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# Wellbeing Skills


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# The Next 15 Minutes

- Why wellbeing is important.
  - Wellbeing outcomes.
  - The student context.
- Four wellbeing skills.
  - The Geelong Three Breaths technique.
  - Strengths.
  - Decision making.
  - Gratitude.
- Further tips.
- Applause or ridicule.

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# Why wellbeing?

# Wellbeing is important

**Greater wellbeing is related to (a selection):**

- Better academic performance.
- Better jobs and pay.
- Better health (get sick less, recover faster).
- Greater resilience (0.5 correlation).
- Better relationships.
- Greater goal obtainment.
- Living longer (on average, around 8 years).

| | Age 85 | Age 94 |
|---|---|---|
| Happy Nuns | 90% | 54% |
| Unhappy Nuns | 34% | 11% |

*(The Nun Study: Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001*
*Positive emotional content, 180 nuns, mean age = 22 years)*

# Student context

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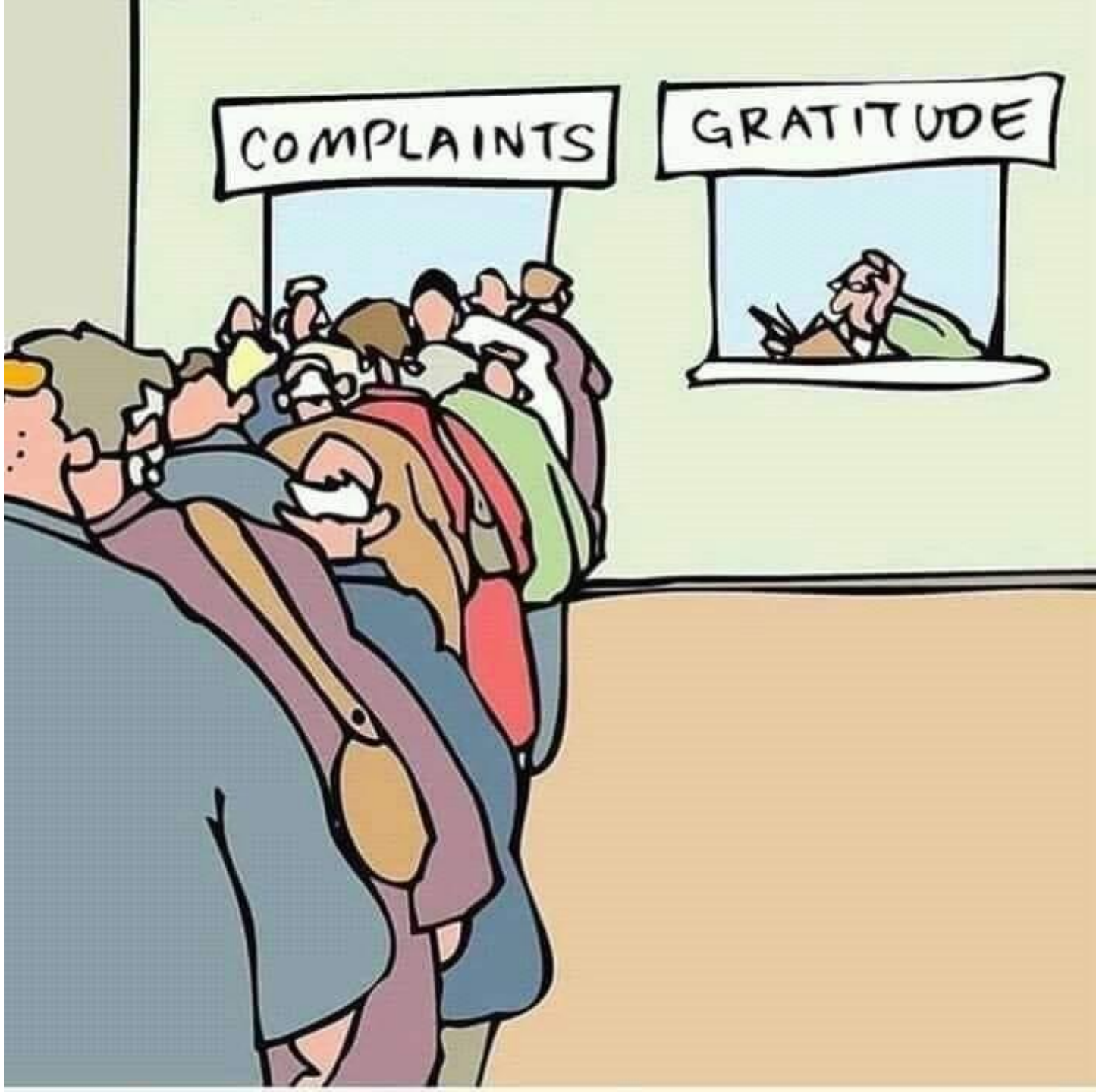
- Students as a group have considerably lower wellbeing than the average public:
  - 1 in 5 in general population, but 1 in 4 university students experience significant levels of psychological distress.
- The reasons are pretty well known:
  - Financial pressures.
  - Social pressures.
  - New experiences and learning curves.
  - High expectations.
  - Stress.
  - Lack of social supports.
  - Cultural aspects.

# Uni context

- Academia is stressful:
  - Burnout, stress, anxiety, pressures with workload, having too many balls in the air, toxic cultures, increasing demands, isolation, and feeling distressed (Berg and Seeber, 2016; Lemon & McDonough, 2018; Mountz et al., 2015).
  - Universities are stressful places (Beer, et al., 2015; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Kasworm & Bowles, 2012; Mountz et al., 2015; Ryan, 2013; Sullivan & Weissner, 2010; Wang & Cranton, 2012).



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# Four skills

# The Geelong three breaths exercise

- Breath One. Take a deep breath. Notice your physical body and any points of pain or tension. Breath out slowly and release any tension away.

- Breath Two. Take a deep breath. As you breathe out think about what you are grateful for right at this very moment. Say to yourself "Right now I am grateful for...".

- Breath Three. Take a deep breath. As you breathe out think what intentional state you want to be in right now. Say to yourself "My intention right now is to be (kind, open minded, relaxed, critical, curious etc)...".

Developed by Justin Robinson at Geelong Grammar.

# At your best – identifying strengths

**At your best**

- Think of a story that illustrates when you are at your best.
  - Chances are your story is infused with your strengths – things are you are good and energize you.
- The key point though is that your strengths are pathways to engagement and enjoyment.
  - It's almost impossible to be at your best while not using your strengths!
  - What strengths can you draw on in times of stress and adversity?

# Decision making for wellbeing

**Decision making**

- Increase your decision-making skills which in turn impact your wellbeing.
- The skill of decision making helps negative complex, uncertain, and multiple decisions and frees up valuable cognitive resources.
- Two types of decision making:
  - Maximisers: Individuals who maximise consider all possibilities comprehensively and strive to select the best option. These individuals search out information to ensure they are exposed to the best alternatives.
  - Satisficers: Individuals who satisfice seek an alternative that exceeds some criterion of acceptability. Once they identify an acceptable option, they discontinue their search and choose that option. These individuals do not pursue the goal to optimise every decision.
- Not all decision need to be maximised! Choosing a life partner (yes), choosing between different brands of detergent or from appetisers on a menu (no). Can you satisfice more?

# Gratitude

**Gratitude**

- Gratitude is strongly related to wellbeing, so increase gratitude by focusing on good things that happen each day.
- Each day to think of three things you are thankful for.
  - These can be big things, such as good health, supportive relationships, and career successes, or little things such as a perfect cup of coffee or hearing your favourite song on the radio.
  - Write down three things at the end of each day for a week, and aim to write new items each time.

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# Further tips

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**Discomfort**

- Embrace negative emotions – they are functional.
- Embrace discomfort – chances are the best days of your life to date included an element of discomfort.

# Further tips

## What does a great day at school/university look like?

# Further tips

- Invest time and effort in family connections.
- We are social creatures so be enmeshed in a community of friends - deep and meaningful relationships.
- Know your personal values and live by them. Similarly, know your purpose and what derives meaning for you.
- Know you personal strengths and find ways to exercise them every day.
- Develop and optimistic thinking style.
- Invest your money in experiences rather than things.
- Be in work or study, and work or study that you enjoy.
- Be grateful.
- Savour the now regularly – rather than the past or future.
- Slow down and do less – perhaps meditate?
- Be curious.
- Monitor your wellbeing.
- Look after your health (the below 5 can make approximately 14 years difference to your life expectancy).
  - Eat real food – not too much, and mostly plants (LCHF).
  - Exercise regularly – and different types: aerobic, resistance, flexibility, balance.
  - Drink alcohol in moderation.
  - Don't smoke.
  - Get enough quality sleep.

Caveat: Genetics and upbringing also make a slight bit of difference, but since you can't do too much about those, don't worry about them…

Nothing great was ever
achieved without enthusiasm.
Ralph Waldo Emerson
quotefancy

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# Thank you

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