

# The Taiwanese Student Happiness Initiative: Fulfilling Lives and Success in the Future

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This research examines happiness levels in a group of Taiwanese students and extrapolates what the data may mean for government and educational policy. I conducted this research by allowing students at universities in Taiwan to access the Seattle-based Happiness Alliance Gross National Happiness Index Survey, which measures happiness. I examine happiness levels in the students, compare them with global happiness survey results, and then recommend policy developments that can be taken by Taiwanese government and educational institutions. This data and the recommendations may have far-reaching implications in Taiwanese society. I focus my recommendations on areas where the students scored lower on happiness levels than global averages, including in satisfaction with life; psychological well-being; community; social support; education, arts, and culture; environment; and government.

**Keywords:** *happiness; Taiwan; Taiwanese students; satisfaction with life; subjective well-being; community; social support; education, arts, and culture; environment; government*

## Introduction

Measuring the feelings of happiness in life, and their impact on human experience and development, has become steadily more important in recent years as an indicator of just how people are subsisting and developing, with an eye toward future success and serenity. Many governments and other institutions are now measuring happiness in populations, and correlating this with self-actualization, life satisfaction, success, and tranquility in life. My aim in this report will be to examine the happiness levels of a medium-sized group of Taiwanese students and to extrapolate from these findings what it may mean for government and educational policy, suggesting strategies that can increase student happiness and, in turn, future accomplishment on their part. I have taught English in Taiwan for many years and have very close relations to many students here, and a particular concern for student feelings of contentment and satisfaction. If you had asked me how happy Taiwanese students were before this research began, I would probably have said quite happy, as Taiwan is a land of famously friendly people, and I see students immersed in fun activities with friends all the time. However, things can be different when students can sit down and privately complete a questionnaire asking them serious questions about their feelings of satisfaction in life, and indeed, my findings did not square with my first view, as readers will see. Finding out that students are, in fact, seeking more happiness in their lives, with their educational lives being most important, will point to many important findings and suggestions for government and educational policy in Taiwan. Readers may, in turn, extrapolate understanding and possible solutions in the educational environment in their own countries. To be sure, in keeping with the name of this academic journal, all of what I will examine points toward the potential for positive social change.

Note that I will first introduce background research being done around the world and measures of happiness in various countries by various institutions. I will then examine the conception of happiness, proper, for a fuller understanding. I will then turn a bit later in the paper to my research findings and the implications for policy in Taiwan.

Probably the most famous attempt to examine and measure happiness at a national level is Bhutan's creation of a Gross National Happiness (GNH) measure in 1972. The term "gross national happiness" was created that year by Bhutan's fourth Dragon King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and the idea was taken up by Bhutan research institutions ("Gross National Happiness," n.d.). A GNH index was created and distributed to Bhutan citizens. Since then, this happiness measure has been used annually with some success in Bhutan's central government planning, as it aims to improve the lives of its citizens. Various GNH indices are also used in other nations, including the United Kingdom, British Columbia, Brazil, and, to some extent, the United States. Even Taiwan has explored these parameters, with *CommonWealth Magazine* (Wu & Chang, 2012) conducting a survey that found that Taiwanese people scored "middling" on happiness measures, with family life scoring highest, and political and economic climate scoring lowest. On August 30, 2013, the Taiwan Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics released Taiwan's first GNH index. This research found that Taiwanese had a moderate level of happiness. Taiwan ranked 19th among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's 34 members, with the country approximately equal to Liechtenstein or Italy. Related research ranked Taiwan even lower, however. It was noted in this journalistic report that, based on this research, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and his government were determined to improve policy effectiveness, which are points I will take up in the next section (Jenn-hwa, 2013).

The original Bhutan GNH indicator was based on Buddhist ideals and philosophy, but since then, other more pragmatic and secular indices have been created (see Walsh, 2013, for further discussion). Readers will note that indicators of happiness are not generally seen as strongly mathematical or "scientific" in the strict sense, and the questions that are asked and the replies given are usually seen as subjective indices (indeed, the common way to express the idea of happiness is as "subjective well-being"). In a word, there may be no exact quantitative indicator of what happiness entails in people, and the data collected is generally qualitative. However, certain of the data that is collected in happiness surveys can be quantitatively assembled and analyzed. For example, data can be collected about income, employment, material well-being, psychological well-being, educational attainment, physical health, and experience with government. These factors can be measured relatively precisely and are important in measuring people's happiness. In this sense, happiness indicators can be seen as quantitatively, and even scientifically, documented. In sum, for those hardnosed realists who still doubt whether this subjective data is scientific enough to provide valuable input for policy decisions, the U.N. *World Happiness Report* (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013) finds that although measures of happiness once seemed "far too subjective, too vague, to serve as a touchstone for a nation's goals, much less its policy content ... evidence is changing this view rapidly" (p. 6). Additionally, in terms of the data that is being collected and analyzed, "measures of subjective well-being ... capture *best* how people rate the quality of their lives" (Helliwell et al., 2013, p. 11, emphasis added). Thus, readers can see that the data collected in happiness indices is useful, helpful, and scientific in essential ways.

As noted above, there are now a number of groups and organizations, including governments, gathering happiness data, such as U.N. activities, the Bhutan Movement, the U.K. National Well-Being Programme, and conferences in various countries; organized citizen movements including the Happiness Alliance, Mindapples, Future Communities, Action for Happiness, Delivering Happiness,

GNH USA; universities such as the University of Pennsylvania: Positive Psychology Center/Authentic Happiness, UC Berkeley: Wellness/Greater Good, and the Harvard School of Public Health; research centers including The Mind and Life Institute, The Happiness Institute, Centre for Confidence and Well-Being; and think-tanks such as The New Economics Foundation: Wellbeing. As noted earlier, the expanding scope of happiness research, and the effort to measure citizen happiness in individuals and countries, can be seen here.

## Happiness

But what exactly is happiness? On the surface, this question might seem easy: good feelings about life, satisfaction with friends, family and other relationships, excitement and fun, personal contentment, and hope for the future. All of these things are true, of course, but keep in mind other details about a complete conception of happiness. Both external and internal features determine well-being and happiness. Some of the important external factors include material comforts and income, work satisfaction and problems of work-life balance (which can be a major source of stress), vital community relations and social support systems, decent governance—the U.N. *Human Development Report 2013* (Malik, 2013) says that “state commitment to education, health and social protection ... emerge as means of navigating towards sustainable and equitable human development” (p. 9), and also access to education, arts, and culture—in Bhutan, “not-yet-happy people are insufficient in non-material domains such as ... culture” (Helliwell et al., 2013, p. 109). More personal or internal factors include mental and physical health, rich values and religion, positive family experience, education, gender (males and females were almost equally happy in the Happiness Alliance U.S. averages), and age (older people were happier in the Happiness Alliance averages).

As we have seen, there is now a U.N. *World Happiness Report* (Helliwell et al., 2013). The report was written by John Helliwell (University of British Columbia), Richard Layard (London School of Economics) and Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia University). In it, they write that the great thinkers and sages of world history “taught humanity, time and again, that material gain alone will not fulfill our deepest needs. Material life must be harnessed to meet these human needs, most importantly to promote the end of suffering, social justice, and the attainment of happiness. The challenge is real for all parts of the world” (p. 3). The U.S. founding fathers recognized how important happiness was when they wrote in the *Declaration of Independence* that all people are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Philosophers such as the Buddha considered the right paths of life leading to satisfaction and contentment, while Aristotle (GoodReads, n.d.a) wrote, “Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.” Activist Aung San Suu Kyi (2012) of Myanmar said in her Nobel lecture, “Let us join hands to try to create a peaceful world where we can sleep in security and wake in happiness.” A recent researcher, Sean Achor (2010), writes that happiness is composed of “positive emotions ... combined with deeper feelings of meaning and purpose,” and “a positive mood in the present and a positive outlook for the future” (p. 39).

I will remember all of this as I examine happiness in this report and not fall into a trap of seeing what are little more than transient, trivial pleasures in daily life as truly important. Just as true, material well-being and income, while important, are not the keys to life happiness. The U.N. authors listed earlier say that “uncertainties and anxieties are high [in the U.S.], social and economic inequalities have widened considerably, social trust is in decline, and confidence in government is at an all-time low. Perhaps for these reasons, life satisfaction has remained nearly constant during decades of rising Gross National Product (GNP) per capita” (Helliwell et al., 2013, p.

3). This point indicates the “Easterlin paradox” formulated by researcher Richard Easterlin (University of Southern California). This paradox states that while U.S. GNP per capita has risen by a factor of three since 1960, measures of average happiness have remained essentially unchanged over that time. Ultimately, GNP is a valuable goal, but it should not be pursued to the point where economic stability is jeopardized, community cohesion is destroyed, the vulnerable are not supported, ethical standards are sacrificed, or the world’s climate is put at risk. Joseph Stiglitz, working with Professor Amartya Sen and Professor Jean-Paul Fitoussi on their “Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress,” noted that “The Commission’s aim has been to identify the limits of [Gross Domestic Product] as an indicator of economic performance and social progress” (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2008, p. 7), and that it would be necessary to “shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people’s well-being” (Stiglitz et al., 2008, p. 12). While basic living standards are essential for happiness, after the baseline has been met, happiness varies more with quality of human relationships than income. Government policy goals in these respects should include high employment and high-quality work (Malik [2013] wrote that “Rapid expansion of quality jobs is a critical feature of growth that promotes human development” [p. 4]); a strong community with high levels of trust and respect, as social trust spurs a sense of life satisfaction—“An integrated society relies on effective social institutions that enable people to act collectively, enhancing trust and solidarity between groups” writes the *Human Development Report 2013* (p. 35); improved physical and mental health, because research has shown that happy, optimistic people are healthier and less susceptible to disease; encouraging values and religion (major religions encourage altruism and care for others); support of family life; and a decent education for all (“better-educated people typically have better health status, lower unemployment, more social connections, and greater engagement in civic and political life,” writes Stiglitz and colleagues (2013). Because of all of these factors, many researchers are now focusing on GNH rather than Gross National or Domestic Product, in terms of life satisfaction. The survey employed in this research is made to measure just this.

In the previous section, the main areas of contentment in life are outlined. Situations and factors like these, as measured across various happiness indices, can differ depending on the approaches of different researchers. I will provide my own list of variables, taken from the Happiness Alliance (2014) Gross National Happiness Index, in a subsequent section.

Readers might also be interested in the following data, from the *Human Development Report 2013* (Malik, 2013). These rankings show the overall life satisfaction levels of various regions around the world, on a scale from 0 (*least satisfied*) to 10 (*most satisfied*). As you might expect, people in highly developed areas of the world ranked higher in life satisfaction. In terms of happiness, data from the Gallup World Poll (Standish & Witters, 2014) used in the *World Happiness Report* shows the Nordic countries are the happiest in the world; the lowest rankings were small, impoverished countries in Africa (Helliwell et al., 2013, pp. 30–55; Malik, 2013, pp. 144–147). The total world average for life satisfaction was only 5.3, which seems to indicate that a lot of work needs to be done in these areas (Malik, 2013, p. 28).

- World: 5.3
- Very high human development countries: 6.7
- High human development countries: 5.9
- Medium human development countries: 4.9
- Low human development countries: 4.5

The Gallup World Poll finds the following data on “purpose well-being” (i.e., thriving) worldwide (Standish & Witters, 2014):

- World: 18
- Americas: 37
- Europe: 22
- Former Soviet Union: 18
- Sub-Saharan Africa: 15
- Asia: 13
- Middle East and North Africa: 13

In addition to these important ideas, I want to voice another side to happiness, something of a “dark side” or “happiness trap,” as Helliwell and colleagues (2013, p. 7) write. Some will criticize me for seeing things this way, and accuse me of being a spoilsport, of grumbling about what are in fact positive aspects of life. Nevertheless, I have witnessed a kind of happiness in the world—and, in many ways, this is largely centered on student life—that I find troubling. These are essentially the trivial and transient “pleasures” referred to earlier. In this light, happiness does not stem from significant, constructive, helpful things like vital community, enduring family relationships, personal success, studying and learning, physical and mental clarity, health, or mutual trust and respect. Instead, this happiness is a series of frivolous activities like partying, endless games and chit-chat on smartphones and computers, with postings on Facebook consuming hours a day, one basketball or volleyball game after another inevitably consuming valuable study time, endless coffee chats and long lunches, or other libertine and often wasteful conduct. Admittedly, fun activities like these can be an element of overall happiness, and I am not against having some fun, even some trivial fun, in life. But when a person is spending hours and days doing these sorts of largely void activities, with little genuine connection and consideration, then that person is traveling down a profligate path in life. The Facebook world we find ourselves in seems to be encouraging this. Naturally, I am friends with a number of my students on Facebook, which has value, but sadly, I often see them engaged in just the sorts of things I am discussing here. (This is not to say that you do not see some valuable pictures and comments on Facebook when students have successes at school or at other times in their lives.) In spite of this aside, the actual data I will examine in this report does focus on the important factors of happiness. And in spite of these comments, students have told me about viable and substantive sources of their own happiness in Taiwan. Their ideas include things such as the fact that Taiwan is a free, safe, peaceful and law-abiding country; that “Formosa” has long been known as a beautiful island; that the food and local cultures here are rich and vibrant; that they value the friendly Taiwanese people and their own educational paths; and that they appreciate the low cost of living in Taiwan and government policies and programs that make life easier. As a foreigner who has lived here for 13 years, I have to agree with these students, and I know that life here can be a real pleasure and source of happiness.

Other terms associated with this subject that readers may refer to or see in this report, include subjective well-being, flourishing, thriving, quality of life, the Greek *eudaimonia*, and positive psychology. I could also include Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, culminating in self-actualization, which is no doubt an important addition in this field. There is also the concept of PERMA by Dr. Martin Seligman (2011). PERMA refers to

**Positive emotions**—feeling good helps one perform better, improves physical health, reinforces relationships, is inspirational, and enables one to look forward to the future with optimism

**Engagement in life**—cooperation and the feeling of being captured in tasks one is involved in, also called “flow” in life

**Relationships**—connections to family, friends, lovers, classmates, colleagues, and even strangers

**Meaning**—dedicating oneself to something meaningful and constructive

**Accomplishment**—striving for success, setting goals, and “enjoying the game.”

In his book, *Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—And How We Can Get More of It*, Dr. Arthur C. Brooks (2008) argues that what’s crucial to well-being is not how cheerful you feel or how much money you make, but the meaning you find in life and your sense of earned success—the belief that you have created value in your own life or others’.

## Materials and Method<sup>1</sup>

I conducted my survey measuring the happiness factors previously noted using the Happiness Alliance (2014) Gross National Happiness Index Survey, which I located on a Web site to be used by students taking the happiness survey at <http://taiwanhappiness.weebly.com>. Students in four schools accessed this Web site and, from there, were able to complete the survey. The data was collected in Spring and Fall 2014, with one multiple sample that initially included 35 students in my Culture and Communication class at National Taipei College of Business (now National Taipei University of Business [NTUB]), which was increased by 89 more students in a combined group from NTUB and Tamkang University near Taipei in the fall. Additionally, there were samples from Chien Hsin University of Science and Technology south of Taipei (26 students), and Shih Hsin University in Taipei (58–64 students). The happiness findings for these groups will follow. As noted, this is a medium-sized survey group, but useful findings about educational and government policy can still be extrapolated.

As to the methodology of the survey tools I employed, the Happiness Initiative developed the Happiness Alliance (2014) Gross National Happiness Index Survey with the Personality and Well-Being Lab (<https://sites.google.com/site/howellhappinsslabs/home>) at San Francisco State University, starting in two phases, which reduced the numbers of measured items as the instrument was polished using factor analysis, corrected item-total correlations, reliability analyses, convergent correlations, and participant feedback. They also referred to a number of other similar surveys as they developed the tool. They continued this research, having many people complete the new surveys, and then gauged their results to ensure that (a) they formed a single factor (using factor analysis), (b) they were internally consistent (their alpha coefficients was greater than .70), and (c) the sum of the scale significantly correlated with the satisfaction rating at the beginning of the survey it was intended to calculate ( $p < .05$ ). They finally conducted a nationwide survey in the United States to ensure that the domains in their work (a) formed a single factor, (b) were internally consistent, and (c) were correlated with the satisfaction rating they were intended to predict. All of this data shows that a sound and reliable survey instrument has been developed.

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<sup>1</sup>Note: No human or animal rights were abused in any way in this research.

As to my own research methods, they are straightforward, based on the data in the surveys I collected. I observe the data and analyze the meaning therefrom, based, in part, on my years of experience living and teaching in Taiwan. I perform some relatively small-scale mathematical operations to clarify data. The data set from the Happiness Alliance includes a worldwide average of all those who have taken this survey, population averages of my students, and the variance between these two figures. This is a cross-sectional study, gathering data from my sample, or population, only once. Needless to say, this group is comprised of Taiwanese students in Taiwan, aged from about 19 to 24. My sex division was about 80% female and 20% male (I do not have the sex division from other schools). I will examine the sum figures of the entire population, but outside of speaking with a few students about these issues, I do not examine individual survey results.

The survey structure is clear enough, aimed at determining parameters of lived experience that result in happiness, or the lack thereof. The “domains” or variables of this survey are listed here. Some of the domains/variables are closely related, which may result in certain correlational links. These include satisfaction with life, the data of the U.K. Happiness Index, and psychological well-being; community and social support; and environment and government. The survey domains are as follows:

1. Satisfaction with life
2. The U.K. Happiness Index (a set of four questions closely related to satisfaction with life)
3. Material well-being
4. Governance
5. Environment
6. Community vitality
7. Social support
8. Access to education, arts, and culture
9. Mental well-being
10. Health
11. Time balance
12. Work.

## **Survey Results and Discussion**

I now turn to my survey results and consider them in terms of Taiwan government and educational policy. In a somewhat disturbing turn, I find that these students are, in sum, not very happy, and they score decidedly lower than worldwide averages (indeed, the samples from Chien Hsin University of Science and Technology and the combined sample from NTUB and Tamkang University scored lower than the global averages in every domain measured). Note that in discussions with some students, I was told that student life is something of a rollercoaster, and students often find themselves feeling dramatic highs and then lows on a fairly regular basis. They explained this could be one reason that their own scores were fairly low on the day of their survey. Table 1 depicts the results from the four schools studied.

**Table 1: Results From the Four Schools Studied**

| <b>Domains</b>   | <b>Worldwide<br/>Average</b> | <b>This<br/>Population</b> | <b>Variance</b> |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| National Taipei College of Business and Tamkang University ( <i>n</i> = 124) |                              |                            |                 |
| Satisfaction with life   | 66                           | 54                         | -12             |
| U.K. Happiness Index   | 63                           | 62                         | -1              |
| Psychological well-being   | 70                           | 64                         | -6              |
| Physical health  | 65                           | 59                         | -6              |
| Time balance   | 50                           | 47                         | -3              |
| Community  | 52                           | 31                         | -21             |
| Social support   | 71                           | 64                         | -7              |
| Education, arts, and culture   | 67                           | 51                         | -16             |
| Environment  | 67                           | 52                         | -15             |
| Government   | 67                           | 62                         | -5              |
| Material well-being  | 67                           | 62                         | -5              |
| Work experience  | 60                           | 50                         | -10             |
| Chien Hsin University of Science and Technology ( <i>n</i> = 26)             |                              |                            |                 |
| Satisfaction with life   | 66                           | 50                         | -16             |
| U.K. Happiness Index   | 63                           | 54                         | -9              |
| Psychological well-being   | 70                           | 61                         | -9              |
| Physical health  | 65                           | 51                         | -14             |
| Time balance   | 50                           | 48                         | -2              |
| Community  | 52                           | 22                         | -30             |
| Social support   | 71                           | 60                         | -11             |
| Education, arts, and culture   | 67                           | 51                         | -16             |
| Environment  | 67                           | 40                         | -27             |
| Government   | 51                           | 33                         | -18             |
| Material well-being  | 67                           | 59                         | -8              |
| Work experience  | 60                           | 48                         | -12             |
| Shih Hsin University ( <i>n</i> = 58–64)                                     |                              |                            |                 |
| Satisfaction with life   | 66                           | 58                         | -8              |
| U.K. Happiness Index   | 63                           | 62                         | -1              |
| Psychological well-being   | 70                           | 67                         | -3              |
| Physical health  | 65                           | 62                         | -3              |
| Time balance   | 50                           | 53                         | +3              |
| Community  | 52                           | 31                         | -21             |
| Social support   | 71                           | 66                         | -5              |
| Education, arts, and culture   | 67                           | 56                         | -11             |
| Environment  | 67                           | 53                         | -14             |
| Government   | 51                           | 38                         | -13             |
| Material well-being  | 67                           | 70                         | +3              |
| Work experience  | 60                           | 52                         | -8              |

*Note:* Numbers have been averaged and rounded.

Interestingly and compellingly, some of the lowest scores on my surveys are in the “Community” category, and the related “Social support” category. Community and social support questions on the survey include questions about neighbors, encountering strangers, business in the community, personal safety, love and friendship, relationships, and voluntary activities. The sum total of my data indicates a strong lack of community feeling among students. The figures in my survey results in the community domain are fully 21–30 points less than the total worldwide average, a difference of 40–57% lower. The social support figures are 7–15% lower. To be sure, it is just such community involvement—friends, family connections, voluntary and benevolent activities, local connections in the neighborhood—that are essential to a satisfying and contented life. That students are not experiencing this type of connection will sound strange to many familiar with Taiwan, as it is a land with famously friendly people, and student lives are largely immersed in fun activities with friends. To be sure, I have experienced this in my many years in Taiwan. But students appear to not be encountering this community involvement deeply. It may be that students’ lives can, in some senses, be remote from the communities around them. They are either too busy with schoolwork to participate locally, or they simply engage in a few too many trivial “fun” activities (as I have noted earlier), and they fail to engage with their neighbors. Schools can step in here and help students to engage locally, by creating programs such as Service Learning and Service Days (which I have worked with at NTUB) that connect students to their neighbors, fellow students, and educators in meaningful ways. There are surely many more such community programs that could and should be activated in schools around Taiwan. And from here, students and teachers can reach out globally and encourage overseas volunteer work, which could create globalized communities. This community involvement will provide students with mature, responsible roles in their neighborhoods, in the neighborhoods of their friends and relatives, and, from there, into neighborhoods around the world. This will provide new connections that could be of value not only in current lives, but after graduation, when students are seeking employment. In this way, the survey I have conducted has pointed to an important development and change that could and should take place in Taiwan educational policy. McMahon (2010) points out that ancient definitions and root words of happiness all point to the idea of chance, or luck. From there it was believed that happiness was essentially a lucky break, and could not be controlled by humans. What I am recommending here very much opposes this.

At another very high and disturbing level, students are feeling less than overall satisfaction with life (this is related to conceptions of positive and negative feelings, and psychological well-being [another domain in the survey]). My groups had scores lower by 15–26% in satisfaction with life and 4–13% lower in psychological well-being. The questions in this domain covered overall satisfaction with life, basic happiness and subjective well-being, worthwhile and purposeful experience, a question about “how happy were you yesterday?” (which is considered important in happiness surveys, to provide a small time scale to the findings), interest in daily activities, optimism, and positive feelings. This is thus an inclusive picture of students’ mental lives and just how much they do or do not like their existence. Given that the scores in my surveys came in so much lower than the world averages, there does appear to be something amiss in Taiwan. In general, the worldwide averages that I am referring to indicate that people are in general fairly happy. And yet, if Taiwanese students are fully 25% lower than these averages, then this is significant, indicating something less than overall satisfaction in life. This is again a complex area, and one that government may not be able to directly intervene in, at least not in highly discernible ways. It almost seems like greater obligation to family and friends is needed, with these closer connections ensuring that students are satisfied with their lives and enjoying their daily activities and experiences. One step here could be schools instigating programs that show students how to be happier and more comfortable in life. There are probably any

number of such programs that could be possible, from the very small, such as one plan that promises happiness simply by (a) Sitting silently for a few minutes each day, (b) practicing gratitude and compassion in life, and (c) performing small acts of kindness each day, to larger structured programs that could take weeks to complete, such as the Pennsylvania: Positive Psychology Center, which offers syllabi that can be used in semester-long courses. In any case, this could be a good idea for schools to enact. Additionally, schools could become more involved with students' families, and contribute in this way.

Another field in which students in Taiwan scored much lower than average is in their perception of the quality of the environments they live in. Their scores were 20–40% lower than the worldwide averages. There are, to be sure, problems in this area in Taiwan, which is, in many ways, a polluted locale, with astonishing numbers of vehicles massing on the roads and often with poor and littered environments, toxic streams, a nuclear waste issue, choked river ways, and the like (note, however, that Taiwan is also renowned for creating excellent recycling programs in cities throughout the country). On the surface, this is an area the government needs to more strongly address—but just as true, students, engaging in service activities as discussed earlier, could make a great contribution in cleaning up Taiwan environments. Once again this is an area that schools could create student “clean-up” and “recycle” days and programs. Getting out to clean up local beaches and wooded areas would no doubt be one such program that would be helpful to the community and popular with students. A clean environment is not too different from a clean, safe, and comfortable neighborhood, which relates this point to the first domain previously examined. Without question, improvement here could make a great difference in students' lives and the lives of those around them.

A fourth domain in which my students scored lower is satisfaction with government (score from 25–35% lower than world averages). Again, this is a complicated area with higher implications. Government questions on the survey ask about satisfaction with local and national governance, corruption, government attention to daily affairs, and societal influence. Taiwan is going through something of a turbulent period at this time, with quite a bit of citizen unrest, and what appears to be dissatisfaction particularly with the national government (the satisfaction ratings for President Ma Ying-Jeou have been as low as 9% recently). In this respect, perhaps my findings are not odd, especially coming from a group of young people. In some senses, Taiwanese young people have taken this problem into their own hands, and large student movements have erupted around the country in recent months. We cannot tell if this will make a difference in the long run, but it is true that studies show that people who become active in politics, and enjoy their own freedoms and rights, are happier. Though important, I suspect that this particular unhappiness among students does not dramatically affect their day-to-day lives, as with life satisfaction, psychological well-being, community, and social support. The busy lives of students often makes such political participation difficult, as students have told me, but in any case, indications of this new involvement are being seen in Taiwan.

I turn now to the domain of education, arts, and culture, which, once again, comes in low among my students. The findings are fairly substantial—13–23% lower than global averages. Students are feeling a lack of satisfaction in these key areas that can provide much satisfaction and enjoyment in life, and release creative potential. This again is an area where schools could step in and enrich students' lives. Introductions to arts and cultural activities and experience, a focus on local ethnicities and aboriginal groups, museum trips, concerts, literature readings, plays, speeches, and an ongoing focus on local, national and global cultures (including those overseas volunteer trips I have discussed) would be of great value in classrooms and schools in general. Further, in terms of education, teachers in Taiwan must always commit themselves to new levels of excellence and

student enjoyment, cooperation, and response in their classes. To be sure, this is the highest aim for universities in Taiwan, and a new focus and obligation are needed. Taiwanese schools have not scored especially high in worldwide rankings over the years, and it is my hope that this can be improved. My own effort here has been to encourage teachers to reach new heights in their teaching and involvement, and to raise the level of my classes as high as I possibly can, fostering student input and satisfaction.

The other areas of my survey in which students scored lower than global averages included physical health (which I am guessing may stem in part from the busy and often harried student's life) and work experience (of which the majority of students have little or none, although part-times jobs are common among college students, and students were willing to answer these questions). I will not address these factors here, as I do not feel they are as vital as the areas I have examined.

## Conclusion

I conclude here this paper examining student feelings of happiness in Taiwan, and the implications for government and educational institutions. Overall, we have seen many areas in which government and schools can contribute to enrich student lives and experience, not only making them superficially happier and more involved, but also substantively underwriting their educational and career development, leading to long-term happiness and success in the future. To be sure, this is the highest-level value we seek to engender with research like this. As noted, happiness research is becoming more and more common around the world, and so we can look forward to continuing data and recommendations to evince this valued dynamic in life, with all of the helpful returns that it can propagate. To return to happiness, proper, the Dalai Lama (GoodReads, n.d.b) once said, "Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions," indicating how people must take these efforts into our own hands—the hands of students and educators, government, and schools—to make this world a better and happier place. Happiness can be as simple as a "table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin" as Einstein (BrainyQuote, n.d.) once said, or it can be a lot more complex, for there are "... broader dynamics at play, involving many more countries and deeper trends, with potentially far-reaching implications for people's lives, for social equity and for democratic governance at the local and global levels" (Malik, 2013, p. 11). Yes, our task is at once local and global—*glocal*, as is said. Our job is to travel all the paths we can to create richness and greater happiness in all of our lives.

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