**Intended Audience**

**This facilitation guide is designed for use by:**

* Senior staff in paraprofessional staff meetings
* Hall Council advisors in executive board meetings
* ILO advisors in executive board meetings
* Student leaders as part of a hall program

**Learning Outcomes**

**Through participation in this training session, students will be able to:**

* Describe their VIA character strengths
* Examine how to utilize VIA character strengths as leaders
* Examine how to utilize their strengths as part of a team

**Sharing Content**

Facilitate a group conversation around VIA character strengths.

**Exercises and Activities**

* **Activity:** VIA Character Strengths assessment (available at: <https://www.viacharacter.org/www>)
	+ You’ll want your participants to get out their technology during this activity so each participant can take the VIA assessment and a printed copy of the “VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues” for each participant
	+ If this is not possible, plan to hold the discussion in a computer lab or other space that provides technology for students to take the assessment.
* **Activity:** “The Science of Character” (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3nT2KDAGOc>)
* **Worksheets:** 1) Unpacking your Character Strengths 2) VIA Character Strengths Reflection Questions

Pass out the Notes and Reflection worksheet at the beginning of the session.

**Materials Needed:**

**Facilitator**

* This packet, whether you print out for your use or just have it on some form of technology.
* Computer to be able to show participants “The Science of Character” video on YouTube.

**Participant**

* Computer, tablet, phone to be able to take the VIA Character Strengths assessment.
* “The VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues” printed out for each participant, or send electronic version to them. Handouts are located on page 5-6.

**Section 1: Background on VIA Character Strengths                        (20 Minutes)**

**Show “The Science of Character” available at:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3nT2KDAGOc>

* Ask students to reflect on the video.
* Guided questions for reflection:
	+ What stands out to you?
	+ Does the idea of character strengths resonate with you? Why or why not?
	+ What qualities do you value in people around you? Why do you value those qualities?

**What is the VIA Character Strengths Assessment?**

* V.I.A. = Values in Action
* Rooted in positive psychology, which aims to make people’s lives more fulfilling
	+ Focuses on what helps people achieve positive well-being and why people thrive
* Goal is to help people reflect on and build their strengths.
* Does not focus on lower-ranked strengths when using the VIA Character Strengths assessment! The goal is to think about our top 5 strengths and how we can use them more mindfully and to find what is best in ourselves
* All 24 strengths are positive and align under six “virtues”
	+ Virtues are core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers. The VIA work-groups found six virtues that emerged consistently from historical surveys, and endorsed across time and cultures. Cross-cultural research has found that these are universal and viewed as being grounded in biology through evolutionary process and selected for aspects of excellence as a means of solving important tasks necessary for survival of the species.
		1. **Wisdom:** Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.
		2. **Courage:** Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
		3. **Humanity:** Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others
		4. **Justice:** Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.
		5. **Temperance:** Strengths that protect against excess.
		6. **Transcendence:** Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.

**When we…**

* Develop a general awareness of our strengths;
* Explore ways to think mindfully about their development;
* Apply them by setting goals and take action.

**Then we… can receive numerous benefits, including:**

* A sense of flourishing;
* Feeling happier;
* Being more engaged;
* Higher energy levels;
* A sense of purpose;
* Better coping mechanisms.

**Section 2: Taking the Character Strengths Assessment (25 minutes)**

**Note to Facilitator: Facilitator should also take the VIA Character Strengths assessment and be prepared to share out results to the group.**

If possible, ask participants to take the VIA Character Strengths assessment prior to beginning this session. The assessment usually takes about 15 minutes to complete.

If participants will take the assessment during the discussion, make sure that participants know to bring a laptop, tablet, or mobile device to take the assessment. If this is not possible, plan to hold the discussion in a computer lab or other space that provides technology for students to take the assessment.

Participants who complete the assessment early should complete the “Unpacking Your Character Strengths” and “VIA Character Strengths Reflection Questions”. If participants have completed the VIA Characters Strengths assessment prior to beginning this session, ask them to complete the worksheets. Participants will be asked to share reflections from their worksheet later in the session.

**Section 3: Sharing Our Results**   **(10 Minutes)**

Ask participants to share their results to the rest of the group and reflect on their strengths. If the group is larger, this can also be done as a pair-and-share.

**Guided questions for reflection on the two worksheets within this packet**

* What were your results? Do they fit with how you see yourself?
* Were you surprised by your results? Did you expect to see any strengths ranked higher than in your result?
* Did you discover anything about yourself as you completed the assessment?
* Can you share some examples of how you use these strengths and values in your life?

**Section 4:  Impact of Identity (15-20 Minutes)**

While the VIA character strengths and virtues were found through historical surveys across cultures, our identities can impact when we choose to use our strengths and when we choose not to use them.

**Ask participants to take a couple minutes to briefly jot down their various identities**

**Identity:** Identity encompasses the values people hold, which dictate the choices they make. An identity contains multiple roles and each role holds meaning and expectations that are internalized into one’s identity. Identity continues to evolve over the course of an individual’s life (Psychology Today). Identity relates to our basic values that dictate the choices we make. Examples: race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality refers to the simultaneous experience of categorical and hierarchical classifications including but not limited to [race](https://www.thoughtco.com/race-definition-3026508), [class](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-social-class-and-why-does-it-matter-3026375), [gender](https://www.thoughtco.com/gender-definition-3026335), sexuality, and nationality. It also refers to the fact that what is often perceived as disparate forms of oppression, like [racism](https://www.thoughtco.com/racism-definition-3026511), classism, [sexism](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-sexism-3529186), and [xenophobia](https://www.thoughtco.com/definition-of-xenophobia-and-examples-2834608), are actually mutually dependent and intersecting in nature, and together they compose a unified [system of oppression](https://www.thoughtco.com/social-oppression-3026593). Thus, the privileges we enjoy and the discrimination we face are a product of our unique positioning in society as determined by these social classifiers (Cole, 2019).

**Ask participants to talk in pairs about the following questions**

* How might your gender impact your strengths?
* How might your race impact your strengths?
* How might the intersectionality of your identities impact your strengths?
* How might your ability level impact your strengths?
* Who might not always show their strengths in certain spaces?

**Now have a few people share out about their discussion**

It’s important to note that our identities make us who we are and how we show up in the world. This is why we wanted to acknowledge identity as we talk about our character strengths and what they mean for us as individuals and in larger settings.

**Section 5:  Common Themes and Strengths in Group (10 Minutes)**

*\*If this activity is done with a group that does not work together, feel free to skip this section.\**

**Participants should reflect on their skills and values as a group.**

* What strengths and values are represented in our group?
* What common themes came up as we discussed our strengths and values?
* How can we utilize our strengths and values as a team?
* What expectations do we have for each other as we consider our group values?

**Section 6:  Wrap - Up (5 Minutes)**

 **Ask the group one or more of the questions below**

* What did you learn from this activity and discussion?
* What strengths did you gain a great appreciation for while talking with others?
* What did you learn from this activity that you can use this week? This semester?

**Resources:**

Cole, N. L. (2019, October 13). Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/intersectionality-definition-3026353

Identity: Self-image, Self-concept. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/identity#what-is-identity>

*The Science of Character*. (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3nT2KDAGOc>

The VIA Character Strengths Survey. (n.d.). Retrieved June 11, 2020, from <https://www.viacharacter.org/Account/Register>

**Unpacking Your Character Strengths**

In the chart below, list your top five VIA Character Strengths in this first column. In the second column provide the description of your strength from the report. Next, in the third column, outline what that strength means to you. Finally, in the fourth column, provide an example of how you recently used the strength.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER STRENGTH** | **DESCRIPTION** | **WHAT THIS STRENGTH MEAN****TO ME?** | **WHEN/WHERE HAVE I USED THIS STRENGTH****RECENTLY?** |
| **Example:** Curiosity | Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake. | Being open to new experiences | Getting to know new people in my organization. |
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**VIA Character Strengths Reflection Questions**

1. How do your top 5 VIA Character Strengths represent “the real you?”
2. What Core Virtues do your top strengths cover and were you surprised by the results
3. What character strengths did you expect to see near the top that weren’t there?
4. What have you discovered about yourself by completing the VIA character assessment?
5. What’s your plan to more actively use strengths lower on your list?