

Flourishing or **Floundering?**

*Using Positive Psychology Principles to
Shape New Learning Paradigms for
Students in Transition*

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Objectives of the Session

- ▮ Define flourishing & discuss its relevance within the mission of higher education
- ▮ Explore a few major contributions from positive psychology, with an emphasis on hope, well-being, and engagement
- ▮ “Take-aways”: Potential applications for promoting student flourishing, with a focus on the needs of students in transition

Who's in the Room?

- ▮ Academic Affairs? Student Affairs?
- ▮ Specialized roles in these or other areas?
- ▮ Types of institutions
- ▮ Populations you serve?
- ▮ Curricular? Co-curricular?
- ▮ Presenter's background: Student Affairs & Educational Psychology (learning & motivation)

Gallup Student Poll Overview

The Gallup Student Poll is a 20-item measure of **hope, engagement, and well-being**. Gallup researchers targeted these three variables because they met the following criteria:

- They can be reliably measured
- They have a meaningful relationship with or impact on educational outcomes.
- They are malleable and can be enhanced through deliberate action

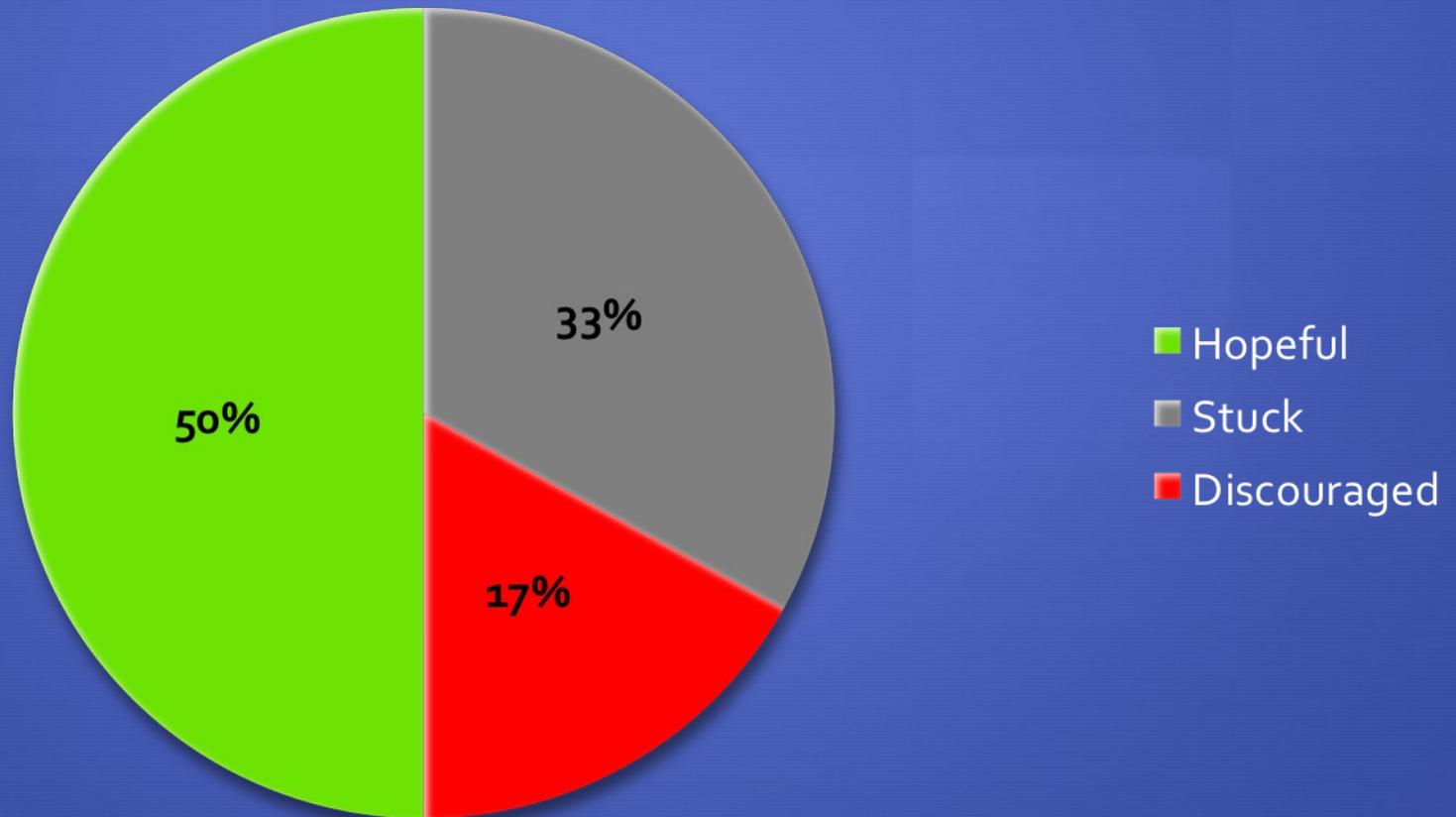
Hope = ideas and energy we have for the future

Engagement = involvement in / enthusiasm for school

Well-Being = how we think about and experience our lives

National Level of Student Hope

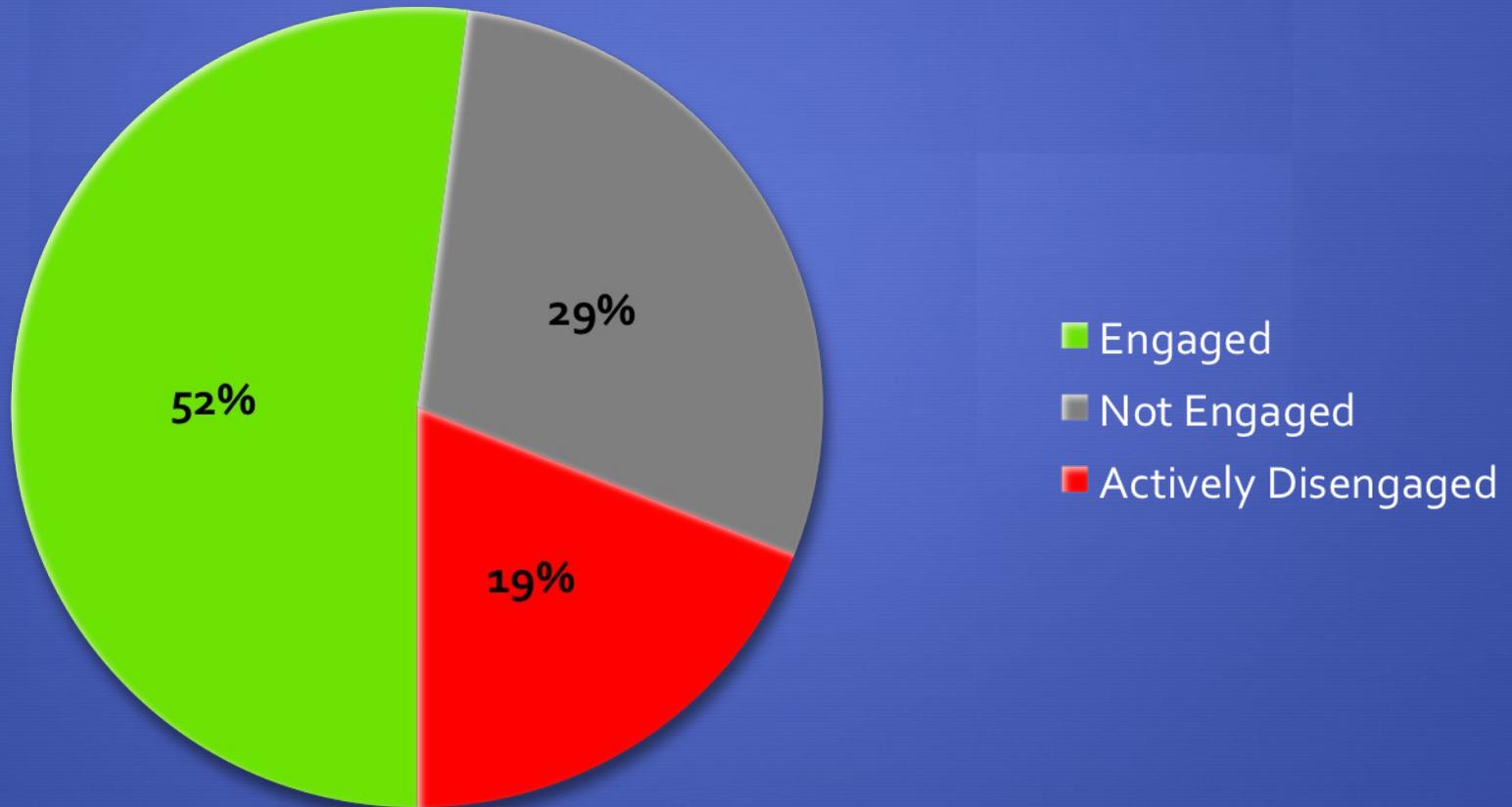
Fall 2009



$n = 228,508$

National Level of Student Engagement

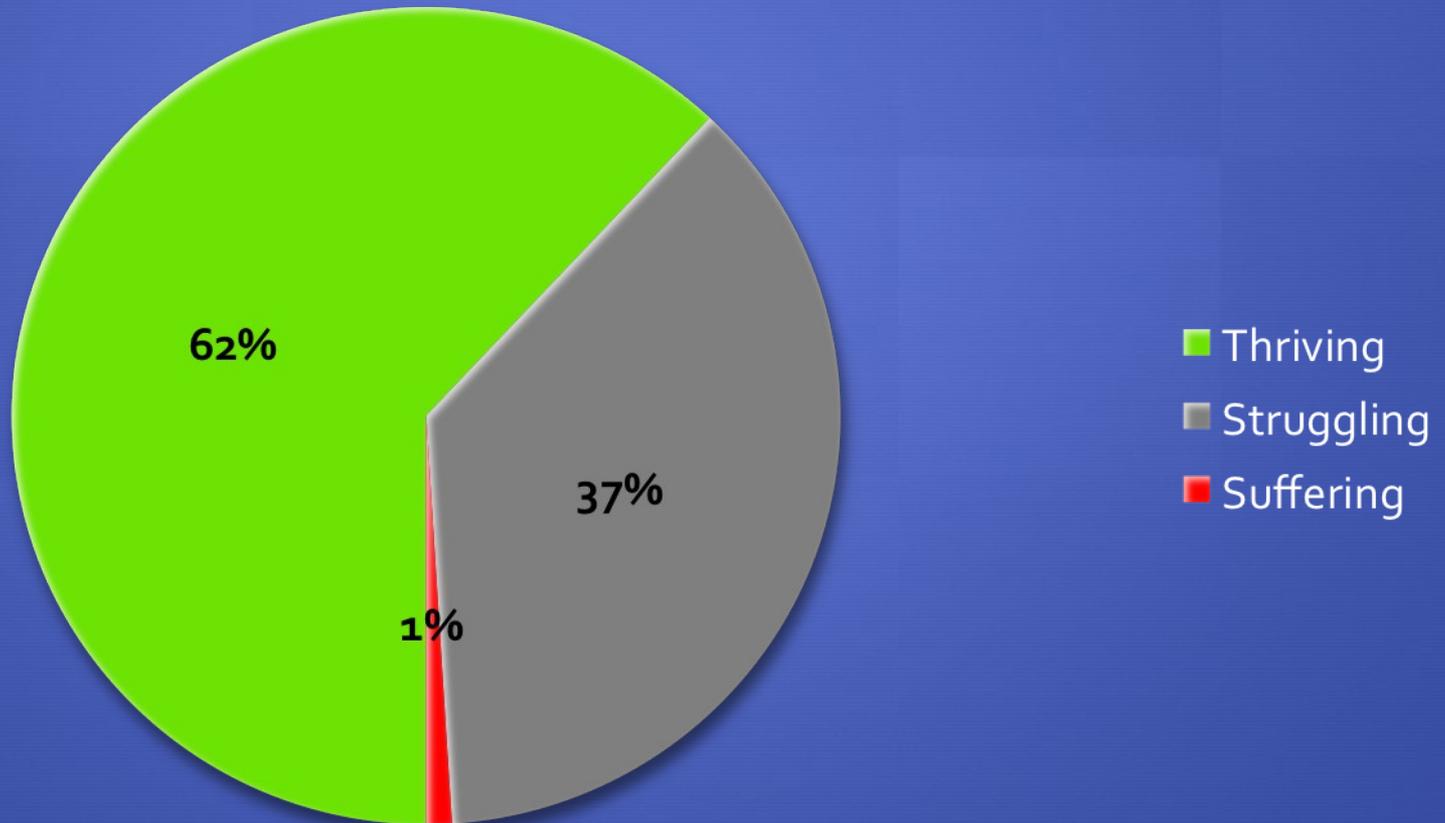
Fall 2009



$n = 230,265$

National Level of Student Well-Being

Fall 2009



$n = 246,682$

Positive Psychology:

(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

- ▮ Pursued to understand factors that enable individuals, communities, & societies to flourish
 - ▮ What's **right** with people?
 - ▮ What can we learn from studying human flourishing?
- ▮ Flourishing refers to well-being, quality of life & relationships, meaningful purpose & engagement
- ▮ At least partially accounts for individual differences in motivation & achievement

Flourishing & Floundering

- Think of student(s) you know who appear to be **flourishing**.
 - *What are their habits & characteristics?*
 - What are they doing differently than students who seem to be floundering or struggling?
- Signs of floundering:
 - Declines in student engagement & well-being
 - What trends do *you* see? What concerns you most?
 - What issues tend to be unique to students experiencing transitions?

Assumption: Promoting student flourishing is part of our mission.

- How are we doing? How do we know?
- Are retention and GPA sufficient gauges?
(Are new indicators needed?)
- How do we go about promoting flourishing?
 - In course curricula? In programs and services?
 - Are these approaches reactive or proactive?
 - *Just as “preventing failure” ≠ success, attempts to prevent floundering may not be the same as promoting flourishing.*

Well-being

- ▣ Core components of *psychological well-being*: (Ryan, Huta, Deci, 2008):
 - ▣ Autonomy (sense of personal control)
 - ▣ Competence (feeling capable of mastery)
 - ▣ Belonging (meaningfully connected to others)
- ▣ In what ways do we promote autonomy, encourage mastery, & foster belonging?

Interpretive Frameworks:

Flourishing begins with the way we think about our lives.

- ▣ What kinds of beliefs or assumptions do students hold?
 - ▣ Ways of thinking about ability & the role of effort (“mindset”)
 - ▣ Options available for solving problems & coping with difficulty
- ▣ How are those beliefs challenged or reinforced in college? (*Via institutional practices, perceived support, implicit messages received in and outside the classroom*)
- ▣ How do these beliefs influence students’ actions?

Hope as an Interpretive Framework

- ▣ **Hope** is a way of thinking about goals (*Snyder, et al., 1991*)
- ▣ More than positive thinking, it's how we connect the future with the present *through our behavior & effort*
- ▣ Hope is a reliable predictor of effort, and evidence suggests it's *malleable* (*Lopez, et al., 2009; Snyder, et al., 2002*)
- ▣ **4 core beliefs** of hopeful people:
 - ▣ The future will be better than the present.
 - ▣ I have the power to make it so.
 - ▣ There are *many* paths to my goals.
 - ▣ *None* of them is free from obstacles.

What does hope look like?

- ▮ 3 “Core Competencies” of Hope:
 - ▮ **Goals** (*hopeful people set personally meaningful goals*)
 - ▮ **Pathways** (*hopeful people perceive they can generate many possible routes to accomplishing their goals*)
 - ▮ **Agency** (*hopeful people perceive they can sustain their effort, persevering in spite of obstacles & setbacks*)
- ▮ These 3 are *interdependent*; when one deteriorates, the others also weaken
- ▮ In a longitudinal study, hope predicted GPA and persistence to graduation even when controlling for ACT/SAT, IQ, and HS grades (*Snyder, et al., 2002*)

Teaching Hope: Learning Strategies Course as a Hope and Well-being Intervention (“at risk” students)

- ▮ Weekly goal exercises reinforce goals, pathways, & agency:
 - ▮ *Purpose, Strategy, Contingency planning, Coping*
 - ▮ *Study skills taught as **pathways** to broader goals (mastery & personal growth)*
- ▮ Weekly small group experiences promote belonging, autonomy & mastery (feedback, coaching, support)
- ▮ Reinforces mindfulness & positive habits (*planning skills, asking for help & using resources, monitoring progress, evaluating use of strategies*)
- ▮ Promotes resilience & confidence in handling setbacks (*better coping strategies, “buffer” against negative life events—more likely to persist in difficult challenges; implications for well-being AND retention*)

Related Positive Psych Constructs

- ▣ Strengths-Based Education: Identifying & developing personal strengths as a basis for thriving
 - ▣ Gallup: StrengthsQuest tool
 - ▣ VIA Character Strengths instrument <http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>
- ▣ Self-determination theory: understanding ties between behavior & well-being (*Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008*)
- ▣ Grit (*Duckworth & Quinn, 2009*)
 - ▣ High passion, high persistence
 - ▣ Predicted achievement as well as longevity
- ▣ Flow (*Csikszentmihalyi, 1990*): Losing oneself in an enjoyable activity; increases positive emotion & contributes to higher levels of engagement

Using data to drive decision-making:

General practices to foster hope, well-being, & engagement

- ▮ Adopt a “mastery model”—give students opportunities to revise their work based on feedback
- ▮ Communicate high expectations & faith that students can meet them
- ▮ Make it okay for students to fail (part of the learning process)
- ▮ Encourage students to set goals toward mastery (vs. performance)
- ▮ Give frequent, formative feedback; aid students in tracking progress
- ▮ Make the implicit, explicit:
 - ▮ Model “expert” thinking processes (steps you use to arrive at decisions)
 - ▮ Explain skills involved in tasks & assignments and their “big-picture” relevance (understanding purpose helps students stay motivated)

Using data to drive decision-making: Examples & Brainstorming

- ▮ Learning Strategies & FYS courses (“caring coaches”)
- ▮ Academic Advising & Career Advising
- ▮ What about housing, judicial, programming?
- ▮ Other curricular initiatives?
- ▮ What implications do **you** see for the work you’re doing?
 - ▮ Guidance in “goaling” and “re-goaling”
 - ▮ Building resilience
- ▮ Could such data reveal new “at risk” groups?

Recommended Resources: Student Well-being Data

- NSSE http://nsse.iub.edu/html/annual_results.cfm
- American College Health Association
http://www.acha-ncha.org/pubs_rpts.html
- ACT Engage: http://www.act.org/engage/pdf/ENGAGE_Issue_Brief.pdf
- Gallup
<http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/161513/student-success-measures.aspx>
- Other sources you use?

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- TED talks: Angela Duckworth on Grit; Martin Seligman on Positive Psychology
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/18/magazine/what-if-the-secret-to-success-is-failure.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>
- <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/making-hope-happen>

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