



PYSC 450: Positive Psychology: The Science of Behavioral Change
Course Syllabus
Spring Semester 2024

Instructor: John L. Dennis, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30-14:00

Office Hours: By appointment, use the [Calendly link](#) to reserve your meeting.

Course Type: Course with Service Learning component

Lab/Site-Visits Fee: \$100.00

"Someday, 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 take you through the recent science of positive psychology, which aims to ‘understand, test, discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive’ (Sheldon et al., 2000). In particular, positive psychology comprises the scientific exploration of well-being, happiness, flow, personal strengths, compassion, creativity, and characteristics of positive groups and institutions that enable their development. In this sense, rather than focusing solely on the happiness of individuals and on a self-centered approach, positive psychology also concentrates on happiness and flourishing at a group level.

We will look at how individuals and groups flourish, and how increasing the well-being of one will have a positive effect on the other. The first part of this course reviews the theory and research on positive psychology, while the second part focuses on theoretical conflicts and real-world applications. Every session will incorporate experiential learning and exercises aimed at increasing personal well-being and at facilitating students’ understanding of the fundamental questions in the field. Ultimately, the students will be able to utilize a more accurate and objective (rather than intuitive) understanding of concepts of positive psychology such as happiness, well-being, and compassion.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

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

Learning Outcomes

Reflect on positive psychology concepts

Develop applicable critical thinking skills regarding positive psychology concepts

Generate effective leadership skills

Analyze how organizations and people within them work

Assessment Measures

Class Discussion, Presentations, Podcast

Tickets, Class Discussion

Presentations, Service Learning Project

Ticket, Service Learning Project

Design a project with 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 in which students gain a significant amount of knowledge before each class begins. Once each class starts, students actively and interactively clarify and apply their new knowledge; the professor helps guide students through this process as a facilitator. This is referred to in pedagogy as a [flipped classroom instruction method](#).

Assignments will be done with the help of several cooperative tools that are consistent 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 a part of a classroom discussion with mini-presentations based on readings, exercises, case studies, and individual/team assignments.

All assignments will be accessed via Moodle.

NOTE: All writing should be written in 12-point, Garamond font, single-spaced, and justified. All files submitted should have written in the top left part of the page the following:

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 & Participation (10%)

Student participation is mandatory for all courses taken at Umbra Institute. The instructor will use the rubric below when determining your participation grade. All students should understand that attendance and punctuality are expected and will not count positively toward the participation grade.

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, and these can be considered the participation rubric, where each class you will be given a max score of 5, with 1 point given for each:

1. **Being there.** When a student is absent, the class cannot benefit from his/her comments and insights. Absences will therefore hurt his/her participation grade. If a student is absent, he/she 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, please notify the professor at least 24 hours in advance.
3. **Being prepared.** To contribute to class discussion, 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, please 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 also helps classmates by moving the discussion forward in new directions.
5. **Being courteous.** Listening carefully to the comments and questions that classmates voice will help one another to learn something new from their 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 with presenting viewpoints in a large group setting. However, contributing to discussions is an important part of the student's career development. If there is anything that may interfere with their ability to contribute on an ongoing basis, students should discuss it with the professor sooner rather than later. The professor will work with students offline to develop a strategy or plan to increase their 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 come talk with me about it before the semester ends.

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 – i.e., Fuori di Zucca, where the structure, mission, and goals of the nonprofit organization are studied, and then a plan is developed for how to advance the organization's goals through the application of positive psychology. Like any service learning project, this project gives students the opportunity to apply their learning to the real world and help non-profits benefit from applying cutting-edge research in the field to their particular context.

The goal of this project is to take the perspective of a workplace designer. You can do the report in any way you like, but a suggested format is to assume that this organization has a group of unhappy employees. You are now presenting your ideas to investors/funding agencies who believe the research showing that happy employees are more productive, and just do better work. These investors/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 presents your ideas. You'll speak about this on the last day of class, presenting the major ideas as though you were reporting to your investors/funding agency. Be sure to consider obstacles and opportunities unique to this specific context.

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 the Google Drive that clearly indicate that you are actively gathering information to learn more about the project. These notes can include article summaries, links to videos, images, interviews, etc. Active engagement in answering these above questions will occur regularly during the semester.

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, April 24**. 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.

Tickets (20%)

Students will submit one ticket (250-500 words) per reading. Every other ticket will be submitted online to Google Drive at least 24 hours before class, while the other ticket will be completed in 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, with each question scoring 2.5 points, and a max score of 10.

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/are you critical of?

The first two Ws will help students remember the positive points from what they have read first, while the last two Ws integrate their experiences/thoughts with what they have read.

Please see Moodle for all assignments.

NOTE: Given the fact that tickets must be between 250-500 words, students should not give a summary of the ENTIRE reading, rather they need to focus their attention on a part of it that they found to be the most interesting to you.

Podcast (15%)

Students will submit one podcast entry (about 7 minutes) to Google Drive based on classroom experiences during the semester. These Podcast posts can be based on tickets, the community research project, or any other exercise, discussion, etc. that happens inside the class or with classmates. Once the Podcast has been reviewed and approved, it will be submitted for publication on the Umbra Institute podcast channel.

Peer Reviews (10%)

Student pairs will review presentations, and Podcast entries, and individually review tickets submitted by fellow students. Reviews should consist of helpful and constructive comments and provide "additive feedback"—making suggestions about what the writer might add to or develop further. Students are responsible for completing one *Ticket* peer review per class. *Podcast* reviews and presentation reviews that will be assigned during the semester. 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 has been completed in class. Please use the [writing review rubric](#) and the [peer review guidelines](#). Please see Moodle for all assignments.

Presentations (20%)

Students will lead a portion of the class via a short presentation of their ticket during the semester. Presentations as well as student-led discussion typically will occupy the first half of the class, while the professor will guide discussion during the remaining half of the class. Presentations should include an activity for the class and a discussion of the reading that connects to the reading. Activities for the class have included students filling out a questionnaire, watching a part of a TED talk video, doing an improvisation game, breaking into groups to answer specific questions, etc. You should not rely *solely* on Google Slide presentations. The presentation should include a short summary of the reading – enough that anyone who has not done the reading would be able to follow what you are talking about, and then you should focus your attention on some particular part of the reading that you find most interesting. All presentations have a leader and a second. The leader is responsible for presenting the material, while the second is there to assist if the leader needs help. Please see Moodle for all assignments.

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.

Broadcasting

Students will significantly improve submitted materials during the course of 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 does a project that has, from time to time, resulted in a peer-reviewed article submission that will be completed in the ensuing months post-completion of this course. The writing of this article, while open to all students, will require a commitment of about an hour or so each week. Bi-weekly meetings (or as needed) will occur via Zoom at a time that will fit all co-writers. Student-authors, as per my practice, will always be first authors. You will learn how to read and summarize original research articles and organize what we've done with 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 (if they so desire) for research projects—like honor's thesis, for example. In addition, if funding opportunities exist, I will again support you in gaining them so that you can present this project at international conferences that specialize in projects similar to what we do in this course.

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. All students are allowed 2 unexcused absences, which do not need to be justified. It is the student's responsibility to keep them in case of real necessity, i.e., sickness or any other unforeseen inconvenience that may prevent students from being in class. More than 2 absences will affect your final grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences (8 or more) 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 immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, 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 on 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 1

- DAY 1 *Introduction and Course Overview*
- DAY 2 *Frankl, p 17-54*
Ticket 1 - In class
Service Learning Project
Present current project: brief overview with Umbra staff

WEEK 2

- DAY 1 *Lyubomirsky Chapters 1 & 4*
Ticket 2 - GoogleDrive
Podcast
Development
- DAY 2 *Service Learning Project*
In-class meeting with the partner

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
Present current project: In-depth overview
- Wed., Feb. 7 *Service Learning Project Development*
"Fuori di Zucca" - site visit headquarters (Timing TBA - Manuel will send out an email with exact time and location)

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
- Feb 16 *Service Learning Project Development*
"Fuori di Zucca" visit partners - Service Learning Project. A detailed itinerary will be sent early this week.

WEEK 5

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

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 conversation with partner

WEEK 9

- DAY 1 *Lyubomirsky Chapters 10*
Ticket 12 - GoogleDrive
Service Learning Project Development.
Resolve areas needing improvement
- DAY 2 *Kashdan, Chapters 6*
Ticket 13 - In class
Podcast
Concepts discussed and 3rd draft due on GoogleDrive

WEEK 10

DAY 1 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Practice presentation for partner.

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

WEEK 11

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

DAY 2 *Service Learning Project Development*
Work on 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 community partner.
Ticket
Final versions with all revisions due.
Service Learning Project Development
Presentation with the partner.

WEEK 13

Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester



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

What is service learning?

Service learning is a type of experiential education integrated into a course such that:

- students engage in an organized activity or project aimed to address a community need that is identified in collaboration with the community partner;
- students critically reflect on the link between the experience in the community, course content, and the learning goals; and
- there is reciprocal learning both by the students and by the community partners.

Students will need a certain degree of flexibility, creativity, and self-initiative in order to realize a service learning project. Organization and open communication in-class with the professor and student team members will be key to student success.

Service Learning Project Overview

Community Partner

Fuori di Zucca (whose literal translation in English is "Out of Pumpkin" but whose meaning is "crazy") is a Volunteering Association that manages a Solidarity Purchasing Group. Its headquarters are located in the historical center of Perugia (next to University for Foreigners main building). The Association was founded in 2016 by a group of 5 people with the aim of creating a small community that would buy fresh food (i.e., vegetables, fruit, cheese, etc.) in a conscious and alternative way. The purchase takes place according to the principle of solidarity, which leads them to prefer small and local producers, respectful of the environment and people, with whom they have established a direct and stable relationship.

Project Description and Goals

Students will work as a team with "Fuori di Zucca", where the structure, mission, and goals of the association are studied, and then a plan is developed for how to advance the association's goals through the application of positive psychology. Like any service learning project, this project gives students the opportunity to apply their learning to the real-world and help "Fuori di Zucca" benefit from applying cutting-edge research in the field to their particular context.

Organization, Expectations, and Roles

Students will be divided into teams, and they will choose their own team. An important amount of time will be dedicated to the service learning project's progress in class. Teams will be required to meet outside of class for four weeks for approximately 1–2 hours. Teams will be responsible for deciding how to divide the various tasks to ensure members contribute equally throughout the course of the project.

Group Presentation

Each team will collaborate to create and present a final detailed presentation accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. Each student will be expected to complete a Presentation Feedback Form and ask questions to the other teams presenting to promote a community of learning and support.

Guidelines:

- PowerPoint (spell-check!).
- 10 minutes.
- Each team member contributes to the preparation and delivery of the presentation.
- Rehearse presentation as a group for content, 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, April 24** (the final week of the program). Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break.

All the presentations will have the same structure:

1. Present the partner
2. Present the project
3. Takeaways & challenges
4. A meaningful activity in line with the course topics (**optional**, it doesn't have to take more than five minutes)

Participation in this event is mandatory and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Grading Rubric

The service learning project (including the final presentation) is worth a total of 25% of the final course grade, which will be divided into three categories, each worth 8.33% of the final course grade:

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