# UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON -- NEW COURSE PROPOSAL

Electronically submit this completed form with attachments in one file to the Chair of the College Curriculum Committee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLEGE (check one):</th>
<th>Arts and Sciences</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Education</th>
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Proposal Submitted By: Holly Schiffrin  
Date Prepared: 11/9/15

**Course Title:** Positive Psychology

**Department/discipline and course number:** Psychology 351  
*This course number must be approved by the Office of the Registrar before the proposal is submitted.*

**Number of credits proposed:** 3  
**Prerequisites:** Psychology 100 – General Psychology  
**Will this be a new, repeatable "special topics" course?** (Do you want students to be able to take this new course more than once if the topic changes?)  
**NO**  
**YES**

**Date of first offering of this new course:** FALL SEMESTER, year  
**FALL 2016-2017**

**Proposed frequency of offering of the course:** 1 per year

**List the faculty who will likely teach the course:** Schiffrin

**Are ANY new resources required?**  
**NO**  
**YES**  
*Document in attached impact statement*

This new course will be (check all that apply):

- Required in the major
- General Elective  
- Elective in the major  
- General Education**  
  
**AFTER the new course is approved, a separate proposal must be sent to the General Education Committee.**

**Catalog Description:**

Prerequisite: PSYC 100. Introduction to the field of positive psychology theory and research. Topics will include positive emotions, character strengths, and research-based techniques to enhance well-being that allow individuals and communities to thrive.

**COURSE HISTORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number and Title of Previous Course</th>
<th>Semester Offered</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychology 470: Seminar in Positive Psychology</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology 470: Seminar in Positive Psychology</td>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHECK HERE** if the proposed course is to be equated with the earlier topics or experimental offerings. This means that students who took the earlier “topics” course will only be able to take the new course if they made a C- grade or lower in the earlier course.

**NOTE:** If the proposed course has not been previously offered as a topics or experimental course, explain in the attached rationale statement why the course should be adopted even though it has not been tried out.

**REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS:**

1. **Rationale Statement** (Why is this course needed? What purposes will it serve?)
2. **Impact Statement** (Provide details about the Library, space, budget, and technology impacts created by adding this new course. Include supporting statements from the Library, IT Department, etc. as needed.)
3. **Sample Syllabus**

**Department Chair Approval:** Dave Kolar  
**Date:** 11/19/15

**CCC Chair Approval:**  
**Date:** 12/8/15

**UCC Chair Approval:** Patricia Reynolds  
**Date:** January 21, 2016
I. Rationale

The primary purpose of this proposal is to introduce a new elective into the psychology major to enhance the course offerings within the department. Positive Psychology reflects a relatively new area of study within the discipline. The term was introduced by Martin Seligman when he was the president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998. He suggested that in the early 1900s, psychology had three missions that included (1) making the lives of all people fulfilling; (2) identifying and enhancing human excellence; and (3) treating pathology. In more recent history, psychology has primarily focused on treating pathology by decreasing maladaptive emotions and behaviors, while ignoring optimal functioning (e.g., happiness and life satisfaction). While it is critically important to address the mental health issues people are experiencing, it is also important to examine how to help people without mental health issues live their life to the fullest. This focus in psychology is analogous to the wellness movement in physical health. Doctors treat people who present with heart disease by using the gold-standard in evidenced-based medicine. However, they also advise healthy people on making behavioral changes (e.g., diet and exercise) that can prevent them from developing heart disease and help them live long and prosperous lives. Similarly, the goal of positive psychology is to identify and enhance the human strengths and virtues that make life worth living and allow individuals and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Given that this is a relatively new area within the field of positive psychology, I began offering this as a special topics course (taught twice) in 2008. The current proposal is to provide the course in a format that will make it available as an elective to all psychology majors, so that more students have the opportunity to be exposed to this relatively new specialty area within psychology. I have made some modifications to translate the syllabus from a small, seminar-style special topics course, which was largely discussion-based, to a larger, 300-level elective. Overall, the purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to positive psychology by exploring the key concepts, research behind the concepts, and techniques that enhance well-being.

In addition, this class will also be listed as an elective in the Contemplative Studies Minor, which is an interdisciplinary minor incorporating four broad areas: 1) study of contemplation across traditions and history, 2) study of the role of contemplation within various human endeavors, including philosophy, religion, art, performance, and science, 3) acquaintance with modern scientific studies in psychology and neuroscience of the effects of contemplation on the brain and well-being, and 4) practical experience and training in techniques of meditation and contemplative practice. Research in the field of positive psychology specifically addresses key areas of contemplative practices including meditation; self-awareness and self-control; as well as promotion of well-being (primarily area #3 in the minor).

II. Impact Statement

Positive Psychology will serve as an elective in the Psychology major (as it did when it was offered as a special topics course). This course will also serve as an elective in the Contemplative Studies minor that is being proposed currently. Given that this course has been taught before, I do not anticipate any additional impact on resources such as the library, space, budget, or technology. The requirements for the course include classroom space and the technology typically provided in the classroom (e.g., computer and overhead projector). The library already has access to the types of research articles that will be required through the PsycInfo database. The primary impact of offering this course on a more regular basis will be on scheduling psychology classes to ensure that electives are offered regularly, but do not interfere with providing sections of classes required for the major.

III. Sample Syllabus

See attached
In the early 1900s, psychology had three missions: make the lives of all people fulfilling; identify and enhance human excellence; and treat pathology. More recently, psychology has primarily focused on decreasing maladaptive emotions and behaviors, while ignoring optimal functioning (e.g., happiness and life satisfaction). Positive psychology is the study of how human beings prosper in the face of adversity. Its goal is to identify and enhance the human strengths and virtues that make life worth living and allow individuals and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This course will provide an introduction to positive psychology. It is designed to explore the concepts, research behind the concepts, and techniques that enhance well-being. The format of the course will include lecture, discussion, interactive assignments, and application of material outside of class. **Prerequisite:** Psychology 100.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to:

1. Understand the purpose and scope of positive psychology by reading primary research articles on the key constructs.  
2. Think critically about the key constructs of positive psychology through individual critique of readings, reflective writing, and class discussions.  
3. Apply research on positive psychology to their own lives through personal reflection in order to increase well-being and overall quality of life.  
4. Explain key concepts of positive psychology and their application to others through writing, group discussion, and presentations.  

**REQUIRED READING**


Positive Psychology Research Articles (available on Canvas)

**ASSIGNMENTS**

*Exams (60%).* There will be four equally weighted exams during the semester that each cover approximately one-fourth of the course material. The format of the exams will include multiple-choice and short answer questions.

*Journal (15%).* Periodically, you will be asked to write a 1-2 page paper applying the material covered in class to your life by either responding to a set of thought questions or by describing your experience doing an exercise given in or out of class. In order to meet the class objective of applying the research on positive psychology to your own life, there are 8 journal topics posted on Canvas that you will write a
reflection paper about during the semester that will also serve as the basis of class discussion. You need to read the journal assignments on Canvas in advance because some assignments require week long activities to write the entry. Each entry will be graded on a scale from 0 (not turned in) to 10 (addresses all parts of the assignment thoughtfully and thoroughly).

**Article Presentation (15%).** Students will work in small groups to read a research article related to one of the chapters in the text and present the information in that article to the class. Students should summarize the key points of the article and facilitate a discussion of the article by addressing how the article relates to material from other readings and answering questions on the article from peers. Students should start the class by using an “attention grabber” related to the topic (e.g., a song, video clip, brief activity, etc). The article presentations should take approximately 20 minutes with the majority of the class spent facilitating discussion of the article. You should plan to meet with me briefly at least 48 hours before your presentation to discuss how you plan to conduct the class as well as provide me with a structured outline/hand out of the session. A grading rubric for this assignment is on Canvas.

**POLICIES AND STANDARDS**

**Assignments:** Most students complete assignments satisfactorily and on-time. Out of respect for the majority of students who meet deadlines, one letter grade is deducted per day for any work turned in late. I **must be notified in advance** if a student will be unable to meet one of the specified due dates. Only severe illness and legitimate emergencies are considered acceptable reasons for missing a due date.

**Midterm Grade:** Students whose average in the class is 70% or higher based on the material completed at the time mid-semester grades are due will receive a “satisfactory.” All other students will receive an “unsatisfactory.”

**Honor Code:** The University of Mary Washington’s Student Honor Code governs all work in this course. All students are expected to follow and affirm the Honor Code guidelines by writing and signing the Honor Code pledge on all assignments, quizzes, and exams. If you have any questions about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment in this course, please ask me – not another student – for clarification. Uncertainty about application of the Honor Code does not excuse the violation.

**Classroom Accommodations for Students with Disabilities.** If you are a student with a disability who requires an academic accommodation, please register with the Office of Disability Resources in 401 Lee Hall and communicate your requests for accommodation as soon as possible.

You are expected to take responsibility for your own learning in this course. This includes:
- attending class,
- actively reading the material assigned (e.g., connecting the material to previous knowledge and applying it to new situations),
- fully participating in class discussions and activities,
- seeking additional information on topics of interest above and beyond what is required, and
- asking for additional assistance if needed.

You are also expected to have an open-mind about your ability to succeed in this course as well as to show respect for the professor and other students in the class (e.g., refrain from participating in non-class activities such as texting). Anyone who exhibits disruptive behaviors that detract from my ability to teach or other students’ ability to learn will be asked to leave the classroom.
EVALUATION AND GRADING

Final Grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Presentation</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading Scale:

A = 94-100  
A- = 90-93  
B+ = 87-89  
B = 83-86  
B- = 80-82  
C+ = 77-79  
C = 73-76  
C- = 70-72  
D+ = 67-69  
D = 60-66  
F = 59 or below
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/24</td>
<td>What is positive psychology?</td>
<td>Ch 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/26</td>
<td>Positive Emotions &amp; Longevity</td>
<td>Danner et al. (2001) – Demo Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/31*</td>
<td>The Meaning and Measure of Happiness</td>
<td>Ch 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/2</td>
<td>Positive Emotions &amp; Well-being</td>
<td>Ch 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/7</td>
<td>Upward Spiral</td>
<td>#1 Harker &amp; Keltner (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9*</td>
<td>Journal Reflection Discussion</td>
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<td>Exam #1</td>
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<td>9/16</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Ch 4</td>
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<td>9/23*</td>
<td>Happiness and Facts of Life</td>
<td>Ch 5</td>
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<td>9/28</td>
<td>Money, Happiness, &amp; Culture</td>
<td>Ch 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/30</td>
<td>Materialism</td>
<td>#3 Kasser &amp; Ryan (1993)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/7</td>
<td>Exam #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>Fall Break</td>
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<td>10/14</td>
<td>Personal Goals</td>
<td>Ch 7</td>
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<td>10/19</td>
<td>Success in College</td>
<td>#4 Sheldon &amp; Houser-Marko (2001)</td>
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<td>10/21*</td>
<td>Self-Regulation</td>
<td>Ch 8</td>
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<td>10/26</td>
<td>Benefits of Planning</td>
<td>#5 Brandstatter, Lengfelder, &amp; Gollwitzer, 2001</td>
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<td>10/28</td>
<td>Positive Traits</td>
<td>Ch 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>Optimism &amp; Pessimism</td>
<td>#6 Norem &amp; Chang (2002)</td>
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<td>11/4*</td>
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<td>Exam #3</td>
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<td>11/11</td>
<td>Virtue &amp; Strengths of Character</td>
<td>Ch 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/16</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>#7 Emmons &amp; McCullough (2003)</td>
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<td>11/18*</td>
<td>Close Relationships &amp; Well-being</td>
<td>Ch 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/23</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>#8 Lucas et al. (2003)</td>
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<td>11/25</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>11/30</td>
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<td>Ch 12</td>
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<td>12/2*</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/7</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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* Journal entries are due on days that are asterisked.

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1 This outline is tentative and subject to change.

New Course Proposal Cover Sheet (October 2015)
Sample Journal Activities (from previous course offerings)

**Pleasure versus Philanthropy** (Seligman)

The primary difference between pleasurable and philanthropic activities centers on who is affected by the activity. Pleasurable activities benefit the self while philanthropic ones benefit others. Before the next class, engage in one pleasurable activity (e.g., hanging out with friends, watching a movie, or eating your favorite dessert) and one philanthropic activity (e.g., letting someone get in front of you in line, paying for someone else’s breakfast, volunteering with kids). Then, write about how you felt after each activity and relate to the readings so far. Be prepared to discuss your experience in class.

**Gratitude Letter** (modified from Seligman)

Think about the people in your life, large and small, who you are grateful for. This might include specific relationships, sacrifices, or contributions that others have made for you. Take this time to select an important person from your past who has made a major positive difference in your life and to whom you have never fully thanked. Write a letter for this person in your life. Your letter should be set apart from the possibility of future gain. Some people have also found it beneficial to present the letter to the person, read it aloud to them, and provide them a copy as a gift. However you are not required to do so. For your journal entry, submit the letter. Then describe any personal insights you had in completing this exercise, how it affected your well being and that of the other person if you gave the letter to him/her, and how it relates to the readings so far.

**Choice** (modified from Peterson)

In his book, *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz suggested that people should learn to discern when it’s important to them to “maximize” about a decision and then to “satisfice” the remainder of the time. Review some of the recent decisions you have made, from simple to complex. How much time, research, and worry went into each decision and how satisfied are you with the results? With your next few decisions, try some of Schwartz’ suggestions including: (1) identify minor decisions that take up more time and worry than necessary; (2) impose arbitrary restrictions on how long you will spend making these decisions (e.g., only go to two stores); (3) make the decision irreversible (e.g., throw away receipt) to minimize regrets and what-ifs; (4) be grateful for the outcome you have decided (e.g., list the pros only of the purchase you made). Try these steps out on your *next several decisions*. Compare the time and worry that went into these decision as well as your satisfaction with the results with previous decisions in similar areas. Relate your experiences and insight to the readings so far.

**Self-determination Theory** (modified from Reis)

The purpose of this journal entry is to gain insight to what contributes to your own well-being, apply self-determination theory (SDT), and compare methods of assessing well-being (e.g., daily diary versus global measures). You should complete two global measures of well-being including the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky). Then, for *seven days*, rate your daily SWB, describe the 3 activities you spent the most time on each day and rate them in terms of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. All measures are available on Blackboard. In your journal entry, briefly describe SDT and how it relates to well-being according to the Reis et al. (2000) article. Then, describe what makes a good day for you personally and relate to SDT. Finally, discuss the implications for measuring well-being using global measures versus the daily diary method (e.g., Is one method better than the other? What are the limitations of each?). Attach the data from your global measures and daily diary entries to your journal entry.

**Count your Blessings** (modified from McCullough)

*Each night for a week*, write down three good things that happened that day before you go to sleep. Try to write some different things rather than all the same things for each day. Then think about why you think each of those things happened. What kinds of reasons did you give for why these events happened (give specific examples)? Are there any particular situations in which good events tend to occur more frequently for you? Relate what you have observed to the readings.

**Savoring** (Modified from Seligman & Peterson)

New Course Proposal Cover Sheet (October 2015)
This exercise is about savoring – the ability to notice a pleasant experience and to make it last as long as possible. Noticing and savoring life’s small (and big) pleasures is a powerful tool for increasing your overall happiness. **Over the next week, find one thing each day** that you can spend 2-3 minutes savoring. Each day, write down what you did, how you did it differently, and how it felt compared to when you rush through it. At the end of the week, discuss how the savoring exercise affected your general sense of well-being this week and relate to the readings.

For reference, here are the five ways to promote savoring:

I. **Sharing With Others**: You can seek out others to share the experience and tell others how much you value the moment. This is probably the single best way to savor pleasure.

II. **Memory-Building**: Take mental photographs or even a physical souvenir of the event and reminisce about it later with others.

III. **Self-Congratulation**: Do not be afraid of pride. Tell yourself how impressed others are and remember how long you’ve waited for this to happen.

IV. **Sharpening Perceptions**: Focus on certain elements and block out others.

V. **Absorption**: Let yourself get totally immersed and try not to think, just sense.

**Use your Strengths** (modified from Seligman)

Take the VIA strengths questionnaire (see external link on Blackboard) and read the feedback it gives you about your top five strengths. Then, e-mail your top five strengths to me by Sunday night at 10pm. Did the assessment sound like you or did any strengths surprise you? **Each day over the next week, find a way that you can make use of one of your strengths in your daily life.** Try to use a strength in a novel way each day. Record what you did, how you made use of your strength, and how it felt different from your usual routine. Discuss in light of the readings.

**Personal Resilience** (modified from Compton)

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. Think about a time in your life that you were resilient (Note: You do not have to describe the adversity.). Please write about how you managed to deal effectively with the situation and “bounce back”. Thinking about the questions below, describe what you did and how it relates to the readings.

1. What personal resources did I draw upon throughout the experience?
2. Was it more helpful to change my thinking, my behavior, or both?
3. What did I do to change my emotions toward more hopefulness and/or courage?
4. What event(s) finally turned things around for me & I began to move forward?
5. Did I find it helpful to draw on social and interpersonal resources?
6. Was it helpful for me to help someone else at those times?
7. What did I learn about myself during the experience?
8. What kinds of events have been difficult and stressful for me?

**Cultivate Optimism** (modified from Seligman)

Much of Seligman’s research on depression suggests that explanatory style is related to depression. People who have pessimistic explanations for adverse events attribute them to internal, stable, and global traits (e.g., I failed the test because I am stupid.) and have higher rates of depression than those who attribute failure to external, temporary, and specific causes (e.g., I failed the test because I was sick and didn’t do my best.). Seligman maintains that it is possible and beneficial to cultivate a more optimistic explanatory style. He has developed the ABCDE model to first identify an adverse event (e.g., I lost the expensive earrings my friend loaned me.) as well as the automatic negative beliefs (e.g., I’m so irresponsible. She’s going to hate me.) and behavioral consequences of those beliefs (e.g., I feel terrible, so I’m going to avoid her.). Then, he asks people to dispute those beliefs (e.g., While she’ll probably be upset, she won’t hate me. I am not completely irresponsible; I’ve always returned things I’ve borrowed from her in the past.) and notice the energizing effects of this disputation (e.g., I was able to relax enough to call her to explain what had happened.). **Over the next week,** make a point to use the ABCDE model when you encounter an adverse event. Include one example of
how you used the five-step process in your journal entry as well as a description of how using this model affected your well-being in general. Relate this experience to the readings.

**Active Constructive (modified from Seligman)**

*In the next week, find as many opportunities as possible* to respond active-constructively to good news from your friends and family. Recall that an active-constructive response includes:
- Being genuinely excited
- Outwardly displaying your excitement
- Capitalizing on the good event by telling other people, celebrating, talking about the victory, etc.

Describe three times that you responded active-constructively. Who were you interacting with and what was their news? What did you do? How did they react to it? How did this affect your well-being this week? Relate this experience to the readings.

**Writing Your Legacy (Modified from Seligman)**

Imagine that one day, long after you have passed away, one of your great grandchildren asks about you and your life. How would you want to be remembered and described? Write a summary of your ideal life (one page) as you would like to have it related to your great grandchild. Be sure to include a description of your values and your personal characteristics. Put this summary aside for a few days and then come back to it. Notice not only what you included in your summary but also what you omitted. Then, answer the following questions.

1. Are there activities that you spend a lot of time on that you did not include? If so, why?
2. What changes might you make in your life so that this life summary might one day be an accurate reflection of your life and personal priorities?
3. How does this activity relate to the readings?

**Meaning, Pleasure, & Strengths (modified from Ben-Shahar)**

Finding the right work that corresponds to both your passions and your strengths can be difficult. Spend some time thinking and answering the following three questions:

1. What gives my life meaning? In other words, what provides me with a sense of purpose?
2. What gives me pleasure? What do I enjoy doing?
3. What are my strengths? What am I good at?

Think about the overlap in your answers to these three questions. What potential careers do you see for yourself where you can combine the answers to all three of these questions? It may be helpful to think of work experiences or projects you have participated and had extremely positive experiences. Relate your answers to the readings.

**Flow (Modified from Csikszentmihalyi)**

Flow is the state of optimal experiences in which one engages in activities simply for the sake of the activity itself. People whose activities are in a state of flow are using high levels of skill and challenge together to create and experience that is rich and personally beneficial. For this journal, please think of something that you do to produce flow (e.g., playing an intense sports activity, letting yourself go while dancing, being totally absorbed in playing music, or playing a fast action video game). *Over the next week,* please try to significantly increase your participation flow experiences. In what type of situation/activity have you experienced flow? Write down how you felt during that experience. Was your sense of well-being affected? If so, how? Why do you think people spend more time “vegging out” rather than participating in activities that challenge their skills and produce flow? Relate your experience to the readings.