



Learning Lens

TC3

A Focus on Exemplary Practices

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Why It Works?

Decades of Gallup research, including interviews with millions of people across the globe, - people identified as "the best of the best" in a wide variety of endeavors - concludes that we reach excellence not by focusing on our weaknesses, but by focusing on our strengths. The "best of the best"

- build their lives around their strengths
- use their strengths to manage their weaknesses, and
- invent ways to use their strengths in areas in which they want to succeed.

The StrengthsQuest™ inventory was developed from that research, identifying the most common human talents and their application to success in the workplace.

The StrengthsQuest™ program applies the results of that research and the identified "Themes of Talent" to student and staff development. More information, including validation and outcome studies, is available at www.strengthsquest.com/resource.asp. Multiple copies of the books *Now, Discover Your Strengths* and *StrengthsQuest: Discover and Develop Your Strengths in Academics, Career, and Beyond* are available in the college.

Got a great learning idea? Share it with the *Learning Lens* by contacting Teresa Davis at x4349 or Groupwise TMD.

Strengths-based Development for Students and Staff



Chris Xavier

Do you have the opportunity to do what you do best everyday? Unfortunately, approximately 80% of American workers and students answer that question in the negative. The Gallup Organization's StrengthsQuest™ program is being used in many areas of the

college to help both students and staff answer that question with a resounding YES! as they shift their focus from fixing perceived weaknesses to developing and applying personal strengths. Research shows that individuals gain more when a comparable amount of effort is used to build on strengths than on attempting to improve an area of weakness.

StrengthsQuest™ is currently used with TC3 students in a number of venues (including college success, developmental, and career exploration courses and in leadership development activities) to help them approach their learning and life goals from a position of strength. Each student begins by taking the StrengthsFinder® inventory to discover his or her natural talents - talents that can be productively applied to the challenges of higher education, both inside and outside the classroom.

At least one student in every group notes, "I didn't know I had any strengths" and students frequently express their surprise at being in a class where the focus is on "what I'm good at instead of what I'm bad at." Discussion and reflective exercises help the students understand their talents, how those talents

can be developed into strengths with the addition of skills and knowledge, and how they can then use those strengths to achieve excellence in academics, careers, and all the other challenges life brings. The program offers students specific suggestions for how to translate their talents into productive study and class participation habits so that increases in self-efficacy are matched by specific student behaviors that will help them achieve academic success.

Since Chris Xavier, Associate Professor of Communications and Media Arts, began incorporating a strengths-based philosophy into the freshman seminar course required in all Communications degrees, she has seen an increase in student engagement and understanding of personal responsibility for learning coupled with increases in both retention and semester GPA's in the program. "It's great to have a student who's somewhat disconnected show that he's listened, understood, and applied the lessons being taught...it's all about learning and I really, really see learning happening in that class."

More than half of the college's staff and faculty have also taken the inventory and participated in an introductory workshop. Staff report enhanced self-understanding and increased team building and conflict resolution skills. And, while most participants expect to increase their self-knowledge, they frequently note that much of the program's value is an increased appreciation for the strengths and perspectives of their colleagues.

More information is available at www.strengthsquest.com and from Chris Xavier, Cornelia Rea, Khaki Wunderlich, and many other staff and faculty members.