

Health Psychology

Course summary

This course examines the complex and fascinating ways psychology and behavior interact with health. We will study and interrogate what psychological scholarship suggests about how best to promote and maintain health, prevent and treat illness, and adapt and thrive in the context of chronic illness. Key topics include: the roles of stress and social relationships in the progression and prevention of disease; behaviors (e.g., physical activity, nutrition, sleep) that contribute to wellbeing or sickness; the psychological dimensions of medical decision-making and provider-consumer relationships; and principles and techniques of health marketing. Health and illness are inextricable from sociocultural and political processes, and we will pay particular attention to health inequities associated with structural and institutional racism.

Course objectives

- 1) to introduce key topics within the field of health psychology
- 2) to apply psychological principles to behavior change for individuals and institutions

Class time

During most of our class sessions, I'll present new material for us to apply and discuss, informed by our engagement with assigned articles, podcasts, and videos. We will often break into smaller groups for brief conversations and other activities. I'll post slides for the day's material before class, but because I often adjust what we cover based on students' interests, the actual slides covered in class may be slightly different. I will post the slides covered in class to Moodle as well as a class recording after each class meeting.

About screens in class: I urge you to be as engaged as possible during class so that you can optimize your learning and the learning of your classmates. If you intend to use electronics (tablet, laptop) to take notes or to access course materials during class, please consider turning off notifications from social media. If you are expecting an important, time-sensitive call or text, please step out of class to attend to it. If I believe you are using your electronics for purposes unrelated to class, I will ask you (privately – either in person or via email) to refrain.

Instructor



Jaine Strauss

Please call me Jaine (the "i" is silent; my name is pronounced just like "Jane"). You may also call me Professor Strauss, if you prefer. My pronouns are she/her.

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Drop-in hours: You are warmly invited to come to my office without an appointment on **Mondays from 3:30-4:30 pm** and **Thursdays from 2:00-3:30 pm.**

Please talk to me in class or email me to set up meetings outside of drop-in times. I'm eager to meet with you at your convenience!

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Drop-in hours

You don't need an appointment for drop-in hours, and you don't need a reason to stop by. I'm eager to get to know you, and I welcome your visit. When you stop by, I might be meeting with someone else. Please be sure to let me know you're waiting, and I'll get to you as soon as I can. Drop-in hours work well if you have a relatively quick (5-10 minute) topic you'd like to discuss or if you just want to say "hi." If you'd like to talk for a longer period of time or if my drop-in hours don't work for you, let me know via email or talk to me after class and we'll schedule a meeting.

Course activities

- In-class, ungraded assignments and engagement in class meetings – 20%
- Health behavior change (HBC) project or research paper – 40%
- Health promotion campaign (HPC) or institutional change plan (ICP) – 40%

In-class activities: Throughout the semester, we'll read scholarly and popular press articles relevant to health psychology, and we'll occasionally watch brief videos or listen to podcasts. Engaging with these materials carefully before class will enhance your experience in the course. Periodically, we'll break into small groups to discuss the readings/videos. You do not need to participate in a small group if that is your preference; you can write a brief response to the relevant prompts instead. There are no exams in this course. Instead, you will demonstrate your grasp of the course materials through ungraded writing assignments – in which you pose questions or offer insights briefly (5-10 minutes) – during class. These writing assignments are graded on completion; assignments that are vague or inaccurate will be marked as incomplete. I am also eager to hear your opinions and insights through participation in class. To ensure that students who miss class have access to course materials, I will do my best to record class using PowerPoint; this generally works pretty well, but sometimes the software fails and when that happens, we'll have to figure out a workaround (likely borrowing another student's notes). More information about attendance and absences is in the top box on Moodle.

Health behavior change (HBC) project:

Many people – especially those interested in a health psychology class – have an excellent understanding of the behaviors most conducive to their wellbeing. Despite this knowledge, many of us don't quite live up to our highest ideals; we know what we should do, but our actions are often at odds with our best intentions. Understanding why this is the case is fundamental to the field of health psychology, and using yourself as a test case is an excellent way to learn about the processes that lead us astray as well as those that can get us back on track. You will select a behavior you'd like to change, and you will use the material presented in this course to monitor that behavior, strategize about how best to improve it, and reflect on your progress toward your goals. You'll present parts of this project to me and to a few of your classmates, so please choose a behavior you feel comfortable disclosing to others. A detailed description of this assignment is available on Moodle.



Course activities (continued):Health promotion campaign (HPC) project:

The burgeoning field of social marketing provides important insights into how best to nudge people toward healthier behaviors. In collaboration with the Hamre Center for Health and Wellness's health promotion team, you will develop a campaign to improve some aspect of behavioral health among your fellow Macalester students. Working with a small group or on your own, you will select a topic from among those identified by the health promotion team. You will search through the scholarly literature for information relevant to improving that behavior, apply "best practices" from the field of social marketing, and develop a set of materials that could be used for a multi-day Instagram campaign or a 45-minute workshop. A detailed description of this assignment is available on Moodle.

Alternative projects:

Most students will complete both the HBC and the HPC projects, but you can opt to substitute an alternative project. A description of these alternative projects is available on Moodle.

Grading philosophy and practices

Last year, I began experimenting with a different approach to grading that focuses on your engagement with the course materials and concepts and on your commitment to learning and improving. In keeping with the core values of health psychology, I seek to enhance your wellbeing and to decrease your stress. Although I will provide feedback to you about your work in this course, you will be responsible for assessing your progress and accomplishments. If your and my assessments diverge, we'll have the chance to talk through our perceptions. I do not expect this course to be "easy" - I hope we will challenge ourselves and learn a lot with and from each other - but I hope that getting the grade you want will not be hard.



Grading philosophy and practices (continued)

Flexibility on deadlines: I recognize that you are balancing many competing demands on your time and attention, and I want you to prioritize your wellbeing. You will start the term with **three** “flexibility tokens” that allow you to stay on track even if you miss a deadline. *One token may be redeemed for:* one 24-hour extension for an assignment (e.g., your HBC behavior change plan) or a missed in-class activity (that is, you do not need to complete the activity at all). If you miss an in-class activity and wish to make it up, you will have one week to do so without using a token (if your circumstances dictate additional flexibility, please consult with me as soon as possible). The tokens are your safety net, but you need not use them.

The flexibility tokens are meant to help you manage your workload for this course under “typical” circumstances, which include assignments from other courses, personal commitments, employment, sports practice and games, concerts and play rehearsals, etc. If you’re dealing with extenuating circumstances, you and I will work together to figure out a strategy to complete this course. Similarly, if you have accommodations that call for flexibility in turning in assignments, we will customize your contract accordingly. Please talk to me about this as soon as possible. ***I am committed to your success in this course – and beyond.***

Tips for optimizing your experience in this class

1. Set up a time to talk with me. I am eager to get to know you, and the better I know you, the more able I’ll be to help you get the most out of this class. I am eager to chat with you during drop-in hours, but please also send me an email to arrange appointments if other times work better for you or if you’d like to talk for more than ~5-10 minutes.
2. I hope the course grading policies will help you can engage with the material with curiosity and without stress. Figure out what’s most interesting to you, and build on that spark.
3. View feedback as an opportunity for growth – because that is its intent.
4. Be patient with yourself, with your classmates, and with me. We are all finding our way during an extraordinary time, and we can use all of the compassion that comes our way.



Guiding principles and policies

- I encourage you to make your overall wellbeing a priority during your time at Macalester and in your life more generally. Taking care of yourself will not only ensure your physical and emotional health but will also help you engage more fully in your academics. I value, and I hope you also value, the wisdom of your experiences, thoughts, emotions, and identities. This wisdom will guide how you handle the stressors you encounter. In this class, please trust your wisdom and care for yourself. If you need to step away from a class meeting – to go to the restroom, to get a drink of water, to take a moment to process thoughts or feelings that arise during our discussions – please do so. If you'd like help working through any particularly challenging experiences, feel free to talk to me or to seek support through campus resources (e.g., the Hamre Center for Health and Wellness; the Department of Multicultural Life; the Office of Student Affairs; the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life).
- I am committed to the success of all students, and therefore I am eager to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Please consult with the Disability Services staff (disabilityservices@macalester.edu) as soon as possible. You can schedule an appointment using [this link](#). The DS staff will send me a confidential letter detailing the appropriate accommodations for this course, and then you and I can discuss how those accommodations apply to this course.
- Macalester has many resources (e.g., the Hamre Center; the MAX Center; Department of Multicultural Life; Open Pantry) to support students, and we also have a number of policies (e.g., Title IX; academic integrity; COVID protocols) meant to safeguard the community and promote wellbeing. Links to these resources and policies are in the top box on Moodle.

Land acknowledgement

Please take a moment to acknowledge the fact that Macalester College is built on the ancestral homeland of the Dakota people – forcibly exiled from the land because of aggressive and persistent settler colonialism. Our campus sits near Bdote, the sacred meeting point of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. In the words of Reverend Jim Bear Jacobs, Bdote is a place of genesis and genocide, both realities alive in the land at once.

This acknowledgment strives to honor the Dakota people, ancestors, and descendants, as well as the land itself. This acknowledgement itself is not enough; it only serves as a first step towards decolonization and justice.



Course materials

Gawande, A. (2014). *Being mortal: Medicine and what matters in the end*. Metropolitan (on reserve in the library)

Articles, podcasts, and videos on Moodle

Course topics

- Health behavior models
- Health promotion and behavioral health:
 - Nutrition, weight, and weight stigma
 - Exercise
 - Sleep
 - Smoking and vaping nicotine
 - Accidents and injury
- Racism, health disparities, and health equity in:
 - Health care access
 - Health care practice
 - Health profession training
- Health communications and social marketing
- Stress and resilience
- Social and interpersonal aspects of health
- Medical decision-making
- Provider-consumer relationships
- Pain and placebos
- Chronic illness, life-threatening illness, assisted living, and palliative care



Important due dates

This course has two major assignments, reflected in the color-coding below. Although the list of assignments may seem daunting, most are relatively small assignments; the sequence and timing are designed to optimize your learning and to keep your projects on track. You will notice that the two major projects overlap in time. I will talk about this in class, as I know it is not ideal. I've bolded the biggest assignments below. **All assignments are due at 6 pm.**

September 9:	Topic proposal for Health Behavior Change project due
September 12-18:	Baseline monitoring of behavior and select wellbeing measure
September 19:	Completed baseline monitoring and initial wellbeing assessment
September 23:	Behavior change plan due
TBD:	Response to behavior change feedback – due within 48 hours of receiving feedback
October 7:	The Hamre Center health promotion team will present information pertinent to your HPCs
October 10:	HPC preference sheets due
October 14:	Assignment to health promotion campaign topic
October 3-16:	Behavioral monitoring
October 17:	Completed behavioral monitoring and second wellbeing assessment due
October 17:	HPC group meeting in class
October 19:	Midterm self-assessment of class engagement
October 26:	HPC group meeting (second half of class session)
October 28:	Canva training with Brooke Schmolke
October 31:	HPC Action plan due
TBD:	Response to action plan feedback – due within 48 hours of feedback
November 4:	Final Health Behavior Change paper due
TBD:	Self-assessment of HBC – due within 72 hours of receiving feedback
November 9:	HPC group meeting in class; first version of HPC posters due
November 28:	HPC group meeting in class
December 2:	HPC final materials due; Self-assessment of class engagement due
TBD:	Self-assessment of HPC – due within 72 hours of receiving feedback
December 16:	Revised papers due for students seeking to raise their grade

