Building a Comprehensive Sophomore Year Experience Program 2015

Jimmie Gahagan & Molly Schaller

Please find a list below of suggested readings for the online course on Developing a Comprehensive Sophomore Year Experience. If you wish to print only certain resources, you may click their respective links to jump directly to them in the packet.

Pre-Course Suggested Readings

1. **Sophomores in Transition: The Forgotten Year, by Barbara F. Tobolowsky** – *Pages 2-10*
2. **Attending to the Sophomore Experience at Belmont University** – *Pages 11-13*
3. **The Second-Year Experience: Turning Attention to the Academy's Middle Children", by Jimmie Gahagan and Mary Stuart Hunter** – *Pages 14-19*
4. **Wandering and Wondering: Traversing the Uneven Terrain of the Second College Year, by Molly A. Schaller** – *Pages 20-27*
5. **The SOPHOMORE-Year Experience: Critical Adjustments, Challenges, & Stressors, by Joe Cuseo** – *Pages 28-30*
6. **The Sophomore Initiative at the University of South Carolina** – *Pages 31-33*

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Although the nature of collegiate transition in the sophomore year is different from that of first-year students, it is no less significant or challenging.

Sophomores in Transition: The Forgotten Year

Barbara F. Tobolowsky

Over the past several decades, student transitions have become a primary focus for many higher education staff and faculty. Not surprisingly, these educators have concerned themselves primarily with the transition into college, because high first-year attrition numbers reflect how challenging this transition is for many new students. Attention has also been given to the senior-year transition, because it is the last opportunity institutions have to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the working world or graduate school. Researchers focus on beginning and ending transitions by exploring the needs, behaviors, and expectations of both first-year students and seniors through national and institution-specific surveys such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement and by assessing the outcomes of targeted programs such as first-year and senior seminars.

The same research focus has not been given to the sophomore and junior years. There is no national instrument that specifically explores student issues and concerns in the middle years of the collegiate experience. The lack of research on the junior year is particularly striking given the importance of the junior year in a student's college experience. Traditionally the junior year is the time when students are finally able to focus on courses in their major, and it is often when students engage in special experiential opportunities such as internships, extended service opportunities, and study abroad. In addition, these students have the bulk of the leadership responsibilities on many campuses through service as peer leaders, mentors, and resident advisors. However, given the absence of both research

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and focused campus programs, we leave discussion of the junior year, by necessity, for a later time.

This chapter focuses on the sophomore-year experience, which in the past few years has moved from the background to the forefront for increasing numbers of researchers and campus practitioners. I discuss the unique issues related to the sophomore year, share findings from current research, and conclude with recommendations for those seeking to offer sophomore initiatives or improve those already in existence.

Making the Case for the Importance of the Sophomore Year

Educators should be interested in the sophomore year because this is the year in which students make many of the decisions that help them succeed in subsequent years, such as clarifying their sense of purpose, making major declarations, and narrowing their career options. While some may think that the national conversation about the sophomore year is simply another educational fad, discussion of sophomore issues actually dates back to 1956 when Freedman coined the phrase "sophomore slump." He characterized the second year as one of student inertia and confusion, and contemporary educators note similar behaviors among today's sophomores (Gansemer-Topf, Stern, and Benjamin, 2007).

Some have argued that the significant attention many institutions now give to first-year students has actually made the second year the more difficult transition experience (Scott Evenbeck, personal communication to the author, October 2006). This growing realization that the second year is another potential period of risk for today's college students led the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition to publish a monograph that explored the sophomore year (Schreiner and Pattengale, 2000). It was groundbreaking work because it exposed not only the issues for sophomores, but also institutional approaches designed to help them.

In 2005, the National Resource Center, again responding to needs expressed by educators, conducted a study exploring the range of programmatic initiatives that U.S. colleges and universities offer sophomores. That research led to a 2007 monograph that included quantitative findings as well as case studies of exemplary programs from public and private institutions in the United States (Tobolowsky and Cox, 2007).

No one can be sure exactly why, after years of ignoring sophomores, educators became interested in this student population. But perhaps it was the synergy of a number of key dynamics. First, at many private campuses, students develop four-year plans that identify learning outcomes for each of the four years. This focus on each year as a distinct time period in the college experience necessarily shed light on the second year.

As private college educators gained awareness of second-year issues, they turned to peer institutions and the National Resource Center for insights regarding programs and supports, which led to conference discussions on sophomores and, in turn, research and publications. This initial movement, led in large part by private institutions such as Beloit College, Colorado College, and Colgate University, encouraged educators at public colleges and universities to turn their attention to sophomores as well. Also, faculty and administrators who saw the success of first-year programs on their campuses found that a focus on second-year students was a natural extension of their earlier efforts. Finally, this more intentional focus on the needs of sophomores may have resulted from institutional concerns about retention: excluding the first year, more students drop out of higher education in the second year than any other year of college (Lipka, 2006).

What is going on that causes second-year students to leave? As with any other departure, the answer is not singular or simple. Freedman (1956) suggested that a "sophomore slump" could be the cause. Students who have not clarified their reasons for attending college or have not selected a major may feel the inertia, confusion, and resulting stress that define the sophomore slump. In addition, courses may become more challenging in the second year as students begin to focus on fields of potential interest. They feel a greater investment in these courses than in some of the first-year general education courses that seemed unrelated to their desired career. This greater investment raises the stakes for students, resulting in added pressure and stress (Coburn and Treeger, 2003; Evenbeck, Boston, DuVivier, and Hallberg, 2000; Freedman, 1956). In more recent research, sophomores discussed feeling "invisible" and "lost." These students felt they were not getting the support they need to make the critical decisions they must make in their second year (Gansemer-Topf, Stern, and Benjamin, 2007).

Other researchers have investigated both previous and current student development theories to see if any of the extant theories might shed light on second-year students. Lemons and Douglas (1987) noted that four of Chickering's vectors (1969) explain the issues of sophomore students: developing competence, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, establishing identity, and developing purpose. Baxter Magolda (1992) found that sophomores tended to fall in earlier stages of intellectual development (that is, absolute knowing and transitional knowing). Most recently Schaller (2005) developed a four-stage model based on interviews she conducted with sophomore students at four-year institutions. This model directly relates to the students' process of making a decision on a major: moving from random exploration through focused exploration and tentative choices to commitment.

Thus, as sophomores' voices are heard and as faculty, administrators, and staff recognize the needs of these students, various initiatives have been created to address those needs. These efforts run the gamut from social

activities to more academic ones, but each represents this new focus on the sophomore transition.

Findings of the National Survey of Sophomore Initiatives

In 2005, as a way to better understand institutional efforts, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition conducted a national survey of sophomore initiatives. All regionally accredited private and public four-year institutions were sent an e-mail message inviting them to participate in the Web-based survey. The response rate was 33.5 percent, with 382 institutions participating in the survey.

The survey questions addressed the types of initiatives offered, their administrative homes, and any assessment conducted evaluating the effectiveness of the initiatives. The survey found that sophomore programs are often new and have not been subjected to assessment. Seldom did institutions describe comprehensive approaches to the second year. Rather, they either offered distinct programs that might focus exclusively on sophomores or programs designed for all students in which sophomores were encouraged to participate.

The most common institutional efforts directed at sophomores are those focused on career planning (74.2 percent), major selection (65.3 percent), and academic advising (61 percent). This seems appropriate in that sophomores are often required to declare their majors during or at the end of the sophomore year. Institutions also provide engagement opportunities for sophomores through class events such as trips, dinners, and dances (46.3 percent); student government (38.7 percent); service-learning or community service (32.8 percent); and cultural events such as plays, musical events, and multicultural fairs (18.8 percent). There are also efforts to engage students academically through special credit-bearing courses geared to sophomores (31.4 percent) and opportunities to coteach, mentor, or assist in teaching a class (20.7 percent).

Campus efforts described by survey respondents are designed to address one or more of the following five goals: creating a sense of community, fostering social engagement, facilitating faculty-student interaction, encouraging major and career exploration, and promoting academic engagement and leadership.

A Sense of Community. Some institutions offer publications geared specifically toward their second-year students (16.8 percent) to help create a unique class identity. These publications might take the form of newsletters, Web sites, or brochures. Regardless of their form, all provide information on events and deadlines of particular interest to sophomores. At Drew University, students and parents are sent a letter from the dean acquainting them with events specific to careers, as well as information regarding offices that might assist students in selecting a major. The

University of Denver has a second-year Web site that includes information about a half-day reorientation conference and other programs, as well as frequently asked questions about registration, internships, advising, and other topics.

Efforts to build community do not stop at publications. Beloit College has offered a long-running sophomore retreat to help second-year students establish a sense of community. Macalester College holds the Sophomore Fiesta, and Colorado College hosts the Sophomore Luau with the primary objective of building a collective identity. Other institutions go beyond campus events and offer class trips to achieve this goal. Both Washington and Lee University and Colgate University host sophomore trips to Washington, D.C. New York University uses the vast resources of the city to engage students with trips to local museums. These initiatives, which vary greatly, are all intended to engage students and build community.

Social Engagement. Often second-year students begin to question the relationships they developed during the first year and seek new, healthy relationships with their peers (Schaller, 2005). Many social and academic opportunities, including retreats (Beloit College, Grinnell College) and peer mentoring (University of Rhode Island), help students connect with other students. Other sophomore-specific initiatives that foster social engagement include curricular learning communities (Emory University, Texas Tech University, Colorado College), a lecture series (Colgate University), trips (Emory, Washington and Lee University), dances (Rowan University, Saint Anselm College), and dinners or other special meals (Yale University, Loyola College, St. Lawrence University). All of these experiences expose second-year students to new peer groups and encourage them to develop meaningful relationships with other students.

Student-Faculty Interaction. Many researchers (Astin, 1993; Kuh and Hu, 2001) have reported the benefits of student-faculty interaction both in and outside the classroom. This survey also found that campuses are creating situations that encourage these interactions. For example, faculty often serve as mentors to sophomore students (31.4 percent) to encourage student-faculty interaction outside the classroom. At Bennington College, for instance, three faculty members from different disciplines, as well as the student's faculty adviser, meet with the student several times throughout the student's college career to review and revise their four-year plan. This process ensures ongoing student-faculty interaction.

Major and Career Exploration. Major and career exploration is clearly the main goal of the sophomore year, and many of the initiatives offered are geared to help students in decision making in these areas. In addition to career and major fairs, which are common on many campuses, some institutions offer other unique programs. West Virginia University sponsors the Sophomore Outdoor Adventure Reorientation (SOAR) program, a one-week spring or summer outdoor adventure trip that focuses on helping students explore and determine their majors. The residential colleges at Yale University have

special sophomore advising nights, when the college dean and residential students discuss how to choose a major.

As students turn their attention to career development and major selection, self-assessments are a natural part of that inquiry. Students need to know their interests and goals before they make those decisions. The Career Services Office at Asbury College provides self-assessment as part of the career advising program to help sophomores select their major. Because many sophomore students are questioning their identity and sense of meaning and purpose, opportunities for self-assessment and reflection can prove to be extremely beneficial as students make their initial, if not final, career and major decisions.

Academic Engagement and Leadership. Campuses also seek to encourage students' intellectual development in the sophomore year. One approach that Beloit College and Colorado College use is to provide venture grants to sophomores that enable them to explore their areas of interest. For instance, Beloit offers the grants to support the students "to travel, do research, start a business, something they always wanted to do" but lacked the resources. Other campuses have service-learning requirements that help students see the world outside themselves. One of the key outcomes of service-learning is to make students better citizens and encourage them to reflect on their own identity. Benedict College requires sophomores to complete twenty hours of service each semester, with the goal of students' "putting their learning into action and honing their leadership skills."

Several institutions engage students academically by offering credit-bearing courses for sophomores. At Emory University and Rhodes College, these courses are part of the core requirements; at Austin College, a sophomore course focuses on leadership development. Several institutions provide opportunities for sophomores to coteach or assist in teaching that not only develop leadership potential but also help engage them academically. At Willamette University, sophomore students can serve as teaching assistants in the first-year seminar course, and at the University of Rhode Island, students coteach the seminar. These classroom experiences help students gain leadership skills as well as academic expertise.

Students have other noncourse-based leadership opportunities during their second year. Furman University offers leadership training, while Butler University, Austin College, and the State University of New York at Fredonia have sophomore class officers who provide the sophomore voice in campuswide discussions or plan second-year-focused events. Sophomore programming is wide ranging, addressing both the academic and social development of students.

Recommendations

Research (National Resource Center, 2005) finds that an emphasis on sophomores is a new programming area for many institutions. Although

sophomores deserve attention and efforts, the task of providing more programming and assistance seems daunting with resources that are already stretched. Here are seven steps for creating or improving sophomore initiatives (Tobolowsky and Cox, 2007):

Do not work alone. Begin to seek out others on campus who are interested in sophomore issues. Many movements begin as grassroots efforts, so search out like-minded colleagues. In addition, try to get higher administration's buy-in, because if programs are part of institutional long-range planning, they will be ensured financial support.

Take stock of the current situation. Taking stock has two primary steps. First, talk to students to determine their needs and concerns. Then conduct a campus audit to identify what is being offered. This may sometimes require serious investigation because these programs are rarely housed in one office. However, much can be learned from this process. Sometimes programs that work well for a small subset of students (perhaps a mentoring program for sophomores interested in science) will be good for the entire class. An audit of existing programs developed for sophomores may lead to reorganizing the offerings under one office or appointing a director of second-year programs.

Develop second-year traditions. The process of developing traditions provides students an opportunity to reestablish relationships, form new ones, and feel that they matter and belong. These events can include welcome-back events prior to the start of the second year, a sophomore common reading or lecture series, or a dance or other social gathering for second-year students. Ideally, campuses should offer a number of second-year events that engage sophomores academically and socially.

Provide career and major exploration events. These events help students accomplish what is perhaps the most critical issue of the sophomore year: declaring a major and thinking about career decisions. They can include major and career information fairs or requiring sophomores do self-assessments to assist them in the decision-making process.

Communicate to sophomores. One of the most telling findings from the National Survey of Sophomore Initiatives was that having a second-year newsletter (electronic or hard copy) was a relatively easy and inexpensive way to communicate events of interest to sophomores. Communication shows students they matter, and it lets them know about events or activities of special interest.

Provide good advising for sophomores. We know that "good advising is the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (Light, 2001, p. 81). Since most institutions want their students to be able to declare their majors by the end of the sophomore year, the importance of advising cannot be overstated.

Assess the impact of all programs and activities. Research speaks volumes to higher education administrators. Be sure to include assessment as an

element in the development of every program and initiative; only then will you know how to improve or build on your efforts.

Conclusion

Clearly the sophomore transition is important because of the several critical decisions students must make in their sophomore year. In the past, in spite of their importance, sophomores have been neglected as campuses focused their efforts primarily on first-year and senior students. Recently researchers and practitioners have started to look at sophomores as a unique cohort and have uncovered the transition issues tied to the second year. This chapter shares some of those findings to illuminate institutional responses to second-year issues. In most cases, campuses offer ad hoc or piecemeal programs rather than comprehensive, holistic, and assessed initiatives that address second-year students' academic and social needs and assist them in their transition through college.

Lessons learned from the success of many first-year and senior initiatives can be applied to initiatives designed for the sophomore year. The most important lesson is this: a comprehensive approach to the sophomore year, embedded in campus culture and tied to the campus mission, is more likely to yield broad institutional support and long-term sustainability than a fragmented approach. This chapter provides educators the information they need to help move sophomores from the shadows into positions of greater visibility within colleges and universities.

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Attending to the Sophomore Experience at Belmont University

Belmont University is in the second year of campus-wide initiative focused on the well-being of sophomores. A new Sophomore Transitions Center offers "coaching" sessions to help sophomores explore their educational choices with more discernment.

Belmont University, like many other colleges and universities, has a robust first-year orientation program and course sequence to help students adjust to college-level work and life on campus. Fewer institutions have programs that specifically address the needs of sophomore students, but faculty and staff at Belmont are finding that this is a crucial time for their students. Sophomores no longer benefit from the hands-on programming targeted at first-year students, but they aren't deeply involved in their academic major yet, either. "It's that time when students ask questions about 'why am here? Am I here for the right reasons, am I in the right academic major?'" says David Sneed, director of the Sophomore Experience at Belmont.

In an effort to address this "sophomore slump," Belmont has established the GPS Program: Growth and Purpose for Students, which is primarily directed at students in their second, third, and fourth semesters. Now in its second year, the program is based in a new Sophomore Transitions Center/GPS office, which offers coaching sessions for students questioning their educational choices and also coordinates academic, residence life, and career services initiatives.

"The word we use for this is discernment," says Jimmy Davis, associate provost for academic affairs. "Students do some careful thinking about their own abilities, interests, and desires and look specifically at the world around them and say, 'what place should I have in the world?' When you're a sophomore, you can't answer that question forever and all time any more than when you were a freshmen in high school, or when you're thirty—it's an ongoing part of life, consistently asking yourself who am I and what's my place in the world? But it's more intense during the sophomore year than at other times, and so we're hoping to provide them some guidance and assistance as they go through that discernment process."

Coaching through Crises

The sophomore slump first came up as an issue at Belmont during the planning process for the university's current quality enhancement plan (QEP). All faculty and staff members contributed ideas for potential frameworks for the QEP. Among those that stood out was a plan to systematically address the sophomore experience. Annette Sisson, the professor of English who first suggested this focus, says the issue was raised by her students, who told her that "the sophomore year was a desert. They were still in the bubble their first year, when we did all those fabulous programs. But then when they began to doubt their major or didn't have one, or friendships were changing—everything changed around them and they felt like they were the only one in crisis."

Several other QEP proposals were considered, but ultimately the sophomore experience was chosen for implementation—both for its feasibility and for the ease with which it could accommodate elements from other proposals. The QEP provided funding for the new Sophomore Transitions Center, which is staffed by Sneed and two part-time "coaches."

"It's not academic advising, and not counseling, but helping the students find their own way," Sneed says.

“We ask them questions, we hold them accountable for the decisions they make and the processes they want to go through. We try to say ‘have you thought about this? Would you like to explore this way?’”

Most coaching sessions fall into one of two types, Sneed says. Many students come in questioning whether they are in the right major or minor. Coaches listen to their concerns and often take the students through inventories such as the StrengthsFinder test or other assessments. “We try to listen what that student’s passions are,” Sneed says. “Our president talks to students about finding their passions and the world’s needs—the intersection where those two come together is where we want our students to be. Our goal is to try to help students identify their passions and the world’s needs, and if we can find an academic major that relates to that.”

“The other model, he says, “is to help a student who comes in and is certain of where he or she is going but wants to take advantage of our resources now to position him or herself more readily for the world beyond Belmont. So we’ll help them developed focused action plan, considering all the opportunities Belmont offers, including study abroad, internships, and special programs.” Often coaches are best able to help students by alerting them to opportunities at the university or greater Nashville, such as civic engagement opportunities, career services, academic advising, or campus ministries.

Curricular Changes

In addition to establishing the Sophomore Transitions Center, the QEP also provided for changes in the curriculum and residence life. The curricular changes built on the revisions made to the university’s general education program in 2003, says Davis. “We’d revised our general education and made it vertical—it’s not something our students can ‘get out of the way’ in the first two years. It has courses designed as second, third, and fourth semester courses, some other specific things in our junior level courses and senior capstone.” Despite this change to a vertical model, however, students were often left to choose their sophomore courses with very little guidance. “We had a coherent program for students as they entered Belmont and in their first semester, and in the junior year we have some courses with particular emphases that are appropriate. But those second, third, and fourth semester courses were just ‘whatever you decide to take’ –it wasn’t intentional. Those sophomore courses lacked a focus, and our students felt it.”

One new change has come with a required speech course. Speech was already required for all students before reaching the sixty credit hours, but the content of the course has been adjusted for all sections. Now, “instead of completing four speeches on a standard boilerplate we have students do a personal survey from their Focus assessment and other inventories they do,” Sisson says, “and their first speech, rather than being personal in a nebulous way, focuses on taking these surveys and how they see this relating to their plans or making them rethink what they are doing.”

Modifying an existing course was easier than trying to staff new courses, but getting all speech faculty on board wasn’t easy at the beginning, Sisson says, especially with so many new sections being added in recent years. “We’ve grown so fast and we have many adjuncts involved—you need to be involved in the culture for it to work really well. We do have workshops and meetings and that helps everyone, but sometimes an adjunct is brought in at the last minute.”

The other piece of curricular change involves sophomore learning communities. Paired classes are scheduled back to back as often as possible, allowing instructors to potentially co-teach both classes. At least one project in the learning community counts for both classes, “which helps them see this as an expansive experience,” Sisson says. “And they get to see faculty on the same page—we model good things with faculty collaboration.” The QEP also provides funding for experiential learning outside of the class in the learning communities.

In addition to coaching sessions and new courses focused on self-exploration, sophomores benefit from new programs organized by residence life and student affairs, including a "Sophomore Summit" that brings second-year students back to campus early.

Residence Life

The Office of Residence Life has also instituted new program that they hope will address some elements of the sophomore slump. Providing housing geared toward sophomores is particularly difficult because they are Belmont's largest on-campus population, says Anthony Donovan, director of residence life—sophomores are required to live on campus, with some exceptions. Still, the university set aside Kennedy Hall, with a capacity of two hundred residents, as a sophomore-designated space. Kennedy Hall residents were given increased self-governance through their community council, which is made up of elected hall residents. "Frequently their community council was the primary person or group putting on programming," Donovan says, including a sophomore service project with Habitat for Humanity. "It probably didn't come about quite the way we wanted to, but there were certainly attempts to give them some control over our policies. We were trying to make our experience for sophomores be a little more distinct, instead of replicating what we do in the freshmen halls."

There also have been successes with residence programming focused on discernment issues, says Nicole White, residence director at Kennedy. "This year, every program has a theme of purpose and practice. As they're going through, I encourage my staff to think about how it helps them find a sense of purpose or practice certain skills or get on a path they want to be on." Attendance at these programs has been exceptional, averaging around 25 percent of the residents in the hall. Donovan also cites the lack of disciplinary problems as evidence that things are going well: violations, from vandalism to alcohol in the dorms, have been almost nonexistent, and he notes that "things that often are problems in residence life are actually symptoms of the discontent that comes from the sophomore experiences people are having."

Still, White says there have some learning curves. "Last year we when it came to training RAs, we told them 'this is the year residents will have a slump and they'll be very unsure and you should be ready for them.' And I don't think my RAs experienced that quite as much, we maybe over-prepared them. This year our goal is to focus less on 'someone's going to have a problem, here's how you help them,' and more to focus on, 'Here's how you empower and engage our students.'"

"I think you have to be a little bit flexible when going into this program," White continues. "There are a lot of things you think you know, and then you get there and the students don't react the way you thought. It's important to have a pulse on things, to ask students what they think. And not just the super involved students; talk to the students who don't volunteer, who don't get involved, and see what they want, what they need."

Davis agrees. "If you walked out and asked a hundred sophomores what they need, maybe two would say anything, the rest would say I'm fine, I'm fine. But tomorrow, another five or six will go to class for the first time and decide they don't like what they're doing and think, man I need a change from this. At that moment, they require assistance from us. The program has to be flexible and ever present so the moment they need something, they think of us and we can respond to them."

For more information on sophomore initiatives at Belmont, visit the GPS Program web page.

THE SECOND-YEAR EXPERIENCE:

TURNING ATTENTION TO THE ACADEMY'S MIDDLE CHILDREN

Sophomores are the quiet ones, finishing avoided general education courses, changing their academic majors and residences, and worrying about finances. Jimmie Gahagan and Stuart Hunter describe new efforts to bring these students out of the shadows and help them succeed.

By Jimmie Gahagan and Mary Stuart Hunter

THREE DECADES OF RESEARCH and practice have demonstrated the power and importance of the experience of students who are making the transition from high school to college. Student persistence to the sophomore year and, ultimately, persistence to graduation are at stake. This recognition of the critical nature of the first year has motivated thousands of institutions around the world to provide a wide range of programs and services for new college students and fueled the movement to improve the quality of the first-year experience. Less well understood is the experience of students in their second year: a different and, at times, even more challenging period than the initial transition to college. One sophomore at the University of South Carolina shared in a spring 2003 focus group, "Your freshman year—it's not that you were babied, but it's like there were so many things that were reaching out to freshmen that you come back your sophomore year and it's just like you are on your own." While less empirical evidence about the range and severity of issues facing sophomores exists than that for first-year students, a heightening interest in sophomores, seen at conferences, in publications, and on electronic discussion boards, strongly suggests that an increasing number of educators are turning their attention to this "middle child" population.

Traditionally, resources are front-loaded in order to provide positive challenge and support for first-year students but fail to carry into the second year. Financial hardships, academic concerns, and questions about their future goals and aspirations can become daunting issues for many second-year students. The increasing recognition that these issues are of critical importance to the learning, retention, and success of sophomores has powerful implications for the work of faculty, staff, and campus administrators. In this article, we explore the current literature and institutional initiatives addressing the second-year experience. In particular, we outline difficulties in defining *sophomore,* explore the unique challenges that sophomores face, and conclude with a set of recommendations and a call for action for institutions interested in improving the second-year experience of undergraduate students.

Defining the Sophomore Year

DEFINING the sophomore year by using traditional academic standing measures can be challenging, if not impossible. At many institutions, large numbers of first-year students matriculate with a considerable number of advanced placement or international baccalaureate credits. Categorizing based

on academic standing, then, could label students sophomores before they even attend their first college classes. In addition, transfer students who are new to a campus may start their second year of college with credits from a previous institution or after having taken classes part-time over a number of years. Finally, students who experience academic difficulty during their first college year may, in fact, be in their third academic year of coursework before they achieve sophomore status according to traditional academic standing criteria.

A task force on the sophomore year at the University of South Carolina struggled with defining the term *sophomore* as the group's work moved from discussion and hypothesis building to a period of research to test its assumptions. For the task force's purposes, sophomores were finally defined as "first-time, full-time students who have persisted into their second year of academic work." Under this definition, it may well be more accurate to use "second-year experience" to describe this period. Each institution turning its efforts to this population will undoubtedly find that it needs to wrestle with the factors that affect its own definition. The description it settles on will likely derive from the unique circumstances of that campus's student population.

Describing the Second-Year Experience

THE TERM *sophomore slump* is widely used to describe students who lack motivation, feel disconnected, and flounder academically. Although research has been conducted for more than forty years on this issue, a comprehensive definition of the sophomore slump has remained elusive. The lack of a clear definition for this phrase as well as for the term *sophomore* further highlights the complexity of the second-year experience. Karen Coburn and Madge Treeger, writing to parents in their book *Letting Go,* describe the significant emotional issues that arise in the sophomore year. One administrator whom the authors talked with described the sophomore year as one in which "no one is loving you up anymore, whether it is your [resident advisor], an advisor, or your parents; and at the same time you're betwixt and between in your academic life" (p. 267). Choosing a major, questioning parents' values, and searching for meaning and closeness to other students become more important as first-year students become sophomores. One student quoted in Coburn and Treeger's work described the sophomore year as "the transition between wide-eyed awe and upper-class confidence" (p. 274).

Our experience in working with sophomores at the University of South Carolina confirms this description. In a focus group conducted in the spring of 2003, one sophomore described his experience this way: "I think that going from freshman to sophomore year is when you probably mature the most. If you look at yourself when you start college and then at the end of your sophomore year, you'll see a big difference in how responsible you are in your priorities, and how you manage stuff. It's what makes you grow up, I'd say." The sophomore year is a time of developmental growth and a period when academic advising and course selection become more important as sophomores are asked to declare their academic majors. Another student in this focus group explained, "Second year is when you start settling down and trying to declare what your major is, and I'm still a little bit confused thinking about what courses to take and if it's compatible with my major."

Over the past several years, literature about the sophomore-year experience has highlighted two primary topics: (1) the developmental changes that take place within students during their sophomore year and (2) institutional policies and support from administrators that help or hinder students during their second year. Mervin Freedman first mentioned a sophomore slump in a 1956 article describing the stages of the college experience. Through his work at Vassar College, he found that student energy in the sophomore year centers on academic work and peer interactions. In addition, selecting a major plays a central role in the student's sophomore year. Freedman found that the sophomore slump is defined by a "lack of inertia or disorganization" and may begin as early as the second semester of the first year of college (p. 22). Susan Furr and Linda Gannaway's work reinforced this idea; they defined the sophomore slump as a period of "confusion and uncertainty" (p. 340).

Confusion and uncertainty are not the only emotions felt by sophomores. Douglas Richmond and Jay Lemons in a *Journal of College Student Personnel* article, hypothesized that components of the sophomore slump include doubts about career, dissatisfaction in relationships, and an increased concern about paying for college. Furthermore, they characterized sophomores as

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being "stranded in no-man's land; the novelty of college associated with being a freshman has worn off, and often sophomores are not far enough along in their academic program to assess accurately or feel a part of their major field" (p. 176). Lemons and Richmond hypothesize about a developmental foundation for the sophomore-year experience. In a *NASPA Journal* article, they identified four of Arthur Chickering's seven vectors—"achieving competence, developing autonomy, establishing identity, and developing purpose"—as potent factors in sophomore student development (p. 18).

In her recent *About Campus* article, Molly Schaller focused on the developmental changes occurring in the sophomore year among students at the University of Dayton. Her qualitative study highlighted changes that take place in the sophomore year as students move toward what Marcia Baxter Magolda and Patricia King call *self-authorship.* Self-authorship is "the capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates engagement in mutual relations with the larger world. . . . [Self-authorship] yields the capacity to actively listen to multiple perspectives, critically interpret those perspectives in light of relevant evidence and the internal foundation, and make judgments accordingly" (p. xxii). Four stages of sophomore development emerged from Schaller's work, including random exploration, focused exploration, tentative choices, and commitment. She recommends structured reflection as an opportunity for students to make meaning of their experiences as they move through these stages.

Dissatisfaction and a sense that they lack institutional support have also been associated with the sophomore-year experience. In capturing twenty years of research about the impact of college on students, Kenneth Feldman and Theodore Newcomb described the sophomore slump in terms of "students' dissatisfaction with the college as an institution and their experiences in it rather than in terms of inertia and disorganization" (p. 92). Their research also revealed that sophomores are more likely to be dissatisfied with their college experience than first-year, junior, and senior students.

Building on Feldman and Newcomb's work, John Morgan and Deborah Davis found that few programs targeted at second-year students were available through student affairs divisions. They noted that first-year students at their own institution received a great deal of support that did not continue into the sophomore year. This lack of attention resulted in these students feeling "alone on campus" (p. 170).

Retooling existing initiatives and developing new programs are two solid strategies for improving the experience of second-year students. Offerings in career services, undergraduate research, service learning, and study abroad can all be organized to promote student engagement and learning during the sophomore year. Lemons and Richmond assert that mentoring and individual attention should form the backbone of programmatic efforts in the sophomore year and that residence life should be used as a vehicle for these efforts. Schaller suggests that sophomores be provided with opportunities for exploration through study abroad, service learning, internships, and other active learning opportunities. In addition, Joyce Wilder found that effective advising as well as interaction between second-year students and faculty play important roles in these students' success.

The title of a monograph published by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and edited by Laurie Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale points to the central issue with sophomores. *Visible Solutions for Invisible Students* synthesizes earlier research and discusses aspects of the sophomore year that are particularly in need of attention, including curricular issues, advising, career decisions, and institutional approaches to helping sophomores. Schreiner and Pattengale recommend that more research be done to describe the sophomore-year experience and challenge institutions and professional associations to apply additional resources to this population. They believe a key ingredient for sophomore success lies in "increasing the level of intellectual engagement in order to sustain the high expectations of the first year" (p. 92).

Sophomore Attrition

DIFFICULTIES in the sophomore year too often lead to student attrition. Surveying students at private institutions, Stephanie Juillerat sought to determine why sophomore students withdraw from school. This research identified increased tuition costs, selection of a major, and housing issues as major challenges for sophomores. Juillerat also reported that sophomores put high value on an environment that promotes intellectual growth; valuable course content and excellent classroom instruction; knowledgeable, fair, and caring faculty; approachable and knowledgeable advisers; tuition that is a worthwhile investment; adequate financial aid; a smooth registration process with a good variety of courses offered; and an enjoyable student experience. Furthermore, Steven Graunke and Sherry Woosley found that commitment to an academic major and meaningful interaction with faculty and staff were "significant predictors of academic success" (p. 374) in the sophomore year and key factors affecting retention.

On many campuses, officials attempt to understand student attrition by surveying nonreturning students about their reasons for withdrawal. Because students fre-

The second year remains a largely unexplored frontier for both students and institutions and deserves additional attention.

quently give what might be considered socially acceptable answers for leaving school, gathering information from these students should be considered just a first step. Students' reasons for leaving may be deeper than even they themselves may recognize and may involve barriers to success that the institution could lower or remove. At the University of South Carolina, 84 percent of first-year students typically continue into their sophomore year, but of those students who do return, 11 percent typically will depart during their sophomore year. It is most likely that most of this attrition is due to a combination of student-initiated action and actions of the institution that have the unintended result of student departures.

Institutional Attention to the Sophomore Year

INSTITUTIONS that are concerned about the second-year experience have begun to examine and implement policies and initiatives specifically designed to support second-year students. Initiatives in three areas are worth examining here: curricular, cocurricular, and residence life initiatives.

Curricular Initiatives. For many students, the sophomore year represents the first time they will begin to take courses in their academic major. In addition, these students are now enrolling in gateway classes, such as sequences of math and chemistry, which are traditionally where academically less prepared students are "weeded out." During a focus group in spring 2003, another University of South Carolina student shared, "Freshman year was really easy; I didn't have a problem at all, and all my classes just seemed basic and not hard, but this year's kind of like stepping up a notch because you know you have to perform well." Academic advising plays a central role in helping students address these concerns. The guidance and support a caring adviser provides can make a powerful difference to a second-year student struggling with an academic or personal concern. Some institutions also now offer sophomore seminar courses that explore a number of common themes such as service learning, career exploration, and academic success. McPherson College in Kansas, for example, offers a seminar that emphasizes developing college life skills, career planning, and service learning. Spartanburg Methodist College in South Carolina and the University of Indianapolis offer similar courses.

One of the earliest programs designed for second-year students was Stanford University's Sophomore College, created in 1995. Students return to campus two weeks prior to the beginning of the autumn quarter for intensive study with outstanding faculty. They earn one to two academic credit hours for courses offered around such topics as green buildings, constitutionalism, ghost stories, and homelessness in America. Linked-course learning communities have also been developed to enhance second-year student learning in a specific discipline or major. These communities often enroll student cohorts in two to three courses and provide an opportunity for students to synthesize learning across courses. Stonehill College in Massachusetts connects an introductory course in business with an arts and science course. The goal is to "expand the student's level of interdisciplinary understanding and create a platform to accelerate learning in the student's major" (www.stonehill.edu/catalog/programs/ba.htm). Substantial empirical evidence has demonstrated that curricular learning communities support first-year students' academic success, retention, and involvement on campus. The body of evidence on the effects of learning communities, particularly in the first year, was most recently gathered by Barbara Smith, Jean MacGregor, Roberta Matthews, and Faith Gabelnick in their book *Learning Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education*. These authors and others suggest that additional research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives at the sophomore level.

Cocurricular Initiatives. As we noted earlier, colleges and universities often front-load resources and activities for first-year students, but few of those efforts continue into the sophomore year. This drop-off in support can leave students feeling unsupported or forgotten. Several institutions, however, have begun to address the issue. Kennesaw State University in Georgia has developed a sophomore mentoring program that pairs sophomores and seniors in the same major. The University of Puget Sound in Washington State has created a Web site for sophomores that provides information on academic advising, community service opportunities, housing, and

other resources that second-year students may need (www2.ups.edu/dsa/soph). The institution also regularly communicates with sophomore students about upcoming campus events. Boston College has developed a retreat called "Halftime" that allows students to get away from campus at the end of their sophomore year for a time of focused reflection and career exploration. Other schools, including Washington University in St. Louis, hold kick-off and orientation events at the beginning of the sophomore year to help orient second-year students to programs and people that could be important to their success. Traditions such as sophomore ring or pin ceremonies are also simple opportunities to help develop an attitude of caring and support for second-year students.

Residence Life Initiatives. At residential institutions, the housing experience can also be designed to support students during their sophomore year. Emory University in Atlanta created a residentially based program called Second Year at Emory. Students live together and participate in a faculty dinner series, receive special attention from their resident adviser, and are invited to a sophomore class pin ceremony. The program also facilitates increased contact with career counselors and academic advisers. Creighton University in Nebraska, Colorado State University, St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Rutgers the State University of New Jersey, and the University of Central Arkansas, among other institutions, have designated sophomore-year housing or sophomore-year living and learning communities. In fall 2005, the University of South Carolina piloted their Sophomore Student Success Initiative, through which resident advisers scheduled meetings with sophomore residents four times throughout the year to discuss academic concerns, leadership development opportunities, self-responsibility and community development, and other topics related to the student experience.

National Attention to the Second Year

NATIONWIDE, increasing numbers of higher educators are seeking information and ideas to assist them in improving the experience of second-year students. An outgrowth of a roundtable discussion held at the 2004 National Conference on Students in Transition was the creation of a listserv on sophomore issues through the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Within a few weeks of its launch, the number of subscribers to SOPH-LIST (www.sc.edu/fye/listservs/index.html) had reached several hundred. Shortly after the list was started, an electronic discussion board was created to provide information and facilitate additional discussion about the sophomore-year experience. Subscriptions to these services have steadily increased since their inception.

In addition, the number of presentations about the second-year experience has substantially increased at national conferences sponsored by the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Academic Advising, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Research and program evaluation related to the sophomore year are in their infancy, and increasing numbers of educators are searching out best practices in assessment and evaluation and effective research design models in order to study this population. A Web-based national survey of sophomore initiatives was sent to some 1,300 accredited, bachelor's degree–granting institutions in the United States in the fall of 2005 by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Data analysis will continue through mid-2006 on responses from more than 400 campuses nationwide, with results slated for release in fall 2006. A monograph scheduled for publication in late 2006 will present campus-based research on the experience of sophomores and results from campus-based assessment of institutional initiatives targeting sophomores.

Response to a spring 2006 national teleconference sponsored by The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition entitled "The Forgotten Student: Understanding and Supporting Sophomores" was strong. The topic generated more interest than any other teleconference topic in the past four years; campuses tuned in via satellite or webcast or ordered videos for later viewing. Educators on campuses of all types, including community colleges, liberal arts institutions, and regional and research universities, engaged with panelists and other viewers by submitting a record number of questions during the broadcast. A conservative estimate numbered the viewing audience at some 2,500 educators.

Recommendations

THE SECOND-YEAR EXPERIENCE holds unique challenges for students and institutions. The following recommendations may provide guidance to institutions in moving toward a more positive and productive second-year experience for undergraduate students.

- *Pay attention to second-year students.* A task force or committee representing a wide range of campus constituents should be

appointed to understand the second-year student experience, to examine sophomore retention rates, and to evaluate institutional support structures for sophomores.

- *Create sophomore-appropriate services, programs, and curricula.* The issues sophomores face are unique to that population and should be addressed in offerings that map to these students' specific needs as well as to the institutional mission, values, and goals.
- *Design first-year experience offerings with the recognition that they should be extended to the second year.* Academic, social, and personal support, as well as opportunities for student involvement remain vital aspects of student retention throughout college and thus should be central to the experiences of students in their second year. Between the well-supported first year and the closely watched junior and senior years, engagement may be particularly critical.
- *Modify existing programs and services* designed to support student learning and engagement for sophomore students. These may include such practices as undergraduate research, study abroad, service learning, curricular learning communities, academic advising and career development, and academic success services.
- *Create institutional traditions for sophomores* such as sophomore retreats, ring ceremonies, second-year summits, or other special sophomore events.
- *Develop an institutional culture that welcomes evaluation and assessment.* Build processes for determining effectiveness into new programmatic initiatives early in their inception and create mechanisms for disseminating results throughout the campus.

A Call to Action

THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE can provide powerful opportunities for development and growth among students. Each year of the undergraduate experience offers students challenges and opportunities and institutions multiple occasions to facilitate student learning and success. The first-year college student deserves, and indeed now receives, significant institutional attention and resources. Campuses have come to understand the importance of offering a multitude of programs to assist students with the transition from high school or the world of work to the collegiate culture. It is also widely believed that by the time students reach their junior and senior years, they are fully engaged in an academic major and have established social networks. The second year remains a largely unexplored frontier for both students and institutions and deserves additional attention. While the challenges are great, we contend that the opportunities are even greater. We encourage a focused and sustained examination of the second-year student experience and are confident that institutions and students will be better for it.

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The academy's middle child, the sophomore, is beginning to earn the kind of attention that has been trained on first-year students for the past several decades. Molly Schaller shares insights on the stages she has found to exist in the sophomore year, arguably the rockiest of them all.

Wandering and Wondering:

Traversing the Uneven Terrain of the Second College Year

By Molly A. Schaller

"I'm just kind of lost . . . as far as my friends, that's all changing, my relationships with other people are changing, my family life is changing, my major's changed like five times."
—Melissa, twenty-year-old sophomore

I SAT IN THE BACK OF THE ROOM as a large group of faculty and staff from across campus gathered to discuss academic excellence. We had just engaged in small-group discussions and were sharing our results. The topic at the moment was what we want entering sophomores to be able to do. One faculty member expressed her concerns: "By the end of the first year, they should really know why they want to be here and what they're aiming for. They ought to have a major by the time they start the sophomore year. I know some students who don't, and I feel like they're kind of lost souls. Academically, we're set up that they really are behind significantly in their majors if they're just deciding on their majors by the end of the sophomore year." This was a sentiment that I had heard many times from faculty and administrators across the country. Is this a reasonable expectation for traditional-age sophomores? What do we know about sophomores, and how can we design campus environments and our interactions with them in ways that optimize their learning?

Institutions across the country have designed and implemented first-year experience programs that have gone a long way toward affecting student success. Retention rates have increased at some institutions as a result of these interventions, and first-year students often get the support they need to negotiate the transition into college. Now many educators are wondering how students fare in the second year of college, what their needs are, and what responsibilities we have in designing environments to meet those needs. These are questions that I have been pondering for years, and other professionals across the country are grappling with them as well.

At present, there are few truly comprehensive programs for sophomore students. There are residential, academic, career, and campus ministry programs for sophomore students at several institutions. Colgate University has one of the most comprehensive programs for college sophomores. Its Sophomore Year Experience is year two of a progressive program that focuses on citizenship education and highlights development of class community, academic enrichment opportunities, mentorship from faculty and alumni, and career exploration. Colgate has devoted significant resources to this program, including hiring a dean of the Sophomore Year Experience and redesigning living opportunities in order to group sophomores together as they focus on learning the arts of democracy.

Institutions that wish to attend to sophomore students in new ways need to ground their programs in an understanding of the challenges of the sophomore year. In my own work with sophomores, I have often felt inadequate, as if I were missing what they need. In the course of my research into the second-year experience, I have found that sophomores are at an important developmental point, one that has implications for our environments, programs, and approaches to learning.

In my effort to make sense of the sophomore year, I listened to nineteen traditional-age sophomores at a midsize, private Catholic university as they described their second-year experience in focus groups or individual interviews. Eleven of the students were women, and seventeen were Caucasian. They were selecting majors in a variety of academic fields: one each in American studies, art, mechanical engineering, political science, psychology and sociology, special education, communication, and biology/premedicine; two in English; three in business; and four in education.

I discovered that these students existed in or moved through four stages in three aspects of their lives. The four stages are random exploration, focused exploration, tentative choices, and commitment. Although I asked questions about spirituality, campus involvement, and home life, most of what students wanted to share pertained to three issues: how they viewed themselves, their relationships, and their academic experiences and decisions. Most of the students were in the focused exploration or tentative choices stage of their experience with each of the three issues; some were still in random exploration of an issue or were moving into commitment on one or more of the issues. What follows is a description of each of the stages and their implications for the design of learning environments.

Random Exploration

FOR MANY of the students in the study, the first year of college had been a time of random exploration. They had moved through the college experience with a sense of exuberance. The change in environment and responsibilities meant that the students had been experiencing themselves and their world in new ways. They described decisions they had made in their first year as lacking self-reflection. While most of the sophomores had moved out of this stage by the end of their first year of college or by the end of the summer between the two years, some remained in this stage in one or more areas of their lives.

Emily (all names in this article are pseudonyms), a transfer student who was experiencing the university much as a first-year student would, exhibited this lack of reflection: "I don't know how many times I've said I'm going to study tonight and then the next thing I know I'm like in a house with a million people in it." For Emily, motivators for this behavior were mostly other people encouraging her to go out or attend a party.

Sophomore students in random exploration seemed very aware of the choices pending in their lives, especially in regard to majors and careers. However, they made choices that allowed them to delay deciding until later. For Emily, that meant selecting a major that would allow her to specialize or focus her life later. She said, "I'm just glad I'm in a broad major because I don't know specifically what I want to do." Because students in random exploration do not yet seem to be in touch with an internal voice or in active reflection about decisions, their movement through the college experience can seem undirected.

Focused Exploration

RANDOM EXPLORATION did not end abruptly for the students in this study. Students described periods of growing awareness about their choices and their world. Many of the students made the transition from random exploration to the next stage, focused exploration, over the summer between their first and second years or early in the sophomore year. Therefore, most of the sophomores in this study were in focused exploration in one or more areas of their lives. In focused exploration, students began to express a level of frustration with their current relationships, with themselves, or with their academic experience. They began to question the choices they had made during random exploration and wondered out loud about the mistakes they had made. Compli-

Most of what students wanted to share pertained to three issues: how they viewed themselves, their relationships, and their academic experiences and decisions.

cating matters for many was the pressure they felt to select a major, to have a sense of a future career and life direction.

Rob selected American studies as his major so that he could "take classes that I just enjoy and learn while I was here." While this worked for Rob at the beginning of the sophomore year, by the middle of the year, he was feeling pressure to get something else out of his college experience. Rob was becoming increasingly concerned about his future. Describing his frustration, he said, "American Studies, I have no idea where I'm going with it. . . . I have no idea what I'm going to do when I get out of college." Rob soon lost enthusiasm for classes because he could not attach his enjoyment of the course topics to his future security. His grades fell, and he found himself losing concentration on his schoolwork.

As focused exploration took hold, many of the participants began to experience the challenge of the sophomore year. Dan, a political science major, described the year by saying, "I think being a sophomore is more—you see both sides. I think it's almost like a turning point in a way. . . . It's like you're standing on a fence." Dan's metaphor for standing on a fence fit what others in the study described: Sophomores look backward and see their first year of college and their childhood, and they look forward and see the rest of their college career and their future.

Although Rob was overwhelmed by thoughts of his future, he was enjoying the opportunity to generally reflect on life. He said, "I'm much happier this year, I'd say. I like who I am. I'm working on getting to know myself better, though. That's pretty much what's important to me now." Others were facing periods of crisis, with exploration of themselves, relationships, and the future at the center of their lives. Melissa, an elementary education major, was experiencing great frustration with her major and decisions about her future. She described the pressure she felt to decide on a major as she walked in the door and blamed the university for encouraging students to make early decisions about their majors. At the end of her sophomore year, Melissa was uncertain and experiencing constant worry. She said she was feeling stressed. When I asked her to describe it, she said, "The stress that I'm talking about is more like, what I'm going to do for the rest of my life, where am I going?"

The longer a student remained in focused exploration, the more comprehensive their exploration became. Some students moved through focused exploration more quickly than others, often seizing on an answer about themselves, their relationships, or their academics that seemed to fit well enough. The students who took on focused exploration more fully seemed to look at their lives more thoroughly. This is the dilemma of the sophomore year. If we want our students to understand themselves and begin the process of becoming self-directed, should they stay in this stage for longer periods of time or in deeper ways? If we believe so, we can anticipate that students will need support as they move through this process. If students don't stay in this stage for long enough or in deep ways, then they may resort to allowing powerful external forces such as parents, peers, faculty, society at large, or old notions of themselves to make decisions for them (see Matt Sheahan's story in "Too Sure Too Soon: When Choosing Should Wait" in the May-June 2004 issue of *About Campus*).

Tentative Choices

MANY OF THE SOPHOMORES in this study began to make choices during the sophomore year that would set the direction for the remainder of their college career. Making

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If students don't stay in focused exploration for long enough or in deep ways, then they may resort to allowing powerful external forces or old notions of themselves to make decisions for them.

these choices, even tentatively, moved students out of focused exploration and into the next stage, tentative choices. Jenna was one of the students who had changed her major multiple times, from psychology to English to a triple major, before she chose education. Jenna described the choice: "I love it so much more now that I know what I'm getting into, and it kind of makes it worthwhile. I know what I'm getting into, and it makes it easier to go to classes, more rewarding now." The decision-making process was challenging for Jenna, but when she stepped into the high school classroom to begin observations, she felt relief that her selection seemed to fit.

Students in the tentative choices stage described a new level of responsibility that came with seeing their future more clearly. Lauren, a psychology and sociology major, had a difficult sophomore year. She described her new sense of responsibility: "I pretty much know what I want out of my future, so I'm figuring out what to do to get there, and I don't mind doing things myself. I'm more independent, more future-oriented, too, more responsible too. Last year, it was just a year to have fun and stuff. This year, it's more like—'settle down, you know your limits on things, and what you have to do to get certain grades.'"

While tentative choices must be made, it is the process of how they are made that seems most important for sophomores. If sophomores examine the options fully, engage thoroughly in focused exploration, and make decisions based on internal connections to the exploration period, then their choices may be more aligned to personal values.

Commitment

FEW OF THE SOPHOMORES in this study were able to move through the lingering anxiety of tentative choices to make confident decisions about their future. Those who could do so moved to commitment. In commitment, students spoke differently than others about their year. They were already planning for the future, clear about what they wanted, and unwavering in their sense of responsibility for their own future. Akash, a business major, found that the approaches faculty took with him were helping him to take on more responsibility for his own education. He reported, "Instead of teachers teaching you, you have to learn it on your own now; they're just kind of there to guide you. It's like the teaching aspect is done. It's about the work ethic now." Akash carefully planned his classes, service work, and friendships because he wanted a secure future. He described his friends as the people who, in twenty years, he would call his "college buddies."

Amy, a photography major, also had made firm commitments to her future and her major. She had experienced constant criticism from faculty, which peaked at her sophomore review. Knowing that she would be limited in her future career, she said, "I'm like growing up and I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do with my life, because being an art major, the possibilities are not grandiose. So, it's like being comfortable with that and accepting that, OK, I might be a waitress for the next five years and I still can be happy; I don't need money as long as I'm happy."

Students in commitment in one or more areas of their life did not doubt their decisions as did sophomores in the tentative choices stage. Instead, they were either resolute in their choices or they felt such relief in making a choice that they ignored their other options. This is an important distinction. Sophomores who make choices while in denial of other options may, in fact, end up revisiting those same alternatives as they age.

Putting the Sophomore Year in Context

WHILE THE SOPHOMORE YEAR is a unique experience, it fits into the larger context of becoming an adult. The students I talked with were keenly aware of the responsi-

bility that loomed after college. Many of them actually talked about the impact that turning twenty had on their view of themselves as adults. Robert Kegan, in his book *In Over Our Heads,* puts the experience of the sophomore year in this context of becoming an adult. He describes adolescence as an egocentric period. In this period, individuals' decision-making processes, like those of the students in random exploration, are often driven by impulses. Being in random exploration also seems related to Marcia Baxter Magolda's finding in her book *Knowing and Reasoning in College* that most of the first-year students and about half of the sophomore students in her study employed what she calls a*bsolute knowing.* For these students, authority figures are responsible for determining what is true and then for providing that information to students. Because students in random exploration do not yet seem to be in touch with an internal voice or in active reflection about decisions, they may feel uncertain about what they should be doing if they are not receiving direction from others. These students may be following the direction of authority or acting impulsively.

In moving beyond adolescence, individuals develop a psychological life that includes the tools to make choices and respond to the expectations of others in relationships, Kegan notes. Similarly, Baxter Magolda's findings suggest that nearly half of the sophomore students in her study were in the stage she calls *transitional knowing.* For these students, truly understanding what is happening in the classroom and in life becomes important. This parallels the sophomores' experience of focused exploration, when they seek meaning and direction in life.

While the sophomores in this study seemed to match Kegan's and Baxter Magolda's descriptions, remaining transitional knowers will not help students meet the demands of adult life. When students are forced to make decisions regarding their major, they may still be responding to the expectations of others instead of making decisions based on a self-constructed voice. In her book *Making Their Own Way,* Baxter Magolda chronicles the importance of self-authorship as central to adult decision making. She also points out that most of the college graduates in her study did not become capable of directing their own choices until well after college. If we recognize this as an important developmental leap, then we have the responsibility to design learning environments that assist in the process rather than leave it to chance. In designing environments to encourage student learning, our challenge is to provide a context in which students can move toward self-authorship.

Implications for Learning

ROBERT BARR and John Tagg's 1995 article on moving from a teaching to a learning paradigm sparked a decade-long conversation about the design of learning environments. The American Association for Higher Education recently published a set of key characteristics of learning-centered institutions that was written by Kay McClenney. One of the six important characteristics is that students "participate in a diverse array of engaging learning experiences aligned with required outcomes and designed in accord with good educational practice." In designing learning environments for sophomore students, we can borrow from McClenney's suggestions for ways to engage students, including expecting students to be responsible for their learning, using active and collaborative learning experiences, and working with students to design individual learning plans.

Sophomores need encouragement to take on responsibility for their learning. To optimize learning, we can design environments to guide sophomores in ongoing, structured exploration of the world and of themselves. Sophomores can be taught to engage in self-reflection and then be required to do so in curricular and cocurricular activities. All of these things require intentional planning by educators.

The key goal for students in random exploration is for them to become fully engaged in the learning process. In turn, the key goal for students in focused exploration is for them to connect with their inner voice, to acknowledge external pressures, and to make decisions about the future that are rooted in a thorough exploration process. If students engage in these processes, the tentative choices and commitments they make will be solid foundations for their lives.

Designing Optimal Learning Environments for Sophomores in Random Exploration. Random exploration plays an important role in students' lives. It is one way to get to know themselves and the world. However, because students in this stage do not engage in reflection, their experiences are not sorted through, categorized, or judged. In random exploration, students may make the same mistakes repeatedly. By taking the following actions, we can help students start to reflect on and learn from their mistakes.

• *Give students the responsibility for learning.* The main barrier to learning for students in random exploration is that they tend to relinquish responsibility for learning. If a student's mother suggests a major, a professor suggests a topic for a paper, or an adviser suggests a class, the student may not engage in a thorough decision-making process about that choice. For example, Lauren,

When students are forced to make decisions regarding their major, they may still be responding to the expectations of others instead of making decisions based on a self-constructed voice.

whom I described earlier as being in the tentative choices stage in regard to her major, was majoring in psychology and sociology but wanted to add a minor in criminal justice. Her father and her academic adviser said that a minor "wasn't worth it," so she did not add one. She described her father as being very involved in her academic life, to the extent that he even chose which sections of courses she should take and color-coded her daily schedule for her.

As Lauren's story about not taking on a minor illustrates, students may acquiesce to appease others or because they think that others know more than they do about an issue. While there are cases when this is accurate, for students, learning requires engagement in the process. Active learning suggests not simply an external activity but an internal process. The challenge for educators both inside and outside of the classroom is to design experiences that provide students with opportunities to explore the world and then to place responsibility for the decision making on the student. Random exploration occurs when many students are experiencing large, impersonal lecture classes and may not be required to struggle with course topics. Students in random exploration should be encouraged to examine their rationales for decisions.

• *Require reflection.* The sophomores in focused exploration said that "getting to know myself" was a central task of their sophomore year. They should receive help with this task. While reflection is an important tool in this process, for those in random exploration, reflection can be superficial. Emily, the transfer student, exhibited a lack of depth in her reflection during a discussion about drinking alcohol and attending parties. She said, "I tend to have more fun a lot of times when everyone is drinking, because I think it's more interesting. Things happen, and I think it's funny the next morning to tell about it." Emily knew that her friends were not this casual about drinking and partying. She said, "I can see where next year I'll be like, 'OK, well, whatever' and not have so much priority on it [partying]." In our relationships with students, we can ask probing questions for students to answer, not for us but for themselves. Emily might have been able to make a connection between being hurt or having difficulties in school because of alcohol use or abuse had someone in her life been asking her probing questions about her social life. Building these connections for Emily may have helped her to begin to evaluate her own choices. In teaching students how to reflect, we can help them in their process of self-exploration.

Often, I've found that sophomores who have violated university policy may not be able to determine why they engaged in a particular behavior. For these students, the use of process maps or other techniques to identify influences on their behavior may assist them in beginning the reflection process. In using a process map, students are asked to examine what happened right before they engaged in a behavior and move backward through an entire event. Students can then be encouraged to identify choices they made and influences on those choices. As students learn to reflect deeply on their choices, they will move toward focused exploration.

• *Expect new relationship building.* Students in focused exploration often described the relationships they had during random exploration as superficial, harmful, or not of their own choosing. Rob, whom I described earlier as being in focused exploration in his academic life, began to question the type of friendships he was in during the second semester of his first year. He said, "I realized it was more like we had just a mutual wanting to get real messed up." He recognized that his friends had not been good for him, saying, "They didn't understand me, and at the same time, I couldn't understand why they'd do the things they'd do." A key for Rob was that he had other friendship options, and developing healthy friendships helped him determine what was not healthy.

While we know that peer influences can be destructive, we also know that relationships with parents and other authority figures can be stifling. Students in random exploration may benefit from learning to examine the pressures in their relationships, the benefits, and the drawbacks.

As a first step, we can encourage new relationship building during the sophomore year. Melissa, who described herself at the opening of this article as being in the midst of an all-encompassing life change, said, "It's just hard to meet new people, because people are so closed off and it's just hard to get acquainted. Freshman year, everybody was all about meeting new people, but once you find your set group, it's kind of like you were stuck to it for this year." To support students in their ongoing search for healthy relationships, we can encourage students to join new organizations, work in new small groups, or do whatever it takes to expand their friendships and to see relationships as choices.

In our relationships with sophomores, we might consider how we respond to their problems, being careful not to give students the answer to every problem they face. A learning-centered approach that requires students to select topics for papers, evaluate their own and classmates' assignments, and come to class prepared to participate in rich conversation can keep sophomores from stagnating in random exploration.

We want students in random exploration to engage in appropriate and healthy searching as they move toward more active decision making about themselves, their relationships, and academics. Faculty and student affairs professionals can work together to identify students who are not engaged in the exploration process and provide them with individual support for becoming engaged.

Designing Optimal Learning Environments for Students in Focused Exploration. Focused exploration can and should be a period of deep personal reflection about life and the future. Students who move through this stage quickly or with ease may not have truly connected with or begun to develop a resourceful inner voice. Students engaging in this process would benefit from support and encouragement to remain genuinely in the search.

• *Provide opportunities for exploration.* Study abroad, service learning, cooperative learning experiences, internships, and opportunities to conduct observations outside of school provide students with the chance to meaningfully explore the world around them. Engaging students in exploration of their world is important in many stages of education. During the first-year experience, students are exploring the new world of college life, but this is just a starting place for the ongoing exploration that needs to occur to prepare students to make internally guided choices about their future.

Dan's story illustrates the importance of meaningful exploration. Prior to coming to college, Dan said, he had "a negative view of college." He felt that college was an expectation others had for him and one that he could not avoid. During his first year of college, he wasn't certain how to make the experience his own. In the summer between his first year and his sophomore year, Dan participated in a study program in India. He said, "I went to India, and that just really made me aware of international things, which I have always been interested in, so I changed to political science, which I know now is what I want." Dan's excitement translated to his experience in the classroom. He said, "I love going to classes. It's kind of neat to get excited over why you're paying so much money and energy to go here." Dan said that during his first year, he was so focused on getting good grades that he forgot about what he was learning. As a sophomore, he said, "My top concern, for me, is to learn more."

Pre-professional programs can easily build clinical, internship, cooperative learning experiences, and observation components into courses during the sophomore year. In liberal arts majors, this may not be as easy and, in fact, may be contrary to the liberal arts philosophy. Not all degrees prepare students directly for a profession. In this case, programs can be designed to encourage students' active exploration of the world, their belief system, and their future. Coursework can include field experience. For example, sociology students can study world issues in the surrounding community. History students can connect their studies to local and institutional history. Chemistry students can conduct research projects to study the natural world, perhaps with senior or graduate students. Intensive service experiences or study abroad can accomplish the same goal, as Dan's story illustrates. Regardless of the academic major that is involved, faculty and advisers can look for ways to help

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sophomores make connections through application of their learning.

During the sophomore year, students who are overwhelmed with focused exploration may drop out of the cocurricular experience. When I asked Nina, an honors psychology student, to describe her year, she said, "I don't like the person I have been. It's definitely the more stressful of my two years. It's been the more confusing of the two years also, which is kind of surprising, 'cause I was very confused last year, but I've had a lot more doubts this year and stuff. I think because my stress level has been much higher, and I've doubted myself being able to handle everything that I faced this year, and how much I've procrastinated. I've been down on myself, and saying that I'm not good enough, and stuff like that." Nina hoped for better in her junior year. She said she would look for new friends, join new organizations, and have more fun, but not until next year. Educators, particularly student affairs professionals, may be able to identify sophomores like Nina and find ways to provide them with necessary support.

• *Structure reflection.* One key source of information for sophomore students in the focused exploration stage is themselves. Rob, Dan, and many of the other sophomores in this study described actively looking for "self." It is important to help students involved in this process to listen to and value their own perspectives about choices they might make. For sophomore students, a key is the ability to identify external pressures and internal desires. Students may benefit from examining what they believe others expect of them as they become more in tune with their own interests, abilities, and desires.

Faculty can encourage self-reflection through assignments in which students are asked to establish learning goals, examine their contribution to the learning of classmates, or take on the perspective of another, or through approaches in which students are required to think through the learning process. This type of reflection is a key component of internship programs, service learning activities, and study abroad.

• *Provide support.* It is tempting to want to save or protect students. When students seem challenged, professionals may be tempted to answer their questions, direct them in their process, or resolve their problems; however, these approaches may not be the most appropriate for students. Melissa described the complex questions she was facing as a sophomore: "What I'm going to do with the rest of my life, where I am going, and like who I associate with." The institutional community should be prepared to keep students engaged in this process long enough to hear their own voice. We may see peaks in counseling center visits during the sophomore year. Negotiating these life questions can be quite challenging. If we are going to encourage focused exploration, we may need to provide students with additional support to help them negotiate the expectations held by others in their lives.

"The Year You Make It Your Own"

I HAVE BEGUN TO ENCOURAGE educators to label the sophomore year in ways that encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. This can be the year in college when students determine their own direction, actively select their friends, identify what they want for their future, and begin to take ownership of their own learning experience. This will happen more broadly if educators take responsibility for carefully designing the sophomore-year experience.

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*THE **SOPHOMORE**-YEAR EXPERIENCE:*
Critical Adjustments, Challenges, & Stressors

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The following *six transitional issues* may serve as key focal points for designing and developing a sophomore seminar or sophomore-year experience program.

1. Adjusting to the loss of the *special attention and support* received during the ***first***-year experience.

2. Coping with the faded flush of *novelty, mystery, and excitement* associated with ***beginning*** college.

3. Moving beyond college-entry ***social*** concerns about "meeting new people" and "fitting in," toward more demanding social tasks that involve *sustaining* initially formed friendships and *advancing* toward deeper, more intimate relationships.

4. Moving from a first year of ***major/career*** investigation and exploration—to a second year that requires *crystallization and finalization* of these decisions.

5. Moving from *centralized*, *staff*-delivered ***academic advising*** to *decentralized*, discipline-based/department-centered *faculty* advising.

6. Transitioning from a *campus*-based, *living/learning* residential environment to ***independent***, ***off-campus*** *housing* (apartment living).

The phrase "sophomore slump" emerged during the late 1950s in reference to a "second wave" of adjustment stressors and setbacks experienced by college students after they successfully navigated their freshman year experience, which often can precipitate a decline in college enthusiasm and performance. Various factors have been cited as contributing to the second-year slump, which include the following *six adjustments*:

1. Sophomores may suddenly find that the *special attention and support* they had become accustomed to during their freshman year has been *abruptly terminated*, as the institution turns its attention to a new cohort of entering students.

2. The flush of novelty, mystery, and excitement associated with *entering* college begins to fade by sophomore year, i.e., the initial "thrill is gone."

3. New, more demanding *social adjustments* are encountered during the sophomore year that move the student from college-entry concerns, such as meeting new people and fitting in, toward more demanding concerns about *sustaining* initial friendships and *advancing* toward deeper, more intimate relationships.

4. Students move from a first year of initiating and exploring possible decisions about majors and careers—to a second year that requires *crystallization and finalization* of these decisions.

5. Moving from professional *staff*-delivered academic advising to discipline/department-centered *faculty* advising.

6. Many sophomores must make a major *residential* adjustment, transitioning from campus-based, student-centered college residences (dormitories) to *independent, off-campus housing* (apartment living).

Sophomore *Support/Development Programs & Strategies*

Some notable initiatives have been designed to promote understanding of the sophomore year experience to enhance the retention and development of college sophomores, which include the strategies.

* Combating the "sophomore slump" by delivering specially tailored, second-year programming designed to expand opportunities for sophomores to become *engaged in the college or local community*, including *service and leadership* roles, such as:
(a) having sophomores serve as advisors or mentors for first-year students
(b) requiring service-learning experiences for sophomores (e.g., Wittenburg University, Ohio),
(c) involving sophomores as research assistants to college faculty (e.g., University of Toronto),
(d) having sophomores serve as teaching assistants for freshman seminars (e.g., Southwest Texas State University).

* Offering *"sophomore seminars"* akin to freshman seminars. For example, George Mason University (VA) offers a 2-credit sophomore seminar to help second-year students identify and confirm a major, explore career interests, network with practitioners in the career field of their interest, and develop a plan to increase their marketability. Similarly, University of Minnesota's Carson School of Management offers a required "professional skills" seminar for sophomores, which serves as an introduction to the business major and to careers in the field of business.

* Conducting *co-curricular* programming that is specifically designed to facilitate sophomores' selection of a college major. For instance, Beloit University (WI) conducts a "Major Week" for sophomores during the spring semester, which culminates in a "major declaration day." At Bradford College (MA), students develop a portfolio for entry to an academic major, which they present during the spring of their sophomore year.

* Tailoring *residential-life* programming specifically for sophomores. For instance, Stanford University offers a "sophomore college" during a three-week period prior to the start of students' second year, which is designed to facilitate academic decision-making and to avail sophomores of research opportunities. At the University of California – Davis, "moving off campus" workshops are provided to second-semester freshmen in order to ease their transition to off-campus housing at the start of their sophomore year.

* Promoting *peer-networking and peer-bonding* experiences for sophomores. For example, Cedar Crest College (Allentown, PA) has been conducting a program called the "Sophomore Quest" since the early 1990s, which engages sophomores in an off-campus adventure that involves hill climbing, rowing, navigating water hazards, etc. The program
was designed to combat the "sophomore slump" by promoting leadership, teamwork, a sense of group identity, and feelings of belongingness among second-year students.

* Increasing institutional communication with and responsiveness to sophomores. For example, the College of William & Mary has instituted a Sophomore Board and a Sophomore Newsletter—published four times annually, with the first publication disseminated during the summer before students begin their sophomore year. Other colleges have administered the "Student Outcomes Survey" (ACT), which is designed to help colleges evaluate institutional effectiveness and student satisfaction—from the perspective of sophomores.

* Attention to the second-year experience with more intentional, campus-wide efforts to make sophomores feel *as important as we do first-year students* (e.g., sophomore rituals, retreats, seminars, career development programming, and sophomore-specific publications).

* Develop a sophomore-specific communication mechanism to keep second-year students in the "information loop" and to address issues/concerns unique to the sophomore experience—a "sophomore newsletter."

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The Sophomore Initiative at the University of South Carolina
The Office of Student Engagement

The Sophomore-Year Experience at the University of South Carolina is the combination of services, programs, and curricular and co-curricular activities that provides the gateway between a student's college transition and their future educational and career aspirations; and offers a foundation to explore the specific academic and co-curricular opportunities USC has to offer. The Sophomore Initiative strives to provide opportunities and share resources to support second year students at USC in a way to promote students finding purpose and in life after college.

*If you are working with a sophomore student who is trying to find purpose, please encourage them to look into The Sophomore Initiative website: www.sc.edu/studentengagement or direct questions they have to tsi@sc.edu. Coordinated by the Office of Student Engagement, students are also welcome to stop by the office and get direction.

Goals for Sophomores:

- Learn about campus resources targeted to meet their needs
- Develop and hone academic and personal skills
- Increase their awareness of the unique issues sophomores face
- Reflect on their experience as sophomores
- Promote self-responsibility
- Better prepare for pre-professional and professional experiences
- Utilize co-curricular activities USC has to offer as a way to become engaged on campus

University of South Carolina Observational and Empirical Data:

* Based on results from the 2005 College Satisfaction Inventory administered by Noel-Levitz, USC sophomores are the most dissatisfied population of students.
* The University of South Carolina's sophomore to junior year return rates were at their highest levels ever at 79.8% as measured for the 2008 cohort. Of the first-year students who return to USC for their sophomore year, an additional 9% on average will not return for their junior year. For the 2008 cohort this number was 6.9% .
* Sophomore focus group data at USC over the last three years has revealed that sophomores face a number of important transitions that need to be addressed, such as academic and social transition, financial concerns, time management, and major and career development.

Selected Responses from Focus Groups:

"I think my sophomore year kind of left me more stranded, because your freshman year there were so many things that were reaching out to you that you come back your sophomore that it's just like you're on your own."

"I felt that the first year is so supportive now I feel like I have to run off a cliff and learn how to fly, fast!"

"It's been a lot more challenging this year. Just harder classes I guess. It's a lot more major classes instead of just core classes, so it's been kind of tough."

Current Program Components:

1. **Sophomore Summer Newsletter**- The brochure, sent to students' homes in the summer before their sophomore year, includes a checklist of activities and resources, outlines specifics about the sophomore year at USC and information about campus resources and tips for success.

2. **Monthly E-mails**- All sophomore students receive a monthly email with information on important deadlines, upcoming opportunities and tips on how to navigate their sophomore year.

3. **Website** –A comprehensive, student-oriented, sophomore web site was developed to help sophomores to connect to USC resources. It can be found at www.sc.edu/studentengagement.

4. **University Housing - Sophomore A-chat** - Once each semester, a Resident Mentor and a sophomore student meet for an intentional conversation about issues that a sophomore may encounter. Conversations are framed around University Housing's learning outcomes for residents which include: academic success, awareness of self, and awareness of others along with specific sophomore-related issues.

5. **TSI Student Organization-** This student organization will work to support the ideals and goals of TSI and will work towards completing the Sophomore Checklist. Sophomore students, as well as students in other classes, will work to explore Sophomore struggles, reflect on sophomore year experiences, and strive to make the sophomore year at USC a more helpful, positive, and engaging experience. Students are currently being recruited for the 2012-2013 academic year.

6. **Sophomore September**- This program, created in Fall 2011, highlights six events that provide an opportunity for sophomores to feel welcomed throughout the first month of the academic year. Students are encouraged to attend all events with the opportunity to win prizes for stopping by five out of six.

    a. **Welcome Back Event**- This event is intended to develop an institutional tradition that will communicate an ethos of care and inform second-year students of institutional resources to support their academic success and overall engagement. Approximately 500 students attend the Sophomore Welcome Back Event on August 30, 2011. Free food, giant inflatables and tables of resources for sophomores were available.

    b. **Study Abroad Fair**- Hosted by the Study Abroad Office for all students on campus, it is included as a part of Sophomore September as a way to promote international and domestic exchanges as a high-impact activity for sophomores.

    c. **Snow Cone Cool Down**- Approximately 450 students stopped by to get snow cones on Greene Street. In order to pick up a snow cone sophomore students had to learn about resources around campus from the information provided while standing in line.

    d. **CareerFest**- Hosted by the Career Center and open to all students, this event is the conclusion of Sophomore September and encourages sophomores to look for a part-time job, co-op or internship in the field they are interested in pursuing a career.

    e. **Major and Information Fair**- A partnership between the Academic Centers for Excellence, the Student Success Center and the Office of Student Engagement, the fair introduces students to offices across the campus that provide academic and co-curricular support for sophomore students (e.g. study abroad, career services, student involvement, community service programs). Along with these offices, representatives from each College and School on campus are on hand to allow students the opportunity to explore different majors or ask questions about changing majors. In fall 2011, 430 students attended this event. Eighty percent of the respondents reported that agreed that they found the information at the fair useful and 87.93% agreed that they would recommend this event for a friend.

    f. **Mutual Expectations on Academic Advising** – National research indicates that academic advisors can be a key network of support for students. This event will bring together sophomores and academic advisors on campus to discuss common expectations and explore ways to improve the advising experience at the University of South Carolina.

7. **High Impact Activities**- Specific activities that are being heavily promoted for second-year students.
   a. ***The National Student Exchange***, an opportunity for students to engage in a domestic study program, is being promoting to sophomores as a complimentary experience to study abroad programs.
   b. ***Mutual Expectations*** is an opportunity for students and faculty members to come together and have meaningful discussions about different expectations at the University.
   c. ***Service-Learning*** provides students with an opportunity to work with faculty on service projects emphasizing hands-on tasks that address real world concerns as a venue for educational growth. During the service-learning experiences, students learn more about contributing to the community and develop leadership skills.
   d. ***The Office of Undergraduate Research*** seeks to enrich the academic experience of USC undergraduates by providing research and scholarly and promoting inquiry, discovery, and creativity in all disciplines through faculty-student mentoring relationships and the integration of instruction with research, scholarship, and creative activities.
   e. ***Study Abroad*** can compliment any academic program or major, and you don't need to know a second language to study abroad in many locations around the world. Study Abroad Office staff and your academic advisor help students determine the options that best fit their academic requirements, career and personal goals, and budget.
   f. ***Career Center Services*** while students in their second year may still be wrestling with which major to claim as their own, the Career Center can provide a number of resources towards helping them find that answer. From assessments to determine interest, to internship and job shadowing opportunities, to career placement assistance, the Career Center is an office sophomores should visit.

8. **Assessment** – Ongoing assessment is conducted with students about their sophomore-year experience. Both focus groups and survey data provide the foundation for this assessment. Specifically for the 2012-2013 year, focus groups will be conducted with current sophomores in February 2013.

For more information on the Sophomore Initiative:

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  - Web: www.sc.edu/studentengagement