



Strengths Academy

Helping Students Lead Extraordinary Lives

Azusa Pacific University



What is a strengths perspective?

- A revolutionary way to reorient student development work around what is right with students.
- A perspective that believes deeply in the power of potential and each person's ability to live extraordinary lives through the development of her/his talents, passions and strengths.





Strengths Perspective Builds on Our History as a Field

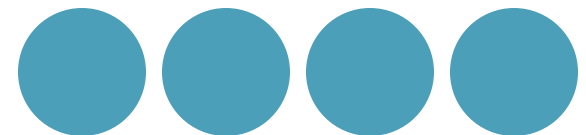
Historical Approach

Developmental
Perspective

- Psychosocial and Identity Development
- Cognitive Structural
- Typology

“The growth and development of students is a central goal of higher education...To accomplish this goal, educators must be familiar with an extensive literature base focusing on student development....”

(Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998)





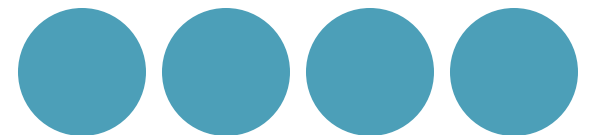
- Student development theory describes how groups of individuals move through various developmental tasks.
- But does it give us an understanding of how to help students live EXTRAORDINARY lives?





Strengths Perspective Arises Out of a Shift in Psychological Theory

- Shift from purely psychology of pathology to the psychology of the positive attributes of individuals
- Increasing attention on studying what works in people's lives as opposed to what doesn't work
- Key elements: hope, positive emotion, confidence, gratitude, courage, spirituality, strengths, resiliency, etc.

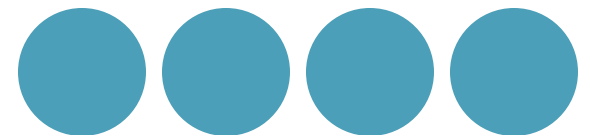




How does that shift relate to student personnel work?

- Positive psychology research has a great deal to tell us about successful students.
- Students scoring higher on the Hope Scale:
 - Obtained higher cumulative GPAs
 - Had a higher likelihood of graduating from college
 - Had a lower likelihood of being dismissed because of poor grades

(Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams, Wiklund)

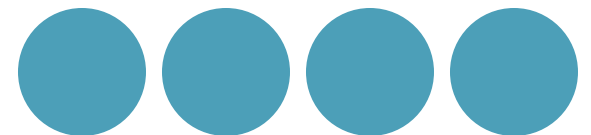




Strengths Origin

- Gallup Organization and Don Clifton
 - Studied over two million highly successful managers, teachers and employees in a range of industries

Highly successful individuals focus on their strengths and manage their weaknesses





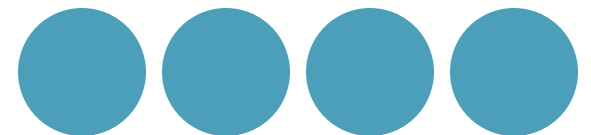
Strengths Perspective is Counter Cultural

“Let’s fix what’s wrong and let the strengths take care of themselves.” (Clifton)

Business managers spend most of their time working with the weakest performers and zeroing in on mistakes.

Parents and teachers focus on students’ lower grades rather than on their highest.

Student personnel studies risk factors related to potential student drop out. We focus on why they leave as opposed to understanding what are the attributes of highly successful students.





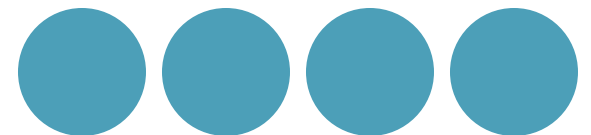
Strengths Approach

Basic Tenets

Each student's talents are enduring and unique (no such thing as all things to all people).

Each student's greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strength.

The goal of a strengths based student life division is to discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it.





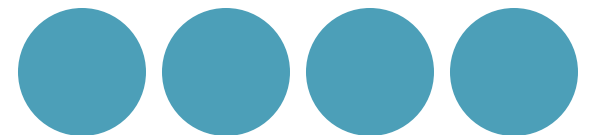
How Do We Identify Student Strengths?

One way: Strengths Finder – Gallup’s Tool

Strengths Finder was created by Gallup through a systematic study of excellence.

34 themes describing the most prevalent talents of individuals in an expansive range of fields and professions emerged from two million interviews.

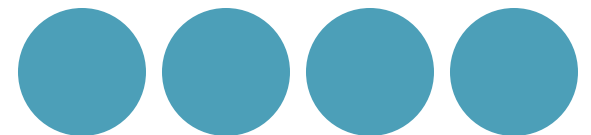
Web-based tool that takes approximately 45 minutes to complete and generates for students a report listing their top five strengths.





Three Levels of Strengths Understanding and Adoption

- Knowledge
- Application
- Decision-making





First: Staff Adoption

Knowledge

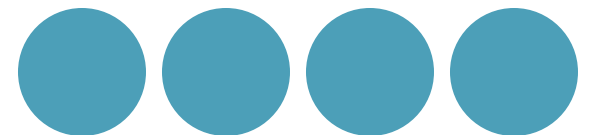
- Strengths staff development
- New staff orientation
- Strengths lunches

Application

- Staff used to train students
- Advising and counseling

Decision-making

- Hiring process
- Committee assignments
- Staff realignment

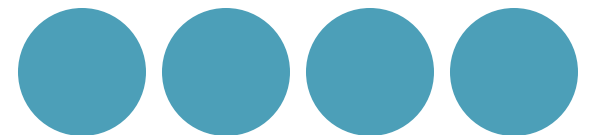




Students – Strength Development Program

Knowledge

- Orientation
- Introductory Sessions
- Residence halls
- Welcome Week





Students – Strength Development Program

Application

- Strengths emails and devotionals
- Strengths Web Site





Students – Strength Development Program

Application

- Strengths emails and devotionals
- Strengths Web Site
- Advising
- Career Counseling
- Student Organizations
- Judicial Affairs
- Future application – peer mentoring/coaching

Decision Making





Assessment

Be clear about what you are hoping to accomplish.

Increased academic confidence

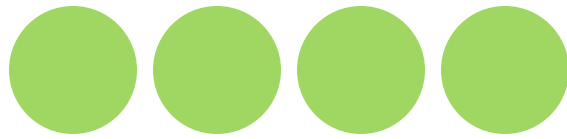
Academic engagement

Better relationship negotiation

Improved identity processing

Greater levels of hopefulness





Assessment

Knowledge

Program evaluations

I have a better understanding of my strengths

Overall – 86% agreed/strongly agreed

Men – 82.9, Women – 87.4, Co-ed – 86.5

the I am motivated to be myself and not conform to expectations of others

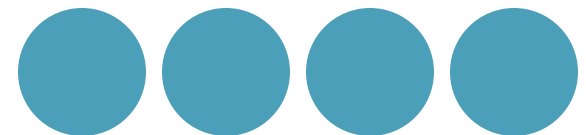
Overall – 84.9

Men – 86.2, Women – 91.6, Co-ed – 89.7

better The Strengths Finder presentation helped me understand the strengths of others.

Overall – 86.3

Men – 80.4, Women – 88.6, Co-ed – 88.4





Assessment

Application

Focus Groups

Decision-making

Senior surveys

