

Effective ePortfolios and Project-Based Learning Experiences:

The Impact of Life Coaching and Positive Psychology Interventions on Well-being and Retention in an Online Program

David Stefan, Ph.D., (David.Stefan@indwes.edu); Lindsay Buechel, M.A

As the field of higher education continues to evolve, academicians, instructors, and program developers also need to continually innovate as proactive agents ready to engage with ever-changing student interests, cultural demands, and societal needs.

E-Portfolios and Project-Based Learning Experiences are two tools highlighted in this session that higher education professionals can utilize to create meaningful, real-world learning experiences for students.

The online Master of Arts in Psychology program at Indiana Wesleyan University is featured in this workshop with special emphasis on the use of reflection journals, student-created TED-style talks, and program-length Capstone projects as practical applications for engaging students' imaginations and measuring effective learning.

David Stefan, Ph.D. and Lindsay Buechel, M.A.

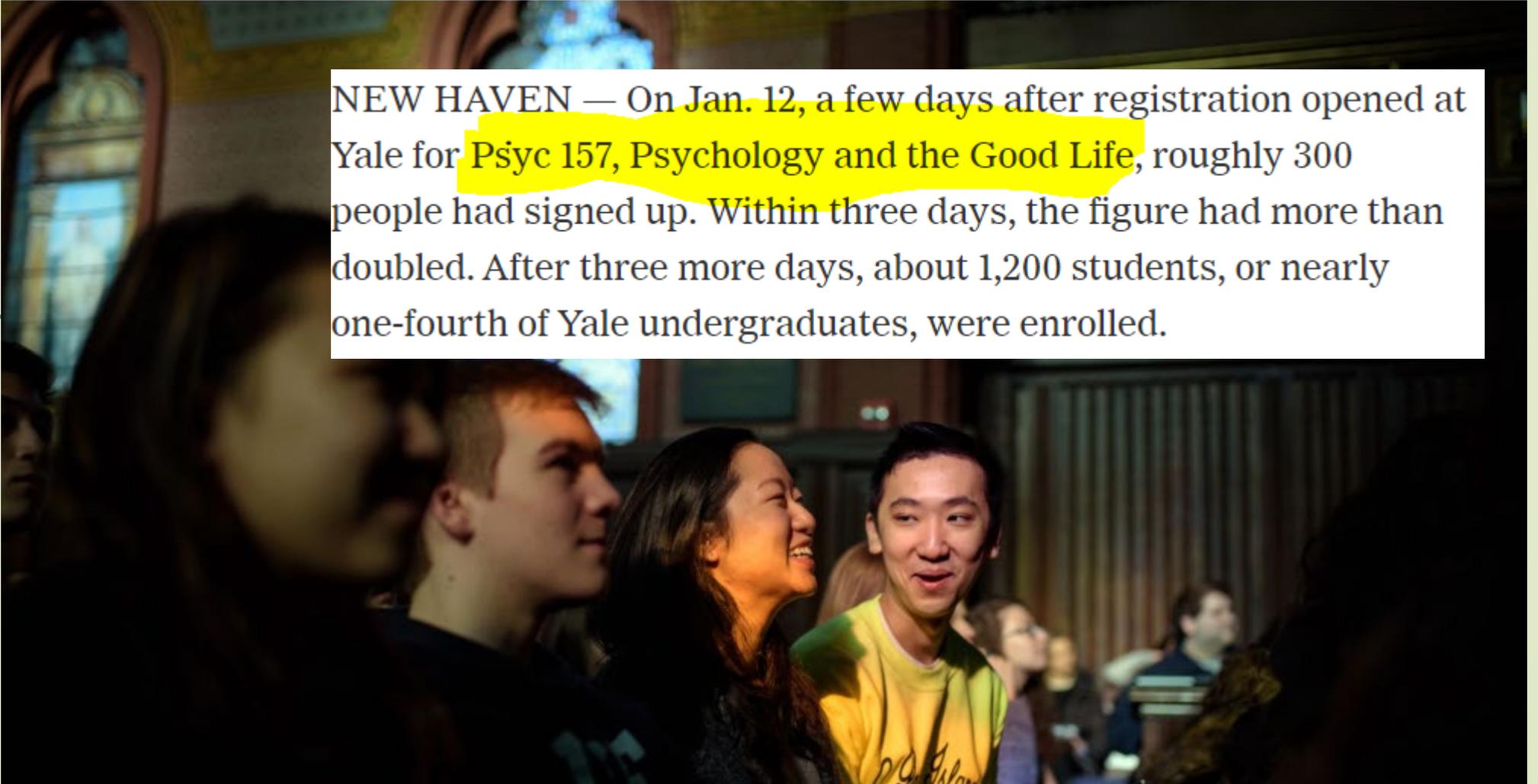


Setting Program (Lifelong) Learning Goals

- ▶ What do you want students to walk away with from your program(s)? If you could only pick two or three virtues, values, or principles that students could leave your program with, what would they be?
- ▶ I want **students to be curious**, to **develop a lifelong desire to learn**, and to acquire a set of skills and tools that helps them understand and **live the good life** (a life full of meaning, gratitude, resilience and connection).

Yale's Most Popular Class Ever: Happiness

NEW HAVEN — On Jan. 12, a few days after registration opened at Yale for **Psyc 157, Psychology and the Good Life**, roughly 300 people had signed up. Within three days, the figure had more than doubled. After three more days, about 1,200 students, or nearly one-fourth of Yale undergraduates, were enrolled.





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What is one way, perhaps the best way, to teach students what it means **to lead a curious life, to be a life-long learner, to have a good life?**

By example. They need to see and hear us **living lives of curiosity in pursuit of the good life.**

In light of this, let me share a bit more about my personal journey.

My Personal Journey in 2016 and 2017

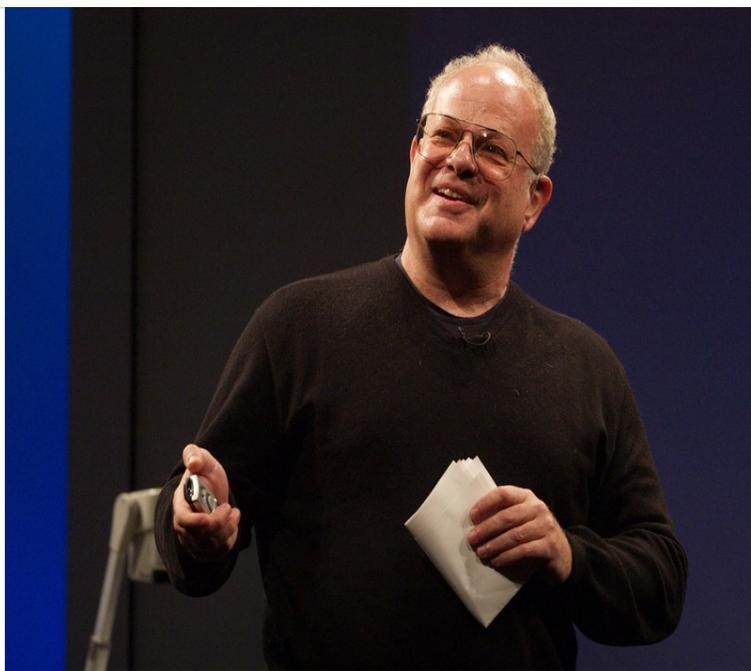
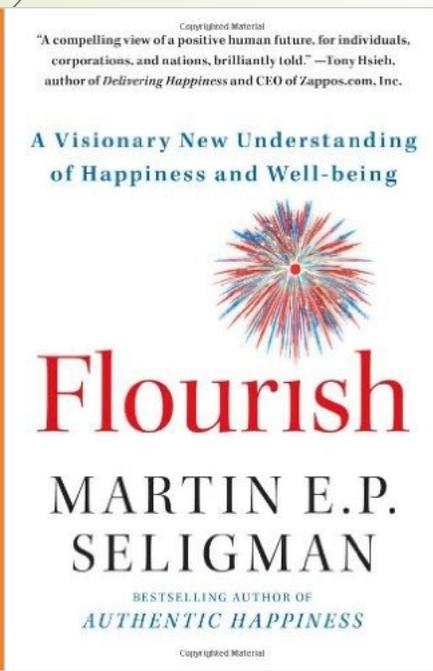
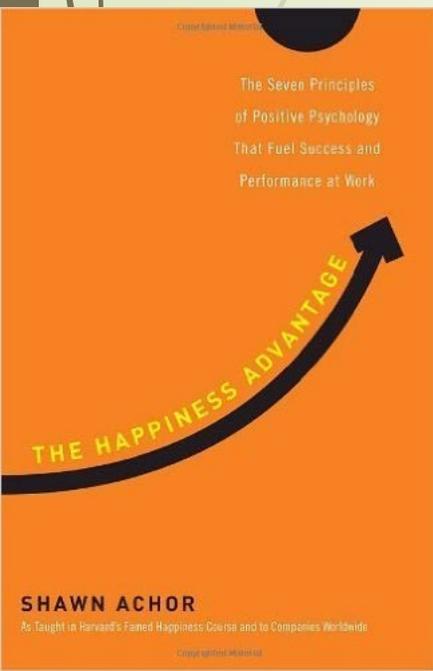
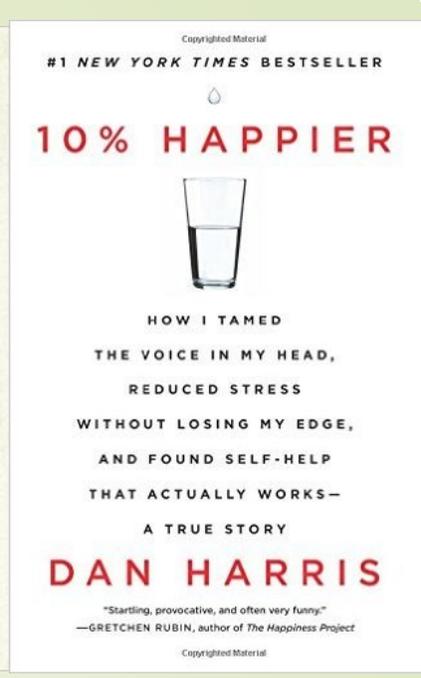
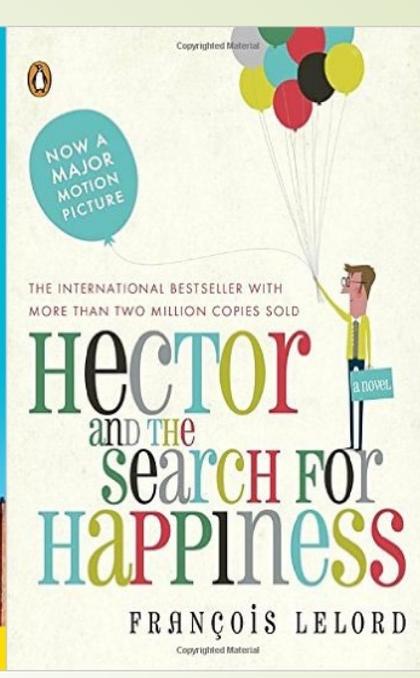
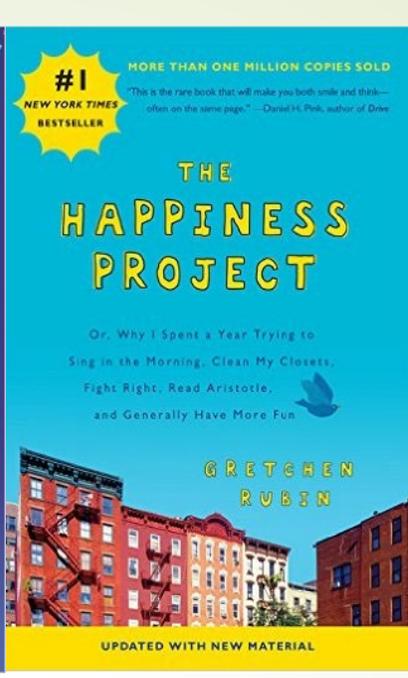
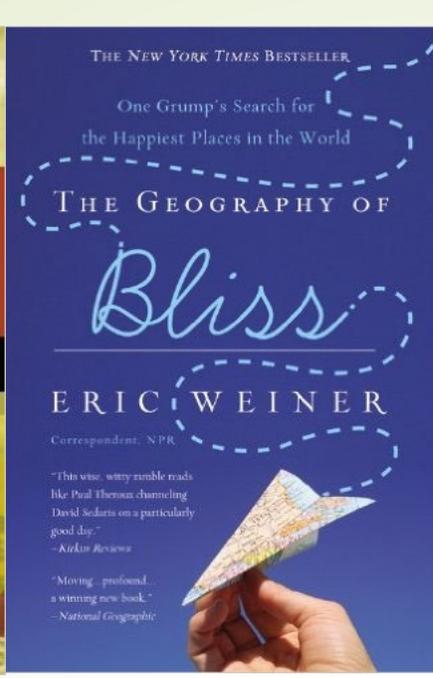
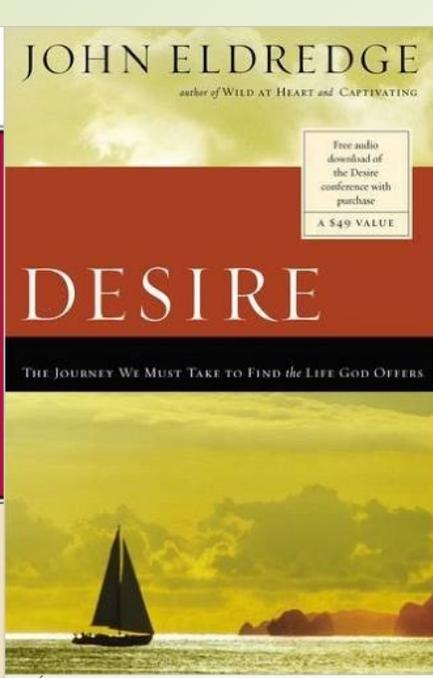
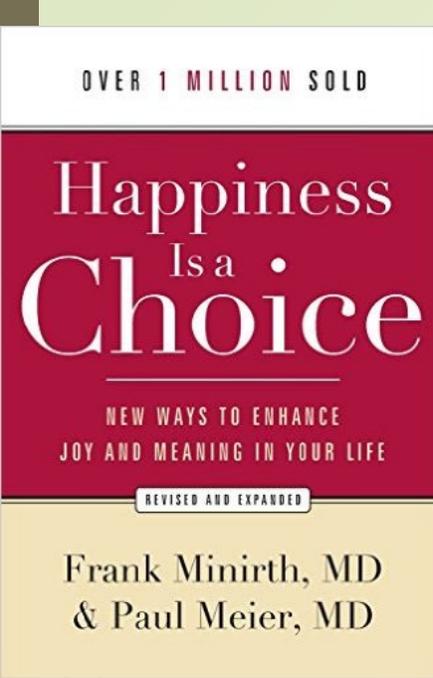


In 2016, I took a deeper dive into what the good life meant to me. This led me to also take a closer look at my relationships, and my own mental and emotional well-being.

I started reading and researching more in the field of positive psychology.



“Positive Psychology is the scientific study of what makes life worth living”
(Peterson, 2014).



PERMA: SELIGMAN'S WELL-BEING MODEL

- P-POSITIVE EMOTION
- E-ENGAGEMENT
- R-POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS
- M-MEANING AND PURPOSE
- A-ACHIEVEMENT



My Personal Journey in 2016 and 2017

As a result of my research in 2016, I developed a project I called **the Visit**.

Seligman and friends developed a tool called the VIA Inventory, which measured character strengths.

What are your top strengths?



Creativity



Curiosity



Judgement



Perspective



Bravery



Perseverance



Zest



Honesty



Social Intelligence



Kindness



Love



Leadership



Fairness



Teamwork



Forgiveness



Love of Learning



Gratitude



Spirituality



Kaufman investigated which 24 character strengths were most closely correlated to well-being...

What are your top strengths?



Which of these strengths do you think contribute the most to well-being?

What are your top strengths?

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Creativity | Curiosity | Judgement | Perspective | Bravery | Persistence |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zest | Honesty | Social Intelligence | Kindness | Love | Leadership |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fairness | Teamwork | Forgiveness | Love of Learning | Gratitude | Spirituality |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Self-Regulation | Humility | Appreciation of Beauty | Prudence | Hope | Humor |



“Out of all 24 character strengths, the only significant independent positive predictors of well-being were **gratitude and love of learning**” (Scientific American, 2015).

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A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being

Flourish

MARTIN E.P. SELIGMAN

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS*

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"IF YOU LIKED SHERYL SANDBERG'S LEAN IN... READ THE GRATITUDE DIARIES."
—*Time*

The GRATITUDE DIARIES

HOW A YEAR LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE CAN TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

JANICE KAPLAN

Book View Now

JANICE KAPLAN
The Gratitude Diaries: How a Year Looking on the Bright Side Transformed My Life



The Gratitude Visit Research



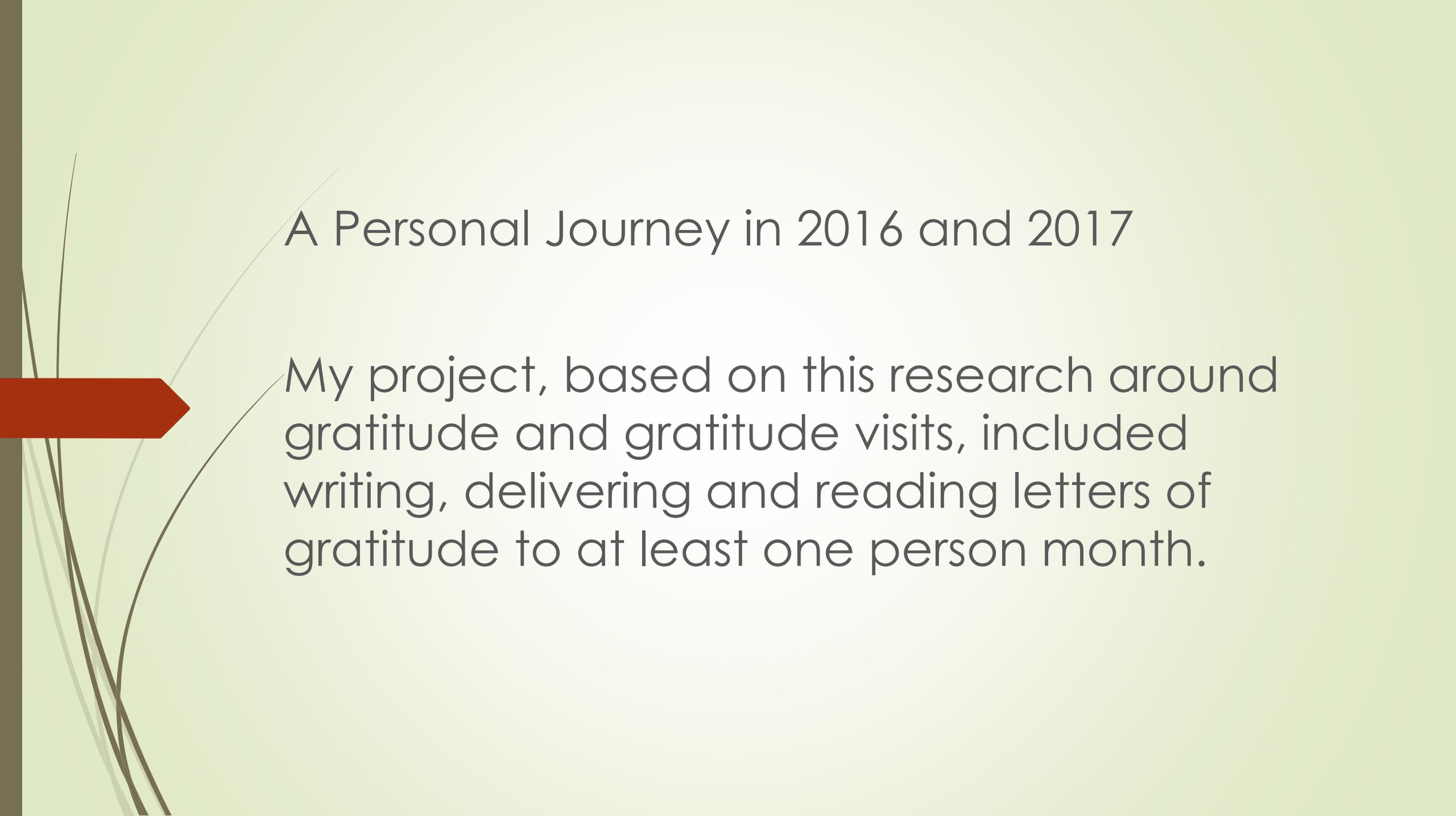
Research from Martin Seligman's positive psychology laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania has shown that gratitude visits can help improve well-being.

Seligman et al. (2005) report in their article "Positive Psychology Interventions": "**gratitude visits, caused large positive changes for one month**" (p. 416).



“One of the most effective ways to deepen your own gratefulness is to write a letter of gratitude to an important person in your life whom you’ve never properly taken the time to thank and then visit that person to present him or her with the letter....

Studies published in the most rigorous scientific publications show that the gratitude visit can increase happiness and decrease depression in the letter writer for as long as three months after the visit.”
(Emmons, 2013).



A Personal Journey in 2016 and 2017

My project, based on this research around gratitude and gratitude visits, included writing, delivering and reading letters of gratitude to at least one person month.



Consider someone that has impacted you that you haven't properly thanked.

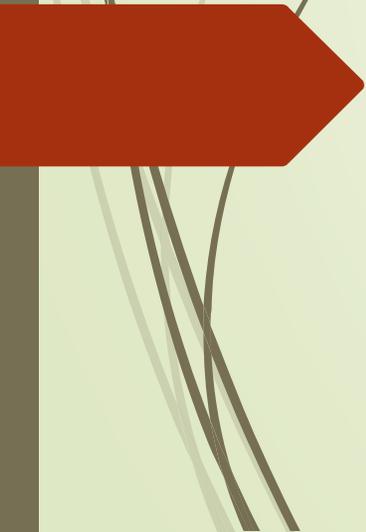
Write a few words of thanks about that individual in the comments.



Emmons (2013) affirms that gratitude has one of the **strongest connections to well-being and life satisfaction even when compared to other positive virtues, including even optimism or compassion.**

Allen (2018) suggests that **gratitude is “the mother of all virtues’** by encouraging the development of other virtues such as patience, humility, and wisdom” (p. 8).

How does this relate to ePortfolios and Project Based Learning Experiences?



What led us on this rabbit trail?

What is one way, perhaps the best way, to teach students what it means **to lead a curious life, to be a life-long learner, to have a good life?**



By example. They need to see and hear us **living lives of curiosity in pursuit of the good life.**

MA in Psychology program with specializations in Life Coaching and Positive Psychology and Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Overview

- ▶ **The Master of Arts in Psychology**, with specializations in Life Coaching and Positive Psychology or Industrial and Organizational Psychology, is designed to train students in the history, theory and research methods of psychology from a Christian faith perspective. **Our program promotes not only development as a competent and ethical professional, but also encourages students to grow in all aspects of their lives, including work, health and relationships.**



MA Program Learning Outcomes

Upon the complete of this program, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the development of the field of psychology over time.
2. Demonstrate a professional identity through acts of service based upon current research in a specialization of psychology.
3. Integrate theoretical models of human bio-psychosocial and spiritual development with the concepts of flourishing.
4. Create a theoretical model of personality development and social interaction.
5. Describe the spectrum of mental health and well-being from both a traditional psychopathology and positive psychology perspectives.
- 6. Apply the principles of positive psychology to promote human flourishing.**



Three Key Program Assessments

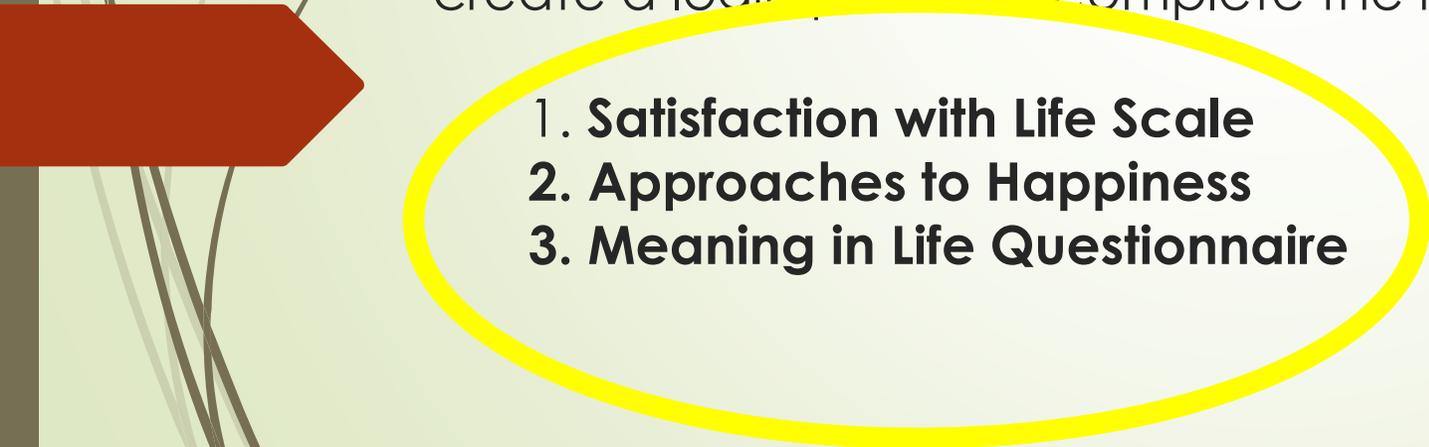
1. **Personal Reflection Journal** (captured in each course throughout the program)
2. **TED-Style Talk** (developed over the length of the program and presented in final course)
3. **Capstone Creative Project** (a personal or professional project related to life coaching and positive psychology and developed over the length of the program)

1. Key Assessment – Personal Reflection Journal Assignment Example

Week One - Assignment 2.5: Gratitude Visit Pre-tests

Complete three inventories on the Authentic Happiness website ([Authentic Happiness.](#))

Scroll down to the bottom of the page and look for Meaning in Life Questionnaire. Click on link to the right that says, Take Test. You will have to create a login profile to complete the inventory.

- 
1. Satisfaction with Life Scale
 2. Approaches to Happiness
 3. Meaning in Life Questionnaire

1. Key Assessment - Personal Reflection Journal Assignment Example

Week 4 - Assignment 4.4: Gratitude Letter Writing and Visit

Go to the Greater Good in Action website: [How to Write a Gratitude Letter](#). Review the Gratitude Letter section on How to Do It.

Write at least a 250 to 300 word letter of gratitude. You will need to schedule a time to meet with this individual before the end of workshop 5 and then **personally deliver the message of gratitude and report on it in the Workshop Five.**

Schedule a time to meet with this individual over the next week so you have time to meet with them, **read the letter to them face-to-face** and write a report on your experience by the end of workshop 5

1. Key Assessment - Personal Reflection Journal Assignment Example

Week 5 - Assignment 5.2: Post-tests and The Gratitude Visit Reflection

Retake three inventories: Satisfaction with Life Scale, Approaches to Happiness, and Meaning in Life Questionnaire.

Report on any significant differences you noticed between the first and second taking of the three questionnaires.

1. Key Assessment - Personal Reflection Journal “The Good Life Synthesis Paper”

The Good Life Synthesis Paper Outline

1. Provide a Title Page
2. Introduce your Synthesis Paper (1/2 to 1 page)
3. Reflect on and summarize major learnings from your “Personal Reflection Journal” (1 to 2 pages)
4. Identify three to five major concepts or themes related to what the Good Life means to you (3 pages)
 - a. Reference your Personal, TED-Style Talk and Capstone Reflection Journals
 - b. Cite at least 10 relevant positive psychology resources from your previous research in the foundation or specialization courses or from new sources
 - c. Support your Good Life ideas with spiritual formation principles, personal faith experiences, and biblical concepts
5. Write a concluding paragraph (1/2 to 1 page)
6. Include a Reference Page



Lindsay Buechel Response

Good Life Synthesis Paper – What does the Good Life mean to you?

Purpose

Life purpose impacts our well-being in terms of our physical health as well as our mental health. In one study, it was concluded that having a low sense of life purpose correlated with high hostility, resulting in blood pressure issues indicatively predicting cardiovascular disease (Mezick et al., 2010). Of course, this is just one example of how our physical health is impacted by our sense of purpose.

Mezick, E. J., Matthews, K. A., Hall, M., Kamarck, T. W., Strollo, P. J., Buysse, D. J., ... Reis, S. E. (2010, March). Low life purpose and high hostility are related to an attenuated decline in nocturnal blood pressure. *Health Psychology, 29*(2), 196-204. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017790>

Forgiveness → Happiness

When I think of what a 'good life' entails, I immediately think of happiness. Studies have shown that when we practice forgiveness, this can lower anxiety, depression, and hostility, as well as reduce our chances of substance abuse and raise our self-esteem ("The power of forgiveness," 2019). The overall benefits of forgiveness certainly lean toward a life filled with more happiness than bitterness.

The power of forgiveness. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/the-power-of-forgiveness>

Encouragement

Encouragement and support are important and necessary in our relationships with others and equally beneficial for child development (Romano, n.d.). The benefits of giving others encouragement can be felt by the encourager as well. Studies have shown that giving encouragement can increase energy to complete objectives, give hope when we are at our lowest, it helps change perspectives, restore self-confidence, and build self-esteem (Santiago, n.d.). I can attest to feeling these benefits when it comes to my capstone project.

Santiago, M. (n.d.). The benefits of encouragement. Retrieved from <https://www.energize.com/the-benefits-of-encouragement/>

Romano, L. (n.d.). What are the benefits of encouragement? Retrieved from <https://oureverydaylife.com/benefits-encouragement-5534751.html>



2. Key Assessment - TED-Style Talk Final Draft

- ▶ **Instructions**

- ▶ Keep in mind that your finished TED-style talk should be a minimum of 15-20 minutes in length, which is the average for most TED-Talks.

- ▶ **While you don't have to do a traditional TED-Talk, there does need to be a narrated component in your talk, podcast, voice-over PowerPoint, or some other creative multi-media presentation.**

Apple Podcasts Preview



3 episodes

The Working Mom's Balance Podcast is aimed at helping you increase your happiness, find meaning and purpose for your life, improve your health, and teach you practical time management skills to get more done in less time.

Tune in each week as Tracy Kulwicki, wife, mom, full-time employee, and life coach shares inspiration and motivation gleaned from the field of

The Working Mom's Balance Podcast with Tracy Kulwicki

Tracy Kulwicki

Self-Improvement

★★★★★ 4.8 • 4 Ratings

[Listen on Apple Podcasts ↗](#)

OCT 23, 2020

2. How to Live a Happy Life

What do we mean when we talk about living a happy life? A truly happy life is not just focused on pleasure and happy feelings all the time. A life that is satisfying is one that is filled with meaning and purpose. In this episode, we talk about the different levels of happiness we can experience and

[▶ PLAY](#) 17 min

OCT 16, 2020

1. A Better Life is Possible

You can live a happier and more enjoyable life. Today's working moms are overwhelmed, exhausted, and stressed out. But the good life is possible, even in the midst of difficult life circumstances. In this episode, we talk more about what an abundant and satisfying life looks like and how you can begin to make the

[▶ PLAY](#) 17 min



Lindsay Buechel Response

What was the format and subject of your TED Style Talk?

TED Talk Animation

from indiana wesleyan University, Pearson LearningStudio, PST-520 classroom.

REFERENCES



3. Key Assessment - Capstone Creative Component

With a capstone emphasis in each course, you will explore an area of personal passion and professional interest in both specializations that you will develop and implement in a culminating project.

Core Courses

- [PSY-520 Lifespan Development 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-525 Theories of Personality Development 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-530 History and Systems of Psychology 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-535 Research Methods in Psychology 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-540 Psychopathology and Emerging Trends 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-545 Foundations of Interviews and Interventions 3 Hours](#)

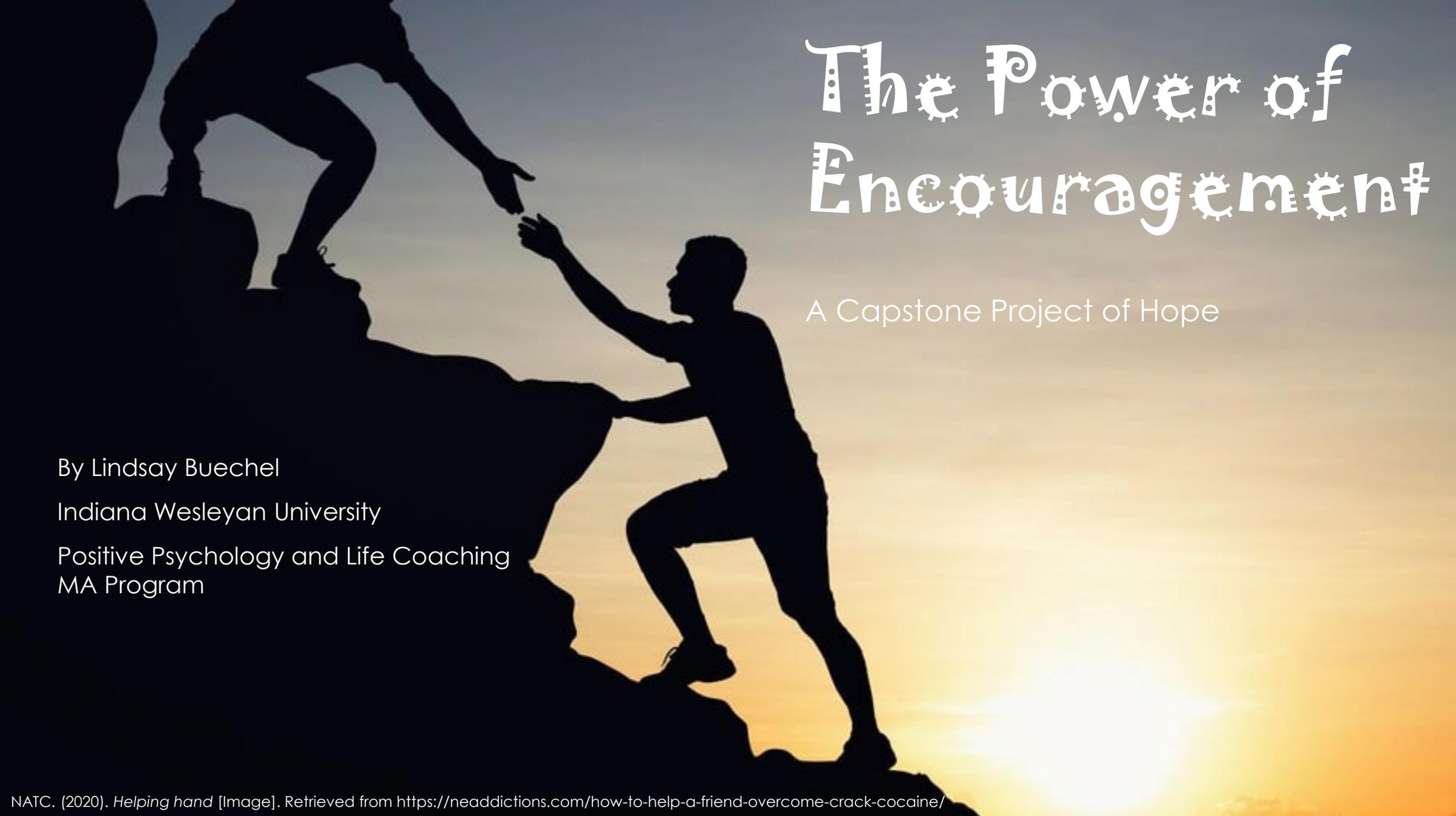
Specialization in Positive Psychology Courses

- [PSY-561 Research in Positive Psychology and Life Coaching 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-562 Positive Psychology, Life Coaching, and Christian Formation 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-563 Life Coaching and Positive Psychology 3 Hours](#)
- [PSY-590 Capstone in Psychology](#)



Lindsay Buechel Response

What was your Capstone Creative Project?

The background of the slide features a silhouette of three people climbing a rocky mountain. One person is at the top, another is in the middle, and a third is at the bottom, reaching up to help the middle person. The scene is set against a bright, glowing sunset or sunrise sky. The title text is positioned in the upper right quadrant.

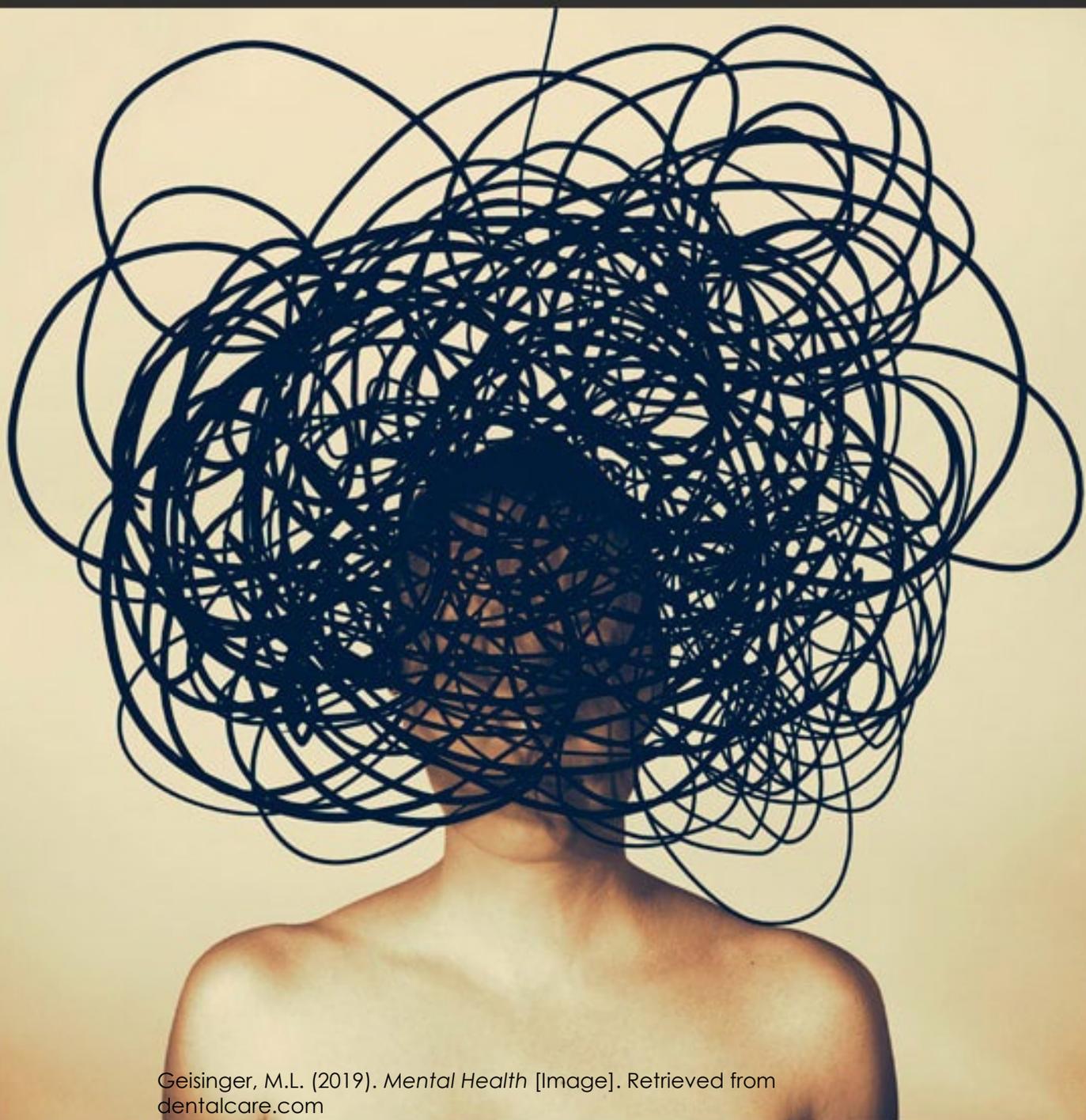
The Power of Encouragement

A Capstone Project of Hope

By Lindsay Buechel

Indiana Wesleyan University

Positive Psychology and Life Coaching
MA Program



Geisinger, M.L. (2019). *Mental Health* [Image]. Retrieved from dentalcare.com

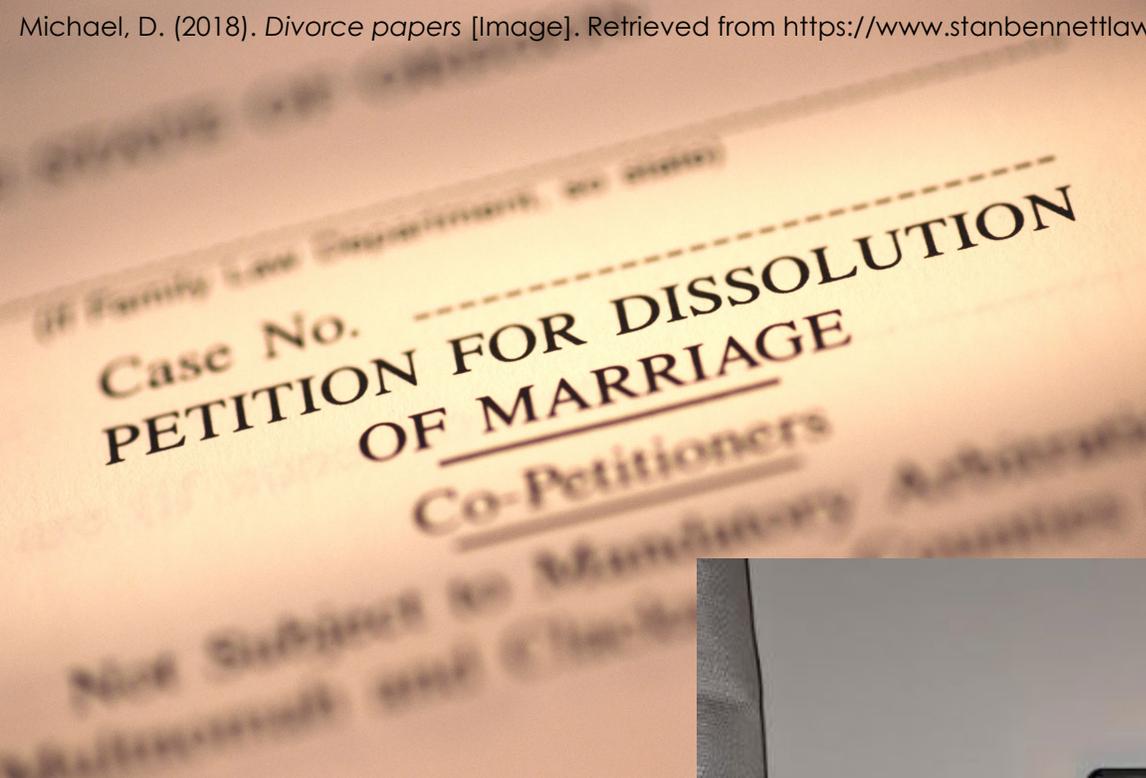
Prior to the pandemic, people were already suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

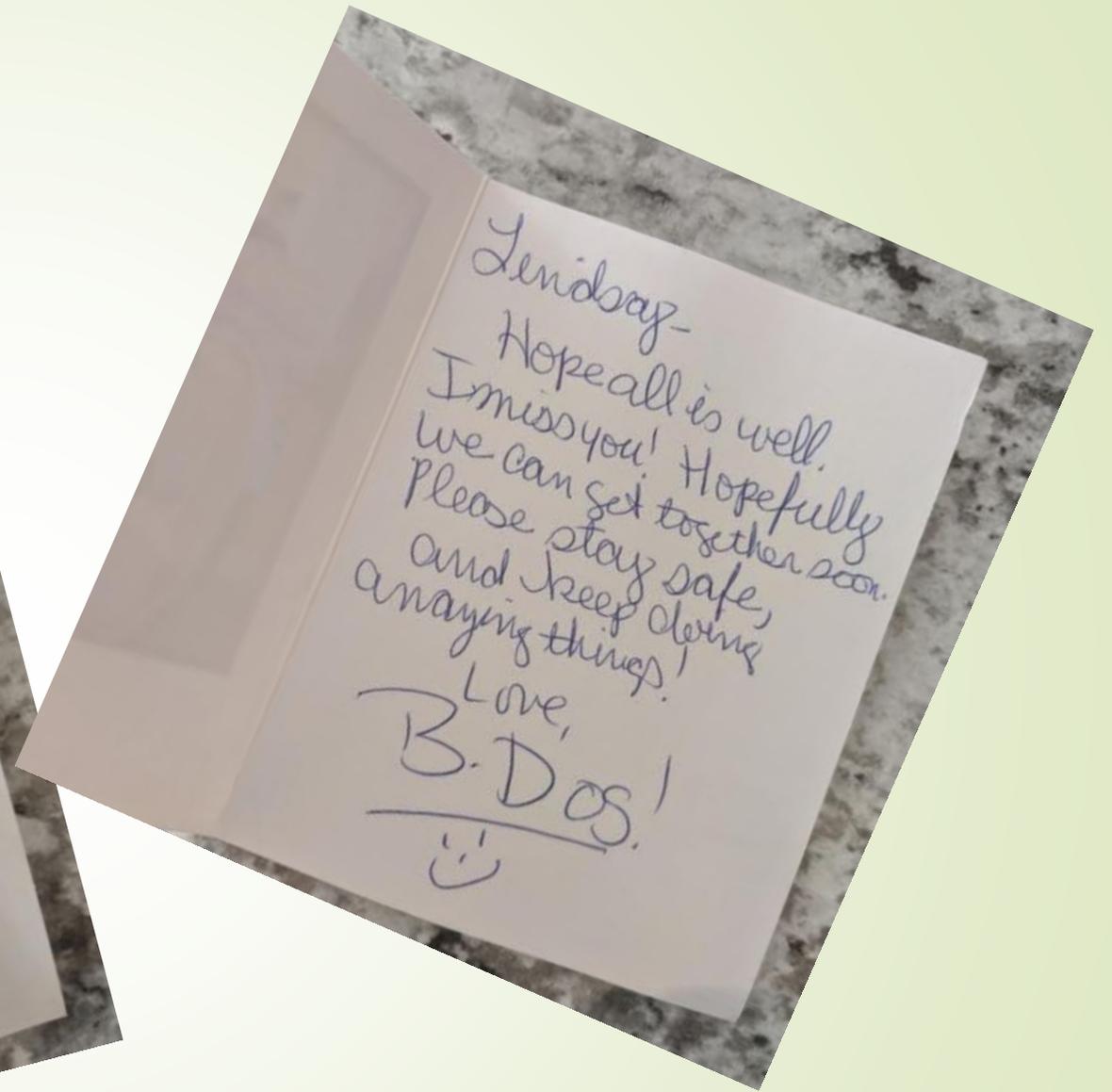
The pandemic exacerbated these conditions in those already suffering and created these issues for many others.

70% of Americans say the economy is a significant source of stress (up from 46% last year). Americans displaying clinical signs of depression, anxiety, or both, since the pandemic, has risen to 1/3 and 55% of Americans with financial hardship.

“The long-term psychological consequences of collective traumas can last a decade or more” (Beheshti, 2020, p. 1).

Beheshti, N. (2020). *10 Eye-opening statistics on the mental health impact of the coronavirus pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2020/05/28/10-eye-opening-statistics-on-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic/#252f51812df0>









← Search

project I had in mind incorporating Positive Psychology in Education. I have since changed direction and need all the help I can get! Because of the lockdown, I understand a lot of people are going through a really tough time financially, educationally, emotionally, and mentally. I am wanting to focus on the emotional and mental part. For my project, I want to write a minimum of 100 letters and cards and send them to people who need a bit of encouragement and prayer. It may only be for a brief moment, maybe a little pick-me-up if you will, but it will at least spread hope and happiness to those who really need it most. If you know someone that is struggling and in need of prayer and/or a letter/card with words of encouragement, can you please private message me their name and address so I can send them a card? I know putting addresses out there is risky business, but I can assure you that once the letter goes out, I will destroy/delete the information immediately. I honestly just want to send as many letters/card to people that need it. No personal information will be used in the project paper that will follow once the project is completed. I would also be happy to send you the results of the project and the corresponding paper that highlights the project and the corresponding information (not personal info) once finished.

I sure would appreciate any and all help with this project. It would really mean a lot to me! Thanks all! Feel free to share the post as well to reach as many as possible so we can all take part in spreading joy!



I would like a card for my 17 yr old daughter. She is a Junior in High scho and is doing her Capstone Research Project on a similar topic. She is stressed about this taking away her research time as well.

~~USA~~
~~USA~~
~~USA~~

USA
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR WHAT YOU ARE DOING!

Absolutely! I would love to send her a letter and boost her spirits!

She has bad depression since she had cancer removed from her leg, and it messed up her back to the point she can no longer work and is in constant pain. I know she would love to get some extra encouragement. She's going to women's camp this fall, and is nervous she doesn't know anyone. Thanks for spreading the positivity.



She has an autoimmune disease and is already fragile. She has been to camp and is in my bible study. This is awesome

APR 16 AT 6:28 PM

I think this is an amazing, important thing you're doing! ❤️. I could definitely use all of the prayer and encouragement I can get. Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness it is very difficult to reach out for help. I suffer from Bipolar 2 disorder, PTSD, depression and anxiety and unable to work. My husband is an essential worker, with co morbidity's to the virus and works commission,so he isn't eligible for unemployment. We found out that he would be making substantially more on unemployment at this time. I struggle with the fact that others have it much worse, but have been told not to minimize my problems. Sorry this is so long. Thanks for reading. My address is

Could you make it to my daughter dejah whos not understanding the lock down mode... And misses her fiends (should you need us) ... She loves labyrinth as well so seeing a little character and a card with good vibes would make her day. ❤️ 🌍

Thank you for your hard efforts and best wishes with post master

I love the idea I would love to include my son for that he is a 15 yr old who is autistic bipolar mood disorder oppositional defiant disorder anxiety depression and panic attacks. I am a single mom his dad is in jail he hadn't seen him since 2014. With all of this I lost both my jobs no income etc. he does not do well with change and With all of this going on there has been alot of that. He could use a push me up right about now if you haven't filled all your slots. Let me know

WHY?

- **Studies have shown that there are amazing benefits to both the giver and the receiver when it comes to support and encouragement. It gives us hope, revitalizes us, helps shift our perspectives and world views, boosts self-confidence, helps people succeed, and builds self-esteem (Santiago, 2017).**

Santiago, M. (2017). *The benefits of encouragement*. Retrieved from <https://www.energize.com/the-benefits-of-encouragement/>





The path of the just is in the shining light.
Proverbs 1:18

WHEN GOD WAS MAKING HEARTS
HE BLESSED YOURS TWICE
BECAUSE WHEN YOU COME RIGHT DOWN TO IT
YOU ARE doubly nice.

Hey Sister ☺ It's so cool to still get real letters.
Especially from you! Hope you are also doing very well too
and Love you.
Love
Lindsay



Thank you
So much for the card.
I truly appreciate it.
I can't wait for
Woman's Camp.

Thank you
So much
Vonda

P.O. Box 685
Independence, KY
41051



GRIT
Firmness of character, indomitable spirit, toughness and resolution, unyielding courage in the face of hardship or danger.

Grace
Freely given unmerited favor and mercy, moral strength, a disposition of generosity and kindness, favor rendered even when you need not do so.
#gritandgracelife

Dear Lindsay,
Thank you so much for your sweet card and words of encouragement, they came at the perfect time! God is good! Praying that you and your family find peace in all of this chaos knowing full well that He has great plans in store for you guys. ♡

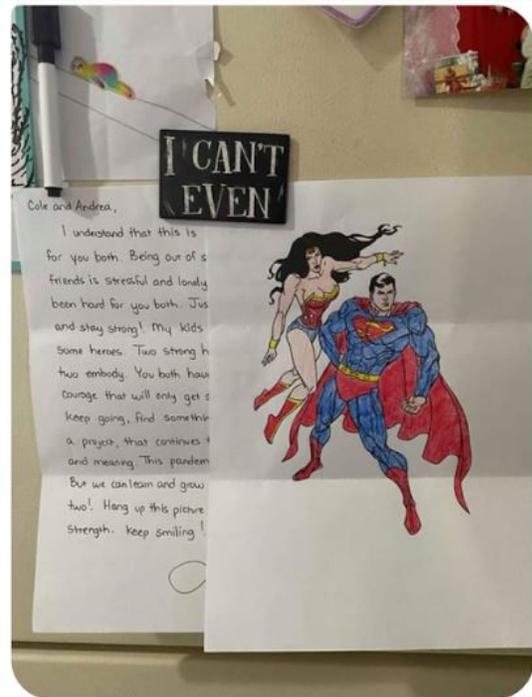
Love,
Rebecca & Elizabeth Taylor

Lindsay Buschel
P.O. Box 685
Independence, KY
41051

Lindsay Buschel
P.O. Box 685
Independence, KY

6:47 PM

Thank you so much for sending the letter!!! My daughter asked me if we could hang them on the refrigerator.



7:27 PM

Your kindness really made a difference in my day! I'm going to find a way to pass this on. I will thank God for this blessing, and you, for being the messenger.

Thank you so much! I am super thrilled about it and want to spread hope and happiness as far as possible to as many as possible! Thanks for your help and I will get a card to her 😊

You can now call each other and see information like Active Status and when you've read messages.

4:01 PM

Hey there! I just wanted to share this with you - my mom posted it to her FB a little while ago.



"A couple of weeks ago I received a card in the mail with wonderful inspirational words written inside! My heart was touched. Then I realized I don't know who signed it! So I did what most would do. I Facebook stalked...and this person sends cards out from people that request her to- so half of the mystery was solved. I just want to reach out and say whoever did this touched my soul! The day I received it was a low day for me and I thank you! I am truly blessed!"

Active Now

vibes would make her day. ❤️ 🌈

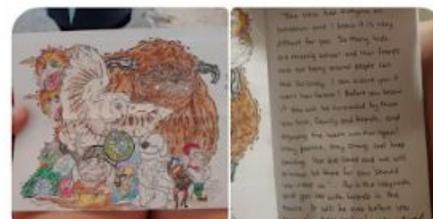
Thank you for your hard efforts and best wishes with post master

Absolutely! I will add her as well. Thank you ever so much!!!!

You can now call each other and see information like Active Status and when you've read messages.

Thank you as well.

9:10 PM



Thank you she loved it. And was so excited to get mail ❤️ your awesome





Helping [Image]. Retrieved from buzzle.com

St John, S. (2012). Hope in the rain [Image]. Retrieved from <https://nicaragua.adventures.org/>





3. Key Assessment - Capstone Creative Project (Comprehensive Report)

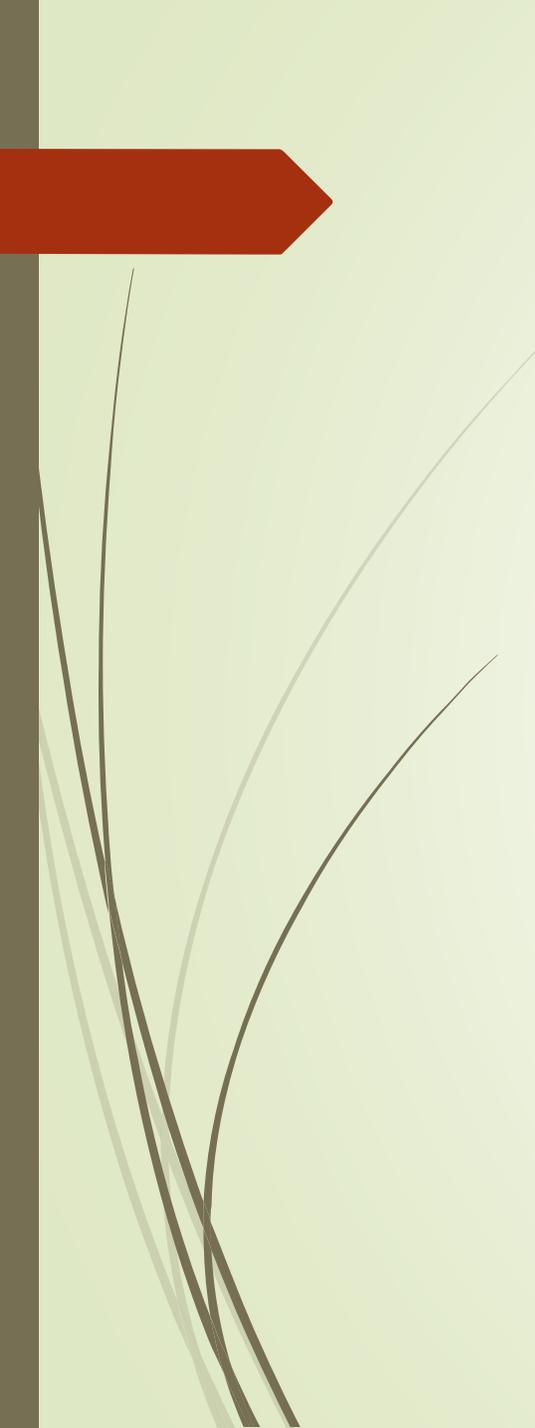
Comprehensive Report

Use the following as an outline. Your paper needs to be written in a scholarly format according to APA guidelines, with a title page, an introduction, clear, brief section headings (but not copied and pasted sentences from this outline), a conclusion and a reference page for sources you are citing.

Your writing should be clear and original. Do not simply cut and paste whole sections of previously written material into your comprehensive report. Instead, paraphrase information from other sources you may have written during the course. You can refer to previous journals and papers from the program and this course, but make sure this report flows as a stand-alone paper separate from any other previous work that you've done.

Report Sections:

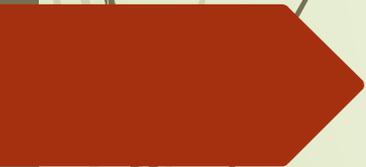
1. An opening statement about your personal and professional background and what led you to the point of starting the MA in Psychology program. (1 page)
2. Reflective Summary (2 pages)
 - a) Identify key lessons learned while in the program.
 - b) Summarize what the Good Life means to you.
 - c) How do you hope to continue to apply the personal, positive psychology and spiritual formation principles from this course in your own life moving

- 
3. TED-Style Talk (2 pages)
 - a) Summarize your TED-Style Talk content.
 - b) Reflect on the experience of creating the talk.
 - c) Discuss the feedback you received from others and what you need to do to improve it for final production.
 - d) How might you use the TED-style talk in the future (e.g. to promote your business as a Life Coach or I/O consultant, refine it further for submission to a TED or TEDx conference, turn it into an article or book, etc...)

 4. Capstone Creative Project (3 pages)
 - a) Provide a summary of your Capstone Creative project; introduce and explain the purpose of your project.
 - b) Write about the history of the project; what did you originally think about doing in the foundation courses and how did it evolve?
 - c) Identify key results, findings, and lessons learned.
 - d) Evaluate the success of the project. Write about the pros and cons of implementation.
 - e) Recommend next steps for moving forward with your project; what would you like to do with your project in the future?

 5. Odyssey Plans (1-2 pages)
 - a) Refer to your Odyssey Plan from PSY-520. Pick one of the three options/plans you created and write about your life and/or career trajectory for the next five years.
 - b) Identify obstacles that might come up and how you might handle them.
 - c) If everything goes according to plan, even anticipating the obstacles and challenges, where would you like to be in five years?

 6. Conclusion (1 page)
 - a) Write a concluding section about your experience in the program.



Thank You

David.Stefan@indwes.edu

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David Stefan, Ph.D. and Lindsay Buechel, M.A.