

# Psychology 3000A

## Science of Stress, Anxiety, and Happiness

### **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. **Prerequisite:** *Psychology 1101: General Psychology*

### **COURSE GOALS**

*The course will be organized around four major integrated goals.*

**First:** Learn the empirically based concepts relating to the psychological and biological mechanisms for stress, anxiety, and happiness

**Second:** Discuss what happiness is and how it and stress and anxiety occur and what affects they have on our brains, bodies, and behavior.

**Third:** Discuss and participate in practice activities to assess the effectiveness of various happiness increasing and stress relieving and anxiety reducing techniques.

**Fourth:** Conduct a library research project and write a research term paper exploring how humans are affected by stress, anxiety, and happiness.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

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.

### **COURSE INFORMATION**

Course starts May 18<sup>th</sup> and last meeting is June 20<sup>th</sup>.

Content available on course canvas website and on the courses Discord:

<https://discord.gg/yu8ajMAgd>

#### **INSTRUCTOR**

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### **REQUIRED READING AND CONTENT**

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*.

Price, D. (2022). *Laziness Does Not Exist*.

Seligman M. (2019) *Ann. Rev. Clin. Psychol.* 15:1–23 (posted on canvas).

Readings from Winters M-F (2020). *Black Fatigue* (posted on canvas).

Other articles, videos, etc. as assigned.

### **COURSE TEACHING MODEL**

This course will use a reciprocal teaching model. Through discussion, we will generate questions about the readings, summarize our knowledge, clarify our knowledge, and use our knowledge to generate questions and make hypotheses. You will learn from us. We will learn from you. And, most importantly, you will learn from each other.

### **GENERAL PLAN FOR EACH WEEK**

On Monday of each week, the discussion topic will open for that week's readings on the discord server. Students are expected to meaningfully participate in all discussions. Additionally, for one session during the semester, each student must monitor and facilitate the discussion forum. Instructions for the discussion forums can be found on canvas.

In addition to the discussion participation and facilitation, students will engage in happiness inducing/stress relieving activities and reflect on these weekly in a well-being notebook.

Finally, students write a 3-page research paper on a topic in stress physiology, positive psychology, or health psychology of their choice and record a 5 min presentation on this topic. Students will also participate in peer review of these presentations.

### **COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND CONTENT**

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:	(10%)
Discussion Participation:	(40%)
Research Term Paper	(15%)
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 150 students, we randomly split the class into 5 Discussion Teams. There are 5 #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.

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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, 1.25 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 3.25 points for each session. The extra .25 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 18<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>th</sup>), Eric, Abby, Maggie, and Zaina 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 3-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 about 5 slides in the allotted time.

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

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The following are deadlines for the research presentation:

1. Research Proposal and bibliography (1/2 page total)– May 29<sup>th</sup>
  - a. One paragraph thesis
  - b. One paragraph summarizing how THREE scientific references support the thesis.
2. Research Term Paper – June 21<sup>th</sup>
3. Video presentation – June 21<sup>th</sup>.
4. Review for peer videos – June 25<sup>th</sup>

### **Research Presentation Evaluation**

Each student will be assigned to watch **FIVE** 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 5 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.

### **ACADEMIC HONOR CODE**

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

#### **Article II: Section 3. Student Responsibilities**

##### Section 3. Student Responsibilities

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 OF INTENT FOR INCLUSIVITY**

Class discussion is critical for the success of this course. There may be topics for which we do not all agree. We must endeavor to be respectful of others as we present our ideas and as we listen to others' ideas. We are committed to creating a learning environment in which all of students feel safe and included. We will monitor the discussion to ensure this. We also rely on your feedback to achieve this goal. To that end, we invite you to talk with us about things that we can stop, start, or continue doing to make the classroom an environment in which every student feels valued and can engage actively in our learning community.

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#### **DISABILITY SERVICES ACCOMMODATIONS PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS**

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](http://www.adapts.gatech.edu). Up-to-date listing of student recourses are available in the GT Student Resources link on Canvas.