



The Science of Well-Being and Human Potential

Department of Psychology – Columbia University

Where:	TBA
When:	TBA
Instructor:	Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D. (sbk2159@columbia.edu)
Office Hours:	TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you’ll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capacities, your own possibilities.” – Abraham Maslow

What does it mean to reach your full potential? Can science inform how you can live *your own* best life? The main mission of this seminar is to provide an up-to-date understanding of theoretical, empirical, and applied advances in the science of well-being and human potential. Consideration will be given to conflicting viewpoints and their respective empirical support. The course is grounded in the core principles of humanistic psychology, and will cover essential human needs, including security, growth, mindfulness, connection, self-esteem, love, creativity, character, resiliency, purpose, flow, gratitude, awe, and other forms of transcendence. We will also cover the latest science of human performance, including the development of intelligence, talent, and creativity. Throughout this seminar you will engage in experiential learning and practical exercises to further help you nurture what’s best within you— and become a *whole person*— which will inform our theoretical and empirical understanding of the latest scientific findings. My hope is that in addition to enhancing your appreciation of how the scientific method can increase your understanding of human potential more generally, the exercises and readings in this course will also help you in your own personal journey to realize your greatest strengths and become more fully human— accepting and becoming flexible with the totality of who you are, so that you can become the person you most want to become.

Prerequisite: PSYC UN1001 The Science of Psychology, or an equivalent introductory psychology course, along with instructor permission (applications will be required).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Understand and articulate key concepts, findings, and controversies in the science of well-being and human potential,
- Understand the research methods (including measures, interventions, and research paradigms) used to assess potential,
- Evaluate evidence for the validity, both internal and external, of empirical claims in contemporary scientific research,
- Articulate from first-hand experience with activities a perspective on how the science of well-being and human potential is (or is not) relevant to your life and can help you realize your own greatest strengths.

ROLE IN THE PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM

The Science of Well-Being and Human Potential is a seminar open to any Columbia undergraduates who have fulfilled the prerequisite course: PSYC UN1001 The Science of Psychology, or an equivalent introductory psychology course, along with instructor permission (applications will be required). This seminar will also be open to students participating in the Psychology Postbaccalaureate Certificate program.

This course will fulfill the following degree requirements:

- For the Psychology major or concentration and the Psychology Postbaccalaureate Certificate program, this course meets the Special Elective Requirement.
- For Psychology majors and Psychology Postbac students, this course fulfills the seminar requirement.

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTBOOKS

This course will include a wide array of peer-reviewed empirical journal articles for reading. Additionally, the following texts will be assigned:

Kaufman, S.B. (2020). [*Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization*](#).

Kaufman, S.B. & Feingold, J. (2022). [*Choose Growth: A Workbook for Transcending Trauma, Fear, and Self-Doubt*](#).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class preparation and participation (10%). The assigned readings are designed to increase your knowledge on the latest advancements in the science of well-being and human potential and to hone your ability to think about the science critically. The topics discussed are complex and leave open a lot of space for criticism and debate. Strong preparation and participation will allow us to have high-level, constructive discussions that can help move the field forward. It is important that you engage with the material during class discussions since active participation in these discussions is so important for learning the information and broadening your perspective on the material. If you feel that regularly contributing to class discussions is difficult for you, you should raise this issue with me as soon as possible. In such cases, we might be able to work out a way for you to feel more comfortable and prepared to contribute to the discussions.

Effective class preparation and participation includes:

- Asking insightful or clarifying questions.
- Connecting the reading to other reading you've done in the course or reading you've done on your own (including relevant media sources), drawing parallels and/or contrasts among findings.
- Actively listening to fellow classmates and responding to their ideas respectfully, even if you disagree with their views.
- Offering thoughtful critiques of the research methodology and providing suggestions for how it might be improved.

Weekly reading reflection papers (40%). The night before each class period you will be asked to submit a 2-page maximum double-spaced reading response to CourseWorks by 6:00pm. The weekly reading reflection papers should attempt to synthesize as much of the reading for the week as possible, drawing connections between the material, and critiquing methodologies or study conclusions where you see fit. Each reflection will be graded on the following scale: (3) excellent reflection; thoughtful, insightful, and integrative, (2) satisfactory reflection; thoughtful but not particularly integrative or inclusive of multiple readings for the week, (1) incomplete or not relevant to the topic, and (0) not submitted. Write something you are proud (and comfortable) to share with others. *Please bring your weekly reflection to class and be prepared to share them with the class.*

Weekly growth challenges (20%). Each week, you will complete one "growth challenge" and then write a *1-page reflection paper* (maximum of 500 words) on the experience. ***Please upload your reflection to Courseworks by 6:00pm the night before each class period. We will not be accepting late reflections, and there will be no make-ups.*** Each weekly growth challenge will be graded on a scale of (3) clearly took the challenge seriously and gave real effort, thoughtfully reflecting on the experience and its relevant for your own personal journey of self-actualization, (2) You took the challenge seriously but mostly just relay that you did it, with less thoughtfulness and insight into your own life, (1) incomplete or not relevant to the topic, and (0) not submitted.

Research paper (20%). The culmination of this course is the creation of a novel research proposal in the fields of well-being and human potential. Choose a topic that can be addressed in

an 8-10 double-spaced (not including references) paper. The paper will first introduce the topic, then review recent knowledge and advancements in the field, and then discuss your novel proposal. Think of this as a grant application. Justify why your proposed line of research is important, how it fills a gap in the literature, and what study methodology you are proposing will help build new knowledge for the field.

Research paper presentation (10%). On the last day of class, you will briefly present your study proposal. You can use Powerpoint slides if you'd like.

CLASS POLICIES

Academic integrity: As members of this academic community, we are responsible for maintaining the highest level of personal and academic integrity: “[E]ach one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.... The exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited. In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others’ ideas in all of your research papers and projects... [and] you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent” (from the [Columbia University Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity](#)).

Cheating and Plagiarism: Whether intentional or inadvertent – plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity. Plagiarism is the practice of claiming or implying original authorship of (or incorporating materials from) someone else’s written or creative work, in whole or in part, without adequate acknowledgement. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism and/or how to properly cite sources, please come to me. I am more than happy to help. Similarly, if you put yourself in a situation, e.g., starting an assignment very late, in which you think your best option might be to cut some corners, see me. It is far better to submit your assignment late and incur that penalty than to compromise your academic integrity and potentially put your academic standing in jeopardy.

Attendance: Class participation is the foundation of this course. I realize that a student may need (for whatever reason) to miss a class. However, keep in mind that multiple absences will impede your ability to succeed in the course and will impact your participation grade. You will still be responsible for the work due in that class (e.g., reading responses). Please notify the instructor as far in advance as possible if you know you are going to miss a class, and more than three absences will reflect an automatic deduction of 10% of the final grade.

Late assignments: It is not fair for you to get more time on your assignments than your peers. Therefore, no late reading responses will be accepted (they must be submitted online the night before class). If there’s an appropriate reason for turning in your final paper late, however, please discuss it with me well in advance so that we can work out an arrangement. I will have to penalize late final papers by 5 points for every day it is late.

Class Etiquette: Presence and participation is a critical aspect of this class. No cell phone use will be allowed in class. Laptops are allowed solely for notetaking purposes, but if excessive

laptop use interferes with your participation, or you are seen to be engaging in your laptop for reasons other than notetaking, I may ask you to bring a notepad instead.

Students with Disabilities: Students with special needs who may require classroom/assignment accommodations should make an appointment with me before or during the first week of class. You should also contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Lerner Hall before the start of the course to register for these accommodations. The procedures for registering with ODS can be found [here](#).

Changes to the Syllabus might happen during the course. The most recent version will always be posted to Courseworks.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Introduction & History

- *Transcend*, Preface (pp. 13-21), Introduction (pp. 23-39), and Appendix I (pp. 257-277).
- *Choose Growth*, Introduction (pp. 11-21).
- Jongman-Sereno, K.P., & Leary, M.R. (2019). [The Enigma of Being Yourself: A Critical Examination of the Concept of Authenticity](#). *Review of General Psychology* (p. 1-10).
- Kaufman, SB. (2018). [Self-Actualizing People in the 21st century: Integration with Contemporary Theory and Research on Personality and Well-Being](#). *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (p. 1-33).

Growth Challenge: *Positive Introduction (see below)*

Activity: Positive Introduction

The Challenge:

- Think about a time in your past when you were at your best, when you demonstrated your strongest character strengths and virtues. Refrain from thinking exclusively about times of greatest performance or achievement—rather, consider a time when you stood up for something or someone you believed in, went out of your way to do something kind, or sacrificed your own momentary happiness for a greater good. Reflect on why you acted this way; what inspired you to act this way? What did it feel like in the moment? Afterward? What does it feel like to think about this moment now?
- Tell your story in no more than 1 single-spaced page. See Maya Angelou’s essay “[Philanthropy](#)” for an example of a positive introduction.
- Bring the piece to class prepared to read your positive introduction aloud and listen to your classmates’ stories. While others are sharing their introductions, allow yourself to be fully present with them. Practice appreciative listening by giving your full attention, and asking questions that help build upon the sentiment that is conveyed.

2. Mindfulness

- Esther Papiés et al. (2015). [The Benefits of Simply Observing: Mindful Attention Modulates the Link Between Motivation and Behavior](#), *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (pp. 148-170).
- Van Dam, N.T. et al. (2018). [Mind the hype: A critical evaluation and prescriptive agenda for research on mindfulness and meditation](#). *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13 (pp. 36-61).
- Scott Barry Kaufman (2016). [One Skeptical Scientist's Mindfulness Journey](#), *Scientific American*.

Growth Challenge: Choose a Mindfulness Meditation (full exercise to come)

3. The Need for Safety

- *Transcend*, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-34).
- Jack Shonkoff et al. (2012). [An Integrated Scientific Framework for Child Survival and Early Childhood Development](#), *Pediatrics* (pp. 1-14).
- Fraley, R.C., Hudson, N.W., Heffernan, M.E., & Segal, N. (2015). [Are Adult Attachment Styles Categorical or Dimensional? A Taxometric Analysis of General and Relationship-Specific Attachment Orientations](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 109 (pp. 354-368).

Growth Challenge: Choose any Practice from Chapter 1 of Choose Growth

4. Exploring Your Emotions

- Kok, B.E. & Fredrickson, B.L. (2010). [Upward Spirals of the Heart: Autonomic Flexibility, as Indexed by Vagal Tone, Reciprocally and Prospectively Predicts Positive Emotions and Social Connectedness](#). *Biological Psychology*, 85 (pp. 432-436).
- Peter Kuppens, Annu Realo, and Ed Diener (2008). [The Role of Positive and Negative Emotions in Life Satisfaction Judgment Across Nations](#), *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (pp. 66-75).
- Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diener (2014). The Upside of Your Dark Side. ([Chapters 3 & 4](#)). New York, NY: Hudson Street Press (pp. 53-122).

Growth Challenge: “Explore Your Dark Side” in Chapter 4 of Choose Growth

5. The Need for Connection

- *Transcend*, Chapter 2 (pp. 35-53).

- Yang, X., & Dunham, Y. (2019). [Minimal but Meaningful: Probing the Limits of Randomly Assigned Social Identities](#). *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 185 (pp. 19-34).
- Algoe, S.B. (2019). [Positive Interpersonal Processes](#). *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (pp. 1-6).
- John Stephens, Emily Heaphy, & Jane Dutton (2011). [High-Quality Connections](#), In K. Cameron and Spreitzer (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship* (pp. 3-40).

Growth Challenge: Choose any practice from chapter 2 of Choose Growth

6. Developing a Healthy Self-Esteem

- *Transcend*, Chapter 3 (pp. 54-80).
- Leary, M.R., Haupt, A.L., Strausser, K.S., & Chokel, J.T. (1998). [Calibrating the Sociometer: The Relationship between Interpersonal Appraisals and State Self-esteem](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74 (pp. 1290-1299).
- Mark Leary and Jennifer Guadagno (2010). [The Sociometer, Self-Esteem, and the Regulation of Interpersonal Behavior](#). In K.D. Vohs & R.F. Baumeister (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (2nd ed). New York, NY: Guilford Press (pp. 339-354).

Growth Challenge: Choose any practice from Chapter 3 of Choose Growth

7. IQ & Human Intelligence

- *Ungifted*, Chapters 2 (pp. 20-42), 10 (pp. 179-215), and 13 (pp. 289-318) (.pdf to come)
- Engle, R.W., Laughlin, J.E., Tuholski, S.W., & Conway, A.R.A. (1999). [Working memory, short-term memory, and general fluid intelligence: A latent-variable approach](#). *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 128 (pp. 309-331).
- Lohman, D.F. (2001). [Fluid intelligence, inductive reasoning, and working memory: Where the theory of Multiple Intelligences falls short](#) (pp. 1-10).

No Growth Challenge this week

8. Talent Development

- *Ungifted*, Chapters 1 (pp. 3-19), 4 (pp. 65-pp.80), & 11 (pp. 216-247) (.pdf to come)
- Simonton, D.K. (1991). [Emergence and Realization of Genius: The Lives and Works of 120 classical composers](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61 (pp. 829-840).
- Kaufman, S.B. (2016). [Creativity is Much More Than 10,000 Hours of Deliberate Practice](#). *Scientific American*.

Growth Challenge: Develop your Talents (full exercise to come)

9. Creativity

- *Ungifted*, Chapter 12 (pp. 248-288) (.pdf to come)
- Runco, M.A., Millar, G., Acar, S., & Cramond, B. (2010). [Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking as Predictors of Personal and Public Achievement: A Fifty-Year Follow-Up](#). *Creativity Research Journal* (pp. 361-368).
- Victoria Oleynick et al., [Openness/Intellect: The Core of the Creative Personality](#) (pp. 9-27).

Growth Challenge: *Creativity Challenge (activity to come)*

10. Character Development

- Russo-Netzer, P. (2023). [A Meaningful Synergy: The Integration of Character Strengths and the Three Types of Meaning in Life](#). Soc. Sci. (pp. 1-30).
- Ryan Niemiec (2013). [VIA Character Strengths: Research and Practice \(The First 10 Years\)](#), In H.H. Knoop & A. Delle Fave (Eds.), *Well-Being and Cultures: Perspectives on Positive Psychology*. New York, NY: Springer (pp. 11-30).
- Ryan Niemiec (2018). [Six Functions of Character Strengths for Thriving at Times of Adversity and Opportunity: A Theoretical Perspective](#), *Applied Research in Quality of Life* (pp. 551-557).

Growth Challenge: *Choose any practice from Chapter 6 of Choose Growth*

11. Love

- *Transcend*, Chapter 5 (pp. 118-148)
- Wayment, H.A., Bauer, J.J., & Sylaska, K. (2015). [The Quiet Ego Scale: Measuring the Compassionate Self-Identity](#). *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 16 (pp. 999-1033).
- Neff, K.D., & Toth-Kiraly, I. (2022). [Self-Compassion Scale \(SCS\)](#) (pp. 1-22).
- Kaufman, S.B., Yaden, D.B., Hyde, E., & Tsukayama, E. (2019). [The light vs. dark triad of personality: Contrasting two very different profiles of human nature](#). *Frontiers in Psychology* (pp. 1-26). (You can find out your light vs. dark balance score [here](#)).

Growth Challenge: *Choose any practice from Chapter 5 of Choose Growth*

12. Living Your Purpose

- *Transcend*, Chapter 6 (pp. 149-185)
- Shalom Schwartz et al. (2012). [Refining the Theory of Basic Individual Values](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (pp. 1-26).
- Kennon Sheldon and Lawrence Krieger (2014). [Walking the Talk: Value Importance, Value Enactment, and Well-Being](#), *Motivation & Emotion* (pp. 1-11).
- Kennon Sheldon (2014). [Being Oneself: The Central Role of Self-Concordant Goal Selection](#), *Personality and Social Psychology Review* (pp. 349-365).

Growth Challenge: Choose any practice from Chapter 7 of Choose Growth

13. Transcendent & Peak Experiences

- *Transcend*, Chapters 7 & 8 (pp. 189-244)
- David Yaden, Jonathan Haidt, Ralph Hood, Jr., David Vago, D., & Andrew Newberg, A. B. (2017). [The Varieties of Self-Transcendent Experience](#), *Review of General Psychology* (pp. 1-18).
- Yaden, D.B., Kaufman, S.B., Hyde, E., Chirico, A., Gaggioli, A., Wei Zhang, J., & Keltner, D. (2018). [The development of the Awe Experience Scale \(AWE-S\): A multifactorial measure for a complex emotion](#). *The Journal of Positive Psychology* (pp. 474-488).

Growth Challenge: Choose any practice from Chapter 8 of Choose Growth

14. Class Presentations