

GEN Course Proposal Form Info and Syllabus
Stress, Health, and Disease
Anthony Austin

General Studies Category

GEN is the appropriate category because the course will A) provide instruction in written and oral communication skills; B) focus on the students' behavior and experiences and their observations of others' behavior and experiences to heighten awareness and understanding of the stress-illness relationship; and C) offer an innovative approach to the process of intellectual exploration, namely the "Humans of South Jersey" class project.

Given the advanced readings, this course is appropriate for junior and senior students.

Course Description

Explanation

Stress, Health, and Disease examines the multiple pathways through which stress can lead to poor health. We will cover different ways of conceptualizing and measuring health and stress. Normal functioning of the body's systems and how stress can affect them in the short term (e.g., fight-or-flight response) and over the long term (leading to disease) is a central theme. Finally, adaptive and maladaptive ways of coping with stress, and their relationships with health, will also be covered.

Focus

This course focuses on critical reading and discussion of written works related to stress and health, meaning that students will read multiple sources and discuss and critique them in class. A large part of this focus centers around the learning theory of connectivism, which suggests that learning comes from making connections between a variety of fields, ideas, concepts, and opinions. Students will learn to make connections between content in the readings, existing knowledge, and personal experiences. Additionally, writing and global awareness components are linked to students attaining a better understanding of how different peoples and cultures think about stress, health, and disease.

Rationale

Stress is ubiquitous in society. The American Psychological Association's latest Stress in America report (October 2018) indicates that the majority of American adults reported having stress about work, money, health-related concerns, and/or issues in the national news, such as mass shootings. Respondents from Generation Z reported having higher rates of stress about these areas than other adults (Example: 81% of Gen Z adults reported stress about money versus 64% of adults overall). Therefore, stress is likely a salient issue for most students.

The leading causes of death in the United States are chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease and cancer. The etiology of these diseases is multifactorial, and stress is implicated as a significant factor in the development of these diseases, especially coronary heart disease. Therefore, this course will make students more informed citizens about these major public health concerns.

Course Proposal Narrative

New Learning Opportunities

This course will give students the opportunity to learn about their own stress and how it can affect their health. Moreover, students will learn from each other and community members to better understand differing viewpoints and potentially developing empathy, making them more effective citizens. Finally, students will learn targeted writing skills and leave the class with a tangible written product in the form of a brochure.

Interdisciplinary Nature

Understanding how stress affects health is unavoidably interdisciplinary, combining elements of psychology, medicine, physiology, epidemiology, and public health. The interdisciplinary nature can be seen in the history of the concept of stress. Hans Selye, who first described stress as we know it today, was an endocrinologist. Walter Cannon, a physiologist, coined the term "fight-or-flight" and wrote foundational work on homeostasis. Psychologists Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman have written extensively on stress and coping with a focus on cognitive links between the person and the environment. Epidemiological research has shown repeatedly that stress is an independent risk factor for chronic diseases, especially cardiovascular disease. Therefore, stress is a public health issue.

Difference from a Program Course in an Academic Discipline

The interdisciplinary nature of this course makes this course different from a program course. The course will be of relevance to majors in psychology, physiology, health sciences, nursing, and public health, among others. Though a unit on stress is covered in PSYC 2212, Health Psychology, this course dives deep to ensure students understand the ways multiple disciplines inform understanding of the relationship between stress and illness.

Alignment of Course Goals to Assignments

General Studies Objectives

Objective 6: Capacity for “reflective reading” – entering into personal dialogue with a text.

Before nearly every class period, students will read a book chapter or article and generate critical, reflective questions to guide discussion of the readings. Questions should A) relate to specific problems, uncertainties, or ambiguities encountered while reading and B) be a means to help themselves and other students make connections between the current reading, previous readings and discussion, existing knowledge, and personal experience. Students will also write critical reviews of four articles to develop an even deeper understanding.

Objective 5: Ability to write and speak effectively and persuasively.

Tied to objective 6, students will discuss the readings to establish a thorough understanding. Their contributions will be assessed based on quality (see the discussion participation rubric in Appendix A in the syllabus). Additionally, students write a reflection paper on the Humans of South Jersey assignment (details below under Objective 11) and create a public health-minded brochure to inform the general public about the potential dangers of stress.

Objective 11: Awareness of the achievements and perspectives of people of different nations and cultures, and of different races, genders and ethnicities.

In the Humans of South Jersey assignment, students will go into the community and conduct interviews about stress, coping, and health with people “not like them.” Representative quotes and pictures of the interviewees will be posted to a private Facebook group (or related platform). Students will then make reflective comments on their peers’ posts that connect the interviewees responses with content discussed in class. Finally, students write a reflection paper about this assignment in general, their actual experiences, and connections made to the rest of the course. Appendix B in the syllabus contains more details.

Essential Learning Outcomes

Communication Skills

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, public health brochure, Humans of South Jersey assignment reflection paper

Critical Thinking

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, critical reviews

Global Awareness

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, Humans of South Jersey

IDEA Objectives

Objective 2: Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, critical reviews, public health brochure

Objective 8: Developing skill in expressing myself orally or in writing

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, public health brochure, Humans of South Jersey reflection paper

Objective 7: Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, Humans of South Jersey

Course Content Goals

Describe different ways of defining the construct of stress.

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, Humans of South Jersey

Explain potential mechanisms that link stress to disease.

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, public health brochure, critical reviews, Humans of South Jersey

Explain ways of coping to reduce stress.

Assignments: discussion questions and participation, Humans of South Jersey

Critically evaluate the literature linking stress to disease.

Assignment: critical reviews

STOCKTON UNIVERSITY
School of Social and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Prefix and Number:

Course Title: Stress, Health, and Disease

Credit Hours: 4

Instructor:

Dr. Anthony W. Austin

Class Schedule:

Classroom:

Office:

Office Hours:

or by appointment

Telephone:

609-26-6411

Email:

Anthony.austin@stockton.edu

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK AND READINGS:

Lovallo, W.R. (2016). *Stress and health: biological and psychological interactions*, 3rd ed. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

The following articles and chapters will also be required. These will be made available on Blackboard.

Cooper, S.J. (2008). From Claude Bernard to Walter Cannon: emergence of the concept of homeostasis. *Appetite*, 51, 419-427.

Coyne, J.C., & Racioppo, M.W. (2000). Never the twain shall meet? Closing the gap between coping research and clinical intervention research. *American Psychologist*, 55, 655-664.

Cramer, P. (2000). Defense mechanisms in psychology today: further processes for adaptation. *American Psychologist*, 55, 637-646.

Folkman, S. & Moskowitz, J.T. (2000). Positive affect and the other side of coping. *American Psychologist*, 55, 647-654.

Lazarus, R.S. (2000). Toward better research on stress and coping. *American Psychologist*, 55, 665-673.

Schneiderman, N., Ironson, G., & Siegel, S.D. (2005). Stress and health: psychological, behavioral, and biological determinants. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 1, 607-628.

Selye, H. (1984). *The stress of life, revised edition* (Chapters 1-3). McGraw Hill: New York

Somerfield, M.R., & McCrae, R.R. (2000). Stress and coping research: methodological challenges, theoretical advances, and clinical applications. *American Psychologist*, 55, 620-625.

Tennen, H., Affleck, G., Armeli, S., & Carney, M.A. (2000). A daily process approach to coping: linking theory, research, and practice. *American Psychologist*, 55, 626-636.

COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

This course will introduce students to the role stress plays in health and disease. Topics covered include defining and measuring stress, coping with stress, the relationship between

stress and disease (e.g., cardiovascular disease, cancer, infectious illness), the pathophysiology of stress, and current issues and controversies in stress research.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students should attain the following objectives after completion of this course:

1. Describe different ways of defining the construct of stress.
2. Explain potential mechanisms that link stress to disease.
3. Explain ways of coping to reduce stress.
4. Critically evaluate the literature linking stress to disease.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS/ASSESSMENTS:

To succeed in this course, you will complete the following:

1. Critical reviews of primary empirical published journal articles (200 points)

You will be required to write four (4) brief 1-page reviews (50 points each) of original journal articles. You will be provided with the specific papers to use in the assignment. The scoring scheme for this assignment will be provided. The following is an overview of the key points of emphasis:

- Your full name and your student ID number (both top right of sheet)
- Full details of the paper, e.g., authors, journal, etc.
- Study overview: Main objective, hypotheses, independent/predictor variable, and dependent/criterion variable
- Methods: Design used, positive and negative aspects of this design, appropriateness of the use in this context
- Main result
- Positives and negatives of the study

There is no need to write in complete sentences for this assessment, coherent bullet points are adequate. However, do not copy and paste. You should be able to extract and succinctly state the required elements.

The **purpose** of this assessment is to: learn how to extract pertinent information from scientific articles and to explore different research topics and methodologies, understanding both their strengths and weaknesses.

The four articles you will review are:

1. Cohen, S., Doyle, W.J., & Baum, A. (2006). Socioeconomic status is associated with stress hormones. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 68, 414-420.
2. Cohen, S., Tyrrell, D.A.J., & Smith, A.P. (1991). Psychological stress and susceptibility to the common cold. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 325, 606-612.
3. Kirshbaum, C., Prussner, J.C., Stone, A.A., Federenko, I., Gaab, J., Lintz, D., et al. (1995). Persistent high cortisol responses to repeated psychological stress in a subpopulation of healthy men. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 57, 468-474.
4. Christenfeld, N., Glynn, L.M., Phillips, D.P., & Shriram, I. (1999). Exposure to New York City as a risk factor for heart attack mortality. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 61, 740-743.

2. Brochure Assignment (150 points).

You will design an evidence-based brochure that provides information to the general public about the relationship between stress and a physical disease, disorder, or condition. Your brochure will be presented to the class. More details will be provided.

3. Discussion questions (115 points). For each of the assigned readings (including each chapter from the textbook, other assigned articles, and articles for the critical reviews), write two critical questions (each question is worth 2.5 points) that come to your mind as you complete the reading. One question should be about specific problems, dilemmas, uncertainties, or ambiguities you have about theories, hypotheses, experiments, results, or conclusions from the readings. The second question should be a means to help you and your classmates make connections between the current reading, previous readings and discussion, content learned in other classes, and personal experience and knowledge. Your questions are a means to help create discussion and to assist in deeper understanding and explanation. Unless there is an excused absence, you will not receive credit for discussion questions if you do not attend class on the assigned day.

4. Discussion participation (115 points). You are expected to participate in discussion surrounding each reading (5 points per reading). A rubric for participation is provided in Appendix A of the syllabus.

Note that there are 25 days in which discussion questions are due and discussion participation is required (see course calendar). However, points are only awarded for up to 23 readings ($5 \times 23 = 115$ points). Therefore, you may miss up to two days of questions/discussion without penalty.

5. “Humans of South Jersey” assignment (260 points). For this assignment, you must go out into the community and ask at least three people “who are different from you” different questions about what stress is and how it affects their health. Our class will create a private Facebook group where you will post photos and quotes from the people you talk to. Then, you are required to comment on your fellow classmates’ contributions and write a reflection paper in which you comment on this assignment in general, your actual experiences, and specific connections you make to the subject matter of the course and readings. See Appendix B for more information about this assignment.

SCORING GUIDE:

Critical reviews	200 points
Brochure	150 points
Discussion questions	115 points
Discussion participation	115 points
<u>“Humans of South Jersey” assignment</u>	<u>260 points</u>
Total	840 points

DUE DATES AND LATE WORK:

Due dates are non-negotiable. Unless there is an excused absence, a penalty of 25% will be assessed for each business day after the deadline that an assignment is submitted.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Stress Management Society: <http://www.stress.org.uk/>
 Stress and Anxiety Research Society: <http://www.star-society.org/>
 International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies:
<http://www.istss.org//AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>
 Stress Management Society: <http://www.stressmanagementsociety.com/>
 American Institute of Stress: <http://www.stress.org/>
 Society of Behavioral Medicine: <http://sbm.org>
 American Psychological Association, Division 38: <http://www.health-psych.org/>
 American Psychosomatic Society: <http://psychosomatic.org>

Aldwin, C.M. (2007). *Stress, coping, and development, 2nd ed.* Guilford.
 Contrada, R., & Baum, A. (2010). *The handbook of stress science: biology, psychology, and health.* Springer: New York.
 Horowitz, M.J. (2011). *Stress response syndromes, 5th ed.* Jason Aronson, Inc.
 Lazarus, R.S. (2006). *Stress and emotion: a new synthesis.* Springer: New York.
 Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* Springer: New York.
 Rice, P.L. (1998). *Stress and health, 3rd ed.* Cengage.
 Sapolsky, R.M. (2004). *Why zebras don't get ulcers, 3rd edition.* Henry Holt & Co: New York.
 Seaward, B.L. (2012). *Managing stress: principles and strategies for health and well-being.* Jones & Bartlett Learning

ACADEMIC EXIGENCIES:

The instructor reserves the right to alter the course outline for academic exigencies.

COURSE OUTLINE:

	Topic	Assigned Reading	Assignment due
WEEK 1			
Tuesday, 1/21	Welcome and Overview		
Thursday, 1/23	Models of health & disease	Chapter 1	Discussion questions
WEEK 2			
Tuesday, 1/28	History of the stress concept	Chapter 2	Discussion questions
Thursday, 1/30	History of the stress concept	Selye (1984)	Discussion questions
WEEK 3			
Tuesday, 2/4	Homeostasis	Chapter 3	Discussion questions
Thursday, 2/6	Homeostasis	Cooper (2008)	Discussion questions
WEEK 4			
Tuesday, 2/11	Physical and psychological stress	Chapter 4	Discussion questions
Thursday, 2/13	Stress and health	Schneiderman et al. (2005)	Discussion questions
WEEK 5			
Tuesday, 2/18	Methods in stress research	Somerfield & McCrae (2000)	Discussion questions

Thursday, 2/20	Methods in stress research	Tennen et al. (2000)	Discussion questions
WEEK 6			
Tuesday, 2/25	Coping	Cramer (2000)	Discussion questions
Thursday, 2/27	Coping	Folkman & Moskowitz (2000)	Discussion questions
WEEK 7			
Tuesday, 3/3	Coping	Lazarus (2000)	Discussion questions
Thursday, 3/5	Coping	Coyne & Racioppo (2000)	Discussion questions
WEEK 8			
Tuesday, 3/10	CNS regulation of the stress response	Chapter 5	Discussion questions
Thursday, 3/12	CNS regulation of the stress response	Chapter 5	
WEEK 9			
Tuesday, 3/17	No class – spring break		
Thursday, 3/19	No class – spring break		
WEEK 10			
Tuesday, 3/24	Stress and the endocrine system	Chapter 6	Discussion questions
Thursday, 3/26	SES & hormones	Cohen et al. (2006)	Discussion questions Critical review #1
WEEK 11			
Tuesday, 3/31	Stress and the immune system	Chapter 7	Discussion questions HPB post #1
Thursday, 4/2	Stress and the common cold	Cohen et al. (1991)	Discussion questions Critical review #2
WEEK 12			
Tuesday, 4/7	Helplessness and health	Chapter 8	Discussion questions Three reflective comments
Thursday, 4/9	Genes and stress	Chapter 9	Discussion questions HPB Post #3
WEEK 13			
Tuesday, 4/14	Genes and stress		First draft of brochure
Thursday, 4/16	Individual differences in stress reactivity	Chapter 10	Discussion questions Three reflective comments
WEEK 14			
Tuesday, 4/21	Stress reactivity	Kirshbaum et al. (1995)	Discussion questions Critical review #3
Thursday, 4/23	Health implications of reactivity	Chapter 11	Discussion questions
WEEK 15			

Tuesday, 4/28	Stress and heart attacks	Christenfeld et al. (1999)	Discussion questions Critical review #4
Thursday, 4/30	Behavior, stress, & health	Chapter 12	Reflection paper

Week 16			
Tuesday, 4/24	Behavior, stress, & health	Chapter 12	
Thursday, 4/26	Wrap up		Final draft of brochure
Week 17			
FINALS WEEK			

APPENDIX A: Rubric for discussion participation

Participation is graded on a scale from 0 (lowest) through 4 (highest), using the criteria below. The criteria focus on what you demonstrate and do not presume to guess at what you know but do not demonstrate. This is because what you offer to the class is what you and others learn from. Half points may be given at the professor's discretion. Your score will be multiplied by 1.25 to place it on a 5 point scale.

Grade	Criteria
0	Absent.
1	Present, not disruptive. Tries to respond when called on but does not offer much. Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussion.
2	Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic facts from the reading, but does not show evidence of trying to interpret or analyze them. Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from the reading), without elaboration or very infrequently (perhaps once a class). Does not offer to contribute to discussion but contributes to a moderate degree when called on. Demonstrates sporadic involvement.
3	Demonstrates good preparation: knows reading facts well, has thought through implications of them. Offers interpretations and analysis of reading material (more than just facts) to class. Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, thinks through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion. Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement.
4	Demonstrates excellent preparation: has analyzed reading exceptionally well, relating it to textbook and other material (e.g., other readings, course material, discussions, experiences, etc.). Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of reading material, e.g., puts together pieces of the discussion to develop new approaches that take the class further. Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to the cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material and helps class analyze which approaches are appropriate, etc. Demonstrates ongoing very active involvement.

* This rubric was adapted from:

Maznevski, M.L. (January 1996). Grading class participation. *Teaching Concerns: Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants*.
<http://trc.virginia.edu/resources/grading-class-participation-2/>

APPENDIX B: “Humans of South Jersey” assignment details

This assignment was adapted from an assignment developed by Dr. Vicki Sheaffer at LeTourneau University in Longview, TX, which in turn was inspired by the Humans of New York blog (www.humansofnewyork.com) and the learning theory of connectivism. A central tenet of connectivism is that learning and knowledge does not only come from within oneself, but that learning and knowledge also comes from making connections between a variety of fields, ideas, concepts, and opinions. This is essential in the digital age.

Assignment objectives:

1. Make students aware of the diversity of the community in which they live.
2. Foster a sense of understanding and empathy.
3. Help students develop interpersonal skills.
4. Inspire a curiosity about people and their stories.
5. Strengthen the application of textbook and course material to the real-world.

Materials/Procedures:

Venture out into the surrounding community. Find people, couples, families, etc. that you consider to be different from you. These people must be willing to allow you to take their picture and be asked a few questions about stress. Here are some question prompts:

1. What does stress mean to you?
2. What does it mean to be “stressed?”
3. What is stress in the modern world?
4. How do you cope with stress?
5. How do you think stress affects health?

You are not limited to these prompts, but they are provided to help get you started.

We will establish a secret Facebook group that is created so that you can post your photos with a caption in the form of a quote that best represents your interaction. You are required to make at least three posts to the group and make reflective comments on at least six of your classmates’ posts. Reflective comments must be tied to course material.

Finally, you are required to write a reflection paper in which you comment on this assignment in general, your actual experiences, and specific connections you make to the subject matter of the course and readings. The reflection paper must be at least 1200 words (not including the title page and references) and will be submitted to Turnitin.

Due dates: All portions of this assignment are due by 5pm on the dates on the Course Calendar.

Scoring guide

Posts—20 points each (60 total)
Reflective comments—10 points each (60 total)
Reflection paper—140 points