

PHIL 434 Issues in the Study of Happiness • Cathal Woods
Spring 2007
Syllabus

Contact Information

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Office Hours

My office hours are Monday and Wednesday at 1300 and by appointment and pretty much whenever I'm in my office. My office is Blocker 229.

You can use my office hours in numerous ways: (1) to get help on the reading before class, to discuss material from class, (2) to talk about assignments, (3) to pick up physical materials, such as handouts or graded assignments.

Texts

1. You need to buy the following:

Kahneman, Diener and Schwartz (edd) *Well-Being: Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*
Nettle, D. *Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile*

Also, pick up a copy of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*

2. Many others texts are on-line, at, or via, this class's blackboard site. Log in at <http://blackboard.vwc.edu/>. Bookmark this page and check it daily – it will be our primary mode of communication outside class. Contact Robin Takacs (x2112) if you need assistance with Blackboard.

Course Goals

Content: The course inquires into a central and important topic, on both a personal and political level, prompting reflection both about the type of person the student wants to be in her own right, and on the society that the student-citizen is about to enter as an adult. The course demonstrates the complexity of the issues and the need to draw on many sources of information in order to address them, bringing together material from economics, psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, sociology and political science. (Note that this is *not* a class on 'how to be happy' though we'll certainly pick up a lot of advice as we read.)

Skills: Students will be asked to understand and draw together information from various disciplines. Some of the writing to be digested is popular, but some of it is professional and contains discussion of methodologies. Students must be able to conduct literature research.

Instructor's Responsibilities

As the class instructor, I take all of the following to be my responsibility:
to be adequately prepared to facilitate discussion and/or lecture in each class;
to encourage students to think for themselves;
to make the course interesting and engaging to the majority of students;
to make explanations clear, e.g. by using only everyday English and defined terms;
to treat all students with respect;
to grade all tests and papers impartially;

to be available for consultation;
to meet the course objectives to the greatest extent possible.

Student Responsibilities

If you are still attending class in Week 2, I take it that you have agreed that you will do all of the following:

attend class;

prepare for class by doing the reading and thinking about the issues;

be prepared to be called on and to participate in class;

work on written assignments and peer reviews.

The more you put into the class, the more you will get out of it. I guarantee that students who fulfill these responsibilities will learn more and enjoy the class more than those who do not.

The Class

General Information

All participants (students, teacher, friends and family, roadies and groupies, etc.) are expected to be on time. (Pet Peeve: Please do not pack up your books and bags before the end of class. I find this annoying.) Feel free to bring food and drink. You are welcome to bring family and visiting friends to class.

N.B.: If you miss a class... In Class 2, you will get contact info for a few other class members. Contact these people for class notes, assignments, etc. Be sure to check the web site. *Missing a class is not an excuse for not having an assignment ready for the next class.*

Class Preparation

For each session, every participant is expected to have read the assigned reading, to have answered the response-to-reading questions, and to be prepared to contribute to the discussion class.

Discussion

Class participation is extremely important. It is how you develop speaking skills. You *must* make contributions to the class discussion. I understand that this policy will make shy students uncomfortable to begin with, but speaking, arguing and discussing are essential to the practice of philosophy. So it is necessary to develop the confidence and ability to speak. Any student may be called on at any time. (Learn to feel comfortable saying 'I'll pass', 'I don't know,' 'Can you repeat that?' etc.) Occasional inability to answer will not be held against you. If you have a *serious* (= life-threatening) problem with speaking *in class*, please inform me.

Note that discussion also involves *listening*, to the contributions of your classmates, so that you can (i) respond to them and (ii) learn from them. All participants should pay attention to what others have to say and take their opinions seriously. Give the speaker a chance to make his/her point before responding - don't interrupt.

I will sometimes find it necessary, perhaps due to time constraints, to leave discussion of one point to move on to another or to close the class. This does not at all reflect on the point just made or on those waiting to contribute.

See also *Grading: Class Participation* below.

Grades

Response-to-Reading Assignments	30
Presentation	10
Final Project (35%, plus 5% peer review)	40
Attendance and Participation	20

Grading Scale: A/A- 100-90 B+/B/B- 90-80 C+/C/C- 80-70 D+/D/D- 70-60

1. Response-to-Reading Assignments: In the 5-day interval (over the weekend), type and submit by e-mail to the rest of the class (including the instructor) by 4 p.m. the day before class a one page *maximum* response to the reading. (Hint: If you *don't* find that limiting yourself to one page is well-nigh impossible, you're not doing this right.) Print off a copy of everyone's responses (including your own) to bring to class. The important thing is that you give your own response to the question. Each is worth 3%. If you do more than 10, you can drop the lowest score. No late work; no make-ups, for any reason.

2. Presentation: A presentation requires you to do two things. First, explain a piece of text to the class in whatever manner you feel is best, (e.g. Lecture, Socratic Discussion, thought experiment, individual or group exercise; with or without handouts or PowerPoint slides, etc.) though with some direct reference to the text. Time: 10 minutes minimum. Second, you should then carefully raise some interesting issue concerning the text (as you do in writing in every Response-to-Reading Assignment) and be able to begin a conversation with the class about this issue. Time: No more than 5 minutes for your issue and another ten where you are the discussion leader. General Advice: Do not panic - explaining almost anything takes ten minutes. The risk is, rather, that, thinking ten minutes is a long time, you'll try to cover too much, and end up yammering on for too long. Also, 'being the discussion leader' can be thought of as 'talking with your friends'.

3. Final Project: As this is an interdisciplinary course, there are a number of different types of project you could undertake. I encourage you to think about presenting your project in a format other than (or in addition to) a written paper based exclusively on literature research. Different forms of research could include gathering data from your college cohort about happiness (by interview, psychological instruments), or, repeating any of the experiments that we come across in the literature. Some suggestions for different modes of presentation: make a video, or an audio track, or a photo-essay, which could itself be photos plus speech.

If you write a research paper, you must show not only that you understand a particular topic, but present and argue at length, using at least two sources not covered in class, for a thesis you are making. In establishing the context of your paper, present material from multiple of the disciplines involved in the course; in discussing your particular thesis, you must continue to draw on at least two different disciplines. For example, having presented data from various fields on the impact of wealth on happiness, you argue that social/government interventions are inappropriate because of the importance of the value of self-determination. Another example: you explain the different notions of *happiness* in different thinkers, and then attempt to explicate the notion as currently used (in the contemporary western world) and explain the sociological and psychological factors which have led us to this point. In short: Tackling

an issue narrowly restricted to a single discipline is out. Use standard formatting. Length: As long as it needs to be; 20 page maximum.

No matter what your project is, you are *required* to present a *written* draft or statement of work-in-progress. (This is *not* an outline, but work that is under way.) Your draft will be given to another member of the class for peer review. You will be required to review someone else's project and this work will be graded.

N.B.: *Word Processing.* It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of all written work, (and to collect work as it is returned.) For this reason, word processing of all documents is highly recommended.

N.B.: *Academic Honesty.* You are expected to be familiar with, and in compliance with, all provisions of the academic honesty section of the student code. All work submitted must be your own. Plagiarism is a failure to cite any ideas (either in quotation *or* *paraphrase*) that are not your own. Any plagiarism will be prosecuted.

4. Participation: See the section 'Discussion' above. Clearly articulating your thoughts is a crucial skill to develop, so participation is graded on a scale from 6 to 10 for the semester. You should aim to make a substantive contribution at least once a week. This means contributing to a discussion by asking a question about an idea, explaining a difficult idea (from the text), articulating a thought in response to the text or discussion.

N.B.: *Disruptions.* Disrupting class will lower your participation grade. Disruptions include but are not limited to: arriving late to class, leaving during class, talking privately to others, reading the newspaper, texting, doing other work in class. Either you're on the bus, or you're driving your own personal intellectual pollution machine through the middle of the classroom.

General N.B.: *Disability.* VWC recognizes, and is sensitive to, students with special needs. In order to use accommodations, students must first register with the college's disability services co-ordinator, Fayne Pearson, at 455-3246, and provide the college with appropriate, professional documentation. If you need accommodations in this course because of a documented disability, or if you have emergency medical information to share, please make an appointment to see me during my office hours.