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CliftonStrengths for Students: Developing Engaged and Thriving Students through Strengths Awareness and Development

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CliftonStrengths for Students: Developing Engaged and Thriving Students through

Strengths Awareness and Development

Office of Student Transitions Adrienne Fraaza, M.A.

Introduction

Grounded in positive psychology, CliftonStrengths is an assessment that helps people discover what they naturally do best and learn how to develop their greatest talents. Instead of focusing on weaknesses, it focus on what is *right* about the individual.

The CliftonStrengths finder measures the presence of 34 general talents, identifying naturally recurring patterns of thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that can be productively applied to daily life. Understanding, owning, and applying one's Top 5 can lead to higher levels of well-being, engagement, productivity, and life satisfaction.

In Fall 2017 and Fall 2018, OST implemented pilot programs integrating Strengths activities into nearly half of FYS sections. Helping students understand, develop, and apply their Strengths can enhance self-awareness and has the potential to improve wellbeing and their thriving quotient (The Thriving Project, 2017).

Thriving students equals a thriving campus.

Learning outcomes: At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- 1. List their top five themes and describe them in their own words.
- 2. Articulate how their strengths help them do what they do best.
- 3. Provide at least one example of how their strengths impact their relationships.
- 4. Describe how they can apply their Strengths to achieve academic and/or career
- 5. Articulate a plan for developing their Strengths.

Methods and Implementation

- FYS instructors self-selected to participate in the pilot. Training for instructors and Strengths champions provided in August
- Codes were distributed; students took assessment at beginning of semester
- In-class presentation given to all pilot sections
- 1:1 coaching sessions required as part of Pilot Y2; not all pilot instructors completed this requirement
- Y1: Instructors were given 3 activities to complete during the semester; this was found to be too rigid and did not provide enough in-depth assessment
- Y2: Instructors were provided resources and ideas to implement Strengths activities and discussion to weave into their class at their own pace; highly encouraged to connect Strengths to assignments and topics already being covered.
- Reflection papers required at end of semester, answering prompts of Strengths development and awareness
- Paper surveys distributed to all pilot sections when no students signed up for December focus groups
- Quantitative data analyzed in Spring 2019, looking at retention rate of students from both pilot years
- Qualitative data analyzed in Spring 2019, assessing whether or not learning outcomes were met as demonstrated by reflection papers

Strengths Academy

Interested in becoming part of the Strengths movement? Train to be a Strengths Champion! Upon completion of Strengths Academy, you will be a WMU Strengths coach. You will support FYS students in the fall semester and will have the skills and materials to coach others on campus and be an advocate for Strengths @ WMU. Visit wmich.edu/transitions/strengths for more information.

Results: Pilot Y1 and Y2

Pilot Y1: Three in-class Strengths activities were conducted by instructors. These activities were designed to measure the impact of Strengths on self-awareness and career readiness.

A few **emergent themes** from activities:

- Students increased self-knowledge and self-confidence
- Engaging in Strengths activities helped them better connect with their peers and work on teams
- Affirmed major/career choice
- Students saw how Strengths can help them plan their future

Pilot Y2: Reflection papers were collected at the end of the semester. Students were asked to respond to prompts that mirrored the learning outcomes. All students demonstrated at least a basic understanding of their Top 5 and could describe them. Students who completed a coaching session gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for their Strengths. Many students wrote that they were grateful for the opportunity to learn about, understand, and apply their natural strengths.

All of the themes that emerged from the Y1 pilot qualitative data also emerged from the Y2 reflection papers. Strongest themes included:

- Self-awareness and self-discovery
- Understanding how to use Strengths in academics, career paths, and future planning
- Interpersonal development
- Deeper Strengths knowledge

Excerpts from student papers:

"This really helps me get to know and better understand what I am good at in a sense. This broadened my thinking of what I might want to do in college and in life and what I might be good at and enjoy all at the same time...finding out my strengths has been the number one most important piece of information I have received this first semester and I will for sure hold on to that for a long time."

"Overall, after closer looking into my everyday life and analyzing the background of my top five strengths, I have a better understanding of who I am as a person. I feel more confident in my career path, for I have picked an end goal that will use my strongest characteristics on a daily basis."

The big "R": Does this impact retention?

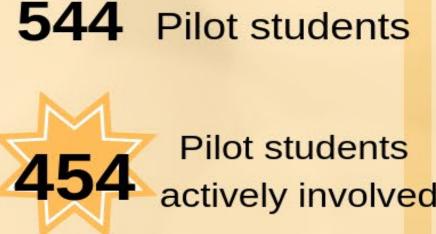
Fall 2017 (Pilot Y1): 77% of pilot students returned in Fall 2018 73% of control students returned in Fall 2018 Fall 2018 (Pilot Y2): 85% of pilot students returned in Spring 2019 88% of control students returned in Spring 2019



By the numbers

CLIFTONSTRENGTHS FOR STUDENTS PILOT YEAR 2

FALL 2018



188

FYS sections

completed a 1:1 session with a trained coach;

pilot students

Pilot students who

That's 41% of active Control group students



71% active pilot students turned in a survey

62% active pilot students submitted a final reflection paper

From surveys received, 89% think Strengths should be used in all FYS classes.

> Of this 89%, 63% had 1:1 coaching

Why students like Strengths:

Realize positive characteristics instead of only weaknesses; builds confidence Good self-discovery for college students Improves communication Helps find a good fit major or career Leads to success now and in the future Helps to become a better person

Recommendations for future:

- 1:1 coaching sessions must take place earlier in the semester
- More trained coaches needed for 1:1's

Top 5 of FYS pilot students

- Adaptability
- Restorative
- Developer Empathy
- **Futuristic**