

ECON 6101H: The Business of Happiness¹²**Instructor:** Professor Dean He, Ph.D.**Email:** deanhe@ust.hk**TA:** Peter Tsui ecpeter@ust.hk**Classroom and Dates:**

- Room 1010, LSK Bldg
- Mondays and Wednesday 2:00PM-5:20PM (15/06/2026 to 8/7/2026)

Course Credit: 2 credits**Course Grading:** Letter Grade**COURSE OVERVIEW**

Albert Schweitzer once said, “Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success.” Was he right? Sort of. According to the best research available (which we will read in this class), to be a successful and happy student leader, you need to understand happiness and manage to it—yours and others.

Unfortunately, most leaders must learn this fact by hard experience. Furthermore, they are never exposed to the expanding science of happiness, which contains a wealth of information on how to be happier as a leader and make others happier as well.

This class has four objectives:

- Students will create a map of their own happiness, desires, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses. In short, they will know themselves much more deeply.
- Students will become conversant in the expanding science of happiness, reading original research in the field.
- Students will learn tactics and strategies to manage their levels of well-being and life satisfaction.
- Students will learn how to lead others in a way that increases happiness.

Students will self-administer the best surveys on happiness, read some of the most influential modern research on the topic, discuss the research in class, and apply their knowledge to leadership scenarios. They will leave after seven weeks, prepared to use the material during the balance of their time at HKUST and in the workforce. Not only will this give them a competitive advantage in the labor market; it will also help them enjoy their work and lives.

¹ The course is adapted and developed from the teaching resources and materials provided by the Leadership and Happiness Laboratory at the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School. I personally acknowledge and thank Professor Arthur Brooks for his willingness to help and guide me become an effective and inspiring instructor/partner for the happiness and leadership curriculum in the Asian context.

² Version as of June 7th 2026

COURSE SCHEDULE

Class 1. The Fundamentals of Happiness

What is happiness? What makes you happy? Can you get happier through study and effort? Happiness is a core competency for leaders that want to be in charge of their lives, both personally and professionally. This class provides an overview of some of the fundamentals of happiness, which prepares us with answers to build a happier life. We intend to explore the modern science of human well-being and shows you how to practice it and use it in the practice of leadership. The concept of Emotional Contagion will also be introduced as we discuss how controlling emotional contagion, improvement personal happiness can improve your leadership influence. Finally, I also hope you can share the ideas of happiness with others, thus bringing more happiness and love to the world and supercharging your own well-being efforts.

1. Reading (REQUIRED):

- McMahon, D.M., “For most of history, people didn’t assume they deserved to be happy. What changed?” Quartz, April 18, 2017 <https://qz.com/958677/happiness-a-history-author-darrin-m-mcmahon-explains-when-the-idea-of-happiness-was-invented/>
- "The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion and Its Influence on Group Behavior," Sigal Barsade, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 47, 644-675, 2002.
- Start the finding pathways to happiness journey: [Greater Good in Action](#)
- Penn Authentic Happiness www.authentichappiness.org

2. Reading (OPTIONAL):

- Kross, E. (2025) *Shift: Managing Your Emotions--So They Don't Manage You*. Penguin Random House. [Highly Recommend]
- “The Contagion We Can Control,” Sigal Barsade. *Harvard Business Review*, Mar. 26, 2020.
- Walsh, L. C., Boehm, J. K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2018). Does Happiness Promote Career Success? Revisiting the Evidence. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 26(2), 199–219

Class 2. Affect and Emotions

This class aims at discussing the management of emotions and behaviors for greater happiness. We will continue some of the good discussions from week 1, in terms of how we take advantage of emotions and make them work for us and managed by us for the purpose of positivity and happiness.

1. Practicum prior to the unit³:

- Authentic Happiness Inventory
- <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/user/login?destination=node/423>

³ The purpose of the practicum is to facilitate a more engaged class discussion and reflection. Your sharing is confidential and won’t be shared without your permission.

2. Reading (REQUIRED):

- Podcast: “Happy Monkey” with Martin Seligman, Zellerbach Family Professor of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania. Director, Positive Psychology Center, University of Pennsylvania. <https://ricochet.com/podcast/art-of-happiness-with-arthur-brooks/happy-monkey/>
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218-226.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14.

3. Reading (OPTIONAL):

- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 377-389.
- Seligman, M. (2018). *The hope circuit: A psychologist's journey from helplessness to optimism*. Hachette UK.

Class 3. The Power of Connection

This class explores why and how do social connections foster happiness. We will also examine how we are wired for connection, and how affiliation, affection and attachment can make happiness work for us. We will also explore the relationship between empathy and connection.

1. Practicum prior to the unit:

- Close Relationships Questionnaires
 - <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/close-relationships-questionnaires>
- Compassionate Love Scale
 - <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/user/login?destination=node/442>

2. Reading (REQUIRED):

- Blumberg, D. L. (2021, January 7). How to Build Better Relationships. Retrieved from <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/how-build-better-relationships>
- Rokach, Ami (2014). “Leadership and Loneliness.” *International Journal of Leadership and Change* 2(1): 48-58.
- Demir, M. (2015).” Friendship and Happiness Among Young Adults.” In *Friendship and Happiness: Across the Life-Span and Cultures*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands

3. Reading (OPTIONAL):

- There is this Stanford book that I need to include
- Bradford, D. L., & Robin, C. (2021). *Connect: building exceptional relationships with family, friends, and colleagues*. First edition. Currency.
- If we don’t have time for the entire book yet in the summer, we can at least read the quick 30 seconds snapshot of it. Here it is: <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/books/connect-building-exceptional-relationships-family-friends-colleagues>

Class 4. Worldly Rewards

In this class, we ask the question what incentivize or motivate us to become or aspire to be happier in life and at work? What can we do about it? Does high salary and financial incentives solve them all? We explore Herzberg's motivation theory in the workplace to identify non-monetary factors that provide employees with a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment in their roles, such as creative independence, opportunities for advancement, status, employee recognition, a sense of achievement and community belonging.

1. Practicum prior to the unit:
 - Optimism Test
 - [https:// https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/optimism-test](https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/optimism-test)
 - Transgression Motivations Questionnaire
 - [https:// https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/transgression-motivations-questionnaire](https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/transgression-motivations-questionnaire)
2. Reading (REQUIRED):
 - a. Daniel Kahneman, & Angus Deaton. (2010). High income improves evaluation of life but not emotional well-being (Vol. 107). National Academy of Sciences.
 - b. Michael Galanakis, & Giannis Peramatzis. (2022). Herzberg's motivation theory in workplace. Journal of Psychology Research, 12(12).
3. Reading (OPTIONAL):
 - a. Niemiec, C., Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2009). The path taken: Consequences of attaining intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations in post-college life. Journal of Research in Personality, 43(3), 291-306
 - b. Brooks, Arthur C. (2007). "Does Giving Make Us Prosperous?" Journal of Economics and Finance 31(3): 403-411.

Class 5. Meaning and Purpose

This class examines the purpose of having meaningful goals and the integral role this plays in professional lives of leaders. We see how setting goals can contribute to self-esteem and success, and we look at the meaning of success: what does it mean to be successful? How does this differ for individuals? How do leaders in general measure success? Differentiating between long-term and short-term goals and exploring the steps involved in creating realistic goals for oneself are reviewed.

1. Practicum prior to the unit:
 - Meaning In Life Questionnaire
[https:// https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/meaning-life-questionnaire](https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/meaning-life-questionnaire)
2. Reading (REQUIRED):
 - Brooks, Arthur C. (November 22, 2015). "Choose to Be Grateful. It Will Make You Happier." The New York Times.
 - Martela, F., & Steger, M. F. (2016). The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance. The Journal of Positive Psychology, 11(5), 531-545.

3. Reading (OPTIONAL):

- Baumeister, Roy & Vohs, Kathleen & Aaker, Jennifer & Garbinsky, Emily. (2012). Some Key Differences between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. 8. 10.2139/ssrn.2168436.

Class 6. Organizational Happiness

Employee well-being stands as an imperative in current business management practices. The correlation between workplace happiness and heightened productivity is incontrovertible. Leaders and organizational professionals are in the position to empower business development as well as to take organizational happiness and employee engagement seriously. Organizational happiness is a competitive advantage, and there is a framework to work strategically to enable organizational happiness, employee engagement, resilience building as an engine for high performance and sustainable success.

1. Practicum prior to the unit:

a. Brief Strength Test

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/brief-strengths-test>

b. Character Strength Survey (240 questions, maybe you can do it for fun outside class)

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/survey-character-strengths>

2. Reading (REQUIRED):

- a. Winnie Qian Peng and Kaiming Chiang (September, 2024). *Happiness Capital: A Hundred-Year-Old Family Business's Quest to Create Happiness*. Harvard Business Publishing.

Class 7. Designing Your Future

In this final class, we set out to find your happiness fit and design your future with new frontiers. We will discuss what works for you and the importance of goal setting and optimism, and to prepare you to develop a happiness portfolio focused on your long term and short term goals and desire. The goal is to build happiness strategies for you work and life at any stage as a leader.

1. Practicum prior to the unit:

- Grit Survey

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/grit-survey>

2. Reading (REQUIRED):

- Duckworth, A., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92, 1087-1101.
- Brooks, Arthur C. (July, 2019). Your Professional Decline Is Coming (Much) Sooner Than You Think. *The Atlantic*.
- **Watch:** Waldinger, Robert. "What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness." TED. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI>
- More on the Harvard Adult Development Study <https://www.adultdevelopmentstudy.org/>

3. Reading (OPTIONAL):

- Duckworth, A. L. (2024). Commentary on personal perspectives on mindsets, motivation, and psychology by Carol S. Dweck. *Motivation Science*, 10(1), 12-13
- Zhang, T., Park, D., Ungar, L. H., Tsukayama, E., Luo, L., & Duckworth, A. L. (2022). The development of grit and growth mindset in Chinese children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 221, 105450.
- Angela L. Duckworth, Patrick D. Quinn & Eli Tsukayama (2021) Revisiting the Factor Structure of Grit: A Commentary on Duckworth and Quinn (2009), *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 103:5, 573-575
- <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2025/07/18/what-is-the-richest-country-in-the-world-in-2025>

Class 8. Class Memo Presentation

COURSE MATERIALS

(A) REQUIRED READING

- Brooks, A. C., & Winfrey, O. (2023). [*Build the life you want: The art and science of getting happier*](#). Penguin.
- Brooks, Arthur C. [*From Strength to Strength: Finding Meaning, Success, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life*](#). New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2022.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., Sachs, J. D., De Neve, J.-E., Aknin, L. B., & Wang, S. (Eds.). (2025). *World Happiness Report 2025*. University of Oxford: Wellbeing Research Centre

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**1. Practicum**

Before each unit, you will take several self-tests pertaining to the material to be covered in the unit. The purpose is to increase your self-knowledge and show you how the material covered in class can increase your well-being as a person and student leader, as well as help you to improve the wellbeing of others. Detailed instructions will be given during class.

Tests are available at: <https://www.authentic happiness.org>

2. Weekly Class Reflection Responses on Canvas (35% of the final grade)

Weekly reflection responses on Canvas, due before each class: In 50-100 words or less, describe something of particular significance that you learned the preceding class from the practicum self-test and/or the readings, lecture, and discussion. Focus on how you plan to use the insight in your study and everyday life.

For example:

- What did you learn about yourself?
- What surprised you?
- What are your self-management action items based on this information?
- How will this information change your behavior as a leader?

3. Final Class Memo (6 pages double space)

This is a summation of what you learned in this course about yourself and how it affects your professional plans. This is an opportunity to show the instructor the depth of your knowledge and commitment to applying it. It should reflect your best writing and most careful thought. Describe the changes you have made to your habits over the last two months.

- Detail your personal and professional goals related to this material for the remainder of your time at HKUST Business School.
- Lay out how you hope this will improve the next five years of your life and career.
- Be specific about how you have been sharing, and plan to share, the ideas in this course.

GRADING / ASSESSMENT

Assessment Method	Description	Weight	Additional Note
Class Participation	In-class discussions are an integral part of the course, and students are expected to contribute to the learning experience of the class by asking relevant questions, offering insights into the topic at hand, and generally behaving in a professional manner. Quality of contribution matters more than quantity. Class participation scores will also account for attendance and lateness	30%	Class Participation is graded at the individual level.
Class Reflection Memos	Due before each class	35%	
Final Class Memo and Presentation		35%	Class Memo (20%) Final Presentation (15%)

GENERAL AI POLICY

Restricted use of ChatGPT is permitted. It is NOT permitted in exams or quizzes, which are closed book. In assignments or projects, students must reference the use and state clearly how they have used (prompts) ChatGPT in a statement in their written work, clearly stating which app they have used. Simply copy and pasting a ChatGPT result will be considered plagiarism, which is not permitted, but thoughtfully using ChatGPT content, appropriately referenced, is permitted.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Honesty and Integrity is a central value in HKUST. Please be aware of the importance to maintain a high standard of honesty in assignments, group projects and examinations in this course. Please familiarize yourself to the university rules and the HKUST academic honor code by visiting following website: <http://www.ust.hk/vpaa/integrity/>