

Course Syllabus: Resilience Building Strategies

Updated

4/2/26

Course Information

- Course Title: Strategies for Building Personal and Organizational Resilience
- Instructor: Sonia Alvarez-Robinson, PhD
- Course Number: 92519 - PSYC 2803
- Class Dates/Times: Tuesday and Thursday 5 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.
- Location: Instructional Center 111
- Credits: 3
- Format: Highly interactive with short lectures, guest presentations, gamified lessons, scenario enactment, case studies, small group discussions, and a final project.
- Textbooks (both available as free ebooks online through GT Library):
 - Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (2014). *Handbook of posttraumatic growth: research and practice* (1st ed.). Psychology Press.
 - Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

Course Description

Resilience is the ability of an individual, organization, or community to survive, adapt, grow, and thrive through acute shocks and chronic stressors. This course, Resilience Building Strategies, introduces skills, strategies, and tools to prepare for, respond to, and recover from both life-altering events and daily challenges. Grounded in the foundations of personal, social, and organizational psychology, this course uses short lectures, guest presentations, gamified lessons, scenarios/case studies, small group discussions, and a final project. The goal is for every student to complete the course with a customized resilience plan to help them navigate adversity, challenges, and change in their everyday lives. This course is open to all GT students.

Learning Objectives

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

1. Understand the core foundations of personal, group, and organizational resilience, grounded in evidence-based research.
2. Understand body and mind connections in human resilience, including the neurophysiological stress response and strategies to calm their stress/fear.
3. Understand the influence of early life experiences on internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-compassion, and gain strategies to reprogram what does not serve us well.
4. Understand the power and potential of post-traumatic growth, the phenomenon of emerging from traumatic experiences with a deeper sense of meaning and joy.
5. Understand how to use self-care as a strategy for responding to and recovering from adverse events.
6. Understand evidence-based practices in building resilient organizations and communities that can survive forces of change and threats to their core missions.
7. Gain cognitive and behavioral tools to build resilience through daily life practices.

Assessments

Participation (Discussions & Activities) – 30%

Quizzes (4) – 40%

Final Project: Personal Resilience Plan + Presentation – 20%

Final Exam (Interactive): 10%

DRAFT Weekly Schedule (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Week 1 (Class 1 & 2)

Topic: **Foundations of Resilience**

- Course overview and expectations/agreements
- Key Definitions
- Core Practices: Head, Heart, Hand
- Phases: Readiness, Response and Recovery
- Domains: Individual, Organizational, Community, Ecological
- Introducing **FIRST** Model

Reading (Articles):

- *What is Resilience and Why is It Important to Bounce Back?*
<https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-resilience/>
- A Perspective That Promotes Resilience [A Perspective That Promotes Resilience | Psychology Today](#)
- Chapter 2 (BKS): Revolutions in Understanding Mind and Brain
- Social cognitive theory of posttraumatic recovery: the role of perceived self-efficacy by Charles C. Benight and Albert Bandura

Activities:

- Personal Reflection: Journaling
- Practicing Strategies to Notice and Name Resilience: Identifying examples of individual and organizational resilience
- Individual Reflection: Life's Rollercoaster Ride
- Individual Reflection: Worry Buckets
- Peer Learning: Pair Share

Week 2 (Class 3 & 4)

Topic: **Understanding Neurophysiological Stress Response**

- Brain functions and chemistry
- Neurological responses
- Physical implications
- Guest Speaker: TBD

Readings (Text):

- Chapter 3 (BKS): Looking Into the Brain: The Neuroscience Revolution
- Chapter 4 (BKS): Running For Your Life: The Anatomy of Survival

Activities:

- Practicing Strategies to Understand Stress Response: Monitor Your Brain, EFT Tapping, Focused Breathing
- Individual reflection: Journaling

- Peer Learning: Pair Share
- Quiz 1 – Recall learnings from Classes 1-4. Provide Course Feedback

Week 3 (Class 5 & 6)

Topic: **The Head: Mindset and Cognitive Framing**

- Understanding conditioning and adverse childhood experiences
- Examine change fatigue, toxic stress, and systemic challenges

Readings (Articles):

- Building Resilience: Reducing the Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences
- The Relationship Between Locus of Control, Personal Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Resilience

Activities:

- Practicing Strategies to Engage Your Rational Mind: Find Your Locus of Control, Mindful Meditations
- Individual Reflection: Journaling
- Peer Learning: Pair/Share

Week 4 (Class 7 & 8)

Topic: **The Heart: Emotional Intelligence and Beliefs**

- Understanding Self-Compassion, Gratitude
- Exploring Positive Psychology
- Transitions – Guest Speakers: GT Alumni

Readings (Articles):

- Self-Compassion, Self-Esteem, and Well-Being. Social and Personality
- Appreciating Life in the Midst of Adversity: Savoring in Relation to Mindfulness, Reappraisal, and Meaning

Activities:

- Assignment: Preparing for Transition
- Assignment: Purpose, Potential, Principles exercise
- Individual Reflection: Journaling
- Peer Learning: Pair/Share

Week 5 (Class 9 & 10)

Topic: **The Hand: Behavioral Strategies**

- Creating a Personal Strategic Plan - Purpose, Potential, Principles
- Examine the Importance of Social Support
- Understand Approaches for Self-Care – Guest Speaker TBD

Readings (Text):

- Chapter 5 (BKS): Body-Brain Connection
- Chapter 16 (BKS): Learning to Inhabit Your Body: Yoga

Activities:

- Practicing Strategies to Build Positive Habits: Seek Healthy Support, Take Time for Self-Care
- Do something creative
- Individual Reflection: Journaling
- Peer Learning: Pair/Share

Week 6 (Class 11 & 12)

Topic: **Mind and Body Connections**

- Reflections on creativity activity

- BKS Discussion: Chapter 5 reading – autonomic nervous system, Polyvagal Theory, vagus nerve anatomy, neuroception
- Navigating Loss: Kubler Ross and Tonkin Models Anticipatory Grief
- Introducing Post Traumatic Growth

Readings (Text and Article):

- Chapter 1 Post-Traumatic Growth Handbook (PTG); The Foundations of Post-Traumatic Growth: An Expanded Framework
- Prosilience #1: Resilience is a Verb, Linda Hoopes
<https://prosilience.substack.com/p/resilience-is-a-verb>

Activities:

- Tonkins Model: Growing Around Grief
- Scenarios: Strategies to Survive (Immediate Response): Adapt (Short-Term): Grow (Medium-Term): Thrive (Long-Term)
- Drafting Your Resilience Plan: Building strategies for readiness, response, and recovery
 - What personal strengths will you draw from?
 - What internal barriers to resilience might you face?
 - What opportunities or challenges might force you to flex your resilience muscles?
 - What strategies will you use to deal with adversity, challenge and change?
 - How will you build resilience in your everyday practices?
- Quiz 2 – Recall learning on self-compassion, shame v. guilt, HALT, transitions, 3-part brain, Polyvagal Theory, managing fear. Reflections of alumni panel, personal strategy activity,
- Read: Prosilience #1: Resilience is a Verb, Linda Hoopes
<https://prosilience.substack.com/p/resilience-is-a-verb>

Week 7 (13 & 14)

Topic: Post Traumatic Growth

- Guest Speaker: TBD
- Exploring PTG Potential: Recovery, Resistance, Reconfiguration (10/1)
- Initial Resilience Plan presentations (10/1)

Readings:

- Chapters 2 (PTG): Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth: Recovery, Resistance, and Reconfiguration
- Kalisch et al.(2019) Deconstructing and reconstructing resilience: A dynamic network approach. Perspectives on Psychological Science, Vol 14(5) 765-777.

Activities:

- Practicing Strategies to Foster Post-Traumatic Growth Using Scenarios: Survive, Adapt, Grow, and Thrive
- Building PTG into resilience plans – initial presentation on draft plans
- Individual Reflection: Journaling
- Complete your Gallup Strengths assessment

Week 8 (Class 15)

Topic: **Building on Your Strengths**

- Understanding and nurturing your strengths and how the impact your resilience
- Guest Speaker: TBD

Reading:

- The Role of Leadership Communication in Building Crisis Readiness and Resilient Leadership in Times of Disruption: An Exploratory Study

Activity

- Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment
- Assignment: Stretch Your Body and Mind - Yoga Class/Experience

Week 9 (Class 16 & 17)

Topic: **Building Resilient Organizations**

- Resilience Plan Presentations **Oct 14**
- Understanding the Collective Context of Resilience: Group, Organization, Community. **Oct 16**
- Bridges Transitions Model – Organizational Applications
- Characteristics of Resilient Organizations

Readings (Articles):

- Building organizational resilience with digital transformation

Activities:

- Collective Resilience Scenarios: Student Org, Group Project, Departmental Challenge
- Individual Reflection: Journaling
- Peer Learning: Group Share

Week 10 (Class 18 & 19)

Topic: **Building Resilient Teams**

- Identify Resilient Leadership Practices
- Describe Power and Practice of Resilient Teams
- Leading Through Crisis

Readings (Articles):

- Workplace Team Resilience: A Systematic Review and Conceptual Development -
- Resiliency and Leadership in Organizations

Activities:

- Strengths-Based Crisis Leadership: How your strengths can be used to lead through adversity, challenge, and change.
- Individual Reflection: Journaling
- Listening to Leadership: 3 Examples of Leading Through Crisis (Mariott, Boeing, Pepsi)
- Using Challenge Map and Multi-Level Model to process an adverse event or circumstance that “has the potential to lead to losses or breakdown of interdependent team processes”. (in class)
- Prepare two examples of leadership through adversity, challenges, and change: one effective and the other ineffective.

Week 11 (Class 20 & 21)

Topic: **Managing Organizational Crisis**

- Leading Through Transitions and Disruption
- Crisis Management; Assessing Risks
- Special Guests : TBD

Readings: Red Cross Preparation Materials

Activities: Preparing for a range of potential threats

- Collective Resilience Scenario (in class)
- Analyze current event: Identify a major disruption to an organization or a community and submit a one-page summary on the impact, key factors, resilience strategies.
- Quiz 3: Organizational and Community Resilience Context

Week 12 (Class 22 & 23)

Topic: **Resilience In Practice**

- Guest Presentation: TBD
- Readings: Key research on resilience

Activities:

- Practicing Strategies: Students select any of the strategies that they want to try to retry such as serotonin boosting, emergency preparedness, mindfulness, stretching, personal purpose planning.

Week 13 (Class 24 & 25)

Topic: **Resilience in Practice: Hearing from Alumni**

Deeper Dive Discussion: Conversations about what we learned so far

Guest Presenters: TBD

- What opportunities or challenges forced you to flex your resilience muscles?
- What strengths did you draw from?
- What barriers to resilience did you face?
- What strategies have you used to deal with adversity, challenge and change?
- How do you build resilience through your everyday practices?

Readings: Students select a level of resilience they want to learn more about and select a reading relevant to that perspective.

Activities:

- Refining Your Resilience Plans
- Final Journaling Activity: Favorite Part – What I Learned

Week 14 (Class 26 & 27)

Topic: Final **Resilience Plan Presentations (Tuesday and Thursday)**

Readings / Activities: Final Project Presentations

Week 15 (Class 28 - no class Thursday)

Topic: **Course Review and Reflection** (Interactive Group Activity)

Week 16 (Class 29)

Activities: In Class Final Exam

Week 17 (Class 30)

End of Course Celebration