

Case Study

Using CliftonStrengths™ to Build Positive Leadership Skills at Michigan Ross School of Business

+10

PERCENTAGE POINTS

Juniors in 2016 had an increase of 10 percentage points over sophomores in 2015 in the percentage who strongly agree they use their strengths in many situations.

Source: GALLUP

CHALLENGE

GALLUP PARTNERED WITH THE University of Michigan Ross School of Business to maximize the opportunity for every student to learn and develop their strengths, be engaged with school and live thriving lives today and in the future. The nationally ranked business school aims to develop leaders who make a positive difference in the world. Michigan Ross is leading the way in positive leadership development strategies. By training students to be leaders who focus on improving people's existing strengths, rather than on how to fix deficits, they can make the greatest gains in business and in life. Positive relationships and work engagement scores improve when leadership development occurs through a strengths-based lens. In addition, Gallup research of over 1.2 million employees globally shows that strengths-based organizations are more engaged and have better outcomes.

Michigan Ross is helping future business leaders develop their strengths while leveraging positive metrics via the Gallup College Student Survey toward improving student growth and outcomes.

APPROACH

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE IMPACT of a positive leadership development focus and to better understand students' experiences at the university, Michigan Ross leaders partnered with Gallup to survey currently enrolled sophomores and juniors. The survey provides positive metrics to track and build students' engagement with school, hope for the future, well-being, attachment to the school and strengths self-efficacy, among other factors.

Meeting Student Needs

MICHIGAN ROSS BEGAN IMPLEMENTING THE GALLUP COLLEGE STUDENT SURVEY to leverage positive metrics to gauge students' experiences in school and in life. The survey includes items and scales aimed at helping students have more positive experiences and outcomes at school.

Survey results were analyzed using multiple logistic regression that accounted for student's attitudes and their demographic characteristics.¹ The results show the following key drivers of student hope, engagement, life evaluation and the likelihood that they would recommend Michigan Ross to a friend.



Top Drivers

Hope

- My professors at University of Michigan Ross School of Business care about me as a person.
- I have a mentor at University of Michigan Ross School of Business who encourages me to pursue my goals and dreams.
- I find ways to use my strengths at school every day.
- I accomplish a lot by using my strengths.

Engagement

- This school is committed to building the strengths of each student.
- My professors care at University of Michigan Ross School of Business about me as a person.
- University of Michigan Ross School of Business is preparing me well for life outside of college.
- I find ways to use my strengths at school every day.

Life Evaluation

- I am treated fairly at University of Michigan Ross School of Business.
- I accomplish a lot by using my strengths.

Likelihood to Recommend Michigan Ross to a Friend

- I have many positive interactions with my professors.
- This school is committed to building the strengths of each student.
- University of Michigan Ross School of Business is preparing me well for life outside of college.
- University of Michigan Ross School of Business is passionate about the long-term success of its students.

¹ Factors included in the model to predict hope, engagement, life evaluation and the likelihood to recommend are:

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|--|--|----------------------------------|
| • Strengths Self-Efficacy | • Professors care | • Useful school communication |
| • Advising items | • Experiential learning | • Professors reply promptly |
| • Commitment to building student strengths | • High academic standards | • Professors know me as a person |
| • Professor subject-matter knowledge | • Challenged to develop full potential | • Receive help I need to succeed |
| • Fair treatment | • Positive professor interactions | |

Focusing on Strengths

MICHIGAN ROSS IMPLEMENTED A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH to building positive leaders using the CliftonStrengths assessment and professional development programs. Key steps to the initiative involved:

- appointing an executive champion who owned the vision for leveraging a strengths-based approach to building positive leadership skills in students
- working as a collaborative faculty-staff team by integrating a strengths-based approach through student activities, such as Appreciative Advising, curricular innovations, signature learning experiences, leadership development, and career coaching
- providing incoming sophomores with access to the CliftonStrengths assessment via Gallup's StrengthsQuest operating system designed for college and university students to identify their top five strength
- providing faculty and staff with access to the CliftonStrengths assessment and professional development opportunities that focus on strategies for maximizing and developing strengths to achieve program goals

Michigan Ross leaders provide access to the CliftonStrengths assessment to help each future business leader in their school know their strengths and learn ways to incorporate positive development strategies in the workplace. Sophomores complete the CliftonStrengths assessment to learn their top five strengths. By identifying how each student naturally thinks, feels and behaves, trained and knowledgeable faculty can steer students to leverage and develop their strengths more intentionally and thereby, learn the best ways that they can grow and succeed. Gallup has studied thousands of work teams and millions of leaders, and has discovered the significant potential in focusing on what is innately “right” with people versus trying to fix what’s “wrong” with them.

Gallup research shows that two-thirds of employees who strongly agree that their manager focuses on their strengths or positive characteristics are engaged with their work; whereas when employees strongly disagree with this statement, the percentage of workers who are engaged in their work plummets to just 2%. Helping faculty, staff and business students learn to identify and maximize people's potential through a strengths development lens makes sense for individuals, as well as businesses. Students at Michigan Ross are learning about their own strengths and how to apply them at school and in other situations so that they can one day be effective, positive leaders in the business world. They are also learning from faculty who have invested in their own strengths and who model ways to leverage their strengths to work more effectively in teams and to develop others. Michigan Ross leaders are unlocking the positive leadership potential of their students by developing their strengths.

IMPACT

THE RESULTS OF THE GALLUP COLLEGE STUDENT SURVEY clearly show the impact that strengths has. Students at Michigan Ross who report having a strong understanding of their own strengths are more engaged with school, hopeful for the future and thriving in life. They are also more likely to report a strong attachment to Michigan Ross, which could lead to stronger alumni involvement and investment in the future. Survey results indicate some year-over-year improvement in students' strengths self-efficacy. For example, juniors in 2016 had an increase of 10 percentage points over sophomores in 2015 in the percentage who strongly agree they use their strengths in many situations.

Data show that a focus on strengths at Michigan Ross improves students' school and life experiences. These findings align with Gallup's strengths research in workplace sectors. For sophomores and juniors who report strong knowledge, application and development of their strengths (measured via the Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale), the odds of being engaged with school and attached to Michigan Ross are higher than for their peers who report less strengths self-efficacy.

Odds of Students Being Engaged With and Attached to Michigan Ross

Engagement		Attachment ²		Strengths Self-Efficacy ³
Juniors	Soph.	Juniors	Soph.	Item
3.4x	1.7x	3.1x	1.3x	Higher if ... I know my strengths.
3.4x	2.5x	3.1x	2.4x	Higher if ... I use my strengths in many situations.
2.7x	2.5x	4.2x	2.3x	Higher if ... I find ways to use my strengths at school every day.
3.2x	2.2x	3.3x	1.9x	Higher if ... I apply my strengths at school.
3.3x	2.1x	5.1x	1.5x	Higher if ... I accomplish a lot by using my strengths.
2.9x	1.5x	3.4x	1.4x	Higher if ... I know how to build on my current strengths.

**Odds reflective of those who strongly agree versus those who do not*

2 Attachment: emotional commitment to the school

- School delivers on promises
- Feel proud to be a student
- Perfect school for me

3 Strengths Self-Efficacy: the knowledge, application and development of one's strengths.

Gallup also found that Michigan Ross students who strongly agree that they know, use and can build on their strengths have greater odds of being hopeful for the future. They also have better odds of thriving in well-being, most notably in purpose well-being.⁴ For example, sophomores who strongly agree they find ways to use their strengths at school every day have more than double the odds of thriving in purpose well-being.

Additionally, students were asked to rate the commitment of Michigan Ross to building the strengths of each student. Juniors who strongly agree their school is committed to building strengths have triple the odds of being engaged with school and nearly six times the odds of being attached to the school than their peers.

Gallup will continue to support the innovative efforts at Michigan Ross to develop positive leaders who build teams effectively and achieve better outcomes for the organizations they serve. Data show that focusing on strengths is foundational to helping students be ready for success at school. The relatively low sample size and same-method bias present in this study point to the necessity for further studies that help identify and isolate the effect of positive strategies on student learning and growth. There is more to learn about the impact of strengths-based development on students and their long-term success in school and in life.

⁴ Purpose: Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals.

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