Course Instructor: Ellen J. Langer, langer@wjh.harvard.edu
Meeting Times: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:00 - 11:30
Sections: TBD in-person and virtual sections as needed
Teaching Fellows: Dr. Deborah Phillips, dphillips@fas.harvard.edu, drp0125@gmail.com (Research Associate, Post-Doc)
Jasmine Boussem, jasmineboussem@fas.harvard.edu

Course description

This course discusses the application of psychological theory, methods and research to health, physical illness and health care. The course begins with an introduction to health psychology, its history, its interdisciplinary nature and its multifaceted components. We will discuss a complex interplay of biological, socio-cultural, psychological, economic and spiritual factors of well-being. Along with the discussion of some of the traditional models and theories in health psychology, we will examine the interventions to health promotion and illness prevention. Discussions will cover both theoretical and practical issues in health psychology from the relationship between belief and health to the interaction between physicians and patients. An in-depth analysis of the relationship between health behavior and experience, health beliefs and communication and health promotion and expressiveness will be discussed.

Please note that this course has a special focus on Mindfulness theory and in particular how mindfulness and mindlessness impacts health. We will investigate how an increase in mindfulness can give rise to an increase in well-being and happiness. Our discussions will include critical health psychology and its approaches to health and illness. The journey is meant to be exciting, inviting, engaging and thought provoking. It is not a “classic” health psychology course working
through the literature and key research implications, but rather a course that uses an introduction to traditional theories as the beginning of a journey exploring mindfulness in health, interventions, and the impact of one’s beliefs and one’s interactions with healthcare professionals on health and well being.

Course objectives

• To introduce students to the realm of health psychology, it’s topics and its implications
• To introduce students to some of the key the models and theories in health psychology
• To introduce students to the role of mindfulness in enhancing one’s well being and health
• To introduce students to biological, socio-cultural, psychological, economic and spiritual factors of well-being
• To orient students to the range of biopsychosocial components of health
• To provide students with opportunities to develop a rigorous understanding of theoretical and practical issues in health psychology
• To introduce students to the relationship between health behavior and experience, health beliefs and communication and health promotion and expressiveness
• To provide students with practical implications of mindfulness for health promotion and illness prevention

Course topics will focus on the following (see specifics in each class):
1. Health models
2. Mindfulness
3. Medical data
4. Psychology of possibility
5. Medical errors
6. Decision making and health
7. Medical model vs. Biosocial model
8. Stress
9. Coping
10. Placebos
11. Meditation
12. Yoga
13. Culture, media and health
14. Chronic illness
15. Chronic pain
16. Aging
17. Psychopathology of everyday life
18. Communication and health
19. Medical language
20. Subjective well being
21. Chronic Health

Books: See individual classes for specific readings

Required Textbook

Required Books


Recommended books


**Assigned readings**

The course will also consist of a series of assigned readings from the journal literature and related writings. These readings will be available on the course site.

If no specific chapters are assigned for a particular class, the entire book is recommended by the date on the syllabus.

**Recommended websites**

APA Division of Health Psychologists
http://health-psych.org

ISCHP
http://www.med.mun.ca/ischp

BPS Division of Health Psychology
http://www.health-psychology.org.uk

**Course activities**

The course will include a combination of:

- Lectures
• Videos
• Small and large group discussions of assigned readings or topics from the lectures and readings as well as topics that are related to the course but not necessarily directly driven by the readings.
• Individual reflection and writing on topics related to either or both the readings; the lectures; and linked to something that is important in the student’s experience
• Individual or small group presentations to the rest of the class in your sections

Course evaluation

Participation: 20%

Your thoughtful responses and your reflective questions to each week’s readings and presentations will substantiate your active participation. This portion of the grade will consist of participation in the combination of classroom discussions, online discussions and section with options for section and online discussions to reflect personal preference and availability. These will be more fully explored in the first weeks of class.

Written Reflections and Mid-Term Exam: 35%

There will be 3 required brief written reflections over the course of the semester, of no more than 2 single spaced pages, discussing or challenging some aspect of a reading; a conceptual synthesis of multiple readings; and any implications. Prior to the mid-term we will distribute 4-5 topics for you to prepare and on the day of the mid-term we will select 3-4 of those topics, from which you will use the class time to write a more in-depth analysis/exploration of one of those selected topics.

Term Paper: 40%
A final paper (10-12 pages) on a topic of your choice that demonstrates how an understanding of the topics covered in this course would help you to be a more effective thinker in the field of health psychology. You can also focus on the development of a related theme to one or more topics, or a research proposal in a new related area as long as you have prior approval for the topic. A final draft paper proposal must be submitted to Dr. Phillips and Ms. Boussem by the week of November 4. The proposal should consist of the topic area chosen and the specific theoretical and/or practical research proposed. The paper is expected to be approximately 10-12 pages double-spaced, typed, with proper citations using APA style. (A concise source to consult about grammar is Strunk & White. (William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White. (1979). The Elements of Style (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.) The due date for the term paper is one week after the final class (12.10.2015). The term paper will serve as a Final Exam Paper. Please submit your final papers through the course website in the assignment section.

**Peer Presentation: 5%**

During the final week of classes, you will be required to present an overview of your final paper to a small group of approximately 4 classmates with each person in the group presenting to the others. Your presentations should be approximately 20 minutes in length. The goal here will be for you to practice leading a critical thinking discussion. There are three rationales for this assignment: the first is to give you the opportunity to get feedback on your final topic; the second is to give you some experience in leading a discussion; the third is to offer you the chance to give constructive feedback on others’ work. The date for the peer group presentation will be announced in our class and a rubric will be provided on the course website. Group assignments will be distributed the week prior to the class session.

**Class schedule**
Sept. 01 - Introduction to the course: What is health psychology?
Readings for Class/prior to September 6:


Sept. 06 - Mindfulness: what is it and why is it important?

Sept. 08 - The Power of Possibility
Langer, E. J. (2014). Mindfulness (Chapters 6-9 at a minimum)

Sept. 13 - Medical Data


Sept. 15 - Medical errors

Sept. 20 - Medical decision-making


Sept. 22 - Stress: medical model vs. bio-social model

Sept. 27 - Stress (continued)


Sept 29 - Coping with Stress: a new model

Oct. 04 - Coping (continued)


Oct. 06 - Placebos


Oct. 11 - Priming health


Oct. 13 - Chronic illness/chronic pain


Oct. 18 - Chronic pain


Oct. 20 - Midterm
Good Luck!

Oct. 25 – Aging
Oct. 27 - Growth in late adulthood


Nov. 01 - The psychophysiology of Meditation

Nov. 03 - The Psychophysiology of yoga

(NOTE: Final Paper Proposals Due By Nov 4)

Nov. 08 - The psychopathology of everyday life, Medical language.

Nov. 10 - Non-verbal communication: doctor/patient interaction


**Nov 15 - Media, Culture, and health**


Nov. 17 - Subjective Well Being Hardiness, optimism, broaden and build theory.


Nov 22 - Chronic Health

Nov. 24 – Thanksgiving
    Happy Turkey day!

Nov. 29 – Peer Presentations (small groups)

Dec 1 - GLADO (to be explained)