Examining the Use of Strengths-Based Self-Assessments to Promote First-Generation College Student Success

National Conference on Students in Transition
October 15-17, 2016

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The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Goals

• Explore how self-assessments can support First-Generation College Students
• Offer an overview of self-assessment programming at UNC-Chapel Hill
• Reflect on ways your campuses could incorporate self-assessment programming
Agenda

• Overview of The Finish Line Project
• StrengthsFinder® & Strong Interest Inventory®
• Program Development
• Program Assessment
• Challenges
• Application to Your Work
• Q&A/Discussion
First-Generation Students at UNC-Chapel Hill

- 78%: Continuing-Generation
- 19%: First-Generation, First-Entry
- 3%: First-Generation, Transfer

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The Finish Line Project

Research and practice to help first generation college students succeed. Our program initiates and evaluates innovative programs for student success at UNC that will form future practices here and across the nation.

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About the Project

On average, 3,000 undergraduate FGCS enroll in UNC-CH each year. FGCS are more likely to come from historically underrepresented groups and low-income families who encounter significant barriers on their path to a degree.

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Initiatives

The Finish Line Project includes innovative and evidence-based strategies to help students earn four-year undergraduate degrees in a timely and affordable manner. The project contains supports and structures for students of all majors.

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Project Team

The implementation of multifaceted programs and supports is a collaborative effort and involves many key partners. The project leaders are Dr. Abigail T. Panter, Principal Investigator, and Project Director and Dr. Cynthia Demetriou, Executive Director.

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Evaluation & Research

The project includes a robust research portfolio. The goal of our evaluation and research is to develop an evidence base of effective practices to improve educational outcomes for first-generation college students.

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The Finish Line Project

Research and Practice to Help First-Generation College Students Succeed

Initiatives to Help First-Generation College Students

1. Connect and Communicate With First-Generation Students
   - Self-Assessments: Strengths-based assessments to enhance college knowledge and expectations.
   - Community Building: Cohort models to foster communication and share common experiences among underrepresented males.
   - Partnerships: Partner with American Indian tribes to help support Native American students attending UNC.
   - New Programs: Develop programs and support to assist rural student access and transition to college.

2. Enhance Curriculum Through Active Learning
   - Transition Courses: Offer multiple courses to help students navigate critical transitions.
   - Gateway Courses: Review and redesign gateway STEM courses.
   - Learning Communities: Create faculty learning communities to support active learning.
   - Community Colleges: Map STEM curriculum on campus and at local community college.

3. Advise and Support First-Generation Students
   - Coordination: Coordinate efforts for Carolina Firsts across campus.
   - Advising: Offer academic advising specifically to meet the needs of first-generation college students.
   - Coaching: Train academic coaches to support any undergraduates.

Research Objectives

- Measure
  - Academic and psychosocial factors among FGCS
  - College knowledge and expectations
  - Changes in student learning patterns, attitudes, and behaviors
  - The acquisition of knowledge or skills as a result of interventions

- Describe
  - Academic success among FGCS overall and by subgroups
  - Micro-aggressions and micro-affirmations among FGCS
  - Pathways to degree completion in the sciences
  - Faculty motives for course redesign
  - Perspectives and behaviors among FGCS regarding applying to graduate school

- Assess
  - Strategies for enhancing college knowledge and expectations
  - Models for academic coaching
  - Strategies for promoting self-regulated learning
  - Strategies for course redesign

The Carolina Firsts Experience

- Efforts begin prior to enrollment to build college knowledge, set helpful expectations, and build resources for success.
- Students connect with supportive communities of students with similar backgrounds and experiences.
- Students enroll in newly designed transition and gateway courses to aid their progress in STEM and other fields of study.
- Faculty, advisors, and academic coaches help students navigate the research university.
- Students fulfill degree completion requirements and move on to graduate school and career opportunities.
Finish Line Initiatives

Connect And Communicate With First-Generation Students

SELF ASSESSMENTS
Strengths-based assessments to enhance college knowledge and expectations.

BUILD COMMUNITY
Cohort models to foster communication and share common experiences among males of color.

PARTNERSHIPS
Partner with American Indian tribes to help support Native American students attending UNC.

NEW PROGRAMS
Develop programs and support to assist rural student access and transition to college.
Self-Assessments
Inventories that help students identify their interests, strengths, personality traits, values, majors and careers

• What self-assessments (MBTI, StrengthsFinder, Focus 2, etc...) are currently being used on your campus?
• What is going well in the use of these assessments?
• What are some challenges in the use of these assessments?
Self-Assessments at UNC-CH

- Student Success Navigator®
- StrengthsFinder®
- Strong Interest Inventory®
- Focus 2®
- MBTI®
Why StrengthsFinder®?

Why StrengthsFinder®?
Why the Strong Interest Inventory®?
UNC-Chapel Hill believes all admitted students can thrive in college, graduate, and grow into lifelong learners.

Components of Student Success

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<th>We believe student success includes:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exploring &amp; growing intellectually</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Appreciating diverse perspectives as well as developing one’s own identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Developing social &amp; emotional skills</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Engaging in meaningful activities, roles, &amp; relationships</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Cultivating a sense of purpose or vocation</td>
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Encouraging Student Success

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<th>Success is likely in an environment that:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fosters self-advocacy &amp; resiliency</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Promotes a growth mindset understanding of intelligence</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Affirms cultural identities &amp; advances inclusive excellence</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Encourages academic excellence, integrity, &amp; leadership</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Demonstrates concern for the well-being of the whole student</td>
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thrive @ CAROLINA
Development of Programming

- Self-Assessment Team
- Training
- UCS Partnership
- Use of inventories across campus
- Programming Format
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<tr>
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<th>DES 7.2</th>
<th>Micro-affirmation Qualitative Study</th>
<th>Cynthia Demetriou, Candice Powell, Carmen Huerta-Bapat, James Ellis</th>
<th>A qualitative exploration of verbal accounts of FGCS’ experiences of micro-affirmations and micro-aggressions while enrolled in college.</th>
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<td>17</td>
<td>DES 8</td>
<td>NC-WIT Study</td>
<td>Amy Germuth, Brooke Midkiff, Kevin Jeffay</td>
<td>This study examines the experiences of undergraduates in introductory Computer Science courses. Responses will be compared between FGCS and non-FGCS.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>QED 2</td>
<td>Self-Assessments/Regulated Goals Study</td>
<td>James Ellis, Katie Cartmell, Carmen Gonzalez, Sharon Levine, Fred Cave</td>
<td>This study is to examine first generation college student participation in self-assessment programming and their experience taking the following assessments: a) Clifton Strengths Finder and b) Strong Interest Inventory. It looks to determine the degree to which each assessment and activities influence academic achievement, campus engagement, and cognitive skill development. Using an untreated control group design with a pre- and post- test.</td>
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“I am most proud of my strength as an achiever. I feel like there’s nothing I can’t do when I really set my mind to it.”

“I learned that I am very strong-willed and stand up for my story and future plans, even when others don’t agree with them or understand.”

“I’m most proud of empathy. It aligns with my values and I want people to feel supported and understood.”

“I will try to use my strengths to achieve my goal of stepping out of my comfort zone to try new things.”

“I will use my strengths to not let problems stop me from seeing different solutions.”
Challenges and Considerations

• **Budget:**
  - Strengths Quest: $10 per code
  - Strong Interest: $10-$16 per assessment, need trained interpreter

• **Assessment Completion/Communication:**
  - Student completion of assessments prior to workshop

• **Student Attendance**
  - Where/when to hold workshops?
  - How to communicate value?
Self-Assessment Programming on YOUR Campus
This research is part of the Finish Line Project (P116F140018; Panter, PI; Demetriou, Executive Director), which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s “First in the World” grant program. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

University of Colorado

"Now, every year, 6,000 new students will learn their strengths and how to use them productively to improve well-being and engagement. And 1,000 staff and faculty members in the region -- at CU-Boulder and other campuses -- are involved in learning about strengths."

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University of Chicago

"The use of [StrengthsQuest] will allow us to begin meeting our goals of providing skill development to the graduate and undergraduate community by empowering our students to invest in their personal success through their engagement with the University of Chicago."

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Kansas State University

"In an effort to increase the retention, engagement, and overall well-being of its students, Kansas State University has partnered with Gallup to become a strengths-based campus."

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George Mason University Well-Being Initiative

George Mason adopted a new strategic plan to become the first certified Well-Being University in the world.

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Questions?
Acknowledgements

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