



Strengths Academy

Strengths-Based Teaching and Learning

Azusa Pacific University



Before we jump in...

In pairs...

Spend a few minutes each describing:

What do you love about your work?



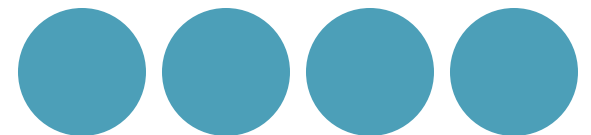


Just Think About...

What if every student could experience that same feeling on our campuses?

What if students experienced that same fulfillment of being at their best *while learning*?

What if a goal of higher education was to help students become all that God created them to be?





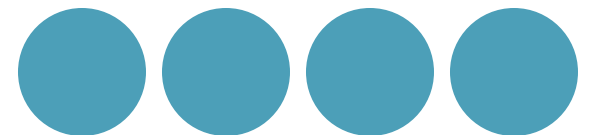
What the Best College Teachers Do

“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.”

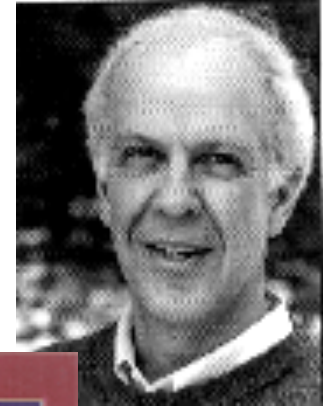
Bain (2005)

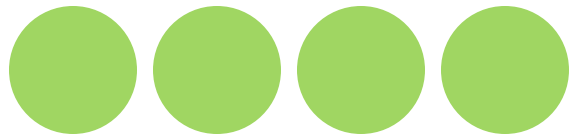




“We teach who we are”

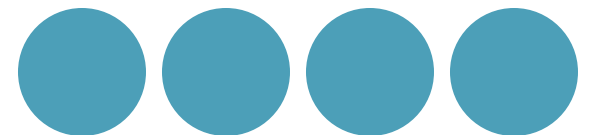
– Parker Palmer,
The Courage to Teach

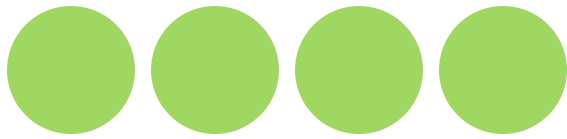




Three Programming Approaches to “Help” College Students

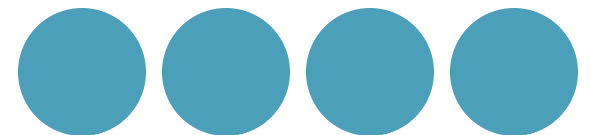
- Survival of the fittest
- Deficit-based remediation
- Strengths-based development and application





The Dominant Paradigm

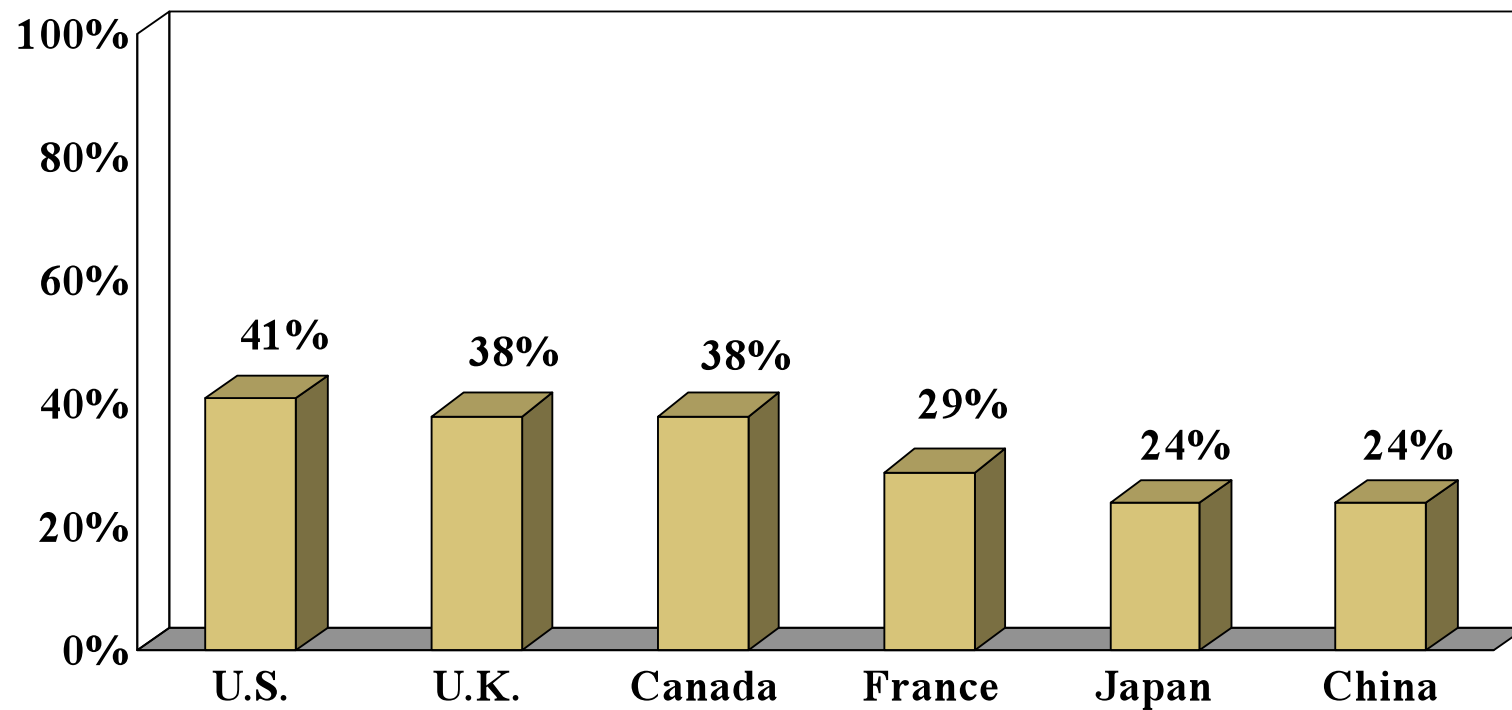
- There are certain skills required to be successful in college
- At entrance, we need to measure students' abilities in these key areas
- Students need to spend most of their time in their areas of weakness, in order to achieve





2006 Gallup Research Report

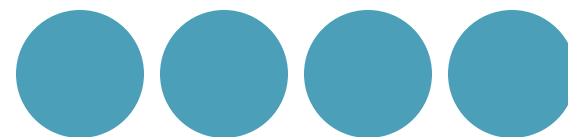
Which do you think will help you become most successful: Fixing weaknesses or building on strengths?





The Problem?

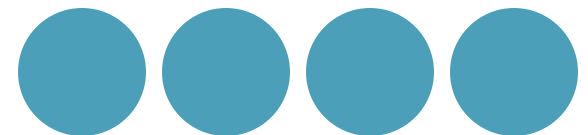
- Spending most of your time in your area of weakness—while it will improve your skills, perhaps to a level of “average”—will NOT produce excellence
- This approach does NOT tap into student motivation or lead to student engagement
- The biggest challenge facing us as educators: how to engage the hearts, minds, and souls of our students





The Heart of It All: Motivation

- Quality of effort → success
- But motivation is the “fuel” for quality of effort – it generates and directs energy and effort
- So motivation is the best predictor of the persistence that leads to success
- ***Therefore...***the best approaches to helping students persist and succeed focus on motivation





Heart

Emotions
Passion
Relational
connections

Mind

Deep learning
that lasts
Focused
attention
Meaningful
processing

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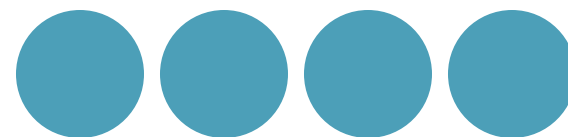
Student Engagement

Soul

Spiritual development
Sense of meaning and
purpose
Calling and vocation

Strength

Energy
Investment of effort and
time
Involvement





Encouraging Engagement

How a strengths-based approach to student learning encourages engagement:

- Connects to what students already have inside them
- Builds on their prior experiences and successes
- Generates positive emotions
- Emphasizes a relational context and interdependence
- Fosters a sense of competence and confidence

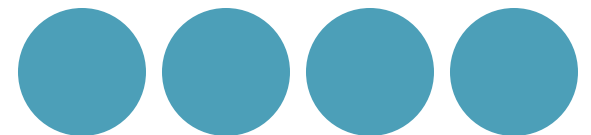




Strengths Philosophy

“Individuals gain more when they build on their talents, than when they make comparable efforts to improve their areas of weakness.”

Clifton & Harter, 2003, p. 112

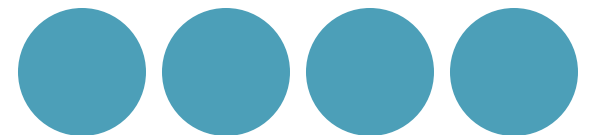




The Strengths Perspective

“You start seeing people in terms of who they are
... rather than in terms of who they aren’t....”

Chip Anderson, 2000





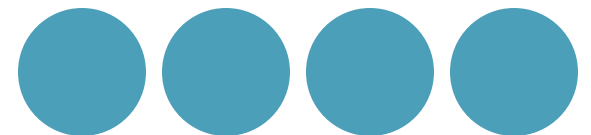
What Are Strengths?

Talent x (Knowledge + Skills) = **Strengths**

Talents are naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.

“By refining our dominant talents with skill and knowledge, we can create **strength**: the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity.”

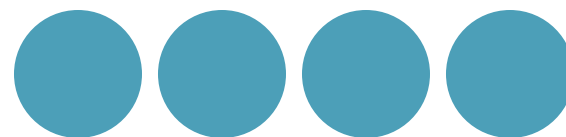
--Clifton & Harter, 2003





Writing Challenge

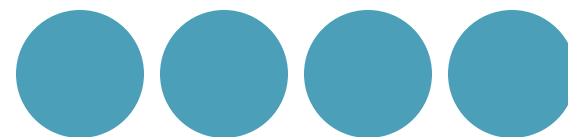
Write your names as many times as you can in 30 seconds





Writing Challenge

Now switch to your other hand and do the same thing!





What is a Talent?

... a naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.

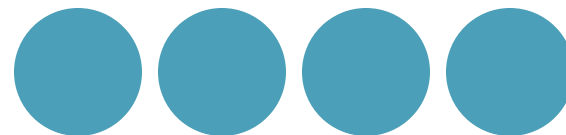
--Clifton & Harter, 2003

Ways of processing information

Ways of interacting with people

Ways of seeing the world

Habits, behaviors, or beliefs that lead to greater effectiveness





Outcomes from Using an Instrument to Identify Talents

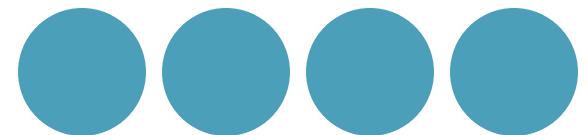
- Provides a common language to talk about talents
- Validates and affirms students' experiences
- Jumpstarts the conversation and provides a springboard for discussion





Clifton StrengthsFinder

- Published by The Gallup Organization
- Identifies **5 signature themes of talent** that can be developed into strengths
- 34 possible themes
- Excellent evidence of construct validity
- 3-month test-retest reliability among college students averages .70 across the 34 themes
- Used with over 4 million people in 17 languages – and 285,000 college students





The Clifton StrengthsFinder Measures Themes of Greatest Talent

A talent theme is a group of similar talents. For example, Achievers:

Enjoy hard work

Have a tendency to push hard to complete tasks

Desire to achieve

Having internal motivation

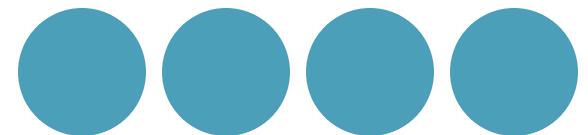
Find satisfaction in getting things done





The Highest Achievers

- Spend most of their time in their areas of strength – they build their lives around developing their talents
- Have learned to delegate or partner with someone to tackle areas that are not strengths
- Apply their strengths to overcome obstacles
- Invent ways of capitalizing on their strengths in new situations





Capitalizing on Strengths

Results:

- higher levels of motivation
- greater engagement in the task at hand
- personal satisfaction
- greater productivity and higher levels of performance



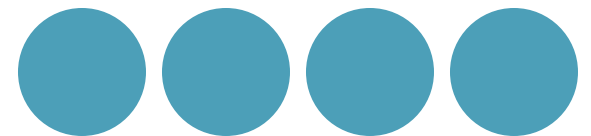
How does a talent become a strength?



Investment is a **MULTIPLIER** of talent!

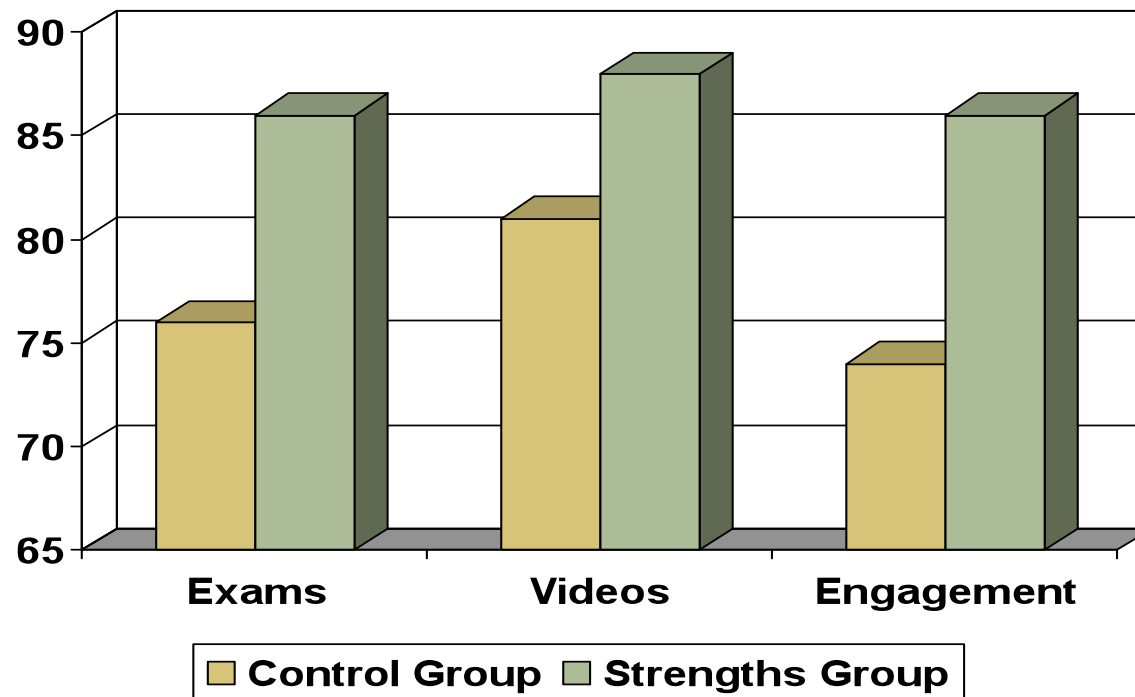


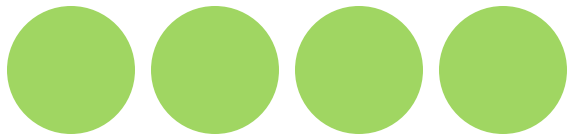
Benjamin Franklin
referred to people
who neglect to
develop and **apply**
their areas of
greatest talent as
*“sundials in the
shade.”*





Strengths-Based Learning (Cantwell, 2005)





Significant Impacts from a Strengths-Based Approach to Learning

- Confidence and academic self-efficacy
- Engaged learning and GPA
- Hope and sense of calling
- Relationships with others
- Conflict management and resolution
- Perception of others, appreciation of differences
- Satisfaction with the university “climate”
- Retention rates





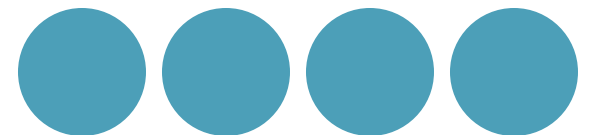
The Focus Changes

FROM:

Problems
Attendance
Preparation
Putting into the student
Average

TO:

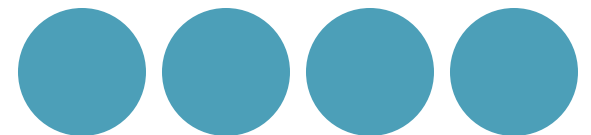
Possibilities
Engagement
Motivation
Drawing out from the student
Excellence





Strengths-Based Teaching

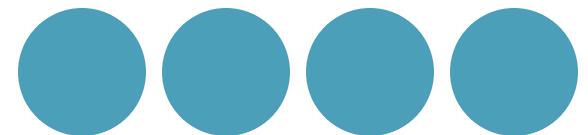
- Capitalizes on the instructor's strengths for maximum teaching effectiveness
- Connects students' strengths to strategies for mastering course content
- Purpose: to motivate and engage students in their own learning process, so that they are able to reach optimal levels of achievement

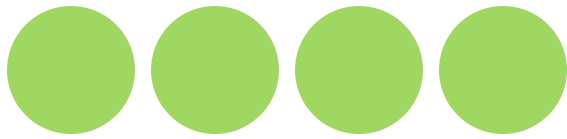




Strengths-Based Educators

- 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





Capitalizing on Your Strengths

Find a partner who shares one of your top five signature themes.

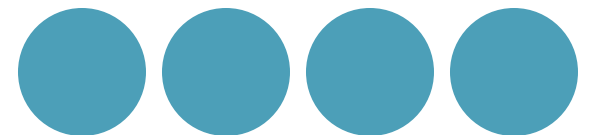
For each of the following aspects of teaching and learning, we want you to talk with your partner about how you capitalize on that theme. What do students see when you are leveraging that talent?

Course Design

Classroom Delivery

Student Interaction

Grading/Feedback to Students

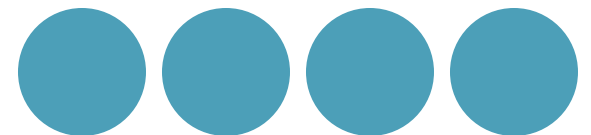




Course Design

How do you capitalize on your chosen strengths theme?

What do students see when you are leveraging that talent?





Best Practices: Course Design

- Strengths philosophy in the syllabus
- Choice in assignments
- Student-designed assignments that reflect their strengths
- Journal assignment about applying strengths to tasks in the class

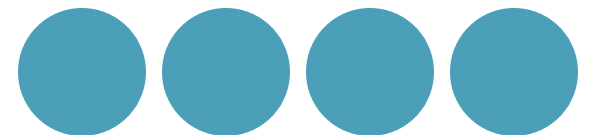
One page on applying one strength to one assignment



Classroom Delivery

How do you capitalize on your chosen strengths theme?

What do students see when you are leveraging that talent?





Best Practices: Classroom Delivery

- Intentionally teach more “authentically” out of each of your strengths.
- Let students know you through a personal narrative that incorporates your strengths.
- Explore how combinations of strengths could strengthen your teaching and scholarship.
- Recognize and counteract the “shadow side” of your strengths.

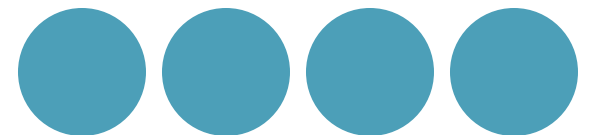


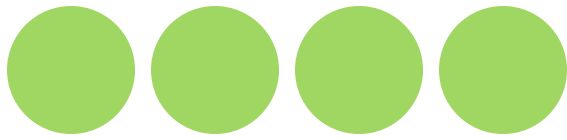


Student Interaction

How do you capitalize on your chosen strengths theme?

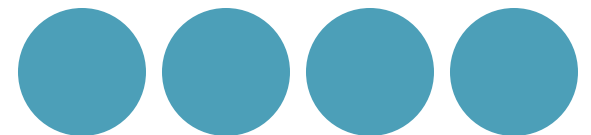
What do students see when you are leveraging that talent?





Best Practices: Student Interaction

- Create learning teams based on strengths. What will each bring to the group?
- Encourage students to “live into” a particular strength for a defined period, as a contribution to classroom enrichment.
- Assign students as study partners based on complementary strengths.

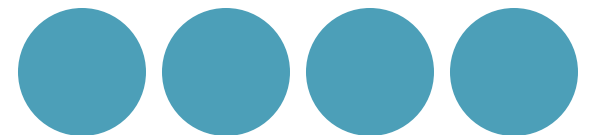


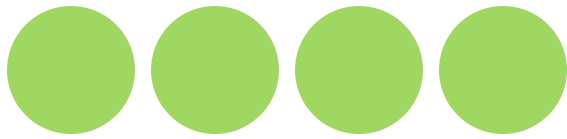


Grading/Feedback to Students

How do you capitalize on your chosen strengths theme?

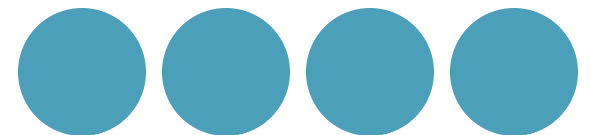
What do students see when you are leveraging that talent?





Best Practices: Grading and Feedback to Students

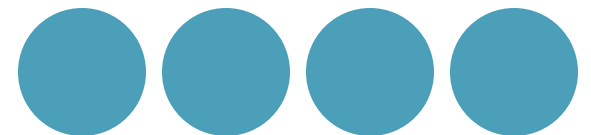
- Provide feedback to students that affirms their strengths (building confidence).
- Connect students' strengths to strategies for mastering course content → focus is on optimal student learning.
- As one component of evaluating an assignment, ask students to reflect on how their strengths have helped them to complete the assignment.
- As part of the course evaluation, ask students to write about how knowing their strengths helped them to become better learners in your course.





Secrets to Success

- Know who you are and teach from your strengths
- Love what you teach and who you teach
- Know your students and how they learn
- Focus on creating an intellectually vital, engaging classroom through:
 - Clear expectations within a context of choices
 - Narrative, examples, illustrations, visual cues
 - Challenging reading assignments and stimulating presentations
 - Problem solving, case studies, experiments
 - Active involvement with the materials and with each other
 - Connections between the content and their own personhood – “meaning making”





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