Using Strengths to Mentor Students

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With help from Krista Soria

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

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StrengthsFinder Facts

• 34 themes
• Online assessment, you get your top 5 with descriptions and action guide
• 33.39 Million
Strengths Profiles

Katy
Empathy- Learner- Arranger- Maximizer- Positivity

Kelly
Achiever- Input- Responsibility- Learner- Discipline
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
Strengths at the U

3 Year Initiative
Over 15,000 First Year and Transfer Students have taken StrengthsFinder

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Driven to Discover"
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: 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-Graduation Transition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths Awareness</td>
<td>Engagement Opportunities</td>
<td>Career Planning &amp; Integration</td>
<td>Major/Career Exploration</td>
<td>Capstone*</td>
<td>Post-Graduation Transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Background Information</td>
<td>Academic &amp; Personal Transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
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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.

SUCCESS

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

Academics & Career
- Studying
- Choosing a Major
- Career Planning
- Research
- Writing
- Class Projects
- Test Taking
- Campus Resources
- Meeting and Working with Faculty & Staff

Daily Life
- Meeting and Building Relationships with Others
- Jobs
- Recreation
- Commuting to and Navigating Campus
- Finances
- Health/Wellness
- Hanging Out with Friends
- Hobbies
- Family

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

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*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.
Gallup Student Success Model

- Strengths
- Hope
- Engagement
- Wellbeing
- Academic Success
Focus of the Present Study

While our efforts have been expansive, in this study, we are focusing on the impact of strengths-related mentorship for undergraduate students at the University.
Why Mentorship Matters

- Contributes to academic and social integration
- Has a significant and positive impact on student persistence especially for ‘at risk’ students, students of color, and first generation students
- Mentors provide psychological and career needs
- Develops student intellectual and critical thinking skills
- Establish the existence of a role model
Data Collection for Assessment

Assessment has been conducted for two years (and continues for year three)

Data collection has included
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Student and staff experiences

More results related to assessment available online: www.strengths.umn.edu
Strengths Assessment Survey

• Survey administered to all freshman (n = 5,514) from November-December 2012
• 997 (18.1%) responded to the items we used in this analysis
• Slightly overrepresented responses from females and White students compared to the population
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<th>Survey Response</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>667</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.5</td>
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Strengths Interactions

- With friends: 60.0%
- With Housing and Residence Life: 50.0%
- In first-year experience courses: 40.0%
- In classes: 30.0%
- With family: 20.0%
- With a professor or instructor: 10.0%
- With a teaching assistant: 5.0%
- In student clubs, organizations, or activities: 3.0%
- In a study group of peers: 2.0%
- With a career counselor/mentor: 1.0%
- With my on-campus employment supervisor: 0.5%
- With my off-campus employment supervisor: 0.1%

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Methods

- Linear regression predicting the relationships between students’ strengths-related interactions and their strengths awareness, hope, and engagement
- Controls: all other strengths interactions, gender, race/ethnicity
Limitations

• Mentorship was not defined in the survey—students provided their own definition and selected this item accordingly
• Data were biased in terms of gender and race
• No additional controls were utilized other than other strengths conversations, gender, and race/ethnicity
Measures: Strengths Awareness

- 10-item scale
- Self-reported agreement (scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)
  - I can name my top five strengths
  - Understanding my strengths helps me do what I do best
  - I know how my strengths impact my relationships
  - I like to learn about myself
  - (etc.)
Measures: Engagement

• Gallup Q12 (12-item scale)
• Self-reported agreement (scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)
  – At this school, my opinions seem to count
  – The mission or purpose of this school makes me feel important as a student
  – My fellow students are committed to doing quality work
  – I have a best friend at school
  – In the last six months, someone at this school has talked to me about my progress
  – (etc.)
Measures: Hope

- Adult Trait Hope Scale (8-item scale)
- Self-reported agreement (scale, $1 =$ definitely false to $8 =$ definitely true)
  - There are lots of ways around any problem
  - I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me
  - Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem
  - My past experiences have prepared me well for my future
  - (etc.)
Results

• Discussing strengths with a mentor was positively and significantly associated with students’ strengths awareness, engagement, and hope controlling for all other strengths discussions and demographics
## Strengths Awareness

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With a mentor</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With an advisor</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a CA in Housing and Residence Life</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In classes</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off-campus employment supervisor</td>
<td>* (-)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>* (+)</td>
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<tr>
<td>With a mentor</td>
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<tr>
<td>With family</td>
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<td>With on-campus employment supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>With off-campus employment supervisor</td>
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## Engagement

<table>
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<tr>
<td>With a CA in Housing and Residence Life</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In student clubs, organizations, or activities</td>
<td>* (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With off-campus employers</td>
<td>* (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>* (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>* (-)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Qualitative Quotes

• The interaction with my mentor because it was nice to discuss our strengths with someone who has had experience.

• With a mentor because I got to learn how different strengths can lead to various successes.

• The mentor during Welcome Week, who explained what the strengths are all about.

• My mentor Who is the MCAE that told me more about the meaning of my strengths. I found out the purpose and he said to check it out more often and incorporate while taking classes.
Powerful Mentoring Questions/Activities

**Affirm**
- Insight Cards
- Share examples
- Five Clues to Talent
- What is your first reaction to these terms? What do they mean to you at this point?
- Does anything in the report surprise you?
- How well do you feel your Signature Themes describe the ways in which you most naturally, think, feel, and behave as a unique individual?

**Achiever**

- I am (being) → a hard worker
- I will (doing) → set the pace for production
- I bring (contribution) → intensity and stamina of effort
- I need (requirement) → freedom to work at my own pace
- I love (value) → completing tasks
- I hate (value) → a lack of diligence

**Metaphor/Image** → completing a race, getting to the finish line

**Barrier Label** → Work is more important than people
Develop

• Draw an image or write a word or phrase that describes one of your Strengths.
• Tell me about a time that you got to do something you do well.
• How have you used _______ Strength to build relationships, as at team member, as a student?
• Tell me a time in your life where you felt really successful. How were you using your strengths?

One student’s description of Harmony

Find Common Ground (harmony)
Powerful Mentoring Questions/Activities

Apply

• How can you use your Strengths to help you achieve your academic goals?

• Examine majors or careers based on your Strengths, how would your Strengths be utilized or not utilized in these majors/careers?

• How could you use your Strengths in involvement opportunities? Is there an involvement opportunity that would be a good fit for your Strengths?

• How do you or how could you use your Strengths to Lead?
Coaching Video Example
5 Clues to Talent

**Yearning**
To what kinds of activities are you naturally drawn?

**Rapid Learning**
What kinds of activities do you seem to pick up quickly?

**Flow**
In what activities did you automatically know the steps to be taken?

**Glimpses of Excellence**
During what activities have you had moments of subconscious excellence when you thought, "How did I do that?"

**Satisfaction**
What activities give you a kick, either while doing them or immediately after finishing them, and you think, "When can I do that again?"
Resources

• Take StrengthsFinder Assessment
  - Read Reports on www.strengthsquest.com
  - Get familiar with the Student Action Items: Academics, Extra curricular, Career

• Purchase Insight Cards: store.gallup.com

• Activities on StrengthsQuest.com

• Gallup’s Educator and MAP Trainings

• Read StrengthsQuest and Strengths Based Leadership

• Visit STRENGTHS.UMN.EDU, read other people’s strength stories, Strengths Videos, Research

• Follow us on Twitter! @UMN_Strengths
Questions?

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