

# Mapping the positive turn for information science

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## Abstract

This half-day workshop will bring together scholars, practitioners, and students from across the iSchool community to discuss current research around “positive” information phenomena, that is, non-problematical perspectives on the information experience. The session will explore a range of positive concepts recently emerged in information science, such as: well-being, happiness, leisure and positive computing. Throughout the session, our conversation will move between information science to specialties such as positive psychology, positive sociology, and the sociology of happiness; we will clarify terms, concepts and themes and ultimately generate an interdisciplinary map of positive scholarship. Participants will share their own thinking and research on these topics, map current and future research trajectories, and produce a foundation for future collaboration. In keeping with a spirit of interdisciplinarity, the event will feature a keynote by the architect of positive sociology, sociologist and leisure scholar Dr. Robert A. Stebbins.

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## 1 Purpose

The purpose of the workshop is to bring together iSchool researchers working in the areas of positive information science, well-being, happiness, and leisure to map such research to other academic disciplines, such as psychology, sociology and health.

Kari and Hartel (2007) have argued for a positive information science, to escape the tendency to see information as always associated with a status of deficiency, problems or overload. There have been a number of responses to this call, particularly in the growth of studies of information behaviour in serious leisure (Hartel, 2003). Casual leisure also has its information aspects, and Tinto and Ruthven (2015) have recently explored the sharing of happy information.

In the wider scene, economists and psychologists have been very successful at putting the concept of well-being on the political, and so the research agenda (Layard 2005; Seligman, 2003), though the “happiness industry” is not without its critics (Davies, 2015). Well-being is a theme of EC horizon2020 funding. The term positive has had particular traction. For most of the past century, psychology focused its research on problematic mental states and processes. In response, a movement toward a positive psychology emerged as “the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive” (Positive ..., 2007). Calvo and Peters (2015) have recently proposed “Positive computing” as a way of realising the benefits of positive psychology, with obvious connections to other trends such as affective computing. Stebbins (2009) has proposed a programme for positive sociology exploring how, why, and when people pursue those things in life that they desire, and the things they do to make their existence attractive and worth living. There is also a “sociology of happiness” (Cieslik, 2014; Hymans, 2014). Another strand in a “positive turn” could be seen in appreciative inquiry, a popular method for analysing and changing organisational experience (Cooperrider et al., 2008). There are wider resonances in agendas driven by policy such as around flourishing communities and resilience.

## 2 Intended audience

Researchers who are currently working in such areas as serious and casual leisure; positive/affective computing; happiness and well-being. Those with an interest in such research.

## 3 Proposed format

We have planned this as a **half-day workshop**.

We will solicit short position papers from all participants that will be circulated prior to the workshop through a simple WordPress site.

The workshop itself will be opened by Professor Stebbins with a 20 minute keynote, mapping out his perspective on the history and logic of the positive trend in the social sciences. This will be followed by five minute overviews from the other organisers of a number of relevant areas of current research in the information domain and beyond. This will amount to a tentative scoping of activity in the information field, mapping ideas and how they relate to work in other disciplines, such as economics, sociology, psychology etc.

Participants will then work in groups of four or five to elaborate this mapping, from their own knowledge and interests. Small group membership will be suggested on the basis of the position statements, and each group will be facilitated by one of the organisers.

After one hour of group work and a refreshment break, a plenary session will hear group reports and together the workshop will attempt to map out the field as it is developing. The session will close with an invitation to share business cards. With permission a delegate list with contact details of all those attending will be shared across the group.

#### 4 Goals

- To map completed and planned relevant "positive" research in the information science domain;
- To review and map relevant "positive" concepts and work in other fields of study;
- To discuss appropriate research problems, methodologies, funding streams, etc;
- To seed potential collaborations.

The organisers will develop a written review of the work of the session, which will be circulated and potentially published as a short piece, co-authored by all delegates. In addition, the potential for a special journal issue providing an overview of positive approaches in information-related fields will be discussed among the participants.

#### 5 Relevance to the iConference

A body of positive information science has already emerged, but there is a lot of activity in other disciplines that we could respond to as a community. Well-being is a major policy and research funding agenda, for example. In the context of the drive for research to have more social impact, this area has much potential. The workshop format will attract participants keen to scope the field and collaborate in setting out a research agenda.

#### 6 Expected number of participants

We expect 25-30 participants; maximum 40.

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