

THE SKILL OF HAPPINESS

Winter Term – 2017

Professor Douglas A. Smith

Premise:

This course is based on the premise that people want to live with joy, to lead meaningful, fulfilling lives and to have the sense that their lives are good and worthwhile – that they want to be happy. There are good reasons for wanting to be happy. By most every measure those among us who have an underlying and predominant sense of well-being and contentment do better in life. They have healthier, more enduring relationships, do better in their life work, are more creative and expansive in their thinking, are less likely to hurt others, have greater resilience, have better health – they even live longer. Yet most of us fail to grasp that happiness is a skill; in fact, it is a set of skills. Like all skills, happiness has a genetic component, but like all skills, happiness can be developed and refined through study, focus and practice. In tough times it is easy to be miserable; it is being happy that is hard. Having an underlying sense of well-being and contentment, even during turbulent times, is of immense value and this course is designed to help you develop the skills that lead to this sense of well-being.

Approach:

How do we develop such a sense of well-being and contentment? We can answer that question far better today as a result of the emerging field of Positive Psychology. Since 1998, when Martin P. Seligman became President of the American Psychological Association, the study of what leads to happiness has been an increasingly valid and important part of the field of psychology. The same research techniques applied to mental illnesses have increasingly been applied to positive emotions resulting in a substantial scientific foundation for the study of happiness and well-being. The skills that lead to happiness, you may not have thought about as skills, such as clarity of purpose, building enduring and healthy relationships, forgiveness, gratitude, altruism, mindfulness, spirituality and optimism, but they are skills and learning how to consistently practice them is a worthy endeavor. This is the singular focus of this course, to help you develop the skills that lead to a more joyful, fulfilling and meaningful life – that lead to happiness. To do this we explore such central questions as:

- What is happiness?
- Who is happy and who isn't?
- How does self-esteem affects happiness?

- How does the brain create mood and feelings of pleasure? How does it create and destroy happiness?
- What role do genetics, circumstances and the choices play in our happiness?
- What are the common traps that people fall into in the pursuit of happiness?
- How can we develop greater resilience in the face of setbacks?

We then consider 13 skills that enable us to be at peace with the past, to have confidence in the future and to live in the present with joy and exuberance; that enable us to live with joy. This course may differ from many courses you will take at DePauw. Many courses seek to answer the question “How to be successful?” This course asks a different, perhaps deeper, question of you: “What does it mean to be a successful human being?”

Required Reading:

- *What Happy People Know* by Dan Baker,
- *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl,
- *Happiness; The Art of Living with Peace, Confidence and Joy* by Douglas A Smith (provided by professor)
- Numerous articles authored by leaders in the field of positive psychology including Martin Seligman, David Myers, Mihal Csikszentmihalyi, Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ed Deiner and Nathan Branden.

Grading/Expectations:

Grading is “S” (Successful), “U” (Unsuccessful) and “D” (work was unsatisfactory, but sufficient to earn credit). Grading criteria are class participation (the class uses extensive dialogue both in small groups and as a total class), preparation (you **must** come to class having read and reflected on assigned reading), and performance in individual work assignments and performance in group activity. In the final week of the course, students work in groups to summarize what they have learned and to do new research of the subject of happiness. ***This group project will require that you be on campus the weekend of January 21 and 22.***

Timing/Location:

The class will begin on Wednesday, January 4 and runs through Wednesday, January 25 meeting from 10:00AM-12:00PM & 1:00 - 3:30PM on Wed/Thurs/Fri and on Mondays from 1:00-4:30PM. If a student will not be attending class because of illness, they are required to call the professor in advance at 614-286-5955. ***Consistent class attendance and thorough preparation is required.*** Class is held in 157 Percy Julian Science Center.

	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Jan 4-6		INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW (Context and Connection before Content) EMOTIONS (Positive & Negative they each play a role) DEFINING HAPPINESS (What the heck is happiness anyway?) Reading Assignment... <i>What Happy People Know</i> – Ch. 1 “What are the Causes /Consequences of Happiness” by David Myers “In Defense of Teaching Happiness”, letter to Kate Knaul by professor Smith	BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS (It’s hard to live with people ... impossible to live without them) IS HAPPINESS WORTHY OF STUDY (Can I really become happier and, if so, will it change my life?) Reading Assignment... “Who is Happy” by Myers & Deiner <i>Happiness: The Art of Living with Peace, Confidence and Joy</i> Prologue & Chapters 1 to 4	PURPOSEFUL LIVING AND HAPPINESS (Why not just drift through life?) WHAT CORRELATES WITH HAPPINESS ... WHAT DOESN'T? (The answers will surprise you) Reading Assignment... <i>What Happy People Know</i> –Ch. 2&3 “A Balanced Psychology and a Full Life” by Seligman, Parks and Steen <i>Man’s Search for Meaning</i> Prf & Part 1
Jan 9-13	WHAT DOES THE MIND HAVE TO DO WITH HAPPINESS? (Everything!!) CHOICES THAT DO NOT LEAD TO HAPPINESS (Traps we all fall into ... including your professor) Reading Assignment... <i>What Happy People Know 4&5 Happiness: The Art of Living with Peace ... Chapter 9</i>	CHOICES THAT DO NOT LEAD TO HAPPINESS (continued ... because there are a lot of traps!) Reading Assignment... <i>What Happy People Know</i> – 6&7 “The Forgiveness Boost” by Richard Light, The Atlantic Monthly	SKILLS THAT LEAD TO PEACE WITH THE PAST (Giving up forever the notion that we can change the past) Reading Assignment... <i>Man’s Search for Meaning</i> – Part 2 <i>What Happy People Know</i> – Ch. 8	SKILLS THAT LEAD TO CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE FUTURE (Preparing for the future, but accepting that we cannot control it) Reading Assignment... <i>Happiness: The Art of Living with Peace ... Chapters 10-13</i> “Tales of the Super Survivors” by David Brooks, NY Times
Jan 16-20	RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF SETBACKS (Developing GRIT!) Reading Assignment... <i>What Happy People Know</i> Ch. 9 & Epilogue	SKILLS THAT LEAD TO HAPPINESS IN THE PRESENT (Happiness is found in the present, but you have to be there to find it) Reading Assignment... None. Complete Mission statements!	SKILLS THAT LEAD TO HAPPINESS IN THE PRESENT (continued ... because at any moment the mind just might shatter time and burst into now!) “THE ONE THING” (A love of life and life of love) (MISSION STATEMENTS DUE) Reading Assignment... “How Successful People Stay Calm” by Travis Bradberry	Guest Speaker DENNIS BLAND “LIAPOP” (A man who exemplifies the quality of “Flourishing”) TEAMS ASSIGNED AND WORK BEGUN ON COURSE SUMMARIES Reading Assignment... ”Our urgent Need for Self-Esteem” by Nathan Branden
Jan 23-25	SELF-ESTEEM AND HAPPINESS (Can’t have one without the other) Reading Assignment... <i>Adult Years</i> by Frederick Hudson, Prologue	COURSE SUMMARY (By student teams ... What did you learn? What can you add?) COURSE SUMMARY (By professor ... sharing new insights you have brought me over the past 3 weeks) EVALUATION /FEEDBACK EXTENDED CHECK OUT		