

# University of Victoria

We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

## Psychology 491 (A03), Spring 2026

### Research Seminar: Psychology of Well-Being

Tues./Thur. 4:30pm – 5:50pm, Room XXXX

Andrew J. Howell, Ph.D.

Sessional Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria

Emeritus Professor, Department of Psychology, MacEwan University

Office:

E-mail:

Office Hours:

### **Course Description and Objectives:**

This seminar focuses on psychological processes and conditions that foster well-being. Students will examine and discuss theoretical perspectives on well-being (e.g., self-determination theory) and contemporary research on such topics as subjective well-being, contextual influences on well-being, mindfulness, realistic optimism, sustainable well-being, meaning-in-life, social media use and well-being, and well-being interventions.

The objectives of this course are: (1) to acquire an understanding of key concepts described in published research and theory concerning the psychology of well-being; (2) to lead discussions on selected published works in this area; (3) to participate in discussions led by others; and (4) to produce a proposal for a novel well-being intervention. Learning objectives for course readings are provided on our Brightspace course site, as are ‘generic learning objectives’ -- applicable to all readings -- that encourage applying and critically reflecting upon key concepts.

### **Course Prerequisites:**

Psychology 300A. Students who remain in courses for which they do not have the prerequisites do so at their own risk. Those who complete courses without prerequisites are not exempt from having to complete the prerequisite course at some later date if such courses are required for the degree program. Students are responsible for checking their registration status by the add/drop deadline.

**Class Schedule and Readings:** (readings are available on Brightspace; all readings are discussed on Tuesdays, as led by students; on Thursdays, Andrew will lead further consideration of the week's subject matter)

Jan. 6 and 8: Introduction to the Psychology of Well-Being

No readings; Andrew will introduce the course and give a talk on "Self-determination, psychological flexibility, and student mental health"

Jan. 13 and 15: The Positive Psychology Movement

Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 103-110.

Pawelski, J. O. (2016). Defining the 'positive' in positive psychology: Part II. A normative analysis. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 11*, 357-365.

Jan. 20 and 22: A Theory of Well-Being: Self-Determination Theory

Ryan, R. M., Huta, V., & Deci, E. L. (2008). Living well: A self-determination theory perspective on eudaimonia. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*, 139-170.

Jan. 27 and Jan. 29: Another Theory of Well-Being: Aristotle's *Eudaimonia*

Fowers, B. J. (2016). Aristotle on eudaimonia: On the virtue of returning to the source. In J. Vitterso (Ed.), *Handbook of eudaimonic well-being* (pp. 67-83). Springer.

Feb. 3 and 5: Well-Being in Context

Di Martino, S., Eiroa-Orosa, F. J., & Arcidiacono, C. (2017). Community psychology's contributions to happiness and well-being: Including the role of context, social justice, and values in our understanding of the good life. In N. J. L. Brown, T. Lomas, & F. J. Eiroa-Orosa (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Positive Psychology* (pp. 99-116). Routledge.

Kyoon-Achan, G., Philips-Beck, W., Lavoie, J., Eni, R., Sinclair, S., Kinew, K. A., Ibrahim, N., & Katz, A. (2018). Looking back, moving forward: A culture-based framework to promote mental wellbeing in Manitoba First Nations communities. *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health, 121*, 679-692.

Feb. 10: Sustainable Well-Being

O'Brien, C. (2008). Sustainable happiness: How happiness studies can contribute to a more sustainable future. *Canadian Psychology, 49*, 289-295.

*How are Canadians really doing? The 2016 Canadian Index of Wellbeing Report.*  
Waterloo, ON: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and University of Waterloo. (Note: read only pages 1-12).

**Feb. 12: Midterm Exam** (covering first 8 readings and their associated classes)

**Feb. 16 – 20: Reading Break – no classes**

Feb. 24 and 26: Meaning in Life

Martela, F., & Steger, M. R. (2016). The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 11*, 531-545.

Lichtenthal, W. G., Roberts, K. E., Pessin, H., Applebaum, A., & Breitbart, W. (2020). Finding meaning in the face of suffering: Meaning-centered psychotherapy and cancer. *Psychiatric Times, 37*, 23-25.

Mar. 3 and 5: Subjective Well-Being

Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Tay, L. (2018). Advances in subjective well-being research. *Nature Human Behavior, 2*, 253-260.

Regan, A., Radosic, N., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2022). Experimental effects of social behavior on well-being. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 26*, 987-998.

Mar. 10 and 12: Realistic Optimism

Schneider, S. L. (2001). In search of realistic optimism: Meaning, knowledge, and warm fuzziness. *American Psychologist, 56*, 250-263.

Howell, A. J. (2016). Implicit theories of personal and social attributes: Fundamental mindsets for a science of well-being. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 6*, 113-130.

Mar. 17 and 19: Mindfulness

Brown, K. W., Ryan, R. M., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychological Inquiry, 18*, 211-237.

Mar. 24 and 26: Positive Mental Health

Walsh, R. (2011). Lifestyle and mental health. *American Psychologist, 66*, 579-592.

Carr, A., Cullen, K., Keeney, C., Canning, C., Mooney, O., Chinsellaigh, E., & Dowd, A. (2021). Effectiveness of positive psychology interventions: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 16*, 749-769.

### Mar. 31 and Apr. 2: Social Media and Well-Being

Twenge, J. M. (2019). The sad state of happiness in the United States and the role of digital media. In J. Helliwell, R. Layard, & J. Sachs, *World Happiness Report*.

Kross, E., P. Verduyn, G., Sheppes, Costello, C. K., Jonides, J., & Ybarra, O. (2021). Social media and well-being: Progress, pitfalls, and next steps. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 25*, 55-65.

### Apr. 3: Project Due by 11:59pm (submitted via Brightspace)

**Final Exam (during exam period 7 – 22 April; date and time to be confirmed; covers 11 readings and all classes since the midterm)**

#### **Evaluation:**

Participation	/10 points
Discussion-Leading Role (10 points each x2)	/20 points
Midterm Exam	/15 points
Final Exam	/15 points
Project	/40 points

Students who have completed each of the above will be considered to have completed the course. Failure to complete one or more of these elements will result in a grade of “N” regardless of the cumulative percentage of all other elements of the course. N is a failing grade and factors into GPA as a value of 0. In accordance with the University’s policy on academic concessions, “A student who completes all course requirements is not eligible for an academic concession”. Consequently, students can only request deferrals for the completion of required course components and not for non-essential course components.

**Participation.** Your attendance and active participation in discussions will be noted for each class.

**Discussion-Leading:** Each Tuesday, the class will be devoted to discussing the reading(s) of the week. The discussion of each reading will be led by up to three students. In no more than 25 minutes, lead your classmates in a discussion that engages them in the material. The objective is to involve your classmates in an exploration of key issues within the article, not to “teach” the article content to your classmates. Involve your classmates throughout; get students to apply concepts to their lives, create an activity for them to engage in, or pose specific and clearly worded questions for them to consider. I’ll

assign a grade out of 10 for members of the leadership “team”, based on focus on key concepts, thoughtfulness, originality/creativity, organization, collaboration and leadership, involvement of classmates, and overall impact of the discussion-leading. Students will choose topics in an order determined at random, but I’ll look for volunteers for leaders of the first two readings. There’s no one way to conduct a good discussion-leading, but here’s a few suggestions:

- Do:
- assume everyone has read the article
  - consider using a few slides
  - quickly recap a key concept before using that concept in an activity/discussion
  - get students to apply concepts to their own lives
  - create an activity (e.g., small-group activity) around a concept
  - pose questions that critically examine a key concept, such as by seeking examples or applications
  - provide your own “take” on an issue, and seek others’ “take”
  - consider a “pros vs. cons” or “strengths vs. limitations” approach as a focus
  - consider using a polling or quizzing website to aid your discussion
  - impose structure; control the discussion or activity; move on when you need to
  - be assertive; project voices; inject energy; track your start and finish times; end on time
- Don’t:
- give a presentation
  - read from the article
  - attempt to cover the whole article or try to “teach” the content of the article
  - pose learning objectives as questions (these don’t “add value” or go beyond the article)

**Midterm and Final Exams.** For each exam, there will be three short-answer questions for each week of readings, with at least two questions on the reading(s) covered that week, and (up to) one question based on in-class material that week. Questions will emphasize specific or generic learning objectives for each reading (see Brightspace for these) or key ideas raised in additional class discussion or activities (e.g., TED talks). Exams are in-person and ‘closed-book’.

**Project.** It has been argued that the products of a science of well-being should be put toward positive change for people, including changing the context or conditions in which people live (Biswas-Diener et al., 2010). You will propose a *psychological innovation project* in which you propose to apply positive psychology concepts and/or theories in a meaningful attempt to impact the well-being of people (e.g., the elderly, students, those in palliative care, team members, etc.) by directly enhancing their functioning (e.g., their thoughts, behaviors, feelings, character traits) or the context in which they live (e.g., a neighborhood, workplace, school, or university; the environment; the healthcare system; the education system; a team; a nation or the world at large).

Be creative in identifying an issue that could be addressed through a positive psychology-based innovation. The article readings are potentially a good source of ideas, as are your personal experiences and observations about the world around you, other courses you are taking, future career interests, and your familiarity with various issues in need of change.

Here are a few examples, just to illustrate some possibilities: You could propose to reduce social media use among teenagers; to use Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to promote greater self-

compassion among stigmatized individuals; to employ AI to increase self-affirmation or facilitate gratitude expression; to enhance well-being among those experiencing anxiety; to enhance the development of character strengths; to improve our environment by fostering nature connectedness; to improve the university environment for student well-being; to cultivate growth mindsets among at-risk parents; to increase self-determination among at-risk individuals; to increase the feeling of belongingness among first-year students; to increase positive body image among adolescents; to randomly induce happiness among strangers; to enhance hope among those recently hospitalized for a suicide attempt; to increase well-being among those living in seniors' homes; to increase work enjoyment among retail workers; to increase citizen well-being through public music performances; or to increase cooperation and friendship among neighbours. **Create a topic that *you* have a personal interest in.** Your proposal should:

- clearly identify and justify the issue being addressed by your intervention (e.g., cite literature and/or statistics supporting the need; cite stakeholders or local examples or news reports to validate the need).
- refer to positive psychology concepts that you propose to capitalize upon to improve or remedy the identified issue, and their basis in theory and research; provide reasons to believe that such an intervention would be impactful.
- provide specifics of the innovation (i.e., specify the innovative change you are proposing to employ, why it is novel, and how it would be implemented); indicate which people or group/organization would be the recipients of the change, and why; describe in detail how you would evaluate the impact of the intervention (e.g., indicate the measures you would employ and when they would be administered).
- reflect upon the strengths and limitations of your proposal (e.g., reflect upon any weaknesses or strengths in the empirical or theoretical basis for the intervention or in its evaluation, including feasibility); suggest future lines of investigation or practice in the area; state why the intervention would be *sustainable* (see readings by O'Brien and Pawelski).
- be of high quality (i.e., organization; originality; grammar; APA formatting, overall impact)

Report on your proposal in *either* of the following equally viable ways:

(1) Present your proposal as a website, podcast, or video (podcast or videos should not exceed 15 minutes in length) or in another creative medium (e.g., a “self-help workbook” or “TED talk”), and include an appended References section. For an audio or video file or http address, copy and paste into a document along with your References and submit as a single .pdf file.

(2) Write-up your proposal in a formal academic fashion, using APA publication manual formatting (7<sup>th</sup> Edition), not exceeding 8 typed, double-spaced pages (12-point font); in addition, include a title page (no abstract) and a References section. This write-up can take a similar form to that of a research proposal or grant proposal. Please submit as a single .pdf file.

The project due date is **Friday, 3 April, submitted via Brightspace by 11:59pm**. Submit whatever you have by the deadline, even if not complete. In fairness to all students, late submissions will not be accepted, except under extenuating circumstances such as serious illness. The project will be graded out of 40, based upon the above five criteria.

## **Be Well:**

A note to remind you to take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone.

### ***Social Life, Friends, & Community at UVic:***

Having a social network is an extremely important foundation for positive mental health. There are lots of benefits to joining clubs, course unions, intramurals and teams on campus.

<https://www.uvic.ca/undergraduate/housing-student-life/student-life/index.php>

### ***Counselling Services:***

The Student Wellness Centre can help you make the most of your university experience. They offer free professional, confidential, inclusive support to currently registered UVic students.

<https://www.uvic.ca/student-wellness/contacts/student-wellness-team/index.php#ipn-counsellors>

### ***Health Services:***

The Student Wellness Centre also provides a full service primary health clinic for students.

<https://www.uvic.ca/student-wellness/contacts/student-wellness-team/index.php#ipn-physicians>

### ***Centre for Accessible Learning:***

The CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations <https://www.uvic.ca/accessible-learning/index.php>. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

### ***Elders' Voices:***

The Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement (IACE) has the privilege of assembling a group of Elders from local communities to guide students, staff, faculty and administration in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

[www.uvic.ca/services/indigenous/students/programming/elders/](http://www.uvic.ca/services/indigenous/students/programming/elders/)

### ***Mental Health Supports and Services:***

Mental health supports and services are available to students from all areas of the UVic community:

<https://www.uvic.ca/student-wellness/wellness-resources/mental-health/>

## **Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response at UVic:**

UVic takes sexualized violence seriously and has raised the bar for what is considered acceptable behaviour. We encourage students to learn more about how the university defines sexualized violence and its overall approach by visiting [www.uvic.ca/svp](http://www.uvic.ca/svp). If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized violence and needs information, advice, and/or support please contact the sexualized violence resource office in Equity and Human Rights (EQHR). Whether or not you have been directly impacted, if you want to take part in the important prevention work taking place on campus, you can also reach out:

Where: Office of Equity and Human Rights, Sedgewick Building, Room C133  
Phone: 250 721 8021  
Email: [eqhr01@uvic.ca](mailto:eqhr01@uvic.ca)  
Web: <https://www.uvic.ca/sexualizedviolence/>

## UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

Department of Psychology  
Important Course Policy Information  
Spring Session 2026

### Accessible Learning

The University of Victoria is committed to creating a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you are registered with the [Centre for Accessible Learning](#) and anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you are a student with a disability or chronic health condition, you can meet with a CAL advisor to discuss access and accommodations.

### Attendance and Absences

**Attendance is important.** Students who do not attend their classes during the first two weeks (and do not inform the instructor of valid circumstances that prevent their attendance) may be dropped from both class registration and the waitlist.

Students are expected to attend all classes in which they are enrolled. Students may be assigned a final grade of N or debarred from writing final examinations if they fail to satisfy a minimum attendance requirement set by the instructor for lectures, laboratories, online course discussions or learning activities, tutorials, or other learning activities set out in the course outline.

Medical documentation for short-term absences is **not required** (approved by Senate). Students who cannot attend due to illness are asked to notify their instructors immediately. If illness, accident, or family affliction causes a student to miss the final exam or to fail to complete any required assignment/assessment by the end of the term students are required to submit a request for academic concession (see below).

### Children and Pets

If you need to bring your children or pet to class, please do not hesitate to do so. It is understood that sometimes this is necessary due to care circumstances. However, please aim to have minimal class disturbance so that student learning is not impacted.

### Class Recording and Auto-Captioning Statement

The instructor may record class sessions and those recordings may be made available to all students in the class via Brightspace. If you have questions or concerns regarding class recording and privacy, please contact [privacyinfo@uvic.ca](mailto:privacyinfo@uvic.ca). Auto-generated captioning may be enabled in this course. Auto-captioning is highly error-prone, especially for specialized terminology and proper names. Students are asked to refer to the audio feed for clarification of any errors. If you find captioning errors that are offensive, please contact your instructor and/or teaching assistant so that they are aware. If you require captions as part of an academic accommodation, please contact [CAL](#).

### Commitment to Inclusivity, Diversity, and Respectful Environments in the Classroom and Online

The University of Victoria is committed to providing a positive and supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members. All members of the university community have the right to this experience and the responsibility to help *create* such an environment. The University will not tolerate racism, sexualized violence, or any form of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

Please be advised that, by logging into UVic's learning systems or interacting with online resources and course-related communication platforms, you are engaging in a University activity.

All interactions within this environment are subject to the university expectations and policies. Any concerns about student conduct may be reviewed and responded to in accordance with the appropriate university policy.

To report concerns about online student conduct: [onlineconduct@uvic.ca](mailto:onlineconduct@uvic.ca)

### Copyright

All course content and materials are made available by instructors for educational purposes and for the exclusive use of students registered in their class<sup>1</sup>. The material is protected under copyright law, even if not marked with ©. Any further use or distribution of materials to others requires the written permission of the instructor, except under fair dealing or another exception in the Copyright Act. Violations may result in disciplinary action under the [Resolution of Non-Academic Misconduct Allegations policy \(AC1300\)](#) or the [Academic Integrity Policy](#), whichever is more appropriate for the situation.

### Course Experience Survey (CES)

I value your feedback on this course. Toward the end of term, you will have the opportunity to complete a confidential course experience survey (CES) regarding your learning experience. The survey is vital to providing feedback to the instructor regarding the course and their teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. When it is time for you to complete the survey, you will receive an email inviting you to do so. If you do not receive an email invitation, you can go directly to <http://ces.uvic.ca>. You will need to use your UVic NetLink ID to access the survey, which can be done on your laptop, tablet or mobile device. You will be reminded nearer the time, but please be thinking about this important activity, especially the following three questions, during the course.

1. What strengths did your instructor demonstrate that helped you learn in this course?
2. Please provide specific suggestions as to how the instructor could have helped you learn more effectively.
3. Please provide specific suggestions as to how this course could be improved.

### Disclaimer

The schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

### Grading

In classes that are based on a percentage grading scheme, the following [Undergraduate Grading Scale](#) is used

Grade	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	D	F
Percentage	90-100	85-89	80-84	77-79	73-76	70-72	65-69	60-64	51-59	< 50
GP Value	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

Rounding is only applied to the final grade and is rounded up at the 0.5% level (e.g., 84.49% is rounded to 84% and 84.50% is rounded to 85%).

### Medical Documentation for absences

No medical documentation for short-term absences is required (Approved by Senate).

If you are seeking a Withdrawal Extenuating Circumstances or an Aegrotat grade, medical documentation may be required if relevant.

### Ombudsperson and Academic Concerns

From the course calendar...

*Depending on the nature of the academic matter of concern to the student, the order in which the student should normally try to resolve the matter is: first, the course instructor; second, the Chair of the department; third, the Dean of the faculty; and finally, the Senate.*

If you are having an academic concern or problem that cannot be resolved with your instructor or the Department Associate Chair, you may wish to consult with the Office of the Ombudsperson (<https://uvicombudsperson.ca>). Current contact information for the office can be found here <https://uvicombudsperson.ca/contact/>.

### Policy on Academic Integrity including Plagiarism and Cheating

The Department of Psychology fully endorses and intends to enforce rigorously the [Senate Policy on Academic Integrity](#). It is of utmost importance that students who do their work honestly be protected from those who do not. Because this policy

is in place to ensure that students carry out and benefit from the learning activities assigned in each course, it is expected that students will cooperate in its implementation.

The offences defined by the policy can be summarized briefly as follows:

1. **Plagiarism.** You must make sure that the work you submit is your work and not someone else's. There are proper procedures for citing the works of others. The student is responsible for being aware of and using these procedures.
2. **Unauthorized Use of an Editor.** The use of an editor is prohibited unless the instructor grants explicit written authorization.
3. **Multiple Submission.** Only under exceptional circumstances may a work submitted to fulfill an academic requirement be used to satisfy another similar requirement. The student is responsible for clarifying this with the instructor(s) involved.
4. **Falsifying Materials Subject to Academic Evaluation.** This includes falsification of data, use of commercially prepared essays, using information from the Internet without proper citation, citing sources from which material is not actually obtained, etc.
5. **Cheating on Assignments, Tests, and Examinations.** You may not copy the work of others in or out of class; you may not give your work to others for the purpose of copying; you may not use unauthorized material or equipment during examinations or tests; and you may not impersonate or allow yourself to be impersonated by another at an examination. The Department of Psychology has a policy of not making old examinations available for study purposes. Therefore, use of old exams without the express written permission of the instructor constitutes cheating by the user, and abetting of cheating by the person who provided the exam.
6. **Aiding Others to Cheat.** It is a violation to help others or attempt to help others to engage in any of the conduct described above.

**The use of a generative artificial intelligence (AI) is strictly prohibited in any submitted work (unless expressly endorsed by the instructor as part of an assignment).**

Instructors are expected to make every effort to prevent cheating and plagiarism. This may include the assignment of seating for examinations, asking students to move during examinations, requests to see student identification cards, and other measures as appropriate. Instructors also have available to them a variety of tools and procedures to check for Internet and electronic media-based cheating. In instances of suspected or actual plagiarism or cheating, instructors, following prescribed procedures, are authorized to take steps consistent with the degree of the offence. These measures will range from a zero on the test or assignment or a failing grade for the course, probation within a program to temporary or even permanent suspension from the University.

Rights of Appeal are described in the Policy on Academic Integrity in the University calendar Spring 2025.

**The definitive source** for information on Academic Integrity is the University Calendar