

Positive Psychology: Findings and Implementations

Lecturer: Dr. Moshe Talmon
talmon@moshetalmon.com

Teaching Assistant: Sivan Prag

Mail for papers: positivepsy19@gmail.com

Office hours: You can meet with us by appointment only

Objective of course: Basic introduction to theories & research findings in the field of positive psychology in their implementations into your personal and interpersonal lives.

Content of course: Positive psychology is a relatively new research field (since 1999) attempting to balance the imbalance that was created (from the end of the Second World War till the end of the 20th century) in the science of medicine and psychology. During that period most of research and scientific publications focused on the problems, disorders, trauma and human ailments in the search for their cure using the so-called “disease model”. This course focuses on all that is good in our lives and might contribute to our well-being, health and happiness. We will study about our positive feelings, our positive thoughts, our positive behaviors and our significantly positive relationships (love, family, community, work). Positive psychology also attempts to research human resilience, adjustment, coping and recovery from events like loss, illness and death.

Method of teaching: The teaching will be based on structured lectures, but the teacher will encourage the participants to translate research findings into possible implementations in their day to day lives. This will be done via personal experience assignments as well as sharing and discussions during class.

Course plan and lectures specific content:

What is Positive psychology?

How do you measure and research happiness and its relation to our well-being

Philosophies, theories and definitions of well-being, happiness, joy, pleasure

Involvement and flow as an optimal psychological experience

Faith, religion and good spirit

Love and friendship

Human strengths and their use in our lives

Subjective and objective wellbeing

Good in the presence of bad

Research on appreciation and positive appraisal

Gratitude, compassion and forgiveness

Exuberance vs moderation and balance

Serenity of the soul and mindfulness

Self esteem and self compassion

Summary and integration of positive channels: joy, involvement, and success

Course requirements:

1. Handing in at least 6 short papers from of the weekly exercises (one-two pages of double spaced typed pages). Each paper counts as 10% of your final grade.
Deadline for the papers are:
1st: March 14th
2nd: March 28th
3rd : April 14th
4th May 11th
5th: May 25th
6th: June 7th
2. Final paper will count as 40% of your grade. Recommended length: 5 pages with double space of size 12 fonts. Deadline June 12th, 2019.
3. Attendance and active participation in at least 85% of the lectures. Any missing of a classes beyond the requirement will delete 5 points from the final grade
4. No final exam.
5. Final class grade is based on the average of the weekly assignments (60% of the grade) and the final paper (40%).

The experiential assignments:

The goal of the assignments is not make you more positive or happier. It is to recognize the goodness in your lives as they are and as you are.

General instruction:

1. In each assignment the active experience is as important as writing your thoughts down.
2. The process of the experience is not less important than the end result.
3. In the case where an assignment has a negative or paradoxical effect, you can of course, stop it at any time and jump to the next assignment or go back to a favorite one from the past.
4. The assignments will be sent by email and not by hand during the class.
5. There are no restrictions regarding the length, but we recommend writing one page. The style of writing is free and not necessarily academic.
6. You may choose to write the assignments in a structured academic manner. If you choose so, please indicate it and keep the regular rules of references, citations etc.

The assignments (gifts):

1. Three daily blessings:

Write down every day three things that happened in that day and that you recognize them as good in your eyes. Try to express it also in person to a close trusted friend during that day.

Write briefly about them: What are your blessings? What was good about them, what about them made you appreciate them or made you feel better?

2. The gift of joy:

Pay attention to something that causes spontaneous joy (especially a sensory one). Try not to judge it's meaningful, healthy or lasting.

Do try to give an extra attention to it, to point it out, to take a picture of it (mental or real), share it, keep it or put it on your favorites list and by doing so making the joy more pleasurable or even expand a bit the duration and satisfaction of your joy.

3. Flow/Involvement:

Find one experience or few of them that you are totally immersed in. So immersed that time, judgment and ego, move aside and you are totally in the moment without losing energy, even though it might entails a great effort on your part (i.e. jogging)

It can be an activity (sculpting, painting, water skiing) or passive (standing under your shower head during a shower, reading a book, watching a movie), It can be a special experience (making love) or a very common one (breathing, walking), It can be an activity that you know well and that demands skill (programming, building) or an automatic activity that only after have done it you realize an hour has gone by (for instance – driving).

Describe the experience and that made it possible for you.

4. The gift of growth:

Each one of us has experiences of pain, sad events and suffering in our lives. Make time in your week to write about that time or event in an open manner, freely and as associatively as possible, without keeping in mind wording, grammar, restraints or wisdom.

Describe what happened – how you felt about it then and how you feel about it today.

How it affected you?

What lesson you took from it?

In what aspects did you grow from it?

What more can you learn from it today?

Since you hand in a very brief paper you want to focus on the growth elements.

5. Gift of gratitude/ appreciation:

Choose a man/woman that has impressed you, enriched you, made you happy, taught you, and that you didn't have sufficient opportunity to thank him for it. Write a letter. Express your appreciation as detailed as possible but make sure to stay genuine. If it's possible, try to give it in person. You may use other forms of communicating –i.e. Song, gift, picture, dance, etc. to express your gratitude and appreciation.

6. The gift of praise:
Choose a friend in one of the groups that you are active in (school, work, family, volunteer, neighborhood, sports). Preferably, one that doesn't stand out, excel or receives praise regularly. Find time and praise him about his positive contribution personally or to the group (family, manager, etc').
Try to pick praise that is true and authentic.

7. The gift of kindness:
Be kind, friendly and pleasant in the most unexpected place.
For example: the next time you have to fix something bureaucratic after you have been delayed and angered, or cut in line, try to be nice and understanding, by for example – try asking how the service giver is doing, express empathy for the overload in his work, thanks to him for showing interest and taking the time to do his job properly. Don't forget the time restraints and the purpose of your visit.
Describe what happened after your words of kindness.

8. The gift of looking forward:
Write each day three realistic things you are looking forward to experience in the following day. At the end of the week review your experiences.

The final paper:

The gift of being happy with your share:

Examine the process that you went through with these exercises during the semester (or with other experiences that have to do with the search of the good in your life) and see if you are happy with your share as it is.

In other words, what is the experience/assignment/deed that allow you to be happy with your share (as opposed from what is ideal, perfect or you got a grade of 100 on it).

See which of the assignments not only made you feel good but also gave you the feeling of growth or flourishing in your world.

Write it as your final assignment.

Readings:

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