

SYLLABUS for The Science and Art of Human Flourishing Class

INTRODUCTION TO YOUR LIFE

What is the purpose of your life? What is the purpose of your education? What does it mean to not simply survive, but to flourish? What are the individual components of flourishing? How do your undergraduate years relate to creating a life that is worth living - becoming insightful, learned, creative, caring, ethical, resilient, engaged, and deeply well? Are there practices by which you can cultivate such things as focus, compassion, courage, wisdom, and diversity?

This course aims to assist you in finding the answers to these questions for yourself and build a sustainable base for flourishing during your undergraduate years and beyond in your personal, civic, and professional life. You will explore scientific, philosophical, and artistic ideas about flourishing, while experimenting with contemplative practices that work directly with your mind, body, emotions, and relationships. Together we will investigate the cultivation of flourishing according to a model with five dimensions understood in terms of fourteen distinct qualities.

1. *Awareness*: plasticity, mindfulness, focus
2. *Wellbeing*: emotion, happiness, resilience
3. *Connection*: interdependence, compassion, diversity
4. *Wisdom*: identity, aesthetics, values
5. *Integration*: courage, performance

Each week of the semester we will explore one of these fourteen qualities to understand its components and dynamics, experiment with practices to personally cultivate skill and experience in its development, and further explore how those skills can be applied in embodied and context-specific behavior within your lives. We will thus explore how expanded self-awareness and self-understanding can lead to greater capacity to work with one's own inherent plasticity to become more resilient, flexible, balanced, and compassionate. We anticipate that this will in turn better prepare you to learn more effectively, form more healthy and caring relationships in your personal life, perform at more optimal levels in your chosen profession, and find purpose and passion in your studies, career, and lifelong growth.

WHY?

This course offers an opportunity for you to explore human flourishing through the lens of the world's body of knowledge and in the context of your own body and mind. We have defined flourishing in terms of fourteen distinct qualities (focus, compassion, and so forth) and we hope by the end of the class you will have *built the foundations* for conceptually understanding human flourishing, *engage* flourishing yourself in an experiential fashion, and *experience the benefits* of such practical engagement in the fabric of your own life. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

I. Demonstrate foundational knowledge

- Analyze and describe the relevant concepts and theories in multiple intellectual fields on the nature and cultivation of human flourishing in its individual fourteen qualities and the various extrinsic and intrinsic factors influencing them.
- Recognize the possibilities, value, and relevance of cultivating individual qualities of human flourishing in your own life, friends, community, and institutions, and do problem solving for them in relationship to specific situations.

II. Experience deep engagement

- Familiarize yourself with the basic personal *experiences* relating to individual qualities of human flourishing in order to make personal sense of them, and master individual *practices* for assessing and developing them.

III. Understand real-world applications

- Acquire *skills*, sensibilities, and perspectives relating to individual qualities of human flourishing, which you can *apply* in diverse contexts of your life towards greater flourishing in your personal life, academic performance, and ultimately professional and civil contexts

Prerequisites

There are truly no prerequisites for this course. Intellectually, the course will range widely across the sciences, humanities, and the arts, but do so in a way that does not assume any specialized prior knowledge. We will provide you with key vocabulary at every point to support you in building up a basic knowledge in each area. Experientially, the course will explore a series of practices that are all learned from the ground up. You are ready as long as you bring a willingness to put the time, awareness, and commitment the course requests.

If at any point you struggle with the intellectual or experiential explorations of the course, we urge you to immediately contact us to discuss how to best address those challenges

CLASSROOM GUIDELINES

Electronic devices may not be used in the class, whether a computer, phone, tablet, watch, or other form factor. The only exception is that on Mondays we will have opening quizzes that require the use of a computer or phone.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES (plus EVALUATION)

FOR THE TECHNICAL DETAILS OF HOW TO SUBMIT ASSIGNMENTS AND DO QUIZZES, UVA STUDENTS CONSULT [UVA Logistics](#)

Workload and Grading in Summary

Your workload will amount to 9 hours a week:

1. Participate in two class sessions: 2 hours
2. Participate in single contemplative lab meeting: 1 hour
3. Watch talks at home: 1 hour
4. Read readings at home: 1 hour
5. Do personal practices at home: 2 hours
6. Do assignments at home: 2 hours

Grading is based upon the following six domains:

1. 16.67% - Class-Lab Participation:
2. 16.67% - Personal Practice
3. 16.67% - Journal
4. 16.67% - Quiz on Talks, Readings, and Vocabulary
5. 16.67% - Four Pause and Reflect Essays
6. 16.67% - Final Review

1. Class & Lab Participation

Summary: We expect your participation in every class and lab meeting. Participation means showing up and fully engaging in exercises, dialogs, and practices. Participation will be assessed through filled out worksheets during class sessions and presence in lab sections.

The main class meeting is two 50 minute sessions per week involving all students meeting together with the professor and teaching assistants. The course will use what is called a “flipped” format in that the lectures that would otherwise be delivered in the classroom are instead flipped out into recordings that are reviewed online outside of class. The emptied classroom will thus become a workshop of highly experiential exercises and exchanges. Any given class may have the following elements: question and answers on any topic, experiential exercises, and reflective dialogs.

Contemplative Labs: One 50 minute meeting per week of students in 20 person groups with one of the assistants. This is focused on group practice and limited discussion.

How to Succeed: Come to every class and lab having reviewed the required materials of that week, and give your full attention and care to the exercises and dialogs involved.

Value: Our class revolves around your participation day after day, week after week. By showing up in body and mind for all exercises, dialogs, and practices, you have the opportunity to bring these concepts of human flourishing to life. Without this participation, our class’s goals of weaving together intellectual and experiential understanding of these topics will be impossible. For you, the great benefit of fully participating is that you gain the ability to better understand and implement flourishing in your own life. It is also essential that you learn from each other to see the diversity of how these qualities of flourishing show up in diverse lives and contexts, which is one of the reasons

you need to show up in body and mind for every single class meeting to engage with the classroom exercises and dialog with our fellow students.

Grading Method: Your class participation is monitored and factored into grades. Your participation is graded by beginning with a 100 points (=A+). 3 points are deducted for each missed class or lab, or a class in which you do not adequately participate (such as not filling in the worksheet fully). If you miss more than six classes or labs combined without a valid, documented excuse, your attendance grade will be reduced to ZERO.

Excuses: if you have a serious illness that is resulting in absences, please contact your teaching assistant. If you have another issue, you can miss two meetings and still get an A. But if you have an institutional commitment that forces you to miss more than 1-2 meetings, please find another class with better times or less focus on class meetings.

Makeup Policy: if you have an excused illness, you can make up the day in question by writing a 2-3 page note on the topic for the day that synthesizes material from the talks, readings, and personal experience. If you miss the class for other reasons, it is not possible to make up the class.

2. Talks, Readings, and Vocabulary

Summary: Each week has recorded talks, readings, and vocabularies for the quality of flourishing we are exploring. You are expected to study all of these carefully each week before the first class meeting of a given week. Each week will then have an online review with 8 questions at the beginning of the first class meeting of a given week (after which it is no longer available).

Each week involves recorded *talks* on the quality of flourishing in question (such as *compassion*):

1. *Reflections on Compassion:* explorations of the quality of flourishing in question from diverse perspectives.
2. *The Science of Compassion:* scientific theories for explaining the quality in question.

Each week will also involve one or two readings (total 60 pages or less).

How to Succeed: watch and read, it is that simple. If you do this each week on schedule, you will naturally build up the necessary vocabulary and comprehension that you will allow you to build up a deep mastery of these materials over the semester which can then be deployed in other classes and contexts.

Value: Our class is both an intellectual and personal journey; it is essential you master the scientific and contemplative vocabulary and theories behind each quality of flourishing to understand their individual nature, mechanism, and value, and be able to utilize that understanding in analytically understanding your own life and the life of others. Thus doing the readings, listening to the talks, and deeply internalizing the vocabulary is critical. Practice without theory will inevitably stagnate or go astray.

Grading Method: You will take 14 reviews; we will drop out your worst review, so that 13 reviews will factor into your grade. The answers will be weighted on a 100 scale (see below).

3. Personal Practice Log

Summary: There are one or two types of practice for each quality of flourishing, which you are required to do for a total of 120 minutes *per* week over at least 5 days. These are recorded in a practice log, with the date, start time and end time, and name of practice(s) done for each practice session.

1. **Working with Compassion:** formal practices that should be done with complete focus and a formal beginning and end to cultivate the quality of flourishing within the immediate context of your own lives.
2. **Taking Compassion into Life:** informal simple practices intended to guide you in cultivating the quality of flourishing within the laboratory of their own lives as you shower, walk across campus, talk to friends, and so forth.

How to Succeed: Do the practice day after day, week after week - and come to us if you are having trouble or questions of any type. Personal development and self-awareness is all about regular and sustained practice - there is no magic bullet. Practice, persistence, and patience - and you will thrive.

Value: Theory is great, but practice is what makes it relevant to your life. These practices are the key to opening up the treasury of flourishing in your life, and in the communities and institutions in which you participate. Understanding takes many forms, and these practices are intended to enable you to develop experiential understanding of these qualities of flourishing in your body, emotions, mind, and relationships, and how to enhance them.

Grading Method: you will receive full credit for completing your practice log on time and according to the prompt. Late practice logs will not be accepted.

4. Reflective Journaling

Summary: Drawing upon the lectures, readings, and your own experiences and life, the journal entries are an opportunity to reflect on the qualities of flourishing to discover and express your own pathway through flourishing. Each Monday by 7am you need to submit the following (where compassion is simply an example of the past week's quality of flourishing in question).

- **Reflection on Compassion:** The first sentence of each entry should be your own succinct definition of the quality, followed by a paragraph-long description of an incident in your own life or experience of others that you think exemplifies the quality. The rest of the entry should respond to the syllabus's prompt for that topic as it relates to your own experience and observations in relationship to the readings, talks, classroom exercises, and practices. It should be 300-500 words in extent overall.

Our goal for the weekly journals is to enable you to over the course of the semester:

- *Define* the quality in a more conceptual manner.
- *Describe* what a quality (e.g., compassion) looks like using examples from personal experience.

- *Discuss* why the quality may be relevant personally/socially, etc.
- *Explain* some of the factors that might impede/cultivate the quality.
- *Apply* your knowledge, by noting, practically speaking, what might be done to cultivate this quality.

How to Succeed: there is no “right” or “wrong” and we won’t grade on style - write however you want, but follow the above guidelines, do it on time, and give it sincere effort. Do those things and it will pay off with a deeper sense of what these ideas and qualities mean in relationship to lived life, and increased capacity to articulate the relationship of your own experiences with intellectual ideas and models.

Value: The journal is intended to facilitate you pondering the qualities of flourishing in your life and experience in the past, present, and ultimately future, as well as being to integrate the intellectual theories about those qualities with that first person experience. By doing this in a written form week after week, it ensures that you are reflecting on each quality in real time and learning how to connect intellectual theory with your own life and experience with a focus on each individual topic. Research shows that cramming information into your mind leads to no long-term learning, while studying and then writing knowledge on a regular basis over a lengthy period of time leads to deep internalization of knowledge in ways that are persistent.

Grading Method: you will receive full credit for completing your journal on time and according to the prompt. Late journal entries will not be accepted.

5. Pause and Reflect Essays

Summary: For each of the five modules, at the end you are asked to pause and reflect on the qualities of flourishing covered in that modules and compose summary reflections on those qualities in a way that interweaves your understanding of the theories and your own experiences (both in life and the formal practices). Each essay should have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, and be 700-1000 words long. It is fine to reuse content from your journals. It is not acceptable to simply talk about your own experiences - you must also engage the various theories and vocabulary from the readings and talks. They are due each Monday by 7am on the week after the module is complete.

Each essay should have the following five sections:

1. Introduction
2. What is the relationship among the three topics of flourishing that are linked together under this module, drawing from the readings and talks?
3. How do these relate to our capacity to flourish or not, drawing from the readings and talks?
4. Provide some examples from your own life and observations
5. Conclusion

It is required that you cite at least four different sources from the assigned talks and readings for this module, and make at least six overall citations of those sources. Citations can be quotes, or paraphrases.

How to Succeed: If you have invested yourself in the study of the theories, done the practices, and

invested yourself in the journaling, the essays will be a natural extension of that work and writing. However, be careful to make sure that your essay makes sense as a whole and is clear and accurate, as well as has been carefully edited for problems with spelling and grammar.

Value: These written essays are also an exercise in integration of first person life experience and intellectual knowledge, while shifting the focus to regular synthesis that goes beyond individual qualities of flourishing to ponder how affiliated qualities interact and relate to each other. This enables you to develop understanding of flourishing in a more nuanced way, and thus be better poised to see the interaction of diverse elements in your own life as well as in theories.

Grading Method: Each exploration is worth 20 points, for a total of 100 points. These are critically graded for quality in expression and substance, so edit carefully. We are more than happy for you to experiment in style.

6. Final Review

Summary: A final review is offered during the designated final exam period. It covers the theories, vocabulary, and practices cover over the course of the semester through a combination of various types of questions.

How to Succeed: The best path to succeed is to listen to the talks, do the readings, and do the weekly journal assignments each week - you will only need a basic review at the end then to prepare for the final exam.

Value: We recognize that final exams are not popular and particularly not ones that involve significant content that has to be remembered. However, the long term value is that this is a final opportunity to review the disparate theories and vocabulary you have been studying as a whole to both see interconnections, and hopefully lay the foundation for a long term retention of this knowledge that you can use in your other classes as well as lives. Studies have shown clearly that knowledge you cultivate regularly over an extended period of time, and then do a final synthetic review of, has the best prospects for persisting in you as knowledge you can use for personal, intellectual, and professional goals.

Grading Method: The exam is worth 100 points and points are taken off for mistakes.

Grading Scale

Please note that in an ideal world, we would love to see everyone get an A+, not because we have low standards, but because everyone seriously invests in this course and gives it the time and attention necessary to succeed. We do not curve the grading at all.

Your total points out of the total possible 600 points will be divided by 6, and then a letter grade will be assigned based upon the following scale:

- 97-100: A+
- 93-96: A
- 90-92: A-

- 87-89: B+
- 83-86: B
- 80-82: B-
- 77-79: C+
- 73-76: C
- 71-72: C-
- 67-69: D+
- 63-66: D
- 61-62: D-
- Everything below 60 is an opportunity to withdraw from the class, or take away an F.