

Keys Issues in the Sophomore Year: Ways to Provide Support



ften referred to as the “sophomore slump,” the second year of college can be filled with many questions and few immediate answers. Sometimes the questions are related to academic studies, or peer and family relationships.

Sometimes, feelings related to values and beliefs can raise internal questions. And, of course, the ever so popular, “What am I going to do with my life?” question comes more frequently throughout the second year.

These questions, coupled with the physical return to a campus that isn’t quite as new or adventurous as it was in the first year, can create a stressful and overwhelming time for second-year students.

Sophomore Year Issues

Academics

- Fear that initial success was just “lucky” and can’t be repeated
- Pressure to choose, and succeed, in a major and/or minor
- Uncertainty about future profession
- Take courses with upper-class students
- Need to build relationships with professors
- Surprised by the increased challenge in studies

Relationships

- Include more people
- Include different types of people
- Experience new communities
- Involvement in new “types” of groups and organizations
- Decrease in friendships back home
- Decrease in the need to go home

Finances

- Use of finances for immediate gratification
- Lack of a long-term financial picture
- Guilt about financial investment being put into someone with no future plans
- Lack of finances could lead to dropping out

Self-Awareness

- Bittersweet—provides personal freedom AND creates internal anxiety
- Begin the search for purpose and meaning

Internal Questions of a Sophomore:

- Who am I?
- Who are these people I am hanging out with?
- What do my academic studies mean to me?
- What am I going to do with the rest of my life?
- How are my beliefs different than my parents?
- Why is college not as fun as it was last year?
- Do I want to transfer?

- More personal emphasis on weaknesses, rather than strengths
- Low energy and drive
- The “newness” is gone
- Feel invisible on campus
- The “real world” still seems far away
- Lack of motivation—doing the same ol’ thing

What Can My Student Do to Get Out of the Slump?

- Visit the Career Services Office to take career assessments, talk to an advisor, and explore possible major and career options.
- Visit the Student Activities Office to explore involvement opportunities.
- Visit the Counseling Center to discuss feelings and stressors, and gain ways to resolve them.
- Visit a professor or academic advisor to determine if there is a need for tutoring or academic support; assess current course-load, and research “fun” classes to continue the exploration of potential areas of interest.
- Talk to an upper-class mentor to learn that the “slump” is natural and you can get over it.

The “sophomore slump” is real and can be successfully addressed. These resources can help your student discern where he is now, where he wants to be and what he needs to do to get out of the “slump.” He will become more self-aware, personally developed and prepared to move on in his higher education.

Adapted from the Paper-Clip Communications audio conference, “Strategies for Sophomore Year Success” (December 2006).