Breaking Good: Bringing Positive Psychology to the Land of Enchantment

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Albuquerque, New Mexico has gotten a bad rap for some because of a certain fictional world... that took someone down a very un-positive psychology path...

We want to tell you about what some of us at the University of New Mexico have done to enable people in the real world to move in a different direction.
What have we done to use positive psychology to open up a better path?

The main ingredients:

Courses
Positive Psychology Lecture
Positive Psychology Lab
Positive Psychology Teaching Practicum

Activities and Groups
Positive Psychology at the Movies
Happiness and Positive Psychology Initiative
Happiness Alliance of New Mexico

Think about what you have done and let’s share ideas.
Positive Psychology Lecture

This began in 2005 and grew from 30 undergraduates every other year to 200 every semester.

It grew to include a graduate student component as a part of the same class.

It grew from having no teaching assistants to two graduate and six undergraduate TAs.

It was voted best course at the university last year.
How is the course structured?

What is happiness and well-being?

What have we learned about how to achieve them?

The classes are organized in relation to the VIA human strengths and other positive qualities.

Video clips are used to show students how people can use them to increase happiness and well-being.

Positive psychology exercises are used to enable students to test and try them out in their lives.
How beneficial are the typical elements of the class?
How beneficial are the positive psychology exercises?

- Taking the VIA Survey: 9
- Basic Strength Paper: 8
- Weekly Strength Reports: 8
- Advanced Strength Paper: 8
- Good Things Assignment: 9
- Good Things Reports: 8
- Strength of Others: 8
How beneficial are the more unique elements of the class?
How beneficial were the video clips?

- Kindness: Helping a Blind Man See in Amelie
- Justice: The Children Save Atticus in To Kill a Mockingbird
- Authenticity: Remember Who You Are in the Lion King
- Forgiveness: Forgiving Killing a Child in Gandhi
- Vitality: An Old Couple Playing the Piano
- Love of Learning: Bar Scene in Good Will Hunting
- Appreciation of Beauty: Playing Opera in Shawshank
- Social Intelligence: Setting the Coach Straight in Blindside
- Creativity: Concentration Camp in Life is Beautiful
- Meaning and Purpose: Seize the Day in Dead Poet Society
- Perseverance: Derek Redmond Finishes the Race
Let’s see, the very best of Hollywood vs. the drama of psychology experiments. Who wins?
How beneficial were the video clips?

- Kindness: Helping a Blind Man See in Amelie
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- Meaning and Purpose: Seize the Day in Dead Poet Society
- Perseverance: Derek Redmond Finishes the Race
- Self-Regulation: Kids in the Marshmallow Experiment
What about this class has enabled students to take a different path?

The continuing development and refinement based on the feedback of the students and teaching assistants.

The increasingly useful collection of video clips that best engage the students and illustrate the strengths.

Using the idea of the “hero’s journey” in stories and movies to inspire and motivate to use the strengths.

The exercises that engage the students and allows them to apply the material and see how it works in their lives.

The personal nature of the class included in learning their names and have peer teaching assistants.
Positive Psychology Lab

It grew out of the interest of students to continue to learn about positive psychology.

The smaller class (18-24 students) lends itself for really bringing positive psychology to life – it has been called “Positive Psychology Live.”

The Positive Psychology Lecture is a prerequisite and people apply to take it – usually about 60 Applications for 20 spots.

The lab has earned perfect ratings almost every semester it has been taught.
How is the course structured?

Everyone gives a presentation illustrating their top strengths and talking about how they can use them to reach their goals.

The whole class provides feedback on what they see as the strengths and positive qualities of their classmates.

Everyone is part of a team of 3-4 students who give a presentation on a group of strengths.

Everyone has at least one mentee and meets with at least 2 times and writes about it.

Everyone does one “positive psychology” exercise each week, writes about and rates it, and discusses it the following week.
How beneficial have these elements of the class been?
How beneficial have these weekly exercises or assignments been?

- Giving Examples of Your Strengths
- Lovingkindness Meditation
- Counting Kindness
- Three Good Things
- Writing about Mentoring
- Using Strengths in New Way
- Savoring and Appreciation
- Gratitude Expression
- Writing about Best Possible Self
- Meeting with Mentee
- Writing to Cope with Stress
- Engagement and Flow Activity
What has been most important in making this class successful?

Doing the individual presentations and getting feedback enables students to see the best in themselves.

Seeing the individual presentations enables students to learn to see the best in others.

Mentoring other students enables students to put into practice what they have learned with others.

Doing the group presentations builds teamwork, community, and creativity in using the strengths.

Doing and discussing the exercises provides a lab for learning what works best for them and different people.
Progression of Positive Psychology at UNM

Positive Psychology Lecture Course

Positive Psychology Lab Course

Positive Psychology Teaching Practicum
This includes 5-7 people who have had the lecture and fill out an application.

They are selected based on their GPA, how well they did in the class, the ability to work well with others, and their conscientiousness and GRIT.

They are each assigned approximately 33 students to learn their names, grade simple assignments, and work with throughout the semester.

They come to class and meet weekly with the instructor and grad TAs to discuss the class and improve it.
Why has the practicum been successful?

The students who become TAs are very interested in and engaged with positive psychology.

The class exercises lend themselves well to helping TAs to get to know and work with their students – e.g., writing about strengths, goals, good things.

TAs drawn on their own experience and creativity and that of their students to improve the class.

They value the opportunity to work with a group of students, get to know them, and help them learn about something that may really improve their lives.
Progression of Positive Psychology at UNM

Positive Psychology Lecture Course

Positive Psychology at the Movies

Positive Psychology Lab Course

Positive Psychology Teaching Practicum
Positive Psychology at the Movies

Positive psychology lecture and lab students receive extra credit.

The peer teaching assistants for the lecture class attend and help to run it.

There is a questionnaire about how the movie affects emotion and motivation.

There is a discussion about where how the movie illustrates positive psychology.

Friends and family members are invited and there is a potluck at the beginning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Times Shown</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invictus</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Will Hunting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life is Beautiful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King’s Speech</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>462</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre and Post Scores Across All Movies

- Happy
  - Pre: 6
  - Post: 7

- Inspired
  - Pre: 5
  - Post: 8

- Hopeful
  - Pre: 6
  - Post: 8

- Motivated
  - Pre: 6
  - Post: 9
Mean Effects Sizes Across All Movies

- **Inspired**: Large Effect
- **Motivated**: Medium Effect
- **Hopeful**: Medium Effect
- **Happy**: Small Effect
Progression of Positive Psychology at UNM

Positive Psychology Lecture Course
Prerequisite
Mentors
Positive Psychology at the Movies
Prerequisite
Assistants
Positive Psychology Lab Course
Positive Psychology Teaching Practicum
Students wanting more
Happiness and Positive Psychology Initiative (HAPPI)
Happiness and Positive Psychology Initiative

HAPPI is a new student group at the University of New Mexico.

Weekly meetings with programs that focus on different strengths and aspects of well-being.

There are fun and engaging activities to build community and find ways to increase well-being in the group.

There is outreach to the university and local community to increase well-being outside of the group.

Contact Moriah Fiebiger at mofie18@unm.edu
Happiness and Positive Psychology Initiative (HAPPI) is a new student group at the University of New Mexico. Weekly meetings feature programs that focus on different strengths and aspects of well-being. There are fun and engaging activities to build community and find ways to increase well-being in the group. Outreach to the university and local community is also done to increase well-being outside of the group.

Here is our best answer...

Or “Breaking Down Good”
Happiness Alliance of New Mexico

They lead efforts to better assess well-being and use the data to inform and influence public policy.

They have led a Happiness Awareness Week jointly sponsored with the positive psychology classes.

They have led efforts to assess and improve well-being in an Albuquerque neighborhood.

Members of the Happiness Alliance have attended and spoken at the positive psychology classes.

The positive psychology students and HAPPI members have become contributing members.

Contact Steve Poland at sfpoland@q.com
Outreach and Future Directions

**PATH Planning Process:** We have been engaged in a planning process called PATH that fits well with Rick Snyder’s HOPE theory.

**For College Students:** We have taught the Psychology of College Success for first generation students and other at-risk students.

**For High School and Middle School Students:** We have done strength-focused mentoring for high school students and plan to expand for at-risk students.

**For Mental Health Professionals:** We have presented on how we use positive psychology to improve well-being and are presenting on its effective use in psychotherapy.
So what have we done to try to bring positive psychology to New Mexico?

And provide the opportunity for people to take a different path...
Positive Psychology in the Land of Enchantment

Main Ingredients

1. Positive Psychology Lecture Course
2. Positive Psychology Lab Course
3. Positive Psychology Teaching Practicum
4. Positive Psychology at the Movies
5. Happiness and Positive Psychology Initiative
6. Happiness Alliance of New Mexico

Breaking (Down) Good
Thank You for Being Here

Correspondence concerning this presentation should be sent to Bruce W. Smith at bwsmith@unm.edu
The End