

Course Title: The Development of Purpose across the Lifespan

Course Code: WELL 23

Instructor Name and Bio: William Damon is Professor of Education at Stanford University and Director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence. He is one of the world's leading researchers on human development and writes on intellectual and social growth through the lifespan. Damon has done pioneering research on purpose in life and wrote the influential book *The Path to Purpose*. Damon's other books include *Greater Expectations* (winner of the Parent's Choice Book Award) and *The Moral Child*. His most recent book is *A Round of Golf with my Father: The New psychology of Exploring your Past to Make Peace with the Present*. Damon has been elected as a Fellow to the National Academy of Education and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Wednesdays 6:00-8:00pm (PT), Jan 11 - March 1

Meeting location: On-Campus (exact location will be sent to registered students)

The class sessions will not be recorded.

Course Features:

- Live session
 - Lecture, discussions, and Q&A
 - Requires interaction and active participation
 - Guest speakers
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Students will give live presentations

Course Summary

This course will focus on the psychological study of purpose. In addition, the course will cover contemporary educational applications of recent psychological knowledge regarding the development of purpose. The course is based upon the work of William Damon's Stanford lab and other similar research labs across the world. Such work is intended as scientific in nature, aiming for a basic understanding of purpose and its developmental course across the lifespan. This work is *not* clinical in nature, and thus the course will *not* cover any therapeutic issues related to abnormal or maladaptive behavior. Rather, the course aims to convey an informed, state-of-the-science grasp of the unique role of purpose in human life as well as the use of such knowledge for the education and edification of people of all ages.

**Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
 365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
 continuingstudies@stanford.edu
 650-725-2650

Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
 - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
 - Students must attend and participate in at least 5 of the class sessions

**Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

Textbooks/Required Materials

The Path to Purpose, William Damon
Teaching for Purpose, Heather Malin
A Round of Golf with my Father, William Damon
Man's Search for Meaning, Victor Frankl (Recommended)

(All books in paperback and Kindle editions)

First Assignment

Prior to the first class, watch this YouTube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWlXxeff17Y>

Tentative Weekly Outline


Week 1: Introductory Class (January 11)

What is Purpose?

Presentation of current psychological science definition of purpose, followed by examples from behavioral science research and class discussion

Week 2: The Origins of Purpose in Child and Adolescent Development (January 18)

Readings:

-  Damon, W. (2009) *The Path to Purpose: How Young People find their Calling in Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
https://www.amazon.com/Path-Purpose-Young-People-Calling/dp/1416537244/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3NZ8KJJ2WKQBQ&keywords=the+path+to+purpose&qid=1662320890&s=books&prefix=the+path+to+purpos%2Cstripbooks%2C169&sr=1-1

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Week 4: Purpose in Later Life (January 25)


Readings:

- Colby, A. et al (2018) Purpose in the encore years: Shaping lives of meaning and contribution. <https://encore.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/PEP-Full-Report.pdf>
- Morton, E., Colby, A., Bundick, M., and Remington, K. Hiding in plain sight: Older U.S. purpose exemplars. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1510022>

Class Guest: Dr. Anne Colby

Week 2: Purpose and Meaning in Catastrophic Circumstances (February 1)

Reading:

-  Frankl, Victor (1959) *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press. https://www.amazon.com/Mans-Search-Meaning-Viktor-Frankl/dp/0807014273/ref=asc_df_0807014273/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312031138203&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=6717223756168652880&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvgmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9031969&hvtargid=pla-493171359305&psc=1
- Hill, P. L. & Turiano, N. A. (2014). Purpose in life as a predictor of mortality across adulthood. *Psychological Science*, 25(7). DOI: 10.1177/0956797614531799.
- Watch this brief [clip](#) where Jimmy Fallon talks about realizing his purpose in life after an injury.

Week 5: Physical health benefits of a purposeful life (February 8)

- Turner, A.D., Smith, C.E. & Ong, J.C. Is purpose in life associated with less sleep disturbance in older adults? *Sleep Science Practice* 1, 14 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41606-017-0015-6>
- Koizumi, M., Ito, H., Kaneko, Y., & Motohashi, Y. (2008). Effects of having a sense of purpose in life on the risk of death from cardiovascular diseases. *Journal of Epidemiology*, 18(5), 191-196.

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- Fredrickson, B. L., Grewen, K. M., Coffey, K. A., Algoe, S. B., Firestine, A. M., Arevalo, J. M.G. Ma, J., & Cole, S. W. (2013). A functional genomic perspective on human well-being. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)*, 110(33), 13,684-13,689.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1305419110>

Week 6: Education and Purpose (February 15)

Readings:

- Malin, H. (2018) *Teaching for Purpose: Preparing Students for a Life of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Damon, W. and Colby, A. (2022) Education and a life of purpose. In Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and Carola Suárez-Orozco (Eds.) *Education: A Global Compact in an Era of Crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press. To be provided in Canvas.

Class Guest: Dr. Heather Malin

Week 7: “Narrative Identity” Approaches to Purpose Development (February 22)

Readings:

- 🧭 Damon, W. (2021) Purpose and the Life Review: Purposeful people look to goals they seek to accomplish over the long haul. *Psychology Today*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-puzzles-your-past/202107/purpose-and-the-life-review>
- 📖 Damon, W. (2021) *A Round of Golf with my Father: The New Psychology of Exploring your Past to Make Peace with your Present*. Radnor, PA: Templeton Press.

Week 8: Life Review Exercises (March 1)

Members of the class may volunteer to present brief narratives structured as “life reviews.” Narratives may be drawn from biographies, literary fiction, family history, or observation. Presentations are optional, and no confidential matters should be disclosed.