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# Introduction

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My intention in writing the *Strong Interest Inventory*<sup>®</sup> *College Profile User's Guide* was to provide an updated, easy-to-use tool for career practitioners who help college students with college and career choices. Over the many years I have trained career counselors, graduate students, and college advisors, I have repeatedly encountered the following questions: (1) “Why should I use a formal assessment tool such as the *Strong*?” (2) “Does it really work with college students?” and (3) “Particularly with our increasingly diverse student populations, is the *Strong* an up-to-date and appropriate tool to use?”

Such concerns are critical, and they were an impetus for me to write an informative, empirically grounded guide—one that authoritatively addresses these concerns and encourages college career practitioners to use what I consider the best career assessment tool for college populations. I have attempted to demonstrate in this guide, through specific suggestions and examples, the power, value, and ease with which the latest edition of the *Strong* assessment, and the *Strong* College Profile in particular, can assist students struggling with a wide range of career questions.

This guide is an extension and revision of an earlier publication, *Strong Interest Inventory*<sup>®</sup> *Resource: Strategies for Group and Individual Interpretations in College Settings* (1995). Since publication of this earlier resource, the *Strong* has been updated through a significant revision (2004) that added more basic interest areas and occupations in technology, finance, and

other growth sectors. In addition, in 2004 the *Strong* College Profile was redesigned to incorporate these revisions to the *Strong* assessment itself and to offer expanded career information specific to college students. The revised College Profile includes college majors, courses, campus activities, and internships related to students' *Strong* scores. Students also learn from their College Profiles what courses and careers are related to their top ten *Strong* occupations, and the educational preparation typically needed for each occupation is explained. I have extracted technical information from the *Strong Interest Inventory*<sup>®</sup> *Manual* (2004) and integrated it into this guide to show how it can inform and improve interpretations with college populations. I strongly suggest that readers refer to the manual for a full understanding of the psychometric properties of the instrument.

Designed for use with the most recent editions of the *Strong* inventory and the College Profile, this guide is divided into five chapters to help readers locate the information they need.

- Chapter 1 provides an overview of the *Strong* College Profile and describes multiple ways for using the *Strong* with college students.
- Chapter 2 presents a practical model for using the *Strong* in individual counseling—complete with guidelines for how to incorporate the assessment into the career counseling process and how to interpret specific scales and patterns of scores.

- Chapter 3 provides tips for designing and leading effective *Strong* workshops, featuring step-by-step guidance and exercises.
- Chapter 4 focuses on interpreting challenging Profiles, such as those with few or multiple elevations. This chapter also presents a case study that demonstrates how to interpret such a Profile.
- Chapter 5 addresses the career development needs of particular student populations and offers suggestions for using the *Strong* as a tool to address common needs of each group.

At the end of this guide are a bibliography and a set of time-saving reproducible masters. The reproducible masters can be scanned or copied to strengthen the professional look of *Strong* presentations.

Please adapt the many suggestions in this guide to address the particular concerns and needs of the students who attend your workshops and meet with you for help with career and academic decision making. My hope is that this guide will provide college counselors with the essential, up-to-date information they need to use the *Strong* inventory with both confidence and creativity.

## About the Author

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Jeffrey P. Prince, PhD, is director of Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of the *Strong Interest Inventory*® College Profile. He has worked in the college student counseling arena for over 25 years, teaching graduate students, training career development professionals, and counseling students. He has authored and coauthored several books as well as articles for a wide array of professional publications pertaining to college student counseling and career assessment. Prince is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and president of the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) and serves on the editorial boards of both *Career Development Quarterly* and *The Counseling Psychologist*.

# Using the *Strong* College Profile to Help Today's Students

Our current generation of college students has been characterized by a number of labels, such as “Millennials” and “Generation Y.” The media have been quick to peg them as, among other things, pressured, pampered, sheltered, confident, conventional, and technologically enamored. Typically, limited data support these cultural generalizations, and those of us who work closely with college students can find such claims sensationalist. At the same time, it is clear that dramatic cultural, economic, and political events have changed the landscape of higher education and career development. College students today are much more diverse in ethnicity, race, sexual identification, age, nationality, and economic circumstances than students of past decades. They face dramatically different job markets, work settings, and career paths. More so than previous generations, they also face intense pressure to be successful and to carefully choose a college major and career field.

The *Strong* College Profile has not only kept up with these changes but also become an essential tool for college career professionals, helping them to work with students to clarify and prioritize interests that are likely to motivate and lead to both academic and job

satisfaction. The *Strong* assessment is highly effective in bringing about dramatic shifts in students' career exploration or academic progress.

## Purposes for Using the *Strong* Assessment

Colleges and universities have used the *Strong* assessment almost since its inception to achieve multiple aims. The *Strong* helps students make decisions about what to major in and what careers to plan for. It also can assist them with resolving a variety of developmental and adjustment issues, such as forming a career identity, determining sources of academic dissatisfaction, and adjusting to college life overall. Because the *Strong* fulfills these functions so effectively, it has become one of the most widely used assessment tools on college campuses today.

The *Strong* is a flexible tool. Counselors can easily incorporate it into their work to enhance the effectiveness of their counseling without necessarily altering their counseling style or theoretical orientation. It can be used equally effectively with individuals and with groups in workshops or classes.

## Making Academic Decisions

The *Strong* College Profile can help students with a variety of specific educational decisions. It is an ideal

tool for identifying courses, academic majors, graduate programs, and job settings worth exploring. For example, the College Profile provides a list of academic majors, college courses, and job environments that correspond to students' top interest areas. The information on the College Profile can also help with specific decisions, such as changing majors, transferring between colleges, and defining a career direction. Following an interpretation of their *Strong* results, many students acquire an expanded view of their alternatives; others, fully aware of their options, are able to narrow them. Either way, the *Strong* assessment can help them make better academic choices.

### Forming a Career Identity

College presents an ideal time for students to explore and define their career identity. Younger students take on new responsibilities for decision making, self-care, and planning for the future. Their identities often develop rapidly along multiple dimensions. These students can benefit from the *Strong* inventory, not only because it helps them with forming preliminary career goals, but also because it can assist them with developing a sense of competence, purpose, and identity through the clarification of interests and motivators.

Graduate students and adult students have different developmental and career concerns. Many are in the midst of life transitions that may shake their self-confidence and lead them to question their career interests and goals. The *Strong* assessment can confirm for older students whether or not their career plans seem to be consistent with their underlying interest patterns. It also is an ideal way to assist advanced students with selecting academic specialties and work environments within particular disciplines that are likely to lead to satisfying career roles. The educational and occupational information provided in the *Strong* College Profile for students' individual top ten *Strong* occupations provides an easy way to encourage students to link their results to further information gathering—often the next step in career planning after a *Strong* interpretation.

### Identifying the Source of Academic Unhappiness

Students often seek career counseling when they have become dissatisfied with their current academic choices,

when they have earned poor grades, or when they have encountered some other difficulty with their academic progress. The *Strong* assessment can be used in a number of ways to help these students identify the source of difficulties. It can help some students understand how their current academic direction does not fit their interests or personality and identify alternate academic options to consider. Students who have been aimlessly drifting through various courses of study can find the *Strong* helpful for narrowing their academic focus to specific fields or activities that have a higher probability of maintaining their interest and motivation. The *Strong* can also be used to develop rapport with students in a nonthreatening way and lead to further exploration of related issues—such as financial, family, or personal problems—that may be contributing to unhappiness or poor academic performance. The Personal Style Scales on the *Strong* College Profile, for example, can be used to stimulate discussion of students' overall experience with college life.

### Adjusting to College and Campus Life

Students who are having difficulties adjusting to college are often hesitant to ask for counseling to address their feelings of isolation, inadequacy, or confusion. They may be more comfortable, however, asking for assistance with specific academic decisions, such as course or major selection. You can use the *Strong* assessment both to assist with the decisions at hand and to serve as a framework for extending the discussion into an exploration of how students' overall lifestyle and activities fit their interests. The *Strong* College Profile is an ideal tool for this. It helps students identify not only academic classes and majors but also campus activities, organizations, and internships that match their interest patterns. You can use this information to help reduce students' isolation and to foster fuller connections to the college environment. The more students are integrated into the fabric of campus life, through activities that are congruent with their interests, the less likely it is that they will drop out.

Offering large-scale administrations of the *Strong* assessment to all interested students during first-year orientation programs is a practical way of helping many students prepare for the adjustment to college. When students take the *Strong* as part of orientation, they

don't need to self-identify as needing help and they learn the importance of attending to the full range of their interests early in their academic career. In addition, such use of the *Strong* conveys a message that the institution is concerned about connecting students to the resources necessary for their academic enhancement and growth.

## An Overview of the College Profile

This guide assumes that you will be using the *Strong Interest Inventory*® Profile, College Edition (2005; also known as the *Strong Interest Inventory*® Profile with College Profile), since this report provides substantial additional material not included in the standard *Strong* Profile. The College Edition was developed specifically to meet the needs of college counselors in their work with students and takes the wealth of career interest data provided in the *Strong* Profile several steps further.

The College Edition consists of the nine-page *Strong* Profile followed by four additional pages that are unique to the College Profile. The College Profile identifies typical college majors linked to themes of highest interest, as well as specific college courses, internships, and extracurricular activities that fit the unique interest patterns of students. Plus, it shows the relationship between students' top *Strong* occupations and college courses and related careers. In addition, a student worksheet and a counselor memo are provided as support tools.

### Using Your General Occupational Themes (GOTs)

This first page of the College Profile highlights the student's three highest GOTs (also referred to as Themes), in descending order of interest. A sample of this page is shown in Figure 1.1.

In addition to its traditional one-word label, each GOT is given an alternate label along with a brief description. The alternate label and attached description help you describe each Theme with language that students can easily understand without the need for instruction on John Holland's theory of six occupational types. For example, for students who may have difficulty grasping the construct "Conventional," the label "Careful Organizers" is provided along with the

**Table 1.1 • Alternate Labels for the General Occupational Themes**

Theme	Alternate Label
Realistic (R)	Practical Doers
Investigative (I)	Scientific Problem Solvers
Artistic (A)	Creative Communicators
Social (S)	Empathetic Helpers
Enterprising (E)	Active Persuaders
Conventional (C)	Careful Organizers

brief description "Conventional students prefer to take an orderly approach to organizing and managing finances, procedures, or data." Table 1.1 presents all six Themes along with their alternate labels.

Listed next on the page are typical college majors that correspond to each Theme. Since many college majors relate to more than one Theme, the same major may be listed under more than one Theme, highlighting how it fits the student's interests in multiple ways. The college majors were derived from empirical data collected during the revision of the *Strong* inventory and from other empirical and theoretically based resources.

The student's three highest-ranked Themes and three sets of college majors will always print on this page, even if the student showed moderate or high interest in only one or two Themes or showed little interest in all six Themes. The reason for this is to encourage students to explore a wide range of majors and to discourage them from prematurely narrowing their options. Specialized text prints on such reports, explaining why it is useful to look at all three Themes irrespective of their level. See chapter 4 in this guide for tips on interpreting challenging or atypical Profiles.

### Using Your Basic Interest Scales (BISs)

The second page of the College Profile expands on the five Basic Interest Scales on which the student scored highest (see sample, Figure 1.2). These scales are listed in descending order of interest, as measured by standard scores. A brief description is provided for each of the five BISs to identify the content measured by each scale. For example, the following description is provided for the Programming & Information Systems scale: "Using computers, managing information, and developing software."