



University diaries

A professor of English describes American university life.
 Aim: to change things.
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"Of course, melancholics have always written in praise of a simplicity that they could not attain - while secretly taking pride in their own inner complexity. But we seem now to have entered an era in which intellectuals praise whole-heartedness and mean it wholeheartedly. Our aesthetics have undergone a sea-change.

This shift in taste is now becoming apparent in books meant for a general audience. In January, Mark Epstein, a psychiatrist whose work is grounded in Buddhism, will offer up *Open to Desire: Embracing a Lust for Life*. And this month, Kay Redfield Jamison contributes *Exuberance: The Passion for Life*."

---Peter D. Kramer, "Goodbye, Darkness," in [Slate Online](#)

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- [John&Belle Have a Blog](#)
- [History News Network](#)
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- [The Cranky Professor](#)
- [Caveat Lector](#)
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- [Scott McLemee](#)
- [.J.V.C. Comments](#)
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- [No Credentials](#)
- [Hardscrabble Creek](#)
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- [Professor Plum](#)
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- [FSUblus](#)
- [Dr. Johnson's Cat](#)
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The latest entry in what people are calling the "exuberbook" craze that's sweeping the nation is by **University Diaries**, an English professor at a private college in the nation's capital. Written at breakneck speed in only two weeks, **Hot DAMN! I'm Happy** has been called "a cynical instabook," by Michiko Kakutani in the **New York Times**, who goes on in her review to comment, "Rarely have I seen such shoddy self-aggrandizing fad-surfing as in the ludicrously titled **Hot DAMN! I'm Happy**." "A scummy little book," agrees Leon Wieseltier in **The New Republic**. "Read it and weep."

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Yet copies of this heartfelt, highly personal account of **UD**'s victory over Claritin addiction and elevated blood pressure are jumping off the shelves of high-end bookstores all over America. In one short, chatty volume, **UD** has managed to encapsulate her philosophy of happiness in a way that plucks at the heartstrings of upper middle class people everywhere.

The secret of **UD**'s happiness recipe lies in an unapologetic moral superiority to other people. "In a world clogged with absolute shitskies," **UD** writes in the amusing style of the book's introduction, "it's relatively easy for only moderately virtuous people to look like saints and feel like a million bucks because of it. Merely refraining from smoking, or being willing to donate blood a couple of times a year, or turning down insider trading information, or actually authoring books and articles that carry your name, has become, in the current climate, ethically equivalent to, say, Janusz Korczak choosing to perish with his students during the Holocaust."

UD goes on to urge her readers to "embrace your inner savonarola" and "freely explore the joy-making possibilities inherent in looking

Archives

- [11/01/2003 - 11/30/2003](#)
- [12/01/2003 - 12/31/2003](#)
- [01/01/2004 - 01/31/2004](#)
- [02/01/2004 - 02/29/2004](#)
- [03/01/2004 - 03/31/2004](#)
- [04/01/2004 - 04/30/2004](#)
- [05/01/2004 - 05/31/2004](#)
- [06/01/2004 - 06/30/2004](#)
- [07/01/2004 - 07/31/2004](#)
- [08/01/2004 - 08/31/2004](#)
- [09/01/2004 - 09/30/2004](#)
- [10/01/2004 - 10/31/2004](#)
- [11/01/2004 - 11/30/2004](#)
- [12/01/2004 - 12/31/2004](#)
- [01/01/2005 - 01/31/2005](#)
- [02/01/2005 - 02/28/2005](#)
- [03/01/2005 - 03/31/2005](#)
- [04/01/2005 - 04/30/2005](#)
- [05/01/2005 - 05/31/2005](#)

down your nose at people who have less self-control than you do, especially self-righteous hypocrites." Chapters include **Laughing at William Bennett**; **The Pastor Who Plagiarized His Sermons**; and **Funny Business at The United Way**.

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