Innovating with Strengths
Encouraging Positive Growth for Students Throughout Campus
Innovating with Strengths

Encouraging Positive Growth for Students Throughout Campus
Welcome!

Amy Barnes
HESA faculty

Krystyne Savarese
Center for the Study of Student Life

James Larcus
Graduate Student, HESA
Overview of Strengths Philosophy

Positive psychology informs the strengths perspective

Focusing on the strengths of an individual or team

Helping students gain a greater awareness of their natural talents, motivations, and behaviors

Emphasis on appreciation of others in team and group settings
Strengths Movement at Ohio State

Began in 2005 in FYE

By 2008, several departments were using it with student leaders (Union, Student Activities, Residence Life, Academic Advising units, etc.)

Initially, 5 staff members were trained as Gallup StrengthsFinder facilitators (2008–2009)

First campus-wide training was with 100 faculty and staff in 2010; A year later, 100 more staff and faculty were trained
Where are we today?

Strengths is being utilized by 44 units currently and we purchase 5600+ codes per year

Many intro workshops being facilitated throughout campus

A group of “Strengths Educators” meets monthly to strategize a vision for the future of strengths at OSU and to plan follow-up training events

Currently developing online training courses to provide more advanced, on-going trainings for facilitators
Professional Development Sessions for Strengths Educators

- How to facilitate an intro workshop
- How to consider function and audience when presenting
- Overview of the 34 strengths
- Facilitating strengths for student staff
- How to incorporate strengths and positive psychology into leadership development
- Using strengths in performance management
- Cohort groups and team dynamics
- Research in Positive Psychology
- Using strengths in academic advising
- Understanding the VIA
- Wellness/Well-Being and Strengths
Several sustained/collaborative strengths initiatives happening at OSU:

2012–2013
Strengths with RAs

2013–2014
Strengths with second-year program (STEP)

2013–2014
Strengths in Wellness Coaching

SP 2014
Strengths-Based Leadership Course
Strengths with RAs Curriculum and Assessment

Intro workshop presented to RAs during August training

Four additional follow-up trainings held within RA staff meetings (hall directors trained to facilitate)

Research conducted with a pre and post-survey that measured self-perceived growth of self-awareness and self-efficacy.
Curriculum overview
RA Research Study

- "I can name my top 5 strengths." -- only significant result in a positive direction for sample
- High scores on pre-test made it difficult to interpret data

- A few significant differences between men and women in the sample

- Females were more likely to have a plan for developing their strengths while males felt more confident in their ability to use their strengths without struggles on the pre-test

Lessons Learned

- Participants identified strengths as a significant hindrance for further development
- Females reported higher strength scores than males in the sample
- Lack of confidence led to planning for future development
- Improvement in self-esteem as monitored on the post-test

Curriculum overview
Lessons Learned

• Using multiple facilitators means varied implementation – some facilitators will believe strongly in strengths; others will just do it because they “have to”

• Some facilitators didn't feel qualified to lead discussions
  • "...as easy as the lesson plans were to implement, I didn't have the background knowledge of the content. It made it difficult to answer questions and facilitate dialogue."
  **Led to more trainings for facilitators

• Did students experience strengths fatigue?
  • Incorporate strengths into areas beyond student leadership

• A need for more scaffolding of strengths programming – move beyond the "intro workshop"
Strengths with STEP (Second-Year Transformational Experience Program)

Pilot program for second-year students at OSU (emphasis on faculty involvement)

Faculty serve as mentors for cohorts of 20 students; 100 students and 5 faculty in each “house”

Gallup StrengthsFinder was presented to 3 houses and VIA character strength assessment was presented to 2 houses

Follow-up curriculum was provided to each faculty member to use in cohort meetings with smaller groups of students
Challenges

Faculty had to pay for the codes for their students (~ $200 each)

Faculty were not trained as facilitators (while we knew this was risky, we also knew we couldn't require training)

Only about half of the faculty in the STEP program participated due to cost and not enough time to implement
Research and Assessment

Survey sent to students about their experience with strengths in their houses/cohorts as part of a larger STEP survey

Feedback solicited from faculty about the usefulness of the sessions
Faculty Feedback

"The students finally had to open up about themselves. They saw who they were."

"This was one of the best activities I did with my students. It shaped the group interactions and helped them to plan their projects."

"We talked about strengths and had students put together information about how they might be able to use their new (or existing) knowledge of their strengths in developing their STEP proposal."
Strengths Educator team re-evaluated our assessment strategy to focus more on qualitative methods
Wellness Coaching (strengths-based using the VIA character strengths survey)

- Individual coaching offered through the student wellness center
- Filling a need for student support when the counseling center is at max capacity
- Graduate students serve as coaches/strengths is a new component
- Quantitative and qualitative approaches to assessment
Qualitative Study
Research Questions

How do students evaluate the effectiveness of components of wellness coaching (e.g. coaching relationship, wellness education, utilization of strengths, goal setting)?

Do students continue to utilize the components of wellness coaching following their exit from the service?

Can students identify key strengths and articulate their application of strengths in an ongoing manner?

Do students identify any enduring personal changes or growth as a result of their engagement with wellness coaching?
Insights from coaching clients

“From my wellness coaching experience, I have gained insight into how I can be a happier and healthier person. I'm learning how to be self-reflective, how to understand my thoughts and emotions, and how to relate to myself in a kinder way.”

“I have tried many new things this year as a freshman, and I can say with the utmost confidence that wellness coaching was by far my best decision/choice I made. I have learned that I am in control of my life.”

“My coach validated my emotions and thoughts and opinions and ability to make the right decisions for myself...I am more self-aware and self-confident and self-empowered because of my wellness coaching experience.”
Strengths-Based Leadership Course

- 3-credit hour course with an emphasis on positive psychology, wellness, and leadership theory

- Strengths (both VIA and StrengthsFinder) are tools used to help students learn more about their strengths and the strengths of others

- Students explore their own strengths, participate in goal setting and coaching appointments with instructors, and collaborate on a team project
Strengths-Based Leadership Course (cont)

Research and Assessment

• Qualitative study designed with exit interviews to occur at the end of spring semester 2014
• 30–45 minute interviews will ask students to reflect on the impact of the strengths curriculum on their personal growth, goal setting, team dynamics, and personal well-being
Research Questions

- Can students identify key strengths and articulate their application of strengths in an ongoing manner?

- How do students make meaning of their strengths assessment results? How do they apply strengths to their personal decisions, their work on a team, in goal setting, or in decisions about future career aspirations?

- Do students identify any enduring personal changes or growth as a result of their engagement with a strengths-based leadership course?

- How are students applying strengths-based knowledge to goals related to personal wellness/leadership development?

- Do students plan to utilize the components of strengths-based leadership following their exit from the course?
Recommendations based upon our experiences at Ohio State thus far
Recommendations moving forward

- Strengths and positive psychology involve complex concepts and require advanced knowledge to incorporate strengths into our work as student affairs professionals

- You can only sustain grassroots efforts for so long without having a dedicated staff member to assist (one GA has helped, but isn’t enough)

- A focus on advanced training of staff who are facilitating strengths is very important (the complexity of the instrument/philosophy must be addressed)

- Strengths fatigue is a concern that many campuses probably face – how do we keep from over-exposing students to intro strengths concepts and help them build on their knowledge/apply strengths?

- Strengths "code of ethics"
DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS

THANK YOU!

Amy Barnes
barnes.269@osu.edu

James Larcus
larcus.1@osu.edu

Krystyne Savarese
savarese.6@osu.edu
Innovating with Strengths
Encouraging Positive Growth for Students Throughout Campus