



**INTRODUCTION TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**  
**Psychology 266**  
**Spring 2015**

**When:** Wednesdays 2-5 p.m.  
**Where:** Annenberg 110 (220 South 36<sup>th</sup> Street)  
**Instructor:** Scott Barry Kaufman  
[sbk@psych.upenn.edu](mailto:sbk@psych.upenn.edu) (the TA should be the first point of contact)  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 3:30-4:30 at the Positive Psychology Center  
3701 Market Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Suite 217  
**TAs:** Jeanette Elstein ([elsteinj@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:elsteinj@sas.upenn.edu))  
Taylor Kreiss ([taylorkreiss@gmail.com](mailto:taylorkreiss@gmail.com))  
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**TA Office Hours:** Mondays 3-4 at the Positive Psychology Center  
3701 Market St., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Suite 211

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Positive psychology encompasses the study of positive experiences, positive character traits, positive relationships, and the institutions and practices that facilitate their development. Positive experiences include the mental states of flow and mindfulness and emotions about the present (pleasure, contentment, laughter), past (e.g., nostalgia, satisfaction, pride), and future (e.g., hope, optimism). The distinction among the pleasant life, the good life, and the meaningful life will be drawn. The positive character traits include wisdom, courage, compassion, love, humanity, justice, temperance, self-efficacy, resilience, grit, *sisu*, imagination, creativity, and spirituality/transcendence. The classification of these virtues is explored. Positive relationships include the factors that enhance meaning and well-being among couples, family, friends, co-workers, and the community. Positive institutions are exemplified by positive education, positive work environments, healthy families, humane leadership, and the development of civic virtues.

This course also reviews the history of positive psychology and the contributions this new field has made to several traditional research areas in psychology. Consideration will be given to conflicting viewpoints and their respective empirical support, including the benefits of balancing positive with negative emotions, the measurement and development of happiness, and the implications of deliberately attempting to increase it. Throughout the course we will also engage in experiential learning and practical exercises to increase well-being, which will inform our theoretical and empirical understanding of important questions in positive psychology.

## GOALS OF THIS COURSE

The mission of this course is to provide an up-to-date understanding of theoretical and empirical advances in positive psychology. More generally, my hope is that this course enhances your appreciation of how the scientific method can advance understanding of the human condition.

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Understand and articulate key concepts, findings, and controversies in the emerging field of positive psychology
- Understand the research methods (including measures, interventions, and research paradigms) used in positive psychology research
- Evaluate evidence for the validity, both internal and external, of empirical claims in contemporary positive psychology research
- Articulate from first-hand experience with positive psychology activities a perspective on how positive psychology is (or is not) relevant to your life

## FORMAT

Lectures will be held on Wednesdays from 2:00 - 5:00 PM at Annenberg 110 (220 South 36<sup>th</sup> Street). Because Positive Psychology is a vibrant area of contemporary research, we will have several guest lectures this semester, and their material will be included in the exams.

## TEXTBOOK

### Required:

Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The textbook is available through the Penn Bookstore, and is also widely available from various online retailers. A copy of the textbook is also available for use through Rosengarten Reserve (located on the ground floor of Van Pelt Library).

Kaufman, S.B. (2013). *Ungifted: Intelligence Redefined*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Haidt, J. (2005). *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

## ADDITIONAL REQUIRED READING

In addition to your textbook, readings will include relevant original scientific papers. These readings will be posted at least one week in advance of the relevant lecture at this website:

<http://scottbarrykaufman.com/teaching/>.

## GRADING

Grading is probably the least palatable of a teacher's responsibilities. Nevertheless, it serves a role in providing feedback to you and the institution about your performance. Your final grade for this course will be based on the following:

Brief Reflection Papers (30%): During the course of the semester, you will complete 10 positive psychology activities and then write a 1-page reflection paper (maximum of 500 words) on the

experience. **Please upload your reflection to Canvas by the date listed on the syllabus.** Reflection papers will not be accepted via email or handed in class. Late papers will not be accepted. Write something you are proud (and comfortable) to share with others, and bring a copy of your reflection to class, because occasionally papers will be read aloud in lecture. **Each brief reflection is worth 3% of your final grade**, and will be graded on the following scale: (3) excellent reflection, thoughtful and insightful, (2) satisfactory, (1), incomplete or not relevant to the topic, and (0) not submitted. These papers will also be reviewed with scrutiny in the case of borderline grades at the end of the semester so that final grades can be rounded up or down (up to a full percentage point) according to quality and promptness. **There are no make-up reflection papers.**

**Meta-Reflection Paper (10%):** Due on the last day of class, you will be required to submit a more extensive reflection (maximum 2000 words), reflecting on your overall engagement with the positive psychology activities, how your well-being and flourishing has changed (or not changed) throughout the semester, and what you've learned about yourself and others by taking this course.

**Exams (60%):** There will be 2 (non-cumulative) exams on material covered in lectures (including guest lectures) as well as required readings. The format will be multiple choice and short answer questions. Each exam will count toward 30% of your grade. *Completion of all 2 exams is mandatory.* Those with very legitimate excuse for missing an exam will be considered on a case by case basis.

The third exam will be administered during finals week on **Monday, May 11<sup>th</sup> from 9:00-11:am.**

**Extra Credit:** To earn up to 3 extra credit points (e.g., raising an 82% score to 85%) in the course, you may complete up to 3 hours of Experimetrix credit by participating in research studies. See *Research Participation Instructions* on Canvas. Note that I cannot promise that Experimetrix studies will be available at the end of the semester, so please plan ahead and do not complain if you cannot find studies at the last minute! Also, take note that there is sometimes a delay of a couple of days before your Experimetrix credit is assigned by the corresponding researcher. So, in cases of missing credit, your first step is to contact the Experimetrix researcher rather than your TA. Additionally, you are also able to submit a one-page single-spaced review of any of the optional articles denoted in the syllabus with an asterisk (1 extra credit point per review, up to 3 extra credit points) by **April 23<sup>rd</sup>.**

I will use the following standard scale for assigning final letter grades for the course:

A+ = 97 and higher; A = 93-96; A- = 90-92  
B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82 and higher

### RE-GRADING

If you have a question or concern that there was an error in grading any of your work, you must submit a re-grade request **in writing to Jeanette** no more than one week after work was returned (late requests will **NOT** be considered).

### PLAGIARISM

Be sure you understand the University's guidelines on Academic Integrity before submitting any assignment. See me, or someone from the Office of Student Conduct (<http://www.upenn.edu/osc>), if you have any questions – especially regarding plagiarism (what it is and how it can be avoided).

### STUDENT ROLE

For each of the lecture topics, do the reading indicated below that topic **in advance of the lecture.** Do not expect a good learning experience if you do not keep your part. Cramming before exams assures an unsatisfactory class experience. (Incidentally, cramming has been shown empirically to be an inefficient

strategy for learning.) Let's make class a creative experience – I am looking forward to learning from your astute questions (informed by the readings) and comments.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Lecture 1—1/21/15: Introduction to Positive Psychology**

Peterson, Chapters 1 & 2

Haidt, Chapter 1

#### ***REFLECTION #1: Positive Introduction*** ***Due by first class (1/21/15)***

*Write a one-page, single-spaced positive introduction. See pp. 25-28 in textbook. Read Maya Angelou's essay "Philanthropy" for a model of a positive introduction.*

### **Lecture 2— 1/28/15: Emotions**

Peterson, Chapter 3

#### ***REFLECTION #2: Pleasure vs. Philanthropy experiment*** ***Due on 2/3/15***

*You will plan and carry out two activities: A pleasurable activity and a philanthropic activity. For the pleasurable activity, plan something fun that you expect to make you feel happy. The only restriction<sup>1</sup> is that this must be an activity that you intentionally plan (not something that you were going to do anyway, or that simply transpires as the week goes on). For the philanthropic activity, plan something that will improve someone else's well being. It could be a secret/anonymous good deed. It could involve giving the gift of time (tutoring, helping a family member or neighbor, etc.). It could involve using your unique talents and strengths to do something special for someone. Again, make sure this is something you plan intentionally (not something you were going to do anyway). In your reflection paper, briefly describe what you did, and then reflect on the similarities and differences between these two experiences.*

<sup>1</sup>*It should also probably be legal. :)*

### **Lecture 3— 2/4/15: Happiness, Meaning, and Well-Being**

***\*\*\*Guest lecture by Martin Seligman\*\*\****

***\*\*\*Guest Lecture by Johannes Eichstaedt \*\*\****

Peterson, Chapters 4 & 9

Haidt, Chapters 5 & 10

#### ***REFLECTION #3: Three Good Things*** ***Due on 2/10/15***

Carry out the 3 Good Things activity **five days in a row** (i.e., starting tonight, and continuing every day until the reflection is due). Each night, briefly write down (a) 3 things that went well that day, and (b) why each good thing took place (e.g., "I had a great time at dinner with new friends from my dorm... this happened because I've been proactive about reaching out to new people, even if I'm feeling shy or weird about it.") See pages 38-39 in your textbook for more guidance.

### Lecture 4— 2/11/15

**\*\*\*Guest lecture by Adam Grant\*\*\***

**\*\*\*Discussion of readings led by Jeanette Elstein\*\*\***

### Lecture 5— 2/18/15: A Positive Psychology of Relationships: Love and Social Connectedness

**\*\*\*Guest lecture by Margaret Clark \*\*\***

**\*\*\*EXAM #1\*\*\***

Peterson, Chapter 10

Haidt, Chapter 6

### Lecture 6— 2/25/15: Flow and Mindfulness

**\*\*\*Guest lectures by Brian Gala and Rebecca Nyquist\*\*\***

**REFLECTION #4: Create a Flow Experience**

**Due on 3/3/15**

First, briefly reflect and write about previous flow experiences you've had. Consider (a) what has facilitated these experiences, (b) what impedes them, and (c) how you could solve these obstacles to flow. Then, intentionally set yourself up for a flow experience, to the best of your ability.

### Lecture 7— 3/4/15: Gratitude and Compassion

**\*\*\*Guest Lecture: Sara Schairer\*\*\***

Haidt, Chapter 3

**REFLECTION #5: Good Deed and Gratitude**

**Due on 3/17/15**

First, choose either to do a good deed in secret (i.e., without the receiver knowing you were responsible) or, if you prefer, tip an enormous amount on your next purchase. Write about how this made you feel and what you think it made the recipient feel.

Then, write a letter of gratitude to someone you have not properly thanked (see pp. 31-34 in your textbook for an example and guidance on writing this letter). It is up to you whether you choose to read this letter in person or over the phone to the person you are thanking. If you are horrified at this proposition, you can simply send your letter or even keep it to yourself. Optionally, include the gratitude letter itself when you turn in your reflection letter (just attach it to the same document).

*(Jeanette away March 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>, No office hours for Jeanette this week)*

**\*\*\* SPRING BREAK 3/7/15-3/15/15 \*\*\***

**Lecture 8— 3/18/15: Character Strengths and Virtues- Part I:**  
**Active Open-Minded Thinking**

**\*\*\*Guest lecture by Jonathan Baron\*\*\***

Peterson, Chapters 6 & 7

Haidt, Chapter 8

***REFLECTION #6: Explore Your Strengths and Personal Beliefs***  
***Due on 3/24/15***

*First, complete the VIA strengths test (on [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org)). Then, find 3 new ways to use your top strengths this week. Can you use these top strengths to help you be a better student? A better friend/family member? To overcome some obstacle? To create a positive experience?*

*Then, in under 500 words, write a statement of personal belief. This I Believe project invites essays that capture the core personal values that define their lives. Tell your story. Be specific. See <http://thisibelieve.org/guidelines/> for guidelines and feel free to (optionally) submit your essay to NPR.*

**Lecture 9— 3/25/15: Character Strengths and Virtues- Part II:**  
**Resilience, Wisdom, Courage, Grit, Sisu**

**\*\*\*Guest lectures by Angela Duckworth and Emilia Lahti\*\*\***

Kaufman, Chapters 8 and 9

Haidt, Chapter 7

***REFLECTION #7 Doors closing/opening writing OR do cognitive therapy on yourself (catch 10 automatic thoughts)***  
***Due on 3/31/15***

*This week you have two options (choose one):*

*(1) Resilience: Use cognitive techniques that are employed in resilience training and therapy. At least 10 times, do a thought record. Remember that this involves 5 steps:*

- A: Activating event: What event or situation made you feel bad?*
- B: Belief: What belief or thought popped into your mind?*
- C: Consequence: What was the consequence of that thought? How did you feel? How did your body feel? How did you react to the situation?*
- D: Dispute: (This is the most important step!) Compare the evidence for/against the thought you had. Can you see a thinking trap there? Can you find another way to look at the situation?*

- *E: Energization: How do you feel now? How do you want to react now?*

*(2) Posttraumatic growth: Write about a time when you faced significant adversity or loss. Write first about the doors that closed due to that adversity/loss. What did you lose? Then, write about the doors that opened in the aftermath of that adversity/loss. Are there any new ways of acting, thinking, relating, etc. that have become more possible now?*

*BONUS REFLECTION: Please upload to canvas 3 things you would put in your "Last Lecture" if you were to give one today.*

**Lecture 10— 4/1/15: Character Strengths and Virtues- Part III:  
Hope, Optimism, Self-Efficacy**

**\*\*\*Guest Lecture by Jeanette Elstein\*\*\***

Kaufman, Chapters 6 and 7

Haidt, Chapter 4

***REFLECTION #8: Self-Compassion  
Due on 4/7/15***

**Lecture 11— 4/8/15: Intelligence, Creativity, and Achievement**

Peterson, Chapter 8

Kaufman, Chapters 1, 2 and 12

***REFLECTION #9: Best Possible Self  
Due on 4/14/15***

*Write for at least 20 minutes about your best possible self. Imagine that, 20 years from now, you have grown in all the ways you would like to, and things have gone as well as you can imagine. What is your best possible self like? What does he/she do on a daily basis? What do others say about him/her? Note that you do not need to share great detail about this best possible self in your reflection paper (although you are welcome to); rather, the reflection paper is meant to focus on the experience you had while reflecting on the best possible self.*

**Lecture 12— 4/15/15: Positive Cultural Influences**

**\*\*\*Guest lecture by Paul Rozin\*\*\***

***REFLECTION #10: TBA***

**Lecture 13— 4/22/15: Positive Institutions**

**\*\*\*Guest lectures by Sherri Fisher, Alejandro Adler\*\*\***

Peterson, Chapter 11

**Lecture 14— 4/29/15: The Future of Positive Psychology**

**\*\*\* Guest lecture by Dan Lerner\*\*\***

**\*\*\*EXAM #2\*\*\***

Peterson, Chapter 12

Haidt, Chapter 11

**\*\*\* Meta-Reflection Due on 5/11/15\*\*\***