion), Afterword and Postscript

VIDEO(s)

none

HOME PRACTICE/REFLECTION (Before class on 3/14)

When we share our stories of our struggles and triumphs, we inspire others. Ponder your 10-week journey in this course and come to class prepared to share an anecdote, “aha!” moment or affirmation for your classmates.

When we make a commitment in front of others, it strengthens our courage and resolve to follow through. Be prepared to share a practice with which you have struggled AND yet know that this behavior would benefit you. Be prepared to receive encouragement and support.

FINAL EXAM: Due Sunday March 11th at 11:59pm

Continued Learning:

To keep your happiness practices going in the future or to learn new concepts and techniques, take a look at the articles and videos on the following websites:

- Dr. Rick Hanson: www.wisebrain.org.
- Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life: <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>
- The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education:
<http://ccare.stanford.edu/>