



PSYC 450 Positive Psychology: The Science of Behavioral Change

Course Syllabus
Fall Semester 2024

Instructor: John L. Dennis, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:00am-10:30am

Office Hours:

Email:

Course Type: Course with a Service Learning component

Lab/Site-Visits Fee: 60 USD

"Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known." - Carl Sagan

"If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?" – Albert Einstein

Course Description

This course will guide you through the latest developments in positive psychology, which seeks to understand, test, discover, and promote the factors that enable individuals and communities to thrive (Sheldon et al., 2000). Positive psychology involves the scientific study of well-being, happiness, flow, personal strengths, compassion, creativity, and the characteristics of positive groups and institutions that foster their growth. Rather than focusing solely on individual happiness and a self-centered approach, positive psychology also emphasizes happiness and flourishing at a group level.

We will explore how both individuals and groups flourish, and how improving the well-being of one positively impacts the other. The first part of the course reviews the theory and research in positive psychology, while the second part addresses theoretical conflicts and real-world applications. Each session will include experiential learning and exercises designed to enhance personal well-being and deepen students' understanding of key questions in the field. By the end of the course, students will possess a more accurate and objective understanding of positive psychology concepts such as happiness, well-being, and compassion.

The course service learning project will use positive psychology concepts studied in this course to help Fondazione Città del Sole thrive.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

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

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Measures
Reflect on positive psychology concepts	Class Discussion, Presentations, Podcast
Develop applicable critical thinking skills regarding positive psychology concepts	Tickets, Class Discussion

Generate effective leadership skills	Presentations, Service Learning Project
Analyze how organizations and the people within them work	Ticket, Service Learning Project
Design a project with a community partner that applies positive psychology concepts as viable solutions for a well-defined issue	Service Learning Project, Podcast
Create and broadcast materials that will help students to start thinking about their future careers	Class Discussion, Podcast, Community Engagement Presentations

Course Materials

Books (selected chapters)

- Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. Penguin Press.
- Kashdan, T. & Biswas-Diener, R. (2014). *The upside of your dark side: Why your whole self - not just your "good" self - drives success and fulfillment*. Random House.
- Frankl, V. E. (2014). *Man's search for meaning*. Beacon Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (2018). *Toward a psychology of being*. Wilder Publications.

Instruction Methods

This class uses a method where students gain significant knowledge before each session begins. Once class starts, students actively and interactively clarify and apply their new knowledge, with the professor guiding them as a facilitator. This is referred to in pedagogy as a [flipped classroom instruction method](#).

Assignments will be completed using several cooperative tools that align with the flipped instruction method outlined above:

1. Students will submit short reactions (250-500 words) to readings 24 hours before class on Google Drive.
2. Students will review materials submitted by fellow students.
3. Students will guide part of a classroom discussion with mini-presentations based on readings, exercises, case studies, and individual/team assignments.

Note: All writing should be in 12-point, Garamond font, single-spaced, and justified. All submitted files should include the following information in the top left corner of the page:

First Name Last Name

File type (e.g., Ticket #1, Podcast)

Book section name, article title, or Podcast title

Laptop/Smartphone Policy

An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create a distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result, you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, students are asked to keep computers and phones away and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have a vision or other accommodation; 2) if you are using a tablet to take notes, one which is not connected to the internet; 3) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools; or 4) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer.

Assessments

Attendance	10%
One-to-One Professor Meetings	5%
Service Learning Project	20%
Community Engagement Presentation	5%

Tickets	20%
Podcast	15%
Peer Reviews	10%
Presentations	15%

Attendance (10%)

Student attendance is mandatory for all courses at the Umbra Institute (see below **Attendance Policy**).

One-to-One Professor Meetings (5%)

During the semester, students will meet with the professor one-on-one for two 10-minute meetings. Those meetings can be online or in person. Use the [Calendly link](#) to reserve those meetings.

Service Learning Project (20%)

Students will work as a team with a nonprofit organization, such as Fondazione Città del Sole, to study its structure, mission, and goals and develop a plan to advance these goals through the application of positive psychology. This service-learning project allows students to apply their knowledge to real-world situations and helps nonprofits benefit from cutting-edge research in the field.

The goal of this project is to take the perspective of a workplace designer. You can report in any format you like, but a suggested approach is to assume that the organization has a group of unhappy employees. You will present your ideas to investors or funding agencies who believe in the research showing that happy employees are more productive and do better work. These investors or funding agencies encourage you to create a different and better kind of company. What would you do? You will produce a short report, a presentation, and a short video (or series of videos) that present your ideas. On the last day of class, you will present the major ideas as though reporting to your investors or funding agency. Be sure to consider obstacles and opportunities unique to this specific context.

Key questions to address in your project:

1. What is the situational context?
2. What are the core issues?
3. What can positive psychology do for these issues? (You need research to back up your ideas.)
4. Can you break down the solution(s) into component parts?
5. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of your proposed intervention?
6. How does your solution impact the positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments of the organization members?

Grading for the Service Learning Project is ongoing. It is highly recommended to create Notes pages within Google Drive to indicate active information gathering for the project. These notes can include article summaries, links to videos, images, interviews, etc. Active engagement in answering the above questions will occur regularly during the semester. Please see Moodle for a detailed prompt.

End of Semester Community Engagement Presentations (5%)

During Special Academic Events Week, the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community during the Community Engagement Presentations on **Wednesday, December 11**. Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break. Participation in this event is MANDATORY and an integral part of the community engagement grade. Please see the [End of Semester Community Engagement Presentations Guidelines and Rubric](#). Please see Moodle for a detailed prompt.

Tickets (20%)

Students will submit one ticket (250-500 words) per reading. Odd-numbered tickets will be completed in class, while even-numbered tickets will be submitted online to Google Drive at least 24 hours before class. See the [ticket rubric](#) to better understand what is expected of you. For articles and book chapters, tickets must answer the following 4 W's:

1. **What** was the reading's main question in a single sentence?
2. **What** was done/discussed, and what did they find?
3. **How** does the reading relate to other readings, in-class discussions, and/or class projects?
4. **Which** part of the reading did you find useful or are you critical of?

The first two W's help students remember the key points from the reading, while the last two W's integrate their experiences and thoughts with what they have read. Remember, you are writing for your future self, so examples, definitions, and context matter. Write so that when you open your tickets in 5 years, you will be able to reconstruct the reading. Once your ticket has been peer-reviewed, you will need to edit it and "submit" it for a final review. Given that tickets must be between 250–500 words, students should not give a summary of the entire reading. Instead, focus on the part you found most interesting. Please see Moodle for a detailed prompt.

Podcast (15%)

Students will work in groups of 3-4 to submit one podcast entry (about 7 minutes) to Google Drive based on classroom experiences during the semester. We will periodically use class time to create a Podcast notes page, then divide the class into groups and work during class time to develop podcasts according to our Podcast schedule, which will be shared with you at the beginning of the semester.

Podcasts will follow the [Podcast hourglass structure](#), which includes:

1. A narrative story that creates conflict.
2. Core concepts from the readings.
3. Implications of those concepts.
4. A narrative story that helps resolve the conflict for listeners.

Podcasts will always include concepts from the readings, but the narrative story can be based on the Service Learning Project, interviews with other MPP professors, other students, Italian UNIPG students, or any other exercise, discussion, etc., that occurs inside and outside the classroom. Once the Podcast has been reviewed and approved, it will be submitted for publication on the Umbra Institute podcast channel. Please see Moodle for a detailed prompt.

Presentations (15%)

Students will lead a portion of the class with a short presentation of their ticket during the semester. Presentations and student-led discussions will typically occupy the first half of the class, while the professor will guide the discussion during the remaining half.

Presentations should include an activity for the class and a discussion of the reading that connects to the reading. Activities for the class might include filling out a questionnaire, doing an improvisation game, breaking into groups to answer specific questions, etc. For activity ideas, it is highly recommended to consult online resources, as we did in the first class. These resources usually provide a good starting point for class activities.

Do not rely solely on Google Slide presentations. The presentation should include a summary of the reading—enough that anyone who has not done the reading can follow what you are talking about. Presenters should be able to answer the four questions for the tickets, then focus on the part of the reading they find most interesting.

All presentations will have two co-presenters. Please see the [Presentation Rubric](#) on Moodle to assist you as you construct your presentations. Please see Moodle for a detailed prompt.

Peer Reviews (15%)

Student pairs will review presentations, Tickets submitted by fellow students, and Podcast entries. Reviews should consist of helpful and constructive comments, providing "additive feedback" by making suggestions about what the writer might add or develop further.

Students are responsible for completing one Ticket peer review per class. Podcast reviews and presentation reviews will be assigned during the semester. For presentation reviews, two randomly assigned students will review presentations to help improve them. A signup sheet for all peer reviews will be shared on Google Drive.

Reviews are due within 48 hours of when the document you are reviewing has been submitted to Google Drive or completed in class. Please use the [peer review guidelines and rubric](#). For detailed prompts, please see Moodle.

Additional Notes

Feedback and Questions

This course should be a valuable learning experience for all students. Their feedback regarding the class is appreciated at any time during the semester. It is easiest to reach the professor by email or right before or after class, or an appointment can be set up.

Email

Please understand that the professor responds to emails between the hours of **12:30-6:30 pm Monday-Thursday**.

Participation

The core work of this course involves reading and collectively making sense of the assigned readings. Being consistently prepared for class, asking questions, responding to questions, and attentively listening to others is essential. Successful participation has four prerequisites, which can be considered the participation rubric. Each class, you will be given a maximum score of 5, with 1 point given for each:

1. *Being there*. When a student is absent, the class cannot benefit from their comments and insights. Absences will therefore hurt the participation grade. If a student is absent, they should make arrangements with a classmate to take notes and pick up any assignments or handouts.
2. *Being on time*. If a student needs to be late for class, they should notify the professor at least 24 hours in advance.
3. *Being prepared*. To contribute to class discussions, students must come to class having carefully prepared all assignments (i.e., readings, tickets, cases, exercises). If students are unsure of the assignments for an upcoming class session, they should ask.
4. *Being brave*. Students are expected to participate fully in all class exercises, voice personal views during discussions, and ask questions about things that are not understood. Asking questions might be intimidating, but doing so helps classmates by moving the discussion forward in new directions.
5. *Being courteous*. Listening carefully to classmates' comments and questions helps everyone learn from different perspectives. Voicing disagreement is essential as it often leads to thoughtful and informative class discussions. Disagreements should be kind and considerate.

Note: Some people are uncomfortable presenting viewpoints in a large group setting. However, contributing to discussions is an important part of the student's career development. If anything may interfere with your ability to contribute on an ongoing basis, discuss it with the professor sooner rather than later. The professor will work with you offline to develop a strategy or plan to increase your comfort level and performance in class participation. If you have questions about your participation grade, it is your responsibility to make an office hours appointment and discuss it with the professor before the semester ends.

Broadcasting

Students will significantly improve submitted materials during the semester, and, in the process, develop skills so that they are [so good they can't be ignored](#) (*So Good They Can't Ignore You* by Cal Newport). The result will be materials that will be so good that we will broadcast them online. For example, selected documents, videos, photos, etc., will be used as the basis for student Podcast posts, and, in the past, they have been shared on social networks such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Slideshare. The goal of broadcasting is to help students develop materials that will allow them to think about their careers – to think like they are a [start-up](#) (*The Start-Up of You* by Reid Hoffman and Ben Casnocha).

Peer-Reviewed Research-based Article

Every semester, this course includes a project that occasionally results in a peer-reviewed article submission, completed in the months following the course. Writing this article is open to all students but requires a commitment of about an hour each week. Bi-weekly meetings (or as needed) will occur via Zoom at a time that fits all co-writers' schedules. Student-authors will always be first authors, according to my practice.

You will learn how to read and summarize original research articles and organize our Service Learning project using APA guidelines. Students who participate in this writing project will be encouraged and supported in submitting this research to their institution, such as for an honor's thesis. Additionally, if funding opportunities exist, I will support you in obtaining them so that you can present this project at international conferences specializing in similar projects. For detailed information, please see Moodle.

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they

do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A A-	93% - 100% 90% - 92%	Exceptional Excellent
B+ B B	87% - 89% 83% - 86% 80% - 82%	Superior
C+ C C	77% - 79% 73% - 76% 70% - 72%	Satisfactory
D+ D D	67% - 69% 63% - 66% 60% - 62%	Low Pass
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused "sick days" and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student's academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students' grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be

made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during an exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Utilizing ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism. Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set to silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices cannot be used during class lectures and discussions for anything other than note-taking, unless there has been specific academic accommodation.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 0

DAY 1 Introductory meeting
Wednesday, Sept. 4 @1730 Aula Magna

WEEK 1

DAY 1 No Class

DAY 2 Class Online
Introduction and Course Overview
Frankl, p 17-54
Ticket 1 - In class
Podcast
Development

WEEK 2

DAY 1 *Service Learning Project*
Present current project: brief overview with Umbra staff
Podcast
Development

DAY 2 Class Online
Lyubomirsky Chapters 1 & 4
Ticket 2 - GoogleDrive
Service Learning Project
Development

WEEK 3

DAY 1 *Kashdan, Chapters 1*
Ticket 3 - In class
Podcast
Concepts discussed and initial notes due on GoogleDrive

DAY 2 *Maslow, Growth and Motivation*
Ticket 4 - GoogleDrive
Service Learning Project
Development

WEEK 4

DAY 1 *Frankl, p 54-100*
Ticket 5 - In class
Podcast
Concepts discussed and revised notes due on GoogleDrive

DAY 2 *Lyubomirsky Chapters 2 & 6*
Ticket 6 – GoogleDrive
Podcast
Concepts discussed and revised notes due on GoogleDrive

WEEK 5

DAY 1 *Service Learning Project Development*
Work through the project.
Kashdan, Chapter 2
Ticket 7 - In class

DAY 2 *Service Learning Project Development*
In-class conversation with Partner

DAY 3 **Friday, October 11:** *Service Learning Project Development*
“Centro Diurno” visit partner - Service Learning Project. A detailed itinerary will be sent early this week.

WEEK 6

DAY 1 *Service Learning Project Development*
Work through the project.

DAY 2 *Maslow, Growth and Cognition*
Ticket 8 – GoogleDrive
Service Learning Project Development
Work through the project
Podcast
Concepts discussed and revised notes due on GoogleDrive

Semester Break

WEEK 7

DAY 1 *Lyubomirsky Chapters 3 & 8*
Ticket 9 - In class
Service Learning Project Development
Work through the project.

DAY 2 *Kashdan, Chapters 5*
Ticket 10 - GoogleDrive
Podcast
Concepts discussed and 2nd draft due on GoogleDrive

WEEK 8

DAY 1 *Maslow, Values*
Ticket 11 - In class

DAY 2 *Service Learning Project Development*
In-class visit to co-housing apartments managed by Fondazione Città del Sole

WEEK 9

DAY 1 *Lyubomirsky Chapters 10*
Ticket 12 - GoogleDrive
Service Learning Project Development.
Resolve areas needing improvement

DAY 2 *Kasbdan, Chapters 6*
Ticket 13 - In class
Podcast
Concepts discussed and 3rd draft due on GoogleDrive

WEEK 10

DAY 1 *Service Learning Project Development.*
In-class interviews with roommates of the co-housing apartments visited earlier in the semester.
(TBC)

Nov 23 *Maslow, Future Tasks*
Ticket 14 - GoogleDrive

WEEK 11

DAY 1 *Kasbdan, Chapters 7*
Ticket 15 - In class
Service Learning Project Development
Practice presentation for the partner

DAY 2 *Service Learning Project Development*
Work on the presentation for Community Engagement Presentations

WEEK 12

DAY 1 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Practice presentation for Community Engagement Presentations.
Podcast
Final versions are due.

DAY 2 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Practice presentation for the community partner.
Ticket
Final versions with all revisions due.
Service Learning Project Development
Presentation with the partner.
Dinner at Numero 0 (Inclusive restaurant) with the roommates of the apartments. Exact timing will be communicated early this week.

WEEK 13

Final Classes, Final Exams, & Special Academic Events Week

DAY 1 **Wednesday, December 11.** Community Engagement Presentations. The full Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester.

**PSYC 450 - Positive Psychology: The Science of Behavioral Change
Service Learning Project
Syllabus Appendix**

Service Learning Overview

Service learning is a form of experiential education integrated into a course where students:

- Engage in an organized activity or project designed to address a community need identified in collaboration with a community partner.
- Critically reflect on the connection between their community experience, course content, and learning goals.
- Participate in reciprocal learning, benefiting both the students and the community partners.

Successful service learning requires students to be flexible, creative, and self-initiated. Organization and open communication with the professor and team members are crucial for student success.

Service Learning Project Overview

Community Partner: Fondazione Città del Sole

Fondazione Città del Sole is a foundation committed to integrating people with disabilities into residential, work, and social environments and promoting inclusive education within communities. The foundation operates various projects led by educators and psychologists. Their primary initiative is a co-housing project where young people with special needs live alongside students or young professionals in the historic center in apartments. This setup helps them develop autonomy and integrate into the broader community. The foundation also runs a radio station called Stazione Panzana, a "Centro Diurno" (Day Center), and manages Umbria's first inclusive restaurant, Numero Zero.

Project Description and Goals

Students will conduct research through observational and conversational phases, aiming to provide the foundation with a document identifying issues and tension sources within some of the foundation's apartments. After identifying these problems, the class will propose solutions based on positive psychology principles to help create a peaceful and welcoming environment among the roommates.

Organization, Expectations, and Roles

Students will be divided into self-selected teams. Significant class time will be dedicated to the project's progress, but teams will also need to meet outside of class for approximately 1–2 hours per week for four weeks. Teams are responsible for dividing tasks to ensure equal contributions from all members throughout the project.

Group Presentation

Each team will collaborate on and deliver a detailed final presentation using PowerPoint. Every student is expected to complete a Presentation Feedback Form and engage with questions for other teams to foster a community of learning

and support.

Presentation Guidelines:

- Use PowerPoint (ensure it is spell-checked).
- The presentation should be 10 minutes long.
- Each team member must contribute to the preparation and delivery.
- Rehearse the presentation as a group to ensure smooth content delivery, appropriate length, and transitions.

End of Semester Community Engagement Presentation

During Special Academic Events Week, the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community during the Community Engagement Presentations on Wednesday, December 11th (the final week of the program). Guidelines and presentation order will be provided after the mid-semester break.

Presentation Structure:

1. Introduce the community partner.
2. Describe the project.
3. Discuss takeaways and challenges.
4. Include a meaningful activity related to course topics (optional and should not exceed five minutes).

Participation in this event is mandatory and is a key component of the community engagement grade.

Grading Rubric

The service learning project, including the final presentation, accounts for 25% of the final course grade. This is divided into three categories, each worth 8.33% of the final grade:

1. Construction of the learning project.
2. Execution of the learning project.
3. End of Semester Community Engagement Presentation.