"The five most commonly ranked initiatives for students in their sophomore-year were: career planning, leadership development, academic advising, class events, and online resources."

2008 National Survey of Sophomore-Year Initiatives

In fall 2008, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition conducted the National Survey of Sophomore-Year Initiatives. The purpose of this survey was to gain a more accurate view of sophomore-year initiatives at four-year institutions.

Chief Student Affairs Officers at colleges and universities were emailed an invitation to participate in the survey. A total of 2,641 institutions were invited to participate in the survey. A total of 315 institutions responded to the survey.

» 2,641 survey invitations distributed
» 315 surveys completed
» 115 institutions reporting at least one sophomore-year initiative

Types of Sophomore-Year Initiatives

The type of sophomore-year initiatives varied among the 115 sophomore-year initiatives reported. The five most commonly ranked initiatives for students in their sophomore-year were: career planning (76.7%), leadership development (58.8%), academic advising (57.4%), class events (50.9%), and online resources (43.2%).

Types of Sophomore Success Initiatives Offered (n=115)

	Percentage
Career planning	76.7
Leadership development	58.8
Academic advising	57.4
Class events	50.9
Online resources	43.2
Peer mentoring by sophomores	38.6
Residence life	38.2
Study abroad	35.7
Community service/service-learning	32.5
Faculty/staff mentors	32.1
Student government	31.8
Print publications	31.0
Undergraduate research	27.0
Cultural enrichment activities	25.0
Retreats	20.4
Opportunities to co-teach or assist in teaching a class	17.1
Financial aid	17.0
Peer mentoring for sophomores	16.7
Curricular learning communities	16.1
Credit-bearing course	14.7
Other	18.1

Purpose and Reason for Sophomore-Year Initiative

When respondents were asked reasons for establishing a sophomore success initiative, the five top reasons listed were: improving retention (65.7%), improving student satisfaction (64.9%), improving student engagement (62.9%), preparing for career (e.g., internships) (49.8%), and assisting in the selection of a major (49.3%).

Reason for Establishing Longstanding Sophomore Success Initiatives (n=205)	Percentage
Improve retention	65.7
Improve student satisfaction	64.9
Improve student engagement	62.9
Career preparation (e.g., internships)	49.8
Assist in selection of major	49.3
Provide opportunities for career exploration	49.0
Develop student-institutional connection	46.8
Develop connection to faculty/staff	44.9
Promote self-awareness	40.0
Provide leadership opportunities	38.0
Develop class cohort/peer relationships	35.6
Provide institutional resources and information	33.2
Provide academic assistance	31.2
Promote critical thinking	29.6
Develop civic responsibility	22.9
Increase exposure to diversity	19.7
Improve oral communication skills	18.5
Response to student interest/request	18.0
Improve written communication skills	17.1
Ease financial burden on students	6.8
Encourage alumni giving	2.9
Other	4.9

Innovative Sophomore Success Initiatives

Respondents were asked to mark which sophomore success initiative was the most innovative program on their campus. The following were listed as the top five: academic advising (14.2%), career planning (13.2%), residence life (13.2%), class events (8.5%), and credit-bearing courses (7.5%).

Institutional Type, Size, & Selectivity

"Five sophomore success initiatives yielded statistically significant findings by institutional affiliation. Public institutions in the sample offered financial aid programs and curricular learning communities more frequently than private colleges and universities. Conversely, private institutions provided sophomores opportunities to co-teach, roles in student government, and class events more often than their public counterparts" (Keup, Gahagan, & Goodwin, 2010, p. 2).

Small institutions more frequently noted offering career planning, community service and service-learning opportunities, and academic advising to sophomores, while large institutions more frequently noted using faculty and staff mentors for sophomores.

"More selective institutions were more likely to provide print publications, class events, online resources, research opportunities, and retreats while less selective colleges and universities hosted cultural enrichment activities and provided financial aid for their sophomores more frequently (Keup, Gahagan, & Goodwin, 2010, p. 2).

"More than 40% of respondents indicated that they did not access longstanding sophomore success initiatives, illustrating a significant area of vulnerability for the sustainability of these programs (Keup, Gahagan, & Goodwin, 2010, p. 3)."

Assessment of Sophomore-Year Initiatives

"More than 40% of respondents indicated that they did not access longstanding sophomore success initiatives, illustrating a significant area of vulnerability for the sustainability of these programs (Keup, Gahagan, & Goodwin, 2010, p. 3).

Method of Assessment for Longstanding Sophomore Success Initiative (n=82)

	Percentage
Survey instrument (e.g., national, local, or course-based)	80.5
Focus groups with students	50.0
Analysis of institutional data (e.g., GPA)	36.6
Individual interviews with students	19.5
Focus groups with instructors/staff	18.3
Individual interviews with instructors/staff	17.1
Other	6.1

Future Plans for Sophomore-Year Initiatives

Over one quarter of institutions without sophomore success initiatives were considering future initiatives. Over 50% of institutions who did not have sophomore success initiatives ranked "lack of funding" as a reason.

Reason for No Sophomore Initiative (n=191)

	Percentage
Lack of funding	53.9
Limited time	38.2
Sophomore issues are not an institutional priority	34.6
Lack of staff/faculty buy-in	27.7
Lack of expertise	18.8
Other	19.9

More information on this survey can be found in Research Reports on College Transitions #1.