

Associations with positive and negative well-being in college students

Objective: To evaluate students at a large, secular, Southeastern university for positive and negative influences of well-being, their ability to recognize advice from an individual source, its perceived benefit to contributing to well-being, and how they would respond to this advice.

Methods: We surveyed secular college students at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA. Questions were developed to assess the positive and negative influences on well-being. We chose one source to provide advice for improved well-being. We measured the students' recognition of the source and response to the advice.

Results: There were 105 responses to the survey. General well-being was noted most commonly to be improved by: good health (72%), a close relationship with family (72%), friends (72%) or God (57%), or satisfaction with professional career goals (53%). Detracting from general well-being were: lack of vigor, energy, optimal health (64%), poor self-image (64%), or stress from university course work (64%). Students could generally identify wise statements from an undisclosed source as able to improve general well-being. When informed the advice statements were paraphrased from the Bible and asked what their response was to seek further advice from the Bible to improve lifestyle/well-being (57%), maintain their current lifestyle and wisdom/knowledge sources (44%), or not use the Biblical advice (16%).

Conclusion: College students most commonly identify health, close relationships with family, friends and God, as well as satisfaction with career goals, as positive sources of well-being. Further, about half are willing to pursue more knowledge to increase well-being.

Results

We received 105 survey responses of which 73 (71%) were female, the average age was 21 years old, most commonly Seniors (n=39, 38%); 78 (76%) were Caucasian and 12 (12%) were African American. The academic majors specified were varied, but the greatest number was in business (n=15, 18%). The demography results are shown in Table 1. Greatest responses to what improves general well-being were: maintenance of good health (n=76, 72%), a close relationship with family (n=76, 72%), friends (n=76, 72%), or God (n=60, 57%), and satisfaction with professional career goals (n=56, 53%, Table 2). In contrast, most common responses to what detracted from general well-being were: lack of vigor, energy, optimal health (n=67, 64%), poor self-image (n=67, 64%), stress/fatigue from university course work (n=67, 64%), or lack of sense of purpose with studies/career goals (n=52, 50%, Table 3). Students most commonly sought to improve well-being by: pursuing a healthy lifestyle (n=76, 72%), spending more time with friends (n=71, 68%), pursuing advice from a mentor (n=59, 56%), seeking a close relationship with God (n=57, 54%), or spending more time with family (n=57, 54%, Table 4). When asked about advice statements to improve general well-being they found most helpful: be grateful (n=76, 72%), be slow to speak and quick to listen (n=72, 69%), and work hard to provide for yourself and others (n=69, 66%, Table 5). No student rejected all of the offered choices as unwise. When asked if they knew the sources of the advice statements a strong majority (n=74, 73%) chose the Bible and then Humanism (n=38, 37%, Table 6). When informed the advice statements were paraphrased from the Bible and asked what their future response should be, the majority chose: seek further advice from the Bible to improve lifestyle/well-being (n=60, 57%), no change, maintain current lifestyle and wisdom/knowledge sources (n=46, 44%), seek wisdom/knowledge from an alternative source (n=10, 10%), and avoid Biblical advice (n=7, 7%). We then compared students who indicated they were seeking, versus not pursuing, a close relationship with God (Table 3) and found no difference in which advice statements they viewed as wise, (p=0.06). In contrast, those who indicated they were seeking God were more likely to know the advice statements came from the Bible (p>0.001) and intended further to pursue God to improve well-being (p>0.001).

**Table 1: Respondent characteristics
(N = 105)**

Question	Choices	N	Percentage
Average age (years)		21.4	NA
Race	White	78	74%
	African American	10	10%
	Asian	8	8%
	Hispanic	4	4%

	Native American	1	1%
	Bi-racial	2	2%
	Other	1	1%
	No answer	1	1%
Gender	Female	73	70%
	Male	30	29%
	No answer	2	2%
Grade	Freshman	6	6%
	Sophomore	21	20%
	Junior	21	20%
	Senior	38	36%
	Graduate student	18	17%
	No answer	1	1%
Major	Education	9	9%
	Fine Arts	9	9%
	Liberal Arts	13	12%
	Life Sciences or Allied Health	14	13%
	Education	3	3%
	Engineering	11	10%
	Business	15	14%
	Earth Sciences	2	2%
	Psychology	8	8%
	Other	25	24%
	No answer	21	20%

**Table 2: What improves general well-being?
(more than one choice possible) (N = 105)**

Responses	N	Percentage
Maintenance of good health and/or sporting activities	76	72%
A close relationship with family	76	72%
A close relationship with friends	76	72%
A close relationship with God	60	57%
Satisfaction with my professional career goals	56	53%
Satisfaction from university course work	44	42%
Maintenance of a high GPA	42	40%
A close relationship with a love interest	41	39%
Satisfaction with current job	36	34%
Social media interactions	21	20%
Sexual relations	15	14%
Mind altering experiences through drugs or alcohol	14	13%
Other	3	3%

**Table 3: What detracts from general well-being?
(more than one choice possible) (N = 105)**

Responses	N	Percentage
Lack of vigor, energy, optimal health	67	64%
Poor self-image	67	64%
Stress/fatigue from university course work	67	64%
Lack of sense of purpose with my studies/career goals	52	50%
Stress/fatigue with current job	49	47%
Insufficient social interaction	48	46%
A bad or insecure relationship with God	41	39%
An unsatisfactory relationship with family	41	39%
Lack of a love interest	35	33%
Other	2	2%

**Table 4: How do you actively improve your well-being?
(more than one choice possible) (N = 105)**

Responses	N	Percentage
Pursue a healthy and active lifestyle	76	72%
Spend more time with friends	71	68%
Pursue advice from a wise and knowledgeable mentor	59	56%
Spend more time with family	57	54%
Seek a close relationship with God	57	54%
Spend more time alone	45	43%
Engage more actively in my university course work	40	38%
Try to be a better companion to my love interest	31	30%
Pursue advice from a wise and knowledgeable literature source	31	30%
Other	1	1%

**Table 5: What paraphrased advice statements do you find helpful?
(more than one choice possible) (N = 105)**

Responses	N	Percentage
Be grateful	76	72%
Be slow to speak and quick to listen	72	69%
Work hard to provide for yourself and others	69	66%
Make good use of your time	65	62%
Find contentment in your current situation	64	61%
Do not let anger fester	64	61%
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you	64	61%
Honor one another	63	60%
Moderation in all things	57	54%
Do not react in anger to situations or person's mistreatment of you	49	47%
Do not seek revenge when you are wronged	47	45%
Approach life in a careful, well thought-out way	42	40%
Bear one another's burdens	41	39%
Speak according to the other person's need	29	28%

**Table 6: The advice statements are from which literature source(s)?
(more than one choice possible)
(N = 105)**

Responses	N	Percentage
The Bible	74	70%
Humanism	38	36%
Greek philosophy	22	21%
Communist belief system	21	20%
Eastern religious thought	19	18%
Atheist dogma	13	12%
Other	4	4%
No answer	3	3%

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