



PYSC 450: The Science of Behavioral Change: A Community-Based Approach
Course Syllabus
Spring Semester 2023

Instructor: John L. Dennis, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:45am-12:15pm

Office Hours: By appointment, use the link: (<https://calendly.com/drjohndennis/10min-meeting>) or before/after class.

Course Type: Course with Service Learning component

Lab/Site-Visits Fee: USD\$100

“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 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	Assessment Measures
Reflect on positive psychology concepts	Class Discussion, Presentations, Blog
Develop applicable critical thinking skills regarding positive psychology concepts	Tickets, Class Discussion
Generate effective leadership skills	Presentations, Service Learning Project

Analyze the community service needs and understand how positive psychology concepts can be used to meet those needs	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, Blog
Create and broadcast materials that will help students to start thinking about their future careers	Class Discussion, Blog, Community Engagement Presentation

Course Materials

Readings

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.

Recommended Readings

The recommended reading(s) and/or text(s) for this course are below. These recommended readings are not mandatory, but they will assist you with research and understanding course content.

Lyubomirsky T. *Happier: Learn the secrets to daily joy and lasting fulfillment*. McGraw-Hill.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1991). *Learned optimism*. Knopf.

Suggested further readings

- 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, 377–389
- Fredrickson, B. (2001) The role of positive emotions in positive psychology – the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–26.
- Fredrickson, B., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J. and Finkel, S. M. (2008) Open hearts build lives: positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95, 1045–62.
- Gilbert, P. (2010) *Compassion Focused Therapy. Distinctive Features*. New York: Routledge.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L. A. and Diener, E. (2005) The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect: Does Happiness Lead to Success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131: 803–55.
- Seligman, M. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000) "Positive psychology – an introduction". *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14.

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](#) instruction method (to view The University of Texas at Austin's discussion about this method, visit <http://vimeo.com/70893101>).

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 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, Blog)

Book section name, article title or blog title

Assessments

Attendance & Participation	10%
Service Learning Project	20%
Community Engagement Presentation	5%
Tickets	20%
Blog	15%
Peer Reviews	10%
Presentations	20%

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, to voice personal views during discussions, and to 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 students' 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 off-line 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.

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, a short video (or series of videos) that present 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 that are 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 pages 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 **Tuesday, April 25th**. 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 being scored at 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 discussion, 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.

Blog (15%)

Students will submit one blog entry (exactly 500 words) to [Google Drive](#) based on classroom experiences during the semester. These blog 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 blog has been reviewed and approved, they will be submitted for publication on The Umbra Institute blog. A signup sheet for blog entries will be shared on [Google Drive](#). Follow the [blog rubric](#) to understand better what is expected of you. Please see Moodle for all assignments.

Peer Reviews (10%)

Students will review tickets and blog entries 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, and one *Blog* review 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 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](#) presentation. 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 blog posts, and, in the past, they have been shared on social networks such as [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Tumblr](#), [Pinterest](#), and [Slideshare](#). The goal in 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 most likely will result 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 Range	Grade	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A		93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-		90% - 92%	Excellent
B+		87% - 89%	Superior
B		83% - 86%	
B-		80% - 82%	
C+		77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C		73% - 76%	
C-		70% - 72%	
D+		67% - 69%	Low Pass
D		63% - 66%	
D-		60% - 62%	
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 & Lateness Policy

Class attendance (in person or through live connection) is mandatory. All students are allowed 2 “sick days” (i.e. 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. Excessive unexcused absences (8 or more) may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. Three late arrivals to or early departures from class will count as an unexcused absence. 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 be considered the equivalent of two unexcused absences. As such, absence from the co-curricular field trip will lower students’ final grade in that course by 4% (the equivalent of two unexcused absences). The absence policy for the Italian courses may be different than for that of the courses in English.

Additional absences relating to illness may be approved by the Director but only if a medical certification is provided. 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.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during 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.

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*
Service Learning Project - Present current project: brief overview
- Day 2 *Frankl, p 17-54*
Ticket 1 - In class

WEEK 2

- Day 1 *Ljubomirsky Chapters 1 & 4*
Ticket 2 - GoogleDrive
- Day 2 *Kashdan, Chapters 1*
Ticket 3 - In class

WEEK 3

- Day 1 *Maslow, Growth and Motivation*
Ticket 4 - GoogleDrive
Blog - Concepts discussed and initial notes due on GoogleDrive
- Day 2 *Frankl, p 54-100*
Ticket 5 - In class
Blog Development
Service Learning Project - Present current project: In-depth overview

WEEK 4

- Day 1 *Ljubomirsky Chapters 2 & 6*
Ticket 6 - GoogleDrive
Service Learning Project - Set roles and division of responsibilities, and review deadlines and project goals.
- Day 2 *Kashdan, Chapters 2*
Ticket 7 - In class

TBC - Wed., Oct. 5 Initial Visit to “Fuori di Zucca” association’s headquarters

WEEK 5

- Day 1 *Service Learning Project Development*
TBC – In class conversation with Partner
- Day 2 *Maslow, Growth and Cognition*
Ticket 8 – GoogleDrive
Service Learning Project - Work through the project.

WEEK 6

- Day 1 *Ljubomirsky Chapters 3 & 8*
Ticket 9 - In class
Blog - Concepts discussed and revised notes due on GoogleDrive
- Day 2 *Kashdan, Chapters 5*
Ticket 10 - GoogleDrive

Semester Break

WEEK 7

- Day 1 *Maslow, Values*
Ticket 11 - In class
- Day 2 *Service Learning Project Development*
Service Learning Project - Work through the project.
Blog Concepts discussed and 2nd draft due on GoogleDrive

March 17 - Sites’ visit for the Service Learning Project TBC

WEEK 8

- Day 1 *Lyubomirsky Chapters 10*
Ticket 12 - GoogleDrive
- Day 2 *Service Learning Project Development*
Service Learning Project - Work through project

WEEK 9

- Day 1 *Kashdan, Chapters 6*
Ticket 13 - In class
- Day 2 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Service Learning Project – Resolve areas needing improvement
Blog Concepts discussed and 3rd draft due on GoogleDrive

WEEK 10

- Day 1 *Maslow, Future Tasks*
Ticket 14 - GoogleDrive
- Day 2 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Service Learning Project – Resolve areas needing improvement

WEEK 11

- Day 1 *Kashdan, Chapters 7*
Ticket 15 - In class
Service Learning Project - Practice presentation for the partner
- Day 2 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Service Learning Project - Presentation with the partner.

WEEK 12

- Day 1 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Blog - Final versions are due.
Service Learning Project - Practice presentation for Community Engagement Presentations.
- Day 2 *Service Learning Project Development.*
Service Learning Project - Practice presentation for Community Engagement Presentations.
Ticket - Final versions with all revisions due.

WEEK 13

TBA The Final Exam and Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester



**PYSC 450 - The Science of Behavioral Change: A Community-Based Approach
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 the Special Academic Events week, the class will give a 15-minute presentation to the Umbra community at the End of Semester Community Engagement Presentations during the exams week. The class will work together to share a few words about the course and project, lead a meaningful activity that focuses on the project, and provide a few thoughts about their experience with the project and partner. Students will receive guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break. Participation in this event is MANDATORY and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Grading Rubric

The service learning project 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