

MACS325

Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions

Autumn session 2012

8 credit points, prerequisite 36 credit points at 200 level

SUBJECT OUTLINE

University of Wollongong



Faculty of Arts

School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication

Media and Cultural Studies (MACS)

SUBJECT COORDINATORS

Chris Barker, room 19.2020
Mailing address: Arts Faculty, University of
Wollongong, NSW 2522
Phone: 4221 3671 (work)
Email: cbarker@uow.edu.au

Office hours Tuesday 10:30-12:30 and
Wednesday 12:30-2:30

Brian Martin, room 19.2016
Mailing address: Arts Faculty, University of
Wollongong, NSW 2522
Phone: 4228 7860 (home), 4221 3763 (work)
Email: bmartin@uow.edu.au
Web <http://www.bmartin.cc/>

Office hours Thursdays 17.30–19.30; Fridays
17.30–19.30

Assessment Summary

	Assessment	Format	Length	Due Date	Weighting
1	Participation	Weekly oral reports plus participation	30–60 seconds	Weeks 1–12	15%
2	Reflective journal	Written report	1000 words	2pm Thursday 12 April	15%
3	Activity	Class time organised by student group	<i>See notes</i>	Allocated in class	20%
4	Consultancy	Report	3000 words or equivalent	2pm Wednesday 30 May	50%

Class times and locations are available from the University's website. Please note that times on the timetable are provisional. Students should enrol in classes via SOLS before week 1. Those with timetabling difficulties should see Chris or Brian.

Generic information relating to all Arts Faculty subjects including codes of practice, plagiarism, faculty handbook, grievance procedures and support services can be found at Arts Central's webpage, under the link Subject Outlines:
<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/current/artscentral/UOW061165.html>

Advice to you from previous students

- Make sure you read the weekly readings to be able to share your thoughts on them each class.
- Pick topics that interest you.
- Start meeting early with your consultancy team and schedule regular catch-ups throughout the semester.
- Be happy!

Subject description

We will explore what is known about the causes and conditions for happiness as individuals, in interpersonal relationships and as society. The question “how can we be happy?” will be approached in an interdisciplinary fashion through various perspectives including cultural studies and cultural angles on psychology, economics and sociology. Students will develop skills and concepts for being informed, responsible independent learners who can solve problems, communicate effectively and use appropriate research methods of observation and questioning (interviews and surveys).

Learning outcomes; graduate qualities

1. Think critically about happiness and its connections with personal, social, political and economic issues (independent learners).
2. Develop understanding of a range of views about happiness and their relation to theories (informed).
3. Learn ways to reflect on and think creatively about happiness and related concepts (independent learners; problem solvers).
4. Develop research skills, including interviewing (effective communicators; problem solvers).
5. Develop and improve oral presentation and writing skills (effective communicators; responsible).

Informed

Have a sound knowledge of an area of a disciplinary study or interdisciplinary area of study offered by the Faculty of Arts through its majors with an understanding of its current issues, their contexts and developments over time.

Independent Learners

Engage with new ideas and ways of thinking, enquiry and critical analysis of issues and research through a sequence of subjects that culminates in the ability to reflect broadly on their field of study. Acknowledge the work and ideas of others.

Problem Solvers

Take on challenges and apply the relevant skills required to respond effectively to the central issues raised. Be flexible, thorough and innovative and aim for high standards.

Effective Communicators

Articulate ideas and convey them effectively using a variety of modes. Engage collaboratively with people in different settings. Recognise how culture can shape communication.



Responsible

Understand how decisions can affect others, and make ethically informed choices. Appreciate and respect diversity. Act with integrity as part of local, national, regional, global and professional communities.

The Faculty Graduate Qualities can be found on the following website:

<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/current/FacultyGraduateQualities/index.html>

Regulations require specifying a word-count equivalent for each assessment component. For MACS325: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• participation, 1000 words• reflective journal, 1000 words• classroom activity, 1000 words• consultancy report and comments, 3000 words
--

Subject schedule

Week	Starting	
1	27 February	1-minute reports; meet-and-greet; MACS325 overview
2	5 March	1-minute reports; set up activity groups
3	12 March	1-minute reports; form consultancy teams; model classroom activity
4	19 March	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy and classroom activity
5	26 March	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy; classroom activity
6	2 April (no class Friday)	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy; classroom activity
	9 April	mid session recess Reflective journal due
7	16 April	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy; classroom activity
8	23 April (no class Wednesday)	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy; classroom activity
9	30 April	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy; classroom activity
10	7 May	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy; classroom activity
11	14 May	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy; classroom activity
12	21 May	1-minute reports; preparation for consultancy
13	28 May	Consultancy report due review

What happens in "lectures"

- Activities organised by Chris/Brian (weeks 1–2)
- Consultancy-related activities (weeks 3–13)

In this subject, sessions listed as 'lectures' will actually be interactive sessions rather than talks.

What happens in tutorials

- Weekly 1-minute reports (weeks 1–12)
- Activities organised by Chris/Brian (weeks 1–3, 12)
- Prepare for reflective journal (weeks 1–5)
- Classroom activities (weeks 5–11)

Textbook

Sonja Lyubomirsky, *The how of happiness: a new approach to getting the life you want* (New York: Penguin, 2008)

Themes

For your reflective journal, classroom activity and consultancy, you should use ideas from research in any of the following areas. You're welcome to propose other areas; check with Brian or Chris.

advertising
altruism
architecture
cognition
communication technology
community
competition
diet
economics
ethics
fashion
forgiveness
friendship
globalisation
gratitude
health
love
medicine
mindfulness
money
music
optimism
psychology
relationships
religion
spirituality
sport
television
work

This subject outline, plus information sheets and consent forms for the consultancy, are available at <http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/>.

Requirements and assessment tasks

Subject Requirements

- You must participate in or submit every component of assessment to pass the subject.
- Extensions for written work can be granted only when applications for special consideration are made through SOLS.
- Penalty for late submission of work: 10 marks per day out of 100.
- The subject coordinators reserve the right to hold an additional oral examination for any piece of assessment.

Task 1 Participation

Due date Weeks 1–12

Weighting 15%

Length 30-60 seconds verbal report each week, in tutorials, plus participation in activities

In the tutorial for each of the weeks 1 to 12, you give a verbal report to the class lasting 30 to 60 seconds. In your report, you should comment on the reading for the week and on how it connects to some relevant information about yourself or people you know or observe.

An important skill for you to learn and practise is to speak to the others in the class without reading. Jot down a few notes to remind you about key points, or go entirely from memory. If you get nervous, practise by yourself one or more times. One minute goes by very quickly!

You will be marked only on whether you give a report, *not* on how well you do it. So go ahead and experiment with different forms of delivery: for example, be dramatic, or draw everyone in by starting with intriguing details.

Your participation mark starts at 15 out of 15. You lose 1.5 marks for every week you do not give a one-minute report or participate in the class. If you are absent, that means you aren't participating; if you miss part of a class, that's partial participation.

Classes are omitted from the calculation when a special consideration request is made through SOLS justifying absence on medical or compassionate grounds.

MACS325 classes are interactive. Part of your learning is from other students, and other students learn from you.

Weekly topics for 1-minute reports

1. *How happy are you?*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 1 and chapter 2 up to “The limits of life circumstances”
2. *Circumstances and set points*
Lyubomirsky, remainder of chapter 2
3. *Income and happiness*
Daniel Kahneman et al., “Would you be happier if you were richer? A focusing illusion,” *Science*, 30 June 2006, pp. 1908–1910. Available as an e-reading.
4. *Happiness activities that fit*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 3 and foreword to part two
5. *Gratitude and positive thinking*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 4
6. *Social connections*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 5
7. *Stress, hardship and trauma*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 6
8. *Flow and savouring*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 7
9. *Critique of positive psychology*
Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-sided* (2009), chapter 6, available as an e-reading.
10. *Goals*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 8
11. *Body and soul*
Lyubomirsky, chapter 9
12. *Education*
Tal Ben-Shahar, “Happiness in education,” *Happier* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), pp. 83–96. Available as an e-reading.

For any given week you can, if you prefer, use a different reading that covers similar issues. You can also have a look at other e-readings. If you find a reading that you think is equal to or better than the one listed, be sure to tell Brian or Chris.

Task 2

Reflective journal

Due date 2pm Thursday 12 April

Weighting 15%

Length 1000 words

You should find and report on 3 pieces of academic research (e.g. journal articles) and 3 pieces of popular writing (newspapers, magazines, websites, etc.) that recommend a particular activity as enhancing happiness. For example there are academic articles that offer evidence that expressing gratitude increases happiness, as well as news reports or features describing the same findings. See the “Themes” list on page 3 for further ideas.

You should then undertake this activity for 5 weeks and report on your experience. In a reflective journal you aim to search out evidence and analyse it; draw conclusions based on the evidence; and reflect on and evaluate the evidence and experience in order to make a pronouncement about its value (in order to improve our lives).

Your reflective journal should address:

1. The evidence provided by academic sources for the benefits of the nominated activity
2. The similarities and differences between academic and popular reporting of the evidence
3. Your implementation of the activity
4. Your reflections (observations and assessments) about your experience
5. Your evaluation of the evidence for the activity based on the sources and your experience. For example, does your experience reinforce or contradict the academic evidence and popular reporting?

For your own purposes you may write as much as you want. But for the purpose of reporting to us (i.e. as an assessment task) we want you to restrict your account to 1000 words and to provide a word count at the end of the journal. This requires focused thinking and succinct writing which are skills we are asking you to develop here. As author Mark Twain is quoted as saying; “If I’d had more time, I’d have written a shorter letter.”

Reflective journals will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)

- Evidence of productive and engaged thinking
- Insights concerning the readings
- Insights concerning your experience
- Quality of writing

Submission

Send your journal to Chris or Brian by email, as an attachment. Name the attachment with your student number, e.g. 1234567.pdf or 1234567.doc. In the text of your journal, include your student number but not your name.

Task 3

Classroom activity

Due dates In tutorial time in weeks 5 to 11

The week for your activity will be decided in class.

Weighting 20%

Students will form teams of 2 to 4 individuals and present a learning activity within a tutorial that is designed to engage other students in one of the core skills that research tells us is pertinent to the development and maintenance of happiness.

Maximum time allocated for each classroom activity will be

- individual, 18 minutes
- team of two, 34 minutes
- team of three, 48 minutes
- team of four, 60 minutes

It’s okay to take less than this amount of time.

Classroom activities will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)

- understanding of case material
- understanding of theory
- audience involvement
- aids (handouts, slides, posters, videos, costumes, props, music)

This is an activity, *not a presentation*.

Here are some examples of activities that are effectively organised to involve the audience and use many aids (the third and fourth assessment criteria). You show understanding of the case study and theory (the first two assessment criteria) by the content and organisation of materials used.

Example 1

Students are put into groups of three according to the team’s prearranged plan. Each group deals with a series of tasks: studying a handout and filling in a questionnaire; drawing a diagram; watching a two-minute video clip and writing a critic’s summary comment; playing a game; and preparing questions for the other groups. At the end, each student answers a single probing question.

Example 2

Each student, on entering the classroom, is given an animal token and a questionnaire. After filling out the questionnaire and depositing it in a box, students go to one of four groups according to their token. Each group spends 12 minutes at each of four stations around the room. At each station, one of the team members runs an activity: a video followed by discussion, a game, a set of handouts followed by a quiz, and construction of a diagram. At the end, students fill out the same questionnaire in order to see how much they learned.

Example 3

Each student is given a workbook, with text, pictures, cut-outs and quizzes. Slides are automatically projected on the screen; posters are on the walls; music is playing; a pile of cards is on a table. Some of the workbook exercises require use of information or clues from the slides, posters, songs and cards. Team members are available to answer individual queries. At the end, the team collects the pages of the workbooks filled out by students, leaving the main content of the workbooks for students to take away.

Guidelines

- *Don't* talk to the class about the case study or theory.

Why not? Because it's low on audience involvement, and it's inefficient.

Instead, use a handout with the same information. People can read text in a fraction of the time it takes to say it out loud.

- *Don't* rely on verbal instructions.

Why not? Because half the class won't be listening and some people won't hear them correctly.

Instead, provide written instructions in a handout, on a poster or a slide show. Only give instructions verbally, if necessary, to explain or reinforce written instructions.

- *Don't* show a video for more than a minute or two at a time.

Why not? Because it's low on audience involvement. Viewers quickly switch into passive entertainment mode.

Instead, have a quiz or other exercise to fill out during the video, or show a minute's worth of the video, have a break for discussion, then show another minute, etc.

- *Don't* tell the class to "get into groups."

Why not? Because self-selected groups may not be the size or composition that you want.

Instead, decide in advance the size of groups and —

possibly — who you want in each one. You can allocate people to groups by some arbitrary criterion, such as birthdays, height or random numbers. Or you can allocate people according to their views about specific issues, such as about money or love. Or you can select the groups in advance, to get a desired mix of personality types. For example, to foster balanced participation, you might put the most talkative students in a group together.

A few specific points:

- Identify sources for any quotes, for example in handouts.

• Plan every detail. For example, if you want responses to a question, you might display the instruction "Everyone write down a response on a slip of paper" rather than "What do you think?" Planning details will make your workshop more engaging.

• Practise in advance to iron out difficulties and check that you can stay within the allotted time. Keeping to time can be a big challenge.

Task 4

Happiness consultancy

Due date 2pm Wednesday 30 May

Weighting 50%

Length 3000 words

On the report, put your student number but not your name. In your comments, use pseudonyms for yourself and any other MACS325 student.

Submission

If you are in Chris's tutorial, submit your report at Arts Central. Put your name on the cover sheet only.

If you are in Brian's tutorial, put your report under the door to his office (19.2016). No cover sheet is needed.

You work in a team of several students to carry out an assessment of the causes and conditions of happiness in a group. You make contact with an appropriate group, negotiate the conditions of your study, carry out an assessment of an identified issue of happiness within the group and make recommendations as to how happiness of the group's members could be increased. You write up a report for the group members and reflections on the project's methods and findings.

The group can be a business, government body, sports club, activist group, church, professional society or any other association of people who regularly interact. Do not use any group affiliated with the university. You must not make contact with

vulnerable or “at risk” groups as per the research protocol below.

You should find out information about the group from various sources, including documents, observations and interviews. Each team should carry out the equivalent of 8 interviews of 15 minutes each.

You should prepare a report for interviewees and/or managers of the group. The report should be produced as a group. It can be a written text, leaflet, slide show, poster, website, video or other format approved by Brian or Chris. The textual content should be equivalent to 1500 words. In the report you should make recommendations as to how the group can increase happiness in one or two ways. It’s usually better not to try to cover too many issues.

You should show your report to group members and obtain their responses to it. You may wish to revise the report in light of their comments.

You should also write comments on the research, including how you chose the group, how you obtained information, any difficulties encountered, any surprises, and what you learned relevant to your own lives. The comments should be 1500 words, written and submitted as an individual task.

You should use findings from both happiness research and from one theme area. Include sources from both these areas.

Group and individual marks

For the report, Chris or Brian will give the group an overall mark. Your individual mark on the report will be based on this overall mark, modified by a factor based on peer evaluation, namely ratings by other members in your group. In class, we’ll discuss how this will operate and give you guidance on doing as well as you can. We will use the Spark self and peer assessment resource kit: <http://spark.uts.edu.au/>.

Your comments will be marked individually.

Interview protocol

You are to talk only with competent adults who are not in a vulnerable category (including being unemployed, in prison, Aboriginal or under the age of consent). You may only make contact with adults able to give informed consent who might be broadly understood as “like you.”

In making contact with a group it is best to identify a person in authority. You will require a letter of consent from this person to conduct the research. If you do not already know them you can phone to talk or make an appointment or write letters or e-mail. Avoid unannounced visits to people you do not know.

Participant information sheets, interview consent forms and sample questions will be provided, and ethical and practical aspects of interviewing covered

in class. You must obtain signed consent forms from any person that you interview and you must hand in any recording of an interview to Chris or Brian at the end of the subject.

Consultancy reports and individual comments will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)

- Understanding of research on happiness and the chosen theme area
- Understanding of the group and the causes and conditions of happiness in it
- Use of sources (about happiness, theme area and the group) — including interviews and observations
- Expression and appearance

UNHAPPY RADICAL



HAPPY RADICAL



Happiness consultancy suggestions

Purposes

The central purposes of the happiness consultancy are for you to demonstrate your understanding of research on happiness and connect it with observations and other data you gather yourself. You will achieve this by exploring the conditions of happiness for a particular group of people and making recommendations to the group about how they might increase their level of happiness.

Procedure

In your student team, you need to consider the kind of group of people you want to make contact with. You need to be practical as well as follow the correct ethical protocols. That is, you need to pick a group of people who interest you and you need to be able to make contact with them. (Do you know anyone in the group? Do they have public contact point?)

You then need to make contact with members of your chosen group and negotiate the conditions of your study. Identify an appropriate person (e.g. manager or group leader) to contact by email or phone. You should explain to them the nature of the project and what it is you want to do.

Your team should try to identify aspects of the group's activities that contribute to their happiness and ones that reduce happiness. You can do this through a combination of observation (make notes of your observations) and interviews with key people. We will explore the interview process in class. You should try to transcribe (write out) at least the key parts of interviews. You will need to draw from your knowledge of the literature on happiness. Having made observations and conducted interviews you should meet with your team and discuss the issues that have arisen. Of course there may be many factors contributing to happiness and/or areas of potential improvement. We suggest that you concentrate on one or two issues in order to make the project manageable and give a reasonable level of depth to your work.

As a team you should prepare a report for the group members and show it to them. You should revise your report in the light of feedback you receive.

As individuals you then need to write your comments on the project's process, methods and findings. You might like to address questions like: How well did your team work together? How could you have worked better? Could you have been happier? How easy was it to identify the causes and conditions of happiness? How well did you interact with the target group? Could you have done better? What have you learned about happiness? If you did the project again, how would you do it differently?

Example 1

A team of three students made contact with a local surf club. They arranged to interview 8 members of the club. They also spent a day at the club observing activities. From their interviews they noted high levels of overall self-reported happiness. This was a result of (a) social interaction, (b) a sense of purpose, and (c) physical activity, all documented contributing factors to happiness. However, they also noted that the volunteers reported lower levels of satisfaction than the paid lifeguards. Interviews revealed that this was because the volunteers were rostered into less

desirable slots without consultation. The student group wrote a report that recommended (1) holding regular consultation meetings, (2) instituting a fairer roster system and (3) inviting volunteers to maintain a gratitude diary recording good things about what they did. After giving their report to club members, the student team recorded comments about their recommendations.

Example 2

A team of two students visited a book club. They observed that a couple of book club members monopolised choices of books and ran the meetings like a seminar, with little opportunity for socialising, causing dissatisfaction among some other members. The students also interviewed several club members individually. Drawing on research into friendship and communication, the team recommended some processes for helping every club member join the conversation and have a say in book choices. The team produced a package — comprising a book bag, bookmark and leaflet, each printed with information about communication skills — and gave one package to each book club member. Club members agreed to try the recommendations. The students visited the next meeting of the club and observed an improved atmosphere.

For some good reports from previous classes, see <http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS325tops/>.

Timetable

Start organising your project early. This is an activity that requires planning and plenty of time to let things unfold in order to deal with any practical problems that occur. We suggest the following timetable.

Week 3: student teams formed during class

Week 4: Consider possible target groups

Week 5: Choose target group

Weeks 6 and 7 (including mid-semester recess):
Contact groups. Devise questions. Arrange interviews.

Weeks 8 and 9: Carry out observations and interviews. Begin comments.

Week 10: Meet to discuss issues. Add to comments.

Week 11: Prepare a draft of the report and present it to target group. Add to comments.

Week 12: Revise report and comments.

Week 13: Finalise report and comments and hand them in.