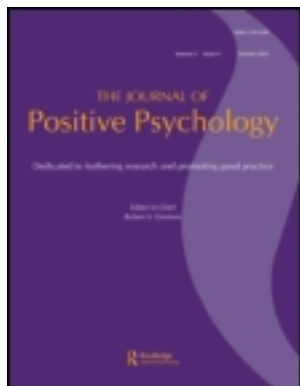


This article was downloaded by: [Hiram College Library], [Dr Acacia C. Parks]

On: 12 December 2011, At: 10:32

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



The Journal of Positive Psychology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpos20>

The state of positive psychology in higher education: Introduction to the special issue

Acacia C. Parks^a

^a Department of Psychology, Hiram College, PO Box 67, Hiram, OH 44234, USA

Available online: 12 Dec 2011

To cite this article: Acacia C. Parks (2011): The state of positive psychology in higher education: Introduction to the special issue, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6:6, 429-431

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2011.637729>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

EDITORIAL

The state of positive psychology in higher education: Introduction to the special issue

Over the last decade, the field of positive psychology has experienced rapid growth and expansion. We have seen significant theoretical advancements, have developed myriad techniques for increasing happiness, and have made major strides in the dissemination of both research and practice to the general public. In no area of application has positive psychology flourished more, however, than in higher education. More departments than ever are offering courses in positive psychology, and demand for these courses is consistently high. Graduate programs offering concentrations in positive psychology have appeared both at the masters and doctoral level. Educational institutions have expressed interest in using principles of positive psychology to inform institutional structure, faculty development, and pedagogy. Positive psychology has been taught and applied in higher education for almost as long as it has existed as a field, and yet, with few exceptions, there is little in the way of published literature that brings all of these developments together. It is this observation that motivated this special issue on *Positive Psychology in Higher Education*.

When I first issued the call for proposals, it was my goal to provide an up-to-date picture of the advancements positive psychology has made in the arena of higher education. As a graduate student at the Positive Psychology Center, I witnessed firsthand the birth and development of the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology program. I often heard by word-of-mouth about projects putting positive psychology into practice in schools across the globe. I even received a few inquiries myself from programs hoping to use a positive psychology approach to foster personal development among students. Furthermore, as someone who has been teaching positive psychology in various forms for 8 years, I found myself curious about what other teachers of positive psychology were up to. The existence of six (!!!) positive psychology textbooks suggested that other teachers of positive psychology were out there, and numerous; however, I could count on one hand the number of conversations I had ever had with colleagues about teaching positive psychology. It seemed to me quite unfortunate that although positive psychology has clearly established itself in higher education, there was no forum in which to

discuss what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how it is working for us.

A secondary goal surfaced for me as I began to put the special issue together. After the Call for Proposals went out, I received numerous emails, not only from potential contributors but from people looking forward to the special issue. It became clear to me that there is a thirst for information on best practices for teaching positive psychology. Anecdotal evidence from the FRIENDS-OF-PP and PSYTEACH listservs supports this impression; each time that I have offered my syllabus to one of these lists, I have received dozens and dozens of requests and questions from eager positive psychology instructors and instructors-to-be. For every instructor out there teaching positive psychology, there appear to be three more who would *like* to teach positive psychology, but do not know where to start.

I selected articles for the special issue, then, with these two goals in mind: first, to open up a discussion among those who are currently teaching and otherwise applying positive psychology in higher education and, second, to provide a resource for people who want to learn more about how positive psychology is taught, and how positive psychology might fit into their academic departments and institutions. I could not be more satisfied with the results. The following 15 articles represent the use of positive psychology at all levels of higher education – from institutional practices and curricular development to pedagogy and the teaching of positive psychology content itself. It is with great pleasure that I introduce them in the paragraphs that follow.

In the opening piece, Lindsay Oades, Paula Robinson, Suzy Green, and Gordon Spence provide a rationale for implementing positive psychology principles at different levels of higher education: in the classroom, in the social milieu on-campus, in the surrounding community, among the faculty and administration, and in student residential environments. Citing evidence that positive states lead to better academic outcomes, they provide specific examples of how these can be fostered through institution-level practices. Chuck Walker follows with a description of techniques for assessing students' real-time experiences of two positive states – positive emotion and engagement – in the classroom.

Such assessments can be used to identify teaching techniques (or institutional practices?) that promote and inhibit students' experiences of positive states, and ultimately, may lead to more successful efforts to educate.

Thomas McGovern provides another practical implementation of positive psychology at the institution level: strengths-based faculty development. Drawing from his own refashioned version of Peterson and Seligman's taxonomy of strengths and virtues, he proposes a four-module program that helps faculty explore the potential uses of each strength for the academic, intellectual, and/or social aspects of teaching. By gaining an understanding of how each of the 24 strengths can contribute to teaching and learning, instructors learn how to most effectively mobilize their own strengths at work. Taken together, these pieces provide concrete ideas for how positive psychology can be used to effect change in academic institutions, and in institution-wide pedagogical practices.

In the next section, the contributions revolve around the various ways in which one might bring positive psychology into an existing psychology department curriculum. Jeana Magyar-Moe discusses ways to integrate positive psychology content into other psychology courses, emphasizing psychopathology, cultural psychology, counseling, and personality (she also offers briefer suggestions for myriad other courses, including social, health, sport, and physiological psychology). Citing the potential difficulty involved in adding a new subarea to an existing curriculum, Chu Kim-Prieto and Carianne D'Orlando describe two core psychology courses in their department – research methods and research experience – that they have infused with positive psychology content. Peter Marks (published in the July 2011 issue – see Erratum) provides a profile of a course that revolves around a positive psychological concept – popularity – while still remaining clearly seated in developmental psychology. Jaime Kurtz finishes this section with a description of her cross-disciplinary course, 'Happiness and Self-Knowledge', which tempers the science of happiness with research on judgment and decision-making.

In the final section, we turn to the question of how one might go about designing a positive psychology course, including issues of course structure, pedagogical methods, and course content. Pninit Russo-Netzer and Tal Ben-Shahar begin by sharing the thought process that went into designing Ben-Shahar's now-renowned positive psychology course that, when taught by him in 2006, was the most highly enrolled class at Harvard. They offer practical advice for designing a positive psychology course, using their own course as a prototype. Further adding to the reader's toolbox for course design, Robert Biswas-

Diener and Lindsey Patterson make an argument for the use of experiential learning in-class, in out-of-class assignments, and even when designing one's syllabus. Amy Kranzler, myself, and Jane Gillham describe a positive psychology course that contains a major service learning component; as students learn about resilience in the classroom, they are also working outside the classroom to teach resilience to at-risk youth. Marie Thomas and Barbara McPherson offer a final methodological innovation: using a positive psychology approach to team-based learning. In their course, they divide students into ongoing groups based on their character strengths, and use that group identity to structure assignments and in-class activities.

Papers in the next section provide practical advice on the selection of topics and readings in positive psychology courses. Grant Rich provides a comprehensive overview and comparison of existing textbooks for positive psychology, including a systematic review of the topics featured in each. Eranda Jayawickreme and Marie Forgeard discuss ways to dovetail more traditional readings with nonscientific materials, including popular books and self-help, as well as sources from philosophy, literature, and film. Concluding the section, Jennifer Teramoto Pedrotti offers strategies for infusing the topic of culture into positive psychology courses, both during course design and through in-class practices.

Finally, Dianne Vella-Brodrick (published in the July 2011 issue – see Erratum) closes with a thought-provoking piece on the ethics of teaching positive psychology. Positive psychology is a field where dissemination and implementation occurs rapidly, sometimes even ahead of the science. Thus, ethical considerations are important not only as an academic topic to discuss with students in class but for us, as teachers, to consider in the design of courses and curricula. Vella-Brodrick makes a compelling case for the various ways in which ethics are relevant to positive psychology, providing concrete ways that we can make use of these ethical concepts as instructors, and also teach ethics to our students.

Concluding remarks

Taken together, these articles provide a snapshot of the state of positive psychology in higher education. The sheer number of contributions in this special issue (selected from many more proposals), as well as the diversity and breadth of the articles, provides evidence that positive psychology is taking root in many aspects of higher education. However, this special issue is only the beginning of what we at the *Journal of Positive Psychology* hope will become an ongoing discussion about myriad issues as they pertain to positive psychology, including pedagogy, course

design, curricular concerns, cutting-edge teaching methods, in-class activities, faculty development, and assessment.

There are two points I want to emphasize for readers. First, it seems clear that despite a lack of communication between positive psychology instructors, courses in positive psychology exist across the country (across the world, even!). By extension, there are teachers of positive psychology out there, willing to be a resource for people wanting to learn more about teaching positive psychology – if you are one of those people, you can start by emailing me, or any of the contributors. We welcome your questions, thoughts, and feedback about our papers, about teaching positive psychology in general, or about ways that we can further promote discourse about teaching positive psychology.

Second, institution-level applications of positive psychology, while clearly in the works, are still in the preliminary stages. Furthermore, there are so many potential applications of positive psychology in higher education that have not yet been developed.

These provide a promising arena for further brainstorming and discussion, and it is my hope that the articles in this special issue will stimulate readers to discuss some of these applications, to try them out in their own departments and institutions, and to create new programs.

Most importantly, I hope that people will *talk* about the topics raised in this special issue, not just in casual conversation, and not just among the colleagues they see day-to-day, but on listservs, at conferences, and in peer-reviewed publications. The special issue is a start, but only a start. It falls on us – on me, on the contributors, and most importantly, on you, the readers – to keep this conversation going.

And now, without further ado, I give you *Positive Psychology in Higher Education*.

Acacia C. Parks
Department of Psychology
Hiram College, PO Box 67
Hiram, OH 44234, USA
Email: parksac@hiram.edu