

Psychology 3000: Stress and Happiness in Italy

- **Course prefix:** PSYC
- **Number:** 3000
- **Name:** Science of Stress, Happiness, and Anxiety
- **Semester:** Summer
- **Academic year:** 2026
- **Course description**
- Like other animals, humans have a fundamental fight-flight-or-freeze mechanism for dealing with stress. How does this system work? How is it beneficial and how is it detrimental to our health and well-being? How does it relate to our overall levels of anxiety? And most importantly, how can we reduce our chronic levels of stress and anxiety? Additionally, though reducing stress and anxiety may improve our mood, it may not make us fundamentally happy. Happiness takes intentional practice. Improving happiness leads to more confidence, higher motivation, and increased cognitive functioning. This course will cover the basic psychological and neuroscientific mechanisms underlying stress, anxiety, and happiness. It will cover how physiological (e.g., cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, aging, etc.) and psychological processes (e.g., attention, memory, emotion, etc.) are improved as stress and happiness increase and how these same processes degrade under chronic stress and prolonged anxiety. Societal factors that increase chronic stress and anxiety will be considered. Techniques for dealing with chronic stress, reducing anxiety, and for improving happiness will be discussed and practiced. ***Additionally, this section includes a two-week excursion to Italy where students will consider the dual nature of travel (how it relaxes us but also increases our stress), and how the Italian culture (both modern and ancient) deals/dealt with stress and stress relief.***
- **Course objectives / approved course learning outcomes**
- At the end of the course, you should be able to:
 - Obtain research articles relevant to a psychological topic via the online databases (*web-of-science, google scholar, etc.*) and synthesize this research.
 - Understand and critically evaluate psychological and neuroscience research.
 - Apply this knowledge to explain how this research applies real-life examples of human stressors.
 - Effectively communicate this synthesized knowledge in both oral and written forms.
- **Required course materials**
 - Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*.
 - Sapolsky, R.M. (2004). *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers. Third Edition*.
 - Capatti, A., & Montanari, M. (2003). Chapter 2. Italian cuisine: a cultural history. Columbia University Press.
 - Capatti, A., & Montanari, M. (2003). Chapter 9. Italian cuisine: a cultural history. Columbia University Press.
 - El-Harami, J. (2015). Entertainment and recreation in the classical world-tourism products. *J. Mgmt. & Sustainability*, 5, 168.
 - Grossi, E., Tavano Blessi, G., & Sacco, P. L. (2019). Magic moments: determinants of stress relief

and subjective wellbeing from visiting a cultural heritage site. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 43(1), 4-24.

- Haar, J. M., Russo, M., Suñe, A., & Ollier-Malaterre, A. (2014). Outcomes of work–life balance on job satisfaction, life satisfaction and mental health: A study across seven cultures. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 85(3), 361-373.
- Killgrove, K. (2017). Imperialism and Physiological Stress in Rome, First to Third Centuries AD In MS Murphy, & HD Klaus. *Colonized Bodies, Worlds Transformed: Toward a Global Bioarchaeology of Contact and Colonialism*, 247-277.
- Mancini, A. D., & Prati, G. (2022). A comparison of mental-health outcomes in the United States and Italy at different levels of cumulative COVID-19 prevalence. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 10(6), 1027-1043.
- Price, D. (2022). Laziness Does Not Exist.
- Seligman M. (2019) *Ann. Rev. Clin. Psychol.* 15:1–23
- Winters M-F (2020). *Black Fatigue* Chapters 1&4

- **Grading policy and weighting (USG)**

- The goals of this course will be accomplished through discussions, your practice, and your participation. Students should commit to participating in all discussion and course activities and be prepared to engage in the course material.

Grading

Discussion Facilitation:	(15%)
Discussion Participation:	(30%)
Research Term Paper	(20%)
Research Video Presentation:	(10%)
Video Presentation Reflection:	(10%)
Well-being Notebook:	(15%)

Total Points	Letter
90%+	A
80%-89%	B
70%-79%	C
60%-69%	D
<60%	F

Discussion Participation

Participation is a critical component of this seminar-style class. To cultivate a seminar environment in an asynchronous virtual format, we have created a course Discord server. It has various channels for students to use, but we expect students to actively participate in discussion and/or moderation in your Discussion Team's #discussion channel.

As the class has over 100 students, we randomly split the class into 3 Discussion Teams. There are 3 #discussion channels, but you will only be able to view and interact in your Team's channel. To determine which Discussion Team you are in, please review "Discord Discussion Participation 101" page on Canvas in the "Welcome" Module.

We estimate an engaged student will spend 30 min or more on Discord each discussion session for a total of 90 minutes each week. During each session, you should submit three comments.

One comment should be relevant example from your real-world experiences about the topic for the session (1 point max).

Another comment should meaningfully and explicitly refer to and reflect on a specific topic from the book (page number, quotation, citation, etc. is expected, 1.5 points max).

A third comment should be a meaningful response to someone else's post (1 point max).

Full credit for each session is 3 points, but you can earn a maximum of 3.5 points for each session. The extra .5 points will be saved and can be used to earn points on sessions when you are unable to participate fully.

Discussion Facilitation (or Moderation)

During the first week (May 12th to 17th), Eric, Yunji, Hanna, and Jennifer will facilitate discussions about the readings on the course's Discord #discussion channels; to model how discussion moderation may look like and for students to reflect on how they'd like to moderate or improve on it. Students will put this reflection into practice and work on their facilitation skills by facilitating discussion over readings assigned in the course schedule (below) for that discussion session.

Students will sign up to facilitate a specific discussion session (e.g., Monday 10AM to Wednesday 10AM, Wednesday 10AM to Friday 10AM, Friday 10AM to Saturday midnight) on Canvas. Sign up instructions can be found under Canvas assignment "Discord Discussion Facilitation" or Canvas page "Discord Discussion Facilitation 101" in the "Welcome" Module. Each student must facilitate one discussion session. Sign-ups will be capped at 3 or 4 students per each discussion session.

Well-being Notebook

Students will practice stress relieving and happiness increasing techniques every day and keep track of their effectiveness. These activities will be discussed on Discord. Notebooks are due each Wednesday starting in Week 2.

- Reflection 1: Engage in well-being activities (try several) every day this week. Write a paragraph for each day (7 total) reflecting on your experience with each activity.

- Reflection 2: Engage in well-being activities every day this week (try new ones or continue with activities from week 1). Write a paragraph reflecting on your experience with four of the activities.
- Reflection 3: Engage in well-being activities (try the same ones or new ones) every day this week. Answer posted questions in your well-being activities.
- Reflection 4: Engage in well-being activities every day this week (you have probably settled on some that work for you). Answer posted questions in your well-being activities.

Research Term Paper and Presentation

Students will write a 5-page term paper on a topic relevant to the psychology and/or neuroscience of stress, anxiety, or happiness of their choice. More details about the term paper can be found on canvas. Additionally, students will record themselves giving a 5-min (maximum) presentation on their topic. The presentation must include slides and should be designed to teach the other students about the topic. Students should have visual aids (e.g., PowerPoint slides) to support their presentation. Students should expect to be able to present between 5-10 slides in the allotted time.

In addition to recording your own presentations, students will be assigned presentations of their peers to watch, evaluate, and provide constructive criticism. More details about this can be found on Canvas.

Research Presentation Evaluation

Each student will be assigned to watch video presentations from other students. Students will leave a Canvas comment on each of their peer's submission. See "Research Presentation Peer Evaluation" document on Canvas for more information.

Research Presentation Reflection

Students will write a 1-page (single-spaced) reflection on the videos they watched describing what they learned from them and how what they learned related to and reinforced course content. More details about the reflection can be found on Canvas.

- **Attendance policy (USG)**
- There is no attendance required for this asynchronous course. Students should engage in discussion as described above.
- **Additional criteria for successful completion of the course**
- *None*
- **Academic honesty / academic integrity statement**

<https://osi.gatech.edu/students/honor-code>

Article II: Section 3. Student Responsibilities

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Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. The immediate objective of an Academic Honor Code is to prevent any Students from gaining an unfair advantage over other Students through academic misconduct. The following clarification of academic misconduct is taken from Section

XIX Student Code of Conduct, of the Rules and Regulations section of the Georgia Institute of Technology General Catalog: Academic misconduct is any act that does or could improperly distort Student grades or other Student academic records. Such acts include but need not be limited to the following:

- **Unauthorized Access: Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of a problem set, laboratory report, essay, examination, or other academic assignment.**
- Unauthorized Collaboration: Unauthorized interaction with another Student or Students in the fulfillment of academic requirements.
- **Plagiarism: Submission of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another person or persons, large language model/artificial intelligence, or yourself, without adequate credit notations indicating the authorship.**
- False Claims of Performance: False claims for work that has been submitted by a Student.
- Grade Alteration: Alteration of any academic grade or rating so as to obtain unearned academic credit.
- Deliberate Falsification: Deliberate falsification of a written or verbal statement of fact to a Faculty member and/or Institute Official, so as to obtain unearned academic credit.
- Forgery: Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any Institute document relating to the academic status of the Student.
- Distortion: Any act that distorts or could distort grades or other academic records.

While these acts constitute assured instances of academic misconduct, other acts of academic misconduct may be defined by the professor.

- **Statement about acceptable student conduct**
- Students must follow the academic honor code and treat each other with respect.
- **Statement about services offered through the Office of Disability Services**
- Georgia Tech complies with regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and offers accommodations to students with disabilities. If you need a classroom accommodation, please make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services to discuss the appropriate procedures. Please email me as soon as possible to discuss your learning needs. Their website is www.adapts.gatech.edu.