POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY
FOR THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

Dr Lana C Jones
PTLC Event
November 7th, 3-4pm, CBP 103
Palm Beach State College
WHO AM I AND WHAT COULD I POSSIBLY KNOW ABOUT POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY?

• Current Positions:
  – Adjunct Professor of Psychology, Social Sciences Department, PBSC, Lake Worth
  – Full time Visiting Scholar, Psychology Department, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton
• Education:
  – PhD Neuroscience, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
  – BA Psychobiology & MA Experimental Psychology, Florida Atlantic University
  – BS Biology, Florida State University
• Knowledge base and research focused primarily on molecular mechanisms of anesthesia-induced age-specific spatial learning deficits in aged rodents, with an emphasis in inflammatory mechanisms in the central nervous system related to normal aging.
• As far as Positive Psychology, I am no one and I know nothing.
• Most of this presentation is information gathered from Jeana L. Magyar-Moe’s chapters from the book “Positive Psychology on the College Campus, Edited by John C. Wade, Lawrence I. Marks, and Roderick D. Hetzel (2015)
THE QUIZ IN THE BEGINNING

• How do you incorporate SUCCESS and CHALLENGE into your classroom?

• What does it mean to be HAPPY?

• What are your STRENGTHS?

• What are your ideas about increasing student SELF ESTEEM?

• How do you exercise your ENTHUSIASM?

• How do you feel about HOPE?
TAKE A MOMENT

• Be thinking about ONE element you can take away and apply directly to your life and/or your courses right now.

• If something pops up that is not clear, make a note and we will come back to that.

• If there is something you disagree with … speak up, we will try to attend to the discussion, being mindful that we have a time constraint, so we may hold that discussion at the end.
TODAY’S PRESENTATION...

• Our current challenges in higher education.
• What is Positive Psychology?
• Understanding the strength theory in higher education.
• Strong teachers…strong students.
• How can tenets of Positive Psychology be incorporated into the modern college classroom?
• Important Research findings.
• Practical and simple Ideas to incorporate into your classroom this semester.
• Questions and Discussion
OUR CURRENT SITUATION

- Unique challenges for modern students and institutions
  - Strained budgets (for institutions and students), Stress, Expectations for measuring and promoting effectiveness, difficulty meeting the needs of changing student demographics

- Discouraging statistics:
  - 43% of students who enter college do not complete a bachelor’s degree within 6 years. (Hennessy, 2010)
  - Ethnic discrepancies in student success, measured by achievement and graduation rates:
    - Asian – 67%, Caucasian – 60%, Hispanic – 50.6%, African American – 40.1%, Native American – 40.6%
    - Students of color will make up 80% of the growth in new students entering higher education (Carnevale and Fry, 2001 *predicted for 2015)

- The emotional states of students is negative.
  - A Yale study conducted by Marc Bracket (with 22,000 students) asked students to choose words that described their emotions at school. The majority of students (75%) chose negative emotion words, with the most popular choices being “tired” (39%), “stressed” (29%), and “bored” (26%).
THE PERFECT STORM – OUR CURRENT SITUATION (CONT’D)

• “Perfect Storm” (Wadsworth, 2005)
  – Increase in diverse student population
  – Revenue shortfalls
  – Greater societal pressure on obtaining a college degree as a career- and income-enhancing commodity that ALL should be able to afford
  – Plus, students with diagnosable mental health disorders

• Problem or opportunity…

• The timing could not be better for Positive Psychology to be in a position to influence higher education!
WHAT IS POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY?

“Positive psychology is the study of what goes right in life.”
~Martin Seligman, president of the APA, 1999 presidential address

Five Elements (according to Seligman, 2005):
1. Positive emotion
2. Engagement…involvement in activities that further fuel interest culminates in achieving FLOW…exercising enthusiasm
3. Relationships…interactions fuel positive emotions (as long as you have healthy people in your life)
4. Meaning…finding and fostering purpose
5. Accomplishment….pursuit of mastery and success

FLOW, also known as being in the zone, is a mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity.
Redefining Student Success

• What is the current definition of student success?
  – Graduation/completion rates
  – GPA

• When student success is defined solely in terms of grades and graduation, not only does the institutional emphasis shift to admissions standards, but it also shifts to the deficits that students bring to the college environment that must be remediated in order for students to succeed.

• Positive Psychology attempts to incorporate core principles to redefine the concept of student success, as a function of the quality of the student’s experience in undergraduate education, student behaviors, and levels of engagement in purposeful activities, learning outcomes, preparation for the world of work, life-long learning, and personal growth and development.
**STRENGTHS THEORY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

- **Strengths Theory:** It is vital to understand and build from one’s strengths while managing (rather than focusing on repairing) weaknesses (*Clifton and Nelson, 1992*)
  - Often we fall victim to the opposite idea by default, “Let's fix what's wrong and let the strengths take care of themselves.”
  - 77% of parents within the US indicate that they would focus upon low grades (D's and F's) even if their child's report card also contained good grades (A's, B's, and C's) (*Buckingham & Clifton, 2000*)

- In higher education, the perspective originated in Astin’s (1985) theory of talent development that emphasized the institution’s role in promoting student learning and success.

- Those who subscribe to this view of students success believe that every student can learn under the right conditions; as a result, the institution must organize its resources and create conditions for teaching and learning to optimize success (*Kuh et al., 2005*).

- This view of student success as developing student talent into strengths has particular relevance for an increasingly diverse student population. A strength development approach emphasizes the need to embrace the wide variety of talents students possess (*Chickering, 2006*).

- How do we become Strengths-based educators?
BECOMING STRONG TEACHERS...

• Strength-based Education is operationally defined as a practice of education where educators take a philosophical stance combined with ongoing practices that emphasize strengths (both of themselves and their students) and the positive aspects of student effort and achievement.

• What is a “great teacher”?
  – There is no cookie cutter approach or recipe for “good teaching”
  – The only rule that applies universally is that all great teachers are alike in that “they use their natural talents to the utmost, whether they are aware of it or not” (Liesveld & Miller, 2005, p. 11)

• How do we identify our talents and strengths?
  – Discover through attending to the following: 1) our yearnings or internal forces that repeatedly attract one to their talent themes, 2) rapid learning in the context of new challenges, 3) flow or complete engrossment in an activity, 4) feelings of satisfaction from experiences where emotional and psychological rewards are great, 5) glimpses of excellence or flashes of past outstanding performance.
  – Or the easy way…..take an assessment!
    • Clifton Strengths Finder 2.0 (www.strengthsfinder.com - $20-50)
    • Different version, yet free at www.high5test.com
MY RESULTS AS AN EXAMPLE

WWW.STRENGTHSFINDER.COM

• **Learner**: great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. Interested in the process of learning rather than the outcome. Curiosity is contagious.

• **Activator**: can make things happen by turning thoughts into actions. They are often impatient. Action is an important part of learning.

• **Input**: have craving to know more, often like to collect and archive all kinds of information. Teaching is enriched by resources.

• **Significance**: want to be very important in the eyes of others. You want to make a difference in student’s lives.

• **Strategic**: create alternate ways to proceed, can quickly spot relevant patterns. Careful thought and planning to the content of the course.

WWW.HIGH5TEST.COM

• **Deliverer**: take responsibility and follow through. Your name and reputation depend on you being responsible for your commitments.

• **Time Keeper**: set timelines and deadlines, dislike surprises, and love to plan, maintain progress, order, discipline, and productivity.

• **Commander**: objective is to take charge and direct people, leadership, not afraid of confrontation.

• **Catalyst**: objective is to act and initiate action. Acing is the best teacher and the best source of information.

• **Storyteller**: objective is to communicate a message, always in search of the perfect phrase and powerful word combination to attract and capture the attention of the audience.
# The 34 Strengths/Talent Themes CSF 2.0

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## Virtues and Character Strengths Applied to Teaching and Learning (McGovern & Miller, 2008)

| 1. Wisdom and knowledge: Cognitive strengths used to acquire and create knowledge | • Creativity and ingenuity  
• Curiosity and openness to experience  
• Love of learning | • Open-mindedness and critical thinking  
• Perspective and wisdom |
|---|---|---|
| 2. Courage: Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals despite external or internal opposition | • Integrity and authenticity  
• Bravery and valor | • Persistence and perseverance  
• Zest and vitality |
| 3. Humanity: Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others | • Kindness and caring  
• Love | • Social intelligence |
| 4. Justice: Civic strengths for a healthy community | • Citizenship and teamwork | • Fairness  
• Leadership |
| 5. Temperance: Strength that protect against excess | • Forgiveness and mercy  
• Humility and modesty | • Prudence  
• Self-regulation and self-control |
| 6. Transcendence: Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and its meaning | • Awe, appreciation of beauty  
• Gratitude  
• Hope, optimism, future-oriented | • Humor and playfulness  
• Spirituality and religiousness |
### BUILDING STRENGTHS IN STUDENTS

- We can use similar measures and activities to help students to identify strengths in themselves.

- **Class Activity:** Write a one-page positive introduction about yourself in which you were at your best. It may be helpful to hand out the 34 strengths worksheet from the CSF 2.0.

- A method supported by research: A 600 sample study of first-year college students found that completion of the CSF and 6 1-hour class session resulted in significant increases in optimism, personal strength awareness, self-confidence, and realistic expectations utilizing pre- and post-class administrations of the Self-Reflection Survey (Clifton, 1997).
Implicit Self-Theory: unstated ideas that people have about the nature of their own abilities. Dweck (1999) described two types of implicit self-theories:

- **Entity theory:** The belief that personal attributes are immutable, trait-like qualities that are not responsive to change, often called fixed mindset, and individuals demonstrate performance goals aimed at demonstrating competence (Dweck & Legget, 1988)

- **Incremental theory:** The belief that personal attributes are dynamic characters that can be changed and cultivated through experience and effort, often referred to as growth mindset, with individuals demonstrating learning goals focused on increasing competence (Dweck & Legget, 1988)

Implicit theories can help to establish cognitive patterns associated with learned helplessness and mastery-oriented response.
• **Academic Self-Efficacy**
  
  – Self-efficacy: The belief in one’s own capacity to be successful.

  – Academic self-efficacy is associated with adjustment, overall satisfaction, and commitment to remain in school (Astin, 1993; Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2001) as well as cognitive engagement (Pintrich & Degroot, 1990).

  – In a meta-analysis study, students’ confidence in their academic abilities was the best predictor of college persistence and academic performance (Robbins et al., 2004).
SIMPLE IDEAS TO APPLY POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN YOUR CLASSROOM

1. Broaden-and-Build Theory
2. Active-Constructive Responding
3. Positive Empathy
4. Hope
1. BROADEN-AND-BUILD THEORY & APPLICATION

• The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998) contends that positive emotions broaden one’s sense of awareness, attention, and thinking and encourage more complete and creative examination of potential actions one can take in a particular situation or circumstance.

• Positive emotions have been linked to undoing the lingering effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2003) to be key ingredients in resilience (Fredrickson, 2001) and to seed human flourishing (Fredrickson, 2013).

• Practical Applications:
  – Humor in the lecture, video clips
  – Mindfulness in providing student feedback to avoid negative emotions, and highlight success and work on a plan for improvement in other areas.
  – Providing students with options, where students are able to feature their strengths
  – Team testing – Allowing students to complete course exams with a partner has been shown to facilitate learning and result in more positive attitudes toward the testing experience (Zimbardo et al., 2003; Magyar Moe et al., 2004, 2006). These positive outcomes may be the result of social and intellectual broadening due to increases in positive emotions felt by students before exams (Magyar et al., 2008).
2. ACTIVE-CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONDING

• According to Gable et al. (2004), there are 4 possible ways in which we can respond to good events in the lives of others:
  1. Passive-destructive: lacking interest, displaying little to eye contact, turning away, leaving.
  2. Active-destructive: pointing out the downside and displaying negative nonverbal cues.
  3. Passive-constructive: happy, but lacking enthusiasm or downplaying, little emotional expression
  4. **Active-constructive:** responding enthusiastically, maintaining eye contact, smiling, displaying positive emotions.

• **Practical Applications:**
  – Listen for positive events before, during or after class, and respond enthusiastically.
  – Elicit good news by positive probative questions like, “What went well for you yesterday?” as opposed to “How was your day?” which may elicit negative responses.
3. POSITIVE EMPATHY

• **Empathy** is typically defined as the ability to understand and enter into another’s feelings, emotions and experiences, and is a hallmark of therapy processes.

• However, traditional empathy typically focuses on experiences of pain, fear, or anger.

• **Positive empathy** flips the script, such that the feelings are validated, but the focus becomes positive in nature.

• **Practical Example:**
  
  – Student: I have tried and tried and I can’t figure out how to complete my project.
  
  – Traditional Empathetic response: I can see you feel frustrated and worn out because it seems nothing is working.
  
  – Positive Empathetic response: Although you are feeling some frustration, it is apparent that you are really committed to your studies. Your persistence is a strength that will help you reach your academic goals.
4. HOPE

- **Hope** consists of one’s perceptions of his or her abilities to create clear goals, develop plans for reaching those goals (pathway thinking) and find and maintain the energy and motivation necessary for following through with goal pursuits (agency thinking) (Snyder, 1994).

- In educational contexts, research finding suggest that hope is malleable and not related to intelligence (Snyder et al., 2002; Feldman & Dreher, 2012) or income (Gallup, 2009).

- Students who are higher in hope earn better grades in core subjects (Marques et al., 2001), score higher on achievement tests (Snyder et al., 1997), and higher GPA’s (Gallup, 2009; Snyder et al., 1991 & 2002; Chang, 1998; Curry et al., 1997, Worrel and Hale, 2001; Gallagher & Lopez, 2009), higher likelihood of graduating and lower likelihood of dropping out (Snyder et al., 2002).

- Student hope levels at measured at college entrance significantly predicted academic progress over the course of 6 years (Snyder et al., 2005).

- High hope people perform better at work (Peterson & Byron, 2008) have higher well-being (Gallagher & Lopez, 2009) and live longer (Stern, Dhanda, & Hazuda, 2001).
4. HOPE (CONT’D)

• Practical lessons in fostering Hope...

1. Spending time and caring
   • Bjornesen (2000) reports that undergraduate students view the most important activity of a college professor is to be spending time interacting with students.

2. Setting goals for the class
   • High-hope teachers are very clear about their objectives, including how students will attain grades and how they will go about mastering the material in each unit.

3. Creating pathways to class goals
   • Set up step-by-step course sequences so that both within a single class and across the semester, the information unfolds in a clear, comprehensible manner. Sometimes it is necessary to offer alternative pathways if the initial path is not yielding positive results.

4. Raising agency to pursue class goals
   • Snyder (2005) reports that modeling enthusiasm for one’s course material is a crucial avenue for teachers who desire to increase student motivation in their courses.

5. Teach hope and self-esteem will follow
   • Teachers who teach students how to study for tests, prepare for final exams, track grades over time, navigate interpersonal disputes, pursue career interests, and interview for jobs enhance student hope (Lopez, 2009)

“Long after our students have forgotten the content of what we have taught, and long after that content may have been supplanted by new and different content, we still can be assured of one enduring life lesson – hope can guide and empower a lifetime of learning” (Snyder, 2005, p.81)
QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, INSIGHTS
REFERENCES

• Gallup. (2009). Hope, Engagement, and Well-Being as predictors of Attendance, Credits Earned, and GPA in High School Freshman, Unpublished data. Omaha, NE
• Magyar-Moe, JL, Clemins, J, & Krueger, M (2004) Outcomes for and characteristics of college students who choose team testing. Poster at 2004 annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Honolulu, HI.
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