

FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION AND ADVISING: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS
OF NON-RETURNING SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS AT A
PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
College of Education

MAY 2009

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper could not have been completed without the assistance from several people at various stages. I thank Dr. Susan Poch, my mentor and friend, for her guidance and emotional support from beginning to end. Her untiring commitment to my success kept me moving forward during challenging moments. I would also like to thank Dr. Dean Johnson for selflessly offering his guidance and support with assisting me with statistical analysis.

Thank you to my committee Dr. Heggins for being the “glue” and holding everything together, Dr. Foster who challenged and encouraged me to think outside “the box,” Dr. Jamison who with enthusiasm and willingness, stepped in during the final stages to make this happen, and Fran for her commitment to institutional research, and for the many hours of assisting me with obtaining data and reports..

I would also like to thank my parents for their support in completing this paper with constant encouragement along the way. A special thank you to my father-in-law for making this journey achievable with his selfless support and kind heart, my brother-in-law for his never-ending support and meals, and my mother-in-law for her kindred spirit, and her quote “Go for it girl!”

Finally, I cannot thank my husband, George, enough. Without his constant encouragement and support I would not have completed this degree. His selfless sacrifice, late nights of editing, and emotional support are immeasurable. His love and understanding and unwavering support has been critical over the last 12 years. A special thank you to my teenage children, Wesley and Ariana, for their understanding and being who they are. Watching you grow and mature has motivated and inspired me in completing this journey.

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Abstract

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May 2009

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The purpose of this study was to examine whether few or negative interactions between second-year students and faculty are factors considered for students who choose not to return to the university. Data were collected from non-returning students to determine reasons for their attrition. Emphasis was placed on second-to-third-year students and three factors for not returning: unsatisfying interactions with faculty, too little interaction with faculty, and poor academic advising. Demographic variables were also examined that included ethnicity and gender.

This study used a theoretical approach to examine factors associated with student-faculty interaction and attrition. The theoretical framework of transition theory was used to explore factors of attrition. The instrument is comprised of 25 factors using a three item scale of major reasons for not returning, minor reason for not returning, and not a reason for not returning.

This study found no statistically significant correlations between second-year students and student-faculty interaction as reasons for not returning to the university. There were, however, statistically significant between-group differences found with juniors, indicating poor academic advising as a reason for not returning. In addition, significant between-group

differences were found for international and female students, indicating unsatisfying interactions with faculty as a reason for not returning. Although not significant, there were compelling trends found that indicate unsatisfactory experiences with advising and interactions with faculty that are worth exploring in future studies.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Four-year public research universities have experienced an ever increasing rate of attrition among sophomore students, particularly between their second and third year (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Gohn, Swartz, & Donnelly, 2001; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). Much emphasis has been placed on the first-year to increase retention and persistence to graduation (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008; Schaller, 2005). However, few comprehensive programs exist for the second-year of college (Schaller, 2005). Universities are beginning to take notice that second-year students have different needs and the programming in place for first-year students is not necessarily meeting the needs of sophomores (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Therefore, universities have begun to take steps to mediate the attrition of second-year students and are placing more emphasis on identifying the reasons for sophomore student departure to better understand the characteristics of the second-year experience (Schaller, 2005).

Several studies of currently enrolled sophomores have highlighted specific characteristics identified with the second-year (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000; Evenbeck, Boston, DuVivier, & Hallberg, 2000; Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Gohn, Swartz, & Donnelly, 2001; Schaller, 2005). Collectively, these studies have found that characteristics significant to students enrolled in their second-year are associated largely with academics, finances, social support, and a feeling of belonging and purpose. Few studies, however, have focused on students who have withdrawn from the university, likely because this population of students is difficult to reach once they have left. Interviews, focus groups, and surveys can offer great insight into the personal experiences of second-year students; however, there are likely significant but not easily identifiable reasons as to why some students persist, and others who did not. There is a limited body of literature that

focuses on non-returning sophomores. It is noteworthy to mention that while there are more studies that focus on the sophomore year experience of current students, they can only inform educators and administrators of what may be critical for non-returners in a limited way. In addition, literature regarding freshman retention and persistence informs colleges and universities of strategies for successful outcomes (Astin, 1984; Fidler, 1991; Keup & Barefoot, 2002; Maisto & Tammi, 1991; Pascerella & Terenzini, 1976); yet, caution should be taken when using data from current student experiences as well as freshman persistence literature, as these are significantly different populations to compare (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

This study explores factors involved with students who chose not to return to the university and seeks better to understand the high rate of attrition of second-to-third-year students in particular. The investigation sought to inform student affairs and academic affairs of the possible relationship between the high attrition rate of second-to-third year students at a four-year public university, with that of students' uncertainty and higher rates of dissatisfaction with being in college. Of particular importance were the characteristics of second-year students approaching, or beginning, their junior year of college and how the transition for these students might differ from students throughout their freshman or senior year. All college students experience numerous transitions as they navigate their way through college, and several studies highlight unique transitional issues with second-year students that may relate to their commitment to the university (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). For example, sophomores are "struggling to explore issues of self-esteem and self-concept as they try different roles in their search for identity development" (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008, p. 638). Further, minimal attention is given to sophomores from student development personnel (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000).

One of the salient findings from existing studies is the importance of relationships (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Graunke & Woosley, 2005). However, this finding appears to relate to relationships in general and more so with peer interaction, whereas student-faculty interaction has been identified as important, but not a leading satisfaction characteristic directly influencing student-university commitment (Gump, 2007). To better understand why sophomores choose to leave college, this study sought to examine second-year students' responses for major and minor reasons for leaving the university. Within the context of this study, the attrition rate of second-to-third year students is approximately 26% for the cohort examined.

Existing studies have found that one of the major catalysts of second-year attrition is a lack of positive interactions with faculty (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Tinto, 1993). In a student satisfaction study, students expressed that they did not have anyone to talk to about feeling lost and/or feeling a lack of belonging and purpose (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). Students generally know to whom to turn when having academic difficulty, yet when experiencing feelings of being lost, uncertainty with being in college, or feeling unsure about their purpose and future aspirations, often do not know to whom to turn—students who are experiencing complex transitional issues.

Research Questions

This study was undertaken in response to an increasing attrition rate of sophomores at the institution under study and whether little, or unsatisfactory, interactions between second-year students and faculty are factors in student dissatisfaction and attrition. The study investigated the likelihood that second-year students who have not experienced significant positive interactions with faculty have greater dissatisfaction with being in college, lower commitment to the university, and a greater likelihood of attrition between their sophomore and junior year. The

following research questions guiding this inquiry were derived from a review of the literature on factors that affect persistence of college sophomores and transition theory as it applies to college student experiences:

1. Are second-year students who are dissatisfied with faculty interactions less likely to return to the university than freshmen, juniors, and seniors?
2. Does too little contact with faculty contribute to the attrition of second-year students compared to freshmen, juniors, and seniors?
3. Does unsatisfactory academic advising contribute to the attrition of second-year students more than freshmen, juniors, and seniors?

Theoretical Framework

To understand second-year students more fully, one should first examine theoretical implications for the developmental stages of these students and their relationship to issues of retention and attrition (Cope & Hannah, 1975; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2006; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2006). Particular emphasis is placed on theories that examine a wide range of contexts that affect students emotionally, academically, and personally (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). A psychosocial theoretical perspective is used as an approach to investigate the experiences of second-year students and the particular complex transitions that take place within this year (Schlossberg, 1981, 1989; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

Psychosocial theorists examine the content of development, how individuals define themselves, their relationship with others, and what to do with their lives (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The most widely cited psychosocial theorist, Chickering (1969), focused his work on student identity development in which he contends that students follow a general pattern in their development. In view of that, “psychosocial theories view development as a series of

developmental tasks or stages, including qualitative changes in thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and relating to others and oneself” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 2). However, there are phenomena with second-year students that do not appear to follow a specific pattern as suggested by Chickering (Gump, 2007; Juillerat, 2000).

It is not uncommon to discover that specific concepts and ideas promoted by a particular theory may not be as useful in certain cases (Evans et al., 1998). The second-year of college is unique and it is difficult for one theoretical perspective to describe this population. Strange and King (1990) note that theory can only be an approximate representation of a specific reality. Yet, according to Evans et al., Schlossberg’s theory fits into the psychosocial, person-environment, and cognitive-structural theoretical categories simply because it has the ability to focus on individuals’ personal and interpersonal lives, addresses the environmental issues, and clarifies changes in the way people think.

Significance of the Study

At many institutions, broad campus-wide programming exists for first-year students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976). First-year students enrolled in a living/learning community may participate in a common reading program designed to enrich the collective experience of all first-year students, and/or enroll in a freshman seminar to connect students with the campus community and faculty. Likewise, some juniors and nearly all seniors often find themselves very much integrated into campus life through academic clubs, small interactive seminars, working relationships with faculty—all through their major programs and course of study (Gump, 2007). Many juniors and seniors also find that they belong to strong cohorts who necessarily take the same courses each term.

Second-year students, however, express a feeling of being in ‘limbo’ or ‘slump’ realizing that they no longer are a part of programming designed for freshmen, they no longer live with the same cohort, and often move off campus and become increasingly isolated from campus events and activities (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000; Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008; Schaller, 2005). Seminars are nearly non-existent in the second-year, as this year is generally mixed with completing most general education requirements and beginning courses towards a major (Schaller, 2005). Further, freshman, juniors and seniors often find opportunities to interact with faculty through the various programs mentioned above, whereas many second-year students may find it difficult to see such opportunities readily available to them.

Interestingly, when asked to openly discuss satisfaction with their college experience, in one study, second-year students appear to have difficulty describing their experiences (Schaller, 2005). Quite often these students discuss dislike of classes, class size, size of campus, and describe factors associated with uncertainty. Deeper discussions often reveal that sophomores who discuss being in college because it was the next natural step after high school, or because parents told them they had to go to college, are also often undecided about their major and unsure about their future (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006).

A leading factor in sophomore persistence has been linked to the need for students to connect with and interact with faculty in a meaningful way (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Because sophomores are not fully immersed in their majors, or have not settled decisively on a major, it has been noted that they receive little faculty attention (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000), although, interactions with faculty promote students’ institutional commitment (Starke, 1990; Tinto, 1997).

Limitations

There are some important limitations to consider with this study. Data were limited to one public four-year university. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to other institutions, particularly private institutions. The Non-Returning Student Survey does not provide direct evidence related to sophomore satisfaction and retention, however, inferences can be made from the type of responses found and trends that occurred in the data.

This study used a post-facto method using archived data. As such, the post-facto method deliberately places the subjects in non-equivalent groups—groups that are known to differ on some trait measure, such as class standing (Sprinthall, 2003). This is important to note because by using a post-facto method, variables are not manipulated as with experimental research, and cause and effect conclusions cannot be made, but a correlation or difference can be predicted. “That is, being provided with information about the independent variables puts the researcher in the position of making above-chance predictions as to performance on the dependent variables” (Sprinthall, 2003, p. 213).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are pertinent:

Attrition refers to students who did not return to the university following a semester of enrollment.

First-year student refers to a student who enrolls at the university as a first-time undergraduate seeking student and has completed less than 30 semester credit hours at a four-year university.

Junior refers to a student who has completed between 60 and 89 semester credit hours at a four-year university.

Persistence refers to students who continue from one semester of enrollment to the next without disruption.

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction/Unsatisfactory each describes the value placed on a particular experience as positive or negative. For the purpose of this study, satisfaction regarding a specific experience is described in terms of level of reason for not returning to the university, (i.e., a major reason, minor reason, not a reason). The response given by the student is equated to whether his/her expectation of a particular experience was met and therefore a reason/not a reason for not returning to the university.

Senior refers to students who have completed more than 90 semester credit hours at a four-year university.

Sophomore and second-year student are used synonymously to describe students who have completed at least 30-59 semester credit hours at a four-year university.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are limited studies that explore significant factors that affect dissatisfaction of the college experience with non-persisting sophomores (Gump, 2007). Studies that explore sophomore experiences focus on current issues—sophomores who are still enrolled and have/are persisting through their sophomore to junior year (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Gohn, Swartz, & Donnelly, 2001; Juillerat, 2000; Schaller, 2005). Fewer studies have focused on students who dropped out during their sophomore year and what was factored into this decision. Nevertheless, retention is a widely studied area of higher education (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Gohn, Swartz, & Donnelly, 2001; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Tinto, 2006), more so than attrition. Many institutions develop programs to enhance the learning experience for freshman, and encourage faculty involvement, to increase retention efforts (Cabrera et al., 2002; Cockrell, Caplow, & Donaldson, 2000; Fidler, 1991; Keup & Barefoot, 2002). A review of literature related to faculty interaction, sophomore transition, and advising are examined in this chapter, as they relate to the research questions.

The review of literature is divided into two sections: (1) the theoretical basis of student-faculty interaction on sophomore development, and (2) the impact of faculty and advisor interaction on students' institutional commitment.

Transition Theory

Traditional-aged college students continuously experience transitions at various points. Traditional-aged refers to students who are between the ages of 18 to 22 years old (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The initial transition is when students entering college experience independence from parents and form a new cohort of friends (Fidler, 1991; Maisto & Tammi,

1991). At many institutions, the first year is marked by extensive programming to engage first-year students in campus activities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Starke, Harth, & Sirianni, 2001; Tsui & Gao, 2006). This could include programs within residence halls, particularly those campuses that have a first year live-in requirement. Many universities dedicate extensive resources to the first year in college in an effort to engage and retain students (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). Fewer institutions offer specific programming for students in the second-year (Schaller, 2005), even though this year is often marked as being a significant turning point for many second-year students where they re-evaluate priorities, goals, and friendships (Schaller, 2005). Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) theoretical perspective regarding transitional movement is a cornerstone to understanding the sophomore year.

Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out

The second-year transition is significantly different from the first; it can be characterized as a time during which students are asked to think for themselves and make decisions without having the same support of the first year (Gardner, 2000; Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). Three phases of transition and persistence were identified by Schlossberg et al. (1997), *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving out*. *Moving in* represents a process during which students become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectation of new systems (Schlossberg, 1997). Students experiencing the *moving through* process are in survival mode and the *moving out* phase represents the experience of feelings of grief even if the individual perceives the transition to be a positive one and self-initiated (Schlossberg, 1997). Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory attempts to define whether a person grows or deteriorates as a result of a transition. How a transition is approached, and what resources are available to assist the student moving through it are critical. Two outcomes are generally found: (1) a

successful transition of moving through, or (2) leaving the institution. Both of these scenarios represent very different outcomes of moving out.

Transition theory offers a different lens through which college and university administrators and faculty are able to identify certain characteristics in college students who are transitioning into adulthood. It is important first to understand the role of perception in transition, based on the definition of the individual experiencing it; the meaning attached is relative, as is the way in which it is categorized within the college experience (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995).

Students are faced with many challenges as they traverse through their college years. As such, what becomes critical is their perception of these challenges, how to move through them, and ultimately move out of them. Many sophomores describe a sense of feeling stuck, quite often at the point of dropping out (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). These students must learn how to effectively manage transitions and in these transitions consideration should be given to student's situation promoting a transition, how self is identified in a transition, what kinds of support are available, and what kinds of strategies should be employed to traverse a particular transition.

Situation, Self, Support, Strategies

Four major factors that influence a student's ability to manage transitions were identified by Schlossberg et al. (1995): *situation, self, support, and strategies*; how effective students are in managing transition depends on their available resources in these areas. It is critically important that students know how and where to find resources to assist them in their developmental process as they are experiencing transition. Identifying the specific needs of sophomores and providing

support for their academic, professional, social, and individual situations are key (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008).

When examining an individual's *situation*, identifying and understanding what triggered the transition and the timing is important (Evans et al., 1998). Does the student perceive that he or she has control over the situation? Once students understand their situations, they can then begin to identify their role in developing positive outcomes by working through various situations.

Two categories in relation to *self* were identified by Schlossberg et al. (1995): personal and demographic characteristics—how individuals view life, how they cope, their outlook, self-efficacy, commitment and values. Students who report a feeling of dissatisfaction approaching their second-year likely have not integrated themselves into campus life (Evenbeck, Boston, DuVivier, & Hallberg, 2000). Further, struggling sophomores have not arrived at a sense of self that allows them to understand with certainty that college is where they want to be; support from the institution in these areas is critical as they make the transition to the next step (Evenbeck et al., 2000).

The third factor affecting students' ability to manage transition is *support*. Support involves social support, in which four have been identified: "intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 114). Primary sources of support identified in several studies are peers and faculty (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Evans et al., 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1997), especially in terms of engaging students in a meaningful way (Graunke & Woosley, 2005).

Strategies is the final factor identified by Schlossberg et al. (1995) noting the ability for students to modify a situation, control meaning and manage stress in the aftermath of a

transition, as well as use effective coping methods by seeking out information and taking direct action. The way in which students perceive a transition is significant to the way in which they cope with the transition and the strategy they employ (Schlossberg et al., 1995). A significant transition occurs in the sophomore year, when students “appear to be drifting—not entirely committed to their academic endeavors nor engaged in organizations and activities available to them” (Gardner, 2000, p. 68). Sophomores are better equipped and feel greater satisfaction when prepared to take direct positive action to move through a transition, when faculty demonstrates that they care (Richmond & Lemons, 1985; Lemons & Richmond, 1987). For students to be successful they need to feel like they matter, are noticed and cared about, and that someone else will be proud of what they do (Schlossberg, 1989; Wolf-Wendel, 2003). Further, students need to recognize support and care given by faculty and administrators (Wolf-Wendel, 2003). As such, positive interactions with faculty may provide a strong foundation for increased satisfaction of second-year students and therefore mediate the rate of attrition of sophomores.

Student Satisfaction

Student-Faculty Interactions

Some research has demonstrated that more frequent and meaningful interactions between students and faculty members outside the classroom consistently promote student persistence (Fidler, 1991; Keup & Barefoot, 2002; Maisto & Tammi, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Starke, 1990; Starke et al., 2001). Graunke and Woosley’s (2005) study was concerned with academic difficulties faced by sophomore students and thereby focused on the matters of faculty-student interactions, student involvement in activities, and commitment to a major as well as the institution. One of the major findings was the extent to which sophomores were satisfied with their opportunities to interact with faculty and the extent to which they felt that faculty were

concerned with their academic success—both had an impact on their academic performance. Student’s general satisfaction with college is positively associated with the frequency of informal and non-classroom contact with faculty (Pascarella, 1980).

Additional research has suggested that small seminars provide opportunities for faculty to engage in more meaningful contact with students (Fidler, 1991; Keup & Barefoot, 2002; Morrison & Brown, 2006). Increasing choices in curricular framework to encourage more informal interaction promotes collaborative learning in and outside the classroom setting (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976). Collaborative learning environments, such as seminars, expose students to much closer connections with faculty beyond traditional lecture-based courses.

Shared learning between faculty and students is a strategy that many campuses have more successfully and pointedly integrated sophomores into the campus community and fostered much closer interactions with faculty (Cabrera et al., 2002). Cabrera et al. report that “the vitality of the classroom experience has regained recognition as one of the most important factors influencing college students cognitive, motivational, and affective development” (p. 20). These communities have long been recognized as primary ways of encouraging student interactions with faculty and have proven to make significant contributions to student achievement (Cockrell, Caplow, & Donaldson, 2000). Of the many college learning environments, collaborative learning, has proven to be the most promising in terms of student engagement (Cabrera et al., 2002; Cockrell et al., 2000). It is within these learning communities that sophomores may have the opportunity to connect with other students who may also be in transition and to have a chance to be in close contact with faculty (Cabrera et al., 2002). As such, sophomores who are

feeling disengaged or disconnected might be reinvigorated by academic approaches that actively engage them (Evenbeck et al., 2000).

Tinto suggests that sophomores should establish good connections to members of their academic community, both students and faculty (1997). Lacy (1978) posits that “faculty are particularly important in influencing intellectual development, educational aspirations, and occupational decisions” (p. 202). If faculty are unavailable or unapproachable, “sophomores may become increasingly distant from the university community” (Graunke & Woosley, 2005, p. 368) and lessen their commitment to their goals and the institution altogether. Graunke and Woosley further suggest that institutions concerned with sophomore success may want to focus on factors more pertinent to sophomores, which will likely result in institutional commitment. For example, Graunke and Woosley (2005) found that increased interactions with faculty were significant in predicting the success of second-year students—their satisfaction with more opportunities to interact with faculty influenced their feeling of mattering and therefore had an impact on their academic performance. Juillerat (2000) also found in her study of satisfaction levels of sophomores that a high value was placed on approachable and available faculty as important to their college experience (see also, Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Chickering and Reisser (1993) assert that “students who reported the greatest cognitive development were also most likely to perceive faculty as being concerned with teaching and student development and to report developing a close, influential relationship with at least one faculty member” (p. 322; see also Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

When students experience positive interactions with faculty there also emerges a much stronger commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1993). As such, students’ satisfaction with faculty involvement in their educational experience may have a much stronger impact on their

persistence in college (Cope & Hannah, 1975). Many faculty would argue that student retention is the responsibility of student affairs. According to Tinto (2006), however, faculty may not fully realize the impact they have in and out of the classroom on commitment and retention. Tinto (2006) argues that “we must stop talking to faculty about student retention and focus instead on the ways their actions can enhance student education” (p. 9) through meaningful interactions. For example, measures should be taken to reward faculty for their involvement and engagement with students as an incentive for promotion and tenure.

Negative experiences while in college, such as poor interactions with faculty or lack of involvement in campus activities, may cause students to lessen their commitment to the university and possibly leave the institution altogether, according to Graunke and Woosley (2005). This may be particularly true of sophomore students. Graunke and Woosley note that sophomores are less likely than students in other classes to be actively involved in their own learning, or to see faculty as actively engaged in students’ personal and academic development. Therefore, the trend appears to demonstrate a relationship between meaningful student-faculty interactions and institutional commitment (Okun, Benin, & Brandt-Williams, 1996) and its relationship with persistence. There is a need for students, particularly second-year students, to be presented with opportunities to build relationships with faculty and to see them as actively engaged in their personal achievement (Tinto, 1993).

Sophomore Advising

A significant predictor of success has been linked to developmental advising which provides opportunities for faculty to connect with students beyond academics (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000). Faculty and professional advisors are in unique positions to meet with students more regularly and personally (Frost, 1991). Students who are struggling with issues beyond the

classroom might see their advisor as an initial person to meet with regarding their personal and academic concerns (Crookston, 1972; Hemwall & Trachte, 1999; Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982). As such, advisors of second-year students may play a critical role in their development in which they have a unique opportunity to purposefully engage students beyond academic concerns. Various studies have examined how student services, such as academic advising, affect persistence (Hemwall & Trachte, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Advising is a structure that exists at all institutions (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000) and one which can be used to a greater advantage with sophomores. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), “research consistently indicates that academic advising can play a role in students’ decisions to persist and in their chances of graduating” (p. 404; see also Endo & Harpel, 1982).

Academic advisors are well positioned to encourage second-year students to think about an academic plan and the relationship between their academic work and their personal lives (Stockenberg, 2007). Sophomores begin to develop a much stronger sense of awareness by reflecting on their first year as a time of orientation and newly found freedom and independence. Generally, it is in the second-year that students begin to really become homesick, feeling lost, unmotivated, and unsure about their future (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). Classes become more difficult and students begin to realize that it is time to get serious. The guidance and support that a caring advisor provides can make a powerful difference to a second-year student struggling with academic or personal concerns (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Advising is necessary for every year of college and in the second-year it becomes even more essential as the advisor is a consistent person that students can turn to when experiencing feelings of doubt and uncertainty (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000). Stockenberg (2007), Flanagan (2007), Gansemer-Topf, Stern, & Benjamin (2007) agree that advising sophomores toward courses that engage them in meaningful

reflection can be particularly valuable. Hemwall and Trachte (1999) suggest that critical self-reflection assists students with personal growth and lifelong learning as they become effective agents for their own learning and personal development. Encouraging students to be active learners increases their understanding of personal growth and future goals, thereby increasing the likelihood of institutional commitment and persistence (Frost, 1991).

After the first year and during the second is when a large number of students leave college (Tinto, 1993). The sophomore year is often marked by confusion and uncertainty and the task of deciding a major can be very stressful and overwhelming (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000; Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008; Tinto, 1993). Sophomores struggling with increased expectations, an intensified curriculum, and higher academic standards often become disengaged from academic life (Cope & Hannah, 1975; Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). Advising is critical at this juncture in a sophomores' college experience in order to strategically motivate them to successfully work through challenges and transitions they encounter. The transitional factors of situation, self, support, and strategies, (the *Four S's*, identified by Schlossberg et al., 1995), is a particularly useful tool to guide advisors when working with sophomore students. By understanding these four factors, especially when identifying the points in which students are moving in, moving through, and moving out of transitions (Schlossberg, 1981), advisors are better equipped with the knowledge of how to assist second-year students during a critical period of adjustment (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000; Richmond & Lemons, 1985).

Summary

Currently, many institutions lose an increasing number of students between their second and third year (Tinto, 1993). The literature suggests that there are significant variables that contribute to successful outcomes of persistence and attrition. As students move in, move

through, and ultimately move out of critical transitions, research indicates that faculty interactions and academic advising may play a critical role.

This study intentionally investigated the role of student-faculty interactions and advising as predictors of satisfaction with college and commitment to the university. In doing so, data was collected and analyzed from non-persisting students to further investigate factors that may relate to attrition. If students have developed meaningful relationships with faculty, they feel that they matter and therefore the expectation of a much greater satisfaction and commitment to the university. Two different types of student-faculty interaction have been discussed: interactions with teaching faculty and interactions with faculty/professional advisors. The second-year is often characterized by confusion and uncertainty. The increasing academic loads, deciding on a major and life goals can be very stressful and overwhelming for many second-year students. Advising is critically important at this juncture in sophomore students' college experience.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the institutional profile, research design, and methodology for this study. Included is a description of the sampling procedure, instrument, data collection techniques, and data analysis used to explore the research questions.

Institutional Profile

This study sampled a population of students from a northwestern four-year public research university with an enrollment of approximately 18,000 students. The institution is residential, multicultural students account for 15% of the student body, and the faculty to student ratio is approximately 14 to 1. The highest degree offered is a doctorate degree.

Sampling Procedure

The data used for this study was obtained from the university's Office of Student Affairs, Research and Assessment (OSARA). In spring 2007 the OSARA arranged to have the university's telecounseling center administer a telephone survey to assess potential reasons for students leaving the university. The population of interest was undergraduate students who were enrolled for the fall 2006 semester, but not enrolled for the spring 2007 semester. Additionally, the OSARA contracted with the university's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC), in spring 2008, to conduct phone interviews to collect necessary information from a second-year of non-returning students. The population of interest was undergraduate students who were enrolled for the fall 2007 semester, but not enrolled for the spring 2008 semester. Students excluded from the target population were those who graduated during the fall 2006 or 2007 semesters, who were dismissed from school due to deficient academic standing, and who were dismissed for conduct violations.

After exclusions were made, the total population of non-returning students was 684 for spring 2007 and 921 for spring 2008, yielding a survey population of 1605 former students. For the spring 2007 survey population there was a total of 211 completed surveys producing a 69% response rate. For the spring 2008 survey population there was a total of 389 completed surveys producing a 56% response rate. The combined total sample population was 600 non-returning students to be surveyed via the telephone. The non-returning students themselves were the primary contacts. However, if the student was unable to complete the survey at the time of the call, a parent or guardian was given the option to respond. This option was given to maximize the information collected. For the purposes of this study, student responses were the only responses analyzed. Therefore, of the 600 interviews, 109 were a parent or guardian participant and 33 did not specify, yielding a final sample of 458 (76% of the sample population).

Instrument

A survey of non-returning students (see Appendix A) was created in response to an increasing attrition rate at the institution under study. The instrument was developed by administrators from the Office of Student Affairs, Research and Assessment and the Division of Student Affairs, Equity and Diversity at a public four-year research university. This team consulted similar surveys to develop a unique instrument for this institution—one which was not lengthy but included enough items to allow for a strong and reliable instrument.

Students were asked to indicate which of 25 potential reasons were factored into their decision for not returning to the university. Questions in the survey reflect institutional, academic, personal, social, and financial reasons. The assessment scale was a three-item scale in which respondents were asked to indicate reasons as major = 1, minor = 2, or not a reason = 3, for not returning. While the data collected by the Office of Student Affairs Research and

Assessment, in its entirety, is informative for institutional use, this study focused specifically on analyzing the data set pertaining to second-to-third-year students.

Reliability and Validity

Since the newly created Non-Returning Student Survey is the main instrument for this study, it is important to assess its reliability and validity. The Cronbach’s Alpha, a test of internal consistency, was conducted on the Non-Returning Student Survey administered by the Office of Student Affairs, Research and Assessment and the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (see Table 1). The reported reliability score of the Non-Returning Student Survey used in this study is .98, which indicates 98% consistency in the scores that are produced by the instrument. The minimum acceptable reliability score for attitudinal survey research is a reliability score of .70 to .80 (Field, 2005; Sprinthall, 2003). Because of the diversity of the constructs being measured, it is not uncommon in attitudinal research to have a suitable alpha of .70 (Field, 2005). The greater the reported reliability score the higher internal consistency of the constructs being measured. Therefore, the results of the reliability score of the Non-Returning Student Survey indicate acceptable internal consistency and reliability of the survey.

Table 1: Reliability statistics
Non-Returning Student Survey

<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha standardized items</i>	<i>N of items</i>
.975	.976	25

The survey was examined for face and content validity to determine whether the questions posed to participants were clear, understandable, and measurable. The survey items were reasonably related to the perceived purpose of the test and were representative of the area the test was designed to evaluate: student satisfaction/dissatisfaction regarding their college

experience (Sprinthall, 2003). Because this study aimed to explore factors associated with second-year student withdrawal, a survey methodology was determined to be the most appropriate instrument. The primary justification and logic behind the choice of survey is attributable to the challenges of reaching non-returning students. The telephone survey used took only five to seven minutes to complete, potentially achieving a much higher response rate than would a more lengthy survey for this particular student population.

Statistical Analysis

A multivariate test was performed to examine factors identified by students which led them to choose not to return to the university. The primary analysis of this study focused on the research questions through a close examination of the significant correlations between major and minor reasons for not returning to the university and class standing. An exploratory analysis was also conducted on demographic variables to determine if there were significant differences.

Because there were multiple dependent variables in this study, a multivariate test was chosen as an appropriate technique designed for the analysis of more than two dependent variables. The technique for analyzing the data for this study was Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). Because this study was concerned with differences between groups, a MANOVA provided information on the predictive power of the independent measures, as well as the relationships and differences observed in the dependent measures.

A MANOVA was performed using SPSS Statistical Analysis software to initially determine if there were between-group differences in responses based on class standing, ethnicity, and gender. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. After determining that there were between-group differences, a test of pairwise differences was performed on all independent variables, with the exception of gender, to analyze the results to determine which

groups differed. Because gender consists of only two factors, a comparison of means was analyzed to determine any differences.

The population for this study included all students who did not return to the university in the Spring 2007 and 2008 semesters. All students who did not return had an equal chance of participating; however, a significant barrier existed with making contact. Since this study used a method of phone interviews, those students who had changed phone numbers, became unreachable and therefore were not included in the study.

The largest percentage of respondents (see Table 2) was female (60%), Caucasian (76%), and freshman (38%). In terms of the overall undergraduate population, the respondents for each class variable were representative of their respective class cohort with sophomores accounting for 23%, juniors 22%, and seniors 16% for this study. In addition, sophomore and juniors combined made up 46% of the sample population. The frequency results for each variable are included in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution
Independent variables

<i>Demographic</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Class	Freshman	175	38
	Sophomore	106	23
	Junior	103	22
	Senior	74	16
Gender	Male	276	60
	Female	182	40
Ethnicity	African American	6	1
	Asian Am/Pac Islander	39	9
	Caucasian	350	76
	Chicano/Latino	20	4
	International	10	3
	Native American	4	1
	Not Reported	29	6

All data were analyzed for mean comparisons and correlations in order to determine if there were statistically significant correlations between satisfaction/dissatisfaction factors and demographics. The responses resulted in a high level of reliability for each factor as well as the overall survey with a reliability statistic of .98, which indicates a high reliability for the individual factors. Table 3 on the following page illustrates the individual data points derived from the reliability statistical procedure.

Table 3: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Problem getting classes required	1.000	651	605	497	548	476	490	463	458	326	518	303	524	484	445	368	330	487	233	433	412	395	491	543	406	
Problems getting classes required																										
Failure to get into desired major	651	1.000	731	662	691	645	630	625	651	473	668	646	668	639	590	476	456	668	364	605	559	506	615	647	535	
Failure to get into desired major	662	731	1.000	584	632	617	631	577	582	486	634	600	669	707	590	459	443	598	352	567	512	480	553	624	498	
Poor academic advising	691	662	584	1.000	835	768	695	799	796	579	791	735	708	658	643	589	605	801	476	759	631	601	731	769	660	
Inadequate housing choices	632	691	632	835	1.000	795	767	798	817	623	837	775	760	728	701	629	626	818	490	785	697	642	787	792	707	
Inadequate facilities	476	645	617	768	795	1.000	691	788	798	515	776	698	675	669	628	584	629	783	419	688	629	584	707	732	617	
Uncomfortable social climate on campus	490	630	631	695	767	691	1.000	714	730	618	744	704	762	778	689	509	530	696	422	685	605	554	636	651	581	
Uncomfortable social climate on campus	463	625	577	799	798	788	714	1.000	808	524	752	671	657	659	625	555	663	842	469	689	619	564	689	746	609	
Size of population of University	458	651	582	796	817	798	730	808	1.000	586	807	723	704	715	744	582	640	798	514	731	649	591	709	735	660	
Uncomfortable social climate on campus	326	473	486	579	623	515	618	534	586	1.000	617	638	603	638	540	554	397	569	411	601	461	425	572	533	523	
Lack of challenge	518	682	634	791	837	776	744	752	807	617	1.000	777	766	729	668	619	615	806	493	776	708	708	651	769	770	711
Too many large classes	503	646	600	735	775	698	704	671	723	628	777	1.000	703	682	633	611	535	735	442	722	652	577	688	690	644	
Desire to move to a new location	534	668	669	708	760	670	762	637	704	605	760	705	1.000	802	760	542	524	695	447	687	614	551	665	709	604	
Difficulty making friends at University	484	659	707	638	728	669	778	659	715	638	739	682	802	1.000	785	535	520	684	413	691	550	505	678	668	568	
Desire to get away from college for a while	445	590	590	645	701	628	689	625	744	540	668	633	760	785	1.000	510	515	648	371	653	552	517	605	629	510	
Desire to move to a new location	368	476	459	589	629	584	509	555	582	554	619	611	542	555	510	1.000	495	637	421	577	541	475	596	588	683	
Difficulty making friends at University	330	456	443	605	626	629	530	663	640	397	615	535	524	520	515	495	1.000	660	372	570	465	441	522	594	494	
As an emotional health or family-related circumstance	487	668	598	801	818	785	696	842	798	569	806	735	695	684	648	637	660	1.000	527	747	667	611	742	802	686	
Influence of parents or relatives	253	364	352	476	490	419	422	469	514	411	493	442	447	413	371	421	372	527	1.000	581	487	339	463	461	388	
Influence of parents or relatives	453	610	567	729	785	688	682	689	731	601	776	722	687	691	635	577	570	747	381	1.000	695	599	716	718	624	
Failure to receive enough financial help to cover costs	412	559	512	631	697	629	605	619	649	461	708	632	614	520	522	341	462	667	487	695	1.000	842	723	678	600	
Failure to receive enough financial help to cover costs	395	506	480	601	642	584	554	564	591	425	651	577	551	505	517	475	441	611	389	599	842	1.000	762	636	546	
Inadequate budget financing	460	615	553	731	787	707	656	689	709	572	769	688	663	678	605	596	522	742	463	716	753	762	1.000	761	657	
Trouble finding employment	543	647	624	769	792	732	651	746	735	333	770	690	709	668	629	588	594	802	461	718	678	626	761	1.000	663	
Desire to work instead of attending college	406	535	498	660	707	617	581	609	660	523	711	644	604	568	510	683	494	686	388	624	600	546	657	1.000	663	

Summary

Three independent variables were used in this study (a) class standing, (b) ethnicity, and (c) gender (see Table 2). The three independent variables were tested separately and in combination with class standing to explore responses given based on 25 factors for choosing not to return to the university (see Appendix A). Responses identified by participants as contributing factors for choosing not to return to the university were coded in the following manner: major reason = 1, minor reason = 2, not a reason = 3.

Specific emphasis was placed on three factors pertaining to: satisfaction with faculty interaction, too little interaction with faculty, and satisfaction with advising. The remaining 22 independent variables may further inform practitioners of factors influencing student departure, however, this study was primarily interested in faculty interaction and advising as factors influencing students' decision to withdraw.

Statistical analysis included examination of means, standard deviation, and correlation as determined by a MANOVA. Mean scores illustrated the average response to each factor as reported by the respondents and the standard deviation results allowed the researcher to determine how well the mean represented the data (Field, 2005). Correlation statistics revealed whether a linear relationship existed between two or more variables (Field, 2005). A MANOVA allowed the researcher to analyze and determine the sources of variance with more than one dependent variable (Kinnear & Gray, 2008).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter details the findings of the study. Analysis was completed to address the research questions which sought to determine factors correlated with sophomore-student departure from the university. Specific factors being analyzed included faculty interaction, faculty contact, and academic advising. Factors associated with student departure were measured by student responses indicating factors for leaving as a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason. Statistical analyses were performed with the data collected and correlations between class standing, ethnicity and gender were tested using SPSS statistical analysis software. A MANOVA was performed in order to determine whether significant between-group differences existed as factors of unsatisfying interactions with faculty, ethnicity, and gender based on class standing. This study sought to determine whether sophomores were more likely than other classes to indicate that one or more of the three factors accounted as reasons for not returning to the university.

Faculty Interaction

Class Comparison

As demonstrated in earlier research studies, faculty interaction may be an important aspect of the sophomore-year experience. Students transitioning from their second-year to their third year are in need of much closer connections to faculty as indicated by Graunke and Woosley (2005). Findings in this study did not identify unsatisfying interactions with faculty as a statistically significant factor in sophomores withdrawing from college (see Table 4), however, it may be a predictor.

Table 4: Comparison of Means
Class comparison and faculty interaction

<i>Reasons not enrolled Spring semester</i>	<i>Class standing</i>	<i>Class standing</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Unsatisfying interactions with faculty	Sophomore	Freshman	.078	.076	.742
		Junior	.020	.086	.995
		Senior	.064	.094	.904
	Junior	Freshman	.098	.077	.585
		Sophomore	.020	.086	.995
		Senior	.044	.094	.967

An observed negative trend (see Figure 1) indicates that students are dissatisfied with interactions with faculty. Figure 1 illustrates a negative trend moving away from responses indicating unsatisfying interactions with faculty as *not a reason* for withdrawing towards a *minor reason* for not returning. This finding indicates a continuous decline beginning in the first year. Freshman appear to be satisfied with faculty interactions, however, as students move into the next year the participant responses indicate that their level of satisfaction continues to decline to a significant degree in the senior year. While this trend is not specific to the second-year, it is worth noting that faculty interactions are important to students as indicated by their responses.

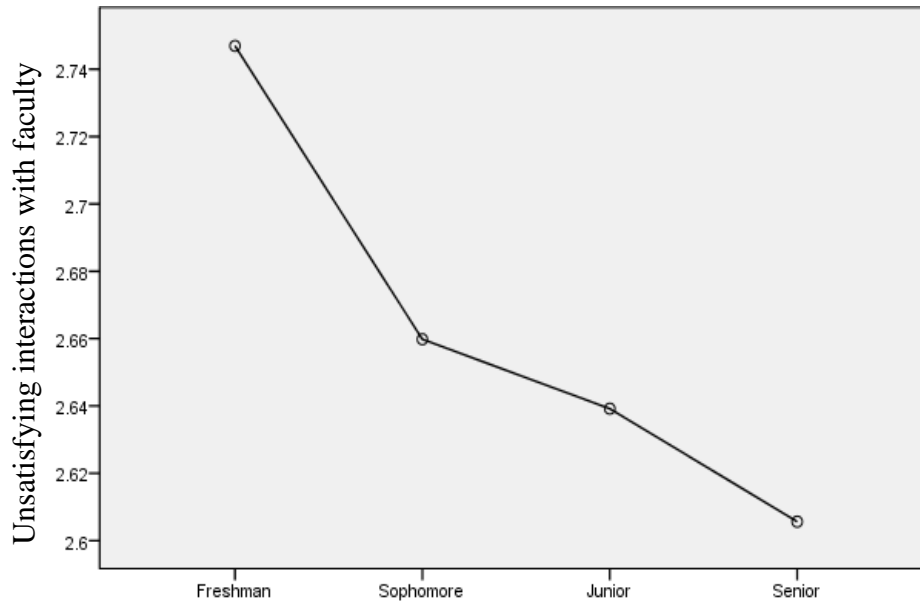


Figure 1: Mean distribution of class standing and *unsatisfying interactions with faculty* as a reason for not returning to the university.

Ethnicity

Between-group differences for class and ethnicity were not found to be statistically significant and, on the whole, students appear to be somewhat satisfied. The largest group of students who indicated a lower mean score for most factors was international students.

Following a MANOVA, a mean score comparison was performed to analyze which groups significantly differed. Factors related to student-faculty interactions were not found to be statistically significant with ethnic minorities; there were significant responses worth noting (see Figure 2). For example, students expressed dissatisfaction with interactions with faculty to a compelling degree, particularly for Native American and International students. The population of students who chose not to disclose their ethnicity also indicated this factor as significant and it is worth taking notice.

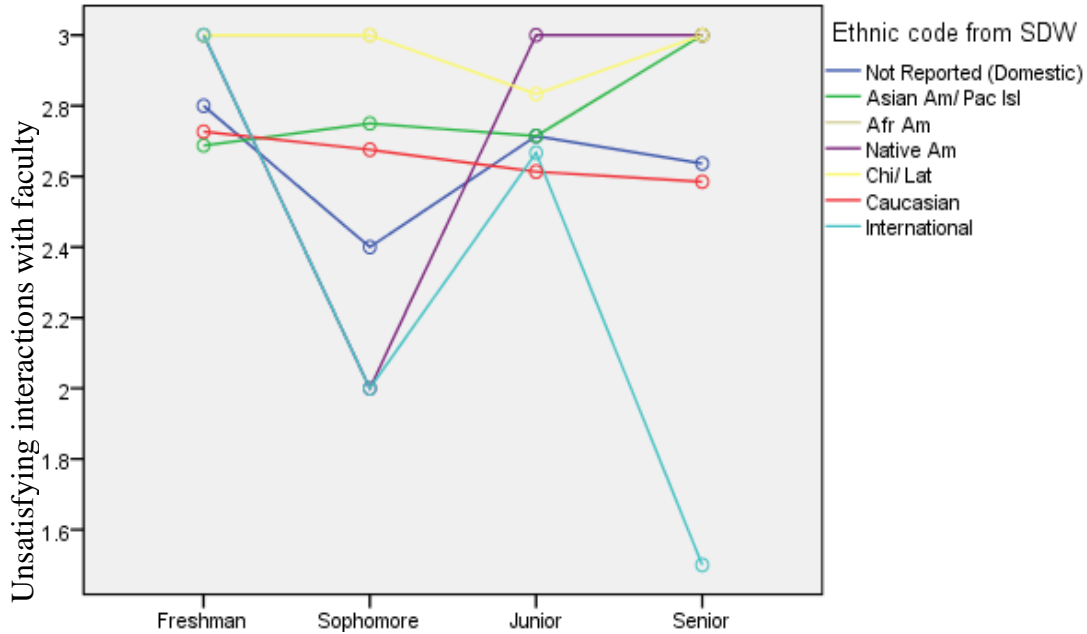


Figure 2: Mean distribution of ethnicity by class standing and *unsatisfying interactions with faculty* as a reason for not returning to the university.

These findings support the primary focus of this study in which negative interactions with faculty may increase the likelihood that sophomores will be less satisfied with their college experience to a point of not returning. This finding is supported by Schlossberg (1989) in which students are searching for ways in which they matter. She identified that when a transition takes place, new roles are assumed. As such, if sophomores who are transitioning between their second and third year are feeling a sense of uncertainty with no longer being a freshman in college and now embarking on mutually supporting relationships with faculty and peers, they may find this experience challenging. This is even more evident when sophomores are beginning to seek interactions with faculty beyond course content.

Gender

The relationship between gender and reasons for not returning to the university were tested for between-group differences of male and female students toward unsatisfying

interactions with faculty. Results indicated that differences in responses were statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 5).

Table 5: Between-group comparisons
Gender

<i>Reasons not Enrolled Spring Semester</i>		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Unsatisfying interactions with faculty	Between Groups	1.918	1	1.918	5.166	.024*
	Within Groups	164.871	444	.371		

* Significant at the .05 level.

Figure 3 illustrates the mean differences by gender. Overall, males appear to be more satisfied than female students, with the exception of seniors. Particular emphasis should be placed on sophomores and juniors, who were the least satisfied than other classes, a point of focus for this study. These trends also indicate that males appear to be more satisfied with their interactions with faculty. Research regarding women in college by Wolf-Wendel (2003) support the greater need for female students to feel a sense of care and commitment by faculty. The finding in this current study may further support her research. It is likely that females in this study indicated unsatisfying interactions with faculty as a point of concern that they do not feel as though they are cared about and therefore are not as committed to the university as indicated in Figure 3.

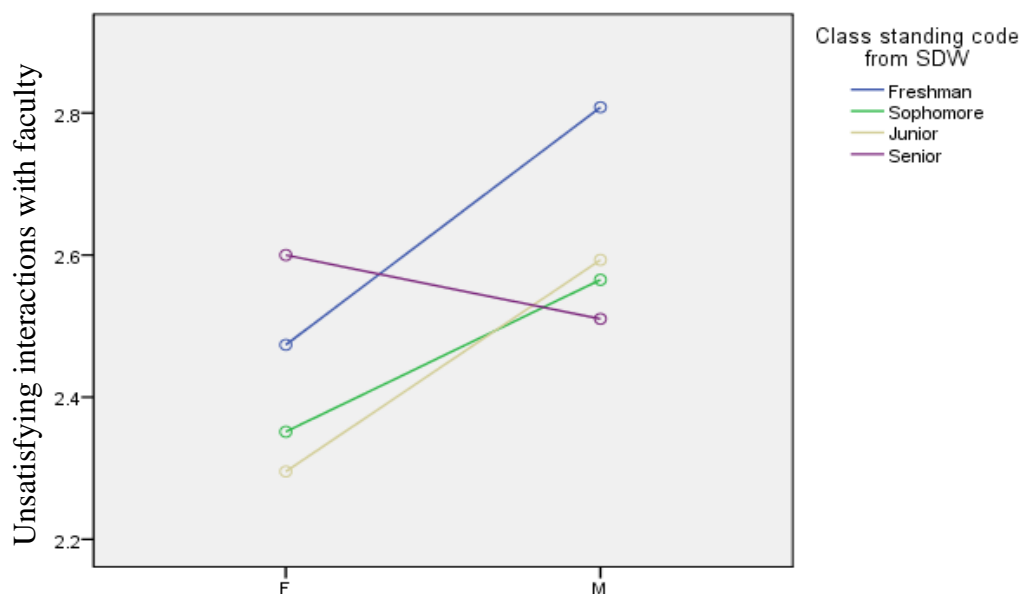


Figure 3: Mean distribution of gender for *unsatisfying interactions with faculty* as a reason for not returning to the university.

The transition concept of the *self*, identified by Schlossberg (1981), supports the finding in this study in which sophomores may be questioning life priorities and the impact of transitioning through the second-year of college. As students are experiencing a significant transition, they often feel marginalized (Schlossberg, 1989). Unsatisfying interactions with faculty, combined together with feelings of marginality, may promote a feeling of uncertainty with second-year students. This concept supports the findings in this study in which students report that positive interactions with faculty are important.

Faculty Contact

Class Comparison

Sophomores indicated the highest degree of dissatisfaction than any other class with seniors indicating the lowest degree of dissatisfaction (see Figure 4).

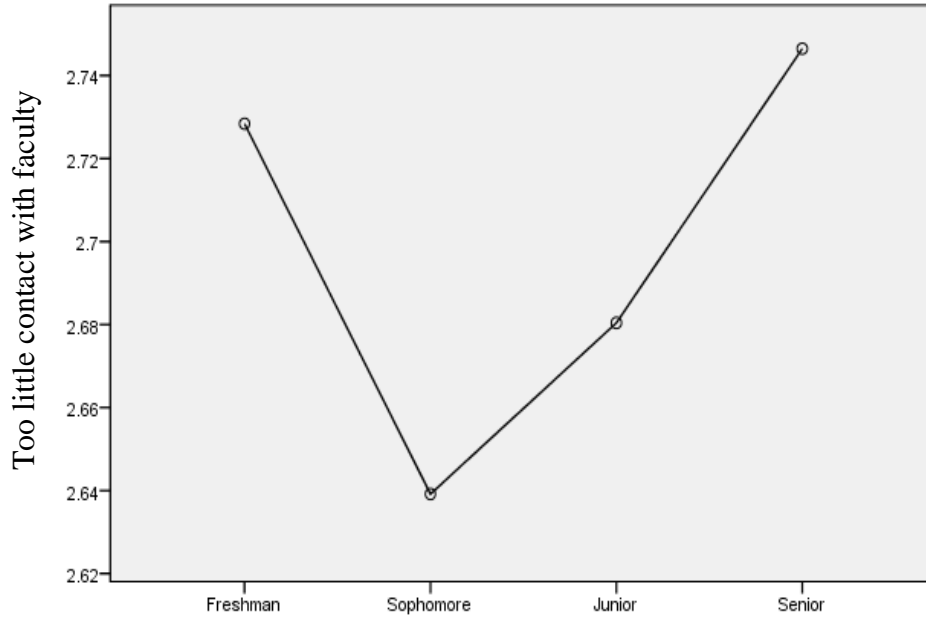


Figure 4: Mean distribution of class standing and *too little contact with faculty* as a reason for not returning to the university.

Participant responses indicate a much larger percentage of students fairly satisfied with the amount of faculty contact they received. However, noteworthy in this graph is the sharp decline from the freshman to sophomore year indicating much lower satisfaction responses for sophomore students. This finding was not statistically significant (see Table 6), however, the trend supports this research in that sophomores are more likely than other classes to indicate that too little contact with faculty is considered as a factor for not returning to the university.

Table 6: Comparison of Means
Class standing and faculty contact

<i>Reasons not enrolled Spring semester</i>	<i>Class standing</i>	<i>Class standing</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Too little contact with faculty	Sophomore	Freshman	.060	.071	.834
		Junior	.033	.080	.976
		Senior	.073	.087	.839
	Junior	Freshman	.027	.072	.983
		Sophomore	.033	.080	.976
		Senior	.039	.088	.970

Ethnicity

Chicana/Latino students and International students indicated too little contact with faculty as a factor in their decision not to return, more so than other ethnic populations (see Figure 5). Also noteworthy, is the sharp decline during the sophomore year and senior year for International students. This finding may be due, in part, to International students not identifying faculty as sources of support. A more current study (Heggins & Jackson, 2003) regarding Asian International students may give some direction in terms of International students. Heggins and Jackson contend that Asian International students are more likely to use religious leaders, student organizations, and church groups as sources of support. Further studies regarding the campus integration and faculty contact with International students are worth pursuing to investigate their connectedness more fully.

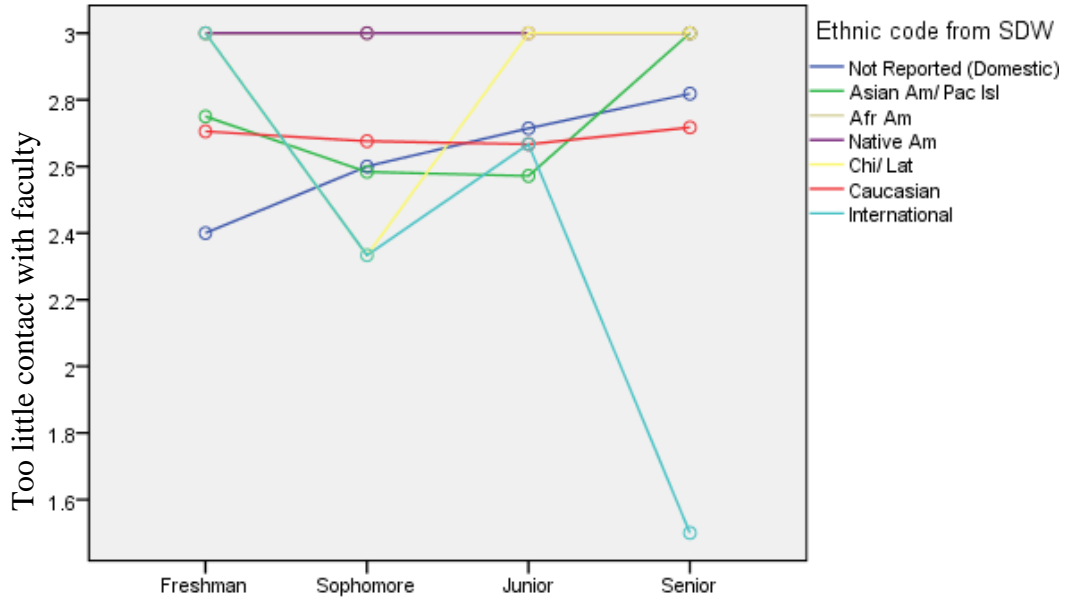


Figure 5: Mean distribution of ethnicity by class standing and *too little contact with faculty* as a reason for not returning to the university.

Gender

Gender and class standing with respect to the amount of contact with faculty was not statistically significant; however, what is noteworthy is the disparity between male and female responses (see Figure 6). Female sophomores were more likely to indicate that they were exposed to fewer contacts with faculty than male sophomores. Figure 6 illustrates the negative trend for female sophomores regarding their responses of too little contact with faculty as a factor in their decision not to return to the university. There was a decline in the junior year for males, however, not as significant as females. The findings for this construct for both males and females indicate lower levels of satisfaction with the amount of contact with faculty between the sophomore and junior years, collectively. The negative trends support this research contending that fewer contacts with faculty may have an adverse effect on the persistence of second-year students.

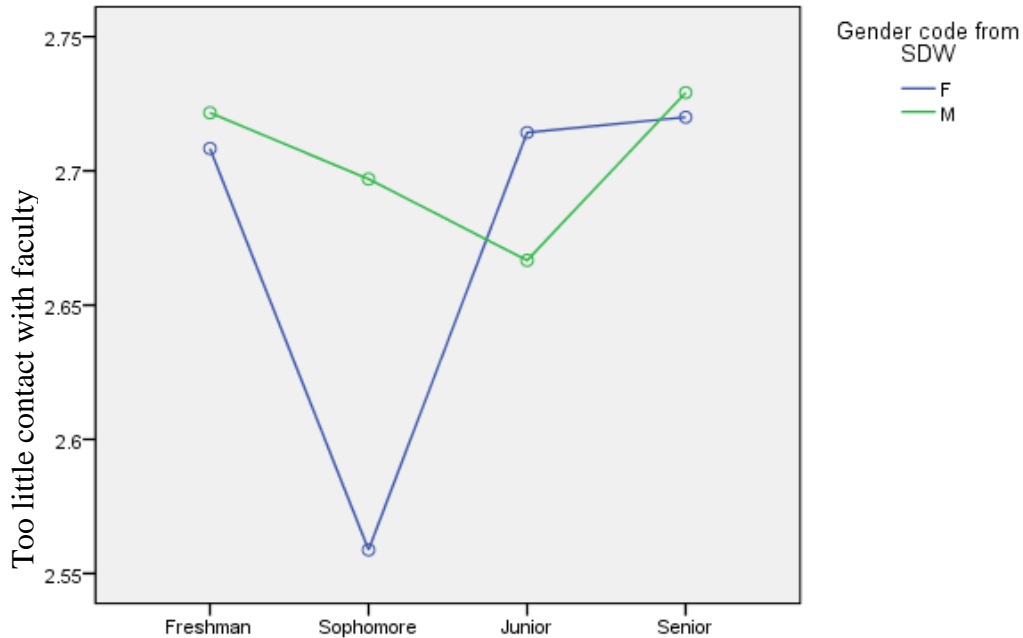


Figure 6: Mean distribution of gender by class standing and *too little contact with faculty* as a reason for not returning to the university.

Academic Advising

Class Comparison

Analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in mean scores for juniors compared to freshmen, indicating poor academic advising as a reason for not returning to the university. Although a statistically significant finding was not present for sophomores, the analysis determined that juniors compared to freshmen was statistically significant at the .05 level, indicating that juniors value good academic advising as an important factor in their choice to remain in college (see Table 7). The researcher acknowledges that students classified as juniors are those who have completed between 60 and 89 semester credits. Further investigation is warranted to determine whether juniors, who indicated poor advising as a factor for not returning, are those who were closer to 60 credit hours—transitioning from the second to third year. This finding indicates support for the focus of this research with regards to advising playing a critical role in students’ transition from the second to third year. Students as

individuals experience variability in their transitions and one constant is advising. The level of advising sought by students in their undergraduate experience varies; however, the finding in this study suggests that juniors acknowledged the significance of advising as a coping resource for the transitions they were undergoing.

Table 7: Comparison of Means
Class standing and academic advising

<i>Reasons not enrolled Spring semester</i>	<i>Class standing</i>	<i>Class standing</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Poor academic advising	Sophomore	Freshman	.134	.076	.292
		Junior	.088	.085	.732
		Senior	.108	.093	.647
	Junior	Freshman	.221*	.076	.020
		Sophomore	.088	.085	.732
		Senior	.196	.093	.153

* Significant at the 0.05 level

Although statistically significant findings were not found for the sophomore class, Figure 7 illustrates the significance that students between the first and third year place on academic advising. A sharp negative trend is observed in Figure 7, illustrating that sophomores and juniors were more likely to indicate that poor academic advising was a minor reason for not returning to the university.

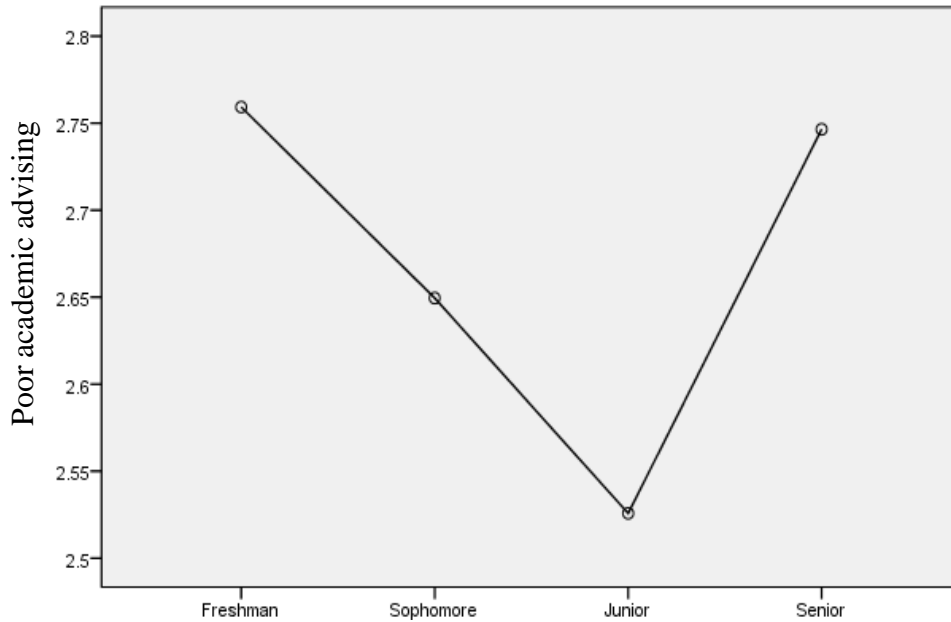


Figure 7: Mean distribution of class standing and *poor academic advising* as a minor reason for not returning to the university.

Ethnicity

Academic advising was found to be a significant predictor of sophomore dissatisfaction and lack of commitment to the university for Native American students, with a mean average of 2, indicating that this factor was a minor reason for not returning (see Figure 8). Also noteworthy, are the responses of Caucasian and Asian American/Pacific Islanders in which the lowest point of dissatisfaction occurs in the junior year and for International students, the lowest point is illustrated in the senior year. The focus of this study is supported with these findings that indicate that on average, ethnic minority students are experiencing higher degrees of dissatisfaction during their sophomore and junior year.

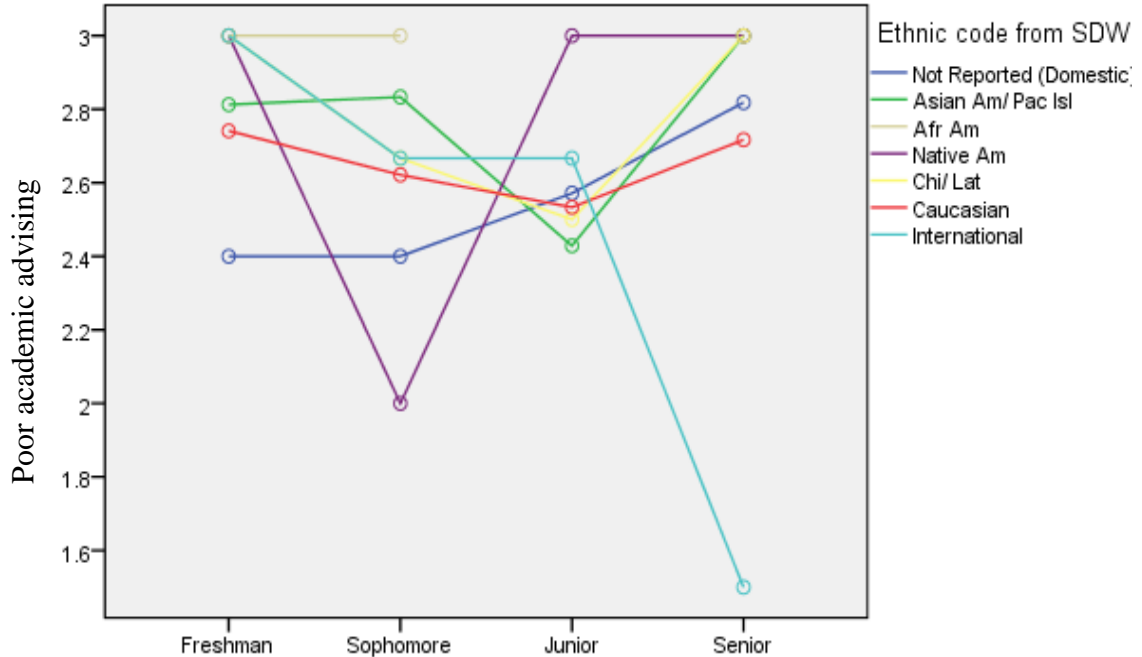


Figure 8: Mean distribution of ethnicity by class standing and *poor academic advising* as a reason for not returning to the university.

Gender

Sophomore males were more likely than females to indicate that poor academic advising was a factor in their decision not to return to the university (see Figure 9). Females were more likely to indicate a greater level of dissatisfaction with academic advising in their junior year, illustrated in Figure 9 by a sharp decline between the sophomore and junior year. Both males and females indicated that between the junior and senior year academic advising was not as much of a factor in their decision to withdraw. However, the trends for both male and female students indicate decline in satisfaction with advising between the freshman and junior years.

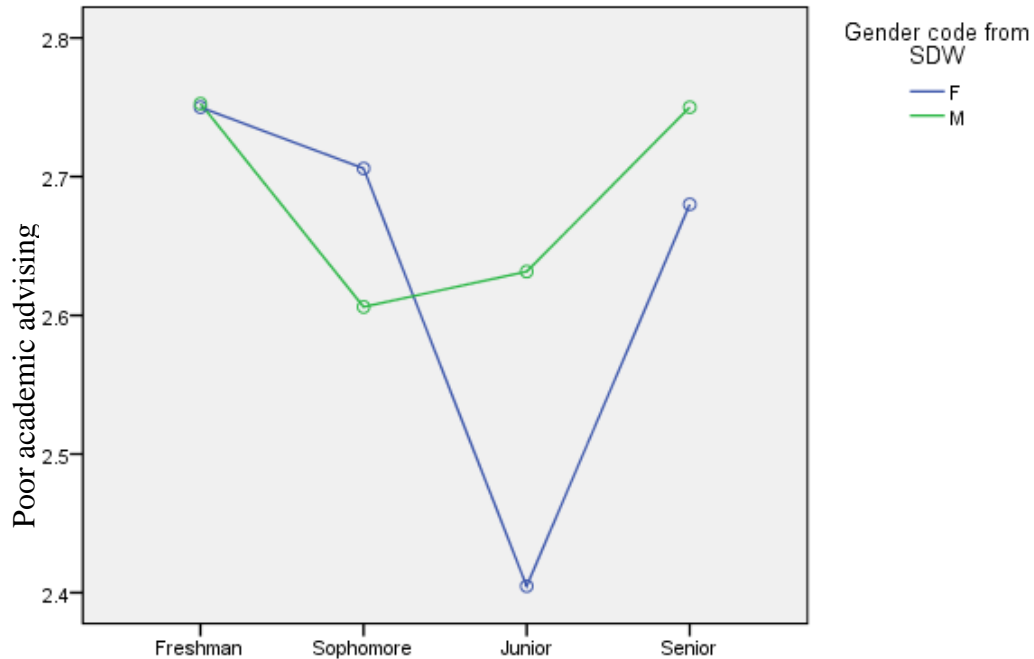


Figure 9: Mean distribution of gender by class standing and *poor academic advising* as a reason for not returning to the university.

Summary

All three factors of *unsatisfying interactions with faculty*, *too little contact with faculty*, and *poor academic advising*, together support a predictive argument towards contributing factors of sophomore attrition. These three variables demonstrate predictive power in terms of attrition. Of particular interest is the continuous decline from the freshman to the senior year with reported dissatisfaction with faculty interactions. Poor academic advising was a statistically significant finding in terms of mean difference between freshman and juniors, with juniors being the least satisfied. This could be due to students who are beginning their junior year and are still in transition. This may be particularly true if these students are still deciding on a major, have not identified faculty of interest in their major, or may not be in any major courses yet. Faculty as professors, and/or advisors may be the most critical support to sophomore students as they address significant challenges in their second-year. Sophomore students are in need of

considerable support during their second-year, especially as this year being marked with substantial uncertainty and confusion.

Although instructors and advisors have been identified as potentially having a positive impact on mediating attrition, their roles in specifically improving satisfaction are only occasionally highlighted in the literature (Gump, 2007; see also Anderson & Schreiner, 2000; Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Support for intentional student development through the advising process has been highlighted in research regarding contact between faculty and students (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982; Frost, 1991). Ender et al. further assert that advisors serve as adult role models and mentors and therefore may have a significant effect on commitment to the institution. Faculty and advisors are in unique positions to assist sophomore students by providing support as they are self-reflecting, and by guiding them in new strategies to move in, through, and out of transitions both positively and effectively.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored factors associated with attrition of second-year students by analyzing perceived satisfaction of interaction with faculty as a contributing factor of commitment to the university. Emphasis was placed on understanding the interrelationship of class standing and reasons for not returning to the university. Additional demographic variables examined in this study included ethnicity and gender. Few studies have explored reasons why sophomores choose not to return to college. More studies have focused on retention issues and extensive programming focused on increasing retention and persistence. This study chose to use archived data of students who were interviewed after leaving the university. This chapter describes the conclusions drawn from the results of the study and discusses the practical implications for institutional approaches to enhancing the collegiate experience for sophomores and therefore, retention. Policies and initiatives are also discussed to encourage implementation or improvement designed to support second-year students.

Second-year students did not report to a statistically significant degree that unsatisfying interactions with faculty were a reason for not returning to the university. However, there is evidence suggesting that sophomores, juniors, and seniors are all dissatisfied to some degree with their interactions with faculty. This factor is important for faculty to note as decreased positive interactions are of measureable concern as students indicate this as a factor in choosing to leave the university, beginning in the second-year.

Support can be offered both by faculty instructors and academic advisors by understanding the student development process and transitions that occur within the second-year. The research questions in this study are supported by the trends found in the data. In essence,

this research found that sophomores are more likely than other classes to indicate all three factors under study: unsatisfying interactions with faculty, too little contact with faculty, and poor academic advising as reasons for not returning to the university. Although statistically significant results were not found for unsatisfactory interactions with faculty and too little contact with faculty, there is predictive evidence to suggest that these were reasons factored into second-year students' departure.

Implications

Despite its limitations, this study contains some important implications for research on the second-year experience. The findings from this study confirm complexities faced within the second-year and highlight the importance of faculty-student interactions and high quality academic advising. It has been demonstrated that faculty and advisors provide critical support for academic and personal success of sophomores, retention, and persistence (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000; Gahagan & Hunter, 2006).

Faculty Support and Advising

High levels of faculty contact and engagement are beneficial for sophomores, particularly at four-year universities. An equitable balance between teaching, research and student engagement allows faculty to be available to students both in and outside the classroom. A new approach ought to occur to develop an interconnected experience for students to include opportunities for interaction with faculty outside of course content.

Several studies have sought to identify the needs of sophomores, and they vary quite dramatically (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000; Evenbeck et al., 2000; Flanagan, 2007; Gansemer-Topf et al., 2007; Gardner, 2000; Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Juillerat, 2000; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000; Richmond &

Lemons, 1985; Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008; Schaller, 2005; Stockenberg, 2007). This study proposes to promote the need for more faculty interaction beyond the traditional lecture-based classroom environment. Seminars are one way for faculty to focus on teaching objectives and increase informal interaction with students. Seminars have the flexibility to move beyond the classroom to alternative meeting spaces to engage students in more collaborative learning environments (Cabrera et al., 2002). As such, students begin to move beyond passive to active involvement in their learning (Tinto, 1997).

Advisors should play a more active role in working with sophomore students. Advisors are in a unique position to work with sophomores more regularly and systematically. Individualized attention should be given to sophomores as each student's challenges may differ. When considering students' individual circumstances, the *Four S's* (Schlossberg et al., 2005) are ideal. Advisors are in positions to work closely with sophomores on how they perceive their situation and their role in transitions that may be occurring, their awareness of support, and then provide a plan of action for them. For these reasons, working with sophomores on the factors affecting their personal and academic lives is critical. Sophomores are at a stage of reflective thinking and require more attention. Both faculty and advisors are well positioned to provide support to students who may be floundering, by helping them to see their strengths, identify passions, and pinpointing their values and intention to persist to graduation.

Not all sophomores experience confusion and uncertainty with being in college; however, it is important to be able to identify those who are. Key points to discuss with sophomores in the advising process are concerns about an intensified curriculum, major exploration, motivation, taking classes for enjoyment, and becoming involved in campus activities (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000). Helping students plan their academic program and future goals encourages

them to see the value in the collegiate experience (Crookston, 1972; Frost, 1991). By carefully planning and taking an interest in sophomore students, especially those who are struggling, faculty and advisors are perceived as being available and willing to take part in their students' education and personal lives. In doing so, students see faculty and advisors as approachable and caring (Schlossberg, 1989; Wolf-Wendel, 2003). The intended outcome of student-faculty interactions is to move students from sophomore slump to sophomore success. Student affairs and academic affairs are essential to the development of sophomore success programs and in the promotion of student-faculty interactions (Pascarella, 1980).

Student Affairs and Academic Affairs Partnerships

This study is intended to stimulate discussion within student affairs on strategic approaches to shift institutional focus from not only the first year but the second-year as well. Central issues for institutions are academic achievement and persistence to graduation (Evenbeck et al., 2000). However, extensive resources are often allocated to first-year programming and not considered for the second-year. Findings from this study are a first step toward providing evidence on key issues facing students who are transitioning between their second and third year of college.

Importance should be placed on identifying and evaluating transitions that sophomores are experiencing. Transition theory is an underutilized theoretical perspective within student affairs practice. Practitioners who become familiar with transition theory are better equipped to assist sophomores with moving into a transition, moving through it, and ultimately moving out (Schlossberg et al. 1995). In practice, student affairs professionals are well positioned to develop programs designed to assist sophomores with specific situations they encounter. Identifying what kind of control exists and how the student works through a particular situation is

important—self-reflection with guidance can help sophomores work through difficult challenges (Schlossberg, 1981). In doing so, practitioners develop systems of support and strategies for these students.

Programs developed through student affairs that are bridged with academic affairs provide opportunities for faculty and advisors to connect and work with sophomores more individually. The second-year is often marked by self-reflection, changing majors, and students beginning to become more independent. Programs designed to assist students in these transitions provide a strong foundation to continue to the next year. Taking into consideration the size of an institution is important as not all programs may be possible. For example, at larger institutions such as the one examined for this study, seminars might prove to be effective. Student-faculty interactions are promoted in smaller seminars in which closer interaction and support is encouraged (Tsui & Gao, 2006). Seminars also offer an opportunity for faculty to engage students in a more meaningful way (Morrison & Brown, 2006; Tsui & Gao, 2006).

Student affairs and academic affairs administrators are encouraged to join together and assess the climate of the sophomore class and develop programs supported both by student affairs and academic affairs. Student affairs practitioners are well positioned to provide support for struggling students. Freshman programs such as advising, seminars, and living learning communities, can be redesigned to meet the needs of sophomore students (Tinto, 1997). Student affairs professionals are called upon to assess support services and tailor portions to the sophomore class (Cockrell, Caplow, & Donaldson, 2000). Inviting sophomores to form a sophomore council to formulate ideas for programming provides incentive to promote campus involvement and to take ownership in programming geared towards their class. A sophomore council also encourages a relationship between student affairs and students—an indication to

students that “we care.” Other programs for the sophomore year might include retreats the week before Fall classes begin, where workshops are developed to inform and discuss issues of motivation, career planning, how to choose a major, financing college, and social experiences (Schaller, 2005).

Allocating funds to develop programs for the sophomore experience is often necessary. Depending on the type of programming, extensive funding might be necessary to build facilities devoted to sophomores such as residence halls or specific hall floors, hiring various staff, or offering housing allowances for peer mentors. Second-year classes can also be offered in residence halls as well as various seminars as an alternative format to the traditional learning environment. Classes offered in residence halls allow opportunity for faculty to engage with students at alternate times outside of class which may enhance learning outcomes. Office spaces in the residence halls create more opportunity for students and faculty to wander through and have spontaneous interaction and a more supportive environment. Tutoring and workshops can also be offered within the halls as either voluntary participation or required as part of housing assignments. If an entire building is not possible, another option is to dedicate specific floors within residence halls specifically for sophomores with the programming mentioned above.

Dine with faculty events are additional ways to support sophomore students by providing a free meal to faculty and encourage conversation with faculty on various topics. These topics can range from academics, major exploration, career paths, research, or open conversation. These are events that can also be incorporated into sophomore residence hall programming.

This section highlights ways in which student affairs and academic affairs together can provide programming for sophomores to address their developmental needs. Student affairs and academic affairs are well positioned to address the academic reality of the second-year

experience and provide support during significant points of transition (Schlossberg et al., 2005). Institutional support is necessary as a step toward decreasing high attrition rates of sophomores (Morrison & Brown, 2006).

Policy and Practice

As institutions become more informed regarding the complexity of retention and learn more about the nuances of the sophomore year, it becomes much clearer that initiatives should be put in motion to circumvent second-year students' attrition. To reach a much anticipated goal of sophomore retention, it should first begin at the institutional level (Evenbeck et al., 2000). A general understanding ought to exist on the nature and complexities of the sophomore year (Evenbeck et al., 2000). Listening to student concerns and their needs is a first step toward developing a response to their transitional issues (Tinto, 1993). The goal is increased satisfaction of the college experience which results in increased retention. Institutions should employ interdepartmental collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs to share in the responsibility of nurturing the development of sophomores (Strange & King, 1990) through strengthening existing and/or developing new programs, cost efficiencies, developing reward systems for faculty, and reaffirming values and commitment to students (Tinto, 1993). Sophomore students in this study indicated that faculty interaction and good advising are important in the college experience. Student affairs offices are positioned in a central role for support services to students through policies and practices created to address support mechanisms for sophomore students. These initiatives uphold the institutional mission and goals (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982; Hemwall & Trachte, 1999) by promoting student affairs and academic affairs partnerships by assisting students to fulfill their personal and educational objectives and aspirations.

In summary, knowledge and understanding of the sophomore experience are critical to the creation and improvement of support services geared toward sophomores. Faculty, advising, student affairs, and academic affairs each have a responsibility to student success. Working together provides the seamless support structure necessary for students to transition from one year to the next (Flanagan, 2007; Gahagan & Hunter, 2006) Identifying critical points in the transitional stages of sophomores provides a roadmap toward program implementation. Allocating resources to encourage student development throughout each year is critical. Student affairs professionals and faculty share the responsibility in developing a holistic approach to serving students.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study explored issues concerning sophomore students from one public four-year university. Limitations of this study exist that include sample size, current studies on non-returning students, demographics, difficulty contacting non-returning students, and limited information from the dataset, as well as utilizing a post-facto method of research.

The sample was representative of the undergraduate population at the institution studied, however, findings cannot be generalized to other institutions or other institutional types. Characteristics of sophomores vary between public and private institutions as well as the size of the institution. Studies that include several institutions of similar size and type are recommended to allow for a much larger sample population as well as a larger sample of ethnic minority students. A study of this nature will allow for generalization to other institutions and will also glean more information and a closer look into the experiences of ethnic minority students.

Little research has been conducted on students who do not return. There are a number of studies concerning sophomore issues and experiences, however, these studies often include

enrolled students who participate in focus groups, interviews, and surveys, many of which are conducted at private institutions. Current work on non-returning second-year students is scant and provide for limited direction. Future exploratory studies need to be undertaken to inform institutions of best practices in mediating factors associated with second-year attrition.

A challenge exists with contacting students who are no longer enrolled. Many of these students move and/or change phone numbers and e-mail addresses. The length of time that passes between the student leaving and when they are contacted is critical. A recommendation is to prompt students to update their contact information at the beginning of each term and when attempting to view their final grade report. The longest span of time exists between the spring and fall terms. Generally, students register for fall classes by the end of spring term. A recommendation is to monitor registration of sophomores directly after the end of the spring term and those who have not registered for fall can be contacted to see if they plan to return. If they are not, a survey can be administered at that time.

A final limitation of this study was the dataset being used. This study was a secondary study to the data collected. When conducting the interviews, students were aware of why data was being collected on students who did not return, however, they were also informed that their responses were anonymous. Therefore, when this investigator received the dataset for the current study, identifiers were removed. Without identifiers, this research was unable to determine exact credit completion of each student. This information would have been valuable in determining how many students were transitioning from their second-year to their third; particularly with regards to statistically significant findings for juniors.

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APPENDIX A
NON-RETURNING STUDENT SURVEY

Non-Returning Student Survey

Hello, this is (interviewer’s name) and I'm calling from the “University”. May I speak with (student’s name)? I am calling on behalf of the “University” in order to learn more about your experiences at the university, and would like to ask you a few questions.

This interview is voluntary and has been approved by the “University”. While portions of this interview may be monitored by my supervisors, the information you provide will remain confidential. If I come to any question that you prefer not to answer, just let me know and I will skip over it. This interview will only take about 5 to 7 minutes to complete.

Now I would like to ask you about why you did not enroll at the “University” for the Spring semester. I have a list of 25 possible situations. For each situation, please tell me if it was a major reason for you not enrolling, a minor reason, or not a reason.

	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason	No Answer
1. Problems getting into required classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Failure to get into desired major	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Poor academic advising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Inadequate housing choices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Inadequate facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Inadequate support for social activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Unsatisfying interactions with faculty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Uncomfortable social climate on campus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Size of the population at University.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Dissatisfaction with academic performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Lack of challenging courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Too many required courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Poor quality of instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Too little contact with faculty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Too many large classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Desire to get away from college for a while	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Desire to move to a new location	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Difficulty making friends at University	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Emotional, health, or family-related circumstance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Influence of parents or relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Failure to receive <i>any</i> financial help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Failure to receive enough financial help to cover costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Inadequate budget planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Trouble finding employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Desire to work instead of attending college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX B
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
CERTIFICATION OF EXEMPTION

MEMORANDUM

TO: Willie Heggins and Selena Castro
FROM: Rani Muthukrishnan (for) Kris Miller, Chair, WSU Institutional Review Board (3005)
DATE: 9/16/2008
SUBJECT: Certification of Exemption, IRB Number 10536-001

Based on the Exemption Determination Application submitted for the study titled Faculty-Student Interaction and Advising: An Exploratory Analysis of Non-Returning Second-Year Students at a Public Research University, and assigned IRB # 10536, the WSU Institutional Review Board has determined that the study satisfies the criteria for Exempt Research contained in 45CFR 46.

Exempt certification does not relieve the investigator from the responsibility of providing continuing attention to protection of human subjects participating in the study and adherence to ethical standards for research involving human participants.

This certification is valid only for the study protocol as it was submitted to the IRB. Studies certified as Exempt are not subject to annual review. If any changes are made to the study protocol, you must submit the changes to the IRB for determination that the study remains Exempt before implementing the changes.