

PSY 420A: Joy, Meaningful Lives, and Well-Being

Professor: Allen McConnell PSY 420, Section A, CRN 68857
E-mail: mconnar@miamioh.edu On-line Synchronous using Zoom (see Canvas site)
Office: 316 Psychology Building Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:15-2:35 p.m. EDT
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Student hours: Via Zoom, Tuesdays 2:45-3:45 pm, and at other times by appointment
<https://miamioh.zoom.us/j/85812932376?pwd=UElOeVJ0Q3haZ2R2TIZOYVZkd2dJZz09>

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 requires 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 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 work acknowledges everyday experiences and scientific findings, respectively. These 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 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 with their colleagues.
- Throughout the semester, students will complete several "putting it in practice" (PIP) activities that, in a first-hand fashion, help students develop practices to increase joy and meaning in their lives.
- Toward the end of the semester, students will write a "more joyous future" paper 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” final paper	200 points
Two in-term exams (200 points each)	400 points
Joy symposium presentation	50 points
Twenty on-line discussion responses on the readings (10 points each)	200 points
Class participation points (5 points per class)	100 points
Putting It in Practice (PIP) assignments	
Counting your blessings (PIP #1)	10 points
Showing concern for others (PIP #2)	40 points
Writing and delivering gratitude letters (PIP #3)	100 points
Improving savoring (PIP #4)	20 points
Performing random acts of kindness (PIP #5)	50 points
Reconsidering views of money (PIP #6)	40 points
Getting out into nature activity (PIP #7)	60 points
Ethics application activity (PIP #8)	80 points
Total Points	1350 points

Final grades will be determined by total points accumulated applied this 1300-point scale:

Points	Percentages	Letter
1203 - 1350	93% - 104%	A
1164 - 1202	90% - 92%	A-
1125 - 1163	87% - 89%	B+
1073 - 1124	83% - 86%	B
1034 - 1072	80% - 82%	B-
995 - 1033	77% - 79%	C+
943 - 994	73% - 76%	C
904 - 942	70% - 72%	C-
865 - 903	67% - 69%	D+
813 - 864	63% - 66%	D
774 - 812	60% - 62%	D-
0 - 773	0% - 59%	F

There are 1350 total points available, but the grading scale is based on 1300 points (i.e., 1300 points=100%), which means there are 50 “cushion points” available. Cushion points provide students with flexibility should they experience challenges or disruptions during the semester (e.g., being sick, technical snafus). Students should view cushion points as something to “save for a rainy day” to help meet potential challenges during the course of 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 (all assignments are due on Tuesdays), and work ahead so deadlines are not an issue (i.e., you have a weekend available before each assignment is due)!

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.

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 by 1:15 p.m. on May 11 (the Tuesday of Finals Week). This paper cannot be submitted late, so please 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 are take-at-home exams and will be available on Canvas on the day before the end exam is due (i.e., March 1 and April 19 at 1:15 p.m.) and are due on the following day (i.e., March 2 and April 20) by 5 p.m. EDT, giving students more than 24 hours to complete them. Exams will be scanned by plagiarism software, and evidence of “copying among students” will be viewed as plagiarism by *all* individuals (thus, do not share your exams or work on exam answers together -- each exam must be exclusively each student’s own work and writing). 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 Symposium

During the last week of class, each student will present a summary of “lessons learned” in the course to share with others, presenting them in a virtual on-line Joy Symposium that we will host on-line in Zoom. Each student will give a 5-minute presentation live to the entire class about the lessons they learned from the course, either on May 4 or 6 (day and time for each student’s time slot will be randomly determined later in 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 greater meaningful in life. PIPs ask students to “go deeper,” whether that’s counting one’s blessings (PIP #1), showing genuine concern for others (PIP #2), writing and delivering gratitude letters to others (PIP #3), improving one’s ability to savor (PIP #4), performing random acts of kindness (PIP #5), reconsidering the role of money in one’s 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 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.

On-line discussion questions for readings

For each day of class where there is an assigned reading (20 days), there will be a reading discussion question posted on-line to assess student reading and to facilitate student reflection before each class. Posts must be completed before the start of class on the day the paper is discussed, each worth 10 points (graded in an all-or-nothing fashion). These questions will not be difficult, require only a few sentences to answer, are designed to reward students for keeping up with the reading (students cannot read others’ posts until after they post their own), and often serve as “starting points” for class discussions. Although students can “answer the questions” without extensive reading in some cases, students who approach readings with the sole goal of “how do I answer the discussion question” will be poorly prepared for exams or for writing analyses papers.

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 do not contribute to class 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. Even though holding discussions over Zoom is more challenging than in-person classes, it's still important to actively participate in class discussions even though they are on-line. More important, the focus of this course is to increase the joy and meaningfulness in our lives, and that goal cannot be accomplished passively and without engaging other (i.e., social psychology is about people *interacting* 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 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 that another student has engaged in academic misconduct.

Class policies

RTFS: Countless hours have gone into crafting this detailed syllabus. 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], "Can I just turn the final paper in a couple of days late?" [no]) are easily answered by reading the syllabus.

Assignments: Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus. With the exception of exams, all other assignments are due on Tuesdays (listed on the syllabus) before 1:15 p.m. EDT (the start of class). Any alterations that entail making assignments due at an earlier date will be announced at least one week in advance of a deadline (any changes will be announced in class, and it is each student's responsibility to attend to these announcements). All assignment deadlines are Eastern Daylight Time (i.e., Oxford time), regardless of the time zone where a student currently resides.

Special considerations: In situations where special, documented circumstances exist (e.g., official university obligations, religious observances), special arrangements can be made with the professor. However, students must make these arrangements before the end of the second week of the semester and provide documentation for them. Also, please note that most assignments can be completed in advance, thus the majority of conflicts with a due date do not require accommodation (e.g., a religious observance falling on a Tuesday due date is not an issue because the work can be submitted before that particular day).

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

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/>; 513.529.1541, V/TTY).

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. The professor will plan to record each class on Zoom, making it available for later review, but students are still expected to attend each class "live." Students may lend notes to fellow students in the same course as long as they do not financially profit from doing so.

Uploads and electronically-submitted 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., JPEG, Mac Pages) cannot be read by Canvas, and they will receive zeros because Canvas cannot process them, no exceptions. All documents will be scanned to ensure authentic scholarship (see academic integrity policy). Students with questions (e.g., how to upload documents, questions about academic integrity) should ask well 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 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 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 to Canvas, they must double check to make sure it was received and posted correctly. Failure to double-check that an uploaded assignment was uploaded is a student responsibility. Canvas does not "lose things," so statements such as, "I know I uploaded it, I don't know what happened, maybe our WiFi wasn't working" will not excuse missing work. Students spend a lot of time on their 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.

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 Makaroff supporting one's absence. There are no exceptions to this policy. Students who miss an exam should contact the professor immediately to and use *multiple* methods of contact (e.g., e-mail, telephone). Students have >24 hours to complete exams, providing them with considerable flexibility to complete these important, time-restricted assignments.

Illnesses and significant health disruptions: 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 are ultimately responsible for the material covered in class, regardless of whether the student is 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 below) or requesting a medical withdrawal.

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 student hours and will answer e-mail questions promptly. Points are earned in small, multiple increments rather than in a couple of monolithic assignments. There are 50 cushion points built into class, providing students with flexibility to handle adversity during the semester. 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 publications regarding deadlines and university policies.

Classroom conduct, respecting others: 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.

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. Further, even though this course is being delivered on-line, students should treat each other with respect even if, at times, the forms of communication may seem less formal (e.g., posting a comment in an on-line chat window should not be viewed as less formal than 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 (for details, visit <https://www.miamioh.edu/cas/academics/departments/psychology/about/diversity-inclusion/index.html>). Here is a statement adopted by the Department of Psychology on diversity and inclusion:

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 1:15 pm EDT (i.e., the start time of class), except for exams (due by 5 p.m. EDT), as indicated below. Readings are from the four paperbacks (*italics*, chapters or page ranges indicated) or entire PDFs of scientific papers (available on Canvas). This syllabus updated on 25jan2021.

	Date	Topic	Assignments
Week 1	Tu 1/26 Th 1/28	Introduction to the course Subjective well-being	Diener et al. (2017)
Week 2	Tu 2/2 Th 2/4	Searching for happiness Focusing on the wrong things	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 1-2); PIP #1 Schkade & Kahneman (1998)
Week 3	Tu 2/9 Th 2/11	Presentism Gratitude	McConnell et al. (2011); PIP #2 Emmons & Mishra (2011)
Week 4	Tu 2/16 Th 2/18	Rationalization No class: Gratitude letters	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 8-9)
Week 5	Tu 2/23 Th 2/25	Improving our happiness Perspective taking	<i>Stumbling</i> (Chapters 10-11); PIP #3 Todd & Galinsky (2014)
Week 6	Tu 3/2 Th 3/4	Exam 1 (available 3/1, due 5 p.m.) Beyond money	Diener & Seligman (2004)
Week 7	Tu 3/9 Th 3/11	No class: Wellness Day Getting more out of money	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chapters 1-2)
Week 8	Tu 3/16 Th 3/18	Savoring Valuing time	Quoidbach et al. (2015); PIP #4 <i>Happy Money</i> (Chapters 3-4)
Week 9	Tu 3/23 Th 3/25	No class: Random acts No class: Wellness Day	PIP #5
Week 10	Tu 3/30 Th 4/1	Investing in others Pets and relationships	<i>Happy Money</i> (Chp. 5, epilogue) McConnell et al. (2017)
Week 11	Tu 4/6 Th 4/8	Foundations of joy Obstacles to joy	<i>Joy</i> (Introduction, Day 1; pp. 1-78); PIP #6 <i>Joy</i> (Days 2-3; pp. 83-168)
Week 12	Tu 4/13 Th 4/15	Eight pillars of joy Nature and awe	<i>Joy</i> (Days 4-5; pp. 193-275) Piff et al. (2015)
Week 13	Tu 4/20 Th 4/22	Exam 2 (available 4/19, due 5 p.m.) No class: Go into nature day	
Week 14	Tu 4/27 Th 4/29	Foundations of ethics Ethics and the individual	<i>Ethics</i> (Chapters 1-5; pp. 1-77); PIP #7 <i>Ethics</i> (Chapters 6-10; pp. 79-158)
Week 15	Tu 5/4 Th 5/6	Joy Symposium Day #1 Joy Symposium Day #2	PIP #8
Finals	Tu 5/11	Final paper due before 1:15 p.m. EDT	