

# The Chalkboard



## StrengthFinders: "Living Your Strengths"

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*Living Your Strengths* is the title of a book that teaches about "harnessing the power of (our) innate gifts." This book's teachings draw on those of the popular book by David O. Clifton, Ph.D., titled *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, which describes his work on Strengths-Based psychology and leadership. The basic concept of Strengths-Based teaching is that we often focus on our weaknesses and on trying to find ways to cure them. Instead, by finding, understanding, and embracing our own strengths and the strengths of others, we can build better communities, develop common languages, and positively view the contributions of ourselves and those around us.

Every person has innate strengths; these are often ignored, or even viewed negatively by ourselves and our peers. If we don't properly understand our own and others' strengths, we may not allow them to work together in ways that lead to positive outcomes. By assessing our strengths and learning how to use them, we empower ourselves to build strong, fruitful communities — classrooms, families, faculty groups, peer groups, etc.

Just as important as understanding our own strengths, we must learn about the strengths of others; in this way, we can form productive partnerships that allow us to work together effectively and efficiently. Each of us is involved in a number of different communities, and each of them is composed of individuals with different strengths. If we apply these lessons in each community, we can use our strengths in unique ways that will benefit each of these different groups.

The lessons in *Living Your Strengths* lend themselves perfectly to the Franciscan values, particularly Responsible Stewardship and Dignity of the Individual. If we use our gifts in the best possible way to facilitate progress and growth, we are acting as stewards by "freely sharing the gifts entrusted to us." If we reflect on and respect our own strengths and the strengths of others, we are dignifying the individual by "recogniz(ing) and affirm(ing) the personal gifts and talents of each person." (quotations from [http://www.marian.edu/Ministry\\_Campus\\_homepage.asp#](http://www.marian.edu/Ministry_Campus_homepage.asp#))

Marian College will be applying *StrengthsQuest: Building A Strengths-Based Campus* (found at <https://www.strengthsquest.com/>) in its special course for new students, "First Year Experience." By completing this process, students may explore majors they hadn't considered, join campus groups outside their "comfort zone," and pursue relationships that will increase their diversity experiences. Part of an excellent education is growth, and that requires challenges to our accustomed circumstances. By acknowledging strengths, students can not only increase their new experiences, but build and participate in communities that will enhance them.

For more information on Strengths-Based psychology as it pertains to teaching, read the article, "Teach With Your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire Their Students," found at <http://www.pilambda.org/horizons/v84-3/gallup.pdf>. For information on the books *Now, Discover Your Strengths* and *Living Your Strengths*, see [http://gmj.gallup.com/book\\_center/default.aspx](http://gmj.gallup.com/book_center/default.aspx)

### Teacher Tips:

From *Works4ME*, found at [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

### "Personalized Nametags"

"The first day of school I give my students a plain nametag with their name printed on it in black marker. I ask them to decorate the nametag with things that tell about themselves. It's interesting to see what they add to their tags. Students can find someone who shares the same interests. They can also take surveys with the nametag information and graph their findings."

From **Sarah Pullie**, a third grade teacher at Latta Elementary School in Latta, South Carolina

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

September Calendar	2
Labor Day Fun	2
Culture Corner	3
Now Showing At Indianapolis Civic Theatre	4
Intern Profile	4

### Congratulations to Marian's chapter of Kappa Delta Pi!

The School of Education was notified last week that Marian College's Alpha Alpha Tau chapter of Kappa Delta Pi has been named a winner in the Achieving Chapter Excellence (ACE) program. Kappa Delta Pi is the international honor society for education majors. Alpha Alpha Tau will receive the award on Thursday, November 1, during the opening session of the organization's 46th Biennial Convocation in Louisville, Kentucky. The chapter also won the award in 2005.

# September 2007

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3 <b>Labor Day</b>	4 School with Mentor	5 School with Mentor	6 Classes at Marian 8-4	7 Classes at Marian 8-1:30	8
9	10 Classes at Marian 8-4	11 School with Mentor	12 School with Mentor	13 Classes at Marian 8-4	14 Classes at Marian 8-4	15
16	17 Classes at Marian 8-4	18 School with Mentor	19 School with Mentor	20 Classes at Marian 8-4	21 Classes at Marian 8-1:30	22
23	24 Classes at Marian 8-4	25 School with Mentor	26 School with Mentor	27 Classes at Marian 8-4	28 Classes at Marian 8-4	29
30						

## Schedule of Events

Welcome back to the classroom!



- ✓ **September 3** — Viking 2 landed on Mars, 1976
- ✓ **September 5** — Voyager 1 launched on a grand tour of the solar system, 1977
- ✓ **September 7** — Independence Day, Brazil
- ✓ **September 8** — International Literacy Day
- ✓ **September 9** — North Korea founded, 1948
- ✓ **September 12** — Mid-Autumn Festival, China
- ✓ **September 16** — Independence Day, Mexico
- ✓ **September 17** — Constitution Day, USA
- ✓ **September 19** — International Day of Peace (third Tuesday in September)
- ✓ **September 22** — Independence Day, Mali
- ✓ **September 23** — Autumnal Equinox
- ✓ **September 30** — Botswana gained its independence from Great Britain, 1966

## Labor Day Fun!

**Earl Park Fall Festival:** In Earl Park, Indiana through September 3. Free family entertainment including a flea market, bluegrass music, truck and tractor pull, demolition derby, parade, car show, raffle, softball tournament, horseshoe tournament, mud volleyball, chili cook-off, and peddle tractor pull. For more information, see [www.earlparkfestival.com](http://www.earlparkfestival.com).

**Marshall County Blueberry Festival:** In Plymouth Indiana through September 3. Over 500 arts and crafts, commercial and food booths from vendors all across the United States, along with top name entertainment, sporting activities including the annual blueberry stomp, a parade, fireworks, and car show. For more information, see [www.blueberryfestival.org](http://www.blueberryfestival.org).

**Metamora Old Time Musical Festival:** In Metamora, Indiana through September 2. Metamora Old Time Music Festival is a celebration of traditional music and folkways held the Saturday and Sunday of Labor Day Weekend, and includes Saturday workshops and performances, Sunday performances only. For more information, contact Al Rogers at [Metamora@myway.com](mailto:Metamora@myway.com).

## *Culture Corner: What Are Your Strengths? Using the Gallup Strengthsfinder Program to Reframe Cultural Competency*

By Andrea Fagan, EDU 518 student, ACTION Program Candidate, and Marian College Director of Marketing Communications

A book called *Now, Discover Your Strengths* details how to use the Clifton StrengthsFinders Profile to discover inner strengths. The program has evolved over the last six years into an important and popular assessment tool that emphasizes a realistic exploration and development of personality strengths, rather than an evaluation of shortcomings. Written by Marcus Buckingham and Dr. Donald O. Clifton, the profile and companion book are based on Gallup Organization survey data gathered from over two million global interviews. What has emerged is a new framework for talking about human development. So how can this framework help teachers of ELLs?

First, the language of the StrengthsFinder program is one of positive reinforcement. If Krashen and other experts advocate for lowering an ELL's affective filter, then a framework that emphasizes a person's distinctive traits in a positive way is a helpful tool. For instance, once a person has taken the assessment, his or her top five strengths are identified. The book explains how those strengths work to complement the strengths of others. Respect and dignity within the context of group dynamics are the key here. It is clear that

this kind of positive operational model would work well in a classroom setting.

The Gallup research identified 34 traits or strengths as the most common. Aspects of personality like "achiever" and "commander" are some examples. A person with a strong achiever theme exhibits stamina and favors hard work and productivity, for example. Cultural competency is not among the list of dominant themes, and yet, a strong case can be made that a global or multicultural perspective is an important dimension of a positive, fulfilling, authentically happy classroom. And, individuals from those "other cultures" can find a place in such a classroom, where their new perspectives and global knowledge are valued by everyone, not cast aside as weaknesses that must be corrected. Sound idealistic?

Consider for a moment how a person from another culture brings new knowledge to the learning community in the classroom. Think about the opportunities for vocabulary and grammar development that the ELL can present to a mainstream classroom. Or what that person's knowledge can add to a study of history. A multi-cultural view—a world view—is truly an asset in today's global society. The StrengthsFinders framework provides a way to explore a person's unique talents and gifts in a positive way that is easily expanded to include cultural competence.

The Strengthsfinders model can be such a powerful positive influence in the classroom. As a testimonial to that fact, visit the Greenville College web site (<http://www.greenville.edu/academics/strengthsfinder/testimonials.shtml>). And while these testimonials are from college students, the messages apply to learners of all ages. The North Kansas City Schools system uses Strengthsfinders to identify and develop the best in its staff. The Gallup web site documents the success story this school district can tell about the evaluation (<http://education.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=22510&VERSION=p>). Worth noting is the comment by Leigh Anne Taylor Knight, school to career director for the school system, which reflects the idea that the strengths approach has helped build a common language of appreciation and respect. "It reinforces our core value of respect for diversity," says Knight. "The language of strengths gives us a positive way to talk about individual differences and connect people from different backgrounds." To try it for yourself, visit the Gallup Education Division web site at <http://education.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=22135>.

Ever Teaching, Ever  
Learning, Ever Changing

## Project Bridge To Achievement

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Readers, this is your newsletter. We welcome any contributions you wish to make. If you have a news item, a suggestion or a correction, please contact Jenny M. Witcher by phone or email. If you are a mentor or student and would like to volunteer to be profiled in subsequent issues, or if you would like to contribute a "Teacher Tip," please contact Jenny, Patricia Stewart or Cheryl Hertzner. Thank you for your interest and participation!

## Project Bridge



Creating a Pathway for New Teachers...  
Increasing Achievement of All Learners

*Now Showing at Indianapolis Civic Theatre:*



September 14 through 30. For performance and ticket information, see <http://www.civictheatre.org/main.html> or call the box office at (317) 923-4597. Indianapolis Civic Theatre is located on the Marian College campus at 3200 Cold Spring Road.

## *Intern Profile: Amy Rice*

Amy Rice graduated from the Indiana University Kelley School of Business in 2003 with a degree in Finance. Most recently, she worked at Fifth Third Securities as a Registered Sales Assistant to a Senior Financial Advisor. In July 2006, Amy decided to resign that position and pursue her dream of becoming a teacher. She started by working as an Instructional Assistant at Whiteland Elementary School, and now she is working toward a teaching license as an intern in the MAT program.

Amy wants to become a teacher because of her love of seeing children enjoy the learning process: "It is so rewarding to see a child that is so proud of his or her

accomplishments and to know that you helped encourage them to strive for their personal best...It is important to me to help all children see their potential, set attainable goals, and help them accomplish them no matter what obstacles stand in their way." Amy's philosophy of teaching reflects these comments: "It is imperative to get the children excited about learning by involving their interests as much as possible. It is also essential to incorporate multiple teaching styles to maximize each child's potential."

Amy became interested in Project Bridge because she'd heard good things about it, and because of the program's emphasis on working

with ESL students. She says, "As I looked into the details, I was excited to learn that I would not only be able to obtain my teaching license, but I would be earning my Master's degree at the same time. Also, with a growing number of ESL students in the schools today, I appreciated the fact that Marian focused on how to effectively teach these students."

We are glad that Amy chose to join cohort 6, and we wish her well as she works toward leading her own classroom!

