

PSY 357 | The Psychology of Happiness, Meaning, and Resilience Fall 2026

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Course Description

This course provides an in-depth exploration of the scientific foundations and practical applications of positive psychology, the study of what makes life most worth living. Placing an emphasis on evidence-based data, students will investigate the psychological factors that contribute to human flourishing, including happiness, character strengths, meaning, and positive relationships. The course also examines the concept of resilience and how individuals adapt and evolve in the face of adversity and integrates approaches to enhancing personal and collective wellbeing. Through critical analysis of current research, experiential learning, and reflective practice, students will develop skills and tools to enhance their own wellbeing and understand what makes life most worth living from a positive psychology perspective.

Course Approach

The course topics, issues and questions will be explored via lectures, readings, class discussions and exercises, students' presentations and home assignments. This course will require students to develop academic skills such as academic reading and writing, presentation skills, reflection and critical thinking. Students will have to familiarize themselves with the reading material of the course, conduct a literature search which will help them to prepare their home assignments and in-class presentations, critically reflect on the material they read, participate in class discussions and deliver a group training exercise. To meet the course requirements and develop the aforementioned skills, students will work both individually and in small groups (depending on class size). A detailed description of how students will work is provided under section "Course requirements".

Learning Objectives

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

- Explain core theories and concepts of positive psychology, wellbeing and resilience.
- Reflect and critically evaluate empirical evidence related to psychological wellbeing and positive interventions.
- Apply strengths-based and evidence-informed practices to enhance wellbeing.
- Demonstrate an understanding of psychological resilience and strategies to foster adaptability and post-traumatic growth.
- Analyze the role of positive emotions, relationships, meaning, and engagement in promoting wellbeing
- Design and present a personalized wellbeing plan, incorporating tools and techniques covered throughout the course.
- Discuss and communicate insights and findings related to positive psychology, wellbeing and resilience

Course Requirements

Attendance

Students are required to attend all classes. Absences are recorded and have consequences. Absences that are due to illness or other such important reasons should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal.

Participation & Readings

Students are required to actively participate in class activities and discussions and take all relevant assessments. It is expected that students will align with CYA academic policies while completing assignments. Book chapters, journal articles and potentially additional material will be provided as a suggested reading material in the weekly schedule list below. Some book chapters & articles might be assigned during lectures as required reading to prepare students for class discussions.

Home Assignments:

You will be asked to complete two home assignments during the course. Deadlines for Assignment submission will be available on Moodle. Assignment 1 will need to include references following the APA7 referencing system.

Failure to submit on time your assignments will result in a zero (0) mark for the corresponding assignment.

1st Assignment (submitted on class/lecture 5 – via MOODLE):

Write a two-page (double-space / 12 Times New Roman) assignment on: *How does the concept of authentic*

happiness (as proposed by Martin Seligman) challenges or aligns with your personal understanding of happiness?

(The assignment will need to include in-text citations and a references section at the end (3rd page), following the APA7 reference system).

2nd Assignment (submitted on class/ lecture 21-via MOODLE):

Write a one-page (double-space/ 12 Times New Roman) reflection on: *How you think the overall content of this course can make a difference in your life?*

Evaluation Criteria -Written assignments will be assessed based on:

- Structure
- Evidence (research evidence-appropriate/relevant references) *
- Analysis
- Critical thinking
- Word/page limit and appropriate use of APA7 reference system

*Evidence and reference system are not needed for assignment 2

Individual Presentation (to be presented on classes/lectures 11, 12 & 13 – depending on class size, presentations may continue on another lecture day)

Students are asked to prepare an approximately 15 minute individual oral presentation on the lecture topic of their preference (covered up to that point) and their reflections including strengths and challenges on the subject. Students will have the opportunity to present to the rest of the class.

The individual presentation is suggested to include:

- 10-15 slides.
- Bullet points to manage the material presented on the slide (do not overload your slides with text). Audio-visual material can also be used.
- References in slides (in-text citations) and a reference section at the end of the presentation, following the APA7 referencing system.

Evaluation Criteria -Individual Presentations will be assessed based on:

- Originality (do not replicate information from lecture slides)
- Relevance of topic and content (including references)
- Structure
- Clarity, precision, expression/word flow
- Presentation style/ confidence/visual contact and interaction with the audience
- Aesthetic result of slides
- Time management

***Submission deadline for power point (ppt) file on Moodle by class/lecture 10 –please check Moodle**

***To receive a grade, you will need to submit your power point on time and present on the day of your time slot. Time slots will be announced on Moodle.**

Positive Psychology Lab-Training exercise (to be presented on classes/lectures 23 & 24 – depending on class size, group presentations may continue on another lecture day)

Students will be divided into small groups. Each student group will need to prepare, introduce, present and run a training session-exercise to the rest of the class by addressing a positive psychology topic (as discussed in class). The exercise should begin with an introduction and a clear analysis of the chosen topic, supported by relevant material (approximately 10 minutes). Then, the group should introduce and deliver a training exercise (approximately 20 minutes) to the rest of the class which should address the topic selected by the group. This should be done in a participatory, and engaging way. At the end, group members should present some conclusions about the intention of the exercise and some thoughts/reflections about the outcomes of the exercise. They will also need to include in their presentation a reflection as a group on the preparation of the session and present the role of each group member in the preparation and delivery of the session (approximately 10 minutes)

Each group session will therefore last approximately 40 minutes. Then, there will be a short time for questions, comments and feedback from other students.

***Submission deadline for power point (ppt) file on Moodle by class/lecture 22 –please check Moodle**

***To receive a grade, you will need to submit your power point on time and present on the day of your time slot. The grade will be the same for all group members unless a group member has not contributed and/or did not show up on the day of the presentation.**

Evaluation Criteria -Training group exercises will be assessed based on:

- Creativity
- Group/teamwork and collaboration
- Relevance of topic and training exercise/content (including references)
- Structure
- Engaging the audience
- Time management

Evaluation and Grading

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Percentages

Assignment 1 -15%

Assignment 2- 15% Individual

Presentation - 30%

Positive Psychology Lab-Training exercise (Group presentation)-30%

Participation in class - 10%

There will be no exams for this class.

The mid-term grade will be based on your first assignment and your individual presentation plus participation and attendance in class. Depending on class size, individual presentations may extend after mid-term week, but they will still contribute to your mid-term grade.

If you fail to submit on time or fail to be present on the day of your presentation, you will receive a zero (0) mark for the corresponding assignment.

Please note that due to the sensitive nature of classroom discussions, recording is not permitted.

CYA Regulations and Accommodations

Attendance Policy

Attendance and punctuality are essential to learning in CYA courses, which rely on in class and on-site interaction. Faculty is required to record absences and either the Academic Advisor (on academic issues) or Student Affairs (on wellness issues) will check-in with students who have repeated absences.

This policy applies to all scheduled class meetings and on-site activities (Athens sessions and school-wide Field Studies).

1. Punctuality

Students are expected to arrive on time; instructors have a corresponding obligation to begin on time.

2. Recording & Outreach

Instructors must record absences at every class/on-site session. In the case of repeated absences, the Academic Advisor (for academic issues) or Student Affairs (for wellness issues) will check in with the student.

3. What Counts as an Excused Absence

3.1. Illness

The student must report the illness via the Illness Reporting Form to Student Affairs. If illness requires missing more than one session per class, the student must submit a signed and stamped doctor's note to Student Affairs and remain in communication with them.

Remote [online] appointments and retroactive doctor's notes will not be accepted.

3.2. Other Exceptional Circumstances

Excused absences for non-illness exceptional circumstances require prior approval from the Academic Director (not the course instructor).

3.3. Accommodation

If the student has academic accommodation that relates to their attendance and has been filed with CYA, they should follow the procedure outlined on the accommodation form that they agreed upon with their professor.

3.4. Timing

The student must seek approval as soon as the problem arises, not retroactively, in order for the absence to be excused

3.5. Academic priority

Students are notified that class attendance takes precedence over other student appointments, travel, volunteering, or visiting

friends/family, and missing class for these reasons is not excused. Students are responsible for avoiding such conflicts.

4. How can students request an excused absence

Before the class submit the relevant form or request (for illness the Student Affairs form; for exceptional circumstances the Academic Director). Notify the instructor that a request has been submitted and learn what material will need to be made up and how to do so.

Provide documentation if required to administration, not the professor (e.g. doctor's note for multi-session illness).

Await the decision from the appropriate office. Professors do not grant excused absence status.

5. Unexcused Absences & Consequences

Three (3) unexcused absences in any class automatically lower the final course grade.

More than three (3) unexcused absences in a class may lead to: a) the placement of a student on academic probation, and potentially b) the student receiving a failing grade for the course depending on course requirements

6. Make-Up Work & Grading

Students must make up missed work for any absence (excused or unexcused) and communicate with instructors about requirements. Failure to complete missed work will result in the reduction of minimum one letter grade. It is the responsibility of the instructor to provide them with make up options. Quizzes, exams, and in-class assessments missed due to an unexcused absence may receive a zero (0) grade, per course requirements as outlined in the syllabus.

Because participation is integral to learning at CYA, a high number of excused absences may still affect the course grade, per the course's participation policy. Course syllabi specify how attendance and participation affect the final grade.

ePolicy on Original Work and Use of Artificial Intelligence

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided.

The use of generative AI tools is a new, undeniable reality. In this course, the guiding principle for their productive use is that you must always remain the primary author and critical thinker behind all submitted work. AI may be used ethically as a tool for development, but never as a substitute for your own intellectual effort.

Permitted Uses: You may use AI for brainstorming, clarifying concepts and passages, editing your original prose, debating ideas, formatting (not generating from scratch) citations and bibliography sections, or reviewing a completed draft. You may also request a generic outline to organize initial thoughts, provided you substantially modify and expand it into your own work. *In all cases, you are required to review, verify and take full responsibility for the final output.*

Prohibited Uses: It is academic dishonesty to use AI to generate drafts, paragraphs, or answers to assignments, to complete in-class or reflective work, or to submit AI-generated content without your significant intellectual transformation and synthesis.

To ensure the integrity of submitted work, I reserve the right to ask students to orally explain or defend the content and reasoning behind any submission. Such a request comprises a standard check, not an accusation. **If a student is unable to do so, I may require the work to be revised and resubmitted. A persistent inability to adequately explain the work may be treated as a violation of academic integrity.**

It is imperative to understand that AI can produce incorrect or biased information. Your critical judgment is essential. You are responsible for fact-checking all content and ensuring your final work reflects your own understanding. Specific applications and citation practices will be further discussed in class. When in doubt, ask for clarification!

Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

Class Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1	Introductions with students, review syllabus, course description No Reading
2	Introduction to Positive Psychology Required reading from: Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 55, 5–14. Suggested reading from: Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). <i>Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being</i> . Free Press (chapter 1)
3	The Science of Happiness Required Reading Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Oishi, S. (2002). Subjective Well-Being: The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), <i>Handbook of Positive Psychology</i> (pp. 63–73). Oxford University Press.

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- 4 **Positive Emotions and the Broaden-and-Build Theory**
 Required Reading
 Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226
***Formation of groups for Positive Psychology Lab**
***Time slots to be announced for individual presentations**
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- 5 **The PERMA Model of Wellbeing (TO SUBMIT ASSIGNMENT 1)**
 Required Reading from:
 Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. Free Press (chapter 1-pages 5-29)
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- 6 **Character Strengths and the VIA Classification**
 Required Reading from:
 Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford University Press.
 (chapter 1-pages 3-30)
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- 7 **Gratitude and Appreciation**
 Required Reading
 Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-being in Daily Life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389.
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- 8 **Hope, Optimism, and Future-Mindedness**
 Required Reading
 Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249–275.
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- 9 **Mindfulness, Self-Compassion and Acceptance**
 (Video projection with Steven C. Hayes)
 Required Reading (choose one)
 Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-Compassion: An Alternative Conceptualization of a Healthy Attitude Toward Oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101.
 Shapiro, S.L., Carlson, L.E., Astin, J.A. & Freedman, B. (2006) Mechanisms of Mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62(3), 373–386. DOI: 10.1002/jclp.20237.
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- 10 **What is Resilience? How are the concepts of religion and spirituality related?**
 Required reading: (choose one)
 American Psychological Association (2014) *The road to resilience*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Available at: <https://advising.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/341/2020/07/The-Road-to-Resiliency.pdf>
 Pargament, K.I. & Raiya, H.A. (2007) Decade of research on the psychology of religion and coping: Things we assumed and lessons we learned. *Psyke & Logos*, 28, 742-766.
 Suggested Reading from:
 Southwick, S. M., Charney, D.S. & DePierro, J.M. (2023). *Resilience. The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges* (3rd ed). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009299725>
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- 11 **Individual Presentations (part I – to be continued based on class size)**
No Reading
Students will need to present their reflections on their selective lecture topic (covered up to that point) including strengths and challenges on the subject.
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- 12 **Individual Presentations (part II – to be continued based on class size) No Reading**
Students will need to present their reflections on their selective lecture topic (covered up to that point) including strengths and challenges on the subject
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- 13 **Individual Presentations (part III – to be continued based on class size) No Reading**
Students will need to present their reflections on their selective lecture topic (covered up to that point) including strengths and challenges on the subject
***Submission of selected papers for presentation and discussion in classes 17, 18 & 19**
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- 14 **Crisis, Trauma, Resilience and Post-traumatic Growth**
 Required reading:
 Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1), 1–18
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- 15 **Positive Relationships, Love, Connection and Social Support**
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Required reading:

Sternberg, R.J. (1986) A Triangular Theory of Love. *Psychology Review*, 93 (2), 119-135.

Optional reading:

(choose one)

Reis, H. T., & Gable, S. L. (2003). Toward a Positive Psychology of Relationships. In C. L. M. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived* (pp. 129–159). American Psychological Association.

Heshmati, S. & Donaldson, S. (2020). The Science of Positive Relationships and Love. 10.4324/9780203731833-5. Available from: (PDF) [The Science of Positive Relationships and Love](#)

16 **Empathy and altruism (WATCHING A FILM)**

Required Reading

Arman, M. (2023). Empathy, sympathy, and altruism-An evident triad based on compassion. A theoretical model for caring. *Scandinavian journal of caring sciences*. 37. 10.1111/scs.13163.

17 **Holding On or Letting Go? Exploring Forgiveness and Unforgiveness – PART I**

Students will bring to class the papers they have read (submitted on class 13) which is relevant to the topic. They will be asked to orally present and summarize the paper they read and reflect on it and they will initiate in class discussions based on the papers.

18 **Holding On or Letting Go? Exploring Forgiveness and Unforgiveness – PART II**

Students will bring to class the papers they have read (submitted on class 13) which is relevant to the topic. They will be asked to orally present and summarize the paper they read and reflect on it and they will initiate in class discussions based on the papers.

19 **Holding On or Letting Go? Exploring Forgiveness and Unforgiveness – PART III**

Students will bring to class the papers they have read (submitted on class 13) which is relevant to the topic. They will be asked to orally present and summarize the paper they read and reflect on it and they will initiate in class discussions based on the papers.

20 **Self-determination, Motivation and Goals -Wellbeing in the workplace**

Required Reading: (choose one)

Deci, E.L & Ryan, R.M. (2000) The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11:4, 227-268, DOI: 10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

Luthans, F., Avey, J.B., Avolio, B.J. & Peterson, S.J. (2010) The Development and Resulting Performance Impact of Positive Psychological Capital. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 41–67. doi 10.1002/hrdq.20034

21 **Designing a Personal Wellbeing Plan**

No Reading

Students will need to design their personal wellbeing plan based on the lectures they attended and present it to the rest of the class

22 **Community, Culture, and Collective Wellbeing (TO SUBMIT ASSIGNMENT 2)**

Required reading: (choose one)

Atkinson, S., Bagnall, A.M., Corcoran, R., South, J. & Curtis, S. (2020) Being Well Together: Individual Subjective and Community Wellbeing. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21(5):1903-1921. doi: 10.1007/s10902-019-00146-2.

Joshanloo, M., Van de Vliert, E. & Jose, P.E. (2021) Four Fundamental Distinctions in Conceptions of Wellbeing Across Cultures. In Kern, M.L & Wehmeyer, M.L. (Eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education* (pp.675-705). Palgrave Macmillan.

23 **Positive Psychology Lab- training exercise (GROUP PRESENTATIONS)**

No Reading

24 **Positive Psychology Lab- training exercise (GROUP PRESENTATIONS)**

No Reading

N.B.: The course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and to keep up to date with current research.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Keyes, C. L. M. & Haidt, J. (2003). *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*. American Psychological Association.

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Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford University Press.

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10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199396511.013.50. Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249–275.

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