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**A Guide to Incorporating Social-Emotional Learning in the College Classroom:
Busting Anxiety, Boosting Ability**



Kristel M. Gallagher, Ph.D.
Thiel College

Shevaun L. Stocker, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin – Superior

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Authors' Contact Information:

Kristel M. Gallagher, Ph.D.
75 College Avenue
Greenville, PA 16125
Phone: (724) 589-2070
Email: kgallagher@thiel.edu

Shevaun L. Stocker, Ph.D.
P.O. Box 2000, Belknap & Catlin
Superior, WI 54880
Phone: (715) 394-8423
Email: sstocker@uwsuper.edu

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SECTION 1 – Overview of the Manual

“The best teachers are those who show you where to look, but don’t tell you what to see.”
– Alexandra K. Trenfor

In higher education, it is a rare opportunity that we get the chance to guide our students in the process of self-discovery through meaningful personal and social experiences. However, you are probably here because you, like us, feel that the fact that this is a rare opportunity is actually a *missed* opportunity. Incorporating social-emotional learning in the college classroom is about showing students where to look to find meaning and purpose in their lives, but allowing them to discover what that meaning and purpose looks like on their own terms. Further, we know that targeting the wellbeing of our students implicitly benefits their academic endeavors. We designed the “SuccEssfuL in ...” program to accomplish this task – guiding our students in the self-discovery process so that they can be successful both in and out of the classroom.

As you will notice, our program was conducted in our statistics courses, earning it the title of the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program (abbreviated to ‘SEL’ when discussing with our students, hence the capitalized ‘E’ and ‘L’ in ‘SuccEssfuL’). However, as you will soon discover, we designed this program with generalizability in mind. So whether you are thinking about a “SuccEssfuL in Biology”, “SuccEssfuL in History”, or perhaps even a more general “SuccEssfuL in College” program, this manual has something for you. The real value of social-emotional learning extends far beyond any specific classroom or discipline. It is no accident that our “SuccEssfuL in...” program was known by our students in class as just the “SEL Program” – we sought to explicitly tie social-emotional learning to the foundation of our program. We were also struck by alignment of the term ‘successful’ with not only the ability to use the SEL abbreviation due to the letters appearing in the word, but also by the implicit messaging to students: the SEL program is to help you in being successful in this class. Thus, regardless of whether SEL stands for social-emotional learning or as an abbreviation of ‘successful’, the abbreviation reinforces at least one element of the program.

The purpose of this manual is to help you begin to think about the ways in which you can incorporate social-emotional learning into your courses. We begin by providing you with relevant background research in social-emotional learning, including a discussion of why you should consider incorporating social-emotional learning practices in the classroom. Specifically, we detail the connection between social-emotional learning and important academic outcomes, such as academic buoyancy and anxiety-reduction. We then describe our own “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program, including an appendix that contains the full set of program materials. Next, we discuss our empirical assessment of the efficacy of the program and provide comments from our students who have completed the program. We also provide our thoughts about, and suggestions for, the implementation of possible variations of our program (spoiler alert: we are all for it!). Finally, we provide a list of recommended readings and our contact information, both of which we suggest you take advantage of as you move forward in your journey. We believe in this program, and importantly in the value of social-emotional learning in the college classroom. *Welcome aboard!*

SECTION 2 – Introduction

Who are we?

As social psychologists, our disciplinary work focuses on exploring why people think, feel, and behave the way they do while in *everyday* situations. In developing a set of practices to target a shared teaching dilemma (how to enable optimal cognitive functioning when students' thoughts, feelings, or behaviors may be undermining that), we were frequently cognizant of the fact that neither of us are trained as practitioners. However, in the end, it has actually been a strength of the program – while many of the practices may have initially emerged and were tested in the field of clinical psychology, this iteration of the practices do not require that level of training to understand or implement. Thus, as non-clinicians, we were able to confirm that these are generalizable to you, other educators in all types of disciplines who are looking for a way to improve your students' experience and learning.

Why did we create this program?

The initial impetus for seeking effective teaching solutions came from hearing students describe their negative self-talk, their frustration, and their anxieties with a specific course – Statistics for the Social Sciences, which we both teach. Most undergraduate programs in the social sciences require some degree of quantitative literacy for students in the major; these are often the very same students who say that they want to get a social science degree to *avoid* math and science (clearly, we have a lot of education to do with the general public about the very important role of science in the social sciences!). Thus, we have a population of students who may have real doubts about their ability to be successful in the class, who may have had negative experiences in previous math courses, or who may just be experiencing significant life stressors.

We were both concerned about the level of anxiety that students bring to the classroom, recognizing the negative impact it has on cognitive performance. We have spent years trying various things to aid students, adjusting the content we cover, the assessment strategies we employ, and the atmosphere we establish in the course. While those endeavors reached some students and had some positive impact, neither of us were sufficiently satisfied with the breadth and depth of influence on student learning.

In short, we know that our students have complicated, sometimes challenging lives. We also know that students often minimize their abilities and engage in negative self-talk around their academic performance. We believe our program's efficacy will generalize to any academic discipline or life situation – it was just the particular concern we had about this academic matter that prompted the development of our “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program. We look forward to hearing about all the different fields in which you apply this information to your own “SuccEssfuL in... ” program!

SECTION 3 – Background

In this section, we aim to both satisfy your curiosity and provide you with information about the theoretical constructs that formed the foundation for the “SuccEssfuL (SEL) in...” program. We begin by describing a somewhat newer term, *academic buoyancy*, that offered us a unique framework for the development of our program. Of course, we also more fully describe social-emotional learning (SEL) as it is the basis for our program activities, and discuss the empirical evidence for the importance of incorporating SEL in the classroom. Finally, this section will help you understand how incorporating SEL-building activities into your course can boost academic buoyancy by reducing students’ levels of anxiety.

What is academic buoyancy?

Before settling on academic buoyancy as the conceptual fit for what we wanted to target in our “SuccEssfuL in...” program, we were focused on the more well-known notions of grit and resilience. In recent years, it seems much focus and attention has been given to exploring concepts such as grit and resilience as predictors of academic performance and persistence. These serve as dispositional explanations for how students may be able to rise above major upheavals in their lives and continue to thrive in the face of significant negative stressors. Grit is seen as the trait of having passion and persistence for attaining a particular goal (Duckworth, 2016). Resilience, then, is the ability to overcome significant setbacks or challenges to attaining those goals and is often viewed as a constellation of personality traits such as optimism, hardiness, and self-control, though the specific traits that make it up are not always agreed upon (Ryff & Singer, 2003).

We initially explored both grit and resilience as being the key outcomes that we were trying to effect change in, with the SEL activities. However, the ‘fit’ was never quite right; while students who have grit are likely to persist with more dedication to their studies, we do not expect that all students will have passion for all of their subjects, equally. And while resilience should be associated with rebounding more productively from challenging feedback on their coursework or struggling to master a theory or skill in a class, as a concept it was really established to describe how we respond to major life events, rather than the more ‘typical’ or daily hassles of homework or poor grades.

Eventually, our exploration of the literature lead us to the concept of academic buoyancy. Almost immediately, this seemed to be a far more accurate portrayal of the type of impact we were attempting to engender with the project. Martin and Marsh (2008) describe academic buoyancy as ‘everyday academic resilience’ and define it as “the capacity to overcome setbacks, challenges, and difficulties that are part of everyday academic life” (Martin, 2013, p. 488), directly encapsulating the two components we were most interested in – the academic setting and the more typical, daily hassles of academic ups and downs as learning occurs. These researchers argue, and provide support for the idea, that while resilience and academic buoyancy have some overlap in their nature and origins, they are not identical constructs. Though this concept does not seem to have reached a broad audience yet, Martin and Marsh have spent over a decade examining the construct, its predictors, and outcomes (see Martin & Marsh, 2008; Martin & Marsh, 2009).

Martin (2013) has specifically examined the nature and degree of relationship between academic resilience and academic buoyancy. Academic buoyancy has been conceptualized as the ways in which students respond to specific academic incidents (e.g., a lower-than-expected grade, a struggle to attain a specific skill), while academic resilience is how students respond to significant, ongoing academic roadblocks (e.g., truancy, chronic failure). This research finds that while these two concepts are correlated, they have unique predictors and outcomes that are worth noting and which we used to measure the efficacy of our interventions. As academic buoyancy reflects students' responding to everyday academic hassles, it is a better direct predictor of a student's anxiety (feeling nervous and worrying about their academic performance), failure avoidance (the motivation to do well is about avoiding the disappointment of parents or teachers), and uncertain control (a student's sense of certainty about knowing how to do well or how to avoid failure in their academics).

Academic resilience turned out to be a better direct predictor of the more dispositional responses of self-handicapping (behavioral tendencies to undermine success on school tasks like putting off studying or doing assignments) and disengagement (giving up on particular subjects or on school, altogether). This research, and other work (Marsh & Yeung, 1998), has led to a bottom-up approach to understanding the relationship between academic buoyancy and academic resiliency. Academic buoyancy predicts student responses to the more daily, low-level hassles in school; over time, this develops into low or high levels of academic resilience (depending on the student's level of buoyancy), which then leads to potential self-handicapping practices or disengagement behaviors.

Among the components of academic buoyancy that Martin and Marsh (2006) have found to be important predictors of students' experiences and performance, anxiety has the strongest negative association with each. Examination of the motivation and engagement of high school students found that a student's self-efficacy, planning, perseverance, uncertain control (understanding how to do well or avoid failure), and anxiety were all predictive of class participation, enjoyment of school, and general self-esteem. Academic anxiety is likely to be experienced when a student views an academic task as being beyond their capabilities and/or that they are lacking the support to accomplish the task. While anxiety has been established as a meaningful predictor of academic performance, we find the current interventions available to be either too narrow in their focus (targeting a single construct, such as stereotype threat) or to be aimed at a much younger audience (e.g., elementary school children). Thus, we saw an unmet need in developing a program that explicitly aims to both reduce anxiety *and* improve students' academic buoyancy, as the 'SuccEssfuL (SEL) in...' project does.

What is social-emotional learning (SEL)?

Broadly defined, social-emotional learning (SEL) is the development of information, mindsets, and skills that allow individuals to identify and manage their emotions, enhance their awareness of and empathy for others, and establish and work towards personal goals. For this project, we utilized the framework established by the [Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) as our guiding model. While it was established for working within the K-12 educational system, we believe it generalizes effectively to working with adults, as we

do in higher education. The five key components of SEL, from the CASEL model, are: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision Making, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills. While no single activity that we implemented likely targeted all five components, we worked on developing an array of activities that, as a whole, allowed students to build their abilities in all of these areas. This was also necessary to accommodate the fact that different students would be at different levels of ability on each of these components – without knowing, in advance, where the strengths and limitations of each individual student would lay at the start of the semester, we had to build a holistic approach to increasing skills and knowledge. If, however, you want to build a program that more systematically addresses a particular competency or two, we imagine that could be just as successful (other possible modifications are addressed in Section 6).

CASEL defines each competency as follows (<http://www.casel.org/core-competencies/>):

Self-Awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”

Self-Management: The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

Responsible Decision Making: The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

Social Awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

Relationship Skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

While this project focuses on building the social and emotional capacities of our students in an academic setting, we also encourage students to consider employing these skills and ways of thinking in other situations in life, as they feel appropriate. As you will read about in Section 5 (Assessment), students did report using these practices in situations beyond the confines of our classroom. This is important in recognizing that SEL skills are improved through the practice of positive activities and through the application of the skills in a variety of situations. We believe they are most effective when we are utilizing them across the dimensions of our lives.

Why should faculty incorporate social-emotional learning into their classroom?

As an educator, you are likely well aware of the stress and anxiety students in your classroom may experience, only some of which may be related to their experiences in that classroom. Students may experience stress related to family dynamics, financial pressures, navigating their friendships and romantic relationships, or work or academic responsibilities and pressures. While not all stress results in negative outcomes, it is likely that chronic stressors, especially if students have not developed effective coping mechanisms, may lead to feelings of anxiety. For several decades, researchers have documented the impact of anxiety in reducing task/academic performance and psychological well-being (see Seipp, 1991, for a meta-analysis reviewing 126 published studies, $N = 36,626$, across multiple countries).

One key reason why higher rates of anxiety (and possibly other negative emotions; Gable & Harmon-Jones, 2010) is associated with reduced cognitive performance is due to either direct or indirect reduction in working memory capacity (Moran, 2016). Working memory allows us to keep relevant any verbal content, visuo-spatial content, or executive functioning (decision-making, goal-setting, or assessment of progress) information. Reductions in our working memory capacity make us more distractible, unable to focus, unable to recall necessary information, or unable to solve problems effectively or efficiently (Engle, Tuholski, Laughlin, & Conway, 1999). Research has also found that trait (considered to be a more global or stable experience of anxiety) and state (a more situational, temporary experience of anxiety) manifestations of anxiety have similarly negative impacts on performance (Seipp, 1991; Valiente, Swanson & Eisenberg, 2012). Thus, a student's anxiety (either situational or dispositional) has the potential to reduce their working memory capacity, impairing their ability to perform complex cognitive tasks such as attention, comprehension, learning and reasoning – all necessary for a productive educational experience.

Martin and Marsh (2008) pointed to the need to identify effective anxiety-reducing interventions for students. We believed the practices developed in the social-emotional learning arena could serve that need, by affording students the opportunity to practice skills related to recognizing and managing negative emotions, as well as teaching them skills that allow them to effectively handle challenging situations. The practices we adopted and adapted aligned well with the components of academic buoyancy and fit Martin and Marsh's (2008) *explicit call* for teaching students specific skillsets to “reduce anxiety at the student level include showing them how to deal more effectively with fear of failure, helping them develop effective relaxation techniques, helping them prepare academically and psychologically for pressure situations such as tests and exams, and helping them deal with the stresses and anxieties associated with academic challenges and adversities that face them” (p. 73).

It has also been suggested that different types of anxiety will benefit from different styles of interventions (Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003). The more physiological reaction of a student with test anxiety (i.e., shallow, rapid breathing, increased heart-rate, sweaty palms) may respond better to a deep-breathing meditation intervention than a student whose anxiety results from reduced self-efficacy or pessimistic responses to academic setbacks. Thus, you will see that the activities we tested in this project reflect a wide array of anxiety-reduction techniques. We were

careful to explain to students that they would find some techniques more impactful than others, and this simply reflects the individual differences of their own situations and personalities.

One last thought about SEL and anxiety-reduction – we were optimistic that in addition to improving the experience and performance of our students in this particular class, that students would find these techniques and mindsets to be of use in other areas of their life where they might experience anxiety. Social-emotional learning encompasses a wide variety of dimensions that tap into various skillsets and attitudes, thus SEL can be effectively used in a variety of contexts. The use of techniques that encourage positive emotions (like the *Feeling Supported* or *Gratitude Letter* activities) may reduce anxiety in the moment, allowing for better concentration on the studying or homework at hand but it is also likely that, as they are practiced in an on-going way, they may also have a positive impact on one's relationships and interactions with others.

Embracing SEL is about understanding that effective education is not just about the content, but is also about the social and emotional conditions under which students are learning. Increasing social and emotional capabilities leads to improved academic achievement and general psychological well-being. We see increased academic success, improved health and well-being, better communication and teamwork skills, and more positive attitudes about the self, peers, and school (see Durlak et al. 2011; Zins & Elias 2006).

SECTION 4 – The Program

In this section, we describe our specific implementation of social-emotional learning into our Statistics for the Social Sciences courses. While we describe this program fully below, you do not have to prescriptively follow it. Rather, you may choose to use it simply as an inspiration or rough guide for incorporating social-emotional learning into your own classroom (see Section 6 for possible variations). Of course you are welcome to follow our program exactly as we describe, and this may be especially helpful if you are new to the idea of social-emotional learning.

What is the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program?

The “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program is a semester-long package of social-emotional learning activities that we incorporated into our statistics courses at two different institutions. The name of the program reflects to students our main goal in having them complete the program – that is, we aim to foster their success both in statistics and in their outside lives using the tenets of social-emotional learning. The program includes 15 short, but meaningful, weekly activities that students complete outside of regular class sessions (see handouts of all activities in the Appendix section). After completing each activity, students submit either a brief, guided reflection piece (usually one paragraph) or a component of the activity they completed (if appropriate).

How did we select the activities?

In our review of effective educational practices to improve the well-being of students (that non-clinicians could implement), we learned of the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC). This organization, affiliated with the University of California – Berkeley, serves to sponsor research on, develop skills and training to build, and communicate the importance of psychological well-being. A key area of implementation for the GGSC is the realm of education. We have both utilized their journalism, trainings, and practical tools in both our professional and personal lives and you will see that the Greater Good Science Center (and their sister-site, the Greater Good in Action website) feature prominently in our program.

Using the GGSC as a foundation, we strategically and thoughtfully selected activities to build our program. Indeed, the majority of our activities were adapted from the Greater Good in Action (GGIA) Curriculum Guide, produced by GGSC. All of the activities found in the curriculum guide are research-backed methods of increasing meaning and happiness in one’s life through a focus on social and emotional well-being (found online at <http://ggia.berkeley.edu/>). Generally, we chose or modified activities that were short, powerful, and relevant to our students. More specifically, we varied the timeframe needed to complete each activity. Some activities can be completed in a single session, while others need to be repeated a number of times over the course of a week in order to have the maximum impact. We were also strategic in incorporating a variety of activities that differed from the stereotypical idea of a “mindfulness” activity. For instance, we did not have students participate in any specific meditation activities, though many of the activities had students complete tasks that reflected the overarching themes

found in most meditation practices (e.g., *Mindful Breathing*, *Three Senses*, *Goal Visualization*, *Self-Affirmation*).

Finally, we also chose activities that differed in their approach to social-emotional learning. While all of the activities can be included under the broad umbrella of social-emotional learning, each activity also falls more specifically into one of two categories. Some activities focus on developing specific *social-emotional skills*, such as the *Mindful Breathing* and *Use Your Strengths* activity. Other activities, such as the *Finding Silver Linings* and *Gratitude Letter* activities, focus on *challenging students' mindsets* (which often times tend to be negative and/or counter-productive in a statistics course). Together, we believe these activities form a well-rounded and powerful introduction to social-emotional learning in the classroom.

How should I introduce the program to my students?

One of the most important aspects of this program, in our opinion, is getting students “on board” from the very beginning of the semester. You might consider this task to be a shameful attempt at a sales pitch in order to “sell” the program to students, but garnering enthusiasm and excitement for the activities (and program in general) is well-worth the effort on the part of the instructor. Student buy-in certainly has the potential to make-or-break the overall success of your implementation. Students need to make a genuine attempt at completing the program activities for them to have an impact. Thus, we are thoughtful in the introduction of our program to our students.

We introduce our program on the second day of class (with a bang!). We draw attention to the program by providing students with a special folder that they use throughout the semester to keep the program materials organized. For example, at one institution we bought pocket folders that had inspirational quotes and drawings and allowed the students to pick one. At the other institution, we provided students with colored pocket folders and stickers and allowed them to decorate their folder. Inside all of the folders, we included relevant materials to introduce the program. For the first week, this includes a handout describing what social-emotional learning is, the different dimensions of social-emotional learning, the benefits of incorporating social-emotional learning in the classroom, and a brief description of the actual program (see Appendix for handouts). We also include in the folder two “activity passes”, described below, and the handout for the first weekly activity that we complete in class together (the *Raisin Activity*). We take time in class to discuss each element included in the folder, answer questions about the program, and then complete the *Raisin Activity*. We have found that giving students these folders increases their excitement and enthusiasm for the program – even our toughest critics loved taking home a whimsical folder or decorating with stickers! By the end of all of this, students are informed, and excited, about the semester ahead. (We recognize that part of how we ‘sold’ the program to students, with the folders, stickers, and activity passes, may not fit every instructor’s ‘teaching’ personality. We do not believe these components have to be implemented in this exact way and encourage you to get student ‘buy-in’ through whatever outlets suit you and your teaching style. You also may be surprised at how excited students – even our older,

nontraditional students – can be over these folders and stickers; more than one student was seen using the folders in later semesters).



Further, we have noticed that students will tend to be excited and enthusiastic about the program if you are. Being honest about why you feel social-emotional learning is important (see Section 3 for help with this) and expressing your sincere desire to help your students be successful both in- *and* outside of the classroom is a great start. Sharing a personal story about some aspect of social-emotional learning is also really important in communicating the value of this program to your students. Not surprisingly, students also tend to enjoy tasks that are about themselves. The very nature of this program is self-discovery, thus you will find that most students are intrinsically interested in completing the activities.

Finally, completing the activities with your students, and letting them know that you will be doing this at the beginning of the semester, can be immensely helpful in getting students to buy-in to the program. This kind of approach communicates to students that the program is a collaborative effort at personal growth, not merely another round of assigned “busy work”. Completing the activities yourself also shows students that you recognize the value of self-improvement at any stage in life and that you actually believe in what you are “selling”. This “walking the walk” approach is perhaps one of the best ways to get students on board, as well as an important way to keep them on board throughout the semester as you discuss your own progress in the program.

What do students have to do for each activity?

Each activity is presented to students in a handout with an identical format. The activities have a descriptive title and subtitle that notes where the activity originated (e.g., the Greater Good in Action Curriculum Guide). Following that, there are five main sections in each handout:

1. Why is it important for me to do this?
2. Why does it work?
3. What do I have to do?
4. What do I need to submit?
5. What if I want to know more?

In the first section, we briefly introduce students to the activity by describing the various benefits they can expect to receive from completing the activity. Next, we provide some research evidence for those benefits and generally describe how the activity works to provide specific benefits. When then specifically list out the steps students need to take to complete the activity. We also list the time requirements, both duration and frequency, for each activity in this section. We modified the time requirements from many of the original activities to fit our weekly schedule of activities. In the next section, we note what

Title of Activity
Developed from the Greater Good in Action Curriculum Guide

Why is it important for me to do this?
This activity asks you to...

Why does it work?
The key to this activity is...

What do I have to do?
Time Required: XXX-XXX minutes for X days this week.

The way you complete this activity is to...

1. Do this...
2. Do that...

What do I need to submit?
After you complete this activity, you should...

What if I want to know more?
Insert article reference here

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students need to submit after they complete the activity. Finally, we provide at least one reference for additional reading if a student desires to continue to learn about the topic.

How is the program structured throughout the semester?

For our program, we decided on 15 weekly activities that corresponded to our 15-week academic semester. As such, students both received a new activity each week and had an activity from the previous week due. In ordering the activities, we were cognizant of the various semester-dependent milestones, such as first tests, breaks, midterm week, and finals exams. Our ordering reflects an attempt to best match the activities where they might have the most impact. For instance, in week 2 we had students complete the *Goal Visualization* activity, specifically focusing in their goals for the course and how they would work to accomplish those goals. In week 5, we had students complete the *Feeling Supported* activity to direct them away from any negative emotions they might be feeling after receiving their first test grades. In week 6, we introduced students to the practice of *Mindful Breathing* to help them navigate the approach to midterm week. We also included the *Gratitude Letter* in week 15 so that students could reflect on their semester and the people who helped them through tough moments during that time. The activities, listed by week, are found below. Complete handouts for each activity are found in the [Appendix](#).

- Week #1 Raisin Meditation
- Week #2 Goal Visualization
- Week #3 Self-Compassion Letter
- Week #4 Making Stress Your Friend
- Week #5 Feeling Supported
- Week #6 Mindful Breathing
- Week #7 Good Things
- Week #8 Meaningful Photos
- Week #9 Use Your Strengths
- Week #10 Self-Affirmation
- Week #11 Finding Silver Linings
- Week #12 Best Possible Self
- Week #13 Random Acts of Kindness
- Week #14 Three Senses
- Week #15 Gratitude Letter

How are the activities incorporated into class sessions?

Our classes met two days each week, so we took a few minutes in class each day to focus on the weekly activities. These brief conversations generally only took 5 minutes, but at most required 10 minutes of class time (particularly when students were excited about an assignment they had just submitted and wanted to share). In the first class session of the week, students received a new activity and their activity from the previous week was due. When we distributed a new activity, we would briefly discuss the idea behind the activity, how it connects to the

overall picture of social-emotional learning, and give instructions for completing the activity. If we were able, we also took this opportunity to share any experiences we had with the activity or our personal approach to completing it over the next week.

Next, we gave students the opportunity to share their experiences on the previous week's activity they had just submitted. This debriefing period was a valuable component of the program, especially when students had completed activities that challenged their mindsets. For instance, the *Self-Compassion Letter* can be tough for many students as it forces them to directly confront a personal weakness and address negative self-talk. In this case, we find it particularly meaningful for students to have the chance to share their experiences completing the activity (even if not discussing their personal story) and to hear their classmates (and instructor) speak about their experiences. Activities that focus on developing skills also benefit from a debriefing period. As an example, many students express the difficulties they have with the *Mindful Breathing* activity. When this happens, we as instructors are able to offer suggestions for addressing those difficulties, as well as validation that those difficulties are common and can be overcome with practice.

We spent less time talking about the program in the second class session of the week. On these days, we simply did a quick check-in with students to see how the activities were progressing and answered any questions that had come up. This quick check-in also served as a reminder to students to be working on completing the activities throughout the week.

At both midterms and finals, we also did a more formal check-in and debriefing with students. We revisited with students the definition of social-emotional learning and the five dimensions. As a class, we discussed each activity we had completed up until that point in the semester and under which dimension of social-emotional learning the activity might best fit. Doing this allowed students to refocus on the overarching goal of the program and reflect on the growth they may have experienced in a short period of time. At midterm time specifically, we also had students revisit the goals they set in week 2 with the *Goal Visualization* activity to critically examine their progress and reevaluate their goals.

How are the activities submitted and evaluated?

In terms of submission, our students, by choice, submitted all of their activities online. At the beginning of the semester, we allowed our students to decide on how they wanted to submit their completed activities with a class vote. At both institutions, students unanimously opted to submit online using our course management systems.

In setting up our evaluation of the activities, we attempted to balance student need for accountability and an awareness of the busy lives our students lead. We realized that if we did not make the activities part of our course grade, it was unlikely that they would be completed voluntarily. We also did not want to overburden our students, which would certainly run counter to the goals of our program in the first place. Keeping both of those issues in mind, we decided to make the activities worth a small, but meaningful, part of our course grades. Completion of the activities throughout the semester was worth 5% of students' final grades in our courses. We

included the following note in our course syllabi describing the program (feel free to use it and modify as you see fit):

*“This semester, you will be participating in the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program developed by myself and a colleague at the University of Wisconsin-Superior [Thiel College] (who will also have students participating in the same program with you!). The “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program will introduce you to the concept of social-emotional learning (SEL) in a unique context – statistics! SEL promotes academic success, health and well-being, communication skills and teamwork, and a positive attitude about yourself and your surroundings. As you can see, many areas of your life outside of our course can be impacted by participating in this program. I will provide you with the tools to be SuccEssfuL, and it is up to you to bring your curiosity, enthusiasm, and willingness to step outside of your comfort zone. As part of this program, you will complete up to 12 activities (mostly outside of class) and spend some time reflecting on each. **Your participation in these activities, and ultimately your sincere and honest reflections on what you did, is worth 5% of your total grade in this course.**”*

Out of the 15 weekly activities, only 14 required a submission (the *Raisin Activity* is completed in class as an introduction to the concept of mindfulness). Students are asked to complete only 12 of the 14 remaining activities, though many decide to complete all of the activities. We provided students with two “activity passes” that they could turn in at any point in the semester in place of a submission for one of the activities. These passes allowed students to opt out of any activities they did not feel comfortable completing, as well as a chance to take a week “off” if they were facing unexpected stressors or forgot about the weekly activity for whatever reason (as activity passes are submitted with no questions asked or reasons required).



The 12 submissions we evaluated were graded loosely on a pass/fail system. We generally checked to be sure that students completed all of the required components of the activity (as outlined in the handout) and that they put forth a good-faith effort in their submission. Students also had to submit their activities on-time in order to receive the pass grade. As noted earlier, we tried to avoid unnecessarily burdening our students, while still holding them accountable for their efforts. The pass/fail system reflects our efforts to do so.

SECTION 5 – Assessment

In this section, we provide an assessment of our implementation of the “SuccEssfuL (SEL) in...” program in our statistics courses. In other words, does this program actually make a difference in the lives of our students? We present both our empirical assessment and a qualitative assessment captured by the comments of our students upon completion of the program. We also provide a detailed description of the measures we used in our assessment so you may monitor the progress of your students, if you so choose.

The data and findings presented in this section reflect our first wave of data collection (completed in Fall 2016). As we both teach at smaller institutions, it is difficult to obtain large N 's, even when combining data across our two institutions; we have data from 46 students who completed both the pre and post-intervention measures. Thus, we are continuing to collect data in Fall 2017, which will also include a control group. This will allow us to demonstrate the unique impact of the intervention, over and above any natural maturation or placebo effect. The strength of our initial findings encouraged us to distribute the manual now, so that more students could benefit, recognizing that the second wave of data collection is ongoing.

Does this program work?

Students in four sections of the course “Statistics for the Social Sciences” at two different institutions ($N = 46$) completed the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program. We assessed the efficacy of our program by having students at both institutions complete a collection of questionnaires prior to starting the program (pre-implementation), as well as after completing the program (post-implementation). In total, we assessed students on 13 distinct measures related to various dimensions of academic life and social-emotional learning. A full description of each measure and how it was used in our assessment can be found at the end of this section. The remainder of this section describes the results of our assessment.

We divided our assessment measures into two categories – those for which we hypothesized an *increase* from the pre-implementation of the program to the post-implementation (Table 1), and those for which we hypothesized a *decrease* (Table 2). In other words, we anticipated that our “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program would provide a positive booster to academic and social-emotional dimensions that are beneficial to student success (e.g., academic buoyancy and academic self-efficacy) and weaken the academic and social-emotional dimensions that are detrimental to student success (e.g., anxiety and self-handicapping).

Indeed, for those measures beneficial to student success (Table 1), we observed increases in all measures from before students completed the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program to after they completed the program. In two cases, both of which are related to how students appraise stressful situations, these changes were statistically meaningful. The most notable change was in students’ appraisal of stressful situations as “challenges” – feeling more confident in their ability to

overcome stress and positively attack stressors, as well as believing they have what it takes to beat stress and the skills to overcome stress (paired-samples t-test: $t(45) = -2.86, p = .006$, Cohen's $d = 0.42$, a small effect size). Another notable change involved students' perception of the resources available to them to help them in times of stress – knowing there is someone they can turn to for help, knowing there is help available to them, and knowing they personally have the resources available to them to overcome stress (paired-samples t-test: $t(45) = -1.81, p = .077$, Cohen's $d = 0.39$, a small effect size).

Table 1

Assessment Measures Beneficial to Student Success (increase viewed as positive change)

Measure	Pre-Implementation	Post-Implementation	Change
Stress Appraisal: Challenge	2.60	3.28	*0.68
Stress Appraisal: Resources	3.53	4.16	±0.63
Academic Buoyancy	0.19	0.48	0.29
Academic Self-Efficacy	7.04	7.23	0.19
Mindset	4.34	4.47	0.13

*Change is statistically significant ($p < .05$)

± Change is a statistical trend ($p < .09$)

Since academic buoyancy, academic self-efficacy, and mindset are generally considered to be either more dispositional traits or well-established by the time one reaches the college level, the minor (and statistically non-significant) changes we observed (Table 1) may be the limit of change that may occur in a single semester. Taken together, the results of our assessment still suggest that the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program may help to bolster traits that are important to student success. However, we recognize the limits of an implementation in a single-semester class.

We also examined traits that are detrimental to students' success (Table 2). For those measures, our largest change between the pre-implementation of the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program and post-implementation was in math anxiety (paired-samples t-test: $t(44) = -1.75, p = .09$, Cohen's $d = 0.26$, a small effect size). Students reported feeling less nervous, tense, and helpless when it comes to math. They also reported having less worry regarding math. Smaller changes were noted in general academic anxiety, statistics-specific anxiety, self-handicapping, and the appraisal of stress as a threat (though none of these changes were statistically significant or statistical trends).

Table 2

Assessment Measures Detrimental to Student Success (decrease viewed as positive change)

Measure	Pre-Implementation	Post-Implementation	Change
Math Anxiety	0.72	0.07	[±] -0.66
General Academic Anxiety	-1.86	-2.04	-0.18
Statistics Anxiety	-0.87	-0.99	-0.12
Self-Handicapping	0.10	0.01	-0.10
Stress Appraisal: Threat	0.76	0.69	-0.07
Failure Avoidance	1.45	1.50	0.05
Uncertain Control	-3.47	-3.41	0.06
Disengagement	-2.00	-1.68	0.32

[±] Change is a statistical trend ($p < .09$)

How does a students' level of anxiety impact the effectiveness of the program?

We also examined the efficacy of our program based on the varying levels of anxiety students brought with them to the course. We found that our program was differentially effective for those students who came to the course with high versus average or low levels of anxiety (both general academic anxiety and math-specific anxiety; categorized using a tertiary split on the sample). For our students high in math anxiety, we saw statistically significant decreases in levels of math anxiety from the pre-implementation of the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program to the post-implementation (paired-samples t-test: $t(15) = -2.811$, $p = .013$, Cohen’s $d = 0.5$, a medium effect size). Math anxiety in these students decreased from an average of 4.86 in the pre-implementation period to 3.41 in the post-implementation period (a change of 1.45). This significant change was not observed in students with average and low levels of anxiety.

However, students low in anxiety did appear to respond differentially in the area of stress appraisal. For these students, we saw statistically significant increases in their ability to view stressful situations as challenges (paired-samples t-test: $t(13) = 3.901$, $p = .002$, Cohen’s $d = 1.15$, a large effect size), and statistically significant decreases in their responses to stress as a threat (paired-samples t-test: $t(13) = -2.181$, $p = .048$, Cohen’s $d = 0.91$, a large effect size). Together, these findings suggest that anxiety may hold students back from being able to learn and grow in ways that are important for their social and emotional development (i.e., in how they appraise or approach a stressful situation). When a student is chronically (overall) or situationally (math) anxious, they often experience a heightened physiological arousal. This may put them into a survival mode, much like the idea of ‘fight or flight’, that does not allow for the complex cognitive processes needed to effectively develop skills to reframe stress (and generally do well academically).

What were our key concerns about student participation?

In the end-of-semester assessment of the efficacy of the activities, we also asked students several open-ended questions about their experience with these activities and their perceptions of the efficacy of participating in them (as well as how many activities they actually completed). Our students' responses were able to help alleviate two of our key concerns (outlined below) regarding the program.

1. Would this program be too burdensome?

Our classes are already rather work-heavy. Students complete homework assignments (at least one a week), weekly quizzes or multi-chapter exams, and are also working on larger projects throughout the semester (which we typically implement in phases). We were worried that the implementation of a weekly SEL activity would only add to their possibly feeling overwhelmed by work for the course.

Of the 44 students who answered the question, only one student said 'no' when asked "Would you recommend that students in other classes complete the 'SuccEssfuL in ...' program? Why or why not?". In reviewing the comments from this question, many students did recognize that this is another responsibility for them and that, as full-time students (who often have many other demands on their time – family, jobs, etc.) they did have difficulty keeping up with all of these demands. However, they generally commented that the benefit they reaped from participating was worth the additional work they put in to it. For example:

I would recommend these activities to students not just in a stats class, but for any other class, or just for your daily activities. It helps to keep the stress level down and gives you the opportunity to reflect on what your priorities are.

I think all students should do some types of activities like this. Some of these techniques we learned to deal with stress or just show people how to appreciate themselves and others can be useful to all students.

I would. I learned many useful skills, and even told some of them to friends and family members. I think it is important to develop these kinds of skills.

Yeah, absolutely. If anything, they kind of let you examine yourself in a different sense.

Oh yes! Definitely! These activities can really help someone as a person and a student in many ways. Things I learned in this class will propel me to my future self and help me discover a multitude of aspects.

Yes but towards the end of the semester it got very hard to do the activities.

2. Would the SEL activities feel too disconnected from the actual content of the course or backfire, by making explicit (anxieties, challenges) those negative emotions that may only be implicit for the students?

Given that students did not specifically comment on the disconnect between the content of the course and the SEL activities in the open-ended questions about recommending the program or making changes to the program, we became less concerned about this issue. We do think it is important to acknowledge that the SEL activities will not directly tie-in to the content of the course you are teaching, most likely, but students will quickly see the utility and benefit of this seemingly separated set of practices.

In all, students seemed to value the self-awareness, self-management, and growth that the program enabled:

You will find yourself reaching for bigger goals than when you started.

I think the program could be useful in any subject because there is always at least one student stressed about a class.

Those exercises were actually my favorite part of the class.

Even though it may seem silly to write out your feelings it helps to sit down and take some time to enjoy life.

I think these activities reach far beyond this course and even this subject area.

These activities can really help someone as a person and a student in many ways. Things I learned in this class will propel me to my future self and help me discover a multitude of aspects.

It allows us to think about things in different ways.

It only takes a few minutes and it can change your life.

I find math classes stressful so any kind of coping skills in a stressful environment are always nice.

I would say that it might be a helpful tool to use and to include in everyday life experiences, because it can be a good reminder that there is always something positive that can come out of a situation, and even if you do something very small for someone, like holding the door for them, it might mean the world to them.

Students just need a mindful and intentional "time out" every week.

If I want to assess the efficacy of the program, what should I measure?

In assessing the efficacy of the “SuccEssfuL in Statistics” program, we utilized 13 widely available measures. We encourage you to consider assessing the program in your own courses, focusing on the areas of student growth that you are most interested in fostering in your students.

We have an on-going practice of assessment using these measures as we continue to implement the intervention each semester. For your convenience, we have included a short description of the measures we used below. We have also included the complete reference for each measure in Section 7 (Recommended Readings and References).

Academic Buoyancy. Students' ability to bounce-back from everyday academic challenges was assessed with the 4-item survey developed by Martin and Marsh (2008). Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include "I don't let the stress of studying 'get' to me" and "I'm good at dealing with setbacks at school (e.g., bad grade, negative feedback on my work)".

Mindset. We developed two items to assess whether students had stronger beliefs in a fixed or a growth mindset (Dweck, 2007). Those who more strongly endorse a fixed mindset believe that abilities are static and more resistant (and unlikely) to change and will spend more of their time focused on documenting their abilities. Those who more strongly endorse a growth mindset believe that abilities are more dynamic and developable (through hard work, mentoring, and feedback) and will spend more of their time in the pursuit of developing their abilities than documenting them. Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 7-point scale, ranging from -3 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +3 (*Strongly Agree*). Items were "I believe that your intelligence is something basic about you that you can't change very much" (reverse-scored) and "I believe that the harder you work at something, the better you will be at it"; higher scores indicate greater agreement with the growth mindset.

Uncertain Control. The ability of students to understand how and why they do well in school (that is, their meta-cognition about their performance) was measured with the 4-item cognitive domain subscale of the Multidimensional Measure of Children's Perception of Control (Connell, 1985) scale. Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include "When I do well in school, I usually can't figure out why" and "If I get a bad grade in school, I am usually uncertain how to avoid repeating it".

Disengagement. Students' degree of disengagement from their educational experiences was assessed with the 6-item apathy subscale of the Survey of Academic Orientations (Davidson, Beck, Hall & Silver, 1999). Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include "I try to work just hard enough to get the grade that I need in a course" and "I might cut class if I think that the lecture material will not be on the test".

Failure Avoidance. Individual differences in sensitivity to anxiety-relevant cues and motivation to avoid punishing, boring, or negative events was measured using the 7-item

behavioral inhibition subscale (BIS) of the Behavioral Inhibition System/Behavioral Activation System survey (Carver & White, 1994). Those with higher BIS scores tend to avoid, when possible, situations where punishment, negative feedback, or failure may occur. Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include “Criticism or scolding hurts me quite a bit” and “Even if something bad is about to happen to me, I rarely experience fear or nervousness” (reverse-scored).

Academic Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy, more generally, represents an individual’s belief that they have the ability to secure an expected outcome – that through talent, effort, or luck, they will be able to have sufficient influence to achieve the outcome they are working toward. Academic self-efficacy is domain-specific self-efficacy – the student’s ability to secure their expected *educational* outcome. This was assessed with the 6-item Academic Self-Efficacy scale (Shank & Cotten, 2014). Students indicated the frequency with which they felt they could do certain academic events on a 9-point scale, 1 (*Never*) to 9 (*Very Often*). Sample events include “learn the class material, even if it is hard” and “motivate myself to do schoolwork”.

Self-Handicapping. Self-handicapping is a self-presentation tool, used to distance oneself from possible negative evaluation. We self-handicap when we either create or claim obstacles to our success, thus providing us with an external factor for which to blame any possible failure. Self-handicapping was measured with 5 items from the Self-Handicapping Scale (Rhodewalt, 1990). Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include “When I do something wrong, my first impulse is to blame circumstances” and “I admit that I am tempted to rationalize when I don’t live up to others’ expectations”.

Math Anxiety. Students’ degree of anxiety about their mathematics ability was assessed with 5 items from the Mathematics Self-Concept, Self-Efficacy, and Anxiety Scale (Lee, 2009). Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include “I often worry that it will be difficult for me in mathematics classes” and “I get very nervous when doing mathematics problems”.

Stress Appraisal. In response to situations, we have the possibility of creating different types of cognitive appraisals; these perceptions and interpretations can then influence our motivation and decision-making. An early assessment of potentially stressful events that we make is the distinction between whether this stressful event presents a threat (the event will require abilities/resources that we do not have or have insufficient quantities of) or a challenge (the event will be taxing but potentially rewarding, if we are able to meet the demands of the stressor). We also engage in assessing our current resources available to us. These three components were measured with the 14-item Stress Appraisal Measure for Adolescents (Rowley, Roesch, Jurica, & Vaughn, 2005), creating subscales

for Threat, Challenge, and Resources. Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include “I perceive stress as threatening” (Threat subscale), “I have what it takes to beat stress” (Challenge subscale), and “There is help available to me” (Resource subscale).

Academic Anxiety (General and Statistics-specific). Students’ general academic anxiety and their statistics-specific academic anxiety was measured with two 10-item subscales of the Academic Anxiety Scale (Gogol, Brunner, Goetz, Martin, Ugen, Keller, Fischback & Preckel, 2014). Students indicated their strength of agreement/disagreement on a 13-point scale, ranging from -6 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +6 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items for the general academic anxiety subscale include “I am afraid of most school subjects” and “In classes and most school subjects, I worry that I will not be able to understand something”. Sample items for the statistics-specific subscale include “I am afraid of this Statistics class” and “In Statistics this semester, I will find myself thinking about performing poorly”.

SECTION 6 – Possible Variations

Does the implementation *have* to be exactly the same as this project?

By this point, you might be thinking about implementing this program in one of your own courses (at least, that is what we hope!). You also might be thinking about all of the logistics of implementing such a program, a task we know can seem overwhelming. Thus, it is important to note that the implementation of this program does NOT have to be exactly the same as our project utilized. In fact, we encourage you to make this program “your own” by modifying it to meet the goals of your specific course. You may choose to spend more or less time in class discussing the research supporting the interventions or processing the students’ experiences. In our classes, we generally spent 5-10 minutes each class period focusing on the activities. However, you can personalize it to match your specific teaching style or the specific needs of your students.

While our students completed one activity every week, an instructor may want an activity to occur for a longer or shorter period of time. The *Good Things, Use Your Strengths*, and *Self-Affirmation* activities, in particular, would be enhanced by having students focus on them for a longer period of time. Or, you may want to implement certain activities multiple times throughout the semester. As an example, you could have students revisit the *Goal Visualization* activity every three to four weeks to assess their progress. If students complete their goal, then they could have the opportunity to set a new goal for the activity. Alternatively, it may be useful to examine whether an activity that we have currently framed as needing students to complete for multiple days (like *Meaningful Photos*) could be modified to be a one-off activity. This may be especially useful when taking into consideration when in the semester you are having students complete the activity (e.g., if it is the same week as a major exam/project, then a one-off activity may be better for their workload than an activity where they have to complete it for five days in a row).

Importantly, we encourage instructors to develop an implementation plan that fits their learning environment and goals for their students. Ideally, instructors could use this as an opportunity to further assess the efficacy of these activities by developing a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) research project.

Can this program be implemented in other academic domains?

YES! We want to stress that this program is not domain-specific – it can, and should, be implemented in other academic domains. In our case, it was our experiences teaching statistics that prompted the development of the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program. Though mathematics is a domain where students often minimize their abilities and engage in negative self-talk, there are certainly other academic domains in which students display similar maladaptive thought patterns. Why not consider a “SuccEssfuL (SEL) in Chemistry” or “SuccEssfuL (SEL) in English”

course? Since the activities in this program are not content-based, but rather promote key mindfulness and anxiety-reduction practices, we envision a seamless transition of our program into other academic domains.

Further, as the activities are implemented primarily outside of the class session, instructors do not necessarily need to worry about explicitly connecting the activities to the specific content coverage in the course. Rather, instructors can use the activities as an adjunct to their teaching, opening the door to a discussion of the importance of social and emotional well-being in achieving both academic and life-long success. Each activity in the program serves several functions, all of which are easily and explicitly connected to the support of student success. For instance, many of the activities provide students with mechanisms for increased self-awareness so that they can identify triggers to anxiety and/or maladaptive thoughts patterns effectively. Other activities focus on self-care strategies that can be employed on-demand (e.g., when challenged by a particular homework or in-class assignment). These on-demand strategies provide students with the skills to reduce anxiety and/or maladaptive thought patterns in the moment and allow for more effective cognitive processing. The bottom line is that any course and any instructor, regardless of the academic domain, can justify a pedagogical practice that supports the success of students.

Lastly, the activities that make up this program do not require any intensive training or credentials to implement. If you have little, or even no experience in the realm of social-emotional learning, you can most definitely still apply these principles to your classroom. More important than training or credentials is a willingness to learn and grow along with your students, as well as enthusiasm for cultivating holistic student success. We are optimistic that this program is robust enough to allow for success, even when tweaked to better fit the context of a different course or academic domain. We encourage you to adopt these strategies and implement them in ways that are most appropriate for how you work with students.

What other social-emotional learning activities are available?

The majority of the activities we used were adapted from the Greater Good in Action (GGIA) Curriculum Guide, produced by the Greater Good Science Center. All of the activities found in the curriculum guide are research-backed methods of increasing meaning and happiness in one's life through a focus on social and emotional well-being (found online at <http://ggia.berkeley.edu/>). Many other activities are available for free on the GGIA website. The activities are organized by theme (e.g., resilience to stress, self-compassion, forgiveness, etc.), allowing instructors to tailor the activities to the needs of their particular students or course.

In addition to the Greater Good in Action website, instructors may find the Greater Good Science Center's website (<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>) to be a useful resource for staying up-to-date on the research surrounding some of the core themes of social-emotional learning – gratitude, altruism, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, happiness, and mindfulness. The Greater

Good Science Center also offers online training (MOOCs) on a variety of topics, resource recommendations for each of their core themes, and a Summer Institute for Educators (which Dr. Stocker attended in 2016).

A few activities in our program were developed from therapeutic interventions found in outside sources (e.g., self-affirmation; three senses). We encourage instructors to, at their own discretion, also add activities that fit with their course goals. However, we urge instructors who are new to social-emotional learning to consider utilizing our program as laid out in this manual as they learn about the practice. More experienced instructors may find value in crafting their own set of activities. In either case, we strongly suggest that you try the activities yourself before presenting them to your students.

SECTION 7 – Recommended Readings and References

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Social-Emotional Learning and Interventions

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL; www.casel.org)

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SECTION 8 – About the Authors

Kristel M. Gallagher, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Psychology
Track Advisor: Social Psychology
Department of Psychology
Thiel College



Contact:

75 College Ave.
Greenville, PA 16125
(724) 589-2070
kgallagher@thiel.edu

Education:

Ph.D. in Experimental Social and Health Psychology (2012) – Kent State University, Kent, Ohio
M.A. in Experimental Social and Health Psychology (2009) – Kent State University, Kent, Ohio
B.A. in Psychology (2007) – Waynesburg University, Waynesburg, Pa.

Courses Typically Taught:

General Psychology
Research Methods for Psychology
Statistics for the Social Sciences
Applied Health Psychology
Social Psychology
Experimental Social Psychology

Pedagogical Research Interests:

Experiential and applied learning approaches in the college classroom
Development and assessment of action teaching projects
Use of lecture-based retrieval cues on tests

Selected Pedagogical Publications and Presentations:

Gallagher, K.M. (2018, Jan). “If you build it, they will learn!” – Beads and biopsychology in an introductory psychology course. Poster presented at the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology, St. Pete Beach, Florida

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Gallagher, K.M. (2013, June). “*Spiderman, Spiderman...*” – *A social psychology action plan*. Poster presented at the Eastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology, Staunton, Virginia.

Shevaun L. Stocker, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Psychology
 Department Chair, Human Behavior, Justice, and Diversity Department
 University of Wisconsin - Superior

**Contact:**

Belknap & Catlin Ave, P.O. Box 2000
 Superior, WI 54880
 (715) 394-8423
sstocker@uwsuper.edu

Education:

Ph.D. in Social Psychology (2006) – University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
 M.A. in Social Psychology (2004) – University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
 B.S. in Psychology (2000) – University of Florida, Gainesville, Fl.

Courses Typically Taught:

General Psychology
 Statistics for the Social Sciences
 Social Psychology
 Health Psychology
 Psychology of Close Relationships

Pedagogical Research Interests:

Development and assessment of action teaching projects
 Development of critical thinking skills through examination of primary source material

Selected Pedagogical Publications and Presentations:

Stocker, S. L. (2012, January). *Implementing Reading Communities to Guide Students Through Primary Sources in Social Psychology*. Presented at the 13th Annual Conference of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP), San Diego, CA.

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SECTION 9 – Appendix

In this section, you will find the program materials referred to throughout this manual. These materials include the following (in the order listed):

- 1. An Introduction to Social-Emotional Learning (Handout for Students) (pp. 36-37)**
- 2. Activity Pass (p. 38)**
- 3. Blank Template for Activity Handouts (p. 39)**
- 4. “SuccEssfuL in Stats” Program Activity Handouts (pp. 40-69)**
 - [Raisin Meditation](#) (pp. 40-41)
 - [Goal Visualization](#) (pp. 42-43)
 - [Self-Compassion Letter](#) (pp. 44-45)
 - [Stress Reappraisal](#) (pp. 46-47)
 - [Feeling Supported](#) (pp. 48-49)
 - [Mindful Breathing](#) (pp. 50-51)
 - [Good Things](#) (pp. 52-53)
 - [Meaningful Photos](#) (pp. 54-55)
 - [Use Your Strengths](#) (pp. 56-57)
 - [Self-Affirmation](#) (pp. 58-59)
 - [Finding Silver Linings](#) (pp. 60-61)
 - [Best Possible Self](#) (pp. 62-63)
 - [Random Acts of Kindness](#) (pp. 64-65)
 - [Three Senses](#) (pp. 66-67)
 - [Gratitude Letter](#) (pp. 68-69)

“SuccEssfuL in Stats” – What is Social and Emotional Learning?

In the past few decades, psychologists have become more and more interested in moving from asking ‘What is *wrong* with people and how do we fix it?’ to asking ‘What is *right* with people and how can we build on that?’. This has led to increased research on psychological well-being, on a variety of topics (e.g., contentment, resilience, happiness, grit). From this work, we have gained a broader understanding of the complexity of human growth and learning. We now know that ***effective education is not just about the content, but the social and emotional conditions under which we are learning matters.***

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (www.casel.org).

What are the dimensions of SEL?



Self-Management: Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one’s goals

Self-Awareness: Recognizing one’s emotions and values as well as one’s strengths and challenges

Responsible Decision-Making: Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior

Relationship Skills: Forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict

Social Awareness: Showing understanding and empathy for others

We all likely have both strengths and areas of development in the social and emotional learning domains. We also may deploy those strengths or experience those challenges differently, depending on the situation. For example, I may exert effective ‘responsible decision-making’ when it comes to deciding how to spend money but less so when it comes to deciding what to eat.

What are the benefits of implementing SEL in education?

Research demonstrates that increasing the social and emotional capabilities of students leads to **improved academic achievement and general psychological well-being**. This has been demonstrated by increased academic success, improved health and well-being, better communication and teamwork skills, and more positive attitudes about self, peers, and school.



So what is the ‘SuccEssful in Statistics’ project?

It will not come as a surprise to you that some students can be anxious about their capabilities in mathematics (Hembree, 1990), like this statistics class. Research has found that students who have higher levels of math anxiety perform less successfully than students with lower math anxiety in those classes. Ashcraft and Faust (1994) have found that this reduction in performance is particularly true for more complex mathematical operations (especially those with multiple steps).

Thus, our anxiety and negative emotional experiences around mathematics can actually change our cognitive processes such that we actually employ different (and less effective) math strategies (Ashcraft & Kirk, 2001). Since the negative and intrusive thoughts that generate the anxiety response are also a cognitive process, they become competition for the math strategies and tasks that we are attempting to employ to solve the problem. This competition for a limited resource means that less focus and attention is available for the task at hand (the math problem) and may explain the lowered accuracy rates and increased time needed to solve problems for high-math anxiety individuals (Faust, 1992).

As I have learned about this educational challenge, that our own anxiety can actually negatively impact our performance in a class like this, I have turned to what we are learning from the study of well-being to find solutions. For some time now, I have been working with a colleague at the University of Wisconsin to develop a **program of activities designed to reduce our anxiety through improved social and emotional learning**. As a bonus, these activities should not only improve your performance and experience in this class, but also in your life in general! ☺



For the program, you will complete up to 12 activities, each one designed to target at least one dimension of social and emotional learning. You will also spend time reflecting on these activities and your experiences.

Activity Pass

Get out of an activity for FREE!



Redeem for one (1) weekly activity from "SuccEssful in Stats".

Name: _____

Activity: _____

Date Used: _____

Title of Activity

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

This activity asks you to...

Why does it work?

The key to this activity is...

What do I have to do?

Time Required: XX-XX minutes for X days this week.

The way you complete this activity is to...

1. Do this...
2. Do that...

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you should...

What if I want to know more?

(insert article reference here)

Raisin Meditation

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

Many of us spend our lives rehashing the past or rushing into the future without pausing to enjoy the present. Distracted from the world around us, our life might feel only half-lived, as we're too busy to savor—or even notice—everyday pleasures.

Practicing mindfulness can help. Mindfulness helps us tune into what we're sensing and experiencing in the present moment — it's the ability to pay more careful attention to our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, without judging them as good or bad. Research suggests that it can not only reduce stress, but also increase our experience of positive emotions.

Why does it work?

One of the most basic and widely used methods for cultivating mindfulness is to focus your attention on each of your senses as you eat a raisin. This simple exercise is often used as an introduction to the practice of mindfulness.

By increasing awareness of internal mental and physical states, mindfulness can help people gain a greater sense of control over their thoughts, feelings, and behavior in the present moment. Paying closer attention to the sensations of eating can also increase our enjoyment of our food and deepen our appreciation for the opportunity to satisfy our hunger.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 3 minutes in a single session (*but you can complete this activity on your own whenever you want; evidence suggests that mindfulness increases the more that you practice it!*)

We will use the video link below to guide us in this introductory mindfulness activity. There are many variations of this activity, available as both video and audio-only, on the internet if you would like a more challenging experience. For

instance, you may want to find a guided meditation that is longer or has less structure than the one we will be using.

However, since this may be a first experience in mindfulness for many of us, we will stick with a simple introduction. I also have available a set of step-by-step written instructions for the raisin meditation. Please see me if you are interested!

Raisin Meditation (3:04 minutes):

<https://youtu.be/X5DfLKgJP8c>

What do I need to submit?

You will not submit anything for this activity as we will complete it in class as a group. The idea behind this activity is to introduce you to the structure and format of the “SuccEssfuL in Stats” program, as well as to show you the types of activities you will participate in this semester. All future activities will require some form of reflection piece as a submission.

What if I want to know more?

“Eating One Raisin: A First Taste of Mindfulness.” Extension Service, West Virginia University.

Adapted from: Williams, M., Teasdale, J., Segal, Z., & Kabat-Zinn, J. (2007). *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*. New York: Guilford Press.

Goal Visualization

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

When we face a daunting task, sometimes the hardest part is getting started. To help you overcome that big initial hurdle, this activity asks you to describe a goal and to visualize the steps you will take to achieve it. In the process, it helps build your confidence that you will be able to reach that goal.

Having confidence in your ability to achieve your goals is a key component of optimism, which research links to greater health and happiness, including lower rates of depression, a better ability to cope with stress, and more relationship satisfaction.

Why does it work?

This activity makes goals feel attainable and manageable. When you believe that you will be successful at something, it encourages you to work harder toward achieving that goal—and this greater effort increases the chance that you will actually succeed. Plus, the more you succeed, the more confident you will be about future goals.

Remember, though, not to get down on yourself if you don't succeed right away or perform perfectly. With repeated practice, you may feel greater confidence in your ability to achieve important goals in your life, and this can have a significant impact on your general mood, as regularly completing the goal visualization exercise helps you develop a more optimistic mindset.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 10 minutes on **three different days** this week.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity, *repeating the steps on each of the **three days** required for this activity.*

1. Identify one goal that you would like to achieve this semester in our statistics class and briefly describe it in writing. Make sure that this goal

is realistic (e.g., “complete and turn in all of the homework assignments on time” rather than “get 100% on all of the homework assignments”) and will actually help you to succeed in the course (e.g., “participate meaningfully in class by asking at least one question” rather than “staying awake in class”).

2. To help you visualize how you will go about accomplishing this goal, describe in writing the steps that you will take to get there. For example, if your goal is to complete and turn in all of the homework assignments on time, these are the steps that you might take to achieve it:

- a) schedule one hour every Monday and Wednesday that you will devote to statistics homework;
- b) turn off your cell phone/other distractors;
- c) put on some comfortable clothes;
- d) turn on some upbeat music;
- e) break down the job into sub-tasks: skim the chapter for a refresher; look over notes from class; carefully read the homework assignment instructions; and so on.
- f) remind yourself that it’s ok if you don’t do everything perfectly or don’t understand everything completely.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit your three goals (from step 1) and the steps you decided you need to take to complete each goal (from step 2).

What if I want to know more?

Sergeant, S., & Mongrain, M. (2014). An online optimism intervention reduces depression in pessimistic individuals. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 82*(2), 263-274.

Self-Compassion Letter

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

This activity asks you to write a letter to yourself expressing compassion for an aspect of yourself that you don't like. Research suggests that people who respond with compassion to their own flaws and setbacks – rather than beating themselves up over them – experience greater physical and mental health.

Why does it work?

Self-compassion reduces painful feelings of shame and self-criticism that can compromise mental health and well-being and stand in the way of personal growth. Writing is a powerful way to cope with negative feelings and change the way you think about a difficult situation.

Writing in a self-compassionate way can help you replace your self-critical voice with a more compassionate one – one that comforts and reassures you rather than berating yourself for your shortcoming. It takes time and practice, but the more you write in this way, the more familiar and natural the compassionate voice will feel, and the easier it will be to remember to treat yourself kindly when you're feeling down on yourself.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 15 minutes

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. First, identify something about yourself that makes you feel ashamed, insecure, or not good enough. It could be something related to your personality, behavior, abilities, relationships, or any other part of your life.
2. Once you identify something, write it down and describe how it makes you feel. Sad? Embarrassed? Angry? Try to be as honest as possible,

keeping in mind that no one but you will see what you write (you will **not** be turning this part in).

3. The next step is to write a letter to yourself expressing compassion, understanding, and acceptance for the part of yourself that you dislike. As you write, follow these guidelines:

- a) Imagine that there is someone who loves and accepts you unconditionally for who you are. What would that person say to you about this part of yourself?
- b) Remind yourself that everyone has things about themselves that they don't like, and that no one is without flaws. Think about how many other people in the world are struggling with the same thing that you're struggling with.
- c) Consider the ways in which events that have happened in your life, the family environment you grew up in, or even your genes may have contributed to this negative aspect of yourself.
- d) In a compassionate way, ask yourself whether there are things that you could do improve or better cope with this negative aspect. Focus on how constructive changes could make you feel happier, healthier, or more fulfilled, and avoid judging yourself.
- e) After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back to it later and read it again. It may be especially helpful to read it whenever you're feeling bad about this aspect of yourself, as a reminder to be more self-compassionate.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit a reflection piece (1 paragraph) where you discuss why this activity might be important and reflect on your experience with this activity. Please note: You will not be submitting your actual self-compassion letter, just a discussion of your experience of the activity.

What if I want to know more?

Breines, J. G. & Chen, S. (2012). Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18, 1133-1143.

Making Stress Your “Friend”

Developed from the TED Organization



Why is it important for me to do this?

We all experience stressful events throughout the course of our days. We have generally been encouraged to view stress as a problem and to work towards a stress-free life because of the decades of research demonstrating the correlation between highly stressful lives and lower health outcomes.

However, recent research shows that stressful events don't necessarily negatively impact our health– it all depends on how we think about them.

The key distinction seems to be in how we evaluate both our body's response to stress and how we evaluate the demands and resources related to the stressor. If we believe that we have the resources or ability to meet the demands of the stressor, then we are more likely to view it as a “challenge” and are more able to interpret it as an opportunity for growth and accomplishment. If we believe that we do not have the resources or ability to meet the demands of the stressor, then we view it as a “threat” and experience higher levels of anxiety and negative emotions in response.

In this activity, you'll learn more about how we can deploy our framing of a stressor (and how we interpret our body's response to it) to be more productive for our well-being and our performance.

Why does it work?

By re-framing our interpretation of the physiological arousal, we can view this as a tool that can actually aid our performance. For example, ‘stress’ releases chemicals like adrenaline that actually help us think faster. It also increases our heart rate so that more glucose (the key fuel source for the brain) is getting to our brain – that also helps our brain perform better. Finally, increased breathing gets more oxygen to the brain. Altogether, this means that this physiological response may be productive for us, depending on the ‘stressor’.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: Approximately 30 minutes.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. To start, watch the TED talk by Dr. Kelly McGonigal (about 15 minutes).

https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend?language=en#

2. Now, think about an event that may be occurring in the near future (next couple of weeks) that you are currently feeling 'stressed' by. In a few sentences, briefly describe this stressor.
3. Next, think about yourself in this particular event. How might you be feeling? What emotions or physical sensations might you be experiencing? Describe those. Then, describe how you might be able to interpret those emotions and sensations in a way that views them as productive. How might you be able to see those responses as beneficial to the stressful situation?
4. As you think about this stressor, do you think of it as a 'threat' or as a 'challenge' (as described in the material above)?
 - a. If you view it as a **threat**: Let's try to re-frame this. Describe, in a few sentences, times when you have successfully met the demands of a stressor in your life. Look – you've met big challenges before! Second, are there resources or internal abilities that you haven't currently taken advantage of that you could? Describe those. Make a plan to use them.
 - b. If you view it as a **challenge**: Let's try to understand this. Describe in a few sentences, times when you have successfully met the demands of a stressor in your life. Look – you've met big challenges before! Second, what resources or internal abilities were you able to use to succeed in those stressful events? Describe those. How could you use them in this current situation?

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit the writings that you completed for Steps 2 through 4.

What if I want to know more?

Jamieson, J. P., Peter, B. J., Greenwood, E. J., & Altose, A. J. (2016). Reappraising stress arousal improves performance and reduces evaluation anxiety in classroom exam situation. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7, 579-587.

Feeling Supported

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

Most of us want to be kind and caring, but that can be easier said than done, especially when we feel stressed, threatened, or insecure. Often in those moments, our natural reaction is to focus on ourselves and make sure that we're safe instead of paying attention to other people's needs and supporting them. But disconnecting from others can actually exacerbate our stress.

This activity helps free you from that downward spiral. It asks you to think about the people you turn to when you're distressed and recall times when you've felt comforted by them. Research suggests that increasing momentary feelings of comfort by thinking about supportive relationships can make us more trusting, compassionate, and helpful towards others in general.

Why does it work?

A great deal of research points to the importance of "attachment security," a state that involves feelings of trust and comfort. When we feel safe and secure, our energy can be more easily directed toward caring for others. Reflecting on the people in our life who love and support us can increase our feelings of security and also remind us of the kinds of qualities we want to embody when supporting others – thereby making us more likely to respond compassionately when we encounter someone in need.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 15 minutes

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. Write down the names of six people to whom you turn when you feel distressed or worried.
2. Write down six positive qualities that are common to these people – qualities that they strongly embody.

3. Next, recall and visualize a specific situation when you were feeling distressed or worried and one of these people comforted and helped you.
4. Write a brief description of that situation and the way you felt during it.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit a reflection piece (1 paragraph) where you discuss why this activity might be important and reflect on your experience with this activity. Please note: You do not need to disclose the experience that you described in Step 4, just a discussion of your experience of the activity.

What if I want to know more?

Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R., Gillath, O., & Nitzberg, R. A. (2005). Attachment, caregiving, and altruism: Boosting attachment security increases compassion and helping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 377 – 389.

Mindful Breathing

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

Stress, anger, and anxiety can impair not only our health but our judgment and skills of attention. Fortunately, research suggests an effective way to deal with these difficult feelings: the practice of

"mindfulness," the ability to pay careful attention to what you're thinking, feeling, and sensing in the present moment without judging those thoughts and feelings as good or bad. Countless studies link mindfulness to better health, lower anxiety, and greater resilience to stress.

But how do you cultivate mindfulness? A basic method is to focus your attention on your own breathing—a practice called, quite simply, "mindful breathing." After setting aside time to practice mindful breathing, you should find it easier to focus attention on your breath in your daily life—an important skill to help you deal with stress, anxiety, and negative emotions, cool yourself down when your temper flares, and sharpen your skills of concentration.

Why does it work?

Mindfulness gives people distance from their thoughts and feelings, which can help them tolerate and work through unpleasant feelings rather than becoming overwhelmed by them. Mindful breathing in particular is helpful because it gives people an anchor--their breath--on which they can focus when they find themselves carried away by a stressful thought. Mindful breathing also helps people stay "present" in the moment, rather than being distracted by regrets in the past or worries about the future.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 5 minutes daily for five days.

The most basic way to do mindful breathing is simply to focus your attention on your breath, the inhale and exhale. You can do this while standing, but ideally you'll be sitting or even lying in a comfortable position. Your eyes may be open or closed, but you may find it easier to maintain your focus if you close

your eyes. It can help to set aside a designated time for this activity, but it can also help to practice it when you're feeling particularly stressed or anxious.

Sometimes, especially when trying to calm yourself in a stressful moment, it might help to start by taking an exaggerated breath: a deep inhale through your nostrils (3 seconds), hold your breath (2 seconds), and a long exhale through your mouth (4 seconds). Otherwise, simply observe each breath without trying to adjust it; it may help to focus on the rise and fall of your chest or the sensation through your nostrils. As you do so, you may find that your mind wanders, distracted by thoughts or bodily sensations. That's OK. Just notice that this is happening and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

To provide you with structure for this activity, below is a link for the audio of a **short guided meditation that you can follow along with** (also available on our course management page). If you would prefer to guide your own meditation, please see me for a set of step-by-step written instructions for a short guided meditation.

Breathing Meditation (5:31 minutes):

http://marc.ucla.edu/mpeg/01_Breathing_Meditation.mp3

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit a reflection piece (1 paragraph) where you discuss your mindful breathing experience and why it might be an important skill to develop.

What if I want to know more?

Arch, J. J., & Craske, M. G. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness: Emotion regulation following a focused breathing induction. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44(12), 1849-1858.

Good Things

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

In our day-to-day lives, it's easy to get caught up in the things that go wrong and feel like we're living under our own private rain cloud; at the same time, we tend to adapt to the good things and people in our lives, taking them for granted. As a result, we often overlook everyday beauty and goodness--a

kind gesture from a stranger, say, or the warmth of our heater on a chilly morning. In the process, we frequently miss opportunities for happiness and connection.

This activity guards against those tendencies. By remembering and listing the positive things that have happened in your day--and considering what caused them--you tune into the sources of goodness in your life. It's a habit that can change the emotional tone of your life, replacing feelings of disappointment or entitlement with those of gratitude--which may be why this activity is associated with significant increases in happiness.

Why does it work?

By giving you the space to focus on the positive, this activity teaches you to notice, remember, and savor the better things in life. It may prompt you to pay closer attention to positive events down the road and engage in them more fully—both in the moment and later on, when you can reminisce and share these experiences with others. Reflecting on the cause of the event may help attune you to the deeper sources of goodness in your life, fostering a mindset of gratitude.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 10 minutes per day for **5 days**.

Each day for five days, write down at least one thing that went well for you that day, and provide an explanation for why it went well. It is important to create a physical record of your items by writing them down; it is not enough simply to

do this exercise in your head. The items can be relatively small in importance (i.e., “my roommate made the coffee today”) or relatively large (i.e., “I got an A on a paper”). To make this activity part of your daily routine, some find that writing before bed is helpful.

When doing your writing, follow the steps below.

1. Give the event a title (i.e., “Professor complimented my work on a project”).
2. Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including what you did or said and, if others were involved, what they did or said.
3. Include how this event made you feel at the time and how this event made you feel later (including now, as you remember it).
4. Explain what you think caused this event—why it happened.
5. If you find yourself focusing on negative feelings, refocus your mind on the good event and the positive feelings that came with it. This can take effort, but gets easier with practice and can make a real difference in how you feel.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit Steps 1 through 5 for **one** of the five days (at minimum – if you want to submit more than one days’ worth, you can).

What if I want to know more?

Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410.

Meaningful Photos

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

Research suggests that finding greater meaning in life helps people cope with stress and improves their overall health and well-being—it's what makes life feel worth living. But finding meaning in life can sometimes feel like an elusive task. In our day-to-day lives, it can be easy to lose sight of the big picture—we tend to focus more on the mundane than the deeply meaningful.

Yet research suggests that there are potential sources of meaning all around us, from the moments of connection we share with others, to the beauty of nature, to the work that we do and the things we create. This activity helps you bring these meaningful things into focus—literally. By having you photograph, then write about, things that are meaningful to you, it encourages you to pay closer attention to the varied sources of meaning in your life, large and small, and reflect on why they are important to you.

Why does it work?

Taking time to recognize and appreciate sources of meaning through photography can help make them more tangible and serve as a reminder of what matters most to you. This greater sense of meaning can, in turn, inspire us to pursue important personal goals and give us a sense of strength and purpose when coping with stressful life events. The use of photography might also benefit people who are more visual than verbal—something for therapists, parents, or teachers to keep in mind as they approach conversations about meaning, purpose, and values in life.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 10 minutes per day for **5 days** to take the photographs, plus one hour to do the writing exercise. While it is not necessary to take a photograph every day, assume that the photography will take you around an hour over the course of a week.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. Over the next 5 days, take photographs of things that make your life feel meaningful or full of purpose. These can be people, places, objects, or pets. If you are not able to take photos of these things—like if they're not nearby—you can take photos of souvenirs, reminders, websites, or even other photos. Take at least five photographs.
2. At the end of the five days, upload your photos to a computer.
3. Then, once you have collected all of your photos, take time to look at and reflect on each one. For each photo, write down a response to the following question: *“What does this photo represent, and why is it meaningful?”*

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit a Word document that contains your five photographs and responses to step #3.

What if I want to know more?

Steger, M. F, Shim, Y., Barenz, J., & Shin, J. Y. (2013). Through the windows of the soul: A pilot study using photography to enhance meaning in life. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 3, 27-30.

Use Your Strengths

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

Sometimes we give our weaknesses and limitations more attention than our strengths. Yet research suggests that thinking about personal strengths can increase our happiness and reduce depression.

This activity asks you to identify one of your personal strengths – a positive trait that contributes to your character, such as kindness or perseverance – and consider how you could use it in a new and different way. Recognizing and exercising these strengths can make them stronger and better equip you to meet life’s challenges.

Why does it work?

While working to improve shortcomings is important for well-being, it is also important to nurture our strengths and put them to use. Reflecting on these strengths can help remind people that they do have important positive qualities, and this reminder can build confidence and self-esteem – and, in turn, increase happiness. Putting strengths to use can help enhance them, and using strengths in new and different ways can reveal how useful these strengths can be in a range of contexts.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 15 minutes, **every day** for 5 days.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity. It’s best if you can do Steps 1 and 2 either early in the morning OR at the end of the day (and implement your plan for using the strength the following day).

1. Take a moment to think about one of your personal strengths – for instance, creativity, perseverance, kindness, modesty, or curiosity. Consider how you could use this strength today in a new and different way. For example, if you choose the personal strength of perseverance, you might make a list of tasks that you have found challenging recently,

then try to tackle each one of them. Or if you choose curiosity, you might attempt an activity that you've never tried before.

2. Describe in writing the personal strength that you plan to use today and how you are going to use it. Then, go ahead and do it – act on your strength as frequently as possible throughout the day.
3. Repeat the steps above every day for 5 days. You may use the same personal strength across multiple days (or all 5 days), or try using a new personal strength each day.
4. At the end of the 5 days, write about the personal strengths that you focused on during the week and how you used them. Write in detail about what you did, how you felt, and what you learned from the experience. Please note: this is what you'll be submitting.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit the reflection that you wrote as part of Step 4.

What if I want to know more?

Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N. & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60, 410 – 421.

Good Morning, Self-Affirmation!

Developed from "DLM – Tips for Life"



Why is it important for me to do this?

Do you ever wake up with feelings of stress and tension even before facing your day? Did you know that when you first rouse out of sleep, you are your most vulnerable and most susceptible to worry and anxiety and stress?

Millions of people experience morning anxiety of some level. On the surface, it may seem harmless. But if you continue to ignore it, the anxiety will build up tension and stress in your system over the years and can adversely affect your health and mental well-being. One easy and effective path to getting rid of morning anxiety is the path of daily positive affirmations. It is a tool that you can use anytime, anywhere, to redirect your negative thoughts and create space for positive thoughts in your mind.

Why does it work?

Those first few moments as you are slowly waking up are critical to setting the tone of your day. You can take charge and decide how you are going to feel starting with that first moment. The power of the mind and the miracle of positive thoughts has been proven by science to improve our health, productivity, creativity, longevity, and overall state of being. Plus, this activity is so easy to do that you do not need any special preparation for it and you don't even need to be in a particular position. In fact, you can do this even as you are still laying in bed under the covers, noodling over the dreams you just had, and slowly coming to full consciousness.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 5 minutes **daily** for **5 days**.

Positive affirmations are simple, first-person, present-tense, active statements that you repeat to yourself on a regular basis. As a result, you create the exact state of mind that you wish to be in. For most of us, that's a positive, healthy and productive state of mind. You can create your own affirmations from scratch, use the affirmations from below that resonate with you, or modify the affirmations from below that you like but don't quite feel right to you.

Here are 10 morning affirmations that are particularly effective in helping you address morning stress and anxiety.

- a) I am feeling healthy and strong today.
- b) I am loved, loving, and lovable.
- c) I have the courage to make this a great day.
- d) My body is healing and improving every day.
- e) Everything works out for my highest good.
- f) I choose to see the best side of people and circumstances.
- g) I make a positive difference for someone today.
- h) Everything I need comes to me at the right time.
- i) My work on earth has meaning and purpose.
- j) I am grateful and content with my life.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. Read over them out loud a few times, familiarize yourself with the sound of your voice as you read positive statements. Some of us are not even used to hearing ourselves talk this way.
2. Then choose your favorite three affirmations from the list and put them on a note card or on your phone where you can quickly access it. Put the phone or note card next to your bed. When you wake up tomorrow, grab the affirmations while still in bed and say each one out loud to yourself three times.
3. Repeat this for 5 days. If you want to extend the experience, pick five to seven affirmations and repeat each three times every morning. You can also swap the first three for a set of new three after a week. When you do this, your mind starts to get used to hearing a positive inner dialogue. As a result, you begin to push out the negative dialogue to the background and change the flow of your thoughts.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit a reflection piece (1 paragraph) where you discuss your experience engaging in morning self-affirmations and why learning to think positive, productive, and healthy thoughts about yourself is an important skill to develop.

What if I want to know more?

Creswell, J.D., Dutcher, J.M., Klein, W.M.P., Harris, P.R., & Levine, J.M. (2013) Self-affirmation improves problem-solving under stress. *PLoS ONE* 8(5), 1-7.

DLM Tips for Life - <http://www.dumblittleman.com/2014/11/get-rid-morning-anxiety-10-easy-positive-affirmations.html>

Finding Silver Linings

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

Most of us ruminate on things that have gone wrong in our lives – a mistake we made at work, an evening that didn't go as planned. It can sometimes seem like our lives are filled with these mishaps and disappointments. Focusing on them too much, however, can cast a pall over our lives and even be associated with depressive thinking.

Looking on the bright side even when things go wrong is a key component of optimism, which research links to lower rates of depression, a better ability to cope with stress, and more relationship satisfaction, among other benefits. While finding the silver lining on a negative experience might (understandably) make you fear turning into a Pollyanna, many of us have a tendency to look on the bright side too rarely, not too often. This exercise is designed to help you achieve a healthier balance.

Why does it work?

Looking on the bright side of life in general, or of a bad situation in particular, can increase happiness by boosting your sense of self-worth, motivating you to go after your goals, and enhancing your enjoyment of life. Regularly completing the silver linings exercise can help you get in the habit of recognizing positive aspects of life and seeing the upside to challenging situations rather than fixating on the downsides. With repeated practice, you may find that it comes more naturally to look on the bright side, even when faced with difficulties in your life.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 10 minutes, **every day** for 5 days.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. To start, list five things that make you feel like your life is enjoyable, enriching, and/or worthwhile at this moment. These things can be as

general as ‘being in good health’ or as specific as ‘drinking a delicious cup of coffee this morning.’ The purpose of this first step is to help you shift into a positive state of mind about your life in general.

2. Next, think about the most recent time when something didn’t go your way, or when you felt frustrated, irritated, or upset.
3. In a few sentences, briefly describe the situation in writing.
4. Then, list three things that can help you see the bright side of this situation. For example, perhaps you missed your bus this morning. Three ways to look on the bright side of this situation might be:
 - . Even though you missed the bus, you got some good exercise when you were running to catch it.
 - a. You’re fortunate to live in a city where there was another bus just 10 minutes later, or where buses run reliably at all.
 - b. Ten years from now, you likely won’t remember what happened this morning.
5. Complete Steps 1 through 4 on five consecutive days. Your five positive things from Step 1 do not have to change each day. However, you should use a different situation for Step 2 each day.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit Steps 1 through 4 for **one** of the five days (at minimum – if you want to submit more than one days’ worth, you can).

What if I want to know more?

Sergeant, S., & Mongrain, M. (2014). An online optimism intervention reduces depression in pessimistic individuals. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 82*, 263-274.

Best Possible Self

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

Sometimes our goals in life can be elusive. But research suggests that building optimism about the future can motivate people to work toward that desired future and thus make it more likely to become a reality.

This activity asks you to imagine your life going as well as it possibly could, then write about this best possible future. By doing so, research suggests that you'll not only increase your happiness in the present but pave the way for sustained happiness down the line.

Why does it work?

By thinking about your best possible future self, you can learn about yourself and what you want in life. This way of thinking can help you restructure your priorities in life in order to reach your goals. Additionally, it can help you increase your sense of control over your life by highlighting what you need to do to achieve your dreams.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 15 minutes.

Take a moment to imagine your life in the future. What is the best possible life you can imagine? Consider all of the relevant areas of your life, such as your career, academic work, relationships, hobbies, and/or health. What would happen in these areas of your life in your best possible future?

For the next 15 minutes, write continuously about what you imagine this best possible future to be. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process.

1. It may be easy for this exercise to lead you to examine how your current life may not match this best possible future. You may be tempted to

think about ways in which accomplishing goals has been difficult for you in the past, or about financial/time/social barriers to being able to make these accomplishments happen. For the purpose of this exercise, however, we encourage you to focus on the future—imagine a brighter future in which you are your best self and your circumstances change just enough to make this best possible life happen.

2. This exercise is most useful when it is very specific—if you think about a new job, imagine exactly what you would do, who you would work with, and where it would be. The more specific you are, the more engaged you will be in the exercise and the more you'll get out of it.
3. Be as creative and imaginative as you want, and don't worry about grammar or spelling.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit your “free writing” on your best possible future self. As noted in step 3, you do not need to worry about grammar or spelling. Your work can also be hand-written if you wish.

What if I want to know more?

Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006). How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 1*(2), 73-82.

Random Act of Kindness

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action](#) Curriculum Guide



Why is it important for me to do this?

We all perform acts of kindness at one time or another. These acts may be larger or small, and their beneficiaries may not even be aware of them. Yet their effects can be profound – not only on the recipient but on the giver as well. This activity asks you to perform five acts of kindness in one

day as a way of both promoting kindness in the world and cultivating happiness in yourself and others.

Why does it work?

Researchers believe this practice makes you feel happier because it makes you think more highly of yourself and become more aware of positive social interactions. It may also increase your kind, helpful – or ‘pro-social’ – attitudes and tendencies toward others. Evidence suggests that variety is key: People who perform the same acts over and over show a downward trajectory in happiness, perhaps because any act starts to feel less special the more it becomes routine.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: Varies, depending on your acts of kindness. Could be anywhere from several minutes to several hours.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. One day this week, perform five acts of kindness – all five in one day. It doesn't matter if the acts are big or small, but it is more effective if you perform a variety of acts.
2. The acts do not need to be for the same person – the person doesn't even have to be aware of them. Examples include feeding a stranger's parking meter, donating blood, helping a friend with a chore, or providing a meal to a person in need.

3. After each act, write down what you did in one or two sentences. Additionally, describe, in a sentence or two, how your random act of kindness made you feel.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit the reflection that you wrote as part of Step 3.

What if I want to know more?

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*.

Three Senses

*Developed from "AnxietyBC Youth Mindfulness" &
Brad Walters (MSW) "Work Day Stress Relief"*



Why is it important for me to do this?

Do you know what it's like to feel grounded? Or, perhaps I should ask, do you know what it's like to not feel grounded? It's that feeling of 'overwhelm' when you have trouble concentrating and can't fathom how you're going to get everything completed.

It may feel like your brain detaches from your body and you become dizzy with thoughts. Or, imagine being caught in a current of water where no matter how hard you swim you just can't reach solid ground. In fact, fighting the current just wears you out and gets you pulled further into the torrent. This is a quick mindfulness activity that is helpful for "grounding" yourself during crazy days.

Why does it work?

A grounding exercise, like this 5-minutes of mindfulness, can slow your breathing, slow your heart-rate, and stop overwhelm in its tracks. It's not going to solve the problems on your to-do list, but you'll probably feel better equipped to deal with them. Five minutes is all you need (you can even set the timer on your cell phone) to engage your senses and get a foothold on your day.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 5 minutes, **every day** for 5 days.

Follow the steps below to complete this activity, *repeating the steps on each of the **five days** required for this activity.*

1. **Relax:** Sit in a comfortable position. You can sit at your desk, lay on your bed or on a couch, or even stretch out on your floor. The important part is that you are relaxed and comfortable.
2. **Breathe:** Just breathe. Refreshing, comfortable, and even breaths. Don't worry about technique, just allow relaxing breaths to enter deeply and exhale fully.

3. **Engage:** It's time to engage your 3 'big' senses (sound, sight, touch). You will do this one at a time, for at least one minute each. You can keep a clock handy or just estimate. The point here is to focus on the present moment and how each sense is being activated in that moment.

4. Simply to notice what you are experiencing right now through. Take a few slow breaths and ask yourself:

- **What are three things I can hear?** (*i.e., fridge running, car going by, music in the next room, my breath*)
- **What are three things I can see?** (*i.e., this table, that sign, that person walking by*)
- **What are three things I can feel?** (*i.e., the chair under me, my blanket, my phone in my pocket*)

5. Think of these answers to yourself slowly, one sense at a time. It's impossible to do this activity and not be present and mindful!

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit a reflection piece (1 paragraph) where you discuss your experience engaging in the three senses activity and why learning how to 'ground' yourself during stressful and chaotic times is an important skill to develop.

What if I want to know more?

Praissman, S. (2008). Mindfulness-based stress reduction: a literature review and clinician's guide. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 20(4), 212-216.

AnxietyBC Youth Mindfulness - <http://youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises>

Brad Walters (MSW) - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/design-your-path/201106/work-day-stress-relief-5-senses-in-5-mindful-minutes>

Gratitude Letter

Developed from the [Greater Good in Action Curriculum Guide](#)



Why is it important for me to do this?

Feeling gratitude can improve health and happiness; expressing gratitude also strengthens relationships. Yet sometimes expressions of thanks can be fleeting and superficial. This activity encourages you to express gratitude in a thoughtful, deliberate way by writing — and,

ideally, delivering — a letter of gratitude to a person you have never properly thanked.

Why does it work?

The letter affirms positive things in your life and reminds you how others have cared for you — life seems less bleak and lonely if someone has taken such a supportive interest in us. Visiting the giver allows you to strengthen your connection with them and remember how others value you as an individual.

What do I have to do?

Time Required: 15 minutes for the letter writing, approx. 30 minutes for the visit

Follow the steps below to complete this activity.

1. Call to mind someone who did something for you for which you are extremely grateful but to whom you never expressed your deep gratitude. This could be a relative, friend, teacher, or colleague. Try to pick someone who is still alive and could meet you face-to-face in the next week. It may be most helpful to select a person or act that you haven't thought about for a while—something that isn't always on your mind.
2. Now, write a letter to one of these people, guided by the following steps.
 - Write as though you are addressing this person directly (“Dear _____”).
 - Don't worry about perfect grammar or spelling.
 - Describe in specific terms what this person did, why you are grateful to this person, and how this person's behavior affected your life. Try to be as concrete as possible.
 - Describe what you are doing in your life now and how you often remember his or her efforts.

- Try to keep your letter to roughly one page (~300 words).
3. Next, you should try if at all possible to deliver your letter in person, following these steps:
- Plan a visit with the recipient. Let that person know you'd like to see him or her and have something special to share, but don't reveal the exact purpose of the meeting.
 - When you meet, let the person know that you are grateful to them and would like to read a letter expressing your gratitude; ask that he or she refrain from interrupting until you're done.
 - Take your time reading the letter. While you read, pay attention to his or her reaction as well as your own.
 - After you have read the letter, be receptive to his or her reaction and discuss your feelings together.
 - Remember to give the letter to the person when you leave.

If physical distance keeps you from making a visit, you may choose to arrange a phone or video chat.

What do I need to submit?

After you complete this activity, you will submit a reflection piece (1 paragraph) where you discuss why this activity might be important and reflect on your experience with this activity. Please note: You will not be submitting your actual gratitude letter, just a discussion of your experience of the activity.

What if I want to know more?

Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410.