

Annex F

The Science of Happiness

- Instructor: Associate Professor of Psychology Christie Scollon
- School: School of Social Sciences
- Inaugural course: Term 1, AY2014-15 (Aug to Nov 2014)
- Next course-run: Term 1, AY2015-16 (Aug to Nov 2015)

Course description

This course is designed to provide students with a foundation in the scientific literature on happiness, or subjective well-being (SWB). In particular, the course will cover questions about the measurement of happiness, the causes and consequences of happiness, happiness interventions, and happiness as an aim for society. The course will focus on rigorous scientific evidence, not self-help books or theories or anecdotal evidence. The course does not aim to make students happier (although I would be pleased if it does!).

A Word About Workload

There is a heavy workload for this course, atypical of most 100-level courses. Do not be fooled by the title of the course. The science of happiness is technical, specific, and scientific.

Instructional Methods and Expectations

Course sessions will be a combination of group discussions, lecture, and project meetings.

Group Project

The basic premise of the project is that SWB researchers have made some key discoveries about happiness. Students will work in small groups focused on a sector of society (e.g., education, community, business). Each student group will examine how SWB can help that area of society or population. The goal is to translate some of the scientific research on SWB so that it has impact on real people.

Example projects include a program, application, intervention, campaign, game, or social enterprise—the sky's the limit—as long as the project has a basis in the science of SWB. Each group will provide a weekly update on the status of their project to be shared with the entire class on a class blog. In Week 13, the groups will publicly present their final projects.

A Word on Uncertainty and Grading

Group Projects will be student-led. I cannot tell you how long your project needs to be, how many pages (if pages at all), or what the outcome will look like. We (the TAs and your Prof) will do our best to help guide you in the development of your project, but ultimately, your creativity and implementation must shine through. I cannot show you an A+ project from last year, and I do not wish to constrain your imagination with too many examples. The only thing I am certain of is that each project will be different.

I cannot provide a detailed grading rubric because it would probably look different for each group. The best I can do is to give you some broad dimensions on which you will be assessed: (1) Extent to which the project incorporates SWB science, (2) Ability to communicate the science to your client/audience, (3) Impact on society, (4) Execution vs Challenge/Risk. Students who are uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity regarding assessments should not sign up for this course. There is an opportunity to do something fun and groundbreaking, but students who are

primarily concerned about the grade will miss the real lesson here. Please consider this carefully before signing up for the course.

Schedule

Week	Topic
1	What is SWB? Who is happy? The basics of SWB.
2	A brief history of happiness. The measurement of SWB.
3	The happiness advantage
4	Can money buy happiness?
5	Dispositional happiness, genetics, adaptation
6	SWB of nations. Culture and happiness
7	Happy thoughts: Cognition and SWB
8	Recess week
9	Religion and SWB
10	SWB and Public Policy
11	Happiness interventions
12	The dark side of happy
13	Grand Finale: Presentation of Group Projects
14	Revision week; Individual Assignment Due
15	Finals week

Assessment Methods

Group Project 35%

Individual Paper 15%

Final Exam (comprehensive) 25%

Participation 15%

Homework/Quizzes/Etc 10%

Additional Information

- When the course was run in Aug 2014, SMU partnered with several organisations including Pat's Schoolhouse, The Asian Parent, The Thought Collective and SMU's Office of Facilities Management
- The course uses student-led group projects, experiential learning, and capitalises on SMU's city location to involve the community around us. In fact, all the partners listed above are within a three-kilometre radius from SMU.
- From AY2015, the course will be run as an SMU X programme. The partner list is being confirmed at this point. Professor Scollon plans to expand the type of sectors/projects the students will collaborate with/work on. For example, she intends for her students to work on a project with a community theatre group, as well as one with a gaming expert.

Project Example:

- Partner organisation: The Asian Parent

Five undergraduate students worked with The Asian Parent, a media company and SE Asia's largest online parenting magazine with a readership of over 12 million page views monthly. The

students developed media for the client which shared some of the latest research from the science of happiness. One product was an online article answering the question “Can money buy happiness?” Another product was a 5-minute illustrative animation which turned the common conception that success leads to happiness on its head. The video explained that scientific research shows that happiness can also lead to success – both interpersonal and career success, as well as greater physical health.

The client published the works of the students on their website, and they can still be viewed there to this day:

- The benefits of happiness (YouTube) : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4l4gPr3E0h0>
- Can money buy happiness?: <http://sg.theasianparent.com/does-money-buy-happiness/>
- 5 ways to raise a happy kid: <http://sg.theasianparent.com/simple-tips-how-to-raise-a-happy-child/>
