

MAPP Alumni Magazine

Published by and for the U. Penn. Master of Applied Positive Psychology Alumni
WINTER 2014

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Alumni

Penn Master of Applied Positive Psychology

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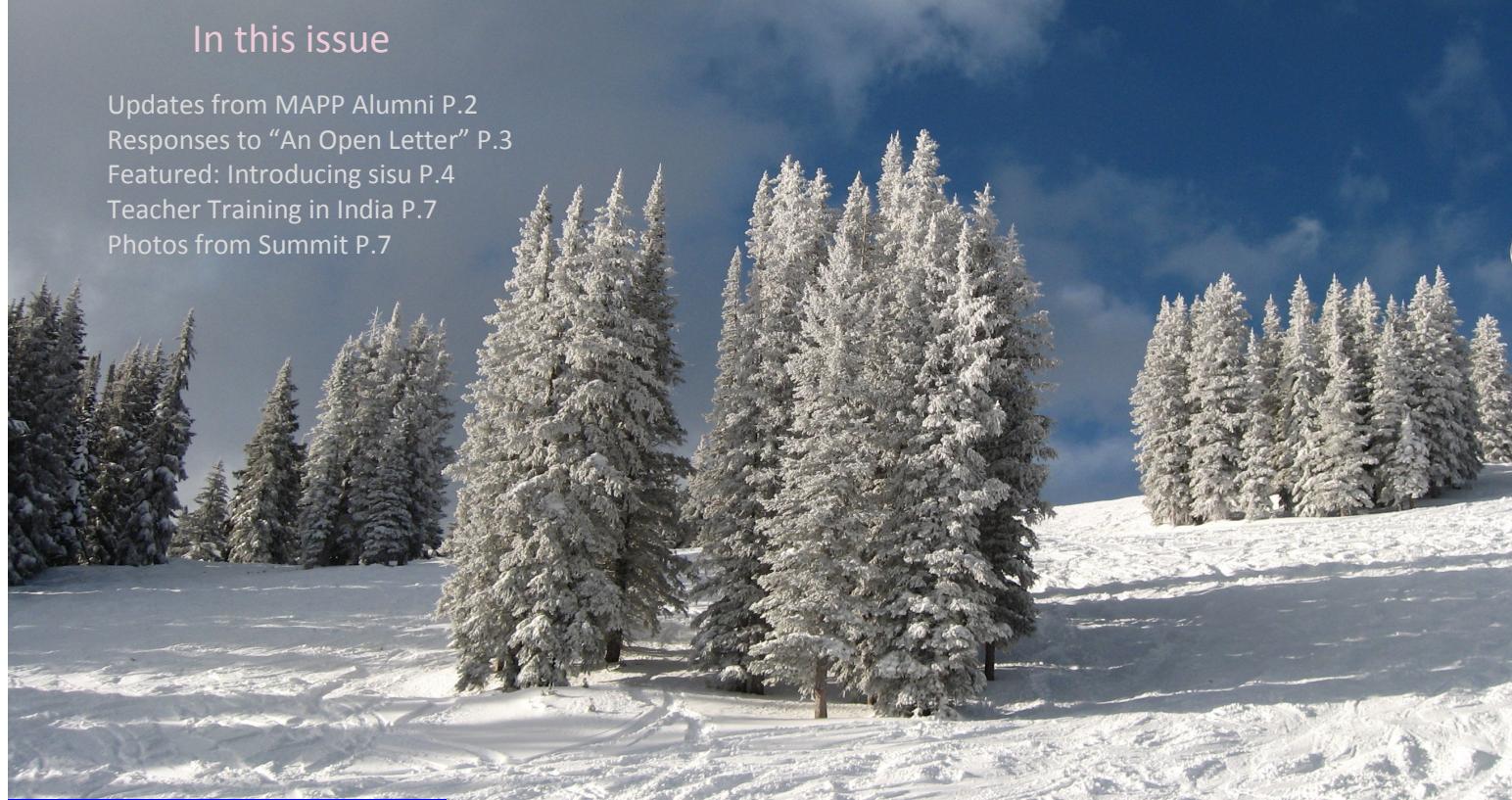
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Call for papers ...

Please submit your news, essays and commentary for the Spring edition of the newsletter.

Include the author name(s) and a brief bio. -- ed.

Tip:

Use full screen mode to best view the newsletter with Acrobat reader.

An Open Letter from the MAPP Alumni Board Vice President

By Emily vanSonnenberg, MAPP '10

As our year serving on the MAPP Alumni Board has come to an end, taking a moment to savor the past year only seems appropriate. Everyone on the Board has contributed to our community in valuable ways and because of this, we have created and accomplished a great deal. In addition to our Board members, we have also been gifted with help from a number of our fellow alumni. Listed below are some of the projects we have begun, achieved, and continue to work toward actualizing on behalf of our MAPP Positive Psychology community:

- Operating Plan: The operating plan is an organizational and content-filled guide that lists the annual events/tasks that the Board needs to accomplish - including, suggestions for when to begin preparing for each task, and date of implementation. This OP will enable future MAPP

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Aspirations & Boundaries

by Greg Quinting, Ph.D., MAPP '07

The recent film "All is Lost" starring Robert Redford may first appear to have a title and story that have little to do with positive psychology. But it is neither about hopelessness nor especially helplessness. Redford plays the only character, whom we know only as "our man" in the closing credits. The story opens with his sailboat gently colliding on the open Indian Ocean with a rogue shipping container, which punches a hole in the boat's hull. Our man faces a series of escalating struggles to survive, the first being repairs to his boat. The audience is left to wonder throughout the film whether our man will live, despite his know-how, resourcefulness and perseverance.

When is *All Hope Lost*? Is hope a matter of discernment? The film then lead me to the notion that positive psychology goes beyond positive emotion, life satisfaction, even beyond "what makes life worth



At what point do you keep going and other people stop? When the odds are against, the odds are impossible, you say, 'That's

it. All is lost. I can't go any further, so I won't.' And other people just keep going for no other reason than just to continue. And that's always fascinated me. – Robert Redford, interview with Matt Lauer, Today, NBC Oct. 2013

living", to also include consideration of our limits and what facing them may tell us about the human condition and spirit. Do we need to teach people how to go on? What do we need to teach?

I highly recommend all of us in positive psychology see "All is Lost" because I believe it is a vivid portrayal of *sisu* as Emilia Lahti described in this issue's featured article.

As we go about our lives we sometimes take on risks, but I hope calculated risks. Despite our calculations we may still find ourselves tested to our limits, physically and emotionally. We must understand those whom we serve who may be so tested, the soldiers, the first responders, those who heal and bring comfort to the suffering, those we hope who will flourish even at the limits of their strengths. The science and philosophy at our foundation offer us fortitude and paths to come to terms with our aspirations and boundaries.

—

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Reflections on the MAPP Summit

After graduating from the first year of MAPP, and sitting in as videographer for all of MAPP 2, I felt very connected to MAPP 1 and 2. When 3 came along, it seemed as if these three classes were quite intertwined. I attended the first two Summits, and felt a sense of closeness and intimacy with such a small and exclusive group. I hadn't returned to campus in easily 4-5 years. So when I came to this Summit, it was a bit overwhelming and disheartening that there were far more unfamiliar faces than familiar ones. The intimacy was lost, or so I thought. In true MAPP fashion, those unfamiliar faces soon became familiar ones, and after

the Summit weekend, the intimacy for me had mostly returned, and I'm re-energized by this community. Maintaining that sense of intimacy in the larger Alumni community that each class feels with each other is something that we have to actively cultivate - and it is there.

*Nicholas Hall, MAPP '06
Manager, Behavioral Lab
Stanford Graduate School of Business*

—

While I've kept in touch with my MAPP colleagues over the years, I had never attended one of the annual MAPP Summits - until this year. I had been thinking that it was time to connect and reconnect with both the MAPP people and the re-

search. I decided to attend the October Summit in Philadelphia and I am so glad I did.

While I listened to the speakers, met new MAPP friends, and caught up with my MAPP 2006 friends I felt the enthusiasm and eagerness to learn that I felt as I participated in the program several years ago. I was very impressed with the incoming MAPP class and very proud of the accomplishments of the MAPP

Alumni. It was also wonderful to see Marty and James again and to be reminded of the fun times we all shared at the beginning.

I enjoyed catching up with the re-



search and the current thinking in the field. I ordered several books as the speakers mentioned them and I can't wait to read them. Marty's "Top Ten Things" were nothing less than inspiring. The posters were interesting, the speakers were timely, and the enthusiasm for MAPP continues to be infectious. I'm looking forward to attending our annual MAPP Summit more regularly in the future.

Thanks to all who worked so hard to make this event so meaningful and worthwhile.

All the best, Doug Turner, MAPP '06

—

An Open Letter ...

(continued from page 1)

Boards to work with greater ease and logic. *Organized by Lisa Sansom and Emily vanSonnenberg*

- **CPE:** The continuing professional education seminars allow us to continue our love of learning by giving us access to lectures/talks with professionals in and related to our field of Positive Psychology.

Led by the ever-persevering Dave Shearon.

- **Fete:** This group put a great deal of time, effort, and heart into creating a space for our alumni to gather and celebrate our shared interests while at the 2013 Summit. *Led and organized by Marsha Snyder and her amazing crew of dedicated alums: Sara Bartels, Mark Tolmachoff, Jennifer Moore-Walker, Jenny Brennan, & Sherry Tsen.*

- **Christopher Peterson Memorial Fellowship:** The first MAPP scholarship has been created, and will be awarded to a MAPP student each year to help with the cost of education expenses. Beginning in 2014, this scholarship will enable greater ease while pursuing this important education.

Led by Shannon Polly and with the help of her passionate crew, including: Susan Hwang, Adam Mussell, Marsha Snyder, Kathryn and Emily vanSonnenberg.

- **MAPP Magazine:** Our MAPP Magazine (as it is now known) took shape this year - highlighting news in our community and profiles on various MAPPsters and their contributions to the field.

Thanks to our exceptional Secretary, Greg Quinting for all his time, care, and precision in this creation.

- **Facebook:** *Thanks to Caroline Miller for her diligent management of our online Facebook page*

- **MAPPALUM.ORG website:** Our alumni website is alive and kicking, and has undergone much care and attention. Check it out regularly to stay updated on our community and the UPenn MAPP program.

Thanks to Kathryn Britton for her continued dedication, willingness, and expertise in giving our community a space to find relevant information.

A special thanks to our President, Lisa Sansom, for leading us this year. Lisa, you are a delight to team up with. You always brought your enthusiastic spirit, and your progressive, practical ideas are matched only by the respect you give to others. What a President you have been!

Thank you.

Dear Emily:

Thank you for your contribution as VP of the Board, and for your thoughtful, comprehensive summary of our work and adventures together! MAPPsters are truly remarkable individuals with an incredible array of gifts, talents, areas of expertise, and beautiful hearts and souls. I am thrilled to have another year working with this great group of individuals!

With gratitude,

Marsha

—

I would like to capitalize on Emily and Marsha's savouring. I really wish that each of you could have been in the meeting room when I presented on our achievements as a Board. There were so many wide-open eyes, truly impressed by all we have done.

Kathryn also was able to call in to talk more about the website mappalum.org, and it was pretty clear that many people present had no idea about the wealth of MAPP knowledge that exists on the members-only part of the site.

James presented about the Chris Peterson Memorial Fellowship since Shannon wasn't able to be there at that time, and there was a very encouraging round of applause - this is something that the Alumni Community has worked towards for eight years!!!

The support and appreciation from our MAPP community was tremendous, and I do think that we shared some great compelling reasons for MAPP alum to get more involved.

We have created enormous value of both the head and heart variety for our classmates and MAPP friends. Thank you all. It's so important that you were part of this, and I am grateful to you all for your service.

Thank you,

Lisa

Above and Beyond Perseverance – Introducing *Sisu*

By Emilia Lahti, MAPP '13

The nuts and bolts of Sisu 2.0

Debut of Sisu as Psychological Strength

Finland has a cultural construct known as *sisu*, which refers to the enigmatic power of individuals to push through unbearable challenges and take extraordinary action to overcome mental or physical challenges. *Sisu* as a term dates back hundreds of years and is an integral part of the country's cultural discourse. Consequently, it has been usually studied as a cultural component but as a psychological construct *sisu* has remained under-researched and poorly defined.

My recent MAPP capstone in the spring of 2013 was the first study to explore the term from a psychological perspective, and seeking to describe *sisu* in a more accessible language. A related online survey tracked the cultural representations of *sisu* among 1,060 contemporary Finns and Finnish Americans. The majority (83%) of the respondents believed

that *sisu* is a quality that can be cultivated and developed through conscious effort, and the respondents also showed interest in engaging in such activities. The majority expressed a need for more discussion around *sisu* in the media, as well as in the context of

self-defined, known capacity, stretching the existing of psychological strength.

The large number of respondents (over 1,800 out of which 1,060 took the entire survey) was an

encouraging indicator of interest in the subject. The study, advised by Dr. Angela Duckworth, gained interest in both Finnish and American media (including the Running Times magazine). The study's results were also presented and discussed at the 3rd World Congress on Positive Psychology in Los Angeles in June 2013, and further research on *sisu* is planned to begin 2014.

sisu

(noun) Extraordinary determination, courage and resoluteness in the face of extreme adversity. An action mindset which enables individuals to see beyond their present limitations and into what might be. Taking action against the odds and reaching beyond observed capacities. An integral element of Finnish culture, and also a universal capacity for which the potential exists within all individuals.

pronunciation [see-suu]

SISU

www.facebook.com/InspireSisu

education and the workplace. Overall, the most commonly held view of *sisu* is that of a powerful psychological strength capacity (62%), rather than the ability to be persistent and stick to a task (34%).

Sisu seems to contribute to what I have named the action mindset; a consistent, courageous approach toward challenges that first seem to exceed our observed capacities. This mindset leads to action to reach beyond a person's previously

Sisu Compared to Other Related Constructs

In the Finnish media and mainstream discourse, *sisu* is occasionally used to describe persistence and ability to pursue a long-term goal. This would, however, make *sisu* essentially the same as persistence, or even grit (if passion is involved). It was interesting to examine whether *sisu*, as a psychological strength, would render itself somehow

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Above and Beyond Perseverance – *Introducing Sisu (continued) ...*

different from other similar constructs and therefore add something useful to the current research (beyond being merely an examination of a cultural construct). In the following, sisu is briefly compared to some of its equally tough peers.

Perseverance

Perseverance is the ability to keep on going and stick to a task through frustration, boredom and hardship. Though sisu sometimes has this long term component to it, its most pronounced element, according to the survey results, is the ability to take action against the odds and display extraordinary courage in the face of adversity, rather than the ability to persist on a task long term. Perseverance is indeed an integral part of the DNA of sisu, but it is by no means the only component. Sisu is about pushing through when there seems to be nowhere to go but you simply must get the job done. Sisu can be said to begin where perseverance ends.

Grit

Sisu differs from grit in at least two fundamental ways. Firstly, while grit is perseverance injected with zeal and passion for a long term goal, sisu is about going on even if passion is lacking. Often, there may not be a glorious reward in the end of the trial but simply the gift of

may be especially useful when working with people who have undergone trauma and endured extreme adversity.

Resilience

Resilience refers to positive adaptation to a trauma or adversity. It is the ability to

bounce back from hardship and begin anew. According to most research, resilience is not entirely a genetic trait but is considered a dynamic process on which our learned coping methods, beliefs and attitudes have an impact.

I see sisu as a subcategory of

this process of resilience, and as a pathway to it under extreme hardship and adversity. Perhaps sisu contributes to resilience as it enables a response to a crisis or adversity that is conducive to positive adaptation (one of the many intriguing hypothesis for future research).



Sisu begins where perseverance ends.

waking up to see a new day dawn. Secondly, though 'being gritty' means to keep on going despite adversities along the way, it does not require a singular critical incident to initiate it (unlike in the case of sisu). Sisu is accessed when individuals reach the end of their perseverance and therefore it always involves facing a higher degree of adversity. Because of this, sisu (more than for example grit)

Continued next page ...

Above and Beyond Perseverance – *Introducing Sisu (continued) ...*

Hardiness

Dr. Salvatore Maddi describes hardness as a combination of attitudes that provide the courage and motivation to do the hard, strategic work of turning stressful circumstances from potential disasters into growth opportunities. Hardiness is a generalized style of functioning which incorporates commitment, control and challenge (the three C's) and is believed to help an individual tolerate stress. Of all the other constructs, hardness seems to come closest to sisu. Sisu has strong courage and determination components to it and therefore may very well contribute to hardy attitudes (especially to control over one's reactions).

Significance of Sisu to Positive Psychology

One of the eminent figures of positive psychology, the late Dr. Chris Peterson wrote that, “the Japanese term ‘ikigai’ (belief that one’s life is worth living) is a valuable reminder to positive psychologists in the United States that the science should not simply be an export business. There are lessons to be learned in all cultures about what makes life worth living, and no language has a monopoly on

the vocabulary for describing the good life.” Sisu is an example of a powerful untapped potential waiting to be unlocked for deeper understanding and application. More study is needed to unearth the possible means for its cultivation, and to ensure a culturally rich and diverse vocabulary of ‘the good life’.



Sisu Offers Potential for Positive Adaption to Crisis

Finland may have the initial monopoly on sisu as a cultural construct, but it is a universal capacity and the potential for it exists within all individuals. Sisu is a new term in the field of positive psychology, and I propose that it

Sisu is a universal potential which exists within all individuals.

contributes to our understanding of the determinants of resilience, achievement, as well as the ‘the good life’. Ludwig Wittgenstein once said, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” Only through having the words and constructs to describe the world and the phenomena around us can we strive to describe it, and therefore, to understand more and to be more. This indeed is the main prerogative of this present research and work around sisu: to expand the realms of our language and thinking, and to thus transform the ways in which we perceive our abilities and potential.

You can find more information and contact Emilia at www.emiliaalahti.com and facebook.com/inspiresisu.



MAPP Alumnus Reports on her Teacher Training in India.

Last year during MAPP I was an employee at the Positive Psychology Center where I worked as a research assistant for Alejandro Adler, one of Marty's PhD students. As part of this work I helped to develop a well-being curriculum for three schools in Nepal in conjunction with Supathy, a NGO in Kathmandu. This work took us to Nepal last February to present and train teachers as well as measure baseline well-being in schools.

Since graduation, I have taken the year to apply what I learned in MAPP in Nepal and India. Alejandro and I spent the month of September in Nepal training teachers in the curriculum I developed which includes four components: mindfulness, gratitude, active constructive responding/positive relationships, and strengths. During the last week in Nepal, Zubin Sharma, a recent Penn. graduate and founder of SEEKHO, joined us to learn more about the partnership Alejandro and I formed with the organization to bring well-being principles to India. My role is of Director of Well-being for SEEKHO and come January I will be spending four months in Bihar, India alongside Zubin to train teachers and other SEEKHO fellows.

Our work has materialized into multiple partnerships, and potentially many more, in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Zubin has published a few articles on what we are doing in the [Huffington Post](#). Furthermore, last month our work was mentioned in the weekly Penn newspaper.

I would love to share this work with the broader MAPP community. Let me know if you are interested in sharing this or learning more.

Emily Larson, MAPP '13

Photos from Summit & Fete

October 2013



Go to mappalum.org/Fete2013
for resources from the presenters

