

# **Strengths at the U: Creating a Strengths-Based Undergraduate Experience**

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# Strengths Profiles

## Katy

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

## Robin

**Relator - Communication - Connectedness - Ideation –  
Restorative**

## Krista

**Intellection - Input - Learner - Achiever - Ideation**

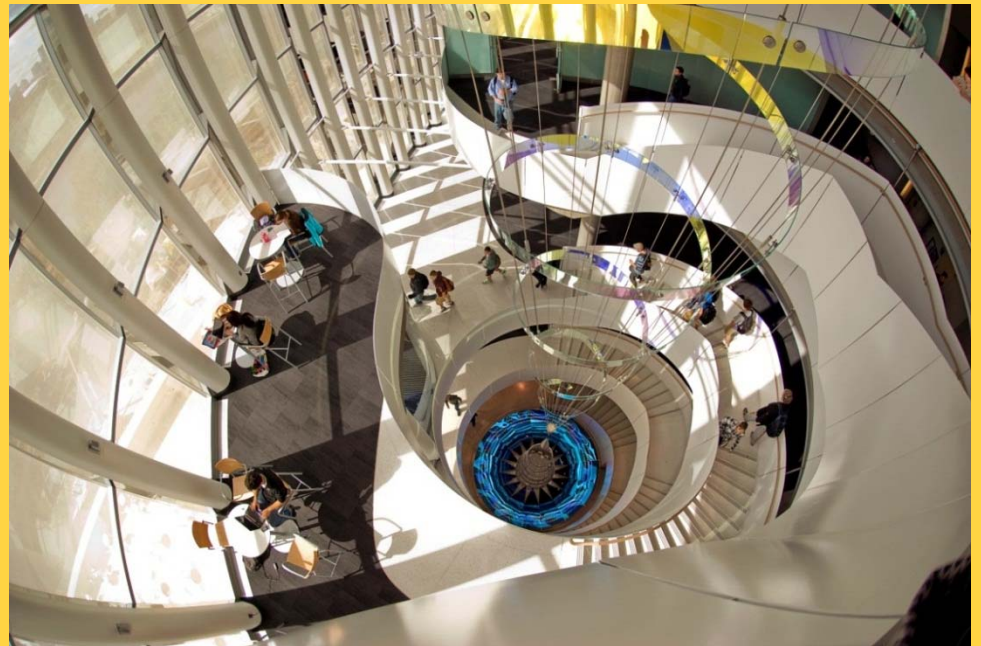
# Office for Student Engagement

## 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](http://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.

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# 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
- Developing potential in academics, career planning, leadership, relationships
- Creating a common language across campus





# 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](http://www.slo.umn.edu)) and the Student Development Outcomes ([www.sdo.umn.edu](http://www.sdo.umn.edu)).

### Strengths Integration Strategies



### 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.



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.

# 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”



Rebecca Kang

## Facebook

Anyone else finish their StrengthsFinder and get their Top 5?  
I got: Achiever, Analytical, Focus, Consistency, and Learner. In that order.

What did everyone else get?

Like · Comment · Follow Post · July 19 at 12:21am

12 people like this.

View previous comments 100 of 107



Emily Schaumann connectedness, harmony, activator, maximizer, positivity

July 19 at 1:24am · Like



Blake Apgar Developer, empathy, adaptability, intellection, ideation.

July 19 at 1:34am · Like · 1

- 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



Francesca DeCastris @tan\_phran

## Twitter

31 Aug

@UMN\_Strengths I'm going to use competition in internships to get the best possible event planning job with St. Jude's #gopher16 #UMN

Expand



Kendra Tillberry @KendraTillberry

## Twitter

2 Oct

@UMN\_Strengths What do you think Booth's from Bones strengths are? I think responsibility, belief, activator

Expand Reply Retweet Favorite

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# 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:

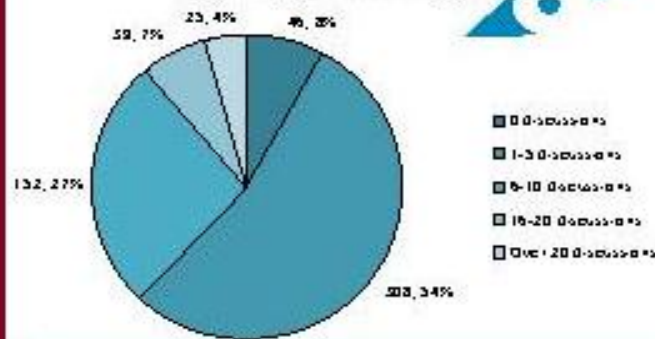
- Pre-and post-surveys of students
  - quantitative
  - qualitative
  - random and census
- Focus groups of students
- Staff surveys
- Future pairing with additional survey



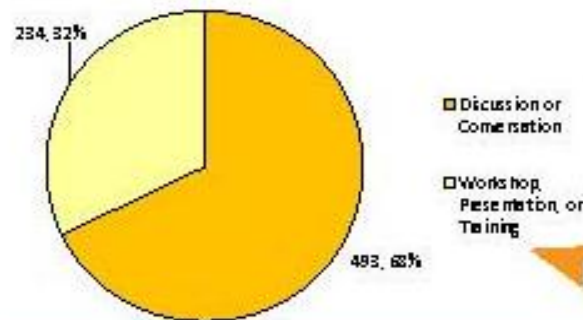
# Participants

- 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

**"During the past academic year, approximately how many discussions did you have with others regarding your Strengths?"**



**"What was the nature of these interactions or discussions?"**



**"Which of these interactions with others had the most impact on you, and why?"**

**The most impactful interaction areas included**

- With friends or family
- In Housing and Residence Life
- With academic advisors and career counselors
- In classroom conversations

Students' direct quotes are included on the following page.

**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.**

**“In which of the following areas did you discuss Strengths during your first year?”**

	n	%
With friends	303	53.2
With an academic advisor	296	51.9
In Housing and Residence Life	288	50.5
In classes	199	34.9
With family	185	32.5
In student organizations or activities	113	19.8
In a study group of peers	112	19.6
With a professor	69	12.1
With a career counselor	65	11.4
With coworkers (other than supervisors)	21	3.7
With my employment supervisor on campus	14	2.5
With my employment supervisor off campus	14	2.5

Note. %'s do not round to 100 as students could select more than one of the items. The % reported is % of students who choose those items (i.e. 51.9% of students selected "Housing..." and 48.1 did not select "Housing...").

**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.**

**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.**

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

	n	%
With an academic advisor	26	78.9
With a career counselor	17	51.5
With friends	14	42.4
With family	14	42.4
With a professor	12	36.4
In classes	8	24.2
In student organizations	5	15.2

Note. %'s do not round to 100 because students could choose more than one option.

# Importance of Strengths

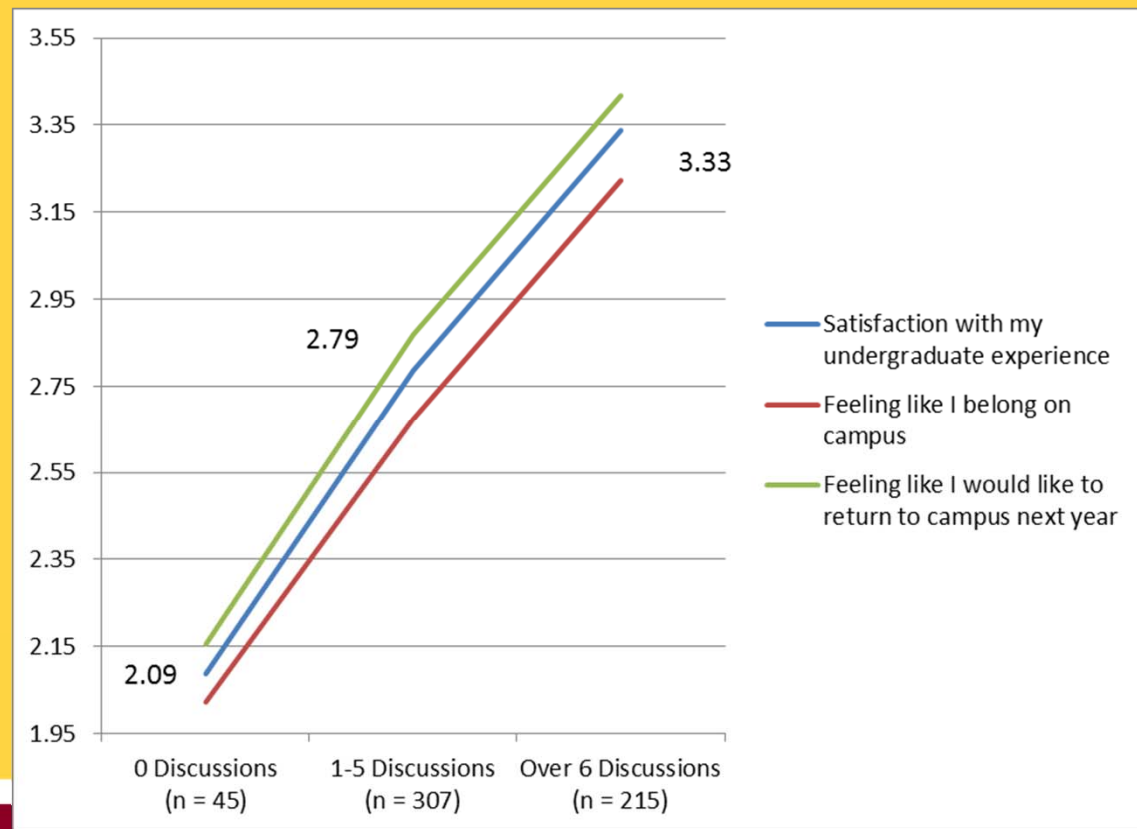
- From the end of the year survey ( $n = 570$ ), we discovered that
  - Approximately 75% of students reported that Strengths has value for them now, as they continue to progress as an undergraduate, and as they enter the workforce or continue their education
- Three quarters or more reported that Strengths
  - 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 ( $p < .05$ )*



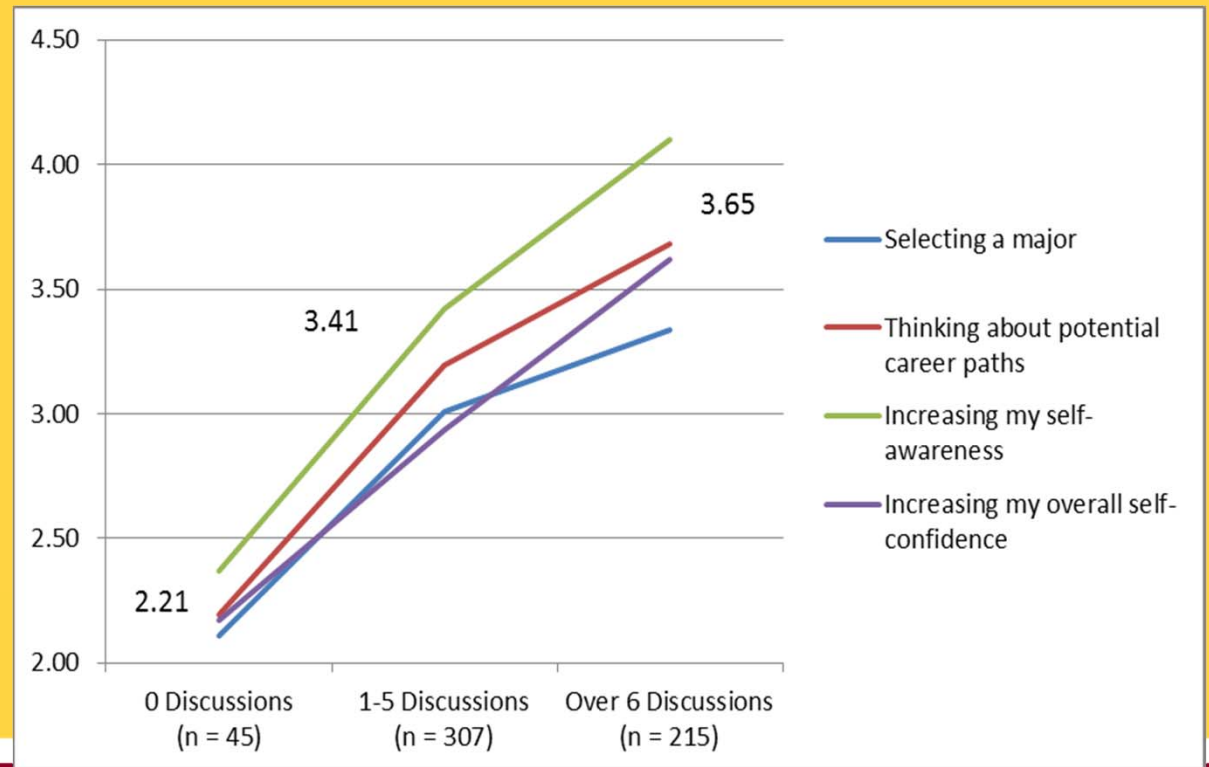
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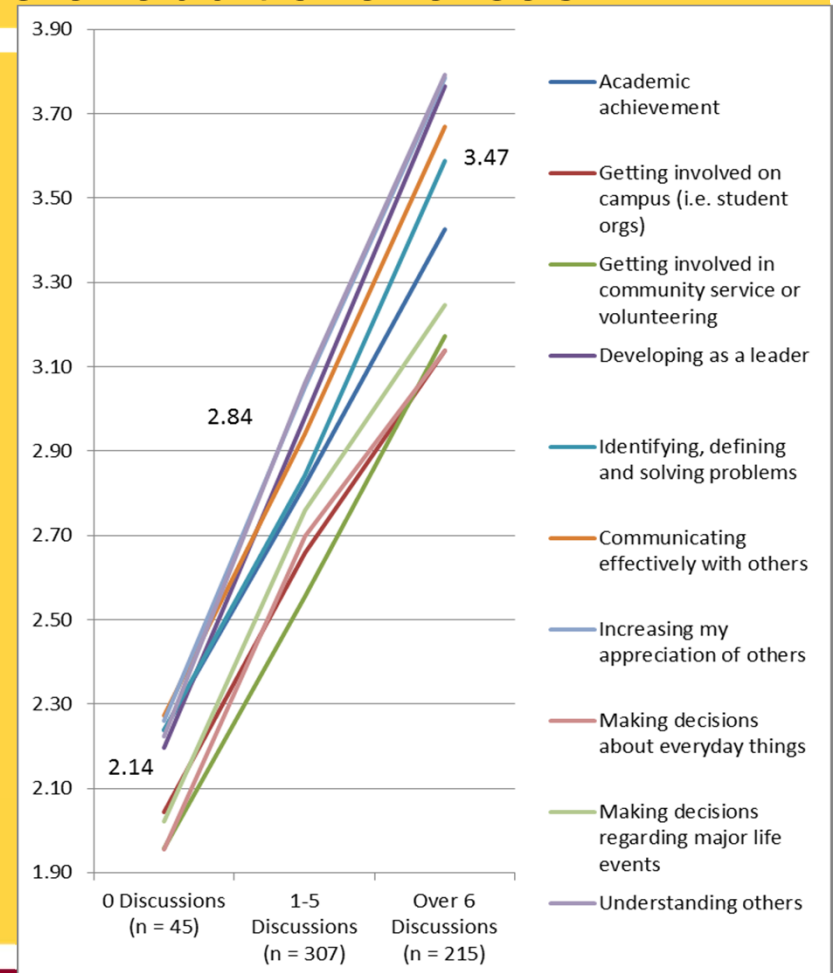
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# Discussions with Strengths Matters

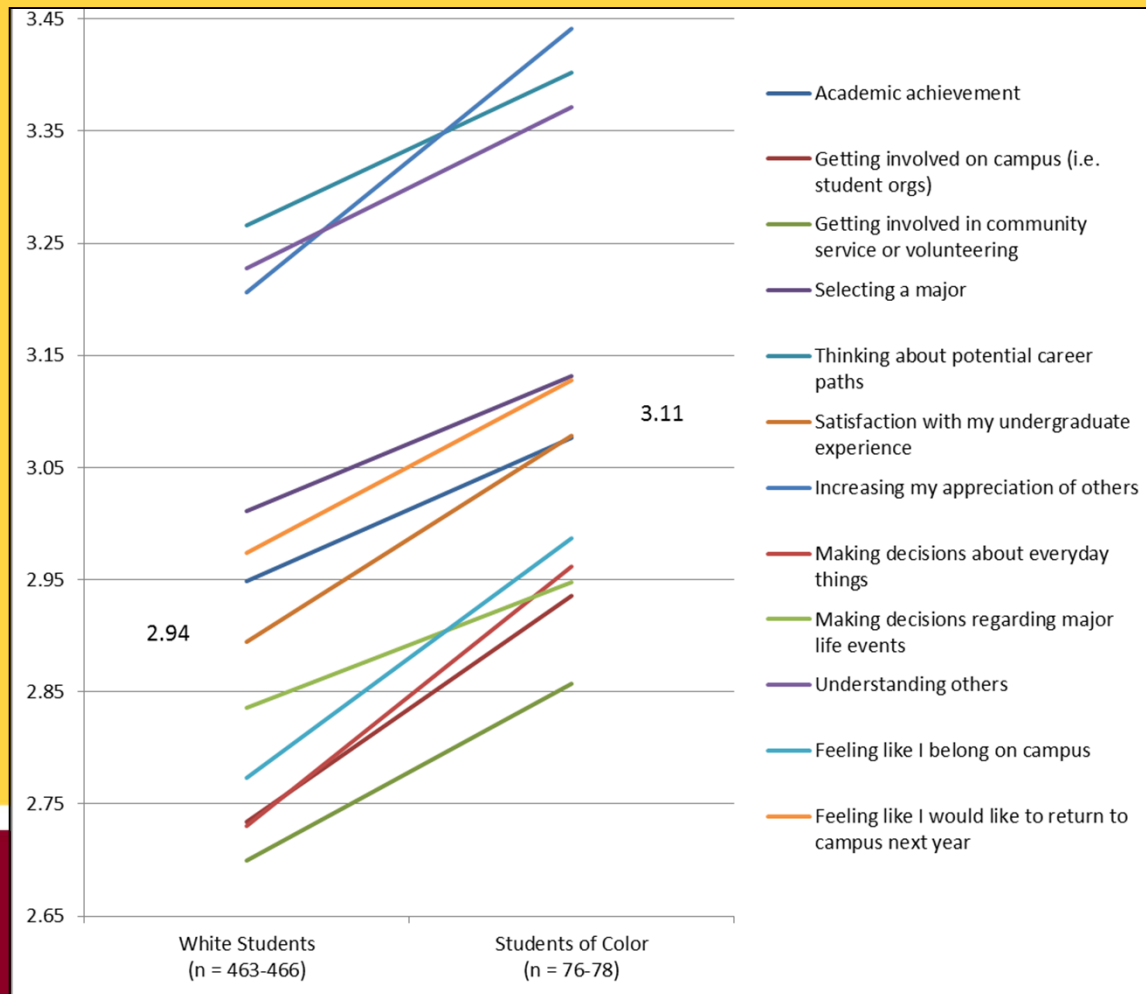
Findings are consistent across several additional areas:

- Academic achievement
- Getting involved on campus (i.e. student orgs)
- 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



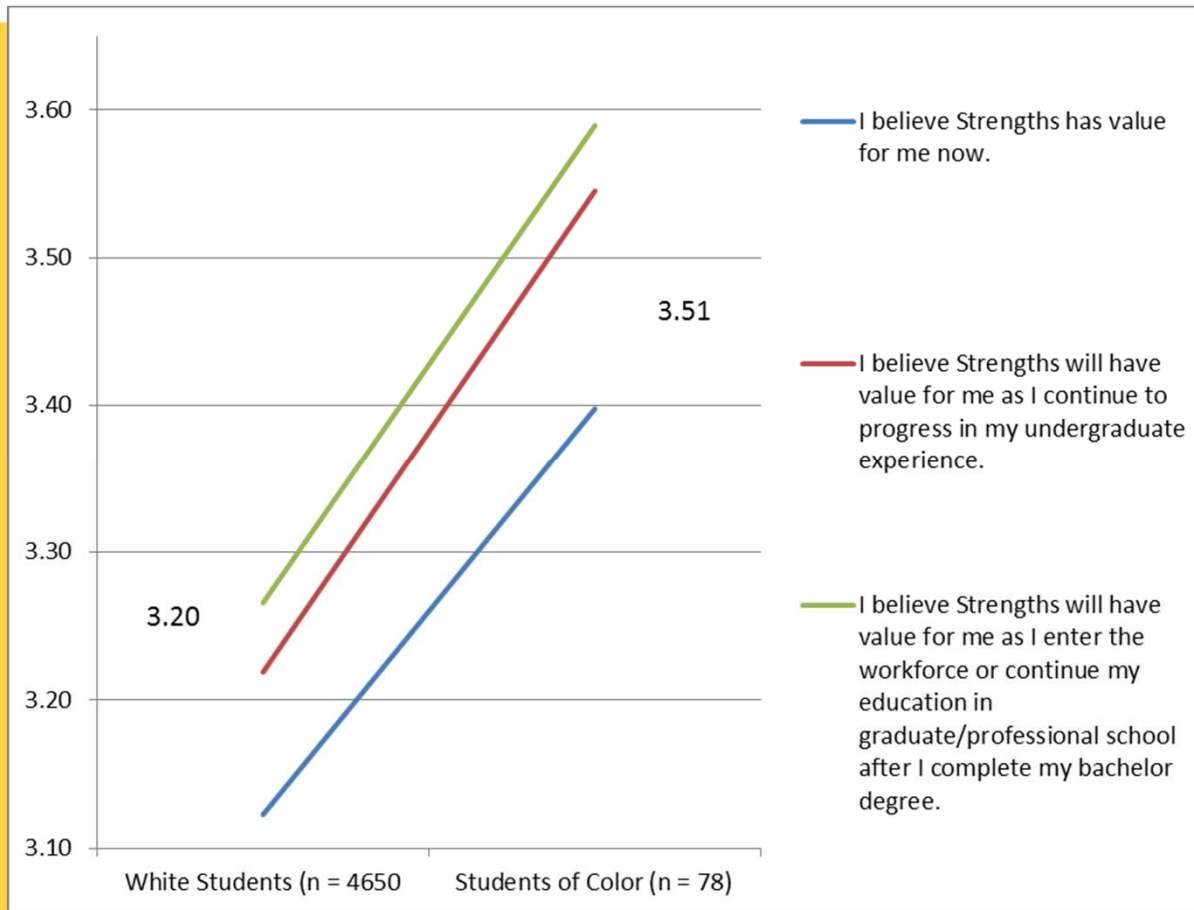
# Impact on Students of Color

“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 ~ 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:
    - advisors
    - in classes
    - in student orgs and clubs
    - with on-campus employment
    - with friends
    - with family
- note: end of the year survey,  $n = 557, R^2 = .307$*

# Insights into Retention & GPA

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

# 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](http://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?

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