

# PSYCHOLOGY 3303

## An Online Conference in Positive Psychology

### *Typical Course Description:*

The description is offered as a general reference and specific components of the course will change from year to year and when taught on campus versus online. Always refer to the course outline for the grading scheme for the year/section in which you enrol.

Much of psychology is focused on disorders and problems in development. Positive psychology is the study of how human beings prosper and live well. One of the goals of positive psychology is to identify and enhance the human strengths and virtues that make life better, allowing individuals and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

This course is designed to explore the concepts, research techniques, and exercises that enhance well-being. The format of the course is inspired by major Psychology conferences. Thousands of professional psychologists attend the annual meetings of the Canadian Psychological Association or the American Psychological Association. There, they learn about the newest theory and research, network with colleagues, and are energized by new ideas. A good conference is both experiential and research-oriented.



This course will be called an Online Positive Psychology Conference. In order to participate in the conference you will be asked to submit a research proposal, attend the video presentations of plenary speakers, actively participate in dialogue sessions called “coffee breaks”, and document your reactions and ideas in online forums as we move through the conference.

The videos, readings and exercises will foster both academic and personal knowledge. A key component of the course is online interaction among students in small groups.

### *Course Objectives:*

The student will be able to:

1. Understand the aims of positive psychology and differentiate positive psychology from ‘pop’ psychology.

2. Understand the emerging position of positive psychology within the rest of psychology.
3. Through structured exercises, acquire insight into personal strengths and virtues, learn and practice strategies to increase happiness and overall quality of life as part of the course requirements.
4. Develop an understanding of the dimensions of subjective well-being and the application to students' lives.
5. Comprehend research that supports the principles, strategies, and skills of positive psychology.

***Readings:***

Petersen, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press. (386 pages).

All required readings will be available online. E-books will be ordered for this course by the CBU library.

***Viewings:***

Each week there will be a series of required video and/or audio clips available online, usually via YouTube, TED talks, or on the CBU server. Several MP3 recordings and/or narrated PowerPoint presentations with instructor's commentary will be made available to the students. All such material will be treated as readings. Where appropriate, a viewing guide will be made available to orient students toward key material.



***Learning from each other:***

In addition to the video and audio material, there will be a series of presentations from other students. It is important to understand that the online posting of other conference participants (i.e., your student colleagues) are key to your learning as well. You are expected to read their postings and should write your reactions to them whenever appropriate.

***Outline of Topics***

***(based on Peterson's chapters)***

Each week, we will complete the exercise in Peterson's text at the end of the chapter. Check back often for additional posted readings, audio or video files, and other material that accompanies the weekly topic. Also, check your email every day for messages about the readings, opportunities to try something new, online discussions, and TRACK assignments that contribute to your grade. The course

will evolve and change as we go along and conference participants are welcome to make suggestions for new topics or assignments.

## 1 What Is Positive Psychology?

- What are its historical roots in Psychology?
- What are the key readings in the field?

## 2 Positive Psychology Is Not a Spectator Sport

- The importance of research support in Positive Psychology
- Epistemology: Action research versus Experimental research

## 3 Pleasure and Positive Experience

- The emotion-cognition helix
- Broaden-and-Build theory of emotion; Csikszentmihalyi's concept of Flow

## 4 Happiness

- Researching happiness, measuring happiness at the national level
- Increasing happiness

## 5 Positive Thinking

- Biased memory, cognition, and explanatory style are the 'frenemies' of positivity
- Dispositional versus situational accounts

## 6 Character Strengths

- The VIA project (Values in Action)
- Tradeoffs among strengths

## 7 Values

- The structure, origin, and problem of human values
- Meaning in suffering (Frankl's approach to psychotherapy)

## 8 Interests, Abilities, and Accomplishments

- Intelligence and its antidotes
- The curious history of achievement motivation research

## 9 Wellness

- The conceptualization of mental health / illness
- Resilience and coping

## 10 Positive Interpersonal Relationships

- The many dimensions love (from neurotransmitters to culture)
- A communication approach

## 11 Enabling Institutions

- Family home, school, workplace, and church.
- Do schools kill creativity on purpose or by accident?

## 12 The Future of Positive Psychology

- Seligman's 3 big questions
- Future research

### **How to Earn Marks by Participating in the Conference**

**I. Concept Quiz.** A concept quiz will cover the readings in the course. To focus your efforts, a list of study topics will be posted before the quiz. It will be a 90-minute, proctored, paper-and-pencil quiz. If you can come to CBU we will write it together. If you cannot come to CBU, you must arrange a proctor through the Distance Education office at CBU.

### **II. Conference Proposal and Presentation.**

In order to participate in the online conference, every person must submit a proposal. This is your way of contributing to the online conference community and ensuring that other participants gain knowledge from you. The core of a typical presentation will be a paper 7 - 12 pages in length, with theory and practical exercises and supplemented by something creative you have done.

Your proposal locks in your topic and guarantees you a place at the conference. In order to make a proposal, you must (1) identify the topic area, (2) list the title & authors of the paper you have chosen to cover from the **Handbook**, (3) describe a link to a topic in the Peterson textbook, and (4) if possible identify the type of learning experience (exercise, activity, etc.) that might contribute to understanding the concepts in your presentation. A typical proposal will be 1 - 2 pages in length (250 - 700 words).

If your proposal is accepted, later in the conference you will be permitted to make your presentation, online via a conference room (discussion forum).

Each presentation has three parts:

1. A summary of your topic.
2. A link to the textbook. The presentation will link your topic to a relevant section of the textbook, analyzing its connection to one of the experiential exercises in the textbook.
3. A new experience. As Peterson says, Positive Psychology is not a spectator sport, so the final part of your presentation will be to offer a suggestion about how other people can experience the concept you are presenting. For example, suggest an exercise or an activity that will help people to understand the concept you are addressing

4. A creative supplement. Exercise your creativity by adding an image, a photo, a collage, an original song, an artistic work, or something that you have created, inspired by your topic.

**III Self-Improvement Project and Paper.** The self-improvement project and paper is submitted in two parts. Part one, the proposal, will focus on an issue to be addressed and how you plan to address it (e.g., increase happiness, stop a bad habit, enjoy more time with family and friends, have a better mood more often, etc.). Part two should describe the results of your efforts, how you evaluated your success, your future, and how you'll make it better using the skills and techniques learned in this course. Details will be provided as we go through the course, check your email often.

The BIG one:

#### **IV. Experiential Exercises and Postings**

Students are required to complete experiential exercises throughout the course in which they apply the material of the course to their lives. Typically, a 150-1000 word *forum posting* will be written about their experience with the exercise and posted to a forum in Moodle. Think of these as mini-papers, not as quick little opinion pieces. The ultimate goal is to experience the positive psychology construct first hand, think about the experience in a meaningful way and, as a result, gain insight into the underlying psychological processes. A key piece of the reflection is to relate personal experience to the literature on positive psychology. You can keep doing these until you've earned a full 40% (keep doing them afterward as well if you like). This is the best way to accumulate grades in this course, be sure to make all of the forum postings.

Experiential exercises include:

**(a) *Coffee Breaks*** where you discuss your reaction to plenary speakers or readings by posting a reaction of 250 - 1000 words. Coffee breaks at a conference are where some of the most interesting discussions take place. People react to the plenary speaker, maybe they are energized by great ideas or want to dispute something controversial that they heard. A good plenary provokes a reaction, and that's what the coffee break forum is designed to capture. After you hear a plenary speaker, jump into the forum to post your reaction, or read what people are saying and react to them. In this way, it is similar to a classroom discussion. Remember, the coffee break forum is your opportunity to express your opinion, support by comments from the speakers and from the Peterson textbook. Post something after every plenary.

**(b) *TRACK Assignments*** watch your email for exciting opportunities to earn points from your act of kindness or compassion. These opportunities will be time-limited so participants must check their CBU email account (used by Moodle) every day or two. TRACK assignments are required, that is mandatory!

**(c) *Late Additions to the Program*** opportunities will come up during the course (for example a news story, guest speaker, webinar or event relevant to Positive Psychology) and we will add something so that you can take advantage of it (and receive course credit).