

# **A Holistic Assessment of a Campus-Wide Initiative to Build Strengths: From Building a Conceptual Framework to Reporting Results**

AIR Forum  
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Krista M. Soria  
Ronald Huesman

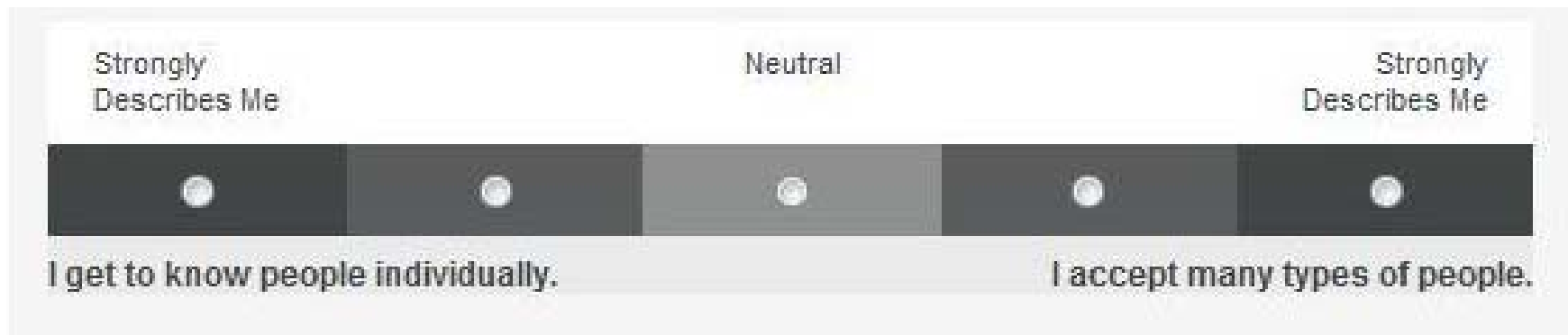
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# History of Strengths

- Donald Clifton began studying unique strengths of leaders in the 1960s
- “What would happen if we studied what is right with people?”
- People gain more when they build on their strengths rather than spending effort to remediate their weaknesses

# Development of StrengthsFinder

- The StrengthsFinder “...identifies areas where an individual’s greatest potential for building strengths exists.”
- 177 items; participants given 20 seconds



The image shows a screenshot of the StrengthsFinder Likert scale interface. It features a horizontal scale with five segments, each containing a white dot. The segments are labeled from left to right: "Strongly Describes Me", "Neutral", "Neutral", "Neutral", and "Strongly Describes Me". Below the scale, two example items are shown: "I get to know people individually." and "I accept many types of people." The scale is currently set to "Neutral" for both items.

# 34 Talent Themes

Achiever	Activator	Adaptability
Analytical	Arranger	Belief
Command	Communication	Competition
Connectedness	Consistency	Context
Deliberative	Developer	Discipline
Empathy	Focus	Futuristic
Harmony	Ideation	Includer
Individualization	Input	Intellection
Learner	Maximizer	Positivity
Relator	Responsibility	Restorative
Self-Assurance	Significance	Strategic
	Woo	

# Themes & Items

CSF Theme	Total Number of Items
Achiever	6
Activator	7
Adaptability	8
Analytical	11
Arranger	13
Belief	11
Command	9
Communication	9
Competition	7
Connectedness	8
Consistency	8
Context	4
Deliberation	8
Developer	10
Discipline	14
Empathy	6
Focus	12

CSF Theme	Total Number of Items
Futuristic	8
Harmony	5
Ideation	7
Includer	7
Individualization	6
Input	5
Intellection	10
Leamer	8
Maximizer	7
Positivity	12
Relator	8
Responsibility	11
Restorative	6
Self-Assurance	13
Significance	12
Strategic	4
Woo	9

# Our IR Office: Four Domains of Leadership Strength

Executing	Influencing	Relationship Building	Strategic Thinking
<b>Achiever *</b>	<b>Activator *</b>	<b>Adaptability *</b>	<b>Analytical **</b>
Arranger	Command	<b>Developer *</b>	<b>Context ***</b>
Belief	Communication	<b>Connectedness *</b>	<b>Futuristic *</b>
Consistency	Competition	<b>Empathy *</b>	<b>Ideation **</b>
<b>Deliberative **</b>	<b>Maximizer **</b>	<b>Harmony ***</b>	<b>Input ****</b>
Discipline	Self-Assurance	<b>Includer *</b>	<b>Intellection *****</b>
Focus	Significance	<b>Individualization *</b>	<b>Learner *****</b>
<b>Responsibility *</b>	Woo	Positivity	<b>Strategic *</b>
Restorative		Relator	

# Development of StrengthsFinder

- Seven million people have taken StrengthsFinder
- Over one million college students have taken it since August of 2011
- Available in 26 languages, respondents from 50+ countries, accommodations for disabilities
- Over 10% of the first million respondents took SF in a language other than English
- One in 33 million: you are unique!

# StrengthsFinder

- Reliability
  - Internal consistency ( $\alpha = .52$  to  $.79$ )
  - Six month test-retest reliability ( $\alpha = .48$  to  $.80$ )
  - (It is difficult to obtain high alphas for an instrument measuring 34 dimensions)
- Validity
  - Construct: less than 2% of item pairs fail to meet a 70% criterion
  - Construct: using “big five” factors of personality, correlations ranged between  $.58$  and  $.83$



# Institutional Context

- University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
- 30,610 UG Fall 2011
- 12 UG Colleges (largest, CLA, has 14,723 students)
- Highly decentralized administrative environment

# Challenges with Assessment

- Large public university with disaggregated and uncoordinated student outcomes assessment activities
  - Redundancy in campus data collection efforts
  - Variable quality of measurement and analysis
  - Negative impacts on response rates
  - Heavy reliance on self-reported data
  - Program implementation (ground up), depth & level varies greatly across campus; assessment often an after thought

# Solutions

- Survey advisory team
  - Monitor & Collaborations
  - Ease “**Territorial**” Issues
- Collaborations across domains
  - Faculty
  - Academic Affairs: Assessment of Learning
  - Student Affairs: Assessment of Student Development
  - Senior Management: Institutional Metrics

# Solutions

- Align with institutional strategic objectives; broader context within a “holistic” assessment of the student experience
  - Better chance findings will be used and not just be “interesting”
- Institutional Research in unique position to serve as “bridge”
  - policy analysis, strategic planning, database management and methods

# Strengths at UMTNC

- Strengths approach to enhance student engagement and well-being which leads to improved retention, graduation, and life success.
- Addresses major attrition factors:
  - Lack of motivation
  - Discouragement
  - Lack of engagement and connection

# First-Year Students

- 5,122 non-transfer first-year students completed StrengthsFinder
- Many staff units/departments have taken it and participated in sessions focused on individual and team components

# Goals for Students

- Increasing self-awareness; understanding and appreciation of others
- Developing potential in academics, career planning, leadership, relationships
- Creating a common language across campus
- 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

# StrengthsQuest “Touch Points”

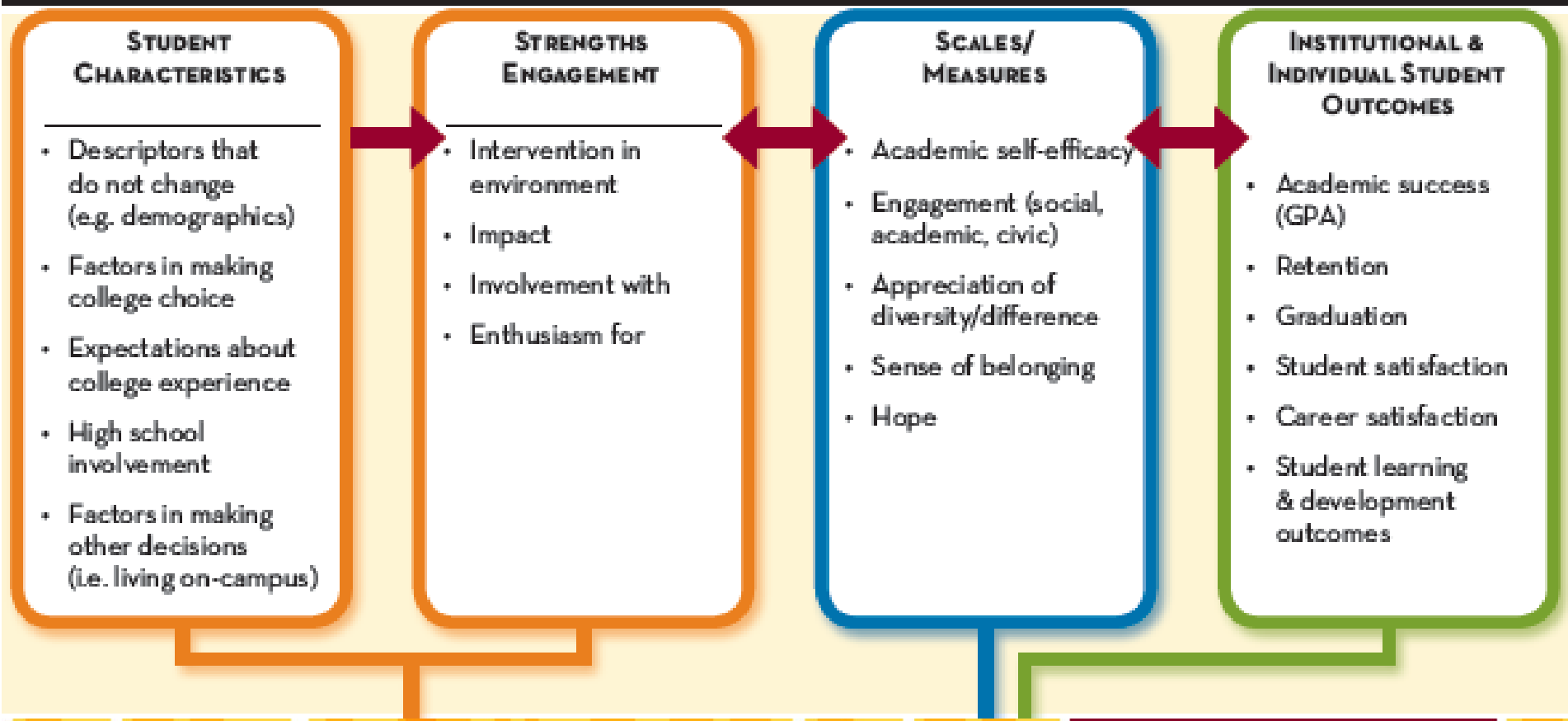
- Welcome Week sessions
- Convocation (President’s office support)
- Advising sessions
- Housing and Residential Life
- Student Employee Leadership Program
- Some first year experience courses
- Some career courses
- Leadership Minor 1000 level class
- Student & Staff Brown Bag Sessions
- Student & Staff Workshops



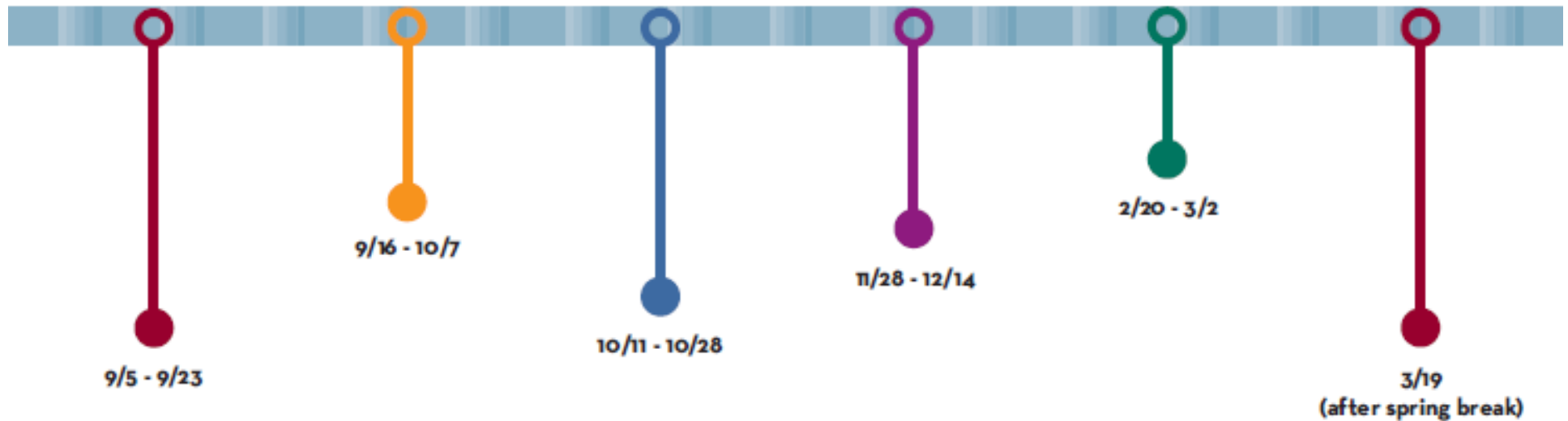
# Assessment Committee

- Established a committee in summer 2011
- 10-15 members, mostly staff and a few faculty
- Tasked with developing an assessment plan, choosing measures, developing instruments

# STRENGTHS IMPACT MODEL



# Strengths Assessment Timeline for 2011-2012 Academic Year



\* = Survey administered to all first-time, full-time freshmen in the Class of 2015

\*\* = Survey administered to a random sample of first-time, full-time freshmen in the Class of 2015

# Assessment Measures

- Academic Self-Efficacy (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001)
- Gallup Q12 College Student Engagement (Cantwell, 2005)
- Strengths Awareness (Schreiner, 2004)
- Adult Trait Hope (Snyder, Thompson, Shorey, & Heinze, 2003)
  
- Additional items to learn more about FY students' engagement with Strengths and the impact it has had on students

# Results

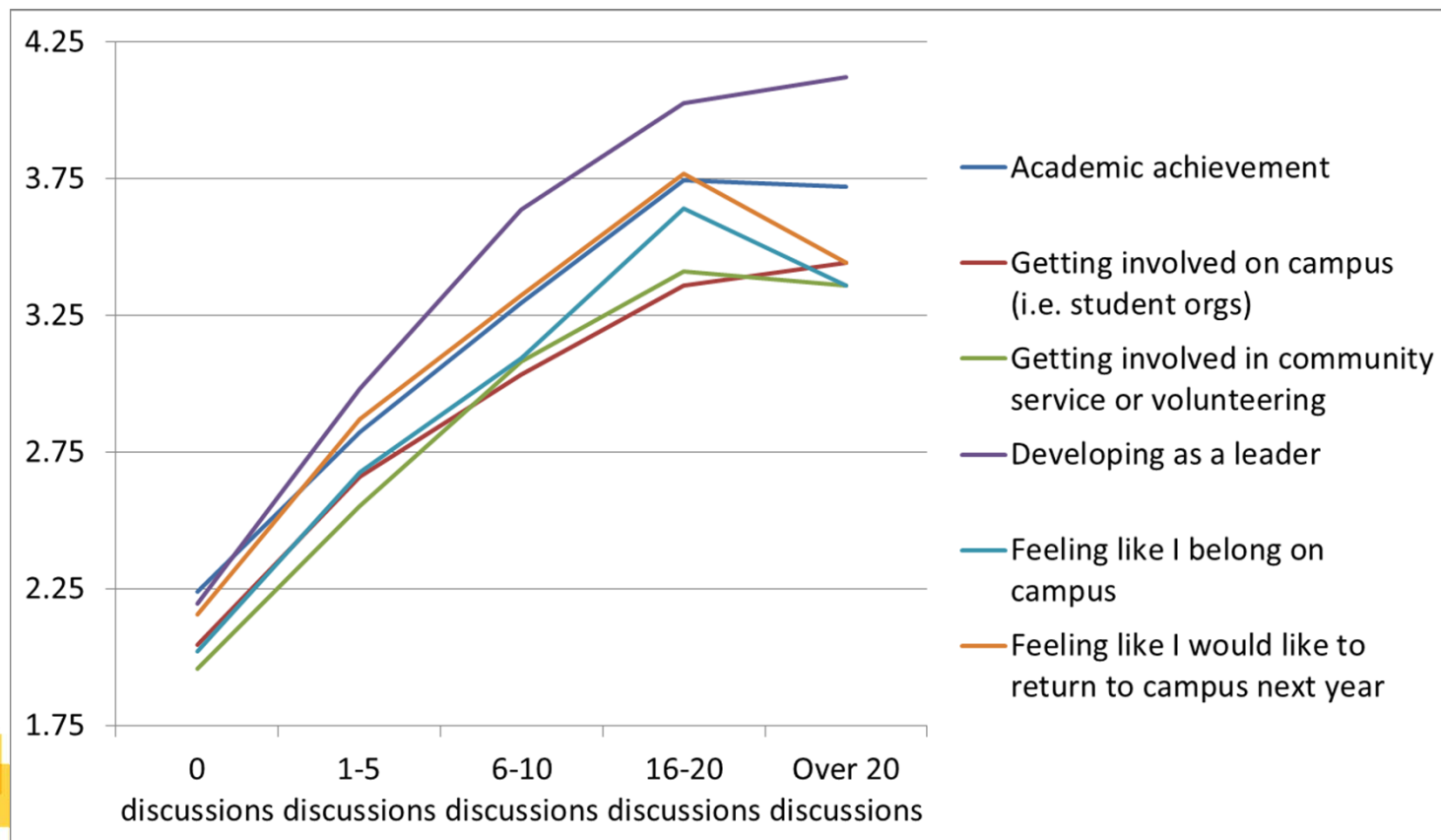
- Pre-survey (September; all FY):  $n = 2008$
- Post-survey (December; all FY):  $n = 1493$
- End of the year survey (April; random sample  $\frac{1}{2}$  FY class):  $n = 571$
- Responded to pre-and-post:  $n = 934$
- Responded to all three:  $n = 299$

# Focus Groups

- Random sample of ½ FY students
- Five focus groups of 28 students
  - Tell us about your experience with Strengths this year.
  - What have been some of the highlights of your first year, and how have your Strengths played into or impacted those experiences?
  - What would make the Strengths approach more meaningful for you?

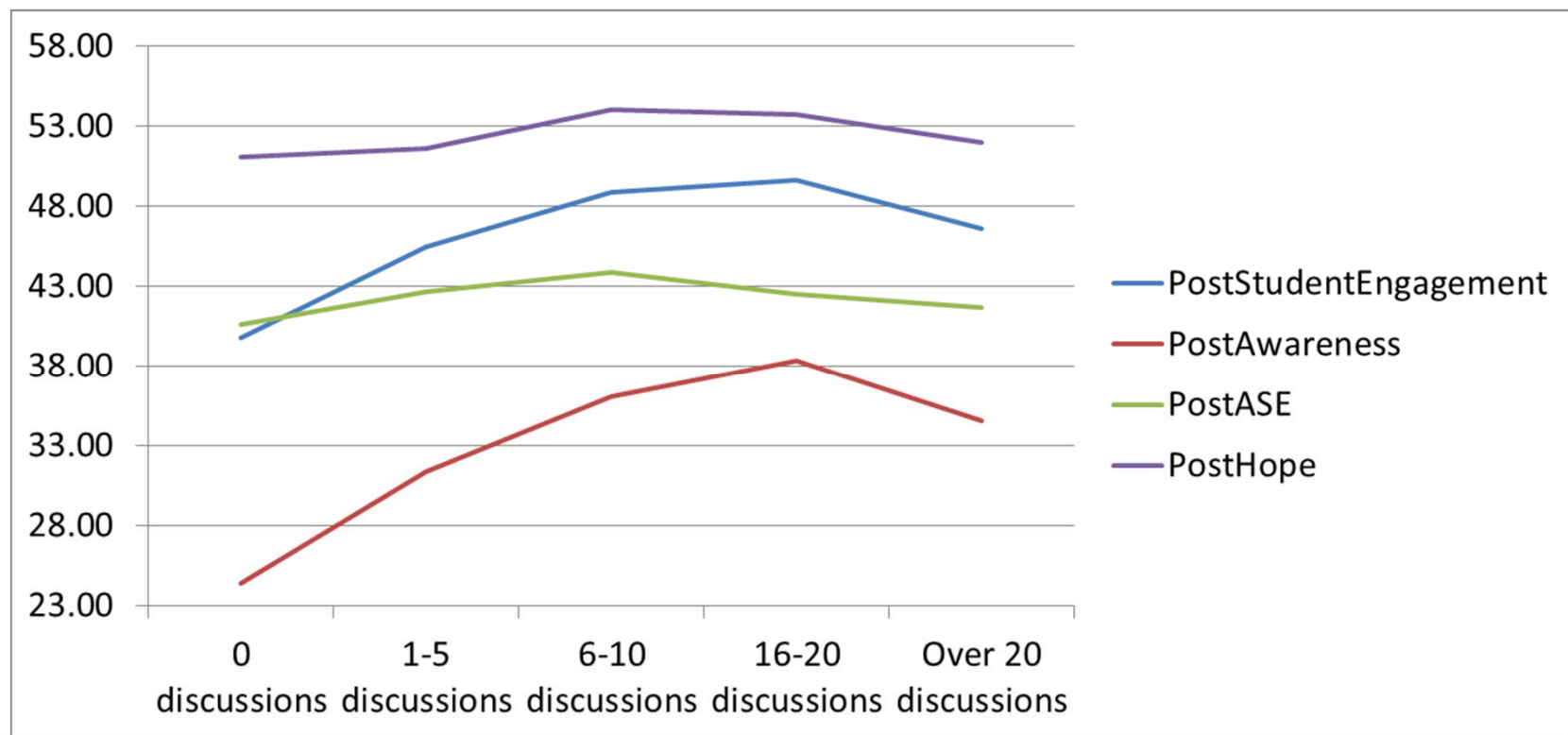
# Interacting with Strengths matters!

- “I believe that knowing my Strengths and interacting with them as positively impacted me in the following areas” (end of the year survey;  $n = 570$ )



# Interacting with Strengths matters!

- Impact on four measures (note: not on the same scale; from the end of the year survey and post-survey;  $n = 297$ )



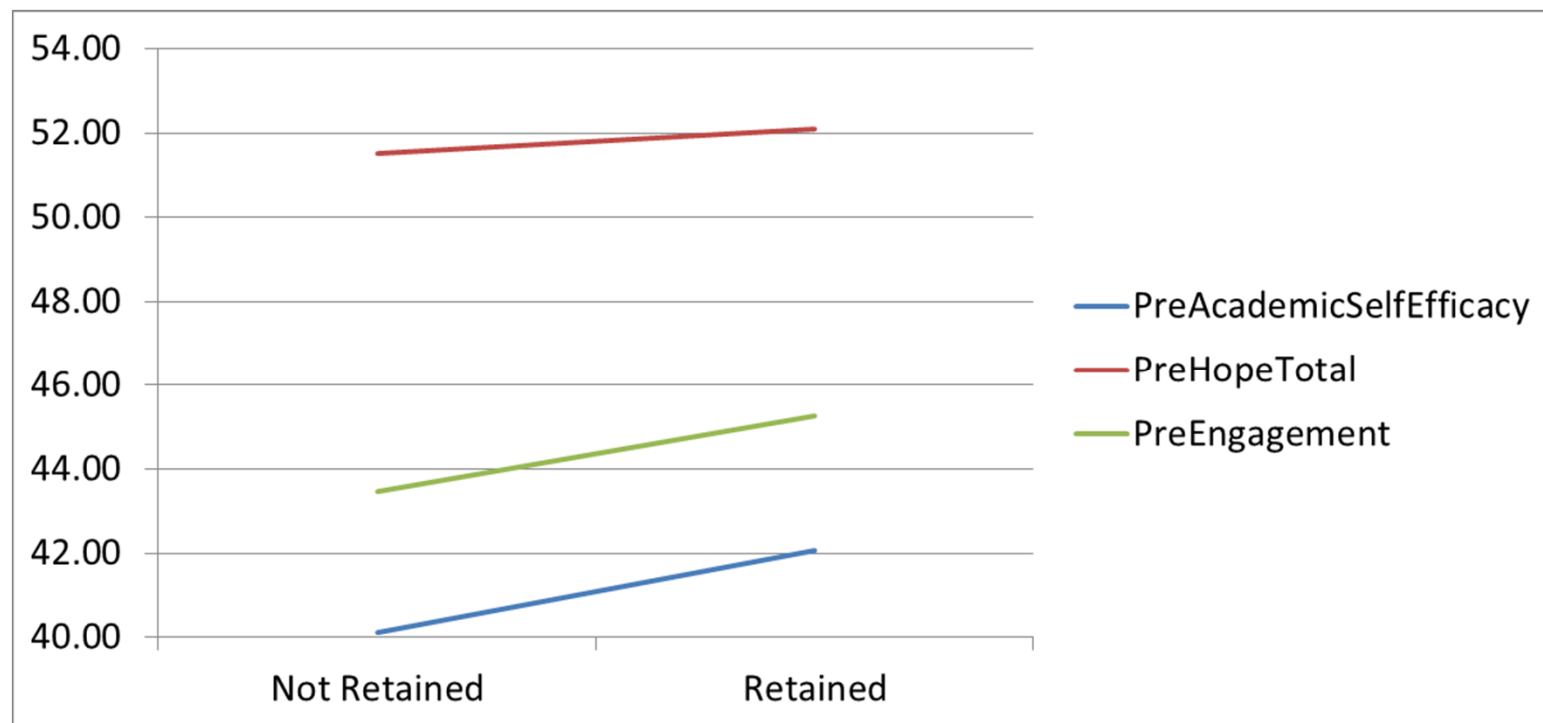


# Pre- and post-survey results

- Paired samples t-tests suggest students had gains in the following areas:
  - Strengths awareness
  - Student engagement
- Also, the positive impact of strengths:
  - Academic achievement
  - Feeling like I belong on campus
  - Developing as a leader
  - Getting involved in community service
  - Getting involved on campus

# Greater outcomes

- First-to-second semester retention and three measures (note: not on the same scale; from the pre-survey;  $n = 1480$ )



# Qualitative Results

- Pre-survey: “explain how knowing your strengths might influence your academic skills or performance in college.”
  - Several key themes:
    - Can leverage their strengths to enhance their academic performance and use their strengths in working with others to complete academic-related tasks.
    - Are better prepared to maximize their strengths in the workplace
    - Can help them to motivate others, understand how others’ strengths influence a group’s dynamics, and understand how to best contribute to a group using their own strengths.

# What worked?

- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Communication
- Support
- Enthusiasm

## StrengthsQuest Assessment

October, 2011



This report presents preliminary findings of an assessment distributed to all new first-year students from Sept. to Oct., 2011. The assessment included the following question: "explain how knowing your strengths might influence your academic skills or performance in college." A qualitative analysis was conducted and several primary themes emerged in the data. This report presents one of those themes and provides evidence by using students' responses below.

### SQ Enhances Relationships!

#### Student Quotes

- My strength of connectedness helped me to be able to connect with people from diverse backgrounds very quickly and easily, especially when I'm an international student.
- Knowing my strengths, and having others know their own strengths, has helps me to work successfully with other people and to meet their needs.
- Knowing my Strengths will help me to determine ways in which I go about studying and even socializing with other students. I know what I do well at and how I can apply these Strengths in situations to better my own experience, as well as others around me.
- Knowing my strengths will help me socially, academically and personally because it helps me understand what types of skills I need to incorporate into my everyday situations, such as studying or interacting with others.
- Knowing my strengths may help me identify with others with similar or counteractive strengths while working in groups
- It helps me to relate to others, and understand my interactions, as well as to help me understand how I might best contribute to a group.
- I also have positivity and woo (winning others over) as two of my other strengths. I can use these in group settings in and out of the class room to bring the group together and to keep the spirit of the group high so we can accomplish our tasks.
- I did not think of myself as that much of a leader until I got Command as a strength, and even now I do not really see myself as a leader so much as someone who tries to direct others to take the best actions. Now I am trying to use this knowledge to turn my directing attitude into more of an attitude of positive influence and friendly advice.

#### Sample

2,009 students responded to the first question (38%). Slightly more females and Asian students responded than are represented in the population.

	n	%
American Indian	26	1.3
Asian	350	17.4
Black	50	2.5
Hawaiian	3	.1
Hispanic	55	2.7
Unspecified	15	.7
White	1503	74.8
Female	1191	59.3
Male	817	40.7

#### Conclusion

The qualitative analysis suggests that students believe that knowing their strengths will positively impact their interpersonal relationships. Students reflected that knowing their strengths can help them to motivate others, understand how others' strengths influence a group's dynamics, and understand how to best contribute to a group using their own strengths.

For additional reports or to learn more about StrengthsQuest assessment, please visit [www.strengths.umn.edu](http://www.strengths.umn.edu)



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# What Next?

- Continue refining assessment plan
- Continue refining measures used in assessment
- Sharing data with campus stakeholders
  - What works?
  - What needs improvement?
- Continue to report results

# Questions?

- [strengths.umn.edu](https://strengths.umn.edu)
- Krista Soria, [ksoria@umn.edu](mailto:ksoria@umn.edu)
- Ron Huesman, [huesm003@umn.edu](mailto:huesm003@umn.edu)