

Special Seminar in Psychology:

Positive Psychology

PSYC 401 (Section 001) – 3 credit hours

University of Michigan

Fall 2006

Monday 2:00-5:00

Christopher Peterson

chrispet@umich.edu

Positive psychology calls for as much focus on strength as on weakness, as much interest in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst, and as much attention to fulfilling the lives of healthy people as to healing the wounds of the distressed. The concern of psychology with human problems is understandable. It will not and should not be abandoned. Positive psychologists are “merely” saying that the psychology of the past sixty years is incomplete. But as simple as this proposal sounds, it demands a sea change in perspective. Psychologists interested in promoting human potential need to start with different assumptions and to pose different questions from their peers who assume a disease model. This seminar will concern itself with the basics of positive psychology.

Requirements: attendance and participation in a weekly seminar, which will include viewing and discussing film clips (🎬); completion of readings prior to class; in-class and out-of-class exercises; a one-page, single-spaced, 12 point font reaction paper per topic; and a seminar presentation (plus annotated bibliography). Further details will be provided in class and posted on CTools, where links to the assigned articles and chapters (📖) are also available.

Relevant Webpages

Positive Psychology Webpage:

www.positivepsychology.org

Positive Organizational Studies Webpage:

www.bus.umich.edu/positiveorganizational scholarship/

Textbook (available in campus bookstores)

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.












Reserve books (available in Shapiro Library)

Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (Eds.) (2004). *Positive psychology in practice*. New York: Wiley.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press/Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. (Eds.) (2001). *Handbook of positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schedule

Date	Topic	Textbook Chapter
9/11/06	what is positive psychology?	
	 Introducing Positive Psychology (PBS Montana)	
	 The Pursuit of Happiness (CBS Sunday Morning)	
9/18/06	serious introductions (pp. 25-28 in textbook)	Chapters 1, 2
	 Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 55, 5-14.	
	 Peterson, C., & Park, N. (2003). Positive psychology as the evenhanded positive psychologist views it. <i>Psychological Inquiry</i> , 14, 141-146.	
	 Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? <i>Review of General Psychology</i> , 9, 103-110.	
9/25/06	pleasure	Chapter 3
	 Chocolate (ABC News)	
	 Fredrickson, B. L. (2003). The value of positive emotions. <i>American Scientist</i> , 91, 330-335.	
	 Jamison, K. R. (2004). Chapter One. Incapable of being indifferent. In <i>Exuberance: The passion for life</i> (pp. 3-21). New York: Knopf.	
	 Bryant, F. B., & Veroff, J. (2006). Chapter 8. Enhancing savoring. In <i>Savoring: A new model of positive experience</i> (pp. 198-215). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.	
	Out-of-class exercise: secret good deed	
10/2/06	happiness and life satisfaction	Chapter 4
	 Happiness (ABC Good Morning America)	
	 Williams Syndrome (CBS 60 Minutes)	

📺 The Mystery of Happiness (ABC News)

📖 McMahon, D. M. (2006). Introduction: The tragedy of happiness. In *Happiness: A history* (pp. 1-15). New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

📖 Diener, E., & Diener, C. (1996). Most people are happy. *Psychological Science*, 7, 181-185.

📖 Myers, D. G., & Diener, E. (1995). Who is happy? *Psychological Science*, 6, 10-19.

Out-of-class exercise: well-being profile—complete Satisfaction with Life Scale, Approaches to Happiness Scale, and Authentic Happiness Inventory at www.authentichappiness.org

10/9/06 optimism and character strengths Chapters 5, 6

📺 Wizard of Oz

📺 Lost Boys (CBS 60 Minutes)

📖 Tiger, L. (1979). Chapter 1. As necessary as air. In *Optimism: The biology of hope* (pp. 13-37). New York: Simon & Schuster.

📖 Haidt, J. (2006). Chapter 8. The felicity of virtue. In *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom* (pp. 155-179). New York: Basic Books.

📖 Comte-Sponville, A. (1996). Chapter 17. Humor. In *A small treatise on the great virtues* (C. Temerson, trans.) (pp. 211-221). New York: Metropolitan Books.

Out of class exercise: take the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) at www.authentichappiness.com

10/23/06 values Chapter 7

📺 Affluenza (ABC News)

📖 Schwartz, B. (2004). Chapter One. Let's go shopping. In *The paradox of choice: Why more is less* (pp. 9-22). New York: HarperCollins.

📖 Fiorina, M. P., Abrams, S. J., & Pope, J. C. (2005). Chapter 1. Culture war? Chapter 2. A 50:50 nation? Beyond the red and the blue states. In *Culture war? The myth of a polarized America* (pp. 1-21). New York: Pearson Longman.

Out-of-class exercise: take the Schwartz Value Inventory (document on CTools)

10/30/05 interests and talents Chapter 8

📺 Best in Show

📺 Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control

📺 Emotional IQ (ABC News)

📺 A&E Biography: Thomas Edison

📺 The Streak

📖 Silvia, P. J. (2006). Chapter 1. Interest as an emotion. In *Exploring the psychology of interest* (pp. 13-30). New York: Oxford University Press.

📖 Gardner, H. (1983/2006). Chapter 1. The idea of multiple intelligences. In *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* (pp. 3-11). New York: Basic Books.

📖 Murray, C. (2003). Chapter 1. A sense of time. In *Human accomplishment* (pp. 3-12). New York: HarperCollins.

Out-of-class exercise: take multiple intelligences test at www.literacyworks.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html

11/06/06 relationships

Chapter 10

📺 Partners of the Heart (PBS American Experience)

📖 Harlow, H. F. (1958). The nature of love. *American Psychologist*, 13, 673-685.

Out of class exercise: gratitude letter (pp. 31-34 in textbook)

11/06/06 institutions

Chapter 11

📺 Bhutan—Gross National Happiness (Chip Taylor)

📖 Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C. R., Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31, 21-33.

📖 Easterbrook, G. (2003). Chapter 1. The great story of our era: Average people better off. In *The progress paradox: How life gets better while people feel worse* (pp. 3- 34). New York: Random House.

📖 Hersey, R. (1955). Chapter 1. Zest for work—Gone or hiding? In *Zest for work: Industry rediscovers the individual* (pp. 3-17). New York: Harper.

📖 Hersey, R. (1955). Chapter 6. The emotional cycle and its impact. In *Zest for work: Industry rediscovers the individual* (pp. 60-85). New York: Harper.

📖 Suttie, J. (2006, Spring/Summer) Compassion across cubicles. *Greater Good*, pp. 30-33.

Out of class exercise: being a good teammate (pp. 39-41 in textbook)

11/20/06 positive interventions Chapters 2 (again), 9, 12

📺 Fair Fighting (ABC News)

📖 Cohen, S., & Pressman, S. D. (2006). Positive affect and health. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15, 122-125.

📖 Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). If we are so rich, why aren't we happy? *American Psychologist*, 54, 821-827.

📖 Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60, 410-421.

Out of class exercise: active-constructive responding (pp. 271-272 in textbook)

11/27/06 student presentations

12/4/06 student presentations (continued)

12/11/06 student presentations (continued) and serious goodbyes

📖 Linley, A. C., Joseph, S., Harrington, S., & Wood, A. M. (2006). Positive psychology: Past, present, and (possible) future. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1, 3-16.

Exercises

Most of the exercises are described in the textbook or are self-explanatory. But here is some elaboration for two of the exercises.

Secret Good Deed

How you act when no one notices is important, and in this exercise, students are asked to do something kind for someone else without attracting any attention to themselves or taking any credit whatsoever. The good deed can be small—like picking up trash in a neighbor's yard or putting a coin in an expired parking meter—but it should be done anonymously or secretly. If done for a stranger, the stranger may see the deed being done, but the do-gooder should fade away as quickly and quietly as possible. If done for a friend or family member, the recipient should not know who performed the deed. If asked about the good deed, the do-gooder should feign ignorance and change the subject. We are all pretty experienced at this vis-à-vis our bad deeds, so those skills can probably be used to good effect here.

Serious Goodbyes

During the first or second class meeting, have each of the students choose at random from a set of cards, each with the name of a classmate. Everyone is to take one card and not reveal to anyone else the name on the card. (If the card has the student's own name, another one should be chosen.) The task of the student throughout the term is to pay special attention to the person named, so that during the last class period, the student can say goodbye by saying what it is that was most appreciated about that person and what will be most missed. Other students are invited to participate.

A compelling way to say goodbyes in this way is to bring to class a ball of yarn which is handed to the first student, who takes hold of one end and then passes the yarn to the person to whom they are saying goodbye, who says the next goodbye and passes the yarn accordingly, until the whole class is linked together.

Some topics worth considering for student presentations

Character education
Creativity
Cross-cultural approaches to happiness
Heroism and bravery
Hobbies
Humor and laughter
Materialism
Optimism training
Positive humanities
Positive psychology and psychopathology
Positive psychology goes to work
Positive psychology in schools
Positive psychology in the media
Religion
Resilience
Utopian communities
What would a “good news” show look like?
Wisdom