Clifton StrengthsFinder (CSF)
Assisting students in discovering, developing, and applying their talents

Supported by the field of Positive Psychology where, when applied to education, the premise is that individuals are able to gain far more when they are building on their talents than when they seek to remediate their weaknesses.

The CSF was designed to measure the raw talents that can be developed further into strengths. Thus, the purpose of the instrument is to identify “signature themes” (or groups of similar talent) that can be productively applied to achieve success.

Within the college setting in particular, the CSF allows faculty and university professionals to work with students to identify the talents they bring into the learning environment. In fact, multiple independent as well as Gallop-based studies have shown that such strengths-based interventions have contributed to statistically significant increases in students’

- Retention rates
- Academic performance
- Meaningful engagement
- Self-efficacy
- Self-confidence

- Optimism
- As well as direction, hope, altruism, sense of meaning and purpose, perception of others and appreciation of differences (Schreiner, 2006, p. 3) (Hulme & Schreuner, 2011, slide 27)

And there is something in it for you, too! Professionals who use StrengthsFinder in their work with college students have the opportunity to learn about their own strengths and how these strengths combine. This knowledge can help build the confidence to provide high-quality teaching or support services based on his or her strengths.

Faculty can apply their strengths to each aspect of the teaching and learning process, from preparation and course design, interaction with students in class, advising and mentoring, and feedback and grading (Hulme & Schreuner, 2011, slide 30).

Research Base

Multiple sources have reported ample supportive evidence of construct validity and 3-month test-retests reliability study among college students averaged .70 across the 34 themes (considered sufficient for similar personality measures).

In addition, the CSF has been used with other 4 million people in 17 languages, including 285,000 college students (Hulme & Schreuner, 2011, slide 30).

Based on Six Principles of Human Nature and Behavior

- “You have a group of talents within you.
- Your greatest talents hold the key to high achievement, success, and progress at levels of personal excellence.
- Becoming aware of your talents builds confidence and provides a basis for achievement.
- Learning how to develop and apply strengths will improve your levels of achievement.
- Each of your talents can be applied in many areas including relationships, learning, academics, leadership, service, and careers.
- As you develop and apply strengths, your achievements will increase and you will experience greater and more frequent successes”.

(Braskamp, 2006, p. 2)

The Organizational Focus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Ignored</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Not Engaged</th>
<th>Actively Disengaged</th>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<td>2006 Poll</td>
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Gallop surveyed over 2000 people working for various U.S. organizations and measured their engagement with their job relative to how they were managed: i.e their manager focused on their strengths, their weaknesses, or ignored them.

- If your manager focuses on your strengths, you are chances of being actively disengaged is 1 in 100
- You are twice as likely to be disengaged if your manager focuses on your weaknesses, and 40 times more likely if your manager overlooks you.
- A similar result found that “[a]round 84% of students who strongly agreed with “My school is committed to building the strengths of each student” were engaged at school, as measured by the 5-item Engagement Index. Only 3% of students who strongly agreed with this statement were deemed actively disengaged” (Lopez, 2011, p. 1).
- Developing an environment that focuses on strengths has “spill-over” effects that carry over to faculty and professional staff communities as well.

Prepared by: Hilarie Fotter, Judy Spross, Dan Jenkins, Heidi Parker (2014)
How it works
And how to apply it

Individuals complete a 30-35 minute online assessment consisting of 180 items. These items are designed to measure 34 possible talent themes. Instructors or students can generate a report describing their top five “signature themes” that represent their greatest themes of talent (Schreiner, 2006, p. 4). Faulty and professionals can then offer student experiences around the results of the SF assessment. These experiences allow students to build off prior experiences and successes and foster a sense of competence and confidence.

Research suggests that colleges and universities that capitalize on the practices based on the quick-growing field of positive psychology will engage in at least three activities. These institutions will “(1) study and understand successful students on campus; (2) establish a campus ethos that facilitates students’ discovery and understanding of their signature strengths; and (3) assist students in finding groups, organizations, or communities that they can serve with their signature strengths.” (Braskamp, L., 2008, p.2).

This kind of environment is considered by many to be an enabling, effective campus environment and one that fosters positive characteristics and well-being. The requirements to achieve one’s potential involves an investment of one’s talents and time, the type of environment that is most effective is one that helps a person draw out their inner talents and potential strengths, and leads to a more meaningful and purpose driven life, for all those who engage in this environment, students and faulty alike. By committing to recognizing and teaching to student strengths, you must also recognize and support your own personal strengths in your work. Faculty who use StrengthsFinder in their work report that:

- Have a greater sense of satisfaction in their work
- Can relate on an individual level to more of their students
- Learn to appreciate and capitalize on your own unique strengths and talents

“Purpose: to motivate and engage students in their own learning process, so that they are able to reach optimal levels of achievement” (Hulme & Schreuner, 2011, slide 29).

References and Additional Resources


The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.