



MAPP Alumni Newsletter - Spring 2011

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Alumni

Penn Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Inside this edition:

Spring 2011

As your new editor for the MAPP Alumni Newsletter I first offer my deepest gratitude to Virginia Millar, both for her diligence in keeping the newsletter so vibrant for years and for making the transition to me so smooth with templates and guides on how to put each issue together efficiently. I'm also grateful that I may still draw upon Virginia's help. An offer made all the more tempting, as I tended to be a bit too self-reliant with this first issue, particularly in learning the tricks of how to convince PowerPoint to function as a desktop publishing program.

My gratitude goes to the many alumni who contributed their stories for this issue whose theme is The "A" After MAPP: How graduates met the challenge in applying positive psychology. It was a pleasure working with the authors to refine the content; I hope everyone is satisfied with the results, even with my edits to get the text to fit neatly on each page. I encourage readers to send me their comments and suggestions, including ideas on themes for future newsletter issues.

It is my honor to serve you as editor.

Sincerely,

Greg

greg.quinting@gmail.com



G. Quinting

MAPP Alumni Board Association's Goals & Aspirations

Board President, Bobby Dauman '06 and Vice President, Lisa Sansom '10

Bobby and Lisa are pleased to share with you the Alumni Board's goals and aspirations for 2011. They are:

1. Relationships

- a. Cultivating, maintaining and nurturing old and new MAPP alumni, personal and professional, connectivity, excitement and relationships.
- b. Making the Alumni Association more inclusive, accessible, effective, productive and fun
- c. Making the Alumni Association Newsletter and Ning more connecting, fun, and informative
- d. Creating a mentorship program, searchable database with specific links on Ning

2. Research

- a. Staying abreast of the latest science, research and findings of Positive Psychology and related fields via 'State of the Science' calls, Ning, newsletters, journal access and links
- b. Sharing members' areas of expertise, interest, needs and goals with the community (also Relationships)
- c. Promoting Positive Psychology, MAPP's, individual's, and organization's accomplishments (also Relationships)

3. Resources

- a. Fund raising to provide more ideas, products, services and applications to our community

Naturally we greatly appreciate all your questions, concerns, suggestions and contributions of all kinds.

With much Appreciation,
Bobby & Lisa

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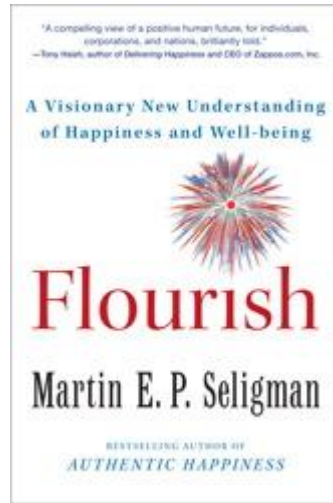
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Flourish: A new book by Marty Seligman

From Simon & Schuster, publ.

Martin E. P. Seligman PhD, a founder of positive psychology, introduces a revolutionary concept of what happiness really is in his new book **FLOURISH: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being**. In a fascinating evolution of thought, Seligman now believes that “well-being, not happiness, is the topic of positive psychology.” Well-being is a richer, more nuanced state in which we feel pleasure, cultivate our talents, build deep, lasting relationships and contribute meaningfully to the world. While happiness remains a significant aspect of well-being, Dr. Seligman places special emphasis on meaning and purpose as the most important contributing factors.

“The goal of positive psychology in well-being theory is to increase the amount of flourishing in your own life and on the planet.” --Martin E.P. Seligman



“Brilliant, beautiful, useful, and true. . . . Written by a research master and thoroughly joyful man, **FLOURISH** enables you to flourish by simply reading the book and following its sane, sage, ground-breaking advice. Skeptics, beware! This book will prove you wrong. You actually can plan your way to a joyful and fulfilling life. Read and rejoice!” --Edward Hallowell, M.D., author of *Shine: Using Brain Science to Bring the Best from Your People*

“One of the leading psychologists in the world has applied his wisdom and experience to the task of increasing wellness, resilience, and happiness for everyone. He also offers a blueprint for policy makers at the national level to promote better performance in the classroom, mental fitness in the military, and health orientation in the practice of medicine. This volume is written in the lucid style characteristic of Seligman and represents a landmark in positive psychology.” --Aaron T. Beck, M.D., founder of Cognitive Therapy

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...the underlying message that runs through all of the group art forms, whether it be dance, music, theater, or film, is: “Look at us! We can get along! We can do this beautiful thing and we are doing it together and actually enjoying each other! There is hope for us after all!”

This is the message that runs underneath and through all the group art forms. I don't know what else would explain an audience's desperate need to know that they'd been part of something grand and joyous and unifying, or even to know that an actor had fun making a movie. And I find myself thinking, my God, if we can't get along playing music, dancing, singing, pretending we're other people, what possible hope is there for the people who work at the U.N.? For doctors? For research scientists? For teachers? For all those places and professions where lives are at stake? What we do as performers has to be joyous and it has to be generous. -A. Arkin *An Improvised Life*



The “A” in MAPP: Stories from Alumni who Rose to the Challenge in Applying Positive Psychology

Editor’s Notes: I reached out to my fellow alumni asking for stories of how MAPP graduates applied positive psychology, but with a new hook: Describe the challenges you first encountered, personal, external, and how you met them. Did you have to be creative? What were the outcomes? What lessons did you learn through the experience that you would find valuable for new alumni?

The stories that follow exceeded my high expectations. I hope you also find them engaging and inspiring. -- GRQ

Angus Skinner, ‘06

Plumbers are great folk and on serious matters I employ them, small things I think I should fix myself. Like my shower control, which broke and which Shelagh kept telling me to fix, for weeks, well months. For most of those months the conversations in my head (about this, I did think of other matters) were about how I could not fix this without a plumber and some about make do, the shower basically still works. Did I have an ABCDE conversation in my head about this? Nope. Well not consciously.

And there is the interesting point. If applied positive psychology works then it works everywhere. In every situation. Not just for others, for ourselves. Not just for therapy, for living. Not just for business, for life. Not just for ambition, for achievement.

This is not about grandly changing the world, as if that made any sense. This is about infecting human culture.

And with what? Not unrealistic idealism. It is easy to mock the three blessings exercise. But it is by no means lame. Its efficacy is clear from the research and all the more convincing because the findings are not radical. The effects are small, real and the practice needs to be sustained. Yet the correlation between this simple exercise and the promotion of flourishing is greater than the correlation between smoking and cancer. Positive psychology is not a paradigm shift, nor a new science. It has opened a new view on the human universe and many such as behavioural economists move to claim space there.

It helped me move my mind from thinking I couldn’t fix the shower to fixing it; cost me £5, took 5 minutes. Not through positive thinking; through engaging efficacy, with hope, optimism and resilience. A simple matter but then the world is built on simple matters.

Fricken ‘A’...the trials and tribulations of putting the ‘A’ in MAPP Jaime Cundy, ‘10

I knew that I was going to be in for a little bit of an adventure on the very first day of MAPP. Dr. Seligman stood up in front of us and began the first of many lectures that would leave us with more questions than answers. I am sure that the lecture was meant to help us feel more secure in our place in the class. I am sure that for many it had that calming effect. Dr. Seligman began to describe to us the 4 ‘boxes’ or ‘areas’ that he saw the ‘A’ in MAPP having a great impact. He highlighted the Lawyers, the Teachers, the Journalist, and the Army. I half expected him to add another box. It never came. When I questioned him about it later he answered in the way that only Martin Seligman can, “You fit into the greatest box Jaime, you fit into the 51% box”

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Fricken 'A'..., continued

(Referencing his challenge to have 51% of the world flourishing). In that one sentence he both inspired and terrified me.

Unlike those with a career path clear in front of them, my path is more like the movie *The Labyrinth*. I have no choice but to muddle my way through and hope that at least some of the choices I am making are the 'right' ones. It can be extremely frustrating at times, and extremely lonely as well. We would often break up into groups based on our career paths; that is when the loneliness would creep in. It was difficult not to get frustrated. It felt as though I was starting the game 3 steps behind everyone else. It was when I began to feel overwhelmed that I decided to step back.

I stopped looking at where I didn't fit, and began looking at where I did. I stopped seeing my lack of a 'box' as a negative, and started seeing it as a huge opportunity. I didn't have the constraints of having a path laid out clearly in front of me. I was free to explore, free to go anywhere, and I have the freedom to do anything that I can imagine.

So for now...my 'A' in MAPP is extremely selfish. I apply what I have learned almost daily, to maintain my own optimism, my own hope, and to help me identify my own goals. I may be in the midst of my own personal *Labyrinth* but I am applying what I have learned to appreciate where I am, and to figure out how I can move forward in the most positive direction, for me.

Realignment of Strengths and Gifts Emily vanSonnenberg, '10

My intention is to share my experience post-MAPP, and generate some ideas on how I came to realize, continue, and begin fulfilling my purpose in Positive Psychology. Just before entering into MAPP, I had graduated from UCLA with a B.A. in Psychology. I had been an avid psychology researcher--a marriage and family analyst at the UCLA Relationship Institute, a UCLA Health and Social Psychology project manager and researcher examining gratitude, and a researcher for Sonja Lyubomirsky. Also at UCLA, I proposed and taught the first Positive Psychology undergraduate class entitled, "Happiness".



Immediately upon graduating from MAPP, I published an empirical article on the gratitude research, and traveled to Beijing, China to give lectures at two Positive Psychology conferences. Upon my return from China, I knew "real life" was about to begin, and I needed to pause for a

moment to re-assess my goals. It was important that my chosen direction would stimulate my brain, tug on my heart, and draw upon my character strengths. I have always wanted to be a therapist. I found a job as a therapist at a non-profit organization that specialized in women who are mothers--suffering from severe trauma and abuse, addictions, and co-occurring psychological disorders. I also had the opportunity to work with my clients' children in addition to working with their children. Here, I was granted an enormous amount of creative control in the type of therapy I would conduct with this population. I applied VIA Strengths work, Hope Theory, Active-Constructive Responding, CBT, Post-Traumatic Growth, as well as positive parenting and goal-setting strategies. While I experienced a great deal of purpose and fulfillment conducting group and individual therapy sessions, a phenomenon arose that I could not ignore.

Within a short time upon beginning this role, I felt more depleted than I can ever remember enduring in my lifetime; something was lacking--and I was suffering in this specific work space, both psychologically and physically. According to my intrapersonal and interpersonal beliefs about well-being, connectedness, and servitude, I knew that suffering was not the way my strengths could best be used in service of others and their potential, in addition to my own potential. I was not thriving; therefore, I could not give all I am capable of giving. What I realized was, as a being whose innate talent, intuition, and cultivated strengths surround the limitless potential of others, that for this

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Realignment ..., continued

potential to actualize, the client must be ready, willing, and open to recognizing and actualizing their potential through the process of change and transformation. The population of people I was working with were largely resistant and unwilling to change. They were on their own journey--which I recognized and respected, though knew was misaligned with my strengths and gifts; I could not work with the unwilling. This experience was difficult, but also a tremendous gift in that it helped me sharply focus on which of my strengths could serve others and myself, and abundantly so. Ergo, this job helped me clearly identify my divine talents and strengths, to honor them, and then, to make decisions that would facilitate aligning my strength of seeing and actualizing potential with those who are ready to grow--and to do just that. I made the decision to amicably part ways with the organization.

Another nugget of gold I received in this experience was a boss who saw in me my own calling, and wanted nothing but my own happiness to flourish in my work. She encouraged and supported my need to do what was aligned with my strengths--as she understood this deep-rooted phenomenon of being "called" as it related to her, in her own life. My heart expanded, and I was filled with gratitude and hope for that quality that I observed in my boss, and the knowing that colleagues in my future can operate with similar high degrees of compassion, understanding, and virtue that generate love and growth.

As I began the therapy job, I started freelance writing positive psychology and human behavior articles for various news publications. The writing assignments I did while in MAPP revealed my joy with the craft and I wanted to pursue it after graduation. I continue to write as a freelancer, while also completing the positive psychology book proposal that started with the book I wrote for my Capstone. Soon after leaving the non-profit job as a therapist, I followed my long-held vision to start my own private practice as a psychotherapist, which I enjoy tremendously. I also work as a freelance consultant for a large government-funded community health center, where I help the director and employees incorporate positive psychology interventions into patient treatment plans and workshops.

In addition to focusing on the development of my private practice and writing endeavors, another MAPP student and I--who is also a very close friend--have begun our own business in Positive Psychology. Our shared vision and mutual belief and support of one another fortifies and enhances our client-centered business, as well as our independent entrepreneurial visions.



Jessica Colman's "A" in MAPP

Since graduation, I have applied positive psychology personally and professionally in a number of ways. Personally, I have used positive psychology's tools to maintain and improve my emotional well-being and relationships. My first act of applying positive psychology professionally was to turn my Capstone into an ebook entitled *Optimal Functioning: A Positive Psychology Handbook*. It is now available for sale on Amazon Kindle. Shortly thereafter, I began working with an established consultant who specializes in positive psychology applications. It was challenging at first, because this consultant tried a number of times to convince me to work for free, or simply "to gain experience." However, I held my ground and eventually we entered into a contract that agreed to compensate me fairly. We then worked together and created lecture content related to Appreciative Inquiry, workplace wellness, and employee engagement. I'm happy to say that we created a very high quality product. I am now working on starting a consulting practice around my book and knowledge of positive organizations. This may become part of a larger business venture with another MAPP graduate, who is creating a practice as well. We are beginning our work together by creating a free seminar about emotional well-being during unemployment, that we plan to provide as a service to the community.

Jessica, MAPP '10

SOMO Leadership, Louis Alloro, '08

SOMO Leadership (Social-Emotional+) is an intentional effort to inspire a thriving, vibrant Cleveland. It shall do this by extending an invitation to those who are willing and interested in leading change in their lives and communities, starting with themselves first. Those who accept the invitation will be supported in discovering and developing their strengths, given tools to think differently and to grow new neural connections which lead to increased individual and collective success, happiness, and well-being. This home-grown system of implementing evidenced-based best practices will unleash a viral response through Cleveland, which is a direct result of generative, decentralized, and shared leadership, one which encourages high value relationships, resiliency, and flourishing.

Imagine a Cleveland that is vibrant and bustling with life, with a grass roots effort activating city-wide change-agents helping people open their minds and hearts, thereby increasing individual and collective well-being, happiness, and success.

And what if we said there is a science behind this?

SOMO Leadership is an emergent, socially-constructed positive intervention combining positive psychology, the science of success and happiness with social construction theory, the idea that reality is what we create. SOMO

Leadership is prosocial, proactive, and profitable. Everyone wins.

SOMO Leadership leads to positive growth and evolution, where everyone is learning, and:

- ❖Clevelanders are competing in the 21st century global economy
- ❖High quality organizations (schools, businesses) are increasing success in every neighborhood so that all Clevelanders have choices and opportunities,
- ❖The city is recruiting, supporting, and retaining high-quality, participatory citizens and industries, and
- ❖There is a shared accountability for collective well-being, success, and happiness.

In the wake of complex challenges in Cleveland, this picture may be hard to imagine, especially for those in the community who are complacent and stagnant, not realizing change is even possible because it's been "this way" for so long.

But there are some who believe that positive change is possible. These people imagine a more positive future for themselves, their networks, and for our city. They realize we are dynamic beings, changing every second of every day. These are Cleveland's SOMO Leaders.

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Denise Quinlan, '08

I'm applying my MAPP learning in working with students aged 10-13 on helping them learn to spot strengths in themselves and in each other. They are setting goals for themselves that they really care about and using strengths to help them pursue their goals. They are also setting goals to build or strengthen friendships using strengths. Mainly I think they enjoy watching wild and crazy videos I find them of people using strengths. After the programme (called *Awesome Us*) I'll find out if this made any difference to their well-being, classroom engagement or to the class climate. I'm also working with teachers and the special aid teachers who work with kids with learning and behaviour problems. I heard Barb Fredrickson talk last week in NZ and am inspired to think about positive emotions as the sub-atomic particles of all interventions. I like Barb's approach of focusing on the emotion that arises out of an intervention rather than 'going through the motions' of an intervention. It takes the pressure off finding the 'right' intervention for everyone and encourages people to self-monitor and check that an intervention is working for them.



(© Sam Mugarby)

SOMO ..., continued

SOMO Leaders exist all over Cleveland, even in our most challenged neighborhoods. They are all ages, ethnicities, shapes and sizes. They share a vision for a more positive future - an abundant one, for all.

I had the pleasure to participate in the SOMO-Micro Learning Lab. I learned evidence-based tools on how the power of positive thinking, feeling, speaking, acting, and reacting can catalyze citizen action and participation in the process of neighborhood transformation. I was introduced to a variety of methods and modalities of positive behavioral interventions through demonstrated techniques to counteract negative coping mechanisms, frequently experienced in my urban community in which I live.

The time is NOW-- to find them and call them to action, teaching them evidenced-based tools coming from positive psychology and related disciplines, which will help them increase self-awareness, create new neural circuitry, get more of what they want, and inspire others to do the same.

When we are successful, the spirit in the city will be as if the Browns were headed to the the Superbowl, or better yet, just won. Can you feel it?

This social change initiative is comprised of:

- 1) Inviting Cleveland Social-Emotional Leaders to experiential learning laboratories (SOMOs).
- 2) Facilitating empowerment education in the form of a personal development program grounded in positive psychology, the science of

success and well-being (and related disciplines) in an experiential learning laboratory.

3) Employing a common, strengths-based language which will help SOMOs refine the habits of mind and emotional regulation that build resilience and enable upward spirals of individual & systemic success.

4) Coaching SOMOs in the application of concepts through their visions, intentions, and desires.

5) Calling SOMOs to action in discovering ways to best bring these tools back into their networks in the spirit of positively influencing and coaching others.

6) Setting up systems of accountability that will continue to foster SOMOs' volitional development.

7) Collecting baseline data that will show success of this intervention.

8) Evaluating & refining program for subsequent SOMOs who will also be offered similar transformative learning experiences in learning labs (micro and macro) around the city.

9) Securing additional sources of funding from grant programs and Corporate Social Responsibility funds to sustain effort.

10) Leveraging local business, faith communities, schools, and organizations to provide stakeholders with training, consulting, and coaching services in line with macro intervention.

11) **Engaging 1.6 million.**

12) Co-creating sustainable, positive social and cultural change for the region.

J.H. Fowler and N.A. Christakis, (2008). The dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network: Longitudinal analysis over 20 years in the Framingham Heart Study. *British Medical Journal* 337: a2338.

Alloro, L.J. (2008). Shift happens: Using Social-Emotional Leadership to create positive, sustainable cultural change. *University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons*.

I envision replicating the SOMO concept in my hometown area of metro Detroit. In these long vacant lots, where still mostly wild vegetation grows, are signs of hope and reemergence. People still living near downtown tend urban gardens in which they raise fresh vegetables as alternatives to the high-priced, low-nutrition foods available at convenience stores. Initiatives are taking place with many of the same objectives described in this article. I believe that Detroit, like Cleveland would stand to benefit by implementing SOMO. - GRQ ed.

Please don't mention Positive Psychology (or my lessons from applying MAPP to the corporate world)

Alan Foster, '08

Over the last three years, almost every positive psychology intervention I have piloted has gone awry. The Appreciate Inquiry summit flopped, the strengths training never got off the ground and if you mention the Optimism seminar given to top managers I will smile nervously and change the subject. Let me explain. After graduating from MAPP I returned to my strategy consulting company. Within our Global Human Capital department I ran Employee Engagement, coaching and a few other areas. I had lots of autonomy and could pilot interventions across the 40 global offices and 5000 employees - sometimes I thought of it my personal laboratory. Upon a little reflection, I think I have learned three lessons:

1. Change the language. No-one cared about the science of Positive Psychology and they found the language off-putting. At many meetings I would bring up some relevant PP research and watch everyone's eyes glaze over. When I argued that we needed more Gratitude in the workplace, I might as well have been wearing a sarong and handing out flowers. Eventually I learned to say "how about we recognize our most inspiring managers and give them a shout-out at the next global meeting?" Same outcome, different language. In fact, we

created a series of fast-paced two minute viral videos called "Rockstars". The videos celebrated our best leaders and are now regular part of the calendar. Jonathan Haidt coached me how to design the images to elicit elevation. None of my colleagues cared for my methods, they just loved the videos.

2. Focus on results. The leaders were all trying to improve business outcomes. They needed to delight clients, to increase profitability, to stop their best employees from leaving. If I could use PP to help those areas, they listened. If it was Positive Psychology for its own sake, they had no interest. For example, we simplified the monthly employee survey and changed one question from "What's wrong with this project?" to "What's working well on the team?" Survey response rates to that question more than tripled. Everyone was delighted and I never had to say "accentuate the positive".

3. Less training, more system tweaks. Initially I tried lots of training to help people understand Positive Psychology. I ran seminars on explanatory styles, on using your strengths, on the differences between pleasure and engagement. They were generally well received but when I reflect on their longer term impact I struggle to point to any big changes that resulted. Yet minor tweaks had the largest results. At an education Non-Profit we recently changed their annual performance review form to focus on each person's strengths as well as their development areas. It was a minor language change on the 3 page form. This

quietly changed the tone of thousands of sensitive conversations that happen behind closed doors. I believe this has more impact that multiple training off-sites.

The mistakes and flops I mention above were all too real. There were lots of things that didn't work. But I remember what Marty told our MAPP class late one Saturday afternoon, "each year I try to have 10 good ideas, most of them flop, a few catch on and one suddenly takes off. I never know which one that will be.". That entrepreneurial / test and adapt approach has a lot going for it.

A positive psychology sales and negotiation coaching call.

Bobby Dauman, '09

Steve: Bobby, my \$35,000,000 deal is dead because of couch pillows!!! Did you get the crazy emails?

Bobby: Yeah, Steve; they sure don't read like the Positive Psychology Sales and Negotiation we've utilized to double your business! So, let's go back to...

S: Oh no, not again!

B: Oh, yes! What does everyone want?

S: Bobby, this is a \$35,000,000 crisis!

B: What does...?

S: OK! To be heard, understood, appreciated and not foolish.

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... *coaching call*. ... continued

B: What's needed before they'll work with you?

S: Continual connection and trust.

B: And what has to precede connection and trust?

S: Bobby, Kathy's cancelling the deal, can't you...?

B: Steve!

S: OK, SAFETY!

B: And what does Kahneman, Gilbert and others posit about ownership, loss aversion and expectations?

S: Bobby, you're killing me!

B: Steve!

S: OK; seller feels whatever they own is worth 1½ times its value, buyer feels he's losing cash and opportunity; both fear mistakes.

B: So, does Kathy who went through a horrendous, public divorce and put her soul into her home feel safe, understood and valued when you're allowing her precious personal pillows to be taken and you're communicating through agents and emails?

S: OMG! I royally screwed up! I should immediately visit, apologize and do what's best for her, right?

B: Right, Steve.

Conclusion: \$35,000,000 deal resurrected.

Girl Power : An afterschool self-esteem building club

Virginia Millar '08

While Positive Psychology is intended to be augmentative and move us beyond neutral, I am reminded that sometimes it is because of situations of dire need that people are willing to open their eyes to the possibilities. *Girl Power* was born of a Friday afternoon incident involving three special needs eighth grade girls. Scribbled notes passed between the girls revealed a cyber-can of worms in which the girls, one with a history of sexual abuse, were "friending" adult men online, engaging in hours of phone calls, and arranging dates to New York City. Four teachers, three parents, one administrator, one translator, and five hours later, a weary, disillusioned, and disgusted group of educators, in evening darkness, lamented that the girls had no self-esteem, nothing to do, and were searching anywhere for love and purpose. At that moment, these same desperate colleagues grabbed on to the suddenly evident hand of positive psychology that could build something different for these girls, and the *Girl Power Club* was created.

Girl Power, by virtue of its one membership qualification. instantly engaged the teamwork spirit and also permitted unprecedented authenticity among a diverse group of primarily low-income girls who would never normally interact. The spirit was typified by one Muslim girl, who during the second weekly meeting

wanted to share her normally covered hair with the group. It is based on strengths exploration (truly ubiquitous!) and resiliency-building along with other key teen needs such as goal-setting and choice-making; it also incorporates activities from the Dove Self-Esteem program which my MAPP cohort had the rich opportunity to explore for David Cooperrider's class. The afterschool club is voluntarily attended by 75% of the 8th grade girls, and teachers vie to be a part of this mini-slice of MAPP Magic. We have cheered on the girls who have chosen to donate hair to *Locks of Love* -*; the girls who are reaching exercise goals; and those who have implemented new study habits and improved grades. Is anyone making any extra money doing this? Unfortunately, not a drop. But it has made a huge difference in some lives and vastly improved the environment in which I work. I am grateful for the research and teachings to which I was privileged, and that have come to flourish in some pessimistically-parched soil.

* - *Locks of Love* is a not-for-profit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children under age 21 with medical hair loss. locksoflove.org



Total Fitness

Mark Tolmachoff, '10

I am in the second iteration of teaching Total Fitness at the U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Total Fitness is an elective I created as a capstone project for MAPP and consists of 12 two-hour lessons designed to teach skills that foster well-being in five domains: emotional, social, family, physical, and spiritual. The lessons are designed to begin with a discussion of the relevant research, followed by introduction of a skill or activity, then end with students practicing the skill or activity in pairs. Nineteen students completed the course last fall. I was at first unsure how they would receive the material, but my fears were unfounded as indicated by feedback from the students. The following are a few examples:

This was the most valuable class during this entire year

I think that it should be a part of the core curriculum

I am now more optimistic and cannot wait to see what life has in store for me

Apparently, word about the course spread, and this spring the elective filled within 20 minutes after registration started. Half of the 64 students began the course in March, and the other half will begin April 27th. Though they all self-selected, there is still some skepticism among a few of the students. One even dropped the course after the first lesson (Character

Strengths) because he thought it was too touchy-feely. As we progress, however, and students see the relevance to their personal lives, the skepticism wanes, and they become more enthusiastic.

Though the positive feedback from the students is heartwarming, I am working to prove empirically that the course does in fact increase well-being. I am conducting an efficacy study using the students currently in class as the test group, those starting in a few weeks are a wait-list control group, and a random selection of students not enrolled are a comparison group. For pre- and post- measurements, students rate themselves using the Scale of Positive And Negative Experience and the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010). I hope to publish the results later this year.

Thus far, I've learned a few valuable lessons. Empirical evidence is critical for winning over a skeptical audience . . . at least in the beginning. Practical application carries the day after that. For groups larger than eight, it is crucial to have a well-trained assistant who can help make sure the students are on track during practical exercises. Students recognize and value their instructor's passion for the subject.

Reference

Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., Biswas-Diener, R., (2010). New well-being measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 97, 143-156. doi 10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y

Lucy Hone, '10

My "A" in MAPP is supposed to be embarking upon a PhD in exercise psychology through Auckland University of Technology, where I'm researching ways to get more people more active more often, thereby reducing the impact of inactivity (diabetes, obesity and depression to name a few) and providing more New Zealanders with the physical and mental health benefits from leading active lives. I say "supposed" because, since Christchurch's second big earthquake on 22nd February, I am now working with the District Health Board on the psycho-social response to the earthquake, and doing webinars/workshops for Vitality Works (NZ's biggest provider of corporate wellness programmes) on "how the science of positive psychology can help your staff in times of stress". I've also just helped put a \$5m pitch together for a leading NZ university for funds to establish a Human Potential programme containing several PP strands. All of this comes after a very quiet few months between finishing MAPP in August and starting the PhD in February, when I dreaded anyone asking me what I was doing with my very expensive American degree, and was starting to wonder myself if I was ever going to apply all this new knowledge. Patience, it appears, was my friend.



Kathryn Snyder, '10

Last spring, I put together an staff *inservice* for my school district's 12 elementary schools. It was called MPS SOARs (Strength, Opportunity, Aspiration, and Reflection). Five of the schools were closing at the end of the year due to budget cuts and the remaining 7 were not only getting an influx of transferring students, but largely shuffled staffs. Morale was quite low and there was a high degree of anxiety due to uncertainty about what the future might hold. The *inservice* was a modified form of Appreciative Inquiry, designed to help the staff members process the end to what they had in their buildings, appreciate their strengths as educators, and be hopeful for what the future could hold. Six teams of 3-4 facilitators each were recruited and consisted of MAPP 5 students, school district retirees, and community members. The teams met for a breakfast planning period on the day of the *inservices*, split off to facilitate two schools each (1 1/2 hours, half hour travel, another 1 1/2 hours), and then regrouped of a debriefing luncheon. MPS SOARs was a huge success and was well-received both at schools that were closing and those remaining open.

Action for Happiness

Vanessa King, '10

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On 12 April, a new charity, Action for Happiness, launched here in the UK with a truly amazing response. I have been lucky enough to be a core contributor, leading on the positive psychology content and working with the illustrious members of the Board. It has been a fantastic experience so far and one I hope will continue!

Our website was overwhelmed with over 4,000 hits per minute, the result of widespread media attention. I then found myself on the influential Today radio program, the BBC's 6pm TV news and several regional radio shows. Four days later, our membership rose to nearly 11,000 from 99 countries!

The vision for Action for Happiness (AfH) is to address the fact that in the UK, as in America, we are richer than at anytime since the 1950's but no happier. Worse, levels of depression and anxiety are increasing with onset at younger and younger ages. In England prescriptions for anti-depressant medication had increased by a whopping 43% in the last four years.

AfH aims to translate and share the research from positive psychology, helping people to identify actions they can take, for themselves and for others. Simply put, and drawing on the thoughts of Jeremy Bentham, an eighteenth century Enlightenment philosopher and social reformer, the aim of AfH is to help increase the happiness and decrease misery around us.

The charity started with an idea of Professor Lord Richard Layard's. Richard is an eminent economist (and friend of

Marty's) and the UK's biggest proponent of the need for wellbeing to shape and inform policy. He has been instrumental in getting the UK government measure wellbeing alongside GDP. He is also author of a well-regarded book, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*.

Richard is joined on the Board by: Dr Anthony Seldon, the High Master of Wellington College (the UK's counterpart to Australia's Geelong Grammar School); Geoff Mulgan (former Head of Strategy at No. 10 Downing Street and now CEO of a social policy innovation foundation); and Nic Marks of the New Economics Foundation.

My involvement came by a series of serendipitous events - a trip to China, an airline upgrade, kindly being offered a lift by Anthony Seldon ... and good timing. At the end of MAPP last year, I'd built up lots of amazing positive psychology contacts across the US and a few in other parts of the world but was feeling a little isolated back home in the UK. I was looking for a way to plug-in here and to use my recently gained expertise. My introduction to AfH coincided with its new director, Mark Williamson, looking for someone with a background in positive psychology to help develop the charity's core offerings.

Together, and with Richard and the Board, we have shaped AfH's *10 Keys to Happier Living* and 49 associated actions (more to come!). The charity's main asset is its extensive and comprehensive website. We have tried to make it friendly and accessible - and clearly backed by science. It's still a work in progress but it's amazing how far we have got in only a few short months.

Post script. The name *Action for Happiness* was chosen as it is more widely recognized than *wellbeing* or *flourishing*. Rest assured however, we covered all the elements of the concepts put forward by Marty, Carole Ryff and Felicia Huppert et al

Applied Positive Psychology in Motion

Elaine O'Brien, '08

I'm thrilled to let you know that I've just been awarded a scholarship as a Teaching Assistant at Temple University for their Doctor of Philosophy program in Kinesiology. I start my doctoral coursework on my birthday, August 29! More about that below.

I loved our MAPP year; it was life changing for me. In terms of applying the "A," I was able to build wonderful positive relationships with fellow classmates, and with alumni/friends across other classes. Some of my favorite post-MAPP "A" experiences have been:

+ Working as a T/A/Recitation Leader for our beloved Dr. Angela Duckworth's undergraduate, "Introduction to Positive Psychology" course. I was inspired by my 24 undergraduate students and loved facilitating/leading them through the Positive Psychology interventions. I got feedback that was validating and helped nurture my soul.

+ Following that experience, I was recommended by Kaori Uno, MAPP 2, and then invited by MAPP 5, Yukun Zhao to apply to present in China last summer. I led three presentations in Beijing on "Positive Psychology: Physical Activity and Flourishing" and "Positive Exercise Practices: Breathing Positive Psychology" at two international Positive Psychology Conferences there.

The first Positive Psychology Conference was at Tsinghua University and featured speakers like Chris Peterson, Nansook Park, Robert Wright, Dacher Keltner and top government ministers from China. At the first Positive Education Conference at Beijing Normal University, presenters included Nansook, Chris, Stephen Meek, Felicia Huppert and again top governmental leaders and top education leaders from China. This was an awesome experience learning, teaching and sharing the spirit of the quest for the greater good for humanity and a better brighter world. I loved China and the people were welcoming and inspiring. I also got to spend time with one of my wonderful "Intro to PP" students from Beijing, Rachel!

Another pivotal experience for me was when MAPP 1, Gloria Park-Perin, invited me to apply to present an abstract for the international Association for Applied Sports Psychology (AASP) Conference last Fall. Our program, with Dr. Jeff Cherubini, "The Body as a Positive Institution" was accepted as a symposium. Our conference program discussant was Dr. Michael Sachs, Temple University. After the AASP conference presentation, Dr. Sachs asked if I would present for his graduate students at Temple University. I was thrilled for that opportunity. Subsequent to my Temple graduate presentation, I researched more into the Doctor of Philosophy program in Kinesiology at Temple. Temple offers a PhD program in The Psychology of Human Movement. When I saw that, I had a visceral response and believed I was meant to apply. I have just been accepted

into the doctoral program and have been awarded a Teaching Assistantship starting in Fall '11. I will be teaching an undergraduate course, "The Psychology and Sociology of Physical Activity. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I am thrilled to be following in Gloria's footsteps, and ever grateful for the MAPP learning and cherished friendships.

Additionally I've contributed an intervention to Sherry Fisher, John Yeager and Dave Shearon's new book, attended a PhD course, Positive Psychology and Well-Being across Society and Cultures taught by Dr. Antonella Delle Fave, M.D. at Oslo Summer School last summer, got to present with Dr. Ray Fowler on Positive Health for MAPP course, "Four Approaches to the Good Life." book, interviewed the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Regina Benjamin, M.D. for a PPND story I wrote and consulted on Marty's Positive Health initiative for the RWJohnson Foundation.





“The International Positive Psychology Association is delighted to invite you to attend the Second World Congress on Positive Psychology to be held at the Philadelphia Downtown Marriott Hotel. This unparalleled international conference - bringing together academicians and practitioners - will gather the world’s most renowned experts in positive psychology to present their latest findings and best practices.” -- ippanetwork.org

Register on the IPPA website:

<http://eseries.ippanetwork.org/source/events/event.cfm?event=WCCP10>



MEETINGS & CONFERENCES AROUND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY (A partial list - Watch for the Summer Newsletter for a Comprehensive list.)

Within the US:

Philadelphia, PA
MAPP Summit (with Fall Semester On-site 3)
October 28 - 30, 2011



Boston, MA
International Society for Humor Studies Conference
July 5-9, 2011

“The ISHS is a scholarly and professional organization dedicated to the advancement of humor research. Many of the Society’s members are university and college professors in the Arts and Humanities, Biological and Social Sciences and Education. The Society also includes professionals in the fields of counseling, management, nursing, journalism and theater. All of us are interested in humor’s many facets, including its role in business, entertainment and health care as well as how humor varies according to culture, age, gender, purpose and context.” www.bu.edu/com/humor/index.html

Worldwide:

Tartu, Estonia
11th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter
August 15 - 20, 2011

Course director: Professor Willibald Ruch

“For new research students just beginning their research careers or those already-trained researchers considering a first research project on humour, this course will ensure that they enter the field with a strong foundation in existing theoretical and methodological issues, and are well versed in the pitfalls confronting the scientific study of humour. For those interested in practical applications of humour in a variety of applied settings, the course will introduce them to the kinds of approaches that are being used around the world to put humour to work and to deliver the benefits of humour and laughter.” humoursummerschool.org/11

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Does a Therapy Based on the Ubiquity of Human Suffering Have a Place in Positive Psychology?

by Lesley Russo '10 and Dave Shearon '06

Acceptance and commitment therapy, known by its acronym “ACT” (pronounced the same as the word “act”) is one of the so-called “third wave” behavioral and cognitive therapies. It has substantial empirical support in recent years as an alternative therapeutic modality to cognitive behavioral therapy. (Hayes, 2004). ACT’s fundamental aim is to lead individuals to mindful, values-guided living. Contrary to the western medical model, its primary objective is not symptom reduction. The premise of ACT is that by changing one’s relationship to thoughts and emotions, an individual will no longer be held hostage by negative thoughts and emotions as obstacles to values-congruent living. (Harris, 2009).

ACT acknowledges that life is frequently painful, but suggests that we create suffering through our own cognitive processes. (Hayes, 2004). Key components of ACT focus on how to more effectively handle psychological pain through mindfulness and acceptance techniques. Unlike cognitive behavioral therapy, ACT does not attempt to dispute or challenge negative or pessimistic thinking. No judgment is made about whether a thought is right or wrong, good or bad. Rather, ACT uses mindfulness techniques designed to bring open, attentive and non-judgmental awareness to an experience. An individual practicing ACT first seeks to accept negative thoughts or emotions as just thoughts and emotions. “I am having the thought that...” or “I am experiencing a feeling of” ACT calls this practice “defusion” as the “objective observer” now merely observes the thought or emotion rather than being fused with it.

Once an individual is no longer struggling with unwanted thoughts and emotions, ACT encourages him or her to take prompt action, in the smallest step possible, to move in a desired direction in life, i.e., toward his or her values. ACT includes techniques for identifying and clarifying one’s values.

While cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT) may use some of the same techniques as ACT, the main purpose of the models differs. ACT

seeks to engender psychological flexibility, not to reduce distress. For example, a practitioner using the flexibility model may use mindfulness techniques to help a client stay open and observe negative thoughts and emotions, while a practitioner using the distress-reduction model might use mindfulness techniques to reduce the negative thoughts and emotions in the first place. (Harris, 2008).

While criticisms have been leveled back and forth among ACT and CBT practitioners and researchers as to the effectiveness of each modality, the differences in actual application and results of the therapies may not be as far apart as the criticisms suggest. (Hofmann & Asmundson, 2008). Although ACT does not target symptom reduction, symptom reduction is often a result. Similarly, CBT therapists generally do not view the alleviation of a client’s anxiety as the only desirable outcome of therapy. In addition, the common CBT process of identifying thoughts and emotions triggered by activating events inherently promotes defusion. Finally, both approaches share a goal of helping clients move forward. As one recent paper states, “there are few CBT therapists who want to help their clients achieve anxiety reduction so that they can sit more comfortably at home doing nothing. Coming from the perspective of either ACT or CBT, we work with clients to achieve their important valued life goals ...” (Heimberg & Ritter, 2008). And isn’t that what positive psychology is about?

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