The PERMA Well-Being Profile of Graduate Students

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Abstract: This paper discussed the preliminary findings of a pilot study concerning the levels of well-being of the new graduate students Term 3 AY 2019-2020 of De La Salle University. The descriptive quantitative design was used. The researcher utilized a survey questionnaire instruments consisting of two parts, the personal information and the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) Profiler. There were one hundred seventeen (117) new graduate students participated in the study. It was found out that the overall well-being based on the PERMA Profiler appeared to be in the normal functioning (M=7.68; SD=1.28). Recommendations for the program development, based on the results of PERMA, presented in this study to guide the graduate students towards a flourishing graduate school journey.

Key Words: Well-being; PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, Accomplishment); Flourishing; Graduate Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Well-being is valuable not only because the people feel good about themselves but also of its various benefits. When compared to people with low well-being, people with higher levels of well-being benefits more, as determined in the studies (University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center, 2020), such as but not limited to: perform better at work, have more satisfying relationships, are more cooperative, have stronger immune systems, have better physical health, live longer, have lower levels of burnout, have greater self-control, have better self-regulation and coping abilities.

The PERMA Theory of Well-Being (Seligman, 2011) has five (5) measurable elements: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA). There is no single element defines well-being, but each contributes to it. Increase flourishing by increasing PERMA is the goal of its theory. Flourishing is a dynamic optimal state of psychosocial functioning that arises from functioning well across multiple psychosocial domains (Butler & Kern, 2016).

Seligman (2011) discussed the five elements as follows: (P) Positive emotion of which happiness and life satisfaction are all aspects of it. The person can increase positive emotion by cultivating gratitude and forgiveness about the past, by savoring physical pleasures and mindfulness about the present and by building hope and optimism about the future; (E) Engagement is an experience in which the person is fully deploys their skills, strengths, and attention for challenging tasks; (R) Relationships are essential to well-being. Connections with people can give one's life purpose and meaning. Research shows that doing acts of kindness for others produces and increase in well-being; (M) Meaning can be derived from belonging and serving something bigger than the self, such as but no limited to family, community, social causes, religious group, professional organizations;

and (A) Accomplishment – people pursue achievement, competence, success and mastery for its own sake, in a variety of domains such as but not limited to workplace, sports, games, hobbies.

Despite the growing literature on well-being, few or there is a dearth of studies that have been conducted along this line within the context of the Philippine education especially in the graduate school. Hence, interestingly, this paper determined the levels of well-being of the new graduate students of De La Salle University Term 3 AY 2019-2020.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The quantitative approach was used, specifically the descriptive design, in collecting and analyzing the data. Ethridge (2004) stated that descriptive studies may be characterized as simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what is. Descriptive research is aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables them to describe the situation more completely than was possible without employing this method (Fox & Bayat, 2007).

2.2 Participants

The participants were the new graduate students enrolled in SPS 5000 Term 3 AY 2019-2020 from De La Salle University Manila. As the start of their new journey in graduate studies it is essential to know the status of the new graduate students' well-being and be guided towards a flourishing graduate school journey in DLSU.

There was a total of 274 new graduate students enrolled in SPS 5000. Out of 274 new graduate students, only 130 (47.45%) participated in the survey questionnaires and only 117 (42.71%) completed the survey questionnaires and gave the consent to use the data for research purposes, which comprised of 38.46% male (n=45) and 61.54% female (n=72). The mean age is 26 years old, ages ranged from 20 to 54 years. 85.47% (n=100) were single, 5.13% (n=6) were married and .85% was widowed. The participants' nationality are as follows: 96.58% (n=113) Filipino, .85% (n=1) Indian, .85% (n=1) Vietnamese, .85% (n=1) Chinese and .85% (n=1) Filipino-Singaporean.

Majority of the participants were employed 83.76% (n=98) while 16.24% (n=19) were full-time graduate students.

2.3 Measures

The researcher utilized a survey questionnaire instrument consisting of two parts, the personal information and the PERMA Profiler. The personal information included the participants' age, gender, civil status, nationality and occupation in the survey questionnaire. The PERMA Profiler measures five pillars that underpin a sense of flourishing in life as defined by Seligman (2011) as Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA).

The PERMA Profiler is a brief 23 item measure that includes three questions for each of the five well-being constructs in addition to questions about negative effect, physical health and loneliness (Butler & Kern, 2016). Participants were asked to answer the questions using an eleven (11)-point Likert scale (0-10, never to always/not at all to completely) with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.93 indicating a high internal consistency (Przybylko, et. Al, 2021). Well-being measure usually are skewed toward the positive end, such that the midpoint becomes about 6.5 to 7.5 (not 5, the middle of the 0 to 10 scale). Further, the PERMA Profiler indicated highly acceptable psychometric properties across various, large and diverse populations. This then capacitates the PERMA Profiler as an effective tool and measure of well-being (Butler & Kern, 2016).

In interpreting the PERMA scores, Peggykern.Org (2020) provided the scale as follow:

Very high functioning =
9 and above (0 to 1 for negative emotion)
High functioning =
8-8.9 (1.1 to 3 for negative emotion)
Normal functioning =
6.5 to 7.9 (3 to 5 for negative emotion)
Sub-optimal functioning =
5 to 6.4 (5.1 to 6.5 for negative emotion)
Languishing =
below 5 (above 6.5 for negative emotion)

The PERMA Profiler has demonstrated acceptable internal reliability and good overall fit in studies including over 15,000 participants worldwide (Butler & Kern, 2016). In the present study, the measure was administered through online version

using the Yale Qualtrics Survey Tool (2020). The link for the said tool was included as part of the SPS 5000 Module 6 Adjusting to Graduate Studies (Office of Counseling and Career Services).

2.4 Procedures

The survey questionnaire instruments were administered to the new graduate students of De La Salle University (DLSU) Manila during the SPS 5000 (Institutional Orientation) Term 3 AY 2019-2020 asynchronous session as part of the Module 6 Adjusting to Graduate Studies - Office of Counseling and Career Services. SPS 5000 (Institutional Orientation) is a required course for the new graduate students in DLSU to be informed of the various services offered to graduate students.

The new graduate student-participants were asked to answer the personal questionnaire and the PERMA Profiler, among others, using the google form and provided a link to redirect them to the free Yale Qualtrics Survey Tool (2020), respectively. They were also provided google form to indicate their scores, with consent to use these scores for appropriate intervention needed for the graduate students in relation to well-being, on what they have obtained in the PERMA Profiler.

2.5 Data Analysis

The Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the data obtained from the instruments. The mean of each item (except for the single item, loneliness) was calculated and an excel spreadsheet of PERMA profile depicting a snapshot of each participants' well-being was created. Particularly, this study utilized mean, percentage and standard deviation to present the information gathered for the descriptive questions in the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main goal of the present study was to discuss the pilot preliminary findings concerning the levels of well-being of new graduate students enrolled in Term 3 AY 2019-2020 from De La Salle University.
Based on the results of PERMA Profiler, it appears that the overall well-being of graduate

student participants reported a positive normal sense of well-being as shown in Figure 1.
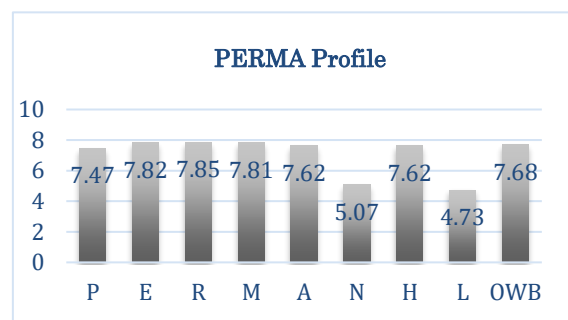

Figure 1

The average PERMA Profiler Score (Overall Wellbeing) is 7.68 on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10). Across the five domains of well-being indicated the scores respectively: Positive emotion (M=7.47; SD=1.50); Engagement (M=7.82; SD=1.31); Relationship (M=7.85; SD=1.59); Meaning (M=7.81; SD=1.60); and Accomplishment (M=7.62; SD=1.22). It seems that the graduate student participants rated most favorably on Relationship being the highest mean obtained. They also reported normal levels of Health (M=7.62; SD=1.58), Loneliness (M=4.73; SD=2.61) and Negative emotions (M=5.07; SD=1.92).

Based on the results, the graduate student participants generally adopt positive perspective, find the things that make them happy and can make them engaged. They could even put goals on challenging themselves in the activities they enjoy. They seem to focus on their relationships with the people around them such as family and friends, and adequately find ways to connect with them. They find the meaning to their life and what gives them a sense of purpose. Being aware of the PERMA Profiler score might assist the graduate student participants consider the meaning and fulfillment to their lives and integrate it with their daily activities.

The presented PERMA scores can help the graduate student participants gained self-insights in relation to the baseline measurement of their well-being. However, it is to note, that the scores do not reflect the totality of their well-being, this is only based on one (1) assessment, which is the PERMA Profiler.

The results can be helpful for the new graduate student participants to know the areas that are lower and higher. They will be able to identify what they value most and where they would like to be. The results may change over time. If they are satisfied with their profile, then they must keep doing the things to proactively care for their mental health, aiming for good functioning in the long term.

4. CONCLUSIONS

What is presented in this present study may serve as a baseline measurement of well-being among the new graduate students. The results of the study may have a significant application as well in the University.

Research studies presented in the University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center (2020) stated that the science of well-being have significant implications for institutional applications such as but not limited to: (1) Schools can educate students for flourishing as well as for workplace success. The skills of well-being can be taught. (2) Workplaces can improve performance as well as raise employee well-being. (3) Counselors can nurture their clients' strengths to prevent mental illness and enhance flourishing, as well as heal damage. (4) Communities can encourage public service and civic engagement.

The Office of Counseling and Career Services (OCCS) of De La Salle University may propose programs and services to assist the graduate students towards a flourishing graduate school journey. Possible programs to be offered must consider addressing the needs for growth of the well-being and teach its skills, specifically the Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment.

The OCCS migrated from face-to-face to Telemental Health Services from the start of the quarantine, March 2020, and it might continue even after COVID-19 pandemic to make it more assessible to the graduate students especially for those who are living in provinces. The counseling service is available to them in guiding them with their needs and concerns. Positive Psychology approach can be used in highlighting the client's strengths in facing the challenging situation.

Programs such as conducting learning sessions regarding PERMA-V, Mindfulness, Value-Guided Actions, Coping Strategies and Resilience among others should also be offered through synchronous and / or asynchronous sessions to assist them in their graduate school towards a flourishing journey. The creation of the OCCS Telemental Health Services for the Graduate Students course in AnimoSpace / Canvas (2020) is also a way to connect with the graduate students in disseminating information materials and teaching them the skills of well-being. They can also set an appointment for counseling by sending direct message to the counselor.

In spite of this, much still needs to be worked on, as this is only a pilot study, particularly when it comes to the number of participants. The measurement used should be validated in the Philippine setting. The results of the present study may be used in future studies to come up with more intensive research on the well-being of the graduate students in DLSU and even in the Philippines such as using multiple regression, experimental and in-depth qualitative. Longitudinal research on the same participants can also be seen, from the time they entered DLSU until graduation.

Future directions of this kind of research should examine the relationships between different profiles and outcomes such as physical health, income, education, professional quality of life (ProQOL, 2012), as well as other factors such as age, culture, and life events.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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