

PS230 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY: THE SCIENCE OF A GOOD LIFE

IES Abroad Milan

DESCRIPTION:

Psychological science has made a steady progress in describing, explaining, diagnosing and treating mental illness. By curing dysregulations and maladjustments, clinical psychology aims at alleviating and/or possibly eliminating a patient/client's suffering. Nevertheless, taking away the negative does not automatically imply promoting the positive and recovering does not necessarily mean flourishing and making life meaningful: it mostly means building up or restoring a healthy balance in mental and physical terms.

So, what makes the human being flourish and life worth living? What are the individual and social strengths and virtues which make life meaningful?

In order to answer these questions, a new psychological science was born : it is Positive Psychology, a relatively new branch of psychology whose goal is the optimal functioning of the individual. Positive psychology is "the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on multiple levels that include the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural, and global dimensions of life" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

This course offers the students the unique opportunity not only to learn about the science of well-being but also to understand how to increase personal strengths and virtues by applying and experiencing each week an intervention from Positive Psychology. Students will record their empirical findings in their learning journals and, while doing so, will reflect on their own well-being and how to increase it.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

Lectures, Discussions, Group exercises, Presentations

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Active Participation - 10%
- Learning Journal - 20%
- Midterm Exam - 25%
- Home Assignment - 20%
- Final Exam - 25%

Learning Journal

The students will keep a digital Learning Journal, where they will record their reflections about what is presented, shared and discussed each week during the course and what is experienced while in Europe. Each week, they will write an entry in their Journal (min 100 max 300 words) based on the reading assignments, activities or classroom discussions and upload it on Moodle. The students should strive to write observations that are thoughtful and meaningful to them and reflect deeply on how the concepts that are covered in class relate to their own lives. Some questions to consider for Learning Journal entries for each week:

- 1) What was the most interesting/inspiring/useful finding, theory, practice you discovered from this week's class and readings?
- 2) In which way what you have experienced this week is relevant for your wellbeing?
- 3) How can you apply these new insights to add to your well-being?

The students will receive a final grade for their Learning Journal entries, which will account for 20% of their final grade for the course.



Midterm Exam

The exam will be composed of multiple-choice questions, short questions/answers, true-false questions, essay-questions covering the contents presented and discussed in class from the beginning of the course until the Review Lesson (see below for the date).

Home Assignment

My Own Well-Being Recipe

After exploring a wealth of scientific research on well-being, individual reflection is needed. The students will review and incorporate scientifically validated components of a good life from Positive Psychology findings and work out a personalized formula for their own well-being.

Some questions to guide them along:

- What ingredients will I choose for my happiness recipe?
- What do I need to be happy?
- What does flourishing mean for me?

During their presentations (5 minutes max + 2 minutes discussion), the students will support each one of their chosen ingredients with findings from psychological science, including theories, experiments, and interventions. Then, they will infuse flavor and meaning into their recipes by incorporating examples from their own personal life experiences.

Grading rubric for paper and presentations: (70 points)

Paper (minimum 1500 words): TO BE SUBMITTED BY EMAIL. 3 points will be deducted for every hour of delay in the submission of the paper.

The student provides a complete overview of the appropriate literature and identifies and explains the specific concepts, theories, and interventions relevant for their formula. The student draws on examples and insights from their own life to formulate a hypothesis for a well-being recipe for themselves.

- Structure and content (abstract, main content, conclusive remarks, bibliography APA Referencing Style - originality): (40)
- Application of findings to own life, reflections, examples, case studies (30)

Presentation (30 points): if the student uses a visual support (e.g. PowerPoint), he/she will submit their PPT file by email at the latest at 1pm on the day before their presentation's day. 3 points will be deducted for every hour of delay in the submission of the visual support. No point will be deducted if before the presentation's day the student communicates to the instructor that he/she is not going to use any visual support.

The student tells an engaging, clear story that combines scientific findings with their own life examples and uses the slides to draw attention to important points.

- Clarity (10)
- Slides (10)
- Eye-contact/engagement/oratory (10)

Peer review

The student will receive one anonymous Wellbeing Recipe (of one of their classmates) and will have to read it and get prepared to make some comments and clarifying questions as Discussant in class after the Recipe's author has made their presentation. This will be graded as Student Engagement/Participation.

Final Exam

The exam will be composed of multiple-choice questions, true-false questions, short questions/answers, essay-questions covering the contents presented and discussed in class from the Midterm Exam until the Review Lesson preceding the final exam.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify key concepts and findings from the field of Positive Psychology
- Put into practice scientifically validated strategies for living more fulfilled and happier lives.
- Develop confidence as public speakers by presenting in front of the class.
- Engage in critical thinking through classroom discussion and debates
- Explore and reflect on the drivers of their own well-being.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

As a member of our class community, you are expected to be present and on time every day. Attending class has an impact on your learning and academic success. For this reason, the IES Abroad Milan attendance policy allows for the following number of absences, which are intended to be used for physical and mental health reasons:

THREE (3) absences in each Italian language course,

TWO (2) absences in each Area Studies course,

ONE (1) absence in each seminar course or course meeting 1 day a week,

ZERO (0) absences in each course of individual music instruction.

Every absence beyond this allowance will automatically result in a penalty of 2 percentage points off the final grade. SEVEN (7) absences will result in a failing grade in Italian language and Area Studies courses. FOUR (4) absences will result in a failing grade in seminar or 1-day-a-week courses. Failure to attend a scheduled exam, test, quiz, or presentation will automatically result in an F grade on that assessment.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Students are expected to abide by the IES Abroad Code of Academic Integrity. All work submitted by a student for academic credit should constitute the student's own original work. Any work submitted for academic credit may be subject to review by a textual similarity detection service for the detection of plagiarism and AI usage.

CONTENT:

Session	Content	Resources and Reading Materials
Week 1 Session 1	Introduction to Positive Psychology • Introduction to the course: overview of the topics, organization of the lessons, exploration of the learning resources • The Learning Journal • What is Positive Psychology • Themes and scope of Positive Psychology	

Session	Content	Resources and Reading Materials
Week 1 Session 2	The foundations of Positive Psychology - Historical perspective: influences from eastern and western philosophical traditions - Individualism vs. Collectivism - Time perspective	Seligman MEP. Positive Psychology: A Personal History. (2019) Annu Rev Clin Psychol. 2019 May 7;15:1-23. Assignment: Measure your need for Uniqueness Complete the questionnaire (on Moodle), calculate the score and record it in your Learning journal, together with a personal reflection. Assignment: Measure your personal Time Perspective Complete the questionnaire, calculate the score and record it in your Learning journal, together with a personal reflection
Week 2 Session 1	What is happiness? - Well-being vs. Happiness - PERMA: The building blocks of well-being - The benefits of well-being	Martin Seligman (2018): PERMA and the building blocks of well-being, The Journal of Positive Psychology Assignment: Measure your wellbeing Take the PERMA questionnaire. The link is on Moodle. Please record your score in your Learning Journal. You will take the quiz again at the end of the semester to see whether there were any changes to your baseline score after completing the course. Assignment: Measure your happiness Take the Authentic Happiness Inventory (link on Moodle). This quiz offers a scientifically validated measure of your happiness levels. Please record your score in your Learning Journal. You will take the quiz again at the end of the semester to see whether there were any changes to your baseline score after completing the course.
Week 2 Session 2	Character strenghts and virtues Strengths and virtues are the pillars of Positive Psychology - What are strengths and virtues? - Strength-based approaches in parenting, workplace, relationships, self-realization	Assignment: Discover and experience your signature character strengths. Take the character strengths test (link on Moodle). The survey includes 240 questions and gives you a ranking of your 24 strengths. In your Learning Journal, write down your top 10-character strengths and find ways to use them every day. Whenever you realize it happens, report it in your Learning Journal. Willibald Ruch, Fabian Gander, Lisa Wagner & Fiorina Giuliani (2021) The structure of character: On the relationships between character strengths and virtues, The Journal of Positive Psychology, 16:1, 116-128

Session	Content	Resources and Reading Materials
Week 3 Session 1	Character strenghts and virtues Comparing Character Strengths	
Week 3 Session 2	Guest Lecture Character Strengths in Action through the Psychology of Sailing Guest Lecturer: dr. Fabio Brunazzi, psychologist	
Week 4 Session 1	Positive Emotions Positive emotions are often referred to as the “tiny engines” of Positive Psychology. We will explore their role in human flourishing. - What is an emotion? - From primary emotions to positive emotions - The role of positive emotions	Assignment: 3 good things. For this week, every evening jot down 3 things that 1) went well during the day, and 2) explain what made them go well.
Week 4 Session 2	Positive Emotions Exploring positive emotions - The effect of positive emotions on well-being - The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions	Fredrickson BL. (2001), “The role of positive emotions in positive psychology. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions”. Am Psychol. Mar;56(3):218-26.
Week 5 Session 1	Positive Emotions Exploring Positive Emotions - Positivity Ratios - Emotional Intelligence	Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Updated Thinking on Positivity Ratios. American Psychologist. Advance online publication. Excerpt from the Handbook of Positive Psychology - The Positive Psychology of Emotional Intelligence by Peter Salovey, John D. Mayer, & David Caruso Assignment: Measure your emotional intelligence (link on Moodle) Assignment: Measure your positivity ratio (link on Moodle) Report your reflections in your Learning Journal

Session	Content	Resources and Reading Materials
Week 5 Session 2	Emotional Intelligence The concept of Emotional Intelligence and its importance in today's business industry. IQ vs EI	
Week 6 Session 1	Review Lesson Review of the topics presented and discussed from the beginning of the course to March 12th included	
Week 6 Session 2	Midterm Exam - The exam is composed of multiple-choice questions, true-false questions, short questions/answers (definitions), essay-questions - The Correction of the Exam will take place at the beginning of the next lesson	Grading Rubric for the Exam: - Correctness of the Answer (multiple choice and true-false questions): the maximum number of points you will receive for each correct answer will be clearly indicated next to each question. - Structure, Clarity and Conciseness of the answers (short questions/answers): the maximum number of points you will receive for each answer will be clearly indicated next to each question. - Structure, Clarity and Critical Thinking (essay-questions): the maximum number of points you will receive for each correct answer will be clearly indicated next to each question.
Week 7 Session 1	Positive Health • The essential role of the Vagus Nerve • Conscious Breathing • Applications • Heart Rate Variability • Heart Coherence • Applications	Wilkie L, Fisher Z, Kemp AH. (2022)The Complex Construct of Wellbeing and the Role of Vagal Function. <i>Front Integr Neurosci</i> . 2022 Jul 7;16:925664. Grippo AJ. (2017), Opinion: "Heart Rate Variability, Health and Well-Being: A Systems Perspective" Research Topic. <i>Front Public Health</i> . 2017 Sep 25;5:246 McCraty, R. (2022), Following the Rhythm of the Heart: HeartMath Institute's Path to HRV Biofeedback. <i>Appl Psychophysiol Biofeedback</i> 47 , 305–316.

Session	Content	Resources and Reading Materials
Week 7 Session 2	Positive Cognitive States How cognitive states and processes shape well-being - Flow - Self-Efficacy - Optimism	Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). <i>The concept of flow</i>. In M. Csikszentmihalyi, Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology (pp. 239-263). Chicago, IL: Springer Netherlands. Segerstrom, S. C., Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2017). Optimism. In M. D. Robinson & M. Eid (Eds.), <i>The happy mind: Cognitive contributions to well-being</i> (pp. 195–212). Springer International Publishing/Springer Nature Zulkosky, Kristen. (2009). Self-Efficacy: A Concept Analysis. Nursing Forum Maddux, J. E. (2009). Self-Efficacy: The Power of Believing You Can. In C. R. Snyder, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), <i>Handbook of Positive Psychology</i> (pp. 277-287). Oxford: OUP
Week 8 Session 1	Guest Lecture ??? Gyrokinesis for Body & Mind Lecturer: Laura Catrani	
Week 8 Session 2	Course-related trip Milan Tibetan Center – The Tibetan Singing Bowls	
Week 9 Session 1	Mindfulness - What is Mindfulness - Mindfulness and wellbeing - Mindfulness and Meditation	Jazaieri, H. & Shapiro, S. (2017), Mindfulness and Well-Being, (2017), In book: The happy Mind: Cognitive Contributions to Well-Being (pp. 41-58)
Week 9 Session 2	Resilience Having a meaningful life means also to have the capacity of bouncing back from inevitable setbacks - What is resilience? - How can resilience be nurtured?	De Roiste, A., (2018). Nurturing resilience: the ‘ordinary magic’ of everyday life. <i>Journal of Human Growth and Development</i>. 28. 278-282. 10.7322/jhgd.152175. Macfarlane, J. (2021). Positive psychology: resilience and its role within mental health nursing. <i>British Journal of Mental Health Nursing</i>.

Session	Content	Resources and Reading Materials
Week 10 Session 1	Interpersonal Processes Social connections are paramount for wellbeing. - What hurts relationships? - How to nurture positive relationships	Teghe, Daniel & Rendell, Kathryn. (2005). Social wellbeing: a literature review. 10.13140/RG.2.2.28891.26406. PERMA Questionnaire via Penn University's Authentic Happiness Website and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (links on Moodle). Record any changes in your learning journal, together with your reflections.
Week 10 Session 2	Home Assignment In-class Presentations by Students Presentation of the personal formula for well-being	Grading Rubric for the Paper and the Presentation: see above
Week 11 Session 1	Home assignment In-class Presentations by Students Presentation of the personal formula for well-being	Grading Rubric for the Paper and the Presentation: see above
Week 11 Session 2	Review Lesson Review of the material presented and discussed in the period from Midterm Exam onwards	
	Final Exam - The exam is composed of multiple-choice questions, true-false questions, short questions/answers (definitions), essay-questions - The Correction of the Exam will take place at the beginning of the next lesson	Grading Rubric for the Exam: - Correctness of the Answer (multiple choice and true-false questions): the maximum number of points you will receive for each correct answer will be clearly indicated next to each question. No deduction for a wrong answer. - Structure, Clarity and Conciseness of the answers (short questions/answers): the maximum number of points you will receive for each answer will be clearly indicated next to each question. - Structure, Clarity and Critical Thinking (essay-questions): the maximum number of points you will receive for each correct answer will be clearly indicated next to each question.

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Milan Tibetan Center – The Tibetan Singing Bowls

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Seligman MEP. Positive Psychology: A Personal History. (2019) Annu Rev Clin Psychol. 2019 May 7;15:1-23. doi: 10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-050718-095653.

- Martin Seligman (2018): PERMA and the building blocks of well-being, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2018.1437466
- Willibald Ruch, Fabian Gander, Lisa Wagner & Fiorina Giuliani (2021) The structure of character: On the relationships between character strengths and virtues, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 16:1, 116-128, DOI: [10.1080/17439760.2019.1689418](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1689418)
- Scheier, Michael & Swanson, Joshua & Barlow, Meaghan & Greenhouse, Joel & Wrosch, Carsten & Tindle, Hilary. (2021). Optimism Versus Pessimism as Predictors of Physical Health: A Comprehensive Reanalysis of Dispositional Optimism Research. *American Psychologist*. 76. 529-548. 10.1037/amp0000666.
- Segerstrom, S. C., Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2017). Optimism. In M. D. Robinson & M. Eid (Eds.), *The happy mind: Cognitive contributions to well-being* (pp. 195–212). Springer International Publishing/Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58763-9_11
- Boehm, J. K., Ruberton, P., Lyubomirsky, S. (2021) 'The Promise of Fostering Greater Happiness' in C. R. Snyder and others (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 3rd edn; online edn, Oxford Academic <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199396511.013.55>,
- Zulkosky, Kristen. (2009). Self-Efficacy: A Concept Analysis. *Nursing Forum*. 44. 93 - 102. Doi:10.1111/j.1744-6198.2009.00132.x.
- Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). *The concept of flow*. In M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology* (pp. 239-263). Chicago, IL: Springer Netherlands.
- Maddux, J. E. (2009). Self-Efficacy: The Power of Believing You Can. In C. R. Snyder, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 277-287). Oxford: OUP <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195187243.013.0031>
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Updated Thinking on Positivity Ratios. *American Psychologist*. Advance online publication
- Jazaieri, Hooria & Shapiro, Shauna, (2017), *Mindfulness and Well-Being*, (2017), In book: *The happy Mind: Cognitive Contributions to Well-Being* (pp. 41-58), DOI:[10.1007/978-3-319-58763-9_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58763-9_3)
- Grippo AJ. Opinion: "Heart Rate Variability, Health and Well-Being: A Systems Perspective" Research Topic. *Front Public Health*. 2017 Sep 25;5:246. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2017.00246. PMID: 28993803; PMCID: PMC5622597.
- McCraty, R. Following the Rhythm of the Heart: HeartMath Institute's Path to HRV Biofeedback. *Appl Psychophysiol Biofeedback* 47, 305–316 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10484-022-09554-2>
- Wilkie L, Fisher Z, Kemp AH. The Complex Construct of Wellbeing and the Role of Vagal Function. *Front Integr Neurosci*. 2022 Jul 7;16:925664. doi: 10.3389/fnint.2022.925664. PMID: 35875509; PMCID: PMC9301262.
- De Roiste, A., (2018). Nurturing resilience: the 'ordinary magic' of everyday life. *Journal of Human Growth and Development*. 28. 278-282. 10.7322/jhgd.152175.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Lea Waters, Sara B. Algae, Jane Dutton, Robert Emmons, Barbara L. Fredrickson, Emily Heaphy, Judith T. Moskowitz, Kristin Neff, Ryan Niemiec, Cynthia Pury & Michael Steger (2022) "Positive psychology in a pandemic: buffering, bolstering, and building mental health", *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 17:3, 303-323, DOI: [10.1080/17439760.2021.1871945](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.1871945)
- Seligman, Martin & Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. (2000). "Positive Psychology: An Introduction". *The American psychologist*. 55. 5-14. 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5.
- Fredrickson BL. (2001), "The role of positive emotions in positive psychology. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions". *Am Psychol*. Mar;56(3):218-26. doi: [10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.218](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.218).
- Fredrickson BL., (2004), The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*.;359(1449):1367-78. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2004.1512.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. (2014). *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology: The collected works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*. 10.1007/978-94-017-9088-8.
- Teghe, Daniel & Rendell, Kathryn. (2005). Social wellbeing: a literature review. 10.13140/RG.2.2.28891.26406.
- Iasiello M, van Agteren J, Keyes CLM, Cochrane EM. Positive mental health as a predictor of recovery from mental illness. (2019), *J Affect Disord*. 2019 May 15; 251:227-230. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2019.03.065.
- Rowland L, Curry OS. A range of kindness activities boost happiness. *J Soc Psychol*. (2019); 159(3):340-343. doi: 10.1080/00224545.2018.1469461. Epub 2018 May 15. PMID: 29702043.
- Vazquez C, Valiente C, García FE, Contreras A, Peinado V, Trucharte A, Bentall RP., (2021), Post-Traumatic Growth and Stress-Related Responses During the COVID-19 Pandemic in a National Representative Sample: The Role of Positive Core

Beliefs About the World and Others. *J Happiness Stud.* 2021;22(7):2915-2935. doi: 10.1007/s10902-020-00352-3. Epub 2021 Jan 11. PMID: 33456320; PMCID: PMC7798377.

- Macfarlane, J. (2021). Positive psychology: resilience and its role within mental health nursing. *British Journal of Mental Health Nursing.* 10. 1-14. 10.12968/bjmh.2020.0049.