



# **Developing a Second-Year Experience Initiative on a Foundation of Theory, Best Practices, Education, and Assessment**

Denise L. Rode, Ed.D.

Director, First- and Second-Year Experience

Northern Illinois University

[drode@niu.edu](mailto:drode@niu.edu)

# Northern Illinois University



- Comprehensive, public, Research I-Extensive institution
- Located in DeKalb, Illinois (65 miles west of Chicago)
- 75-80% of student body comes from metropolitan Chicago
- Majority of students in upper-division are transfer students
- Primarily residential, but also many commuters
- Major programs include College of Business, School of Nursing, health-related majors,
- music, art, engineering, education
- Approximately 2,650 freshmen; sophomore class of approximately 1,800 (but many more fall into 30-59 credit hour category)
- First- to second-year retention rate of approximately 72%; many students in good academic standing leave between second and third years

# Charge to Develop a Pilot Sophomore Year Experience Initiative



- Strategic Planning proposal for an SYE was written in 2008 but was not funded in favor of Foundations of Excellence® initiative
- Came from the Vice President of Student Affairs & Enrollment Management in July 2011
- Two directors were selected to run the pilot—Executive Director of Housing & Dining and Director of Orientation & First-Year Experience
- One “driver” of this initiative was the plan to go to a second-year residency requirement in 2015
- Co-chairs met to constitute committee and develop plan
- Committee composed of professional staff, faculty, and graduate students, met every three weeks
- Sub-committees formed around key events (Sophomore Summit, Benchmarking, Sophomore Survey)

# Starting Points



- Find your natural allies and support from above
- Convene a committee
- Audit of existing programs and services that can be “packaged” and promoted for the SYE
- Do existing groups of primarily second-year students exist? If so, partner with them
- Start with 2-3 “signature” initiatives
- Develop communication pieces

# Starting Points



- Put together a “dog and pony show” to take to campus stakeholders; get on agendas of key committees (Student Affairs Cabinet, Faculty Senate, President’s Cabinet, Supportive Professional Staff Council, Operating Staff Council); ask THEM what they think second-year students need
- Develop a “sounding board” of current sophomores and/or juniors; find out what they need
- Don’t only talk to involved second-year students; find those who aren’t highly engaged and learn what would get them engaged
- Beg, borrow, and (maybe not) steal resources to develop early initiatives
- Get on the SYE-list through the NRC, and learn what colleagues are doing on their campuses

# Educating Ourselves about the Sophomore Year Experience



- Co-chairs of Task Force began to comb the literature about the SYE in 2011-2012
- Used Spring 2013 as a time to educate ourselves on the SYE
  - Academic Impressions online course
  - Summit on Sophomore Success
  - Attend programs on the SYE at regional and national conferences
  - Read print and online articles on this topic of growing interest, but also look into other research which supports student engagement and self-efficacy

# Literature Review



- Hunter, M.S., Tobolowky, B.F., & Gardner, J.N. & Associates (2009). *Helping sophomores succeed: Understanding and Improving the Second-Year Experience*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.
- Juillerat, S. L. (2000). Assessing the expectations and satisfaction of sophomores. In L.A. Schreiner & J. Pattengale (Eds.), *Visible solutions for invisible students: Helping sophomores succeed* (Monograph No. 31, pp. 19-30). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Pattengale, J. (2000). Policies and practices to enhance sophomore success. In L. A. Schreiner & Pattengale (Eds.), *Visible solutions for invisible students: Helping sophomores succeed* (Monograph No. 31, pp. 31-46). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Schaller, M. A. (2005). Wandering and wondering: Traversing the uneven terrain of the second college year. *About Campus*, 10(3), 17-24.
- Tobolowsky, B.F., & Cox, B.E. (2007). *Shedding light on sophomores: An exploration of the Second College Year: An Exploration of the Second College Year*. National Resource Center on the First-Year Experience® & Students in Transition: Columbia, SC.

# Sophomore Summit



- **8:00 a.m. Check-in & Refreshments**
- **8:30 a.m. Welcome & Opening Remarks**  
*Multipurpose Room* Dr. Brian O. Hemphill, Vice President for Student Affairs & Enrollment Management
- **8:45 a.m. Keynote Address**  
*Multipurpose Room* Dr. Molly A. Schaller, Assistant Professor & Coordinator of College Student Personnel Program at the University of Dayton
- **10:00 a.m. Who are NIU Sophomores?**  
*Multipurpose Room* Panel of NIU Experts:  
Dan House, Director of Institutional Research  
Tim Griffin, University Ombudsman  
Michelle Pickett, Director of Academic Advising Center  
Joyce Keller, Associate Director of Career Services  
Brandon Lagana, Director of Mktg. & Info. Res. Mgmt.
- **11:00 a.m. Small Group Conversations**
- **12:00 p.m. Small Group Debriefing**

# Sophomore Summit



- **12:30 p.m. Lunch in the Dining Area**
- **1:15 p.m. Panel of NIU Sophomores**
  - Smart Classroom* Jenna Marchiorello, Major: Operations Mgmt & Info. Systems
  - Daihee Cho, Major: Accountancy
  - Shondell Coleman, Major: Organizational Business Management
  - Sarah Steubing, Major: Biological Sciences
  - Diana Sanderson, Major: Marketing
- **2:00 p.m. Remarks and Activity Session**
  - Smart Classroom* Dr. Tricia Zelaya, Visiting Professor, Counseling, Adult & Higher Education
- **3:00 p.m. Refreshments**
- **3:00 p.m. Small Group Conversations**
- **4:00 p.m. Where do we go from here?**
  - Smart Classroom* Dana Gautcher, Director of Student Academic Success
  - Denise Rode, Director of Orientation & First-Year Experience
  - Mike Stang, Executive Director of Housing & Dining

# Theoretical Foundation

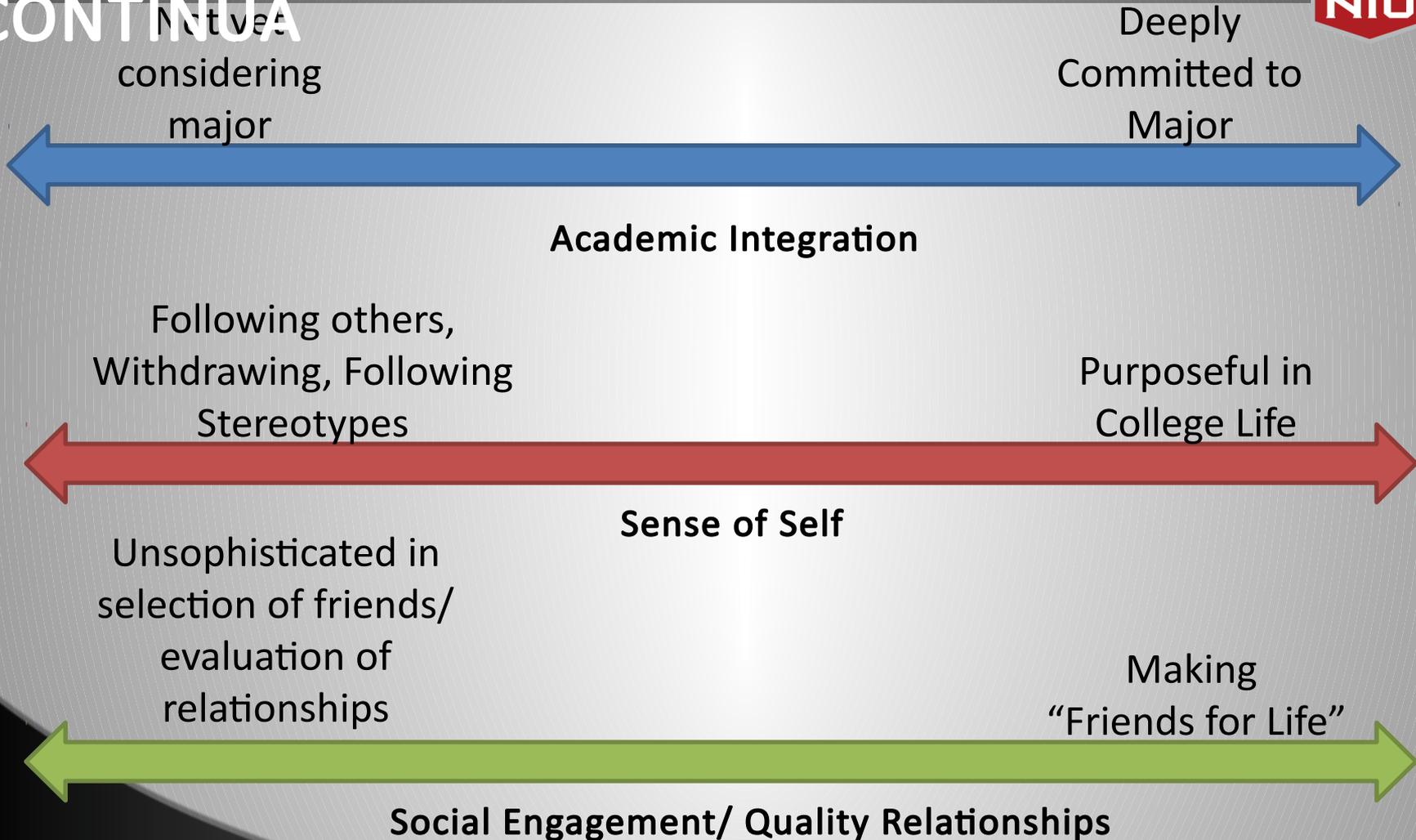


Molly Schaller describes the stages of the sophomore year as:

- Random Exploration
- Focused Exploration
- Tentative Choices
- Commitment



# PROPOSED SOPHOMORE YEAR CONTINUA



# Stages of the Sophomore Year

Schaller (2005)



Stages have *tone* and *content*

Students may experience multiple stages at one time

Major content areas: Relationships, Self, Academics

*Random Exploration*: exuberance, lack reflection

*Focused Exploration*: frustration, reflection begins

*Tentative Choices*: relief, some lingering anxiety –  
action begins

*Commitment*: confidence

# Theoretical Foundation



- Epistemological Development
  - How is it that students *view knowledge*?
  - Key to understanding the pedagogical challenges with sophomore students
  - Includes moral development – as the question of frame of reference is a key to understand the inherent pressures facing students
- Psycho/social development
  - How one sees self in relation to the world or others impacts choices on many levels.

# Assessment



- Sophomore-Year Experience Survey
  - Developed by Laurie Schreiner at Azusa Pacific University
  - Sent by e-mail link to approx. 1,700 second-year students in March
  - Advertised by posters, social media, announcements at student organization meetings
  - 221 student respondents, “survey fatigue”
  - Incentives given

# Assessment



Survey Results showed that NIU second-year students are:

- Hard-working and resourceful but may not always be engaged in their course work
- Somewhat ambivalent about their NIU experience
- Many students indicated a sense of belonging at NIU but others weren't convinced of the value of their education
- Approximately 20% had not yet chosen a major
- About 20% would not be considered as “thriving”

# Focus Groups



- Students gathered from student organizations and second-year leadership positions
- These students were “thriving”
- Efforts should be made for more representative focus groups
- Common concerns were time management, finances, and lack of connection to major
- Changing relationships

# Benchmarking Best Practices



- 34 institutions
- Asked questions about:
  - Programming
  - Mission/philosophy/objectives
  - Structure/support
  - Marketing
  - Assessment
  - Future plans

# Benchmarking Best Practices



- Where housed in the university
  - Academic Advising
  - Residence Life
  - Student Involvement/Activities
  - Career Services
  - Specific Academic Department
  - Student Affairs
  - Free standing unit

# Benchmarking Best Practices



- Oversight
  - Sophomore or Second-Year Office
  - Committee of faculty, staff and students
  - Academic Affairs unit
  - Student Affairs unit
- Marketing
  - Social Media (Facebook, Twitter)
  - Websites
  - Brochures/Mailers
  - Student groups
  - E-mail

# Benchmarking Best Practices



- Program examples
  - Fall kick-off events
  - Retreats and trips
  - Career/Internship workshops and fairs
  - Mentoring programs
  - Study Abroad programs
  - Financial Aid, Scholarships, Campus Employment
  - Service events
  - Recognition events
  - Sophomore seminars

# Issues facing Second Year Students



- Academic majors and academic self-efficacy
- The curriculum and academic progression
- Academic engagement
- Faculty contact
- Student satisfaction
- Social integration and involvement
- Student motivation
- Lifestyle decisions
- Financial issues
- Career Development
- Values
- Relationships
- **Purpose**



**From NIU survey, focus group data, and benchmarking conducted in Spring 2012, we recommend that NIU SYE focus on the following four areas:**

- Major selection and confirmation
- Residential living
- Involvement and engagement through student activities, organizations, and leadership opportunities
- Career development.

# Draft Goals for second-year students (Y2@NIU) include:



- Increase awareness of the unique issues second-year students face
- Promote engagement in the university and surrounding community
- Develop and hone academic and personal skills
- Prepare for pre-professional and professional experiences
- Enhance communication with university faculty and staff
- Meeting with an academic advisor or career specialist at least twice during the second year

## Mission Statement:

The Second-Year Experience at Northern Illinois University assists students in exploring the unique critical issues and tasks of the second year of college. In partnership with the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs & Enrollment Management, the Second-Year Experience intentionally provides support for students by:

- \* Connecting them to peers, faculty, staff, and campus resources in meaningful ways;
- \* Building class community in and out of the classroom;
- \* Defining academic and co-curricular goals for the NIU experience;
- \* Educating faculty, staff, and families about the challenges and opportunities in the second year; and
- \* Examining institutional policies and practices from a second-year perspective.





# Northern Illinois University

Y2@NIU

Faculty Connection

Study Abroad Fair

Sophomore Newsletter/ Media

Sophomore Common Reading Experience

Leadership & Service

Internship Career Fairs

Sophomore Retreat

Dinner Series/ Faculty Stories / Etiquette Dinner

Sophomore Welcome/ Resource Fair

Major Selection

Mid-Semester Check for Sophomores

Exploring Majors Fair

Sophomore Days of Service

Sophomore Strengths Course

Career Exploration

# SYE Recommendations



- Adopt an SYE mission statement as developed by SYE staff, second-year students, and the SYE steering committee
- Continue to develop specific SYE initiatives as well as “packaging” existing programs and services
- Continue to assess the impact of the second year of college, especially for those students who may not have a natural connection to the University
- Develop an informative, exciting Web presence for the SYE
- Create a monthly electronic newsletter to connect second-year students to initiatives intentionally planned to promote their growth and development
- Communicate on a quarterly basis with families of second-year students, beginning in the summer before the sophomore year
- Expand the pilot Sophomore Days of Service offerings

# SYE Recommendations



- Designate the month of September as a time of intensified programming for second-year students
- Continue strategic planning for a comprehensive SYE
- Building on successful sponsorships from Kohl's, Wal-Mart, and Target, continue to develop corporate partnerships to support the SYE
- Support the development of a Second-Year Living Learning Community
- Consider the development of a sophomore retreat series and a Second-Year Success Series
- Participate in the "Bark 'Til Dark" schedule of activities with events that connect second-year students with faculty; student/faculty events also can be scheduled at alternate times
- Partner with Housing & Dining on a Second-Year Living Learning Community.

# Questions/Discussion

