

**Jill Belli, Fall 2013: ENG 1101**

A learning community on the theme of well-being with HUS 1101, Justine Pawlukewicz,  
Human Services

*The Composition of Happiness: Assessing the Rhetoric & Reality of Well-Being*

Ever wonder what happiness *really* is? In this English and Human Services learning community, you'll explore--from pop culture, positive psychology, and social services perspectives--what makes individuals and communities flourish or flounder.

In English Composition I (ENG 1101), we will work our way through the complex and contradictory nature of "happiness," exploring abstract concepts (such as "free will" and "progress"), zooming in to study individual needs and desires (and the ways in which these are both created by and marketed to by popular culture and self-help products), exploring the "science of happiness" as defined by the expanding field of positive psychology, and finally broadening our gaze to engage larger issues such as "resiliency" in the U.S. military, well-being in economic policies, and happiness in educational curricula. Throughout the course, we will engage "happiness" as a discourse (the rhetoric of "happiness") that both circulates in and helps create our world.<sup>1</sup>

**Rationale/Need:**

Sometimes students have a cliché idea about happiness and well-being without a full assessment or critique of the subject. Our students, especially freshman, often feel alienated or disempowered about their educational experience, feeling as if they have no voice or stake in what goes on at the campus. This is particularly true because we are a commuter campus, so students often find it challenging to develop a sense of community at City Tech. Since students will be working on a service-learning research project at City Tech that assess well-being on campus and in the curriculum, it will not only address all three issues above (and meet our learning outcomes) but also help the school to become more aware of and respond to the needs of the students it serves.

**Proposed Common Student Learning Objectives and Gen Ed Student Learning Outcomes (SLO):**

- Students will move from merely personal visions and/or cultural stereotypes of happiness to a more critical, theoretically grounded perspectives on the subject
- Students will be able to evaluate well-being from rhetorical, cultural, and human services perspectives
- Through low-stakes writing assignments on OpenLab, students will reflect on contemporary issues related to well-being and critically engage with course content

---

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to Human Services, HUS 1101, focuses on the assessment of individuals, families, groups and communities in terms of level of functioning. These include elements of resilience, self-sufficiency, developmental milestones and systems theory within the current social and political climate. How they impact the state of well-being is paramount for the professional intervention of prevention, clinical treatment, rehabilitation, delivery of human services and the design of public health initiatives.

- Through a service learning assignment, students will assess well-being in their current College community and present recommendations

#### [Gen Ed Student Learning Outcomes]

- Engage in an-depth, focused, and sustained program of study
- Show curiosity and the desire to learn
- Derive meaning from experience, as well as gather information from observation
- Gather, interpret, evaluate, and apply information discerningly from a variety of sources
- Resolve difficult issues creatively by employing multiple systems and tools
- Make meaningful and multiple connections among the liberal arts and between the liberal arts and the areas of study leaning to a major or profession
- Discern consequences of decisions and actions
- Work with teams, including those of diverse composition. Build consensus. Respect and use creativity
- Show ability to contribute actively by applying knowledge to the identification and analysis of societal and professional problems to enact solutions
- Discern multiple perspectives

#### [High Impact Educational Practices]

- Learning Community
- Writing-Intensive Classes
- Service Learning/Community-Based Learning
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Undergraduate Research

### **Sample Assignments**

#### [OpenLab and Low-Stakes Writing]

- Through low-stakes writing assignments (such as in-class freewriting and semester-long blogging on the OpenLab), students will reflect on contemporary issues related to well-being and critically engage with course content
- We are developing a collaborative OpenLab site, where we will house both of our courses. Students will blog regularly on various issues related to well-being, from both a Human Services perspective and a rhetorical/cultural perspective

#### [Critical Engagement with Well-Being; Building the “Happiness Archive”]

##### **“Happiness Archive”**

This is a semester-long blogging project that feeds directly into course essays and the Final Research Service Learning Project

In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed explores “a ‘happiness archive’: a set of ideas, thoughts, narratives, images, impressions about what is happiness” (15).

*"I want to attend to how happiness is spoken, lived, practiced: happiness, for me, is what it does"* (Ahmed 15).

Over the course of this semester, we will contribute to this project of critically examining how "[H]appiness shapes what coheres as a world" (2). You will blog often, contributing to the archive both by providing examples of "happiness" in the world in which you live. As Ahmed states, "[t]he media are saturated with images and stories of happiness" (3). Like Ahmed, you will "track the word *happiness*, asking what histories are evoked by the mobility of this word." You will "follow the word *happiness* around," "notice what it is up to, where it goes, who or what it gets associated with" (14).

Don't simply point out an example though. Dig deeper, and analyze it by isolating "everyday habits of happiness and consider[ing] how such habits involve ways of thinking about the world that shape how the world coheres" (15).

Make sure to answer the "so what?" question by making claims about your examples. Pursue "not only what makes happiness good but how happiness *participates in making things good*" (13).

## Background

I will be teaching a freshman composition course that is thematically built around critically engaging with representations of "happiness" in the world. Our class "happiness archive" project draws on Sara Ahmed's idea in *The Promise of Happiness* of conducting an ethnography of happiness. The goal of this ongoing class project is, through low-stakes writing and student-generated content (the students come up with the examples themselves, often taking photos of ads they see on the subway, etc.), to critically interrogate the rhetoric and "performance" of happiness in everyday life. This ongoing, multimedia, networked blogging is also a scaffolded assignment, introducing students (and allowing them to rehearse) in a low-stakes setting many of the skills needed for writing in formal academic settings (such as making claims, supporting these claims with evidence, attribution/citing sources). This project allows them (in Paulo Freire's phrase) to practice "reading the world and the word"), and to draw on various types of literacies a diverse student body may bring to the academy.

Approximately halfway into the semester, this low-stakes writing leads directly into a formal essay on visual analysis (and also upcoming presentations for their research projects, for which they will need to create multimedia texts/presentations). At this point, students have each already done multiple posts in the "happiness archive" (and we have been working – both in-class and online – to revise and strengthen this work). This segment of the course also represents a shift from more individual definitions/plans for happiness to collective/institutionalized well-being.

## Is It That Easy? (Happiness Archive #2)<sup>2</sup>

Posted on [September 11, 2011](#) by "[student](#)"

Our world is all about easy, quick and instant gratification. The new advances in technology are all about how to makes things easier and run more quickly. If the computer takes longer than seven

---

<sup>2</sup> In order to demonstrate the work students do in this project, I have included these two examples, which are actual student (blog) posts from a past semester's class "happiness archive."

seconds to start up or to open a program than it's a slow computer. How long does it take for people to get annoyed when their food doesn't come right away? ten minutes? five? People want things done in a quick and easy fashion; the easier it is the better. But is it the same thing with feelings? Do we want the same thing with feelings?



**SPREAD** the joy of owning a new home to family and friends and we will reward you with **\$2500**. Not because **sharing happiness** is enough reward in itself, but lets face it, \$2500 just buys even more smiles.

This ad is telling people to tell their friends and family to buy a house and they will receive \$2500. However, it explains that the reward is not the only thing but "spreading the joy" is also a reward. The ad is appealing to people's emotions of wanting to share happiness with others as well as receiving money to get them to tell their friends and family about the company. But is it that simple to get friends and family to buy a house? Is it that easy to pay thousands of dollars for a new home?

Especially with the economy now a days to spend money to buy a house isn't that easy. But what is this ad teaching us? Has happiness been simplified to just tell others to get more? Has it become a word for the cheerful feeling we feel when we get something new?

True Happiness is not about having the most objects or being the best or the highest. The celebrities who have everything they could ever want aren't happy. The richest person in the world is not the happiest. Happiness is something that we have to work on and work towards. In Judaism, happiness is the perception of being grateful with all that you have and not always looking to have more. It's not an easy task to be happy but the easy things in life aren't always the best things in life. Sara Ahmed, in the introduction to her literary work *The Promise of Happiness*, says states that experiences can be enjoyable if "we have worked hard to attain them" (11).

Happiness is not about feeling it as fast and as easy with no work as you can. It's not about telling someone of good news to buy a house and then everyone will be happy. Happiness involves work and takes time and patience to really feel happy with your life. Something that our world lacks.

### **Happiness in a box**

Posted on [September 12, 2011](#) by "student"



We are constantly being bombarded with the promise of happiness. Buy this, eat that, sign here. Advertisers have become experts in selling this highly sought after emotion. One of the most recognizable products seems to be McDonald's "Happy Meal". For most Americans ordering a Happy Meal was a custom of their childhood. The excitement of a new toy, kid friendly foods, all packed neatly into a brightly colored box. Turns out, that cute little box bearing a wide grin isn't so innocent.

We are unwittingly allowing our children to fall under the hold of the omnipresent advertiser. In fact CNN reports "the fast food industry spent \$4.2 billion on advertising in 2009 and found that 40 percent of preschool-aged children ask to go to McDonald's on a weekly basis, and 15 percent ask on a daily basis. Also, 84 percent of parents say they've taken their children to eat fast food at least once in the past week." Do Happy Meals really make kids happy? Do they even enjoy the food or have they been conditioned to "like" happy meals because they come with prizes? From a young age children are learning to associate McDonalds with getting a new toy, a positive experience. Later in life they are more likely to head back into a McDonalds to spend their own money, maybe even take their own

kids.

The issue is that there is a disconnect between what makes us happy and what we think makes us happy. Maybe you enjoyed the experience of going out to eat with your parents or Happy Meals were a treat reserved for special occasions. It was the social experience that you enjoyed but you think the Happy Meal did the trick.

Last year San Francisco law makers attempted to ban the toys from Happy Meals unless they changed their “nutritional standards”. “The new law addresses how toys and other marketing freebies entice kids to buy fast-food meals.”

Should the ban on Happy Meal toys be allowed? As consumers it’s our responsibility to weed out authentic happiness from the boxed kind. The promise of happiness remains fair game.

[http://articles.cnn.com/2010-11-09/us/california.fast.food.ban\\_1\\_meal-combinations-apple-dippers-yale-university-s-rudd-center?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-11-09/us/california.fast.food.ban_1_meal-combinations-apple-dippers-yale-university-s-rudd-center?_s=PM:US)

[Blogging Guidelines]

I provide the following to students so they know my expectations for blogging. We also regularly conduct in-class workshops as a class, looking at their posts and suggesting ways to improve them (mini-writing workshops on their own content)

We are using City Tech’s OpenLab (built on the blogging software WordPress) for our course site, and here you can find everything you need this semester. However, this is not just a place where you will come to find information and read what I have already written. Instead, you are expected to consistently and actively participate in creating content on our blog such as posting reflections on the course texts, discussing ideas with me and your classmates, reading and commenting on what others have posted, and linking to interesting/relevant material you have found through everyday experience as well as outside research.

Here you can find detail guidelines for the blogging component for the course, which is a significant portion of your participation grade (20% of the final course grade).

### **Blog Quantity & Deadlines**

There may be multiple blog posts/comments due every week (perhaps even more than one per class) and these assignments ensure that you will be actively engaging with the materials and the ideas presented in the course on a regular basis. All blogs are due by the beginning of class on the due date; however I encourage you to post your blog by the night before class, if possible, to give both me and your classmates adequate time to read/comment on your writing (we will use this writing as part of our in-class discussions and workshops). Late blogs will receive no credit.

Unless otherwise noted, all blog posts should be a minimum of 250 words (though I encourage you to write longer ones), though comments can (and should!) be shorter because often you are just dropping a quick response to someone else.

You are expected to read all blog posts/comments on our site (including those made by me and by your classmates).

### **Blog Formality & Mechanics**

Blogging has a particular form and “genre,” conventions/characteristics (just like any other mode of writing), and we will discuss this style more as the semester progresses.

For now, keep in mind that your entries are “informal” writing assignments (you can—and should!—use “I”) and you do not need to be revise them as meticulously as your formal essays. However, you should of course still proofread them for coherence/meaning as well as obvious spelling/grammar mistakes.

### **Blog Purpose**

Your blogs are meant to prepare you for our in-class discussions and your formal assignments, but they are also a place for you to reflect on your everyday experiences, current news/events, and personal thoughts/emotions that are related to our course content and to your progress as writers this semester. You are not restricted to just blogging when you are assigned to do so ... you should blog about things you are interested in and you feel would be of interest to others in the class.

Additionally, if you want to strengthen your writing skills or increase your English language proficiency, you’re in luck! Simply writing in such detail will aid you tremendously in reaching these goals. I encourage you to blog often!

Sometimes you are blogging an individual reading response (almost like a journal) and other times you will be asked to participate in an on-going conversation with others in the class (a prompt will either be provided by me or a student). You may be expected to start off a discussion on our blog, and then others will be expected to respond to you by “commenting” on your post.

The material you post on our course blog will become part of our class meetings: I will discuss excerpts from student blogs (both to facilitate writing workshops and to use as a jumping-off point for the day’s reading/discussion). In addition, everyone in the course will be reading your writing (and our course blog and all of its content may eventually become public to the Web), so you should spend as much effort as possible composing your writing there.

### **Blog Grading**

Although I will be reading your blogs regularly, I will only be providing you with a cumulative grade at the end of the semester for your work.

Our in-class blog workshops (mentioned above) should provide you with a good sense of where your writing stands grade-wise, but I am always more than happy to discuss your writing in more detail with you. Please feel free to e-mail me to schedule an appointment to come see me to get individualized comments on your blogging.

Simply skimming a reading and jotting down a few words about it does not mean that you have satisfactorily fulfilled a blog post. Similarly, only using spelling/grammar check on your computer does not count as revision/proofreading. You will be graded on the quality of your engagement with the material and the effectiveness of your presentation of your ideas. Missing blogs and incredibly short,

general, and/or sloppy blogs will be given no credit and will negatively affect your overall course grade.

Please be aware that all blogs are time-stamped automatically and late blogs will receive no credit.

### **Blog Titles**

Make sure to title each blog with a concise, relevant title that clearly reflects the content you post. The blogs automatically provide your name and the date/time you post, so there is no need to put that in the subject line. A reader should be able to quickly glance at your blog title and feel satisfied about what it contains (much like the title of an essay or a book chapter).

### **Blog Content**

Unless otherwise noted or provided with a specific prompt, your assigned blogs are a response to the readings, and you may approach them in the following ways:

Find a quote, passage, or idea from one of the texts (or multiple texts) that particularly grabs your attention, sounds provocative, raises questions, or confuses you (however, you should make sure to try to grapple with the issues, not just state, "I don't know what this means!"). Provide the excerpt (properly cited, with quotation marks and page number in parentheses) and then build your blog around this material.

If we have a number of readings for the day, you don't need to blog on each one individually (no need to create four separate blogs!) or to simply list a few lines about each one in isolation. Instead you might try to synthesize the readings, or to focus on only one or two of them, making thematic connections among various texts.

Additionally, you can relate the texts to an outside source (another work of literature, a film, an image, a newspaper article). In this case, you should link to the material if possible (using the "link" button in the post editor ... if you are unsure what an editing button does, just hover your cursor over it and then it will provide text that explain the function, and make sure to provide citation for it. Also, clearly explain how/why it is related to/significant for an understanding of the assigned material. This outside information is acceptable (and often even encouraged), but you should always make sure to ground your responses in the texts that we are reading (provide quotations and analysis of them).

However, please don't become dependent on secondary sources to understand the texts we are reading ... right now I am looking only for your close reading of the texts. I want to see you work through the material, not simply report back what someone else has already written. When we get to the research component of our course, things will change a bit.

Finally, even though we meet for class frequently, you may not always get to discuss everything you want, or perhaps you have a new thought on something when we are not together. Therefore, you can continue this line of inquiry in your blog. Don't merely repeat what has already been discussed ... make sure to flesh the ideas out in some way and build on them. Feel free to ask questions that you think should be taken up during the next class meeting.

And of course, you should post whenever you want – if you see a relevant one on the subway – snap a photo of it, post, and blog! If you saw a TV show that made you think about some of the concepts/themes we've been discussing in the course, blog away! If you believe something in another



one of your classes at City Tech relates in some way (even tangentially) to what we have been discussing and you want to share with us, blog blog blog 😊

**[Final Research Project: Collaborative Service Learning on well-being at City Tech]**

- Through a service learning assignment, students will assess well-being in their current College community and present recommendations (both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being in their learning environment)
- Since students will be working on a service-learning research project at City Tech that assesses well-being on campus and in the curriculum, it will not only address all three issues mentioned in the need/rationale (and meet our learning outcomes) but also help the school to become more aware of and respond to the needs of the students it serves
- This is a collaborative project: students will work in groups based on topics of their own choosing relating to well-being at City Tech.
- The project will consist of traditional academic research and ethnographic/qualitative research/fieldwork (in which students will conduct observations, surveys, and interviews that help them to assess the status of well-being at City Tech), ultimately leading to recommendations for improvement on campus.
- The audience goes beyond their professor and immediate classmates: they will not only be aiming their work at various City Tech offices/administration (in the hopes of effecting real change on campus) but also producing an OpenLab site that can serve as an archive of their findings and a presentation of them to the community. It is our hope that this will be an ongoing site that future students can contribute to/collaborate on.
- Assessment: students will compose a series of low-stakes writing assignments that will lead into more formal work, such as research proposals, annotated bibliographies, interview transcriptions, survey analyses, and a research report write-up. Students will also present their findings to the class. The work is a semester-long project and is sequenced/scaffolded along the way, with various opportunities for feedback (both from professors and peers) along the way. The final project will be assessed as a portfolio.