

# Welcome to The Happiness Advantage

Spring 2017 | Thursdays 5-6pm, 6-7pm

Location: 75 Evans | 1 Unit P/NP

Facilitator: Priya Shah | Email: [pshah@berkeley.edu](mailto:pshah@berkeley.edu)

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Serena Chen, Department of Psychology

\*\*Please do not contact Dr. Chen, Psychology personnel, or the DeCal board regarding enrollment\*\*

## Course Description:

“I’ll celebrate after I \_\_\_\_.”

Popular belief holds that if we fill that blank with our personal or career goal and aim for success in achieving it, happiness will follow. Once we succeed, however, we form new goals and happiness gets pushed farther and farther into the future. Inspired by recent groundbreaking research in the field of positive psychology, Harvard alumnus and professor Shawn Achor posits a theory that happiness fuels success, not the other way around. He has performed numerous experiments to gather evidence to support his belief and compiled his findings in a book called *The Happiness Advantage*.

Achor has found that priming a person’s brain for happiness will always increase their performance. He bolsters this argument with research that shows that an increase in happiness not only helps the individual improve their own focus and quality of work, but also creates a “ripple effect” which benefits those around them. The seven strategies he suggests are capitalizing on positivity, adjusting our mindset, retraining our brains, finding the right path to cope with defeat and stress, forming manageable goals, making small adjustments to the prep work leading up to a task, and investing in our social network. A simple change, such as recognizing one thing that you are grateful for each day, has been proven to improve people’s happiness and, in turn, their performance. Achor challenges everyone to become a scientist and learn about positive psychology through experience, by conducting experiments and coming up with their own conclusions about what works best for them.

The objective of this course is to socialize strategies that are proven to improve one’s outlook (and happiness), have you try them for a period of 21 consecutive days, and then measure the tangible as well as intangible (perceived) benefits to test Achor’s hypothesis. Working under the umbrella of happiness, we will delve deeper into the practices of mindfulness (meditation), gratitude, and kindness. We will explore these themes through guest speakers, literature on the topics, in-class discussions, and four hands-on projects that challenge you to apply these practices to your daily lives. The hope is that with continuous practice over the course of 21 days, these practices will develop into habits that manifest more naturally and regularly.

## Required Text:

*The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor

## Course Policies:

### Attendance

- Class participation is a major component of your grade. As a result, attendance is mandatory.
- Excused absences include illnesses, doctor’s appointments, and other emergencies with documentation. You must notify the facilitator by email in the event that you will be missing class.
  - Conflicts with midterm exams will be excused.
  - Review sessions and meetings are unexcused.

- **Please be on time.** Being late is disrespectful to the guest speakers and to your fellow students.
- Chronic tardiness is not acceptable and will result in the equivalence of an absence.
  - 2 tardies = 1 absence
- **More than two unexcused absences or four tardies will result in a No Pass grade.**
- The last class of the semester is **REQUIRED** in order to receive a passing grade. We will be filling out course evaluations.

### **Assignments**

In this class, we will explore core themes by discussing them in class and applying them to our lives. The assignments are a tool for you to reflect on this process. The facilitator reserves the right to request a redo of any assignment if it does not meet requirements. All students must complete **all** of the homework assignments in order to receive a passing grade. If you will not be in class on the day a project is due, please notify the facilitator to set up an alternative time to submit your assignment.

### **Grading**

Grading is based on attendance record, participation in class discussions, and completion of homework assignments. Assignments will be graded based on the following:

- Check (√)= satisfactory
- Check minus (√-)= unsatisfactory, please redo

Attendance (30%)

Participation (20%)

4 projects (50%)

    Mindfulness Challenge (10%)

    Gratitude Challenge (10%)

    Acts of Kindness Challenge (10%)

    Create Your Own Challenge (20%)

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is considered academic dishonesty and will result in a NO PASS grade, as well as possible disciplinary action from the University Office of Student Conduct.

### **General Policies**

Due to the nature of the course and our desire to be respectful to our speakers and peers, our course has both **NO LAPTOP** and **NO EATING** policies. Repeated violations of these policies will result in a NO PASS grade.

### **Assistance**

This class was created to be a great learning experience for you. If you have questions about an assignment or concerns unrelated to this course, please notify the facilitator. If you have health, family, or work situations that interfere with your ability to attend class or complete assignments, please let the facilitator know right away so we can discuss how best to resolve it.

## Lecture schedule

This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Please refer to announcements in class and on bCourses for updates.

Date	Theme	Agenda	Homework DUE
January 26 <sup>th</sup>	--	Introduction	--
February 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mindfulness	Guest Speaker	--
February 9 <sup>th</sup>	Mindfulness	Discuss reading	Read pg. 3-33 of <i>The Happiness Advantage</i>
February 16 <sup>th</sup>	Mindfulness	Share mindfulness challenges	Mindfulness Challenge
February 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Gratitude	Guest Speaker	--
March 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Gratitude	Discuss reading	Read pg. 37-104 of <i>The Happiness Advantage</i>
March 9 <sup>th</sup>	Gratitude	Share gratitude challenges	Gratitude Challenge
March 16 <sup>th</sup>	Kindness	Guest speaker	--
March 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Kindness	Discuss reading	Read pg. 105-170 of <i>The Happiness Advantage</i>
March 30 <sup>th</sup>	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS	--
April 6 <sup>th</sup>	Kindness	Share kindness challenges	Kindness Challenge
April 13 <sup>th</sup>	Happiness	Guest Speaker	--
April 20 <sup>th</sup>	Happiness	Discuss reading	Read pg. 171-210 of <i>The Happiness Advantage</i>
April 27 <sup>th</sup>	Happiness	Share your own challenges	Create Your Own Challenge

## Homework Assignments

### 21-Day Challenges:

Over the course of the semester, we will be running four 21-day challenges. The first three will have the themes of mindfulness (meditation), gratitude, and kindness, with set instructions for your practice. The final challenge will be a bit more creative; based on our reading of *The Happiness Advantage*, you will create your own challenge. For these challenges, you will need to keep a daily log to record your observations and reflections. Daily entries should be 5-8 sentences long. The important part of these challenges is to practice them for 21 days *consecutively*. This will enable you to truly immerse in mindfulness, gratitude, and kindness, and allow for habit development. After the challenge, it is entirely up to you whether you choose to continue.

#### 1. Mindfulness (Due Thursday, February 16<sup>th</sup>)

For this challenge, you will be meditating for a minimum of 10 minutes per day. You are welcome to sit for longer if you'd like! On the first day of the challenge, we will have in-class instruction for how to focus on your breathing. This practice may take place in the morning, during the day, or at night, depending on what time works best for your schedule.

Begin by writing a couple sentences (2-3) about how you feel. This should include adjectives

to describe your emotions and what thoughts are most pressing in your mind at the time.

Then, find a quiet place to sit upright with your eyes closed and practice focusing on your breath for 10 minutes. When your mind wanders (trust me, it will!), just calmly bring your attention back to your breath.

After your practice, write 3-5 sentences about your experience. How do you feel? Was it difficult to keep your attention on your breath? Were you able to observe your natural breath, or did you feel you had to exaggerate it? Do you feel more relaxed? Do any of the concerns you had before your practice seem less daunting and more manageable?

**2. Gratitude (Due Thursday, March 9<sup>th</sup>)**

This challenge entails an evening time activity. Every night, preferably within 10-15 minutes before going to bed, record *three* things about your day that you are grateful for. These do not have to be big, life-changing events; it can be as simple as running into an old friend. Be as descriptive as possible about what you are grateful for, and try to include how that part of your day made you feel. Write 5-8 sentences per day and try your best to find unique instances each day. ☺

**3. Kindness (Due Thursday, April 6<sup>th</sup>)**

For this challenge, you are to perform (at least) one random act of kindness every day. The acts that ‘qualify’ as acts of kindness are innumerable; feel free to be as creative as you’d like! Below are some ideas to get you started. For more inspiration, you can visit [www.kindspring.org](http://www.kindspring.org).

- Gift your favorite book.
- Leave a note of thanks for someone you appreciate.
- Treat a friend to a cup of coffee.
- Donate old clothes to a nonprofit like Goodwill.
- Compliment 5 people you don’t know throughout the day, with phrases such as “Your smile is contagious!” or “That shirt looks great on you.”

Please record a journal entry of 5-8 sentences per day describing what you did, the recipient's reaction (if applicable; these can be anonymous as well), and how you felt after performing the kind deed.

**4. Create your own (Due Thursday, April 27<sup>th</sup>)**

The final project is entirely in your hands. Using the book *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor and our in-class discussions as your inspiration, create your own challenge to run over a course of 21 days. Start your written project with a paragraph introduction to the topic of your choosing, what you plan to do each day, and when/how you will record your reflections. Then, journal at least 5-8 sentences per day describing your experience with your challenge. At the end, conclude with another paragraph about your overall experience and whether you think you will continue this practice (or any of the others we explored) in your daily life.