SOCIOLOGY OF HAPPINESS (SC082)

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Period: Fall 2008/2009
Class time: M, W, F @ 2pm
Credits: 3
Class location: ????
Web: www2.bc.edu/~calvobra/teaching.htm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is happiness? Can we measure happiness? What are the objections to the study of happiness? Are we getting happier? What does make us happy or unhappy? Does money buy happiness? Should happiness be pursued individually through private lifestyles or collectively through public policy? Does sociology have a clue? Students in this course will learn to find answers to these questions drawing from the sociology of happiness. Contributions from personal experiences and fields such as psychology, economy, psychiatry, theology and neuroscience are considered, but the emphasis is on sociological perspectives.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The final grade for the course will be calculated based on: group documents, in-class essays, participation, and final exam.

Group Documents

55% of the final grade will be based on group reports. The class will break into study groups that will select one topic to be studied, under my guidance, throughout the semester. During the second week of class, each group must schedule a meeting with me to get the topic approved. At least one day before the meeting, study groups should: create a Google Documents account, email me the URL, and upload two Word documents: a project summary and a study plan. The project summary should be a one page summary of the proposed topic and main questions. The study plan should describe goals and include a well-organized timeline describing specific tasks and individual responsibilities. Once my approval of the topic is granted, each group will start working on a progress report, including a first draft of an introduction and a literature review. Each group will be responsible for: (1) keep all three documents on-line throughout the semester, so me and other students in the class can read them; (2) give me privileges to comment and edit their documents (do not grant this privilege to other people); and (3) update all three documents on a weekly basis before 12pm on Mondays, incorporating relevant comments, class contents and readings. By the end of the semester, the progress report should turn into a final draft including an introduction, development, conclusion, and references. The progress report should never exceed 4,000 words (excluding references) at any given point in time. Please include a word count in the title page and update it as necessary. Each group will receive two grades for their documents: one by the end of October (25%) and another one by the end of the semester (30%). Both grades
will be based on the quality of the documents, as well as on the timing and periodicity of
the updates. To ensure the participation of all group members, I will ask that group
members evaluate each other’s participation at the end of the semester. If there is any
evidence of an unequal work load distribution, I will take this into account to adjust the
grade of each member of the group. Unless groups have a valid and documented excuse
(including phone numbers doctor or coach for me to call), I will not give credit for late
group project submissions. We will address the group documents guidelines and
requirements in detail during the first weeks of classes.

In-class Essays
15% of the final grade will be based on 12 brief unannounced in-class essays.
Each essay will be graded 0 or 10. On one side, this means that each person will be able
miss up to 2 essays but still get the maximum of 100 credits. On the other side, it also
means that it will be very difficult to get permission to make up essays missed beyond the
first two, unless students bring notes from their doctor or coach (including phone
numbers for me to call) for every essay missed out of the 12.

Participation
15% of the final grade will be based on participation in class discussions and
activities. For example, the class will be divided in debate teams that will defend a
specific position regarding a controversial topic related to happiness. They will be
responsible of collecting the evidence for its position AND against the position of its
opponents. Debate teams will have to email me a one or two pages summary of the
evidence they collected at least one week before their debate is scheduled. To ensure the
participation of all team members, I will ask that team members evaluate each other’s
participation after their debate is over. Before the next class, each team will be required
to revise their summary of evidence and upload it to their Google Documents Webpage
so other students can access it.

Final Exam
15% of the final grade will be based on a final exam. The final will be
cumulative, covering the entire course contents, all required readings, and all the final
drafts of the group documents. I will not give permission to take an exam early. Unless
students have a valid and documented excuse (including phone numbers of the doctor or
coach for me to call), I will neither give permission to take an exam late. It is not a valid
excuse to have several exams on the same day or having purchased a non-refundable air
ticket. Athletes who must be away for games may be allowed to take the exam late as
long as they come to see me in advance with a letter from their coaches, and we have
agreed to a time and date for the make-up exam before the actual exam day.

COURSE POLICIES

The best way to get in touch with me outside of the classroom is through email. The
course is based on collaboration among the students. Students are strongly encouraged to
share their questions, thoughts, and findings. Students should format all their documents
using the 3d edition of the ASA Style Guide. They should cite all their sources, even unpublished work by their classmates. I take cheating and plagiarism seriously. Students are responsible for knowing the University’s academic integrity policy is and how cheating and plagiarism are defined.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

The required readings are listed in the following section. They can be accessed from electronic reserve in the BC library, journals’ web pages, electronic databases (e.g. sociological abstracts), and authors’ web pages. Students can access electronic reserve, journals’ web pages, and electronic datasets at: [http://www.bc.edu/libraries/materials.html](http://www.bc.edu/libraries/materials.html). Links to authors’ web pages are provided at the end of each reference whenever they are available.

In addition to the readings listed below it is likely that a few additional required readings will be announced during the semester.


**TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE**

*September 2-5: The Study of Happiness*

*September 8-12: The Concept of Happiness*

**First draft of group documents due this week**
September 15-19: Measurement of Happiness
Update group documents due Monday 15 at 12pm

September 22-26: Sociological Theories of Happiness
Update group documents due Monday 22 at 12pm

September 29-October 3: Fluctuations in Happiness
Update group documents due Monday 29 at 12pm

October 6-10: Correlates and Causes of Happiness
Update group documents due Monday 6 at 12pm

October 13: No Classes, Columbus Day
October 14-17: No Classes, Groups Meet to Work on their Projects

October 20: Progress report

Progress report of the group project due October 20 at 12pm in my email

October 22-24: Does Money Buy Happiness?


October 27-31: The Happiness of Nations

Update group documents due Monday 27 at 12pm


November 3-7: The Benefits of Happiness

Update group documents due Monday 3 at 12pm


November 10-14: Stumbling on Happiness

Update group documents due Monday 10 at 12pm


November 17-21: Happy Aging

Update group documents due Monday 17 at 12pm


November 24: Inequality in Happiness

Update group documents due Monday 24 at 12pm


November 26-28: No Classes, Thanksgiving

December 1-5: Happiness and Public Policy

Update group documents due Monday 1 at 12pm


December 8: Conclusions

Final group documents due December 8 at 12pm in my email

December 13: Final Exam

Final exam, 9am