



GG101x: The Science of Happiness Course Syllabus

Course Contact

Due to the high number of students registered for this course, the instructors will not be able to reply to individual emails. You can email questions or problems to HappinessCourse@berkeley.edu and a member of the course team will make every effort to assist you. You can also post questions or problems to the course [discussion board](#).

Instructors

Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., Founding Director, Greater Good Science Center & Professor of Psychology, UC Berkeley
Emiliana Simon-Thomas, Ph.D., Science Director, Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley

Course Description

“The Science of Happiness” is the first MOOC to teach the ground-breaking science of positive psychology, which explores the roots of a happy and meaningful life. Students will engage with some of the most provocative and practical lessons from this science, discovering how to apply key insights from cutting-edge research to their own lives. Created by UC Berkeley’s [Greater Good Science Center](#), this course will zero in on a fundamental finding from positive psychology: that happiness is inextricably linked to having strong social connections and contributing to something bigger than yourself—the greater good. Students will learn about the cross-disciplinary research supporting this view, spanning the fields of psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and beyond.

What’s more, “The Science of Happiness” will offer students real-life techniques for nurturing their own happiness. Research suggests that up to 40 percent of happiness depends on our habits and day-to-day activities. So each week, students will learn a new research-tested “happiness practice”—and the course will help them track their progress along the way.

The course’s co-instructors, Dacher Keltner and Emiliana Simon-Thomas, are not only leading authorities on positive psychology but also gifted teachers skilled at making science feel fun and personal. They’ll be joined by world-renowned experts discussing themes like empathy, mindfulness, and gratitude—experts including Barbara Fredrickson, Sonja Lyubomirsky, and Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Health professionals can earn [continuing education credit hours](#) for participating.

Key Course Elements

- Instructor Lecture Videos



- Guest Lecture Videos
- Readings (e.g., articles from [Greater Good](#), peer-reviewed scientific papers, book excerpts)
- Discussion Forums
- Weekly “Happiness Practices” (ungraded)
- Weekly Emotion “Check-Ins” (ungraded)
- Pre-/Post-Course Survey (ungraded)
- “Problem Sets”: Self-test questions after select videos and readings (graded)
- Midterm (graded)
- Final Exam (graded)

Additional Course Elements (hosted on other platforms)

- [Greater Good Quizzes](#)
- Live Q&A video chats with the instructors (tentative dates below)
- Supplemental Readings – recommended, but not required (e.g., from *The How of Happiness*, *Born to Be Good*, and other books—see below)
- Supplemental videos
- Recommended films about happiness
- Discussions organized around affinity groups, hosted on a separate platform by [Sennseis](#)

Recommended Supplemental Readings

We’ll be recommending specific chapters from these books throughout the course. Purchasing them is optional.

- [The How of Happiness](#) (*HOH*), by Sonja Lyubomirsky (Penguin Press, 2008)
- [Born to Be Good](#) (*BTBG*), by Dacher Keltner (W.W. Norton, 2009). Through a special deal we arranged with the publisher, you can also purchase *Born to Be Good* [packaged with The Compassionate Instinct](#), which was edited by Dacher and is a compilation of many articles you'll be reading in this course. International students can [order an e-book](#) of this Born to Be Good package at [eBooks.com](#). The package of Born to Be Good and The Compassionate Instinct is priced specially for "Science of Happiness" students, offered together for just £8.00 in the UK, €10.00 elsewhere in Europe, and \$14.50 in Australia. These prices exclude any local sales tax. The US price (\$12.99) appears in all countries where the other currencies do not apply; however, that price is available only to people outside the United States and Canada.

Live Video Q&As with Instructors

Periodically in the course, we will host live video Q&As with the instructors. Students will have the opportunity to submit questions to the instructors in advance, then watch a live streaming video of them answering some of these questions; students can then pose follow-up questions in real time. These video chats will be hosted and archived on edX. Below are the tentative times and dates of these Q&As. Details are still subject to change, but we will also notify students in advance on the Courseware, the Course Info page, and



via email.

- **September 15** (16:00 UTC/9:00 am PDT): Emiliana Simon-Thomas and guest instructor Sonja Lyubomirsky
- **October 14** (Time TBD): Emiliana Simon-Thomas
- **November 12** (16:00 UTC/9:00 am PDT): Emiliana Simon-Thomas and Dacher Keltner

Grading

- Problem Sets = 30% of grade
- Midterm = 30% of grade
- Final Exam = 40% of grade

* Students must earn a total grade of at least **60%** in order to pass the course and earn a certificate of completion. Students who want a higher level of proof that they have completed the course, such as for their school or employer, can pay for a [Verified Certificate of completion](#).

Main Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify key psychological, social, and biological factors in happiness
- Understand the relationship between happiness, human connection, and “pro-social” qualities, such as compassion, altruism, and gratitude
- Describe the principles behind why specific activities boost happiness
- Apply lessons from positive & social psychology to their personal and professional lives, enhancing their self-understanding
- Practice research-tested techniques for boosting happiness

Course Outline

New course material will go live every Tuesday at 9:00 am (UTC) in the [Courseware](#) tab on edX. On September 9, we will post the first week's videos and other content. Then we will post more material every Tuesday for the subsequent three weeks, each week covering a different theme. During the week of October 7, we'll break for a week so students can catch up and take the midterm exam.

Then we will start rolling out new material again every Tuesday for four more weeks. The last week's content, and the final exam, will be posted on November 4. Students will then have two weeks to catch up on all course material and complete the final by November 18.

Week 1: Introduction to the Science of Happiness

Will be available starting on September 9

- Welcome to the course: overview and logistics
- What is happiness, and how do scientists measure it?
- Why does happiness matter?
- Happiness Practice #1: Three Good Things



- The role of positive emotions within happiness
- Can we increase our own happiness?
- So what does—and doesn't—make us happy?

Guest Lecturers:

- Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D.
- Barbara Fredrickson, Ph.D.

Key Papers:

- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). [The benefits of frequent positive affect: does happiness lead to success](#). *Psychological Bulletin*, 131(6), 803–55.
- Kahneman, D. (1999). [Objective happiness](#). In D. Kahneman, E. Diener & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: Foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 3-25). New York : Russell Sage Foundation Press.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: Chapters 1 & 2; *BTBG*: Chapter 1

Week 2: The Power of Connection

Will be available starting on September 16

- Why do social connections foster happiness?
- How we're wired for connection
- Affiliation, affection, and attachment
- Happiness and romance, family, parenting, and friends
- Happiness Practice #2: Active Listening
- Empathy & connection

Key Studies:

- Eisenberger, N. I., Lieberman, M. D., & Williams, K. D. (2003). [Does rejection hurt? An fMRI study of social exclusion](#). *Science*, 302(5643), 290-292.
- Nelson, S. K., Kushlev, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). [The pains and pleasures of parenting: When, why, and how is parenthood associated with more or less well-being?](#) *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(3), 846-895.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: Chapter 5 (pp. 125-137); *BTBG*: Chapter 9

Week 3: Kindness & Compassion

Will be available starting on September 23

- How kindness fosters happiness
- How compassion motivates kindness
- The happiness-altruism loop
- Happiness Practice #3: Random Acts of Kindness
- Evolved for kindness: *why* kindness makes us happy
- Scaling up kindness: contagious kindness, elevation, and heroism

Guest Lecturers:

- Paul Ekman, Ph.D.
- Philip Zimbardo, Ph.D.

Key Studies:

- Goetz, J., Simon-Thomas, E., & Keltner, D. (2010). [Compassion: An evolutionary analysis and empirical review](#). *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(3), 351–374.



- Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). [Spending money on others promotes happiness](#). *Science*, 319(5870), 1687-1688.
- Warneken, F. & Tomasello, M. (2006). [Altruistic helping in human infants and young chimpanzees](#). *Science*, 311(5765), 1301-1303.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: Chapter 5 (pp. 138-149); *BTBG*: Chapters 4 & 11

Week 4: Cooperation & Reconciliation

Will be available starting on September 30

- Why cooperation is good for happiness: its evolution and neuroscience
- Peacemaking and reconciliation
- Forgiveness: a practice for happiness and stress reduction
- Happiness Practice #4: Eight Essentials When Forgiving
- The importance of trust

Guest Lecturers:

- Frederic Luskin, Ph.D.
- Jack Kornfield, Ph.D.

Key Studies:

- Tabibnia, G. & Lieberman, M.D. (2007). [Fairness and cooperation are rewarding](#). *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1118, 90-101.
- Tsang, J., McCullough, M. E., & Fincham, F. D. (2006). [The longitudinal association between forgiveness and relationship closeness and commitment](#). *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25(4), 448-472.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: Chapter 6 (pp. 169-179)

Week 5: Midterm Exam (and time to catch up on course material)

Will be available starting on October 7. Must be completed by November 18.

Week 6: Mindfulness, Attention, and Focus

Will be available starting on October 14

- How paying attention can make you happier
- What is mindfulness?
- Happiness Practice #5: Mindful Breathing
- How mindfulness benefits the mind, brain, and body
- Happiness Practice #6: The Body Scan
- The social benefits of mindfulness

Guest Lecturers:

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D.
- Shauna Shapiro, Ph.D.

Key Studies:

- Killingsworth, M. & Gilbert, D. (2010). [A wandering mind is an unhappy mind](#). *Science*, 330(6006), 932.
- Davidson, R. J., et al. (2003). [Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation](#). *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65(4), 564-570.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: pp. 198-199, 240-244



Week 7: Mental Habits of Happiness: Self-Compassion, Flow, and Optimism

Will be available starting on October 21

- “Training the Mind” for optimism & misconceptions about “mind training”
- Self-compassion: a path to resilience and happiness
- Happiness Practice #7: Self-Compassionate Letter
- The importance of flow
- Goal setting and optimism
- Happiness Practice #8: Best Possible Self

Guest Lecturers:

- Kristin Neff, Ph.D.

Key Studies:

- Germer, C. K., & Neff, K. D. (2013). [Self-compassion in clinical practice](#). *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(8), 856-867.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & LeFevre, J. (1989). [Optimal experience in work and leisure](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(5), 815-822.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: Chapter 4 (pp. 101-124) & Chapter 8

Week 8: Gratitude

Will be available starting on October 28

- Why gratitude is good: the strong links between gratitude and happiness
- Happiness Practice #9: Gratitude Journal
- The roots of gratitude
- Challenges to gratitude
- Practical ways to cultivate gratitude
- Happiness Practice #10: Gratitude Letter & Visit

Guest Lecturers:

- Robert Emmons, Ph.D.

Key Studies:

- Emmons, R. A. & McCullough, M. E. (2003). [Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389.
- Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. A. (2010). [Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration](#). *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30(7), 890-905.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: Chapter 4 (pp. 88-100)

Week 9: Finding Your Happiness Fit and the New Frontiers

Will be available starting on November 4

- The cutting-edge: awe, wonder, and beauty
- Which happiness practices are right for you?
- Happiness Practice #9: Find Your Fit
- Enduring lessons and principles
- Synthesis and your journey forward

Key Studies:

- Lyubomirsky, S., & Layous, K. (2013). [How do simple positive activities increase well-being?](#) *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(1), 57-62.



- Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). [Approaching awe: a moral, aesthetic, and spiritual emotion](#). *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, 297-314.

Optional supplemental reading: *HOH*: Chapters 3 & 10; *BTBG*: Chapters 7 & 12

Final Exam

Will be available starting on November 4. Must be completed by November 18.

Instructor and Staff Bios

Course Instructors



Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, and the founding director of the university's Greater Good Science Center. Since earning his doctorate from Stanford University, Dacher has devoted his career to studying the nature of human goodness and happiness, conducting ground-breaking research on compassion, awe, laughter, and love.

Dacher is the author of the best-selling book *Born to Be Good* (W.W. Norton, 2009) and a co-editor of the anthology *The Compassionate Instinct* (W.W. Norton, 2010), in addition to more than 100 scientific papers and two best-selling textbooks. An outstanding speaker who has earned many research and teaching awards, Dacher has received rave reviews for his "Human Happiness" course at UC Berkeley. His work is featured regularly in major media outlets, including *The New York Times*, CNN, and NPR. In 2008, the *Utne Reader* named him as one of 50 visionaries who are changing our world. What makes Dacher happy is wrestling with his loved ones, yoga, being up close to Iggy Pop, and swimming in cold, salty water.



Emiliana Simon-Thomas, Ph.D., is the science director of the Greater Good Science Center. A neuroscientist who earned her doctorate from UC Berkeley, her research has explored the neuro-biological roots of pro-social emotion and behavior, as well as the psychosocial benefits of emotional authenticity and connection. A gifted teacher, Emiliana has presented to the Dalai Lama and audiences worldwide. What makes her happy is meals with friends & family, live roots reggae with steel drums and horns, and boogie boarding at the beach.

Course Producer



Jason Marsh, M.J., is the Greater Good Science Center's director of programs and the founding editor-in-chief of the GGSC's award-winning online magazine, *Greater Good*. A graduate of Brown University and the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Jason is also a co-editor of two anthologies of *Greater Good* articles: *The Compassionate Instinct* (WW Norton, 2010) and *Are We Born Racist?* (Beacon Press, 2010). What makes Jason happy is chasing fly balls, playing charades with his daughter, and reading A.O. Scott.

Course Assistants



Juliana Breines, Ph.D., is a postdoctoral fellow at Brandeis University who received her Ph.D. in social and personality psychology from the University of California, Berkeley. Her research examines the influence of self-compassion on physical and psychological health. Things that make her happy: Cape Cod beaches, movie nights with her husband, and writing about psychology.



Tchiki Davis, M.A., is a Ph.D. student in social and personality psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. She earned her B.A. at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and her M.A. at the University of Denver. Tchiki's research aims to clarify how emotions and emotion-focused interventions affect unhealthy behaviors. Tchiki increases her own happiness using exercise, art, and positive psychology activities.



Hai Hoang, B.A., recently graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with highest honors in psychology. He plans to pursue a Ph. D in applied psychology. Beside schoolwork, Hai is a student speaker for numerous events and has held several student-advisory positions on campus. He does martial arts and photography in his free time, but what makes him most happy is being with the people he loves.



Lauren Klein, B.A., recently graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with degrees in psychology and rhetoric. She has worked for the Greater Good Science Center and the Berkeley Initiative for Mindfulness in Law and enjoys exploring the science that suggests human connection inspires happiness. Her perfect day is equal parts coffee and conversation—and maybe a perfectly-timed Muni bus transfer (or two).



Bianca Lorenz is a senior psychology major at the University of California, Berkeley. Bianca also tutors at San Quentin State Prison's GED program and facilitates a class at UC Berkeley about the current state of mass incarceration. Her future research goals focus on utilizing positive psychology to reduce recidivism rates. In addition to research, backpacking and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* make Bianca most happy.



Nada Rendradjaja is a senior psychology major at UC Berkeley and recently completed a psycho-social internship in New York. She hopes to pursue clinical psychology but also enjoys studying vision, persuasion, and beauty. She works at the campus sleep lab and is executive director of the *Undergraduate Journal of Psychology*. Art and cheese make her happiest. She collects pinwheels.

Special thanks to:

Story artist [Matt Jones](#), whose wonderful illustrations pop up throughout our course videos, illustrating the vagus nerve, the Dalai Lama, and many other keys to happiness.

Our dynamo video production and post-production team, including [Jigar Mehta](#) of [Shoot Edit Burn Media](#); Jason Sussberg and Emile Bokaer of [Dogpatch Films](#); and [Melanie Ruiz](#).

The [Berkeley Resource Center for Online Education](#) (BRCOE).

Continuing Education for “The Science of Happiness”

“The Science of Happiness” is approved for 16 CE credit hours for psychologists, therapists, social workers, counselors, nurses, and members of NIRSA. A shorter, introductory version is approved for 6 CE credit hours. Continuing Education for this course is co-sponsored by R. Cassidy Seminars.

In order to earn CE credit hours for participating in this online course, you must first [register for CE credit](#) through the course’s continuing education co-sponsor, R. Cassidy Seminars (RCS), paying for either [16 CE](#) credit hours or [6 CE](#) credit hours. When you register for CE credit, you will create a login through the RCS website, which you will use to receive a CE certificate of completion.

Click [here](#) to learn more about how to earn continuing education credit hours for this course.