

CEE 2803A Syllabus

The Science of Happiness and Design, Section A, 3 credits

Fall 2026

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: TBD

To schedule time, visit: [Book time with me](#)

General Course Information

Description

People want to function well, and engineers want their creations to function well. Part of functioning well is being happy or sparking happiness. This course focuses on these topics. The course draws on recent empirical research, primarily from psychology, that shows which elements of happiness are under our control, how we fail to predict what makes us happy, and how we can apply therapeutic techniques to ameliorate unpleasant feelings. We will also look at techniques to increase tranquility during times of stress. Intertwined with this material, there will be readings and discussions about what aspects of the built environment increase happiness. Assignments in this course require reflection on applying course material to one's life.

Course Learning Outcomes

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

1. Understand how decisions about money and expectations of material fulfillment affect and do not affect our happiness
2. Determine which factors of a particular built environment are likely to increase and decrease wellbeing
3. Understand the degree to which exposure to nature matters for individual happiness
4. Know the primary factors that differentiate happy countries, e.g., Finland, from unhappy countries, e.g., Afghanistan
5. Discriminate between hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of happiness
6. Understand how self-narratives (stories about the self) are an element of happiness
7. Understand how being generative gains importance as one grows older
8. Apply simplified techniques from cognitive behavioral therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy to your life

Required Course Materials

Dolan, P. (2015). *Happiness by Design: Change What You Do, Not How You Think*. London: Plume. ISBN: 9780147516305. Available in hardback, paperback (recommended), and e-book.

Grading Policy

The allocation of final grade points to assignments is as follows:

- Reading Assignments on Perusall (20%)
- Attendance (10%)
- Journal Assignments (35%)
- Midterm paper on design (15%)
- Final paper on your happiness (20%)

Description of Graded Components

Perusall readings are hosted on an application where you can read and comment on the assignment. These “readings” may be a video or audio assignment, but they are usually text-based. Your grade depends on the quality of your engagement with the article, which includes time spent, number of comments, and quality of comments.

Attendance means being present and attentive in class.

Journal assignments require you to integrate what you have learned in this class with elements of your life. They are short written assignments.

The midterm paper requires you to integrate what you have learned about design with two challenges, namely, your primary classroom and your residence. The paper requires you to re-design these spaces and explain your rationale.

The final paper requires you to reflect on three elements of the course.

All written assignments will appear on Canvas. Please be attentive to the deadlines for these assignments, which will appear in your Canvas dashboard and other Canvas pages.

Late Assignments Submission: Late submission results in an incremental reduction of 10% per day of the raw grade.

Citations: The preferred citation style is American Psychological Association (APA), but any consistent professional style is acceptable.

Finding Assignments:

Course Policies

Attendance and/or Participation

Attendance means being present in class and participating in discussions about readings. I may call on you to comment on an assigned reading. If you repeatedly show signs of failing to do the readings, your attendance will be affected.

More broadly, I hope your semester goes as planned and is free of personal emergencies and illnesses. In the event of illness or an emergency, it is of course acceptable to miss class or submit assignments late. Family emergencies include the illness or death of a family member. Personal emergencies include severe illnesses and accidents. I understand that you also might need to travel to sports meets or professional conferences. For any absence, you should provide documentation, which will turn it into an excused absence.

For more serious emergencies with long-term consequences, please discuss the situation with your academic advisor.

Please also see the institute expectations and restriction related to attendance at :

<https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review [Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a learning need that requires special accommodation, please contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) at 404-894-2563 as soon as possible to discuss your needs. They will give you an accommodations letter. Please also email me so we can set up a time to discuss your accommodations and needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. The [Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Use of Generative AI

You are welcome to converse with ChatGPT or an alternative to develop your ideas. However, you are not permitted to copy and paste prose generated by a generative AI into an essay. I would strongly suggest you do not have ChatGPT and your word processor open at the same time. You should also be aware of the [environmental unsustainability of generative AI](#).

Extensions, Late Assignments, and Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Late submission results in an incremental reduction of 10% per day of the raw grade. For illness or emergency absences, documentation is required to receive an excused absence.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

When in class, you should silence your cell phone and store it in your bookbag. You should also turn off your laptop. Please do not text during class time. You may use a tablet if you are taking notes on it. Audio and videotaping are prohibited unless approved by the instructor in advance.

Additional Course Policies

Canvas Notifications: You should automatically get notifications when I leave comments. If you do not, visit: [Help on how to set up your notifications](#).

Campus Resources for Students

Student Well-Being

At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A [comprehensive list of wellness-related resources](#) has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being.