

Study Happy Library wellbeing initiatives from the University of Warwick



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May 2016 – we have just spent an afternoon working with our finalists to reduce their stress levels, to get them in the right frame of mind for revision to make them more successful students.

In reality, we didn't do much to achieve this. The real work was done by Archie, Ben-G, Bree and Lola. These are not some of our more exotically-named library assistants, but part of our ever-popular PAT (Pets As Therapy) dogs that we host in the library at times of high student stress as part of our Study Happy wellbeing programme.

Why?

One question that we hear (admittedly less and less often) is: 'Why on earth is the library doing this?' The opening sentence of this article gives a bit of a clue, but why we do it and why it is so important to us (and it is important – why else would we restructure to enable us to focus more time on this if it weren't?) may need a bit more explaining.

Our Study Happy programme¹ – and more of that later – is part of the offer of our Community Engagement teams. Although the library is involved in work with the local Coventry and Warwickshire community (for example, outreach work by our archives team in the Modern Records Centre² and Widening Participation activities by several library colleagues), when we say 'community engagement' we primarily mean new ways of engaging with our undergraduate, postgraduate and teaching communities within the university.

Of course, we have engaged with these communities for years. Our customer services colleagues are the friendly staff whom students see first when they come into the library and our academic support librarians are the bedrock of our links with academic departments, working in partnership with academic colleagues on learning and teaching issues, collection development and embedding information and other academic skills into the curriculum. But over the last few years the picture has become more complex and more exciting. We have developed new learning spaces³ that have provided more of a community focus. Some are for general use: the remodelled main library and most of our Learning Grids. Others are aimed at particular segments and meeting the needs of different communities: for example, the BioMed Grid, the Postgraduate Hub, the Wolfson Research Exchange and Teaching Grid. These spaces have provided more arenas to have deeper conversations with our communities. And this is nothing new. The coffee houses of the 17th and 18th centuries provided an opportunity to access information and network: 'places where people gathered to drink coffee, learn the news of the day, and perhaps to meet with local residents and discuss matters of mutual concern'.⁴ This doesn't sound far removed from our regular Thursday morning 'Research Refresh' sessions⁵ in the Research Exchange (Fig. 1).

The advertisement is a dark-themed poster with white and green text. At the top, it says 'Take a break from your RESEARCH for coffee, tea & cake'. Below this is an illustration of a white coffee cup on a saucer with steam rising from it. Underneath the illustration, it says 'discuss, network & refresh at #ResearchRefresh'. At the bottom, it specifies the time 'Thursdays 10.30am-12.00pm' and the location 'The Research Exchange, 3rd Floor Extension, Main Library'.

Figure 1: Advertising 'Research Refresh'

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All this fits nicely with the University of Warwick Library mission statement: 'connecting you with information, support and your community'.⁶ All libraries do information, a lot do support but the community element is something that is very important – and has become increasingly important – to Warwick. In 2014 the university launched a new strategy, 'Looking forward'.⁷ This highlights 'community' as a key University Value and adds new weight to this by making 'Engage our communities' one of our six strategic goals. A key objective for us in the library is to create 'the conditions for our students and staff to succeed'. That is what we, Archie, Ben-G, Bree and Lola are trying to achieve.

We aim to support the 'whole student'. The best way to explain this is to have recourse to Maslow's 'Hierarchy of needs'.⁸ Like many of you reading this, we have encountered this concept in many training courses over the years... but at last (for us) it makes sense!

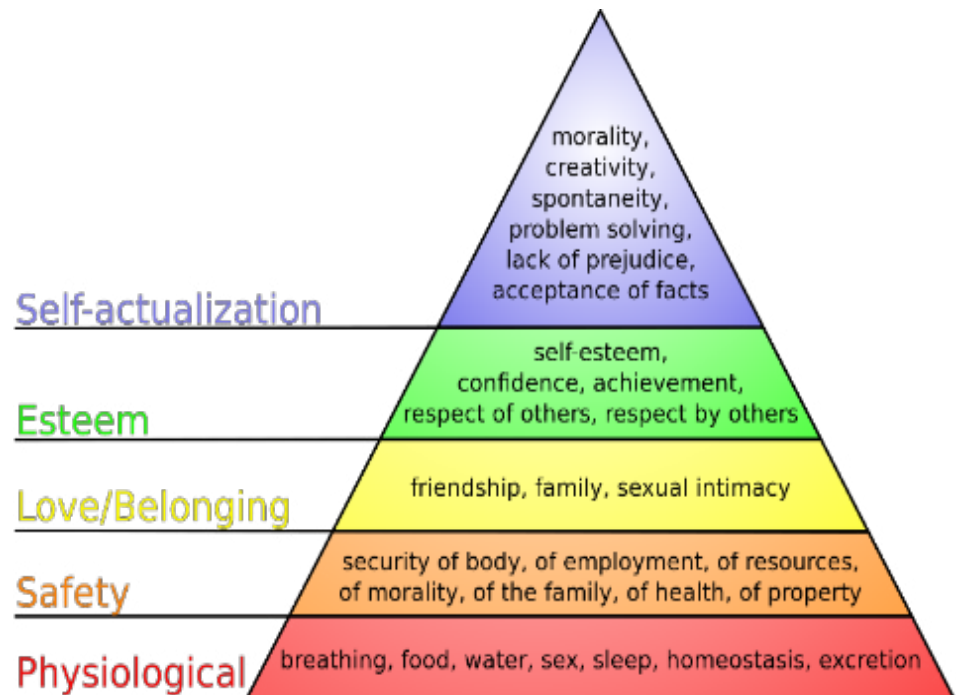


Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

For those who haven't been on the same management courses, Maslow covers the things human beings need in place to be successful (see diagram Fig. 2). The basics are **physiological needs** (food, water, warmth, somewhere to rest) – universities provide access to accommodation, eateries, shops, etc. – and **safety needs**: we have an excellent security team on campus to keep our students safe.

But universities could be doing more to support the upper part of the triangle.

Our Community Engagement teams do a lot of work around creating a sense of **belonging**, helping students feel at home through induction programmes (which go way beyond library orientation [Fig. 3]), networking sessions (holding weekly get-togethers in our community spaces, such as Research Refresh mentioned above, running speed networking events and hosting student music festivals) and facilitating cultural events, which range from large community gatherings (such as providing a forum for students to celebrate Chinese New Year) to more modest events – for example, helping our smaller community of Malaysian students to celebrate their harvest festival, Kaamatan (see Figs. 4a and 4b). These events allow students to talk proudly about their culture and the rest of us to learn. Trying tasty dishes from across the globe is something we unfortunately have to do as part of the job... but more seriously, in a world

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Figure 3: PG induction fun in the PG Hub

where universities aim to be global, while cohorts of students of different nationalities remain quite siloed, this really helps with integration. It also helps students feel at home. As one student told us:

'I had loads of fun and... I didn't feel homesick for not being able to go back and celebrate Kaamatan in my home town because I celebrated it here in Warwick... It was really a memorable experience.'



Figure 4: Celebrating Kaamatan

In the current political climate these activities have become more urgent: the library has been a key force in developing the university's 'Warwick: One World!' programme,⁹ which celebrates cultural diversity and the 'oneness' of the institution.

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We also support students with their **esteem needs**. When they hand in their dissertation they get thanked, but there is generally no fanfare. We provide the fanfare. We hold impromptu celebrations in the PG Hub involving a 'dissertation survivor' photo session, images from which get sent home and usually lead to a flurry of 'likes' on social media (see Fig. 5). For **self-actualisation**, we provide students with the skills to succeed (information skills, digital skills and other academic skills) plus the opportunity to use their creativity: the walls of the PG Hub are adorned with students' photographic endeavours.

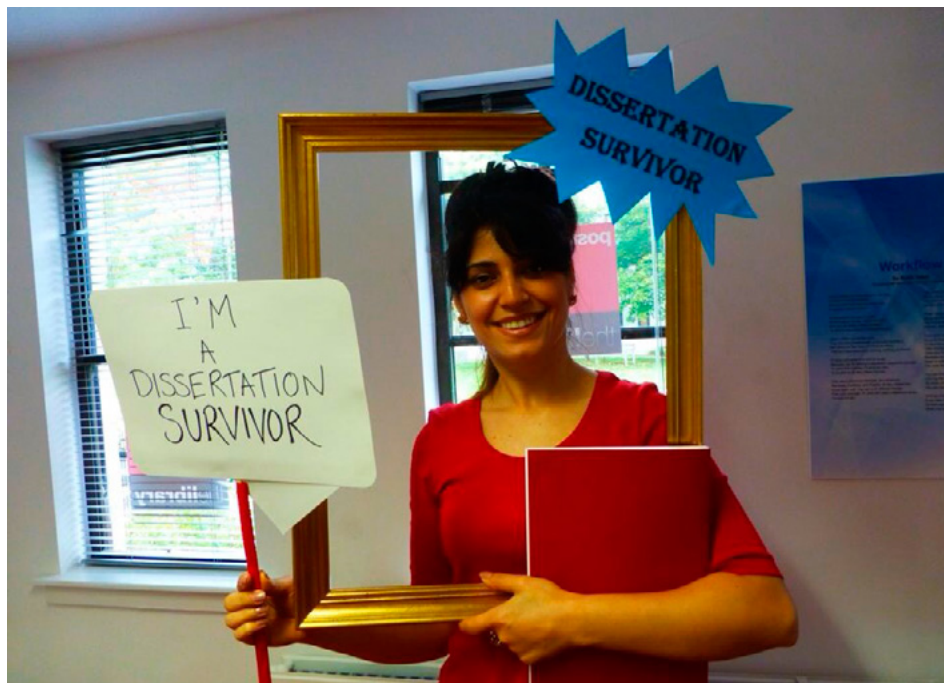


Figure 5: Celebrating dissertation submission

Underlying all this is 'wellbeing'. As we all know, the wellbeing agenda is massive for those of us involved in education. The number of young people in Britain seeking counselling over exam stress has increased by 200% in recent years according to the NSPCC.¹⁰ Schools are responding by providing strategies to help, including mindfulness sessions.¹¹ Matters only become more acute when students reach university. The Universities UK report *Student mental wellbeing in higher education* highlights just how big and complex the issues are and shows how stress points around transitions (coming to university, entering exam periods, moving up to postgraduate study, etc.) need to be carefully managed.¹²

This is where our Study Happy programme comes in.

Who?

But why is the library so closely involved in all this? Fitting nicely into the library's mission statement is only part of the answer. There are wider reasons why more and more libraries are becoming a key part of their university's wellbeing package of support.

Students go to the library all the time. There is a 'stickiness' they have with libraries and they keep coming back to us. They feel at home. They know the staff. They know we are looking out for them. If we notice they are stressed and talk to them about looking after themselves, this feels natural. They spend long hours in the library, some of them at times when they are feeling most stressed about essays and exams. They tell us things they wouldn't tell their tutors. They don't feel they have to put on a 'front' with us. We are not going to be writing their references.

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We also know everyone on campus. We know all the other support agencies. We know how to spot problems and refer. Librarians are also hugely strategic thinkers, are focused on users and their needs and are willing to try out new services.

In short, libraries have the staff, relationships, skills, spaces and pedigree to get involved and provide front-line information and referral as well as primary help. We are not saying we should be taking on all aspects of wellbeing – other colleagues have skills and cover aspects we would never hope or want to cover – but we are a valuable first port of call and can hopefully help tackle problems before they go too far.



Figure 6: Promoting 'Study Happy'

What?

So what do we do to help our students 'study happy'?

The first iteration of Study Happy ran over four weeks of the peak exam period in the summer term of 2014 and offered students a range of activities to take a break and connect with others to help them cope with exam stress. Subsequently, we have extended the programme to run throughout the year to encourage students to think about their wellbeing from the outset, to develop

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good practice and build resilience to cope with any stress point on the student journey. We offer a diverse range of activities that will hopefully provide something to appeal to everybody. Much of what we do is developed with different partners around the university, including Student Support, Counselling and Wellbeing staff, and our Sports Centre colleagues. We encourage students to follow the five steps to wellbeing:¹³

- connect
- be active
- take notice
- keep learning
- give

Creativity – tapping into Maslow’s self-actualisation – is an important part of our offer. Our craft, origami and adult colouring sessions appeal to those wanting to take a short break from study to do something creative and in many cases learn a new skill (or pick up a skill from childhood again, something students have commented on favourably). We find the best way is to just leave the materials out for students to help themselves and then display their work for everyone to enjoy. This has proved popular in the library and on social media. It has even led to us being interviewed on local radio: good PR for a caring university!



Figure 7: Ukulele session in the Learning Grid

Students can also learn to play the ukulele. This is a fun lunch-time session in one of our learning spaces, a collaboration with Warwick’s Music Centre, in which students can pick up a ukulele for the first time and be able to play a simple tune by the end. If your head is buzzing with revision, focusing on how to fashion a chord can really take your mind off your studies for half an hour, leaving you fresh when you return. Again, all of this helps to support self-actualisation and creates a sense of achievement (learning something new). Creative thinking in one area also encourages creative thinking around finding solutions to issues in your studies as well.

But we also support other forms of relaxation and taking time out from studying. We encourage students to be more active to aid relaxation with yoga and body balance sessions, collaborating with our partners in Warwick Sport. These go particularly well when the weather allows us to offer them out of doors in the sunshine. The weekly Wellbeing Walk around our beautiful campus

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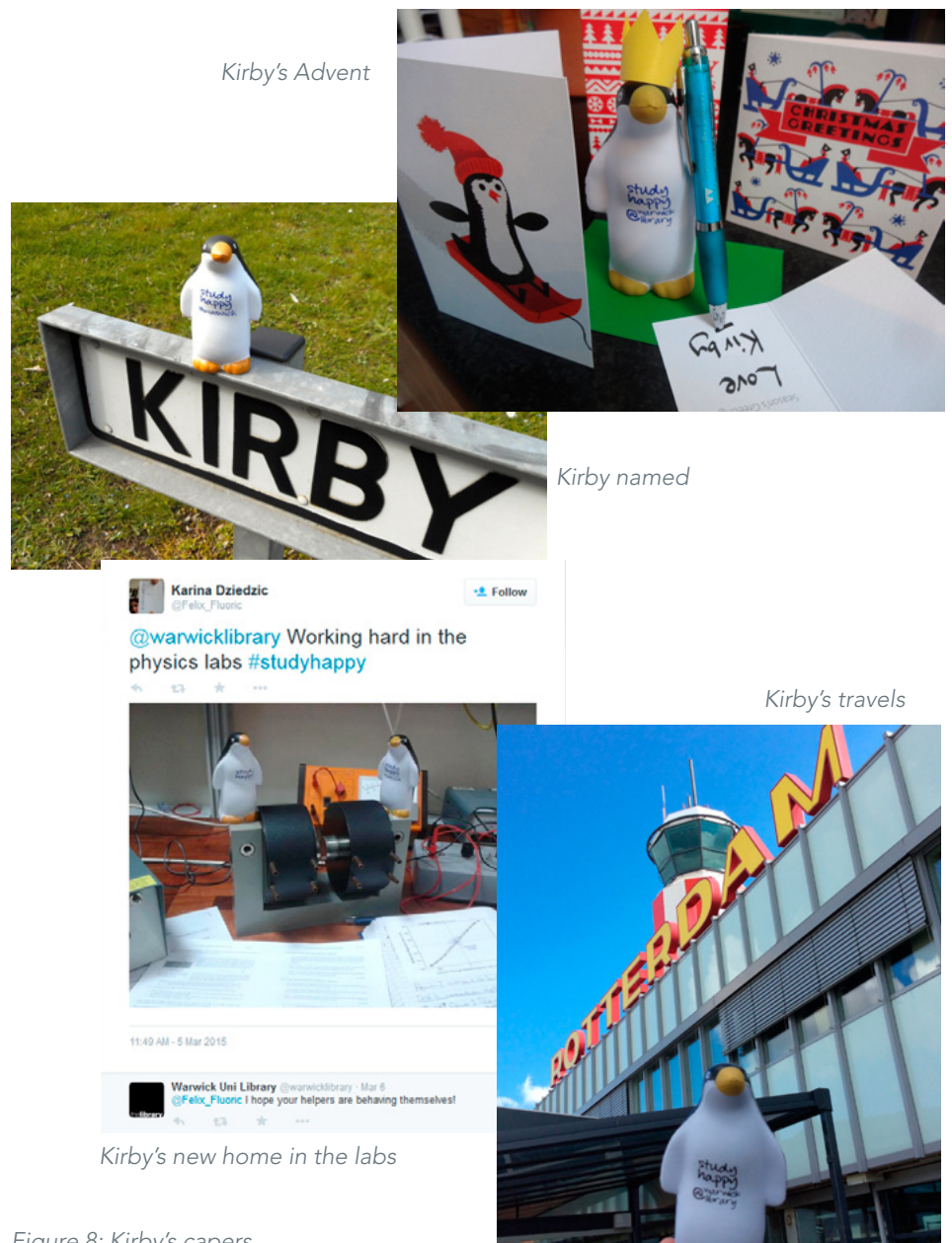


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lakes is also a good way for students to get some fresh air, 'take notice' and 'be active'. And there is always the massage chair for those who want a more laid-back approach to physical relaxation.

Most of our activities also give students the opportunity to 'connect', to develop a sense of belonging. 'Alice in libraryland' was held last March to celebrate World Book Day and University Mental Health Day. Along with crafts, games, puzzles and a Mad Hatter's tea party, there were student development workshops, poetry and meditation. Some students came for a short while for the food, others stayed over an hour enjoying the company and atmosphere. Meditation continues throughout the year and encourages students to further 'take notice'.

Students always love a freebie. We give away a penguin stress toy, Kirby (named after Kirby Corner, a road on campus), who has become the mascot of our campaign (see Fig. 8). He appears on the library bags and is a star of Twitter: appearing in the halls, labs and the pub (wherever the students take their new buddy) and also on #KirbysTravels (with our little friend exploring the world). He even struck 24 poses for last year's Kirby advent calendar from @warwicklibrary.



Kirby's Advent

Kirby named

Kirby's travels

Kirby's new home in the labs

Figure 8: Kirby's capers

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Not surprisingly we find students engage well when we give out food too: bananas, fruit and cake. While this is a good way to encourage students to take a break we also take the opportunity to ask them for their tips on a post-it note on different exam-related topics such as revision tips or simply sharing the best music to listen to when revising. We have had an abundance of useful tips from: 'forget your phone – much more productive' and 'cup of tea breaks' to 'don't panic!' The value of these tips is that they are peer-to-peer – not from their mum or a 50-something librarian – essential when suggesting 'Listen to Beyoncé' (see Figs 9 and 10). Interestingly, while we had some fantastic feedback when we gave out cakes, our students, when given the choice between cake and fruit, mostly choose the healthy option, which suggests the messages about wellbeing are getting through. Due to the success of the giveaways, we now host weekly get-togethers – called 'Kirby Corner' – to meet with students, give out free coffee and biscuits or fruit and a penguin with light-touch information from ourselves or another service, such as Warwick Sport (helping the students to 'be active') or Warwick Volunteers (helping them to 'give').



Figure 9: Ever-popular banana giveaways

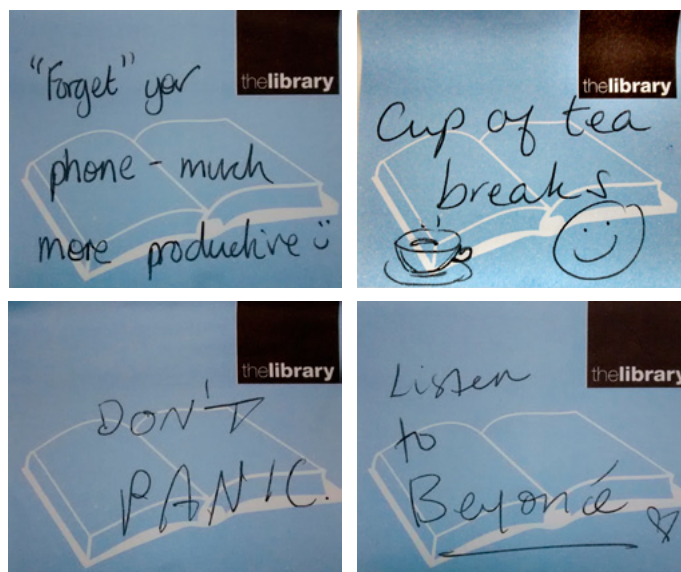


Figure 10: Top revision tips

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By far the most popular Study Happy events, though, are when we invite the PAT dogs in to the library (see Fig. 11). Between four and six volunteers from the charity Pets as Therapy bring their dogs for small groups of students to pat for fifteen minutes. The first time we offered this we did not know what to expect. We were inundated and the queues of students wanting to meet the dogs stretched the whole floor of the library. We have since implemented a booking system to manage the queues and are mindful not to tire out the dogs, some of whom flip onto their back for a tummy tickle the instant the students enter the room and stay there the whole time. With typical hyperbole, the students rate these sessions highly: 'You've made my day'; 'Cutest dogs ever', 'Perfect start to term! Need it all the time, it is so calming. I miss my dog so much!' Missing their own dog is a common theme, but we think they also miss socialising with a different generation – parents, grandparents – and these events provide this too as they chat about their life to the volunteers (Fig. 12). 'Gorgeous dogs, gorgeous owners' is a frequent piece of feedback (Fig. 13).



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Figure 11: Typical reactions to the PAT Dogs

Having attended our events students often share the experience on social media, continuing to connect with others and reinforcing the sense of belonging. For us, this is also a great way of raising awareness of what we now offer. The first time we had the PAT dogs in they became instant stars of Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. We have received some brilliant feedback...

Thank you @warwicklibrary... for puppies during exam time #studyhappy HEAVENNN¹⁴

I attend a uni that brings therapy dogs to the library so students can pet them to de-stress!! [dog emoji] [smiley with hearts] gotta love @warwickuni [thumbs up]¹⁵

...including from parents:

Daughter revising for uni exams in library and they bring in "therapy dogs" and cake. How times have changed!¹⁶

It is great to watch students go from stressful to successful with the help of our furry friends.

Archie, Ben-G, Bree and Lola will be back with us soon.

Please form an orderly queue.



Figure 12: Talking with the PAT Dog owners in the Teaching Grid

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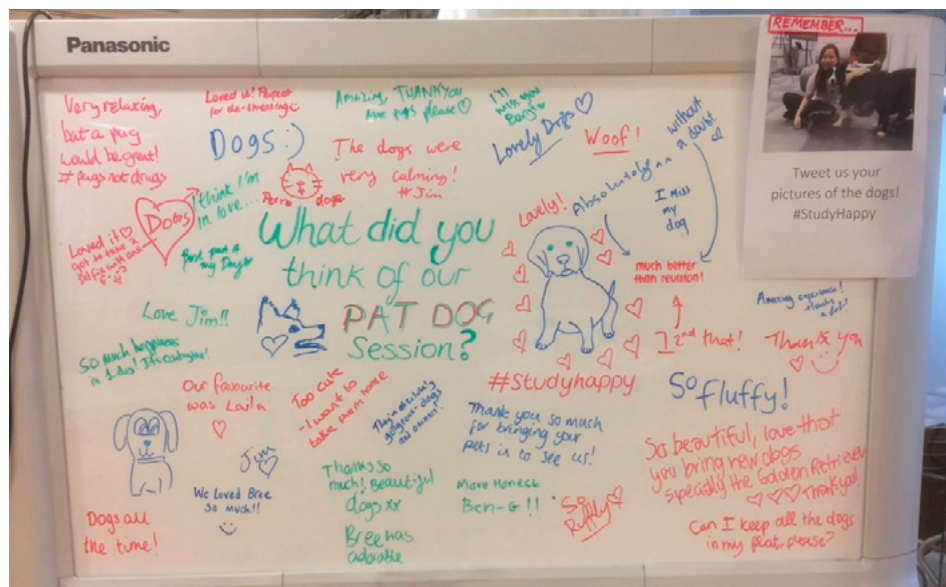


Figure 13: Typically understated student feedback

Notes

All websites accessed August 2016

1. See <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/students/study-happy> or on Twitter, #StudyHappy
2. See <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/> or on Twitter, @MRCWarwick
3. See <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/using/libspaces/>
4. Brian Cowan, *The Social life of the coffee: the emergence of the British coffee house*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005, p.79
5. See https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/pghub/social/research_refresh/ or on Twitter, #ResearchRefresh
6. See <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/about-us/library-strategic-framework.pdf>
7. See <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/strategy/>
8. Abraham Maslow, A theory of human motivation, *Psychological review*, 1943, 50(4), p.370-96; image from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs.svg
9. See https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/students/warwick_one_world or on Twitter, #WarwickOneWorld
10. Richard Adams, Surge in young people seeking help for exam stress, *The Guardian*, 14 May 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/may/14/calls-to-childline-over-exam-stress-break-records>
11. See, for example, Mindfulness classes 'helps lower stress' in schools, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33235584>
12. Universities UK, *Student mental wellbeing in higher education: good practice guide*. London: Universities UK, 2015, <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/student-mental-wellbeing-in-higher-education.aspx>
13. See <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-well-being>
14. Tweet from @pandamoyee
15. Tweet from @lindanagy93
16. Tweet from @MrsJoyGlenister

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