**Instructor Information:**

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**Nature of the Course**

In this course, students learn about the “Positive Psychology of Trauma” or posttraumatic growth (PTG). We study the lives of 35 PTG role models, explore 20 growth concepts and review five PTG models. Using a case study approach, we analyze how individuals develop strengths after a traumatic experience. They are “icons of the inner spirit of human nature” (Wilson, 2006). We also learn about common posttraumatic stress reactions.

Psychotraumatology, the study of psychological trauma, is a relatively new field in psychology. Over the past few decades, researchers and psychologists in traumatic stress studies have described and treated pathological reactions to trauma. In this class, we explore the positive end of the “continuum of posttraumatic impacts… transcendent self-actualizing modes of existence that represent the essence of all that is good in human character and virtue” (Wilson, 2006). Although a few weeks of the course will provide information about traumatic stress reactions, PTSD, and treatment, our focus is on the “best (i.e., highest, growth-promoting, self-actualizing) consequences of psychic traumatization” (Wilson, 2006).

**Course Description**

By analyzing recent cases in the news, we explore individuals’ positive reactions to trauma--often called trauma transformation, self-reinvention, positive life change, posttraumatic growth (PTG), stress-related growth (SRG) or self-transcendence. Using a case study approach and applying growth principles, students will decide if someone like Elizabeth Edwards would be considered a role model. Preliminary “positive psychology of trauma” research has utilized anecdotal accounts of individuals who triumphed over crisis, adversity, and tragedy. In this course, students will follow a “scientific study of such individuals [to] enable discovery of the mechanism of self-transformation” (Wilson, 2006).

After watching documentaries and videos based on true traumatic life events (from Positive Psychology at the Movies, Niemiec & Wedding, 2008) or course/textbook cases, students will identify posttraumatic stress and growth. Class discussions will focus on analyzing growth resulting from disasters such as the crash of the airplane carrying the Marshall
University Football team in 1970 or the miraculous landing of a commercial airplane into the Hudson River in 2009. Students will apply Schwarz’s “Tools for Transforming Trauma,” Wilson’s “12 Principles of Self-Transformation,” Joseph & Linley’s “Positive Psychological Perspectives on Posttraumatic Stress,” Calhoun, Cann & Tedeschi’s 2010 model, and Nelson’s 2011 PTG Path (PTGP) to video/course/textbook cases and guest speakers. One video per discussion may be viewed online; optional videos may be found in libraries/stores.

In the Intro. Lesson, students learn about “defiant gratitude” (Emmons, 2007). In Lessons 1-3, students learn basic information about common traumatic stress reactions & disorders related to trauma and treatment. Our guest instructor, Noemi Mattis, J.D., Ph.D., is a trauma psychologist and Holocaust survivor. By accessing our course E-Reserve, students will also review portions of The PTSD Workbook, Part 1 of The PTSD Sourcebook (2009), and appropriate selections from other e-textbooks online. After watching a 90-minute videotaped interview with Dr. Mattis, students will take an online open-book/open-note midterm quiz.

In the remaining lessons (4-9), students learn about PTG growth concepts such as flow, peak experiences, mindfulness, meditation, self-soothing activities, Hanson’s “hardwiring happiness” practices and transcendent self-actualizing modes. In addition to completing growth exercises, students watch 8 course lectures presented in an audio/PowerPoint format. Lectures from guest speakers—trauma survivors & role models of posttraumatic growth—are available on the course. Students write one reaction paper about a guest speaker’s lecture.

At the end of the semester, undergraduate students will prepare a PowerPoint show: Find one NEW role model of posttraumatic growth and explain how he/she exemplifies 2 growth concepts. Explain the 2 growth concepts & apply those concepts to a real individual’s life. Graduate students: Use 3 growth concepts & apply them to a NEW role model’s life. Add 10 research slides about a specific PTG topic to the presentation. The PowerPoint show focuses only on human strengths/activities associated with PTG and highlights specific growth concepts important to a NEW role model’s growth. Students take an open-book final exam.

Course Objectives

The main goal of the course is to learn about principles that can transform trauma or adversity into growth and human strengths. At the end of the semester, students will be able to

1. Name symptoms of PTSD;
2. Recognize traumatic stress reactions in videos;
3. Describe 20 posttraumatic growth concepts;
4. Describe simple breathing/relaxation techniques to manage traumatic stress reactions;
5. Identify growth principles when hearing guest lectures or viewing videos;
6. Provide examples of simple and complex trauma;
7. Explain the concept of “defiant gratitude” (Emmons, 2007);
8. Decide if individuals are role models by evaluating case studies, applying growth principles, and making comments in class discussions; and
Course Requirements

You don’t need to buy a textbook to take this course; all readings are on E-Reserve. Optional Textbooks are listed below. You are under no obligation to buy an optional textbook.


Disclaimer

Students are NOT encouraged to share their personal experiences with crisis, adversity, tragedy, or trauma with other students in the class. All questions and information related to PTS or PTSD will be applied to video case studies, course case studies, and textbook case studies. All exercises are related to growing from adversity. Students should NOT complete exercises that deal with recovery or healing unless they are working with a licensed professional in therapy. Students may call the U Counseling Center at 801-581-6826 to schedule a free intake interview. Exercises required for this class are related to growth and focus exclusively on positive transformation of adversity into human strength.

Grading

Failure to complete one major assignment often results in an unsatisfactory grade.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
<th>TOTAL POINTS = 100</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Comments in class discussions and replies to classmates</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>2. Growth exercises (½-page reflection papers)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>3. Midterm quiz (open-book, open-note)</td>
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<td>4. 1-page reaction paper about one guest speaker’s lecture</td>
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<td>5. GRAD PROJECT: 30-slide PowerPoint show w/ 3 growth concepts &amp; a NEW PTG role model. Include 10 research slides, citations &amp; a Works Cited page. Presentation to 2 adults. UNDERGRAD PROJECT: 20-slide show about two growth concepts plus a description of a NEW PTG role model matching the growth concepts. Presentation to 2 adults. For full credit for both grads &amp; undergrads, you’ll post a disclaimer &amp; evaluation from each participant. Ask them to email the instructor and place YOUR name and date of your presentation in the subject line.</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>6. Final exam (open-book, open-note)</td>
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GRADING

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Planning Time

Successful students earning an A, B, or C grade use their time wisely. Just like a face-to-face course, the standard formula for college coursework is 1:3. Every one hour of class time will result in 3 hours of homework, so a three-unit course will require an average of 9 hours of homework (reading, research, and studying) per lesson. 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.

Online Course Responsibilities

This course requires significant self-motivation. Some lessons take a considerable amount of time to complete. Please note that not all lessons are created equal. Students complete the Intro. Lesson and Lessons 4 & 5 in one week but have two weeks for all of the other lessons. Be patient as you work your way through the first few lessons.

The following is a list of general notes as they relate to the course:

- All course communication with the instructor should be completed using the Canvas email tool.
- Assignments are to be copied and pasted directly into the submission area. If you email your assignment, I can’t promise the score will be included in your final grade.
- Students may post PowerPoint shows as attachments. Please use .ppt. I can’t open .key.

Online Courtesy & Communication Policy

Extreme consideration for the feelings of others is expected. People cannot see you smile and may not know when you are joking. Do not tell people they are stupid or wrong. Do explain why you believe differently. If someone has the facts wrong, direct them to the source of accurate information or politely offer your alternative “facts.” Use of profanity or direct/indirect insults which defame a person’s character, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

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. This is important because the instructor must be able to gauge what the student has learned. Therefore, copying the
work of another person, whether an essay, answers on your assignments or during a test, 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.

University Policy for Incomplete Grades

University policy states that the “I” grade may be given-at the instructor’s discretion-whenever a student has satisfactorily completed at least 80% of the coursework, but is unable to complete the remainder due to extenuating circumstances beyond the student’s control. The instructor will stipulate the particular work to be completed before a new, replacement grade can be submitted. If the work is not completed within one calendar year, the “I” grade will change to a failing “E” grade.

General Information

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 this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the instructor and to the Center for Disability Services, http://disability.utah.edu/ 162 Olpin Union Building, 581–5020 (V/TDD) to make arrangements for accommodations. This information is available in alternative format with prior notification. Please provide the instructor with a letter from the Center for Disability Services as soon as possible.

All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disabilities.

THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO CHANGE/MODIFY THE CONTENTS OF THIS SYLLABUS

COPYRIGHT NOTIFICATION

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Notice to students that materials used in connection with the course may be subject to copyright protection.

TEACH Act Copyright Notice

The materials on this course Web site are only for the use of students enrolled in this course for purposes associated with this course and may not be retained or further disseminated.