

MEDIA-TECHNOLOGY-HEALTH & HAPPINESS

Junior Seminar

JS300: Media-Technology-Health & Happiness

Spring 2021

Classroom—JEM 142

[Web LINK](#)—

Dr. Jon Hyde

Office: JEM-164

email: jhyde2@smcvt.edu

Phone: (802) 654-2258

THE COURSE

In this seminar, we will be exploring **the connections (and disconnections) between media, technology, health and happiness**. So many shifts and changes been happening in each of these areas over the past decade. And, certainly, the coronavirus global pandemic has magnified the impact of many of those changes in short period of time. So what does it take to be healthy and happy amidst the stressors of modern society?

Throughout the course, we will be using interdisciplinary and social science approaches to analyze and conduct research about media health and happiness. We will examine different cross-cultural definitions and assumptions (including our own) of good health, happiness, and well-being. We will investigate how the biases and expectations of modern media systems and technologies influence us all (for good, bad, and otherwise). We will assess the ways in which income, race, education, geography, age, family, gender, politics and other cultural factors impact both our individual and societal notions of what constitutes being healthy and/or happy in the 21st century.

Important Questions. *So what are the methods and instruments of analysis which are typically used for gathering **data** and **systematically** assessing health and happiness? Who conducts such research? How has COVID-19 reshaped these assessments? How are major companies such as **Apple, Amazon, Google, Disney** and others deeply involved in skewing our definitions and the data? How are new technologies such as **FitBit, Strava, and Apple's iHealth apps** redefining assessment, data collection, information control and the marketing of health and happiness? What could or should be the role of our **educational institutions** in promoting well-being? Amidst all of these rapid changes, **how can we develop strong and appropriate methods** to manage our own individual health and happiness?* These are but a few of the central questions we will examine in this course. Along the way, each student will develop their own research projects and cultivate the beginnings of their own educational and informational public health materials.

General Road Map. For the first half of the course, we will focus on issues of **HEALTH—physical and mental**. In the second, we will zero in on issues of **HAPPINESS and well-being**. Health, happiness and well-being are highly interconnected and as we'll see, so too are the ways in which modern MEDIA and TECHNOLOGIES influence our comprehension and pursuit of them. Overall, there are **several** main threads we will tackle throughout the course:

- 1) We will examine **definitions** of and **assumptions** about health and happiness across cultures, even as we interrogate our own definitions.
- 2) We will learn about the specific factors and data used to assess health, happiness, and media or technology use across diverse populations.
- 3) We will scrutinize the **qualitative** and **quantitative research** on the impact of media and technology use (e.g., social media use, smartphone addiction, screen time, exposure to advertising messages) on mental and physical health and well-being.
- 4) We will critically analyze the stereotypes, marketing patterns, news coverage and other media representations of health, happiness, and wellbeing.
- 5) We will examine a variety of **organizations** which are developing strategies to foster better health and greater personal or community control of happiness and well-being.
- 6) We will engage in **research projects** to explore the ways in which income, race, education, media, geography, age, family, gender, politics and other cultural factors impact notions of what constitutes being healthy and/or happy in the 21st century;

EVALUATION & PROJECTS

1. Attendance, In-Class Participation, Collaboration, Screening Guides, & Discussions ► 20%

This requirement refers to: (1) Attendance in person and online; (2) Zoom/COVID etiquette; (3) Participation refers to how much you contribute verbally to discussions and how well you constructively contribute to the overall well-being of the class; and (4) how well prepared you are for class (i.e., readings, in class projects, screening guides, collaborations, etc.)

2. Writing, Research, and Presentation ► 50%

There will be two research projects, one presentation, and a number of smaller writing assignments for the course.

IMPORTANT NOTE: (1) Late projects will be penalized 10% for every day they are late. (2) **Failure to complete any of the projects in this course results in a minimum 2-full grade drop and often translates into an F for the course.**

3. Exams ► 30%

There will be two exams for the course: one mid-term and one final. These exams will be comprehensive and cover all readings, screenings, discussions and presentations.

REQUIRED

This course is **media rich**. We'll take advantage of a range of interesting and important resources in a variety of media forms. Each week, you'll be responsible for a series of readings, screenings, or podcasts. These will come from a wide range of sources and media outlets including primary research materials of health and happiness studies, data sets from policy analysts, as well as materials meant for the general public. You'll also screening documentary films or streaming TV programs on Netflix, Amazon, YouTube, and Vice, among others.

- **Required READINGS**— For this course, **we will be doing A LOT of readings**—short, long and everything in-between— Science Times, The BBC, The New York Times, The Atlantic, The New Yorker, National Geographic and more. On many occasions, I will be posting/handing out individual readings each week. You'll need to **keep them all in a folder** and you'll need to bring the required reading to the class for which it is due. The one book purchase that you'll need to make is the following (available at the SMC book store and elsewhere): **The Geography of Bliss**, by Eric Weiner.
- **SCREENINGS (in-and-outside of class)** — Additionally, for this course, we will be doing A LOT of screenings. You will be required to screen documentaries, TV shows, films, video clips, performances, and other multimedia productions. These screenings are **MANDATORY**. You will need to have access to Netflix, Amazon, YouTube, and other OTTs (over the top subscriptions) throughout the semester.

IMPORTANT NOTES & WORDS TO THE WISE

Global Pandemic Adaptability and Flexibility—Obviously, this course is taking place during unprecedented times. Coronavirus has shaped and will continue to reshape how this course (and all others) take place. Given the on-going and constantly shifting health protocols associated with COVID-19, the course and the syllabus may need to change during the semester. We're all going to need to be adaptable and flexible in how we approach school, education and indeed life during these times.

Class Contributions to Health and Happiness—One of the fundamental elements of health and happiness research is that it is not merely a “me” issue but a “we” issue. There is very much a collaborative and social aspect to most aspects of our well-being. It’s important in this course to find ways to contribute to the collective well-being of the class.

DIVERSITY and INCLUSION: Our classroom should be an inclusive learning environment for all students, and it is important that we work together to create and maintain an inclusive community for all forms of diversity: race, gender, class, culture, nationality, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, ethnicity, etc. Acts of hate or bigotry will not be tolerated.

ETHICAL COMMUNICATION/INTERACTIONS: It is of absolute importance that you treat all of the people with whom you work with the **utmost respect and integrity**. This goes for your face-to-face interactions as well as ALL print, telephone, text, tweets, or other forms of communication.

PHONES, TEXTING, & LAPTOPS/IPADS — Be PRESENT in class, both mentally and physically. Help others to do the same. Make sure that when we start class, your devices are OFF. Period. **Texting/calling/computing during class counts as an absence.**

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Assignments</u>
1	▶ Course Overview & Introduction: What makes us healthy and happy? Education and Digital Well-Being	Definitions-Self Assessments: Happiness Health Media Use
2	▶ Fundamentals of Good Health: What’s in a Breath? More than Just O²: Breath, Breathing, and Immunology	Readings: Screenings: (See course web site)
3	▶ Selling Sickness – Turning Healthy People into Patients ▶ Media representations of health and well-being	
4	▶ FOOD, Health and Well-being: Low Fat Diets and The Obesity Epidemic	
5	▶ Bio-HACKING our Bodies and the Efforts to Engineer the Future of Human “Health”	
6	🚩 MID-TERM EXAM!	
7	▶ Findings from Global Happiness Studies: Conceptions, Constructions and Measurements of Well-Being – Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches	
8	▶ Cross-cultural Comparisons: The Geography of Bliss and the Happiest Countries in the World: Finland, Bhutan, Denmark, Switzerland...	
9	▶ The Fundamental Importance of Sadness and Melancholy ▶ Empathy vs. Narcissism	
10	▶ Maslow 2.0: Transcendence and Self-Actualization in a Digital World - Developing Your Emotional Intelligence	

11	▶ Nature Rx: Re-establishing our biological connections to the Outdoors:	
12	▶ Happiness and Education – Can you learn it? Can you teach it? Should it be taught? How and by whom?	
13	▶ There’s a Free App for that: Technologizing of Happiness and the Algorithmic Engineering of Well-Being	
14	▶ Presentations	
15	▶ Presentations	
16	<u>Final Exam</u>	