

**SE 189 ONLINE ADVANCED SEMINAR IN THE
SCIENCE AND PRACTICE OF COMPASSION**
INSTRUCTOR: NANCY GUERRA, nguerra1@uci.edu
Online Discussion Section: tbd

THE LADDER OF COMPASSION

Step 6: Kindness and Altruism

Step 5: Empathy

Step 4: Perspective Taking

Step 3: Gratitude

Step 2: Self-Compassion

Step 1: Self-Awareness

OUR QUEST:

- **TO LEARN ABOUT THE “LADDER OF COMPASSION” AND THE SIX STEPS TO LEADING A MORE COMPASSIONATE LIFE.**
- **TO CONNECT COMPASSION TO SERVICE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.**

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to deepen your understanding of the science of compassion and to provide you with opportunities to practice what you learn. Each week you will be asked to view an asynchronous online lecture with videos and activities. You are expected to devote approximately two hours per week asynchronously and one hour in the online synchronous discussion. The material provided each week is approximately two hours, although sometimes it may be a little more or a little less. You are also free to find other related videos and readings of interest to you to fulfill the two hours.

We rely on a framework that integrates various compassion-related themes--the “Ladder of Compassion.” The Ladder of Compassion provides you with six steps to leading a more compassionate life—each step builds on the previous step--moving from a focus on yourself to a

focus on others and our common humanity. You will have an opportunity to engage in many practice activities to facilitate your own personal awareness and growth. You also will be given a set of readings from books and journal articles that provide additional scientific background for what we are studying and hoping to master. Please complete the required readings as they are selected to help you on this journey.

COURSE GOALS: By the end of this course you should:

- Understand the Ladder of Compassion and the science behind each step.
- Gain related skills such as empathic listening, perspective taking, and critical thinking about how to practice effective altruism.
- Understand how compassion, altruistic service, and social justice are interconnected.

COURSE READINGS:

Articles:

- Condon et al. (2013). Meditation increases compassionate responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*, 2125-2127.
- Emmons & McCullough (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *JPS*, 377-389.
- Hofmann et al. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 36, 427-440.
- Neff, K.D., & Germer, C. (2017). Self-Compassion and Psychological Wellbeing. In J. Dory (Ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*, Chapter 27.

Course Books:

- Thupten Jinba (2015). *A Fearless Heart*.
- Peter Singer (2015). *The Most Good You Can Do: How effective altruism is changing ideas about living ethically*

Suggested Readings:

- Paul Bloom (2016). *Against Empathy: The case for rational compassion*.
- Richard Blum (2016). *An Accident of Geography: Compassion, innovation, and the fight against poverty*.
- Tara Cousineau (2018). *The Kindness Cure*.
- Viktor Frankl (1946). *Man's Search for Meaning*.
- Byron Katie(2002). *Loving What Is*.
- Jim Ziolkowski. *Walk in Their Shoes: Can One Person Change the World?*

Reflection Journal. Each week you will be expected to reflect on what you learned, how it applies to you and your life goals. You will write these thoughts in a reflection journal, and we will spend a few minutes discussing comments as a group in the discussion section..

Grading: The course is offered pass/not pass or for a grade. Your assignment will be the 4-5 page summary paper based on your reflection journal. You are expected to be intrinsically motivated to participate in the course, complete readings as relevant to your interests, attend online discussion sections and complete your reflection journals.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: COURSE OVERVIEW: THE LADDER OF COMPASSION

This week begins with a review of the six steps in the Ladder of Compassion and a definition of terms. These steps move from self-awareness and self-compassion through understanding others to effective altruism. We will also take a look at a TED Talk by Krista Tippett, an award-winning journalist and founder of the "On Being" project, as she deconstructs the meaning of compassion through several moving stories, and proposes a new, more attainable definition for the word. Following this, we review a video, Compassion 101, that provides a somewhat different framework for looking at the virtues associated with compassion. We will discuss these two approaches in our synchronous session.

Next, we focus on the many ways in which you can integrate compassion and service into your lives. We interview UCI students who have been in the Global Service Scholars program and a leader of a non-profit dedicated to serving homeless children and their families. We focus on why service to others and to society is critically important in today's world.

Week 2: MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION

Week 2 introduces you to mindfulness and meditation. These contemplative practices are the foundation for much of what we will learn and practice in the course. For students familiar with the concepts, this will be an opportunity for further reflection and practice. You will learn about how we can use mindfulness to enhance compassion in our lives. We will watch selected videos and review the readings on mindfulness, meditation and compassion. Links will be provided for additional mindfulness and meditation resources.

Dr. Roger Walsh, Professor of Psychiatry at UC Irvine, helps you practice breathing and meditation.

Read: Condon et al. (2013). Meditation increases compassionate responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*, 2125-2127.

Jinba, chapters 1, 5.

Week 3: SELF-AWARENESS

Week 3 builds on what you have learned and practiced on mindfulness and meditation. Being “present in the moment” is the first step to becoming more self-aware—knowing key traits that define you and what your greatest strengths and challenges are. We begin with a brief review of self-related concepts focusing on understanding and evaluation. We then focus on personality traits including The Big Five and The Myers-Briggs Inventory, strengths assessments and 360 evaluations. The lecture includes links to self-assessments for you to take on your own.

Next, we focus on how you understand and interpret others and the world around you. We introduce the concept of cognitive “framing” (including biases, scripts, and cognitive distortions) and how this impacts how you interpret events and how you act. We will discuss how “patterns of thinking” are the basis for a range of cognitive-behavioral interventions. Examples of different interpretations of the same event, misinterpretations of events, and cognitive reframing will be reviewed.

Read: Hofmann et al. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 36, 427-440.

Jinba, chapters 3, 4

Week 4: THE PRACTICE OF SELF COMPASSION

Week 4 focuses on self-compassion. We begin by watching a video by Kristen Neff, “The Science of Self-Compassion.” The difference between self-esteem and self-compassion will be discussed. We do this by reviewing different strategies for increasing self-compassion. Students will be asked to identify a new strategy they can practice.

Next, we hear from Alex Cook about his project to increase self-compassion, You Are Loved. We conclude with a Self-Compassion Test and a review of additional resources to help you practice self-compassion.

Read: Neff, K.D., & Germer, C. (2017). Self-Compassion and Psychological Wellbeing. In J. Dory (Ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*, Chapter 27.

Jinba, chapters 2, 6, 7

Week 5: GRATITUDE, SAVORING AND AWE

Week 5 builds on what we learned about self-compassion by exploring the concept of gratitude. Self-compassion helps us be kind to ourselves. Gratitude continues this positive focus, pushing us to reflect on what we are grateful for in our daily lives. We will learn more about the neuroscience of gratitude, how to increase gratitude, and the effect of gratitude on health and well-being.

We further expand our understanding of gratitude to include the concepts of savoring and awe. Just as coping helps us deal with stressors and negative experiences, savoring helps us maximize our enjoyment of positive experiences. Awe is a particular type of savoring when we are in the presence of something vast and/or magnificent, such as looking up at millions of stars in the sky.

Professor Paul Piff and Professor Jessie Borelli will be featured on the video.

Read: Emmons & McCullough (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *JPSP*, 377-389.

Week 6: PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Week 6 introduces the concept of perspective taking, including the distinction between cognitive and affective perspective taking, and the difference between perspective taking, empathy and sympathy. We will consider how perspective taking changes over time during childhood and adolescence, including a review of Selman’s 5 stages of perspective taking.

In Part 2, we examine how perspective taking develops during adulthood and how it connects to leadership styles. We also review how perspective taking sets the stage for empathy. We will do this by watching Jamil Zaki's Ted Talk entitled "Building Empathy: How to hack empathy and get others to care more."

Week 7: EMPATHY

We will review and discuss the evolutionary basis of empathy, how to increase empathy, and the limits of empathy. We will practice empathic responding with the “reading the eyes” test and learn about active listening and empathic communication. We also will watch a talk by Professor Richard Matthew on “compassion fatigue” that includes a discussion of which professions are most affected and effective strategies to reduce this type of burnout.

Week 8: KINDNESS AND HOW TO INCREASE IT

This week we consider kindness as a distinct behavior that can be learned and spread. We look at the benefits of kindness for the giver and the receiver.

We also look at common approaches to increasing everyday acts of kindness, and evaluations of these types of programs. We consider how kindness is related to compassion and altruism, and how to increase kindness in our own lives. You will be asked to select and practice two random acts of kindness this week and write about your experiences in your journal.

Review: Read about the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at the Stanford Medical School (www.ccare.stanford.edu).

Week 9: THE QUEST TO CREATE A MORE EMPATHIC, COMPASSIONATE, AND KIND WORLD: EFFECTIVE ALTRUISM

In the video segment we will review the concept of effective altruism and potential challenges/ethical decisions. We will hear from students and philanthropists who are trying to make the world a better place.

Read: Singer, Chapters 1-15.
Bloom, Chapter 6-7

Week 10: COMPASSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

This week we will review what we have learned about the ladder of compassion, and consider how to connect what we have learned in our lives with our own search for meaning and purpose. We will watch a video about Viktor Frankl, who wrote about the search for meaning based on his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp.

We will hear from Dr. Melissa Smith, a physician who uses her talents to promote social justice, about how compassion and social justice are related, and how working towards social justice calls on compassion and can be a path towards effective altruism.