SOCIETY OF HAPPINESS (SC082)

Instructor: Esteban Calvo
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Period: Spring 2008/2009
Class time: T, TH @ 10:30am
Credits: 3
Class location: Campion 303
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 makes 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 projects, in-class essays, participation, and final exam.

Group Projects

40% 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 first month 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 write a proposal, upload it into a single Google Document, and invite each member of the group and me to be collaborators. The proposal should include: (1) a title page with the name of the project, full name of all group members, and a word count; (2) a one page project summary of the proposed topic and main question; and (3) a study plan describing tasks, due dates, and person in charge of each task. Once my approval of the topic is granted, each group will start uploading their progress into their Google Document on a weekly basis. By the end of the semester, the Google Document should turn into a final report including an introduction, development, conclusion, and references. The progress report should not exceed 4,000 words (excluding references) at any given point in time. Please update the word count in the title page as necessary. Each group will receive two grades for their Google Document: one by mid April (10%) 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 of a 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**

20% of the final grade will be based on 7 brief unannounced in-class essays. Each essay will be graded 0 or 20. On one side, this means that each student 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 three, unless students bring notes from their doctor or coach (including phone numbers for me to call) for every essay missed out of the 7.

**Participation**

20% of the final grade will be based on participation in class discussions and activities. In every class you will have the opportunity to share your opinions, knowledge, or insights about the topics or readings that we are discussing. At the end of the semester, groups will have the opportunity to present the results of their projects. In addition, the class will be divided in debate teams that will defend a specific position regarding a controversial topic related to happiness.

**Final Exam**

20% of the final grade will be based on a final exam. The nature of the final exam will be cumulative, covering the entire course contents, all required readings, and all the final reports of the group projects. The format of the final exam will consist on five short open-ended questions. 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 3rd edition of the ASA Style Guide or the latest edition of the Chicago Manual of Style. 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. 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

January 15: Core Questions about Happiness

January 20-22: The Concept of Happiness

January 27-29: Measurement of Happiness

February 3-5: Stumbling on Happiness

February 10-12: Happy Aging

February 17-20: Fluctuations in Happiness

Google Document due Tuesday 17

**February 24-26: Does Money Buy Happiness?**
**Update Google Document due Tuesday 24**

**March 3-5: No Classes, Spring Vacation**

**March 10-12: Sociological Theories of Happiness**
**Update Google Document due Tuesday 10**

**March 17-19: Correlates and Causes of Happiness**
**Update Google Document due Tuesday 17**

**March 24-26: Happiness and Public Policy**
**Update Google Document due Tuesday 24**

**March 31-April 2: The Happiness of Nations**
**Update Google Document due Tuesday 31**

**April 7: No Classes, Groups Meet to Work on their Projects**
April 9: No Classes, Easter Weekend

April 14-16: Inequality in Happiness

**Group project (first submission) due April 14 at 12pm in my email**


April 21-23: The Benefits of Happiness


April 28-30: Conclusions

**Group project (final submission) due May 1 at 12pm in my email**

May 6: Final Exam

**Final exam starts at 12:30pm**