

## **The Science of Happiness**

### **Instructors:**

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Welcome to The Science of Happiness! This course examines the state of college student mental health and wellness on a personal and systems level. This class is an opportunity to re-evaluate your beliefs, values, and assumptions. In this course we look at how individuals can create positive change by reinterpreting their goals and identifying steps towards successful experience. Key findings from the fields of positive psychology and the study of mental illness will inform our understanding of the biopsychosocial underpinnings of well-being. The class seeks to reunite the current mission to cure mental illness with the exploration of how to foster more fulfilling and productive lives, and the understanding and the development of high potential. We will study the whole mind, in a variety of contexts, adding a greater understanding of health to that of illness.

### **NO RECITATION THE FIRST WEEK**

**Session 1: Introduction to “The Science of Happiness”**  
**(There is no homework but you will begin to do the Good Day Experiment to be discussed in class)**

**Session 2: Introduction to “The Science of Happiness” (Part Deux)**

#### Readings:

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University.

***Read chapters 1, 2, & 4***

Seligman, M.E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive Psychology: An Introduction. *American Psychologist*. 55(1), 5-14.

## **The Basics of Well-Being**

### **Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

Please write a paragraph to one page, double-spaced paper that addresses the following questions:

Given your first week introduction to positive psychology and the results of your Motivation rating sheet, what are your best thoughts and questions about the information (or process) that we addressed in class during the first week? The purpose of the assignment is simply to help you think through the introductory classes and look forward to the semester ahead. Be prepared to introduce your ideas about what well-being is and hopefully we will help with this! Complete the Good Day Experiment (for at least 1 week but we highly recommend two) and be prepared to discuss your findings (and hand it in). The Good Day Experiment is one of a few positive interventions that if maintained can shift you above your set point (it can be found under Recitation Exercises on NYU Classes).

### **Session 3: Well-Being & The Hedonic Treadmill**

#### Required Viewing:

The Happy Movie (Dir: Roko Belic) (You may rent on itunes for \$3.99 or free on Netflix)  
Epicurus on Happiness: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irornIAQzQY>

#### Readings:

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University.  
**Read chapter 3**

### **Session 4: Interventions**

#### Readings:

Kahn, M. (2003) "Does this Mean I'm Crazy?" Hidden Worries of Treatment-Naïve Patients. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 11:1,43-45.  
Rashid, T. (2009). "Positive Interventions in Clinical Practice." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 65(5), 461-466.  
Seligman, M.E.P., Steen, T.A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60, 410–421.

#### Excerpts from:

Plato's cave  
Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography

#### Optional Reading:

New Testament (passage on NYU Classes)  
Hebrew Bible (passage on NYU Classes)

#### Recommended Viewing:

Film: The Matrix

### **Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) write that people who stop and reflect on things for which they are most grateful are happier and more content with life. These researchers found that having people write three things down (with a brief explanation of why they were grateful for these things) at the end of each day had particular success. You will find an explanation of this assignment on page 38 of the Peterson Primer. Please complete this exercise for 5 days of the week, [write a paragraph to a page double-spaced report detailing how this exercise affected you as the week progressed, and how you now reflect on the process and results. Questions should come from the readings for February 6th \(consider the excerpts as 1 reading\).](#)

### **Session 5: The Science of Positive Emotions**

#### Readings

Fredrickson, B. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*. 56(3), 218-226.

- Fredrickson, B., Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade. (2000). The undoing effect of positive emotions. *Motivation and Emotion* 24(4), 237-258.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131(6), 803-855. (**Read ONLY 803-804, 822-846**)

#### Recommended Viewing

Film: Zorba the Greek

### **Session 6: The Science of Positive Relationships**

#### Readings

- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529. [**This is a long paper, only the first 7 pages are assigned (p.497-503)**]
- Gable, S. G. & Gosnell, C. L. (2011) The positive side of close relationships. In K. M. Sheldon, T. B. Kashdan and M. F. Steger (Eds.) *Designing positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward* (pp. 265 – 279).
- Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University.  
**Read chapter 10**

#### Required Viewing:

Nicolas Christakis /TED Talk:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/nicholas\\_christakis\\_the\\_hidden\\_influence\\_of\\_social\\_networks.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/nicholas_christakis_the_hidden_influence_of_social_networks.html)

#### Recommended Viewing

Film: Annie Hall  
Film: Love Actually  
Film: When Harry Met Sally

### **Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

Random, conscious acts of kindness have been empirically shown to decrease stress and strongly benefit enhanced mental health. Lyubomirski has found that individuals who complete five acts of kindness over the course of even one day report feeling much happier than control groups even days after the exercise is over. Note that these acts are consciously done rather than scanning the past day to see what you might have done that was nice. In preparation for this recitation, please choose three successive days on which to consciously perform such acts. They can be as simple as holding the door for someone, helping someone with their bags, etc. **Please write a paragraph to a one page double-spaced report detailing your interventions, and the reactions of both the beneficiaries and yourself. Questions should relate to the readings of February 11th.**

### **Session 7: Optimism**

#### Readings

- Feudtner, C. (2009). The breadth of hopes. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 361(24), 2306-2307.
- Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University.  
**Read chapter 5**
- Schneider, S.L. (2001). In search of Realistic Optimism: Meaning, Knowledge, and Warm Fuzziness. *American Psychologist* 56(3), 250-263.

Recommended Viewing:

Film: Life is Beautiful  
Film: Rudy

**Session 8: Signature Strengths & Flow**

*(Please bring your VIA-IS assessment results with you to the class.)*

Please log onto Martin Seligman's website [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org), and take the VIA-IS assessments (you will need to create your own account). Hold on to a copy of your assessment, you will need to bring it into recitation the week of September 30th.

Readings

Niemiec, R. Appendix to *Positive Psychology at the Movies*.

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University.

**Read chapters 6 & 8**

**Review pp. 65-69**

Rashid: 340 ways to use your signature strengths

Optional Reading

Biswas-Diener, R., Kashdan, T.B., & Minhas, G. (2011). A dynamic approach to psychological strength development and intervention. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(2), 106-118

Required Viewing

Please see the list of films from Ryan Niemiec on Blackboard. Choose one that corresponds to one of your top three and enjoy.

## Change

**Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

Please write a paragraph to a one page, double-spaced paper that addresses the following questions (no questions this week): Bring the VIA-IS assessment. Choose one of your top signature strengths and spend 30 minutes each day for three days immersed in a related activity (the same or a variety). For example, if a top signature strength is appreciation of beauty and mastery, and your passion is music, choose a favorite performer, and really listen for 30 minutes – immerse yourself, eyes closed, no distractions, etc. If it is love of learning, pick up a book solely for enjoyment or go to the museum, etc. Gratitude, spend 30 minutes solely focused on writing a letter of gratitude, or making a list of people who you would like to thank, and then calling them.

**Session 9: Mindset and Plasticity (Part I - psychology)**

Readings

Dweck, C. Messages that motivate (7 page PDF).

Dweck et al. (2007) "Implicit Theories of Intelligence Predict Achievement Across an Adolescent Transition: A Longitudinal Study and an Intervention." *Child Development*, 78:1, 246-263.

Article from the New York Times –  
1. South African Marriage

Required viewing

TEDTalk: Dan Gilbert on happiness

[http://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_gilbert\\_asks\\_why\\_are\\_we\\_happy.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy.html)

**Session 10: Mindset and Plasticity (Part 2 / Neuroplasticity)**

Readings

Doidge, N. (2007). *The brain that changes itself*. New York: Penguin Books. **(Yes...the entire book)**

**Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

Complete the “Stages of Change Exercise” found under “Change Exercise” in the Recitation Exercises folder on NYU Classes. Write a paragraph to a page double-spaced report detailing how this exercise affected you as the week progressed, and how you now reflect on change. [Questions should relate to the readings and videos of February 25th.](#)

**Session 11: Barriers to Change 1<sup>st</sup> Response Paper Due**

Readings:

Tykocinski and Pittman. The Consequences of Doing Nothing: Inaction Inertia as Avoidance of Anticipated Counterfactual Regret; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1998 vol 75 No. 3. 607-616.

Villarica, Hans. “The Chocolate-and-Radish Experiment That Birthed the Modern Conception of Willpower.” *The Atlantic*. April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Required Viewing:

TEDTalk: Barry Schwartz discussing The Paradox of Choice.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO6XEQIsCoM>

Recommended Viewing

Film: Dead Poet’s Society

## Tools for Change

**Session 12: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**

Readings

Beck, A.T. (2005). The Current State of Cognitive Therapy: A 40-Year Retrospective. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. Vol 62(9), 953-959.

Gabbard, G., Beck, J., and Holmes, J. (2005) *Oxford textbook of psychotherapy*. Oxford University Press. **Read: Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies, pages 15 – 25.**

Recommended Viewing

Film: The Shawshank Redemption

**Weekly Recitation Assignment:** See CBT Handout on Blackboard under Recitation Exercises. write a one page double-spaced report on either Part 1 or Part 2. No questions due this week. We will also take part of this recitation to split up into groups and begin to think about a final project.

### **Session 13: CBT Part II/Begin PTSD/PTG & Resilience**

#### Reading:

Joseph, S., (2013). *What doesn't kill us: The new psychology of posttraumatic growth*. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, pages 67 – 117.

Peterson, C., Seligman, M.E.P., & Vaillant, G.E. (1988). Pessimistic explanatory style is a risk factor for physical illness: A thirty-five year longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 23-27.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish*. New York: Free Press. (**Chapter 8, pages 152 – 163.**)

### **Session 14: Conclude PTSD/PTG & Resilience**

**Weekly Recitation Assignments:** When, if ever, does it make sense to pursue the “best” in making decisions? Decision making strategies that produce the best objective results do not always produce the best subjective results, ie., that people can sometimes do better using certain strategies for making decisions, but feel worse. Should people in general be willing to do a little less well objectively in order to feel better about how they do? Is this true in some areas of decision making but not others? If so, when should people care more about objective results and when should they care more about subjective results? Taking all of this in mind, what is a specific area(s) in your life where this might be the case, explain why and how you would pursue this? [Questions should relate to the readings and videos of March 4<sup>th</sup>.](#)

### **Session 15: Gratitude and Positive-Psychotherapy**

#### Readings

Rosmarin, D.H., Pirutinsky, S., Cohen. A.,Galler, Y., & Krumrei, E.J. (2011). Grateful to God or just plain grateful? A study of religious and non-religious gratitude. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(5), 389-396.

Seligman, M.E.P., Rashid, T., & Parks, A.C. (2006). Positive psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 61, 774–788.

### **Session 16: Tools for Communication**

#### Readings

TBD

**Weekly Recitation Assignment:** For this week’s exercise, I would like you to express your gratitude to someone else. Think of someone who has contributed to your well-being whom you’ve never fully thanked. This can be a parent, coach, sibling, romantic partner, friend, mentor, etc. Write a letter to that person describing the benefits you have received from them and why you appreciate them. Be detailed. Describe how the actions

made you feel. Take this letter and read it out loud to that person (if it will not cause harm or embarrassment or upset to the other person). If possible, do this in person. Take enough time to be together to exchange emotions. If this is not possible, send the letter to them. Bring a copy of your letter to class, along with some thoughts on how this exercise made you feel, what your experience was like, and (if you were able to share this with the recipient of the gratitude), how the sharing experience made you both feel. Be prepared to share a part or the whole letter depending on your comfort level. In the past people have thanked those who are no longer alive.

**No questions for this week. ALSO: Please hand in a brief proposal of your final project.**

**Session 17: PREP I (*Please be sure to bring your PREP manual to class*)**

Readings

Fraenkel, P., Markman, H., Stanley, S. (1997). The prevention approach to relationship problems. *Sexual and Marital Therapy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 249-257.

Taylor, S. E., Klein, L. C., Lewis, B. P., Gruenewald, T. L., Gurung, R. A., & Updegraff, J. A. (2000). Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight. *Psychological Review*, 107(3), 411-429. [can read just first 5 pages]

**Session 18: PREP II (*Please be sure to bring your PREP manual to class*)**

Readings

Atkinson, B. (2005) *Emotional intelligence in couples therapy*. New York: Norton.

***Chapter 3 – The Prerequisites for Relationship Success.***

Brody, J. (1992). To predict divorce, ask 125 questions. *The New York Times*, Aug 11, 1992.

Carrere et al. (2000). Predicting Marital Stability and Divorce in Newlywed Couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Vol. 14, No. 1, 42-58.

DeVita-Raeburn, E. (2006). Lust for the long haul. *Psychology Today*

**Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

Consider a time in your life (or even this week) when a challenging event made you stronger. What was the event? In what ways do you feel stronger? How and when do you feel this strength manifesting itself? What was the process of moving from challenge to strength? **Please write a paragraph to a one page double-spaced report detailing the above. Questions should relate to the readings of March 11<sup>th</sup> and March 13<sup>th</sup>. Part of the class will be devoted to discussing topics for the upcoming paper, please be prepared to discuss your ideas.**

**Session 19: Exercise**

Readings

Callaghan, P. (2004). Exercise: a neglected intervention in mental health care? *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 11, 476-483.

Two articles from the same link: DanBuettnerScienceKit.pdf

“Crimes of the Heart”. *Newsweek Magazine*, February 15, 2010 Brink, S. (August, 2010).

“A Town’s Health Makeover”. U.S. News and World Report.

Mutrie, N., & Faulkner, G. (2004). Physical activity: Positive psychology in motion. In P. A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 146-164). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

## **Session 20: Eating and Nutrition**

### Readings

TBD

### Required Viewing:

Film: Supersize Me  
&

TEDTalk: Dan Buettner discussing How to Live to Be 100.  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_buettner\\_how\\_to\\_live\\_to\\_be\\_100.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_buettner_how_to_live_to_be_100.html)

### **Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

See Diet Journal on Blackboard under Recitation Exercises. Please complete the Diet Journal and [write a paragraph to a one page double-spaced report detailing how this exercise affected you and/or any important observations you were able to make about how your diet effects your mood and vice-versa. Question should relate to films of April 10th.](#)

## **Session 21: Sleep**

### Readings

Klinkenborg, Verlyn. Awakening to Sleep. New York Times, 5 January 1997.

Henry, D., et al. (2008). "Is sleep really for sissies? Understanding the role of work in insomnia in the US." *Social Science & Medicine*, 66, 715-726.

Kilgore, W., et al. "The Effects of 53 Hours of Sleep Deprivation on Moral Judgment." *SLEEP*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2007, 345-352.

### Optional Reading:

Ahmed, Q. (2010). "Sleep Deprivation: The Metabolic Costs of Chronic Partial Sleep Loss." *PCCSU*, 2010.

# **From Positive Potential to Positive Excellence**

## **Session 22: The Sciences of Meditation and Mindfulness**

### Readings

Davidson J. R., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., Rosenkranz, M., Muller, D., Santorelli, S. F., Urbanowski, F., Harrington, A., Bonus, K. & Sheridan, J. F. (2003). Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65, 564-570.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future. *Clinical Psychology*, 10 (2), 144-156.

Langer, E., Djikic, M., Pirson, M., Madenci, A., & Donahue, R. (2010). Believing is Seeing: Using Mindlessness (Mindfully) to Improve Visual Acuity. *Psychological Science*, 21(5), 661-666.

### **Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

See Sleep Journal under Recitation Exercises on Blackboard. Write a paragraph to a one page double-spaced report detailing something you have observed (and hopefully learned) about your sleep. What makes it better? What makes it worse? What could you change, and what would be some of the barriers to changing your sleep habits? Questions should relate to the readings of April 15th.

### **Session 23: Positive Education -- 2<sup>nd</sup> Response Paper Due!**

#### Readings

Seligman, Martin E. P., et al. "Positive Education: Positive Psychology and Classroom Interventions." *Oxford review of education* 35.3 (2009): 293-311. *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)*. Web. 17 Jan. 2013.

Tough, Paul. (2011) "What if the Secret of Success is Failure?" *The New York Times*.

### **Session 24: From Positive Potential to Positive Excellence: Part I**

#### Readings

Lerner, D. (2012). Positive excellence: An exploration of the potential impact of positive psychology on the road to excellence and expertise.

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University.  
**Read chapter 12**

### **Weekly Recitation Assignment:**

**During this recitation all groups will present their final projects, ALL FINAL PROJECTS MUST BE NO MORE THAN 6 MINUTES.**

### **Session 25: From Positive Potential to Positive Excellence: Part II**

#### Readings

Doskoch, P. The Winning Edge. *Psychology Today*.

Locke, E.A. & Latham, G.P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal-setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey. *American Psychologist*, 57(9), 705-717

### **Session 26: From Positive Potential to Positive Excellence: Part III**

#### Readings

Kashdan, T.B., & McKnight, P.E. (2009). Origins of purpose in life: Refining our understanding of a life well lived. *Psychological Topics*, 18, 303-316.

Steger, M. F. (2009). Experiencing meaning in life: Optimal functioning at the nexus of well-being, psychopathology, and spirituality. In S. J. Lopez (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2ndEd.) (pp. 679-687). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Vallerand, R. J., Mageau, G. A., Ratelle, C., Leonard, M., Blanchard, C., Koester, R.,... Marsolais, J. (2003). Les passion de l'ame: On obsessive and harmonious passion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 756-767.

**Weekly Recitation Assignment:** Thoughts and behaviors that regulate good feelings in response to positive events are known as savoring strategies. Unfortunately, we often fail to appreciate these experiences fully, and we may not be consciously aware of the specific things that make these experiences enjoyable. This activity is about becoming more aware of how to savor a positive experience. Ideally, you would choose the final project but if you prefer to savor something else, go ahead. Try to remember the sights, sounds, and smells of the final project. Think about the emotions and thoughts you experienced. Carefully reflect on what you enjoyed about the activity, experience, location, or object you chose to savor. Sometimes, the joy in savoring occurs even more intensely after your time with that activity, experience, place, or object is over. In no less than one-paragraph and no more than a page double-spaced describe the activity, how it impacted you, and how you might find ways to savor more fully in your everyday life. (as taken from Activities for Teaching Positive Psychology, Froh and Parks). No questions are required this week.

### **Session 27: Mindfulness Meditation**

No required readings...yet another reason to love mindfulness meditation. Peter Doobinin, Dr. Schlechter's meditation instructor will come in to discuss the practical aspects of meditation.

### **Session 28: FINAL (Just the final, the whole final, and nothing but the final. Congratulations!)**

### **DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS...**

#### **Readings -**

You must purchase:

“The Brain that Changes Itself” by Norman Doidge

“The Primer in Positive Psychology” by Christopher Peterson

There is also the PREP Manual.

You will need to purchase 2 movies: The Happy Movie (Dir: Roko Belic) and Supersize Me (Dir: Morgan Spurlock) (You may rent on itunes for \$3.99 or it is free through Netflix Instant or Hulu)

All readings should be done by the day of class. All articles will be found on NYU Classes in the folder “Resources.”

#### **Lectures –**

This class is an exercise of practice and participation, and you must share a common knowledge to engage in productive conversation during recitation. If you disengage from this class and do not participate during recitation, it has a significant impact on the other students. Attendance will not be kept during class routinely but if the instructors observe the attendance to be below 80% (we will be assessing this by approximation), we reserve the right to have a pop attendance. Those not attending the class will receive a zero. So,

come with me on this one, you are all receiving 15% of your grade automatically if you tend to show up to class. We will take attendance three times. If you are not present the three times we take attendance, your grade starts at an 85%. If you miss a class you must let your TA know in advance, no emails after the fact will be accepted.

### **Recitations –**

We believe sharing your reactions to the articles, our lectures, and the exercises, is what makes the class both engaging and meaningful. We would like everyone to attend the recitations, which will meet weekly. Attendance will be kept and you will be expected to turn in assignments which will be graded mostly for completion and not content. If you miss a recitation you must contact your TA in advance and if you want credit for your weekly exercise (see below) you will need to include it in the email and bring a hard copy to the next class.

### **Weekly Exercises -**

There will be exercises that will be assigned for the recitations, they are either found in the syllabus or on NYU Classes. These exercises will be an integral part of class each week and thus we expect everyone to complete them and to hand them in. You will be expected to discuss the exercise in recitation. The exercise of the week is listed directly under the date of the week in the syllabus (I am sorry this is confusing, an example is, for the week of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the exercise to be handed in that week will be The Good Day Experiment.) You will largely be graded on effort (handing something in that looks like some time was spent on it) but the content is also subject to inspection. You will receive a “√” “√+” or “√-.” You receive a √- for simply completing the exercise, a √ for presenting your thoughts in an accessible manner (using good grammar, etc.), and a √+ for connecting the reading to the exercise. If you average √’s, then you will receive 100% of the grade (so if you get a few √-’s, don’t panic, just get a few √+’s). The exercise should be no less than a paragraph and no more than a page. You will also be expected to include a question for each reading assigned for that recitation. You should include a brief sentence or two that explains what interests you about these questions. The questions should indicate that you did the readings. The TA may ask you about your questions during the recitation and use them as a way of facilitating discussion. For any week, you only need to have questions for those readings/videos that are identified in the “Weekly Recitation Assignment.” If you do not hand in your exercise/question that will be counted as getting no credit.

### **Response Papers –**

Two response papers will be due throughout the course. Response papers should be 4 - 5 pages double-spaced (MLA or APA format, size 12, double spaced, Times New Roman, left heading). The response papers will involve some degree of personal examination using the material from the class. It should not be a diary entry and it should not be a book report – introduction, thesis statement, support (with references), and conclusion please. We will also expect a certain amount of proofreading (use your resource center if you need to!) and do not want terrible grammar or spelling. If you cannot hand in the

paper on time you must email it to your TA (so that we know it is done) and bring a hard copy to the next recitation.

Response Paper:

We used to think, and this was supported by research, that the brain became a static organ as people entered adulthood. We now know this is no longer true (as will you when you read The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science). The one thing in life we can be certain of is that there will always be change (someone else said this but I can't find the quote). If this is true, an important quality in all of us is our ability to tolerate and embrace change, or our plasticity. Consider some area in your life that you would like to change, describe why this change is important to your overall well-being. Then discuss 3-5 things in this book that could help you think about how to implement that change.

Response paper:

Choose one of the topics presented below.

1. Please write on your first page "Topic 1," "Topic 2," "Topic 4," or "Topic 3."
2. The length of the paper should be 4-5 pages (maximum 1,250 words).
3. You must use at least 2 academic articles from the syllabus and a third source may come from an additional article, a lecture, or one of the videos from the syllabus. You cannot use the Doidge book as one of the academic articles but it may be used in addition.

TOPIC 1: Write about how positive psychology can further advance a field of interest (such as healthcare) or a need in society (such as nourishing our green environment) or a need in the world (such as positive peacekeeping in the middle east). A shortcut to this topic is, "Considering positive psychology's aim to enhance human flourishing worldwide, how can the field make a significant impact on promoting healthy environments and institutions?" We want you to think big and dream, using empirically-based constructs of positive psychology to support your vision. An example: "'Green' is a buzzword. Individuals, homes, businesses and communities are working to support environmentally friendly living. Positive psychology can help" (And then describe the ways in which PERMA, and/or self-regulation, and/or goal-setting, etc can support this effort). Have fun.

PS. Write about how positive psychology can advance the career you are advancing. Since we have covered how positive psychology is advancing the field of education in the work of Dweck and the KIPP schools, if you are going to discuss education please do not focus on their achievements.

TOPIC 2: Write about how two specific research conclusions (from the readings, lectures, or the in-class guests) inter-relate, complement, or contradict each other. Here you have the chance to dig into the details of these research theories and offer you own analytical commentary. A shortcut to this topic is, "How do two research conclusions play off each other?" An example (not using 600 materials to avoid limiting your creativity!): "Goal-Setting Theory and Hope Theory are not only complements to each other, but ineffective without each other." Have fun.

TOPIC 3: Create a unique, comprehensive model organizing the ideas of positive psychology. We are not asking you to restate the five areas we covered or to regurgitate

things you have read, but to consider a different model for how positive psychology concepts go together and interact. What do you think should be at the heart of positive psychology – is it the notion of flourishing, or something else? Can you think of a new way to unify the components of positive psychology in a novel theoretical framework? A drawing or figure is very welcome. Make this something that you're proud of. Have fun.

TOPIC 4: WILDCARD! If you have developed a special interest during your time in the class you may speak with your TA and develop your own essay topic (you MUST speak with your TA).

### **Final Project -**

The final project is to be completed in small groups of 3 students who will be encouraged to think as a mental health team (if you go higher than 3 students, you must clear it with the TA's or myself). The goal of the final project is for students to disseminate information about positive psychology and student wellness on campus. Projects will focus on ways to improve self-esteem, happiness, physical health and other wellness domains covered during the class. During your second to last or final recitation you will present your project.

Possible examples of the projects include:

·Optimism – one project may seek to create awareness that optimism is not a static concept and that people can actually become more optimistic by identifying their cognitive distortions and consciously shifting their thoughts and behaviors. The project group might conduct a survey on campus of how students perceive themselves and their world, looking specifically at factors that may predispose one to an optimistic or pessimistic vantage point. The group will then prepare their results in the required poster format, which will be presented at the final session and posted in various spots on campus in abbreviated format. Finally, the group could then host an event within their dorm or at the Student Union where they disseminate information about the science of optimism and its relationship to change.

·Nutrition – students interested in nutrition and the mind might hold a cooking session on 20 ways to eat healthy with a microwave. The group might also choose to clarify the relationship between caffeine, sleep, and attention. It is well known that many students use caffeine as a study aid, yet the effects on attention and concentration are often negated by sleep deprivation, lack of exercise, and generally poor eating habits. The students could include healthy sleep and nutrition tips directed at improving performance in the materials they present on campus and in their poster.

### **Office Hours:**

*(For both Dan and Alan, office hours are by appointment, please email in advance.)*

**Alan's location:** Bellevue Hospital, 462 1st Avenue (28th street), Room A244  
Dr. Schlechter's office is located on the 2nd floor of the "A" building - the elevators (the "A East" elevators) are across from a group of vending machines next to the adult emergency room (if you walk in the front entrance of Bellevue and walk straight back, you can't miss it!).

**Dan's location:** Dan likes NYU...a lot. If he were on FourSquare (which he is not), he would be the mayor of Bobst. If being at Bobst were cool, he would be the coolest guy...possibly ever. He would be king of the little Fonzie's (and what was Fonzie? That's right.) Reach out to Dan and you will likely find the meeting will be over coffee (or on nice days a stroll) in or around Bobst.

**Social Media:**

Past classes have asked us how they might keep abreast of positive psychology related goings-on both here at NYU and beyond, as well as how we might develop an group of current and past Science of Happiness students. In an effort to do so, we recently began our very own Twitter account (@NYUHappiness) and Facebook page (NYUHappiness). We will be sharing related media, both for you and for any friends to whom you may want to forward the good word along. We will also share some of the clips and gems from classes (both yours and ours), offer updates to assignments or recitations, and most importantly, be a hub where you can connect with others and share your own insights and experiences. Please do join...the more the merrier!

**Grades:**

**15% - Lecture Attendance**

**30% - Recitation Attendance (10%), Participation (10%), and Exercises (10%)**

**10% - Final Exam**

**30% - 2 Response papers (each 15%)**

**15% - Final project/paper and poster presentation**