Instructor Information
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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description
Enhancing Midlife Satisfaction is a 3-credit online course introducing students to a positive approach to midlife challenges and transitions. Students learn to use selective optimization with compensation (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes, 1997) and other positive psychological strategies such as optimization (Ben-Shahar, 2009) and realistic optimism (Seligman, 1998). Successful adult development, according to Freund, includes “prioritizing goals (selection) according to their importance for increasing gains (optimization) and avoiding losses (compensation) in consideration of currently available resources” (2008). In this course, students learn what it means to “maximize gains” and “minimize losses” (Baltes, 1997) and work to construct an idea of their “hoped for selves” in midlife (Markus & Nurius, 1986 as reported in Lachman, 2001). “Positive psychological outcomes result when hoped for selves are realized and feared selves are avoided” (Lachman, 2001). Students take an active approach to learning by interviewing midlife adults and identifying positive strategies for enhancing satisfaction in midlife.

According to Newport and Pelham (2009), midlife may be the longest sustained period of unhappiness in the life span when compared to the young adult and older adult years. In the 2008 Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index poll, well-being scores dropped slightly for two decades from the early 40s through the late 50s. Starting at a high-point of 79% in the early 20s, well-being scores dipped to 71% and 70% in the 40s and 50s respectively and started to rise again to 76% in the 60s. Newport and Pelham’s 2009 findings provide support for a U-shaped pattern based on information from the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index poll (2008-2009).

Results from a West German study suggest that midlife unhappiness may depend on “objective and subjective returns of professional and personal life investments. These social investment decisions date back to early adulthood and bear a high risk of failure during midlife. Unforeseen consequences and long-term private and professional commitments make it costly to adjust, but at the same time new investments may pay off in a pro-longed future. This dilemma turns many middle-aged people into ‘frustrated achievers’” (Brockmann, 2009).

Although several research studies have found evidence of increasing satisfaction with age. Lachman (2004) explained that “sources of happiness and well-being vary by social class (Markus et al., 2004) and race” (Ryff et al., 2004). Young and middle-aged adults may often experience higher levels of negative affect than older adults (Lachman, 2004). A German study “showed that anxiety peaked in the age group of 51-60” while self-esteem and resilience dropped (Beutel et al., 2010). “The middle adult years appear to be a time when the balance is shifting among the three adaptive processes [growth, maintenance/resilience, and regulation of loss]…. During middle adulthood… people begin to depend more and more on cultural supports for adequate functioning…. Advances in economics, nutrition, general knowledge, technology, and medicine have compensated for the weakening of the biological supports for life” (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010).
Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to

1. explain their understanding of midlife development theories and methods used to promote midlife satisfaction;

2. discern appropriate positive psychological interventions for five adults interviewed for the project in the following areas: health, education, relationships, work, coping skills, and management strategies; and

3. design a plan to apply general positive principles to enhance midlife satisfaction in their future.

Course Activities

**Guest Lectures:** Students will watch guest expert videos on improving midlife health using “Positive Health” measures such as nutrition and exercise. Guest experts will discuss advances in applying preventive health measures to midlife changes. Videotaped lectures on women’s midlife health are also available on the course.

**Class Discussions:** Students will participate in nine class discussions. As part of the discussions, students will identify midlife transitions and coping strategies after watching video clips from the “49 Up” documentary. Rather than watching the entire documentary at the beginning of the semester, students will take notes on either one or several segment(s) from “49 Up” each week. During the class discussions, they will answer questions and share opinions about expert guest video lectures as well as readings and evaluate positive strategies designed to enhance midlife satisfaction. Students will state their opinions, support their opinions with evidence from readings or videos, evaluate at least two strategies/exercises each week, and respond to two other classmates. During class discussions, graduate students will add interesting insights after reading one extra Positive Midlife article each week selected from journal articles on the Resources file.

**Project:** As an introduction to interviewing, students will pattern their project after the documentary “49 Up,” which follows British children from age 7 until age 49 with video interviews spaced every seven years. Students will watch an individual discuss important areas of life at ages 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42, and 49 in a clip of 15 or 20 minutes. Prior to constructing their own interview questions, students will watch a “49 Up” video segment and will identify life events, transitions, and management strategies to share in weekly discussions. As practice for the project interviews, students will analyze the lives of two individuals (Steve Jobs and Diane Sawyer), identify specific midlife transitions and challenges, evaluate times when they exhibited perfectionism or optimalization, and compare findings with other students in a class discussion. For the project, teams of 2 or 3 students will interview six adults—one in each of the following age groups: age 35-39 (short interview), 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, and 60-64. Teams will plot each individual’s life events and midlife transitions on a timeline and identify appropriate positive psychological strategies. Interviews with an individual in the late thirties will be shorter than the interviews for individuals ages 40-64. Although exceptions are possible, teams will work as either class partners or a small group. Beginning in Week 2, each team will conduct a short interview with an adult age 35-39. For the next 5 weeks, each team will interview one midlife adult per week. In Week 9, teams will submit an interview summary and timeline for each adult. In Week 12, teams will submit a Project PowerPoint show with (1) the most important points of each interview, (2) a timeline of important life events/transitions, (3) positive psychological strategies/exercises for each individual in areas such as health, work, relationships and coping strategies, and finally (4) conclusions about general positive strategies to enhance satisfaction in midlife.

**Graduate Research Paper:** Graduate students will also write a 5-page research paper on a midlife topic of their choice from the following areas: Positive Midlife Relationships, Positive Health, or Positive Work.
**Final Essay Exam:** This course does not require a proctored final exam. For the final essay exam, undergraduate students will write four short essays (grad students will write six short essays) chosen from a list of 10 possible questions. Students will have one week to write their essays. Students may use notes, books, and material from the course.

**Grading**

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<td>Class Discussions</td>
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<td>Project</td>
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**Grads:** Interview Summaries, Timelines, PowerPoint show with strategies & Research Paper  
**Undergrads:** Interview Summaries, Timelines, and PowerPoint show with strategies

**Final Essay Exam** 18 points

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**E-Books - The following textbooks are accessible as e-books through the Marriott Library:**


Kennon M. Sheldon, Todd B. Kashdan, Michael F. Steger (2011) *Designing Positive Psychology: Taking Stock and Moving Forward*

**Course Policies**

All interviewees will remain anonymous, and discussions will be confidential. Students will not reveal the names of participants. All interviewees will sign disclaimers, and students will conduct professional interviews.

**Course Responsibilities**

Successful students use their time wisely. The standard formula for college coursework is that for every hour of class time, students will spend at least three hours on homework. A three-unit course will require an average of 10-12 hours of homework (reading, research, and studying) per lesson. In this class, interviewing will add time to the weekly average. As a result, successful students plan their time wisely so that they keep up with assignments by maintaining a pace that fits the course schedule. They also communicate with the instructor often so that they can receive much needed feedback on their work.
ACADEMIC DISHONESTY & PLAGIARISM

Cheating will not be tolerated in this course. Anyone caught cheating will fail the course and will be reported to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, in accordance with the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Successful students always make sure that their work is original. In our discussions, students must include quotations from videos, selections from readings, and other specific facts as support for their answers. If they repeat the exact information in other students’ postings, the instructor will assume that their answer isn’t original. This is important because the instructor must be able to gauge what the student has learned. Copying the work of another person on an essay, as answers on your discussion posting or on an exam is considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of cheating. Any time a student uses someone else’s work and does not give that person credit, it is plagiarism. Anyone who plagiarizes will receive a failing grade on the assignment. If this is repeated, the student will fail the course and can be expelled from the university. If you are “suspected” of plagiarism, you will bear the burden of proof. You must be able to present rough drafts or related materials and discuss the topic intelligently. Refer to the University of Utah Plagiarism Policy for more details and/or the University of Utah Policy and Procedures Manual.

ADA POLICY

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the course, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services (CDS), 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD).

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