This is a small collection of entries from our Spring 2020 blog. In spite of the fact that our class never met face-to-face, the blog helped us to get to know and appreciate each other’s unique perspectives.

We documented, through photographs and/or text, small delights that we experienced throughout each week. Noticing delights was an exercise in mindfulness.

Students also completed and wrote about a collection of mini-experiments in order to explore mechanisms and pathways through which we can synthesize happiness in our lives.
This is us in our Zoom classroom!
/delight/sandwich art
April 29, 2020
/delight/this photo of my dog looking down at my camera

April 30, 2020
My mom and I went to the grocery store earlier, and our interaction with our cashier brought me joy (although I’m struggling a little bit to explain why). The cashier couldn’t have been more than 17 years old, and it was clear by her trepidation while bagging that she was either very new to the job, or maybe a naturally nervous person. Then, while scanning our produce, she held up two limes and said, “What are these?” She didn’t know what limes were. In that moment, I felt a powerful sense of sympathy, protection, and appreciation for this girl. She was clearly incredibly overwhelmed, yet here she was, serving in the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic. I also thought about how many people would probably respond angrily or with judgement, and my heart broke for her. I was a grocery store cashier the summer before college, so I know how impatient and rude people can be. I’m so grateful for this girl, and all others, who are providing essential services despite their own fears and anxieties.

I’ve been doing the daily NYT Times Sudoku, and beat my own record today! It usually takes me about 30 minutes, so this one must’ve been a lot easier cause I cut my time down in half…? But so satisfying to finish a sudoku without errors!
Thoreau’s very own meditation spot, nearby my home.
/delight/the look of the clouds and sky as I was doing outdoor yoga
May 3, 2020
/delight/iconic
May 5, 2020
/delight/waking up to the smell of bacon
May 2, 2020

Card Night
May 10, 2020

Family card night!
As I was driving home from the grocery store, I passed by one of my favorite delights: a huge man walking a tiny dog. The mismatch of this pairing always brings me so much joy. Or, maybe this pair was not mismatched at all. Maybe they’re the perfect pair, like a yin yang situation. Anyway, I love dogs, and I love that little tiny dogs wearing sweaters and bows are able to transcend toxic masculinity.

I don’t have a photo for this because my mom doesn’t like her photo being taken. This morning my little sister and I made my mom breakfast for Mother’s Day and she went to a park with two of her friends for a social distancing version of a “mom’s night out”, and she’s just been smiling all day and it’s so nice to see that. Seeing my mom happy and not stressed makes me really happy.

OUR CLASSMATE WON THE MVP AWARD TONIGHT!!!
Caitlin got the Pres. Brown Senior Female Athlete award at the sports award ceremony tonight!! so proud!
/delight/my dog’s paws on my yoga mat because he has no sense of boundaries
May 3, 2020
When it makes apples sunshine self-actualizes in a braggy way.
When I was trying to do my walking meditation yesterday, I noticed that my little cousin had written “don’t drop out of college” on my high school graduation frame. It’s nice to know that I haven’t disappointed him yet!
My mom brought me a latte during class today, and it made me so happy! Omg I just noticed after posting this originally that there’s a heart in the foam!
In the spirit of the last day of class, I went to Fedex to (gladly) mail back my Chemistry textbook, and I checked the mail when I got home to find a little piece of Lexington that filled me with more excitement than any magazine should.
/delight/spooky sky
May 17, 2020
This is just an appreciation post for breakfast. As I ate breakfast this morning, I realized how much joy it brings me every day. I love how everyone talks a little quieter when eating breakfast. I know it’s just because we’re all still waking up, but to me, it adds to the sanctity of the meal; it’s like we’re all trying to preserve the calm before the day begins. And while I love big elaborate breakfasts, that’s not really what I’m talking about here. This morning I just had toaster waffles with peanut butter, and it was amazing. I love all breakfast foods — eggs, toast, pancakes, cereal. So much love for breakfast.

I might be alone on this one, but I love changing sheets (and imagine the follow-up delight of getting in a bed with clean sheets)
/delight/little bits of sunshine on a rainy day!
May 22, 2020

This cantaloupe brightened my day after class when I was feeling sad about the weather and college being over. Isn’t it wild to think about the first people who opened up cantaloupes (and all fruits) and tried them for the very first time? I think fruit/vegetables definitely fall under the category of “under-appreciated miracles,” so this is my appreciation post.

/delight/Lemon pajamas
May 13, 2020

A few weeks ago, my mom mentioned to me in passing that she thought having lemon-print pajamas for the summer would be “so cute.” It took a few days of scouring the Internet to find some that were both tasteful and from a reliable website, but it was worth it. They miraculously arrived on time, and I was able to give them to her on Mother’s Day. We spent a lovely day together, but seeing her surprise and excitement when she saw her new pajamas was probably my favorite part.
/delight/brushing my teeth
May 16, 2020

Since I’ve been on the lookout for delights, I’ve realized that I really enjoy brushing my teeth. It’s a little delight for me each morning and night. People have pointed out to me in the past it’s a little strange that I close my eyes when I brush my teeth, but I get into a zone (not quite flow) and closing my eyes allows me to lose myself a little bit. I love feeling the bristles against my gums, and I especially love the feeling of a fresh start to a new day or a clean reset after a long day. It’s like the refreshing feeling of showers, but for your mouth!

/delight/knit socks
May 13, 2020

It’s been really cold in PA the past few days, and this is one of the only pairs of winter socks I brought back home with me. Nice and warm!
/delight/finding my cat asleep in bowls
May 4, 2020
Finishing the Women’s Lacrosse team’s Run for RARA 5K – we raised over $13,000!
May 17, 2020
/delight/baby birds nestled together
May 1, 2020

They’re about ready to leave the nest!
/delight/finding this photo of a sunrise in Lexington
May 21, 2020

This is the perk of having 6:30am lifts with our lacrosse team! This photo is completely unedited and it makes me so happy.
HAPPY EVENTS WILL TAKE PLACE IN YOUR HOME.
PANDA EXPRESS
A throwback picture to when my brother and I were best friends; it’s not that we don’t get along anymore, we just aren’t quite as close because of my god-awful teens (they were really bad). My mom says this is her favorite picture of us kids because this was during the time where my thing was randomly hugging my brother and shouting ‘I love you!’ (which I do not remember at all). Anyways, it’s a nice reminder of the fun times my brother and I had as kids.
I’d only ever seen dandelions in movies and cartoons until I moved to the states, so every time I see one now it’s still a little exciting that they really exist.
If instead of being pointed at me this semester, my laptop camera had faced the other direction, this is what you all would have seen: Kerrs Creek. Today it is rushing, but many days it is calm and hosts a whole neighborhood of life: crawdads, herons, tadpoles, ducks, minks, minnows, toads, kingfishers, otters, and even a bald eagle from time to time. When it is calm, all of that beauty and complexity and texture can be seen and appreciated.
For my secret good deed, I wanted to spread positivity to someone outside of my family in order to keep it actually anonymous. There is an older lady who lives alone in my neighborhood, and I cannot begin to imagine how lonely it would be to live alone during quarantine. I don’t know her super well, but I one time when I had friends over, she brought us cookies because she said watching us play made her smile and reminded her of her high school days. She is so kind and loving. So, I wrote her a note to encourage her and tell her that she is loved and not alone during all this and to remind her to find joy in little blessings she sees throughout the day (like the things on our delights page). I signed it by saying I didn’t want any thanks or praise, but asked her to pass along the kindness, and then I put it in her mailbox. I really hope it didn’t creep her out to get an anonymous note—haha! It felt good to leave her the note, and I really wish I could’ve gotten to see her face when she opened it. I love making people smile and spreading joy to others, so this experiment was really fun for me to do, and even more special that it was secretive because I get none of the glory.

The secret good deed that I took part in was really small and directed toward my mom. One afternoon over the weekend, I pulled all of the weeds from my mom’s garden outside. This is not something that she would notice without me directing her attention to it but knowing that I am helping her in the smallest way gives me a really
good feeling. It hurts her body to be bending over for significant periods of time pulling weeds, so knowing that I was doing something in secret for her that would make her life easier meant a lot to me and hopefully it would mean a lot to her. Honestly, I quite enjoy being outside in the sun and being in the garden as the flowers and leaves are starting to really bloom, so getting a head start on the weeds in the soil is really satisfying. That satisfying feeling of pulling the weeds in the garden mixed with knowing that it is potentially having a positive impact on my mom’s life by giving her one less thing to worry about makes me happy and fulfilled.

/mini-experiment/Secret good deed
May 13, 2020

When I was trying to think of ideas for a secret good deed, I was having trouble thinking of something that didn’t require money and could remain anonymous. I’m an only child and I’m currently living with my mom, so anything I did around the house would be too obvious. She also moved somewhat recently, so I don’t know how much the neighbors would have appreciated a random plate of cookies in front of their door (given these times of social distancing). It took me a while to think of something, but it dawned on me just this weekend. I was walking out to get a package from the mailbox when I realized just how many times I had done just that during this quarantine. My mailbox had become a frequent stop for UPS, USPS, and Fedex, so I decided to write them a note they could see the next time they made a delivery. I thanked them for their work, told them how much we valued them, and implored them to stay safe and healthy. I don’t know exactly how they’ve reacted, but I do know that there are a lot of people still working tirelessly despite the pandemic—people who bring some semblance of normalcy to our lives in these crazy times, people whose work is often, but wrongly, overlooked. Whether they were confused, touched, or indifferent, I hope that at the very least, they were reminded that what they do matters.
I decided to write my gratitude letter to my best friend, Katherine. We have been best friends since we were born (I included the photo of us as newborns, I’m on the right) and I like to hold it over her that I am 19 days older than her! Even though our relationship has been longstanding and really strong no matter what life throws at us, there are not many instances where we express deep emotions with each other because we are usually too busy laughing at our antics. We confuse a lot of people because we can just exchange a look and be in tears from laughing so hard. I am definitely the more emotional of the two of us so I express my gratitude for our friendship every now and then, but it was different writing out a full letter detailing what she means to me and how our relationship has made me a better person throughout the years. I could tell it meant a lot to her and from there we got right back to laughing at something ridiculous one of us has done. I am really happy that I took part in this mini-experiment because taking a moment to express your thanks to someone like your best friend only strengthens the relationship!
May 10, 2020

I decided to use this opportunity to write an open letter to my W&L professors. Seniors got an email last week asking us to submit videos saying what we’ll miss the most, and, without a doubt, I know I’ll miss classes/professors the most. I know I will see my friends again, and I can always come back to visit the campus, but I will never get to take W&L classes again. I am so appreciative of the passion and dedication that W&L professors bring. I admire their endless patience as well as their endless curiosity. The classes I have taken at W&L have shaped me into who I am today. But, as we all know, the class is only as good as the professor, and I feel so lucky to have had such a dedicated faculty that is committed to challenging me while still supporting me. My flow activity is definitely sitting in class, completely engrossed in a conversation about ethics or justice or the human mind. I lose myself in these moments. I feel that perfect balance of difficulty and ability, and it’s thanks to the professors I’ve had that I feel so well-suited in these moments. I will continue to chase after that flow feeling long after graduation.

May 11, 2020

I wrote my gratitude letter to a family friend who taught me how to bake. My mom and her were best friends, and I have two older brothers and she has three sons, so whenever my mom had errands to run, my brothers and I would get dropped off at Mrs. D’s house. With five boys running around the house, I tried my best to keep up, but I would always be the odd one out. So, when I went over to their house, Mrs. D taught me how to bake a new treat every time. She took time to notice me being an outside and to actually include me in something and teach me a practical skill. I’ve noticed recently (as I’ve been stuck at home) that I’m much more confident baking than I am cooking, and my mom reminded me that is likely because of Mrs. D. So, I decided to tell her
the impact she has made on my life not only in the kitchen, but also on how to notice outsiders and treat them with love and kindness. I absolutely loved writing this letter of gratitude. I still haven’t sent it yet, but I plan to later tonight. Also, when brainstorming for this project, I realized there are so many people in my life who I feel like I need to thank for the impact they have made, so I am planning on writing at least three or more letters of gratitude to different church youth leaders and mentors in my life. The letters will not only show the person my thanks, but they also make me more aware of how much I have been blessed with the people I have in my life. It certainly makes me count my blessings.

/mini-experiment/gratitude letter
May 17, 2020

I wrote my letter of gratitude to my grandmother, whose 89th birthday is in a few days. I found the writing experience to be joyful because it brought to mind moments her and I shared while I was growing up. My nana was a huge help to my parents around the house and I was lucky to spend the most time with her as I am the youngest of three. When my parents were at work and my sisters were away at school during the day and I hadn’t started yet, I always had my nana. In this letter I focused on how influential she was to me in motivating me to work hard in school. I cited the times she would help me with my homework, read with me, and play with me, always keeping me engaged in whatever I was doing, pushing me to activities that would later make me successful. Now that I am graduating soon, it was nice to revisit these special moments and look at how lucky I am to have such an amazing grandmother. I found this process of writing to remind me of how important her small gestures and words were to me as a young child and how they have shaped me into the person I am today.
/mini-experiment/Three Good Things
May 18, 2020

I have been meaning to start a gratitude journal for a while now, especially since the start of this class, and I really appreciated that this assignment prompted me to start. I have tried to make journaling a habit for years now because I love to write, and each time I pick up journaling or creative writing, I fall back in love with the controlled expression involved, the ability to thoughtfully select and exchange the right words to express exactly what I’m thinking or how I’m feeling. However, I’ve struggled to maintain the habit, so I’m hoping I will genuinely commit to it now that I have built this practice into my routine a little bit. I really enjoyed reflecting upon three good things that happened each day; it served as a nice reflection/replay about what happened that day, which is more important now than ever when all the days seem to blend together. And, similar to the practice of finding delights, I became more aware of all the little things I have to be grateful for each day. I plan to continue these gratitude entries, and I’m excited to have a record of this unprecedented time to look back on to remind myself that even when everything seems to be falling apart, we always have some joy to cling onto.

/mini-experiment/three good things
May 18, 2020

This mini-experiment was a very positive experience for me overall. I’ve been doing this kind of thing (doing a quick summary of good things that happened during the day/week) quite often over the past few months because it was recommended to my boyfriend by his psychologist, so this was a nice extension of that. The difference between the two activities was the actual physical act of writing down the three/more good things that happened each day this week. Usually my boyfriend and I just sit down and talk about some nice things that happened during the day, but writing it down feels a lot more impactful. I’ve noticed this to be a trend with a lot of our mini-experiments and mindfulness assignments – putting things down onto paper makes them feel
a lot more memorable and helps ground me. I don’t know whether that’s because I have to think about how to phrase those experiences or if it’s the visual of seeing them and reading them on the paper, but it helps me cement those experiences into my memories. I generally have a hard time remembering things on my own, so visual cues like photos or exercises like this one where I’m writing my experiences down really helps me remember what happened during the day. It feels good to be able to look back at my week on paper and remember those specific instances where I felt happy and experienced something good. I want to continue doing this kind of exercise, documenting the good things in my life so that I can have stronger memories of them. Journaling or just taking photos of the things that make me happy is a good way of going about that. I’ve noticed that this mini-experiment has helped me let go of any negativity that I might have been holding onto and focus on positive things, and I want to keep that kind of mindset going forward.

/mini-experiment/three good things
May 17, 2020

I have been doing the three good things mini experiment pretty diligently for the last week or so since we got the email from Dr. Murdock. I usually write gratitude lists and consider what in my life I really appreciate. However, I usually write those every few days or once a week, so it took a lot of discipline for me to sit down and think about three good things that had happened every day. It was like a deeper version of the delights that we have been working with throughout the semester. The delights are really nice but rather surface level, this mini experiment forced me to consider every aspect of these events in my day, what caused the event, how it made me feel, using as much details as possible. I think that when this semester is over when I won’t have the opportunity to share the everyday things that bring me delight on a daily basis with our class blog, that I will try to adopt the three good things activity into my daily routine so that I can consistently appreciate the goodness that happens to me regularly. In the real world, rather than making formal entries I would probably make a list in my phone and write events down that brought out the goodness in humanity or
the beauty in my daily life, so I can easily look back on them and reflect on the smaller things in life that make it worth living. This casual activity was really worth it, and I find myself recommending it to people whenever they feel sad about what it is going on right now – virtual graduations, not seeing friends, etc. – because it is so helpful to put things into perspective.

/mini-experiment/Three Good Things
May 18, 2020

Journaling has always been something that I wish I loved. The amount of journals that I have started, filled about 10 pages, then left to be untouched forever is pretty embarrassing. I think the reason I struggle so much with them is that I find it hard to choose what to write about. I always feel like I am writing for an audience, as if someone was going to pick it up and read every intimate detail, or as if I am writing for my 50-year-old self who finds the journal packed away one day. I feel like I am forcing myself to write about profound, eloquent things, and it doesn’t feel very natural to me. However, with this assignment, I used it as a way to try journaling in a different format. By focusing on these three good things, both big and small, it gave me a lot of structure and felt really natural. I wasn’t picky about which three things to put down, knowing that they did not have to be anything profound. Looking back at them, I have a full paragraph about a bacon, egg, and cheese bagel that I had that day and how much I love bagels... really nothing intelligent or profound in that passage. But it’s genuine, and it’s representative of what I was thinking about. Some entries get a little more deep as I reflect on relationships with my family or overarching things I am grateful for, but it also was so relieving to just write about the simple things in life that made me happy that day. I am going to try to keep up this journaling method, continuously reminding myself that I am not putting on a show for anybody, no one needs to read it, and who cares if I write eight sentences about bagel details and a ranking of my favorite bagels in Charlotte. It’s only what I make of it, and reflecting on the joys and delights of really minor things has helped me appreciate the small moments that bring me joy. Anything is worth journaling about, and anything is worth appreciation.
These self-compassion exercises that we’ve been doing were difficult for me at first. I don’t really have a routine of self-compassion in place. I realized that while I do care for myself physically, mentally and relationally – I work out pretty regularly because it makes me feel awake and energized, I paint and dance a bunch because it gets me in a great flow state, and I have good connections with my close friends that have remained strong even during isolation – I don’t really care for myself emotionally. I actually tend to distance myself from some particular painful emotions and parts of my life because I don’t like confronting them and dealing with them. I don’t do this with a lot of my emotions, but there are some emotions that are linked to specific memories that I kind of just shut out so that I don’t get overwhelmed. That’s why I hesitated to do the ‘being with difficult emotions’ meditation until the end of this week, because I didn’t want to put myself in that uncomfortable place. I was actually quite surprised with how good this meditation felt, because it wasn’t really about confronting any painful or difficult emotions, but more about sitting there with them and releasing the tension in your body that comes from those emotions. I really liked it, because instead of blocking out those emotions like I reflexively do, I forced myself to stay there with them and be kind to myself and not judge myself for feeling them. It was really soothing. I’m definitely going to be doing more self-compassion meditation because it’s an exercise that I think will alleviate a lot of stress for me and bring me to a more balanced, tranquil state of mind.
I found this video to be compelling because of its honesty in describing a day in the life of an average adult. I like to think that my life might not be exactly as depicted one day, but there are definitely many truisms from DFW’s supermarket scenario and the menial tasks that we must involve ourselves in every day. I also liked his honest thought that the people in the supermarket appeared non-human. When I see people in subways or in shopping lines or participating in something assembly-line-like, I can’t help but think of them as sheep. I hate when I find myself in a situation like an airport security line where I feel like I am in a herd of sheep going through lines and just following rules and directions mindlessly. Thinking this way, however, is my natural defense system in protecting the idea that I am the center of the world and the perceptions I have created about people are factual and not an opinion. Instead, these things are not true. I have fabricated them in my mind because it is simple; I am constantly determining things as good, bad, or neutral, and these are the products of those categorizations (as we talked about in Koru class). I enjoyed DFW’s recognition of the similarities that exist between people, rather than focusing on the differences that can further divide us. Most people in the world are good. We may not see each other at our best all of the time, but if we become a little softer, we may be able to see the best in others more often than not. When I was growing up – even still today – my parents always reminded me that we are all fighting our own personal battles and you often never know the extent of another person’s struggles in the surface-level interactions DFW describes. By simply being aware of this, and giving others the benefit of the doubt, the boring tasks and dull moments of life might not have to be so bleak.
This commencement speech by David Foster Wallace is one of my favorites to listen to time and time again. I have listened to it in different aspects, different occasions, and different settings. What I find so poignant about it is how each time I listen to it, it is applicable to my life in a different way than it was the last time I listened. Throughout the whole video, I found it hard not to relate this to Covid-19. Tensions are high, people are stressed, and lines at nearly any grocery store are painful. I find myself getting so frustrated as I wait in these lines, spaced 6 feet apart. The people in front of me have huge carts of food, and I only have the few ingredients that my mom asked me to get for dinner. I act as if I am in a life-pressing rush, even though I am literally going straight back home to do some more nothing. I keep needing to remind myself... I am in no rush... there is an extremely valid reason for these long lines. The importance of taking a step back and seeing the world at a larger scale is so necessary right now. Sure, my packages take longer to deliver. The grocery store lines are long. I miss being able to go to my friends’ houses. But—there is a global pandemic. It is larger than me, than my family, even larger than my city. Wrapping my head around what is happening is so difficult, but it is crucial. It is the solution for things to get better: people re-grounding themselves, remembering that they are not the center of the world. We see this every day in people that are not social distancing, or who don’t wear any PPE in public. These actions are taken without respect to the elderly cashier who may be more susceptible to the sickness, or to the friend who goes back home to a parent with Cancer. I truly do think that this speech deserves to widely resurface during this pandemic, reminding ourselves of the greater good that needs to be accomplished and the importance of acknowledging what we are in.