

COURSE TITLE: TOXIC PRODUCTIVITY MINDSET

NO. OF CREDITS: 6 QUARTER CREDITS
[semester equivalent = 4.00 credits]

WA CLOCK HRS: 60
OREGON PDUs: 60
PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48: 60

INSTRUCTOR: Brenda McKinney
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We are facing an epidemic—a life threatening, brain-paralyzing, heart-destroying disease known as the ‘doing disease,’ as described by Bec Heinrich. This relentless drive to keep moving, achieving, and fearing stillness is taking a toll on our well-being. In this course, Toxic Productivity Mindset, you will explore brain science and data-driven studies, along with personal anecdotes, to uncover the reasons behind why doing enough is never enough. If you find yourself overcommitted, compulsively overachieving, and constantly exhausted, join me to delve into why pursuing productivity at the expense of your physical, emotional, and mental health is detrimental. This course will help you identify deep-seated beliefs about overwork and provide actionable strategies for both your personal life and classroom.

This course is appropriate for elementary and middle school teachers, counselors, and high school teachers with advisories.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Upon completion of this course, participants will have:

- Identified and defined the concept of toxic productivity
- Explored brain science that explains our incessant need to keep achieving
- Identified deep-seated beliefs about overwork and cultural norms
- Acquired practical, actionable strategies to combat toxic productivity
- Reflected on personal experiences for change and developing new habits
- Promoted awareness in the educational environment
- Learned how to foster a healthier environment for students

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Completion of all specified assignments is required for issuance of hours or credit. The Heritage Institute does not award partial credit.

The use of artificial intelligence is not permitted. Assignment responses found to be generated by AI will not be accepted.

HOURS EARNED:

Completing the basic assignments (Section A. Information Acquisition) for this course automatically earns participants their choice of CEUs (Continuing Education Units), Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, or Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours. The Heritage Institute offers CEUs and is an approved provider of Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, and Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours.

UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT INFORMATION

REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

Continuing Education Quarter credits are awarded by Antioch University Seattle (AUS). AUS requires 75% or better for credit at the 400 level and 85% or better to issue credit at the 500 level. These criteria refer both to the amount and quality of work submitted.

1. Completion of Information Acquisition assignments 30%
 2. Completion of Learning Application assignments 40%
 3. Completion of Integration Paper assignment 30%
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CREDIT/NO CREDIT (No Letter Grades or Numeric Equivalents on Transcripts)

Antioch University Seattle (AUS) Continuing Education Quarter credit is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis; neither letter grades nor numeric equivalents are on a transcript. 400 level credit is equal to a "C" or better, 500 level credit is equal to a "B" or better. This information is on the back of the transcript.

AUS Continuing Education quarter credits may or may not be accepted into degree programs. Prior to registering, determine with your district personnel, department head, or state education office the acceptability of these credits for your purpose.

ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION

REQUIRED TEXT

None. All reading is online.

MATERIALS FEE

None.

ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR HOURS OR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

A. INFORMATION ACQUISITION

Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments.

Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

Assignment #1: Introduction

To introduce yourself, share your current professional situation in a 250-word response.

- Outline your goals for personal development and change.
- What aspects of toxic productivity are you most interested in exploring?
- How do you hope this course will benefit you professionally and personally?

If you are working collaboratively in a group, turn in all #1 assignments before beginning.

Assignment #2: Stuck in Toxic Productivity

Read in your text, Toxic Productivity, pgs. 1-16, to understand the toxic productivity mindset and what fuels it. Focus on the key takeaways on pg. 16. Do the 5-minute journal prompt on pg. 32.

Watch the videos on setting an intention.

- How to IMMEDIATELY Change Your Mental State - Tony Robbins Motivation
<https://youtu.be/f7jWDIbRjIE?t=10>
- Recognizing and breaking free from toxic productivity
<https://youtu.be/shxzgiz7ceg?t=954>

Do the exercise on xxi in the introduction. Take special note of Keep, Stop, Start.

Consider new learnings for you in the dynamics of unhealthy habits, messages from your career, culture, and the curiosity you are developing about your choices in being productive (doing versus being burned out, living for the to do lists versus completion, and obsessively needing to be productive).

Respond in 250+ words by sharing new learnings and reflections from your reading and the videos. Address what you see about your own choices include comments about how setting an intention can help guide your coursework

Assignment #3: Signs of Toxic Productivity

Read in your text, Toxic Productivity, pgs. 17-33 and pages 153-160 to understand the toxic productivity mindset and what fuels it. Focus on the key takeaways the idea of urgency.

Watch the following videos to deepen your understanding:

- Scarcity vs. Growth: Which Mindset Do You Have
https://youtu.be/nBcs_V9Fdbg?t=5
- Scarcity Culture Brene Brown
<https://youtu.be/VtBr9WUbJA0?t=3>
- How to Identify Harmful Productivity (w/ Israa Nasir)
<https://youtu.be/590AubRfBIM?t=3>

Observe. Spend time this week observing your own patterns where "doing" often feels more comfortable than "not doing." Honestly appraise your new learning about the scarcity complex.

Create. Choose to do a mind map, chart, or visual representation that illustrates masks of productivity in your own life, habits that keep you stuck in a routine that is not healthy, and what you have learned from the Story of the Sandcastle.

Reflect in a 500-word response how you can implement change to achieve a healthier balance.

Assignment #4: Enough is Never Enough

Read in your text, *Toxic Productivity*, pgs. 59-75, to gain insights into toxic productivity mindset and what fuels it. Pay special attention to key takeaways on pg.75 and the mindset shifts on pgs. 60-61, 72-73.

Watch the following videos to deepen your understanding:

- Achieving More by Doing Less
<https://youtu.be/S8yWLA--S8Q?t=3>
- Ted Talk: Enter the Cult of Extreme Productivity – Mark Adams
<https://youtu.be/2paoNvG5Nmo?t=1>
- Overcoming Toxic Productivity Israa Nasier
<https://youtu.be/Op7zQeoiQDk?t=14>

Use one of the following apps (see below) to create a visual slideshow to demonstrate your learning about the roots and meaning of gratefulness. Include both the videos and reading. Use visuals to summarize your reflections and thoughts.

- *Google Slides, Prezi or Adobe Spark*

Your assignment should include:

1. A picture or illustration to represent your core beliefs.
2. A picture or illustration to represent core beliefs about your productivity outside of your workplace.
3. A picture or illustration to exemplify ways productivity makes you feel worthy.
4. A picture (s) to show the emotional dynamics that create low self-worth.
5. A picture or photo that demonstrates how time productivity has been important to you.
6. Three (3) pictures showing how to boost self-worth and productivity in students.

Add notes to explain each slide as it relates to the learning or audio narrate your presentation.

OR

Write a description of why you made each choice and how it connects with the reading and the videos.

Assignment #5: The Role of Shame

Read in your text, *Toxic Positivity*, pages 113-130 to understand the role of shame in toxic productivity. Take special note of key takeaways on page 130. Then explore your shame with the short writing activity on pg. 80-91. Include in your response.

Watch the following videos to deepen understanding:

- Understanding Guilt vs. Shame: Israa Nasir's Guide to Emotional Resilience
<https://youtu.be/L86YBFmwjCc?t=1>
-

Israa Nasir on The Truth About Comparison
<https://youtu.be/-xoKGGJkIPk?t=3>

- Changing Perspective from Shame to Self-worth | Sue Bryce
https://youtu.be/5_Tq5A0m7_U?t=6

Design an infographic that highlights the key concepts and strategies related to managing shame. Use visuals to make your points clear and engaging. Include a reflective analysis with your visual representation.

- [Free Online Infographic Maker by Canva](#)
- [Free AI Infographic Generator - Make Infographic in Seconds](#)
- <https://www.visme.co/plp-make-infographics/?vc=bing-infographics&msclkid=512c8c0eb8411080e455ebb13ec9fb6d>

Assignment #6: When Everything Must Be Perfect

Read in your text, Toxic Productivity, page 97, to understand the toxic productivity mindset and what fuels it. Focus on the key takeaways on page 111.

Watch the following videos to understand and appreciate perfection:

- Reframing perfectionism - the vital need for change | Julian Reeve
https://youtu.be/mi-kD8_dyKw?t=229
- Why Your Brain Loves Hard Work (And How to Make It Work for You) Dr. Andrew Huberman
<https://youtu.be/-2lIWvaFvto?t=39>

Read the article on How Perfectionism Affects Your Mental Health
[The effects of perfectionism on mental and physical health](#)

Write a detailed reflection of 250-500 words on your life with perfectionism, including personal anecdotes and insights.

Then choose of the following: 1. Reflection or 2. Letter to self.

- Discuss how you plan to implement changes to achieve a healthier balance
- Write a letter to your future self or reflect addressing current struggles with perfectionism and offering advice and encouragement to yourself for overcoming the challenges. Be specific about goals for achieving balance.

Assignment #7: Quiet Your Inner Critic

Read in your text, Toxic Positivity, pages 131-150. Pay special attention to the profiling of your inner critic, page 140.

Watch the following video:

- Israa Nassir EXPOSES the Secrets that Lead to Toxic Productivity
<https://youtu.be/O8zaBeaGX7M?t=7>
- Building Your Inner Coach
<https://youtu.be/q7a5TlZOmeQ?t=4>

Using Keep, Start, Stop create a series of 10-20 Google slides that indicate your new learning about neuroscience and work habits, personal reflections on perfectionism as a stuck habit, and curiosity about the idea that everything must be perfect, or you are imperfect.

[Free Google Slides Templates – SlidesCarnival](#), [The Keep Stop Start Method – Empower Leadership](#).

Include in your slides a 250-word discussion of the character summary of your inner critic (pgs. 140-148)

Assignment #8: Mindset Shifts to Cultivate Abundance

Read in your text, Toxic Positivity, pages 151-161, 164-165. Review the key takeaways on page 166.

Article Review:

- [How To Let Go of Scarcity & Move into An Abundance Mindset | mindbodygreen](#)

Watch the following videos on an abundant mindset:

- Abundance Is a Choice | Elaine Starling | TEDxGrandviewHeights
<https://youtu.be/tMQ0D4sfEys?t=67>
- The Most Scarce Resource on the Planet: Mindset of Abundance | Naveen Jain | TEDxBerkeley
<https://youtu.be/KX78jynWLD0?t=206>

Reflect on your reading and video links:

- Strategies you can use to implement a shift from a scarcity mindset to an abundant mindset
- Ways the abundant mindset thinking can benefit your students
- Create a chart or diagram that shows your abundant mindset versus your scarcity mindset

Respond with a 250-word response about your own scarcity/abundant mindset.

Assignment #9: Rest and Restoration

Read in your text, Toxic Productivity, pages 167-190.

Watch the following videos:

- Redefining Rest - Slowing Down to Speed Up! - Bec Heinrich
<https://youtu.be/hypNfi10JZo?t=6>
- Creating Healthy Work Habits
<https://youtu.be/zknoDcwlwms?t=111>
- The Battle for Your Time: Exposing the Costs of Social Media - Dino Ambrosi
<https://youtu.be/4TMPXK9tw5U?t=231>

Reflect on burnout, resting, taking advantage of blank spaces and how you might change habits to schedule in both rest and rejuvenation.?

Create a visual representation that illustrates your current work habits and the changes you plan to implement to incorporate more rest and restoration based on insights from the reading and videos. Submit the document along with your assessment of your findings and plan.

Assignment #10: Reimagining Productivity

Read in your text, Toxic Productivity, pages 189-199. Focus on the key takeaways page 199.

Take the Procrastination Survey

- [?Free Procrastination Test - Online Self-Assessment](#)

Read the following articles:

- [3 Ways to Work Smarter, Not Harder | Psychology Today](#)
- [The Best Way to Find Balance in Your Life | Psychology Today](#)
- [Master Your Mind and Energy | Psychology Today](#)

Watch the following videos:

- Overcoming Toxic Productivity with Israa Nasir: Balancing Work and Wellness
<https://youtu.be/gNSIb70q7dM?t=7>
- How Micro Habits Will Change Your Life (w/ Israa Nasir)
<https://youtu.be/JcC9CPLnBhI?t=3>

Discuss the role of productivity and busyness in your own life. Share what was most meaningful and inspiring for you from the reading, articles, video and an assessment of how you can change your life in a 500-word response.

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

B. LEARNING APPLICATION

In this section, you will apply your learning to your professional situation. This course assumes that most participants are classroom teachers who have access to students. If you do not have a classroom available to you, please contact the instructor for course modifications. Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments. Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

Assignment #11: Keep a Journal

Embracing Positive Down Time Activity – Keep a journal.

Use the six definitions of stress shared with you from Sacred Rest, pgs. 178-180. Having a ritual around rest is an incredible way to incorporate it into your daily routine. You might even begin to see a domino effect from this two-week journal.

- Choose your time of day.
- Pick one or more restorative thing(s) you can do during that time frame and that will work every day for you.
- Do that one small thing consistently for two weeks.
- KEEP track with an accountability tracker. Your phone, a journal.
- Remember you may have to set an alarm to remind yourself when you first begin.

Send your journal responses and how you felt after completing this consistently for two weeks. Did you make any adjustments? Do you feel ready to tackle more of the six types of rest? What other ideas do you have for implementing without disrupting your schedule?

Ideas to help you get started:

Tools: Weekly review. Time Tracking Tools. Pomodoro Technique. Social Media Blockers.

[Are you suffering from Toxic Productivity or Embracing Positive Downtime? – Hardly Hamilton](#)

[Three levels to stop your social media addiction – Hardly Hamilton](#)

[Kicking out distractions – Study Tips – Hardly Hamilton](#)

[How a Bullet Journal tripled my productivity – Hardly Hamilton](#)

Assignment #12: Lesson Plan

Create a lesson or series of activities you would do with students conveying some aspect of what you gained from this course on becoming you. Identify the main themes and the subjects: e.g., reading, writing, arts, history, and media studies.

- The link for the new Lesson Plan <https://www.hol.edu/about/lesson-template>
- What would you want students to come away with, and how would you evaluate your outcome?
- The lesson plan must be detailed, show creativity, and offer something I have not seen before. It must directly relate to learning in this course.
- Share at least three samples (photos) of student work from your class.
- Share what you've learned with other teachers taking our courses by checking the lesson library box when you submit your lesson.

*Note: If you are taking this course in the summer or if you are not currently teaching in the classroom, you can create two samples that would be useful to share with students.

All group participants are required to complete this assignment independently.

Assignment #13: Share with a colleague

Share what you have learned with a colleague/administrator/PLC/team/district leadership.

Include in the conversation/presentation, research on how toxic positivity will most impact your teaching/life and how you observe this idea of a toxic culture in the classroom.

Explain the science of why our efforts to be so positive are backfiring and what is critical if we expect to be successful in changing our habits and mindset.

Discuss the long-term implications of the toxic positivity and how walking the walk is totally different than talking the talk. Include what you have learned about changing habits, the cultural myths, changes you have made, and how to quiet your inner critic.

In 500+ words: Write up this conversation, detailing how this new research was received and any plans.

Assignment #14: (500 Level ONLY)

In addition to the 400-level assignment, complete the following Option A, Option B and either Option C or D (total of three assignments):

Option A) Professional Development Presentation - Required

- Prepare PowerPoint, Keynote, or video presentation that you can share with staff or students.
- Demonstrate strategies to explain how toxicity affects students in the classroom. As a teacher, you are in a unique and powerful position to help your students think about and practice being more positive while developing positive habits.
- Minimum of 20 slides. Think about creative presentation, not too many words on a page, use of images and graphics for maximum effect. Be sure to proofread slides.
- Include your own notes at the bottom of each slide or a response at the end.

Option B) Research Paper - Required

- Identify at least three-five research studies related to gratefulness at elementary, middle, or high school (select the grade level you are teaching or planning on teaching). Write a comprehensive summary of each study and determine how you would implement the ideas and strategies in your classroom teaching and lesson design.
- Ideas include:
 - a. Psychology of toxic productivity and how it is impacting students
 - b. The impact of social media on brain function and toxic positivity
 - c. Suppression of negative emotions and the impact on brain function from toxic positivity
 - d. Toxic academic culture and what we can do to fix it
 - e. The culture of complaining
- Create a plan for change based on what you have learned.
- Specify how you will incorporate these into your daily life.
- Research must include at least three (3) to five (5) substantial resources.
- Your response to the research and your plan must be 500-750+ words.

Option C) Read a Personal Choice

- Read **one** of the following books and write a 400 – 500 word response to your findings.
- Whitney Goodman, LMFT. 2022. **Toxic Positivity: Keeping It Real in a World Obsessed with Being Happy**, Penguin Books. ISBN: 9780593542750
- Jill Brandenburg. 2024. **Positivity Is Overrated: 10 Tips for Ditching Toxic Positivity and Owning Your Emotions**. ISBN: 979-8-30017-932-8

OR

Option D) A project of your own choosing. Must have instructor approval.

*****All 500-level participants are required to complete the 500 Level assignments independently.**

C. INTEGRATION PAPER

Assignment #15: (Required for 400 and 500 Level)

SELF REFLECTION & INTEGRATION PAPER

(Please do not write this paper until you've completed all of your other assignments)

Write a 400-500 word Integration Paper answering these 5 questions:

1. What did you learn vs. what you expected to learn from this course?
 2. What aspects of the course were most helpful and why?
 3. What further knowledge and skills in this general area do you feel you need?
 4. How, when and where will you use what you have learned?
 5. How and with what other school or community members might you share what you learned?
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INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON YOUR WORK:

Instructors will comment on each assignment. If you do not hear from the instructor within a few days of posting your assignment, please get in touch with them immediately.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING THIS COURSE:

Brenda McKinney, CEO of Vancouver, WA based BrainVolution, is a developer and dynamic facilitator of workshops that teach practical thinking and learning tools for raising student achievement with the brain in mind. She has trained educators throughout the Pacific Northwest and is a popular presenter because of her ability to motivate, make things fun, and teach practical techniques for the classroom that can be used immediately. Brenda continues to read hundreds of books and articles on the subject of neuroscience and searches for the answer to success for every student. Her work with at-risk students and those with reading problems have made her a popular speaker at the state, regional and national level.

Brenda is able to synthesize the new research and continues to address the role of how to use the latest findings to create high achievement classroom. She brings 30+ years of experience at the elementary, middle school, high school and university level as a mentor teacher, consultant, motivational speaker, university instructor, and reading specialist. Brenda has her Master's in Education from Washington State University and is nationally certified in Brain Based Learning through the renowned Jensen Corporation, led by Eric Jensen, a noted international spokesperson for neuroscience and education.

Brenda will inspire and motivate you with her energy, enthusiasm and knowledge. Her wisdom, techniques, and brain based approach to education will inspire you and challenge you to meet the demands of this ever changing world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

TOXIC PRODUCTIVITY MINDSET

Reading

Clear, James. 2018. Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones.

ISBN: 9780735211292

A practical guide on how to change your habits and get 1% better every day. Using a framework called the Four Laws of Behavior Change, Atomic Habits teaches readers a simple set of rules for creating good habits and breaking bad ones. This book has been enjoyed by teachers. It is a great read for this course.

Heath, Dan. 2021. Reset: How to Change What's Not Working.

ISBN: 9781668091289

The author of the concept Do Less for More. This involves making tough choices about what to stop doing in order to invest more in what truly matters. It's about both cutting and investing. It is a perfect read with our text of Toxic Productivity.

Goodman, Whitney. 2022. Toxic Positivity: Keeping It Real in a World Obsessed with Being Happy.

ISBN: 978-0-5934-1827-7

You will discover some of the negative effects of toxic positivity on our mental and emotional health, our relationships, and our society, and how to counter them with more realistic and compassionate approaches. Eye-opening appraisal of positivity culture in Western society. A perfect fit to read along with Toxic Productivity. This is a choice for the 500 Level book.

Nasir. Israa. 2024. Toxic Productivity: Reclaim Your Time and Emotional Energy in a World That Always Demands More

ISBN:9781962305358

The perfect text to learn why the productivity mindset is dangerous. This unhealthy compulsion to be productive is often at the expense of our mental and physical well-being, relationships, and overall quality of life. It's a common sentiment in today's work culture, where the drive to be constantly productive is often celebrated, if not expected. This mindset isn't just harmful; it's dangerous. Practical, helpful, and provides more understanding about how social media controls us.

Petersen, Caleb. 2024. An Introduction on How to Stop Being Toxic: A Practical Guide to Breaking Toxic Patterns, Repairing Relationships, Setting Healthy Boundaries, and ... Feeling Overwhelmed (Toxic to Thriving)

ISBN: 978-1962795074

This book offers practical suggestions to help you discover the root causes of toxic behaviors and focuses on replacing them with healthy habits. Breaking patterns is crucial to wellness. Very effective and helpful text.

Philips Dr. Anita & Sarah Jakes Roberts. 2023. The Garden Within: Where the War with Your Emotions Ends and Your Most Powerful Life Begins

ISBN: 978140023299

As a self-help book it offers a heartwarming narrative of self-acceptance, healing, and empowerment. Dr. Anita's insights promise to change the course of readers' lives, guiding them to cultivate a vibrant and thriving emotional garden within. If you are ready to rediscover hope, joy, and love within yourself, this book serves as an indispensable guide on the transformative path toward a more powerful and fulfilling life.

Sah Dr. Sunita, 2025. Defy: The Power of No in a World That Demands Yes

ISBN: 978178658457

How many times have you wanted to object, disagree, or opt out of something but ended up swallowing your words, shaking your head, and just going along? We comply more than we realize. This book delves deeply into why we accept this pressure to take on more in our lives than we can handle and why we comply even when we disagree.

Smith Dr. Sandra Dalton. 2017. Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity

ISBN: 978147892167-7

Not everyone needs the same amount of rest. Not everyone rests in the same way. This book realistically looks at types of rest and how we can incorporate them into our lives. Identifying your own personal rest deficit is crucial for addressing your specific needs. This involves recognizing signs of fatigue, burnout, or imbalance in various aspects of your life. A great self-help read. Highly recommended.

Articles

35 Common Toxic Positivity Phrases To Stop Using—Plus, What To Say Instead

Toxic Positivity: Why It's Harmful, What to Say Instead

It's Time to Ditch Toxic Positivity in Favor of Emotional Validation

The 5 Red Flags You're in a Toxic Positivity School

Toxic Positivity at School - Teach Better

When Toxic Positivity Seeps into Schools, Here's What Educators Can Do

<https://www.theteachingdistillery.com/blog-2/signs-of-toxic-positivity-in-schools-and-its-impact-on-teachers>

Videos:

<https://youtu.be/5EOj2Z7hw5w?t=5>

How Toxic Positivity Leads to More Suffering

https://youtu.be/pCdan_hhSSg?t=23

Toxic Positivity and Its Antidote

https://youtu.be/s_2dKgXChMc?t=22

The Reality of Toxic Positivity

<https://youtu.be/tZuHaarrTm0?t=24>

Unpacking Positivity

<https://youtu.be/XL2vLhwoUXk?t=1084>

Whitney Goodman Toxic Positivity

<https://youtu.be/dmLTLkCBSN8?t=159>

The Toxic World of Self Help: Hustle Culture, Toxic Positivity, Addiction, and Fake Gurus.