

**Syllabus: Psychology 410, Summer 2020
Psychology of Happiness and Well-Being**

Course Content:

The goal of this course is to understand and experience teachings on happiness and well-being that come from psychological science and from Buddhism (particularly Tibetan Buddhism), through an intercultural learning experience in Tibet. Through being immersed in authentic Tibetan community and culture, students will be able to have an anchored learning experience of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and compare this with their studies about the psychological science of well-being and happiness. Belief in Buddhism or any other religion is not necessary for the course. The cultural experiences in Tibet and understanding the teachings of Buddhism give one assemblage point upon which to compare and contrast multiple views of happiness and well-being. Particular attention is given in this course to understanding the concept of anxiety management from a psychological science and Buddhist viewpoint, as the management of anxiety has a very strong effect on well-being.

Textbook (Required Readings):

The course uses open source readings and videos that can be accessed through the PSU Library proxies, and open source websites.

Instructors and Program Support

Course Instructors and Program Support: Christopher Allen, Ph.D. and Norzom Lala, MSW candidate.

Christopher and Norzom are married partners. Christopher is an adjunct faculty member and senior instructor in the department of psychology at PSU. He has won the John Eliot Alan award for outstanding teacher at PSU in 2015 and 2019. His area of expertise includes personality and well-being psychology, and a special interest in mindfulness practices. Christopher can be reached at challen@pdx.edu.

Norzom is an indigenous Tibetan nomad from the region of Amdo. Norzom is one of 10 Dalai Lama Foundation sponsored scholars in the world, and a research assistant in the department of social work. Her interests and specialties include mindfulness and anxiety tolerance. Norzom can be reached at: norzlala@pdx.edu

The course is hosted by professional local guides familiar with the Amdo region and culture. These guides are an important part of the course whom will care for the safety and well-being of students and instructors, and whom will share their wisdom and viewpoints with the group.

Class Calendar

The course begins study in July 2019 via distance learning and several in-person meetings. The trip is in August 2020

Grading

Quizzes on pre-trip readings: 25%

Oral discussions of critical course concepts during the trip to Tibet: 25%

Intercultural participation and learning: 25%

Trip and course evaluation paper: 25%

In-Depth Course Description

The course will cover important Tibetan Buddhist concepts on well-being and compare and contrast these with psychological science on well-being. For example, Tibetan Buddhism promotes an ideal state of well-being that results from freeing the mind of its afflictive tendencies. Psychological researcher Ed Diener Ph.D., after years of leading scientific research teams on psychological happiness, concluded something similar, when he said his research supported the idea that “satisfaction is less a matter of getting what you want than wanting what you have” (Deiner, 2005). Both western models of scientific psychology and Tibetan Buddhism claim that the happiness resulting from internal mental training is more durable than stimulus-driven pleasure, although neither are against stimulus driven pleasure. Psychological science and Tibetan Buddhism have similarities and differences in their approaches toward guiding people toward “conative balance” or in Tibetan Buddhist terms, “desiring wisely”. Important evidence-based psychotherapies such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy that are used particularly for the self-regulation of anxiety and impulse control, use principles similar to Tibetan Buddhism. Yet in Tibet, well-being and mindfulness are not therapies, rather they are imbued into daily community and culture.

This course takes place in Amdo, Tibet, along the Tibetan plateau, also called the “Roof of the World” due to some of the highest elevation mountains and grasslands in the world. Amdo was and is the home of many important Tibetan Buddhist scholars and teachers including the current 14th Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet. Amdo is a unique area of Tibet and perhaps the least visited region of Tibet. Amdo retains much of the ethnic and religious Tibetan and Buddhist ways of life and retains a traditional economy of pastoral nomads and farmers. Daily life in Amdo focuses on cultivating a balanced life and generating compassion for self and others.

The trip begins in Chengdu, China and moves to regions including Ngawa and Dzoge. Students will be taken to some of the most rarely viewed and stunning nature spots and temples in Tibet. By staying in one place for several days, students will have time to get to know the local Tibetans and their way of life centered around the practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Students will stay in mountain monasteries and learn together with nuns and monks, as well as from the instructor for the course. Students will travel to beautiful areas of nature and follow labyrinths and paths and walk famous mountains trails (short hikes). Students will learn both Tibetan Buddhist and psychological methods for self-regulation, happiness and well-being, and do this learning in some of the most ancient temples and sacred nature spots in Tibet.

Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate an understanding of key aspects of happiness and well-being concepts according to Tibetan Buddhism. and psychological science, and be able to describe how they are similar, complementary, or different.

Learning Outcome 2: Be able to discuss and describe anxiety management according to Tibetan Buddhism, discuss and describe three psychological science approaches to managing anxiety, and discuss and describe similarities and differences between various models and paradigms.

Learning Outcome 3: Students will be able to articulate insights into components of Tibetan Buddhism and contrast this with a student’s own culture and worldview, values, and beliefs.

Learning Outcome 4: Interpret intercultural experiences from own, and more than one worldview, and recognize and demonstrate the ability to act in a supportive manner toward various cultural groups.

Learning Outcome 5: Initiate and attempt interactions with people from Tibetan and Chinese culture, and successfully negotiate shared understanding with local Tibetans and local Chinese.

Class Policies and Requirements:

Health Conditions: This course occurs at higher altitudes, varying from 8,000 to 14,000 feet in altitude, and includes walking, short hikes, and riding in vehicles for several hours at a time. Students will be given adequate time to acclimatize to various altitudes.

Group Interaction: The class will rely on group discussion and interaction. Respect toward different personality tendencies such as introversion and extroversion will be considered, and anxiety in general and about speaking and participating in groups will always be considered and students will be treated with respect around these issues. Part of the course is learning about well-being and anxiety and being comfortable and mindful with oneself and one's personality and behavioral tendencies. However, the group is traveling together for the trip, and students will need to interact with the group as well as the locals of Tibet. Quiet time and personal distance needs are respected as well as possible.

Intercultural Interaction: Students are required to participate in cultural events, meetings with members of the local culture, and to be curious learners and culturally sensitive.

Camping, Housing, and Sleeping: Housing is generally in hotels or dormitories. Students may request participation in the homestay program which includes staying overnight with a nomad or farming family.

Medical Services: Medical services are much different in Tibet. There are hospitals but they are often hours away. Guides have some medical training and the guides and teachers are extremely careful regarding safety.

Itinerary Program in Brief

B. = Breakfast L. = Lunch D. = Dinner

Day 1. Arrival at Chengdu Airport (CTU) with a group transfer to FuRong (Hibiscus Hotel) or similar. Chengdu, at only 1,640 feet of altitude, is the capital of the Sichuan province, located in southwest China. It's known as the 'land of abundance,' the hometown of the Giant Panda, and the city of Brocade. Enjoy a welcome dinner at a local restaurant. (D.)

Day 2. Following breakfast, enjoy a full day in Chengdu. We first visit the world's largest breeding center for the giant panda—with more than 150 giant pandas. It is a 40-minute drive to reach the research center, located on the north side of the city. Enjoy two to three hours at the center, strolling through its bamboo forest. Then visit the Wenshu Monastery (Manjushri Temple), one of China's most famous and best-preserved Buddhist temples. Lunch at a local dumpling restaurant. Later walk through city streets to visit People's Park for a glimpse of Chengdu's daily life and visit the excellent Chengdu (history) museum. After enjoy an early dinner at a local hot pot restaurant. (B. L. D.)

Day 3. Drive to Barkham (population 50,000), the capital city of Ngawa prefecture at just over 8000 feet. The drive is only about 220 miles, but it will take about six or seven hours. On the way, stop to visit the Choktse chieftain's five-story stone palace, and if there is time, visit Barkham Dargyeling as well. The Sichuan part of Amdo lies within Aba/Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in far northern Sichuan province. Ngawa is about the same size as the state of South Carolina. It has a population of 900,000, with Tibetans making up about 55% of the community. Until the 1950s, there were four traditional provinces of Tibet, Amdo in the north-east, Ü-Tsang in the South (Lhasa and the current-day Tibet Autonomous Region), Kham in the East and Ngari (including the former Guge kingdom) in the north-west. Amdo was traditionally a place of great learning and scholarship. Today, ethnic Tibetans predominate in the area, many of whom are nomadic. This area is very diverse, including high snow mountains, seemingly endless grasslands, deep gorges and canyons, and evergreen forests. Overnight in the Barkham Gyarong Grand Hotel. (B. L.D.)

Day 4. Morning drive to Tujichenpo town to visit the Tujichenpo monastery, which is a reconstructed Nyingmapa monastery. This impressive site formerly had over 300 monks and is revered as one of the significant power-places in Gyarong. After sightseeing at the monastery, we continue driving to Dzamtang. If time allows, we will visit the Sirin Khar Gon on the way (about 15 miles before the town). It belongs to the Karma Kagyu school and has intricately designed temples, three nine-storied towers, and a cluster of stupas. It was founded quite recently in 1954. Overnight in the Dzamtang ShanglaDorjee Hotel at 10,500 feet. (B. L.D.)

Days 5 & 6. Two full days in Dzamtang to visit, study and experience the most famous Jonang monasteries in this valley, Dzamtang Chode Gompa, Tsechu Gon, and Dzamtang Tsangpa Gon. Before the arrival of Drung Kashe Rinchen Pel, the Dzamtang area was a stronghold of the Bon religion. The Jonangpa ascendancy was secured by Ming imperial patronage when Rinchen Pel visited Beijing in 1419, and his successors, including Gyelwa Zangpo (1419-1493) and Gyelwa Senge (1508-1568), who further developed these ties. The original monastery Dzamtang Chode Gon had 300 monks, while Tsechu Gon, which was the smallest, had only 100 monks. In these monasteries, you can enjoy the surviving early murals, woodblocks, and a three-dimensional mandala of Kalachakra. Now the local government is developing the area, so there are lots of new buildings in town. Overnight at the same hotel. (B. L.D.)

Day 7. Drive from Dzamtang to Ngawa (10, 500 ft.) in about three hours. Since it is a short drive today, we can stop for a picnic on the way and share food with local herdsman in their yak tent. On arrival in the afternoon, visit the Ngawa Kirti Gompa, a Gelugpa monastery founded in 1472. Overnight at the simple hotel of the Nangzhik Gompa, an 800-year-old Bon monastery. (B. L.D.)

Day 8 & 9. Two full days to enjoy Ngawa (population 20,000). The hills around the town are dotted with more than 30 monasteries of the Nyingma, Sakya, Gelug (Amchok Tsenyi Gompa), and Jonang (Setenling Gompa) schools of Buddhism, also as well as Bon (Nangzhik Gompa). Overnight at the same simple monastery hotel. (B. L. D.)

Day 10. A four-hour drive brings us to Gurgou, where we'll have time to relax and enjoy the Gurgou Holy Peak Hot Springs. The 140-degree water contains 17 trace elements such as lithium, selenium, and germanium, which are considered good for human health. The spring water is used for bathing, drinking (locals-only, not us!), and medicinal purposes — overnight Impression Hotel or similar. (B. L. D.)

Day 11. An easy three-hour drive to Chengdu. Time to relax in the afternoon, then a final farewell dinner. Optional evening excursion to Jinli Walking Street, a network of alleys housing dozens of food and gift vendors. Overnight at FuRong (Hibiscus Hotel) or similar, Chengdu. (B. L. D.)

Day 12. Departure Day. Airport transfer provided. (B.)