

Recently the Center hosted a teleconference entitled, *The Forgotten Student: Understanding and Supporting Sophomores* with Marcia Baxter Magolda, Rajesh Bellani, and Edward Chan as our expert panelists. There were a number of questions we were unable to get to during the teleconference. The panelists address those questions below<sup>1</sup>.

1. Can you share how intercultural/multicultural considerations are implemented in an appropriate manner for sophomore students?

Although neither of these references address sophomores specifically, they do address how to work with all students to increase multicultural sensitivity:

Ortiz, A. M., & Rhoads, R. A. (2000). Deconstructing whiteness as part of a multicultural educational framework: From theory to practice. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(1), 81-93.

Zuniga, X. (2003). Bridging Differences through Dialogue. *About Campus*, 7(6), 8-16.

One consideration would be the type of curriculum in place at your institution. The sophomore year might indeed be an appropriate time to explore issues of diversity, especially if it is a concentrated effort across the institution, such that the sophomore year becomes the year to engage with multiculturalism. This engagement could be built into the curriculum through a required sophomore course or even a Gen Ed course that typically occurs in the sophomore year. At KSU, the Gen Ed course World Literature has the two semesters of first-year composition as prerequisites, so that students are usually at least sophomores by the time they take the course. Having taught the course, I've found that students seem more open to exploring issues of diversity (at least compared to my first-year composition courses) and my guess is that this may be in part because they are no longer dealing with first-year transition issues. Of course, this is strictly anecdotal.

2. How might the challenges for sophomores differ at an urban campus vs. a traditional or residential campus? How can we better address this?

Kennesaw State (KSU) isn't quite an urban campus, but is often considered "metropolitan"—many students come from the metropolitan Atlanta area or have connections to it through work and lifestyle. Most KSU students commute, are often of non-traditional age, and very often work at least 20 hours a week. These factors put substantial constraints on any sophomore programming that requires extracurricular activities. This is precisely why I've pursued programs that do not require extensive time outside the classroom, such as learning communities and mentoring programs that are flexible enough to work with students' schedules. Nevertheless, the reality is that intervening in the educational/social development of sophomores will require time

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<sup>1</sup> We have removed the name and institution of the individual(s) who posed the question to respect their privacy.

commitment by sophomores (and others). Some form of compensation also becomes an issue.

3. Can you comment on the difference between sophomores who live on campus versus those who live off campus?

In terms of programming, please see response to question #2 above. At KSU, I've found that it's very difficult to encourage participation from commuters (especially since they often have heavy work schedules). In terms of student development, it might be necessary to think of commuters within the context of non-traditional student characteristics.

4. Please describe more explicitly how this concept of self-authorship connects to integrative learning. Are there specific activities that you would describe as good/best practices to help students connect their learning (curricular and co-curricular) and apply what they've learned to real world application. How to help reposition who is in the front of the bike?

The role of self-authorship in integrative learning and best practices are both captured in this book: Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Learning partnerships: Theory & models of practice to educate for self-authorship*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. The first chapter addresses the link between self-authorship and integrative learning and multiple chapters address best practices.

5. What do you do when so many of the majors require decisions in the first year or earlier?

Introductory programs regarding choosing a concentration can happen at any time. The main point that should be emphasized is that one is not locked in a particular concentration and that switching out of a particular area can be done. There might be some challenges in doing so, but they are not insurmountable. Usually there is great pressure in the sciences to declare early. I tell students if they are not sure they need to take some classes and see if it works for them. They can always look at post-baccalaureate programs. The goal is to help students see that they have choices.

This might also be an opportunity to construct programming that helps students become more thoughtful and intentional in the majors they choose. Experiential learning (cooperative education, internships), mentoring, or courses that require career exploration are possibilities. This would need to be considered more deeply, but it may be that the sophomore year is a more appropriate developmental moment to explore career/major implications than the first semester of the first year. Several institutions feature career/major exploration as part of their sophomore programming (e.g., Colorado College's Sophomore Jump).

6. How do we begin to justify costs to develop a sophomore experience? In an age of scarce resources, what are the costs institutionally to not investing in the sophomore-year experience?

Institutions need to look at issues of retention not only from the first year to the second, but the second to the third year as well. Collecting institutional data is helpful in making arguments to sustain new program. As institutions of higher learning, we owe our students the support and effort to ensure a wonderful academic experience. Alumni are another great and free resource that can help in programmatic support for sophomore-year development, especially in the area of career exploration

Certainly, sophomore attrition is part of the “Retention/Progression/Graduation” model (as they call it in the University System of Georgia). Although the numbers may not be as high as during the first year, they are still substantial. Beyond institutional effectiveness, a focus on student success would necessitate resources at all stages of a student’s career, as mentioned above.

7. We at Queens College (NYC) are wondering how to secure the monetary and administrative support for programs and services that are beneficial to sophomores when it is very difficult to secure such support for other programs, including first-year programs?

Start small and work with like-minded people on pilot programs. Use community and alumni resources for initiatives and just brand it as a sophomore-year experience. Also, work on starting a dialogue with colleagues about sophomore development and concerns that you ( and others) see. If enough dialogue is created, upper administrators might start paying attention.

Tying sophomore programming to retention/progression/graduation issues might be useful in justifying funding. A few institutions have received FIPSE grants for sophomore programs. We, administrators, need to be more proactive in going after grants. Also look around to other programs at your institution to see what you can tie into or build off of. I work with the Honors Program and our Senior-Year Experience Seminar at Kennesaw State as a source for students to mentor sophomores; since the students are mentoring for course/program credit, there’s no need to pay them. Also see responses to question #6 above.

8. The students that Student Affairs Officers generally interact with are the involved students and the ones in trouble, and it’s relatively easy to help them out. How do you reach out to the students you don’t necessarily see?

That is the question of the century- There is not a good approach other than asking students for referrals to friends they feel are not engaged. Once you have those names, doing focus groups (with food) can be help with information, but also starts the process of investing the student in the campus community. The idea that someone wants to listen to them might be the first step in getting to those that we normally do not see. In addition, at Colgate we have asked friends to bring their non-engaged friends. This has been a great approach for us.

The sophomore program at Kennesaw State is not in the student affairs sector. I've tried to target students through first-year seminar instructors either while they have them in a class or even afterward (since there's already a connection). Still, it's been difficult to "capture" the attention of sophomores without orientation (as with first-year students) or a common, mandatory advising point. Some form of the latter might be a useful tool in connecting to all types of students.

9. Do you have any proactive strategies for working with "helicopter" parents, so that they can understand and encourage the academic and career exploration that their children are experiencing in the second-year college?

At Colgate we weaved the theme of self-authorship in the publications, keynotes, newsletters, and presentations. During Family Weekend, we have discussions about how parents can best support their children. A technique that has worked well is to remind them of their experiences growing up.

Educating parents about self-authorship and how crucial it is to their students' development might help them join as partners in the educational effort. Karen Coburn has written some on this; one piece in a recent issue of *About Campus*.

10. Regarding Molly Schaller's research, is the "deep reflection" facilitated in ways that are more successful than others-through classes, one-on-one sessions with advisors or counselors, etc.?

It can be successful in all of these contexts. The key issue is engaging students in thinking about big questions – they are more than ready to take these up if it is introduced. Of course, guided experiences such as classes or one-on-one settings help structure the process. However, even putting questions out into the student community could spark reflection. Another option is to train student leaders to engage their peers in pursuing important questions.

11. How would you suggest working with groups of students that are in different places developmentally in their understanding of the learning partnership?

The beauty of the learning partnership is that it adjusts to the students' current development. If multiple developmental levels exist within a group, peers can serve as partners for each other. Use of the learning partnerships model suggests supporting and challenging all students simultaneously and relying on students themselves to do some of that for each other. See the chapters in Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Learning partnerships: Theory & models of practice to educate for self-authorship*. Sterling, VA: Stylus for specific ways various educators have done this.

12. Three groups of students do not necessarily fit the definition of second-year or sophomore students, but they may be subject to the same or similar issues described in the first hour of the conference. Are the concerns of these students unique, or should they be addressed with the same strategies already described?

- A). First-year students who take full advantage of extensive orientation and social/academic bonding in fall semester, but who for some reason must sit out spring semester, only to return in the following fall as second-semester students. These students have missed out on a semester of “seasoning:” which their peers had enjoyed.
- B). First-year students who begin their college education in spring semester, usually not granted the extensive orientation and academic/social bonding which is usually reserved for fall semester.
- C). Transfer students who show up as bona-fide second-year students in fall semester, but who do not have the same social/academic bonding which their peers enjoyed in their first year.

This is a great point and tough issue to respond to. Certainly, a lot of this (re-)integration will depend on your institution’s campus culture. I’ve tried to market sophomore-level learning communities to transfer students as an opportunity to adjust socially at Kennesaw State. Your point also indicates the difficulty with assigning sophomore status purely based on credit hours, and this is probably why we often see “sophomore” and “second-year” used interchangeably. A second-year mentality might be equally important. It seems to me that sophomore programs have to be substantially more flexible when it comes to defining the student population it serves.

13. We are struggling with finding a way to effectively communicate with sophomores. Most have moved off campus and few are in common courses. How can we reach this population particularly if they are not in a major yet?

Is there a sophomore-class council at UCF? Maybe there should be one to help build class community and investment in the college. An Alumni and Development office can be very helpful in this area. The use of newsletters, and electronic communications that have branded SYE ( logo) can help with student communication.

We have had the same struggles at Kennesaw State. It’s even difficult to reach them through e-mail, since students are often all over the place with their addresses. We are starting to implement policies to require students to keep up with their university student e-mail addresses, but this is an ongoing process. I’ve also tried advertising to students in second-semester, first-year courses (e.g., Composition II). We also have a Gen Ed course that, to some degree, works as a sophomore-level course because it requires two semesters of composition as prerequisites. Some institutions have a sophomore orientation or other ceremonial event at the beginning of the second year.

14. We started with the First-Year Experience, then looked at the Senior-Year Experience, then transfers, now sophomores.. By focusing on these individual pieces, are we losing sight of the whole student experience?

Focusing on a particular time frame with particular needs seems reasonable as long as it does not eclipse the whole experience. Perhaps we need to be thinking about how what we do in first-year experience affects what we would do in sophomore, etc. We should be

able to sketch out a developmental curriculum for the four years. See Carolyn Haynes recent article in *About Campus* regarding how they are doing that in an honors program.

This is a great question. I would add on to this that, at least here at Kennesaw State, we have a wide variance in students within even one of these categories. That being said, I think there are discernible common issues for each of these categories. As mentioned above, having all programs in some way reference a common developmental plan or at least build and feed off each other is crucial.

15. In addition to all of these issues...what about students of color (in their learning) on a predominantly white campus? What are some ways to continuously address their challenges to the university, admin, faculty, and staff? (Besides the occasional conference or teleconferences, how do we get the university community to understand better and take a role in addressing these issues and becoming a part of the solution?)

The Learning Partnerships Model aims to create a welcoming environment for all students. By validating students as knowers and situating learning in their experience, students of color are welcomed more so than in traditional approaches. The model can also be used to help white students work with deconstructing whiteness. Helping white students develop a multicultural outlook is the best way I know to change the overall environment to make it “warmer” for students of color. Two resources I find particularly helpful here are:

Ortiz, A. M., & Rhoads, R. A. (2000). Deconstructing whiteness as part of a multicultural educational framework: From theory to practice. *Journal of College Student Development, 41*(1), 81-93.

Hornak, A., & Ortiz, A. M. (2004). Creating a Context to Promote Diversity Education and Self-Authorship among Community College Students. In M. B. Baxter Magolda & P. M. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship* (pp. 91-123). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

This might be an opportunity to develop the sophomore year as, not the only, but a particular time to explore issues of diversity. See response to question #1. Moreover, this is an issue that transcends the sophomore year.

16. How do we help sophomores through the challenges of college, such as failing a test or class, peer pressure experiences. and so on?

Convey to them that this is a “normal” part of life and help them with strategies for working through these situations. What happened? What responsibility did they have? What could they do differently? How important is it? Why is it important? What do they value in this? How do they want to grow from it? What is one strategy for avoiding a repeat performance? Where are the support systems they can access? Working through these kinds of questions can help them process an individual experience and take the process forward into other experiences.

This is a place where targeted sophomore advising or peer mentoring might be particularly beneficial. Of course, the students have to engage in these activities in order to benefit.

17. What suggestions do you have for creating sophomore-learning communities, especially ones that pair core general education classes and a course in students' majors?

We've been experimenting with sophomore-level learning communities at Kennesaw State for a few years now, and, to be honest, it's been difficult. For Education students, we've combined a World Literature Gen Ed course with a sophomore-level introduction to Education. Our program is located within Academic Affairs and that's probably helped forge relationships with various departments in order to use their courses in learning communities (though not always). Relationships are key here and it has been useful to work with a colleague in the Education department who has been willing and motivated to try this type of format. Multiculturalism is a common issue that both courses explore, and we've built assignments from that overlap.

The biggest trouble has been filling the seats in the communities. Unlike with first-year students, where you can use orientation as a way to get students into communities, it's harder to inform sophomores about communities and encourage their participation. Orientations for transfer students have been one opportunity. I've also worked closely with advisors and advising centers. I would suggest starting small—only a few communities with only two courses. You'll definitely want to get them courses at the most popular times with students.

18. How do we help our multicultural student sophomores, who struggle with parents who aren't so much "helicopter," but truly believe that their way is the right way for their students (e.g. Asian parents and students, where hierarchy in families are priority #1)?

Tough question. One thing NOT to do is push autonomy on the part of the student in terms of traditional independence. Judith Jordan's work on mutuality might be useful here – she addresses how people value each other in a relationship but do not sacrifice themselves for the other. One good source is: Jordan, J. V. (2004). Toward competence and connection. In J. V. Jordan, M. Walker & L. M. Hartling (Eds.), *The complexity of connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller training institute* (pp. 11-27). New York: Guilford Press.

19. Could you address the impact on the sophomore student of questioning of spiritual beliefs and the possible loss of family support because of the questioning?

Sharon Parks writes eloquently about the role of doubting in faith development. This approach might help sophomores understand the role of questioning beliefs in a way they could share with their parents. The book is: Parks, S. D. (2000). *Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose, and faith*. San Francisco: CA: Jossey-Bass.

20. How do you get the second-year students to continue the level of first year “excitement” (with the college experience, campus activities, etc.) as they go into the sophomore year?

One approach is by building the sophomore year around their experience. Ask them near the end of the first year what they want to focus on the second year and organize the co-curriculum around that to entice them into it – this validates them as knowers and situates learning in their experience.

It might not be possible to maintain the same level, or at least the same type, of excitement as in the first year, but anything that addresses issues specific to sophomores—i.e., making them feel special—would be useful. I also feel that the sophomore year can be a good time to channel student excitement into academics and their majors.

21. If we institute these second-year programs successfully, one might predict that our indicators (i.e. retention) would say that we now need to have a third-year experience and eventually a fourth year. Are we then turning college into a four-year orientation? Is this appropriate?

What you suggest here seems perfectly reasonable, although not “orientation” per se. The curriculum is built around a 4-year plan that moves from basic to advanced – why not organize the co-curriculum the same way? Meeting the needs of students as they grow more complex requires a different focus over time. If we think about practice as guidance appropriately placed, it becomes much more than orientation to the experience.

22. What are some of the symptoms/consequences of the sophomore slump? Is it low GPA, change in majors, attrition? Do these symptoms change for traditional and nontraditional students?

Molly Schaller’s work is informative here. Her recent *About Campus* article articulates some of the dynamics of the sophomore experience.

Another useful resource is the National Resource Center’s monograph on sophomores - Schreiner, L.A. & Pattengale, J. (\*Eds). (2000). *Visible Solutions for Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed (Monograph No. 31)*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and students in Transition.

It’s likely that a lot of the emotional/developmental issues would be different. Traditionals and non-traditionals might exhibit some of the same academic symptoms; however, they might arise from different sources (family/household, work).

23. How do we help them understand that their experience may be (and probably should be) different? How can you work with student staff members who are experiencing the same sophomore issues as the residents they’re working with?

The learning partnerships model can be used with staff [student and fulltime] as well. See particularly this chapter: Mills, R., & Strong, K. L. (2004). Organizing for learning in a division of student affairs. In M. B. Baxter Magolda & P. M. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educator for self-authorship* (pp. 269-302). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

24. As we talk about the notion of self-authorship, what strategies are available for those of us who work with international student populations who, in many cases, have less flexibility in negotiating or navigating academic exploration?

Self-authorship takes on many forms and it is often confused [in part due to the name] with independence. Self-authorship refers to interdependence – maintaining relationships with close others while forming an internal self. Students can be guided toward self-authorship in the context of their particular experience – family/cultural expectations, realities of international study, etc. While they may have less degrees of freedom to choose among options, they can still process internally what they value and believe and how they will integrate that in their lives.

25. Have any of you explored the role of a learner’s epistemological beliefs (beliefs about the complexity of knowledge, the innate ability of a learner to develop self-regulated learning strategies) and those learner-held beliefs’ influence on a sophomore’s successful transition through this time?

Baxter Magolda’s longitudinal study follows students through college based on the evolution of their epistemological beliefs. Others are doing work in the area as well, although not specifically focused on sophomores. See the May/June 2006 issue of *Change* magazine for an article on intellectual development in the college years – it is a resource review that contains most of the contemporary resources on this topic.

26. How do cultural identity issues play out with other developmental issues affecting the sophomore year? What effect do cultural, ethnic issues have on the sophomore slump? In this regard, what interventions might help students of color ease the “sophomore slump” at least from a cultural perspective if not from an academic one?

I would hope to see research on this question emerge as sophomores become a scholarship focus (sounds like a great question for a dissertation!).

27. Please describe the concept of self-authorship and how it connects to integrative learning?

The best resource for a thorough discussion of this is:  
Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2004). Self-authorship as the common goal of 21st century education. In M. B. Baxter Magolda & P. M. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship* (pp. 1-35). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

28. Characteristics of the Millennial Generation and challenges facing sophomores have been discussed in a broad sense. Had the panel seen differences in experiences or characteristics for specific populations such as underrepresented ethnic minority students or first generation students?

As with question #26 above, this is an area that needs to be explored.

29. On creating support groups for sophomores, what are your views on creating specialized groups that target a specific identity (such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation). Is there a need to create such specialized groups?

Students whose identities are marginalized need all the support they can get! These groups would be a way to provide “safe haven” for exploration of these identity issues.

30. After spending their whole first college year learning independence and self-reliance, do you see second years “running back” to their helicopter parents when their first-year systems are gone?

The sophomore year experience should continue with the theme of self-reliance by also adding in the concept of self-reflection and defining purpose. Molly Schaller’s work is excellent in this area

It seems to me that another variation on this is students starting to rely more and more heavily on peer opinion (in both good and bad ways). I think both tendencies can be channeled into positive outcomes, while simultaneously stressing the need to gain independence and autonomy (at least for traditionals).

31. How can community college enhance the second-year experience for students given the high number on nontraditional students in a commuter campus setting?

Marcia Roe-Clark’s recent *About Campus* article contains some strategies for this.

I don’t have experience with community colleges; however, I would think that the non-traditional /commuter issues overlap some with what we have at Kennesaw State. Time and motivation to participate in activities outside the program curriculum seem to be the main issues, thus the need to be sensitive to these issues. I would also think that a program would need to be directed to preparing students for transition to a four-year institution (perhaps an opportunity for collaboration) or the workplace (for which, strategies might be borrowed from senior-year programs).

32. Given that a universal trend of higher education is to provide appropriate attention and resources toward first-year students through first-year programming (i.e., seminars and learning communities), how can we become proactive and pre-emptive with sophomore retention efforts by introducing into the mindset of first-year students about the difficulties they may face in their sophomore year without provoking anxiety and concern?

Near the end of the first year, students can be educated about their increasing role in their future experience. Showing them some of the research would help them know that some of the questioning that is to come is normal and expected. Giving them access to strategies to work through these issues and presenting them as normal growth experiences would help ease their anxiety.

We might also consider introducing things like the sophomore inventories like the one developed at Beloit College in first-year seminars as a preview for what's to come.

33. What are some common mistakes Student or Academic Affairs professionals make when trying to provide new or different assistance to sophomores?

Institutions want to start out big and start from scratch. Look at what you are already doing and reshape it to meet second-year needs. Use faculty, students, and alumni as resources. The best approach comes from within your own culture.

Also consider developing concrete learning objectives as you develop a program.

34. How do you balance sophomore's feelings of independence and their need for further aid or support from their institution (aka resistance or attempts to process)?

The learning partnerships model might be useful here – it involves “staying with” a student who is in this awkward place! See: Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2004). Learning Partnerships Model: A framework for promoting self-authorship. In M. B. Baxter Magolda & P. M. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship* (pp. 37-62). Sterling, VA: Stylus.