

Sophomore Retention Plan – Final Report

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### Abstract

Most universities focus their retention efforts on first year students to best help students adjust to college life at their particular institution. In addition to the first year, sophomore year is also filled with unique transitional challenges. Often called the 'lost' year in higher education, sophomore year is marked as a time of internal transition. Sophomores typically question their purpose/direction and try to find their 'place' at the university as well as navigate career decisions. Many institutions are now beginning to address sophomore needs through intentional programs and services aimed to 're-integrate' sophomores into their second year. This report looks at research on sophomores as well as current practices at other institutions that aid in furthering the sophomore transition. The core of this report is a comprehensive look at ways that Winona State University can address sophomore retention issues on its campus. There are five key aspects to the recommended Sophomore Retention Plan. They include: a Welcome Back and Sophomore Year Kick Off, Exploration and Declarations Fair, Strengthening Advising, Increasing Assessment, and Intentional Sophomore Residence Hall Training and Programming. There is also a section that reports on feedback from meetings across campus that illustrates various ideas/insights as to how to serve sophomores best.

### Sophomore Retention Plan

85% of students who drop out do so within the first two years (Wilder, 1993). When looking at reducing college student attrition, typically, a retention plan at most institutions will focus efforts and resources on a student's first year. A first year plan may be centered on helping first year students adjust to the separation from life back home, increased academic rigor, and handling more personal responsibility. These adjustments can be very challenging and certainly deserving of attention. However, it is becoming increasingly realized that significant transition issues continue on into the sophomore year and, if not addressed, may cause their attrition. Instead of the more external needs of the first year, sophomores deal with more internal challenges like selecting a major, re-integrating with their social network and 'finding their place' at the university. Thus, focusing retention efforts solely on the first year is ignoring a population of students vulnerable to attrition. This paper will discuss the unique needs of sophomore students and a plan for how Winona State University can utilize current resources to have a positive affect on sophomore retention. Also, an overview of current practices that address sophomore attrition at select institutions as well as suggestions from various departments/individuals at WSU will also be presented.

### Challenges of Sophomore Students

Sophomores have been reported as having the highest needs of any class (Juillerat, 1999). Unfortunately, many of the transitional needs of sophomore students often go unnoticed. Whereas the adjustment issues of the first year are mainly a physical transition (getting used to being in a new place with a new role), the adjustment issues during the second year are seen as being internal (who am I, where am I going, which

career should I choose). If the first year is seen as the year of getting settled, the second year is seen as the year to realize direction. Finding direction is huge undertaking and although sophomores have high levels of needs sophomores also receive the least attention of all college students (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). To further understand the challenges facing sophomores, a literature review of sophomore research was conducted as well as a review of data collected on sophomore students at Winona State University.

### *Sophomore Data/Research*

Early research on sophomores indicated that sophomores reported the lowest satisfaction of all the classes (Freedman, 1956). Sophomore research remained focused on satisfaction as the main sophomore issue until Margolis added, “(sophomore challenges) result from an identity crisis involving social, academic and the personal self” (Margolis, 1976). Richmond and Lemons furthered research by describing a connection between sophomore issues and developmental challenges proposed by Chickering’s College Student Development Vectors (Lemons, Richmond, 1987). Richmond and Lemons found that four of Chickering’s vectors were particularly salient to sophomore issues. These four vectors are Achieving Competence, Developing Autonomy, Establishing Identity, and Developing Purpose. These vectors should be seen as stages of development where successful achievement of competence and autonomy will lead to greater confidence in the development of identity which would aid in the development of purpose. Pattengale and Schriener (2000) found that the sophomore year may be a time of disengagement. Gruanke and Woosley (2005) found that certainty about a major is predictor of academic success and that faculty interaction also plays a positive role in

sophomore success. Further, a study done by Wilder (1993) noted that that interaction with faculty, especially advisors, had a significant positive affect on sophomore success.

Although research on sophomore students has progressed a long way since the 1950s, it was surprising that there was not more research conducted. Knowing that there are unique needs and developmental challenges facing sophomores, second year student retention would benefit from further research.

#### *Sophomores at Winona State University*

At WSU, 72.8% of the 2004 freshman class returned for a second year where 62.1% of that same class returned to WSU for a third year (WSU Institutional Research). With an average graduation rate of approximately 50% of new entering first year students, it would indicate that 80% of the students that were going to leave did so within the first two years. 80% departure in the first two years also indicates that only 20% of students that left the university did so after the start of their junior year. Another way to view this is that approximately 80% of new entering freshmen in 2004 that remained to the start of their junior year will likely stay and graduate. This fact illustrates the need to look at the first two years at Winona State University as critical for reducing student departure and possibly improving our graduation rate.

Overall, Winona State University has a solid reputation for research assessment. During the annual Assessment Day, students are asked for responses to a variety of topics. Topics include areas such as social behaviors. Sophomore responses of note to the area of social behavior includes a report of 23% of male and 16% of female sophomore respondents reported in 2006 that they attended campus events. 23% of male and 15% of female sophomore respondents reported participation in academic clubs.

24% of male and 21% of female respondents reported participation in social clubs on campus. These numbers indicate a low level of social involvement on campus. This fact is consistent with some research. Gardner (2000) reports that sophomores in general do become more engaged in individual activities and less so in the campus community. Further, research also shows that lack of social and academic integration to the campus will lead to increased student departure (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, Winona State sophomores may directly benefit from increased initiatives to engage them in the campus community.

Possible Interventions

After reviewing research and institutional data, practices at other institutions were reviewed to determine possible suggestions on how WSU may best programmatically address sophomore issues. Also, over 40 staff discussed sophomore retention and their suggestions/comments were collected and sorted to find possible themes.

*Best Practices*

Over 50 institutions were reviewed that offer some sort of program/initiative that is intentionally focused on sophomores. Listing of reviewed institutions is as follows:

Beloit College	Brandeis University	Bridgewater State College	Cal Polytechnic State University,
Colgate University	College of the Holy Cross	Colorado College	Duke University
Eastern College	Eastern Kentucky University	Emory University	Fairfield University
Greenville College	Hiram College	Indiana Wesleyan University	Kennesaw State University
Macalaster College	McPherson College	Moravian College	Northeastern State University
Pace University	Saint Louis University	St. Michael's College	Southern Arkansas University
Southern Illinois Edwardsville	Spartanburg Methodist College	Stanford University	Stony Brook University
Texas Southern University	Trinity Western University	University of Central Arkansas	University of Denver
University of Georgia	University of Indianapolis	University of Louisville	University of South Carolina
Univer of Wis-La Crosse	Univer of Wis- Oshkosh	Washington University	Yale University

The following is a thematic summary of current practices from public and private campuses across the country. This listing highlights commonly reoccurring program themes and is not meant to provide a total report of all initiatives at all institutions.

Current practices are as follows:

1. **Sophomore Kick-Off Event:** This event takes place at many institutions and has some major similarities in each. The focus is to reconnect sophomore students to the university by reintroducing them to some key services, get them thinking about major and minor choices, and having fun. *Macalaster College, Pace University, Trinity Western University, University of Denver, and Washington University.*
2. **Residence Life Programs:** Many schools have incorporated residence life programs to meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> year student needs. Most of these programs have workshops and seminars that focus on sophomore needs. Some programs were living learning communities where sophomores lived together and also had learning objectives. *California Polytechnic, Colgate University, Eastern Kentucky, Emory University, University, Saint Louis University, University of Central Arkansas, University of South Carolina and Yale University.*
3. **Second Year Experience Office:** A few schools had one office concentrating on the 2<sup>nd</sup> year experience. A wide range of services were offered from these offices to combat the “sophomore slump.” Most offered workshops, referral services,

leadership opportunities, and mentoring experiences. *St. Michael's College, Southern Arkansas University, Southern Illinois University- Edwardsville, Texas Southern University, Trinity Western University, University of Georgia, and University of Louisville.*

4. **Second Year Experience Course:** These courses are similar to a first year experience course in format, most are 1 credit, but focus on sophomore issues. General topics for this course include finding your personal mission and exploring greater self understanding. *McPherson College, Spartanburg Methodist College, Indiana Wesleyan*
  
5. **Other Sophomore Academic Courses:** Stanford University does an intensive study program that connects sophomores with a faculty member for a few weeks before the beginning of their sophomore year. University of Indianapolis has a Lecture/ Performance Series 1 Credit class that is mandatory for all sophomore students. University of Texas at San Antonio offers a course to sophomore students that focus on faculty research.
  
6. **Majors Investigation:** Many colleges conduct some sort of majors fair for sophomores. Some have week long events with workshops and advisors. The intention is to transition sophomores from the undecided to the academically focused (in a major). A few offer a common book experience with a 'finding your calling' type theme.

*Hiram College (OH), Stony Brook University, Texas Christian University, Trinity Western University and Washington University*

7. **Needs Assessment of Sophomore Students:** University of Denver asked their sophomore students what their needs are and then put together a series of workshops on their top ten concerns.
  
8. **Mentoring Programs** – Kennesaw State (GA) has a comprehensive mentoring program. Not only are sophomores paired with a senior to transition smoothly into major coursework but sophomores are also paired with a freshman orientation class to act as a mentor to first year students.
  
9. **Comprehensive Programs**
  - **Beloit College (WI) - Sophomore Year Initiative Program** – this is the oldest sophomore retention initiative. This program promotes close connections with faculty but more independence than first year initiatives. Also, the SYE offers programming that deals with selecting a major as well as evaluating and investigating experiential learning opportunities. The Sophomore Year Initiative also includes welcome-back activities, a two day sophomore retreat scheduled in November, a Major Exploration and Declaration Fair in the spring semester, and completion of a Comprehensive Academic Plan (CAP).
  
  - **Colorado College (CO) - “Sophomore Jump” Program** - the “Your Sophomore Year” webpage and the Sophomore Connection newsletter provide an opportunity for sophomores to network with faculty and one another. Also, Faculty/Sophomore dinners are where students enjoy a meal and get to know faculty better. Another aspect of this program is a 1-day Sophomore Workshop that allows students to explore three different majors/minors during the Progressive Majors Lunch, and gather information about internships, community, and study abroad opportunities.

- **University of Denver (CO) – Second Year Experience** – This extensive and comprehensive second year experience is designed to transition sophomores back to academic life after a long summer and guide them through important decision making that will happen during the year (college experiences, major and career choices). New this past fall was a conference style workshop that talked about career decision making, internships and study abroad and a Second Year Survival Kit. Other parts of this program include a Welcome Back Event, a sophomore newsletter, sophomore programming calendar, an extensive sophomore programming webpage, and a faculty/sophomore luncheon.

### *Feedback from WSU Departments*

An objective of this initiative was to provide informational sessions and to raise awareness of the unique needs of sophomore students with at least 30 faculty/staff.

Early on in the implementation process of this initiative, student service and administrative departments were contacted and meeting times were set up to discuss sophomore retention and gain feedback on possible recommendations. The following is an agenda outline of the meetings with campus staff:

- I. Introduction**
  - A. Introduce ourselves**
  - B. Why are we doing this?**
    - 1. Efforts in first year may be futile if withdrawing anyway. We have only forestalled attrition crisis for one year with first-year programs.**
    - 2. Sophomores typically receive the least amount of attention than other class levels**
  - C. Purpose of Meeting**
    - 1. Raise awareness about sophomore needs/issues**
    - 2. Gain feedback on possible recommendations**
    - 3. Discuss resources and how this group may be served better**
- II. Needs/Issues of Sophomore Students**
  - A. Key Points**
    - 1. The first year can be seen as a honeymoon period, sophomores can feel disillusioned and then detached**
    - 2. The first year is a ‘physical transition’ where the sophomore year is an internal transition**
  - B. Aspects of the ‘Sophomore Slump’**  
(Defined by Lemons and Richmond as a “period of developmental confusion”)

1. Prolonged indecisiveness about selecting a major
  - a. painfully aware of what they don't want
  - b. inadequate academic advising
  - c. lack of integration between academic advising and career planning.
2. Low levels of academic and social engagement
  - a. family support plays a big role
  - b. Res life can be a link with integration into culture
  - c. Not yet into major courses or into "weed out" courses.
  - d. Low levels of faculty interaction outside the classroom.
3. Low levels of commitment
  - a. withdraw of 1<sup>st</sup> year support system
  - b. values clarification
4. Poor choices that interferes with academic success
  - a. No plan "B" when what they were planning on majoring in doesn't work.
  - b. Real consequences to 1<sup>st</sup> year choices
5. Disappointment and frustration with the academic experience
  - a. more aware of needs and more critical of services
6. Increased time to completion rates
7. Lack of co-curricular involvement
  - a. campus employment may help
  - b. clubs provide subculture connection

### III. Possible Recommendations

#### A. 1 day Sophomore Orientation

1. Welcome from president
2. Conference style workshops that would include: developing goals, career counseling, transitioning majors, graduate school session, study abroad, navigating academics.
3. Have senior "peer mentors" for each major/ department to hold break out sessions.

#### B. Exploration and Declaration Fair

#### C. Additional 'needs' research

#### D. Website for sophomore resources

#### E. Have a 'point person' for sophomore retention

#### F. Transitional advisors

#### G. Intentional sophomore programming in the residence halls

### IV. Discussion

- A. From the perspective of what you do, what could be your role in this plan?
- B. What resources would help you carry out this role?
- C. Any insights or best practices?

Meetings were held with over 40 staff members at WSU. These meetings were held with the following staff/administrators on campus:

<b>Department/Area</b>	<b>Staff Member</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Extension</b>
<b>Institutional Research</b>	Theresa Waterbury	Director	X5607
<b>Assessment Office</b>	Susan Hatfield	Coordinator	X5244
<b>Counseling Center</b>	Pat Ferden	Chair	X5330
	Lynda Brzezinski	Counselor	X5330
	Elizabeth Burke	Counselor	X5330
	Eunice Alsaker	Counselor	X5330
	Joe Bodnar	Counselor	X5330
<b>Advising and Retention</b>	Jean Bellman	Prg Mngr	X5660
	Barb Oertel	Director	X5155
	Mic Nauman	Coordinator	X5660
	Sonja Kuhn	Grad Assist	X5660
<b>Disability Resource Center</b>	Nancy Dumke	Asst Director	X2391
	Deb Huegel	Office Mngr	X2391
<b>Residential College</b>	Ron Elcombe	Director	X2501
<b>Career Services</b>	Vickie Decker	Director	X5340
	Barb Larsen	Assoc Director	X5340
	Vivien Skranka		X5340
	Jenny Hegland	Career Services	X5340
	Jill Voshage		X5340
<b>Rochester Center</b>	Jan Stephenson	Assoc Director	X7148
	Jenny Hegland	Career Services	X5582
<b>Office of Inclusion and Diversity</b>	Mai Doua Yang	Grad Wrk Std	X5595
	Alex Hines	Director	X5595
	Sherry Emerson	Office Manager	X5595
<b>Student Support Services</b>	Karen Johnson	Prog Director	X5465
	Carolyn Kosidowsk	Advisor	X5465
	Toni Zaborowski	Program Asst	X5465
	Jill Quandt	Tutor Coord	X5465
<b>Housing and Residence Life</b>	Paula Scheevel	Director	X5311
	Tracy Rahim	Hall Director	X5323
	Xavier Wilson	Hall Director	X5495
	Tamara Merkouris	Hall Director	X3801
	Jodi Anderson	Hall Director	X5320
	Judy Piel	Housing	X5397
	Heather Bratland	Admin. Asst.	X5305
	Lorene Olsen	Dean	X5570
<b>College of Science and Engineering</b>	Jeff Anderson	Dean	X5585
<b>College of Liberal Arts</b>	Troy Paino	Dean	X5017

<b>College of Nursing</b>	Tim Gaspar	Dean	X5122
<b>College of Business</b>	Gabe Manrique	Dean	X5193
<b>Academic Affairs</b>	Sally Johnstone	Vice President	X5010

A key aspect to these meetings was a discussion on possible recommendations for interventions to assist in the further transitioning our sophomore students. Often in these meetings, it was common for the staff member to comment on how little they thought they would be able to offer in the form of valuable feedback. However, it was quickly discovered that they had much to offer. It was common for several different meetings to discuss similar themes. The following is a highlight of possible intervention strategies. Not all individuals endorsed all or any of the following suggestions:

**Re-format Advising** – A key theme that was reoccurring was that of adjusting how advising was done at WSU. The need for strong advising to help retain sophomores was also reflected in the research. A sampling of comments is as follows:

- Recruit faculty intentionally that want to advise
- Advising scheme in the faculty work load to give “credit” for faculty who advise.
- Good advisors are self-selected by students.
- It is very important to link advising to career services.
- Sophomore information should be part of faculty development days in August.
- Counselor Education students could play a role in advising students in transition.
- A larger proportion of students that are undeclared leave the university.
- We need centralized advising and quality control over who is advising at the university.
- We need an advising plan that focuses on undecided students.

- Professional advisors should be for undeclared majors.
- Professional advisors would also be a resource to faculty who are dealing with students in transition.
- We need training for academic advisors. Would be in favor of a more centralized advising model.
- We should get list of advisors and ask them what they feel makes a good advisor, what do they do that works, what kind of support do they need.
- Centralized advising would be the best model.
- Could pair up faculty to learn how to advise like a team approach.
- Feels it is hard to teach someone how to be a good advisor, so training programs don't work.
- Different advising scheme (first two years seeing a centralized general advisor).
- Faculty development on advising.
- Coordinator of first and second year experience.
- Current good advisors are overloaded in departments.
- Larger major advisors and students would benefit from a half time professional advisor offer supplemental advising and recruiting

**Associates Degree** – Another key suggestion would be to improve the visibility of the Associate of Arts degree to sophomore students. It is hoped that this would encourage those that want to transfer to another institution to stick around and focus on obtaining their AA degree before transferring. This would keep them on campus longer so that they might decide to continue on at WSU.

**Expand Connections with Career Services** – Another larger, more reoccurring theme is to expand the role of Career Services to increase the connections with sophomore students. A sampling of comments on the role of Career Services is as follows:

- Recommends ‘Mankato State Model’ for connecting advising and career work.
- Recommends more staff be trained on understanding the results of the Strong Interest Inventory in order for more effective advising.
- Professional advisors would connect with career services specialists.
- Would like more career assessment options for our students.
- Career Services is essential and needs to be extended
- Train more advisors on the career assessments.

**Increased Engagement** – Many professionals on campus had thoughts on utilizing increased engagement to help sophomore students feel more integrated in their major and in the community. Here is a sample of comments:

- Students would benefit from a practical learning experience, such as an internship, service learning or volunteer service during their sophomore year in order to solidify interest or the need to redirect.
- Overall engagement at the sophomore level is very important.
- Experiential learning is very important in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years.
- New faculty should be recruited that are interested in experiential learning.
- Likes programming ideas for sophomores in the halls.

- Transfer students should be added to any sophomore programming to make them feel more a part of the University.
- Need a transfer student specialist
- Study abroad and travel study options would be important in programming.
- Beef up practical experience in sophomore year.
- More student engagement –breaking the bubble.
- Co-Ops- interested in this to give students practical experience with same company.
- Shadowing or internship experience in sophomore year is important.
- Rochester WSU requires a field experience early on in education (ED 150).
- Service learning and engagement at the sophomore level is important.
- Get sophomores involved in peer groups in their major, bio club, science club, etc.

**Continue to Gather Information** – Several meetings included asking what our current data says about sophomores. Aside from what Institutional Research and Assessment collects, the following is a collection of comments regarding data:

- Data should be collected on why sophomore students are leaving.
- Interest in retention rates regionally.
- Recommends the National Survey of Students Engagement.
- Do more assessment.
- Talk to the Leadership academy that focuses on students in transition.

**Creating a Shared Experience** – The idea of coordinating activities so that sophomore students had more of a shared experience was explored. The following is a sample of comments:

- Need a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year coordinator and advisory committee who can champion the efforts in changing the University Studies model to a more intentional preparation concept.
- Programming should be started at the end of the freshman year, while we have them in the halls.
- Students need a common experience in their University Studies curriculum, so they can relate to all students at WSU and we would know that every student at WSU has had an intentional education.
- Co-curricular programming needs to be educational and not just social.
- Would like us to consider what can be done at the end of the first year to encourage and cause sophomores to think about the next step.
- Send them off from their first year with the frame of mind that they are ready for what is next. With this information in hand over the summer, they would be able to talk to their parents about study abroad internships and more.
- Bring common experience to WSU.
- Set Schedule – prepare a schedule for first year students and mail it to them
- Alumni mentoring program may work
- Look for a sophomore to senior program.
- Engage sophomores with the retiree center to use them as mentors and guides.

### Recommended Sophomore Retention Plan

At the core of this initiative is the creation of a sophomore retention plan. As this plan was developed, special consideration was taken for making sure recommendations were comprehensive in nature. Knowing that there is no 'silver bullet' to solve the complex internal issues that the second year brings, a comprehensive approach would best address increasing sophomore academic and social integration at Winona State University. Also, a comprehensive approach to addressing student needs follows the concept of 'transformational education'. Transformational education is the creation of a learning environment that shapes a student's whole person and helps them find meaning through interactions with faculty and students (Boivin, Fountain, & Baylis, 2000). It is safe to assume that most colleges and universities, including Winona State University, want to 'transform' their students in some way from the time they enter campus until the time they walk across the stage at graduation. The basic tenants of transformational education (Boivin, Fountain, and Baylis, 2000) are as follows: (1) education of the whole person, (2) providing an appropriate balance of challenge and support, (3) being challenged by doing, (4) some type of mentorship with faculty or upper-class student. A definite theme of the key aspects to this retention plan is a reflection of the basic tenants of transformational education.

Also, another consideration in the development of this plan was a focus on utilizing already existing resources at WSU in new and more effective ways. As discussed earlier, many of the practices toward serving sophomores intentionally at other institutions revolved around using or coordinating resources already on campus in a new way.

*Key Aspects of the Sophomore Retention Plan***Welcome and Sophomore Year Kick Off -**

It is recommended that any sophomore retention initiative begin with a creation of a webpage that raises awareness of sophomore issues and provides resources common to the sophomore experience. Also, a calendar of events with reminders will also be a highlight of this webpage.

Next, universities are increasingly realizing that sophomores may have “re-entry” problems (Schreiner, Pattengale, 2000). A key way to address this re-entry issue is to initiate progressive programming that will kick start sophomores down a positive path. The re-entry process will start with a ‘congratulations on surviving your first year’ letter/postcard that is sent out from the University President or Dean of Students. This note will also invite them to a “Sophomore Year Kick-Off” during the first week of classes. This gathering can take on many forms. Due to sophomores not requiring a formal orientation to WSU, such a gathering does not need to be formal as well. Maybe it’s called a “Welcome Back BBQ” or “Summer Survival Stories” open mic event but the basis of this event will be to allow sophomores to ‘re-connect’ as a class and reintroduce resources that would be particularly salient to the sophomore year.

**Exploration and Declaration Fair/Second Year Conference-**

A majors’ fair is an excellent way to facilitate movement on major/career decision making by undecided sophomores. This fair would have a representative from each major (could be faculty or upper class student in major) and a representative from the registrars office. It is intended that an undecided student could gather information on various majors, make a decision, have an advisor assigned and declare on the spot. Also,

several 'break out sessions' would provide useful information to sophomore students on topics such as study abroad, finding your passion, internships and leadership opportunities.

### **Strengthening Advising –**

Academic advising can be a key factor in preventing sophomore departure and increasing sophomore motivation (Anderson, Schreiner, 2000). The one issue that the literature pointed to most often to reduce sophomore attrition was the need for effective advising. It is recommended that the university look closely at the current advising structure to determine the effectiveness of academic advising. For this report, it is recommended that the current gaps and inconsistencies in academic advising be filled with centralized advising. Providing centralized advisors would also allow for students to talk to one professional that can handle advising a student that wants to transition from one major to a different one or to help with career academic advising. Centralized advisors can also act as a point person for faculty advisors. Also, these advisors could provide training and expertise to the whole campus and work closely with career services.

### **Residence Life Sophomore Training Module and Program Development Strategies-**

Housing and Residence Life at WSU serves about 750 sophomore students. The sophomores in the halls tend to be less engaged overall than first year students. This housing training module will discuss issues of the sophomore year experience to better prepare our Hall Directors and Resident and Community Assistants to work with this population.

Sophomores need to be engaged both academically and socially. An intentional programming model based on four vectors of Chickering's psychosocial development

model that are particularly salient to the sophomore experience will be discussed.

Richmond and Lemons (1987) noted the following four vectors as particularly important to the sophomore year: achieving competence, developing autonomy, establishing identity and developing purpose. These vectors, which are also important in the first year, are highlighted for different reasons in the sophomore year. The programming model for sophomore students in the residence halls will focus on these four vectors and why they are important in the sophomore year.

*Training Module for Resident and Community Assistants-* An outline of the training for Residence Life employees is outlined below. This training focuses on information about the transitions in the sophomore year and how Resident and Community Assistants can engage students to further develop and be successful at WSU.

1. Sophomore year internal transition

- a. Sophomore year tends to be an internal transition as opposed to the external transition of the first year.

- b. Asking questions such as:

What am I doing here?

What does this place have to offer me?

Am I in the right major?

2. Characteristics of sophomore slump

- a. lack of academic and social engagement

- b. prolonged indecisiveness in choosing a major

- c. low level of commitment to the university

- d. Lack of co-curricular involvement

3. Factors that may influence this “slump”

- a. inadequate academic advising
  - b. lack of connection between advising and career choices
  - c. lower levels of social integration
  - d. insufficient levels of interaction with faculty outside of class
  - e. disillusionment with classes
  - f. withdrawal of 1<sup>st</sup> year support
  - g. lack of confidence
  - h. unrealistic expectations of what college should be like
4. Where can we help?
- a. Increased social engagement with other sophomores
  - b. Programs to help life decisions (choose a major, career planning and explorations, life skills, etc)
  - c. Increase sophomore support by focuses on issues that are important to them.
5. Discussions on how we have seen these issues played out in the residence halls where students would break out into groups and discuss the issues the student is dealing with and how we can help.
- Programming model for sophomore student in the residence halls-* sophomores are dealing with the same vectors as first year students, but with different focus. The following model looks at four of Chickering's vectors and what to focus on in programming to sophomores.
6. Programming model discussion on issues particularly important to sophomore students.

- a. Achieving Competence- Sophomore students may be very aware of what they are not good at, but lacking in knowledge of what they are good at.

Programming concentrating on finding a person's strengths should be looked at.

- Strengthsquest Assessment
- Strong Interest Inventory
- DiSC Assessment

- b. Developing Autonomy- Sophomores will have an increasing need for independence from parents and thinking about total autonomy as an adult.

Programming that can help in this area would be:

- Financial Planning
- Ready to move off campus- working with a landlord and contracts
- Financing Education- what are your options
- Making decisions you can trust- how to make life changing decisions

- c. Finding Identity- Sophomores are traveling along the vector of identity at an accelerated rate. Questions like “who am I?”, “what I am doing here?” and “is this place right for me?” are inevitable in the sophomore year.

Programming that gets students thinking about who they are and having experiences that challenge their comfort zones will help with this

development task.

- Study Abroad and Travel Study Options
- Finding your Passion
- Goal setting for your future
- Graduate School informational workshop
- Community Service Opportunities

- d. Developing Purpose- Sophomores are searching for direction. For the sophomore student, parents may still be playing a key role in their life

decision making. Programming that offers them career planning and investigation as well as recreational pursuits will further a student in developing their purpose.

- Encouraging going to the clubs and organizations fair (again)
- Career Planning Workshops
- Dinner Speaker Series focusing on different careers

*Additional thoughts about sophomore programming-* To engage the sophomores in the residence halls in these programming efforts, our recommendation is to appoint the Quad Hall Director as the “sophomore liaison” who would be responsible for coordinating the efforts through communication. At the beginning of the year, the Hall Director could send out a ‘welcome back’ to the sophomores highlighting the university’s initiatives as well as the ones in Housing and Residence Life that they will see throughout the course of the year. Furthermore, the Hall Director would manage a sophomore list serve to make sure that all the sophomore’s know about the programming targeted at them. Programming would be divided up among the Quad, East Lake Apartments and Lourdes Hall since this is where the majority of our sophomore population lives.

### **Increasing Assessment**

Although WSU directs considerable resources already to assessment and institutional research, it is recommended that the university increase its level of assessment to better meet sophomore needs. In particular, assessment on campus should be expanded to include needs based assessment, assessment of advisors, and exit data from sophomores that are leaving WSU.

*Needs Based Assessment-* Currently, the data that we collect looks at social

behaviors, study behaviors, demographic information and profile type data.

Incorporating ‘needs based’ data into our current data set would allow WSU to have a clearer sense of whether sophomore students have needs that are not being met. Students would be asked through an instrument or series of questions if they have needs or issues that are not being address. Although this information may be surmised through current assessment, asking students directly on a large scale about their needs would allow WSU to build services and programming in a thoughtful and responsive way.

*Assessment of Advisors* – It was suggested in one of our departmental/academic meetings that a useful way to learn about effective academic advisors is to find effective advisors and ask them what they do. It is believed that students may self-select academic advisors at times at WSU. Meaning, students ‘shy’ from advisors that may not be helpful and gravitate toward advisors that are. It is recommended that WSU ask advisors that have more than 35 advisees about their approach to advising and why they feel they are effective. Also, this discussion would be an opportune time to find out about any help or support that the advisor would need to make their role even more effective.

*Exit Data from Sophomores* – Learning about why sophomores leave our campus would be useful information toward lessening attrition. Exit data would allow the university to identify themes and patterns to why sophomores are leaving. This information would be helpful in building support services and programming that address sophomore issues before additional students leave campus.

## Objective Outcomes

***Objective #1 - Create a holistic, campus-wide sophomore retention plan******that addresses the unique needs of sophomore students.***

The preceding pages outline a five point comprehensive sophomore retention plan. This plan was compiled based on gathering and interpreting information on sophomore student needs and retention at WSU as well as determining ‘best practices’ data collected from other institutions. Recommendations focus on utilizing resources that already exist in different ways to target sophomores. In addition, this plan has a section on other recommendations that may also be enacted.

***Objective #2 - Provide informational sessions and outreach to raise awareness of unique needs of sophomore students with at least 30 faculty/staff.***

Meetings with over 40 staff and administrators were held throughout campus to raise awareness about sophomore issues and gain feedback on possible recommendations.

***Objective #3 - Create a training module for at least 30 Community Advisors/Res Life Staff.***

The training module outlined in this report will be presented in the August training of Resident and Community Assistants. Hall Directors will be encouraged to accept and adapt the programming model outlined in this report.

## Discussion

Although much of this plan focuses on increasing retention numbers, the altruistic component to helping students succeed should not be overlooked. Many students that

leave higher education after their second year may be leaving with increased debt and without the increased opportunity of an advanced degree. Providing sophomores with attention to finding purpose, academically connectedness and socially competency will allow the best promise of a college education to be fully realized. It is hoped that efforts outlined in this report will ultimately lead students to achieving their goal of a college degree.

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