PDV 95, Mindsets Matter: Strategies for Improving Your Performance, Health, and Well-being

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS: SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Tuesdays, 7:00-8:50pm PT
5 weeks, October 19-November 16

Instructor:
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What is this course about?

“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.” - Anaïs Nin

When you exercise, is it a chore or an indulgence? When you take a new medication, do you think about how it will help you heal, or do you worry about side effects? Do you avoid or embrace stress? Your answers to questions like these can reveal your mindsets—thoughts, beliefs, and expectations, conscious or otherwise. Drawing from cutting-edge research in psychology, medicine, and behavioral economics, this course will illustrate how powerfully—and sometimes surprisingly—mindsets impact our motivation, performance, health, and well-being. We’ll see how cultivating the mindset that exercise is fun and indulgent can help us enjoy movement more. We’ll learn about how stress can improve work performance—if we adopt the right stress mindset. And we’ll see how the mindsets that form in the doctor’s office influence how our bodies respond to sickness. Along the way, we’ll take the latest research and apply it to our lives as we see how adopting more useful mindsets is not only possible—it’s necessary for us to thrive.

What will I learn in this course?

By the end of this course you will:

• Be familiar with research on how mindsets influence our health, performance, and wellbeing in key domains, and
• Have strategies you can use to cultivate mindsets to help you thrive

What will this course look like?

This course is designed to improve your life. All aspects of the course have been created to further this goal, and, as participants in this class, you will have the opportunity to
bring your own thoughts, experiences, and reactions together with the course material. With this in mind, the best things you can bring to this course are your insights, your reflections, and your enthusiasm.

Class sessions:
Weekly class sessions will take place on Zoom. Classes will involve both a lecture component and student participation in group discussions and activities, personal reflections, and small-group break-out rooms. Because of this, it is strongly suggested that you attend the live class sessions on Monday evenings so you can participate in real time. However, recordings of the class will be made available for students enrolled in the class only, and so if you miss a class, or would like to re-watch all or part of a class session, you will have the option to do so.

Readings:
Weekly readings will be assigned to give you the opportunity to dive deeper into the topics discussed in class. Where possible, readings on a given topic will include both peer-reviewed research articles and popular media articles written for non-scientific audiences. Readings are optional, and some, but not all, of the material in the readings will be covered in class. Ideally, readings would be completed before coming to class, so that you can be prepared to actively engage in the lecture, contributing your own thoughts and questions that came up during your readings. Reading before lecture has also been shown to improve learning, because the lectures then reinforce material that you’re already familiar with!

Assignments:
Assignments will include the following:
1) Weekly short reflections at the end of every class session sharing one thing you learned or one remaining question you have from that day’s class. These assignments will be scored out of 3 points.
   *Note: these very short reflections would ideally be completed immediately after class, but are due no later than midnight the day after class (Tuesday night at midnight). If you cannot attend class live and instead watch the recordings, please complete this assignment within 24 hours of watching the video.*
2) Weekly “experiments” where you will be asked to put the insights from class material into practice in your life and then write a short report on your experience. These assignments will be scored out of 5 points.
   *Note: these reports will be due by 12pm on Mondays, to give me an opportunity to read your responses before class on Monday evenings*
3) A final class reflection detailing what you will take away from the course and what mindsets you hope to cultivate in the future. This assignment will be scored out of 5 points.

Class culture & policies:

Zoom etiquette:
The Zoom room will be set to automatically mute participants and keep your video off upon entry. If you are in a noisy area, we ask that you keep yourself muted unless you are actively
participating or asking a question. If possible, you are strongly encouraged to leave your video on during class so that we can see each other’s faces and build our class community.

With this in mind, however, it is a difficult time for everyone, and we should all strive to be flexible, understanding, and accommodating of one another. I encourage all of you to make our class time together special. For some of you, that might mean a time that is free from distractions, while for others it might mean eating dinner during class or sitting down for class with your favorite beverage.

Life happens, so if you need a stretch break, bathroom break, tea refill, or to care for a pet or child or loved one during class, please feel free to turn your video off for a few minutes to take care of yourself & others.

Questions and e-mails:

I encourage you to make use of the Discussions page on Canvas to ask questions related to course material or assignments, or to share reflections! I will monitor the discussions, but you should also feel free to respond to questions or discussions posted by other students on Canvas. Centralizing all course-related questions there will also avoid the issue of having the same questions asked over and over again, as all students will be able to see answers to all questions, which will reduce email for everyone. I’ve also found that answers provided by students can be even more helpful and informative than the answers I provide!

That said, you should of course feel free to email me if there is something you would like to discuss privately. I respond to emails roughly during business hours, from Monday to Friday during the day. I’ll do my very best to respond to you within 24 hours, or on Monday if you email me on a weekend.

Class playlist:

Add your favorite songs to our collaborative class playlist on Spotify! (Link forthcoming)

Grade Options & Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR):
  This is the default option. Attendance and all assignments will be optional.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC):
  You must complete 60% of assignments to receive credit.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass):
  You must complete 60% of assignments to receive credit, and 100% of assignments to receive an A. Assignments will be graded for clarity, referring to course readings or lectures, and successfully applying course topics to your own experience.

Weekly Schedule
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Reading &amp; assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wintertime mindset</td>
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<td>Optional: Check out my “campfire conversations” interview as part of the Hebridean Dark Skies festival: <a href="https://share.transistor.fm/s/842f34b0">https://share.transistor.fm/s/842f34b0</a></td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Stress mindsets</td>
<td>It might be fall, but the days are getting shorter, and winter is coming! Try one strategy discussed in class to cultivate a positive wintertime mindset. Write 2-3 paragraphs answering: What did you do? How did it feel? How does being aware of your mindset influence your mindset? Did you experience winter any differently this week?</td>
<td>Crum, A. J., Salovey, P., &amp; Achor, S. (2013). Rethinking stress: The role of mindsets in determining the stress response. <em>Journal of personality and social psychology</em>, 104(4), 716.</td>
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<td>Optional: Check out Kelly McGonigal’s TED talk on <em>How to Make Stress Your Friend</em></td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Mindsets about food &amp; exercise mindsets</td>
<td>Have a conversation with one friend or family member about how stress can be useful for health, performance, &amp; well-being and how they can rethink their stress mindset. Write 2-3 paragraphs answering: What was it like to share this information with someone else? How did this person react? Did anything they said surprise you? How was your own mindset about stress reflected in this conversation?</td>
<td>Zahrt, O. &amp; Crum, A. J. (2017). Perceived Physical Activity and Mortality: Evidence from Three Nationally Representative U.S. Samples. <em>Health Psychology</em> (peer reviewed article)</td>
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<td>November 2, 2021</td>
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<td><em>Mind Over Milkshake: How Your Thoughts Fool Your Stomach</em>, Alix Spiegel, NPR</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Mindsets in healthcare</td>
<td>Choose your own adventure!</td>
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<td>November 9, 2021</td>
<td>Guest Lecture from Sean Zion, PhD Candidate in the Stanford Mind &amp; Body Lab</td>
<td>Option 1: Move joyfully</td>
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<td>Do any form of exercise while trying to embody the mindset that exercise is fun, indulgent, or social (bonus points if you do this with a friend or family member (safely, masked, distanced, and outdoors if necessary – or over Zoom counts!). Write 2-3 paragraphs answering:</td>
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<td>What did you do, and what mindset did you try to focus on?</td>
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<td>Did this change the experience of that activity for you? If so, how?</td>
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<td>Option 2: Eat vegetables indulgently</td>
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<td>Eat or prepare a dish flavored with an assortment of vegetables: try a new recipe or find a traditional dish that brings fond memories, comfort, and joy (bonus points if you do this with a friend or family member – over Zoom counts!). Don’t forget to give your dish a delectable &amp; appealing description! Write 2-3 paragraphs answering:</td>
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<td>What did you eat? How did you feel? What mindset did you try to focus on? Did this change your experience of cooking and eating this food? If so, how?</td>
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<td>Readings</td>
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<td>Could your mindset affect how well a treatment works? Esther Landhuis, NPR</td>
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<td>The Science of “Wise Interventions”: Applying a Social Psychological Perspective to Address Problems and Help People Flourish, Lisa Quay</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Bringing it home: Strategies for changing your mindset</td>
<td>Look for examples of health mindsets in the wild. These can be examples from television or pop culture, news or media, or friends or family.</td>
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<td>November 16, 2021</td>
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<td>Write 2-3 paragraphs answering: What health mindset did you identify? Where did you see this example? What clued you into this mindset? Do you think this was a useful health mindset message, or would a different message or mindset have been more helpful?</td>
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Reflect on what you’ve learned over the past 5 weeks using the 3-2-1 method. Write:

3: What 3 things do you want to remember from this class a year from now?
2: What 2 things would you share with someone who hasn’t taken this class?
1: What 1 thing do you want to commit to doing differently as a result of this class?

Deep dive: Optional additional reading for each topic

Week 1:
Mindsets about Intelligence:
- Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, Carol Dweck (book)

Wintertime Mindset:
- What Scandinavians Can Teach Us about Embracing Winter, Kari Leibowitz, The New York Times (popular media article)
- Norwegian winter mindset might help in a COVID-19 world, Melissa De Witte, Stanford News

Week 2:
Stress Mindsets:
- The Upside of Stress, Kelly McGonigal (book)

Week 3:
Mindsets about Food:
Effects of taste-focused vs. health-focused labels on vegetable intake in university dining halls: A randomized controlled multi-site intervention. *Psychological Science*

- *It’s all in a name: How to boost the sales of plant-based menu items*, Jonathan Wise & Daniel Vennard, World Resources Institute News
- *Encouraging sustainable food consumption by using more appetizing language*, Daniel Vennard, Toby Park, & Sophie Attwood (2018), World Resources Institute

**Mindsets & Exercise:**

**Week 4:**

**Mindsets in Healthcare:**
- *Cure*, Jo Marchant (book)
- *What’s the Opposite of the Placebo Effect?*, Kari Leibowitz, The Paper Gown for ZocDoc (popular media article)

**Week 5:**

**How to Change your Mindset:**

**About the instructor:**

Kari Leibowitz, PhD, is a health psychologist, speaker, and writer. She completed her PhD at Stanford University in the Stanford Mind & Body Lab. Her research, writing, and workshops help us understand and harness mindsets to improve health, well-being, and performance. Kari received her undergraduate degree from Emory University, and her work has taken her all over the world as she organized the 2013 visit of the Dalai Lama to Emory, co-led three summers of Emory’s Tibetan Mind/Body Sciences study abroad program in India, and served as a U.S.-Norway Fulbright scholar. As a Fulbright scholar, Kari lived in Tromsø, Norway, north of the...
Arctic Circle, and studied mindsets about winter. In addition to publishing her academic work in numerous peer-reviewed outlets, Kari has delivered talks and workshops on how to leverage the power of mindset to international audiences. Her writing on this topic has appeared in *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times*. When she’s not talking about the power of mindsets, you can find her playing with her dog, Zeus, and trying to keep her houseplants alive.

Learn more at [karileibowitz.com](http://karileibowitz.com).
**Strategies for reading research articles:**

If you’re not used to reading research articles, they can be overwhelming at first. The first thing to do is read the abstract – that will give you the overview of the paper and give you a preview of what you’ll read in the paper. Once you’ve read the abstract, one strategy that can be useful is to focus on one section of the paper based on your interests:

- If you’re most interested in understanding other research that has been conducted on this topic and what inspired the research presented in the current paper, focus on reading the introduction/background section
- If you want to know what was done in the study, how they designed their experiment, or what was measured, focus on the methods section
- If you want to know what statistical analyses were conducted and what the researchers found, focus on the results section
- If you want to know what the researchers found in this study and you’re interested in the conclusions and implications of that finding, focus on the discussion/conclusion section

You can also ask yourself the following questions about each of the sections of the research paper to help yourself understand it at a deep level:

- **Introduction**:
  - What is this research about?
  - Why is this research important?
  - Do the researchers put forth any hypotheses?
  - What previous work has informed the current research?

- **Methods**:
  - How were the hypotheses tested?
  - What was measured?
  - What was manipulated in the control vs. experimental condition?
  - Who were the participants?

- **Results**:
  - What did the researchers find?
  - Did the findings support the researchers’ hypotheses?
  - *Note here that if you are not familiar with the statistics used, you can skim over those and focus on the narrative description of the results, which should be sufficient to tell you what the authors found

- **Discussion**:
  - What did the researchers find?
  - What are the implications of these findings?
  - Why do these results matter?
  - What were the limitations of the study?
  - What future research should be conducted to further this work?