

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Subject Description Form

Please read the notes at the end of the table carefully before completing the form.

Subject Code	APSS1A39											
Subject Title	Philosophy of Meaning and Happiness											
Credit Value	3											
Level	1											
GUR Requirements Intended to Fulfill	This subject intends to fulfil the following requirement(s) : ☐ Healthy Lifestyle ☐ AI and Data Analytics (AIDA) ☐ Innovation and Entrepreneurship (IE) ☐ Languages and Communication Requirement (LCR) ☐ Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) ☐ Service-Learning ☒ Cluster-Area Requirement (CAR) ☒ Human Nature, Relations and Development [CAR A] ☐ Science, Technology and Environment [CAR D] ☐ Chinese History and Culture [CAR M] ☐ Cultures, Organizations, Societies and Globalization [CAR N] ☐ China-Study Requirement ☐ Yes or ☒ No ☒ Writing and Reading Requirements ☒ English or ☐ Chinese											
Pre-requisite/ Co-requisite/ Exclusion	Nil											
Assessment Methods	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">100% Continuous Assessment</th><th style="width: 25%;">Individual Assessment</th><th style="width: 25%;">Group Assessment</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1. Term Paper [EW Assessment: 40% to be assessed by subject teacher and 10% assessed by ELC]</td><td style="text-align: center;">50%</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>2. Quizzes [ER Assessment]</td><td style="text-align: center;">40% [2 x 20 %]</td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table>			100% Continuous Assessment	Individual Assessment	Group Assessment	1. Term Paper [EW Assessment: 40% to be assessed by subject teacher and 10% assessed by ELC]	50%		2. Quizzes [ER Assessment]	40% [2 x 20 %]	
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	<table><tr><td>3. Class Participation (attendance & involvement in class discussion)</td><td>10%</td><td></td></tr></table> • The grade is calculated according to the percentage assigned; • The completion and submission of all component assignments are required for passing the subject; • Student must pass all component(s) if he/she is to pass the subject; and • Student must obtain a D grade or above on the Writing Requirement assignment to pass the subject.	3. Class Participation (attendance & involvement in class discussion)	10%	
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Objectives	Living a happy and meaningful life is a perennial human concern, yet explicit reflection on the nature of meaning and happiness is often neglected. This course aims to give students the resources for thinking critically about what a happy and meaningful life entails as well as how to apply these ideas to their own lives and contexts. The aims of this course are as follows: 1) To improve students’ understanding of what historical and contemporary philosophical authors have said about happiness, meaning in life, and related concepts. 2) To instigate students to critically reflect on their own pursuits of meaningful and happy lives. 3) To raise awareness of existential and contextual challenges that may confront students’ pursuits of personal happiness and meaning in life. 4) To improve students’ ability to articulate themselves with respect to philosophical and existential issues.			
Intended Learning Outcomes <i>(Note 1)</i>	Upon completion of this module, students will be able to: a) Demonstrate an understanding of key philosophical concepts related to happiness and meaning in life; b) Relate philosophical concepts critically to their personal aims and aspirations as humans seeking to lead good lives; c) Apply philosophical theories of meaning and happiness to contemporary issues; d) Enhance their skills in English reading and writing.			
Subject Synopsis/ Indicative Syllabus <i>(Note 2)</i>	What does it mean to lead a <i>good</i> life? People usually assume a good life has to do with notions of happiness and meaning, but what these terms mean is less clear. This course will critically investigate philosophical approaches to questions of meaning and happiness both in historical authors as well as more contemporary debates. We will discuss topics including the following: what classical philosophers in both European and Chinese philosophical traditions have said about the good life, the difference between happiness and meaning, competing contemporary theories of happiness and meaning, the relation of meaning and happiness to virtue, cosmological considerations and absurdity, the relationship			

	between meaning and life-narration, the shape of a life, love, and other social-contextual factors, including new technologies. Indicative Outline: 1. Introduction - Happiness and meaning in the popular imaginary - Philosophical v. psychological approaches - Positive Psychology 2. Ancient Greek philosophies of eudaimonia - Socrates and the examined life - Plato's theory of self-mastery - Aristotle on eudaimonia and virtue - Hellenistic theories of tranquillity 3. Classical Chinese philosophies of the good life - Confucius on the <i>junzi</i>, humaneness, and social roles - Mencius and Xunzi's developments of Confucianism - Zhuangzi on 'carefree wandering' 4. Contemporary theories of happiness - Happiness and hedonism - Happiness and preference satisfaction - Happiness and objective well-being - Happiness and the emotions - Happiness, morality, and virtue 5. Contemporary theories of meaning - Meaning of life vs. meaning in life - Cosmological concerns - Camus on the myth of Sisyphus - The absurd - Subjective, objective, and hybrid theories - Narrative theories and the shape of a life - Aging and mid-life crises - Meaning and death 6. Meaning and social context - Meaning and morality - Meaningful work - Meaning, AI, and technological unemployment - Meaning and the collective afterlife - Meaningful lives and virtual reality 7. Conclusion
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	Pictures of the good life and culture Meaning in life vs. happiness reconsidered																																																				
Teaching/Learning Methodology <i>(Note 3)</i>	The class will be organized primarily around lecture, which will involve class discussion and opportunities for students to express their own views and actively participate. Feedback and guidance will be given by the lecturer throughout the class, including but not limited to consultations. In accordance with requirement for the 'EW', students will access resources from the ELC to improve the quality of their writing. This will involve, more specifically, two elements: (1) accessing additional online lectures/materials related to writing strategies and issues and (2) students will be required to submit a plan and a draft to the ELC for feedback and 10% of the total grade will be constituted by the ELC grade. The second draft should be a minimum of 1,500 words.																																																				
Assessment Methods in Alignment with Intended Learning Outcomes <i>(Note 4)</i>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Specific assessment methods/tasks</th><th rowspan="2">% weighting</th><th colspan="6">Intended subject learning outcomes to be assessed (Please tick as appropriate)</th></tr> <tr> <th>a</th><th>b</th><th>c</th><th>d</th><th></th><th></th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1. Term Paper [EW Assessment: 40% to be assessed by subject teacher and 10% assessed by ELC]</td><td>50%</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>2. Quizzes [ER Assessment]</td><td>40%</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>3. Class Participation (included take-home assignments)</td><td>10%</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Total</td><td>100 %</td><td colspan="6"></td></tr> </tbody> </table> Explanation of the appropriateness of the assessment methods in assessing the intended learning outcomes: 1. The <i>term paper</i> (1,500 – 2,500 words) will assess how students reflect on their own pursuit of good lives in light of philosophical considerations covered in the class, both lecture and required readings. The term paper will give students an opportunity to demonstrate comprehension, critical engagement, and integration of key concepts from lecture and class reading. Students will also be given a supplementary bibliography and encouraged to do additional research to enhance their papers. The term paper will							Specific assessment methods/tasks	% weighting	Intended subject learning outcomes to be assessed (Please tick as appropriate)						a	b	c	d			1. Term Paper [EW Assessment: 40% to be assessed by subject teacher and 10% assessed by ELC]	50%	✓	✓	✓	✓			2. Quizzes [ER Assessment]	40%	✓		✓				3. Class Participation (included take-home assignments)	10%	✓	✓	✓	✓			Total	100 %						
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	assess both comprehension of key philosophical concepts as well as the ability to apply these concepts critically to one's own life as well as social context. In accordance with the 'EW' (English Writing) requirement, students will be required to submit a writing plan and draft to the ELC for feedback and 10% of the total grade will be constituted by the ELC grade. 2. <i>Quizzes</i> will assess whether students have understood basic philosophical concepts concerning happiness and meaning. This will be based on lecture material as well as required reading in accordance with the 'ER' (English Reading) requirement. 3. <i>Class participation</i> will be assessed based on attendance and in-class discussion. Discussion questions will ask students to connect philosophical concepts to their own personal lives and contexts.	
Student Study Effort Expected	Class contact:	
	▪ Lecture	39 Hrs.
	Other student study effort:	
	▪ Reading and Writing Term Paper	60 Hrs.
	▪ Other Take-Home Assignments	10 Hrs.
	▪ Studying course materials	26 Hrs.
	Total student study effort	135 Hrs.
Reading List and References	<i>Required Readings to Fulfil ER Requirement:</i> ▪ Wolf, S. (2010). <i>Meaning in Life and Why it Matters</i>. Princeton University Press [pp. 1–132]. ▪ Frankfurt, H. (2004). <i>The Reasons of Love</i>. Princeton University Press [pp. 1–100]. <i>Suggested Supplementary Readings:</i> ▪ Annas, J. (1995). <i>The Morality of Happiness</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Benatar, D. (2017). <i>The Human Predicament: A Candid Guide to Life's Biggest Questions</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Bishop, M. (2015). <i>The Good Life: Unifying the Philosophy and Psychology of Well-Being</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Bostrom, N. (2024). <i>Deep Utopia: Life and Meaning in a Solved World</i>. Washington, DC: Ideapress Publishing. ▪ Cahn, S. and Vitrano, C. (ed.) (2007). <i>Happiness: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Camus, A. (2018). <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>, trans. O'Brien. Vintage.	

	▪ <u>Cholbi, M. (2021). <i>Grief: A Philosophical Guide</i>. Princeton University Press.</u> ▪ Cottingham, J. (2003). <i>On the Meaning of Life</i>. Routledge. ▪ Danaher, J. (2019). <i>Automation and Utopia</i>. Harvard University Press. ▪ Flanagan, O. et al. (2023). <i>Against Happiness</i>. Columbia University Press. ▪ Fletcher, G. (2016). <i>The Philosophy of Well-Being: An Introduction</i>. Routledge. ▪ Goetz, S. and Seachris, J. (2020). <i>What is this Thing Called The Meaning of Life?</i> Routledge. ▪ Haidt, J. (2006). <i>The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom</i>. Basic Books. ▪ Haybron, D. (2008). <i>The Pursuit of Unhappiness</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Haybron, D. (2013). <i>Happiness: A Very Short Introduction</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Ivanhoe, P. (ed.) (2005). <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i>. 2nd ed. Hackett. ▪ Irvine, W. (2006). <i>On Desire: Why We Want What We Want</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Kahane, G. (2014). Our Cosmic Insignificance. <i>Nous</i> 48: 745–772. ▪ Kauppinen, A. (2012). Meaningfulness and Time. <i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i> 84: 345-377. ▪ Klemke, E. and Cahn, S. (eds.) (2017). <i>The Meaning of Life</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Landau, I. (ed.) (2022). <i>The Oxford Handbook of Meaning in Life</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Landau, I. (2017). <i>Finding Meaning in an Imperfect World</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Landau, I. (2011). Immorality and the Meaning of Life. <i>Journal of Value Inquiry</i> 45: 309-317. ▪ Mawson, T. (2016). <i>God and the Meanings of Life</i>. Bloomsbury. ▪ May, T. (2017). <i>A Fragile Life: Accepting Our Vulnerability</i>. University of Chicago Press. ▪ May, T. (2015). <i>A Significant Life: Human Meaning in a Silent Universe</i>. University of Chicago Press. ▪ Metz, T. (2013). <i>Meaning in life</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Metz, T. (2019). <i>God, Soul, and the Meaning of Life</i>. Cambridge University Press. ▪ Metz, T. & Seachris, J. (2023) <i>What Makes Life Meaningful? A Debate</i>. Routledge. ▪ Nagel, T. (2012). <i>Moral Questions</i>. Cambridge University Press.
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	▪ Nussbaum, M. (2001). <i>The Fragility of Goodness</i>. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press. ▪ Nussbaum, M. (1996). <i>The Therapy of Desire</i>. Princeton University Press. ▪ Russell, B. (1976). <i>The Conquest of Happiness</i>. Routledge. ▪ Scheffler, S. (2013). <i>Death and the Afterlife</i>. Oxford University Press. ▪ Seachris, J. (ed.) (2012). <i>Exploring the Meaning of Life: An Anthology and Guide</i>. Wiley-Blackwell. ▪ Setiya, K. (2017). <i>Midlife: A Philosophical Guide</i>. Princeton University Press. ▪ Veltman, A. (2016). <i>Meaningful Work</i>. Oxford University Press.
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Note 1: Intended Learning Outcomes

Intended learning outcomes should state what students should be able to do or attain upon subject completion. Subject outcomes are expected to contribute to the attainment of the overall programme outcomes.

Note 2: Subject Synopsis/Indicative Syllabus

The syllabus should adequately address the intended learning outcomes. At the same time, overcrowding of the syllabus should be avoided.

Note 3: Teaching/Learning Methodology

This section should include a brief description of the teaching and learning methods to be employed to facilitate learning, and a justification of how the methods are aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the subject.

Note 4: Assessment Method

This section should include the assessment method(s) to be used and its relative weighting, and indicate which of the subject intended learning outcomes that each method is intended to assess. It should also provide a brief explanation of the appropriateness of the assessment methods in assessing the intended learning outcomes.

(Form AR 140) 8.2020