Strengths at the U: Creating a Strengths-Based Undergraduate Experience
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Katy Hinz
Office for Student Engagement

Robin Stubblefield
Office for Student Engagement

Krista Soria
Office of Institutional Research
Strengths Profiles

**Katy**
Empathy - Learner - Arranger - Maximizer - Positivity

**Robin**
Relator - Communication - Connectedness - Ideation - Restorative

**Krista**
Intellection - Input - Learner - Achiever - Ideation
Office for Student Engagement

**Initiatives**
- Strengths at the U (Building a Strengths-Based Campus)
- Central Promotion of Engagement Opportunities

**Programs**
- Student Employment Leadership Program (SELP)
- Global Leadership Certificate Program (in development)
Foundations of the Initiative

• Strengths was already happening in ‘pockets’ at the U
• Strengths Advisory Board (2009)
• Gallup Strengths in Education conference (June 2009)
• Vice Provost for Student Affairs championed initiative for first year students (March 2011)
• Involved the Office for Student Engagement
• Formed working groups
• Strengths.umn.edu was created
Empowering Others

- Provide training: Educator and Mentoring and Advising Program (MAP) seminars
- Make resources available: (strengths.umn.edu)
- Share approaches, results, and strategies for implementation: Tate Advising conference, Career Development Network, College of Science & Engineering FYE course, International Student Services, Athletics, and others
- Rely upon campus experts to provide additional support
Strengths Approach

We are using a Strengths approach on our campus to enhance student engagement and well-being which leads to improved retention, graduation and life success.
Strengths at the U

Fall 2011
- 5122 first-year students

Fall 2012
- 5312 first-year students; 910 transfer students
Overall goals for students

- Increasing self-awareness; understanding and appreciation of others
- Creating a common language across campus
- Developing potential in academics, career planning, leadership, relationships
Goals (con’t)

• Increasing overall confidence and sense of responsibility in pursuing their goals

• Advancing achievement of Student Learning and Development Outcomes

• Positively impacting retention, graduation, and satisfaction
STRENGTHS AT THE U: CREATING A STRENGTHS-BASED UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

STRENGTHS INITIATIVE FRAMEWORK

On the Twin Cities campus we are using a Strengths approach to enhance student engagement and well-being which leads to improved retention, graduation and life success. StrengthsFinder® is a tool that contributes to the demonstration of the Student Learning Outcomes (www.slo.umn.edu) and the Student Development Outcomes (www.sdo.umn.edu).

Strengths Integration Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRE-ARRIVAL</th>
<th>1ST YEAR</th>
<th>2ND YEAR</th>
<th>3RD YEAR</th>
<th>4TH YEAR</th>
<th>POST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRengths Awareness</td>
<td>Engagement Opportunities</td>
<td>Career Planning &amp; Integration</td>
<td>Major/Career Exploration</td>
<td>Post-Graduation Transition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic and Personal Growth

In addition to these strategies, colleges and units are encouraged to integrate a Strengths-based approach into their own programs, learning experiences and curricula.

EXPERIENCES

- Student Learning
- Internships
- Volunteering
- Learning Abroad
- Student Employment
- Leadership Opportunities
- Fraternity and Sorority Life
- Campus Traditions

STUDYING
- Choosing a Major
- Career Planning
- Research
- Writing
- Class Projects
- Test Taking

COURSEWORK
- Meeting and Working with Faculty & Staff

DAILY LIFE

- Meeting and Building Relationships with Others
- Jobs
- Time Management
- Commuting to and Navigating Campus
- Health/Wellness
- Hanging Out with Friends
- Hobbies

SUCCESS

INCREASED:
- Student Outcomes
- Career Fit
- Well-being

University of Minnesota
Driven to Discover™

*Capstone: a final project, culmination of experiences and resources, reflection, or other experience that relates to preparing to transition from undergraduate student to graduated student.
Examples of Student “Touch Points”

- Welcome Week session
- Convocation (President’s office support)
- Academic advising and career counseling sessions
- Housing and Residential Life
- Workshops
  - I know my Top 5, What’s Next?
  - Top 5+ series
- 34 in 34
- Parent’s weekend
- Student Employee Leadership Program
Examples of Student “Touch Points”

- Online resources & interactions
  - strengthsquest.com
  - strengths.umn.edu
  - Twitter
  - Facebook
  - Portal

- Classes
  - First-year experience
  - Access to Success
  - “Success over stress”
  - Career courses
  - Leadership minor
What have we learned?

• Establish and communicate the why, the how, not just the what

• You can provide the training and information but you can’t provide the attitude

• Create plan and partnerships for intentional touchpoints

• Empower & excite others! Garner support and share ownership
What have we learned?

- Set and work towards realistic expectations
- Provide opportunities for stakeholder involvement across the initiative and the institution/school on ongoing basis (training, advisory and working groups, informal conversations, etc.)
- Take the time to put together an intentional assessment plan in the beginning
What have we Learned: Assessment

Strengths engagement:
• Did students take StrengthsFinder?
• How did students interact with it?
• What types of interventions did the U provide?
• With whom did students interact with around Strengths?

Strengths impact:
• Have Strengths interactions and experiences positively contributed to the student experience?
Data Collection

Triangulation, mixed-methods:
- Pre-and post-surveys of students
  - quantitative
  - qualitative
  - random and census
- Focus groups of students
- Staff surveys
- Future pairing with additional survey
Participants

- Pre-survey (September; all FY): $n = 2008$
- Post-survey (December; all FY): $n = 1493$
- End of the year survey (April; random sample $\frac{1}{2}$ FY class): $n = 570$
- Responded to pre-and-post: $n = 934$
- Responded to all three: $n = 299$
- Focus groups: $n = 28$ in five groups
91.9% of first-year students reported that they discussed their strengths with others during their first semester.

Of students who reported having at least one strengths interaction, 32% of first-year students reported that they participated in trainings, workshops, or presentations that featured strengths.

Students reported that strengths interactions with friends or family, in housing and residence life, with advisors, and in classrooms were most impactful.

Students' direct quotes are included on the following page.
“In which of the following areas did you discuss Strengths during your first year?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With an academic advisor</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Housing and Residence Life</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In classes</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With family</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In student organizations or activities</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a study group of peers</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a professor</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a career counselor</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With coworkers (other than supervisors)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my employment supervisor on campus</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my employment supervisor off campus</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First-year students were more likely to have discussions about their Strengths with friends, with academic advisors, in Housing and Residence Life, in classes, and with family members than in other areas.

Students who did not discuss Strengths with others indicated they would have liked to have had discussions with academic advisors, career counselors, family, friends, and professors.

“In which areas would you have liked to discuss your Strengths during your first semester?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With an academic advisor</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a career counselor</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With family</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a professor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In classes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In student organizations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. %’s do not round to 100 because students could choose more than one option.
Importance of Strengths

• From the end of the year survey \( (n = 570) \), we discovered that
  – Approximately 75% of students reported that Strengths has value for them now, as they continue to progress as an undergraduate, and as they enter the workforce or continue their education

• Three quarters or more reported that Strengths
  – increased their self-awareness and appreciation of others,
  – helped them communicate effectively with others, develop as a leader, and think about potential career paths.
Discussions with Strengths Matters

“I believe that knowing my Strengths and interacting with them has positively impacted me in the following areas”

• End of the year survey
• Agreement scale 1-5
• n ~ 570
• Random sample
• Differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)
Discussions with Strengths Matters

“I believe that knowing my Strengths and interacting with them has positively impacted me in the following areas”

- End of the year survey
- Agreement scale 1-5
- n ~ 570
- Random sample
- Differences are statistically significant (p < .05)
Discussions with Strengths Matters

Findings are consistent across several additional areas:

• Academic achievement
• Getting involved on campus
• Getting involved in community service or volunteering
• Developing as a leader
• Identifying, defining and solving problems
• Communicating effectively with others
• Increasing my appreciation of others
• Making decisions about everyday things
• Making decisions regarding major life events
• Understanding others
Impact on Students of Color

“I believe that knowing my Strengths and interacting with them has positively impacted me in the following areas”

- End of the year survey
- Agreement scale 1-5
- $n \sim 570$
- Random sample
- Differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)
Impact on Students of Color

- End of the year survey
- Agreement scale 1-5
- \( n \approx 570 \)
- Random sample
- Differences are statistically significant \((p < .05)\)
Engagement with Strengths Matters

- When predicting students' **perception of the positive impact of Strengths**, do these findings hold when controlling for demographic, college experience, and academic variables?
- Factor analysis of 17 preceding variables, $\alpha = .97$
- Significant and positive associations when students had interactions with the following people/groups:
  - advisors
  - in classes
  - in study groups
  - with friends
  - with family

*note: end of the year survey, $n = 527, R^2 = .269$
Engagement with Strengths Matters

• When predicting students' **beliefs about the value of Strengths**, do these findings hold when controlling for demographic, college experience, and academic variables?
• Factor analysis of 3 items $\alpha = .96$
• Significant and positive associations when students had interactions with the following people/groups:
  o advisors
  o in classes
  o in student orgs and clubs
  o with on-campus employment
  o with friends
  o with family

*note: end of the year survey, $n = 557, R^2 = .307*
## Insights into Retention & GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Disagree &amp; Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Agree &amp; Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can name my top five Strengths</td>
<td>92.3% (336 retained out of 364)</td>
<td>95.2% (819 retained out of 860)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe Strengths has value for me now</td>
<td>93.4% (152 retained out of 162)</td>
<td>99.9% (266 retained out of 268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can name my top five Strengths</td>
<td>3.30 (n = 148, sd = .55)</td>
<td>3.42 (n = 365, sd = .49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to apply my Strengths to achieve academic success</td>
<td>3.33 (n = 120, sd = .32)</td>
<td>3.42 (n = 327, sd = .47)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Data

- **Academic skills**: “I believe that knowing my strengths will provide a positive influence to my academic skills/performance in college in many ways. Those five strengths not only show me that I have hidden talents, but they also give me the opportunity to take action knowing what good qualities I have. I can use my five strengths to perform well in college knowing what kind of a person I am.”

- **Career planning**: “I know what careers better suit me for the future, and it has helped me to use my strengths to the best of my ability.”
Qualitative Data

• **Confidence**: “Since I now have a better idea of what my strengths are, I am empowered with confidence and understanding that I can do more and be more. I know that I can challenge myself and be confident about it.”

• **Relationships**: “Knowing my strengths, and having others know their own strengths, has helps me to work successfully with other people and to meet their needs.”
Ways to Help Students Understand their Strengths

• Ask Questions!
• Understand the reports & resources on www.strengthsquest.com and how you and students can use them
• Integrate strengths into your work with students
• Signature themes grid (strength, definition, example, future use)
• Scavenger Hunt activity
• Verify Signature Themes (share top 5 with others)
• Degree of Talent (highlight/cross out activity)
Ways to Help Students Apply their Strengths

• Academics
  – NACADA Academic Advising for Student Retention and Persistence: A Strengths Development Approach
    - Identify Students’ talents
    - Affirm talents and increase awareness
    - Envision a Future
    - Plan specific steps
    - Apply strengths to challenges
      - Academic Action Items
      - I do it with ease
Ways to Help Students Apply their Strengths

• **Career**
  – Career Action Items
  – Job Analysis
  – Strengths in Job Search, Interviewing, New position
  – Join the Club

• **Teams**
  – Team Talent Map

• **Student Engagement**
  – Join the club
Questions?

Katy Hinz
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