

## **SOC 198: The Dark Side of Happiness**

Registration # TBD

Fall 2016

M Time 10:00-10:50am

Classroom TBD

UB Seminar – 1 credit

Professor: **Kristen Schultz Lee, PhD** Office Hours: MW 2:00-3:00pm  
453 Park Hall Or by appointment  
Kslee4@buffalo.edu

### **Course Overview and Objectives.**

We all want to be happy, some would argue it is a particularly American trait to prioritize happiness over all else. But what are the limitations and dangers of this relentless pursuit of happiness? We will read work by both positive scholars and those critical of positive science in a semester-long exploration of positivity, pessimism, happiness and unhappiness. We will discuss the ways in which a culture of positivity may blame individuals for their own illness or economic troubles and how relentless optimism may even result in a lack of preparedness for natural disasters and a refusal to see looming crises. In the end, students will evaluate the arguments read throughout the semester along with their own portfolio of happiness artifacts and their position papers on the power of positivity to decide if there is in fact a dark side to happiness.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** Having completed a UB Seminar, students will be able to:

<b>Course Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Maps to the Following Program Outcomes / Competencies:</b>	<b>Delivered through the Following Instructional Method(s):</b>	<b>Student Achievement Assessed with the Following Method(s)/Assignments:</b>
A. Articulate the components of the UB Curriculum program and the integration of multiple disciplines.	UBGE	Lecture, in-class activities	Primary: UB Curriculum in-class assignment  Secondary: None
B. Understand their chosen major or other fields of study and the key concepts that will be explored in those disciplines.	UBGE	Lecture, in-class activities	Primary: Academic plan in-class assignment  Secondary: None

C. Describe the unique character of higher learning in a university, such as deep domain knowledge, the role of research, and the value of experiential learning.	UBGE	Lecture, in-class activities, syllabus	Primary: E-portfolio project (analysis of UB artifact); class activities on academic integrity and undergraduate research at UB  Secondary: Class preparation and participation
D. Understand the necessity for writing/ communication in university and professional settings.	UBGE, SUNY Basic Communication, MSCHE Oral and Written Communication	Lecture, assigned readings, in-class activities	Primary: Final project presentation; position papers; course discussion board  Secondary: Class participation; E-Portfolio Project
E. Initiate use of the eportfolio and select a thematic framework for the UB Curriculum program using articulated transfer and UB coursework.	UBGE, SUNY Information Literacy, MSCHE Technological Competency	Lecture, in-class activities	Primary: E-Portfolio Project  Secondary: None

**Evaluation.**

1. *Class preparation and participation (10% of final grade).* Students are expected to attend and participate actively, professionally, and meaningfully in all class sessions and activities and to demonstrate familiarity with the content of the assigned readings during class discussions. Students' notes/questions on the assigned readings for the day will be collected on 10 occasions (unannounced) and assigned a pass/fail grade. Further, students will receive a pass/fail grade each class based on the extent to which they made a meaningful contribution to class. Full points for participation and preparation will be awarded to students with 70% or more passes. (Outcomes: C, D)
  
2. *UB Learns Discussion Board (2 posts and 2 responses; 10% of final grade).* Students will be required to engage with course material and with one another outside of the classroom via a course discussion board. Throughout the semester, you will be responsible for submitting 2 original posts to the discussion board in reference to course readings and activities or outside material (e.g. a news story) relevant to course material.

You will also be responsible for submitting 2 academic responses to your classmates' posts. (Outcomes: D)

3. *Position paper (1 paper, 40% of final grade).* Across the course of the semester, I will offer four thought prompts. You will be required to choose ONE prompt and write a 1-2 page response. These responses will take the form of position paper in which you will choose a position and build a logical and evidence-based argument to support your position. Position papers are due the Monday after which the prompt is given. I encourage you to choose your position paper wisely and not to wait until the last minute. Successful completion of these brief papers is indicative not only of your understanding of course material and writing ability but also of your time management skills. (Outcomes: D)
  
4. *E-Portfolio Project (40% of final grade).* The purpose of this project is for you to collect, analyze, and synthesize information about happiness, unhappiness, and positivity in the world around you across the course of the semester. The class will be divided into groups, each with a different topic related to the transition to happiness and positivity. Individually, you are expected to collect and analyze a minimum of 3 artifacts (e.g. newspaper articles, advertisements, TV shows, films, comics, etc.) about your topic in a sociological manner and combine them into a **cohesive** e-portfolio. **One of your artifacts must be from a UB-sponsored event (e.g. a presentation or performance) or UB-related activity/source (e.g. UB Spectrum article/op-ed) so that you pay attention to and engage with happenings on campus.** In your individual e-portfolio, you will provide an introductory overview of your project portfolio and a sociological analysis of each artifact. You will also include one assignment from your previous coursework that relates to the topic of happiness, well-being or positivity. This assignment can come from any discipline (Art, Humanities, History, Natural Science, etc). In your overview, you will discuss how the past assignment relates to your other artifacts and to the course material overall. As a group, you will prepare a presentation to share with the class what you have learned. Your final grade will be composed of an individual grade based on your portfolio and 3 portfolio reviews across the semester, a group presentation grade, and a peer grade from your group members. Detailed instructions and a grading rubric will be available on UBLearn. (Outcomes: C, D, E)

### **Required Readings.**

- Barbara Ehrenreich. 2009. *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America.* New York: Metropolitan Books.

All other required readings will be available on UBLearn.

### **Class expectations.**

Students are expected to attend all class sessions, read all assigned readings *prior to the class session in which they are discussed*, actively participate in class discussions and activities, and complete all required assignments in accordance with established guidelines. Reading the

syllabus and handouts and keeping track of dates for tests and assignments is your responsibility. **Consult Ublearns regularly.**

**Electronics: Please turn off and put away all electronic devices before coming to class.** I reserve the right to confiscate any electronic devices being used in class until the end of class. If you are expecting an important phone call, please let me know before class begins. In this case, you will still be required to leave it on vibrate and exit the classroom quietly if you receive the call.

**Subject matter:** As in many sociology courses, we will read some texts, complete some assignments, and watch some video clips that may use explicit language and that will explore controversial and sometimes very personal topics. While I understand that at times you may feel discomfort, I expect that you will keep an open mind and be willing to think critically. **This means that you should appreciate the process of scientific inquiry and understand how this process is distinct from defending or promoting personal beliefs. A climate of respect for all persons and groups is expected in course work and classroom behavior.** If you anticipate having strong political, religious, or other objections that will prohibit you from interacting with course material and your classmates in an academic manner, you should see me or reconsider your enrollment.

### **Make-up of Assignments.**

- Late assignments will not be accepted. Early assignments are always accepted.

**Grading Scale and Standards.** Final grades will be tabulated according the following scale:

A= 94 or above	B+ = 87-89%	C+ = 77-79%	D+ = 67-69%
A- = 90-93%	B = 84-86%	C = 74-76%	D = 60-66%
	B- = 80-83%	C- = 70-73%	F = less than 60%

- A range grades (high distinction) are for *superior* quality work that indicates you have mastered the course material both in the sense of understanding and demonstrating *integration* of the concepts and related research literatures.
- B range grades (superior) demonstrate that you *know almost all* course material *well*.
- C range grades (average) indicate that you understand *much* course-related material.
- D range grades (minimum passing grades) are earned by demonstrating only *limited understanding* of course material.
- The grade F reflects failure to demonstrate rudimentary understanding of the material.

Incompletes (I/IU): A grade of incomplete (“I”) indicates that additional course work is required to fulfill the requirements of a given course. Students may only be given an “I” grade if they have a passing average in coursework that has been completed and have well-defined parameters to complete the course requirements that could result in a grade better than the default grade. An “I” grade may not be assigned to a student who did not attend the course.

Assignment of an interim 'IU' is at the discretion of the instructor. A grade of 'IU' can be assigned only if successful completion of unfulfilled course requirements can result in a final grade better than the default 'U' grade. The student should have a passing average in the

requirements already completed. The instructor shall provide the student specification, in writing, of the requirements to be fulfilled.

**Disability Accommodations.** “The University at Buffalo has a strong commitment to ensuring our academic and campus facilities and programs are accessible to all students, regardless of disability. Every UB student has a right – and UB faculty and staff have a responsibility to protect these rights – to full and equal educational opportunity. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits UB from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability.” If you have registered with the Disability Services Office, or need to, please see me. For more details see: <http://www.ub-disability.buffalo.edu/guide.shtml>

**Academic Integrity.** “The University at Buffalo has a responsibility to promote academic honesty and integrity and to develop procedures to deal effectively with instances of academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for the independent and honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect for others' academic endeavors. By placing their name on academic work, students certify the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgments.” More details at: <http://www.student-affairs.buffalo.edu/judicial/swj.php>

Plagiarism, cheating, and other academic dishonesty will result in a minimum of a zero on the assignment, and I will formally report you to the University, as outlined in the University's Academic Integrity policy. I reserve the right to use plagiarism detection software on all coursework submitted to me. Please see me if you need help with citations or if you have any questions regarding this policy. Have academic integrity by educating yourself about the standards and following them.

All class materials, outlines handouts, syllabi, PowerPoint presentations, etc. and any audio and video recordings are my intellectual property. You may not record my voice, take my photograph, or videotape my movements without my express permission. You may use material I have prepared and distributed to you only for the purpose of studying for this course. All other uses are prohibited; unauthorized use is a breach of academic integrity.

### **Thinking about a Major or Minor in Sociology?**

To major in sociology, you must: (a) earn a “C” or better in four required courses: SOC 101 (Introduction to Sociology), SOC 293 (Social Research Methods), SOC 294 (Basic Statistics for Social Sciences), and SOC 349 (Sociological Theory); and (b) complete eight sociology electives.

To minor in sociology, you must: (a) earn a “C” or better in SOC 101 (Introduction to Sociology); and (b) complete five additional sociology electives, four of which must be at the 300- or 400-level.

More information about the undergraduate program can be obtained on our website: <http://sociology.buffalo.edu/undergraduate/>

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Readings and Activities
<b>Unit 1: Positive Thinking and Positive Science</b>		
Monday, August 29	Introduction to the course and sociology; Positive Thinking and Visualization	<p>“History of <i>The Secret</i>.”  <a href="http://www.theseecret.tv/about/history-of-the-secret/">http://www.theseecret.tv/about/history-of-the-secret/</a></p> <p>Discussion of academic expectations, student responsibilities, and academic integrity in course and at UB.</p> <p>Activity: Academic integrity.</p>
Monday, September 5	<b>Labor Day: NO CLASS</b>	
Monday, September 12	Positive Science	<p>Seligman, Chapter 1</p> <p>Watch excerpt from “Happy”</p> <p><b>Position Prompt:</b> Based on our readings and discussion of positive thinking and positive science, what do you think is the appeal of positive thinking and positive science? What do you see as the dangers of each?</p>
<b>Unit 2: The Problems with Positivity</b>		
Monday, September 19	The Problem with Positive Science	<p>Ehrenreich, Intro</p> <p>Discussion of UB Curriculum, the institutional themes, and the principle of integrative learning.</p> <p>In-class Assignment on UB Curriculum</p>
Monday, September 26	An American obsession with positivity?	<p>Ehrenreich Chapter 3</p> <p>Portfolio Review #1</p> <p><b>Position Prompt:</b> Do you think there is a uniquely American obsession with positivity? To what extent do you agree or disagree and what evidence can you cite to bolster your argument?</p>
Monday, October 3	Positivity in the Workplace	Ehrenreich, Chapter 2
Monday, October 10	Positivity, health, and religion	Ehrenreich, Chapter 1

		<p><b>Time use reflection due.</b></p> <p>Class Activity: Building research and study skills for college and beyond.</p>
Monday, October 17	Failure to Expect the Worst in our Lives	No readings
Monday, October 24	Positivity and Crisis	<p>Cerulo, Chapter 7</p> <p>Portfolio Review #2</p> <p><b>Position Prompt:</b> To what extent is positive thinking responsible for a lack of preparedness for natural disasters and for the Great Recession? Would more skepticism or even pessimism mitigate the effects of natural disasters or economic downturns?</p>
<b>Unit 3: Happiness Myths: Youth, Money, and Kids</b>		
Monday, October 31	Cohort, Youth, and Unhappiness	Romm, "Where Age Equals Happiness"
Monday, November 7	Money and Unhappiness	<p>No readings.</p> <p>In-class Assignment on majors and developing an academic plan.</p>
Monday, November 14	Marriage, Kids and Unhappiness	<p>Senior, "All Joy and No Fun"</p> <p><b>Position Prompt:</b> Why are we so bad at predicting what will make us happy? To what extent is happiness even within our control?</p>
Monday, November 21	Marriage, Kids and Unhappiness	<p>No readings.</p> <p>In-class Assignment on undergraduate research at UB</p> <p>Portfolio Review #3</p>
Monday, November 28		Group Presentations
Monday, December 5		<p>Group Presentations</p> <p>Final Projects Due</p>