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UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF STRENGTHS ON THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS

by

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UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF STRENGTHS ON THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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The purpose of this qualitative, interview-based study was to identify the way that students and advisors utilized knowledge about students' strengths in college. Strengths were defined by StrengthsQuest, a product of The Gallup Organization. Five college students and three academic advisors from the business college at a large, public research university, representing various cultural backgrounds, family statuses and ages participated in the study. Student and advisor participants explored the influence of strengths on self awareness, confidence, relationships, academic matters, as well as future plans. Advisor participants also discussed the need for additional courses or integration of strengths-based education in existing courses.

This study provided an opportunity to begin connecting StrengthsQuest to student development theory within the field of higher education, specifically Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development, Baxter Magolda's (1992) cognitive development theory, as well as two typology theories, Meyers-Briggs Type Inventory and Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities and Environments.

This study found that students were using the knowledge of their strengths during college and that this may have increased their confidence, the quality of their relationships, and goals. Students who had more exposure and training to use their strengths had a better understanding of themselves and others. Faculty, staff, and student affairs practitioners can use this information to create additional opportunities to provide engaging and enriching experiences for students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Woo, Achiever, Focus, Strategic, Developer . . . who knew these were strengths? These are actually 5 of the 34 strengths identified by the Gallup StrengthsFinder assessment. Why is this important? Individuals, especially college students, who know and understand their strengths, have many opportunities to develop personally, socially, and academically.

How do students utilize their strengths? How do strengths influence students' actions? These questions have only begun to be researched and answered. Previous studies have shown that strengths-based interventions have contributed to increases in student retention and academic performance, as well as increases in students' academic engagement and self-efficacy, self-confidence, optimism, direction, hope, altruism, and sense of meaning and purpose (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006, p. 3). However, most of the research that has been conducted was not peer reviewed.

This study also presents the opportunity to begin connecting StrengthsQuest to student development theory. Psychosocial theory, specifically Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development, explain how people develop throughout their life. StrengthsQuest provides students tools to facilitate their development (Erwin & Delworth, 1982; Erwin & Kelly, 1985; Hood, Riahinejad, & White, 1986; Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Williams & Winston, 1985). Cognitive moral theories, specifically Baxter Magolda's (1992) cognitive development theory, consider how people interpret and make meaning out of their experiences. Students were able to explore and interpret their

experiences through their strengths which led them to meaning making. The StrengthsQuest is similar to typology theories in that it "capture[s] some of the uniqueness and individuality of students as personalities by utilizing information of their values, attitudes, beliefs, self-concept, and behavior" (Astin, 1993, p. 36).

Junior and senior college business students, as well as their academic advisors, were studied in order to learn more about how students utilized their knowledge of strengths and how this knowledge influenced their thoughts and actions. Many of the studies on StrengthsQuest utilized quantitative methods; however, this study makes use of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods provide the students and advisors the opportunity to share their experiences while providing the opportunity to analyze the data more closely.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, interview-based study was to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on the business college students' experiences during college. Students in the Business College took an assessment that identified their strengths called the StrengthsQuest at the beginning of their freshman year while in a ten-week leadership course. Throughout this course students were exposed to their strengths and the advantages and opportunities associated with strengths after having taken this assessment. The study explored how junior and senior students valued their strengths. The study also explored how professional academic advisors described how they perceived students were using their strengths.

Research Questions

This qualitative study explored the following grand tour question: How college students and academic advisors perceived the StrengthsQuest as influencing students' experiences in college? The study also explored the following five research questions:

1. What do students think about their strengths as identified by the StrengthsQuest assessment?
2. How do students describe the role of knowing their strengths in college?
3. How do advisors intend for the students to benefit from knowing their strengths?
4. What do advisors do to educate students about their strengths?
5. How are students and advisors perceptions of strengths similar or not similar?

Research Design

This was a qualitative, interview-based study of students and advisors to identify the way that students and advisors utilized knowledge about students' strengths in college. The population and purpose of this study were chosen because almost every freshman student in the Business College was required to take the leadership course, where StrengthsQuest was mandated as one of the course requirements. Eight participants were interviewed for the study: three professional academic advisors and five students. All of the participants volunteered after receiving electronic invitations. The students and staff were all affiliated with the same Midwestern, Doctoral/Research-Extensive, public, predominantly White university.

I chose to conduct a qualitative case study in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the value placed on knowing strengths. Qualitative methods provided the students and advisors opportunities to explore their thoughts and add to their responses. I was also able to ask additional probing questions to expand upon responses which would not have been possible in a survey. I interviewed each participant individually to learn more about how the students' utilized their strengths and how the advisors thought strengths were being utilized by students. The interviews were then transcribed and reviewed by the participants. Analysis was done by reading through each individual's response and studying how students considered and utilized their strengths.

Definition of Terms

Junior student: College student with 53-88 credit hours.

Professional academic advisors: Professional academic advisors were staff in the Business College charged with advising students on academically related matters. Professional academic advisors have also taught the freshman leadership course in which StrengthsQuest was administered.

Senior student: College student with 89 credit hours or more.

*Strength: "*A strength is the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity" (Anderson, 2005, p. 186). See Appendix A for a full list of strengths and definitions of each strength.

StrengthsQuest: "StrengthsQuest is a student-development and -engagement program designed to help high school and college students achieve success in academics, career, and life" (Hodges & Harter, 2005, p. 190). Students begin the program by first

completing the "Clifton StrengthsFinder, an online assessment that reveals a person's Signature Themes—the five greatest areas of talent" (p. 198). Students are then introduced to StrengthsQuest: Discover and Develop Your Strengths in Academics, Career, and Beyond (Clifton & Anderson, 2006). Students use this workbook, as well as activities, throughout the ten-week leadership course. The workbook "helps students understand their talents, teaches them how to build strengths, and provides insights into how they can apply their talents and strengths in academics, careers, and life" (Hodges & Harter, 2005, p. 198).

Talent: "A talent is a naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied" (Anderson, 2005, p. 185).

Significance

The purpose of this qualitative, interview-based study was to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on the business college students' experiences during college. The purpose of this study was to identify the way that students and advisors utilized knowledge about students' strengths in college.

Freshmen business students each took the StrengthsQuest assessment as part of the required ten-week freshmen business leadership course. Throughout this course, students learned about their strengths, how leadership qualities related to their strengths, and how to work with others who have different strengths. Once the students completed this course there were no more structured opportunities to learn about or utilize ones' strengths. Both students and academic advisors have a stake in knowing how useful this assessment was to students through their junior and senior year.

Ample literature has been published by The Gallup Organization regarding the value of StrengthsQuest in different settings (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006). However, there is a scarcity of literature concerning the benefits of StrengthsQuest in the college setting. Studying the value that students receive from knowing their strengths throughout their college career may provide insight about how students approach their classes, relationships, and other aspects of their life. The findings of this study suggested that by finding more opportunities to teach students about their strengths, students will use their strengths to their benefit in a variety of situations and will be more confident.

Delimitations

The study had several delimitations given that it was a qualitative study conducted through face to face interviews. I chose to focus on one institution. Only five students participated in the study and three professional academic advisors participated. Student participants were required to be at least 19 years old and have taken the StrengthsQuest assessment their freshman year or later. Beyond those requirements, there were no other requirements to unite the student sample. The professional academic advisors all worked with StrengthsQuest for at least three years. All three of the advisors have taught the freshmen leadership course in which the assessment was given.

Limitations

There were several factors that affected the generalizability of these findings. Consistent with qualitative research, participants were selected through purposeful and convenience sampling, based on their unique perspective on the topic (Creswell, 2007).

There were only five professional academic advisors in the Business College so all advisors were asked to participate and three participated. Seniors and juniors were invited to participate. By using this volunteer method, these participants may not represent the typical business student. The information obtained from the participants represented their opinions and perceptions at the point in time in which the interview was conducted. The participants may or may not have been completely open with me. Additionally, I collected and interpreted all of the collected data.

Conclusion

The Business College has been requiring freshmen to take the StrengthsQuest assessment for over five years. This study examined the perceptions of both students and advisors to gain insight about how each individual and group used and felt about the assessment. The Literature Review in Chapter 2 provides a more detailed review of the research available regarding the use and effects of utilizing StrengthsQuest and other similar assessments. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this study, which utilized interviews to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on the business college students' experiences during college. Chapter 4 presents the findings that emerged, through the themes: It's Me in a Nutshell, Understand Other People, It's a Choice, Go Where You're Passionate, Periscope is longer, and Advisor Additions. Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to provide an understanding of the StrengthsFinder assessment and the purpose of StrengthsQuest. Given the lack of peer-reviewed literature on StrengthsQuest I decided to review other student development theories that would potentially be useful. This effort also helps link StrengthsQuest to the field of higher education and college student development theories. Student development and typology theories, specifically those by Chickering and Reisser, Marcia Baxter Magolda, Myers-Briggs, and Holland, were considered to provide insight as to how the utilization of strengths can affect student development. This literature review is not a comprehensive analysis of existing literature. Rather, it provides the reader with background information which provided support for the present research conducted. The purpose of the study was to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on the business college students' experiences during college.

Clifton StrengthsFinder

The Clifton StrengthsFinder was developed by Edward "Chip" Anderson and Donald O. Clifton. Anderson, a professor of educational leadership at Azusa Pacific University, studied student achievement prior to joining Clifton. Clifton was a former professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and was chairman of The Gallup Organization, an organization well-known for management consulting, training, and polling. Anderson began by studying the least-performing college students and

developed programs around those students to try to help those types of students become successful. He realized that "more students leave because of disillusionment, discouragement, or reduced motivation than because of lack of ability or dismissal by the school administration" (Anderson, 2005, p. 183). Clifton approached education another way, he added that "to produce excellence, you must study excellence" (p. 183). Clifton and Anderson then collaborated to apply Clifton's work on strengths to college students and the university setting.

In 1998, The Gallup Organization designed the StrengthsFinder assessment to provide individuals with the opportunity to discover their talents "by measuring the predictability of patterns of behavior within individuals" (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 258). StrengthsFinder was developed after 30 years of research in more than 30 countries.

> The StrengthsFinder presents individuals with pairs of statements, sorts the responses, and presents the results back in the form of dominant patterns of behavior, or themes of talent. Thirty-four themes have been identified to capture prevalent patterns of behavior recognized through Gallup's study of excellence. (p. 258)

Most of the StrengthsFinder and StrengthsQuest research was conducted by Gallup researchers and presented as "white" papers. The following research conducted by Gallup researchers was not peer-reviewed, unless specifically stated.

StrengthsFinder was originally designed for business and industry to identify talent as the basis for increasing productivity and morale of employees (Schreiner, 2006). The StrengthsQuest instrument was adapted from StrengthsFinder and adjusted to focus on students and their development. The students took the StrengthsQuest assessment and

the freshmen leadership course focused on StrengthsQuest so this term will be used instead of StrengthsFinder.

In order to talk about strengths it is important to understand talents. "A talent is a naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied" (Anderson, 2005, p. 185). Talents empower a person to accomplish tasks. "A theme is a group of similar talents" (p. 186). The Clifton StrengthsFinder has identified 34 major themes which can be developed into strengths (individual strengths are defined in Appendix A). "A strength is the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity" (p. 186). The Gallup Organization has learned three things about top achievers:

1) Top achievers fully recognize their talents and develop them into strengths.
2) Top achievers apply their strengths in roles that best suit them.
3) Top achievers invent ways to apply their strengths to their achievement tasks. (p. 188)

The process of strengths-development begins at the individual level and involves three stages: identification of talent, integration into how one views himself or herself, and behavioral change (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Hodges & Harter, 2005). The first phase, identification of talent, involves identifying their themes of talents and increases their self-awareness (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). In the integration phase, "individuals are more able to explain the behaviors that take place as a result of their top talents. They begin to define who they are in terms of their talents" (p. 257). The final stage includes behavior

change. In this stage, "individuals tie their successes back to their themes of talent" (p. 257).

The Clifton StrengthsQuest has been used with over 112,000 college students. Previous empirical studies have shown these kinds of strengths-based interventions have contributed to statistically significant increases in student retention and academic performance, as well as increases in students' academic engagement and self-efficacy, self-confidence, optimism, direction, hope, altruism, and sense of meaning and purpose (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006).

A study was conducted in 2004-05 by Gallup researchers to determine the psychometric properties of the StrengthsFinder when used with college students (Schreiner, 2006). Students from five community colleges and nine universities participated in this national study to determine the validity and reliability of the assessment. Usable results were collected from 438 students. Students completed the assessment and then completed it a second time 8-12 weeks later. Researchers compared the results of this retest to the *California Psychological Inventory* (*CPI-260*) and the *16PF*. Researchers found a mean test-retest reliability estimate across the 34 themes was .70 (p. 5). When the results were compared with the *CPI-260* and *16PF*, 93.4% of the predictions were confirmed by significant correlation coefficients (total of 128 predictions) (p. 7).

Gallup researchers have conducted multiple studies to determine the impact of strengths awareness on participant behaviors (Harter, 1998; Hodges, 2003; Williamson, 2002). In one such study, email invitations were sent out to participants 75 days after

they had completed the StrengthsFinder assessment (Hodges, 2003). Data was collected from 459 surveys over a period of several weeks. The surveys focused on three items which were "written to serve as indicators of behavioral change as a result of the participants' strengths awareness" (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 263). The first item was designed to measure the impact of strengths awareness on lifestyle. Fifty-nine percent of respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, "Learning about my strengths has helped me to make better choices in my life" (p. 263). The second item focused more on individual productivity. Sixty percent of respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, "Focusing on my strengths has helped me to be more productive" (p. 263). The third item was associated with the field of Positive Psychology. Sixty-three percent of respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with this statement, "Learning about my strengths has increased my self-confidence" (p. 263).

Another study completed by Gallup researchers focused on college freshmen enrolled at a private, faith-based university (Williamson, 2002). The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a difference between a study group of students introduced to strengths-based development and a control group who were not (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Williamson, 2002). The study group of 32 randomly selected students "participated in two one-hour presentations on strengths theory and presentation of individuals' StrengthsFinder results, and a one-on-one advising session with a trained StrengthsCoach" (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 264). The control group consisted of 40 students, also randomly selected. These students "did not receive any feedback on their results or participate in any group or individual strengths-based advising" (p. 264).

Williamson (2002) defined first-semester college student success as, at a minimum, completing 12 credit hours of coursework at a 2.0 GPA or higher. Only two of the 32 students in the study group failed to meet the success standard, whereas eight of the 40 control group students failed to meet the standard. The students who received strengths-based advising likely benefitted from the presentations and one-on-one advising sessions. Additionally, the college GPAs were significantly higher for the study group at the end of the first semester (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 264; Williamson, 2002).

Other studies have considered the effects of strengths-based development on confidence (Rath, 2002). Confidence draws from Bandura's (1982) work with self-efficacy (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 268). Self-efficacy is defined as, "an individual's conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context" (Strajkovic & Luthans, 1998, p. 66). "Self-efficacy, or confidence, can be developed through positive feedback, mastery experiences, or performance attainments, vicarious learning, and physiological or psychological arousal" (Bandura, 1997). This study indicated that increased confidence may be an outcome of strengths-based development. In this study, 212 UCLA students completed a pretest, participated in a strengths-based developmental intervention, and then completed a posttest. The pretest and posttest surveys were identical and designed to measure participants' awareness of strengths, direction about the future, and level of confidence (Hodges & Harter, 2005; Rath, 2002) and the intervention included activities and homework assignments. The posttest scores on the confidence subscale were significantly higher than the pretest

scores indicating that the strengths-based intervention positively influenced the students' confidence levels.

StrengthsQuest provides students with many tools for college. However, little research connects StrengthsQuest with college student development theory. Student development theory explains how students develop as they progress through college. Connecting StrengthsQuest to student development theory could provide additional insight as to how students develop and strengths can influence development.

College Student Development

College student development theory consists of four main uses: to describe, explain, predict, and control (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Theory provides a description or conceptualization of what is happening (Evans et al., 2010). Student development theory "describes how students grow and change throughout their college years; it provides information about how development occurs and suggests conditions that encourage development" (Evans, 2003, p. 179). Theory may also predict the developmental outcome of a student (Evans et al., 2010, p. 24). Finally, control means that theory can provide tools for individuals to produce specific developmental outcomes (p. 24). These theories were developed to serve students better by understanding their process of development throughout college. I have attempted to connect the idea of strengths with these existing theories to demonstrate how strengths might overlap with existing theories. Several student development theories have been reviewed below.

Psychosocial Identity Theories

Identity development theories "help practitioners to understand how students attempt to discover their abilities, aptitudes, and objectives while assisting them to achieve maximum effectiveness" (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 577). Within identity theories, psychosocial theories attempt to explain how people develop throughout their life; some theorists focus solely on college students. Psychosocial theorists "examine the content of development–that is, the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationship with others, and what to do with their lives" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 42). I focused on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of development because this psychosocial theory may connect best with the issue of strengths.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) developed seven vectors of development to describe psychosocial development during college. Chickering began conducting research in 1959 in an effort to provide college faculty with information on how to organize their programming to improve student development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 37). While teaching at a college, he administered various tests, personality inventories, and other instruments as well as interviews. Chickering and Reisser later revised Chickering's original theory to make it more inclusive of other student populations. The term "vectors of development" was used to show that the progression is not necessarily linear (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010, p. 66). "Typically, traditional-aged college students explore the first three vectors in their first few years of college, while upperclass students wrestle with vectors four, five, and

possibly six" (ASHE, 2003, p. 13). Students may go through the vectors at different rates, may deal with multiple vectors at the same time, and the vectors may interact with each other (Evans et al., 2010).

The first vector is developing competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This includes developing intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Evans et al., 2010). In the second vector, managing emotions, "students develop the ability to recognize and accept emotions, as well as to appropriately express and control them" (p. 67). The third vector is moving through autonomy toward independence (Evans et al., 2010). In this vector, students develop emotional independence, instrumental independence, and "they come to recognize and accept the importance of interdependence, an awareness of their interconnectedness with others" (p. 68).

The fourth vector is developing mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Here, students develop "intercultural and interpersonal tolerance and appreciation of differences, as well as the capacity for healthy and lasting intimate relationships with partners and close friends" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 68). Students who have a strengths-based education, perhaps, reach the fourth vector sooner than other students because they have a better understanding of who they are and how to interact with others. Knowledge of strengths help individuals understand the actions and reactions of other people. The fifth vector, establishing identity, builds on each of the vectors that come before it.

> Identity includes comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, a sense of one's social and cultural heritage, a clear

> self-concept and comfort with one's roles and lifestyle, a secure sense of self in light of the feedback from significant others, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration. (p. 68)

Students who have a strengths-based education may also reach the fifth vector sooner. An understanding of strengths helps students become more comfortable with themselves and understand their own actions and reactions. The sixth vector is developing purpose which "consists of developing clear vocational goals, making meaningful commitments to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong interpersonal commitments" (Evans et al., 2010). It includes "intentionally making and staying with decisions, even in the face of opposition" (p. 69). Again, students who have an understanding of their strengths may reach this vector sooner because these students have a better idea of what they are good at and how they can use their strengths to succeed in their career. The seventh, and final, vector is developing integrity (Evans et al., 2010). This includes "three sequential but overlapping stages: humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence" (p. 69).

Research has been conducted on a variety of student populations using Chickering and Reisser's work (Cokley, 2001; Fassinger, 1998; Pope, 2000; Taub, 1995; Taub & McEwen, 1991) as well as factors related to development. Several of the development factors include academic satisfaction and student involvement.

Academic satisfaction and classroom performance. Research has shown that confidence is significantly correlated with academic satisfaction and classroom performance (Evans et al., 2010). Erwin and Delworth (1982) examined the "interaction between development of identity and the college environment as perceived by the

student" (p. 53). The researchers randomly selected 169 freshmen, who were retested two times during the year using the Erwin Identity Scale (EIS). The EIS consists of 58 items and attempts to measure Chickering's vector of identity (Hood et al., 1986). The instrument measures three subscales, confidence, an understanding about one's sexual identity, and conception about body and appearance. This study found a correlation between confidence and academic satisfaction and classroom performance (Erwin & Delworth, 1982). The researchers also found that several students' confidence had decreased during the semester as they faced challenges in the classroom. Perhaps knowing their strengths would have helped these students overcome the challenges in the classroom by utilizing their strengths and retain or increase their confidence throughout the experience.

Erwin followed up the previous study with a longitudinal study following the students from the freshman year to the senior year (Erwin & Kelly, 1985). The Confidence subscale of the EIS was used on a random sample of 440 college freshmen. Of the original sample, 220 students remained enrolled through their senior year and were contacted. However, only 132 responded and were retested. Erwin and Kelly found that college students gained confidence from their freshman to senior year. Also, "after removing any effects for students' confidence when they entered college, seniors' confidence was predicted best by their satisfaction with their academic performance, followed by their commitment to a vocational choice" (p. 398). Conceivably, the knowledge of one's strengths would be even more helpful in developing and sustaining one's confidence in academic performance and career choice. In addition to academic

satisfaction and classroom performance, involvement on campus also affects student development.

Involvement on campus. Another development factor included involvement on campus. "[S]tudents who are more involved in cocurricular activities score higher on scales measuring confidence, developing purpose, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and intimacy" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 76).

Hood et al. (1986) examined the development of college students along Chickering's vector of identity during their four years on a university campus. The researchers randomly selected 169 students while they were in a freshman orientation program and administered the EIS. Of the 139 students who participated, 55 participants took the EIS during the middle of the first semester and the rest took the EIS during the middle of their second semester. The students were contacted again four years later and 82 from those who had participated completed the EIS again. Hood et al. found that college seniors scored higher on the three identity subscales than freshmen. Also, they found "involvement in campus groups and recreational activities was related to growth on the Confidence subscale" (p. 113).

Williams and Winston (1985) specifically studied the differences in developmental task achievement between those who participated in organized student activities and those who did not. Students who were enrolled in educational psychology and foundations of education classes were invited to participate in the study. Out of the participating 168 students, 105 indicated that they participated in at least one recognized student organization or activity. The students completed The Student Development Task

Inventory. The inventory was comprised of 140 items in nine subtasks (emotional autonomy, instrumental autonomy, interdependence, appropriate educational plans, mature career plans, mature lifestyle plans, intimate relationships with opposite sex, mature relationships with peers, and tolerance). Students who participated in organized student activities and organizations "showed statistically significant greater developmental task achievement in the areas of interdependence, educational plans, career plans, and lifestyle plans than did students who did not participate" (p. 56). These students may have also been developing their strengths while involved in the organizations.

Hunt and Rentz (1994) focused on students who participated in traditional Greek-letter social groups. The purpose of their study was "to assess the relationship between Greek-letter social group members' level of involvement and their psychosocial development" (p. 290). The researchers used a random stratified sample of 321 students; approximately half were women. The Student Development Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI) was used "to assess developmental task achievement and to identify characteristics of psychosocial development" (p. 290). The students also took the Extracurricular Involvement Inventory, which measured "the intensity of involvement in organized student activities" (p. 291). The researchers found that

> Involvement, whether within the fraternity or sorority alone or in conjunction with other organized campus activities, was significantly related to: establishing and clarifying purpose; developing mature interpersonal relationships; and establishing an intimate relationship with another based on trust, reciprocal caring, and honesty. (p. 293)

They also found that the positive relationship between involvement and psychosocial development was apparent by gender as well as class standing. Students who know their strengths could potentially choose activities based on their strengths which would assist in clarifying purpose and developing relationships as well as continue developing their strengths. Psychosocial theories are one way to explain student development; however, cognitive moral theories also provide an additional explanation of student development.

Cognitive Moral Theories

Cognitive structural theories "consider how people interpret their experience and make meaning out of concepts to which they are exposed" (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002, p. 57). Progression through the stages occurs as individuals "engage in new experiences, are exposed to differing perspectives, and resolve cognitive conflict" (p. 57). Whereas stages or vectors in psychosocial theories can occur in different orders, such as Chickering and Reisser's, cognitive structural stages happen one at a time and always in the same order (Evans et al., 2010). Baxter Magolda's (1992, 2004, 2009) cognitive moral development is one exemplar of cognitive moral theories. This theory may also provide a connection with the issue of strengths.

Baxter Magolda (1992, 2004, 2009) studied cognitive development in college students. She built on Perry's model and focused on "the ways in which students make sense of their educational and learning experiences" (Bock, 1999, p. 29). She began her research after identifying a gender gap in the research, a need to explain cognitive development for both men and women. She conducted a longitudinal qualitative study involving students from Miami University in Ohio (Evans et al., 1998). After decades of

research she developed an epistemological model of four ways of knowing: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing. Within absolute knowing, people "assume knowledge was certain and known by those designated as authorities" (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 34) and "the purpose of evaluation is to reproduce what the student has learned so that the instructor can determine its accuracy" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 125). In the second stage, transitional knowing, "the individual acknowledges that some knowledge is uncertain and that authorities do not always have all the answers" (Hamrick et al., 2002, p. 61). Transitional knowers "expect instructors to go beyond merely supplying information to facilitate an understanding and application of knowledge" and "evaluation that focuses on understanding is endorsed over that which deals only with acquisition" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 126). In independent knowing, knowledge is seen as mostly uncertain. "The role of the instructor shifts to providing the context for knowledge exploration" (p. 126). The final stage is contextual knowing. This stage "reflects a convergence of previous gender-related patterns" (p. 127). Within this stage, individuals are able to understand that the "legitimacy of knowledge claims is determined contextually" (p. 127). This final stage is rarely reached by undergraduate students.

Recently, Baxter Magolda worked with Abes and Torres (2008) to blend the findings of their three longitudinal studies "to construct an integrated view of college student and young adult development that encompassed three major phases: following external formulas, crossroads, and self-authorship" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 628).

These phases demonstrate the "gradual emergence of an internal voice to coordinate external influence and manage one's life" (p. 628).

The first phase, following external formulas was used by college students "to decide what to believe, how to view themselves, and how to construct relationships with others throughout college and into their twenties" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 628). Knowing one's strengths likely facilitates this transition. This phase can be broken down into three phases: early external meaning making, middle external meaning making, and late external meaning making. Early external meaning making is similar to Baxter Magolda's (1992) early use of absolute knowing. Students in this phase demonstrated "[c]onsistent and completely uncritical acceptance of external authority" which "suggested no awareness of uncertainty on these students' part" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 629). Students in middle external knowing became aware of uncertainty but "did not know what to do with it and continued to look to authorities to resolve it" (p. 629). This phase was similar to Baxter Magolda's (1992) early use of transitional knowers. The third phase, late external meaning making, was characterized by "an increasing openness to uncertainty, recognition of the need to be oneself, and an awareness of the potential conflict of one's own and other's expectations" (as cited in Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 629). Students who have developed their strengths are typically more confident so they may be able to move into this phase before their peers.

Students enter the phase of crossroads when they are "no longer able or willing to depend on the unexamined trust in authority" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 630) and begin to explore knowledge for themselves. Students who know their strengths are likely more

confident and ready to investigate issues beyond their personal knowledge. Two phases within crossroads emerged: listening to their internal voice and cultivating their voices. Students in the listening to their internal voice phase explored "identifying what made them happy, examining their own beliefs, finding parts of themselves that were important to them, and establishing a distinction between their feelings and external expectations" (as cited in Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 630). When students began wanting to hear their own voice they moved into the cultivating their voices phase which "involved developing parts of themselves they valued, establishing priorities, sifting out beliefs and values that no longer worked, and putting pieces of the puzzle of who they were together" (as cited in Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 630). Students were ready to exit this phase when they bring their "internal voice to the foreground to coordinate (and perhaps reconstruct) external influence" (p. 630).

The final phase is self-authorship, which is understood as "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and relationships" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 631). Baxter Magolda recognized three elements of self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments. Strengths knowledge could be implied to be able to trust oneself. Individuals who were trusting their internal voice "recognized that reality, or what happened in the world and their lives, was beyond their control, but their reactions to what happened was within their control" (p. 631). This understanding "set them on the road to taking responsibility for choosing how to interpret reality, how to feel about their interpretation, and how to react" (p. 631). Individuals move on to building an internal foundation phase and "they begin to

organize their choices into commitments that formed a philosophy, or an internal foundation, to guide their ongoing reactions to reality" (p. 631). Baxter Magolda found that "those who were building their internal foundations used their commitments to guide their reactions and choices" (p. 631). The third phase within self-authorship, securing internal commitments, usually occurs in one's 30s. Individuals progressed from having their commitments in their head but sometimes falling short in actions to becoming ingrained and second nature. When the commitments became second nature individuals were able to "navigate the challenges in their lives, making them comfortable with the chaos they encountered" and a "greater sense of security that led to a greater sense of freedom" (p. 631). Students who have an understanding of their strengths likely reach this phase before others because they know what they are good at, they have been refining their talents, and they have achieved near-perfect performance, meaning they have developed their talents into strengths.

The student development theories considered above include exemplars of psychosocial and cognitive moral theories. Psychosocial theories, specifically Chickering and Reisser, considered how people develop throughout their life by examining the important issues people face, how they define themselves and their relationship to others, and what to do with their lives. Baxter Magolda's cognitive moral theory was similar but it focused on how people interpret and make meaning out of their experiences. Studies have shown increased academic performance, confidence, sense of purpose, ability to develop relationships, and form career plans as they progress through the stages or vectors (Baxter Magolda, 1994; Erwin & Delworth, 1982; Erwin & Kelly,

1985; Hood et al., 1986; Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Williams & Winston, 1985). StrengthsQuest does not provide a stage or vector model but studies have also shown an increase in academic performance, confidence, sense of purpose, as well as ability to make better choices, hope and increased sense of meaning (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006). However, one area that was not addressed by either the psychosocial or cognitive moral studies was how students utilized these increased abilities. Perhaps beginning to make connections between the idea of strengths and these theories would result in a fuller understanding of student development. Typology theory also provides another opportunity to connect StrengthsQuest to current student development theory.

Typology Theory

Typology theories provide a "framework within which individual development occurs and influences the manner in which students address development in various aspects of their lives" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 33). Typology theories are designed "to capture some of the uniqueness and individuality of students as personalities by utilizing information of their values, attitudes, beliefs, self-concept, and behavior" (Astin, 1993, p. 36). Typology theories "consider certain persistent characteristics or behaviors of individuals that remain relatively stable over time" (McEwen, 2003, p. 162). Unlike psychosocial and cognitive-structural theories, typology theories are not hierarchical nor are they experienced in a linear manner. "Various types are viewed and discussed as being different but not 'good' or 'bad.' Each type is seen as contributing something positive and unique to any situation" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 204). StrengthsQuest is

similar to typology theories because they also are not linear and each strength can contribute positively. In typology theories, "Students may, indeed, change back and forth from one characterological type to another, but the scheme does not assume a linear, developmental process where being of one type tends to lead naturally to another 'higher' type" (Astin, 1993, p. 36). Students retain their strengths but their top five strengths may rotate within their top ten strengths.

The term typology means the "existence of discrete, independent categories in which people can be sorted" (Astin, 1993, p. 37). Two of the most well known typologies theories are Holland's theory of vocational personalities and environments and the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory. Each of these typologies demonstrates this type of categorization.

Meyers-Briggs Type Inventory. Myers developed the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) after examining "how individuals orient themselves to the world around them, how they take in information from their environment, how they come to conclusions about what they observe, and how they relate to their environment" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 35). As with other personality theories, "one's psychological type is comprised of innate dispositions that develop over the course of a lifetime but are also most differentiated during young childhood" (Salter, Evans, & Forney, 2006, p. 174).

The MBTI instrument consists of a series multiple choice questions that represent behavioral preferences and preferred self-descriptive adjectives. The MBTI scores result in 16 psychological types and four bipolar dimensions (Harrington & Loffredo, 2001). The four bipolar dimensions are: extraversion-introversion (EI), sensing-intuition (SN),

thinking-feeling (TF), and judging-perception (JP) and the sixteen different types are ISTJ, ISFJ, ENTP, ENTJ, and so forth. Extraverts are stimulated by the world around them whereas introverts tend to reflect and enjoy solitude and find the external world draining (Evans et al., 2010). Sensing and intuition are the two perceiving functions, which describe how people take in information and experience events. Intuition consists of "perceiving information based on unconscious processes" whereas "sensing involves using the five senses to take in information and concretely observing details and facts" (p. 36). There are two judging preferences, thinking and feeling, "which are used to organize information and make decisions" (p. 36). Thinking involves organizing information and making decisions based on facts, evidence, and logic, whereas, those using feeling focus on subjective values. Finally, the last two, judging and perception, describe how the individual relates to the world around them. "Perceptive types tend to spend more time observing and taking in information, while judging types take in information more quickly and focus on making decisions" (p. 36). Individuals are born with the ability to use both poles, but each person has a preference for one pole over another (McCaulley & Martin, 1995). The MBTI has been used in a variety of research.

Harrington and Loffredo (2001) demonstrated how the MBTI was "a useful instrument for assessing the personality variables associated with life satisfaction" (p. 448) after investigating the relationship between psychological well-being, life satisfaction, self-consciousness, and the four Myers-Briggs Type Inventory dimensions. The participants, 79 women and 18 men, were all enrolled in undergraduate and graduate psychology and education classes. The students completed the Psychological Well-Being

Inventory, the Satisfaction With Life Scale, the Self-Conscious Scale-Revised, and the MBTI. Harrington and Loffredo found that the results "provide more evidence for patterns of personality that are associated with a higher level of psychological well-being" (p. 448).

Folger, Kanitz, Knudsen, and McHenry (2003) focused on the personality types of scholars, those who receive competitive scholarships. A five year population of 93 scholars was examined to see how the F and T type differed within the group. The researchers hypothesized that *Thinking* would be dominant for most of the students, rather than *Feeling*. However, the researchers found that more scholar students (57%) primarily had *Feeling*, rather than *Thinking*. Folger et al. found their results were controversial "to speculate that a high percentage of academically talented individuals bypass logic in their decision-making" (p. 601).

Blume (1992) also suggested that college students can improve their study habits by knowing their MBTI type and that different learning styles are associated with each preference (Pittenger, 1993, p. 480). Meyers and McCaulley (1985) also stated that "the MBTI is especially useful in career counseling for providing clients with an understanding of their interests and how they may wish to live their lives. In theory, occupations should attract particular types, and similar occupations should have similar type distributions" (as cited in Pittenger, 1993, p. 480).

Like the MBTI, knowing strengths can increase individuals' life satisfaction and study habits because the more they know and understand about themselves the easier it is to make pleasing choices. The MBTI is not the only typology, Holland's theory of

vocational personalities and environment also provides another opportunity to link StrengthsQuest to student development theory.

Holland's theory of vocational personalities and environments. Holland's theory of vocational personalities and environments provide a framework for studying students' college experiences. "The theory links students' personality types with the characteristics of academic disciplines, creating a model of person–environment fit that can be used to explain selection of an academic major, socialization into the major, and student learning and development" (Pike, 2006, p. 591). Holland proposed that "a person with a clear sense of identity has an explicit and relatively stable picture of his or her goals, interests, skills, and suitable occupations" (Holland, 1996, p. 403).

Holland's theory utilizes six basic personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional (Holland, 1996). Realistic people tend to be interested in and prefer activities that involve work with practical, concrete and tangible things, such as tools and machines (Evans et al., 2010; Umbach & Milem, 2004). They are described as conforming, practical, inflexible, and reserved (Evans et al., 2010); these descriptions are very similar to Discipline, Responsibility, and Intellection strengths (Appendix A). Investigative people prefer activities that require acquisition of knowledge through investigation and problem solving (Evans et al., 2010; Umbach & Milem, 2004). They are described as analytical, intellectual, precise, and cautious (Evans et al., 2010); these descriptions are very similar to Analytical, Activator, and Deliberative strengths (Appendix A). Social people focus on activities that involve healing or teaching others (Evans et al., 2010; Umbach & Milem, 2004). They are described as

helpful, friendly, and empathetic (Evans et al., 2010); these descriptions are very similar to Empathy, Communication, and Includer strengths (Appendix A). Enterprising individuals prefer focus on achieving individual or organizational goals (Evans et al., 2010; Umbach & Milem, 2004). They are described as domineering, extroverted, self-confident, resourceful, and adventurous (Evans et al., 2010); these descriptions are very similar to Achiever and Significance strengths (Appendix A). Artistic people favor spontaneous, creative, unstructured activities (Evans et al., 2010; Umbach & Milem, 2004). They are described as emotional, expressive, imaginative, and impulsive (Evans et al., 2010); these descriptions are very similar to Adaptability, Arranger, and Futuristic strengths (Appendix A).

Feldman, Smart, and Ethington (1999) wanted to test the assumption of Holland's theory that "achievement of people is a function of the congruence or 'fit' between their personality type and their environment" (p. 643). Data was obtained from previously collected freshman surveys and follow-up surveys collected four years later. The overall sample consisted of 4,408 students but the study was based on 2,309 students who were enrolled four years later and whose academic major was included in Holland's (1997) classification of academic majors. The findings supported the assumption that "congruence of person and environment is related to higher levels of educational stability, satisfaction, and achievement" (Feldman et al., 1999, p. 643).

Porter and Umbach (2006) determined that the Holland categories provided an "excellent framework" for the study of student major choice (p. 445). The purpose of the study was to integrate and test various theories to provide comprehensive understanding

of student major choice. Data were obtained from first-time, full-time, degree-seeking cohorts of new students over the fall of three consecutive years. The students all answered the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Student Information Form during orientation. Approximately 83% of each cohort was used in the analysis, which consisted of a multinomial logistic regression. The researchers found that political views and the Holland personality scales were very strong predictors of student major choice (p. 444). After taking into account personality, academic preparation, family influence and academic self-efficacy did not seem to matter (p. 444). After introducing the controls, gender differences were not significant and racial differences remained significant.

Typology theories and StrengthsQuest are similar in that they provide students with distinct categories in which they are able to explore and develop. StrengthsQuest is also similar in that it is able to capture the uniqueness and individuality of each student. However, StrengthsQuest goes beyond the MBTI and Holland's assessments by providing students with their top five strengths. The possible variation of strengths vastly exceeds that of the MBTI, again emphasizing the ability of StrengthsQuest to capture the uniqueness of individuals. The typology studies found increased psychological well-being of one category over another, higher levels of satisfaction for those whose personality fit their environment, and predictors of students' major. However, these studies did not take into account other factors that may have affected students' well-being or satisfaction with major, including what strengths each individual student possessed and whether they were utilizing those strengths.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of the literature on StrengthsQuest as well as a brief overview of psychosocial theory, cognitive moral and typology theory as they relate to college students. StrengthsQuest and college student development studies have shown relationships between confidence, relationships and academic success based on the development or type of the student. From this review, it seems clear that more research focused on college students utilizing StrengthsQuest is necessary and that StrengthsQuest can work in conjunction with other student development theories. The following chapter presents the methodology of this study, which utilized interviews to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on Business College students' experiences during college.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

The research on the issue of individual strengths is lacking as demonstrated in Chapter 2 and thus, there is a need to explore how knowing their strengths affect college students throughout their college experience. Qualitative research was used in this study because a qualitative approach is a better fit for the research problem (Creswell, 2007). Freshmen business students at Midwest University take the StrengthsQuest assessment, but, there is no information on students' perspectives of it or experiences with it. This lends toward qualitative research because this kind of research is interpretive and about how people make meaning of things. Qualitative methods provided the students and advisors opportunities to explore their thoughts and add to their responses. I was also able to ask additional probing questions to expand upon responses which would not have been possible in a survey. Interviews, rather than surveys, were appropriate to gather a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" that was needed for this research problem (p. 51).

This methodology used a case study approach. Creswell (2007) defined a case study as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes" (p. 73). In this study, the case was both spatially (a business college in a research

university) and topically bounded (the case of the use of StrengthsQuest within a business college).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, interview-based study was to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on the business college students' experiences during college. StrengthsQuest "gives students and educators the opportunity to develop strengths by building on their greatest talents -- the way in which they most naturally think, feel, and behave as unique individuals" (Gallup, 2007).

Ample literature has been published by The Gallup Organization regarding the value of StrengthsQuest in different settings (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006). However, there is a scarcity of literature concerning the benefits of StrengthsQuest in the college setting. This study will help fill this gap and help Midwest University and the Business College provide better services to its students.

Research Questions

The grand tour question in this study was: How college students and academic advisors perceived the StrengthsQuest as influencing students' experiences in college? The following five research questions were also explored in this study:

1. What do students think about their strengths as identified by the StrengthsQuest assessment?
2. How do students describe the role of knowing their strengths in college?
3. How do advisors intend for the students to benefit from knowing their strengths?

4. What do advisors do to educate students about their strengths?
5. How are students and advisors perceptions of strengths similar or not similar?

Institutional Review Board Approval

Prior to the commencement of the study, I completed the ethics training program for human subjects research and was certified by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). I then sought and received approval through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix B). As required by the IRB, participants signed informed consent forms prior to the interviews (Appendix C). The participants were also informed that the information obtained in this study may be published in educational journals or shared at educational conferences and that any information obtained during this project that could identify the participant would be kept strictly confidential. Also, as required by the IRB, the transcriptionist signed the transcriptionist confidentiality agreement (Appendix D).

Research Site and Context

The study was conducted within the Business College at a large, four-year, Doctoral/Research-Extensive, Midwestern higher education institution. The university enrolled approximately 24,100 students as of fall 2009 and is a predominantly white institution. Cost to attend this institution totaled to approximately $6,956.70 for residents and $17,996.70 for non-residents (excluding the cost of housing) for the 2009-2010 academic year according to the 2009-2010 University Fact Book. Students have a choice of over 150 undergraduate majors from ten different colleges. The Business College enrolled approximately 3,000 students in the fall 2009. All of the business students are

required take a ten-week leadership course as a freshman. The learning objectives of the introductory course are as follows:

1. To help each student understand the fundamental principles of business administration and ethical leadership and to guide each student to develop his or her own unique talent and potential through assignments, exercises, and self awareness activities as well as out-of-class experiences and programs;
2. To help new students fully assimilate into the culture of the university and the Business College;
3. To help familiarize students with the full range of disciplines, academic opportunities and experiences available in the Business College at the University and in the broader community;
4. To develop a deeper and broader understanding and appreciation for the diverse experiences in science, art, culture, etc. available at a research institution.
5. To facilitate students at the very outset of their college experience to leverage their strengths to enhance learning and academic planning and position them to take advantage of future career opportunities;
6. To learn about others and opportunities and explore how diverse groups, organizations, and cultures are fundamentally important to developing effective teams, organizations, and communities.

Freshmen business students each take the StrengthsQuest assessment as part of the required ten-week freshmen business leadership course that met once a week.

Throughout this course, students learned about their strengths, how leadership qualities relate to their strengths, and how to work with others who have different strengths. Strengths are referred to during almost every class throughout the ten weeks. Once the students complete this course there are no more structured opportunities to learn about or utilize one's strengths. Both students and academic advisors have a stake in how useful this assessment is to students throughout their college experience.

Participants

Student participants qualified for this study by meeting three criteria. Students were required to be at least 19 years of age or older, had taken StrengthsQuest their freshmen year of college or later, and were a junior or senior in the Business College. I purposefully selected juniors and seniors because they had more experiences to share since they had more opportunities to utilize their strengths. Academic advisor participants were selected for this study because they had StrengthsQuest training and had taught the freshmen business leadership course.

A purposeful sample of eight people participated in this case study. Purposeful sampling was useful because it allowed me to select individuals and sites for study because they provided information directly related to the topic (Creswell, 2007; McMillan, 2008). Students in the Business College were selected because these students were required to take StrengthsQuest in their freshman year during the freshman leadership business course. I contacted students that I already had access to through the freshmen leadership course and organizations that I was involved in but I will not specifically mention those organizations in order to maintain confidentiality. The

academic advisors were qualified for this study because they were professional academic advisors in the Business College. Names and contact information for the professional academic advisors in the Business College were already known because I worked as a part-time advisor in the college. Potential participants, both students and professional academic advisors, were sent e-mail invitations to participate (Appendix E). The emails explained the study and offered them the opportunity to participate. I only followed up with students who responded in order to ensure students were voluntarily choosing to participate. The students also contacted me directly to ensure confidentiality. Potential participants received a copy of the consent form after they responded to the researcher's email (Appendix C).

I made no limitations based on race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, academic major, age, family status, income or socioeconomic status. Of the five student participants, two were juniors and three were seniors in the Business College. The students were 19, 20, 21, and two were 22; the median age was 20.8. Three of the students identified as white, one identified as Asian, and one identified as Hispanic or Latino. One of the five students identified as a first-generation college student. The students' GPA ranged from 2.8 to 3.802, with a median GPA of 3.534.

The other three participants were professional academic advisors in the Business College. The professional academic advisors ranged in age from 54 to 60. One advisor identified as white, one identified as white and Native American, and one advisor chose not to disclose their ethnicity. The advisors had a range of experience with StrengthsQuest, one had three years and the other two had seven years. They had a

similar range of experience at the university, one had been with the university seven years and two had been with the university eight years. Demographic information was obtained through completion of the Demographic Information form that was provided to each participant prior to his or her interview (Appendix G, H). Other participant characteristics are provided in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

The participants were given a copy of the consent form when they arrived for their interview and they were asked to read and sign the form if they agreed to participate. The interviews were held in locations in which a door could be closed to ensure confidentiality. The interviews with the professional academic advisors were held in their offices and the interviews with the students were held in the student union and in a conference room in the Business College. Interviews lasted between 25 and 65 minutes and continued until all interview questions were asked and answered. All interviews were tape-recorded.

The grand tour question for this study was: How college students and academic advisors perceived the StrengthsQuest as influencing students' experiences in college. To answer the grand tour question, I developed and asked the participants to respond to open-ended, semi-structured interview questions. The interview questions were developed based on topic areas addressed in StrengthsQuest literature (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006). The students were asked one set of interview questions, consisting of 11 questions with probes (Appendix I) and the professional academic advisors were asked a set of 13 interview questions with probes (Appendix J).

Participants were asked to answer questions openly and honestly. At the end of each interview, students and advisors were also asked if there was anything else they would like to share about their strengths or strengths in general. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to share their experiences more freely (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Since this was a semi-structured interview, I used a list of predetermined questions but was able to reword or reorder the questions based on the participant. I was also able to ask follow up questions as needed. Individuals were able to describe their experiences in unique ways when the interview format is less structured (Merriam, 1998). Background information was obtained through a paper-and-pencil questionnaire (Appendix G, H). All of the interviews were recorded with both a microcassette recorder and a digital recorder and then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber.

Data Analysis

I generally followed Creswell's method to analyze the participants' transcripts. According to Creswell (2007), one must "first describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study" (p. 159). After that, I then "develop[ed] a list of significant statements" and took "the significant statements and then group[ed] them into larger units of information, or themes" (p. 44). Then I wrote "a description of 'what' the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon" and wrote "a description of 'how' the experience happened" (p. 44). To conclude, I wrote "a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions" (p. 44).

Specifically, after receiving the transcriptions, I reviewed the transcriptions for errors and then provided the participants with the opportunity to review and edit the

transcriptions as well. I read for content and then reread the transcriptions for extra familiarity. While reading the transcripts, I used in vivo coding. I identified and wrote down two to three words, using the participants' words, to assign meaning to the information provided by the participants.

I found over 600 codes while coding the transcripts (Appendix K). As I reviewed the codes, several ideas kept arising which I developed into themes. Six themes emerged: It's Me in a Nutshell, Understand Other People, It's a Choice, Go Where You're Passionate, Periscope is Longer, and Advisor Additions (Table 3). I then recoded the transcripts based on those six themes. Using word documents, I made each participant's transcript a different color, in order to label each coded section. I also had a document for each theme and cut and pasted each coded section into the appropriate document. Using the themes that emerged, I then developed sub-themes. I then analyzed the data and presented the data by theme.

Verification Strategies

Verification is important in qualitative research because it provides reassurances of external validity, internal validity and reliability and is "an attempt to assess the 'accuracy' of the findings" (Creswell, 2007, p. 206). Validity is "concerned with how you establish the warrant for your work; whether it is sound, defensible, coherent, well-grounded, appropriate to the case, worthy of recognition" (Simons, 2009, p. 127).

One verification method that was used to ensure internal validity was member checks. "In member checking, the researcher solicits the participants' views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Participants were

emailed the transcript of their interview and asked to make corrections whenever they found an error. Two of the participants responded and verified that the content of the transcript was correct and one participant made corrections. The other five participants did not respond.

External validity deals with knowing how well a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study (Yin, 2009). The use of thick, rich description assists in external validity. "Rich, thick description allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). I used the participants' words to create the thick, rich description as much as possible in order to allow the audience to determine for themselves whether or not the study is applicable to their StrengthsQuest program or other similar programs. If the study is applicable, they will be able to use the findings as they see appropriate for their needs.

Reliability means that if another investigator conducted the same study, they would arrive at the same findings and conclusions (Yin, 2009). "The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study" (p. 45). Reliability was sought by having the research process supervised by Dr. Rachelle Winkle Wagner. Reliability can be enhanced by "obtain[ing] detailed fieldnotes by employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape" (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). When conducting my interviews, I used a tape recorder and a digital recorder in order to capture every word and pause by each of the participants. Also, the interviews were transcribed verbatim

from the recording. I was able to code more accurately because the transcriber included every word and pause by each participant.

The use of triangulation was used to satisfy all three types of verification, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. In triangulation, "researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). "Triangulation is a means of cross-checking the relevance and significance of issues or testing out arguments and perspectives from different angles to generate and strengthen evidence in support of key claims" (Simons, 2009, p. 130). In this study, data triangulation was used because I used "different data sources to gain understanding of the issues," by gaining data from both students and academic advisors. Chapter 4 presents the findings that emerged, using the themes It's Me in a Nutshell, Understand Other People, It's a Choice, Go Where You're Passionate, Periscope is longer, and Advisor Additions.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, interview-based study was to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on the business college students' experiences during college. This study explored various areas of students' life that could be influenced by the knowledge gained by completing the StrengthsQuest assessment and beginning the process of developing those strengths. Specifically, the study explored how college students and academic advisors perceived the StrengthsQuest as influencing students' experiences in college. The research questions were:

1. What do students think about their strengths as identified by the StrengthsQuest assessment?
2. How do students describe the role of knowing their strengths in college?
3. How do advisors intend for the students to benefit from knowing their strengths?
4. What do advisors do to educate students about their strengths?
5. How are students and advisors perceptions of strengths similar or not similar?

Description of the Participants

Each of the participants had differing levels of experience with StrengthsQuest. The participants were also unique in other ways and a short introduction to each participant is provided below.

Anna was in her senior year as a Business Administration major with a GPA of 3.75. She held executive positions in both student government and her sorority, as well as serving on the advisory board for the honors program. She had received numerous scholarships. Anna was one of two student participants who did not take the freshmen leadership course (where StrengthsQuest was mandated); however, she received StrengthsQuest experience as a new student orientation (NSO) leader. Anna described herself as having "an appreciation and enthusiasm for life." She said, "I'm dedicated to pursuits, people and achieving the best possible results. I'm focused, but quirky; responsible, yet still fun." Anna's strengths, in order, were: achiever, discipline, responsibility, focus, and harmony.

Danielle was also in her senior year as a double major in Finance and Economics and had a GPA of 3.6. She was involved in her sorority, Panhellenic Association and an environmental student organization and had received numerous scholarships. Danielle also served as a teaching assistant (TA) for the freshmen leadership course which involved teaching a recitation of approximately 28 freshmen. Danielle described herself as "ready to graduate and tackle new life challenges." Danielle's strengths were, in order: focus, achiever, strategic, deliberative, and futuristic.

Collin was a junior with a Business Administration and Psychology double major and had a GPA of 3.72. He held an officer position in both his fraternity and the University Program Council and also served on a fee committee through student government, and a diversity enhancement group. Collin was also a NSO leader and involved in a mentoring program. He also received numerous scholarships. Collin

described himself as “a very goal oriented, hard-working individual, who strives for the best. I am very ambitious and have great plans for my future.” His strengths were analytical, achiever, competition, input, and restorative.

Barbara had enough credits to be a junior but was only in her second year at UNL. She was a Business Administration major and had a GPA of 2.8. She was a member of the business fraternity Alpha Kappa Psi and involved with a learning community of business students, a small group of first year students who shared a common academic interest, lived on the same residence hall floor, and received other educational opportunities. She said, “I am a college student who likes to hang out with friends and not take life too seriously. I work really hard in school and am happy with the results.” Barbara’s strengths were: adaptability, responsibility, empathy, developer, and restorative.

Elizabeth was a senior Accounting major with a GPA of 3.802. Elizabeth was the other student participant who did not take the freshmen leadership course. She did not take the course because she completed her freshman year at another institution but she also received StrengthsQuest experience as an NSO leader. Elizabeth was involved with NSO, student government, and a fee committee through student government. She also received numerous scholarships. She described herself as “mostly upbeat and organized. I really take time to form strong relationships with a small circle of people. I’m hard working and can become discouraged if the results don’t accurately portray my efforts. I like order and I plan far in advance.” Elizabeth’s strengths were: belief, discipline, input, learner, and she did not remember her fifth strength.

The three advisors who participated in this study were more similar. All of the advisors were over 50 years of age and all had at least a master's degree. All three advisors, Martin, Polycarp, and Sarah used StrengthsQuest when teaching the freshmen leadership course and while academic advising. However, two of the advisors had StrengthsQuest Coach training, which the third did not (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Name	Student/ Advisor	Major	1st gen?	Year	Class?	Other experience?
Anna	Student	Business Administration	No	Senior	No	Orientation leader
Barbara	Student	Business Administration	Yes	Junior	Yes	N/A
Collin	Student	Business Admin & Psychology	No	Junior	Yes	Orientation leader
Danielle	Student	Finance & Economics	No	Senior	Yes	TA for FR class
Elizabeth	Student	Accounting	No	Senior	No	Orientation leader
Martin	Advisor	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	SQ coach training & Teaching
Polycarp	Advisor	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Teaching
Sarah	Advisor	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	SQ coach training & Teaching

The participants displayed a variety of the 34 Gallup Strengths (strengths) (strengths are defined in Appendix A). Some strengths were more prevalent than others, for example, nearly all of the participants (5 of 8) listed "achiever" as one of their top five

strengths. Other strengths are not common, for example, context is rarely a top strength (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Strengths

	1st Strength	2nd Strength	3rd Strength	4th Strength	5th Strength
Anna	Achiever	Discipline	Responsibility	Focus	Harmony
Barbara	Adaptability	Responsibility	Empathy	Developer	Restorative
Collin	Analytical	Achiever	Competition	Input	Restorative
Danielle	Focus	Achiever	Strategic	Deliberative	Futuristic
Elizabeth	Belief	Discipline	Input	Learner	Unknown
Martin	Strategic	Connectedness	Learner	Achiever	Communication
Polycarp	Context	Arranger	Learner	Responsibility	Belief
Sarah	Focus	Woo	Strategic	Responsibility	Achiever

Overview of Themes and Subthemes

This chapter presents the themes and supporting documentation in the voices of the students and advisors who have had experience with StrengthsQuest. Six themes and 15 subthemes emerged as outlined and defined in Table 3. The theme "It's Me in a Nutshell" discussed how participants were able to learn more about themselves and the themes was broken down into three subthemes: "Take ownership of those qualities," "Wear a sign," and "That's kind of my hierarchy." The "Understand Other People" theme discussed how strengths were prevalent in the participants' relationships with others and this theme was broken into three subthemes as well, including "Create a good team," "How Best to Communicate," and "Constantly chatting." The participants

discussed other ways they used their strengths and the theme "It's a Choice" emerged and three subthemes resulted: "Doing it for a Reason," "Depends on the Class," and "New Perspective." Participants also talked about using strengths in the academic arena or "Go Where You're Passionate," specifically, "Fit into What I Want to Do" when discussing changing or picking their majors and "Solidified my choice in major" when they discussed keeping a major. Participants also discussed their future plans, and found their "Periscope is longer," which resulted in two subthemes: "Networking tool" and "Be the most effective employee." "Advisor Additions" contributed to a sixth theme and two subthemes emerged: the "Goals for StrengthsQuest" and additional "Opportunities to learn about strengths" (see Table 3).

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
1. It's Me in a Nutshell	a. Take ownership of those qualities b. Wear a sign c. That's kind of my hierarchy
2. Understand Other People	a. Create a good team b. How Best to Communicate c. Constantly chatting
3. It's a Choice	a. Doing it for a Reason b. Depends on the Class c. New Perspective
4. Go Where You're Passionate	a. Fit into What I Want to Do b. Solidified my choice in major
5. Periscope is longer	a. Networking tool b. Be the most effective employee
6. Advisor Additions	a. Goals for StrengthsQuest b. Opportunities to learn about strengths

Themes and Subthemes

It's Me in a Nutshell

StrengthsQuest and knowing one's strengths appeared to increase students' awareness of self, including learning more about themselves, increasing their confidence and defining their decision making process. Anna said it best when she said, "It's kind of me in a nutshell." Collin also said, "[Strengths are] more like components to my character and I think that says a lot about me." The students and advisors all acknowledged that knowing strengths and especially working with the strengths provided an opportunity to know oneself better. Elizabeth added, "Being able to put a term with your conduct and characteristics, I think, is really crucial and it just solidifies how well you know yourself. So I just think that everyone should be given a chance to experience what their strengths are." This statement implied that knowing one's strengths also helped strengthen their concept of identity. As mentioned above, these types of interventions have increased students' levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence, optimism, direction, hope, altruism, and sense of meaning and purpose (Cantwell, 2005; Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006, p. 3). Three subthemes emerged within "It's Me in a Nutshell," including "Take ownership of those qualities," "Wear a sign," and "That's kind of my hierarchy."

Take ownership of those qualities. Part of being aware of oneself included learning about oneself. StrengthsQuest has provided the students opportunities to understand their thoughts and behaviors. All of the participants agreed that knowing their strengths helped them know themselves better. As Elizabeth, a senior accounting major,

said, “StrengthsQuest is just another way for me to learn more about myself, and then, in turn, it affects my personal life because I just feel more of an ability to achieve my short-term and long-term goals.” Elizabeth has had the opportunity to learn more about herself and better all aspects of her life.

Some students who have accepted their strengths have also embraced their strengths. Anna demonstrated this when she said, “Back when I first started out with my strengths, I [was] identified in a room full of positive wooers as hard core. You know, for whatever reason, it's a point of pride.” Woo stands for winning others over (see Appendix A for more information). Anna indicated that she felt really proud of her strengths which suggested that she was more likely to use and develop her strengths. Collin expanded when he said, “It also kind of made me feel like I could take ownership of those qualities too.” By being proud and able to take ownership of the strengths, the students were able to explain many of their actions as they related to their strengths and even defined themselves by their strengths.

Some of the students also found a benefit in being able to explain themselves to others through their strengths. Students were typically using their strengths before taking StrengthsQuest but were not able to articulate their actions as using their strengths. Elizabeth “appreciate[d] being able to put a title on something” because

> Input is really strong. I can see it every day because I just really like to take in information and take in memorabilia . . . so Input was really helpful because I was like, finally, something that I can say that people understand.

Individuals with Input are inquisitive and collect things that are of interest to them. Collin added,

> I was really happy/surprised that I had Achiever as my top strength, because a lot of people in high school identified me as the overachiever. I just considered myself ambitious. So it was nice to see that was an actual strength and I was actually utilizing that.

Achiever was a common strength among the participants, which meant they have a constant need for achievement. The students seemed to take comfort in the fact that their actions were not unusual and that they were utilizing a strength.

Learning more about themselves also included appreciating more than just their top five strengths. Anna also shared that she has:

> Been drawn to many of them as people give different definitions of them and talk about how they use them. So in some ways, I'm kind of jealous I don't have some of those other ones, but I really like my top five.

This suggested that while Anna liked her strengths, she also sort of wished she had others. She demonstrated an understanding of the benefits of all the strengths, even when she did not have that strength in her top five. Martin, an advisor, discussed the idea of adopting a strength. As he explained, this idea:

> Recognizes that you might be missing one that you think you have and so, instead of saying, "oh, no, I don't have that, it's not in my top five," it gives you permission that this is something that I really do a lot. I really fit this one here. For some reason it didn't come up in my top five, but I really fit it.

The ability to adopt a "shadow fifth strength" worked well for those who thought that a certain strength should have been in their top five but was not. The assessment identifies individuals' top five of the 34 strengths but everyone can utilize more than just their top five, especially when other strengths are needed in a situation.

Another way to learn about yourself is to learn more about your limitations and how to better work with other people. As Anna said:

> Knowing my own tendencies, based on what the StrengthsQuest results were, has allowed me to more cognitively think about where my strengths aren't, in order to have a better result, to see more broadly, [and] understand where other people are coming from. Knowing yourself better allows you to work with other people more effectively probably.

Anna suggested that by knowing her strengths, she also knew where her weaknesses are. This has allowed her to know when she needs other people's strengths to fulfill a project or be able to understand why someone is reacting a certain way. Since people usually use their top five strengths and sometimes use their top ten, people benefit by knowing what they do well and they do not do well. This allowed them to utilize their strengths and the strengths of others. Knowing one's strengths not only allowed them to learn about themselves and take ownership of those qualities but it also helped increase students' confidence.

Wear a sign. After knowing their strengths and working with their strengths, students seemed more confident. Many were so confident they were able to describe themselves using their strengths and it was as if they were wearing a sign. Barbara, a junior business administration major, remarked:

> Knowing what I'm good at is obviously going to raise my confidence, so now that it's on paper and I know this is what I'm good at, if I don't really succeed in other areas, that's fine because I know I will in others.

Barbara understood that she need not worry about not having other strengths because she could still persevere with the strengths she did have. As an advisor, Sarah also agreed that students' confidence level increased as they learn more about their strengths. She said, "They know how to approach even a difficult subject. And you can tell that they're feeling like, okay, I've got this under control now whereas, maybe they would have

floundered before." Confidence is a key outcome of knowing strengths because students believe they have the ability to succeed or complete tasks which will help them reach their goals (Bandura, 1982; Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Strajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

Some of the students also expressed an increase in confidence because they were able to be themselves and not have to explain themselves to others when their strengths were known. Anna, a senior business administration major, expressed this best:

> That was a confidence boost because it's really hard to say, you know, my strengths are . . ., this was a tool, an objective tool, saying she's good at this, respect that and use that in her. So, if you could just wear a sign of what your strengths were, so you didn't have to talk about yourself it would just do it for you.

Anna indicated that she knew her strengths and she was capable and willing to use her strengths. She implied that her strengths could be utilized better if everyone knew what they were, if everyone could wear a sign. In addition to learning about themselves and increasing their confidence, understanding strengths can also affect students' decision making process.

That's kind of my hierarchy. Throughout the process of learning about and using their strengths, students began to formalize their decision making process. Collin described his decision making process:

> The first is scheduling and that is actually something that has recently developed in the last year or two . . . I kind of do a first-come basis. If I already have something scheduled, that takes precedence over something else and then I evaluate important[ance] . . . I just kind of base it off of the opportunities and I have to be really careful about scheduling, especially homework and applications and then tasks for organizations . . . I also think about how long it will take to accomplish the task. If it's something that I can do in five minutes, I would rather get it done right away because it's off of my mental to-do list.

Collin was very involved on campus and his process worked for him to help him manage all of his obligations and complete tasks on time. Elizabeth had a different set of strengths and but her process was similar to Collin's process:

> I put things in order as important and ordinarily, right now in my life is a bit messy, I try to have it be faith first, family second, then school, then comes work, then comes extra involvement. So, that's kind of my hierarchy.

Elizabeth and Collin both used a hierarchical process to help them determine their priorities and how to accomplish their tasks. This implied that they are using their knowledge of their strengths to help them prioritize their lives. Both had Input as a strength and this may have affected their process. Elizabeth's first strength, Belief, was evident in her priorities. Collin's strength of Achiever was evident when he said he would rather accomplish quicker tasks first. This allowed him to feel more accomplished (see Appendix A for a description of the strengths).

Danielle had a different way of making decisions than both Collin and Elizabeth. She observed:

> I think I'm just more aware of how I make decisions. The process I go through hasn't changed, but I can understand better why I do certain things in the decision making process. When I'm thinking about a decision, I list everything out and I do a pros and cons lists and then I'll set it aside, and then I'll come back to it if it's a really important decision. And that's part of my Strategic and Deliberative. I want everything planned out, I want to know all my options and then I want to feel like I'm making the best decision, based on the information.

Danielle demonstrated both Deliberative and Strategic strengths. Individuals with Deliberative take their time making decisions and analyze all of the risks involved. The Strategic strength allowed Danielle to sort through issues and identify potential obstacles.

Danielle was aware that these two strengths played a prominent role in her decision making process which led her to make lists and analyze each decision more than the average person. This understanding also helped Danielle because she realized, "It's not necessarily a bad thing; it's just how I go through the process." Understanding how she used her strengths helped Danielle understand why it took her so long to make decisions.

Other students indicated the way they make their decisions had not changed but they did not elaborate. The students who talked about their process also related their process to their strengths. They showed an understanding of how strengths were working in their life. Strengths also played a role in students' relationships with other people.

Understand Other People

Knowing strengths not only helps individuals know themselves better but it also helps people understand other people as well. As Martin, an advisor, explained, "It helps understand other people and how they are different than you are and how they're similar to you. And the differences are better understood if you don't look at people as though they should all be the same." Within this theme, three subthemes emerged: "Create a good team," "How best to communicate," and "Constantly chatting."

Create a good team. The strengths of a group or leadership team can provide support or can lead to conflict. The following three participants all experienced or explained the benefits of using their strengths and others to work more effectively. Elizabeth was involved with a new student orientation group where they had taken StrengthsQuest and utilized the results and she said,

> We talk a lot about strengths because you have to learn how to work with people and you have to understand what some people are good at and what

> some people are not necessarily good but how you can put them all together and create a good team.

Elizabeth indicated that knowing strengths can help create a stronger team. By knowing the strengths of the group, duties can be assigned to fit each person's strengths. Collin used his knowledge of strengths and what he gained at a leadership conference and said:

> I think it is helpful when leaders know their strengths, just because StrengthsQuest is all about using those strengths to overcome if you don't have a certain quality. Those strengths should take precedent and you should be able to get along through those.

Collin expressed an understanding of the benefits of using strengths in a leadership position. This understanding can be expanded and related to interpersonal skills as well. As Elizabeth also indicated, individuals can use their strengths to the advantage of a relationship because then they can explain how they feel and why are reacting a certain way.

Anna spoke from personal experience. She said, "I've learned that, you know, I can't do everything and I don't do everything perfectly, but when paired with people who have strengths in areas that I'm lacking, you know, the whole group is better off." Anna talked about one of the groups she was involved in and how she worked with the rest of the leadership team.

> And so, identifying what works in everyone, kind of allows you to take the best of the best and make it function together. I think that's what we're doing, it's probably not always possible and there certainly are conflicts, but it's using the best in people to achieve the best results.

The students seemed to understand the benefits of knowing their own strengths and being aware of others' strengths, no matter which group they were involved with. Different

strengths seemed to be a benefit so that all pieces of a task can be accomplished. However, sometimes when members of a group have similar strengths, conflict can arise.

Sometimes similar strengths and that can lead to conflict. Danielle experienced this when she joined a group that had just formed.

> We're all very Futuristic and we have this grand idea of what we want it to be. Because the [group] didn't really have a lot of structure and all of us had our own individual idea of where we wanted the organization to go, it's kind of difficult at times because we're all fighting with each other. We all wanted it to be better, but where we thought better was different. And so, in the early stages, that was a little difficult because everyone was pulling in different directions as to what they thought was most important.

Similar strengths created conflict in this situation but the use of other strengths can help resolve the conflict. Danielle did not elaborate on how strengths had resolved this situation but members with Harmony, as well as other strengths, could have intervened and brought the group back together. Those with Harmony do not like conflict and look for areas of agreement (Appendix A). Knowing each member's strengths can help facilitate the work of an organization as well as a group project.

Several participants talked about the benefits of strengths when completing group projects. Danielle thought through the benefit of knowing each group member's strengths when completing group projects:

> I think that a lot of times people are very nervous, especially in randomly assigned groups, [because] you don't want to come across as overbearing or as rude, but you don't want to stand up and say, this is what I'm good at and this is what I want to do. Whereas, if everyone lists out their top five strengths and you can start to infer what other people offer and then they don't have to feel like they're being rude.

This idea for group work seemed to be in agreement with what Sarah encouraged her students to work toward. As an advisor, she said:

> I think the freshmen have started to use their strengths better when they're working in groups. The a few groups that they're in, I think that they're starting to realize how to identify what somebody does, or at least ask them those questions, what do you like to do?

This technique could improve the effectiveness and efficiency of group work as well as organizations in general.

Elizabeth had a slightly different perspective on group work. She said, "I'm not afraid anymore that I'm the organizer of a group or that I'm disciplined enough to get a group project done." However, when asked if she initially took on the organizer role she responded, '"I wait and see because for so long I've been that person and sometimes I get so tired of it that I'm like, I'm not doing it this time; I'm not going to do all the work." She went on to share that she tries "to let other people take initiative but in the end, I always have the last say . . . because I'm not willing to submit a C level project and presentation." Elizabeth wanted everyone to contribute but in the end she made sure the project was up to her standards without making other group members rework their contributions. Strengths are not only beneficial when working in groups but also throughout relationships with other people.

How best to communicate. The participants agreed that they did not choose their friends based on strengths but strengths did play a role throughout the relationship. Danielle stated, "I don't think I look for different qualities from freshman year, before or after I took the StrengthsQuest. I feel like I've always looked for the same [qualities], just if the person is going to be a strong friend." Danielle then explained how knowing strengths can benefit the relationship.

> In the times when I'm starting to get frustrated with them and they're starting to get frustrated with me, it's easier for us to articulate the things that are different about us that make it hard for us to get along.

Anna put it well when she said, "knowing more about how strengths work and work together allows me to know how best to communicate with my friends." Being able to communicate effectively can make relationships stronger and reduce conflict.

Collin was aware of how his strengths, especially Competition (being aware of others' performance and always wanting to be better; Appendix A), came out as he interacted and communicated with his friends.

> One of the things that I know that I tend to do, like in an argument or a debate, I tend to start sounding a lot more pompous and I talk down to people, which I've been working on. And I mean, some of my friends point it out which like triggers, oh, yeah, I should probably tone it down.

This exhibited one opportunity to learn more about one's strengths and how they can affect friendships and interactions with others. Other strengths also create other opportunities as well as difficulties.

Strengths have also affected how the participants interacted with their friends and how they approached those interactions. When talking about Discipline (enjoy routine and structure; Appendix A) and Responsibility (take psychological ownership and see projects through to completion; Appendix A), Anna said "nothing makes me more tense or immediately stressed out as being late . . . When we're actually late, I'm feeling tense and I'm very cranky, right from the get-go." Anna also shared that she felt the same way whether it was being late for a meeting or late for a dinner when no one was waiting. Elizabeth felt similarly but approached this kind of a situation in a different way.

> I know that, at times, [knowing others' strengths] prevents conflict between my friends and I because I know that [my friend] is more laid back. She's not on time a whole lot and I've learned to . . . factor in extra time because I know we're probably going to be late and not to get bent out of shape about it.

Elizabeth followed this with an impactful statement:

> If you are always expecting your friend to be on time when they're never going to be on time, then that creates conflict. I guess that's probably one of the biggest things I've learned, don't expect things of people when, really that's not their strengths and I can't expect people to be like me.

Although each has had similar training with strengths, Elizabeth and Anna approach this similar situation differently and that has resulted in very different reactions. Anna and Elizabeth both had Discipline, which lends itself to wanting structure, but their other strengths were different. Elizabeth's Learner strength may have aided her in this situation because Learner allowed her to want to continually improve. She may have been able to improve her reaction to her friend's tardiness. Anna had more of the strengths that resulted in liking structure, Achiever, Discipline, Responsibility, and Focus (Appendix A). As partially mentioned before, Martin, an advisor, summed this up well:

> [Strengths] helps understand other people and how they are different than you are and how they're similar to you. And the differences are better understood if you don't look at people as though they should all be the same as we are. So, it helps them to be able to endure other people's variations when they know that this is just the natural way this person is wired. And, therefore, they can put up with something that they might not naturally fit with, recognizing that it may be for the benefit of the whole group to be able to do that, that this person is a benefit because of those strengths, even though they are not yours.

Elizabeth seems to understand what Martin was aiming for. Some people will understand this right away, others will understand later, and some will continually struggle with this concept depending on their strengths and how well they understand their strengths.

Students' understanding of their strengths have helped them to work better in groups and relationships but they also have had many opportunities to use their strengths in a variety of situations.

It's a Choice

The previous themes incidentally demonstrated the participants using their strengths but this section intentionally illustrates strengths in use. Danielle observed, "It's a choice of how much you want to use them." She added, "If you're in a situation where they can help you then you're going to use them. But, if you've made that decision that the strengths are just a bunch of bullhockey then you're not going to use them." Most of the participants were aware that strengths were constantly being used or at least had the potential to be used. Three subthemes emerged: "Doing it for a reason," "Depends on the class," and "New perspective."

Doing it for a reason. The participants all demonstrated different ways they used their strengths in social situations. Some used their strengths more than others and some were more aware of their strengths than others. Barbara was the youngest participant of the group and had the least experience with strengths. She acknowledged using her strengths generally:

> I'm able to be responsible for my actions and make responsible decisions for all of us, I guess. And, I know people come to me, my friends, they know that I'm always there to listen because, I feel for them. I'm more of a go with the flow type person, so, I'm easy to be around, I guess. Mostly people like me, that's what I get told anyway.

Barbara seemed to be using her strengths, Adaptability, Responsibility, Empathy, Developer, and Restorative (Appendix A), but did not seem to be aware of how prevalent

they were in her responses. Adaptability allowed her to "go with the flow" and Responsibility helped her make good decisions. Her friends came to her to talk because of her Empathy, Restorative (good at figuring out problems and solving them), and Developer (allows her to cultivate potential in others).

Many of the participants considered their strengths in relation to the organizations they had joined while in college. After the leadership conference previously mentioned, Collin acknowledged that he did not know if he necessarily thought about people's strengths but he thought it was "really important to be around people that you want to emulate and be like." He used this knowledge to help choose organizations to become involved in.

> I started to see a trend between the kinds of people that were in those organizations. I thought that was just very important, the fact that you could be in a group with like-minded individuals and, depending on the group, that goal or idea changed but regardless, if they were involved, they were doing it for a reason. Most everything I've joined requires an application of some sort [so] people have to try to get into the group and then they were accepted for a reason. So there's something positive about them, something influential. I thought that was really great.

Although Collin did not think his strengths were being used, this statement was an example of Collin's Analytical strength in action (Appendix A). His Analytical strength allowed him to look for the reason why these groups were succeeding and he discovered that it was because of the people involved. Collin was not the only one who used his strengths to join organizations.

Danielle used all of her strengths to make the decision to join a sorority. Her Achiever and Deliberative strengths were evident when she said:

> I didn't join the Greek system until my sophomore year and I feel like I joined it partly as an Achiever. All the Greeks I had met my freshman year, were achieving things, they were leaders in organizations, they were strong academically and, I wanted to be an Achiever. I wanted to show people that I was an Achiever and a hard worker. So, that was part of my decision.

Her Strategic and Futuristic strengths also played an important role.

> And then, part of it was, I'm a Business major and a lot of job opportunities you hear about are due to networking and who you know. A Greek organization is a great way to tap into all those Alumni that are out there for jobs. So, it was partly a strategic decision as well, as far as, I will then have this fast network of all these [sorority sisters] in the world that I will be able to tap into later on.

Danielle was able to use most of her top strengths in that one decision that has shaped her college experience and possible her future career. She made a thought out decision to impact her college experience as well as her future. Sometimes the use of strengths to join organizations is obvious and other times you have to look a little deeper.

The observablity of strengths also depends on strengths themselves. As Polycarp, an advisor, observed:

> Those that, I think, their strengths facilitate them to do that, will do that and they would probably do that naturally, even without the knowledge of their strengths. And those that won't join, probably have strengths that probably make them less likely to join groups. Not everybody's a joiner.

Sarah, also an advisor, added to this idea, saying "I think they'll probably join as many as they were probably going to; they're just more selective now. They're finding the ones that are a good fit for them and keeping them and eliminating the ones that are not." The students used their strengths in academic situations, in addition to the social situations mentioned above.

Depends on the class. Strengths can also be used in academic situations, including studying, participating in class, and interacting with professors. Some students have noticed their study habits changing, others remaining the same, and others have had to adapt their study habits to accommodate their strengths. Danielle did not think her study habits had changed since taking StrengthsQuest. She was using her strengths while she studied though.

> My planner is like broken down by timeframes . . . I have to have at least an hour to be able to just sit there and get something done. Also, I hate leaving things in the middle of something. If I start it I want it to be done because I want to be able to check it off the list. So, I think I just have to plan blocks of time, which is probably like part of my Focus. Once I'm focused in on something, I don't want to be interrupted until it's been resolved.

Danielle could see her Focus working but her Deliberative strength was also evident (Appendix A). Focus allowed her to determine her goals and reach those as efficiently as possible. Deliberative allowed her to determine risks and accommodate accordingly; a potential risk could have been that if she did not finish a task then something else would come up and take away time from the first task so she deliberately decided to take the time to finish tasks that she had already started.

The study habits of some participants changed after taking StrengthsQuest and understanding their strengths. Before taking StrengthsQuest, Elizabeth read a lot, highlighted a lot, didn't go to office hours, crammed, and didn't really ask for help. Her study habits have changed since then. Now:

> If I have questions, I ask people. I'm not afraid to ask people. If I understand something and I see that someone else isn't, I try to help them as much as I can. I talk about [the material], even outside of class, with my friends.

Elizabeth has spent time figuring out what works for her and what does not. This had a direct influence on the way she began to approach academics. This was also evident in the next example.

Strengths are considered to be benefits but some students still struggle to use them effectively. Individuals must understand their strengths if they are going to use them to their advantage. As Martin, an advisor, put it, "What we teach them is that they should use their strengths to find different ways to achieve their goals." Elizabeth had to do this in a unique way with her Input strength because this strength affected her ability to study and take exams.

> Sometimes I can see where my strengths are a disadvantage because I'm an Input. You'd think that was great for me schoolwise, but academically it's kind of been awful. I'm a collector; I don't necessarily collect all the right things. And so, sometimes my sensor will pick out these things in my homework and when it comes to test time, it's hard because I have inputted some of the material that's not related to what's on the exam. I find that to be kind of detrimental because I do like acquiring information, I just like to acquire information that's interesting to me and that I feel is helpful and that's not always in agreeance with professors. And so, academically it's been kind of a challenge and it even is now.

Although she struggled with her Input, she was "trying to work through it and I've learned different ways to study, I guess, and try to combat that." Learner may have affected Elizabeth's ability to identify the material that will be important to the instructor. As mentioned before, individuals with Input are inquisitive and collect things that are of interest to them (Appendix A). Those with Learner love to learn but they also continually try to improve. As Elizabeth realized, she had difficulty picking out the right material but she has constantly been working on and learning different ways to improve.

Students also use their strengths when they participate or do not participate in class. After being asked if students would participate more in class after knowing their strengths, Polycarp, an advisor, shared:

> It's based on their strengths. I would think those individuals that have those types of strengths that would lend themselves to willingly talk, like Woo or Includer or maybe Positivity or Self Assurance, those individuals may be more willing. Whereas, some may be less likely based on their strengths, maybe Analytical or Intellectual.

The student participants seemed to respond as the advisor expected. Barbara shared, "I don't like talking in front of 200 people in class." Anna elaborated and said, "I far and above, appreciate listening and understanding more than talking. I don't think that's changed because of what my strengths are. I'm not sure how that even fits in with them." We do not know what Barbara's and Anna's strengths are in the six through ten range so it is difficult to determine how their strengths play a role. Deliberative, Analytical, Input, and Intellection are strengths that typically lend themselves to listening rather than speaking (Appendix A). When asked if he participated more in class, Collin said "I don't know that I do actually. I mean, I'll still participate in class. It really depends on the class. And one of my Strengths is Input, so, I like just listening." As mentioned previously, individuals with Input enjoy collecting things that are of interest to them. Collin is likely so busy collecting information that he does not verbally participate, although he is likely still engaged in the class.

Danielle seemed to be using her Deliberative and Strategic strengths when she shared why she did not participate in class:

> I'm from a really small high school and I drove a lot of class discussions and things like that. So when I came to college, I was actually like, I'm

> not going to drive class discussions. I don't want to feel like I'm doing all the work in class settings. So StrengthsQuest kind of didn't have a chance there. I'd already decided that's what I was going to do.

Even though Danielle said StrengthsQuest "didn't have a chance," her explanation sounded very planned and deliberate, demonstrating Deliberative and Strategic strengths (Appendix A). Even though Danielle was not participating in class she was still actively engaged. She continued:

> Since I decided I wasn't participating in class, what I do is I have a little notebook that I write thoughts that I'll have during discussion or what-not, so then I'll interact more with professors because it's not like I wasn't thinking about what was going on, I just wasn't speaking a lot. And then, I'd go into office hours and be like, okay, here's what I want to talk to you about.

Danielle found a way to use her strengths in a way that fulfilled her needs and still provided her with an engaging academic environment. The students have demonstrated how they use their strengths in social and academic situations but they also used their strengths while in the job setting.

New perspective. Several of the students also worked while they were in college. These students were able to use their strengths in these settings as well. Elizabeth was in charge of planning certain aspects of new student orientation. She explained:

> This is where my strengths come out, because, logistics-wise, you have to be organized, you have to be on top of things, you have to plan ahead, and you have to build strong relationships. Although, Relator might not be one of my top strengths, I know the importance of being able to communicate effectively, and I think that with my job, especially, it's all about creating a positive connection between advisors, [student and parents].

Elizabeth was able to utilize her strengths and tap into strengths that were not necessarily in her top five. Other times, the top five strengths were evident.

Barbara saw herself using her strengths while she worked with children at a childcare center. She said, "It's not that routine. Working with babies every day, you just got to adapt and go with the flow and what works best for each child. You've got to adapt to them and they've got to adapt to you." This job seemed to fit Barbara's strengths very well, Adaptability, Responsibility, Empathy, Developer, and Restorative (Appendix A) because she was able to attend to the children's needs while helping them develop.

Collin was a mentor to middle school and high school students through a structured university program. This program focused on strengths as well. He explained, "Their focus on strengths was not only using your strengths, but helping other people identify their strength, which put it in an entirely new perspective but gave me a lot more thought about it actually." Collin had the opportunity to use his top strengths as well as those that were not in his top five.

> Learner, not one of my top five but, that was probably something I definitely used. And actually Analytical would have been very important to me, just trying to figure out what my [mentee's] strengths were, and then trying to figure out a way to help him realize that was a strength without having him take the Strengths test. Because that's what I think the StrengthsQuest just does, actually, is like self-actualization.

As mentioned previously, in some situations, individuals have to draw on strengths that are not within their top five. Collin was able to do that while in this mentoring situation. He found a way to use the strengths he had and also to use other strengths that were not as developed to fulfill his responsibility and make himself better at the same time. Throughout all of these experiences, the participants were able to use and develop their strengths. They also began using the strengths in different ways.

Go Where You're Passionate

Students also used their strengths to help pick, change, and keep their major. Throughout this process the participants have shown an understanding of how their strengths can assist them. Danielle shared, "Every time I've been like, is this the right field for me, is Finance or Economics really the right thing? I've just looked at my Strengths and [realized] this fits who you are." Polycarp, an advisor, explained the ideal use of strengths, as related to choosing a major, "If you just simply say, go where you're passionate, focus on the disciplines that you're passionate about. I think passion is where their strengths are." Two subthemes emerged: "Fit into what I want to do" and "Solidified my choice in major."

Fit into what I want to do. Many students choose a major and find that it does not suit them or their goals. The process of picking or changing their major has resulted in additional growth and understanding of their strengths. As Martin, an advisor, put it, "I think that the impact of knowing their strengths has helped them to determine what kind of major to choose." This statement helps explain why Elizabeth was an education major and changed to Accounting. She realized:

> Education requires much more than I am capable of giving. When I give of myself, it just kind of drains me . . . I like to spend time getting to know a small group of people . . . I just couldn't see myself being able to sustain a classroom for many years to come. I like Business. I like the way those minds think, and a lot of that has to do with the way I take in information and the way that I utilize it and put it into action. So I would say my Strengths definitely came out when I decided to switch over to Accounting.

Elizabeth realized that she could not be a teacher because she could not continually give of herself. Knowing her strengths had a direct influence on her choice of major. As

Martin said, knowing her strengths helped Elizabeth choose a major that was a better fit for her strengths.

Danielle began as a Business Administration major and changed to Finance and then added Economics. She stated:

> I don't think I really use my strengths. I think it was just the whole, this is interesting, I should take more classes in this area. If I'm going to take more classes, I may as well get a major in it so it will count for something. So, I think it was just more of my own interests and not like my strengths are playing a role.

Although Danielle did not see her strengths playing a role, this statement alone showed at least four of her top five strengths: Deliberative, Achiever, Futuristic, and Strategic (Appendix A). Danielle was able to see the benefits that her strengths could provide in her career.

> I think that they do apply to what I'm doing. I'm thinking about going into investments, corporate finance, because that's a long-term, big picture type of thing. So, that's very much Strategy, Deliberation, like, is this product worthwhile. So, I think that my strengths definitely fit into what I want to do. They just help me be able to do it better, I guess.

Danielle mentioned her Strategic and Deliberative but Futuristic was another strength that was demonstrated in this statement, as she would decide which investments would be the best long-term decisions.

Barbara was an Actuarial Science major but changed to Business Administration after struggling in Calculus III. She said, "I just knew I couldn't do it. So, instead of struggling and getting frustrated and stressed and to my breaking point, I just knew I had to change it and do something that I was able to do." Barbara's Adaptability strength was evident in this situation because she was able to change majors without the struggle that

other strengths could have created (Appendix A). Barbara was not sure whether she would continue as a business major though. She shared:

> I've been thinking about that a lot lately. I think since I'm so far through school and I already have this much, might as well finish it out and then, I don't know, maybe I'll go back for a different degree or something. I haven't figured it out.

Barbara also discovered her love for working with children and explained, "Since getting this job, I kind of want to switch, or maybe get an Associates in Early Childhood Education, because I love working with children. So, it really has made me change my mind." Barbara was still deciding whether to keep or change her major by the end of this project. The experiences with strengths helped some students pick or change their major but, for others, it helped them solidify their choice in major.

Solidified my choice in major. The other two students entered college as Business Administration majors and their experiences "solidified [their] choice in major," as Collin put it. Collin entered as a Psychology major with the intent of choosing the major he liked better. However, he chose to keep both and shared that:

> [My strengths] actually kind of solidified my choices in major. The only Strength that really surprised me was Competition because that wasn't something that I thought of as a strength, nor something that I thought much about for myself. I can see it now in my other endeavors. But, at the time, it really surprised me. But, having Competition and Analyzer, it kind of solidified my idea of Business as the cliché in saying that Business is cut-throat. Things like that. And then, the Analyzer part also helped me solidify my choice in Psych major. After StrengthsQuest, I started getting a lot more involved in Psychology Research and so I really found a use for Input and Analyzer, which was key.

This demonstrated how strengths were prevalent even before students were aware of them. Collin was able to find different ways to utilize his strengths in the majors he had

already chosen (Appendix A). Others used their strengths to help keep the major after it was chosen.

Elizabeth previously talked about how her strengths came out when she switched to Accounting but she also talked about how her strengths "indicate and solidify [her] choice as an Accounting major."

> I think it's made me understand why I'm an Accounting major. Discipline, Input and Learner are all very crucial to being an Accountant, because you have to learn policies, procedures . . . Without discipline and the ability to take it all in about what's going on in the entire business environment, you would fail very quickly as an Auditor. And also, Accountants normally do taxes. You've got to be inputting all the changes that are happening within a year's time.

Like Collin, Elizabeth was able to find ways to utilize and practice her strengths (Appendix A). The use of strengths also extends beyond the major into one's career.

Periscope is Longer

Strengths can be used in all aspects of life. Participants were able to explore how strengths were beneficial when entering into a career. Sarah briefly explained, from an advisor's viewpoint, how students' perspectives on jobs have changed throughout their college experience.

> I think, when they're freshmen, they have a very short eyeglass. They don't see beyond the first job. I think our juniors and seniors are getting the point when they're using they're strengths. I think their periscope is longer, they see more of the future than they might have before.

Sarah indicated that students were learning about their opportunities throughout their college experience. The students began to realize that the skills they were learning would serve them beyond their first job and into future jobs. This realization was evident in the

students' responses. These participants talked about how strengths were beneficial in networking and beginning a career.

The participants have shown how strengths can be useful as they begin to search for jobs. Collin shared how knowing his strengths was useful as a networking tool.

> I think this is will be good talking points actually. I was at a business mixer [and] I just struck up a random conversation because I was bored but one of the employers I was talking to actually referenced the StrengthsQuest and I was like, oh, what are your strengths and it just kind of went from there.

Previously, Danielle explained that one reason she joined a sorority was to network when it came time to look for a job. She is now taking advantage of that membership benefit. "I'm looking for jobs and reaching out to all my [sorority] ladies and trying to find a job." Understanding that strengths can help network and find jobs was a valuable realization.

The "periscope" also helped the students think about the kind of employee they want to be. Most of the students understood that strengths could be used beyond their college experience and into their careers. Anna shared:

> I think, more than affecting my course of study, what's it's done is helped me understand how I can best be utilized in the future and how I can position myself in order to be the most effective employee that I can possibly be someday.

Most of the participants were able to envision how their strengths could be utilized in the future.

Danielle could also see how her strengths could benefit her in her career. She was interested in investment banking and corporate finance. "Hopefully, they will help me be better at doing what I do than other people who don't have those strengths. Someone who's maybe quicker at making decisions but not as long-term focus." Elizabeth also

envisioned how her strengths could benefit her in her career. "I think that my loyalty, paired with my Discipline will prove to be a consistent employee." She went on, "I think that my strengths will contribute a lot to trying to find a job that's people-related, but more financially and numerically sound in the future." Danielle and Elizabeth each envisioned using their strengths in ways that relate to their goals and majors.

Collin spoke more generally about the benefits of knowing not only his strengths but of others in the organization as well.

> I think it also goes back to the character and it says a lot about the person. Whether that's you or your employer or your employees, you can tell a lot about people, how they learn, how they operate, how they're going to lead. So, by telling an employer that one of my strengths is Achiever, they're going to know that I'm a very motivated individual. If I know that one of my employers has Woo as one of their Strengths, I know that they have a very charismatic attitude.

This kind of understanding could benefit all of the participants as they enter the job market. Finding a good fit not only included matching their strengths to the job but also making sure they could work with others and others' strengths.

Barbara was the youngest student participant. She had junior standing but was only in her second year of college. She incorporated her strengths into her responses less than the other students. For example, when asked about how her strengths would help her in her career she said:

> I think they've already helped me through college and I've grown-up. I think that it will happen again once I graduate college. I'll grow up more, become stronger in all of them because I'm in the real world and have a job. I think it will happen. I think they will all help me grow up more.

This discussion may relate to her strengths or to a less developed understanding of strengths. Time will tell whether the depth of the responses will change. The students

shared their experiences as they related to strengths; however, the advisors also had additional insight about the goals of StrengthsQuest and other ways to utilize strengths-based education.

Advisor Additions

The advisor participants had a perspective unique to that of the student participants. The advisors had additional insight that the students did not have about the goals of StrengthsQuest and additional ways students could learn about strengths. Two subthemes emerged: "Goals for StrengthsQuest" and "Opportunities to learn about strengths."

Goals for StrengthsQuest. Each of the advisor participants shared their thoughts on the goals of StrengthsQuest. The goals were similar yet different enough to share each of their ideas. According to Polycarp, the goals of introducing the strengths were "to identify the strengths, to affirm the strengths, to envision how [students] can use their strengths, plan on how to use them and how to apply their talents and strengths in the future." Polycarp went on to discuss that the freshmen leadership course only assisted with identifying and possibly affirming strengths.

Martin and Sarah's views were more similar. Martin had three goals for StrengthsQuest: "Better knowledge of themselves. Better abilities in choices, as far as life career major goals. Better ability to interact with others." He added, "And confidence would be in there as well. I don't know if I would set that as a goal, but it would be one of the things that I would expect for it to come out." Sarah agreed and stated that the "goals are to start using those strengths." She added that students should be able to

explore "How can I be a better group member? How can I help our group to excel by tapping into someone else's strengths?" These goals were achieved, or at least attempted, through class activities and assignments.

Opportunities to learn about strengths. The advisors also shared different opportunities that could be utilized to assist students in greater understanding of their strengths. The major issues addressed were the need for additional courses or integration of strengths into existing courses.

Another important consideration is that if strengths were only introduced and not explored it could be a disadvantage to the students. As Martin said, "One of the things that they talked about was the fact that just knowing your strengths can actually be a detriment, that if you don't actually exercise them, then that can create a problem." Students needed some training about their strengths in order to understand them and begin making conscious efforts to use their strengths.

All of the advisors agreed that there should be additional courses and/or the opportunity to integrate strengths into existing courses. Polycarp stated, "there's still an ongoing discussion of having it a [sophomore, junior, and senior class,] carrying the strengths through four years where we can get to that point, to truly develop their strengths." Sarah explored the idea of creating a certificate program. She envisioned a program where "they incorporate strengths with speakers and events, and, if you do this, a strengths seminar your sophomore year, your junior year, your senior year, you'll get a certificate of completion and have specific requirements related to it."

Martin also thought about the benefits of incorporating strengths into student organizations. He gave one option as, "Selling it to the various students groups and clubs and so forth to have them use strengths as part of their process, so that people can continue to see the strengths and continue to build their strengths." Encouraging student organizations to utilize strengths could provide additional learning opportunities for the students. Students needed to understand that their strengths can be used in any situation, whether it is school-based, social, or something else.

All of the advisors agreed that there was a need to have a larger buy in throughout the college and the university. As Sarah said, "We need to have more people buying into [strengths] and understand the value of it. If you don't understand the value of it, then you're not going to incorporate it into what you're doing." And Martin added, "Unless we can either sell them on the idea, or find a way to require the idea, there are going to be a limited number of faculty members that are going to carry that on through." The advisors agreed that more people across the college and university needed to "buy into" the strengths concept. They indicated that the more people who accepted and endorsed StrengthsQuest, then more opportunities would be provided to students to use and develop their strengths.

Conclusion

Each of the participants had unique experiences with StrengthsQuest. They demonstrated countless opportunities to use and incorporate strengths into their daily activities. Knowing and exploring their strengths gave the participants a greater understanding of themselves. The participants additionally used their strengths in their

relationships, their schoolwork and to shape their major and career. The advisors also explored the goals of teaching StrengthsQuest and additional opportunities to learn about strengths. The next chapter will present the discussion of the findings of the study.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative, interview-based study was to discover the influence that the StrengthsQuest assessment had on the business college students' experiences during college. This study explored various areas of students' life that could be influenced by the knowledge gained by completing the StrengthsQuest assessment.

All of the student participants had completed the StrengthsQuest assessment either in the freshmen leadership course or in another setting while in college. Since taking the assessment, the students each had different experiences and opportunities to use their strengths. This chapter will review the findings of the study as well as discuss the implications and potential for future research.

I used the following research questions to provide insight as to how college students and academic advisors perceived the StrengthsQuest as influencing their experiences in college:

1. What do students think about their strengths as identified by the StrengthsQuest assessment?
2. How do students describe the role of knowing their strengths in college?
3. How do advisors intend for the students to benefit from knowing their strengths?
4. What do advisors do to educate students about their strengths?
5. How are students and advisors perceptions of strengths similar or not similar?

Discussion of Findings

Previous Gallup research has shown that strengths-based interventions have contributed to statistically significant increases in student retention and academic performance, as well as increases in students' academic engagement and self-efficacy, self-confidence, optimism, direction, hope, altruism, and sense of meaning and purpose (Cantwell, 2005; Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner, 2004, 2006, p. 3). This study corroborated this earlier evidence, suggesting that students experienced an increase in self-confidence and sense of meaning and purpose after taking the StrengthsQuest assessment.

The more exposure and experience the students had with StrengthsQuest and their strengths, the more they appeared confident and comfortable with themselves. The students who had additional experiences, either with new student orientation or the mentor opportunity, provided more thorough explanations and displayed a deeper understanding of how their strengths affected their actions and reactions.

The evidence also indicated that students used the knowledge of their strengths in many ways. Students used their strengths to learn more about themselves, increase their confidence, and formalize their decision making process. Students also understood how to interact with others better including group situations and personal relationships. They also used their strengths to help choose their majors as well as consider future career plans.

I began with the idea that I was going to interview a wide range of individuals, although I did not define that range. My sample resulted in a group of participants who

had different experiences with StrengthsQuest but I had not expected to work with so many students who had additional experiences with strengths-based education, for example, one took the freshmen leadership course where the StrengthsQuest was on the syllabus and received additional education while in the mentoring program; another took the freshmen leadership course, was a new student orientation leader where she received StrengthsQuest training, and worked as a new student orientation leader a second year; and another took an alternate leadership course instead of the freshmen leadership course and was a new student orientation leader where she received StrengthsQuest training. These experiences provided the participants significant training on the StrengthsQuest and their own strengths, opportunities for different life experiences and different opportunities to use their strengths.

The students with more training or experience with the StrengthsQuest were able to explain their actions and reactions in relation to their strengths. Some of the students were involved in a lot of organizations and some were involved in only a few but they were all involved in the groups because they supported the goals of the organization or the organization could help them reach their personal goals. They all demonstrated the use of their strengths in choosing organizations as well as their involvement in the organization.

The more exposure and experience the students had with StrengthsQuest and their strengths, the more they appeared to use their strengths. The students all gave example of using their strengths. However, the students with additional strengths experience gave multiple examples and weaved in their strengths usage when responding to a variety of

questions. These students could explain their actions by talking about their strengths. For example, Danielle explained how the members of the newly formed group she was involved with had similar strengths and that had caused conflict. Elizabeth and Anna both shared how their strengths affected their relationships when their friends were late. Collin explained how his Competition strength could negatively impact his relationships and how, because he knew this, he could adjust his behavior.

Even students who seemed not to actively use their strengths, still referenced their strengths in their descriptions of themselves. During Barbara's interview, I sensed that she did not think she was using her strengths very much, however, I could hear her strengths being described in her responses. Also, she did not expand or develop her answers as much as the other participants. Was this really a lack of using strengths? Was this a lack of understanding her strengths? Or could this have been from a lack of development? Given previous research, this could be rectified by additional campus involvement (Williams & Winston, 1985); or she could have been in different epistemological stages of knowing (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Thus, it is possible that students who were in the transitional knowing phase were more uncertain of themselves as they realized that authorities do not have all of the answers. Other students may have been in the independent knowing phase where they realize that most knowledge is uncertain and they have become accustomed to thinking through choices and making decisions based on that knowledge.

Another Gallup study had found that students made better choices after learning about their strengths (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). The advisor participants seemed to also

believe this would result after the students learned about their strengths. Collin had joined organizations because of the people that were involved which could be interpreted as making a better choice. Given the information gathered in this study, that finding may or may not be true. However, the student participants demonstrated a more formalized or intentional decision making process. Collin, Elizabeth, and Danielle all explained their decision making process and how it related to their strengths.

Also of interest, several students mentioned that they wished they had other strengths. This type of strength envy could indicate that the students were not completely comfortable with their own strengths and were trying to compensate by thinking about others. However, the students were still learning and developing their strengths. Also, if a strength is of enough interest to a student, they can adopt it as their fifth strength. Otherwise, they may realize, although the strength sounds good, it is not a good fit for them.

This data gave strong support that knowledge of strengths was useful to students. They reflected on their strengths afterwards, as indicated by their ability to explain thoughts and actions using strengths language. As indicated above, the students were able to use their strengths.

This study contributed to the existing research in several ways. I was able to add more work on the way StrengthsQuest is used by students. Knowing and using their strengths, may help students increase their confidence, the quality of their relationships, and goals. StrengthsQuest is being used by some in higher education but now there is

more evidence that strengths-based education helps students develop and make meaning throughout their college experience.

Implications and Future Research

Given the information provided by the advisors and also supplemented by the students, more opportunities to learn about and incorporate strengths should be provided to the students. The benefits of knowing, understanding, and using strengths are advantageous, as evidenced by previous studies (Hodges, 2003; Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Rath, 2002; Williamson, 2002). Many opportunities to incorporate strengths-based education are attainable but, as the advisors indicated, more "buy in" is needed from the faculty and the campus in general.

According to these findings, students who had more exposure and training to use their strengths had a better understanding of themselves and others. Academic advisors and faculty should continue to consider additional strengths-based educational opportunities as well as continue addressing how to make the freshmen leadership course more effective. All involved must also be mindful that all strengths are considered valuable and no one strength is better than another. Continuing and improving the strengths education is important, given the information gained in this study, as well as previous research, because this type of education may help students understand themselves better, improve their relationships, help them make better or more informed decisions. This can lead to enriched experiences while in college and beyond.

Faculty should take steps to learn more about StrengthsQuest and incorporate opportunities to use strengths into their courses. For example, group work could be

assigned by strengths. Each group could have an organizer, a creative type, an analyzer, etc. Students could complete the project by contributing based on their strengths, rather than each member completing a portion of each task.

Student groups could also incorporate strengths into their activities. The leadership of the group or the advisor would need to be more experienced or knowledgeable about strengths in order to provide support to the younger or less knowledgeable members. Many student groups plan and host events. The use of strengths could be advantageous in this situation, as it was in course group work, individual members could complete tasks that complement their strengths. Students could grow in their understanding of their strengths and receive other benefits explored in this study.

Student affairs practitioners can also benefit from strengths knowledge in the same ways mentioned above for faculty and student groups. Many in student affairs facilitate group work and event planning. The knowledge and use of strengths could be applied to student workers as well as staff.

Many of the students also discussed their strengths in relation to their social relationships and other non-school related topics. Students talked about their strengths in relation to their courses and academic matters when probed. This could imply that the students may not have made the connection between their strengths and their academics. Future strengths-based courses could include a greater focus on the application of strengths in school-related matters.

This study addressed how StrengthsQuest influenced business students but StrengthsQuest could be valuable to other disciplines in similar or different ways as well. Additional research could explore how other majors or disciplines utilize or are influenced by strengths. Some disciplines may find some strengths more advantageous than others. Additional research could focus on whether there are comparisons with the use of strengths and race or gender.

More qualitative, peer-reviewed research on StrengthsQuest is needed to verify and expand upon these findings. Most of the prior research was conducted using quantitative methods. Qualitative research will provide additional opportunities to gain a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Creswell, 2007, p. 51). More research will provide a greater understanding of the opportunities provided by knowing one's strengths as well as support the buy in needed by faculty and university staff.

More research is also needed to further clarify the link between StrengthsQuest and student development theory. Past and current research considers each independently but there may be a link between strengths-based education and the development of college students. Possible starting points could include a study to examine the level of strengths understanding and the relationship to Chickering and Reisser's vectors. Specifically, are those students who have an understanding of their strengths advancing through Chickering and Reisser's vectors at a faster rate than their peers? StrengthsQuest could also be linked to Baxter Magolda's cognitive development. Certain strengths may facilitate moving through the phases at a different pace than others. Or, does the level of understanding of strengths affect the rate a person moves through the phases? Similar to

the ideas presented above, within typology theories, possession of certain strengths or combinations of strengths may result in certain MBTI or Holland's categories.

Currently, most of the research on StrengthsQuest has been conducted by Gallup. More peer reviewed research of StrengthsQuest is needed for StrengthsQuest to be more acknowledged amongst student affairs practitioners and within the discipline of higher education more generally. Additionally, there is little, if any, research that compares students' confidence and knowledge about self between students who have taken StrengthsQuest and those who have not. Some research includes pre- and post-assessments (Schreiner, 2006) but that does not clarify whether students would have still gained those skills and understandings as much without having had taken StrengthsQuest.

Conclusion

The existing literature supports the benefits attained by those who participate in StrengthsQuest and engage in strengths-based development. This study explored how knowing one's strengths influenced business college students' experiences during college. Student and advisor participants explored the influence of strengths on self awareness, confidence, relationships, academic matters, as well as future plans. Advisor participants also discussed the need for additional courses or integration of strengths-based education in existing courses. This study demonstrated that students were using the knowledge of their strengths during college and that this may have increased their confidence, the quality of their relationships, and goals.

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Appendix A

DESCRIPTION OF STRENGTHS

StrengthsQuest™
The Gallup Organization

REFERENCE CARD

Achiever	People strong in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.
Activator	People strong in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.
Adaptability	People strong in the Adaptability theme prefer to "go with the flow." They tend to be "now" people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.
Analytical	People strong in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.
Arranger	People strong in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to figure out how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.
Belief	People strong in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their life.
Command	People strong in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.
Communication	People strong in the Communication theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.
Competition	People strong in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.
Connectedness	People strong in the Connectedness theme have faith in the links between all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has a reason.
Consistency	People strong in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone in the world with consistency by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.
Context	People strong in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.
Deliberative	People strong in the Deliberative theme are best described by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate the obstacles.
Developer	People strong in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from these improvements.
Discipline	People strong in the Discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.
Empathy	People strong in the Empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives or others' situations.
Focus	People strong in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make

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Futuristic	People strong in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their visions of the future.
Harmony	People strong in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.
Ideation	People strong in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.
Includer	People strong in the Includer theme are accepting of others. They show awareness of those who feel left out, and make effort to include them.
Individualization	People strong in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.
Input	People strong in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.
Intellection	People strong in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.
Learner	People strong in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.
Maximizer	People strong in the Maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. They seek to transform something strong into something superb.
Positivity	People strong in the Positivity theme have an enthusiasm that is contagious. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.
Relator	People who are strong in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.
Responsibility	People strong in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.
Restorative	People strong in the Restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.
Self-Assurance	People strong in the Self-assurance theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.
Significance	People strong in the Significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized.
Strategic	People strong in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.
Woo	People strong in the Woo theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with another person.

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Appendix B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

November 13, 2009

Jennifer Mostek
Department of Educational Administration
2541 SW 18th St Lincoln, NE 68522

Rachelle Winkle Wagner
Department of Educational Administration
117 TEAC UNL 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20091110337 EX
Project ID: 10337
Project Title: An Analysis on the Value of StrengthsQuest on Business College Students at a Midwestern Research Extensive University

Dear Jennifer:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 11/13/2009. This approval is Valid Until: 11/09/2010.

1. The approved informed consent forms have been uploaded to NUgrant (files with -Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use these forms to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent forms, please submit the revised forms to the IRB for review and approval prior to using them.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
• Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
• Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
• Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
• Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
• Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the

participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Mario Scalora, Ph.D.
Chair for the IRB

Appendix C

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Informed Consent

Identification of Project:
An analysis on the value of StrengthsQuest on business college students at a Midwestern research extensive university.

Purpose of Research:
The purpose of this study is to discover the value of strengths on College of Business Administration students throughout their college experience. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you have taken StrengthsQuest and are a junior or senior in the College of Business.

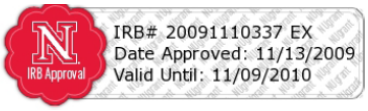
Procedures:
If you choose to become involved, you will be asked to be involved in an audio taped interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. You will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire to learn more about your background.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study.

Benefits:
This is an opportunity for participants to reflect on their personal experiences with StrengthsQuest and the effect it has played in their life. The resulting information may provide information that will lead to better supporting students in the College of Business Administration.

Confidentiality:
All personal information will be kept confidential. Any materials with your name or personal information or audio-taped data will be stored in a lock file cabinet in the researcher's home. You will be asked to identify a pseudonym that will be utilized in the reporting of the study including any publications or presentations. Identifying information for participants will not be available in any reporting of the data as the report will be from aggregated data.

Opportunity to ask questions:
You have the right to ask any questions pertaining to this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or continuing participation in the study. You may call the researcher at 402-499-2449 or e-mail jmostek2@unl.edu with questions. You may also contact Dr. Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, the secondary investigator, at 402-472-2380 or rwinkle-wagner2@unl.edu with questions.



Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 if you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant, to voice concerns or complaints about the research, to provide input concerning the research process, or in the event the study staff could not be reached.

Freedom to withdraw:
You have the right to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time during the study without affecting your relationship with the researcher, your relationships in relation to any department on campus, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Consent to receive a copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision to participate or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. You will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

____ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Name and Contact Information of the Researcher:
Jennifer Mostek, J.D., Principle Researcher
Email: jmostek2@unl.edu
Phone: 402-499-2449

Contact Information of the Institutional Review Board:
Research Compliance Services
Alexander Building West
312 N. 14th St.
Lincoln, NE 68588-0408
Phone: 402-472-6965

Appendix D

ADVISOR INFORMED CONSENT

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Informed Consent

Identification of Project:
An analysis on the value of StrengthsQuest on business college students at a Midwestern research extensive university.

Purpose of Research:
The purpose of this study is to discover the value of strengths on College of Business Administration students throughout their college experience. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a professional academic advisor in the College of Business Administration.

Procedures:
If you choose to become involved, you will be asked to be involved in an audio taped interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. You will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire to learn more about your background.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study.

Benefits:
This is an opportunity for participants to reflect on their personal experiences with StrengthsQuest and the effect it has played in their life and the lives of their students. The resulting information may provide information that will lead to better supporting students in the College of Business Administration.

Confidentiality:
All personal information will be kept confidential. Any materials with your name or personal information or audio-taped data will be stored in a lock file cabinet in the researcher's home. You will be asked to identify a pseudonym that will be utilized in the reporting of the study including any publications or presentations. Identifying information for participants will not be available in any reporting of the data as the report will be from aggregated data.

Opportunity to ask questions:
You have the right to ask any questions pertaining to this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or continuing participation in the study. You may call the researcher at 402-499-2449 or e-mail jmostek2@unl.edu with questions. You may also contact Dr. Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, the secondary investigator, at 402-472-2380 or rwinkle-wagner2@unl.edu with questions.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 if you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant, to voice concerns or complaints about the research, to provide input concerning the research process, or in the event the study staff could not be reached.

Freedom to withdraw:
You have the right to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time during the study without affecting your relationship with the researcher, your relationships in relation to any department on campus, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Consent to receive a copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision to participate or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. You will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

____ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Name and Contact Information of the Researcher:
Jennifer Mostek, J.D., Principle Researcher
Email: jmostek2@unl.edu
Phone: 402-499-2449

Contact Information of the Institutional Review Board:
Research Compliance Services
Alexander Building West
312 N. 14th St.
Lincoln, NE 68588-0408
Phone: 402-472-6965

Appendix E

TRANSCRIPT CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Confidentiality Agreement

This agreement made on this _____ day of _____ 2009, between Jennifer Mostek, primary researcher, and _____, transcriptionist.

The transcriptionist agrees to keep any and all communication (oral and written) pertaining to the research study conducted by Jennifer Mostek strictly confidential. This includes, but is not limited to any and all conversations, audio tapes, or e-mail correspondence pertaining to the transcription, and/or transcription copies (electronic and paper.)

The transcriptionist agrees not to duplicate any materials provided by the researcher or presented to the researcher without the consent of the primary researcher. This includes, but is not limited to, audio tapes and transcriptions. The completed transcriptions will be electronically sent to the primary researcher after completion and also saved on a flash drive. Any e-mail or electronic correspondence or files containing transcribed information will be destroyed after receiving confirmation of receipt from the primary researcher.

The transcriptionist will return any audio tapes, or copies there of, to the primary researcher along with any electronic copies or paper copies of the transcriptions within a reasonable amount of time as by the transcriptionist and the researcher.

By signing this confidentiality agreement you agree to the terms discussed above limiting you, as the transcriber, from sharing any information obtained during transcription or through the use of the audio tapes to anyone except the primary researcher.

_____
Signature

_____
Print Name

_____
Date

Appendix F

EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Recruiting Message/Email

Greetings,

You are invited to be involved in a study about the value of StrengthsQuest on business college students throughout their college experience. My hope with this project is to identify how students use their strengths upon completion of the freshmen leadership course. I also hope to identify how professional academic advisors value StrengthsQuest and how they believe students should benefit from it. The findings of this study will be used to determine the value and usefulness of knowing one's strengths.

Your participation in the study would include involvement in an interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The time and location of this meeting can be determined by you. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact me at the following e-mail address: jmostek2@unl.edu or on the telephone at: 402-499-2449.

Thank you. I look forward to meeting with you and to talking more.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Mostek

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Jennifer Mostek, J.D.
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Phone: 402-499-2449
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Appendix G

PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC ADVISOR DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Professional Academic Advisor Demographic Information

Participant name: _____ Date: _____

Pseudonym of choice: _____ Age: _____

Title: _____ Years at institution: _____

Degree(s) held: _____

_____

_____

Ethnicity (check all that apply):

☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Hispanic or Latino
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Other _____

Sexual orientation (check box):

☐ Straight ☐ Lesbian ☐ Other _____
☐ Gay ☐ Bisexual

StrengthsQuest results:

1) _____ 4) _____

2) _____ 5) _____

3) _____

Years of experience with StrengthsQuest: _____

StengthsQuest training received (i.e. giving assessment, taking assessment, teaching assessment):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Circumstances you use or reference StrengthsQuest: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix H

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Student Demographic Information

Participant name: _____ Date: _____

Pseudonym of choice: _____ Age: _____

Current Major: _____ GPA: _____

Year in school: _____ Semesters at UNL: _____

Ethnicity (check all that apply):

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other _____

Sexual orientation (check box):

- ☐ Straight
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Bisexual

Do you consider yourself a first-generation college student? Explain: _____

_____

StrengthsQuest results:

1) _____ 4) _____

2) _____ 5) _____

3) _____

Other campus/community involvement (also list offices held): _____

_____

_____

_____

Awards/honors/scholarships: _____

_____

Employment while in college (include hours worked per week): _____

_____

Hobbies/interests: _____

Describe yourself in a paragraph: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix I

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Interview Protocol

1) What are your top five strengths?
    a. Are there other strengths you regularly consider important?
2) How have you thought about your strengths since you completed BSAD 101?
3) How has knowing your strengths affected you?
4) Has your decision making process been affected since taking the StrengthsQuest assessment?
    a. Have you changed the way you think through choices?
    b. What types of factors to you consider when making decisions? (i.e. school: homework, classes, major; personal: free time, relationships)
5) How has the way you choose your friends been affected?
    a. Do you look for different qualities than you did your freshman year prior to taking StrengthsQuest? If so, what are those qualities?
6) How do your strengths affect your friendships?
    a. Do some strengths come out more than others in your friendships?
7) How has your confidence been affected since taking StrengthsQuest?
    a. Do you participate more in class?
    b. Do you interact with your professors or other faculty more?
    c. Have you joined clubs or other groups?
    d. Have you taken on leadership roles in clubs or other groups?
8) How have your study habits changed or continued since taking StrengthsQuest?
    a. How did you prepare for class before taking StrengthsQuest?
    b. How do you prepare now?
9) How have your strengths affected your major?
    a. What is your major?
    b. How do you think about your strengths?
    c. Have you changed your major since taking StrengthsQuest?

If yes:

    a. What was your major and what is it now?
    b. How did you decide to change your major?
    c. How have you considered your strengths when making the decision to leave your previous major or enter your current major?
    d. How do your strengths help you in this major?

If no: How do your strengths help you in this major?

10) How do you think your strengths will help you in your career?
    a. What do you want to do after graduating?
    b. Is your major preparing you for this career?
11) Is there anything else you would like to share about your strengths or strengths in general?

Appendix J

ADVISOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Professional Academic Advisor Interview Protocol

1) What are your top five strengths?
    a. Are there other strengths you regularly consider important?
2) What is the value of StrengthsQuest?
3) What is the purpose of providing the StrengthsQuest assessment?
4) What are the goals?
    a. Are we achieving those goals?
5) How are students using their strengths?
6) How do you think knowing their strengths has affected the students?
7) How do you think knowing their strengths has affected students' decision making process?
    a. Would knowing their strengths affect how they make choices?
    b. Would knowing their strengths affect how they choose friends?
    c. Would knowing their strengths affect how interact with friends?
8) How do you think knowing their strengths has affected students' confidence?
    a. Do they participate more in class?
    b. How do they participate in class?
    c. Do they interact with your professors or other faculty more?
    d. How do they interact with professors or other faculty?
    e. Do they join more clubs or other groups?
    f. Do they take on leadership roles in clubs or other groups?
    g. What kind of leadership roles to they undertake?
9) How do you think knowing their strengths has affected students' study habits?
    a. Do they prepare any differently?
10) How do you think knowing their strengths has affected students' major?
    a. Do they change their major? Often?
    b. Do you think they consider their strengths when deciding whether to change majors?
11) How do you think knowing their strengths has affected students' career aspirations?
    a. How do students' majors prepare them for their careers?
    b. How do students' strengths prepare them for their careers?
12) Are we doing enough with StrengthsQuest?
    a. Should there be a follow-up course?
    b. Should strengths be integrated into other courses?
13) Is there anything else you would like to share about strengths?

Appendix K

LIST OF CODES

THEME - Know self → It's Me in a Nutshell

- Confidence → Wear a sign
  - More confident
  - Tell I'm suffering
  - Scariest things
  - Improved confidence
  - More comfortable self
  - Give confidence
  - Help you focus
  - Feel less confident
  - Didn't show up
  - Make it yours
  - Chose reflect you
  - Was most calm
  - Situational piece
  - Become you

- Decision making process → That's kind of my hierarchy
  - Not conscious effort
  - Know yourself
  - See other side
  - First-come basis
  - Importance
  - How long task
  - More aware
  - List everything out
  - Didn't know why
  - What can I bring
  - Prioritize things
  - Strengths reinforce choices
  - Helped students
  - Clearly define problem
  - Develop criteria
  - Strengths perfect criteria
  - Screening criteria
  - Assist students
  - Good for choices
  - Subconsciously it's there

- Learning about self → Take ownership of those qualities
  - Drawn to many
  - Jealous don't have
  - Really like top
  - Me in nutshell
  - Not me
  - Limitations of strengths
  - Other perspectives
  - Knowing self better
  - Obligated to best
  - Want prepared
  - Want focus
  - Point of pride
  - Strength is there
  - Understand how works
  - People not understanding
  - Aware of them
  - See them more
  - Should be doing
  - Raise my confidence
  - Fine don't succeed
  - Helped me
  - Helped open eyes
  - Reinforced idea
  - Components of character
  - Drive that
  - Good thing achiever
  - Take ownership
  - Fix more situations
  - Excited and disappointed
  - Definitely exhibit these
  - Didn't know how
  - Don't realize until
  - Already using them
  - Fits who you are
  - Learned about strengths
  - Put a title
  - Collect things
  - See it everyday
  - No surprise
  - Know good at

- Learning about self → Take ownership of those qualities (cont'd)
  - Boost self-confidence
  - Whole experience
  - Bare minimum
  - Completely opposite
  - Pad resume
  - Huge shift
  - Hit me hard
  - Building great experiences
  - Really inspiring
  - Not looking for
  - Term to conduct
  - Self positive light
  - Natural within you
  - Everybody has strengths
  - Focus on good
  - Benefit of knowing
  - Naturally good at
  - Strengths flow major
  - Not necessarily flow
  - Focus on strengths
  - Better interactions
  - Understand different people
  - Identify lower strength
  - Turn it off
  - Trust the team
  - Do things better
  - Missing long term
  - Who they are
  - Understand people better
  - Where get information
  - First step (strengths)
  - Help myself
  - Help student
  - Establish five strengths
  - Understand or learn
  - Develop five strengths
  - Opportunity to reflect
  - First wishy-washy
  - Just another MBTI
  - On board
  - Envision use
  - Incorporate use
  - Passionate about
  - Affect self-awareness
  - Exercises develop strengths
  - Most agree
  - Use in academics
  - Most suited
  - Strengths drive choice
  - Strengths naturally guide
  - Self-awareness biggest piece
  - Understand why reacting
  - Assessing things
  - Decisions not made
  - Bunch of hogwash
  - Don't see value
  - Really is me
  - Confidence goes up
  - Know how to approach
  - Under control
  - More you know
  - Don't have confidence Identify do naturally
  - Strengths to excel
  - Bring out best
  - Do naturally
  - Mind at ease
  - Do all time
  - Back on track
  - Knowing not strong
  - Inhibits you
  - Nothing about weaknesses
  - Work around it

THEME - Relationships → Understand Other People

- Teamwork / Leadership → Create a good team
  - Common themes
  - Hard core
  - Sharing with group
  - Didn't explain personality
  - Strengths very known
  - Small group role
  - Objective too
  - Taken on responsibility
  - Very involved freshman
  - Leadership capacity
  - Tempered by people
  - Can't do everything
  - Paired with others
  - Create effective group
  - Different pairs helpful
  - Identifying what works
  - Using the best
  - Don't actively think
  - Extremely useful
  - Not in top
  - Took teamwork
  - Tweaking ideas
  - More critical
  - Had to settle
  - Aware how to lead
  - Leadership styles
  - Leaders know strengths
  - Strengths take precedent
  - Figure out problems
  - Not decisive leader
  - Makes you wonder
  - Grand idea
  - Wanted it better
  - Worked together
  - Thoughts were different
  - What is purpose
  - Reach end goal
  - Didn't fit into
  - Group projects
  - What I'm good at
  - Focus on those
  - Work with people
  - Know yourself
  - Not afraid anymore
  - Accomplish a task
  - Not willing
  - Not doing all work
  - Kind of manipulate
  - Leadership position
  - Strengths come out
  - Creating positive connection
  - Work with peers
  - Reflective of me
  - Now feels natural
  - Team different strengths
  - Use strengths better
  - Starting to identify
  - Bring out strengths
  - Strengths help lead
  - Use strengths

- Personal /friends → How Best to Communicate
  - Communicate with friends
  - Seek different friends
  - Not everybody same
  - Who I need
  - Later in relationship
  - Best to appreciate
  - Where coming from
  - Work effectively
  - I'm not perfect
  - Achiever mentality
  - Get somewhere quickly
  - Stress being late
  - Harmony in family
  - Identify in others
  - More positive people
  - Social person
  - More so now
  - Key be aware
  - Leave to friends
  - Analyze every situation
  - Don't like outdone
  - Try to fix
  - Affected relationship
  - Easier to articulate
  - Strong friend
  - Big thing
  - Affects my interactions
  - Works really well
  - Where he falls
  - Forming a relationship
  - Not like me
  - Complete opposites
  - Getting to know
  - Diversify my strengths
  - Friends through others
  - Not allowed to attach
  - Strengths show
  - Joke about them
  - Not hide
  - Prevents conflict
  - Collector of facts
  - Like sharing
  - Talking about faith
  - Difficulty understanding
  - Knowing helps confirm
  - Knowing half change
  - Understand other people
  - Concept of diversity
  - Endure people's variations
  - Put up with
  - Larger group friends
  - Group similar strengths
  - Strengths doesn't matter
  - Don't want to be identified
  - Not who I am
  - Incorporate all
  - Impact on interaction
  - Understand acts
  - Enhance relationship
  - Pick people enjoy
  - Way you interact
  - Similar to me

- Influence of others → Constantly chatting (cut)
  - Influential on college
  - Hated every second
  - Scared to go alone
  - Find a community
  - Should apply
  - Make people feel special

THEME - Using strengths → It's a Choice

- Social → Doing it for a Reason
  - Relate to people
  - Go with flow
  - Made better friends
  - Most same friends
  - Responsible for actions
  - There to listen
  - Feel for them
  - Go with flow
  - Influencing though processes
  - Don't think strengths
  - Example setting
  - Not focus negative
  - Strengths compensate
  - Something positive
  - Something influential
  - Leaders in organizations
  - Identify clubs
  - How they participate
  - Duplication of interventions
  - Based on strengths
  - Strengths facilitate that
  - Not everybody
  - More willing lead
  - Developing strengths
  - Tapping into organizations
  - More selective now
  - Good fit
  - Eliminating ones
  - Strengths benefit organization

- Academics → Depends on the Class
  - Appreciate listening
  - Hard time speaking
  - Phenomenal at engaging
  - Just reaffirming
  - Don't have time
  - Went extra mile
  - Life started happening
  - Move forward
  - Don't identify school
  - Professor's strengths
  - Mutual understanding
  - Don't like talking
  - Feel more comfortable
  - Take more time
  - Didn't prepare
  - More prepared
  - More responsible
  - Like just listening
  - No interact
  - Don't try as hard
  - Come naturally
  - Bare minimum
  - Think ahead more
  - Learning different methods
  - Standing out
  - Distinguish self
  - Like hands-on experience
  - Important business major
  - Everyday uses
  - Not doing all work
  - Interact with professors
  - No questions not listening
  - Wasn't studying before
  - Sometimes a disadvantage
  - Inputted material not related
  - Work through it
  - Take initiative
  - Engaged in class
  - Pick interesting things
  - Study different ways
  - Want order perfect
  - Crammed a lot
  - Ask questions
  - Help them
  - Talking helps
  - Utilize theories

- Academics → Depends on the Class (cont'd)
  - Keep order
  - Lot going on
  - My brain's superhighway
  - Strengths & assignments
  - Understanding role
  - Major chosen
  - Not recognizing
  - Reduce willingness participate
  - More willing participate
  - Willing to sit
  - Additional variables interact
  - Encourage to interact
  - Ways to achieve
  - Interactive & learn
  - Learning on own
  - Violate concept
  - Played off strengths
  - Based on strengths
  - Lend themselves talk
  - Not as willing
  - Knowing strengths good
  - Develop and understand
  - Negative connotation
  - Develop a plan
  - Causes them stress
  - Knowing strengths help
  - Making good decisions
  - See the value
  - Starting to interact
  - Just talk
  - Helped take risks
  - Coordinate learning
  - Use strengths to help
  - Strength pull out
  - More conscious
  - Strengths motivate
  - More aware
  - Departmental strengths sessions

- Other / Combination → New Perspective
  - Go with flow
  - Frustrating job
  - Go with flow
  - Shrug things off
  - In-depth review
  - Constantly chatting
  - Work with people
  - Responsible come in
  - Incorporated would help
  - Don't remember
  - Could exhibit any
  - Focus on strengths
  - Utilize strengths
  - Helping other people
  - Obvious strengths
  - Identify strengths
  - Figure out strengths
  - Self-actualization
  - Think have others
  - Adopt that
  - Be a pushover
  - Assertive nature
  - Situation calls for
  - Want it done
  - Choice to use them
  - Up to them
  - Just the organization

THEME - Major → Go Where You're Passionate

- Picking / changing → Fit into What I Want to Do
  - Not totally confident
  - Deciding factor
  - Couldn't do it
  - Had to change
  - Plugging through it
  - I don't know
  - I don't know
  - Some positive
  - Love working
  - Really like options
  - Solidified major choice
  - See it now
  - Liked both
  - Didn't know
  - Just interesting
  - Count for something
  - Strengths fit
  - Made me understand
  - Hold them accountable
  - Really good at
  - Thought teaching exciting
  - They were challenging
  - Requires more than capable
  - Like small group
  - Like business
  - Makes more sense
  - Kind of rebellious
  - Helped determine major
  - Fit strengths
  - Impact major choice
  - Change major once
  - Decide something different
  - First inclination
  - Field supported strengths
  - Migrate to disciplines
  - Critical in majors
  - Opportunity to realize
  - Important in interviews
  - Change more often
  - Stay with it
  - Part of personality
  - Strengths drove them
  - Technical aspects
  - Motivational aspects
  - Path toward career
  - Need to learn before
  - Applying talents
  - Emotional and motivational
  - Help overcome
  - Doesn't fit well
  - Tap into strengths
  - Feed strength
  - More conscious
  - Feed that
  - Not good fit
  - Identify good fit

- Keeping → Solidified my Choice in Major
  - Feel need
  - Can't have it

THEME - Future plans: job opportunities & higher ed → Periscope is longer

- Good talking points
- Tell people about
- Resume building
- Articulate concise thought
- Strategic decision
- Help be better
- Passionate about
- General interests
- Focus my energies
- I am loyal
- Could contribute
- Learn how groups interact
- People-related
- Financially sound
- Be middle person
- Up in the air
- Identify career
- Propel them
- Lack of knowledge
- Understand different careers
- Career fit strengths
- Concept of team
- Can't do all
- Someone other strengths
- Tools fulfill career
- Gain tools/experiences
- Encourage internships
- Choosing their careers
- Periscope is longer
- Look beyond
- Major gives knowledge
- Internal understanding
- Be valuable
- Come naturally
- Employers using strengths
- Understand best utilized
- Things most important
- Knowing myself
- Clarify for others
- Pretty powerful
- Law school
- Unique to strengths
- Understanding the details
- Preparing me
- Strengths very important
- Grow up more
- Move south
- Options really open
- Probably law school
- Year figure out

Advisor Additions

- Opportunities to learn about strengths → Opportunities to learn about strengths
  - Short period time
  - Strengths-based campus
  - Just knowing detriment
  - Exercise strengths
  - Observable within college
  - Bought into
  - Integrate student groups
  - Continue to build
  - Difficulty to integrate
  - Different focus
  - Sell or require
  - Adapted papers
  - Other strengths
  - Practice strengths
  - Used in past
  - Get more buy in
  - Adopt a strength
  - Missed one
  - Larger buy in
  - Post on door
  - Recruitment of people
  - Need to see
  - Being supported
  - Introduced and identified
  - Not develop strengths
  - Want to develop
  - No time develop
  - Don’t achieve goals
  - Identification and affirmation
  - Create goals
  - Through four years
  - Maybe develop
  - Assignment immediately after
  - Start developmental piece
  - On board
  - Not overcome prejudices
  - Strengths-based college
  - Scratching the surface
  - Assist with development
  - No application phase
  - Didn’t appreciate strengths
  - Not waste time
  - Focus in stages
  - Strengthens don’t matter
  - Focus on future
  - Opportunity use strengths
  - Incorporate strengths
  - If understand strengths
  - Break down groups
  - Create effective groups
  - Learn from each other
  - Push buttons
  - Get training
  - Disciplines built fences
  - Missing the boat
  - Facilitate learning
  - Falls off drastically
  - Partial education
  - Too much to do
  - Forgetting in between
  - Moving on
  - Work world
  - Certificate program
  - Follow-up course
  - Don’t understand strengths
  - Requires work
  - Resist it
  - Strengths-based college
  - Strengths-based campus
  - Need buy in

- Goals/Purpose of StrengthsQuest → Goals for StrengthsQuest
  - Knowledge of self
  - Ability in choice
  - Ability to interact
  - Confidence
  - Help support students
  - Identify strengths
  - Affirm strengths
  - Use strengths
  - Apply to future
  - Using strengths
  - Choices & roles
  - Didn't tap into
  - Start using strengths
  - Feel more satisfied
  - Internalize information