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This chapter defines thriving as a holistic definition of student success that forms the desired outcome of the sophomore year, highlighting the pathways that contribute to thriving and how those differ among students of color.

Thriving in the Second Year of College: Pathways to Success

Laurie A. Schreiner

The second year of college represents an important transition for college students; they have survived the first year of college, successfully navigating an unfamiliar landscape of academic and relational challenges that bear little resemblance to their high-school experience. Bolstered by this initial success, students enter their second year with confidence they will be able to succeed another year using many of the same strategies that worked for them as first-year students. They also expect the same campus support as they continue their collegiate journey; thus, when the institution turns its attention to the needs of the incoming cohort of first-year students, sophomores are surprised and often feel abandoned. Somewhat like middle children, the response of one student in a focus group sums up the collective perception of students in their second year: "we're not the youngest anymore, but we aren't getting out anytime soon, either!" (Schreiner & Young, 2017).

Although the "sophomore slump" was a term first coined in 1956 (Freedman, 1956), national data on sophomore satisfaction were not published until 2000 (Juillerat, 2000), with regular data collection on the sophomore experience occurring only since 2007 (Schreiner, 2010a; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007; Young, Schreiner, & McIntosh, 2015). Since 2010, data collected through the Sophomore Experiences Survey (Schreiner, 2015) have demonstrated a steady increase in the percentage of sophomores who are struggling with aspects of the second-year experience, with one-third of respondents in 2017 reporting that they are "barely surviving" this important transition year (Schreiner & Young, 2017).

In this chapter, the contours of the sophomore experience will be outlined, with a particular emphasis on the campus experiences that contribute significantly to the variation in whether students thrive or not during this

key transitional year. Thriving is defined as being intellectually, socially, and psychologically engaged in the college experience (Schreiner, 2010b)—a goal that leads to persistence, but is more holistic and far-reaching than whether the student survives to cross the stage at graduation. This chapter will describe the "pathways" to thriving in the sophomore year—those aspects of students' second-year campus experience that explain most of the variation in their levels of thriving. The ways in which the pathways to thriving differ among students of color will also be highlighted to enable institutions to map a successful experience for all sophomores.

The Sophomore Transition

The designation of "sophomore" is more challenging to define than first-time first-year student, as registrars' offices may determine sophomore status by the number of credit hours accumulated, but other campus offices—and students themselves—may define sophomore in terms of the second year of college. When creating programs and services to help students transition successfully through the sophomore experience, the most important aspects of the experience have little to do with credit hour accumulation. Rather than attaining a certain number of credits—which a talented dual-enrolled high-school student could accomplish before ever entering college—the sophomore year is best conceptualized as the second year of college because of the transitions involved. However, the broadest definition that incorporates both credits and time spent in college allows students to self-select into sophomore-year programs and services, which enables their needs to be met.

Transitions are periods of time that require significant change as a person moves out of one role, routine, or relationship and into another (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). The second year involves academic transitions, as students solidify their major and move into courses within that major—courses that are often intentionally designed to distinguish between those students who are well prepared to continue in the major and those who will be gently advised to select another major. Issues of meaning and purpose take center stage during this time, particularly among students who have yet to find something that interests them or have too many interests and are not yet ready to narrow them into one major. For about 20% of sophomores, the academic transition includes recapturing momentum they lost in their first year, as these students enter their second year having made insufficient academic progress toward graduation (Adelman, 2006). Because the issue of academic momentum is so crucial to timely completion of a degree, the "second year may be even more important than the first" (p. 53).

Relational transitions also occur during the second year in ways that are different from the first year. Students often transition into new types of relationships during the second year, as they form friendships with

classmates in their major or become more selectively involved in campus organizations and activities. The most significant relational changes in the college years tend to occur during the sophomore year; there is invariably a shift in one's friendships as one confirms a chosen major that is the right fit or as one changes living arrangements, both of which frequently happen in the second year of college (Schaller, 2010b).

Finally, developmental transitions occur in the second year, primarily around issues of purpose and identity. Among traditional-aged sophomores, the random exploration of the first year of college typically evolves into a more focused exploration of their options (Schaller, 2010a), but has not culminated yet in self-efficacy about the career decision-making process or about whether the major is a good fit for them. For example, in the latest data collected on sophomores (Schreiner & Young, 2017), 21% of students at the end of their second year of college still were unsure of their major.

Developmental transitions may also involve issues of identity, as "who am I?" appears to be a "clear task for the sophomore year" (Schaller, 2010a, p. 73). These identity issues may be related to shifts in self-concept that occur as plans and dreams change, but they also occur among students whose cultural or sexual identity develops within the context of a college environment that is dominantly white and heteronormative. For LGBTQ students of color who are balancing multiple social identities, they may experience a lack of acceptance across multiple contexts (Schueler, Hoffman, & Peterson, 2009). Acknowledging the struggle to develop an authentic sense of self and creating safe spaces for this developmental transition can provide students with the support they need.

Barriers to Success

In the research that has been conducted on sophomores since 2000 (Juillerat, 2000; Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Keup, Gahagan, & Goodwin, 2010; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000; Schreiner, Slavin Miller, Pullins, & Seppelt, 2012; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007; Young et al., 2015), several barriers to success in the second year of college have consistently been noted. Some of these barriers are internal and individual, such as (a) academic struggles, (b) lack of academic motivation, (c) identity confusion, (d) major and career indecision, and (e) difficulty selecting meaningful campus engagement that connects to their interests. Others, however, are external and institutional: (a) the campus run-around and a lack of attention to service excellence that particularly impacts sophomores; (b) difficulty connecting to faculty in meaningful ways; (c) inadequate academic advising to address meaning and purpose, which is the major developmental issue of the sophomore year; (d) campus systems and policies that hinder thriving among marginalized students, as well as among sophomores in general; and (e) the removal of almost all forms of campus support from the first year. Regardless of whether the barrier is individual or institutional, colleges and universities

that systematically address these barriers will be better equipped to help their sophomores succeed.

Thriving in the Sophomore Year

Addressing these barriers to success begins by defining success in the first place. Rather than define sophomore success solely in terms of persistence to the junior year, a more holistic perspective of success provides greater opportunities for all students to succeed. *Thriving* is an expanded definition of student success, as it represents optimal functioning in three key areas that contribute to student success and persistence: academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. Thriving students are engaged in the learning process, invest effort to reach important educational goals, manage their time and commitments effectively, connect in healthy ways to other people, are optimistic about their future and positive about their present choices, are appreciative of differences in others, and are committed to enriching their community (Schreiner, 2010b). Thriving students are functioning at optimal levels and are getting the most out of their college experience because they are *psychologically engaged* as well as engaged in educationally productive behaviors.

With this definition of student success in mind, thriving then becomes the desired outcome of the sophomore-year experience. Sophomores who are thriving are investing effort in their academic work and in the process of selecting a major that interests them and brings out their best. They experience a sense of meaning and purpose to their lives that provides direction as they engage in their classes, become involved in campus and community life, form healthy relationships, and make a difference in the world around them. This vision of a thriving sophomore then informs all programs and services that are designed to meet sophomores' needs; every aspect of the second-year experience is thus evaluated through that lens.

Assessing the outcomes of the sophomore year is an important institutional and research undertaking. The Sophomore Experiences Survey is a highly reliable and valid online instrument that has been used since 2007 to collect data directly from students in the spring semester of their second year. Available at no cost from The Thriving Project at Azusa Pacific University (www.ThrivingInCollege.org), the instrument assesses sophomores' levels of thriving, their satisfaction with and level of participation in a wide variety of campus experiences in their second year, their perceptions of institutional integrity, their sense of community on campus, their involvement with faculty, their levels of spirituality, and various outcomes such as intent to graduate, perception of tuition as a worthwhile investment, overall satisfaction with the college experience, and whether they would choose the institution again, if given the choice. Students also have the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback about what has affected their thriving and what they would change about their sophomore year. Comparison to

national norms is provided to institutions, along with the verbatim student comments. At the heart of the instrument is the Thriving Quotient, a 24-item reliable and valid measure of psychosocial well-being that includes five factors: (1) Engaged Learning, (2) Academic Determination, (3) Social Connectedness, (4) Diverse Citizenship, and (5) Positive Perspective (Schreiner, 2010b).

Pathways to Thriving

Analysis of the data collected through the Sophomore Experiences Survey over the last decade has indicated that there are several consistently significant pathways to thriving in the second year of college, but that these pathways differ for students of color. Some pathways disappear altogether for certain racial groups, while other pathways become even stronger contributors to thriving than they are for White students. Each of the major pathways is explored below, with an emphasis on the ways in which they differ for students of color on dominantly white campuses.

Major Certainty.   Particularly in the sophomore year, students who are sure of their major are significantly more likely to thrive than those who are still struggling to find a major that is a good fit for them. Selecting the right major connects students to faculty in more meaningful ways, but also introduces them to a new group of friends with whom they are likely to have more in common. Yet sophomores report intensifying pressure about choosing an academic major that will ultimately lead to a fulfilling career (Gore & Hunter, 2010). Those who have not yet connected with a major may grapple with identifying and clarifying their sense of purpose and identity (Schaller, 2010a). For second-year students who have chosen a major, that decision may be revisited and questioned when they experience academic challenges in major courses or find that the courses are not what they expected (Gansemer-Topf, Stern, & Benjamin, 2007). Major certainty is a significant pathway to thriving primarily among White and Latino/a sophomores; it is not a significant pathway to thriving among African-American and Asian-American students in the second year (Young et al., 2015).

Campus Involvement.   Among sophomores, being involved in campus activities and organizations is predictive of thriving levels mostly for White students. Its benefits for students of color are less clear. In previous studies, campus involvement had little effect on thriving among African-American students unless the student was in a leadership role (Young et al., 2015). For Latino/a and Asian-American students, participating in campus events and organizations was not a pathway to thriving at all. There appear to be major hurdles to campus involvement among underrepresented students, with Latino/a students reporting their commuter status as an obstacle to their involvement and African-American students reporting that working off campus interfered with their involvement on campus. Yet in the national samples Latino/a students were the most likely to be commuters,

and African-American students were the most likely to work off campus for 20 hours a week or more (Young et al., 2015). In subsequent focus groups with students, there were clear racial differences in the type of campus activities and organizations that were of interest to students, indicating that campus involvement is not likely to lead to thriving unless those experiences are designed with the needs of diverse students in mind and with their input into the planning process.

Student–Faculty Interaction.   There are few campus experiences that are more powerful contributors to thriving than positive interactions with faculty. A vast amount of research in higher education has confirmed that rewarding relationships with faculty in and out of the classroom are associated with greater learning gains, higher levels of academic performance, better communication and critical thinking skills, and greater academic confidence, as well as personal and social development (Kim & Sax, 2017). Among sophomores specifically, the quality and frequency of their interaction with faculty was the only specific campus experience that significantly predicted not only their thriving levels, but every other positive outcome in the 2015 national study of sophomore experiences (Young et al., 2015).

However, the benefits of interacting with faculty differ for students of color. For example, in Young et al.'s (2015) examination of the Sophomore Experiences Survey results, African-American students reported interacting with faculty more than any other racial group, yet benefited the least from that interaction; their interactions were least likely to be positive or rewarding. However, when they experienced positive interactions with faculty, that experience contributed more to their ability to thrive than was evident in any other racial group. Asian students interacted the least with faculty, yet tended to benefit most when the interactions were directly connected to their major. Latino/a students also reported little interaction with faculty, but tended to benefit when the interactions focused on their personal development or when faculty expressed a personal interest in them (Young et al., 2015).

Spirituality.   Spirituality is a significant pathway to thriving in the sophomore year because of its connection to meaning and purpose, yet the pathway is twice as strong a predictor of thriving in the second year for underrepresented students as for White students (Young et al., 2015). These effects are most pronounced among African-American students, for whom spirituality is the major predictor of their thriving. In the Sophomore Experiences Survey, the Spirituality scale assesses the extent to which students' spiritual or religious beliefs provide them with a sense of purpose and function as their foundation for life and for coping with difficult situations. For students of color, and African-American students in particular, spiritual or religious beliefs seem to serve as an anchor and source of support that enables them to navigate the second year successfully.

Spirituality thus represents an overlooked pathway to thriving, as many campuses provide few resources for spiritual development and often do not see such development as part of their mission to educate the whole student. Even on faith-based campuses, the role that spirituality plays in thriving—and the ways in which spirituality is embodied differently across racial communities and contexts—is under-utilized as a pathway to success in the second year. When it represents the dominant source of support for African-American student thriving, institutions cannot afford to continue to ignore this pathway.

Institutional Integrity.   Institutional integrity, a concept that originated with Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004), represents students' perceptions that an institution is delivering on its implicit and explicit promises. In the Sophomore Experiences Survey, three items comprise this scale: (a) my expectations have been met or exceeded so far by my experiences on this campus; (b) this institution was accurately portrayed in the admissions process; and (c) the actions of faculty, staff, and administrators are congruent with the stated mission of the institution. Our research has found that students' perceptions of institutional integrity are strongly predictive of their sense of community on campus and thus contribute significantly to their levels of thriving (Young et al., 2015).

Admissions brochures, university websites, and campus tours all communicate both implicit and explicit promises about what the campus experience will be like for students. Once students arrive on campus, they may experience disappointment or even a sense of betrayal if they discover that their actual experience is not what they were led to believe it would be. Students of color who perceive little compositional diversity on campus when they arrive, or who experience discrimination or a negative racial climate, are thus likely to have negative perceptions of institutional integrity that impact their levels of thriving (Ash & Schreiner, 2016).

These initial disappointments are experienced upon arrival in the first year. What changes in the sophomore year is that expectations have continued to be communicated throughout the first year, and these expectations shape how sophomores interpret their second-year experiences. Our research has found that particularly with first-generation or low-income sophomores, expectations about financial aid were not congruent with their actual experiences in the second year (Schreiner & Young, 2017). Sophomores also have increased expectations about the level of service and support the institution should provide, as Nelson (this volume) further elaborates in her chapter. Ash and Schreiner (2016) noted, "When institutional integrity is compromised, students are not likely to feel they are part of the campus community or that the institution is a good fit for them; ultimately, their ability to thrive and their desire to graduate from that institution will be compromised, as well" (p. 49).

Sense of Community on Campus.   For most sophomores, their sense of community on campus is the major pathway to thriving. Although

spirituality is the strongest pathway to thriving for African-American students, sense of community is the second strongest pathway; for all other students, it is the dominant pathway to thriving (Young et al., 2015). A sense of community has four elements: (a) *membership*, or a sense of belonging on campus; (b) *ownership*, or a sense of voice and contribution on campus; (c) *relationship*, or positive emotional connections to others on campus; and (d) *partnership*, or working interdependently with others toward mutually desired goals (Schreiner, 2013). Students who report a strong sense of community on campus feel they are part of a stable and dependable network of people who care about them, are committed to their growth and well-being, and are able to meet their needs (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1995).

White students are significantly more likely to report a strong sense of community on campus than are students of color; the lowest scores on sense of community are reported by Asian students (Young et al., 2015). Despite these differences, when students do experience a sense of community on campus, they are highly likely to thrive. Thus, it is incumbent upon institutional leaders to create a campus climate that enhances a sense of community among all students.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Given these five demonstrated pathways to thriving in the sophomore year and the ways in which they differ for students of color in particular, there are three recommendations for policy and practice that would enable institutions to effectively address the major challenges and opportunities of their second-year students. Each of these recommendations is elaborated upon in subsequent chapters of this volume.

1. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the second-year experience on your campus and use the results to inform decision-making. Most institutional leaders are unaware of the issues that are of greatest concern to sophomores. Few nationally-normed instruments collect data from students during their second year, focusing instead on first-year and senior students. A comprehensive audit of the sophomore year would begin by convening a sophomore advisory group comprised of second-year students, faculty, student life staff, and staff from the major transactional offices that serve sophomores. This group would determine the appropriate outcomes desired for the sophomore year and would coordinate the assessment process.

A comprehensive audit typically consists of the following steps: (a) collecting survey data from all sophomores on campus that could be compared to national norms and disaggregated by race, gender, resident/commuter status, and other demographic characteristics; (b) conducting focus groups of sophomores from specific sub-populations that may be of most concern, to better understand the results of the survey data and to identify additional needs; (c) examining every campus policy through the lens of second-year

students, with a particular emphasis on first-generation and low-income sophomores' perceptions; (d) auditing the general education curriculum and the curricula of each major on campus to identify the percentage of adjuncts, proportion of D, F, or W grades, class size, and average course evaluation of instructors of second-year courses; (e) auditing campus organizations, activities, and events from the perspective of their appeal to the diverse range of sophomores on campus; and (f) creating a matrix of all campus programs and services that are available to sophomores, with an emphasis on those that target sophomores in particular. This comprehensive audit is likely to raise issues related to many of the pathways to thriving, but most notably institutional integrity, student–faculty interaction, and campus involvement. Armed with the assessment results, the advisory group would use those results to inform their recommendations for changes that would most benefit sophomores, with a particular eye toward sophomores on the margins of campus.

2. Target academic advising as an area with the most potential to help sophomores succeed.   In the two decades of data collected nationally on sophomores, the campus experience with which sophomores are least satisfied is advising (Juillerat, 2000; Schreiner, 2010a; Schreiner et al., 2012; Young et al., 2015). Yet advising is the one campus service that is already part of every university's infrastructure and budget; the changes that are needed typically are in training and personnel rather than in costly new programming. Too often, the quality of advising delivered in the sophomore year is uneven, and the personnel who are in the advising role are not trained to address the developmental issues of sophomores. When advising is defined solely as course registration, does not connect to career planning or life goals, or does not address issues of meaning and purpose, an opportunity to impact sophomore success is missed.

Academic advising may well be one of the best vehicles for enhancing thriving in the second year because it offers the opportunity for every sophomore to have an ongoing one-on-one relationship with a faculty or staff member who knows the student well, knows the institution, and can assist in planning for the future as well as addressing current concerns. Improving the academic advising experience addresses the major developmental needs of sophomores by focusing on meaning and purpose; it also provides an ongoing relationship that supports the student and helps the student make decisions about meaningful involvement on campus, engagement in classes, and career planning. Appropriately delivered, academic advising can support most of the pathways to thriving by providing the opportunity for ongoing dialogue about spirituality, meaning and purpose, perceptions of the institution, ways of becoming involved on campus, motivation to engage in classes and connect to faculty, and strategies for becoming increasingly connected to the campus community.

The changes that are most often needed in advising are training advisors adequately and providing sufficient time for advisors to interact

effectively with students. Training advisors or success coaches in a strengths-based approach that focuses on identifying students' assets, setting realistic goals, and helping students envision their future will best equip them to provide sophomores with the assistance they need (Schreiner et al., 2012). Reorganizing advising loads and staffing to provide advisors with the time needed with students will pay dividends in student success. As sophomores dialogue with advisors about the type of person they desire to become as a result of their college experience, and see how their strengths are pathways toward becoming that person, they will be motivated to engage in the behaviors necessary to succeed. Based on surveys conducted by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2011), the average advising load is twenty-five advisees per full-time faculty member or 300 advisees per full-time professional advisor. When advising is not restricted to course registration weeks but occurs throughout the year as an ongoing relationship, a reasonable caseload enables this important task to be accomplished successfully.

3. Intentionally design the sophomore year around high-impact practices that connect students to faculty in meaningful ways.   There is significant evidence that connecting sophomores to faculty through educationally purposeful activities is likely to result in greater sophomore success (Schreiner et al., 2012; Young et al., 2015). High-impact practices are active learning experiences that research has consistently connected to student persistence and learning gains (Kuh, 2008). Examples include service learning, learning communities, diversity and global learning, internships, writing-intensive courses, and research partnerships with faculty. What they all have in common is they "demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback" (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018, paragraph 1). Yet the sophomore year is when such high-impact practices are least likely to occur (Schreiner & Young, 2017).

Intentionally designing the sophomore year so that every student has the opportunity to participate in at least one high-impact practice each term would enable students to connect to faculty in ways that often are not possible in the typical sophomore curriculum. Schaller's chapter in this volume provides several specific suggestions for intentionally designing the sophomore year. In addition to her suggestions, my recommendation is to focus on high-impact practices that are the best fit for your campus' mission, ethos, student needs, and faculty expertise. For some institutions, student–faculty research partnerships in the sophomore year are the best fit because of the research interests of the faculty and graduate school aspirations of the students. For other institutions, designing study abroad for all sophomores fits their global citizenship mission. For still others, redesigning the sophomore curriculum to emphasize common intellectual experiences, service

learning, and writing across the curriculum fits their liberal arts emphasis. Rather than one approach fitting all institutions, the recommendation is to customize a sophomore intellectual experience around several high-impact practices that foster engagement with faculty in a way that fits the institutional mission and ethos.

Conclusion

Research on the sophomore year is significantly mature to provide institutional leaders with evidence of both the challenges and opportunities that occur during this pivotal year. By focusing clearly on the pathways to thriving in the second year, institutions can assess their sophomores' needs and attend to those most overlooked on campus, provide ongoing individual support through an already-existing advising infrastructure, and intentionally design active learning experiences that will help every sophomore connect to the campus community and persist.

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