

HIST 387-003 History of Happiness in Modern History

Spring 2023

Instructor: Peter N. Stearns

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Class info: Posted to your Blackboard account

Office Hours: East 207A By appointment (email to schedule). Regular hours on Tuesdays, 2:45 - , but please confirm appointment.

Class Schedule: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00-1:15 PM, East 122

Goals

This course explores various aspects of happiness in modern societies, with a primary focus on developments since the 18th century and on issues around happiness in the world today – including contemporary challenges and variations. Major topics include the role of religions and regional traditions; the nature of the modern “happiness revolution” and its drawbacks; the political uses of happiness; and the eager interest in happiness in the world today. In various ways, happiness has been a significant theme in modern world history, and it stands as a goal and a problem for many contemporaries. The course offers a chance to explore these themes, and while it is definitely does not set out to provide personal guidance it may offer some opportunity to reflect on individual goals.

Assessment

The main components of the grade are as follows: 25% participation; 25% three short papers (8.3% each); 30% semester essay; 20% take home final

Class participation is measured in part through satisfactorily completing 10 of 15 possible weekly questions – answers should be *200 words* or more. These participation questions will be sent out at the end of each week, due Friday of the following week, when they will be evaluated for credit. Additional credit can come through class discussion, conversations with the instructor etc. *Note: when possible complete assigned reading before the relevant class, and before submitting the participation response.*

Short papers roughly 1000 words each.. These are described more fully in the schedule below. Paper #1 due Feb. 2; Paper #2 due Feb. 23; Paper #3 due Mar.28 Paper #1 explain the happiness position of one country in the current international happiness rankings; Paper #2 Explain why Americans smile so much; Paper #3 What is the Easterlin paradox

Semester essay. This is due on the last day of class (May 4), length roughly 2500 words. Topic to be submitted for initial approval by the beginning of Week 6 (Feb. 28). Students must arrange to discuss progress on paper with instructor during Week 11 (Apr. 10-14) in office hours or by other arrangement

Take home final. Date to be arranged after classes have ended. Essays questions, two hours writing time.

Important: please consult the Blackboard course site before every class, and also watch for weekly emails. The site offers discussion questions for the classes, and also, frequently, assigned readings. Click on “Course Content” for the readings.

Academic Honesty and Collaboration

The integrity of the University Community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple practices to follow at all times are that: 1) all work submitted be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and 3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct.

Required Text

Happiness in World History by Peter N. Stearns (Routledge, 2021)
All other readings available by the links below or on Blackboard.

Class Schedule:

Major topics: I. Introduction and interdisciplinary (1-3); II. Traditions (4-6) III. Revolutions in Happiness and Cheer (7-10); IV. Translating into modern life (11-16) V. Comparative issues (17-20) VI. Problems (21-2) VII Recent trends (23-8)

Date	Topic	Assignment
Week 1 Tuesday, January 24 th	Happiness as a topic – why try to study it? What are the challenges? What is happiness in the first place?	Stearns, ch 1
Thursday, January 26 th	Psychological views	S. Oishi and E. Westgate, “A Psychologically Rich Life: beyond happiness and meaning,” Psychological Review 2021, pp 1-6 and D. Myers and E. Diener, “The scientific pursuit of happiness” , Perspectives on Psychological Science 2018 Stearns, ch 2

Date	Topic	Assignment
<p>Week 2 Tuesday, January 31st</p>	<p>A first cut at international differences</p> <p>Short essay assignment (due next time): look up the most recent global happiness report. Pick one country and discuss factors that explain this ranking – examples: a country that seems pretty predictable and why; a country that ranks higher than expected and why; a country that ranks lower and why. 1000 words</p>	<p>“Happiest Countries in the World 2022”</p>
<p>Thursday, February 2nd</p>	<p>Traditions: early societies and the problem of the “golden age”; impact of agriculture and social class and gender issues</p>	<p>First essay due</p> <p>Stearns, ch 3</p>
<p>Week 3 Tuesday, February 7th</p>	<p>Traditions: philosophies and popular patterns</p> <p>The hedonic and the eudaimonic</p>	<p>Stearns, ch’s 4 and 6</p>
<p>Thursday, February 9th</p>	<p>Traditions: major religious impacts – issues of hope and joy</p>	<p>Matthieu Ricard, “A Buddhist View of Happiness” J. of Law and Religion Feb. 2014</p> <p>Stearns, ch 5</p>
<p>Week 4 Tuesday, February 14th</p>	<p>The “Happiness Revolution”</p>	<p>Stearns, ch 7</p> <p>Darrin McMahon “Happiness the Hard Way” Greater Good Magazine May 2009</p>
<p>Thursday, February 16th</p>	<p>The Problem of Causation and Extent</p>	
<p>Week 5 Tuesday, February 21st</p>	<p>The Cheerfulness and humor angle</p>	<p>C. Kotchemidova, “From Good Cheer to Drive By Smiling” J. of Social History 2005</p> <p>Second short paper: Why Do Americans Smile So Much? 1000 words – due the following session</p>
<p>Thursday, February 23th</p>	<p>Downsides, objections, and comparative issues; religious reactions</p>	<p>Asa Jansson, “Normal and Pathological Happiness in the Age of Depression” (on Blackboard).</p> <p>Second short paper due</p>

Date	Topic	Assignment
Week 6 Tuesday, February 28 th	19 th and 20 th centuries: happy families and happy kids	Stearns ch 8 Paper topic submission due
Thursday, March 2 nd	New happiness rituals and happy endings	Vyta Baselice, Burrichter, Stearns – birthday
Week 7 Tuesday, March 7 th	The challenge of work: what was the impact of industrialization on work and happiness?	JE De Nevere and George War, “Does Work Make You Happy?” Harard Business Review Mar. 2017; Malcolm MacKinnon “Work Instrumentalism Reconsidered,” Brit J of Socioklogy Mar 1980
Thursday, March 9 th	White collar workers: happier?	Michael Moffa, “Emotions for Hire” Organizational Behavior
Spring Break, March 13 th through March 19 th		
Week 8 Tuesday, March 21 st	The rise of modern leisure (and boredom), and the decline of the festival	D. Kesler and D. Wann, “The Well Being of Sports Fans” J. of Sport Behavior 2020
Thursday, March 23 rd	Growing consumerism; growing happiness?	Tori DeAngelis, “Consumerism and Its Discontents” Amer Psych Assoc Monitor on Psychology June 2004 Short paper 3: due the following session: what is the Easterlin paradox?
Week 9 Tuesday, March 28 th	Global issues: Happiness and Western influence in the 19 th century; the case of Japan	Stearns ch 9; Florian Coulmas, “Happy Japan: an essay”, (on Blackboard), from Katie Barclay, Darrin McMahon and Peter Stearns eds., Routledge World History of Happiness Short paper due
Thursday, March 30 th	Russia and Latin America: different challenges	

Date	Topic	Assignment
Week 10 Tuesday, April 4 th	Communism and fascism – and happiness	Stearns ch's 10 and 11
Thursday, April 6 th	Contemporary comparisons: happiness in the contemporary world	Stearns ch 12
Week 11 Tuesday, April 11 th	Contemporary problems: death and depression	Jacobsen “The Transformation of Death Discourse” (on Blackboard), Gordon Parker and Ian Hickie “Is Depression Overdiagnosed?” British Medical Journal Aug 18 '07 (these are two separate short articles) Arrange to discuss progress on paper at some point during the week
Thursday, April 13 th	The rise of anxiety; changes in the student experience	
Week 12 Tuesday, April 18 th	Innovations: are we in a new period of happiness? The role of race, gender, religion, age	Stearns ch 13
Thursday, April 20 st	The impact of social media	Guna Graciyal and W. Viswas, “Social Media and Emotional Wellbeing” Asia Pacific Medical Educator Apr 24, 2021
Week 13 Tuesday, April 25 th	The rise of positive psychology and well-being movements	Daniel Horowitz “The Proliferation of Happiness” Colisseum Mar 13 2018
Thursday Apr 27 th	The international happiness movement	Stearns ch 14
Week 14 Tuesday, May 2 nd	The current crisis: pandemic, polarization and a decline of happiness?	Stearns ch 15

Date	Topic	Assignment
Thursday, May 4 th	What can we do better as a society? As individuals?	
Finals		