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The Effects of Strengths-Based Curriculum on First-Year Students

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INTRODUCTION

With an elevated need and focus on student success within the University, a strategic opportunity is presented by the ability to complement the current tools being utilized within First Year Seminar (FYS) with an instrument that could increase student knowledge of self through strengths development. Gallup research has shown that engaging students in an area of interest in which they also excel will lead to the outcomes of better academic performance, higher test scores, and ultimately students' ability to reach their full potential after high school (Naviance.com). A student knowing more about themselves can affect their academic outcomes (Gomez, 2008; Lopez, 2009). In support of this claim, Lopez (2011) also found that the development of strengths, rather than an approach of engaging in strengths and weaknesses, leads to hope and engagement. Hope and engagement, in turn, lead to positive outcomes in academic success and well-being. As these concepts are indicators of being at-risk, they become important factors to monitor and influence for retention purposes.. The more a student can engage and be coached in concepts around the development of self, the more likely they may be to invest in our institution.



OBJECTIVES

1. Expose CEHD FYS students to strengths-based curriculum at the beginning of their academic career.
2. Coach students to apply their strengths and customize a plan for student development.
3. Expose students to campus resources and supports.
4. Enhance student experience that will assist in maintaining or improving college retention.
5. Increase the self-reported level of intrinsic motivation (belief in positive progression and attainment toward their life goals or hope) in each CEHD FYS student that will in turn be reflected by their grade point average and engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Gallup's StrengthsFinder was delivered to 108 First Year Freshmen students enrolled in 5 College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) taught First Year Seminar (FYS) course sections. As a continuation of the assessment, CEHD FYS courses engaged in an initial discussion on Gallup's 34 talent themes in relation to each student's Top 5 Signature themes.

- Participating students had at least five contacts within FYS:
- 1) Pre-survey on academic confidence and engagement
 - 2) StrengthsFinder Assessment
 - 3) StrengthsQuest Curriculum
 - 4) StrengthsQuest Curriculum
 - 5) Post-survey on academic confidence and engagement

Contacts 2, 3, and 4 were delivered within one class period.

STUDENT RESPONSES

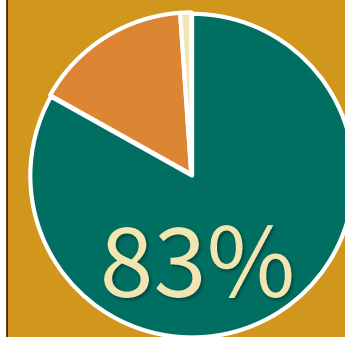
"[StrengthsFinder] really showed me qualities I didn't know I had. It made my confidence level boost completely, and it also motivated me to continue to work at these strengths..."

"Knowing I have all these qualities could help me venture out of my comfort zone and meet new people, take on new responsibilities, solve people's problems and much more. This assignment has helped me get to know myself a lot better."

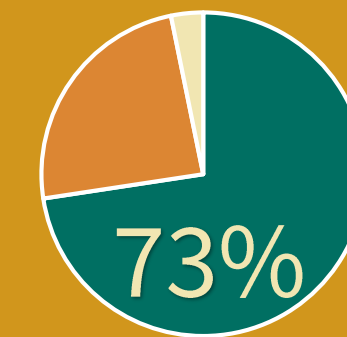


RESULTS

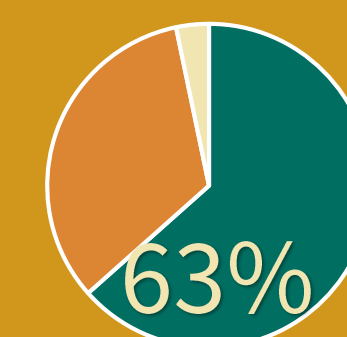
95 of 108 CEHD students participated in the post survey



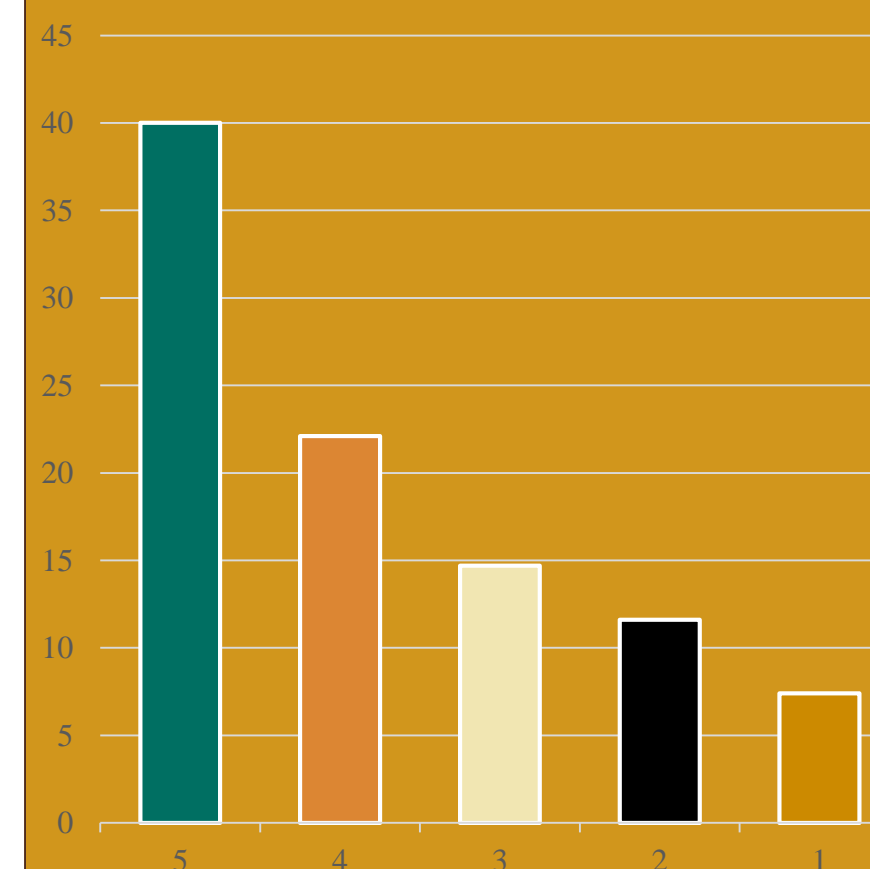
Can apply Top 5 to program of study



Can apply Top 5 to organization and community involvement



Can apply Top 5 to building relationships



40% of CEHD FYE students could name their Top 5 strengths while 87.4% of students could describe their strengths

Average GPA for CEHD FYE Participants



Fall '14 FYE



Fall '15 FYE

Fall '15 to Spring '16 retention: 92% CEHD 95% University-Wide



CONCLUSIONS

- A substantial number of students were able to apply their strengths to academic achievement, campus engagement, and relationship building.
- Students who participated in StrengthsFinder assessment reported either a confirmed or strengthened personal identity based in their strengths
- FYS instructors believe their students were favorable of their involvement in the assessment process and delivery of curriculum
- Fall to Spring retention remained consistent from 2014 to 2015
- The assessment did not have a major impact on student grade point average when compared to the previous CEHD FYS group or students who did not enroll in FYS for the Fall 2015 semester.

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