

# Psy 410F: Joy, Meaningful Lives, and Well-Being

Professor: Allen McConnell

Psy 410F, Section B, CRN 13283, Spring 2025

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Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:40 a.m. – 1 p.m.

In-person office hours: Thursdays 2:45-3:45 p.m. (316 PSYC), and at other times by appointment

Virtual office hours: Wednesdays 1-3 p.m. (schedule at <https://tinyurl.com/profmcconnellofficehours>)

## Readings

- Dalai Lama (1999). *Ethics for the new millennium*. Riverhead Books.
- Dalai Lama, Tutu, D., & Abrams, D. (2016). *The book of joy*. Avery.
- Dunn, E., & Norton, M. (2013). *Happy money: The science of happier spending*. Simon & Schuster.
- Gilbert, D. T. (2007). *Stumbling on happiness*. Vintage Books.
- Other materials available on the Psy 410 Canvas site (<https://miamioh.instructure.com/courses/227740>)

## Course Overview

What does it mean to lead a joyous life? How do our social experiences facilitate it? Often, people focus on ends such as pleasure, success, self-worth, uniqueness, and wealth, yet these pursuits lead many people to experience life with little meaning, poor resilience, sporadic satisfaction, narcissism, and loneliness. That is, rather than living a life of joy, people often feel trapped in a rat race where the pursuit of things, achievements, and recognition produces ambivalence instead of fulfillment. In this course, we will read books authored by leading social psychologists and by popular figures such as the Dalai Lama and the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu in concert with research from the social psychology literature on topics such as positive emotions, well-being, self-nature connection, money and happiness, and a meaningful life to identify themes that contribute to people's pursuit of purpose and lasting happiness in an increasingly complex, challenging world. This course involves a lot of work! There is a lot of reading, a lot of writing, many outside-of-class activities, and a lot of in-class discussion all in the service of understanding the role that social interconnections play in a life of joy.

This seminar focuses on integrating social psychology research and theory with insights offered from some of the world's leading authorities on happiness and meaningful living.

- The four books read in our course provide a blend of mostly science (e.g., Dunn & Norton, Gilbert) and mostly philosophy (e.g., Dalai Lama, Archbishop Tutu), though they acknowledge the value of everyday experiences and scientific findings, respectively. These books are supplemented by scientific research papers from the psychology literature. In concert, these materials provide a canopy of insights ranging from basic science and theory, to insights gleaned from lived experience, to perspectives derived from faith and philosophical viewpoints.
- Course exams focus on student mastery of readings and discussions. There are two in-term exams and one final paper project that serves as a final capstone product of course mastery. Students will also participate in the end-of-semester Joy Symposium to share overall lessons learned with the class.
- Throughout the semester, students will complete several "Putting It in Practice" (PIP) activities to help develop practices to increase joy and enhance meaning in their lives.
- At the conclusion of the semester, students will write a "more joyous future" paper to leverage the principles from our course to find more joy in their own lives and to improve others' lives as well.
- Writing is a significant component of this seminar. To "get something out of the class," one must actively think and reflect, and writing is the best vehicle for doing so. The class will be a lot of work, but as we will see in the class, joy typically does not come from hedonistic bliss, but rather, from meaning and connection. Thus, this "is the work" required to develop practices and approaches to life that can sustain real joy.

## Grades

Source	Points
“A more joyous future” final paper	200 points
Two in-term exams (200 points each)	400 points
Joy symposium share-out document	25 points
Joy symposium oral presentation talk	25 points
Twelve unannounced reading quizzes (10 points each)	120 points
Class participation points (5 points per reading assignment class)	100 points
Putting It in Practice (PIP) assignments	
Counting your blessings (PIP #1)	10 points
Reducing device distractions (PIP #2)	20 points
Building concern for others (PIP #3)	40 points
Writing and delivering gratitude letters (PIP #4)	100 points
Performing random acts of kindness (PIP #5)	50 points
Reconsidering views of money (PIP #6)	40 points
Getting into nature (PIP #7)	60 points
Improving one’s ethical life (PIP #8)	60 points
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>1250 points</b>

Final grades will be determined by total points accumulated applied this 1200-point scale:

Points	Percentages	Letter
1110 - 1250	93% - 104%	A
1074 - 1109	90% - 92%	A-
1038 - 1073	87% - 89%	B+
990 - 1037	83% - 86%	B
954 - 989	80% - 82%	B-
918 - 953	77% - 79%	C+
870 - 917	73% - 76%	C
834 - 869	70% - 72%	C-
798 - 833	67% - 69%	D+
750 - 797	63% - 66%	D
714 - 749	60% - 62%	D-
0 - 773	0% - 59%	F

There are 1250 total points available, but the grading scale is based on 1200 points (i.e., 1200 points=100%), which means there are 50 “cushion points” available, providing 4% of extra credit in the course. Cushion points provide students with flexibility for challenges or disruptions during the semester (e.g., being sick, technical snafus) and should be viewed as something to “save for a rainy day” to help meet challenges during the semester. Also, please note that late work, regardless of the circumstances, will not be accepted (remember, there are 50 points of grade cushion available). Please submit assignments on time, and students should work ahead so that deadlines are not an issue (waiting until the last minute to complete assignments increases self-induced risks)!

The professor reserves the right to adjust the grading scale. If modifications occur, changes will only make it easier for students to get a better grade (i.e., the scale will never be adjusted against students). However, it would be unwise to anticipate that an adjustment will occur. Final grades are based on the total points earned, no exceptions. There is no end-of-semester negotiation period where students beg and barter for better grades. The professor is concerned about student growth and development, and he is eager to meet with students to support their learning and success. Please do not wait until it’s too late to identify opportunities for improvement!

## Final Paper

At the end of the semester, in lieu of a final exam, each student will turn in “A More Joyous Future” paper project to synthesize principles covered in class to both increase one’s own joy in the future and to increase the joy of another important person in one’s life in the future. The final paper is due before 5 p.m. on May 13 (the Tuesday of Finals Week). This paper cannot be submitted late, so please be sure to submit it on time!

## Exams

Two essay exams will be administered during the semester, with each one covering the material presented since the previous exam (i.e., they are not cumulative). Although exams are important, they only constitute 33% of the course grade. Exams focus primarily on the readings, class discussions, and course lectures. Although exam material will primarily reflect what is discussed in class, material that is assigned but not discussed in class is fair game. However, exams will not assess trivial aspects of the readings. The purpose of the exams is to assess how well students master material and integrate their readings and class discussions.

## Joy Symposium

During the last week of class, each student will present “lessons learned” in the course to share with others, presenting them in the Joy Symposium held during the last week of classes. Each student will give a 5-minute presentation to the entire class about the lessons they learned from the course, either on May 6 or May 8 (day and time for each student’s time slot will be randomly determined toward the end of the semester).

## Putting It in Practice (PIPs) Activities

Throughout the semester, students will complete “Putting It in Practice” (PIP) activities to get first-hand experience with practices to develop more meaningful lives. PIPs ask students to “go deeper,” whether that’s counting one’s blessings (PIP #1), focusing more on people and less on distracting devices (PIP #2), showing genuine concern for others (PIP #3), writing and delivering gratitude letters to others (PIP #4), performing random acts of kindness (PIP #5), reconsidering the role of money in life (PIP #6), getting outside in nature (PIP #7), and working to improve the ethics of one’s life (PIP #8). Each PIP varies in the amount of time that is involved (and some require several days to complete, so please review them well in advance), and thus, the points associated with each PIP varies. Please note that PIPs, just like other class assignments, cannot be turned in late, regardless of the circumstances (please work ahead to avoid issues).

## Reading Quizzes

Short unannounced reading quizzes (12 total) on assigned readings will be administered to provide feedback on reading comprehension and to reward students for keeping up to date. They will not be difficult. For students who read conscientiously, this will be the easiest 10% of the grade. Quizzes are administered at the very beginning of class. Students who are late to class or are absent *cannot* make them up (even with an excuse, remember there are 50 cushion points) unless they have a documented student accommodation (and in these cases, quiz questions are changed). Quizzes provide feedback on reading and content mastery (i.e., if students perform poorly on reading quizzes, they should adopt better strategies for mastering course readings and attend office hours to discuss how to improve their course mastery with the professor).

## Class participation

Class participation and attendance is assessed throughout the course. Students earn 5 points for participation on each class day there is a reading assignment. Students who habitually do not contribute to class will lose points even if they attend class (they will receive a warning to speak up before losing points). Because this course is discussion oriented and is small in size, participating is essential. Moreover, the course focuses on increasing joy in life, and that goal cannot be accomplished passively or without engaging with others!

## Academic integrity

Both Miami University and the Department of Psychology are dedicated to providing a learning environment based not only on academic excellence but on academic integrity as well. In this course, it is expected that students will adhere to all Miami University guidelines regarding academic misconduct (see Chapter 5 of the *Miami Student Handbook: Academic Integrity* for details). Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Submitting another party's work (in part or in whole) as one's own, including work from another student, artificial intelligence systems, websites, books, or failing to provide appropriate citations for others' ideas
- Allowing other students to submit one's work as their own
- Submitting work (homework, papers, etc.) conducted for another course without professor approval
- Using prohibited materials during a test or quiz in any form (e.g., notes, internet access, texting)

Engaging in academic misconduct can result in penalties ranging from a *minimum* of a zero on the assignment to an F in the course, an "AD" signifying academic dishonesty on Miami transcripts, academic suspension, and expulsion from Miami University. Misunderstanding appropriate academic conduct will not be accepted as an excuse for academic misconduct (please review Miami's *Academic Integrity Policy*). Work suspected of violating academic integrity policies will be submitted to university officials for investigation (no exceptions).

## Class policies

**RTFS:** Many hours have gone into crafting this detailed syllabus, thus before asking a question, please read the syllabus! Most questions (e.g., "Is Exam 2 cumulative?" [no], "I know I missed the assignment, but can I turn it in late and get some points?" [no]) are easily answered by reading the syllabus.

**Assignments:** Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus. Unless noted, all assignments are due by the due date by 11:40 a.m. EDT (start of class). Late work (even 1 min late), *regardless of the circumstances*, will not be accepted (Canvas locks the assignment after the deadline). Assignments are available to students many weeks before the deadline, and students should not procrastinate because late work is not accepted. Changes to work deadlines will be announced in class, and it is each student's responsibility to attend to such announcements. All assignment deadlines are U.S. Eastern Daylight Time (i.e., Oxford time).

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend classes to maximize learning (participation counts for 8% of the overall grade because of the course emphasis on student-led discussion). Students with documented accommodations (see next point) requiring missing classes should work with the instructor to identify ways to maintain their learning. In situations where documented circumstances exist (e.g., official university obligations, religious observances), special arrangements can be made with the professor. However, students should make these arrangements before the end of the second week of the semester with documentation.

**Accommodations:** Students with a disability who feel that they may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the course listed in this syllabus, or students with physical, medical or psychiatric disabilities, or students with AD(H)D or specific learning disabilities are encouraged to contact the Miller Center for Student Disability Services (<https://miamioh.edu/student-life/sds/>). The professor is strongly committed to supporting students who require accommodations, and it is each student's responsibility to document these circumstances with the Miller Center and to bring them to the professor's attention.

**Course materials, recordings, and legal disclaimers:** Attending class, obtaining course materials, and taking notes (on class discussions and course readings) are each student's responsibility. The professor will not lend out notes or materials not provided on Canvas under any circumstances. If students miss a class, they should get notes from a fellow student. Students may lend notes to fellow students as long as they do not profit from doing so (i.e., the commercialization of class materials is strictly prohibited).

*Writing competency:* Writing competency is expected in all assignments. Students who need assistance with their writing skills should contact the Howe Center for Writing Excellence (<http://miamioh.edu/hcwe>).

*Uploaded assignments:* All assignments require uploading documents to Canvas. Uploaded documents must in one of three formats: PDF (Acrobat's Portable Document format), DOC (Microsoft Word's Document format), or RTF (Rich Text Format). All other formats (e.g., JPEGs, Mac Pages, Google Docs) will receive zeros because Canvas cannot process them. All documents will be scanned to ensure authentic scholarship (see academic integrity, above). Students with questions (e.g., how to upload documents, questions about academic integrity) should ask the professor well before assignments are due (e.g., problems with uploading or uncertainty about how to use Canvas will not excuse late or incomplete work). If (and only if) Canvas is unavailable immediately before a deadline, email the assignment to the professor to ensure it is not late (but only do this if Canvas is down, and make sure you have tried Canvas multiple times on the due date; the email's timestamp will serve as the indicator of whether the work was completed on-time, and emailed assignments after the due date and time will not be considered). Once students have uploaded an assignment, they should double check to make sure it was received, was the correct document, and posted correctly. Failure to double check that an uploaded assignment was correctly posted is each student's responsibility. Canvas does not "lose things," so statements such as, "really, I uploaded it, I don't know what happened, maybe our WiFi wasn't working" will not excuse missing assignments. Students spend a lot of time on coursework, so it's important that they spend an extra moment to *confirm* that their uploaded assignment arrived in good shape. Missing assignments will receive zero points, no exceptions.

*Illnesses and significant health disruptions:* Students must abide by all university health policies throughout the semester. Should a student become seriously ill and unable to complete assignments for a sizable portion of the class because of illness, the student should contact the professor immediately by email to determine how alternative arrangements might be made. Students who fail to stay in contact with the professor assume the consequences for reduced options and remedies. Students are ultimately responsible for the material covered in class, regardless of whether they are absent or present. If a student's absences are of significant duration or severity, the professor will advise them about available options, including assigning an incomplete grade (see next point) or requesting a medical withdrawal.

*Incompletes:* Except for cases of documented medical (see previous point) or family emergencies, incompletes will not be given. There is no need for students to do poorly in this class: the professor is available for student hours and will answer e-mail questions promptly. Points are earned in many small increments rather than in a couple of monolithic assignments. There are 50 cushion points built into class, providing students with flexibility to navigate adversity. Deadlines for dropping classes and withdrawals are provided by the Office of the Registrar. Students who miss these deadlines assume responsibility for the consequences. Please consult Miami's official websites regarding deadlines and university policies.

*Exam make-ups:* There are no make-ups for missing an exam for an unexcused reason. An unexcused absence occurs when a student (1) did not obtain prior permission from the professor concerning the absence or (2) did not provide documented evidence justifying the absence. Valid documented evidence can be one of three things: (1) a signed note from a health care professional stating that the student was sick and unable to attend class, (2) a letter from a funeral home or clergy on their letterhead indicating that one attended a memorial service, or (3) a letter from Dean Baernstein supporting one's absence. There are no exceptions to this policy. Students who miss an exam should contact the professor immediately and use *multiple* methods of contact (e.g., e-mail, telephone).

*Classroom conduct, respecting others, and valuing diversity:* Students are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and civil manner in class, and they are encouraged to express their opinions, beliefs, and lived experiences. It is another thing, however, to be disrespectful or rude to students or to the professor. It is fine to disagree with others, but bigotry or disagreeable behavior is unacceptable. Respect and civility are *especially important* in a course focused on developing joyous and meaningful lives; thus, our class must be a place where people feel comfortable, valued, and have a voice.

Disruptive conduct (e.g., distracting texting and computer use, conversations in class) is unacceptable and students who disrupt class (for students or for the professor) will be asked to leave class. Also, class norms of respect and decency extend beyond formal class meetings to on-line contexts as well even those such contexts may *seem* less formal (e.g., comments posted on-line should be viewed as “just as formal” as saying something aloud in the presence of others). Please be courteous and respectful in all forms of communication and interaction in our course.

The Miami Department of Psychology is strongly committed to diversity and inclusion because it is essential for understanding human behavior. To reflect this commitment, the Department of Psychology adopted this statement in its governance:

We, members of the Department of Psychology, value diversity and inclusion because the goal of psychology is to improve understanding and outcomes for all individuals. We value persons of all identities, including dimensions such as age, culture, national origin, ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and others. As psychologists, we understand that diverse groups bring diverse perspectives; this diversity produces better outcomes in a variety of contexts, including learning and decision making, and our ability to work with one another. Consistent with these values, our department actively seeks opportunities to increase and improve understanding of diversity. These enduring efforts include conducting research with diverse populations on topics related to intergroup understanding and asking questions that are relevant to different groups. We promote the academic and professional development of students, faculty, and staff from different backgrounds and provide education to improve intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes for all members of our academic community. We endeavor to actively engage in positive behaviors in order to achieve these goals. In sum, we value diversity because multiple perspectives improve our ability to understand psychological processes and to understand and contribute to the communities we serve.

## Semester schedule

Assignments are due on the day indicated before 11:40 a.m. EDT (i.e., the start time of class) unless noted.

Readings are from the four paperbacks (*italics*, chapters or page ranges indicated) or entire PDFs of scientific papers (which are available on Canvas). Syllabus updated 29jan2025

	Date		Topic	Assignments
Week 1	Tu	1/28	Introduction to the course	
	Th	1/30	Subjective well-being	Diener et al. (2017)
Week 2	Tu	2/4	Searching for happiness	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 1-2); <b>PIP #1</b>
	Th	2/6	The downsides of technology	Kushlev et al. (2019)
Week 3	Tu	2/11	Presentism and bad predictions	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 6-7); <b>PIP #2</b>
	Th	2/13	Gratitude	Emmons & Mishra (2011)
Week 4	Tu	2/18	Rationalization	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 8-9); <b>PIP #3</b>
	Th	2/20	<b>No class: Gratitude letters</b>	
Week 5	Tu	2/25	Improving our happiness	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 10-11); <b>PIP #4</b>
	Th	2/27	Perspective taking	Todd & Galinsky (2014)
Week 6	Tu	3/4	<b>Exam I</b>	
	Th	3/6	Beyond money	Diener & Seligman (2004)
Week 7	Tu	3/11	Getting more out of money	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chapters 1-2)
	Th	3/13	Savoring	Quoidbach et al. (2015)
Week 8	Tu	3/18	Valuing time	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chapters 3-4)
	Th	3/20	<b>No class: Random acts</b>	<b>PIP #5</b> (due by Friday, March 21, at 5 p.m.)
Week 9	Tu	3/25	<b>No class: Spring Break</b>	
	Th	3/27	<b>No class: Spring Break</b>	
Week 10	Tu	4/1	Investing in others	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chp. 5, epilogue)
	Th	4/3	Pets and relationships	McConnell et al. (2017); <b>PIP #6</b>
Week 11	Tu	4/8	Nature and positive emotions	Piff et al. (2015)
	Th	4/10	<b>No class: Go into nature</b>	<b>PIP #7</b> (due by Saturday, April 12, at 5 p.m.)
Week 12	Tu	4/15	Foundations of joy	<i>Joy</i> (Introduction, Day 1; pp. 1-78)
	Th	4/17	Obstacles to joy	<i>Joy</i> (Days 2-3; pp. 83-168)
Week 13	Tu	4/22	Eight pillars of joy	<i>Joy</i> (Days 4-5; pp. 193-275)
	Th	4/24	<b>Exam 2</b>	
Week 14	Tu	4/29	Foundations of ethics	<i>Ethics</i> (Chapters 1-5; pp. 1-77)
	Th	5/1	Ethics and the individual	<i>Ethics</i> (Chapters 6-10; pp. 79-158)
Week 15	Tu	5/6	Joy Symposium Day #1	<b>PIP #8</b>
	Th	5/8	Joy Symposium Day #2	
Finals	Tu	5/13	<b>Final paper due</b> before 5 p.m.	