

NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY

THE IMPACT OF STRENGTHS-BASED LEADERSHIP TRAINING
AT NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY

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To Carolyn Tennant, who pinned me down and made me think about graduate studies.

To my Family, my Team, my Community who never doubted that this was possible and probable.

To my students, who make my job worth it. Every day.

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ABSTRACT

Northwest University, a Christian institution of higher learning, uses the Gallup Organization's *StrengthsFinder 2.0* psychometric to equip student leaders through interactive, integrated, Strengths-Based Leadership Training (SBLT). This strengths-based approach is new to Northwest University. This study was the first formal assessment of the program outcomes, and it used a qualitative survey to explore student leaders' experiences. The theoretical framework included Arthur Chickering's vectors of student development, Erik Erickson's theory of psychosocial development (specifically the stages concerning identity and intimacy formation), as well as a survey of Gallup's strengths-based materials. Students reported multifaceted positive benefits of their experience with SBLT. Students who participated in SBLT reported positive personal development and improved team interactions. Results imply that the program could be improved by expanding the experiential element of the training and helping students further integrate SBLT concepts in their daily work. Based on this analysis, recommendations include adjusting the current format and presentation of SBLT, quantitatively evaluating the SBLT program, and modifying the program accordingly.

Introduction

It is 8:30 AM Saturday on the campus of Northwest University. This hour usually rumbles with a collective snore from students sleeping late, but today nearly a hundred groggy student leaders have gathered for a day of experiential leadership development. These student leaders collectively represent every organization on campus that serves undergraduate students at Northwest University. Earlier in the year, they received an interactive introduction to the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* psychometric, learning how their ‘Top Five’ strength themes are implemented individually and as they work on teams. These students will spend their Saturday learning and completing teambuilding challenges designed to highlight their strengths in action. They will learn they are strong—and *how* they are strong. They will reflect on their experiences both individually and corporately. For some, this training will become a fundamental piece of how they view themselves and how they work with others. For some, it will be the start of a lifelong process of learning how to lead and thrive through their strengths. For some, it will alter the vocation they choose to pursue or how they choose to pursue it.

At least, that is what Northwest University hopes.

Statement of the Problem

Northwest University (NU) expects its student leaders to develop and guide their fellow students, even as they train for ministry in every sort of occupation. NU adopted a strength-based model for student leadership development in 2010. Strengths-Based Leadership Training (SBLT) is designed to increase self-awareness, aid identity formation, and bolster the capacity for teamwork. Those elements are vital for success in any student leadership role and imperative for success at life in general.

Though, anecdotally, SBLT has been successful, NU has not done a significant inquiry into the effectiveness of this model. Merely believing that SBLT has been effective is not sufficient reason for satisfaction, nor does accepting fragments of positive feedback prove (or provide a space to improve) the student experience of SBLT. How does this program augment the progress of students as they form their identities and develop relational skills? What do students identify as the most and least transformative portions of this program? Has it been more successful for some student groups than others? What adjustments would maximize the impact of SBLT for students? Do students expect SBLT to have a long-term impact on their lives outside of NU? These questions, and more, are necessary to discover the results of SBLT.

Northwest University Student Development

“We, the people of Northwest University, carry the call of God by continually building a learning community dedicated to spiritual vitality, academic excellence, and empowered engagement with human need.”¹ This is the mission statement of Northwest University. NU is committed to the holistic development of Christian students for their time at the university and beyond. Learning is not confined to the cognitive domain of the classroom—it is holistic,² and, therefore, transformative. The Office of Student Development, of which the researcher is part, facilitates much of the learning that happens outside of the classroom. Student Development encompasses student government, student activities, residential life, security, athletics, career services, and wellness.³ Student Development’s core values center on helping students thrive in

¹ Northwest University, "Mission/Values," Northwest University, <http://www.northwestu.edu/about/mission/> (accessed September 1, 2012).

² Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1983), page 115.

³ Northwest University, "Student Development," Northwest University, <http://eagle.northwestu.edu/departments/student-development/> (accessed September 2, 2012).

their extracurricular involvements as they prepare to engage the larger world.⁴ This holistic approach is reflected in Student Development's new motto: "Learning to do life well—together."⁵

Despite this emphasis on "together," NU's divisions of student leaders have generally functioned fairly separately. NU has longstanding student leadership programs through Campus Ministries, Student Government, Residence Life, and Student Media. However, throughout the tenure of the researcher (August of 2006 through the time of this writing) the number of student leadership positions available across campus has approximately doubled. To manage that growth, each of these organizations has created and implemented their own training methods and philosophies. It is only since October of 2010 that any sort of unified student leadership training has occurred.

Northwest University's Strengths-Based Leadership Training

In October of the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years, NU's Student Development Team hosted a weekend of SBLT designed to provide both cognitive and experiential knowledge and development. All the student leaders took the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* psychometric and gave their results to their supervisors. All scholarshiped student leaders (and some non-scholarshiped leaders) were expected to attend the training. This created a group of approximately one hundred students from Northwest University's Student Government (NUSG), Northwest University's Missions Association (NUMA), Student Media (Karisma yearbook, Talon newspaper), Residence Life Staff (RLS), and Act Six Scholars, plus many Student Development professional staff. NU hired consultants both years to facilitate this training. NU staff augmented

⁴ Northwest University, "Res Life @ NU," Residence Life, <http://eagle.northwestu.edu/departments/reslife/> (accessed September 1, 2012).

⁵ Northwest University, "Student Development," Northwest University, <http://eagle.northwestu.edu/departments/student-development/> (accessed September 2, 2012).

the consultants during the training and integrated the concepts into their work with students throughout the rest of the year.

The Format

For the 2012-2013 academic year, the SBLT format looked a bit different. At the beginning of the fall semester, NU professional staff gave each group of leaders an hour to an hour and a half introduction to strengths using interactive tools that showed how strengths could play out within teams and individual roles. This introduction provided a common language between the teams, supervisors, and other student leaders, enabling them to understand their interaction through a framework of strengths.

The full day of training came in January and was designed to provide all student leadership teams with a unified experience of strengths. NU hired a different consultant to conduct multimedia, interactive training. The training began over breakfast and then included instruction and discussion of strengths in philosophical, theological, and practical terms. Students were frequently asked to find a partner (with varying criteria) to discuss how strengths played into their lives and leadership on a daily basis.

After a lunch break, the leaders were separated into their functional teams (NUMA, Karisma staff, etc.), creating twelve groups of six to eleven members. These groups had to solve a puzzle before receiving a clue that would lead them to one of ten locations around campus where a facilitator⁶ waited with a teambuilding challenge and clue to point them to the next location. These challenges were designed to display different strengths within members of the groups, thereby providing students with tangible examples of their strengths in action.

After each group completed all the challenges, everyone reassembled to discuss the experience. Each group presented what they had learned about themselves as individuals and as a

⁶ Facilitators were NU professional staff from Student Development and Campus Ministries.

team. The consultant facilitated closing discussions, and a challenge to apply this new learning. The Director of Student Programs allowed the researcher to give a brief announcement and explanation of the upcoming survey before dismissing the students.

Literature Review

The existing literature pertaining to this research project springs from distinct areas of study: developmental psychology and a strengths-based approach to the formation of teams and individuals. Combined, these two areas of study provide an important framework for strengths-based leadership for undergraduates. This review presents the foundation and philosophy of strengths-based leadership, including the theological underpinnings, then summarizes the developmental theories of Erik Erikson and Arthur Chickering as they relate to undergraduates.

StrengthsFinder 2.0 and Strengths-Based Leadership

Overview

The *StrengthsFinder 2.0* psychometric, based on over forty years of research, was developed and published by Donald O. Clifton through the Gallup Organization.⁷ Gallup surveyed millions of people around the world and found that approximately two thirds of those surveyed believe they are unable to do what they do best at work each day.⁸ In contrast, Gallup's studies also indicated that those who feel like their work allows them to do what they do best are six times more likely to be engaged in their work and over three times more likely to be satisfied

⁷ Andrew D. Carson, et al, "Mapping *StrengthsQuest* Themes to Holland's Vocational Personality Types." *Journal of Career Assessment* 19, no. 2 (May 2011), SAGE Publications, SAGE Journals (accessed August 27, 2012): 198.

⁸ Tom Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2007), ii.

with their lives outside of work.⁹ The general idea is that people work hardest, happiest, and most effectively when they work from their strengths. *StrengthsFinder* was developed as a tool to help people identify and function within their strengths.

StrengthsFinder Psychometric. Gallup, over their decades of research, identified 400 separate themes of talents and compiled the thirty-four most common into the *StrengthsFinder* psychometric.¹⁰ Gallup revamped the original psychometric to make *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, a faster, more reliable version capable of providing more individualized results.¹¹ *StrengthsFinder 2.0* is an online tool that asks participants to self-report which statement in a pair better describes them and to what extent. Among the thirty-four themes, there are 278,254 unique combinations of the top five themes.¹² This number stands in sharp contrast to most personality assessments that offer between four and sixteen different “types” of people.¹³ Literally millions¹⁴ of individuals in schools, businesses, and community groups around the world have used *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, and it has been translated into over twenty languages.¹⁵ *StrengthsFinder 2.0* is not meant to serve as a stifling categorical system but as a series of cues to provide guidance toward a fulfilling life.¹⁶

According to separate and independent studies conducted by Schreiner and then Lopez, Hodges, and Harter, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* has a test-retest correlation and reliability that averaged at or above .70.¹⁷ Schreiner studied the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* in light of two other personality instruments (the 16PF and the CPI 260) and confirmed that the traits predicted to correlate

⁹ Ibid., iii.

¹⁰ Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner, *Strengths Quest*, 3.

¹¹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder*, v.

¹² Ibid., 302.

¹³ David Kiersey and Marilyn Bates, *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*, 5th ed. (Del Mar: Prometheus Nemesis, 1984), 70.

¹⁴ Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner, *Strengths Quest*, 312.

¹⁵ Rath, *StrengthsFinder*, iii.

¹⁶ Donald O. Clifton, Edward “Chip” Anderson, with Laura A. Schreiner, *Strengths Quest: Discover and Develop Your Strengths in Academics, Career, and Beyond* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2006), 299.

¹⁷ As cited by Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner, *Strengths Quest*, 301-302.

between the assessments were indeed significantly correlated.¹⁸ There were also correlations found between Holland's Vocational Types and *StrengthsFinder 2.0*.¹⁹

Positive Psychology. The philosophy of *StrengthsFinder 2.0* falls under what is called positive psychology, a movement to emphasize what is going well within individuals and groups (virtues, strengths, etc.) rather than what is going wrong (psychopathology, weaknesses, etc.).²⁰ Our culture's value of the well-rounded individual inadvertently creates a society of mediocrity²¹ where everyone strives to be passable at most things instead of truly great at something. Positive psychology, as it relates to *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, functions from the premise that every individual has inherent talents which time and training can cultivate into strengths.²² Working from within those strengths creates opportunities for optimal functionality, as well as endowing a greater sense of personal well-being.²³ Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly describes the same thing as a state of *flow*—the highest “positive aspects of human existence—joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life...”²⁴ Both the achievement of excellence and increased life satisfaction are benefits of positive psychology and approaching life through the lens of strengths.

Talents, themes, and strengths. *StrengthsFinder 2.0* assesses talents in order to help people identify and build their strengths.²⁵ “A talent is a naturally recurring pattern of thoughts, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.”²⁶ Most people are blind to their greatest talents

¹⁸ Ibid., 302-303.

¹⁹ Ibid., 297.

²⁰ John W. Lounsbury, et al., “An Investigation of Character Strengths in Relation to the Academic Success of College Students.” *Individual Differences Research* 7, no. 1 (2009): 53.

²¹ Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2006), 7.

²² Carson et al., “Mapping *StrengthsQuest*,” 198.

²³ Lounsbury et al., “An Investigation of Character Strengths,” 54.

²⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row: 1990), xi.

²⁵ Rath, *StrengthsFinder*, 17.

²⁶ Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner, *Strengths Quest*, 2.

because they feel incredibly natural instead of extraordinary.²⁷ A few common markers indicate talents: an uninitiated yearning, an area of satisfaction, the capacity to learn quickly, and the beginnings of excellence leading to subsequent excellent performances.²⁸ By measuring these naturally occurring talents, StrengthsFinder is attempting to uncover what is most innate and lasting about the participant's personality.²⁹ Rath cites a longitudinal study by Caspi *et al* that demonstrates a remarkable correlation between personalities of the group observed at age three and their adult personalities at age 26.³⁰ This speaks to the enduring nature of talents within individuals. Groups of related talents form themes.³¹

Strengths, therefore, are refined collections of talents within the same themes augmented with knowledge and skills that produce “the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performances in a given activity.”³² Honing a strength means synergizing related talents with skills and knowledge.³³ While one could have a large quantity of talents, skills, or knowledge, the best results come when the three are combined to enhance an individual's inherent nature.³⁴ Rath states: “You cannot be anything you want to be—but you can be a lot more of who you already are.”³⁵

Holistic nature of strengths. Strengths are holistically applicable to life.³⁶ They are not exclusive to careers because, rather than indicating specific roles in which individuals will excel,

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁸ Donald O. Clifton and Paula Nelson, *Soar with Your Strengths*, (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 1992), 43-56.

²⁹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder*, 18.

³⁰ Ibid., 18.

³¹ Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner, *Strengths Quest*, 3.

³² Ibid., 4.

³³ Ibid., 97.

³⁴ Rath, *StrengthsFinder*, 20.

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

³⁶ Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner, *Strengths Quest*, 2.

they indicate how individuals can excel in whatever roles they fill throughout their lives.³⁷

Clifton and Anderson cite the research of Robert Rosenthal who proved the power of external expectations in the learning process. Students who were expected by their teachers to do more and do better in their academic performances fulfilled those expectations.³⁸ Students who learn their own strengths are able to expect more of themselves in the correct areas and, thereby, increase their progress and development.³⁹

As a person hones and functions within their natural strengths, they become increasingly able to pursue and fulfill their unique potential.⁴⁰ A preliminary analysis by Gallup based on the longitudinal research of Judge and Hurst, suggested that individuals working from their strengths during adolescence and early adulthood (ages fifteen to twenty-three) reported greater job satisfaction and higher income levels when surveyed again twenty-six years later.⁴¹ This speaks to the importance of individuals knowing their strengths, but, also to the importance of knowing strengths in adolescence and early adulthood. Strengths help students understand their futures differently, understand others differently, and understand themselves differently.⁴²

Since peer and mentor relationships significantly impact college students,⁴³ *StrengthsFinder 2.0* creates a common language for understanding among peers, families, and other relationships.⁴⁴ Clifton and Anderson found that strengths-based instruction impacted the

³⁷ Ibid., 241.

³⁸ Ibid., 227.

³⁹ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹ Rath and Conchie, *Strengths Based Leadership*, 16.

⁴² Ibid., 75.

⁴³ Sharon L. Holmes, "Applying Student Development Theory to College Students' Spiritual Beliefs" *College Student Affairs Journal* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2004), (n.d.): EBSCOhost (accessed October 8, 2012): 130.

⁴⁴ Rath, *StrengthsFinder*, 16.

relationships of students;⁴⁵ as students became more aware of their strengths, they became more aware of the strengths of others.⁴⁶ This awareness also helps students resolve conflict⁴⁷ by allowing them to identify when their strengths themes compete with others' and, subsequently, how to capitalize on their strengths to negotiate the conflict.

Weaknesses. Clifton and Anderson define weakness as “any lack of knowledge, skill, or talent that negatively affects your performance or that of others.”⁴⁸ However, they differentiate areas of “weakness” from areas of “lesser talent;” lesser talented areas simply do not negatively impact the performance of one’s self or others.⁴⁹ Each theme has what Clifton and Anderson call a “shadow side.”⁵⁰ Shadow sides emerge when a theme is over-used or used inappropriately. These shadow sides are present for each theme and must be monitored diligently for an individual to function well. Themes that are not in the list of the top five do not indicate that area as a weakness for an individual. *StrengthsFinder 2.0* measures what themes are most dominant. Other themes are certainly present, but the results simply show the strongest themes.⁵¹ Weaknesses matter, and need to be attended to, but should not be the greatest focus. A combination of self-awareness, intentional skill acquisition, and the effective use of others’ strengths can effectively deal with these weaknesses.⁵²

Strengths-Based Leadership. Gallup offers resources to help people apply strengths specifically to leadership, teaching individuals how and when to use which skill. The most effective leaders intentionally hone their strengths, surround themselves with the right kinds of

⁴⁵ Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner, *Strengths Quest*, 73.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁵¹ Ibid., 22.

⁵² Ibid., 77.

people to maximize their teams, and understand the needs of their followers.⁵³ The overarching contributions of successful leaders, from the viewpoint of over 10,000 “followers” Gallup researched,⁵⁴ were trust, compassion, stability, and hope.⁵⁵ Conchie and Rath delineated how each of the 34 strengths themes can build trust, show compassion, provide stability, and create hope; they also offer insight on how to lead people who are strong in each of these themes.⁵⁶

A Theology of Strengths

The theological underpinnings of strengths tie back to the Genesis account of creation⁵⁷ where God endows humankind with “his image.”⁵⁸ There are different views of what that phrase means, but there is a general consensus that God has endowed some facet of divinity to each person. SBLT effectively calls out what is deepest and truest from the image of God in each person, to celebrate it, to hone it, and to use it fully.⁵⁹

Throughout the Bible, there are examples of God endowing specific talents and purposes to individuals: Jeremiah,⁶⁰ Samson,⁶¹ John the Baptist,⁶² and the general description given in Psalm 139.⁶³ Paul talks about each person as the recipient of spiritual gifts⁶⁴ to use for the benefit of the church, the community, and the world as a whole.⁶⁵ Peter explains the implicit demand for each person to use whatever unique gifts they have for the benefit of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁶

⁵³ Rath and Conchie, *Strengths Based Leadership*, 2-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 253-254.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 103-235.

⁵⁷ Albert L. Winseman, Donald O. Clifton, and Curt Liesveld, *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire Your Community*, (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2008), 11.

⁵⁸ Gen. 1:27 (NIV)

⁵⁹ Winseman, Clifton, and Liesveld, *Living Your Strengths*, 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶¹ Judg. 13:2-5 (NIV)

⁶² Luke 2:11-17 (NIV)

⁶³ Ps. 139:13-16 (NIV)

⁶⁴ Winseman, Clifton, and Liesveld, *Living Your Strengths*, 29. 1 Cor. 12: 4-11; Rom. 12:6-8 (NIV)

⁶⁵ Winseman, Clifton, and Liesveld, *Living Your Strengths*, 11.

⁶⁶ 1 Pet. 4:10 (NIV)

Matthew's gospel cites Jesus' parable of the talents to emphasize the necessity of fully using whatever has been given.⁶⁷ As each person individually reflects the image of God and uses his or her gifts, the collective metaphor of "The Body of Christ" becomes tangible.⁶⁸ Each person's talents allow that individual to live out the basic actions of faith (evangelism, service, prayer, etc.) and to do so empowered by a unique set of strengths.⁶⁹

Two main biblical texts address the idea of leadership and action founded on divinely endowed strengths: Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Both employ lists of gifts that are not intended to be comprehensive but illustrative of the diversity that God creates.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the gifts Paul lists are not to be confused with the offices of the church (such as elders and deacons) mentioned throughout the New Testament,⁷¹ as these roles seem to be designated by maturity and character rather than divine endowment.⁷²

Both the Corinthians and Romans passages also employ the metaphor of a body to explain the interconnections of unity and diversity. Using the human body as a metaphor was common within antiquity; Paul used it to emphasize the importance of unity despite diversity.⁷³ Besides the body metaphor, Paul also used classical Greek wordplay⁷⁴ and a rich array of imagery, personification, and rhetorical questions to illuminate these passages. Both speak to the God-ordained nature of individual strengths.

⁶⁷ Winseman, Clifton, and Liesvield, *Living Your Strengths*, 52-54. Matt. 25:14-29 (NIV)

⁶⁸ Winseman, Clifton, and Liesvield, *Living Your Strengths*, 44. 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:15-16 (NIV)

⁶⁹ Winseman, Clifton, and Liesvield, *Living Your Strengths*, 30-31.

⁷⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 402.

⁷¹ Acts 20:17-28, Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:1-13, etc.

⁷² Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 250.

⁷³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 600.

⁷⁴ Robert Jewett, Roy David Kotansky, and Eldon Jay Epp, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 739.

Romans 12. Paul, though he had never visited Rome, made the confident assertion that an array of gifts was and would be present in both their faith community⁷⁵ and the individuals.⁷⁶ In verse 6, Paul uses the word *charisma* “to denote a God-given ability to serve the community of Christ in a particular way.”⁷⁷ Paul declares the necessity of using those gifts as individual parts of the larger whole.⁷⁸ There seems to be a textual link between functioning within one’s *charisma* and the renewing of the mind that Paul mentions in Romans 12:2,⁷⁹ implying that a renewed mind will function within its gifts. It further implies that functioning within *charisma* is necessary to renew the mind. Humility is also given as the context for the discussion of these gifts;⁸⁰ special abilities are created for communal edification, not individual glory. “The point is that the body is *one* not despite its diversity, but it is *one body* only by virtue of its diversity.”⁸¹

I Corinthians 12. This passage contains essentially the same message as the passage from Romans, but with further elaboration. While verse one’s use of the Greek phrase *ta pneumatika* leaves room to question if it is meant in reference to individual spiritual people, most commentators choose to interpret it as a reference to spiritual gifts.⁸² God is the one who endows these spiritual gifts, not humans, so there is a repeated and underlying emphasis on humility, diversity, and unity.⁸³ Each gift, each part of the body, is different in function and nature but equal in importance. Paul’s series of rhetorical questions clearly implies that no one gift is meant for all believers.⁸⁴ These specialized gifts allow, and even mandate, that the roles and

⁷⁵ Dunn, 26.

⁷⁶ Jewett, Kotansky, and Eldon, *Romans*, 739.

⁷⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 402.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 403

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 407

⁸⁰ Jewett, Kotansky, and Eldon, *Romans*, 737.

⁸¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*. (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 725.

⁸² Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 575.

⁸³ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 244-246.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 247.

opportunities within the body of Christ be specialized—and affirmed as specialties—while still not showing favoritism between the gifts.⁸⁵ If anything, Paul’s mention of “greater gifts” in verse thirty-one can be interpreted in relation to these weaker and private functions.⁸⁶ Despite how different parts are viewed (weaker, private, etc.), all are necessary.⁸⁷ The body is comprised of and completed by invaluable members. Fee opines, “Diversity has roots in God himself (vv.4-6); he in turn by his Spirit has given diverse manifestations (gifts) to different people for the common good of the community.”⁸⁸

Though Gallup’s lists of strengths cannot be exegeted from scripture, there is enough conceptual congruence to call strengths “biblical.” The literature on strengths lists the most common strengths, just as Paul’s lists of gifts are not exhaustive. While strengths-based literature acknowledges the role of strengths within a community or team, the theme of unified diversity is far more prominent in the biblical texts. While the biblical terms and framework are certainly distinct from that of Gallup’s *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, the underlying concepts of emphasizing innate and individual abilities is certainly correlative, allowing the construction of a theology of strengths.

Developmental Stages of College Students

Many theories address the development of individuals during the years generally spent in the college setting. Notable among these are the theories from Erik Erikson and Arthur Chickering. While Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development spans the course of a lifetime

⁸⁵ Ibid., 256.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 248.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 246.

⁸⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 585.

and is more widely known than the work of Chickering, Chickering offers more depth into seven specific vectors of student growth. Both theories are beneficial in understanding the developmental components of college students.

Erik Erikson

Noted developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson saw social interaction as a crucial component of the development that continues over the span of a lifetime.⁸⁹ Erikson divided the human lifespan into eight stages, each with a central question to be resolved.⁹⁰ The college years span two of these periods. Concluding at the approximate age of 19 is the stage of identity formation. Students seek to reach internal consensus about who they are and who they will become. Erikson opines that developing an ideology is central to identity formation.⁹¹ Erikson defines ideology as “a coherent body of shared images, ideas, and ideals which, whether based on a formulated dogma, and implicit *Weltanschauung*, or a highly structured world image, a political creed or a way of life, provides for the participants a coherent if systematically simplified overall orientation in space and time in means and ends.”⁹² During this stage, individuals become aware of the effects of their upbringings and decide what patterns to assimilate as they move into independent life.⁹³ Searching for a place to fit in the social structure, students in this stage will often experiment with different identities based on peer groups and personal expressions; this can place them in conflict with authority structures.⁹⁴ The solidification of identity is imperative for the next developmental stage: intimacy.⁹⁵ Without that stability of self, there can be no (or greatly

⁸⁹ Young Bae, "Human development: Theories and learning futures." *Futuristics* 23, no. 3/4 (1999), (n.d.): EBSCOhost (accessed September 23, 2012): 16-17.

⁹⁰ David G. Myers, *Exploring Psychology*, 6th ed. (Holland: Worth, 2005), 119.

⁹¹ Arthur Chickering, *The Modern American College* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 33.

⁹² Chickering, *The Modern American College*, 33.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 33

⁹⁴ Young Bae, "Human Development," 16.

⁹⁵ Harry T. Reis, "The Role of Intimacy in Interpersonal Relations." *Journal of Social and Clinical*

diminished) stability in intimacy. This is what Erikson dubs *psychosocial moratorium*: “a condition of role suspension in which the young person does much of the work of identity exploration and resolution. To the extent that identity is resolved and the self boundaries secured, the young person is free to enter intimate relationships without fear of being overwhelmed or losing the self.”⁹⁶

From ages twenty to twenty-four, the central question is one of intimacy; students grapple for the skills to create and maintain enduring close relationships.⁹⁷ Erikson describes intimacy as deep care between people that leads to a level of fusion between their identities.⁹⁸ This often lays the foundation for marriage and family life.⁹⁹ Just as identity is foundational for real intimacy, intimacy is foundational for the development of generativity and integrity in the concluding stages of life.¹⁰⁰ Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have supported Erikson’s stance on the importance of intimacy in long-term psychological health.¹⁰¹

Markstrom *et al* developed the *Psychosocial Inventory of Ego Strengths* based on Erikson’s theories of psychosocial development.¹⁰² The assessment was developed to determine the resolution of each stage and to explore the under-examined facets of Erikson’s writing on ego “strengths” or “virtues.”¹⁰³ Markstrom explains,

The ego strength of *hope* emerges from trust vs. mistrust in infancy, *will* emerges from autonomy vs. shame/doubt and *purpose* from initiative vs. guilt in early childhood, *competence* emerges from industry vs. inferiority during latency,

Psychology 9, no. 1 (Mar 1990), (n.d.): EBSCOhost (accessed September 23, 2012): 18.

⁹⁶ Chickering, *The Modern American College*, 195

⁹⁷ Reis, “The Role of Intimacy,” 18.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Young Bae, “Human Development,” 17.

¹⁰⁰ Reis, “The Role of Intimacy,” 18.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰² Carol A. Markstrom, “The psychosocial inventory of ego strengths: Development and validation of a new Eriksonian measure.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 26, no. 6 (Dec 1997), (n.d.): EBSCOhost (accessed September 23, 2012): 705.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 706.

fidelity emerges from identity vs. identity confusion in adolescence, *love* emerges from intimacy vs. isolation in young adulthood, *care* emerges from generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood, and *wisdom* emerges from integrity vs. despair in later adulthood.¹⁰⁴

While Erikson certainly argued that each of these strengths could be present throughout a lifespan, they also have the potential to have heightened fulfillment at the end of each corresponding stage; Erikson states “anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole.”¹⁰⁵ The assessment developed was tested and proved valid and reliable.¹⁰⁶

Arthur Chickering

Arthur Chickering’s book *Education and Identity* proved foundational for much of the field of student development.¹⁰⁷ Chickering’s underlying belief was that a university setting is uniquely equipped to foster human development.¹⁰⁸ Rather than the view that colleges have little or nothing to do with their students’ formation, Chickering opines that education can only be effective if it is holistically applicable to students’ lives and experiences.¹⁰⁹ He delineated seven vectors that cover the specific aspects of growth for students while in college.¹¹⁰ Chickering believed these vectors to be largely cumulative.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Cited by Markstrom, “The Psychosocial Inventory,” 707.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 705.

¹⁰⁷ Nancy J. Garfield and Laurence B. David, "Arthur Chickering: Bridging Theory and Practice in Student Development" *Journal Of Counseling & Development* 64, no. 8 (April 1986) *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 1, 2012): 483.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur W. Chickering, *Education and Identity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969), 3.

¹¹⁰ Ferris State University, "Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning," Teaching and Learning Topics; College Student Development—Theories and Applications, http://www.ferris.edu/fctl/Teaching_and_Learning_Tips/College_Student_Development_Theories_and_Application/CollegeStudentDevelopment.htm (accessed October 5, 2010).

¹¹¹ Linda Messer Martin, "Development Change in College Students: A Study Based on Chickering's Model of Student Development," (Syracuse University, 1998) In PROQUESTMS Dissertations and Theses

First is the development of competence: students acquire and refine skills needed to form a chosen career and the general self-assurance that they can accomplish what they attempt. Second is the task of managing emotions: harnessing, redirecting, exploring, and controlling their own feelings instead of simply conforming to societal or familial norms. Third is the development of autonomy: independent maturity. Those first three vectors culminate in the fourth, which echoes Erikson in the establishment of identity. Fifth is the freeing of interpersonal relationships from the confines of intolerance or previously held limited perspectives. Sixth is the development of purpose, which a Christian perspective might label as a sense of calling. Seventh is the process of establishing integrity. Beliefs that were endowed by society or family are reexamined and either rejected or internalized.¹¹²

Chickering and his co-authors, Dalton and Stamm, did further study on the spiritual component of student development and declared the importance of it for students, staff, and faculty.¹¹³ Chickering validated the “rational empiricism” of the current system of higher education,¹¹⁴ but emphasized the importance of including spiritual development in holistic activities, discussions, and experiences.¹¹⁵

Chickering also posited seven elements necessary for the institution itself to provide for students to experience maximum growth: clear and consistent institutional objectives, manageable size, student-faculty interactions, innovative and engaging teachers, student communities, and

A&I: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection, (<http://search.proquest.com/docview/304470137?accountid=28772>): 34.

¹¹² Ferris State University, “Faculty Center”.

¹¹³ Alyssa N. Bryant, "Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education." *Review of Higher Education* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2006), (n.d.): EBSCOhost (accessed October 8, 2012): 527.

¹¹⁴ J. D. Gillespie, "Encouraging authenticity and spirituality in higher education." *Choice* 43, no. 8 (Apr 2006), (n.d.): EBSCOhost (accessed October 8, 2012): 1454.

¹¹⁵ University of California Los Angeles, "An Interview with Arthur Chickering," *Spirituality in Higher Education Newsletter: a National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose* 1, no. 2 (June 2004): page 4. <http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/docs/newsletters/1/Chickering.pdf> (accessed October 8, 2010).

integrated student development programs.¹¹⁶ In a longitudinal study by Linda M. Martin, the environment at a small, religiously affiliated, liberal arts institution was examined to discern whether Chickering's vectors were correlatively met by his environmental factors or not. The results were mixed.¹¹⁷ Positive correlations linked student/faculty interaction and extra-curricular activities with competence and a sense of purpose.¹¹⁸ There were no environmental variables that significantly impacted the student's achievement of mature interpersonal relationships, nor did the study address the formation of autonomy.¹¹⁹ This study did not find gender to be a significant factor in the results, but it raised further questions on the role of gender in development.¹²⁰

Comparing and Contrasting Erikson and Chickering

Erikson and Chickering agree with each other in multiple ways. Erikson's stages of identity formation and intimacy development correlate seamlessly with Chickering's vectors. Chickering even credits Erickson in shaping a foundational understanding of identity.¹²¹ The following of Chickering's vectors fit into the concepts of Erikson's stage of identity formation: the development of competence and autonomy and the establishment of identity, purpose, and integrity. The remaining vectors fit into Erikson's stage of intimacy development: managing emotion and the freeing of interpersonal relationships. Both Erikson and Chickering believed their stages or vectors to be largely cumulative.¹²² Because Erikson's theory addresses the whole of the human lifespan and Chickering's vectors address specifically the four traditional college

¹¹⁶ Linda Messer Martin, "Development Change in College Students," 36-37.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 161.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 162-164.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 172.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 169-173.

¹²¹ Arthur W. Chickering, *Education and Identity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969), x.

¹²² Linda Messer Martin, "Development Change in College Students: A Study Based on Chickering's Model of Student Development," (Syracuse University, 1998) In PROQUESTMS Dissertations and Theses A&I: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection, (<http://search.proquest.com/docview/304470137?accountid=28772>): 34.

years, Chickering's model is reasonably more intricate, reflecting his attempt to give the ethereal concept of identity "greater specificity and concreteness."¹²³ The works of these two theorists complement each other and provide a better view of the development of college students.

Summary

StrengthsFinder 2.0 offers a new framework with which to view talents and approach their development. Understanding strengths themes allows individuals better self-awareness, increased excellence in their work, and better interpersonal understanding. Erikson offers key insights into the developmental tasks faced by individuals during their college years. Chickering's vectors of student development correlate with Erikson as well as expand the view of what students face as they navigate the university setting. All three sources of information are foundational in the discussion of strengths-based student development.

Research Questions

The information from this literature offers the context for the main research question of this study: how has strengths-based leadership training (SBLT) impacted student leaders at Northwest University? Secondary questions include the following: How has SBLT impacted students' self-awareness (cognizance of their interaction with others)? How has SBLT impacted students' identity formation (conception of who they are and who they are becoming)? How has SBLT impacted students' capacity to work in teams? These questions, and more, will be explored in the research methodology.

¹²³ Arthur W. Chickering, *Education and Identity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969), x.

Methodology

Method and Rationale

This research project employed a qualitative methodology, seeking to assess the experience of NU student leaders who underwent SBLT. A qualitative approach was appropriate because of the explorative nature of this project. Qualitative methodology allowed students to share from the various complexities of their experiences with SBLT instead of the researcher assuming, and the methodology dictating, what facets to explore. The qualitative survey collected open-ended responses concerning the impact of SBLT on student leaders.

Sample

This survey was offered to every student leader who participated in SBLT. To limit the students through a random selection or a focus group would have limited or potentially skewed the responses. Therefore, the researcher chose to gather as many student responses as possible. All student leaders were traditional undergraduate students, most between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two, unmarried, and sophomores to seniors in class standing. They spanned a wide variety of academic majors; most were native English speakers, and there were more female and Caucasian students than male or non-Caucasian students. Aside from the elected NUSG Executives and Senate, NU student and professional staff selected these leaders and assigned them to their roles and teams.

Instrumentation

The researcher met with NU's Dean of Community Life and Director of Student Programs on September 10, 2012, to discuss an initial draft of the survey. The Dean and the Director are the administrative force behind SBLT. The researcher wanted to gain preliminary insight and approval for the format, wording, and content of the survey. Together, they were able to refine the informed consent section and the survey itself, checking it for biases, etc. The Dean and the Director were in full support of this research endeavor and were curious to discover the results.

The researcher assimilated the Dean and the Director's feedback and then selected a sample of former student leaders who had undergone SBLT. On September 10, 2012, the researcher sent an email explaining the project and offering the survey for critique. The respondents sent helpful and positive feedback about the survey's clarity and usability (see Appendix 1). After receiving approval from NU's Human Subjects Review Board, the researcher used surveymonkey.com to create an electronic survey (see Appendices 2 and 3).

Conducting this survey online and limiting the demographic information protected the respondents' anonymity by eliminating identifying elements. Many student leaders regularly submit handwritten forms to their supervisors, so an electronic survey negated identification via handwriting. The survey intentionally did not ask for demographic indicators like gender, class standing, or age because the combination of those could be distinctly identifying (e.g. if there was only one 19 year-old female sophomore in NUMA).

The survey began with an informed consent section (see Appendix 2). The researcher worded the necessary elements of this section in a tone conducive to a voluntary student survey. This was an intentional lapse in professional language in hopes of better facilitating engaged

results. Each student had both the inherent and the clearly communicated option to refuse to answer each and every question, thus protecting their rights and maintaining ethical practices.

The researcher intentionally limited the survey to ten questions, hoping to increase participation by keeping it palatably short. The questions themselves were a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were used either to categorize a student's role or level of experience or because asking a fully open-ended question would assume a certain answer. For example, question seven is a closed question: "Has strengths-based training made you more aware of how you interact with others? Explain." Altering this question to be open-ended would have simply required asking "*How did* (instead of *has*) strengths-based training make you more aware..." Asking "how" would have implied that SBLT did indeed increase the respondent's self-awareness, which might not be the case. Asking for an explanation after the closed-ended question allowed this question to function as an open question, fostering a qualitative response instead of a quantitative one. The researcher recognized in advance that some participants may provide responses as brief as "yes" or "no," but that is one risk of qualitative research: the quality of the response is not always what is hoped.

The survey was advertised at the January SBLT retreat and then released via email on January 22. An email sent on January 24 served as a reminder, and then a final email sent on January 25 announced that the deadline was extended until January 28 (see Appendix 4 for all three emails).

Analysis and Validity

The researcher recognized a positive personal bias toward SBLT because of its impact on her own life and team as well as the previous positive informal feedback she received from

student leaders. The researcher hypothesized that SBLT has positive impacts on students' self-awareness, identity formation, and capacity for teamwork. Protection from these biases came through multiple people reviewing the survey before it was distributed,¹²⁴ the impersonal instrumentation of an online survey, a second reader, and distribution of the data to the Dean of Community Life, the Director of Student Programs, amongst other members of the Community Life team.

Analysis centered on themes drawn from students' responses. Ninety-eight student leaders were invited to participate in the survey. Fifty-one responded, but two quit the survey before finishing it, leaving forty-nine completed surveys: fifty percent participation. Every student who participated in the survey gave his or her informed consent. In the majority of the questions, one or more respondents indicated their preference not to answer. The responses were sorted in a variety of ways. The percentages indicated in the following summaries do not always add up to one hundred percent because of those who preferred not to respond.

Question one¹²⁵ asked students to identify their area of campus leadership. This question presented the demographics, showing which student leader positions were most widely represented in the survey responses. Residence Life Staff and NUSG both contributed sixteen responses (thirty-two percent), Act Six Scholars not serving in other leadership roles¹²⁶ provided ten responses (twenty percent), while NUMA and Student Media contributed four responses each (eight percent), and nobody "preferred not to respond."

¹²⁴ The Dean of Community Life, the Director of Student Programs, SBLT alum, NU faculty, the Human Subjects Review Board, etc.

¹²⁵ "Please indicate your area of leadership."

¹²⁶ Many Act Six Scholars serve in leadership roles around campus; the survey instructed those with leadership roles to report themselves according to those roles instead of as Act Six Scholars.

Question two¹²⁷ asked students if they had worked with *StrengthsFinder 2.0* in any previous context. Twenty-two responses (forty-four percent) indicated that this year was their first experience with SBLT, while twenty-eight respondents (fifty-six percent) indicated previous experience. No one preferred not to respond, though the question was skipped once.

Respondents' previous exposure to SBLT was compared with the overall tone of questions three through ten to see if there was a correlation between the amounts of the student's previous exposure to SBLT and the self-reported impact of it. There did not seem to be a distinct correlation between the responses of students who indicated previous experience with SBLT and those for whom it was new. While the majority of the responses to questions three through ten indicate favorable results, further study would be necessary to determine the cause of this correlation.

Question three¹²⁸ asked students about their initial reactions to their "Top Five" strengths themes. Sixty percent of students indicate some sort of positive reaction—agreement, recognition, excitement, etc. While fourteen percent of the respondents reported being either surprised or confused by their results and four percent gave responses irrelevant to the question (i.e. "They have been the same for me every year."), only six percent of responses were negative. The word "accurate" was included in twenty-two percent of the responses and fourteen percent used the word "agreed." Cumulatively, this indicates an overall positive response and is a general affirmation of students' experiences with the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* psychometric.

¹²⁷ "Have you worked with the StrengthsFinder tool before?"

¹²⁸ "What was your initial reaction when you received your "Top Five" results from the StrengthsFinder test?" For a full list of responses, see Appendix 5.

Question four¹²⁹ asked if SBLT had changed respondents' initial reactions to their strengths themes. Thirty percent of students indicated that the training had changed their initial reactions to their "Top Five." One respondent stated the following:

During training, I felt my strengths were given more meaning. I was able to see them better as I talked to different people either by comparing myself with others with some of the same "Top Five" traits or by seeing my traits stand out compared with people who didn't have any of my traits. It made me feel better about the Top Five traits I received, and helped me see that no matter what traits one gets, you can be a leader.

Forty-two percent of respondents indicated that the training had not changed their reaction. The notable majority of those responses in conjunction with question three, indicated that their initial positive responses remained during and after training. "[My reaction] did not change. I liked them before and after," one student succinctly stated. This appears to affirm the efficacy of SBLT in explaining individual strengths as well as confirming the perceived accuracy of *StrengthsFinder 2.0*.

Questions five¹³⁰ and six¹³¹ collected data on what students valued most and least in the SBLT experience. Ten percent of responses specifically indicated that the January training contained the most valuable portion of SBLT, and ten percent indicated the autumn trainings. However, most responses related to concepts or outcomes. The most valued aspects of training included personal growth (sixteen percent), cognitive growth (ten percent), the team-building activities (eight percent), identity formation (six percent), and the location (two percent).

¹²⁹ "Did your initial reaction to your "Top Five" change during or after training? If so, how?" For a full list of responses, see Appendix 6.

¹³⁰ "Thinking back to the initial strengths-based training in August or October (depending), and now in January, what was the most valuable aspect of strengths-based training for you? Why?" For a full list of responses, see Appendix 7.

¹³¹ "What aspect of the strengths-based training was least valuable to you? Why?" For a full list of responses, see Appendix 8.

However, a full sixty percent of respondents indicated that the aspect of training they valued most related to working with their teams. As one respondent articulated,

I think the most valuable aspect of the strengths-based training was thinking about how to appreciate others' strengths and work together as a team to capitalize on them. As a leader, you not only need to know yourself, but the other student leaders and also those you lead— [this is] really practical information that I can apply on a daily basis to the work that I do as a student leader at NU.

The amount of responses concerning teams seems to signify both the value that students place on teamwork and the insight they gained about teams through SBLT.

Respondents listed a larger variety of the least-valued elements of training. Twenty-two percent of the responses mentioned what many students deemed “lecture,” sixteen percent cited redundancy in the information presented, and twelve percent referenced the team-building activities. Other least-favorite components included a perception of the consultant as a “motivational speaker” (six percent) and the lack of intentional reflection on how the team-building activities directly connected to strengths themes (eight percent). The January training was cited six times more than the autumn trainings (thirty-six percent versus six percent) as containing the least valuable portion. When considering this comparison, please note that the January training occurred approximately two weeks previous to the survey distribution while the autumn trainings happened up to five months previous. Also, the average length of the fall training sessions were just over an hour, while the January training day lasted approximately eight hours and had multiple components.

Question seven¹³² asked how SBLT had increased respondents’ awareness of how they interact with others. Seventy-six percent of the responses indicated increased self-awareness in the respondents’ interaction with others. The word “understand” was used in twenty percent of

¹³² “Has strengths-based training made you more aware of how you interact with others? Explain.” For a full list of responses, see Appendix 9.

the responses and “aware” appeared in sixteen percent. Ambivalent responses comprised twelve percent, and the majority of the ten percent of negative responses cited previous self-awareness in their interaction. “...I was already aware of how I interacted with others, but [SBLT] did give me insight into more of my personality and identity.” These responses suggest a notable increase in students’ self-awareness.

Question eight¹³³ asked if and how SBLT had impacted students’ concept of who they were and who they were becoming. Sixty-four percent of the responses indicated positive identity formation, eliciting responses similar to the following.

Yes, [SBLT] has helped me become a more holistic leader. Figuring out my identity as a leader - I think - helps me impact others more effectively as well as myself with a clear view of my own leadership style. Knowing how I perceive myself and how others perceive me makes for effective communication to occur.

Ambivalent responses (eighteen percent) and negative responses (eight percent) both included references to previous self-awareness and rejecting the idea that the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* could define them. While the positive responses were not unanimous, the data indicate a distinct and positive growth in respondents’ identity formation.

Question nine¹³⁴ asked about the impact of SBLT on the respondents’ teams. Seventy-five percent of the responses to indicated that the respondents’ teams benefited. Of those positive responses, thirty-four percent specifically mentioned how the respondents had learned more about their own roles on a team, and forty-eight percent of the responses noted how SBLT increased their understanding of the roles other people play on their teams. Several responses mentioned both personal growth and increasing team awareness:

¹³³ “Has strengths-based training impacted your concept of who you are and who you are becoming? Explain.” For a full list of responses, see Appendix 10.

¹³⁴ “Has strengths-based training impacted the way you work with your team? Explain.” For a full list of responses, see Appendix 11.

Through the Saturday leadership seminar, I was able to observe my team working in their strengths and see how I fit into that according to my own strengths. There was no need for us to double up on areas where other people were strong, but for me to figure out how I could innovatively use my strengths to contribute in a new way.

Fourteen percent of the responses indicate ambivalence, citing some value for teamwork in the training, but feeling that it had not been particularly transformative. The six percent who reported no team improvement cited the redundancy of SBLT year after year and the lack of intentional reflection in the team-building activities. These data, specifically in correlation with the value of team students indicated through the responses to question five, suggest that SBLT strongly benefits teamwork.

Question ten¹³⁵ asked if respondents had interacted with SBLT concepts outside of official training times. Responses ranged from “I use [my strengths] in almost every area of my life. I try and take my strengths and integrate them into decision making, conversations, meetings, and activities,” all the way across the spectrum to “...I see little value in [the concept of strengths] so I choose not to interact with it more than I am required to.” However, the majority of responses (sixty-four percent) indicated medium to high levels of strengths integration, specifying relationships such as those with friends, families, romantic interests, coworkers, teams, supervisors, as well as noting increased self-awareness.

Questions one¹³⁶ and ten¹³⁷ were compared to gain insight into which student groups integrated SBLT into daily functions. Of the ten participating Act Six Scholars, four skipped this question, three mentioned discussing strengths in Act Six meetings, and only one reported a high

¹³⁵ “Have you interacted with the concept of Strengths beyond the official training times? (team meetings, individual meetings with your supervisor, casual conversations, etc.) Explain.” For a full list of responses, see Appendix 12.

¹³⁶ “Please indicate your area of leadership.”

¹³⁷ “Have you interacted with the concept of Strengths beyond the official training times? (team meetings, individual meetings with your supervisor, casual conversations, etc.) Explain.”

level of personal integration. However, note that multiple Act Six Scholars serve in other student leadership roles and were instructed to report themselves according to those roles, so this set of responses is incomplete and may not reflect the integration level of the larger Act Six program. Eleven of the sixteen NUSG respondents cited strengths integration through meetings and their personal lives, three indicated a lack of integration, and two skipped the question. Of NUMA's four respondents, two skipped this question, one simply said "no," and one reported some discussion of it in some of their meetings. Three of the sixteen Residence Life Staff respondents skipped this question, two gave negative answers, but eleven reported strengths concepts being integrated throughout their lives. Three of the Student Media respondents reported some level of integration and the fourth anticipated it. These data suggest that Student Media, Residence Life Staff, and NUSG have the most integration of strengths into their daily lives as student leaders. Interestingly, the two groups with the highest participation in this survey (Residence Life Staff and NUSG) also report the highest levels of integration. Possible implications include the continuance of the integration efforts for Student Media, Residence Life, and NUSG teams and additional integration efforts for NUMA and Act Six Scholars.

Recommendations

Overall, the data indicate that SBLT is a positive and transformative force on the NU campus. Students were generally positive throughout their responses and indicated distinct themes of growth in self-awareness and their capacities to work with teams. Refining the program according to students' feedback is the next step and could be done with reference to the following suggestions.

Training Format

The responses clearly indicated a preference against “lecture” styles of presentations. While some lecture is inevitable when disseminating foundational information, lectures can be presented in shorter segments and kept intentionally interactive. Also, while some repetition is necessary for learning, note should be taken when the information is repeated (within the same session or across different training sessions) to avoid unnecessary redundancy. Consideration should also be given for the groups and students (like the Act Six Scholars) who have experienced SBLT multiple years. Lastly, quantitative research for future training will show if these adjustments have worked and what additional adjustments should be made.

Application

Both positive and negative comments indicate that the students who gained the most from SBLT were able to see how the knowledge applies to their daily lives. Intentional emphasis on application and reflection will bolster the effectiveness of teambuilding activities. This reflection can turn fun challenges into deep learning.

Integration

As the correlation of questions one and ten suggest, there may be departmental variances of the integration of SBLT. Additional inquiry could explore the amount of intentional incorporation of strengths that is offered to each team of student leaders. Additional support could be given to the supervisors to increase the SBLT application they offer to their teams.

Weaknesses

In response to questions throughout the survey, students referenced discontent with their strengths and how they need to fix their weaknesses. An important premise of SBLT is that honing personal strengths will produce better results than focusing on weaknesses. Further emphasis and explanation on this topic may be needed.

Conclusion

Strengths provide an important framework for students' understandings of themselves and others. Northwest University's work toward this end is well founded, but the lack of a formal source of feedback was a shortcoming in the program. This qualitative study exposed themes, benefits, and weaknesses within the SBLT program. Further quantitative study can provide additional insight. Despite imperfections, the data strongly indicate that SBLT is a positive and formative element of Northwest University's Student Development program. SBLT facilitated noteworthy growth in students' capacities for interpersonal relationships (individual relationships and team dynamics) as well as personal growth (identity formation and self-awareness). This research project uncovered the experiences of NU's student leaders and the impact of Strengths-Based Leadership Training.

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Appendix 1: Email to SBLT Alumni and Responses

On September 10, 2012, 10:29pm, the researcher sent the following email to five recent NU graduates who participated in SBLT.

Hello, Wonderful People!

This may seem random, but I'm wondering if you could help me out with something. I'm currently working on my MA thesis, and my research project is to discover the impact of NU's Strengths-Based Leadership Training (StrengthsFinder, VisionTrek, etc.) on student leaders. I've written the following survey and want to distribute it via surveymonkey to this year's leaders after we do the main training retreat (like what we did in Downtown Seattle in 2010 or at the Arboretum last year).

But first, I want to make sure this survey is understandable to people other than me.

Would you be willing to read through the following ten questions and tell me if they make sense to you or not—and maybe even briefly state what you think the question is asking or what response you think it's eliciting?

If you're up for doing this, I'd be totally grateful. If you're not, I'm grateful for you regardless! Please feel NO PRESSURE to do it, or even to respond to this email. If you do want to give feedback, your comments will be anonymously included in my thesis (the data section or an appendix connected to the data section) and will help refine this survey for the student leaders. If you're interested in seeing the final project, just ask. ☺

And, of course, the survey starts with an informed consent survey...

Thanks for taking this survey!

What IS this? A ten-question survey to measure the results of the StrengthsFinder training NU is doing with all you wonderful student leaders.

Why do you need my input? To figure out what's working well in our strengths-based training, what needs to change, and how it should change. We need your help to make this training better for current and future student leaders! Also, Rachel Klas is using the results of this survey as research to write her thesis for the MA of Missional Leadership program at NU.

Do I have to answer ALL the questions? There *are* only ten, but participation is *totally voluntary*. You can choose the "I prefer not to respond" option on any questions you want, but thoughtful and diligently honest answers are going to be the most helpful. *Nothing* you say will be traced back to you or held against you concerning your leadership position or scholarship. Just know that your honest thoughts on this are really valuable to us!

Want more info on this project or a copy of this statement? Contact Rachel Klas at (425.889.5288 ~ rachel.klas@northwestu.edu) or the head of the Northwest University's Human Subjects Review board, Dr. Kevin Leach (425.889.5248 ~ kevin.leach@northwestu.edu) who approved this project.

If you do not agree to this, just close this window and have a great day!

If you agree, please check the box below, and we'll get going!

- **I voluntarily agree to participate in this survey.**

Survey Questions:

1) Please indicate your area of student leadership:

- Residence Life Staff (ARs, CBs, RAs)
- NUSG (Executive Team, ECs, Senate)
- Student Media (Karisma, Talon)
- Act Six Scholars (unless serving in another leadership position)
- NUMA
- I prefer not to respond

2) Have you worked with the StrengthsFinder tool before?

- This year was my first experience with StrengthsFinder
- I have worked with StrengthsFinder already (previous leadership training, class, etc.)
- I prefer not to respond

3) What was your initial response when you received your “Top Five” results from StrengthsFinder? (Did you agree/disagree with them? Understand or not understand them? Wonder why NU was making you do this at all? Etc.)

- I prefer not to respond

4) Did your initial response to your top five themes change during/after training? If so, how?

- I prefer not to respond

5) What was the most valuable aspect of strengths-based training for you? Why?

- I prefer not to respond

6) What aspect of the strengths-based training was least valuable to you? Why?

- I prefer not to respond

7) Has strengths-based training made you more aware of how you interact with others? Explain.

- I prefer not to respond

8) Has strengths-based training impacted your concept of who you are and who you are becoming? Explain.

- I prefer not to respond

9) Has strengths-based training impacted the way you work with your team? Explain.

- I prefer not to respond

10) Have you interacted with the concept of Strengths beyond the official training times? (team meetings, individual meetings with your supervisor, casual conversations, etc.) Explain.

- I prefer not to respond.

Any feedback on any of those questions specifically or on the informed consent/survey as a whole will be valued, but NO PRESSURE!

I'm really glad you exist.
Seriously.

~ Rachel

Three of the five alum responded to the survey, providing sample responses, summary statements, and question analysis. Their responses are copied directly from replying emails and italicized. Their comments within the survey itself are in bold italics.

Respondent A

Respondent A replied on Tuesday, September 11, 2012 11:33am. Segments of the survey in which no comments were made have been omitted.

I love Strengths Finder! That sounds like a great topic choice for your Masters. Happy to help. I hope the school year is off to a great start for you. I've been praying for you and this year.

I thought it might be easier to copy/paste the survey and put my comments in [bold italics].¹³⁸ Let me know if I've confused you more than helped and I'm happy to reformat.

Thanks for taking this survey!...

Do I have to answer ALL the questions? There *are* only ten, but participation is *totally voluntary*. You can choose the "I prefer not to respond" option on any questions you want, but thoughtful and *diligently (diligently/ or just take out this word)* honest answers are going to be the most helpful. *Nothing* you say will be traced back to you or held against you concerning your leadership position or scholarship. Just know that your honest thoughts on this are really valuable to us!...

Survey Questions...

3) What was your initial response when you received your "Top Five" results from StrengthsFinder? (Did you agree/disagree with them? Understand or not understand them? Wonder why NU was making you do this at all? Etc.) ***This is a pretty heavy question. My brain wants to go in a number of different directions. Is there a way to make it more specific? Maybe...***

"What were your initial thoughts on your 'Top 5' Themes?" OR

"Did you initially agree with your 'Top 5' results from StengthsFinder? Why or why not?" OR

"Did you initially understand your 'Top 5' results? Why or why not?"

4) Did your initial response to your top five themes change during/after training? If so, how?

¹³⁸ Originally, Respondent A's comments were in red, but the formatting of this thesis required an alteration.

*Did your understanding of your top five themes change during or after training? If so, how?
Did your initial thoughts of your top five themes change during or after training? If so, how?
This question will depend on #3 but I understand the type of answer you are looking for with
this question*

5) What was the most valuable (*PART*) of strengths-based training for you? Why?
What was the most valuable part of StrengthsFinders training for you? Why?

6) What aspect of the strengths-based training was least valuable to you? Why?
What was the least valuable part of StrengthsFinder training for you?

7) Has strengths-based (*The wording is a little confusing here. Is it "strengths-based" training?
Or "strengthsfinder training? I guess I always thought of it as StrengthsFinder because that is
how you introduce it in the survey*) training made you more aware of how you interact with
others? Explain.
*Has the StrengthsFinders training made you more aware of how you interact with others?
Explain.*

8) Has strengths-based training impacted your concept of who you are and who you are
becoming? Explain. *This question seems a little heavy. Not quite sure the direction you are
wanting the answer to go.*
"How did the StrengthsFinder training impact how you see yourself?" Explain.
"Was your understanding of who you are impacted by the StrengthsFinder training? Explain."
"How did the StrengthsFinder training impact the way you see yourself?" Explain.

9) Has strengths-based training impacted the way you work with your team? Explain.
*Has the StrengthsFinder training helped you understand the way you work with a team?
Explain.*
How as the StrengthsFinder training influenced the way you work with your team? Explain.

10) Have you interacted with the concept of Strengths beyond the official training times? (team
meetings, individual meetings with your supervisor, casual conversations, etc.) Explain.
I'm a little unsure of what it means to "interact with the concept of Strengths"
*Have you discussed the topic of StrengthsFinder outside of the official training times?
Have you noticed the impact of StrengthsFinder outside of the official training times?*

I hope this helps. Looking forward to hearing how it goes!

Respondent B

Respondent B replied on Monday, September 10, 2012, 11:15 pm.

*Hi, Rachel,
Happy to do it.*

Survey Questions:

1) Please indicate your area of student leadership:

- *Residence Life Staff (ARs, CBs, RAs)*

2) Have you worked with the StrengthsFinder tool before?

- *This year was my first experience with StrengthsFinder*

3) What was your initial response when you received your “Top Five” results from StrengthsFinder? (Did you agree/disagree with them? Understand or not understand them? Wonder why NU was making you do this at all? Etc.)

I was surprised at specific and accurate they were. I think that in some situations, the opinions of people that know you are just as valuable as your own opinion, so their confirmations ("That sounds a lot like you, [Respondent B]", etc.) were a good indicator of that. I dunno... I feel like for a lot of us, we were (and maybe still are, to some extent) trying to figure out who we really were, so this was a valuable tool, if nothing else to give us specific vocabulary to work with.

4) Did your initial response to your top five themes change during/after training? If so, how?

I don't think they changed. I think that the more I thought about them, the more they made sense and the better I felt about them.

5) What was the most valuable aspect of strengths-based training for you? Why?

Talking through the results with other people after the results and after all the team building stuff in Seattle and the ropes course and all of that. Seeing and discussing how well the results of other teammates matched up to them in real situations (well, almost... You don't get to monkey around on a ropes course every day) helped me realize more that this was a legit deal.

6) What aspect of the strengths-based training was least valuable to you? Why?

You can only sit in the HSC 104¹³⁹ chair seats for so long.

7) Has strengths-based training made you more aware of how you interact with others? Explain.

I think so, to some extent. I don't consciously run through my list every time I interact with anyone, and anytime I do it's almost always in hindsight.

¹³⁹ HSC 104 is the classroom where the introductory information was presented

8) Has strengths-based training impacted your concept of who you are and who you are becoming? Explain.

As I touched on before, I'm in one of those seasons where I'm still trying to figure out who I really am, so having some specific, meaningful vocabulary to work with is very helpful in thinking about myself, explaining who I am to others, and especially in the current job hunt. While I'm obviously freeing myself to change a bit in the years to come, the strengths are a reliable anchor-point of sorts to refer back to.

9) Has strengths-based training impacted the way you work with your team? Explain.

As far as my experience with Res Life goes, after the strengths-finding stuff was over and we got into our years, I don't remember talking about it much as a team, though I'm sure we all had it in the back of our heads. I feel like this kind of training is something that is helpful, beneficial, and all of that, but in the thick of things it tends to get either overlooked or forgotten unless someone is intentional about bringing it up. Then, I think, it could be re-helpful (not sure that's a word...).

10) Have you interacted with the concept of Strengths beyond the official training times? (team meetings, individual meetings with your supervisor, casual conversations, etc.) Explain.

As I mentioned before, outside of official training times the Strengths didn't come up very often, and almost never spontaneously. It wasn't like we were sitting in the Caf and somebody said, "Sorry, [Respondent B], Michael took your seat, but that's okay, 'cause you're Adaptable" or anything like that.

Since graduating, I've had to keep in mind my Strengths in entering the wild and woolly job hunt. I've had it mentioned it to me a couple of times (I think you have at least once, Rachel) but never have had any real serious discussion. I've filled out some personality profiles and tests for various pursuits, but haven't run into the Strengths again until now.

Now I need to go dig through some stuff and dig out my results. Organization and Memory weren't In my top five. At least, not that I remember.

Best of luck!

Respondent B

Respondent C

Respondent C replied on Tuesday, September 11, 2012 2:16 pm.

Rachel,

This survey looks great! All questions are great questions, I don't feel like any are repetitive of each other. They are very concise and to-the-point—GREAT JOB! ☺

My addition, of a personal note:

Strengths-Based Training provided by Northwest University has been one of the most valuable experiences that I've taken away from my college education. Though it was not an inherently "academic" study or rigorous course layout, it is the experience I feel was the most motivating and life-giving for me. It was very interesting to see the strengths of each of my team members and to figure out how we could best work together to accomplish our common goals. As a result of this training, our team learned how to interpret the actions and reactions of our fellow teammates, and thus became a more cohesive group (and still consider each other great friends!).

I constantly see all 5 of my strengths playing into my current employment (now at -----), and I believe that is the reason why I thrive in this workplace and enjoy coming to work every day. Completing the StrengthsFinders assessment this summer for what was my 3rd time brought even more perspective on these, and was just as vital as the first 2 times. I sincerely appreciate that Northwest takes the time to invest in their leaders and employees, and fully support this type of test—it is probably the most effective and precise assessment test I've ever seen, and will probably use it in the future when working with different leaders whom I might have the pleasure of working with.

Hope that works for you, Rach! Thanks for letting me be a part. ☺

Respondent C

Appendix 2: Survey Informed Consent Section

Thanks for taking this survey!

What IS this? A ten-question survey to measure the results of the strengths-based training NU is doing with all you wonderful student leaders.

Why do you need my feedback? To figure out what's working well in our strengths-based training, what needs to change, and how it should change. We need your help to make this training better for current and future student leaders! Also, Rachel Klas is using the results of this survey as research to write her thesis for the MA of Missional Leadership program at NU.

Do I have to answer ALL the questions? There *are* only ten, but participation is *totally voluntary*. You can choose the "I prefer not to respond" option on any questions you want, but thoughtful and diligently honest answers are going to be the most helpful. *Nothing* you say will be traced back to you or held against you concerning your leadership position or scholarship. Just know that your feedback is really valuable to us!

Want more info on this project or a copy of this statement? Contact Rachel Klas at (425.889.5288 ~ rachel.klas@northwestu.edu) or the head of the Northwest University's Human Subjects Review Board, Dr. Kevin Leach (425.889.5248 ~ kevin.leach@northwestu.edu) who approved this project.

If you do not agree to this, just close this window and have a great day!

If you agree, please check the box below, and we'll get going!

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this survey.

Appendix 3: Survey Questions

- 1) Please indicate your area of student leadership:
 - Residence Life Staff (RAs, CBs, ARs)¹⁴⁰
 - NUSG (Executive Team, ECs, Senate)¹⁴¹
 - Student Media (Karisma, Talon)¹⁴²
 - Act Six Scholars (unless serving in another leadership position)¹⁴³
 - NUMA¹⁴⁴
 - I prefer not to respond
- 2) Have you worked with the StrengthsFinder tool before?
 - This year was my first experience with StrengthsFinder
 - I have worked with StrengthsFinder already (previous leadership training, class, etc.)
 - I prefer not to respond
- 3) What was your initial reaction when you received your “Top Five” results from the StrengthsFinder test?
 - I prefer not to respond
- 4) Did your initial reaction to your “Top Five” change during or after training? If so, how?
 - I prefer not to respond
- 5) Thinking back to the initial strengths-based training in August or October (depending), and now in January, what was the most valuable aspect of strengths-based training for you? Why?
 - I prefer not to respond
- 6) What aspect of the strengths-based training was least valuable to you? Why?
 - I prefer not to respond
- 7) Has strengths-based training made you more aware of how you interact with others? Explain.
 - I prefer not to respond
- 8) Has strengths-based training impacted your concept of who you are and who you are becoming? Explain.

¹⁴⁰ RAs (Resident Assistants) supervise the floors in the residence halls; CBs (Community Builders) are volunteer assistants to the RAs; ARs (Apartment Representatives) supervise the campus apartment buildings

¹⁴¹ Executive Team: Student Body President, Activities Chair, Treasurer, Communications Chair, and Senate Chair; ECs (Event Coordinators) assist the Activities Chair with campus events; NU Student Senate

¹⁴² Karisma Yearbook; Talon student newspaper

¹⁴³ Act Six, an Urban Leadership Scholarship

¹⁴⁴ NUMA (Northwest University Missions Association) is comprised of the following: Chairperson, Worship Director, Prayer Director, Public Relations Director, Missions Director, Prayer Director, Outreach Director, Life Group (Campus Small Group) Director, Pursuit (Student-Led Chapel) Director

- I prefer not to respond

9) Has strengths-based training impacted the way you work with your team? Explain.

- I prefer not to respond

10) Have you interacted with the concept of strengths beyond the official training times? (team meetings, individual meetings with your supervisor, casual conversations, etc.) Explain.

- I prefer not to respond.

Appendix 4: Survey Emails to Student Leaders

Initial email to student leaders; sent Tuesday, January 22, 2013 at 4:22 PM

Hello, Student Leaders!

Hopefully, you had a wonderful long weekend, are settling in to this new semester, and gearing up for Screaming Eagles' Week!

As we talked about at the end of Student Leadership Training, we are asking for your feedback on the Strengths-Based training you have received. Hopefully, you've had a chance to talk about it with your teams and supervisors. We want to know what has been impactful (and what hasn't!) so that we can improve this process for you, your teammates, and future leaders.

The survey is **10** questions, **anonymous**, and will probably take you **less than 20** minutes, but your feedback is **really important** to us! We need all responses by this Friday, January 25. Here's the link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NUstrengths> Why not do it now?

Also, if you took any pics during Student Leadership Training, please hit reply and send them to me. I'm trying to make a good collection for the future.

Many Thanks!

The Community Life Team

Email reminder, sent Thursday, January 24, 2013 at 12:21 PM

Hello, Leaders!

This is just a reminder to respond to the survey about Strengths Training by TOMORROW night! (Why not take it now? Here's the link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NUstrengths>)

This survey is really important to us because

1. We want to equip you well
2. We want to hear if that's happening or not
3. We want to do an even better job for student leaders in the future!

The survey is **10** questions, **anonymous**, and will probably take you **less than 20** minutes, and your feedback is **very impactful** for the future of this program!

In addition to using your responses to improve our training, I am also using the results from this survey to write my MA thesis. I would *sincerely and thoroughly appreciate* having something to write about! 😊

Many thanks for the time, energy, and skill with which you lead our campus!
Seriously.

~ Rachel

Survey deadline extension; sent Friday, January 25, 2013 at 8:58 PM

(This is the last email you'll get about this survey—I promise!)

Our THANKS to all of you who already completed the NU Strengths Training survey!

For the rest of you, we've decided to extend the deadline to Monday at noon so that we can still receive your input!

Here's the link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NUstrengths>)

Many thanks for all of your valuable feedback!

~ Rachel & the Community Life Team

Appendix 5: Unedited Responses to Question Three

“What was your initial reaction when you received your ‘Top Five’ results from the StrengthsFinder test?”

- It was quite dead on. Especially the descriptions of each strength.
- I thought they hit the mark! I probably would have rearranged them because I don't think my "top strength" was necessarily at the top of the list.
- I thought it was a helpful tool to figure out how I function as a leader more effectively. Knowing what I am best at can maximize my strengths in the field when it comes to on-hand work.
- I was not sure how accurate the results were. While I agreed with all of them, I thought that there were other strengths that should have been in my top 5.
- I agreed with them, they fit perfectly!
- I felt the results were very accurate and insightful into my strengths but also who I am as a person and what I excel at in my personality. I felt they represented me well.
- It was interesting seeing how it developed. It seemed quite accurate.
- I was surprised because what I had thought to be my greatest strength was not even among the five listed.
- I used the same results I received last year.
- I was very satisfied with my top five strengths. I could see each one of them in my life and while reading through the book, I highlighted each section that I felt like was me.
- I was interested by the results and felt that some of them described me well
- For the most part, I agreed with the results, though I needed some clarification at first to understand what a few of the terms were referencing.
- They fit me perfectly!! I love my strengths and how they teach me how I function.
- The first time I took the test, I was a little confused. But since having training on multiple occasions, I understand my top five well and they make sense.
- I think two of the strengths in my top five do not truly describe me well, but I think the other three do describe me very well.
- I thought they were really accurate
- They were so true.
- I was not really surprised by most of my strengths, since they basically just told me what I already knew. I was a little surprised by the priority they assigned to some strengths over others, but overall my results weren't too surprising.
- I was not sure what all of them meant, and when I read through all of them I thought maybe StrengthsFinder missed one, and I was not sure if they were really in the right order.
- At first, I was skeptical. But, as time went on I began to notice some of those strengths coming out in my life.
- surprised
- I was excited overall. My very first initial feelings were estranged due to the fact I didn't know that "woo" stood for "win others over", but other than that I was pleased with my results. Especially once I read their description.
- Honestly I didn't understand the "connectedness" as my first strength. However, my "learner" and "harmony" strengths resonate with me. I would be interested to take the test

again because I feel I've done a lot of growing during my time at Northwest. It would be interesting to see what strengths have changed and which ones remained the same.

- I felt that they are very accurate.
- I felt it described me pretty accurately.
- I felt my results were very accurate and I would have picked at least 3 out of the 5 to describe myself before taking the StrengthsFinder quiz.
- I thought it was very accurate. I didn't think I was the specific strength but once I saw the description I strongly agreed with the results.
- I was excited to see just what ways I interact and lead others. I definitely saw these in my own life and they've been manifest in this way since I was young.
- I was a bit surprised. I think I would have picked different ones for myself
- I was very interested, but not very surprised because I already knew these things about myself.
- When I received my Top Five strengths, I thought they were really reflective of who I am, so I thought the StrengthsFinder test was very accurate! It has been so helpful to know my strengths so that I can further develop them and be a better leader.
- They seemed spot on after reading the sections that explained them
- I agreed with some of my strengths, but others I didn't see in me. During my first experience with strengths-finder (Act Six training before arriving at NU), I learned to see how these traits WERE in me.
- Confident that I reflect my results
- When I received my Top Five, I could immediately see how all those strengths fit into my life. I could now put a word to why I did things.
- That these strengths fit me very well but there were hints of other strengths that I could see in my life.
- I was pleased with my results. They fit me well!
- Totally wrong. I was slightly disappointed in them because two out of the five actually related to who I was as a person.
- I agreed with pretty much all of my top five. I think I knew deep down I knew that I had some of those strengths, but never really thought that deeply about it. I actually didn't totally realize that I had a couple of the strengths until after looking at my results. I think it gave me different perspectives on how I interact think and solve problems that really have helped me.
- They were surprisingly accurate. I actually had no idea that some of them were my strengths until I saw my results.
- The strengths did not particularly surprise me. They seemed to pretty accurately describe me.
- I was surprised at how I could see each of those strengths in my life.
- I agreed with my top five, after previously taking the test there were a few that were still there, but it was interesting to see how much I had changed even after three years.
- They have been the same for me every year.
- Amazement- I couldn't believe how perfectly the words described the things that I'm good at!
- My first response was how do these questions answer my strengths, but I also have looked into and identify with them. It is helpful to know and discuss.

- I was like no way these are me.
- I have already done this test in previous years. I was initially shocked, but have learned over the years to play to my strengths.
- I thought some of them were a little off, but I guess if that's what they think, I'll agree!

Appendix 6: Unedited Responses to Question Four

“Did your initial reaction to your ‘Top Five’ change during or after training? If so, how?”

- It made me more aware as to how to utilize my strengths.
- It didn't really change at all.
- Yes, it did! I was pleasantly surprised to find out how useful each "Top Five" was when conversing with other leaders about their level of effectiveness when it comes to using their strengths.
- Yes, after training and throughout the year, I have seen my strengths used quite a bit. I more easily agree with them now, although I still would like to see which strengths did not make the 5, but came close.
- No, it did not.
- During training, I felt my strengths were given more meaning. I was able to see them better as I talked to different people either by comparing myself with others with some of the same "Top Five" traits or by seeing my traits stand out compared with people who didn't have any of my traits. It made me feel better about the Top Five traits I received, and helped me see that no matter what traits one gets, you can be a leader.
- It changed after training I learned more about myself and why my top 5 where my top 5
- Not much but I began to look out for those strengths in the things I do.
- My reaction was the same this year as it was last year. I also feel I have adapted to my strengths more.
- After strengths finder I would agree that my top five would still be my top five however through the training I think I figured out my top six and seven. I thought that there were perhaps two strengths that I would consider my top but were not in my top five.
- Not during this training but in previous trainings.
- No, it didn't change much. I got to focus in more closely to observe my strengths, but I know myself pretty well so it was more of a matter of connecting the personality I already knew with the Strengths terms that I had been given.
- Nope. I still loved them and felt that they described me. They helped show me how I work with groups.
- Yes, I understand them much better, especially how they can function in different capacities.
- It did not change.
- It was pretty much what I expected
- No.
- No, it didn't.
- Yes it did, when I understood what they meant, I realized they probably were the best ones for me, and that the others could be my 6th or 7th.
- Yes. I'd be curious to see if my top five would change if I took the test again.
- made sense after looking into it
- No.
- I liked that the facilitator let us choose the strength that resonated with us the most.
- My reaction did not change.
- Not much, if at all.

- No it did not change.
- I think it stayed the same. The only thing that changed was that the sessions became very repetitive. They asked the same questions so it got boring at times because there was so much review.
- I wanted to apply my newfound knowledge of my strengths to my work environment and see how instead of focusing on my weaknesses, I could improve upon my strengths with a team and individually.
- I don't think that I would have picked the "top five" on my own, but reading the descriptions during training I knew that they definitely described me.
- No, my reaction to my top five did not change during training.
- I learned more about my five areas of greatest strength and I greatly appreciated the time to reflect on who I am and how that influences how I lead. Very valuable!
- I didn't disagree with my "top five" however I saw other strengths that I thought could also describe me. Seems like most of them are ambiguous and could describe anyone on the right day.
- No.
- No
- The training helped me refine some of my ideas about the strengths.
- Nope. I was still happy.
- I still think the same way about them. This isn't necessarily my first rodeo with these strengths.
- My initial reaction to my top five didn't really change during the training. It did a little bit during the group activity I think just because I was more aware of how or when I could use my strengths to help my team. The training was helpful in that it caused me to think strategically about team work and how everyone would or could use their strengths to improve the overall experience in the group.
- Yes, at first I thought my main strength was one thing but then I realized that I was definitely a harmony person. I also realized that I thought the test should have given me a few different results instead but obviously not all tests are 100% accurate.
- My reaction did not really change other than by learning that my strengths were more common than I had expected.
- No, but it did help me see my strengths more clearly.
- My initial reaction did not really change with training, but I did think the training helped clarify what it was all about.
- Not really- from the beginning I agreed with my strengths. The training did, however, help me to clarify in my mind what that can practically look like.
- It did not change. I liked them before and after.
- Yea as I read through I realized they were me and I am confident in owning them now
- In previous years, yes. This year not so much.
- Yes, but I thought my top was not correct.

Appendix 7: Unedited Responses from Question Five

“Thinking back to the initial strengths-based training in August or October (depending), and now in January, what was the most valuable aspect of strengths-based training for you? Why?”

- Putting into words my strengths. I knew them but seeing them in words makes me a lot more aware of them.
- Being able to realize that it wasn't an inability for me to do some aspects of my job because I was incapable but that they weren't as fine tuned and I needed to work off of my strengths instead.
- most valuable aspect was going over my groups strengths with each other. This helped us to work together in a more successful manner for the time after the test.
- It was just a good reminder for the team about each others strengths
- Breaking down our strengths on paper, going over what they mean, and seeing similarities in our team (last fall)
- The most valuable part of the strengths based training for me was seeing what Top Five traits others received and seeing how that affected them as a leader and how my traits might affect me. The comparison with other people was very helpful.
- I found that learning what the strengths of my sib team was the most beneficial because I was able to better learn how our strengths overlapped and filled in our team so that we could be successful. I also really appreciated the January training because it was more of a general overview and very inspiring in seeking opportunities to make sure that my strengths are used.
- I enjoyed the team building exercises because it challenged everyone to not only pay attention to their strengths but to recognize the strengths of others as well.
- Learning how to use our strengths effectively. In day to day basis they are being used.
- Out of my strengths training experiences (in August and January), the August training was FAR more valuable to me than the one in January. Besides the fact that I was learning my strengths for the first time, I felt like my August training was geared more towards team cohesiveness. I really enjoyed not only learning about my own strengths but about my teammates strengths and how we can all work together. The graphs and charts were extremely helpful and they have been something my team and I have pulled out and re-looked at throughout the year.
- The focus of leadership based on working with people's strengths
- I think any of the group games/activities were valuable. I did not get much at all from the discussion times because they always went way too long, and after a short while they seemed pointless. The reason I think the games were valuable is because I think you get to know people when you actually do activities with them, rather than when you discuss terms about yourself with them.
- Learning my groups strengths and how they worked well together. Also, learning to embrace our strengths and use them to do all we can.
- Understanding the strengths of my team so that I could better understand how my strengths would fit into that framework.
- For me, the most valuable aspect of training was conversing and doing activities with my sib-team members, because this helped me to understand them and how they work.
- I loved getting to know the strengths of the people I work with

- To get to know my team more.
- Team building activities with my fellow senators were awesome, because it pulled us together and made us strong, as well as helping us to get to know each other.
- Understanding that its better to grow your strengths and become incredible instead of growing your weaknesses and becoming average.
- It just helped me to understand those areas that God has wired me in.
- working as a team. Getting to know each other.
- Finding out what category each one was in (leading, supporting, etc).
- The thing I took away most was the fact that I could see what other people's strengths were and utilize them to maximize team production. Training helped me to be more aware of others' strengths, learn how to recognize them, and how to capitalize on them.
- The initial training in Oct was not very helpful. The session I participated was focused on explaining the strengths. What would have been more helpful is if we had to read the team's definitions outside of the messian, then do an in class exercise.
- The all-day seminar at the beginning of January provided a lot of great insight to strengths and how to appreciate the one's given to you.
- The challenges that we did at the camping area in August was the best because it was off campus. Being in a new area helped me think in a different way.
- Discussing our strengths with our team and seeing how they complement each other.
- The most valuable part of training was being able to be with my team, figure out what each others strengths were, and use that to bond and problem solve.
- The most valuable aspect of strengths-based training was learning others' strengths so that I could work more effectively with them, and them with me.
- I think the most valuable aspect of the strengths-based training was thinking about how to appreciate others' strengths and work together as a team to capitalize on them. As a leader, you not only need to know yourself, but the other student leaders and also those you lead - really practical information that I can apply on a daily basis to the work that I do as a student leader at NU.
- Taking the test was the most beneficial the trainings didn't teach me anything new
- I was not involved during August or October but the most valuable part of strengths-finder has just been knowing they are my strengths and the descriptors that help me learn more about how they play a role in who I am.
- Spending time with the team that I am a part of. It was a good community experience with an emphasis in leadership training.
- Doing activities that made us use our strengths and then reflect on them was very valuable.
- Learning how to apply my strengths in a practical way by working in a team.
- The team getting to know each others skills.
- Through the strengths-based training I have learned that it is not only important for me to be growing in my weaknesses, but also that I can use my strengths to be a good leader.
- Just being able to relate to my team in more ways than we have been able to relate. It was just the fun we needed to start the semester so that we can work together.
- I think the most valuable aspect of training to me was first having the speaker come up and explain and show everyone how they could use and utilize their strengths. He definitely put it into perspective for me in that I realized just how valuable knowing how

to work with others is. I generally get along and work well with most people, but this training shed a new light on teamwork for me. It showed me the benefit about being intentional about using not just my own strengths when working with people, but also finding other peoples strengths within a group and helping them use their own as well, creating better community and opportunity for success.

- I really enjoyed chatting with other leaders about their primary strengths and how they play out in their daily lives. It became especially interesting talking with leaders who shared my primary strength and hearing them tell me about how they see it every day.
- For me, it was finding out where all of the other people in my groups strengths were and what they do to utilize those strengths. That helped me to realize how to be a better leader in my own way as well.
- I really liked getting to understand how my team operates.
- Getting to work with my team and see how all of our strengths play together.
- I loved meeting with my team and learning about how our strengths could work together from the different sheets given out in the August training.
- I was able to work with both of my teams and not have to pick one over the other also I feel that the January session was alot more entertaining, interactive and more helpful than the first we really were able to come together and see our team using there strengths.
- I felt both were very repetitive from previous years.
- It helped me to understand myself better.

Appendix 8: Unedited Responses to Question Six

“What aspect of the strengths-based training was least valuable to you? Why?”

- Quite repetitive.
- The session in which we discussed the strengths in the Library was not very important to me. EC's were not required to attend together, so while I did learn some information about the strengths, I didn't see much value in the time spent.
- maybe the motivational speaker
- I did not think the PPT and strengths training was challenging this January. I liked the Amazing race, but besides that, I feel like I got more in depth training last fall.
- Probably the Scavenger Hunt. It was way too long and very tiring. The challenges were good, but should have been in a smaller space. The activity did help somewhat in seeing how we worked together as a team, but I feel it would have been much more effective if we didn't have to travel such huge distances for such an extended period of time.
- None. All of the training is valuable in one way or another.
- As much as I enjoyed our guest speaker in January, I didn't feel like I learned a whole lot from him because he was talking to such a large, diverse group of leaders. I did enjoy how he tied in spiritual values to our mission.
- Any of the lecture/discussion times. I always found myself having little to say because there was not a lot to respond to. "I see [certain strength] displayed in this way in my life..." type of conversations are mundane and quickly became boring. In the January training, it seemed like we had brought in a motivational speaker or something. I had very little connection to the speaker and disagreed with a few of the things he had to say. He seemed interested in just pumping people up, which I thought was unnecessary in a group of people whose positions already display their enthusiasm and initiative.
- Since I had done the training so many times before, a review of what strengths were what wasn't very valuable. Also, doing it in multiple contexts with different leadership teams made it a bit redundant.
- I think much of the 'inspirational' kind of stuff was kind of a waste of time. I'd rather just receive the training information and be done.
- The first half (seminar) sounded like every other leadership conference I've been too. It was not valuable at all because it taught me nothing I didn't already know.
- Some of the stuff was repetitive and took a lot of time that was unnecessary.
- Lecture type settings
- I didn't feel like talking about our experience after the scavenger hunt was very important/productive. Although it was somewhat amusing.
- to be honest, i didn't really absorb any of the first bit of the training. it was really early and not as interesting as after lunch :)
- While the scavenger hunt was fun, I believe that the activities could use a little tweaking. For example, it would of been helpful for there to be "real life" scenarios, as Res Life does during training.
- Probably the second session after winter break was least valuable. There was not a lot of new information. My team already knew their strengths so it felt like we did not need to be there with the student leaders that were hearing it for the first time.
- The full length training day with Chris. It was engaging and fun and kept us moving and

interacting with many different leaders on campus.

- I think that a lot of the talks about different ways to lead and how to lead large groups was the least valuable to me, just because the nature of student media is not directly leading a whole ton of people, rather just the small group involved.
- The least valuable aspect of the strengths-based training was having to go over all of the same material more than once.
- I really liked the Amazing Strengths game. It was so much fun! However, I think it would have been more beneficial if it was specifically stated beforehand that the main purpose was to utilize our strengths throughout the game. I think as college students we just naturally lean towards the competitive nature of things and it seemed most groups (mine included) wanted to finish first and may have been more focused on winning than what the game's activities were trying to teach us. Maybe more clearly emphasize and outline the purpose of the exercise before starting the game and really explain that it's not about competition, but learning to work together better as a team.
- Listening to the guy talk
- Scavenger Hunt. It seemed typical and unproductive. It got my group to know each other a lot better, but we didn't find out anything new about each others strengths, how their used, or how we can apply them.
- I did not like the lecture. Though it was "interactive", it was still a lecture and was viewed in my opinion as childish. Reminded me of middle school. More time interacting with the team (not necessarily activities) and less time talking about interacting.
- The lectures. I felt like I got very little out of the lectures because they were very generalized and sometimes I didn't see how they fit with my life or strengths
- The physical relay course. It was ridiculously active and kind of embarrassing for asthmatics and other people who are out of shape. It was not enjoyable getting from point A to B. The challenges themselves were great.
- I thought it was all valuable.
- I'm not necessarily sure. Though the games were fun with my team, I think they didn't help at all really.
- There wasn't a lot that I thought wasn't valuable about this training. I think thought that one thing that could be improved would be that they could be a little more specific as to the application of peoples strengths would help them. It was clear to me, but I know for some people some of the presentation and videos were a little vague. The speaker was good but the videos and slide shows could have been more specific. Maybe if he related the strengths training more towards campus life for current college students and finding a job after college for people currently looking
- In some ways doing the activities. It did not give me a lot of time to reflect on my strengths. It was more about doing the activities.
- The initial strengths-based training was not that helpful because most of my team wasn't present.
- The talk of the second one in January. I didn't really learn how to apply my strengths in real areas to help my team.
- The first session was not as helpful it was like sitting through lecture and I losted focus. this one was fresh interesting and very helpful and I learned alot.
- I think having close to the same experience every year makes it difficult to learn new

- things. Especially when you work with the same people.
- The group activities.

Appendix 9: Unedited Answers to Question 7

“Has strengths-based training made you more aware of how you interact with others? Explain.”

- Not really, just how well I work in groups.
- Yes and no. I've worked on teams for years and understand how it works to be on one. It was a reinforcement of what I already knew.
- Yes, it shows me how normal my thought process is for my leadership type. Otherwise, I keep wondering why I can see things and find things in others when they can't see it in themselves, or why I keep pushing forward even when others quite. I am stubborn (an Achiever) and I do not like stereotypes (an Individualization kind of person). IT has helped me put a name to my strengths and given me helpful hints in how to maximize these strengths as well as keep an eye out for my weaknesses (i.e. doing too much).
- I can see my strengths in the way that I speak to people, in how I view others. Because of this, I can try to work on the things that I do not do well with others, as well as focus on further improving the strengths that I already have.
- I am positive. Now I know.
- Yes!
- Yes, in my "Top Five" rating, none of my top five strengths were with connecting with other people. This has helped me show that because I don't have a natural strength in connecting with others (which I had already somewhat knew, but it was good to have it confirmed), I need to work hard to connect better with people.
- Yes! It has given me a spring board so that I can communicate with those I work most closely with how my strengths can be used.
- Yes I have learned that I am always a positive person and I need positive people in my life
- I have learned that it is important to recognize and acknowledge the strengths of the people in my team. Not everything I do will fit my strengths but if I ask for help instead of giving up, I will achieve so much more.
- Yes, there are still some areas I need to work on.
- Definitely. Setting words to some of my strengths helps me be able to explain how I work to others. I am fully aware that I cannot be summed up in a matter of five words, but it allows me to quickly and efficiently explain myself to those I work with and around.
- It has when I get to know someone well. Having a more intimate knowledge of someone, I can usually pick up on what their strengths are and it helps me to interact with them.
- No. Putting words on my actions or interactions with others does not change my own awareness of my actions. Whether I see myself resolving conflict or see myself resolving conflict knowing that I have Harmony as one of my strengths, there is no difference. I was self-aware before and after StrengthsFinder. It does not take a description of my personality to see how I interact with others.
- Yes. It has made me aware of what I am good at and it also helps me try and see others strengths and help them use them to their potential.
- Completely. I have a much better understanding of how I interact, as well as how I communicate with people.
- Maybe slightly.
- It has given me a deeper understanding of who I am and how I work with others. I notice

- my strengths coming out when I work with people
- Yes. Now I know how to act towards other strengths.
 - No, strengths-based training didn't show me anything new about the way I interacted with others.
 - Yes, now I understand why I am driven the way I am.
 - It has definitely reminded me that I need to work on relationships more and not just my goals.
 - without knowing it yes
 - Yes, I've found my strengths manifest themselves in my communication with others in a profound way. It's a good way for me to understand myself more.
 - Yes! I feel more aware of others' behavior and attributing it to their strengths. I am more patient with people and pay more attention to how they could be an asset and shine.
 - Yes. I realized I need more time to think than others.
 - Yes, now that I have identified what my top strengths are, I know how I can best be an asset for the team and which areas of a project I am going to need help with.
 - Yes! My team had a great overlap in strengths but also areas where we were different. Once we knew what we do well in it was easy to see how we needed to address each other. I've also been able to take that and use it with other residents as I fulfill my role as a part of res life.
 - Yes I am more self-aware now than ever before and may change my career choice thanks to this training.
 - Somewhat. Its cool to see how other people approach problems and life in general and somewhat be able to understand their viewpoint.
 - No, it simply put better words to what I already knew about myself and how I interact with others.
 - Very much so! I think about it probably every day, especially since we are studying this a lot now in my senior capstone class. I'm learning to appreciate others' differences more - instead of thinking that they need to see things like I do or feeling like I need to see things like they do. Now, I'm beginning to understand more and more that our differences aren't obstacles to great work; they can actually help us do our best work.
 - No
 - It has during training, but I haven't yet thought of it when living out my daily life.
 - Yes. I know better how to approach those around me.
 - Absolutely. It has shed light on some of the things that I do and say that I normally would look over. Knowing this has made me become more aware of things I need to work on in my life.
 - Yes it has because it shows how I can do my part and when to back off.
 - I don't know. I think I had a good handle on how I interact. This was a nice exercise though.
 - Yes, it has made me very aware of the way I interact with people and has given me insight into how I can better interact with people.
 - Nope. I see that I still interact the same way. But I am just more aware of what I am stronger at, and what I am not.
 - Yes! I could definitely say that for myself, this strength based training has made me more aware of how I interact with others. Not only in how I am using and utilizing my own

strengths but also in how I can create opportunities whether in activities or in conversation to find out or allow the other person to use their strengths making their experience more beneficial to them. I have taken it as a challenge for me to be less self centered in that I will focus more on what the other person is getting out of the conversation I am having with them rather than what I am getting out of the conversation. how can I help them focus their life using their goals.

- It has made me understand more consciously what motivates me to do what I do. This helps me understand where I have the most understanding for others and where I get easily impatient.
- Yes. I do realize when I am using my strengths and how often throughout the day I am using them.
- It totally has. I understand myself better and in that I have respect for others.
- Yes, it definitely has. I now actively think about how I can utilize my strengths in my leadership, and I can see and understand why my teammates work the way that they do and how they individually contribute.
- Yes a little.
- Not really I was already aware of how I interacted with others but it did give me insight into more of my personality and identity.
- yes.
- Yes because i know how I act and how I sometimes work.

Appendix 10: Unedited Responses from Question 8

“Has strengths-based training made you more aware of how you interact with others? Explain.”

- Just made me realize that I am the way I am for a reason and there is no reason to try and change who you are hard wired to be.
- Yes. It is cool to see different characteristics of myself outlined on paper.
- Yes, it has helped me become a more holistic leader. Figuring out my identity as a leader - I think - helps me impact others more effectively as well as myself with a clear view of my own leadership style. Knowing how I perceive myself and how others perceive me makes for effective communication to occur.
- Yes. It has been so good to put into words part of my personality, as opposed to deciding for myself who I am. And, I now attempt to better the strengths that I do have, so as to do the best that I can in the specific areas.
- not really. I have done this before.
- Yes!
- Yes it did. It helped me see where my strengths are and where I can really excel as a leader. However, I did not agree that I can't change dramatically into someone with different strengths. I believe that if its God's will, I could develop hugely in other strengths and that I can't limit who I am or who God wants me to become based on my strengths right now. However, the strengths-finder test and training was very helpful in showing me where I'm at RIGHT NOW in terms of my abilities.
- Yes, because it has given me a greater awareness about what I am good at and what type of activities and opportunities I should get involved in.
- No
- It has challenged as an individual. I never realized the areas outlined after taking the test. Now that I know my top five strengths its easier to work with other people because I can confidently perform my tasks without taking on more than I can handle.
- Yes, it has shown me that I am capable of doing more than what I say I can do.
- Yes. I especially enjoyed this test because it focuses on strengths and strengths alone. Instead of focusing on all of my faults, this test calls out my strengths and explains how to capitalize them and use them to my best ability. Understanding my strengths will help me be able to use them effectively in my life and encourage me to live them out on a daily basis.
- It has helped me to learn more about how I interact with people and what I need to do regulate myself.
- No, because it is essentially an observation of who I already am. It does not challenge me to change in any way, it simply puts words on things that I already do. If anything, it has made things more frustrating because instead of looking at my actions as a whole, I try to compartmentalize them and focus only on the 5 things that I have been labeled.
- Yes. It is helping me see what I am good at and how I can use my strengths in my future career.
- Yes - I have a much fuller understanding of who I am as a unique individual. I think the strengths training helps one discover the unique aspects of each person's personality and leadership, as well as what areas are most developed and working best.

- It has not; I think it is a cool little tool to see a few aspects of who I am, but nothing more. Who I am is much broader than a test can explain.
- Yes, I am excited to see my strengths grow and I'm glad I have the tools to shape them
- Yes. It has helped me to really understand how I'm wired.
- Slightly, yes. After being presented with my results, I spent a lot of time thinking about whether or not they were accurate, and the time I spent thinking about their accuracy helped me to see certain parts of myself that I wouldn't usually see under normal circumstances.
- Yes, it shows how I think and act and how I will think and act in the future, and what to focus on.
- Yes. It has helped me realize those things about me that are important to me.
- more or less
- Absolutely. I'm finding I'm making more connections with what I want to do in respect to my strengths, such as being persuasive and interacting with other people.
- I am naturally pretty introspective so a lot of the reflection information was stuff I normally think of!
- Yes. It helps to explain my quirks.
- Yes, even though I already had these strengths and an idea of them before having the training, I now feel that I have embraced them even more and that is shaping me into an even better version of myself.
- YES! I can see now why I act a certain way under pressure or when things change. Also, when working with one other person or group I can reflect back on how I acted during that group time and could see how my strengths came out and also how my weaknesses came out.
- Yes I hope to become all that God plans for me by understanding more of my strengths through our training. I am taking positive action steps to change my life.
- I would say that it influenced my perceptions of myself, but not made a large impact or huge change.
- No, strengths-based training has not impacted my concept of who I am or who I am becoming, but it has put better words and terminology to aspects of myself that I already knew.
- Yes, the strengths-based training has helped me become more aware of who I am and I'm learning to appreciate that more than before. God has given me specific strengths (and not other ones) so that I can do the specific work He has for me.
- No
- Slightly. I've taken other personality tests before that have taught me similar things about myself. This has helped me know more about what I'm good at and why though.
- Not necessarily. My identity is enhanced by this training, but not monumentally so.
- It has. I can now put words to things I do and it has solidified my personality and from there, I can refine and grow those areas of my life.
- Not necessarily. I don't define myself based on a test.
- For sure! It has made me much more confident in my leadership because I can see what my strengths are. It has also made me more humble realizing that I need other people who are strong in different areas.
- Not really. It was very insightful, but it wasn't necessarily ground breaking enough o

influence my daily walk in life.

- It definitely has impacted my concept of who I am and becoming. I am feeling like I am really getting a lot of direction at this time in my life. Both here at NU and in finding what I want to do for a career. It just so happened that I have recieved some other leadership training around the same time as this training. I saw it as very beneficial to me and the rest of the leaders on campus that participated. I am sure that if the leaders on campus earnestly thought about what they learned at this training they would realize it is invaluable. I think that often times as we go about trying to achieve a goal in our lives that we get lost in the process and get distracted and focussed on the wrong things. This training was very reassurings and encouraging for me in that it showed me how I could better focus and help others focus so that anyone you work with can be successful and us their god given strengths
- For sure. It really helped me to conceptualize what I am good at. Of course, I have always had a general idea of my strengths, but having them all laid out before me with practical ways I can improve on them really helps me to visualize where I can go in the future.
- Yes! I love learning more about myself and how my mind works and how God has specific areas that he designed me to do well in.
- Yes just as I mentioned above.
- yes.
- Yes, I noticed the way I am.

Appendix 11: Unedited Responses from Question Nine

“Has strengths-based training impacted the way you work with your team? Explain.”

- Definitely has. I know my role and I don't try to focus on areas that I am not great at, but rather focus on areas I excel at.
- Yes. It made me realize where I am most valuable and how my strengths add to accomplishing tasks.
- Yes, it has helped me indicate my place on the team because not everyone has my combination of strengths on that team. Uniquely, it makes me feel special but also, it helps me realize I have a perspective and talent to bring that, otherwise, would not be present at all: I have something to offer
- Absolutely, I can now see the way that my team thinks in a clearer manner, and then change the way that I interact with them so as to improve our overall success.
- I guess. It just helps us determine which jobs people should get.
- Yes - I notice other peoples strengths and play to them...
- Yes, its shown that I need to work hard to connect with others on my team. So I'm now making an extra effort.
- Yes, because I am better able to understand how they react and interact in situations where we are too work together.
- Yes I have learned that I hold my team together. I focus more on the positive and bring woo to the team. I am not as organized so some others on the team are better than me at that. I learned my role and what I was good at on the tam.
- As a team we acknowledge each others strengths in the things we do together. Individually it helps us see how our strengths come out in the different tasks we perform.
- Yes, learning to participate and not just watch from the sidelines or let others do the work.
- Definitely. Like I said earlier, my team and I go back and look at the graphs and charts we were given to compare who excels in what. In planning events, we refer to each other by our strengths and will call out our strengths in each other. It allows our team to work very smoothly with one another.
- Definitely, it has shown me why we are strong in some areas, where we have potential, and where we need to work together to fill in the gaps.
- Not really. I have learned more about them, but not just through StrengthsFinder. That happens simply from spending time with them
- Yes. It has helped me understand them better and how they think and process.
- Definitely. Through the Saturday leadership seminar, I was able to observe my team working in their strengths and see how I fit into that according to my own strengths. There was no need for us to double up on areas where other people were strong, but for me to figure out how I could innovatively use my strengths to contribute in a new way.
- Not really; working with teams both before and after taking strengths-finder, I have always focused on being kind, polite, organized and fun.
- yes, we all understand each other better and have memories to laugh about
- Yes. If I'm weak in an area, I know who is strong at it now.
- Absolutely. The second half of training pulled me together with the rest of my team, helping me to learn about each of them as individuals and about all of us as a team.
- Sort of, now I know that since I have "individualization," I can sort our workers based on

their strengths, since I can identify how they work together.

- Maybe some, but not much. I'm still me.
- no
- A bit, yes. I suppose intentionality is a big focus, and it has allowed me to focus on what I'm good at.
- See question 7 and 5
- Yes. It helps me to be more confident in my quirks.
- Yes, I believe as a team we have shifted the dynamic to allow people to play to their strengths and let others help out in situations where one individual might not be as strong.
- I already talked about this on a previous question. My group has been able to use this knowledge when we do event planning and also in executing events. It has made all of these things much easier and has reduced the likelihood of having stress.
- Yes I try to focus now on what I can do for my team through my training whereas before I was looking for way to improve my weaknesses to become more well rounded.
- It has made me more open and comfortable with my team. Knowing what they're strong in and having the comfort of them knowing what is not one of my strengths has been helpful for setting expectations and our interactions.
- I am able to understand my team much better and appreciate their different ways of thinking than before. I feel like I understand them a lot more than before and I truly believe that this training has helped us work better with one another.
- No, we've all done it before (each year) and it seems unnecessary to do it year after year especially when we use the same strengths that we got years ago. Many of us feel like we've changed since coming to NU.
- No. In previous strengths-finder trainings during Act Six sessions I was able to sit down with the rest of my cadre and learn more about what their good at, but like I said, the scavenger hunt didn't help at all.
- yes, in knowing their strengths and mine, I can interact with them and maximize all of our strengths and gifting.
- Yes. Knowing the strengths of other team members has made me more aware of why they do things and I can give them tasks that more suit their strengths than mine.
- Yes it has because I know where my strengths lay and how to interact with my team using my strengths.
- Yes, it has helped us draw the strengths out in each other.
- Yes. I know how some people will react or be flexible in certain situations.
- I don't think so. But it is too early to really find out.
- Yes. Like I said before It has helped me immensely with how I go about how I work with people. Specifically when working with the senate team I have caught myself thinking about different peoples strengths and how we might improve the student life on campus through using our strengths and creating opportunities where students can improve their learning environment and talents and skills or strengths through student activities and clubs
- Yes it has. I think we really bonded through strengths training, especially the scavenger hunt thing. This will definitely help us to work together better in the future.
- Completely, I have more grace for others. I also seek the help of others a lot more. I have found anew confidence in myself for what I am capable of.

- Yes, it has helped us all to see what one another is good at and delegate responsibilities accordingly. It has also helped us to understand that we all have strengths in different areas and that is okay- we don't all have to be good at everything, and no one strength is superior to another.
- Not very much. We need more practical applications. My strengths aren't as easily defined as other I feel.
- It really helped us bond not just as one team but two. That should have happened first semester because all first semester both teams were strangers to each other and we should have bonded earlier.
- yes
- Yes it made me realize that I do not enjoy being a part of this team.

Appendix 12: Unedited Responses to Question Ten

“Have you interacted with the concept of strengths beyond the official training times? (team meetings, individual meetings with your supervisor, casual conversations, etc.) Explain.”

- No. Most of the times Strengths finder is brought up it is Act Six.
- Yes. We had a team meeting completely devoted to it.
- I have thought about them, as well as continued to discuss both mine and my team's strengths outside of official times.
- Yes. In our sessions together as a team.
- Yes - casual conversations.
- Yes I have. Its a very interested topic to discuss with friends who have taken the test as it really gives you an accurate glimpse of where the other person's best abilities are. Its a fun way to really get to know each other and its extremely insightful.
- Team meetings, meetings with allison - just talking through what it will look like in day to day interactions.
- No.
- It has appeared in team meetings and casual conversations with friends.
- All the time. What I love about StrengthsFinder is that it creates a common language, between people. I have had countless conversations with my Professors, peers, and employees on my strengths because it is a quick and simple way to get to know someone in a limited amount of time.
- Definitely, having worked with it for 3 years and being in Res Life, it is hard not to.
- No, I see little value in it so I choose not to interact with it more than I am required to
- Yes. I talked about my strengths all the time when it fits in to conversation.
- Yes, constantly. I talk about strengths with all my leadership teams, supervisors, friends who have had the training here at NU, and even people who have no idea what strengths training is.
- In casual conversation and occasionally in brother-sister floor meetings.
- No, most of my friends haven't taken the test
- Yes, after being presented with my results, I spent time thinking about whether or not they were accurate. I also spent time wondering why only the top five were chosen, and what my other strengths that weren't displayed would have been.
- Yes, we go over them in meetings.
- no
- Yes, I've purchased Strengths Finder for my girlfriend as a gift, and also for my parents and my brother as Christmas gifts. I've been excited about their results.
- yes! on my soccer team, my research group, etc. It easy to delegate tasks when you know where people might shine the most and contribute the most.
- No.
- Yes, we have spent more than one meeting discussing our individual strengths, team strengths, and how that affects the group. It is easier to identify who should assume different roles for activities now that we know each other's strengths.
- We have had different types of surveys in our meetings that talk about strengths that we have, our personality types and our love languages.

- Minimally, just within the team.
- Yes, we have discussed the concept of Strengths at our team meetings, which my staff really appreciated. We talked about the importance of knowing our own strengths and each others' strengths so that we can all have the most effective work experience. It was actually really fun to learn each others' Top Five strengths and discover more about each individual person on the team.
- No
- No, I've just never thought of it unless it's mentioned or prompted.
- I use them in almost every area of my life. I try and take my strengths and integrate them into decision making, conversations, meetings, and activities.
- We've had some discussion time as a team in some of our meetings.
- Yes. Shared it with friends.
- No. I tend not to lean on surveys and their results as much, because they are not always accurate. But I think that if I just keep going about life how I have been then my strengths tend to show themselves more than if I try to focus on them.
- I actually have begun to do this. Not necessarily directly with the strengths finder, but in my internship working on projects where I can use my strengths in art and advertising. I work with my boss and other people I know with other strengths to find ways we can collaborate and work together to get projects done. In casual conversations its the same way. I dont engage in a lot of small talk, not necessarily because of the strengths test but just because I am a pretty direct person in general I have become even more focused on having meaningful and intentional conversations
- I've talked with my family about the test, and just the other night, my mom found a free online test and took it. It's truly fascinating to see others' strengths come out.
- Yes, we have briefly discussed it as a team.
- Yes, in my own study and I try to talk about it with my supervisor. I also enjoy talking about it with my parents and see what they see in me.
- Not yet but I am sure we will it impacted our team in a good way.
- Not recently, but in previous years after the training it would be a main focus of conversation.
- Yes at times I would find myself implying my strengths to a conversation.