

HIST 387-003 History of Happiness in Modern History

Spring 2024

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 after class -, 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 – PLUS regular class attendance. The 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 Jan. 25; Paper #2 due Feb. 15; Paper #3 due Mar. 19th. 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 (April 25th), length roughly 2500 words. Topic to be submitted for initial approval by the beginning of Week 6 (Feb. 20th). Students must arrange to discuss progress on paper with instructor during Week 11 (Apr. 2nd-4th) in office hours or by other arrangement

Take home final. Date to be arranged, for 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. Note: use of Artificial Intelligence materials for assignments is acceptable so long as cited in references. But use of AI-generated papers or other assignments is plagiarism. CHAT GPT policies will be discussed during the first class session.

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 16 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 18 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
Week 2 Tuesday, January 23 rd	A first cut at international differences 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	“Happiest Countries in the World 2023”
Thursday, January 25 th	Traditions: early societies and the problem of the “golden age”; impact of agriculture and social class and gender issues	First essay due Stearns, ch 3
Week 3 Tuesday, January 30 ^h	Traditions: philosophies and popular patterns The hedonic and the eudaimonic The problem of elite v. popular happiness, and the festival tradition	Stearns, ch’s 4 and 6
Thursday, February 1 st	Traditions: major religious impacts – issues of hope and joy	Matthieu Ricard, “A Buddhist View of Happiness” J. of Law and Religion Feb. 2014 Karen Bauer, “Qur’anic Happiness” Stearns, ch 5
Week 4 Tuesday, February 6 th	The “Happiness Revolution”	Stearns, ch 7 Darrin McMahon “Happiness the Hard Way” Greater Good Magazine May 2009
Thursday, February 8 th	The Problem of Causation and Extent	
Week 5 Tuesday, February 13 th	The Cheerfulness and humor angle	C. Kotchemidova, “From Good Cheer to Drive By Smiling” J. of Social History 2005 Second short paper: Why Do Americans Smile So Much? 1000 words – due the following session

Date	Topic	Assignment
Thursday, February 15 th	Downsides, objections, and comparative issues; religious reactions. Later changes in philosophy	Asa Jansson, “Normal and Pathological Happiness in the Age of Depression” (on Blackboard). Second short paper due
Week 6 Tuesday, February 20 th	19 th and 20 th centuries: happy families and happy marriages. Why? Gender issues	Stearns ch 8 Paper topic submission due
Thursday, February 22 nd	New happiness rituals and happy endings. Why should children be happy?	Vyta Baselice, Burrichter, Stearns – birthday
Week 7 Tuesday, February 27 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, February 29 th	White collar workers: happier? The problem of emotional manipulation	Michael Moffa, “Emotions for Hire” Organizational Behavior
Spring Break, March 4 th through March 10 th		
Week 8 Tuesday, March 12 th	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 14 th	The rise of American consumerism and its role in happiness – is there a special national pattern? Note: the lecture and discussion will be recorded. Do unhappy people buy more things?	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? (John McCardle)

Date	Topic	Assignment
Week 9 Tuesday, March 19 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 21 st	Russia and Latin America: different challenges	Jane Costlow, “Who Can be Happy in Russia”
Week 10 Tuesday, March 26 th	Communism and fascism – and happiness. Happiness and the state	Stearns ch’s 10 and 11
Thursday, March 28 th	Contemporary comparisons: happiness in the contemporary world- when why and how did interest in happiness increase? What does Bhutan have to do with it?	Stearns ch 12
Week 11 Tuesday, April 2 nd	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 – either office hours or separate session
Thursday, April 4 th	The rise of anxiety; changes in the student experience. Revisiting happiness and school	
Week 12 Tuesday, April 9 th	Innovations: are we in a new period of happiness? The role of race, gender, religion, age	Stearns ch 13
Thursday, April 11 th	The impact of social media	Guna Graciyal and W. Viswas, “Social Media and Emotional Wellbeing” Asia Pacific Medical Educator Apr 24, 2021

Date	Topic	Assignment
Week 13 Tuesday, April 16 th	The rise of positive psychology and well-being movements	<u>Daniel Horowitz “The Proliferation of Happiness”</u> Colisseum Mar 13 2018
Thursday Apr 18 th	The international happiness movement	Stearns ch 14
Week 14 Tuesday, April 23 rd	The current crisis: pandemic, polarization and a decline of happiness?	Stearns ch 15
Thursday, April 25 th	What can we do better as a society? As individuals? Does the history of happiness help?	Final paper due
Finals		