

# The University Wellbeing Programme

Tarli Young<sup>1</sup>, Aaron Jarden<sup>2</sup>, Sarah MacInnes<sup>1</sup>, Rachel Colla<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup> The University of Queensland,  
<sup>2</sup> The University of Melbourne

## Introduction:

University students tend to have low wellbeing compared to the general population and wellbeing decreases as their study progresses<sup>1</sup>. This is problematic as high wellbeing can buffer against mental health issues and also improve physical health and academic outcomes. Positive psychology interventions offer a tested avenue for increasing wellbeing but university students can be difficult to access due to time constraints which lead to high dropout. Our study imbedded a program of positive psychology interventions into a second-year positive psychology subject. Students completed the University Wellbeing Program (UWP) in lectures and tutorials over 6 weeks with each week covering a different positive variable. Students were provided with an introduction to the topic and a positive psychology interventions designed to increase the positive variable (see Table 1). The activities targeted either subjective wellbeing or one of the factors of psychological wellbeing<sup>2</sup>.

Table 1: The University Wellbeing Program

Week	Wellbeing Factor	In-class activity	Take-home activity
1	Positive Emotions	• Gratitude letter	• Three good things
2	Autonomy	• Mindfulness meditation • Mindful eating	• Mindfulness meditation
3	Purpose in Life	• 'Best possible self' • Identifying values	• Values Cards, acting in line with values
4	Environmental mastery	• Strengths finder • Goal setting	• Strengths spotting • Acting on goals
5	Positive Relations with others	• Loving Kindness meditation	• Daily acts of kindness
6	Self-acceptance	• Self-compassion pause • Self-compassion letter	• Self-compassion pause

## Hypotheses

Participation in the UWP will lead to:

- H1: Increased wellbeing including emotional, social and psychological wellbeing
- H2: Significant shifts in wellbeing categories from languishing → moderate → flourishing
- H3: Increased positive affect and decreased negative affect

Exploration of moderators and mediator:

- H4: More frequent practice leading to greater wellbeing gains
- H5: High levels of pre-intervention valuing happiness will lead to greater wellbeing gains

## Methods

**Procedure:** Three studies to test the effects of the

**Study 1:** Single experimental group ( $N=67$ ), weekly surveys and 1 month follow-up

**Study 2:** Replication with single experimental group ( $N=155$ ) and two timepoints: pre, post

**Study 3:** A 2 (Time 1, Time 2) x 2 (Group: experimental, control) mixed factor design ( $N=247$ )

## Measures:

- Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC)<sup>3</sup>
- Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)<sup>4</sup> (S2 and S3)
- Valuing Happiness Scale<sup>5</sup> (S2 and S3)
- Meaning in Life Questionnaire<sup>6</sup> (S3)

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>Cotton, S. J., Dollard, M. F., & De Jonge, J. (2002). *Stress and student job design: Satisfaction, well-being, and performance in university students.*
- <sup>2</sup>Ryff, Carol D., et al. (2006) *Psychological well-being and ill-being: do they have distinct or mirrored biological correlates?*
- <sup>3</sup>Keyes, C. L. (2005). *Mental illness and/or mental health? Investigating axioms of the complete state model of health.*
- <sup>4</sup>Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). *Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales*
- <sup>5</sup>Mauss, I. B., Tamir, M., Anderson, C. L., & Savino, N. S. (2011). *Can seeking happiness make people unhappy?*
- <sup>6</sup>Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). *The meaning in life questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life.*

# Integrating positive psychology interventions into university classes boosts student wellbeing



Tarli Young  
t.young@uq.edu.au

## Results

**STUDY 1:** Significant increases in overall wellbeing across 8 time-points  $F(7, 182) = 5.625, p < .001$  and significant linear trend  $F(1, 26) 16.85, p < .001$ . (Figure 1). Significant shifts in wellbeing categories (Figure 2),  $z = -2.11, p = .035$ .

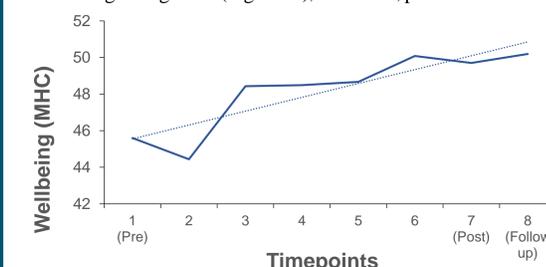


Figure 1: Changes in wellbeing across 8 timepoints

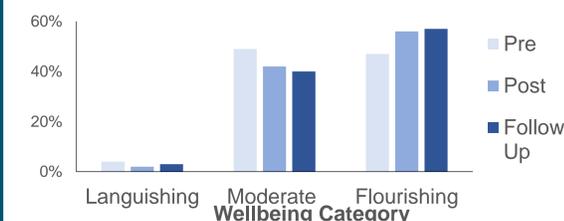


Figure 2: Percentage of participants in mental health categories at pre, post and follow up

**STUDY 2:** Significant increases in emotional, social, psychological and overall wellbeing from pre to post ( $p < .001$ ). Significant increases in positive affect and decreases in negative affect ( $p < .001$ ). No association between practice frequency and wellbeing gains. Pre- valuing happiness moderated changes in wellbeing when controlling for pre-wellbeing, such that, at higher levels of valuing happiness pre predicted larger wellbeing gains (Figure 3)

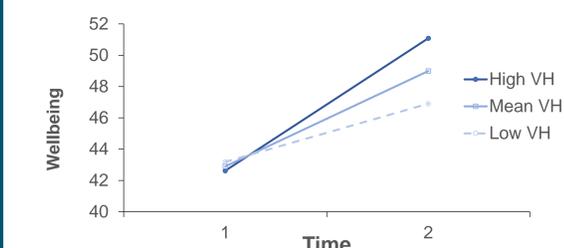


Figure 3: Wellbeing gains at three levels of pre-valuing happiness, when controlling for pre-wellbeing

**STUDY 3:** A 2 (Time: Time 1, Time 2) x 2 (group: experimental, control) mixed factorial ANOVA on student's wellbeing revealed no significant main effect of time,  $F(1, 114) = .17, p = .681, \eta^2 = .001$  or group,  $F(1, 114) = 0.9, p = .768, \eta^2 = .003$ . However, there was a statistically significant interaction between time and group,  $F(1, 114) = 6.304, p = .013, \eta^2 = .05$  (see Figure 4). No moderation by practice frequency or valuing happiness and no mediation via meaning in life

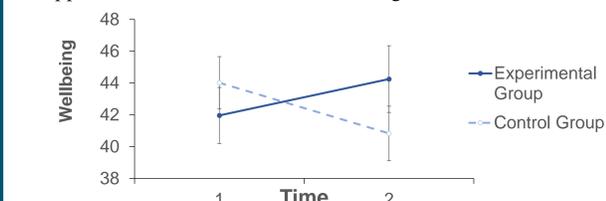


Figure 4: Wellbeing as a function of time (pre and post-intervention) and group (experimental and control).

## Conclusion

The UWP provides an effective intervention to improve students' wellbeing— shifting students towards flourishing mental health. The more students valued happiness, the more they gained from the program. Importantly, the UWP is imbedded in class which resulted in very low attrition rates (e.g. 3% in Study 1). As students were already attending class there were low time costs and minimal stigma. Integrating positive psychology interventions into university classes can provide an easy yet effective way to increase students' wellbeing. This could have flow on benefits for their physical health and academic success while buffering against mental health issues.