

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS EXPERIENCING THE
“SOPHOMORE SLUMP:” THE NEED FOR CONTINUED SUPPORT

By

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Abstract

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Students navigating their sophomore year can expect to declare a major, narrow their career options, and find their purpose as a college student. Also, during this time students can experience the “Sophomore Slump”, a time where students encounter dissatisfaction, confusion, and uncertainty with college. Due to the well documented experiences of first-generation college students, this study examines the experiences of first-generation and continuing-generation students experiencing the “Sophomore Slump.” Through quantitative and qualitative methods occurring over spring and fall 2016 and spring 2017 semesters the results identify areas where first-generation students experience challenges in relation to the “Sophomore Slump” to a greater degree than their continuing-generation counterparts. Recommendations are made to provide support for academic success of first-generation college students during their sophomore year.

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Introduction

Students experience a wide variety of successes and challenges throughout their college career, as well as a wide variety of support. It seems as though there is no shortage of services geared toward freshmen students to aid in their transition to the university. These support services are manifested in orientation programs, professional advisors, peer mentors, and other outreach programs. When students get into their junior and senior year they become enmeshed in their majors and the focus shifts to their needs post-graduation: careers and graduate school. It begs the question what is in place for the university's middle child, the sophomore student? It was this question that took me to the literature to research the needs of sophomore students. My research brought me to information around the "Sophomore Slump" phenomenon, a period of dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and increased academic rigor. As an educator who works in a student support program for first-generation freshmen and as a first-generation college student myself, I wanted to know if the challenges already present for first-generation students impacted the intensity of the "Sophomore Slump." Therefore my research focused on looking at the generational status of a student, their experiences as a sophomore student, and to determine if there are differences between first-generation (defined as neither parent has obtained a 4-year degree) and continuing-generation (defined as at least one parent has obtained a 4-year degree) students in relation to the "Sophomore Slump."

The thesis study was conducted at a medium size public liberal art's institution in northern California. The student population is made up of 53.9% first-generation students

and 42.4% continuing-generation students, with 3.7% having an unknown generational status. The population of sophomore students is 1073 out of 8503 total students attending this university. Of the entire student population, 32% has a geographic origin (hometown) of Los Angeles California, 13.9% from the local area, 12.2% from the San Francisco Bay Area, and 9.7% from northern California area; indicating a significant portion of the population are far from home.

This thesis will begin by reviewing the literature that identifies the experiences of first-generation students, and support offered to first-generation students in their freshmen year. I then discuss and review the sophomore year experiences and the “Sophomore Slump” phenomenon, highlighting the apparent lack of literature discussing the “Sophomore Slump” in relation to students who are first-generation. Next, a review of the qualitative and quantitative methods used for this thesis will be discussed followed by the results and a discussion of those results. This thesis will conclude with recommendations for supporting first-generation students experiencing the “Sophomore Slump.”

Literature Review

College is marked by transitions. From the time a student is admitted to a university they begin to transition into a scholar and critical thinker as they move away from their family and into their own independence (Schlossberg, 1981). During the most prominent transition experienced in college, the freshmen year, students are provided ample support through peer mentors, orientation programs, and outreach from student services professionals. This environment of intentional support is not continued into the sophomore year experience and therefore students are left alone to make sophomore year transitions. Tinto (2012) describes four fundamental elements for promoting student retention in higher education: clear and challenging expectations, abundant academic support, academic and social involvement, and consistent assessment and feedback to students. These elements contribute to promoting student success at the college level and therefore promoting successful transitions through a students' college career.

This study explores the phenomenon of the “Sophomore Slump” as experienced by first-generation students. Through a review of the professional literature and previous research, this study seeks to evaluate the need for continued and intentional support for first-generation students in their sophomore-year. The literature review begins with a definition of first-generation college students and presents the demographics of these students. The review then describes the experiences and challenges of first-generation college students and the support they typically receive as incoming freshmen. The experiences and challenges of sophomore-year students are followed by a description of

the “Sophomore Slump.” This review will close by highlighting the lack of support for sophomore students, and conclude with the benefits of a continued support for first-generation college students during their second-year to combat the “Sophomore Slump.”

First-Generation Students

Demographics. First-generation college students (defined as neither parent has obtained a 4-year degree) face challenges that many continuing-generation students (defined as at least one parent has obtained a 4-year degree) do not. These challenges can lead to lower retention and graduation rates among first-generation college students. Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott, and Pierce (2012) found that “...generational status interacts with other forms of adversity that results in poor academic outcomes” (p. 778). Adversity might include marginalized experiences in the university environment, financial challenges, as well as expectations of and obligations to family. Additionally, first-generation students are likely to live and find friends off-campus, belong to fewer campus organizations, work more hours per week, and be less integrated into the campus community than their peers (Hertel, 2010). The 2014 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported 47.8% of first-year students were first-generation college students, with the racial/ethnic diversity of students dominated by White (49.3%), Black (19.7%), Hispanic (22.3%), with an average age of 28. First-generation college students typically have “...lower high school GPA, SAT scores, and educational aspirations...” than continuing-generation students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, as cited in Vuong,

Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010, p. 51). In their 2014 study, Atherton found students, who had at least one parent with college experience; were 32% more likely to score above the verbal SAT median score than first-generation students. This percentage rose to 48% for students with both parents possessing college experience. While it is not indicative of every first-generation college student, the intersecting demographics of first-generation students' results in a population facing many challenges that continuing-generation college students typically do not experience.

Challenges. Due to the challenges first-generation college students face, it is vital to provide intentional support for these students as many "...cannot turn to family members to receive guidance navigating a potentially disorienting experience" (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012, p.15). Research indicates that cultural capital or lack of such capital plays an important role for college students (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Cultural capital is knowledge, in this case regarding navigating college, that can be obtained by parents who have a 4-year degree or higher; they are able to impart wisdom regarding the importance of meeting with faculty, utilizing support services, and accessing degree information to their child. In contrast, students whose parents did not obtain a 4-year degree are more likely to struggle to understand and obtain this information (Murphy & Hicks, 2006; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Smith and Zhang (2010) found first-generation student received the least amount of guidance from their parents in preparing for college, in helping with school related problems, and in encouraging rigorous academic work.

In addition, White and Ali-Khan (2013) discuss the role of academic discourse as a form of cultural capital. Academic discourse encompasses such things as acronyms for programs or courses, course level information, course catalogs, and communicating with professors or peers. First-generation students often do not have a parent to help navigate and explain the meaning surrounding academic discourse. Lacking cultural capital can “impede the aspirations of students” (John, Hu, Simmons, Cater, & Weber, 2004, p. 213). While there are a multitude of support services available to students, in many cases it is the responsibility of the student to seek these services. However, without pre-existing knowledge students may not understand the extent of support services that exist. The research highlights that many of the challenges first-generation students face relates back to their lack of parental, guardian, or elder support to guide them through the college transition.

One of the most prominent challenges is the lack of preparation for the increased academic rigor that accompanies entering higher education. As compared to continuing-generation students, first-generation students, “...have less tacit knowledge of and fewer experiences with college campuses and related activities, behaviors, and role models” (Pike & Kuh, 2005, p. 290). First-generation students who lack experience with the college environment find themselves at a disadvantage in academic preparedness, understanding expectations, and general college know-how. Students find the academic practices that worked in high school do not translate into successful academic habits at the college level (Morales, 2012). Additional findings by Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri, and

Murdock (2012) provide evidence that high school grade point averages (GPAs) are associated with success at the college level. First-generation students typically have lower GPAs than continuing-generation students (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Further, DeWitz, Woolsey, and Walsh (2009) make the claim that students with lower high school GPAs experience more difficulties meeting the expectations of college curriculum.

First-generation students enter college with barriers already in place and struggle to adapt to transition. A major component of the transition is learning how to study for college level courses. Bradbury and Mather (2009) found that first-generation college students had “difficulty learning how to adapt to the different styles and expectations of their professors” (p. 269). Murphy and Hicks (2006) found continuing-generation students and first-generation students differed in the number of hours they spent studying, with continuing-generation students studying more than first-generation students on average.

The academic rigor of college level courses and the need to learn appropriate study skills present challenges and barriers, particularly for first-generation students. Key findings from Atherton (2014) demonstrate that students “whose parents had college experience were significantly more likely to have higher levels of academic preparedness” (p. 827). As a result of new academic challenges and high school under-preparation many first-generation students find themselves in remedial classes (Jenkins, Miyazaki, & Janosik, 2009). The 2014 NCES report found that 35.6% of the population

were first-generation college students who took remedial courses in the 2011-2012 academic year, if a parent had a bachelor's degree or higher the percentage fell to 27.7%.

Remedial courses have a number of implications for future academic success. Many institutions require students to pass their remedial courses in their first-year or they are not permitted to continue as a student (Executive Order No. 665, 1997). In addition, remedial courses do not count towards satisfying requirements in a major, which puts students behind in their progress toward degree completion. Ting (2003) found that not only do first-generation college students have lower first-semester grade point averages than continuing-generation college students, but first-generation college students are also "...at a higher risk for attrition than were second-generation college students" (as cited in Vuong et al., p. 51). Early success for first-generation college students is an important component to getting students set-up to succeed in their academic career (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013). Considering the fact that GPAs in subsequent years build off of the first semester, grades students receive in their first two semesters contribute to their future success at the college level, as reflected by their GPA. DeFreitas and Rinn (2013) found while comparing continuing-generation students to first-generation students, that continuing-generation students "are more likely to persist in the face of poor academic performance" (p. 58).

In addition to being underprepared for the academic rigor many first-generation students have unrealistic expectations about the college experience. Chen and Carroll (2005) indicate that only 24% of first-generation college students obtain a 4-year degree

despite having high expectations of degree completion. In 2010, first-generation college students were 32% less likely to graduate from a 4-year institution than continuing-generation students (Aud, Johnson, Kena, Manning, Wang, & Zhang, 2012). First-generation college students' unrealistic expectations of the time and effort it takes to succeed in college ultimately impede their ability to persist to graduation. Holding unrealistic expectations leads students to study inadequately or ineffectively, as reflected in their note taking and the number of hours they spend outside of class to study. When first-generation students lack knowledge of "hidden codes" (note taking, test taking, essay writing), which is a component of university discourse, they struggle to understand and adapt to the college experience (White & Ali-Khan, 2013, p. 27). Many students attend higher education institutions without being properly prepared during their high school years (Murphy & Hicks, 2006). Often the lack of experience in college preparatory classes in high school leads students to hold unrealistic expectations about the time and effort their college level courses require.

First-generation college students are torn between two competing worlds, college and family. Stebleton and Soria (2012) found family responsibilities as a significant obstacle for first-generation college students. College is unfamiliar territory for first-generation college students and their families. First-generation college students and continuing-generation college students receive support and guidance from their parents, however the type of support looks different due in part to the cultural capital each population contains (Hicks, 2006). Hicks (2006) found that 98% of first-generation

students had parents who believed in order to be successful in school they needed to work hard as opposed to 84% of continuing-generation students. Part of the transition into the freshmen year is finding ways to bridge the new college responsibilities with those required at home (Wang, 2012). As students try to navigate between the two worlds, the pull from one world might at times supersede that of the other. Due to conflicting worlds, many students return home during the weekends where they fall back into their pre-college roles and aiding the family unit (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). Spending weekends away from the university not only puts a financial strain on a student but also an academic strain, because now the student is unable to meet study groups on-campus, utilize the weekend lab hours and attend university events.

First-year Support for First-Generation Students. First-generation students need support to demystify the college experience, dispel the misconceptions about college life, and promote integration into the campus community (Murphy & Hicks, 2006). Adding intentional support to their first-year at the institution "...will help first-generation students feel a greater sense of control and responsibility during the college transition" (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012, p. 13). Universities offer many student support services, such as learning centers, professional advisors, tutoring centers, cultural centers and more. First-generation college students may not recognize the importance of being connected to the campus and engaged with the resources or know how to become engaged with these aspects of college life (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Connection to these services can be facilitated through the relationship with a peer mentor, encouragement

from faculty and staff, as well as through targeted programming hosted by academic or student services departments. Students who do not engage these resources are more likely to experience confusion, anxiety, and a general sense of being overwhelmed (Morales, 2012).

Peer-to-peer support (e.g. peer mentoring) offers intentional guidance and direction to freshmen regarding resources on campus to promote autonomy (one's ability to control their learning experiences) and academic achievement. Morales (2012) concluded that "various degrees of both social and academic integration correlate with eventual success, and a lack of these often lead to attrition" for first-generation college students (p. 91). Peer-to-peer support networks help students with "mitigating difficulties and acknowledging success during a time characterized by unpredictability and discovery" (Lenz, 2014, p. 198), and are a direct link for students to promote social and academic integration. Students tend to drift toward peers in classes, clubs, and the residence halls as a source of support during the college transition. Knowledge and sharing common experiences is especially vital for first-generation college students who lack the cultural capital and self-efficacy to navigate college confidently (Hertel, 2010; Wang, 2012). In many cases, peers who disclose similar challenges and obstacles bond and create a sense of community in their new environment. Through structured peer-to-peer relationships, upper-class students are able to share their knowledge and experiences with new first-year students to aid in their transition and normalize the challenges (Wang, 2012). Additionally, mentors provide support when the pull between family and college

life adds undue obstacles (Wang, 2012). Mentors also help with goal setting, companionship, encouragement, (Ward, Thomas, & Disch, 2014) and empowerment (Lenz, 2014). Mentors can be defined in a variety of ways, but according to Lenz (2014), the quality of the relationship between the student and the mentor is what matters most. Quality mentor relationships help to “foster higher academic achievement and student retention because they also enhance the general self-confidence, personal growth and self-empowerment” (Ward et al., 2014, p. 564).

In addition to peer relationships, faculty and staff have a significant opportunity to impact college student adjustment. First-generation college students need to find ways to acquire cultural capital during their time at the university. Faculty and staff can impact a students’ experience by reaching out intentionally and early in the semester to promote the use of resources and maximize the students’ potential (Morales, 2012). Moschetti and Hudley (2015) identify “institutional agents” (p. 237) as key campus persons, such as faculty and academic advisors who can aid students in their transition into the university. Murphy and Hicks (2006) highlight the need for faculty, staff, administrators and peer supporters to provide support for first-generation students to better integrate into the campus. Within academia there is the concept of the “null curriculum” (White & Ali-Khan, 2013, p. 38), this concept oftentimes gets overlooked and not emphasized to students new to the university. The “null curriculum” refers to everything from academic discourse, information capital, access to resources, and note taking strategies (White & Ali-Khan, 2013, p. 38). Faculty and staff who recognize and acknowledge this concept

provide more effective aid to students. Typically students who attend smaller institutions have more opportunities to interact with faculty; this increased interaction with faculty positively impacts student persistence (Vuong et al., 2010). Richardson and Skinner (1992) found larger class sizes and lack of opportunities to interact with faculty leave first-generation students at greater academic risk (as cited in Murphy & Hicks, 2006). Positive interactions with faculty and staff, as well as the quality of teaching and advising experiences, can have a significant effect on student attrition in subsequent years (Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011).

Sophomore Year Experience

The sophomore year is a unique and challenging time for students characterized by declaring a major, narrowing career options, and finding purpose (Tobolowsky, 2008). Sophomore students face additional challenges such as not being academically prepared after freshmen year, an increased need for autonomy, and difficult financial realities. After a year of navigating the college environment sophomore students enter into yet another year of exploration and expectations, largely on their own. Quality of teaching, advising relationships, and student connection to university policy and facilities are key indicators of student retention in the sophomore year (Willcoxson et al., 2011). Advising support and selection of major are two primary sophomore initiatives as found by the national survey of sophomore-year initiatives (Young, Schreiner, & McIntosh, 2015). In contrast to the freshmen year where outreach and support was plentiful and guidance in

the junior and senior years focus on graduating and plans after graduation, research identifies the sophomore-year as the forgotten year (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). As a result many students in their sophomore year experience the phenomenon of the “Sophomore Slump.”

“Sophomore Slump.” The “Sophomore Slump” is used to describe the experience of students in their second year at the university who are encountering dissatisfaction, confusion, and uncertainty with college (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). After a year of navigating a new environment, excitement begins to wane and sophomore students begin to feel the routine of the academic year. As students begin to lose interest in their academic courses and withdraw from the overall class experience, these factors ultimately lead to attrition (Gump, 2007). The challenge of exploring one’s identity in relation to social, academic, and self-identities (Margolis, 1976), can be magnified when students do not engage in academic and social experiences in college. The research identifies four vectors that impact sophomore student success: achieving competence, developing autonomy, establishing identity, and developing purpose (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Tobolowsky, 2008; Vuong et al., 2010). These represent four of the seven vectors presented in Chickering’s 1969 theory of identity development. Students who experience difficulties with these four vectors have been linked to the “Sophomore Slump” (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). Sanchez-Leguinel (2008) emphasized that not only are sophomores faced with achieving competence in general but are “...faced with the challenge of achieving competence at a higher

intellectual and developed level than when they first began their college education” (p. 638).

The nuances of college begin to set in as students’ transition into the sophomore year, where a key component of the sophomore year is declaring a major. This important decision is influenced by information from family members, particularly those who attended college (Milson & Coughlin, 2015). Students in their sophomore year begin to build relationships with faculty or peers in their major, which can influence their connection, and satisfaction with their chosen major (Milson & Coughlin, 2015). Some sophomore students have not yet defined their major, leading to additional stress and confusion that is associated with the “Sophomore Slump” (Tobolowsky, 2008). The lack of defining a major and the slow process of building relationships, impact the connection and success of sophomore students (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). As students transition into the sophomore year they begin to enroll in major courses. These courses set a student up to progress through the major they have declared. Typically, students take general education courses in their freshmen year—many of these courses do not match the rigor of major courses, do not make connections across curriculum, and are viewed as courses to “get out of the way” (Gump, 2007, p. 108). As such, students feel disconnected from their major and find the need to utilize campus resources that were not utilized during their freshmen year to satisfy the higher expectations in major classes (DeWitz, et al., 2009). Further, students who have academic difficulties and begin to struggle in courses in their first year often experience negative implications related to their sense of purpose

and sense of belonging at the university when they begin to struggle in courses directly related to their major (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006).

As previously highlighted, first-generation college students are often underprepared for the academic rigor that comes with college, which leads many students in their second year to continue struggling in the face of more challenging curriculum. Murphy and Hicks (2006) found no statistical significance in the different expectations regarding academic achievement between first-generation and continuing-generation students. However, first-generation college students do earn lower grade point averages than their continuing-generation counterparts, a GPA of 2.6 for first-generation as compared to a GPA of 2.9 for continuing-generation students (Chen & Carroll, 2005). While first-generation students hold high expectations of themselves, many are unable to manage their time effectively to achieve the academic success they expect of themselves (Willcoxson et al., 2011). Academic struggles in the first-year at the university continue to persist into the second-year where there is increased academic rigor and minimal intentional support.

As students experience academic struggles the need for strong self-efficacy becomes more prominent in the sophomore year. Self-efficacy is defined as one's perception of "...one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Research indicates that a students' self-efficacy has a significant impact on their academic success (Bandura, 1997; Schaller, 2005; Vuong et al., 2010; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Vuong et al.

(2010) state “self-efficacy beliefs affect academic success as defined by GPA and persistence rates of first-generation college sophomore students” (p. 61). Research identifies that when a student has distinct goals, the goals can promote a student’s self-efficacy, increase their likelihood to persist, and ultimately provide a smoother transition into college (DeWitz, et al., 2009; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Self-efficacy, academic performance, and persistence work together in a cyclical pattern to influence each other during the college student experience (Wright et al., 2012). When students believe they can successfully complete the work (self-efficacy), it leads to greater persistence, which ultimately improves the student’s success rate and, reinforces self-efficacy. Low self-efficacy in college can prove to be a very challenging experience for students and ultimately impede their ability to continue at the university. Negative expectations of one’s ability during this transitional period can ultimately lead to attrition, particularly when a student’s sense of inadequacy is reinforced by the inevitable failures that happen as they learn to be college students (Willcoxson et al., 2011).

A sense of belonging is another influencing factor during the sophomore year. Sense of belonging can be identified in the framework of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a “basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Viewing a student’s sense of belonging as a basic human need illuminates and reinforces the importance of connecting to peers, campus community, and the institution as a whole in promoting student success. Further, satisfying a student’s sense of belonging allows them to participate in characteristics related to being a successful

student such as regular attendance, participation, and the ability to seek out resources (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Absenteeism and poor academic performance have been linked together as components of the “Sophomore Slump” (Gump, 2007; Wilder, 1993). Thus, when a student does not feel that they belong to the campus community, it is likely absenteeism would increase (Strayhorn, 2012). Key findings by Schreiner and Nelson (2013) found campus climate, quality of instruction, and advising to be important components associated with sophomore students’ success and sense of belonging. In their 2012 study on sense of belonging, Morrow and Ackermann found that “peer support was a significant predictor of second-year retention” (p. 489). Many students have a need to be validated amongst their peers and have a reciprocal relationship, one where both sides value the presence of the other (Strayhorn, 2012). Validating a students’ sense of belonging occurs when students see the institution implement policy and practices that focus on the welfare of students, create a welcome atmosphere on campus, and feel a sense of pride with the institution they have chosen (Schreiner & Nelson, 2013).

Many institutions require freshmen students to live on-campus in their first year to aid the transition into college and connect students to the university community. Pike and Kuh (2005) state that living on campus had “...a direct, positive effect on learning outcomes...” (p. 289). When students encounter positive interactions on campus it has the ability to impact a students’ connection to campus and their sense of belonging at the university (Banning & Cunard, 1986). Sophomore students, who have a need for increased autonomy, coupled with the lack of available on-campus housing, tend to seek

housing off-campus in their second year. As a result, they become burdened with new financial strains and responsibilities that can interfere with their connection to campus and their academic success.

Concerns raised by financial realities emerge in the sophomore year just as many students begin to be disenchanted with the college experience. Schreiner and Nelson (2013) found concerns about financing college were a key component to persistence among sophomore students. When students struggle to pay for college their sense of guilt for the financial strain they put on their parents begins to take shape (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). According to a 2014 NCES report, 75.6% of students receiving aid were first-generation college. Additionally, findings by Lee and Mueller (2014) found that first-generation college students rely more on student loans, which creates additional financial concerns as debt accrues. The added stress of managing finances is not unique to the sophomore year, but does have added emphasis as the reality of the costs of education sets in.

Sophomore Year Support. Pike and Kuh (2005) coined the phrase “get ready,” “get in,” and “get through” as a means to prepare and offer support to first-generation college students (p. 292). There are four factors that can influence one’s ability to cope with transitions: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Universities can increase success rates by addressing these factors to help focus their support of first-generation college sophomore students. However, the sophomore year has few programs for students during this transitional time (Young et al.,

2015). Universities are predominantly in the “get through” stage when they find students needing extra support. Some students may not come from college preparatory high schools, lack the social and cultural capital needed to navigate the college transition, and/or lack strong self-efficacy, making the sophomore year a critical time for students to be offered the support they need to “get through” their college career successfully (Pike and Kuh, 2005).

Compared to support offered in the first-year of college, the second-year offers less intentional support. As highlighted by Sanchez-Leguelinel (2008), higher education institutions provide ample support services for freshmen during their first year to aid in the transition to college, however these services are lacking in the second year “...leaving sophomores feeling ignored and abandoned by the institution” (p. 638). Some institutions have made efforts to address this lack of services for sophomores. Of the 778 institutions surveyed for the national survey of sophomore-year initiatives and the sophomore experiences survey those who were conducting direct outreach to sophomores focused their efforts around retention, career exploration, career preparation, academic assistance, and selection of a major (Young et al., 2015). Additionally, the University of Texas Pan American, an institution with a freshmen class of 46.8% first-generation students in 2011, implemented a peer-mentoring program focusing on the needs of sophomore students. In particular, this institution addresses: “academic performance, social and physical wellness, and emotional growth in order to increase retention and graduation rates” (Reyes, 2012, p. 378). The John Jay College of Criminal Justice also facilitates a

sophomore peer mentoring program where students meet with a peer counselor to discuss their academic progress and degree requirements as well as discuss various campus services and activities “designed to address their professional and social needs” (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008, p. 640).

Based on research by Toblowsky (2008), institutions such as these tend to focus their efforts for sophomore students on “creating a sense of community, fostering social engagement, facilitating faculty-student interaction, encouraging major and career exploration, and promoting academic engagement and leadership” (p. 62). In addition to peer support, sophomore students would benefit from relationships with professional advisors who focus on the students’ interests, goals, and future plans (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008). Connections to faculty and professional advisors can promote degree completion, self-efficacy, and career aspirations (Vuong et al., 2010; Milson & Coughlin, 2006). Quality interactions between faculty/staff and student provide a connection to the university that sophomore students need at this developmental stage (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Sophomore students struggle in their second year to feel connected to the university, and through these intentional interactions students can focus on and celebrate their success and bolster their connection to the university (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). To increase student retention and persistence efforts, support for students must extend beyond the first-year at the university to more effectively integrate students into the overall social and academic community on campus (Wilder, 1993).

Summary

This literature review focused on the experiences of first-generation college students and the need for continued support for this population during the phenomenon known as the “Sophomore Slump.” The research highlighted and explored the demographics, challenges and support for first-generation college students. The characteristics and challenges associated with the sophomore year and how those challenges contribute to the “Sophomore Slump” followed.

A primary challenge for first-generation (neither parent has obtained a 4-year degree) college students is their lack of preparation for the academic rigor of college as reflected in high school GPA, SAT scores, and need for remedial coursework (Jenkins et al., 2009; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Additionally, first-generation students lack the cultural capital needed to navigate the college environment (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). First-generation college students find themselves pulled between family obligations and lack family members who can offer assistance in understanding college (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Competing discourse creates a challenging experience for students as they enter the college environment.

The challenges experienced by first-generation students have prompted some universities to implement directed support focusing on the transition and success of students in the sophomore year. Peer support networks create meaningful connections to the university at a difficult transitional time (Lenz, 2014). Support encompasses peer mentoring, outreach from faculty and staff, and unstructured peer connections such as

those found in the classroom or residence halls. Intentional support has promoted the success and retention of students to maximize their potential.

This literature review continued by describing the experiences of sophomore students as defined by the “Sophomore Slump.” The “Sophomore Slump” is a phenomenon encountered by students in their second year at the university when the excitement of college begins to wane and the realities set in (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). The sophomore year brings new challenges and obstacles for students to overcome as they declare their major and enroll in courses that establish new expectations of academic achievement (Tobolowsky, 2008). Additionally, the sophomore year is characterized by exploring ones social, academic, and personal identity (Margolis, 1976). Thus, when students become disenchanted with the college experience and struggle in academic and personal development, they may encounter the “Sophomore Slump.”

Literature that calls for institutions to pay closer attention to the needs of sophomore students is abundant (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Gump, 2007; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013; Willcoxson et al., 2011). While some institutions do implement sophomore specific programs (Reyes, 2012; Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008), to be effective these must be tailored to the specific needs of unique populations in higher education, such as first-generation students. Schreiner and Nelson (2013) identify the necessity for institutions to disaggregate student data in order to promote student success at each class level. Much of the literature focuses on support offered in the first-year.

The literature and research confirm the “Sophomore Slump” phenomenon for the general population of students in their second year. Lacking in the literature is the effects the “Sophomore Slump” has on first-generation college students. Additionally, there is a need to review disaggregated data to assess the “Sophomore Slump” impacts on special populations, such as first-generation students, and identify if disparities exist. As evident by the literature, first-generation students confront challenges not faced by many continuing-generation students (Hertel, 2010; Murphy & Hicks, 2006; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013); thus, an argument can be made for the benefits of continued support to first-generation students in their sophomore year when new challenges arise.

This study explores the differences of experiences in the sophomore year for first-generation students as compared to continuing-generation students and examines whether first-generation students should receive intentional support in their second year at the university to increase success rates. Described in the following chapter is a review of the methodology utilized in this study.

Methods

This chapter will review the methodology employed during the spring 2016, fall 2016, and spring 2017 semesters to explore first-generation and continuing-generation sophomore student experiences and how they relate to the Sophomore Slump. The data collected will be used to determine if the evidence supports a conclusion that first-generation college students experience the Sophomore Slump to a greater degree than continuing-generation college students. This chapter will review the pilot study conducted in spring 2016 semester, intended to validate and refine the survey instrument for the following academic year. Spring 2016 interviews, as a part of the pilot study will be discussed. The chapter will then describe the institutional changes that occurred during the fall 2016 semester and how those changes impacted the thesis study for fall 2016 and spring 2017. Finally, the thesis study methods will be described.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was developed as a component of the EDUC 682 - Mixed Methods course during the spring 2016 semester. The pilot study included qualitative and quantitative data collection which informed the thesis work overall and was intended to refine the survey and interview protocols to use in surveying and conducting interviews the subsequent academic year for this thesis.

Survey. The survey was developed using a web-based survey instrument, Google Forms. The web-based survey consisted of twenty-three survey items covering themes

related to: academic achievements, major involvement, faculty/staff interactions, goals, financial constraints, social interactions/sense of belonging, and demographic questions. The survey questions and categories were developed after reviewing the literature and were intended to provide an overview of the experiences students face in the sophomore year.

The pilot survey was deployed March 21, 2016 through April 1, 2016. A survey request form, detailing the parameters of the survey and desired participant demographics was submitted to the University's office of Institutional Research and Planning (now known as the office of Institutional Effectiveness) to obtain student emails. In addition, the survey was approved to be on the Institutional Effectiveness' survey calendar. Three emails were sent regarding the survey to all participants. The first email was the initial invitation. The second email included an incentive to participate with information about a drawing for a University dining coupon participants were entered into, and the third and final reminder was sent out forty-eight hours before the survey closed, this email also included information regarding the prize drawing. Sixty-two students completed the survey representing a twenty percent response rate for the pilot study.

Participants. Participant emails were obtained through the Institutional Effectiveness survey request form. Participants were chosen based on their sophomore year status and their parent's education. By random sample, Institutional Effectiveness selected 302 participants to participate in the pilot study survey. The research focuses on the differences experienced by first-generation and continuing-generation and so the

request was made to deploy the survey to include both first-generation and continuing-generation students. Of the 302 students, fifty-seven percent were first-generation, thirty-nine percent were continuing-generation and three percent were unknown. Demographic data of participants indicated that the sample consisted of forty-five percent underrepresented minorities (URM), forty-seven percent non-minorities, seven percent had unknown minority status.

Of the respondents fifty-three percent were first-generation and forty-seven percent were continuing-generation students. Representation of participants across the colleges was also considered with 17 in the College of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, 13 in the College of Natural Resources and Sciences, and 17 in the College of Professional Studies. The data suggests the respondents' demographics were a close match for the original random sample of 302 sophomore students selected by Institutional Effectiveness staff.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on April 7, 2016. Participants were chosen using a convenience sample. I work with a large population of sophomore students in the peer mentoring program at the university. The 15 sophomore students in the program were assigned a number at random and a random numbers table was used to select three students to invite to be interviewed. Of the three students invited, two agreed to participate; the third student did not have time in their schedule. Participants were emailed via their University email, which is publicly available on the University directory. The email indicated the interviews were not associated with the peer

mentoring program and would not effect on their position as a peer mentor. Participants were offered a five-dollar coupon to University dining as a thank you for participating. Interviews were conducted on the University campus. Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher provided the participant their five-dollar coupon to University dining and then reviewed the interview protocol. Participants were given an informed consent form to review and sign prior to the interview. Participants were provided the option to skip questions and end the interview at any time. The interviews lasted one hour, were audio recorded, and the researcher took notes during the interview. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions with the same themes of the pilot study survey items: participant background, academic achievement, major involvement, faculty/staff interaction, goals, and social interactions/sense of belonging.

The survey data was analyzed using Minitab Statistical Software. Independent *t*-tests were run to compare first-generation and continuing-generation experiences based on factors generated by the researcher (Table 1). Interviews were transcribed and coded for common themes using MAXQDA: Qualitative data analysis software.

Table 1. Pilot Study Factors with the associated questions. These factors were created by the researcher and modeled after the Skyfactor/Mapworks factors used in the thesis study.

Factor	Questions
Faculty Interactions	Q13: To what degree do you agree with the following: my faculty are approachable Q13: To what degree do you agree with the following: my faculty are concerned about my success Q13: To what degree do you agree with the following: I am comfortable talking with faculty about progress in my courses
Obstacles in the Sophomore Year	Q7: To what degree have the following been an obstacle in your school work or academic success: time management

Factor	Questions
	Q7: To what degree have the following been an obstacle in your school work or academic success: poor study behaviors
Major Integration	Q11: To what degree do you agree with the following: the content of my major courses are challenging Q11: To what degree do you agree with the following: my major classes are engaging Q11: To what degree do you agree with the following: the quality of instruction in my courses is excellent

Thesis Study

Skyfactor/Mapworks. As a part of campus-wide retention efforts, this University contracted with Skyfactor/Mapworks, a web-based assessment and retention tool in fall 2014. The Skyfactor/Mapworks tool includes a 218 predetermined item survey with an additional 22-institutional specific questions that the university can alter to fit their needs (Skyfactor, 2016). The survey is typically deployed to freshmen in the fall and spring semesters. In fall 2016 the Office of Institutional Effectiveness deployed the fall transition survey to sophomore students. The decision to deploy the sophomore Skyfactor/Mapworks fall transition survey had implications for this thesis; the outcomes of the survey follow the same transitional themes of the thesis survey. In order to avoid duplication of efforts, I worked with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to update the survey consent form of the Skyfactor/Mapworks fall transition survey to allow the researcher access to the anonymous survey responses. The study's IRB was also updated to gain access to the survey responses for this thesis.

Survey. The modified survey was deployed September 26, 2016 through October 11, 2016 and sent to 1,005 sophomore students. The office of Institutional Effectiveness defines a sophomore student as a student in their second year at the institution, excluding transfer students, this definition is the same for this thesis study. Survey invitations were sent via the Skyfactor/Mapworks system on September 26, 2016 to the student's University email. Three reminder emails were sent to non-respondents on September 29, 2016, October 3, 2016, and a last chance reminder on October 7, 2016. The survey closed on October 11, 2016. As an incentive, Skyfactor/Mapworks offers an individualized survey report for each student who completes the survey and an opportunity to apply for a \$1,500 scholarship. Each email advertised the survey report and each reminder email advertised the scholarship opportunity. Two hundred and sixty-eight students responded, for a 27% response rate.

Interviews. Participants for the semi-structured interviews were identified by the office of Institutional Effectiveness, using a stratified sample of Skyfactor/Mapworks fall transition survey respondents to identify participants for interviews. Participants were selected based on first-generation status, race/ethnicity, and gender. The stratified sample was used to ensure the sample matched the population of sophomore students at the University. The initial sample taken on February 1, 2017 included 13 first-generation students and 11 continuing-generation students. Of that sample three students responded but only two showed up for their scheduled interview. Due to the low response rate the researcher obtained a second stratified sample on February 23, 2017. The second sample

consisted of 49 first-generation students and 42 continuing-generation students. From this second sample the research obtained two more responses, one student showed up for their scheduled interview the other student was a no-show. The researcher selected up to ten students at a time from the sample list to email. Participants were emailed twice via their University email as provided by Institutional Effectiveness. The first email invited the student to participate in an interview and offer their experiences as a sophomore student at the University, the second email was a reminder email sent five days before the deadline. Students were given a two-week window to respond to the researcher. Once the two-week window closed the researcher moved on to the next batch of participants to invite to an interview. The email invitation included a brief overview of the study, an advertisement of the incentive to participate, deadline to respond and the informed consent document was attached. Participants were offered a five-dollar coupon to the University bookstore as a thank you for participating. This multi-phase recruitment effort resulted in a total of three interviews in spring 2017.

Interviews were conducted on the University campus. Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher provided the participant their five-dollar coupon to the University bookstore and then reviewed the interview protocol. Participants were given an informed consent to review and sign prior to the interview. Participants were provided the option to skip questions and end the interview at any time. The interviews lasted one hour, were audio recorded, and the researcher took notes during the interview.

Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions with the same themes of the

pilot-study and thesis-study survey items: participant background, academic achievement, major involvement, faculty/staff interaction, goals, and social interactions/sense of belonging; a full list of questions and interview protocol can be found in Appendix 1.

Analysis. The survey data was analyzed using Minitab Statistical Software. Independent t-tests and correlations were used to compare first-generation and continuing-generation experiences on a series of relevant factors. Each factor consists of a variety of scaled questions. The questions were then combined in Minitab Statistical Software system to create each factor score. Factors were used based on the Skyfactor/Mapworks algorithm, a full list of factors and their associated questions can be found in Table 2. Interviews were transcribed and coded for common themes using MAXQDA: Qualitative data analysis software. After transcribing the interview, reading through the transcriptions several times, I was able to create codes based on the variety of topics discussed. After reviewing the literature in depth I had anticipated the types of codes I would need to generate. Each line of the interview was reviewed, then coded, then reviewed again. Each review of the transcription was intended to obtain consistency of codes used. Then using the MAXQDA coding frequencies option I was able to group codes into themes that were common throughout each interview. The list of common themes can be found in Table 5.

Table 2. Skyfactor/Mapworks factors with the associated reliability and survey questions. Note: The factor Major Integration was created by the researcher and not a part of the Skyfactor/Mapworks algorithm.

Factor	Reliability	Questions
Commitment to the Institution	0.78	Q2: Level of Commitment – to what degree are you committed to completed a: degree/certificate/licensure at this institution

Factor	Reliability	Questions
		Q3: Intent to Return – to what degree do you intend to come back to this institution for the: next academic term Q4: Intent to Return – to what degree do you intend to come back to this institution for the: next academic year
Self-Assessment: Self-Discipline	.79	Q: 71 Self-Assessment of Management Skills – to what degree are you the kind of person who: is self-disciplined Q: 72 Self-Assessment of Management Skills – to what degree are you the kind of person who: follows through with what you say you’re going to do Q73 Self-Assessment of Management Skills – to what degree are you the kind of person who: is dependable
Self-Assessment: Time Management	0.78	Q74: Self-Assessment of Management Skills – to what degree are you the kind of person who: plans out your time Q75: Self-Assessment of Management Skills – to what degree are you the kind of person who: makes “to do lists” Q76: Self-Assessment of Management Skills – to what degree are you the kind of person who: balances time between classes and other commitments (work, student activities, etc.)
Financial Means	0.87	Q64: To what degree are you confident that you can pay for: next term’s tuition and fees Q65: To what degree are you confident that you can pay for: next year’s tuition and fees Q66: To what degree are you confident that you can pay for: monthly living expenses (e.g. room, board, utilities, rent)
Basic Academic Behaviors	0.72	Q23: Academic Behaviors – to what degree are you the kind of person who: attends class Q24: Academic Behaviors – to what degree are you the kind of person who: takes good notes in class Q25: Academic Behaviors – to what degree are you the kind of person who: turns in the required homework assignments
Advanced Academic Behaviors	0.78	Q89: Academic Behaviors – to what degree are you the kind of person who: participates in class Q91: Academic Behaviors – to what degree are you the kind of person who: communicates with instructors outside of class Q90: Academic Behaviors – to what degree are you the kind of person who: works on large projects well in advance of the due date Q95: Advanced Study Skills – to what degree are you the kind of person who: spends sufficient study time to earn good grades

Factor	Reliability	Questions
Academic Self-Efficacy	0.86	Q82: Academic Self-Efficacy – to what degree are you certain that you can: do well on all problems and tasks assigned in your courses Q83: Academic Self-Efficacy – to what degree are you certain that you can: do well in your hardest course Q84: Academic Self-Efficacy – to what degree are you certain that you can: persevere on class projects even when they are challenging
Academic Resiliency	0.88	Q85: Academic Resiliency – to what extent do the following statement describe you: you do everything you can to meet the academic goals you set at the beginning of the semester Q86: Academic Resiliency – to what extent do the following statement describe you: you are a hard worker in your classes Q87: Academic Resiliency – to what extent do the following statement describe you: when you know a course is going to be difficult, you put in extra effort. Q88: Academic Resiliency – to what extent do the following statement describe you: when you get a poor grade, you work harder in that course
Peer Connections	0.93	Q116: Peer Connections – on this campus, to what degree are you connecting with people: who share common interests with you Q117: Peer Connections – on this campus, to what degree are you connecting with people: who include you in their activities Q118: Peer Connections – on this campus, to what degree are you connecting with people: you like
Homesickness: Separation	0.64	Q120: Homesickness – to what degree do you: miss your family back home Q121: Homesickness – to what degree do you: miss your old friends who are not at this school Q122: Homesickness – to what degree do you: miss your significant other who is not at this school
Homesickness: Distressed	0.86	Q123: Homesickness – to what degree do you: regret leaving home to go to school Q124: Homesickness – to what degree do you: think about going home all the time Q125: Homesickness – to what degree do you: feel an obligation to be at home Q126: Homesickness – to what degree do you: feel that attending college is pulling you away from your community at home
Academic Integration	0.87	Q209: Overall Adjustment – overall, to what degree are you: keeping current with your academic work Q210: Overall Adjustment – overall, to what degree are you: motivated to complete your academic work

Factor	Reliability	Questions
		Q211: Overall Adjustment – overall, to what degree are you: learning Q212: Overall Adjustment – overall, to what degree are you: satisfied with your academic life on campus
Social Integration	0.9	Q213: Overall, to what degree: do you belong here Q214: Overall, to what degree: are you fitting in Q215: Overall, to what degree: are you satisfied with your social life on campus
Satisfaction with Institution	0.89	Q216: Overall Evaluation of the Institution – overall to what degree: would you choose this institution again if you had it to do over Q217: Overall Evaluation of the Institution – overall to what degree: would you recommend this institution to someone who wants to attend college Q218: Overall, please rate your experience at this institution:
Test Anxiety	0.88	Q96: When you have a test, to what degree do you: have an uneasy, upset feeling before taking an examination Q97: When you have a test, to what degree do you: feel anxious about an exam even when you are well prepared Q98: When you have a test, to what degree do you: performs worse on exams because you're worrying that you'll do poorly
Advanced Study Skills	unavailable	Q92: To what degree are you the kind of person who: studies in places where you can avoid distractions Q93: To what degree are you the kind of person who: studies on a regular schedule Q94: To what degree are you the kind of person who: reads the assigned readings within a day before class
Major Integration	unavailable	Q148: To what degree are you: committed to your major/program? Q149: To what degree are you: making connections to faculty in your major/program Q150: Making connections with other students in your major/program

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the pilot study conducted in spring 2016, the institutional changes that occurred in fall 2016 and how those changes impacted the

thesis study that was conducted in fall 2016 and spring 2017. The following chapter will provide the results from the thesis survey and interviews from the pilot and thesis studies.

Results

This chapter will review the results of the thesis study. Survey results from the spring 2016 pilot study informed the creation of the spring 2016 and spring 2017 interviews. Due to the institutional changes the spring 2016 pilot survey results cannot be used to compare to the thesis results. The thesis study results are presented followed by the interview themes that emerged from the spring 2016 and spring 2017 interviews.

Survey

The Skyfactor/Mapworks fall transition survey was sent to 1,005 sophomore students with a response rate of 268 students. Of those 268, eight students left their generational status blank, leaving sixty-seven percent first-generation and twenty-nine percent continuing-generation. Thirty-one students indicated their major was in the College of Arts Humanities and social sciences, seventy-six are in the College of Natural Resources and Sciences, and eighty-two are in the College of Professional Studies.

Table 3. Demographic data of Skyfactor/Mapworks fall transition survey respondents.

Race/Ethnicity	Status: First-generation (n=182)	Status: Continuing-generation (n=78)	Total (n=268)
Black	5	2	7
Latino	105	18	125
Asian	6	5	11
Two or More	8	3	12
White	49	49	99
Unknown	1	1	3
NR Alien	8	0	11

Students were asked a series of questions via the Skyfactor/Mapworks survey, these questions were combined to create each individual factor based on the

Skyfactor/Mapworks algorithm. Independent sample *t*-tests were used to compare the experiences of first-generation to continuing-generation students based on the series of factors. The following yielded statistically significant results for differences among the two populations: In the category of *Self-Assessment: Self-Discipline* ($t = 2.76, p = 0.007$) and *Advanced Study Skills* ($t = 2.54, p = 0.012$). First-generation students show a mean of 5.663 and continuing-generation students show a mean of 6.010 on a scale of one being *not at all* to seven being *extremely* for the self-assessment of management skills that make up the *Self-Assessment: Self-Discipline* factor, indicating first-generation students lack self-discipline as defined by the survey instrument. *Advanced Study Skills* for first-generation students show a mean of 4.78 ($SD = 1.36$) and continuing-generation students show a mean of 5.21 ($SD = 1.03$) on a scale of one being *not at all* to seven being *extremely* for the self-assessment, indicating first-generation students lack advanced study skills as defined by the survey instrument.

Two factors were on the verge of statistical significance: *Academic Self-Efficacy* ($t = 1.93, p = 0.056$) where first-generation students were reporting lower means for self-efficacy ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.17$) for first-generation students than the continuing-generation ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.07$) students. Also, *Academic Integration* ($t = 1.72, p = 0.089$) was on the verge of significance where first-generation ($M = 5.54, SD = 1.16$) students were reporting lower means for academic integration than the continuing-generation ($M = 5.83, SD = 1.10$) students. Both of these factors also have the same scale of one to seven, with one equaling *not at all* to seven equaling *extremely* for the self-

assessment. A full list of factors based on a student's first-generation or continuing-generation status can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Factor scores based on students' first-generation status (FG=first-generation and CG=continuing-generation) $p < 0.05$ yields statistically significant results.

Factor	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Status	n	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>
Commitment to the Institution	0.63	0.527	FG	77	6.15	1.07	147
			CG	173	6.25	1.06	
Self-Assessment: Self-Discipline	2.76	0.007	FG	163	5.663	0.997	152
			CG	68	6.010	0.814	
Self-Assessment: Time Management	1.64	0.103	FG	161	5.19	1.48	153
			CG	69	5.50	1.23	
Financial Means	-0.64	0.522	FG	160	5.28	1.11	123
			CG	70	5.18	1.19	
Basic Academic Behaviors	0.32	0.752	FG	172	6.227	0.661	132
			CG	74	6.257	0.693	
Advanced Academic Behaviors	1.37	0.173	FG	153	4.61	1.22	109
			CG	66	4.89	1.40	
Academic Self-Efficacy	1.93	0.056	FG	162	5.06	1.17	134
			CG	67	5.36	1.07	
Academic Resiliency	1.23	0.223	FG	156	5.80	1.02	126
			CG	63	5.976	0.918	
Peer Connections	0.63	0.527	FG	153	5.20	1.48	109
			CG	61	5.34	1.50	
Homesickness: Separation	-1.10	0.277	FG	64	3.37	1.64	41
			CG	26	2.91	1.82	
Homesickness: Distressed	0.20	0.844	FG	130	5.42	1.64	92
			CG	52	5.47	1.68	
Academic Integration	1.72	0.089	FG	145	5.54	1.16	112
			CG	59	5.83	1.10	
Social Integration	0.19	0.849	FG	150	5.25	1.52	112
			CG	59	5.29	1.43	
Satisfaction with Institution	-0.36	0.721	FG	146	5.51	1.37	113
			CG	61	5.44	1.35	
Test Anxiety	0.81	0.422	FG	154	3.99	1.55	108
			CG	65	4.19	1.75	
Advanced Study Skills	2.54	0.012	FG	156	4.78	1.36	156
			CG	65	5.21	1.03	
Major Integration	-0.73	0.466	FG	136	5.32	1.29	101
			CG	57	5.17	1.35	

The Skyfactor/Mapworks survey asks students several open-ended questions specific to their institution, these questions are labeled Institution Specific Questions (ISQs), and are

determined by this university's Institutional Effectiveness Office. One such question (ISQ6250) asked "What could this university do to better improve your second year experience", answered by 51% of respondents (n = 136) the top five responses were: *Nothing* (n = 30), *Facility Improvement* (n = 28), *Financial Aid* (n = 14), *Co-curricular Resources* (n = 13), and *I'm not sure* (n = 12). *Facility Improvement* responses included more study space on campus, parking facilities, better wifi, and building development/upgrades. *Facility Improvement*, *Nothing*, *I'm not sure*, and *Financial Aid* maintained as the top responses when looking at only first-generation students and continuing-generation students.

Of the comments provided by respondents (n = 180) to the question "What do you like most about college?" (ISQ206), the top five responses mentioned were: *Autonomy* (n = 70), *Academics* (n = 59), *Peer Connections* (n = 58), *Faculty Connections* (n = 20), and *Environment* (n = 19). When taking into account first-generation (n = 126) and continuing-generation (n = 52), both populations reflected the same comments.

Of the respondents (n = 178) to the question "What do you like least about college?" (ISQ207) the top five responses mentioned the most were: *Workload* (n = 34), *Stress/Pressure* (n = 30), *Cost* (n = 27), *Far From Home* (n = 24), and *Dissatisfied with Classes* (n = 11). Responses in the *Dissatisfied with Classes* category covered boring class sessions, impacted classes, time and availability of classes, and unclear expectations. After breaking the responses to this question out by generational status, the top five responses for first-generation students (n = 124) were: *Workload* (n = 24), *Far*

From Home (n = 18), *Cost* (n = 18), *Stress/Pressure* (n = 17), and *Time Management* (n = 8). Continuing-generation students (n = 53) yield similar top five responses: *Stress/Pressure* (n = 14), *Workload* (n = 10), *Cost* (n = 9), *Far from home* (n = 6), and *Struggling to Connect with Peers* (n = 5).

Interviews

The pilot study interviews occurred during spring 2016 and the thesis study interviews occurred during spring 2017. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions with the following themes: participant background, academic achievement, major involvement, faculty/staff interactions, goals, and social interactions/sense of belonging. Interviews were conducted in order to give the student narrative to the sophomore year experience. Interview questions and themes were based on what the literature identifies as common sophomore year experiences and factors that can contribute to the “Sophomore Slump.” Two students in spring 2016 participated in the interviews and three students participated in the spring 2017 interviews. The interview protocol did not change from spring 2016 to spring 2017 and all five interviews are included in this analysis.

Student 1 is a first-generation Latina female, her major is psychology, she is from the Los Angeles area, and lives off-campus. Student 2 is a first-generation Latina female, her major is oceanography, she is from the Los Angeles area, and lives off-campus. Student 3 is a first-generation Latina female, her major is sociology, she is from the Los

Angeles area, and lives on-campus. Student 4 is a first-generation Latino male, his major is geography, he is from the Los Angeles area, and lives off-campus. Student 5 is a first-generation white female, her major is mathematics, she is from Humboldt county, and lives off-campus. All five participants work on or off campus for ten or more hours.

After transcribing and coding the student responses to each interview question, six themes emerged from all five interviews. These themes were identified as factors influencing the sophomore year experience and contributing to the “Sophomore Slump”:

- (1) faculty interactions,
- (2) experiences specific to the sophomore year,
- (3) development of autonomy and self-efficacy,
- (4) major declaration,
- (5) academic achievements, and
- (6) involvement in major (through coursework, clubs, interactions with faculty or peers).

Additional themes to emerge were goal setting/future plans, accessing resources, and experiences as first-generation students. Table 5 displays the top six themes and examples of their responses. Every student stated enrolling in major courses and less general education courses marked their sophomore year. Declaring a major was a big part of entering college for these participants. Most had already pre-determined their major and had a set path. However, even with a declared major they second-guessed their choices. The interviews provided rich narrative to the sophomore year experience and factors contributed to the “Sophomore Slump” further detail to their individual experiences will be discussed in the next section.

Table 5. Top six themes to emerge from spring 2016 and spring 2017 interviews with examples of comments associated with each theme.

Theme	Response Examples
Faculty interactions	seeking out faculty for assistance or clarification on assignments or tests; networking; helpful; more invested in freshmen than sophomores
Experiences specific to the sophomore year	learning how to communicate with faculty; more major courses; classes are harder; learned how to study; organization and time-management are important; moving off campus; taking on more units
Development of autonomy & self-efficacy	“I feel accomplished”; “I feel successful”; reflection; personal growth;
Major declaration	had to declare because of units; introductory class inspired major declared; afraid of turning out to not like major; came into college with idea for major but then added a minor to supplement opportunities
Academic achievements	time-management; balancing major courses and general education courses; getting good grades adds to motivation to do well in school; don’t expect to be perfect but need to work hard
Involvement in major	involvement in major clubs; service learning; connecting with other students; networking with faculty; “more attached to major courses”; internships and research opportunities

Outside of the themes students were asked during the interviews “what would you have liked to see during your sophomore year to improve your experience?” The responses indicated deeper connections with faculty, information on research and internship opportunities, creating how-to guide for the sophomore year, more information on what to do after graduation, connection with graduate students, and assistance on major declaration and the future paths. These ideas were based off opportunities they would have like to have during their sophomore year due to the areas they struggled in.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the results for the spring 2016 pilot study with the factors faculty interactions, obstacles in the sophomore year, and major integration. Due to institutional changes and the deployment of the Skyfactor/Mapworks survey the pilot study was used as a framework for the interviews in spring 2016 and spring 2017. This chapter then reviewed the Skyfactor/Mapworks factors in relation to generational status as well as specific ISQs that provide deeper insight into the experiences of sophomore students. Then the chapter listed the common themes identified from the spring 2016 and spring 2017 interviews. The following chapter will provide a discussion of the results.

Discussion

Data collected for the pilot study and thesis study provide insight into the experiences of sophomore students at this University when instances of the “Sophomore Slump” arise. Sophomore students find themselves in the forgotten year of college (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006) and as Student 4 expressed during their interview: *“I feel like sophomores just, I don’t know how to put this nicely. Aren’t cared about as much, you know. For being the middle child of college.”* The sophomore year can provide many challenges for students that lead to dissatisfaction with college, uncertainty, and increased academic rigor. These experiences are associated with the “Sophomore Slump.”

Lacking in the literature regarding the “Sophomore Slump” were results broken out by generational status. Interviews and surveys were used to determine if students who are first-generation experience aspects of the “Sophomore Slump” to a different degree than those who are continuing-generation students. This thesis serves to paint a more in-depth view of the experiences of students during the sophomore year and experiences with the “Sophomore Slump” based on a student’s generational status. This chapter will review the findings from both interviews and surveys along themes associated with the sophomore year and aspects of the “Sophomore Slump”: dissatisfaction with college, development of autonomy and self-efficacy, achieving competence, major involvement, and making connections.

Within the results timing should be taken into consideration. The Skyfactor/Mapworks survey was deployed near the beginning of students’ sophomore

year while the interviews occurred during mid-spring semester of their sophomore year, thus covering the full year.

Dissatisfaction with College

From the Skyfactor/Mapworks survey first-generation and continuing-generation students are reporting high means for the factors: Commitment to the Institution and Satisfaction with the Institution with no statistical differences between first-generation or continuing-generation student. Overall, respondents to the survey indicated that in the fall semester they were satisfied with their choice to attend the university. Further research into these responses in the spring semester would identify if changes occur over the full course of an academic year. The students' interviewed in spring found continued satisfaction with being at the university although it was not possible to compare results by generational status. Each student intended to return to this university in the following year, even though transferring after the second year was an option three of the four interview participants had considered. Quality of major as well as, the reality they are halfway done with college and they do not want to get behind kept them at the university.

The excitement of college can begin to wane in the sophomore year as students navigate increased responsibilities and college becomes routine. Student 4 summed up their sophomore year experience with the following statement:

“By now, sophomore year, I’ve seen things, I’ve been in the field, I’m just trying to get through my semester. I didn’t lose motivation but I lost my starry-eyed wonder ‘oh college is amazing’. Oh, it’s still great but it’s not a brand new world anymore.”

Student 4’s statement exemplifies how dissatisfaction with college can manifest. The sentiment *“oh college is amazing”* is lost for this student in the second year, as college becomes routine; the literature supports this as a common finding (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Gump, 2007; Tobolowsky, 2008). However, Student 4 states they have not lost their motivation, suggesting resilience to push through the experiences of dissatisfaction and keep their end goal in mind. Student 4 discussed the importance of finding a job after college and being successful and satisfied in their field several times during the interview. All students interviewed consistently mentioned the future and future success through internships, research opportunities, and graduate school as a guiding factor in their sophomore year. These experiences connect to the vector *Developing Purpose* in Chickering’s Theory of Identity Development where students are making meaningful commitments to personal interests and activities and developing clear career goals (Patton et al., 2010). Experiencing difficulties in *Developing Purpose* contributes to “Sophomore Slump” struggles (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). The interview narratives provide insight into the importance of *Developing Purpose* at the institution in order to push through “Sophomore Slump” challenges. When a student experiences uncertainty within their sophomore year they may be lacking a strong purpose. One potential conclusion to combat loss of excitement with college, challenge

the uncertainty students may feel, and thus aid in combating aspects of the “Sophomore Slump” is to foster a student’s career goals and guide them in developing their purpose.

The Skyfactor/Mapworks survey also contained the open-ended question (ISQ207): What do you like least about college; responses to this questions provide more insight into the factors that contribute to a student’s dissatisfaction with college life. When coded for common themes the top response for first-generation students was *Workload*. This finding is consistent with the literature where first-generation students struggle to meet the expectations of college level coursework (Bradbury and Mather, 2009), this can include the amount of work expected of students. As first-generation students attend college, they lack the “hidden codes” (note taking, test taking, essay writing) (White & Ali-Khan, p. 2013), the lack of knowledge around these skills can lead a student to struggle with the amount of work that is expected of them at the college level, particularly when that level of work increases in the sophomore year. Lacking from these responses is the narrative for these students; continuing-generation student cited *Workload* as their second most frequent response suggesting continuing-generation students may be able to persevere through the amount of work required.

A student’s satisfaction with college and ultimately their success can be influenced by a student’s environment. For Skyfactor/Mapworks survey the number one theme for the question (ISQ6250) “What could [the university] do to better improve your second year experience?” highlighted *Facility Improvement* as an important issue, this included: more study space, fixing rundown buildings, and increasing the number of

available parking spaces. Kuh (2005) discuss the benefits to student learning when living on-campus; the university in this study has 76% of all students living off campus.

Limited parking impedes students getting connected to the campus community, attending class, and getting to work off-campus. These can be added obstacles for all students, but can be even more detrimental for sophomore students in an already challenging year. It is clear from the respondents of the Skyfactor/Mapworks survey that inadequate parking is a top concern. As one student wrote: “*[The university] could make parking easier; it can be difficult to find parking when going to class, and many people skip class because they are unable to find parking.*” Not enough parking spaces can provide undue stress to a student and have unintended consequences that cause a student to feel unwelcome and unable to access the university space. Dissatisfaction can manifest itself in many ways as a student navigates the sophomore year. Providing avenues to support students during these dissatisfying experiences can mitigate experiences of the “Sophomore Slump.”

Development of Autonomy and Self-Efficacy

The ability to take control of one’s own education, or autonomy, represents a vital component of the sophomore year. The survey question (ISQ206): What do you like most about college yielded *Autonomy* as the number one theme for students regardless of generational status. Study results suggest that sophomore students are enjoying the ability to study what interests them, develop their independence, and grow personally as college students. Developing autonomy is a key aspect of the sophomore year, with the majority

of students in this study identifying autonomy as the most enjoyable aspect of college, this finding is consistent with the literature (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Tobolowsky, 2008; Vuong et al., 2010). Moving off-campus can impact a student's self-efficacy and development of autonomy. In the case of Student 3 living on campus is "*very convenient because if I have a 9am class, I can just wake up and waddle on over*" whereas in the case of Student 4 "*because I live off campus I had more things to take care of, cooking, cleaning, taking care of a house. It's made studying and getting work done a little more difficult.*" Student 4's autonomy was further developed as an off-campus student where he needed to manage more responsibilities. Student 3 plans to move off campus for junior year when her autonomy will likely develop further.

Students need to believe in their ability to be successful college students, meaning they have strong self-efficacy. A student's self-efficacy has an impact on their academic success (Bandura, 1997; Schaller, 2005; Vuong et al., 2010; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Thus when a student harbors strong self-efficacy that can help lessen the effects associated with "Sophomore Slump." The survey responses highlight the importance of developing strong self-efficacy. The survey factor: *Academic Self-Efficacy* is nearing significance for differences among first-generation and continuing-generation students ($t = 1.93, p = 0.056$) where first-generation students ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.17$) indicate a lower mean than continuing-generation students ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.07$). The lack of self-efficacy can impede a student's success at the university. A student's self-efficacy,

academic performance, and persistence at the university influence one another (Wright et al., 2012). Study results suggest that first-generation students need assistance in the development of their self-efficacy. As first-generation students struggle with the workload associated with the sophomore year, they may begin to question their self-efficacy. Supporting student self-efficacy can be accomplished through the development of specific goals (DeWitz, et al., 2009; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Interviews for this study provide a narrative to a student's development of autonomy and self-efficacy. When asked during the interviews "how would you define yourself as a college student?" participant responses indicated their development of autonomy and self-efficacy through responses such as:

Student 1 stated: *"I feel pretty successful right now. Because I could be done, it's all up to me, I could be done in a year, I could be done early because of how I targeted my first year balancing out the GEs and my psych courses."* Student 1 is expressing how she has become independent and reliant on herself to get through her academics. She shows a strong belief to finish out her college undergraduate studies as a result of the time and effort she put in over the last two years.

Student 5 and Student 3 did not show the same level of autonomy and self-efficacy as Student 1 did; Student 5 stated: *"I'd say I'm accomplished at this point. Halfway done. Hopefully. Yeah, I feel pretty accomplished. Yeah, I don't know. It's pretty cool though"* and Student 3 stated: *"I think I can say that I've been successful in my college semesters so far. More so than expected I'd say."* From both of these statements

the students it can be inferred that the students are still developing their autonomy and self-efficacy. While they didn't speak with the same conviction as Student 1 their interviews show the progress in developing their autonomy and self-efficacy. Through the interview responses participants indicated that much of their success was attributed to what they learned from experiences in freshmen year such as learning how to study, time-management, and finding a good balance between personal and academic goals. These factors contribute to the development of autonomy and self-efficacy.

Achieving Competence

Another important outcome of the sophomore year is achieving a sense of competence as an adult student. Students who are successful at achieving competence have the confidence to set and complete their goals (Patton et al., 2010). One aspect of competence is developing self-discipline. The factor *Self-Assessment: Self-Discipline* showed a significant difference ($t = 2.76, p = 0.007$) between first-generation ($M = 5.663, SD = 0.997$) and continuing-generation ($M = 6.010, SD = 0.814$) students. Students who are first-generation reported lower self-discipline than their continuing-generation counterparts. This finding is consistent with the literature, when lacking experience with college, first-generation students attempt to utilize strategies from high school and find those strategies to be unsuccessful in college due to the increase rigor (Morales, 2012). Students who were interviewed also expressed this sentiment. They were able to make it through freshmen year using much of the same skillset from high school but over the

course of their freshmen year and the fall semester of sophomore year they begin to “learn how to study” at the college level. Students who were interviewed said that time-management was the most important skill they developed in their sophomore year. Time-management is an aspect of self-discipline and a contributor to study skills. However, the survey results indicated no significant difference between first-generation and continuing-generation students for the *Self-Assessment: Time Management* factor. Overall respondents were reporting mildly high means ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.48$ for first-generation and $M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.23$ for continuing-generation), on a scale of one being *not at all* to seven being *extremely*. Therefore, self-perception of time management is something all students in the sophomore year are developing regardless of generational status. With increased academic rigor, time-management is an essential skill for sophomore students.

Students in the sophomore year are expected to achieve competence at a higher intellectual level (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008). This is supported through Student 3’s example when she discussed in her interview that now enrolled in major courses she cannot skim the reading but must actually read and comprehend in order to be successful. These results are also consistent with the findings from the thesis study where the factor *Advanced Study Skills* ($t = 2.54$, $p = 0.012$) were significantly different between first-generation ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.36$) and continuing-generation ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.03$) students. First-generation college students tend to have lower GPAs than continuing-generation college students (Chen & Carroll, 2005) and students must find ways to

navigate the increased academic rigor and expectations in their college level courses (Bradbury & Mather, 2009); these results indicate that students who are first-generation struggle to utilize the necessary study skills needed to obtain a higher GPA.

Coupling reduced *Advanced Study Skills* with reduced *Self-Discipline*, this study indicates that students who are first-generation lack skills necessary to succeed with increased academic rigor and are struggling to achieve competence at higher intellectual level in the sophomore year. One possible conclusion students may struggle with *Advanced Study Skills* and *Self-Discipline* may be due to their lack of cultural capital. First-generation students who lack the knowledge around academic discourse and available resources are a result of having parents, guardians, or elders who did not attend college. Thus first-generation students require targeted support to get them the cultural capital they need to support their academic aspirations.

Major Involvement

Major declaration is an important step for college students. Some students enter the university with a clear major in mind; others change and explore different majors. Regardless, university policy requires students to declare a major by the time they reach 60 units, which is most likely to happen in the sophomore year. Students tend to take their general education courses during their freshmen year and begin to enroll in major courses in sophomore year.

Survey respondents who had selected a major indicate they feel committed to the major they chose. The interview narratives described a varied and rich journey in the process of declaring a major. Each student interviewed had a diverse experience ranging from the uncertainty of which major to choose, having a prior interest that the university does not offer, changing majors within the first year, to adding a minor to supplement the opportunities their major may not afford them. Having selected a major, each student struggled with the major's courses in a variety of ways. For example, Student 1 and Student 2 discussed struggles with entry level courses for the major and Student 5 discussed how the increased number of credits taken during her sophomore year added to difficulty in maintaining enough time committed to each course. Student 3 struggled with the workload of the courses and the need to read in-depth to be prepared for class, rather than being able to skim the text, a strategy that worked freshmen year. Each example shows the variety of experiences and for all students interviewed, the connections to their major were key factors in keeping them engaged. Particularly, when the students received good grades in their major courses, their self-efficacy increased.

Student 4's experience differed, he expressed he had not yet enrolled in major courses and was predominantly working on general education courses and prerequisite courses. Student 4 expressed a strong desire to be enrolled in major courses but expressed frustration at the quantity of general education courses that were required. As previously stated, Student 4 has a strong desire to connect with his major but the connections and getting involved in his major are being impeded by general education coursework. This

narrative is consistent with findings from Gump (2007), where general education courses are seen as “courses to get out of the way” (p. 108). Student 4 will enter major courses in fall of 2017 and during his interview he expressed a fear of “*turning out to not like my major*” once he enrolls in more major specific courses. By the end of their sophomore year students should feel they have made the right choice in their major (Milson & Coughlin, 2015), this indicates that Student 4 may be struggling with components of the “Sophomore Slump” if he is doubting or questioning his major choice. Positive interactions within their chosen major, feeling confident of major choice, and feeling confident in their ability to succeed in their major can help with dissatisfaction during the sophomore year and feelings of uncertainty, aspects of the “Sophomore Slump.”

Making Connections

Satisfaction with their major, for students interviewed, revolved around the connections they made with their faculty and peers. These findings are consistent with the literature where peer connections, a sense of belonging, and developing relationships with faculty lead to student success in the sophomore year (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). The students interviewed expressed their desire to connect with faculty in their major because they were more invested in those courses rather than the general education courses which had made up the majority of courses to that point. The literature identifies faculty as key persons for

students to connect with as a resource in order to maintain commitment to the major, especially for first-generation students (Hudley, 2015 and Milson & Coughlin, 2015).

Networking is a component of cultural capital which first-generation students lack (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Students interviewed saw the importance of networking but had to overcome their lack of knowledge and skills to execute it. While they struggled to connect with faculty they were all successful in connecting with peers, suggesting the need for greater outreach from faculty. From the survey the *Peer Connections* factor did not yield statistically significant results between first-generation and continuing-generation students, however their reported means ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.48$ for first-generation and $M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.50$ for continuing-generation) display they are forming connections with their peers, however what is lacking is the narrative of how that experience has occurred. Students often develop their peer networks by becoming involved in major specific clubs, service learning, and study groups with peers in their major (Lenz, 2014). From the survey the *Social Integration* factor yields similar means to *Peer Connections* ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.52$ for first-generation and $M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.43$ for continuing-generation). Peer connections and social integration were influential to students feeling like they could succeed which is consistent with sense of belonging literature citing the need to connect with peers to aid in navigating the unknown and increasing self-efficacy and autonomy (Hertel, 2010; Lenz, 2014; Wang, 2012). Additionally, Milson and Coughlin (2015) highlight the importance of peer connection within the major to promote student success. Thus it can be concluded that students are

encountering positive interactions on-campus, which are likely aiding in navigating aspects of the “Sophomore Slump.” As students inevitably begin to struggle in their major courses, connecting with other students provides first-generation students with a way to access cultural capital and promotes student success.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the findings from both interviews and surveys along themes associated with the sophomore year as well as components of the “Sophomore Slump”: dissatisfaction with college, development of autonomy and self-efficacy, achieving competence, major involvement, and making connections. Reviewing these themes serves to paint a more in-depth view of the experiences of students during the sophomore year and experiences with the “Sophomore Slump.” The following chapter will provide a conclusion of the thesis and list recommendations.

Conclusion

This study reviewed the experiences of first-generation and continuing-generation sophomore students in relation to the “Sophomore Slump.” The literature demonstrates that the sophomore year is often the forgotten year in college. Many institutions, including the institution in this study, lack sophomore specific programming to combat the challenges associated with the “Sophomore Slump.” An important component of the current study was to break out the data by students who are first-generation and continuing-generation to determine differences among the populations and the areas for continued support.

The sophomore year is marked by increased academic rigor and literature suggests first-generation students lack the skills to and knowledge to reach that expected academic success in sophomore year (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Murphy & Hicks, 2006; Willcoxson et al., 2011). The factors yielding statistically significant differences among first-generation and continuing-generation sophomore students revolve around the academic themes: *Self-Discipline*, *Academic Self-Efficacy*, *Academic Integration*, and *Advanced Study Skills*. These findings suggest first-generation sophomore students would benefit from programs geared toward developing their academic skills and promoting their academic success.

During the interviews students were asked “what would you have liked to see during your sophomore year to improve your experience?” The responses provide rich suggestions to aid sophomore student success. Recommendations based on interviews

include: more opportunities to connect with faculty, information on research and internship positions, a how-to guide for the sophomore year, more information on graduate school or entering the workforce after undergrad, opportunities to connect with graduate students, and assistance on major declaration. These suggestions from the interview participants complement the areas of statistical significance between first-generation and continuing-generation students.

This study explored the difference in experiences for first-generation and continuing-generation students and identified the areas where support for first-generation students could be further developed. Support necessary to the success of first-generation sophomore students centers around combatting the experiences of the “Sophomore Slump” and providing students the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their academic goals.

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Appendix

Interview Consent Form

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Sarah J. Bacio (Sarah.Bacio@humboldt.edu) from Humboldt State University (HSU). I understand the project is designed to gather information about experiences of sophomore students enrolled at HSU. The information I share will be used to help improve the sophomore experience for future students. All information will be confidential and pseudonyms will be used to ensure that comments are not linked back to me personally. No significant risks are associated with sharing my experiences as a sophomore at HSU.

By agreeing to participate in the research I agree to the following:

1. My participation is voluntary and I understand that I can decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, at no risk.
2. Participating in this research does not help nor hinder my academic standing at HSU, nor will my faculty or administrators be informed of my participation in the research.
3. I understand that I am sharing my experiences with Sarah J. Bacio in her capacity as a graduate student and this study is in no way affiliated with RAMP.
4. Participation involves being interviewed for approximately thirty minutes to an hour. Notes will be taken during the interview as well as an audio recording. We will meet at campus location of your choice.
5. I understand that the researcher will use a pseudonym in any reports used. All transcripts, notes, and audio recording will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible to the researcher. This information will be destroyed upon the publication of my thesis.
6. If I agree, I understand that direct quotes will only be used with a pseudonym and any quotes used will not be able to be linked back to me.
7. I understand this research study has been approved by HSU's Institutional Review Board and any questions can be directed to me or my advisor Eric Van Duzer (707) 826-3726. If I have any concerns with this study, I can contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545. If I have questions about my rights as a participant, I can report them to the Humboldt State University Interim Dean of Research, Mr. Steve Karp, at karp@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4190.
8. I have read and understand the above consent form and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Please indicate whether you consent to the researcher quoting any portion of your interview in her thesis report.

_____ I approve the use of quotes from my interview, as long as pseudonyms are used.

_____ I do not wish to be quoted from my interview

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name

Researcher Signature

Interview Protocol:

Introduction:

I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me and share your experiences as a sophomore student here at HSU.

Again I am here talking to you in my capacity as a graduate student in the Master's of Education program not affiliated with RAMP.

Your voice is very important to this research and will provide a great deal of insight into what it's like to be a second-year student and could shape future support and opportunities provided to sophomore students.

My thesis project is focused on the sophomore year experience; successes and challenges faced during the sophomore year.

It is my hope at the conclusion of my thesis project that I will be able to have a comprehensive summary of the sophomore year experience and that my project will be able to paint a picture of the sophomore year experience at HSU to better inform the university and provide opportunities for future growth.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask you today. I am only looking for you to share your experiences, opinions, and beliefs on a variety of topics relating to the sophomore year of college.

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. If this is okay with you please sign the release form. So you are aware, only researchers (myself and my faculty advisor on the project) will be privy to the tapes, which will be destroyed after they are transcribed, and at the conclusion of the thesis project.

Additionally, you must sign a form devised to meet our IRB requirements.

Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.

provide copy of informed consent form to review

Do you have any questions regarding the form? If you are comfortable with this then we can move forward.

get signature of informed consent and collect document

Thank you for your agreeing to participate. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour.

During this time, I have several questions to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. If at any time you need clarification please feel free to ask questions.

A: Interviewee Background

1. To get started let's do some introductory questions.
2. What is your declared major and how did you decide on said major?
3. How many semesters have you been at HSU?
4. Are you a first-generation college student, meaning did either of your parents obtain a 4-year degree?

B: Academic Achievement

1. Tell me what it is like being a sophomore student here?
2. How is it (being a sophomore student) different from your freshmen year experience?
3. What has been the most difficult part of your sophomore year? Were those the same as the freshman year? How were they different? Can you give me an example?
 - a. Can you expand on that?
 - b. Are there other difficulties that arose?
 - c. How did you manage those difficult aspects?
4. Describe a challenging experience you encountered in your sophomore year that you did not encounter in your freshmen year.

5. What did you learn as a freshman that helps you avoid problems and be more successful this year?

C: Major Involvement

1. Tell me about your experiences in your major courses?
 - a. Can you give me an example of what you liked or disliked?
2. How are they different from the GE courses you have taken?
3. As a student in ____ (major) _____ what kinds of things are you looking forward to doing before graduation?

D: Faculty/Staff interactions

1. What kind of relationships do you have with faculty in your program?
2. Have you had any memorable experiences with faculty?
3. Does that relationship differ from your relationship with your advisor?

E: Goals

1. What did you think college would be like when you are in your senior year of High School? How far off were you?
2. What were the most difficult aspects transitioning to college?
3. Now that you are a sophomore with at least two semesters already behind you how would you describe yourself as a college student?
 - a. How has that view changed since freshmen year?
 - b. How do you see that image changing, if at all next year?

G: Social Interactions/Sense of Belonging

1. Who do you feel provided you the most support during your sophomore year? Probing questions:
 - a. Can you tell me more about how they supported you?
 - b. Are there other things they did that were supportive?
 - c. Can you elaborate on how it felt to have _____ be a support network for you?
2. What are the best aspects of your sophomore year?
 - a. Can you talk me through why _____ was so enjoyable?
3. What about HSU or your experiences keeps your coming back each year?