



# Building Faculty Ownership for Strengths: Philosophical and Practical Considerations

*Laurie Schreiner, Ph.D.  
Karen Longman, Ph.D.  
Azusa Pacific University*



*Karen Longman*  
*Azusa Pacific University*



*Maximizer*  
*Achiever*  
*Learner*  
*Relator*  
*Connectedness*





*Laurie Schreiner*  
*Azusa Pacific University*



Ideation  
Strategic  
Learner  
Achiever  
Futuristic



# Question:



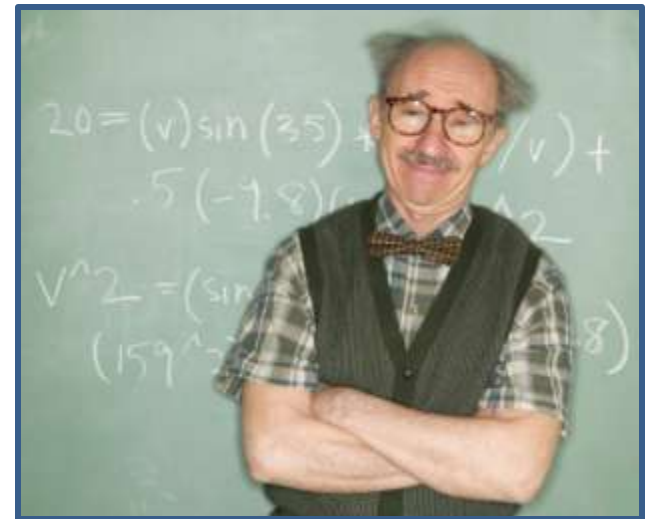
How many faculty does it  
take to change a light bulb?

In pairs:

As you think about implementing a strengths-based approach on campus, what kinds of resistance might emerge among your faculty?

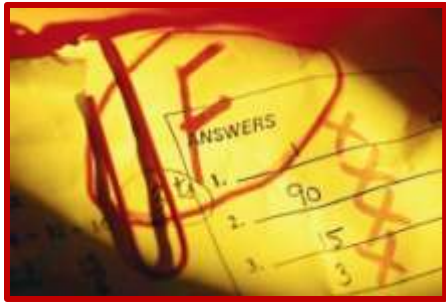
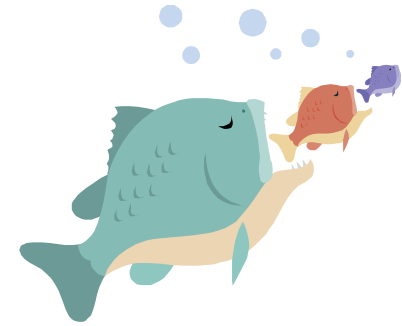
# Sources of Faculty Resistance

- Philosophical differences
- Misunderstanding the strengths approach
- Questions about validity
- Inertia and the status quo
- Time and workload issues



# Philosophical Differences

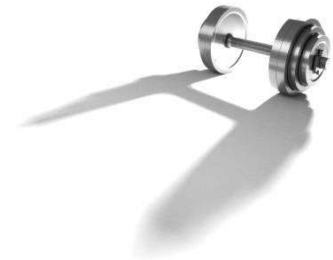
Survival of the fittest



Deficit-based remediation

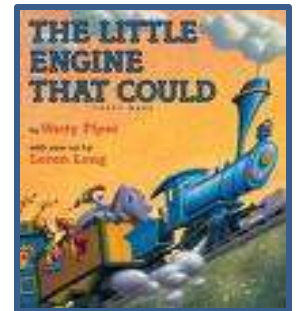
vs.

Strengths-based development and application



# Misunderstanding the Strengths Approach

- Misperceptions:
  - You’re just focusing on self-esteem—and that’s not the purpose of higher education!
  - Is this like the “Little Engine That Could”?
  - This seems too touchy-feely – I’m not the warm and fuzzy type!
  - If students aren’t told their weaknesses, how will they ever improve?
  - The best way to achieve excellence is to work on your weaknesses—right?



# Validity Questions

- This is a natural—and important—question faculty ask
- What if some different “strengths” appear when taking the CSF a second time?

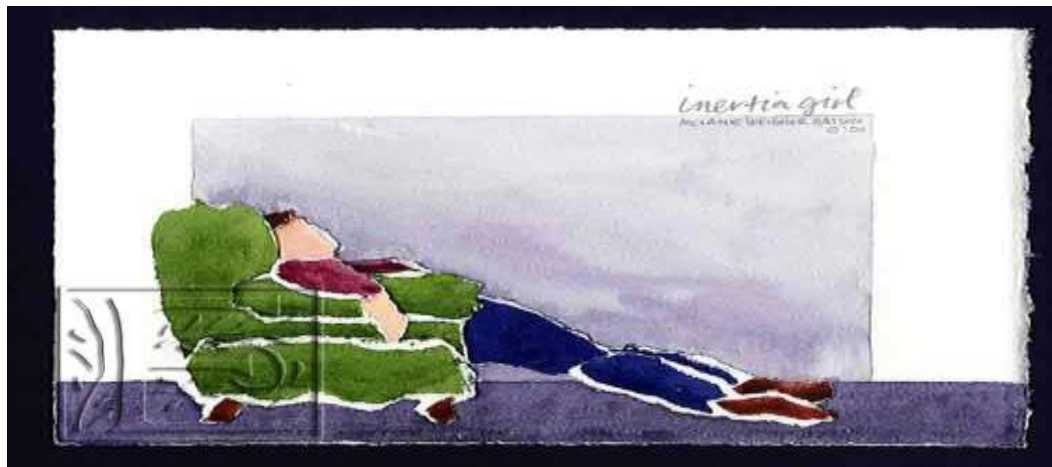
Actually:

- Results of the national validity study with *StrengthsFinder* among college students
  - Excellent construct validity with CPI and 16PF
  - 3-month test-retest reliability averages .70



# Inertia and the Status Quo

- We're always more comfortable with what we're currently doing – even if it isn't working well
- Leadership issues – faculty are needed who can spearhead this effort



# Time and Workload Issues

Faculty invariably feel the pressure of many competing demands

- Advising
- Teaching
- Syllabus preparation
- Research
- Professional associations



# Addressing Time and Workload Issues

- Demonstrate how to take a strengths-based approach to current tasks
  - Advising
  - Teaching
  - Syllabus preparation
  - Research
- Emphasize the greater benefits in each area when a strengths approach is adopted



Is strengths the frosting on the cake, or seamlessly evident throughout?



# Giving Faculty Confidence: Why Adopt a Strengths Approach?

*Learning*

*Achievement*

*Motivation*

*Engagement*

*Sense of community*

*Student satisfaction*

*Persistence*

**Strength =**

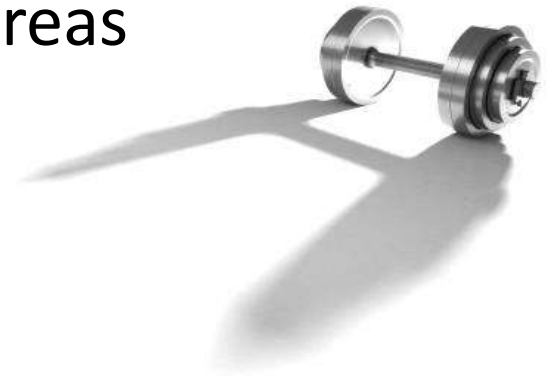


**(Talent + Energy) x (Knowledge + Skill)**

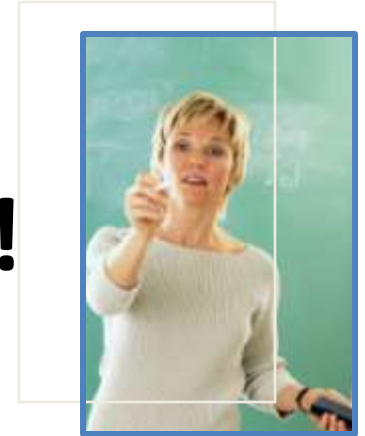


# Strengths-Based Development

- Theme: Students will reach their potential when they build on their talents – and they can be taught to apply those talents to areas in need of improvement
- Outcome desired: Optimal learning, student excellence, and maximum gain from the college experience
- Approach: Assess talents, then teach students to apply them to new and challenging areas



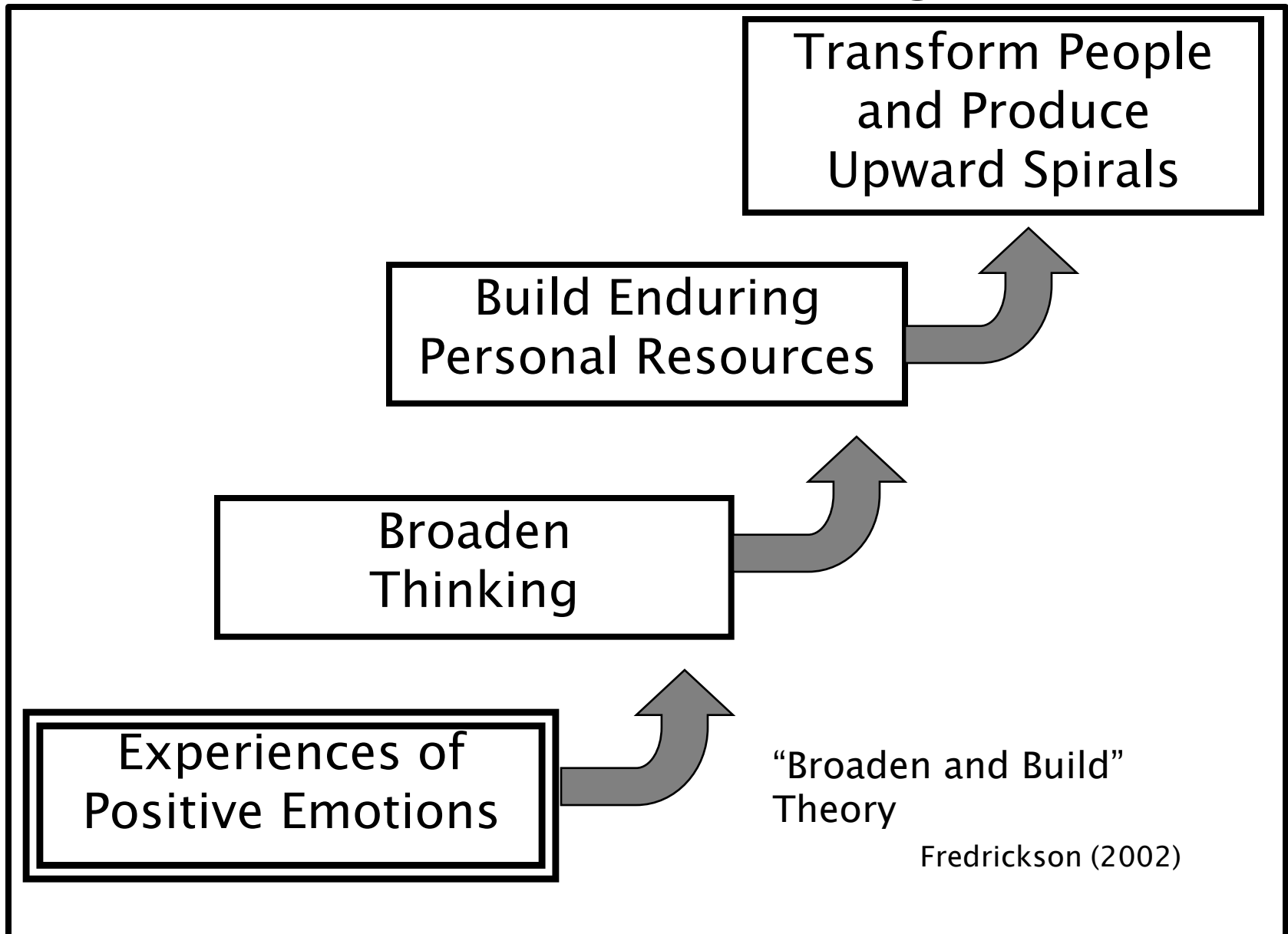
# Strengths: Not Just “What You’re Good At”!



Strengths lead to success, but they also

- Energize you – they “strengthen” you
- Create positive emotions which open up the channels for learning and complex problem solving
- Lead to greater investment of time and effort because they are self-reinforcing

# Strengths Awareness Contributes to Human Flourishing



# Why A Strengths-Based Approach Promotes Student Achievement



Strengths Awareness → Positive Emotions →  
“Broaden and Build” complex thinking and  
response repertoire → Self-Efficacy →  
Motivation to excel → **Engagement in  
learning**

Strengths Development provides new pathways  
to goals → **HOPE**

Apply strengths to areas needing improvement  
→ **Greater likelihood of success**

# Why a Strengths Approach Affects Persistence



Strengths awareness and application →  
**achievement**

Recognizing strengths in others and how my  
strengths work in relationships → **sense of  
community** → satisfaction with the college  
experience

Learning to apply my strengths to new situations  
or challenges → **coping skills**

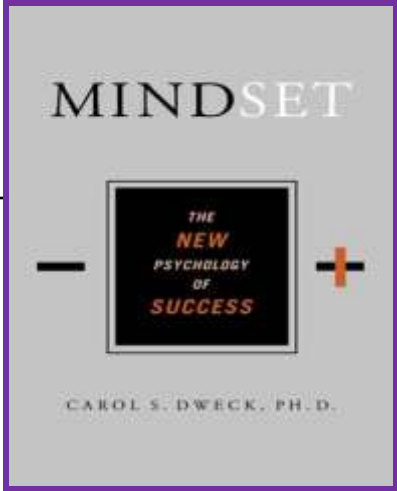


# The Key: Your Mindset

***“The view that you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life.”***

- Carol Dweck, Stanford

*See Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*



mindset



**FIXED MINDSET**

**GROWTH MINDSET**

Intelligence is something very basic about a person that can't be changed very much

You can always change how intelligent you are

# Two Strengths-Based Strategies

## Talent Identification

- ◆ Approach widely used in higher education
- ◆ Identify & affirm existing talents
- ◆ Who you *are*
- ◆ Talents produce success

## Strengths Development

- ◆ Approach intended by The Gallup Organization
- ◆ Identify & affirm talents as precursors to strengths
- ◆ Who you can *become*
- ◆ Effort to develop talents into strengths produces success

Strengths development encourages a growth mindset, as it emphasizes the investment of *effort* (skills, knowledge, time) to develop talents into strengths



It's all about  
strengths  
development!



# Building Strengths

1. Identify the natural talent themes
2. Affirm those themes with significant others
3. Develop the themes by learning knowledge and practicing skills – invest energy and effort
4. Apply the strengths to new or challenging situations
5. Combine the strengths with other talents you have—and with the talents of others—to produce excellence



# Evidence of Effectiveness



- **Qualitative studies**

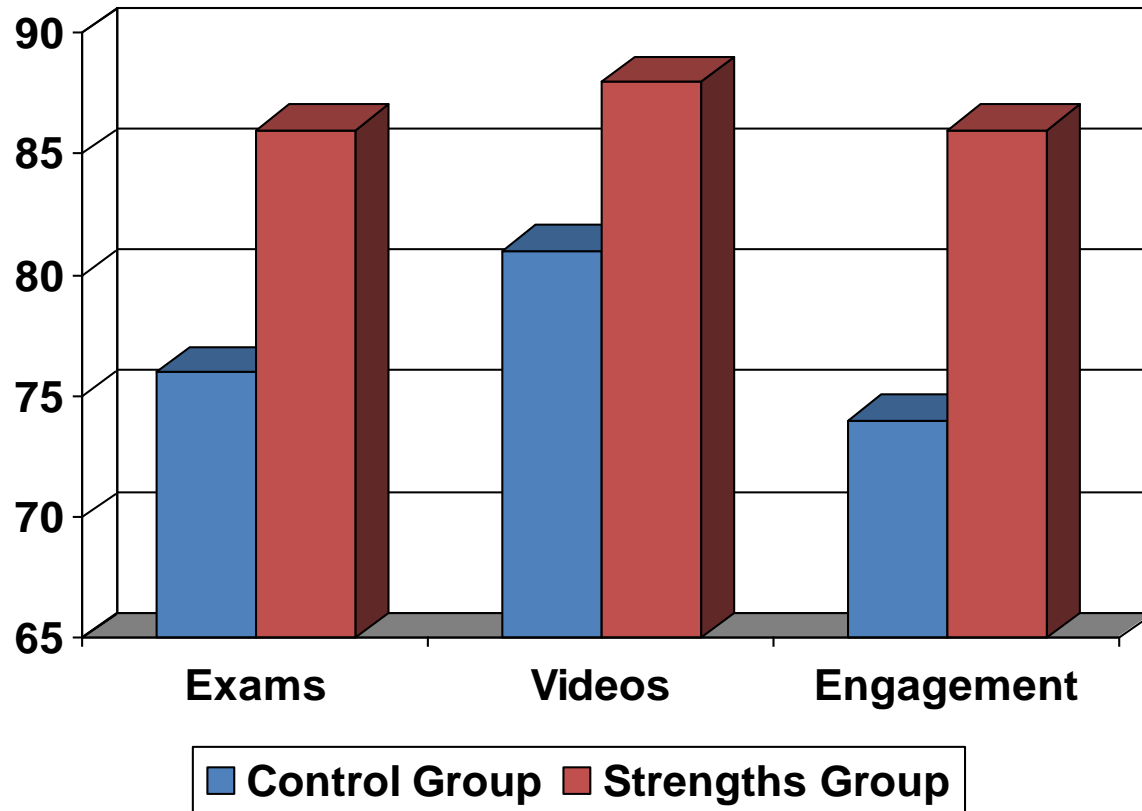
- Intent to use and develop strengths
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- See people differently
- Sense of calling, direction, or purpose
- Self-perception
- Awareness of strengths
- Confidence levels
- Future planning

- **Quantitative studies**

- Satisfaction with advising
- GPA
- Retention rates
- Course evaluations
- Satisfaction with the total college experience
- Engaged learning
- Optimism
- Academic self-efficacy
- Career self-efficacy
- Test performance in courses

# Strengths-Based Learning

Cantwell, 2005



# Perceived Academic Control

Beliefs about the degree to which effort will make a difference in academic outcomes

Tends to drop during transitions  
Affects GPA and persistence

(Perry, Hall, & Ruthig, 2005)

“My success is up to me”

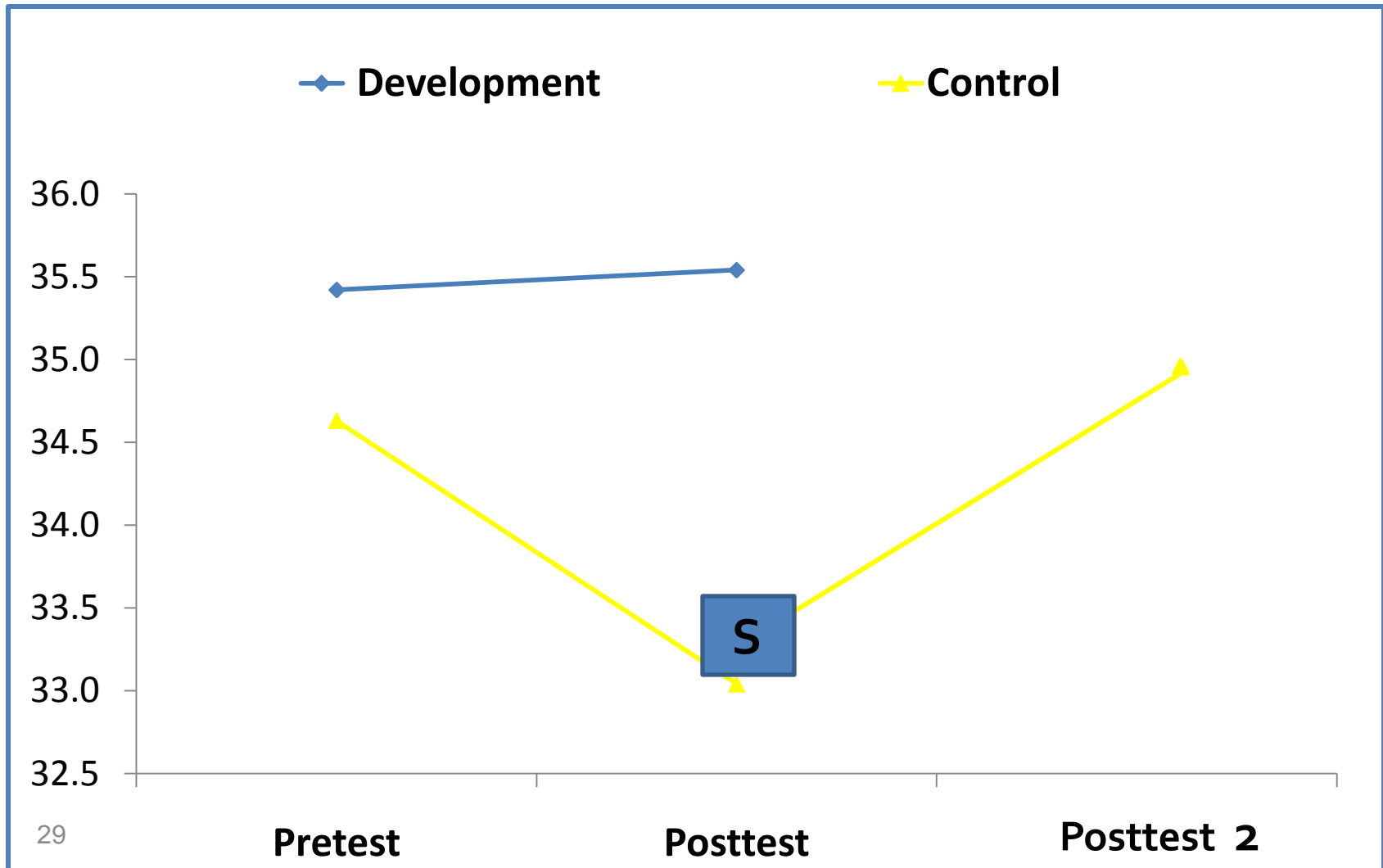




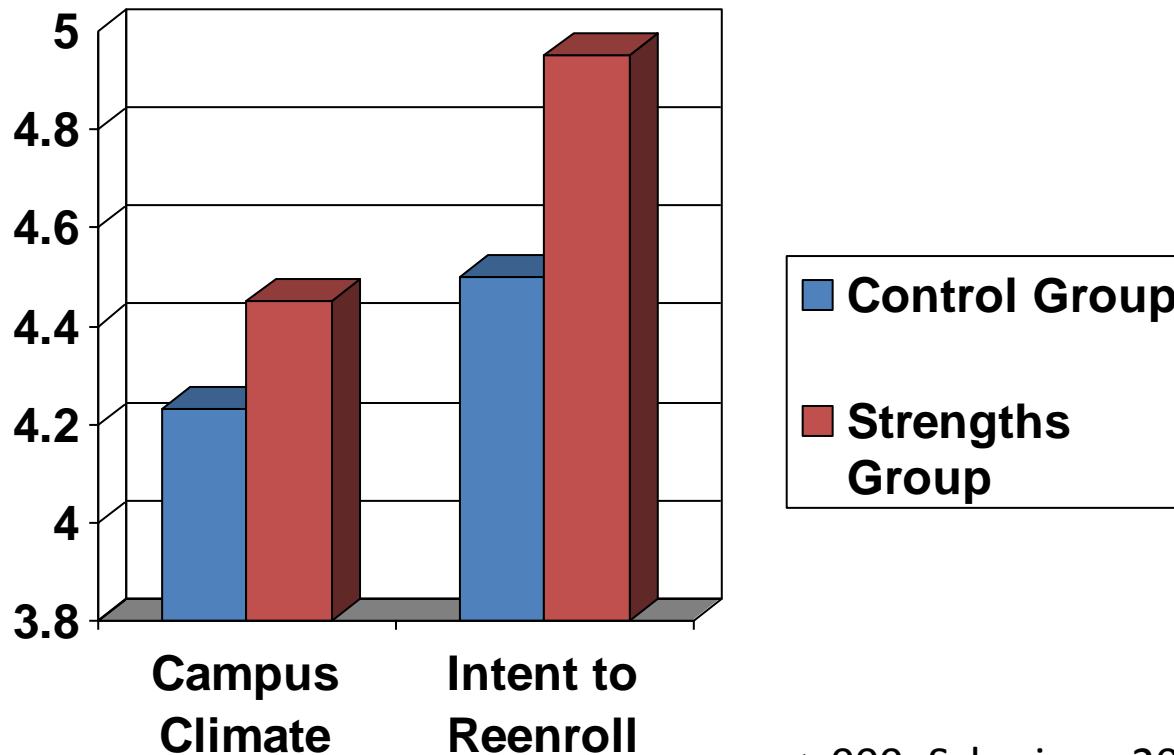
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil - PS 23:4

# Impact of Strengths Intervention on Perceived Academic Control

(Louis, 2008)



# Sense of Community on a Two-Year Commuter Campus





# Capitalize on Faculty Strengths

- Appeal to the **Input, Intellection, Analytical** and similar themes—do your homework and provide evidence of effectiveness
- Appeal to the **Relator, Maximizer, Developer**, and similar themes—point out how it maximizes and jumpstarts faculty relationships with students





- Appeal to the **Strategic, Connectedness, Discipline,** and similar themes—demonstrate how the approach can work with current strategies and tasks
- Appeal to the **Significance, Belief, Activator,** and similar themes—emphasize the results in students' lives and the impact the program has made on students

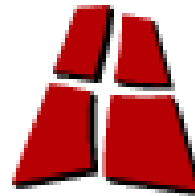


# Noel Academy for Strengths-Based Leadership and Education

*Eileen Hulme, Ph.D.  
Executive Director*

Engaging Faculty in Strengths-Oriented Approaches to Student Learning  
and Success

## **FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS**



**AZUSA PACIFIC**  
UNIVERSITY

# A Model for Faculty Development: Learning Goals



- Recognize the role of motivation in student learning.
- Design strategies for engaging students in the learning process.
- Identify the talent themes that they utilize in their teaching roles.
- Employ a strengths development approach to their own teaching roles.
- Create classroom activities and assignments that enable students to develop their strengths specific to academic tasks and coursework.
- Integrate a strengths development approach into the existing curriculum of courses they teach.

# Applying a Strengths Perspective to Teaching

***Tell me about one of your best professors ever.....***





# “My Best Professors Ever...”

- Did not teach me **what** to think, but taught me **how** to think
- Helped me **make connections** between a serious academic curriculum and my own personal life, values, and experiences
- Worked with me **one-on-one** outside of class
- Asked questions or posed problems that helped me **learn to think like a professional** in my field
- Encouraged me to disagree with them and to **challenge assumptions** – mine and theirs
- **Engaged me** in the learning process

(Light, 2001)



# What the Best College Teachers Do

Bain (2004)



- “The best teachers tended to look for and appreciate the individual value of each student....they looked for the abilities that any person brought to the table.”
- “Every student is unique and brings contributions that no one else can make.”
- “Personality played no role in successful teaching ....each had developed their own unique genius.”





# The Most Effective Teachers

**Combine intellectual excitement with interpersonal rapport. (Lowman, 1990)**

*They know that learning begins with what students bring to the classroom – what's already inside them.*



# Strengths-Based Educators

(Returning to the Marble Cake Image)



- Know their own strengths and how they combine to produce excellence in teaching
- Apply their strengths to each aspect of the teaching/learning process:
  - *Preparation/course design*
  - *Interaction with students in class*
  - *Mentoring and advising students*
  - *Grading and feedback to students*
- Are transparent to students about how they apply their strengths to mastering tasks in the discipline





# Your Teaching Success

***Think about one of your best teaching moments . . .***

- What ***energized*** you about that moment?
- What ***talents*** were operating in that moment?
- What ***skills*** (and how much practice) went into that moment?
- What ***knowledge*** contributed to that moment?



**Now think of a challenge you face in your teaching– how could you apply your talents, skills, knowledge, and effort toward that challenge?**

Talents 

Skills 

Knowledge 

Effort 





Our strengths are a lens through which we see the world  
... they shape the way we



process information

experience others

view time and structure

accommodate change

communicate





## Reflect on your 5 signature themes

- How does each enable you to be excellent in your teaching role?
- What values arise from each?
- How do these values affect the way you perceive students or the expectations you have for them?



# What is a “strengths-based” course?



- **Instructor**
  - teaches students to apply strengths to course assignments
- **Assignments**
  - provide variety and choice, allowing students to leverage their strengths
  - create learning teams that capitalize on diversity of strengths
  - are designed to identify and build students’ awareness and development of their strengths
- **Students**
  - are given the resources to identify their talents and to work outside of class to develop them into strengths

**Purpose: to motivate and engage students in their own learning process, so that they are able to reach optimal levels of achievement**



# 60 in 60!

## Creating Moments that Matter – 60 Seconds or 60 Minutes

- Ask students to write a short paper after the second week of class, identifying the teaching strategies that best suit their strengths.
- **Five on Friday** – Students take five minutes to reflect on ways they have used their strengths to achieve class, college, or personal goals.
- **Minute Paper** – Students write a short narrative about how they have applied their strengths in their daily interactions.
- **Assignment Alignment** – Give students options for some assignments that allow them to build upon their strengths.



# Next Steps



What is one thing you will do as a result of today's workshop...

- In your own teaching?
- In working with your faculty?
- In encouraging a strengths-based approach to student learning on your campus?

# For More Information



**Noel Academy for Strengths-Based  
Leadership and Education**

*Engaging Learners, Inspiring Leaders*

[www.apu.edu/strengthsacademy](http://www.apu.edu/strengthsacademy)



# Permission to Use

All the information contained on the PowerPoint slides in this presentation are the intellectual property of Eileen Hulme, Laurie Schreiner, and the Noel Strengths Academy

Please do not reproduce without written permission.

All strengths descriptions are the property of The Gallup Organization and should not be reproduced without the permission of the Gallup Organization.

Thanks so much for your understanding.

