School for New Learning  
DePaul University  

SW 262: The Happiness Project  
Winter 2017  
Wednesdays:  
January 4 – March 8, 2017  
Loop Campus, Lewis Center, Rm. 1512

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Course Description: What is happiness? How do we know that we are happy? How can we become happier in our lives? In recent years, there have been an increasing number of college courses dedicated to the study of happiness, positive psychology, life satisfaction, etc. This course will be an introduction to how various fields and disciplines are examining topics relevant to the nature of happiness and well-being, while providing an opportunity for students to examine their own ideas and expectations for happiness. While using Gretchen Rubin’s work, including her popular book The Happiness Project, as a tool, students will review theories and research in psychology, the sciences, religion, and the arts, as well as ancient wisdom and popular culture, to determine what is known and assumed about happiness. Participants in the course will develop and assess their own happiness project during the last several weeks of the course.

Faculty Biographical Sketch: Derise Tolliver Atta, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist and Associate Professor/Resident Faculty/Faculty Mentor and self-designated Chief Happiness Officer (CHO) at the School for New Learning, DePaul University. She earned her graduate degrees from Duke University and her undergraduate degree from Wellesley College. She is a past Chicago Director of the DePaul University/Tangaza University College B.A.
Degree Program, which was based in Nairobi, Kenya. She is a founding co-director of DePaul University’s study abroad program in Ghana, West Africa and has been facilitating the course since 1996. She is also the Chairperson of SNL’s Africa Diaspora Committee and Faculty Coordinator of SNL’s International and Travel Study Programs.

Dr. Tolliver Atta teaches about Afrikan psychology, spirituality and culture in adult education, health and wellness, racism, oppression and liberation, and she has published articles on these topics. She is passionate about sharing knowledge about natural approaches to health and healing. Her life mission is to help people “re-member” who they truly are, and she tries to facilitate this through her teaching, scholarship and service. She is committed to helping all to connect with happiness and joy in their lives.

**General Course Objectives**

*To identify and understand key concepts, theories and perspectives on happiness
*To have hands-on experience with many of these concepts
*To enhance one’s effectiveness in reading, critically analyzing and conversing comfortably about scholarly research
*To increase one’s skills in distinguishing between science and opinion
*To be able to apply scientific findings and theoretical perspectives to one’s personal life
*To develop a plan of action to make a positive difference in one’s level of subjective well-being

**Competencies**

**H3A:** Can use two or more theories of human psychology to understand and solve problems.

*Students are able to use the theory of positive psychology and at least one other psychological perspective to explain the concept of happiness and issues related to it.*

**H3X:** Can identify and utilize psychological theoretical perspectives to understand personal experiences of happiness.

*Students will be able to utilize relevant psychological theories to explain the happiness construct.*
A3X: Understands philosophical, religious and/or spiritual models about happiness and can apply them to oneself and others.

Students will be able to analyze and contrast ancient wisdom and modern theoretical models to explain theirs and others’ happiness experiences.

S2X: Understands and can articulate scientific explanations for the phenomenon of happiness.

Students demonstrate their knowledge of the biology of happiness in written assignments and group discussions.

S3X: Understands happiness as a health care issue.

Students can analyze and discuss the impact of various happiness “activities” on the physical and mental health status of individuals.

L7: Can learn collaboratively and examine the skills, knowledge, and values that contribute to such learning.

Students, working in groups, will analyze and make meaning of popular and scholarly information about happiness and approaches to increase happiness in one’s personal life. One of the shared goals will be a classroom presentation of their understanding of the course material.

FX: (negotiable for Focus Areas related to psychology, counseling, wellness, etc.) To be written by student /faculty.

Outcomes

- Students will be able to understand, examine and articulate historical and contemporary perspectives of the phenomenon of happiness.

- Students will be more adept at utilizing scholarly findings to support the development of a personal change project.

- Students will be able to conduct personal research to develop consensual definitions of “happiness.”
• Students will be able to work collaboratively to develop a presentation to teach another group of students about issues related to happiness.

• Students will engage in more reflection about their own beliefs, assumptions and ideas about happiness and its role in their own lives.

Learning Experience

Learning strategies: discussion, collaborative learning, personal happiness project, mini-research project, happiness journal, in-class experiential activities


Other required readings (generally articles) will be web-based and/or available from Dr. Tolliver Atta, in class, or online.


Attendance: It is important that you attend each class session. Please note that students missing more than two in-class sessions of this ten week course will not have met the requirements for a passing grade. If you are unable to attend a class, it is your responsibility to (1) inform Dr. Tolliver Atta at least 24 hours prior to the missed class and (2) make arrangements with a classmate to get notes and pick up handouts for you (that means make a friend the first night of class!) and (3) keep up with assignments. Dr. Tolliver Atta will not fax nor email notes or assignments.

Do not talk or text on your phone or surf the internet while in the classroom during class activities. If you need to use these devices, respect your peers and instructor by leaving the room or you may be asked to do so. Similarly, set your pagers, cell phones or any other electronic devices so they do not ring or buzz loudly during class.
Evidence to be submitted for assessment of learning

Described below are the major activities for this course and their contribution to the overall grade (500 points maximum):

Class participation/attendance. (15 points/week, 150 points total – lateness will be downgraded 2 points/week; absence is downgraded 15 points for the week one misses)

Weekly written assignments/happiness journal entries. 5 entries over the course of the quarter; each entry will have a specific prompt (20 points/entry, 100 points total - late entries will be downgraded 5 points for each week late – assignment is considered late if submitted after the class session it is due.)

Practice happiness activity. (25 points- lateness will be downgraded 5 points/week)

Classroom Group Presentation. You will become a member of one of four groups that will be responsible for presenting three chapters from the Rubin book to the rest of the class. Each group member will be responsible for identifying one scholarly article that supports the information that is described in their chapters. Together, group members will be responsible for preparing a handout with annotations of the scholarly articles. The preparation for the group presentation takes place primarily outside of class. (100 points)

Personal Happiness Project. You will likely write this up as an empirical paper. You may also use a different format if it is a better fit. However, please address all of the issues below.

A. Introduction: What was the focus of your happiness project? Why did you decide to change what you (hopefully) changed? What variables facilitated and impeded change for you? What mechanisms may explain why? What was your hypothesis about changing your “state” of happiness? Use research to support your answers.

B. Methods: Describe the procedure(s) you used to change yourself. What techniques did you use? What is the psychology behind these techniques? How did you measure change?
C. Results: What happened? Even though self-report data may suggest the intervention was effective, you must also provide corroborating evidence from other sources. Reports from friends/family/coworkers (e.g., unsolicited comments such as, “Hey, you seem kinder these past few weeks.”), objective health indicators (e.g., weight loss), and behavioral measures (e.g., since you’ve started a gratitude journal, you’ve written 3 times more “thank you” emails this month compared to last month) are all appropriate.

D. Discussion: Was your hypothesis supported or not supported? Are your results consistent with prior research? What have you learned about self-change and positive psychology?

You might talk about strengths, weaknesses, and difficulties in implementing your intervention, or you might explain why some techniques seemed to be more effective than others. What would you do differently if you had the chance to do it again? Why? (100 points for project – paper or approved artifact with twice weekly reflections presented in appendix + 25 points for outline and presentation = 125 points total; lateness will be downgraded 5 points per week)

Grading (specifics of rubric to follow)

Specific guidelines will be presented for major assignments to clarify the expectations for each learning product. Each assignment will be assessed according to the grading rubrics that are presented below. Work will be evaluated as follows:

\[ A = \text{designates work of high quality} \]
\[ B = \text{designates work of good quality} \]
\[ C = \text{designates work which minimally meets requirements set forward in assignment} \]
\[ D = \text{designates work of poor quality which does not meet minimum requirements set forth in the assignment} \]
\[ F = \text{designates substantial work not submitted} \]
Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1: *Introductions and Course Overview*

Jan. 4  What are your ideas about and definitions of happiness?
        Examining self and those around you.

Activities and assignments: Introductory exercises; In class, students will develop a definition of “happiness.” Students will also generate a common list of 5-10 questions to ask themselves, classmates and 5 people outside of class about their definitions and understanding of “happiness.” Each student will write up a summary and analysis of their findings to present in discussion next week (personal research). Tonight, students will choose groups for chapter report-outs on the Gretchen Rubin book, *The Happiness Project*.

Readings (due January 11, 2017):


f. Summarize and analyze your findings from your interviews on happiness (J).
Week 2:  What is Happiness?  Ancient Wisdom and Modern Ideas

Jan. 11  The Psychology, Philosophy and Religion of Happiness

Critiques of positive psychology and happiness

What do experts and scholars tell us about the concept of happiness?
How is happiness understood and measured?

Activities and assignments: Discuss relevant reading assignments; Compare findings from personal research; Discuss self-report scales (published on the internet) that measure levels of happiness, well-being and related constructs.

Readings (due January 18, 2017):


c. Hand drawn or painted art of happiness or joy (n.d.), Redbubble. Website. Retrievable at http://www.redbubble.com/groups/hand-drawn-or-painted-art-of-happiness-or-joy


f. Complete positivity ratio test online at www.positivityratio.com/single.php - write about your results and your understanding of your own level of happiness as a journal entry (J).
Week 3:  *The Art and Science of Happiness*

Jan. 18  Happiness as art

Happiness as science

What do creative representations, e.g. visual art, music, prose, poetry, performance, etc. tell us about the concept of happiness? How are they similar and/or different from scholarly writing and research findings?

You will view and listen to artistic representations of the concept of happiness and discuss meaning in light of assigned readings. We will also discuss the scientific research on happiness and subjective well-being.

**Readings (due January 25, 2017):**


d. Check out the following websites that deal with happiness as a business:
The Happiness Business; Happiness works
Write a reflective journal entry about what you learned from your examination of these websites. This should be ½ - 1 page long (J).

**Week 4: Cultural and Business Perspectives of Happiness** – Do experiences of happiness and subjective well-being vary by culture? What is the happiness industry, who is in it and what can we learn from them?

Activities and assignments: Group #1 (chapters 1-3) and Group #2 (chapters 4-6), report out on The Happiness Project, by Gretchen Rubin. Each group will be responsible for presenting information from 3 scholarly articles, one for each month covered (and a brief annotated bibliographic reference on each, not the published abstract) that is related to the themes from the book chapters. We will discuss cultural conceptions of happiness. The class will also view websites and written materials that focus on the business of increasing, supporting, understanding, and building happiness, such as life coaching, wellness centers, etc.

**Readings (due February 1, 2017):**


c. Bottles, K. (2012). The downsides of trying too hard to be happy (part II). The Doctor Weighs In. Website. Retrievable from


f. Gratitude list – submit as a journal entry a list of 100 different things that you are grateful for (J).

**Week 5:**  
**Benefits and downsides of happiness**

**Feb. 1**  
**Setting happiness goals**  
*Mindfulness, gratitude and positive thinking*

Activities and assignments: We will consider reported benefits and downsides of happiness in modern day cultures. We will then discuss mindfulness, gratitude and positive thinking and the roles they can play in our experience of happiness. There will be classroom exercises to help learners to examine these constructs. Each learner will identify a happiness goal to pursue during weeks 7-9. An outline for the pursuit of this goal will be submitted to Dr. Tolliver Atta next week. You are also to practice one happiness activity during the upcoming 7 days and write 2-3 pages about your experience in your happiness journal.

**Readings (due February 8, 2017):**


e. Kupferman, E. (n.d.) A key to happiness is forgiveness of Self and others. Retrievable from www.expressivecounseling.com/forgiveness-practice

Week 6: Love, emotions and relationships

Feb. 8 Radical forgiveness

Activities and assignments: Learners will be introduced to information on emotions and their measurement, the concepts of flow, love and happiness in relationships, and radical forgiveness.

Readings (due February 15, 2017):


Week 7: **Dealing with “negatives” – pessimism, loss, trauma, the “bad” of life**

**Sharing stories of happiness**

Activities and assignments: Can there be happiness in the midst of loss, trauma, stress, disappointment and other negative situations? We will discuss this question and the possibilities of happiness during times of negative life events. Each learner begins their personal happiness project this week, beginning February 12, 2017. This will span the next 21 days (the time conventional wisdom states that it takes to change a habit). You will write a paper about your personal project (unless you contract to do some alternative form of learning product) and do a class presentation during week 10.

**Readings (due February 22, 2017):**


Week 8: Holistic happiness—Taking care of self: mind, body and spirit
Feb. 22 Guest(s)

Activities and assignments: Discussions of readings on the mind/body/spirit connections to experiences of subjective well-being and happiness. Check-in on personal happiness project. There may be some experiential activities/exercises to report on (they won’t be very strenuous – participation at each person’s level of comfort).

Readings (due the week of March 1, 2017):


Week 9: Play and happiness
Mar. 1

Activities and assignments: How important is play in our experiences of happiness? We will discuss some of the scholarship on this question. We will also play. Some of our activities might be a little messy, so be prepared!

Week 10: Presentations on personal happiness projects
Mar. 8 Reflections
Celebration

Addenda

DePaul University Academic Integrity Policy

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students’ own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university’s academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html for further details.

Statement on Plagiarism:

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: “Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else’s. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one’s own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another’s work or ideas without proper acknowledgment.” Plagiarism will result in a failure of the assignment or possibly of the course. If you are unsure of how to cite a source, ask!
DePaul University Incomplete Policy

Undergraduate and graduate students will have up to two quarters to complete an incomplete. At the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) following the term in which the incomplete grade was assigned, remaining incompletes will automatically convert to "F" grades. In the case of the Law School incompletes must be completed by the end of the semester following the one in which the incomplete was assigned. Ordinarily no incomplete grade may be completed after the grace period has expired. Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee. This policy applies to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four week grace period before final degree certification.

Protection of Human Research Participants

This course may involve research activities intended solely for classroom learning outcomes. Collecting data from human beings for such activities do not require institutional review if there is no intent to generalize, publish, or otherwise disseminate the findings. However, students must still abide by federally-mandated guidelines for the protection of human beings who may be the sources of such data. These include, but are not limited to, keeping persons’ identifiable characteristics confidential and taking care to minimize or entirely remove the possibility of mental, social, financial, or physical harm. If findings from your research activities may be disseminated beyond classroom discussion, your activities carry risk of harm to the participants, or the identities of the participants are ascertainable, students must obtain approval from the SNL Local Review Board and DePaul Institutional Review Board. Please consult with the course instructor and visit the website of the Office of Research Protections at DePaul University (http://research.depaul.edu) for additional information and guidance.

For Students Who Need Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability
Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter, preferably within the first week of class, and make sure you have contacted:

- PLuS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-4239 in the Schmidt Academic Center, room 220 or;
- The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-7290, DePaul University Student Center, room 307.

**Writing Help**

For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, sample SNL assignments and much more, see the [Writing Guide for SNL Students](http://snl.depaul.edu/writing/index.html). For on-campus and online tutoring, see the [DePaul University Writing Centers](http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/).

[In addition, consider adding the Writing Centers’ syllabus supplement available here](http://condor.depaul.edu/writing/instructors/syllabus.html)