

Professor: Dr. Mariana Alessandri

Office: ARHU 302 (across from elevator)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30 and Thursdays, 3-4pm (these hours are set aside for you, to talk to you about class or life or philosophy or graduate school or anything. You do not need to make an appointment to come by during these hours. If you have scheduling conflicts and can't come during these hours, please email me to make an appointment.)

Email: mariana.alessandri@utrgv.edu (do not use my Blackboard email)

Required Books

- 1) Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube [ISBN: 0872206335]
- 2) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs [ISBN: 1585100358]
- 3) Epictetus, *The Handbook (Enchiridion)*, trans. Nicholas P. White [ISBN: 0915145693]
- 4) Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington [ISBN: 087220166X]
- 5) John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher [ISBN: 087220605X]

All books will be on reserve at the library. All other readings will be posted on Blackboard

Course Question: Can you hack your way into happiness, or do you first need to define happiness and then make a plan to achieve it?

Gretchen Rubin is a living happiness expert who has written many books, and she believes that “it’s easier to change my surroundings than to change myself.”¹ By this she means that we can make ourselves happy even without doing philosophy, without thinking too deeply about how to become happy, or defining what happiness means, or why we should be happy, or if we deserve to be happy, etc. She has a podcast called “Happier with Gretchen Rubin,” which I recommend you listen to during the semester (<https://gretchenrubin.com/podcasts/>)

My initial thoughts (which are subject to change during the semester, depending on your experience and input): as a trained philosopher, I don’t doubt Rubin that it’s easier to change your surroundings than yourself, but I don’t think it’s better. I think it’s better to do what Rubin considers the “boring part”: thinking about and defining happiness, and studying different philosophers’ ideas about achieving happiness and becoming ethical and responsible people.

In this class we will test one theory against another: changing our surroundings (using Rubin’s happiness-hacks) vs. studying and practicing philosophy. Both aim to make us happier, and you get to be the judge of which one actually makes you happier. We will first study Ancient Ethics, in which we will read Plato, Aristotle, and some Stoics; then Modern Ethics, with Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, and then Religious Ethics, with Emmanuel Levinas and Søren Kierkegaard. At the end of the semester, you will choose a winner (Rubin or one of the philosophers) and do a presentation on happiness hacks vs. philosophy.

This class will make you do a million crazy things (I will be doing them too), all with the goal of making your life happier, more meaningful and more productive. Every week (M-F) for 15 weeks we will try a new happiness hack from Gretchen Rubin. From month to month, we will also be trying out the philosophers’ recommendations, including keeping an ethics journal, practicing being virtuous, doing 15 hours of service learning, and trying to be moral by accident. This is our chance to be the happiest and most complete selves that we can be, so if you are willing to read and practice, then welcome to the class!

In addition, I also have an optional book group called “Popcorn and Pláticas,” which meets every Tuesday from 3-4pm in my office, ARHU 302. We will read 3 “self-help” books this semester: Gretchen Rubin’s *Better than Before*, Cal Newport’s *Deep Work*, and Sherry Turkle’s *Reclaiming Conversation*. These are a good supplement to the class and can be purchased at the bookstore.

¹ Gretchen Rubin, *Better than Before*, 189.

My 3 Rules

- 1. Show up: I take attendance every day.**
- 2. Bring Today's Reading: Whoever brings their book/text to class will be marked present. No e-copies.**
- 3. No Electronic Devices: Too tempting!**

Grade Calculation (A=90-100 points; B=80-90 points; C=70-80 points; D=60-70 points; F=0-60 points)

Attendance	10 points
Community Service (15 hours)	15 points
Ethics Journal	10 points
Essay 1: Before you Serve	5 points
Essay 2: Ancient Wisdom	15 points
Essay 3: Modern Wisdom	20 points
Essay 4: Service	20 points
Presentation on Life Hacks vs. Philosophy	5 points
Total	100 points

Attendance (10 points)

A+ = no missed classes (extra credit: if your final grade is within .5 points of the higher letter, you will bump up)

A = 1-4 missed classes (full 10 attendance points)

A- = 5 missed classes (9 attendance points)

B+ = 6 missed classes (8 attendance points)

B = 7 missed classes (7 attendance points)

B- = 8 missed classes (6 attendance points)

C = 9 missed classes (5 attendance points)

D/F = 10 missed classes or more (0 attendance points)

Community Service (15 points)

You will visit the Humanitarian Respite Center (HRC) in McAllen for a total of 15 hours throughout the semester. The HRC's mission is to "restore human dignity" to those who are entering our country. While you are there, you will guide the immigrants through the process of getting a hot meal, new clothes, a shower, and a phone call to family members. You will learn what to do the first time you visit. Between busloads of immigrants, there is plenty to do: make food, prepare their to-go bags, sort clothing, etc.

The HRC is open 7 days a week and there are immigrants going through there every day (433 people in one day was the highest number in 2014; now it's about 100 each day). After 15 hours, you will have a good sense of what they do there, why, and what impact they are having in the world on the issue of immigration. You will write your final essay on your responsibility to immigrants.

Ethics Journal (10 points)

Writing was an important component in self-knowledge for some schools of Ancient philosophy. In this class, you will use the journal I give you to reflect on your life as it collides with the topics and readings we talk about in class. Write about your definition of happiness, your goals, your obstacles, your dreams, fears, successes, plans, grievances, resolutions, and evaluation of how you are doing at life. You will write a half-page journal entry at least twice a week, and your second essay will be based on your entries. Sometimes I will tell you what to write about and sometimes you can write about whatever is important to you that day. I will collect and grade these journals at random, so you must bring them to every class period. Every time I collect them I will grade them out of 10, then for your final grade I will average the totals. I will provide these journals in the first week of class.

9-10 points = journal had the required number of entries, which were thoughtful and meaningful

8-9 points = journal had the required number of entries, which were not all thoughtful and meaningful

7-8 points = journal was missing up to 25% of entries, which may not have been thoughtful or meaningful

6-7 points = journal was missing up to 50% of entries, which may not have been thoughtful or meaningful

5-6 points = journal was missing up to 75% of entries, which may not have been thoughtful or meaningful

1-5 points = missing more than 75% of entries, which may not have been thoughtful or meaningful

0 points = no journal entries turned in

Essay 1: Before Service-Learning (5 points)

This 2-page essay is designed to get your ideas about what you will be doing at the HRC this semester during your 15 hours of service. What do you think you will be doing? Do you want to go or not? Why? Do you think you it's your responsibility to serve immigrants? Why or why not? More information TBA.

Essay 2: Ancient Wisdom (15 points)

Leading up to this essay, you will have written in your ethics journal while you are trying to practice a virtue with Aristotle. This 2-3 page essay will be your evaluation of whether your attempt to be patient, temperate, or generous worked or didn't work.

Essay 3: Modern Wisdom (20 points)

This 2-3 page essay will be your point of view in the debate between Kant and Mill on whether you think we can be moral by accident. After trying to be moral by accident, you will write about which philosophy you think is right.

Essay 4: After Service (15 points)

In this 2-3 page essay, write about your personal responsibility to the immigrant community from Central America entering the US through the Rio Grande Valley and stopping at the Humanitarian Respite Center. You will use either Kierkegaard or Levinas to think about what responsibility means and what role you play in immigration.

Happiness Hacks vs. Philosophy Presentation (5 points)

During the last week of class, you will present to the class which set of practices helped you most: those from the life-hacks school of Gretchen Rubin, or those from the Philosophers. You can choose any one figure that inspired you the most, or a combination of figures. Your presentation will be oral, and it will be limited to 3 minutes. Which camp made you happier? Which person's advice made you happiest? Schedule:

Rubin's Happiness Hack

- Week 1: Take the 4 tendencies quiz
- Week 2: Distinctions
- Week 3: Monitoring
- Week 4: Scheduling
- Week 5: Accountability
- Week 6: Abstaining
- Week 7: Convenience
- Week 8: Inconvenience
- Week 9: Safeguards
- Week 10: Loophole-Spotting
- Week 11: Distractions
- Week 12: Treats
- Week 13: Pairing
- Week 14: Clarity
- Week 15: Identity

Philosophy Practice

1. Practice generosity, temperance, or patience.
2. Try to be accidentally virtuous (Is it possible?)
3. Connect to something greater than yourself by volunteering 15 hours of your life at the Humanitarian Respite Center, located at 1721 Beaumont St.



Core Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes: This course satisfies a core curriculum requirement. Upon completion of this course, students will have demonstrated mastery of the core curriculum objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. These objectives for core curriculum classes in Language, Philosophy and Culture are set forth by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Each associated learning outcome (as defined by UTRGV) is listed here. Student learning outcomes will be regularly assessed to determine whether THECB objectives are being met by students completing core curriculum classes.

1. **CRITICAL THINKING:** Students will demonstrate comprehension of a variety of written texts and other information sources by analyzing and evaluating the logic, validity, and relevance of the information in them to solve challenging problems, to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and to develop and explore new questions.
2. **COMMUNICATION SKILLS:** Students will demonstrate the ability to adapt their communications to a particular context, audience, and purpose using language, genre conventions, and sources appropriate to a specific discipline and/or communication task.
3. **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will demonstrate an awareness of the range of human values and beliefs that they draw upon to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.
4. **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

Learning Objectives for Philosophy Degree: This course may also be taken to fulfill a requirement for a B.A. in Philosophy. Students who graduate with a degree in philosophy from UTRGV are expected to have attained a certain level of intellectual development which is characteristic of the intense study of philosophy. The goals for all philosophy classes that count towards the major in philosophy include, in combination with the particular goals for the course, the following objectives:

1. **CRITICAL THINKING AND READING:** Students will demonstrate well-developed critical thinking and reading skills orally and in writing.
2. **HISTORY:** Students will describe the history of Philosophy, by identifying and distinguishing between the major historical and conceptual divisions of philosophy, the positions within those divisions, and major thinkers who contributed to those periods and specializations.
3. **COMMUNICATION:** Students will exhibit well-developed oral and written communication skills; will respond effectively to questions and criticisms of presented material.
4. **ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW:** Students will demonstrate the capacity to accurately present, analyze and evaluate historically underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions and traditions.
5. **PERSONAL, CIVIC, AND/OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Students will articulate and evaluate their various activities, identities, values, and goals in order to develop a flexible strategy for ongoing personal growth, community engagement, and/or professional achievement.

The UTRGV academic calendar can be found at <https://my.utrgv.edu/home> at the bottom of the screen, *prior to login*. Some important dates for spring 2018 include:

January 16	First day of classes
January 19	Last day to add a course or register for spring 2018
March 12 – 17	SPRING BREAK – NO classes
March 30 – 31	EASTER HOLIDAY – NO classes
April 12	Last day to drop a course; will count toward the 6-drop rule
May 2	Last day of classes
May 3	Study Day – NO class
May 4 – 10	Spring 2018 Final Exams
May 11 - 12	Commencement Ceremonies

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who suffer a broken bone, severe injury or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services. Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility

Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at ability@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

MANDATORY COURSE EVALUATION PERIOD

Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (<http://my.utrgv.edu>); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades. Online evaluations will be available:

Spring 2018 Module 1	February 14 – February 20
Spring 2018 Module 2	April 11 – April 17
Spring 2018 (full semester)	April 11 – May 2

SCHOLASTIC INTEGRITY

As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, and VIOLENCE

In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

COURSE DROPS

According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

STUDENT SERVICES

Students who demonstrate financial need have a variety of options when it comes to paying for college costs, such as scholarships, grants, loans and work-study. Students should visit the Students Services Center (U Central) for additional information. U Central is located in BMAIN 1.100 (Brownsville) or ESSBL 1.145 (Edinburg) or can be reached by email (ucentral@utrgv.edu) or telephone: (888) 882-4026. In addition to financial aid, U Central can assist students with registration and admissions.

Students seeking academic help in their studies can use university resources in addition to an instructor’s office hours. University Resources include the Learning Center, Writing Center, Advising Center and Career Center. The centers provide services such as tutoring, writing help, critical thinking, study skills, degree planning, and student employment. Locations are:

- Learning center: BSTUN 2.10 (Brownsville) or ELCTR 100 (Edinburg)
- Writing center: BLIBR 3.206 (Brownsville) or ESTAC 3.119 (Edinburg)
- Advising center: BMAIN 1.400 (Brownsville) or ESWKH 101 (Edinburg)
- Career center: BCRTZ 129 (Brownsville) or ESSBL 2.101 (Edinburg)

Date	Philosophy Reading: to be completed in time for class discussion	Try this hack all week: https://gretchenrubin.com/
1/16	Happiness Hacks vs. Philosophy	Take the 4 Tendencies quiz online
1.18	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (70a-86c)	
1.23	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (86c-100b) Service Learning Information Session	Distinctions
1.25	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (17a-28b)	
1.30	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (28b-42a)	Monitoring
2.1	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Bk. I—Happiness and Being-at-Work) Due: Essay I (Receive Essay II Instructions)	
2.6	Aristotle (Bk. II—Virtue and the Mean)	Scheduling
2.7	Aristotle (Bk. VIII—Friendship and Community)	
2.13	Aristotle (Bk. IX—Friendship and the Self)	Accountability
2.15	Aristotle (Bk. X—Pleasure and Happiness)	
2.20	Intro to Hellenistic Phil: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, and Cynicism Reading: Epicurus, <i>Letter to Menoeceus</i> (Blackboard)	Abstaining
2.22	Epictetus, <i>The Handbook</i> (§1-§28)	
2.27	Epictetus, <i>The Handbook</i> (§29-§53)	Convenience
3.1	Due: Essay II (mid-semester check-in; Receive Essay III instructions)	
3.6	Introduction to Kant; read <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (pp. 7-17)	Inconvenience
3.8	Kant, <i>Grounding</i> (pp. 19-33) (March 12-17 is Spring Break. Practice “Pairing” happiness hack from Rubin)	
3.20	Kant, <i>Grounding</i> (pp. 33-44)	Safeguards
3.22	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (pp. 1-26)	
3.27	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (pp. 27-41)	Loophole Spotting Listen To Happier Podcast on “ Down with Boredom ”
3.29	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (pp. 42-64)	
4.3	Due: Essay III (Receive Essay IV instructions) Kierkegaard on Boredom (no reading assignment)	Distractions
4.5	Read Kierkegaard, <i>Practice in Christianity</i> (pp. 233-257) (Blackboard) If you haven’t started your Service Learning, do so today!	
4.10	Kierkegaard, <i>Works of Love</i> “Our Duty to Love the People We See” (Blackboard)	Treats
4.12	Kierkegaard, <i>Works of Love</i> “You Shall Love” (Blackboard)	
4.17	Levinas, selections from <i>Ethics & Infinity</i> (Blackboard)	Clarity
4.19	Levinas, selections from <i>Is it Righteous to Be?</i> (Blackboard)	
4.24	Final Presentations	Identity
4.26	Final Presentations	
5.1	Summary of the Course	
TBA	Due: Essay IV on Service Learning (due during finals week)	