

# Psy 420: The Social Psychology of Joy

Professor: Allen McConnell  
E-mail: mconnar@miamioh.edu  
Office: 316 Psychology Building  
Phone: 513.529.2407  
Office hours: Thursdays 12N - 1 p.m., and by appointment

Psy 420, Section B, CRN 73648  
Class meets in 302 Psychology Building,  
on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:15 - 2:35 p.m.

## Readings

- Dalai Lama (1999). *Ethics for the new millennium*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Dalai Lama, Tutu, D., & Abrams, D. (2016). *The book of joy*. New York: Avery.
- Dunn, E., & Norton, M. (2013). *Happy money: The science of happier spending*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gilbert, D. T. (2007). *Stumbling on happiness*. New York: Vintage Books.
- PDF readings (and other course materials) available from the course's Canvas site.

## 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 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 place in an increasingly complex and challenging world. This course features a lot of reading, a lot of writing, many outside-of-class activities, a semester-long joy journal, and considerable in-class discussion all in the service of understanding the role that our social interconnections play in a life of joy.

This seminar has a number of objectives that focus on integrating social psychology research and theory with insights offered from some of the world's leading authorities on happiness, peace, and meaningful living.

- The four books chosen for this course represent a blend of mostly science (e.g., Gilbert, Dunn & Norton) and mostly philosophy (e.g., Dalai Lama, Archbishop Tutu), though each one acknowledges everyday experiences and scientific findings, respectively. These four books are supplemented by scientific research papers, which are selected from the social psychology literature. In concert, these materials provide a canopy of insights ranging from basic science and theory, to insights gleaned from personal anecdotes, to perspectives derived from religious orientations and philosophical viewpoints.
- Course exams focus on student mastery of readings and course discussions. There are two in-term exams and one final exam. Although they are important, they are less than 40% of the overall course grade.
- Throughout the semester, students will complete several "putting it in practice" (PIP) activities that, in a first-hand fashion, should help students develop practices to increase joy and meaning in their lives.
- Students will also keep a "Joy Journal" to reflect on course materials and to develop connections between the materials covered in class and enhancing their day-to-day lives.
- Toward the end of the semester, students will design a "more joyous future" project to leverage the principles and themes from class 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.

## Grades

Source	Points
“A more joyous future” paper project	200 points
Two in-term exams (200 points each)	400 points
One final, cumulative exam (300 points)	300 points
Joy Journal entries (due by Saturday at 1 p.m., pick 10 of 11 weeks)	
General reflection (20 points per week)	200 points
Focused reflection (20 points per week)	200 points
Twelve pop quizzes on readings (10 points each)	120 points
Class participation points (5 points per class)	120 points
Putting It in Practice (PIP) assignments	
Counting your blessings (PIP #1)	10 points
Showing concern for others (PIP #2)	30 points
Performing random acts of kindness (PIP #3)	30 points
Writing gratitude letters (PIP #4)	60 points
Improving savoring (PIP #5)	20 points
Reconsidering views of money (PIP #6)	20 points
Doing something new activity (PIP #7)	60 points
Sharing lessons with the public (PIP #8)	30 points
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>1800 points</b>

Final grades will be determined by total points accumulated during the semester applied this scale:

Points	Percentages	Letter
1665 - 1840	93% - 102%	A
1661 - 1664	90% - 92%	A-
1557 - 1610	87% - 89%	B+
1485 - 1556	83% - 86%	B
1431 - 1484	80% - 82%	B-
1377 - 1430	77% - 79%	C+
1305 - 1376	73% - 76%	C
1251 - 1304	70% - 72%	C-
1197 - 1250	67% - 69%	D+
1125 - 1196	63% - 66%	D
1071 - 1124	60% - 62%	D-
0 - 1070	0% - 59%	F

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 for better grades. Students who are dissatisfied with their class performance should discuss the situation with the professor early in the semester. Assignments are due by 1 p.m. on the dates listed on page 6, with the exception of Joy Journal entries (which are due before Saturday of relevant weeks by 1 p.m.). Please submit assignments on time, and early submissions are always encouraged! All non-exam assignments (e.g., PIPs, Joy Journal entries, quizzes, final paper project) cannot be submitted late, *regardless* of circumstances (see details below).

## Exams

Two in-term 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). In addition, there is a final exam, which is all-essay and is cumulative and includes material from the last two weeks (after Exam 2) as well. The exams focus on the readings and class discussions. Although the exam material will primarily reflect what is discussed in class, reading material that is assigned but not discussed in class is fair game. However, exams will *never* assess trivial aspects of the readings. The exams assess how well students are mastering the readings and class discussions and appreciating the interrelations among ideas covered in the course.

## Joy Journal

Throughout the semester, students will make entries in a “Joy Journal” to reflect on each week’s materials (e.g., books, scientific papers, class discussions) and consider how to apply the content to their everyday lives. Throughout the semester, there are 11 different joy journal entries (see weeks on page 6 that are in boldface), and each joy journal entry is due before 1 p.m. on Saturday of the relevant week (e.g., Week 1’s joy journal entry is due before 1 p.m. on Saturday, September 1). Students only have to complete 10 entries to receive “full credit,” and they can either choose to skip one week or do all 11 for up to 40 bonus points. Each week has two components, each worth 20 points. The first component, *general reflection*, is an open-ended response for students to reflect on the week’s materials and implications for their life, with a length of approximately 250-500 words (1-2 pages, double spaced, normal text). The second component, *focused reflection*, is a specific prompt provided by the professor that each student should respond to, also approximately 250-500 words. Students should ensure that their general reflection does not overlap with focused reflection entries. Thus, students will have two entries for each of the joy journal weeks -- one a general reflection (250-500 words) and one a focused reflection (another 250-500 words). Students can write longer than 500 words per entry, but only the first 500 words are evaluated. Entries that are too short (i.e., <250 words) will receive a 50% deduction for that entry (please check the word count). The number of words is less important than the content and related reflection. The point of the joy journal is to encourage active reflection of course material and application to student lives. Please note that the Week 1 joy journal entry is different than other entries because it sets the groundwork for several future assignments, and it is a mandatory week. Students should understand that their joy journal is read by the professor, and thus they should not share (1) things students are uncomfortable disclosing or (2) things that implicate the student or others in activities that the professor has a duty to report. Joy journal entries must be posted by Saturdays by 1 p.m. -- late posts are not evaluated, *regardless of the circumstances* (students can complete journal entries well in advance of the deadlines).

## Putting It in Practice (PIPs) activities

Throughout the semester, students will complete “putting it in practice” (PIP) activities in order to get first-hand experience with practices based on scientific principles to develop greater meaningful in life. Each PIP asks students to “go deeper,” whether that’s counting one’s blessings (PIP #1), showing genuine concern for others (PIP #2), performing random acts of kindness (PIP #3), writing gratitude letters (PIP #4), improving one’s ability to savor (PIP #5), reconsidering the role of money in life (PIP #6), doing something completely new that one has never done (PIP #7), or sharing one’s insights for the meaning of life with others (PIP #8). Each PIP varies in the amount of time that is involved, and thus, the points associated with each PIP varies. Please note that PIPs, like other class assignments, cannot be turned in late, regardless of the circumstances.

## Quizzes

Throughout the semester, short pop quizzes (12 total) on assigned readings will be periodically administered to reward students for keeping up with readings. They will not be difficult. If students complete the readings, this will be the easiest points in the class to earn. They will be administered at the very beginning of class. If students are late to class or miss class, they cannot make them up (even with a documented excuse).

## Class participation

Class participation and attendance will be assessed each class throughout the semester. Missing class will cost students 5 points per day (even if the absence is excused). Students who habitually say nothing will lose points even if they attend class (they will receive a warning from the professor to speak up before losing points). Because much of this course is discussion oriented and the class size is small, participating is essential.

## 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 work (homework, papers, etc.) conducted for another course without professor approval
- Submitting the work of another individual or party (whether in part or in whole) as one's own, including work from another student, a website, a book, or failing to provide appropriate citations for others' ideas
- Allowing other students to submit one's work as their own
- Possessing prohibited materials during a test or quiz in any form (e.g., notes, internet access, texting)
- Providing or receiving assistance from another student without the professor's permission

Engaging in academic misconduct can result in penalties ranging from a *minimum* of an F 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 (see *Miami Student Handbook*, Chapter 5). Please see the professor for clarification regarding any of the above policies. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with the professor if they suspect another student has engaged in academic misconduct.

## Class policies

**RTFS:** Countless hours have gone into crafting this very detailed syllabus. Before asking a question, please read the syllabus! Most questions (e.g., "Is the final exam cumulative?" [yes], "I know I missed the assignment, but can I turn it in late and get some points?" [no], "So, with the exception of exams, there are no make-ups on any assignments in the class?" [yes, that's true]) are easily answered by reading the syllabus.

**Assignments:** Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus. Any revisions that entail making assignments due at an earlier date will be announced at least one week in advance of a deadline. Alterations to the class will be announced in class, and it is each student's responsibility to attend to these announcements.

**Special considerations:** In situations where special and documented circumstances require that a student not take an exam during a scheduled time (e.g., learning disabilities, an official university obligation, religious observances), special arrangements can be made with the professor. However, students must make these arrangements at the beginning of the semester and provide documentation for them.

**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 books under any circumstances. If students miss class, they should borrow notes from a colleague to catch up on what was missed. Students may lend notes to fellow students in the same course as long as they do not financially profit from doing so (i.e., the commercialization of class notes is strictly prohibited).

*Uploads and electronically-submitted assignments:* All assignments require uploading documents to Canvas. These documents should be in one of three formats: PDF (Acrobat's Portable Document Format), DOC (Microsoft Word's Document format), or RTF (Rich Text Format). All documents will be scanned to ensure authentic scholarship (see academic integrity section). Students with questions (e.g., how to upload documents, questions about academic integrity) should ask the professor before assignments are due (e.g., problems with uploading or uncertainty about how to use Canvas will not excuse late or incomplete assignments). If Canvas is unavailable right before a deadline, email the assignment to the professor to ensure it is not late (but only do this if Canvas is down). Once students have uploaded an assignment to Canvas, they should double check to make sure it was received and posted correctly (the system does not "lose things," so statements like, "really, I uploaded it, I don't know what happened" will not excuse missing assignments).

*Classroom conduct:* Students are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and civil manner in class, and they are encouraged to express their opinions and beliefs. It is another thing, however, to be disrespectful or rude to students or to the professor. It is fine to disagree with others and to express non-politically-correct views. However, bigotry or disrespectful behavior is unacceptable. Moreover, some topics in this course may be sensitive (e.g., how does religion inform one's life, the importance of money or status) and many people will hold different opinions on such issues. Please be respectful and keep an open mind... not only to others, but to oneself as well. Many people may be "working through issues" in this course or reconsidering long-held beliefs, and everyone should find our class a comfortable, supportive space.

Disruptive conduct (e.g., distracting texting, computer use, conversations in class) is unacceptable and students who disrupt class (either for students or the professor) will be asked to leave class. Students who want to spend classroom time texting, watching videos, talking to friends, or sleeping should stay at home.

*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 the dean supporting one's absence. There are no exceptions to this policy. Students who miss an exam should contact the professor as soon as possible to address the situation and use *multiple* methods of contact (e.g., e-mail, telephone).

*Reading pop quizzes:* Periodically, unannounced reading quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class. These quizzes will be brief (i.e., 2-3 sentence answers) and cover basic aspects of the readings assigned for that day. Pop quizzes are graded as all or nothing (i.e., no partial credit) and will be returned to students at the next class session. Students who miss a quiz (even for an excused absence) cannot make up quizzes (and students who arrive late to class are likely to miss a pop quiz, so please be on time to class).

*Class participation:* Students are expected to actively participate in each and every class. For each class with a reading assignment, class participation is assessed by the professor in an all or nothing fashion. Class participation points cannot be made up if students miss class (even with an excused absence -- students cannot participate in class if they do not attend the class).

*Incompletes:* Except for cases of documented medical or family emergencies, incompletes will not be given. There is no need for students to do badly in this class: the professor will be available for meetings and he will answer e-mail questions promptly. Points are earned in small, multiple increments rather than in a couple of monolithic assignments. Deadlines for dropping classes and withdrawals are provided by the Office of the Registrar. Students who miss these deadlines assume responsibility for the consequences. For more details, consult Miami's official publications regarding deadlines and university policies.

## Semester schedule

Assignments are due on the day indicated before 1 p.m., except Joy Journal entries (due on Saturdays by 1 p.m., see **boldfaced week numbers**). Readings are from the four paperbacks (*italics*, chapters or page ranges indicated) or are entire PDFs of scientific papers (listed by authors and publication year; available on Canvas).

	Date		Topic	Assignments
<b>Week 1</b>	Tu	8/28	Introduction to the course	
	Th	8/30	Subjective well-being	Diener et al. (2017)
<b>Week 2</b>	Tu	9/4	Searching for happiness	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 1-2); <b>PIP #1</b>
	Th	9/6	Focusing on the wrong things	Schkade & Kahneman (1998)
<b>Week 3</b>	Tu	9/11	Presentism	McConnell et al. (2011)
	Th	9/13	Rationalization	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 8-9)
<b>Week 4</b>	Tu	9/18	Improving our happiness	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 10-11)
	Th	9/20	Foundations of ethics	<i>Ethics</i> (Chapters 1-5)
<b>Week 5</b>	Tu	9/25	Religion and meaning	Hunsberger & Jackson (2005); <b>PIP #2</b>
	Th	9/27	Ethics and the individual	<i>Ethics</i> (Chapters 6-10)
Week 6	Tu	10/2	Perspective taking	Todd & Galinsky (2014)
	Th	10/4	Random acts of kindness day	<b>PIP #3</b>
Week 7	Tu	10/9	<b>Exam 1</b>	
	Th	10/11	Gratitude	Emmons & Mishra (2011)
<b>Week 8</b>	Tu	10/16	Beyond money	Diener & Seligman (2004); <b>PIP #4</b>
	Th	10/18	Getting more out of money	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chapters 1-2)
<b>Week 9</b>	Tu	10/23	Savoring	Quoidbach et al. (2015); <b>PIP #5</b>
	Th	10/25	Valuing time	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chapters 3-4)
<b>Week 10</b>	Tu	10/30	Investing in others	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chp. 5, epilogue)
	Th	11/1	Foundations of joy	<i>Joy</i> (Introduction, Day 1; pp. 1-78); <b>PIP #6</b>
<b>Week 11</b>	Tu	11/6	Obstacles to joy	<i>Joy</i> (Days 2-3; pp. 83-168)
	Th	11/8	Positive emotions	Fredrickson (2013)
Week 12	Tu	11/13	Eight pillars of joy	<i>Joy</i> (Days 4-5; pp. 193-275)
	Th	11/15	<b>Exam 2</b>	
Week 13	Tu	11/20	Building a more joyous future	<b>PIP #7</b>
	Th	11/22	Thanksgiving Day (no class)	
<b>Week 14</b>	Tu	11/27	Nature and awe	Piff et al. (2015)
	Th	11/29	Pets and relationships	McConnell et al. (2017)
<b>Week 15</b>	Tu	12/4	A meaningful life	Heine et al. (2006)
	Th	12/6	Wrap-up day	<b>PIP #8</b>
Finals	Th	12/13	<b>Final exam</b> (12:45-2:45 p.m.)	<b>"A more joyous future" paper</b>