

Spring 2024
Dr. Norcross

PSYC 365
3 credits

Positive Psychology

The chief purpose of education is to teach young people to find pleasure in the right things.

Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact.

William James

In calculating final course grades, we employ the conventional 90%+ for the A range, 80%+ for the B range, 70%+ for C range, and 60%+ for the D range.

Course Policies

This is our class. Please be interested, honest, curious, responsible, and active. Here are behaviors that do not: arriving late, sleeping during class, and papers arriving after the deadline. We manifest the tenets of positive psychology during our class time.

Regular class attendance is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Attendance will not be taken formally but you are expected to come to class and participate.

AI Policy

I applaud the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI), such as GPT, ChatGPT, and DALL-E, for the expansion and distribution of global knowledge.

You will be assigned one chapter from the course textbook and will write 6 multiple choice questions for the Tuesday quiz. Expect to devote two or three hours to the task. Three of those questions can be definitional or knowledge questions; the other three questions should ask students to apply the material in the chapter.

When posing a question, provide a context and introduction for it instead of simply asking the question, give a sentence or two explaining it or placing it in the context of the readings. If you request that we engage in a short activity, please provide some context or rationale for it.

Many of the interesting points in the reading will generate multiple questions. However, when posing questions in class, please ask one at a time.

We seek informed discussion and respectful debate among psychology majors. If your peers

You will plan and carry out two activities. The first activity will be a pleasurable one. Think of something fun, enjoyable, and legal that would make you happy. Kindly avoid activities you would naturally encounter in your routine; plan something out of the ordinary. The second activity will be one of philanthropy. Do something helpful for others, anything from using your signature strengths for others, to volunteering some time to help someone in need. After you complete both activities, take some time to reflect on them.

Then write a paper exploring the similarities and differences between the two. Describe your pleasurable and philanthropic activities. Summarize your feelings during and after each of the activities. How were they similar and how did they differ?

Paper 3: Two Signature Strengths

Signature strengths are cross-situational. Read pages 4 to 38 of the textbook to learn more about them. Multiple studies link use of signature strengths with improved well-being and happiness for as long as 6 months.

If you have not already completed the VIA, go to www.authentic-happiness.org to take it for free. Once you have your results, select your top 2 signature strengths for the next week or so to find new ways to use your signature strengths. For more information, visit www.authentic-happiness.org.

Reflect on how, if at all, your happiness and well-being have changed. What were your signature strengths? Have you noticed any differences in your happiness? Do you attribute these differences to using your signature strengths? If there was no difference, why do you think that is? Please compile your experiences and thoughts about the activity in this paper.

Paper 4: Create a Flow Experience

Flow experiences, also known colloquially as being in the zone, is the mental state of a person performing an activity fully immersed, involved, and joyful. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does, and a resulting loss in one's sense of time and self. For more information on flow experiences, please read pages 123 in your textbook.

For this two-part assignment, first analyze a previous flow experience. In your description, please consider what led to the experience, what potentially impeded the experience, and what you did to circumnavigate these impediments. Second, set yourself up for a flow experience. Describe what you did to set the stage for the experience, whether or not it happened, and reflect on the situation as a whole. If you had a flow experience, talk about the emotions and thoughts associated with it. If you did not, generate ideas about what may have prevented the experience.

Paper 5: Peak Experience

Think of the most wonderful experiences of your life: the happiest, ecstatic moments (Polson, 1985). Those are your peak experiences.

Begin this exercise by reviewing pages 144 to 147 of the textbook on peak experiences. For your paper, describe a peak experience as vividly and accurately as possible. Summarize where you were at the time of the peak experience, what you were doing,

Paper 6: Three Good Things for Which < R X ¶ U H * U D W H I X O

The research is overwhelming that people who count their blessings regularly are happier and more content with life. This consistent relation between happiness and gratitude is explored on page 97 of your textbook, and we highly recommend that you read it.

For 7 nights in a row, set aside a few minutes before you go to bed to identify 3 things that went well or made you happy that day. These events do not have to be life-shattering; they can be of little or great importance. Once you have them in mind, think about why this good thing happened. This is not a question of why they made you happy; be sure to focus on why the thing happened.

At the end of these seven days, write a paper about your experience. Give examples from your week about the good things, but do not provide all of them. Rather, reflect on the entire experience and whether your focus on gratitude affected your happiness over the course of the week. Estimate how much (percentage) this exercise increased your amount of gratitude.

Paper 7: Savoring

Savoring is the practice of focusing on the good things in life and trying to prolong them. It could go on forever, and trying to elongate and intensify your positive feelings. Pages 1

Glimmers are the opposite of triggers, which activate the fight or flight response in the body. A glimmer, by contrast, activates the rest and digest response, encouraging homeostasis in the body and a state of relaxation. Triggers can be avoided, and glimmers can be sought to increase our joy and safety.

This assignment entails two steps. First, identify your glimmers over a 7-day period. Keep an informal written list of them, perhaps on your cell phone. You are probably aware of several already. Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful place. Recall what made you feel comforted and loved as a child. Think of your love for family and friends. Keep open for them each day. Second, write a brief paper addressing the following questions: How many glimmers did you experience over the week-long period? What were they? Any recurring categories of glimmers? Did you identify your glimmers? Did you already have an idea of your glimmers? Did you follow the aforementioned ideas on how to identify your glimmers? Did your glimmers help you achieve a state of comfort or joy? What is the probable mechanism of action (which processes do they elicit feelings of comfort or joy)? What is one way you would improve this assignment?

Paper 9: Social Media Cleanse

Most social media use represents a massive and unproductive leisure time that rarely contributes to personal or cultural improvement. For this assignment, you will avoid all social media (e.g., television, internet, online platforms) not school or work-related for an entire week. Temporarily turn off notifications. Please explain the detox in advance to family and friends so that they do not worry about your safety or welfare. The assignment lets you press pause on social media platforms. It may also boost your mood and self-image, according to the research. For the paper, summarize your experiences, results, and slips. Did you experience any boost in mood or self-image? What are the lasting lessons of your social media cleanse?

Paper 10: Posttraumatic Growth

In the face of trauma, a person can adapt in ways that launch them into a better sense of well-being. This is done through renegotiating personal goals and life priorities in meaningful ways. This change in perspective is known as posttraumatic growth.

For this assignment, please write about a time of significant adversity or loss. The professor will be reading these papers, so choose a story you feel comfortable sharing with. Begin by talking about the initial hardships that came as a result of this adversity or loss. Think about what you lost and what changes were initially made for the worse. Then, reflect on the positive changes that you underwent as time went on. Start this reflection internally, focusing on changes in priority, thinking, goals, or life outlook. Follow that with how those changes poured into your life. Some good examples of external changes include, but are not limited to, relationships, routines, and health.

Paper 11: Gratitude Letter (only for students who have not previously written one)

A gratitude letter is a popular, research-supported method of positive psychology. This method entails writing letters of gratitude to people who have been especially kind to you but who have never been properly thanked. Research indicates that a gratitude letter can temporarily increase your happiness.

For this assignment, read pages 362 to 364 in the textbook. Then identify a living individual who has been especially kind to you but who has never been properly thanked. This person should not be a psychology professor, college roommate, fellow student, or romantic interest.

Word process (single space) a gratitude letter of at least 700 words. Format the assignment as a letter with the date, your return address, the name/signature.

The letter should describe your grateful feelings and the reasons for your gratitude. Begin the letters with the reasons you are expressing gratitude now (e.g., In our Positive Psychology course, we are studying gratitude; avoid general and diffuse praise in favor of the specific and concrete. Please do not include general news about your life, your job, or your hot friends. This gratitude letter is exclusively about thanking somebody for their kindness. Sign your name to the letter.

Provide me with a draft of the letter, deleting (if you like) the name of the recipients and any overly personal details. I will treat the content of the letters as confidential and will return it to you (for mailing) once reviewed and edited.

After revising the letter based on my feedback, put it in the mail. Mail the letter to the intended recipient; that is part of the assignment and part of the beneficial effect of the gratitude letter. By selecting this writing assignment, you are ethically committing to mailing the letters.

Paper 12: Positive Psychology Critique

For all the strengths of positive psychology, it does not come without its criticism. There is no shortage in the literature of articles highlighting the weaknesses and limitations of positive psychology. We hope that at this point in your psychology career, you can critique with nuance, appreciating the contributions of positive psychology while recognizing its imperfections.

Please secure 2 peer-reviewed journal articles that critique positive psychology. Briefly summarize the articles. Support each criticism with research. Then, take your own stance and support it with specific examples from the articles, class material, and the textbooks. We request originality in your viewpoint; kindly avoid regurgitating what the articles said or what you learned in class. Word count for this paper: 500 to 800.

Paper 13: Meta Reflection

Over the course of the semester, you have delved into what positive psychology has to offer. You undoubtedly were aware of some concepts presented in this class, but you should have many takeaways from this semester. To celebrate that, please reflect on how your well-being has changed, if at all, this semester. Reflect on what changes occurred or did not occur. Explore if your engagement with positive psychology activities in this course impacted you. If there were factors outside the class that impacted your well-being, then please share those as well. Describe any self-knowledge and social awareness you have received from this course. Then offer well-reasoned hypotheses for why those changes occurred.

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