

HOPE

People Person

Social psychologist David Myers
reaches the world in print.

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Psychology for the World

By Greg Chandler

Dr. David Myers of the Hope psychology faculty is ever a teacher, relating his discipline to the individual even while reaching millions.

In the mid 1990s, Dr. Myers was being interviewed for an ABC TV one-hour special on “The Mystery of Happiness,” the topic of his book *The Pursuit of Happiness: Who Is Happy—and Why*. At one point during the taping, he asked the host, “Are you a happy person?”

He replied that he wasn’t. “The program then made him into a case example of what factors do and don’t mark happy lives,” said Dr. Myers, who has been a member of the Hope faculty since 1967.

While Dr. Myers did more than 400 media interviews based on the *The Pursuit of Happiness*, which he called “an interim report on a fledgling science” in his preface, he was particularly pleased by the network program, which was broadcast three times to

huge audiences. “They did a really good job of presenting the scientific pursuit of happiness.”

While Dr. Myers may be best known to general audiences for books such as *The Pursuit of Happiness*, he has actually built a reputation as one of the nation’s top authors of textbooks in the field of psychology.

Some 15 million college students around the world have read one of Dr. Myers’ textbooks. He has authored 31 versions of the 10 editions of his introductory psychology text, along with 10 editions and five brief versions of his text on social psychology. The books have been published in a dozen foreign languages. His writings have also been published in more than three dozen academic journals, including *Science*, *The American Scientist*, and *Psychological Science*, and four dozen magazines, from *Scientific American* to *Christian Century*.

“I feel privileged to assist in the teaching of so many people, in so many places, and in so many languages. I feel a responsibility to do it well,” Dr. Myers said. “Fortunately, I have been blessed with abundant help from world-class editors and hundreds of supportive colleagues.”

Long-time colleague Dr. Thomas Ludwig, who is the John Dirk Werkman Professor of Psychology, credits Dr. Myers for encouraging his interest in joining the Hope faculty in the late 1970s. He says Dr. Myers’s prominence in his field has been a credit to the college and to the study of psychology itself.

“Dave has consistently worked to bring the results of psychological research to public awareness, helping people understand how psychological principles help explain human behavior,” said Dr. Ludwig, who has developed computer-based and online activities to accompany Dr. Myers’s introductory psychology texts. “Millions of high school and college students have learned about psychology by reading one of Dave’s books, and this has given them a good foundation for success in their careers and their personal relationships.”



Dr. David Myers is a firm believer in the value of Hope’s liberal arts education as preparation for the complexity, variety and change students will experience across their post-college lives. His own scholarship reflects a range of interests within his discipline, from psychology and social psychology itself to topics as disparate as happiness and hearing loss.

Dr. Ludwig has also team-taught classes with Dr. Myers in recent years on the connection between psychology and faith, a topic on which Myers has written five books, including *Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith* (with British psychologist Malcolm Jeeves).

Not bad for someone who didn’t initially consider psychology as a career field when he entered Whitworth College, a liberal arts school in Spokane, Wash., in the early 1960s. Majoring in chemistry for his undergraduate degree, Dr. Myers initially planned to go into medicine, but by his senior year, he had decided to go into another direction.

“I decided I didn’t want to be a doctor. I wanted to be a professor, but I needed something to profess that wasn’t biology or chemistry,” he quipped.

It was then that Dr. Myers decided to go into psychology, with a particular interest in social psychology. He earned his master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Iowa. He joined the Hope faculty the year he received his Ph.D. from Iowa.

Dr. Myers points to his own experience as a student at a liberal arts college, as well as his many years of teaching students at Hope, as examples of the value of a liberal arts education.

“What liberal arts colleges do is help prepare students for the unpredictable future,” Dr. Myers said. “Most students enter college with an idea of what they want to do, and they’re wrong. They end up majoring in something unrelated to what they were thinking about. They’ll end up working in something unrelated to their major.”

“A liberal arts education prepares you to think critically, to communicate effectively, to understand yourself and the world around you,” he added.

At one point early in his career, Dr. Myers considered returning to his home state, as he

was being strongly encouraged to apply for a position at a major university there. He and his wife, Carol, struggled with the decision, ultimately agreeing that they wanted to stay in Holland long-term.

“This was the place that fit who we were. We never regretted that decision,” Dr. Myers said.

Dr. Myers is also thankful that the college has supported him, even when tackling controversial subjects. In 2005, he co-authored the book *What God Has Joined Together: The Case for Gay Marriage*, with Letha Dawson Scanzoni. The book was written as an effort to reconcile the conflict between those in the faith community who favor traditional marriage and those who support gay marriage.

“Hope has given me the freedom, without restraint, to follow my calling,” Dr. Myers said. Dr. Myers is an enthusiastic member and supporter of the Hope community. Even as he is featured internationally for his work, he is quick to highlight his connection to the college to those he meets. A sports enthusiast as well, he can consistently be seen in the faculty section at home basketball games, and regularly plays hoops at the Dow Center during the lunch hours. With 45 consecutive years as a part of the campus community, he is the longest-serving current member of the Hope faculty.

Hope professor of psychology Dr. Jane Dickie credits Dr. Myers for encouraging her to reapply at the college after being initially turned down for a teaching position. Dr. Dickie says Dr. Myers works to ensure justice and fairness in this world.

“David is rational and an empiricist to the highest degree. It surprises him when others do not act in rational ways,” Dr. Dickie said. “But he is very patient, and explains with detail and with finesse to help people understand. This is what has made him not only a very successful, world-class author, but a great colleague in the department.”

Another area where Dr. Myers has found his voice in the public arena is in his advocacy for helping those with hearing loss. He has been a leading advocate nationally for the installation of “hearing loops,” which broadcast public-address systems, television and telephone sounds directly to hearing aids (transforming them into wireless loudspeakers). He founded a college-hosted web site, hearingloop.org, and has written about 30 articles on the topic, as well as a 2000 book, *A Quiet World: Living with Hearing Loss*, which depicts his own journey with hearing loss. A recent front-page *New York Times* story on this consumer-led movement soon became the paper’s second most e-mailed article of the prior month, and concluded by explaining: “In the pre-loop days at Dr. Myers’s church in Michigan [Hope Church], the assistive-hearing headsets were rarely used by more than a single person at any service. Other worshipers were dissuaded by the inconvenience and embarrassment, he said. Shortly after the loop was installed, 10 people told him they were using it, and the number has been growing as more people get hearing aids that work with the system. ‘If we build it, they will come,’ Dr. Myers said. ‘I see no reason why what’s happened here in West Michigan can’t happen across America.’”

It now is happening, and in April of last year, Dr. Myers received the American Academy of Audiology’s President’s Award for his advocacy of hearing loop systems. It was one of three major awards he has received recently. He also was honored by the Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences Foundation, and received the Society for Personality and Social Psychology’s 2011 Award for Distinguished Service on Behalf of Social-Personality Psychology.

For all his recognition and notoriety, Dr. Myers still finds joy in coming to his Hope office on a daily basis and interacting with students and faculty members, and continuing to study the field he has written so extensively about.

“I learn something new every day. That’s the joy of what I do,” Dr. Myers said. 🐟

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– Dr. David Myers, professor of psychology

Appreciative students seek autographs from Dr. David Myers following a lecture in Beijing, China. His texts on psychology and sociology have been published in a dozen languages, and have been used by millions around the globe.

