

## **SOCIOLOGY OF HAPPINESS (SC082)**

Instructor: Esteban Calvo  
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Office hours: TH 12:30-2 and by appointment

Period: Spring 2008/2009  
Class time: T, TH @ 10:30am  
Credits: 3  
Class location: Campion 303  
Web: [www2.bc.edu/~calvobra/teaching.htm](http://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 3d 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*

- Veenhoven, Ruut. 2000. "The Four Qualities of Life. Ordering Concepts and Measures of the Good Life." *Journal of Happiness Studies* 1:1-39. Available at: <http://www2.eur.nl/fsw/research/veenhoven/Pub2000s/2000c-full.pdf>.

*January 27-29: Measurement of Happiness*

- Veenhoven, Ruut. 2008. "Questions on Happiness." Pp. 1-32 in *Happiness in Nations, Introductory Text*. Available at: [http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_nat/nat\\_fp.htm](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/nat_fp.htm).

*February 3-5: Stumbling on Happiness*

- Gilbert, Daniel. 2005. "Foreword." Pp.xiii-xvii in *Stumbling on Happiness*. New York: Vintage.
- Gilbert, Daniel. 2005. "In the Blind Spot of the Mind's Eye." Pp. 83-105 in *Stumbling on Happiness*. New York: Vintage.

*February 10-12: Happy Aging*

- Calvo, Esteban, Kelly Haverstick, and Steven A. Sass. Forthcoming, 2009. "Gradual Retirement, Sense of Control, and Retirees' Happiness." *Research on Aging* 31(1):112-135.
- Siegrist, Johannes, Olaf Von Dem Knesebeck, and Craig Evan Pollack. 2004. "Social Productivity and Well-being: A Sociological Exploration." *Social Theory and Health* 2:1-17.

*February 17-20: Fluctuations in Happiness*

### **Google Document due Tuesday 17**

- Diener, Ed, Richard E. Lucas, and Christie Napa Scollon. 2006. "Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill: Revising the Adaptation Theory of Well-being." *American Psychologist* 61:305-14.

- Veenhoven, Ruut and Michael Hagerty. 2006. "Rising Happiness in Nations 1946-2004: A Reply to Easterlin." *Social Indicators Research* 0:1-16.

*February 24-26: Does Money Buy Happiness?*

**Update Google Document due Tuesday 24**

- Arthaud-Day, Marne L. and Janet P. Near. 2005. "The Wealth of Nations and the Happiness of Nations: Why "Accounting" Matters." *Social Indicators Research* 74:511-48.
- Kahneman, Daniel, Alan B. Krueger, David Schkade, Norbert Schwarz, and Arthur A. Stone. 2006. "Would You Be Happier if You Were Richer? A Focusing Illusion." Working Paper No. 125, CEPS, Princeton, NJ.

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

*March 10-12: Sociological Theories of Happiness*

**Update Google Document due Tuesday 10**

- Glatzer, Wolfgang. 2000. "Happiness: Classic Theory in the Light of Current Research." *Journal of Happiness Studies* 1:447-64.
- Turner, Jonathan H. and Jan E. Stets. 2006. "Sociological Theories of Human Emotions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 32:25-52.

*March 17-19: Correlates and Causes of Happiness*

**Update Google Document due Tuesday 17**

- Blanchflower, David G. and Oswald, Andrew J. 2004. "Money, Sex, and Happiness: An Empirical Study." *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 106:393-415.
- Diener, Ed, Eunkook M Suh, Richard E. Lucas, and Heidi L. Smith. 1999. "Subjective Well-being: Three Decades of Progress." *Psychological Bulletin* 125:276-302.

*March 24-26: Happiness and Public Policy*

**Update Google Document due Tuesday 24**

- Diener, Ed and Martin E. P. Seligman. 2004. "Beyond Money: Toward and Economy of Well-being." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 5:1-31.
- Veenhoven, Ruut. 2002. "Why Social Policy Needs Subjective Indicators." *Social Indicators Research* 58:33-45.

*March 31-April 2: The Happiness of Nations*

**Update Google Document due Tuesday 31**

- Inglehart, Ronald and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. 2000. "Genes, Culture, Democracy, and Happiness." Pp. 163-84 in *Culture and Subjective Well-being*, edited by E. Diener and E. M. Suh. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Radcliff, Benjamin. 2005. "Class Organization and Subjective Well-being: A Cross-national Analysis." *Social Forces* 84:513-30.

*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**

- Veenhoven, Ruut. 2005. "Return of Inequality in Modern Society? Test by Dispersion of Life-satisfaction Across Time and Nations." *Journal of Happiness Studies* 6:457-87. Available at: <http://www2.eur.nl/fsw/research/veenhoven/Pub2000s/2005d-full.pdf>.
- Yang, Yang. 2008. "Social Inequalities in Happiness in the United States, 1972 to 2004: An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis." *American Sociological Review* 73:204-26.

*April 21-23: The Benefits of Happiness*

- Lyubomirsky, Sonja, Laura King, and Ed Diener. 2005. "The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect: Does Happiness Lead to Success?" *Psychological Bulletin* 131:803-55.
- Rablen, Mathew D. and Andrew J. Oswald. 2007. "Mortality and Immortality." Working Paper No. 785, Department of Economics, The University of Warwick, UK.

*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**