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. Be prepared to enjoy yourself and to have fun!

Faculty Biographical Sketch: Derise Tolliver Atta, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist and Associate Professor/Resident Faculty/Faculty Mentor at the School for New Learning, DePaul University. She earned her graduate degree from Duke University and her undergraduate degree from Wellesley College. She is a past Chicago Director of the DePaul University/Tangaza College B.A. Degree Program, which is based in Nairobi, Kenya. She was 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 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 self-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

**Required text:**

Other required readings (generally articles) will be web-based and/or available from Dr. Tolliver Atta, in class, online, or on D2L.

**Suggested readings:**

**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 on-ground class session it is due or after the D2L window closes for posting)

**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 preparation 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” notes 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, 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** designates work of high quality
- **B** designates work of good quality
- **C** designates work which minimally meets requirements set forward in assignment
- **D** designates work of poor quality which does not meet minimum requirements set forth in the assignment
- **F** designates substantial work not submitted

**Tentative Course Schedule**

(Note: Course schedule subject to change based on learning needs and opportunities available to enhance learning. This will be discussed and announced in class. Students will be informed of any changes that are necessitated between class sessions via email from instructor).

**Week 1: Introductions and Course Overview**

**Sept. 11** What are your ideas about and definitions of happiness?
Exercising self and those around you.

Activities: We will have an overview of the idea of happiness and how the course will explore this concept/experience. In class, students will together generate 5-10 questions to ask
themselves, classmates and 5 people outside of class about their definitions and understanding of “happiness.” Tonight, students will choose groups for chapter report-outs on the Gretchen Rubin book, The Happiness Project.

Readings (due the week of September 18, 2018):


e. Assignment: Each student is to interview 5 people using the questions generated in class and should be prepared to discuss their findings during class discussion during week 2 (personal research). A written presentation of their findings is to be turned in to instructor at the beginning of Week 3 class (J).

Week 2: What is Happiness? Ancient Wisdom and Modern Ideas

Sept. 18 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: Discuss reading assignments; Compare findings from personal research.

Readings (due the week of September 25, 2018):


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

Week 3: The Art and Science of Happiness
Sept. 25 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?

We 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 the week of October 2, 2018):


d. Check out 3 websites that deal with happiness as a business: The Happiness Business; Happiness works (happinessatworksurvey.com/business-case); one of your own choosing

e. Assignment: Groups #1 and #2 should be prepared to report out on their chapters from the Gretchen Rubin book at the beginning of class during Week 4. Be sure to have your annotated bibliography to pass out to class members at the time of your presentation

Week 4: Cultural and Business Perspectives of Happiness – Do experiences of Oct. 2 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: 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. After the report outs, 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 the week of October 9, 2018):


f. **Assignment:** 100 item gratitude list, to be submitted during Week 5 class. List 100 things that you are grateful for. At the beginning of your list, write down any thoughts and/or feelings you have about assignment prior to writing your list. After you have completed the list, reflect and note any thoughts and/or feelings you have after you complete this assignment (J).

**Week 5:**  
**Benefits and downsides of happiness**  
**Oct. 9**  
**Setting happiness goals**  
**Mindfulness, gratitude and positive thinking**

Activities: Group #3 (chapters 7-9) and Group #4 (chapters 10-12) 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. After the report outs, 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. We will also discuss the upcoming assignments, the 7 day happiness activity and your personal happiness project.

**Readings (due the week of October 16, 2018):**


e. Assignments:

1. Each learner will identify a happiness goal to pursue during weeks 7-9. An outline for the pursuit of this goal will be submitted online to Dr. Tolliver Atta by the beginning of Week 6 class session.
2. You are to practice one happiness activity (of your choice) during the upcoming 7 days and write 2-3 pages about your experience. This will be due no later than the beginning of Week 7 class session (J).

**Week 6: Love, emotions and relationships**

**Oct. 16**

Activities: We will introduce information on emotions and their measurement, the concept of flow and love and happiness in relationships.

**Readings (due the week of October 23, 2018):**


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

**Oct. 23**

*Sharing stories of happiness*

Activities: Can there be happiness is 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

**Readings (due the week of October 30, 2018):**


Assignment: You are to begin your personal happiness project. 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. Please refer to beginning of syllabus for further details about this assignment and its learning product.

Week 8: **Holistic happiness—Taking care of self: mind, body and spirit**

*Oct. 30*

Activities: We will discuss 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 engage in (they won’t be very strenuous – participation at each person’s level of comfort).

**Readings (due the week of November 6, 2018):**


Week 9: **Play and happiness**

*Nov. 6*

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**

*Nov. 13*    **Reflections**

**Celebration (this is our last class meeting)**

Assignment: Write up of your personal happiness project is due no later than November 20, 6pm.
Addenda

This course includes and adheres to the college and university policies described in the links below:

  Academic Integrity Policy

  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!

  Incomplete Policy

  Incomplete (IN) Grade:

  This process follows university policy. A student who encounters an unusual or unforeseeable circumstance that prevents her/him from completing the course requirements by the end of the term may request a time extension to complete the work.

  The student must formally initiate the request by submitting the Contract for Issuance of Incomplete Grade form (via email, word doc), no later than week 10 (or prior to the final week of a shorter-term course).
The instructor has discretion to approve or not approve the student's request for an IN grade.

The instructor has discretion to set the deadline for completion of the work, which may be earlier but no later than two quarters (not counting Summer term).

The instructor may not enter an IN grade on behalf of a student without a completed and agreed upon contract.

The student is alerted that IN grades are not considered by Financial Aid as evidence of satisfactory academic progress.

Course Withdrawal Timelines and Grade/Fee Consequences

Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability

Protection of Human Research Participants

University Attendance Policy

Other Resources for Students

University Center for Writing-based Learning

SNL Writing Guide

Dean of Students Office