
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Course Number:	UGS 302	Instructor:	David W. Springer, PH.D.
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Semester:	Fall 2009	Phone:	(512) 471-0512
Meeting Time:	Tuesdays 9:00am-Noon	Office Room:	2.202C
Meeting Place:	MAI 220D	Office Hours:	Wednesdays 10:00 to 11:00am or contact Hollee Ganner (471-9824; hganner@mail.utexas.edu) to schedule an appointment
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Course Mentor:	Lindsey Avery (lindsey.avery@mail.utexas.edu)		

THE ART OF BEING HUMAN: CONSTRUCTING A LIFE WITH MEANING

“The man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.”

~Albert Einstein

“We know what we are, but know not what we may be.”

~Shakespeare

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This interactive seminar will explore how individuals create a meaningful and happy existence. Critical reflection on selected readings, art, poetry, photography, music, and films will cover a range of topics, such as happiness, discipline, compassion, humor, balance, suffering, power, conflict, love and grace. Students will critically reflect on their own lives using an interdisciplinary perspective, and relate their experiences to class material.

Note about Course:

Signature Courses are designed to expose entering UT students to the broad goals and possibilities of a university education, while promoting a greater sense of intellectual community among undergraduates. Signature Courses are designed to make students aware of the high standards necessary for college-level academic work and help students cultivate skills to meet those standards. This class is designated as a First-Year Seminar and a Signature Course.

II. REQUIRED READINGS

Allison, J., & Gediman, D. (Eds.) (2007). *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

Dalai Lama, & Cutler, H. C. (1998). *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Prather, H. (1970). *Notes to Myself*. Moab, UT: Real People Press.

OPTIONAL READINGS

Peck, M. S. (1978). *The Road Less Traveled*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Phillips, C. (2001). *Socrates Café: A Fresh Taste of Philosophy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Prather H. (2002). *How to Live in the World and Still be Happy*. York Beach, ME: Conari Press.

III. TEACHING METHODS

This class will use a combination of readings, lectures, films, and small group discussions. This course is scheduled to meet for three hours each week.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

This is a seminar, writing emphasis course, which means that contributions from each student are needed to advance the learning process. In order to count as a substantial writing component course, this First-Year Seminar requires at least sixteen (16) pages of written work during the semester. Students will be expected to come to class prepared to participate in class learning. Here is a brief summary of how the course will work.

Students are expected to attend class sessions regularly and to participate in an interactive framework between students and professor. Students are expected to complete the readings prior to class, and should be well prepared to participate in discussions and experiential learning assignments. Failure to regularly attend the class and demonstrate through discussions that one has comprehended the readings will be strongly considered in assigning the final grade. Students are responsible for any material missed due to absences.

Students are expected to turn in all required assignments on the agreed upon due date **at the beginning of class**. Assignments turned in after class starts will be considered late. All late assignments will be assessed point penalties at the rate of **2 points each day late**. If the due date is a problem, then the student should see the professor and negotiate another due date ahead of time.

The University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students (<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>). If you use words or ideas that are not your own you must cite your sources. Otherwise, you will be guilty of plagiarism.

Documented Disability Statement

Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to their e-mail address. Students should check their e-mail regularly and frequently—daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-sensitive. Students can find UT Austin’s policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

Use of Blackboard in Class

In this class the professor uses Blackboard—a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://courses.utexas.edu>—to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and to share other resources. Students can find support in using Blackboard at the ITS Help Desk by calling 475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Please plan accordingly.

Writing Center

Students are encouraged to use the Undergraduate Writing Center (located in FAC 211; phone number 471-6222: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/home>). The Undergraduate Writing Center offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT undergraduate, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Any undergraduate student enrolled in a course at UT can visit the UWC for assistance with any writing project. They work with students from every department on campus, for both academic and non-academic writing. Whether you are writing a lab report, a resume, a term paper, a statement for an application, or your own poetry, UWC consultants will be happy to work with you. Their services are not just for writing with “problems.” Getting feedback from an informed audience is a normal part of a successful writing project. Consultants help students develop strategies to improve their writing. The assistance they provide is intended to foster independence. Each student determines how to use the consultant's advice. The consultants are trained to help you work on your writing in ways that preserve the integrity of your work.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If students are worried about someone who is acting differently, they may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns about another individual’s behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

V. COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Students must write two Reflection Papers (assignment 1a) and two Selection Papers (assignment 1b). Both Reflection and Selection Papers are due at the beginning of the classes marked on the schedule. Each paper should be 4 pages in length, typed, double-spaced with 12-point font and one-inch margins on all sides. You will write a total of 4 papers (two Reflection Papers and two Selection Papers), each worth 15 points (for a cumulative worth of 60% of the final grade).

1a. Reflection Papers:

Since the papers are brief, by “reflection paper” I mean an essay in which you critically reflect on what you consider to be the main points of the readings, class discussions, or movie. The goal is not to simply summarize the readings/discussions/movie. However, to write an effective reflection paper you must, obviously, understand them and communicate that understanding.

These are some questions you might ask yourself as you read the books and watch the films: What are the main points the author/film tries to make? What are the most forceful aspects of the work, and what, if any, effect does the book/movie have on your thinking about your own life? I’ll also be looking for the following as I grade the reflection papers:

- Personal critical reflection (how much critical self-reflection about your own past experiences, future visions, hopes, dreams, and so on are evident in the paper). Each reflection paper should include reflecting on at least one passage from the Prather text.
- Integration of critical thought, experiences, and readings blended together (how well do you demonstrate the ability to integrate critical thought, your experiences, and class material).
- Integration of self with class material (how well do you demonstrate that you have struggled with the integration of your personal characteristics [e.g., values, ethical dilemmas, personality traits, spirituality, etc.] with key concepts covered in class readings and discussions).
- Analysis of student strengths (how well do you analyze your strengths).
- Analysis of student areas for growth (how well do you critically reflect on what your areas for growth are at this point in your life, and how you plan on addressing these areas).
- The quality of the writing as well as the content. Written material should be carefully proof-read and errors (punctuation, typographical, spelling) corrected. Good writing requires a reiterative process that must be followed if quality is to improve. I strongly encourage you to read your paper several times and, if possible, have someone else proof read it.

To answer these questions, you will have to state your own views on relevant subjects. You may talk about yourself or your experiences. But this should not be an essay solely about you and your feelings (this is not a diary); try to connect your experiences to the larger questions and concepts discussed in class. In your reflection paper you may want to draw on evidence or arguments from other sources. If you do use information from other sources, make sure it is properly cited.

1b. Selection Papers:

To provide you with flexible choices, you may choose two assignments from the list of possible Selection Papers listed below.

- a. Read the biography of someone you admire (artist, scientist, writer, politician, public figure, athlete, etc.). Discuss your impressions about what this person's signature strengths might have been. How early were they manifested, and what factors seemed to influence their development?
- b. Ask a relative (grandparent, parent, sibling) to take the online "signature strengths" survey (www.authentic happiness.com). Interview them based on the results, and describe any insights you gained about similarities and differences between your strengths and theirs. To what do you attribute the patterns?
- c. Choose a favorite movie, novel, or artwork (e.g., musical selection, painting) that you feel illuminates or exemplifies some aspect of happiness or character strength. Comment on how the writer/filmmaker/artist portrays his or her perspective; note consistencies or inconsistencies with what we have read or discussed.
- d. Choose a country included on the "World Map of Happiness" (handout will be provided in class; see http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/nat_fp.php). Do some reading on and research about the country, and comment on the social, political, and/or cultural factors that may contribute to the country's "happiness" ranking.

3. Students may select to complete either the This I Believe Essay (assignment 3a) OR the Gratitude Letter (assignment 3b).

3a. This I Believe Essay – Written Paper:

This I Believe is an exciting national project that invites you to write about the core beliefs that guide your daily life. National Public Radio (NPR) airs these personal statements from listeners each Monday on [Morning Edition](#) and [All Things Considered](#). *This I Believe* is based on a 1950s radio program of the same name, hosted by acclaimed journalist Edward R. Murrow. In creating *This I Believe*, Murrow said the program sought "to point to the common meeting grounds of beliefs, which is the essence of brotherhood and the floor of our civilization." More information about *This I Believe* can be found at the following link: <http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/about.html>. (Taken from [NPR.org](#), August 25, 2009.)

Each student that selects this assignment will write one essay, which you will actually submit to *This I Believe*. This essay is worth 20% of the final grade.

This I Believe provides essay-writing instructions. These instructions, copied below from the *This I Believe* Web site (<http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/guide.html>), will also be used as the grading criteria for this class:

- **Tell a story:** Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching -- it can even be funny -- but it should be *real*. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.

- **Be brief:** Your statement should be between 350 and 500 words. That's about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace.
- **Name your belief:** If you can't name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on a core belief, because three minutes is a very short time.
- **Be positive:** Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Tell us what you do believe, not what you don't believe. Avoid speaking in the editorial "we." Make your essay about you; speak in the first person.
- **Be personal:** This is radio. Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

Sample essays can be found at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4564213>, as well as in the required *This I Believe* text by Allison and Gediman (2007).

3b. Gratitude Letter:

We often go through life without telling the people we care about the most why we are grateful to have them in our lives. This assignment provides students with the option to write a two-page (approximately 350 to 500 words) Gratitude Letter to someone that they care about (e.g., a parent, caregiver, grandparent, sibling, aunt/uncle, cousin, roommate, friend, teacher, etc.), in which they share with the person why they are grateful that they are in their life. The same guidelines for writing the This I Believe Essay provided above apply equally to this assignment: Tell a story, be brief, state what you are grateful for, be positive, and be personal. I encourage you to share the written letter or the audio recording of your reading of the letter with the person for whom it is written. The letter is worth 20% of the final grade.

4. Audio Recording of This I Believe Essay or Gratitude Letter:

In addition to turning in a written copy of the This I Believe Essay or the Gratitude Letter, each student will also be required to turn in an audio recording of his or her essay or letter to the professor. To create his or her audio recording, each student should contact Mike DeLeon to reserve time in the audio room. Mr. DeLeon may be reached by e-mail (mike.deleon@mail.utexas.edu) or phone (475-6156). Directions to the GSB offices can be found at: <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/diia/lab/>. This audio recording is worth 10% of the final grade.

5. Class Attendance and Participation:

Discussions will have two basic components. Each student will have the opportunity to comment about an aspect of the readings/movie that is important to him or her. This could mean talking about what part of the readings/movie most impact or resonate with you. It could mean taking issue with some aspect of the readings/film. I will assume that everyone has completed the readings and is prepared to respond [we will be watching film(s) in class]. So, come to class each week prepared to speak coherently about the readings or watch a film with a critical eye. I will act as discussion leader, and sometimes will provide informative notes, discussion questions, and lecture material to supplement class readings and discussion.

At the end of the semester I will judge your overall contribution to class discussion. This portion of your participation grade will be based on your: (a) familiarity with readings; (b) ability to hear and understand what others say; (c) ability to express yourself clearly; (d) ability to synthesize the thoughts of others to form new insights, conclusions, or questions; (e) ability to disagree constructively; (f) cooperation in building a stimulating and supportive intellectual atmosphere in class; and (g) ability to use Socratic questioning. Because a significant portion of your grade is based on class participation, it is obvious that attendance is crucial; you cannot participate if you aren't physically present. Missed classes will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. If you have to miss a class, please let me know as soon as possible.

Each student should visit the professor one-on-one during his office hours or schedule an appointment to meet with him as soon as possible in the semester. Finally, because this is a Signature Course, attending at least one event of the University Lecture Series will also be factored into the participation portion of the final grade (see below for details).

University Lecture Series

Designed to create a campus-wide conversation, the University Lecture Series gives first-year students an opportunity to interact with leading members of our faculty—scholars, scientists, and civic leaders who are nationally and internationally renowned. All students, faculty, alumni, staff and community guests are invited, but the events will be aimed at entering first-year students.

Signature Course students are required to attend at least one of the two large lectures (or watch online).

The large lectures (see below) will be at 7 p.m. in **Bass Concert Hall**, and can be viewed online within 72 hours after each lecture. For additional event details, see <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/uls>. Bring your UT ID, as they have required this in years past for admittance.

September 21

The State of the Economy

Tom Gilligan, Dean, Red McCombs School of Business

September 22

How to Know a Tyrant When You See One: Models of Tyranny and Leadership from Classical Drama

Paul Woodruff, Dean, School of Undergraduate Studies

VI. COURSE GRADING CRITERIA

GRADING SCALE

2 Reflection <u>AND</u> 2 Selection Papers (Total of 4 Papers @ 15 Points Each)	60%	100 – 94 = A
This I Believe Essay <u>OR</u> Gratitude Letter	20%	93 – 90 = A-
Audio Recording of Essay <u>OR</u> Letter	10%	89 - 87 = B+
<u>Attendance and Participation</u>	10%	86 – 84 = B
		83 – 80 = B-
		79 – 77 = C+
TOTAL	100%	76 - 74 = C
		73 - 70 = C-
		69 - 67 = D+
		66 - 64 = D
		63 - 60 = D-
		59 and below = F

VII. COURSE OUTLINE (TENTATIVE)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topics, Readings and Assignments</u>
September 1	<p><u>Topics</u> Introductions and Class Overview, Review Syllabus Lindsey Avery gives tour of Undergraduate Writing Center at 11:15am</p>
September 8	<p>VIEWING OF MOVIE, <i>EXAMINED LIFE</i></p> <p><u>Topics</u> Living an Examined Life</p> <p><u>Readings</u> Dalai Lama & Cutler – Introduction, Chapter 1</p>
September 15	<p>DISCUSSION OF SIGNATURE STRENGTHS http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx</p> <p><u>Topics</u> Constructing a Life with Meaning and Happiness</p> <p><u>Readings</u> <i>A Monk's Struggle</i>, by Pico Iyer <i>The Myth of First-Year Enlightenment</i>, by James M. Lang <i>Dwelling in Possibilities</i>, by Mark Edmundson</p>
September 22	<p><u>Topics</u> Constructing a Life with Meaning and Happiness</p> <p><u>Readings</u> Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapters 2, 3 & 4 <i>The New Science of Happiness</i>, by Claudia Wallis <i>The Futile Pursuit of Happiness</i>, by Jon Gertner</p>
September 29	<p>REFLECTION/SELECTION PAPER 1 DUE (NOTE: REFLECTION PAPER TO COVER PART I OF DALAI LAMA TEXT AND ANY RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS OR ACTIVITIES)</p> <p>GREG DAVIS – GUEST SPEAKER http://www.gregdavisphotography.com</p> <p><u>Topics</u> Warmth and Compassion, Intimacy, Examining Your Life</p> <p><u>Readings</u> Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapter 5</p>
October 6	<p>DR. KRISTIN NEFF – GUEST SPEAKER ON SELF-COMPASSION AND VIEWING OF MOVIE, <i>THE HORSE BOY</i> (www.horseboymovie.com)</p> <p><u>Topics</u> Connection to Others, Empathy</p> <p><u>Readings</u> Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapters 6 & 7</p>

- October 13** **VIEWING OF MOVIE, *DEAD POETS SOCIETY***
- REFLECTION/SELECTION PAPER 2 DUE**
(NOTE: REFLECTION PAPER TO COVER PART II OF DALAI LAMA TEXT AND ANY RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS OR ACTIVITIES)
- Topics**
Transforming Suffering
- Readings**
Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapters 8 & 9
- October 20** **Topics**
Shifting Perspective, Finding Meaning in Pain and Suffering
- Readings**
Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapters 10 & 11
- October 27** **REFLECTION/SELECTION PAPER 3 DUE**
(NOTE: REFLECTION PAPER TO COVER PART III OF DALAI LAMA TEXT AND ANY RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS OR ACTIVITIES)
- CLASS MEETS AS USUAL AT 9:00AM**
TOUR OF BLANTON MUSEUM BEGINS AT 10:00AM (Note: We will walk over to the Blanton Museum together. Bring your UT ID.)
<http://blantonmuseum.org/index.cfm>
- Topics**
Bringing about Change, Anger and Hatred
- Readings**
Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapters 12 & 13
- November 3** **Topics**
Happiness and Meaning: A Global Perspective
- Readings**
To be provided by Professor
See http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/nat_fp.php
- November 10** **VIVÉ GRIFFITH - GUEST SPEAKER**
- Topics**
Anxiety, Self-Esteem, Living and Dying, Meaning-Making, Happiness
- Readings**
Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapter 14
- Reading and discussion of poetry from the 1600's to today to explore the meaning of life, happiness, and overcoming pain and suffering.
- November 17** **REFLECTION/SELECTION PAPER 4 DUE**
(NOTE: REFLECTION PAPER TO COVER PART IV OF DALAI LAMA TEXT AND ANY RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS OR ACTIVITIES)

DR. HOWARD CUTLER-PHONE CONFERENCE

Topics

Living a Spiritual Life

Readings

Dalai Lama & Cutler – Chapter 15

November 24

NO CLASS DUE TO THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

December 1

***THIS I BELIEVE* ESSAY OR GRATITUDE LETTER DUE.
(NOTE: FOR THE *THIS I BELIEVE* ESSAY, THIS INCLUDES
TURNING A COPY INTO YOUR PROFESSOR AND SUBMITTING
YOUR ESSAY TO THE *THIS I BELIEVE* PROGRAM AT NPR.)**

**AUDIO RECORDING OF THIS I BELIEVE ESSAY OR GRATITUDE
LETTER IS ALSO DUE.**

Last Day of Class
Course Evaluation and Wrap Up