Does Education Make You Happy?

By CATHERINE RAMPELL

Ignorance isn’t bliss. Rather, education is.

At least, that’s what trends in education and well-being levels across American cities seem to show.

On Tuesday, we wrote about the happiest states and cities in America (Hawaii and Boulder, Colo., took top honors). In response, lots of readers have speculated about what made some states report higher levels of well-being than others.

Now Richard Florida, director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, and his colleague Charlotta Mellander have taken a closer look at the metropolitan well-being numbers. They found moderate correlations between happiness and other factors, like wages, unemployment and output per capita.

But the variable they looked at that showed the strongest relationship with happiness was “human capital,” measured as the share of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher:
Richard Florida

See how close those dots are to the line of best fit? That means that educational attainment can help explain a lot of the variation in well-being levels across American cities. (The correlation between happiness at the city or metro level and human capital is 0.68, Mr. Florida writes.)

Now of course, correlation is not causation. Maybe the factors that lead to higher levels of human capital also lead to higher levels of general well-being. Still, colleges might want to start sending the chart above to high school seniors who are thinking about skipping out on higher education.