

The Science of Happiness and Success (FSS1150-1550): Abbreviated description

General objectives: This 12-week course examines the science of happiness and success and teaches students practical strategies proven to foster academic achievement and lifelong wellbeing. The course emphasizes both **lecture-based** and **experienced-based** learning. Lectures introduce students to the scientific evidence that supports current psychological theories and principles of happiness and success. However, all lectures include reading materials, interactive quizzes and skill acquisition exercises designed to help students acquire a number of social-emotional (e.g., manage your stress, utilize your core strengths, foster a growth mindset) and academic skills (e.g., manage your workload, maximize retention, write papers efficiently and prepare for exams). The course was developed by Dr. Santor, a clinical psychologist within the faculty of social science with over 25 years of experience lecturing at the university and working in clinical practice. The ultimate goal of the course is to help students develop effective study habits, effective social-emotional skills, and a long-lasting positive mindset about themselves.

Rationale: This course teaches both learning and wellbeing skills. Excelling in your courses will depend both on how well you deal with stress and manage your workload. No amount of relaxation, breathing or emotional support will be sufficient unless you manage the workload. In this course, I distinguish stress as load (i.e., how much you have to do and whether or not you have the drive to do it) from stress as worry (i.e., your worries about whether or not you will get it all done, your doubts about whether or not it will be any good). Both types of skills are critical and are interrelated, and both are needed to succeed and enjoy school.

Specific objectives of the course: In this course, students are taught specific study skills (e.g., how to take notes and discuss readings, how to schedule effectively and efficiently, how to prepare for and take exams, research and write academic papers), as well as wellbeing skills (e.g., how to deal with worries, doubts and setbacks, how to minimize test anxiety, how to balance academic and recreational activities, deal with setbacks and failure, how to make friends and as well as how to ask for both academic help and help for emotional difficulty). These are the skills needed to excel at college and university and effectively cope with stress. Students in this course will have access to all of the resources throughout their studies at the university.

Evaluation of the materials: Results of our evaluation of the course appear on pages 5 to 11 of this document.

Teaching methods: Lecture, workbooks, individual project/paper, experiential learning.

Lecture materials: Lecture materials and interactive questionnaires can be made available to professors, instructors and lecturers interested in implementing this course at their institutions.

Feedback: Read about what students are saying about this course. Results of our evaluation are summarized on pages 5 to 11 of this report.

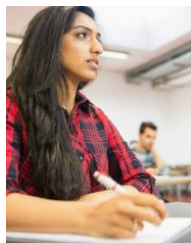
List of lectures:

Please note that some lectures are delivered over two classes and that some lectures cover multiple topics.



Lecture 1: Introduction

In this first lecture, you will be introduced to how this course works, as well as the two major themes addressed throughout all of the lectures—the skills needed to be happy and successful at school.



Lecture 1: Fast & effective notetaking

Notetaking can increase your retention and depth of understanding, help you stay on top of your classes and even reduce your boredom. You will learn about Cornell Notes, comparison charts and diagrams.



Lecture 2: The art of scheduling

In this lecture, you will learn about a number of strategies to manage your time efficiently and effectively, including story boarding, semester schedules and to-do lists.



Lecture 3: How to write great papers

Writing papers is a big part of many courses. In this lecture, you will be introduced to the key elements of a great paper and be shown step-by-step how to write each and every element, from research to proofing, until you have finished your first great paper.



Lecture 4: The science of sleep

Sleep is essential to your physical health, mental health and learning. In this lecture, you will learn about the mechanisms that govern how sleep affects most of what we do and how to improve your sleep.



Lecture 5: Beat the forgetting curve

Research shows that most of what you read or listen to in a lecture will be forgotten by the end of the day – unless you do something active with that information. In this lecture, you will learn about the most effective retention strategies.



Lecture 6: Breathing/mindfulness

Relaxation breathing and mindfulness have been shown to reduce stress, improve attention and even increase your math grades. In this lecture, you will also learn how acquire these remarkable skills in just minutes a day.



Lecture 7: Doubt, worry & what-ifs

Everyone has doubts. But sometimes, negative thoughts can overwhelm you. In this lecture, you will learn about the different types of negative thoughts and their impact as well as learn some of the most effective skills to deal with worries, doubts and what-ifs.



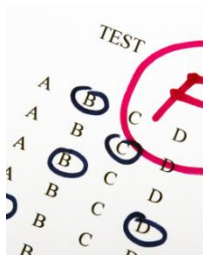
Lecture 8: Exam readiness

In this lecture, you will learn how to prepare for exams, manage the worries and doubts that often arrive during an exam, as well as identify the pitfalls that most students make writing exams and how to avoid them.



Lecture 9: Goal setting & procrastination

Goal setting is difficult. It means putting things off that are often easier and a lot more fun and making choices about what really matters most to you. In this lecture, you will learn how to set goals, stick to them and manage your procrastination.



Lecture 10: Dealing with setback

Most students will fail a test at some point. How you respond is often more important than the setback. In this lecture, you will learn how to overcome, persevere and turn setbacks into growth opportunities.



Lecture 11: Building lasting habits

In this lecture, we review the hurdles most students face trying to turn study skills and coping strategies into lasting habits and troubleshoot the academic challenges you may still be trying to address.



Lecture 12: Asking for help

Knowing when and how to ask for help is one of the most difficult decisions you will ever make. In this lecture, you will learn about the barriers to help-seeking and how to overcome them.



Lecture 13: Motivation and Grit

The last stretch of a 5K run and the last two weeks of the semester are painful. You are out of gas, and it feels like you won't make it. In this lecture, you will learn about the core components of perseverance and how to build GRIT.



Lecture 14: The Good Life

In this lecture, you are introduced to the five domains of wellbeing and the various skills needed to find wellbeing.



Lecture 15: Personal Strengths

Every one of us has a number of character strengths and values which define who you are. In this lecture, you will learn how capitalizing on your strengths can make work, life and relationships more fulfilling.



Lecture 16: SEL Skills [1]

This first of a two-part lecture introduces and teaches you about five domains of social-emotional learning, including the extraordinary benefit of emotional awareness and being able to say how you feel.



Lecture 17: SEL Skills [2]:

In this second part, you will learn about the skills you need to make and keep friends and partners and why having friends is critical to your success and wellbeing throughout your lifetime.



Lecture 18: Unfairness

This lecture introduces the foundations for bias and prejudice, reviews the prevalence and impact of microaggressions and discrimination and teaches strategies to deal with it when it happens.



Lecture 19: Mental illness

In this lecture, you will learn about major types and risk factors for mental illness and about the effectiveness of treatments for mental illness. You will also learn how to identify your tipping point and how to ask for help when you need it.



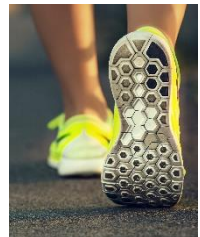
Lecture 20: What works best

In this lecture, you will learn about the different strategies and treatments for mental illness and how well they all work.



Lecture 21: Managing finances

In this optional lecture, you will learn about the strategies that can help you understand your spending habits, budget better, resist the urge to spend, and know how and when to ask for help.



Lecture 22: Benefits of exercise

In this final lecture, you will learn about the benefits of exercise, not just for your physical and mental health but for your learning as well.



Lecture 23: Recap & reflection

In this final lecture, we will revisit what we know about happiness, wellbeing and success and work to implement a plan to keep everything that you have learned and acquired going.

Evaluation methods and distribution of grades: The course is evaluated through a series of homework exercises, one brief, 5-page paper, as well as one mid-term and final structured 25-question personal reflection on these skills that have helped you and what skills you would like to focus on next semester. All of the activities in this course are designed to help you learn what researchers know about happiness and success and to stimulate all of the different activities that you will need to master at university and college.

Description of activities and grading in the course:

Homework (25%): The homework exercises are worth 25% of your grade and are mandatory. You must complete all of them. These exercises are designed to help you acquire the skills you are being asked to learn in lectures and to help you stay on top of the work. **Think of this as a grit-building exercise that will serve you well in courses and years to come.** All of the activities that are graded as homework as listed by week as "assignments" in Brightspace. Homework will be evaluated on the basis of whether or not you have completed the exercises on time and if you have fully completed them. Some of the homework exercises involve completing a study plan; others involve taking notes. To show that you are completing the work, you will be asked to upload a copy of your work in Brightspace before each class. Failure to upload your homework by 11 pm on the stated due date will result in no points being awarded for that exercise (unless you are able to provide an acceptable reason for the failure to submit your work). If the homework has not been completed properly, it will be returned, which will allow you to complete it properly.

Mid-term exam (30%): The mid-term exam is worth 30% of your grade and will be comprised of 45 multiple choice questions and one short answer question, in which you will be asked to "compare and contrast" two of six different skills. Again, the goal is to practice how to use different skills (e.g., flashcards, how to write short answer test questions) on your exams. We'll spend lots of time practicing the skills needed to both master the material as well as the skills that are needed to do well at mid-term and final exams.

Paper (30%): The paper is worth 30% of your grade. For the paper, you will be asked to write a 5-page paper, for which you will be given a detailed "rubric" that tells you exactly what you need to do. Elements of the paper will be completed as homework assignments in the first half of the course, first, and then assembled and graded in the second half of the course. You will be given a chance to improve your paper.

Final reflection (15%): The final reflection is worth 15% of your grade. You will be required to reflect on what you have learned, how it has helped and what you would like to focus more on doing next semester. This is a structured reflection based on 15 questions. Students typically write about six pages. As part of this guided reflection, you are also asked to complete a survey (with feedback) that identifies strengths and areas to keep working on.

Interactive questionnaires: Homework exercises (e.g., how to build a growth mindset) are typically accompanied by one or two interactive questionnaires (e.g., do you have a growth mindset), which have been designed to facilitate student understanding or acquisition of a skill. Students are provided detailed feedback to their responses.

Required reading: The reading materials for this course are a series of research articles from the library that will be provided to you, as well as excerpts from one book which will also be provided to you.

Expectations: You are expected to come to class prepared, which means completing the readings and the assignments prior to class. Missed exams and late submissions of papers must be supported by a medical certificate (see the University policy in this area) to avoid penalties. Absences for any other serious reason must be justified in writing to the professor or to the academic secretariats of the faculty within five business days following the date of the exam or the assignment deadline. The professor or the faculty reserves the right to accept or refuse the reason put forward. Justifications such as travel, jobs, or the misreading of the examination timetable are not acceptable.

What students are saying

"This course, from the very beginning, was my comfort course. I, first of all, didn't feel like I had to prove myself to the class or the professor in any way, which really took the pressure off. It was a place where I could go to learn and make mistakes on the way. This class made me feel like my mistakes were okay, and it was the only class where I felt like the professor looked at us as people, too and not just student numbers. It also gave me a sense of enjoyment with school, which is something that I used to have and longed for in university. It was almost like the lecture topics were planned accordingly to the stage in the semester, as sometimes I would leave class thinking that was exactly what I needed to learn at that moment. The skills, habits and techniques I learned greatly benefitted my first semester, and I can say with confidence that my mental state would not be where it is at this point if I had not taken this class. I believe that this class should be something that every first year should take as it benefitted me so much. "

More of what students are saying

"The whole course was very beneficial to me, although scheduling and making a to-do list every day were my most effective strategies. Producing a weekly plan has helped immensely in avoiding delaying any tasks and procrastinating instead of finishing my studies."

Relaxation breathing is a technique that helped me manage stress and promote a sense of calm. By doing this regularly, I noticed several changes in how I think and act. With enough practice, I started being more in control of my worries, as well as where to put my focus.

"Learning about Cornell notes was the most helpful thing I found. I have always found it hard to organize my notes the right way. The Cornell note helps me organize everything as well as summarize. I use Cornell notes for all my courses now, and it has really helped me."

"This course helped me with all my other courses and to start my first year on the right foot. I found it helpful when we would learn new skills, and I then applied them to my studying. This benefited me a lot."

The lesson on "how to get grit" inspired me to continue pushing on. In addition, I now keep a reminder on my wall above my desk about how to develop grit for future reference.

"The thing that I found most helpful in this course was learning how to schedule. Before taking this course, I never really had to schedule anything before, because teachers would do that for me."

.I didn't realize what I was doing before this class. I didn't know how to study properly; I didn't know what you needed to do to get a good night's sleep. And all of these skills have helped me. I didn't really take school seriously as I do now.

The PERMA model helps me monitor my mental health because I can reflect on whether my life has all the five aspects of PERMA or not. If it does not, then I can take action to include that area, and my happiness and motivation will increase.

One of my favourite skills is the Pomodoro technique, in which you focus on an activity until you are at your limit and then proceed to take a break & repeat the process until your task is complete. This technique allows my studying to be done without leaving me drained in the end.

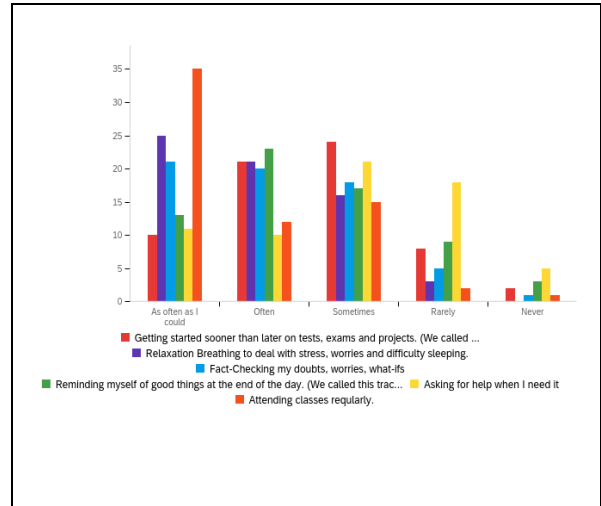
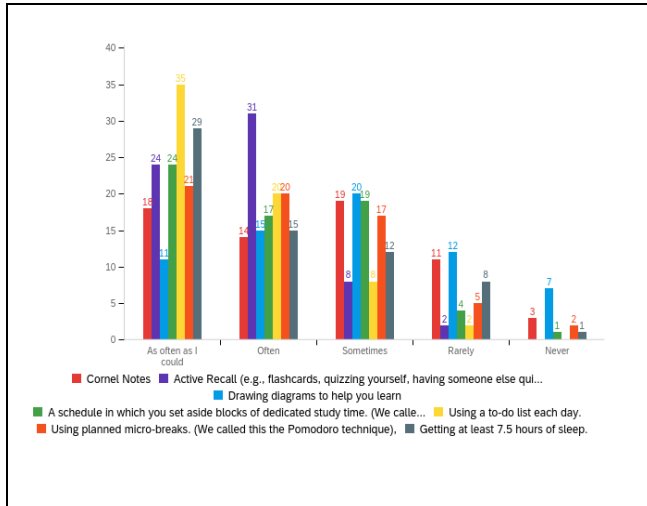
I have many aspects of my life that I would like to improve, and the [interactive] questionnaires have helped me understand things I need to do and what aspects of my being need to better my life and the way I view things. These questionnaires allowed me to learn which aspects of studying and recall I need to work on to obtain the best knowledge and work toward the grades I want

"Scheduling and creating a to-do list were the most helpful because they helped me plan what time I will study throughout my week. Not only that but by giving myself a 'carrot' at the end of each day, it gave me the motivation to complete my work efficiently. My work ethic became more healthy and manageable."

The lecture that talks about mental health helped me in so many ways. It made me realize that talking to people about my problems is good and that's important to do it every once in a while. The lecture taught me that people are there to help and that talking to people is good, and after I started, it was like a weight being lifted off my shoulder, which has been there for way too long.

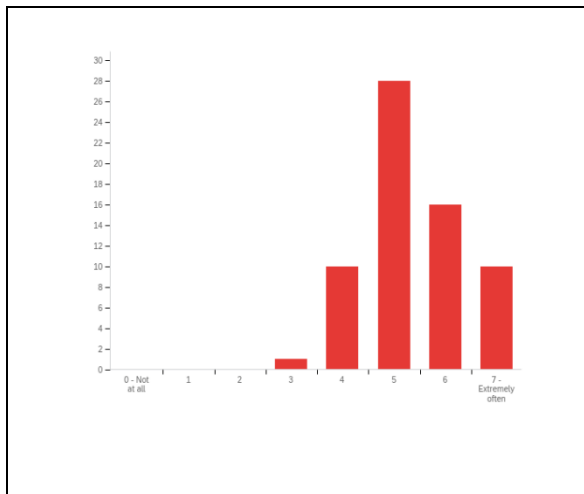
Responses to evaluation questions:

Q1 and 2: In this class, you learned about a number of study and coping skills. We would like to know how often you used these skills in all of your classes this term.



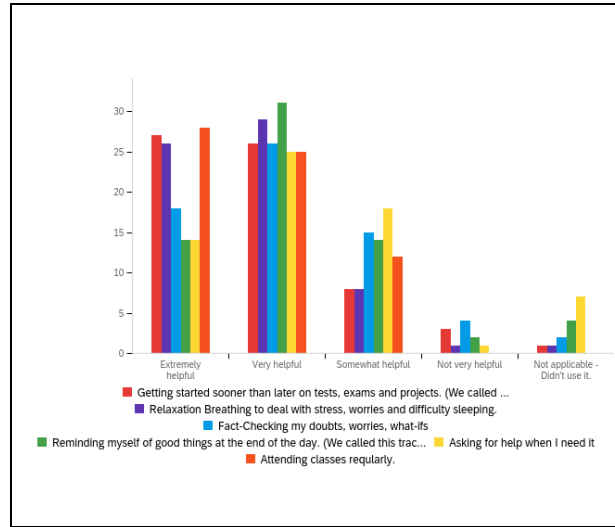
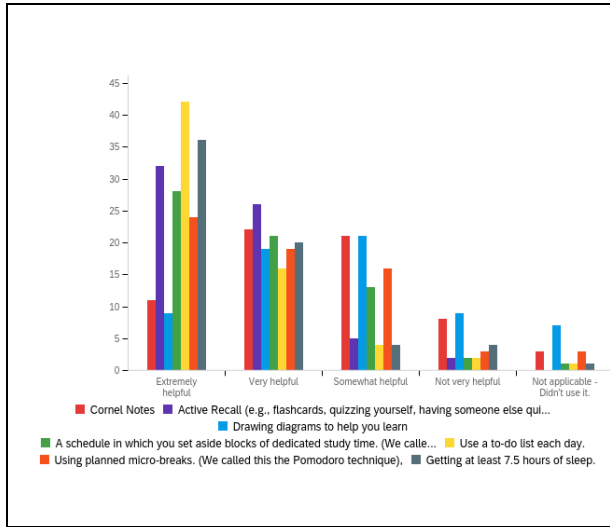
Comment: Students report that skills taught in the lecture were, in fact, well utilized by students. We will use these benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts to increase skill uptake.

Q3: How often did you use these skills in other courses?



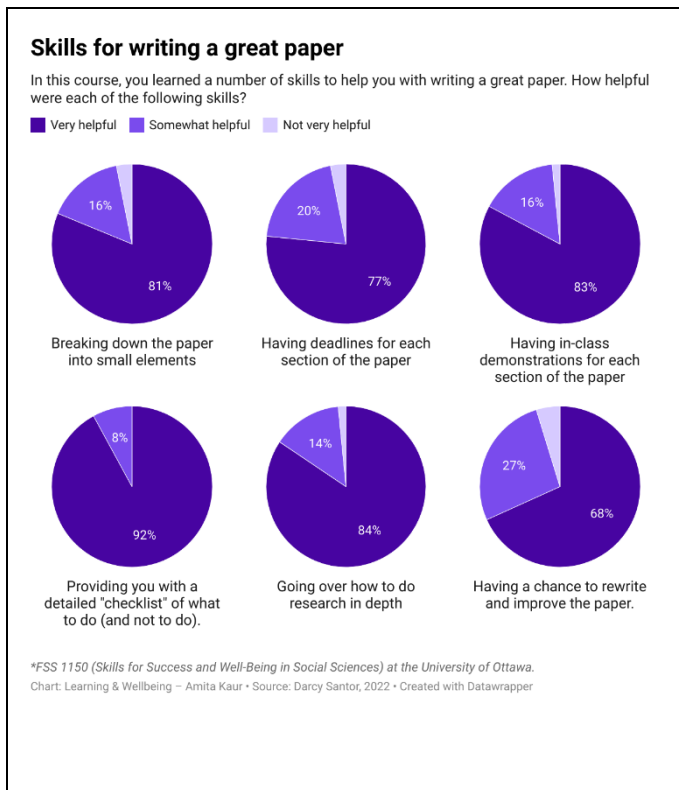
Comment: In general, the goal of the course is to provide students with skills that would be used in other courses. Accordingly, we also asked students explicitly about how often they used these skills **in courses other than FSS1150**. In general, students reported using these skills in other courses and not just the course they were taking.

Q3: Skills (Helpfulness) How helpful were these skills to you?



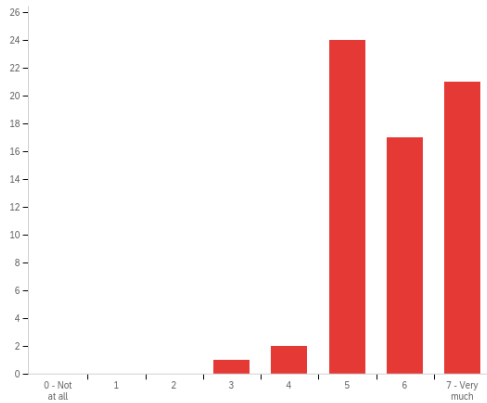
Comment: This question was used to evaluate the uptake of skills and will be used to fine-tune our efforts to ensure the uptake of all skills. Few students (generally fewer than 5) rated these skills as not applicable. Again, we will use these benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts to increase skill uptake.

Q4: We spent a number of classes learning about how to write a great paper. How helpful was each component?



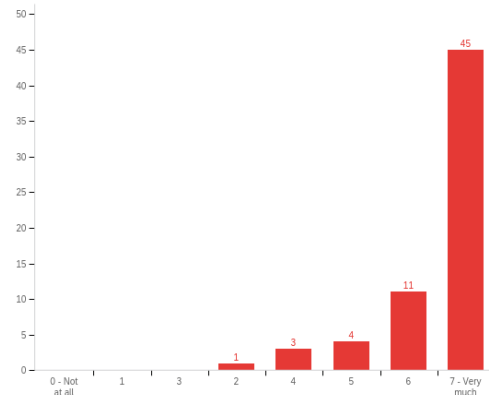
Comment: Throughout the entire 12-week course, students were shown how to write a great paper, with in-class demonstrations for each element of a great paper, including how to conduct research, write a thesis statement, summarize a body of knowledge, critique a body of knowledge, discuss implications of facts and finding, and how to avoid plagiarism. Students (even those in the second and third year) rated all elements of this aspect of the course extremely helpful.

Q5: How helpful did you find these writing skills in other courses?

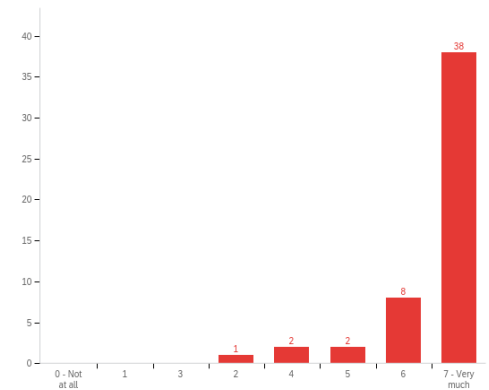


Comment: Results show that these writing skills were extremely helpful in other courses, as well.

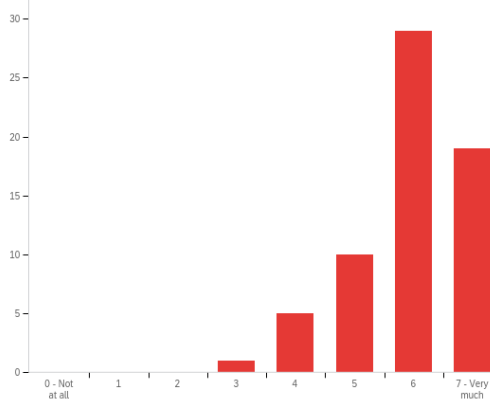
Q6: Would you recommend this course to other students who may not feel ready for university studies?



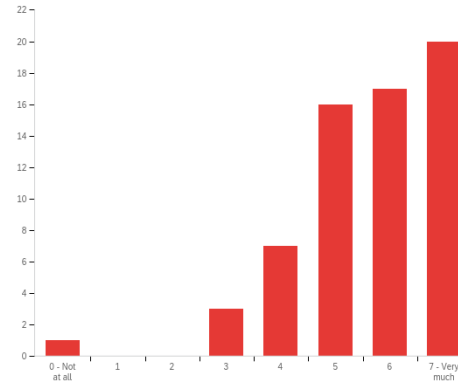
Comment: In general, students indicate that they would recommend this course to other students. This remains even when considering first-year students only (see below)



Q8 - The skills in this course have made me feel more confident about my ability to do well at school.

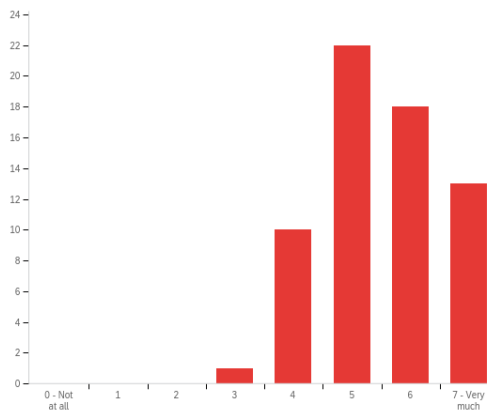


Q9 - I believe that I did better in my courses, in part, because of the skills I learned in this course.



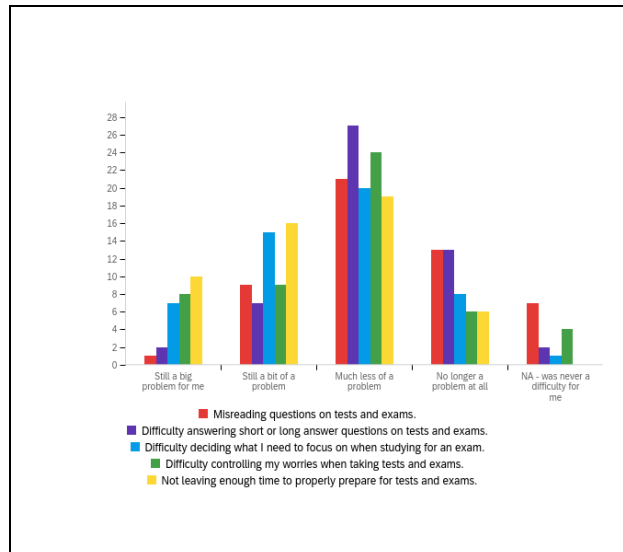
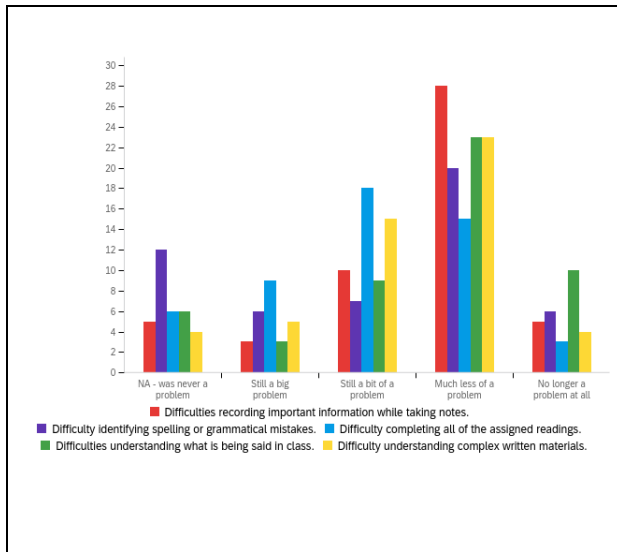
Comment: The majority of students attribute success in all of their courses to skills acquired in this course.

Q10 - How helpful did you find the interactive questionnaires in learning about the various topics in the course (e.g., Stress Quiz, Sleep Quiz, Character Strength Quiz)?



Comment: One of the unique elements of this course is the use of interactive questionnaires to facilitate the understanding and acquisition of skills. The questionnaires are completed as part of the homework assigned in classes.

Q10: What kind of academic difficulties are you still experiencing?



Comment: Results show that students made good progress with a number of difficulties. Only a few students indicated that skills in this question were never a problem and, for the most part, made good gains in reducing the extent to which these difficulties were still problems. A small group of students stated that these skills continued to be a "big problem," which we will try to address in the coming years.

