

# PSY BEH 192B: The Science and Practice of Compassion

Fall 2020

## Lead Instructor:

Paul Piff, UCI  
[ppiff@uci.edu](mailto:ppiff@uci.edu)

## Co-Instructors:

Week 2: Dacher Keltner, UC Berkeley  
Week 3: Emiliana Simon-Thomas, UC Berkeley  
Week 4: Paul Bloom, Yale University  
Week 5: Nancy Guerra, UCI  
Week 6: David DeSteno, Northeastern University  
Week 7: Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, UC Berkeley  
Week 8: Elissa Epel and Eve Ekman, UC San Francisco  
Week 9: Philippe Goldin, UC Davis  
Week 10: Richard Matthew, UCI

## Office Hours:

Dr. Piff will hold regular weekly office hours via Canvas Conferences (Wednesdays from 1 to 2 p.m. and by appointment).

## Course Assistants:

Name: Julie Kircher | [jkircher@uci.edu](mailto:jkircher@uci.edu) | Office hours: Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Name: Sean Goldy | [sgoldy@uci.edu](mailto:sgoldy@uci.edu) | Office hours: Fridays from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Name: Madeline Snyder | [snyderme@uci.edu](mailto:snyderme@uci.edu) | Office hours: Mondays from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

## Overview:

The purpose of this course is to teach the emerging science of compassion, which explores the roots of a meaningful, purposeful, and happy life. Students will discover how cutting-edge research is yielding fundamental insights into the nature of human kindness, the origins of empathy, the promotion of altruistic behavior, and the benefits of living a more compassionate life. The fundamental premise of the course is that connecting to others, behaving in kind ways, and contributing to something larger than yourself is a primary driver of human happiness and flourishing. Students will gain expertise in cross-disciplinary research from psychology, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and beyond.

The course is also informed by extensive discussions with the poverty alleviation, sustainable development and humanitarian assistance communities about preparing students for careers in these areas.

This course is designed as a gateway course for students participating in the year-long Blum Living Peace program that involves an on-ground seminar and immersive field study experience. This course will prepare students for experiential and service learning (such as the UCI Social Ecology requirement of a four-unit field study) as well as stand as a core course of the proposed Compassion and Service Track within the existing Civic and Community Engagement Minor.

### Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- Critically discuss and analyze the meaning, usefulness, and limitations of the following terms: empathy, empathic communication, empathic concern, cognitive empathy, sympathy, affective empathy, perspective taking, cognitive perspective taking, altruism, prosocial behavior, cooperation, and compassion
- Articulate and discuss the evolutionary, biological, neurological, social, developmental, and structural roots of empathy, compassion, and altruistic behavior and understand the linkages between them
- Critically examine and apply original scientific research on the science of compassion
- Reflect on the role of compassion in your life and better understand what factors may hinder vs. facilitate it
- Evaluate and empathically reflect the points of views of others, particularly those with different ethical and political orientations.
- Reflect critically on how your own learning and experiences provide you with the necessary tools to be ambassadors for empathy, compassion, and service.
- Apply your knowledge to pressing problems of the day

### Requirements:

Requirements for this course include:

- Assigned readings
- Lecture videos
- Supplemental (not optional) videos
- Quizzes
- Mandatory attendance at weekly webinars hosted by co-instructors
- Discussion forums
- Individual assignments
- Final assignment

### Grades:

Your final grade for the course will be comprised of the following:

- Your attendance in the weekly **webinars** (10% of your grade)
- Your participation in the weekly **discussion** (20% of your grade)
- Your performance on the **quizzes** (20% of your grade)
- The quality of your **assignments** (20% of your grade)
- Your **final project** (30% of your grade)

Grades are based on the following percentages:

A+ ≥ 100 > A ≥ 94 > A- ≥ 90  
B+ ≥ 87 > B ≥ 84 > B- ≥ 80  
C+ ≥ 77 > C ≥ 74 > C- ≥ 70  
D+ ≥ 67 > D ≥ 64 > D- ≥ 60 > F

Grades are not based on a curve and will not be rounded. Your grade will be calculated by adding the points that you *earn* on each assignment. You can earn two extra percentage points in the course by completing one of two extra credit options, described below.

Your grade for discussion posts and written assignments will be based on the quality of your answers, as well as on the quality and strength of your writing. We strongly recommend that you use a style manual that provides you with tips on good writing.

Quizzes will cover material from the lecture videos, supplemental videos, and assigned readings. Quizzes will be available for 24 hours, and you will have 20 minutes to complete the quiz once you begin. Quiz answers will be available via Canvas after the quiz window closes.

**\*\*Please check your grades frequently. The deadline for discussing all grading issues is Friday of Week 10.\*\***

#### **Incompletes:**

Incomplete grades will be assigned only in documented emergencies.

#### **Webinar Policy:**

Webinar attendance is a mandatory part of this course. To receive credit, please login to the webinar within the first five minutes (but preferably at the starting time) and stay for the duration. You can be late or miss a webinar ONCE during the quarter. In case you are unable to attend, webinars will be recorded and viewable the following week.

#### **Due Dates:**

In fairness to all students in the class, make-up quizzes will be offered in cases of *advance notice of documented emergency only*. Permission will not be granted to take the quizzes early or late. Students who do not take a quiz within the allotted window of time will not be able to make up the quiz. Also note that I will drop your lowest quiz score, in case you miss one or do not do as well as you would have liked to. Please plan your schedule accordingly.

Assignments are due on the specified date and time, as shown in Canvas. Late assignments will not be accepted for points. There will be a total of four assignments for this course (due Sundays of Week 2, Week 4, Week 6, and Week 8). Details regarding these assignments will be available via Canvas. The final assignment (described in brief below) will be due on the Friday of Week 10.

If you experience technical difficulties submitting an assignment, please email your full assignment to one of the course TAs within a few minutes of the assignment deadline. You are

responsible for ensuring that your assignment is submitted on time in .doc, .docx, or .pdf format. Links to Google Docs will not be accepted.

### Hot Topic Modules:

Applying the science of compassion to pressing current issues is an important aspect of this course. I have selected readings, videos, and other materials related to four pressing issues of the day. These materials are organized into four Hot Topic Modules intended to stimulate your thinking on how the content of this course can be applied to make a real difference in our communities and in our lives.

During this course, you will be asked to select one of these topics as an area of focus. Some of your discussion prompts, assignments, and extra credit opportunities will relate to the Hot Topic Module of your choice. Hot Topic Modules will be available starting Week 1 so that you may engage with these materials throughout the course.

### Discussion Posts:

Each week you will be asked to post on the discussion board at least two times. Your first post will be an original response to that week's prompt. Your second post will be a reply to another student. Grades are based on the quality and accuracy of your post, including references to relevant material from this course. Both original posts and replies should demonstrate that you are engaging with course material. Reply posts should advance the conversation in a meaningful way by raising additional perspectives that might support or constructively challenge the other student's main points.

### Final Assignment:

For your final assignment, we want you to synthesize your learnings and observations across the weeks and apply them to *the real world* and your chosen Hot Topic Module. Please identify a problem - in your school, community, city, state, country, or world - that is related to your Hot Topic Module and that you think stems from a compassion deficit. That is, pick a problem related to your Hot Topic, however big or small, that you think is caused by a lack of compassion. Please describe the problem and why you think it stems, at least in part, from a lack of compassion. Next, please outline a **viable** solution to this problem – that is, design an intervention that you think would increase compassion and, in turn, help mitigate the problem. Be specific. What kind of intervention would you introduce? How would you design it? How would you implement it? What sorts of challenges do you think you might encounter? This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade and is due Friday of Week 10. More details on this assignment will be available via Canvas starting in Week 9. This includes a rubric, which you should consult and study BEFORE you get started.

### Extra Credit:

There are two options for earning up to 2% of extra credit in this course. If you elect to complete an extra credit assignment, please choose one from the two options below. You can only receive credit for completing one.

**Option A: Extra Credit Essay (2%).** This extra credit assignment refers to the Hot Topic module that most interests you. Throughout the course, you will learn about much of the currently published research on a variety of topics related to the science and practice of compassion. However, the body of published research on any topic has limitations. For the extra credit assignment, we challenge you to critique the literature and existing work presented in your selected Hot Topic module. Write a 3-5 page essay that addresses the specific questions that are outlined in detail on Canvas.

**Option B: Extra Credit Surveys, Part 1 and 2 (2%).** If you choose the survey option, you must complete both Part 1 and Part 2 to receive any credit. You will be asked to enter your full name and student ID number into each survey. Entering this information correctly is the only way to receive credit. Your responses are confidential. Part 1 must be completed by the end of Week 1 (Sunday, 10/11/2020, 11:59 PM). Part 2 must be completed at the end of the quarter (during Week 11). Survey links are available on Canvas during the specified timeframe.

### Getting Help and Keeping in Touch:

Even though this is an online course, it's not a "do it yourself" endeavor. Remember, Prof. Piff and TAs are here to help. We want you to be connected to your Lead Instructor and the TAs. However, it is your responsibility to seek help when you need it. Use the following methods to get in touch and/or ask questions:

- Questions concerning class materials should be posted on the class discussion forum called "Post Your Questions and Comments Here," so that all students can benefit from reading the answer. Discussion postings are archived and will be available throughout the course.
- Please refrain from emailing Dr. Piff or TA with questions about the readings or video lessons. Instead, post these types of questions to the discussion forum. We will do our best to respond quickly to questions.
- When we have a need for communication that is private, whether personal, interpersonal, or professional, we will use individual email or Canvas messaging.

Important class announcements will be made via Canvas. Please ensure that you have read each of these announcements and adjust your Canvas settings so that you receive notifications when announcements are posted.

### Online Communication:

#### Basic considerations

In an online classroom, we communicate primarily through writing. Although expressing ourselves through writing has many advantages, it also has disadvantages. Of central concern is the possibility for misunderstandings or conveying a tone that you do not intend to convey. This happens because we lack the benefit of having access to one another's body language, facial expressions, tone, and non-verbal gestures. As a result, we need to be aware of the real possibility of unintentional miscommunication.

### **Specifics for this class**

We require that all communication be done in a respectful, courteous, and professional manner. When in doubt, always err in this direction: aim for being slightly more courteous than you may think you need to be. Nobody will object to an extra “please” or “thank you.” Always take a few minutes to read what you have written before posting a comment or sending an email – pause and think – could what you have written be construed as impolite or snappy? When in doubt, re-think your words and tone, and re-calibrate your message. We may not always agree, but disagreeing while simultaneously showing respect and courtesy toward someone is a skill that will serve you well throughout your life and in many contexts. Always make criticism constructive and not personal. If you disagree with someone, they should not feel personally attacked. Keep the ideas separate from the person. We will always keep these principles in mind when communicating with you – please do the same toward us, the TA, and your fellow students.

### **Internet Connectivity and Technology:**

Please ensure that you have a stable Internet connection when you are taking the quizzes. Whenever possible, use a wired connection instead of a wireless connection. Connectivity issues that arise during a quiz may prevent you from completing the quiz or may cause scoring errors.

Please download multiple web browsers (e.g., Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari) before the beginning of the course. This will help to ensure that you are able to navigate around technology problems that may be browser-specific. Often, switching to another browser will solve a problem.

### **Readings:**

A detailed list of readings for each week is available in the weekly modules via Canvas.

#### *Why bother to do the readings?*

The assigned readings *complement* the class lecture and supplemental videos. In other words:

### **Lecture Videos + Supplemental Videos + Assigned Readings = Complete Picture**

When reading for this class, we recommend that you think about how the concepts that you are reading about apply to this class as a whole, to the assignments, and to other real-world situations.

#### *How to read for this class?*

Reading the required texts isn’t meant to be an exercise in memorization. Instead, please focus your reading efforts on understanding the key concepts and applying these concepts to scenarios in the real world and to the assignments. If you are unfamiliar with this active type of reading, you can take a look at the [helpful tips here](#).

Class Outline
<b>Week 1:</b> Introduction. The landscape of compassion; introductions to course; definitions; controversies; scientific approaches (Prof. Paul Piff, UCI)
<b>Week 2:</b> Evolutionary approaches to compassion, including compassion among non-humans (Prof. Dacher Keltner, UC Berkeley)
<b>Week 3:</b> Compassion in the brain and body (Prof. Emiliana Simon-Thomas, UC Berkeley)
<b>Week 4:</b> The development of compassion in babies and children (Prof. Paul Bloom, Yale University)
<b>Week 5:</b> The development of compassion among teens and young adults (Dean Nancy Guerra, UCI)
<b>Week 6:</b> Social psychological (emotional, situational, contextual) causes of compassion (Prof. David DeSteno, Northeastern University)
<b>Week 7:</b> Individual differences and social psychological barriers; where compassion breaks down between individuals, groups, and cultures; intergroup perspectives (Prof. Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, UC Berkeley)
<b>Week 8:</b> Health and clinical perspectives on compassion (compassion fatigue, self-compassion, well-being) (Prof. Elissa Epel and Prof. Eve Ekman, UC San Francisco)
<b>Week 9:</b> Cultivating and building compassion (Prof. Philippe Goldin, UC Davis)
<b>Week 10:</b> Compassion in communities and context - in organizations, healthcare, global perspectives (Prof. Richard Matthew, UCI)

### Academic Integrity:

We take academic integrity extremely seriously. The learning environment at the University of California, Irvine is based on honesty and integrity. Sustaining this environment requires that all participants recognize the importance of maintaining the highest ethical standards.

It is critical that all individual student assignments be the sole work of each individual student and that team assignments be a collaborative effort with equal contributions from all team members. The quizzes you take in this course are to be taken by you and you alone, without assistance from another person, though you may use the information from course materials and the text book to assist you. Using the help of another person or resources beyond those provided/used in our course constitutes academic dishonesty. In addition, posting lecture notes, presentation videos, assignments, quiz questions/answers, pages or excerpts from readings, and/or any material that you receive in this class to note-sharing websites constitutes academic dishonesty.

Material submitted in this class may be passed through turnitin.com, which will check your assignments against published works, content on the Internet, and every other paper submitted to turnitin.com. Please ensure that the work that you submit in this class is your own and that you use your own words when writing your assignments.

Anyone found to be in violation of the university policy on academic integrity will receive an F in the course. There are no exceptions to this rule, as we have zero-tolerance for all forms of academic dishonesty. We will never look the other way.

Remaining in the course assumes that you understand what academic integrity is, in all its varied forms, and pledge not to engage in any type of dishonest conduct (which includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, and dishonest conduct). You, the student, are required to know and understand the relevant policies regarding academic integrity. To this end, you are required to carefully read the information found by following the academic integrity link below. Additionally, all participants in the course are also bound by the University of California Code of Conduct.

UC Irvine's Policy on Academic Integrity: <http://senate.uci.edu/academic-integrity/>

The University of California Code of Conduct: <http://www.ucop.edu/ethics-compliance-audit-services/files/stmt-stds-ethics.pdf>

### **Disability Services:**

If you need support or assistance because of a disability, you may be eligible for accommodations or services through the Disability Service Center at UC Irvine. Please contact the DSC directly at (949) 824-7494 or TDD (949) 824-6272. You can also visit the DSC's website: <http://www.dsc.uci.edu/>. The DSC will work with your instructor to make any necessary accommodations. Please note that it is your responsibility to initiate this process with the DSC.