Learning to Be Happy

Two Courses Explore the Idea of Happiness

VICTOR ROGERS
INSTITUTE COMMUNICATIONS

A couple of Georgia Tech courses are in pursuit of happiness. The newest course was inspired by a New York Times story in spring 2018 about Yale University’s most popular class — a class on happiness.

“After reading the article I thought, ‘This is something our school needs,'” said Irene Daboin, coordinator of Georgia Tech Counseling Center’s Peer Coaching Program and the instructor for PSYC 2803: Psychology and the Pursuit of Happiness. “Working in the Counseling Center, I get to see first-hand the things that students are struggling with and the stress on campus.”

Daboin had been looking for a way to promote a healthy campus for the first time, the Georgia Tech Police Department’s K9s have kennel space including showers in the new police facility at the corner of 10th Street and Hemphill Avenue. See more photos of the new space at news.gatech.edu.

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Photos by Rob Felt
Queer in AI Fosters Inclusion in Research Community

Daniel Spieler is an associate professor in the School of Psychology who regularly gets in two hours of cardio five days per week. He does his workout each morning and evening, and it powers his commute to and from campus, where he studies cognitive aging. Spieler finds his 13-mile bike commute and his research focus to be connected in a crucial way: “One aspect of research in cognitive aging is a better understanding that things like cardiovascular exercise are really important for maintaining cognition as people age.” In short, he says activities like biking can keep you alert as you get older.

Commuting by Bike: Getting to Work While Working Out

Through July 24
Health Initiatives hosts Mindful Moments on Wednesdays from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in the Juniper Room, Student Center. The events feature short guided mindfulness exercises, techniques, and stress management skills that can be incorporated into a daily routine. healthinitiatives.gatech.edu

July 31
Human Resources hosts a Be Well session on Your Leave to Welcome a Child from 11 a.m. to noon in Room 221, Scheller College of Business. hr.gatech.edu/bewell

Aug. 13
Human Resources hosts a Be Well session on Parks and Programs from noon to 1 p.m. in Room 223, Scheller College of Business. hr.gatech.edu/bewell

Aug. 29
What are GTARC and GTRC? Learn more about the two 501c3 organizations to understand Georgia Tech’s research administration. This session welcomes new hires as well as seasoned staff and will take place from 10 a.m. to noon in the Seminar Room, Research Administration Building. Register at: training.esp.gatech.edu

July 22–23
FASET New Student Orientation will take place in the Student Center, Fertl Center for the Arts, and surrounding areas. Other sessions will take place July 25–26, July 30–31, Aug. 11–12, and Aug. 13–14. More information is available at: transitionsprograms.gatech.edu

July 22–23
Final Instructional Class Days will take place for full summer session.

EVENTS

ARTS AND CULTURE

July 26
Flicks@Tech hosts a free screening of Marvel’s Captain Marvel at 7 p.m. at the Stamps Recreation Fields. For more information, visit: studentcenter.gatech.edu/activities

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The Experience of Biking in Atlanta
Over the years, Spieler’s bike commuter knowledge has improved alongside the bike infrastructure of the city. He cites the Edgewood Avenue bike lane, Lucky Street Cycle Track, and the Tech Square pedestrian scramble in Midtown as adding ease to his experience on the roads as a bike commuter. "Ninety-nine percent of drivers are courteous and careful, but they don’t always understand what it’s like to be a biker," he said. "My advice to bike commuters is that they stay safe by taking the lane," referring to the practice of cycling in a lane of traffic instead of hugging the curb, in order to remain visible and prevent passing in conditions that are unsafe, and to avoid a section of the road which often contains obstacles such as debris and storm grates.

One major difference between the bike and the car commute, in Spieler’s experience, is the amount of face-to-face communication you get while on the bike. "Because I go at consistent times, I see some of the same people out on their porches while I’m riding through neighborhoods. Sometimes I’ll pull up to a light on Edgewood and there will be six other bikers there. Especially if it’s rainy, we will talk to each other, and say ‘good job.’ There’s a self-reinforcing aspect to it that I really like. And that’s the type of social interaction you don’t get in a car.”

Within the past five years, Spieler has noticed an increase in the streets commuting, including more e-bikes. “The more bikes that are out on the road, the safer all of us are,” said Daniel.

— This story was originally shared as a Midtown Alliance Commuter Highlight at midtownatl.com.

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**AGING, from page 1**

functioning.

“The night-to-night variability in the older study participants had a major impact on their performance in tests aimed at evaluating episodic memory,” said Audrey Duarte, an associate professor in the School of Psychology and principal investigator in the Memory and Aging Lab. “The association between sleep and memory has been known, but this study’s novelty is showing that the connection is particularly evident for older adults and black participants, regardless of age.”

The study, supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, is believed to be the first of its kind to examine the relationship between sleep and memory with both age and racial differences.

Duarte and Emily Hokett, a Ph.D. student in the School of Psychology, recruited 81 volunteers from the Atlanta area. The volunteers were evaluated carefully to screen out those who had mild cognitive impairment or other potentially confounding factors. Younger adults were recruited in the age range of 18 to 37 years, while older adults were recruited in the range from 56 to 76 years. Ultimately, 50 adults were selected for the study.

“We wanted to look at lifestyle factors to see how sleep duration and quality over a period of seven nights. Though they did not measure brain waves, the devices allowed sleep measurements to be done in the participants’ own homes,” Duarte said.

Participants were asked to visit a Georgia Tech laboratory for a memory test that measured electroencephalography (EEG) brain wave activity as they attempted to recall word pairs that had been seen earlier. Not surpris-

ingly, better performance correlated with better sleep in most of the older adults. But Duarte and Hokett were surprised that the relationship between sleep and memory-related brain activity extended to both older and younger black participants — some of whom were college students. To understand the potential causes of the poor sleep, they administered a standardized questionnaire designed to measure stress levels in those participants.

“The main factor that correlated with poor sleep quality in black participants was race-related stress,” said Hokett. “When participants had higher values on that measure of stress, they would also have greater sleep fragmentation, on average. We found a very significant relationship here. The study found that black adults slept for 36 minutes less than other adults, which translated into a 12% decrease in memory-related brain activity. On an average night, black adults in the study spent 15 minutes more time awake after falling asleep than did other participants. The study also found significant variations in sleep between each age group. “Some of our 70-year-old subjects looked like our 20-year-old students,” Duarte said. “There are many factors that contribute to individual differences.”

**HUMANITIES, from page 1**

The direction of liberal arts education in the United States.

“It’s an approach to teaching humanities at the intersection of cultural studies and career education, which are two different fields,” Strakovsky said of the class.

“Their unique and at the cutting edge of what is happening in both fields,” said Stenport.

The Value of Humanities in the Workplace

Ryan Gemiere, a second-year physics major from Saint Louis Park, Minnesota, took the class in 2018. He is now a research assistant in the career design studio at the School of Modern Languages, working with Strakovsky and Stenport on the intersection of humanities and STEM.

“A strong understanding of many subjects that fall under the umbrella of the humanities, especially philosophy and management, is fundamental for a successful career based in physics,” he said.

The course includes lecture and project components.

- Students learn about changing world of work.
- Not sure role of liberal arts skills in professional life.
- Also learn how to hone their career goals and create long-term plans for their lives.

The students are then sent out to create case studies examining how humanities skills, such as well-developed communications abilities and a focus on human-centered problem solving, are crucial in helping solve intricate social and policy challenges.

Students have examined issues such as energy consumption and conservation, the impact of space policy on humanity, how to keep equity issues in the forefront of the sustainability debate, and water security.

Different Perspectives Are Crucial

This exploration also helps students learn about communicating with people from different perspectives. "Having the ability to think from the perspective of a different culture allows you to tap into new markets and discover new questions that you might not even realize are questions if you’re only looking at it from your own cultural perspective," Strakovsky said.

Career exploration as a form of cultural studies also helps students overcome a pervasive unease with the process that will get them their first job.

In career education, we talk about networking and the importance of tailoring resumes and writing cover letters a certain way," Strakovsky said. "There’s a place for that, but students will often talk about how they hate it because it feels artificial and manipulative."

“But when you bring the cultural studies framework to it, and you explain that this is a community and you are learning about it, that you’re on a study abroad in this community, it changes their perspective. If you were living in another country and trying to learn the language and the culture, of course you could connect with as many people as possible to ask questions and do justice to understanding that community,” Strakovsky said.

For Gemiere, who wants to work in the space sector after he graduates in 2021, the class proved invaluable.

“To do something other than university research with a physics degree, I believe an understanding of many humanities topics is essential," he said. "I would even say that the humanities enriches the research process in which many physicists take part.”

A Leader in Empowering Liberal Arts Graduates

The School of Modern Languages, a unit of the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, is quickly enlarging its reputation as a national leader in empowering liberal arts graduates to pursue successful careers in many sectors.

The School’s new Master of Science in Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies and the Master of Science in Global Media and Cultures, which is offered in conjunc-

The Georgia Tech community is invited to a celebration honoring Jacqueline J. Royer, dean of the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, for nine years of transformative leadership as the college’s third dean. The event will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Alumni House.

**EVENTS**

**July 24**

The last day of classes for late short summer session.

**July 24-25**

Reading period will take place for full summer session.

**July 25 – Aug. 1**

Final exams for full and late short summer sessions.

**July 30**

An additional reading period will take place for full summer session.

**Aug. 2**

End of term for all summer sessions.

**Aug. 5–9**

Health initiatives hosts Mindful Moments on Wednesdays from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in the Juniper Room, Student Center. The events feature short guided mindfulness exercises, techniques, and stress management skills that can be incorporated into a daily routine.

**Aug. 10–23**

Phase II registration for fall semester.

**Aug. 12**

Students begin to move in for fall semester.

**Aug. 14–15**

Human Resources hosts Gradtaining from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the third floor of Clough Commons.

**Aug. 19**

New Student Convocation will take place at 5 p.m. at McCamish Pavilion.

**Aug. 23**

Graduate Student Convocation will take place at 4:30 in the First Center for the Arts, followed by the Graduate Student Picnic at 5:30 p.m. on Tech Green.

**Aug. 27**

The Georgia Tech community is invited to a celebration honoring Jacqueline J. Royer, dean of the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, for nine years of transformative leadership as the college’s third dean. The event will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Alumni House.

**Sept. 2**

Campus will be closed in observance of Labor Day.

**Sept. 4**

The Diversity Symposium will take place from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Global Learning Center.

**For a more comprehensive listing of events, or to add your own, visit calendar.gatech.edu.**

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culture through a wider lens. So, she talked to John Stein, vice president of Student Life and the Brand-Frist Center, who had read the same article and was also thinking about a happiness course at Tech. He suggested that Daboin collaborate with the School of Psychology to figure out how to make it work.

“It took us a little while,” Daboin said, referring to a couple of failed attempts to offer the class. “We were hoping for a certain number of students to enroll and didn’t get enough. This year we decided to focus less on the number of students, and instead just get the class going.”

The class, offered for the first time this summer, has 10 students.

“It’s a very intimate class, which is great,” said Daboin, who has a Ph.D. in clinical and community psychology from Georgia State University and is a licensed psychologist. “It lends itself to discussion and a more in-depth way of talking about issues and applying it on a personal level.

The class is sort of our pilot to see if this is something the students like and if we can do it on a larger scale in fall and spring.”

The class is designed to teach students scientifically-validated strategies for living a healthier, happier, and more satisfying life at Georgia Tech and beyond. Students explore psychological concepts related to mental health and well-being and learn to apply the concepts to better manage their own stress and improve their habits, which will lead to more fulfilled lives.

The class begins and ends by measuring the students’ happiness. It also measures the students’ psychological wealth, including their satisfaction with life and their emotional wellbeing. Students also must envision their best possible self, identify their personal strengths and values, do actual acts of kindness, and keep a gratitude journal.

Daboin wants students who have taken the class to become wellness ambassadors by sharing strategies they have learned, and promoting a healthier campus culture.

“It’s exciting to see students immediately connecting the lessons learned in class to their personal lives,” said Daboin, who thought students would have to sell the class every step of the way. “But it’s hitting home,” she said. “If these students can walk out of this class leading healthier lives and their psychological well-being improves, then hopefully it will be a little contagious.”

More Happiness
Chris Martin, a postdoctoral fellow in the Wallace H. Coulter Department of Biomedical Engineering, taught a happiness course at Emory University and brought it with him to Tech in 2018.

He teaches BME 2803 Special Topics: Happiness. The class was created by Emory sociology professor Corey Keyes, and Martin taught it for three sessions while earning a Ph.D. in sociology at Emory. Martin taught the course at Tech last fall and spring, and his third session will be this fall.

The class covers three big themes: maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain, the meaning of life; and coping with suffering.

The course explores various theories of happiness, such as how money does or does not help one’s level of happiness.

“In the modern world, we have too many choices and that tends to inhibit happiness,” he said. “Making the choice is burdensome. You think about all of the things you didn’t choose. And, you feel like you lost out on all of the things you didn’t choose because of what you chose.”

Martin said there is an underlying idea that one’s circumstances are the result of their choices. And part of a person’s level of happiness is tied to expectations.

“Happiness can sometimes be elusive because we think a possession or purchase will make us happy for months, but it only makes us happy for a few days,” he said. “This is called the hedonic treadmill. You experience some pleasure and some pain, but you end up pretty much in the same place.”

The two things that seem to help sustain happiness are variety and appreciation. If there is variety in what you purchase, that will help. Also, take time to consciously appreciate what you bought.

“Otherwise, once you purchase something nice your aspiration level goes up,” Martin said. “So, you have to keep purchasing things that are significantly more expensive than the last thing you purchased, which is impossible.” This fall, there will be two sections of Martin’s happiness course: a regular section and one for the Honors Program. The regular class is housed in BME but is open to all undergraduates.

Most students who take the class are engineering majors who have an interest in the humanities. About 25 students usually enroll.

The curriculum covers a discussion of happiness, the hedonic treadmill and if it is realistic (for the students) to increase happiness, and students’ idea of a good relationship. The final paper is on what they have learned from the class and also what they have learned about life overall. The class also talks about character strengths, careers, and relation ships.

“The students enjoy having discussions,” Martin said. The assignments are reflections, so I get to know each student’s unique personality. I get to hear stories about their lives, and it’s quite an honor.”

HAPPINESS, from page 1

Irene Daboin teaches her class called Psychology and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Much of season three of Stranger Things was filmed at Gwinnett Place Mall, located in Duluth, Georgia.

Photo courtesy of Tomorrow’s News Today Atlanta

Photo by Makez Carter