

# Positive experiences of UNF students: A mixed-method model.

*Samantha Shaner  
Hannah Lehman  
Lakshmi Narayanan, Ph.D.  
Shanker Menon, Ph.D.  
Bruce Wallace, M.A.  
University of North Florida*



## INTRODUCTION

Positive psychology is becoming an increasing interest in recent years and topics such as happiness, subjective well-being, life satisfaction are being examined in many areas of psychology (Quick et al, 2007; Simmons& Nelson, 2006). Many large scale studies are being conducted by survey researchers globally to understand these constructs. In addition there is also a lot of interest in examining positive dispositional variables such as Grit, Vigor and Engagement. In this study we looked at the positive experiences students have at UNF and the positive emotions associated with these experiences. We used an online survey on Qualtrics and studied the specific conditions that promote a positive climate for student learning. We also looked at how the perceptions of these positive experiences as well as positive emotions. We also examine how these are related to some dispositional variables and demographic variables.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study was to examine what were specific incidents that students experience that students themselves perceive as very positive. The second objective was to study how and why these experiences made students felt challenged, energized, motivated, excited, and positive in some way. The third objective was to examine the emotional reactions students had to these events. The final objective was to find out how these positive perceptions related to some dispositional variables and demographic variables.



## MATERIALS & METHODS

This study examined the positive experiences of students taking 3 different modalities of classes at UNF such as face-to-face, online, and hybrid. Data was collected from students about the positive experiences they have had with UNF in the last 6 months. Students were asked to describe briefly any event, episode, or incident related to their class experience that that happened in the last 6 months that made them feel challenged, energized, motivated, excited, or made them feel positive in some way. If there was no such experience they could just say none.



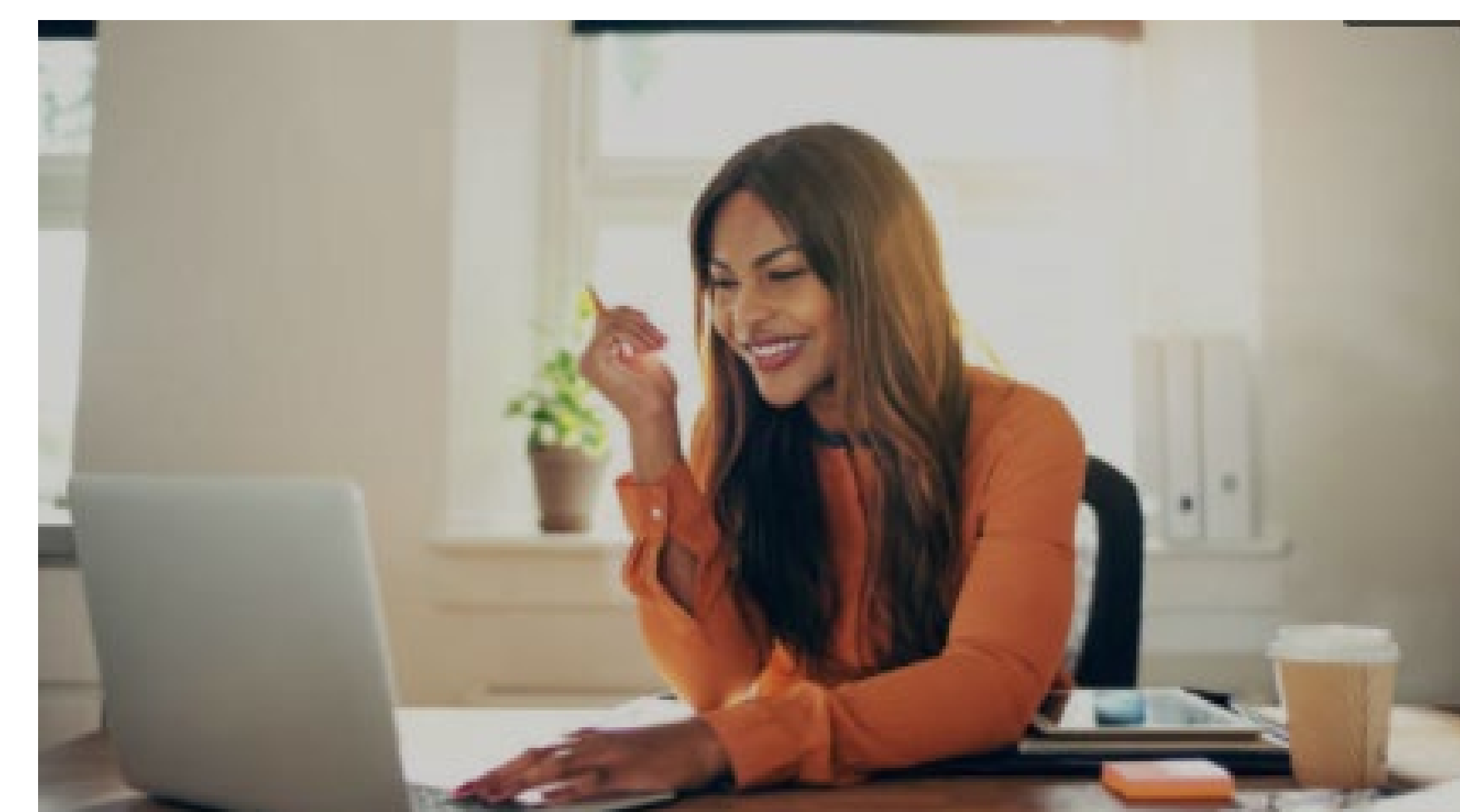
Data was collected online using the Qualtrics system and the survey was completely anonymous. The survey used a qualitative method for examining positive experiences and also measured quantitatively dispositional variables such as Grit, and Engagement which included Vigor, Dedication and Absorption.

## RESULTS

The students identified a number of episodes and incidents where they had positive experiences such as assignments with real-life focus that were applied, Challenging and inspiring projects, Supportive relationships with their instructors who were perceived as caring and empathetic, projects that made them involved directly with the community, the ability to work in teams and groups, the environment including the physical setting environment also were also reported as inspiring them. Surprisingly just getting a high grade in class was less frequently mentioned. A bivariate correlation showed a significant correlation between the GRIT questionnaire and the three categories of Engagement: Vigor ( $r(48)=.383, p<.05$ ), Dedication( $r(49)=.248, p<.05$ ), and Absorption ( $r(50)=.315, p<.05$ ). There was also a significant correlation between GRIT and age ( $r(53)=.363, p<.05$ ).

A significant correlation was found between age and the three categories of UWES: Vigor ( $r(47)=.381$ ), Dedication ( $r(48)=.348$ ), and Absorption ( $r(49)=.359$ ).

A significant relationship was found between the type eustress has on an individual and the Vigor category of the UWES questionnaire ( $F(4)=3.927, p<.05$ ).



## CONCLUSIONS

This study took a unique approach in examining only positive experiences or eustress that students have had in the last six months with a qualitative methodology that looked at specific context-related episodes. In addition some dispositional variables such as Grit and Engagement were also examined.

Some interesting findings emerged. This knowledge base of positive stress in academia can give us more insights on what are factors that contribute to a positive climate for student learning and what are dispositional and situation factors that can enhance these experiences. The significant relationships of eustress to variables such as Grit, Vigor, Dedication and Absorption suggest that perceptions of eustress pointed to the importance of both situational and dispositional factors.

This study also gave us a better understanding of unique conditions and situations that are student specific for generating eustress and positive experiences. The most significant finding from this study is the diversity of positive experiences. The other interesting finding is that many of the positive experiences students described were not related to their grades or performance. Support, encouragement, real life experiences, novel situations, physical setting of the environment, and challenge were most important. More research with larger samples and different populations are needed to get a better understanding of these results especially given the significant relationships with the dispositional variables of Grit and Engagement.

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