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REFLECTING BACK: DO SENIOR STUDENTS  
BELIEVE THEY EXPERIENCED A SOPHOMORE SLUMP?

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business  
Department of Higher Education and Student Development  
Taylor University  
Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

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by

Taylor M. Eddy

May 2016

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**Higher Education and Student Development  
Taylor University  
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Taylor Melissa Eddy

entitled

Reflecting Back: Do Students Believe They  
Experience a Sophomore Slump?

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree  
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May 2016

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### Abstract

The present study sought to understand the reasoning behind the occurrence of the sophomore slump through the perspectives of students. Though the sophomore slump is defined as overall poor academic performance and apathy toward academia, the reasoning for this trouble has not received deep exploration. The researcher for the present study surveyed fifty-one seniors to understand better what year of college these students considered their worst, most difficult, and/or most disappointing. Sixteen of those seniors (31%) indicated at least one semester during their sophomore year that they would categorize as the “worst.” Sixty-seven percent indicated freshman year, and 50% indicated junior year. The participants then explained why they would label certain semesters as such. Findings from this study show multiple explanations for a student who slumps during his or her second year of college. Following the discussion, this study includes implications for practice, suggestions for further research, and the limitations of the study.

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*Ehre sei Gott allein.*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Many opportunities cause excitement when one comes to college for the first time. Campuses across the nation become abuzz with activity and excitement each fall. As freshmen begin their year, they navigate through a new world, finding the right classrooms, the right offices, the right friends. Colleges usually set in place programming to help these students grow accustomed to the college life. At the end of the year, freshmen leave their new homes for the summer and wait in anticipation for the coming fall.

The second-year students at institutions all across the country often inherit the stereotypical profile of the overlooked middle children of universities (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). The “Sophomore Slump” refers to a time, typically during the second year of college, when students may experience a greater difficulty personally or academically when compared to the other three years. Some do not consider this time period a serious problem, while others cannot elaborate enough on its importance. The relatively small amount of research done on the subject clearly indicates the sophomore slump as a phenomenon and something worthy of concern by institutions of higher education. Lower retention rates, lower academic performance, and higher levels of apathy provide enough reason for worry.

Whereas the first year of college seems filled with activity and newness, along with an ample amount of support from faculty and staff, the second year of college may not meet students' expectations. During the second year, levels of excitement drop, as do support services. Relationships likewise change between the first and second year, either fading or deepening, and require the sophomore's attention. Sophomores struggle to find their place at the university and engage in the college experience. If students lack involvement with their university, their commitment to the college or university can weaken. Developmentally, college sophomores stand at a different place than first-year students, and these developmental challenges and changes require attention. Sophomores often feel more pressure to settle on a career choice and make decisions that could affect the rest of their lives. These second-year students struggle with confusion and uncertainty about where to go and what to do. While the majority of colleges and universities understandably have developed and emphasized first-year experience programs, only a few have established programs for the second year. These programs benefit both the students and the university as a whole.

### **What is the Sophomore Slump?**

Schreiner and Pattengale (2000) defined the "Sophomore Slump" as lowering GPAs, decreased interest, overall poor academic performance, and lower retention rates. The sophomore slump stands a phenomenon not widely understood. Some believe sophomores experience feelings of loneliness attributed to a lack of belonging, which may result from the shortage of programming provided to students. Initial expectations are not met when students return to school for the sophomore year (Zhang, 2013).

Currently, little research gives evidence connecting the results of the sophomore slump to the reasons why it occurs. The sophomore slump evidences itself through lower academic performance but does not give a rationale for the existence of a sophomore struggle (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). Though lower GPAs and lower retention rates during the second year certainly offer cause for concern, this study explored what negatively affects GPAs and retention rates according to the student viewpoint. Furthermore, the study strove to address the gap found within the literature: the student perspectives of the sophomore slump and the reasoning behind the slump. Attempting to find what influences the slump can enable higher education professionals to help students struggling in the second year.

### **Does the Sophomore Slump Exist?**

Typically, the middle child in a family has become thought of as the overlooked child (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Stainburn, 2013). The first child does everything first and has more responsibility. The last child, often babied, gets close attention from other members of the family. But the middle child goes simply unnoticed. On a college campus, sophomores fall into that “middle child” stereotype. Seniors apply for jobs or graduate schools with the future in mind (Zhang, 2013). Juniors, finally upperclassmen, have a grasp on how college works and have typically found their place in their major (Peden, 2015; Zhang, 2013). Freshmen appear in the midst of excessive excitement, and faculty and staff alike reach out toward them to make sure they do well (Beyer, 1963; Wheeler, 2011). But what about the sophomores? After so much guidance and attention in the freshman year, sophomores often seem forgotten. The sophomore year receives

less understanding than the other years of a student's career (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Gump, 2007; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000).

### **What Is the Impact of Interpersonal Relationships on the Sophomore Slump?**

As defined by *Dictionary.com*, a relationship is “a connection, association, or involvement.” For the purposes of this study, the word “relationship” described any relationship a college student would have with another human in his or her life. This definition includes cross-sex friendships, same-sex friendships, family connections, romantic affiliations, and faculty and staff relationships. Each and every human functions as a relational being, including those in their second year of college: “We are relational beings inherently connected to others. Our flourishing thus depends on the health of these connections” (Downie & Jewellyn, 2011, p. 296).

The flourishing of second-year students also appears effected by the relationships. One study found that having close relationships with advisors allowed sophomore students a more successful sophomore year and proved greatly beneficial to the students (Peden, 2015). One sophomore wrote in her school paper, “After much consideration, I think social factors contribute to this slump. I experience it as a feeling of being socially adrift” (Ferguson, 2013, para. 8). This sophomore felt relational aspects in her life led to a slumping her sophomore year.

### **Research questions**

This research sought to answer the following questions: From a student perspective, do sophomores slump during their second year compared to the other three years of college? If so, what reasons do students attribute to causing the sophomore slump?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Defining the Sophomore Slump**

As previously stated, Schreiner and Pattengale (2000) characterized the “sophomore slump” as lowering GPAs, decreased interest, overall poor academic performance, and lower retention rates. The first use of the term came in the 1950’s by M. B. Freedman, who said the slump more likely occurred in the second half of a student’s freshman year (Gump, 2007). Though, as first-year experience programs have increased throughout the country, the sophomore slump more likely lies within a student’s second year of college. Little extensive research exists on the topic, though the issue has garnered awareness for over fifty years (Gump, 2007). Overall, the sophomore slump entails a lower academic performance from students during their second year of college when compared to their other three years.

Though the topic has claimed some attention for the last few decades, the experience of the second-year student remains less understood than the first-year experience. The second year differs much from the first and appears “at times, even more challenging period than the initial transition to college” (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006, p. 17). Some have called the sophomore slump a developmental concern (Gump, 2007), while some wonder if anything could, or even should, address and resolve the issue (Beyer, 1963; Grasgreen, 2011). Margolis (1976) claimed that failure to understand the

sophomore slump and the inability “to counsel from that understanding can lead to more serious clinical problems such as depression or paralyzing self-consciousness” (p. 133). Stainburn (2013) noted that 6% of students at major flagship state schools drop out during their second year, and a quarter of second-year students do not feel either at home on their campus or energized by the classes in which they enroll. One study found that 20 to 25% of sophomore students experience the slump (Grasgreen, 2011); other research highlighted college sophomores as more likely—above freshmen, juniors, or seniors—to express dissatisfaction with the college experience (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Findings like these indicate the sophomore slump as a concern for higher education and necessitate additional research in order to understand this phenomenon better.

Ideally, students can avoid the sophomore slump, especially when better informed about the issue. Miller (2006) warned his student readers:

Sophomore year is often characterized by confusion, soul-searching, motivational problems, and, occasionally, flat-out rebellion against parents, professors, or friends. You may find yourself feeling depressed and alienated, and studying listlessly or skipping classes because you feel that your coursework has no meaning for you. Welcome to the Sophomore Slump. (p. 349)

In an entire chapter of his book, dedicated to the second-year slump and ways in to avoid it, Miller (2006) outlined four typical causes of this harder sophomore year: failing to connect with friends and build a network, failing to involve oneself in a major of interest or challenge, failing to get involved in extracurricular activities of interest, and failing to take care of oneself physically by exercising and maintaining a good diet. To combat these root issues, some of his suggestions included intentionally connecting with people,



getting involved in community service, trying new things, and breaking away from the normal routine. Miller even suggested students try dating, “even for a short time,” to help avoid feeling “bummed out” (p. 353).

### **Relationships during the Second-Year**

VanValkenburg (2013) focused on the relationships within the life of sophomores. Friendships during the sophomore year play a role in the student’s second-year experience. Meeting new people and developing multiple friendships fills the freshman year. High relational expectations occur when students return for their second year of school. One study by VanValkenburg (2013) found students often experienced either a deepening of the friendships made freshman year or a fading of friendships, which has a significant impact on the students. When friendships did not last, not only did the students began to feel lonely on a personal level, but they also felt more disconnected from the university at large. After experiencing the separation from some friends, while still open to meeting new people and forming new relationships, students typically focused more on deepening the relationships they already had.

### **Difference between the First and Second Year**

Schreiner and Pattengale (2000) tried to explain factors that cause and amplify the difference between a student’s first year and their second year. During the first year of college, as expected, students face challenges of living on their own for the first time: moving away from their families and friends, living in a new environment and adjusting to that new culture, dealing with higher levels of responsibility for their academics, and developing as an individual. Because of known and expected hurdles during the first year, institutions place a needed focus on helping freshmen succeed.

Freshman year provides academic support services, counseling interventions, peer mentoring, social development programs, and so forth. By the sophomore year, most, if not all, of these programs fall away (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008), and the university provides less support (Vaughn & Parry, 2013; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Unfortunately, a problem arises when higher education professionals “expect that sophomores will have adapted so that we may turn our attention to the next wave of first-year students” (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000, p. 2). Sophomores may often feel abandoned and ignored when freshmen year programs subside (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008). A sophomore in a focus group at the University of South Carolina stated, “Your freshman year—it’s not that you were babied, but it’s like there were so many things that were reaching out to freshmen that you come back your sophomore year and it’s just like you are on your own” (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006, p. 17).

While dealing with the transition from freshman year, sophomores may also become disenchanted and cynical about their school, no longer ignorant to the realities of college life. The glamor of the excitement of the college experience has worn off (Koenig, 2014). According to Margolis, (1976), “What distinguishes sophomore identity crisis is that although there is the continuation of academic and social demands, there are no longer any obvious built-in barometers of success” (p. 134). Whether or not they commit to a major, sophomore students may know of their weakness or their areas of interest. They may even question an interest they previously told family and friends they wanted to invest in for the rest of their life, thus, causing tension they had not anticipated (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). Letting go of previous dreams or career plans can lead to mourning and dissatisfaction (Vaughn & Parry, 2013).

Students in their second year of college have anxiety about finding a direction for their life, choosing a path for their career, finding a place on campus, and dealing with relationships from home that fade (Wheeler, 2011). Sophomores face daunting concerns of uncertainty and confusion about finances, academics, and their futures (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). The students may also feel that the expectations they had for their second year and the reality they face do not match up (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). The combination of these challenges leads to the sophomore slump.

Some claim that sophomores require more attention because of their unique developmental place, adding that second-year students may differ depending on what type of institution they attend (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). In discussing identity development, some suggest that, because sophomores typically feel more pressure to make career decisions and settle into a major, they tend to experience higher levels of conflict about their identity (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007). Schaller (2007) and Tobolowsky and Cox (2007) also suggested sophomores may struggle with autonomy and competence, which would further stifle identity development.

Tobolowsky and Cox (2007) summarized four stages second-year students may find themselves experiencing. First, sophomores tend to experience random exploration: the exploration of themselves, their relationships, and their academic setting. Second-year students also encounter concern for their lives and their future that manifests in focused exploration or wanting to find a major and a clear direction for their academics. Tentative choices during the sophomore year refer to refining choices made during the freshman year as now-sophomore students gain knowledge about themselves and the world. Finally, commitment occurs when sophomores have or gain confidence and feel

secure in themselves and their place in life. Margolis (1976) pointed out the individuality of each student and his or her unique way of handling the crisis in his or her life:

The problem is specific to each college student and gains its form by the student's ability to deal with crisis both abstractly and concretely. It is a problem involving feelings, expectations, and competencies, which each can be undercut by the student's need to ask larger philosophical questions about him or herself vis-à-vis the world. (p. 133)

This uniqueness within the development of college sophomores calls for focused attention to their needs and what may help them succeed during their second year.

### **A Call for Further Support**

A conclusion comes from the existing literature of the sophomore slump: sophomores must receive further support and feel more seen on their college campuses. The unique challenges that occur in the sophomore year indicate a need for continued attention from the freshman year into the sophomore year.

**Suggestions.** Gahagan and Hunter (2006) recommended paying attention to sophomores; they equated this awareness to understanding the sophomore experience, examining the retention rates of second-year students, and evaluating what structures the university offers sophomores by way of support. Graunke and Woosley (2005) found that noteworthy factors of grade point average indicated satisfaction with faculty interactions, suggesting that, if sophomores feel more seen by the faculty on their campuses, they improve academically. By the time students reach junior or senior year, they typically have developed connections through their major field and through extracurriculars and leadership positions within those extracurriculars (Wang &

Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Thus, higher education professionals should pay attention to second-year students and even develop a task force dedicated to the sophomore experience, intentionally providing what students need during this unique phase in their college career (Hunter, Tobolowsky, & Gardner, 2010). Because of the lack of connections sophomore students experience, second-year students feel less committed to their universities and have a higher chance of dropping out of college.

Most research on the sophomore slump calls for specific resources dedicated to the second-year students. The study by Miller (2006) offers a remedy for the sophomore slump: “goal-centered activity—activity that has you exploring the areas that you have decided are of interest to you and that propel you forward toward a set of longer-term goals that you’ve established for yourself” (p. 350). Wang and Kennedy-Phillips (2013), as well as Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz (2010), who studied first-generation college sophomore students, suggested the need for programming specifically geared toward second-year students. Specific programming for sophomores could include help in deciding a major, mentoring programs, and focused attention similar to what students receive as freshmen. Gahagan and Hunter (2006) also recommended adopting programs and curricula designed for sophomores specifically and having first-year experience programs extend beyond the first year.

### **Examples of Second-Year Programming**

As they often feel forgotten, sophomore students must feel welcome as they return to campus for their second year of college. Colorado College starts its school year with a Luau for all sophomore students (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007). The faculty who taught in the first-year experience program attend to reconnect with students they taught

the year before. Focused on including second-year students, the college knows that “the Sophomore Luau is expensive but sets the tone for the second year by letting students know that they are important and not forgotten” (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007, p. 71).

Washington University, located in St. Louis, also has a kick-off event for sophomores. Washington does this in order to “help orient second-year students to programs and people that could be important to their success” (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006, p. 21).

Sweet Briar College (2014) in Virginia has second-year experience programs, which they call “SophoMORE year programs.” In these programs, the college makes sophomores aware of the resources they may need on campus, provides vocational guidance to students, and enlightens students about opportunities to study abroad. Realizing the importance of the students’ well-being, Sweet Briar also helps inform the students of social events, both on and off campus, and helps to keep them informed about how to develop healthy, lifelong skills. Stanford University (2015) also has a sophomore year program. Stanford offers a three-week residential program in which students, during their second year, attend seminars of “intense academic exploration” with 12 to 15 other students. Within the program, sophomore students can connect with upperclassmen, graduate students, and faculty. Students carry the material learned in the seminars into conversations over meals and other activities, forging both academic and social connections.

Sophomore learning communities have also shown to cause a better success rate for sophomores. Portland State University in Oregon requires all of their sophomores to participate in a learning community. They have found that students in these academic communities learn more than they would otherwise (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). The

University of Massachusetts Amherst (2014) also uses living-learning communities to enhance the sophomore experience. Each community focuses on a different theme. This year, the themes include Creative Expressions, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Technical Solutions, and Explore, Engage, Connect for Social Justice. The college hopes to support their sophomores and help them develop necessary skills, such as time and stress management.

Boston College has developed a retreat for sophomores, happening at the end of the sophomore year. This retreat allows students a time to get away and reflect on their time at school and explore the direction of their lives, thinking about the careers they have chosen to pursue (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). A course at Belmont University requires sophomore students to write a speech explaining what they perceive as their purpose, which helps the students to reflect on their place in life and where they see themselves in the future (Vaughn & Parry, 2013). Belmont University (2015) has focused living communities for sophomore year students as well. Along with living in one of two halls with other sophomores, the students have common classroom experiences and programs designed for the unique experience of the second year.

### **Summary**

While colleges continue efforts improve the second-year experience, further research would expand the literature. Achieving competence, managing one's emotions, gaining interdependence, establishing identity, and developing mature relationships, purpose, and integrity—steps critical to a college student's growth—happen during the collegiate years (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007). How these steps occur or continue specifically during the second year remains unknown. Helping students feel connected

on their campuses requires “effectively involving second-year students academically and socially is an emerging issue critical to sophomore success” (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013, p. 547).

While research has addressed first-year students and college students as a whole, the literature lacks extensive exploration of sophomore development apart from the freshmen, junior, and senior years. The research that has emerged in recent years highlights two key topics: “the developmental changes that take place within students during their sophomore year” (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006, p.18) and the policies or practices of institutions that help or hinder sophomores. Sophomore relational development lacks research. Though mentioned by VanValkenburg (2013) and Miller (2006), no existing studies assess how the relationships within the students’ lives impact the sophomore slump. Because each and every human functions as a relational being, not researching how relationships affect sophomores while they slump would prove neglectful.

This research further explored the sophomore slump and its cause by gaining a student perspective on the phenomenon: reflecting back on their college careers, do students see a slump occur in their second year of college?



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Problem Statement**

Creswell (2012) defines a qualitative phenomenological study as the “key concept, idea, or process studied in qualitative research” (p. 16). A phenomenological design studies the shared experience of several individuals. For this research, the sophomore slump served as the studied phenomenon. The researcher sought to develop “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The following research questions guided the study: From a student perspective, do sophomores slump during their second year compared to the other three years of college? If so, what reasons do students attribute to causing the sophomore slump? The researcher addressed these questions by interviewing 62 students through written essays. Students in a senior-level writing course at a university wrote these essays, reflecting on what they would describe as their worst two semesters of college.

In this study, the word “worst” refers to the undergraduate year or semesters of college the participants considered the most unsatisfactory or the most difficult. The researcher clearly articulated to the participants to consider all aspects of the college experience and life during the past four years when determining their worst two semesters. For example, participants should have taken all such elements as academics, relationships, and personal reasons into account.

## **Participants**

The researcher gathered graduating senior students enrolled in a four year institution as participants for this study. The researcher chose senior students as participants because they had experienced all four of the college years. While currently in their senior year, these students could reflect over the entirety of their college career and decide the year in which they most strongly experienced a slump. The study took place at a faith-based, liberal arts university. Approximately 2,000 students attend the school—45% of whom identify as male and 55% of whom identify as female.

## **Procedure**

The researcher conducted pilot testing by asking two students (1 male, 1 female) to clarify the essay questions. Next, another male and female student field-tested the essay. The researcher used these pilot interviews to clarify the essay questions and time limitations but did not include these pilot interviews in this study.

At the time of the study, participants attended a culminating senior-level course at the university. The university requires the course of all students from every discipline. The researcher explained the consent form to all participants, who then each signed the form. The researcher then distributed the essay forms for completion (see Appendix A). Participants received no extensive direction other than to read the form and provide a written response to the essay questions. All participants had 15 minutes to complete the forms, and the researcher did not ask any follow-up questions after the participants had completed the essays. After the allotted 15 minutes, the researcher collected the consent forms and the essays separately to ensure confidentiality. Students who wanted to know the findings included their email address on the consent form so the researcher could

contact them at a later date. The researcher utilized this procedure to understand the student perspective. Lower academic performance and retention rates become cause for concern, but the reasoning behind a slump during the sophomore year needs further exploration. Knowledge of the reasons for the sophomore slump can better equip higher education professionals to assist students as sophomores move through their second year. The questions of the essay asked what two semesters of college the student considered the worst he or she experienced and for the top two reasons that he or she defined each semester as the worst. The researcher intentionally left these questions more general in an attempt to have the participants interpret for themselves what they viewed as their most disappointing or dissatisfying year of college as well as the reasons for that difficulty.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher collected the essays from students and safely stored them in a university office until analysis. The researcher then coded the data, reading through each of the essays and transforming them into electronic documents to ensure clarity in understanding what each participant had written. The researcher then read each documents and extracted main codes. This process—coding the data— “involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The researcher did not use all the information from the student essays, as customary with qualitative data. Themes, or categories, emerged from grouping codes together. The researcher categorized themes together in order to

draw conclusions. The researcher then interpreted data in order to make sense of the data. After interpreting the data, the researcher could add her study to existing literature.

To ensure accuracy within the process, a third party reviewed the themes derived from the research. Because the coding process can prove highly interpretive, an external perspective to the process added a needed outside viewpoint. The researcher then reevaluated the findings based on the external review. This review and reevaluation helped to add validity to the codes and themes (Creswell, 2013).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

This qualitative research included 62 written essays from students enrolled in a senior-level course. Two separate classes answered the administered questions, and each had approximately 15 minutes to complete the essays. Combined, the two class sections contained 63 total students. Of the 63 students, the researcher chose 1 as a pilot study. Eleven of the remaining participants identified as juniors or those graduating in only three years. The researcher removed the 11 juniors and those graduating in less than four years from the study, as these students could not reflect back on an entire, traditional four-year college experience. The researcher utilized the data from the remaining 51 students in at least their eighth semester of college.

#### **Senior Participants**

Participants indicated their top two worst semesters of their college career (see Table 1). For example, 67% of students indicated that at least one of their worst semesters fell within their freshman year.

Table 1

*At least one of the participants worst semesters fell within their:*

Year of College	%
Freshman year	67%
Sophomore year	31%
Junior year	50%
Senior year	27%
Fifth year	1%

*Note.* 51 senior participants: 47% male, 49% female, 4% no specification.

### **Categories**

As each participant gave at least 2 reasons for each semester they ranked, the majority of students had at least 4 reasons that fell within categories the researcher coded and themed. In total, participants gave 214 reasons for ranking a particular semester as one of the worst. Of those reasons, four major themes emerged: 31% interpersonal, 22% academic, 14% intrapersonal, and 12% health reasons. Minor themes also developed: 10% referred to transitions and 6% to student over-commitment. The remaining 5% dealt with issues relating to study abroad, sports, or finances.

**Interpersonal.** The interpersonal category proved the largest finding. The grouping included issues with or stress from interpersonal relationships, including family relationships, relationships with friends, peers, or roommates, relationships with significant others, the death of a loved one, and general relational problems. For example, one student wrote, “I didn’t have anyone I could be open or transparent with.” Another said, “I also was wrapped up in unhealthy relationships with women. This

affected all facets of my experience, and then my grandpa died, which was the catalyst of a near breakdown and eventual recovery.” Another noted he lost a “huge portion of [his] friend network.” One participant simply described his relationships as “strained.”

**Academics.** The theme of academics involved stress, issues, or problems within the academic areas of one’s life, including the following situations: switching, dissatisfaction with, or difficulties in an academic major; having a heavy or overwhelming academic workload; feeling apathy or a lack of motivation toward academia; having a difficult student teaching placement; experiencing dissatisfaction with or difficult classes; feeling overwhelmed with or stressed because of school work; encountering problems with professors in an academic setting; receiving poor and/or upsetting grades; and feeling stress from applying or studying for next steps. One student wrote, “I didn’t know if I was doing the right major/career case.” Another said that “applying to grad schools/ studying for the GRE on top of a heavy course load was really stressful.” One student experienced difficulty in staying “committed to school work that won’t matter after graduation.” Still another said, “I had a heavy workload—16 or 17 credit hours, and I felt burnt out from my work.”

**Intrapersonal.** This category involved issues within one’s self, such as dealing with past pain, facing inner character flaws, questioning or exploring identity, struggling with self-confidence or self-belief, wondering if one should transfer schools, making poor decisions, and worrying about next steps/the future. One participant described experiencing a “huge identity crisis.” Similarly, another student wrote, “I was still trying to adjust and figure out who I was as an individual.” One student said she was “dealing with the changes from being a sure-of-herself, important-feeling, influential, essential

member of my family, church, and school community (also feeling known) to being unknown, important, disconnected, and afraid.”

**Health.** Issues stemming from one’s health included general anxiety or depression (responses given without reason for having anxiety or depression triggered), physical health problems, traumatic events (including sexual abuse, sexual assault, homelessness, severe car wrecks, etc.), and spiritual health. “I was exhausted,” one student wrote. Another said, “Repeated health issues left me feeling confused and unsure of my future.” One participant said he was “in a state of homelessness living out of a bag,” and another student faced a sexual assault she became aware of during this time. Dealing with issues in spiritual health, one student wrote, “I felt very disconnected from God,” and another said, “I began to question my faith in ways I had never allowed myself to before. [It was] hard and scary.”

**Transition.** Students expressed problems caused by coming to the university as a first-time freshman or as a transfer student, including homesickness, unrealistic expectations of the university or college community, and uncertainty of where to fit in. One participant wrote that the university “was a new environment for me and a new culture.” Another said, “Getting used to all things college (dorm, classes, relationships) was somewhat overwhelming at first.” Still another described the experience as “time for adjustment to new places, new things, and most of all, new routines.”

**Over-commitment.** Some participants described pressure from more than one area in life, including finding balance among school, work, family, and friends, as well as student leadership pressure. “Overcommitted...” one student wrote, continuing,



I had activities almost every night of the week and no time to rest during the day (especially at night). Part of this was me not allowing other people to help me and I took on too much stuff for myself.

One student wrote he dealt with a “very large course load as well as extracurricular activities.” Another said she was “getting used to being a collegiate athlete and trying to balance academics, friendships, and mental health.” “Major transition time,” one wrote, “[I had] just gotten married over the summer...hard to find the balance between school, friends, and husband. Most of my best friends and husband were student teaching/teaching, so I was alone most of the time.”

**Study abroad.** Some stress came from issues of studying abroad, including reverse culture shock, transitioning to the university as a new student after having a first semester in Ireland, and transitioning back after studying abroad. One participant wrote that, while studying abroad, it felt “hard to stay connected with people” and the new experience proved “challenging but rewarding.” Another student said, “I was studying abroad the semester prior and it was hard to come back [and] reunite with friends.” One student said, “I was dealing with reverse culture shock (I had spent January to July overseas). Because of this, I dealt with depression.”

**Sports.** Students also described stress or dissatisfaction because of sports involvement, including having a disappointing season. One student wrote that, at a previous university, she “wasn’t playing in any of my college soccer games...till [the] end of the season. That was really frustrating and hard to be working hard and not playing.” Another participant said, “I play on the soccer team, and I was serving as a captain that year. We had a *terrible* season, much pain, much heartache.”

**Financial.** Other participants wrote about worries and stress caused by financial issues or problems. The participant, in discussing her financial struggles, wrote that her “dad was unemployed,” and she faced the “stress of the possibility of not returning to [the university].”

### **Slumping during the Second Year**

In order to focus on the theory of the sophomore slump, the researcher divided the study further. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to 16 senior participants who responded saying at least one of their worst semesters fell within their second year for the sake of confidentiality. Ten (63%) of the 16 identified as female, and 6 (38%) identified as male. Each student said either his or her third or fourth semester proved one of the worst, giving 34 different reasons for experiencing the slump within the second year. Of the reasons given, four major themes again occurred: 32% interpersonal, 24% academic, 21% health-related, and 15% intrapersonal. Of the remaining reasons, 6% resulted from facing over commitment, and 3% resulted from studying abroad.

**Interpersonal.** Thirty-two percent of the reasons dealt with interpersonal issues. Sara dealt with family issues, saying her “grandparents’ marriage [was] falling apart,” and she felt left “dealing with [the] aftermath.” Cal and Charlotte faced trouble with friendships. Cal wrote, “Many of my closest friends graduated after my freshman year, and my best friends lived off campus.” Diana had a romantic relationship end, and Patrick “experienced a roller-coaster of romantic relationships.” Each participant who fit into the interpersonal category said at least one reason for slumping their sophomore year had to do with issues within different relationships in their lives. With 32% of students identifying interpersonal reasons as the cause of their slump, the results showed that,

though the slump typically becomes categorized by poor overall academic performance, the root of the problem often stems from interpersonal strife.

**Academic.** Twenty-four percent of the reasons given proved academic, in which school work caused participants enough stress to rate the semester as one of their worst. Both of Cooper's reasons dealt with academia: "My professor was not understanding," and "I feel like I didn't get the grade I deserved." Patrick also felt disappointed by his academic performance; he said, "[I] got the worst grades in my college career." Both Sally and Peter felt pressed to decide on a major. Sally wrote, "[I] was confused about what I should major in...[I]was forced to pick something. [I] agonized over that decision because I really didn't know what to do. [I] felt a lot of pressure." As the literature suggests, academic strain can also become a major cause of students slumping during their sophomore year.

**Health.** Health issues made up 21% of the reasons that seniors thought they slumped during the sophomore year. Mental health fit into this category. Gillian wrote she had "a terrible season of anxiety and depression," and Neal also said he "suffered severe depression" during his second year. Christina struggled with her spiritual health, saying she faced spiritual disillusionment: "[I] began doubting my Christian faith, but also felt guilty about my doubts and pressure to recommit to Christianity from friends and boyfriend." Physical health also made an impact in the lives of some participants. Mark had a broken foot, and June said "I was sick a lot and really discouraged." Diana faced a traumatic event—being sexually abused by her boyfriend—an experience that can cause issues in every area of one's health. Not being fully well during part of their sophomore year caused these students to slump. Though the current literature surrounding the

sophomore slump did not predict this result, the participants of this study exposed health as a determining factor of whether or not a student slumps during his or her second year of college.

**Intrapersonal.** Intrapersonal issues emerged as the next highest category (15%) in the reasons for slumping during second year. Neal described dealing with “regrettable experiences,” while Ria and Sara felt worried about the year ahead. Violet wrote, “I struggled a lot with my identity—who I was, who I wanted to be, and how the people around me affected that too.” Intrapersonal issues such as figuring out one’s identity prove common during the college years, rendering responses such as this unsurprising. Though the slump is not defined primarily by intrapersonal struggles, literature does propose that questioning and exploring identity can occur as a part of the second year. Participants within this study helped to elaborate, giving a more comprehensive view on the definition of how sophomore students manage intrapersonal aspects of their lives.

**Over-commitment and study abroad.** The smallest categories emerged as over-committing and issues stemming from study abroad. Six percent of the students faced the sophomore slump due to over-commitments. June described the struggle for balance, saying she felt “very busy and felt pulled in many directions.” Three percent of students indicated issues stemming from a study abroad experience or reentrance issues back to the university. Christina experienced reverse culture shock after studying abroad. She wrote, “Returning to [my university] after spending an amazing semester abroad made it difficult to relate to others and fit back in.” Though research has not typically defined the sophomore slump by either of these categories, 9% of participants indicated these issues

as primary causes of the slump. While not many of the participants who experienced the sophomore slump fell into these categories, the reasons remain significant.

### **Research Questions**

From the student perspective garnered in this study, about 31% of students slump during their sophomore year, a finding largely congruent with research that reports 20 to 25% of second-year students experience a slump (Grasgreen, 2011). Though by no means all-encompassing, these results prove consistent with the literature. Furthermore, 32% of students experienced a slump at least in some part because of the interpersonal relationships in their lives, making interpersonal relationships the most cited reason in this research for slumping during the second year. While the literature largely defines the sophomore slump by overall poor academic performance, only 24% of the reasons given by participants specified academia as the reasoning behind their slump. The remaining 76% dealt with other reasons within the students' lives, showing the root of the slump goes beyond what takes place in the classroom. These reasons, or a combination of these reasons, may cause the lower academic performance.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### Examining Reasons for the Slump

**Interpersonal Relationships.** One of the major themes of this study emerged as the effect of interpersonal relationships on not only the sophomore year but also any year of the college career. Of all senior participants, 31% stated they experienced a poor semester at least in part because of interpersonal relationship stress. This finding supports general research, which says humans need and desire connection to other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Parameswari, 2015). Success in college and in life improves with the influence of positive interpersonal relationships (Parameswari, 2015). Good personal relationships can also affect and promote one's health (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). When students lack community or when their community does not function in a healthy way, they more likely experience a poor semester. During the sophomore year, developing community proves especially difficult. While making friends during freshman year can serve somewhat as a survival technique—students seeking to find community with anyone around them so they feel they have a place on campus—relationships seem less readily made within the second year (Gansemer-Topf, Stern, & Benjamin, 2007). Intrapersonal relationships play a significant part of one's life; therefore, not surprisingly, problems in these relationships cause stress in students' lives.

**Academia.** The second major theme, specifically during the second year, was participants struggling in the academic portions of their lives. This result proves consistent with the research concerning the sophomore year. After the freshmen year, students typically take fewer general education courses and more heavily involve themselves in their major classes (Gaff, 2000). These courses become more difficult than the previous year, can challenge students, and require more time and work outside the classroom (Gin, 2009). Because of the heightened challenge, students feel more pressured obligation to choose a major and course of study that suits them and begin to think about career goals (Miller, 2006).

For many college students, the stress of academia begins in high school. With goals of getting into a good college, high school students often fight to achieve the best grades possible and become top students in their class. The pressure only increases as more and more students apply to college, forcing institutions to become more selective. According to Kadison and DiGeronimo (2004), “. . . many kids get the message early on that being good isn’t good enough” (p. 35). When this pressure and stress becomes too severe, students can begin to neglect their health— physical, mental, and otherwise— and, therefore, have unsatisfactory semesters (Misra & McKean, 2000). Stress also plays a part of the students’ lives once accepted into college and while making their way through their college years. Personal influences and their everyday environments can cause stress (Hafer, 2015). All individuals deal with differing levels of stress throughout their lives, and the severity of one’s stress can become problematic to his or her health.

**Health.** Health emerged as another significant theme within this study. Mental health among college students has declined over past years, as reflected in the research.

In fact, college student mental health appears at the documented lowest point in the past 30 years (Culp-Ressler, 2015). According to Kadison and DiGeronimo (2004), “In fact, since 1988, the likelihood of a college student’s suffering depression has doubled, suicidal ideation has tripled, and sexual assaults have quadrupled” (p. 1). Humphrey, Kitchens, and Patrick (2000) outlined noteworthy mental health problems on college campuses for higher education professionals to pay attention to, including mood and anxiety disorders, violent behavior, substance abuse, learning disabilities, personality disorders, and eating disorders. Soet and Sevig (2006) added depression, anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders, eating disorders, and PTSD to the list. Traumatic events also impact a person’s mental health. For example, 34% to 53% of victims of childhood sexual or physical abuse have a severe mental illness (Greenfield, Strakowski, Tohen, Batson, & Kolbrener, 1994; Ross, Anderson, & Clark, 1994). In fact, mental health disorders often follow sexual abuse (Nauert, 2010). If a college student faces a traumatic event, their mental health likely will suffer.

Many possible causes generate physical health difficulties. In attempt to ward off physical health problems, students need to eat well, exercise regularly, and get the correct amount of sleep (Center for Online Education, 2015; University of Minnesota, 2013; Valle, 2012). College students have a tendency not to eat well. One study found neither males nor females consumed the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables per day (Fontenot, 2011); not getting the right nutrition can effect a student’s energy level and ability to focus, as well as cause harmful long term effects (Buxton, 2014). Some students find exercise hard to come by, though establishing healthy exercise behaviors during college helps the behaviors become long-term habits (Haberman & Luffey, 1998).



A lack of healthy eating as well as a lack of exercise increases students' risk for mental health issues and sleep problems (Swiech, 2013). Sleep-related issues also connect to student health. Studies show the amount of sleep college students get has decreased within the last 30 years, and students increasingly report sleep problems, which may result in difficulty when dealing with personal and academic demands (Jensen, 2003).

Spiritual development also serves an important function in a college experience (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Mayhew (2004) defined spirituality as "the human attempt to make sense of the self in connection to and with the external world" (p. 666). As such, every person faces spirituality and how it manifests in their life. Because this study took place at a faith-based institution, the students appear more in tune with their spiritual health. The students who describe themselves as spiritual or those involved in religious activities more likely have good mental and emotional health (Hofius, 2004). As shown in this study, students defining themselves as religious strive to stay spiritually healthy and feel the effects of unhealthy spirituality more readily.

**Intrapersonal.** Intrapersonal questioning, including questions of one's selfhood and one's decision making, became another major theme seen in the study. Though one's identity further develops throughout the lifespan, college students develop their identity further during college and grapple with who they are and who they want to become (Evans et al., 2010). Sophomores prove apt to question themselves and their beliefs (Gin, 2009). These questions affect the students' choice of study, extracurricular activities, and even future friend groups. For this reason, Miller (2006) suggested sophomores make academic, career, social, extracurricular, physical, financial, and spiritual goals. Stepping away from not only the place they grew up but also the helping hands of first-year

experience programs, sophomore students seek to develop their own “personally held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 577).

**Over-commitment.** During college, students have many opportunities to become involved in aspects of campus life. While helpful for students to take advantage of some of these opportunities (Astin, 1999), students feel overwhelmed if they take on too much (Hetland, Saksvik, Albertsen, Berntsen, & Henriksen, 2012). Students want involvement but may face complications if they do not know how to set up healthy boundaries effectively and find balance in their experience, which can result in various health problems (Shaw, 2012). Over-commitment during the sophomore year can cause students more stress and health problems and thereby cause them to slump. Though over-committing and issues of study abroad served only as minor themes in this study, they remain significant to the overall college experience.

**Study abroad.** Regardless of the benefits to studying abroad during college (Dwyer & Peters, 2012; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005), returning from a study abroad experience can cause stress. Upon returning, students have to face a stage of adjustment as well as a recovery stage (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). Students become vulnerable to reverse culture shock, which can prove severe, especially when students do not consider readjusting back to their home nation. Students may easily feel like their world paused in their absence and are surprised to come back and fully realize everyone has continued to live life without them (Young, 2014). This reentry can cause stress that students typically do not anticipate, leading to a difficult semester.

**Summary.** The literature proves the validity of each reason participants noted for having a difficult semester. Stressors resulting from interpersonal relationships,

academia, intrapersonal questioning, and health problems appear common to the college experience. The current study prompts both action and further research.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study expanded the literature on the sophomore slump, as it sought to answer the following questions: From a student perspective, do sophomores slump during their second year compared to the other three years of college? If so, what reasons do students attribute to causing the sophomore slump? Higher education professionals benefit from understanding why their students might slump and seeking to meet students in the struggle. Because second-year students are neither new to the institution nor about to graduate, some professionals believe these students do not need as much attention as other students. In reality, sophomores face their own unique set of obstacles and need the help of willing student affairs practitioners.

This research shows that students may face pain, hurt, and confusion as a result of the interpersonal relationships in their lives. As noted previously, 32% of seniors indicated one of their worst semesters took place during their sophomore year due to interpersonal relationship problems. In addition, 31% of the total number of senior participants reflecting over their four years showed interpersonal relationship problems caused one of their worst semesters. Higher education professions need to be ready to assist students in these problems, as well as appear approachable in order to serve their students. Student development practitioners need to help students learn how to develop good, healthy interpersonal relationships, as well as handle conflict when it arises. Students would benefit from programming that highlights conflict resolution skills, the importance of being a good friend to others, and characteristics of healthy interpersonal

relationships. Mentoring could help in providing some of these positive interpersonal relationships, both student-to-student mentoring and staff/faculty-to-student mentoring.

This study also shows the importance students place on academics during their college years and the stress academics can cause them. Attempting to understand student stress proves necessary. Higher education professionals also should help the students gain perspective when the students feel overwhelmed by their coursework. In the same way, student affairs practitioners can assist students in organizing their time and not overcommitting that time in order to stay healthy and accomplish needed tasks: for example, practitioners can help students write out their schedule, ask if they feel overwhelmed, and help them find ways to put more space into their days. If educators offer this aid, students can learn how to say no to certain opportunities and see the importance of taking time for oneself by not scheduling every hour of every day.

Health also emerged as a major stressor in the lives of college students. As mentioned, helping students know when they have overcommitted could help with this problem. Higher education professionals should help students become aware of and develop healthy habits to the best of their ability. Professionals who live healthy lives offer excellent examples to students trying to develop such habits who observing the practitioners on a regular basis. Students also need to know where they can seek help if they struggle with any aspect of their health. Programming on how to live a healthy life during one's college years would benefit students, as would resources informing students of where to acquire help with any aspect of their health.

Students often deal with intrapersonal issues during their college experience, as shown by this research. Higher education professionals need to understand these issues

to the best of their ability and willingly help students sort out what they feel and think about themselves. Helping students grow and develop self-awareness should become a priority of all student development professionals. Professionals must walk alongside students as the students develop and mature in their identity. This type of leadership can occur through mentoring and by telling students of one's willingness to help them with more than just their studies. Programs designed to guide students in discovering more of their identity would also assist students in navigating intrapersonal issues.

Though this study focused on the phenomenon of the sophomore slump, 67% of participants reported having at least one of their worst semesters fall within the freshman year. Though first-year experience programs appear popular around the nation, the transition time for incoming freshman remains difficult. The university at which the study took place has a well-established first-year program that renders positive results, as do many colleges and universities. Even so, this study shows students still struggle during the freshman year. Student affairs professionals need to remain aware of this and willingly seek freshman out and help them if needed. First-year experience programs may need strengthening in order to reach freshmen students on a deeper level.

As mentioned earlier, 50% of all seniors said at least one of their worst semesters fell within the junior year. Though many assume juniors have acclimated to the institution by their third year, other struggles may emerge and demand assistance. While freshmen, seniors, and, in this study, sophomores, have received attention, this research indicates juniors may need further consideration as well.

The findings of this research also highlight the need for a whole-person focus in institutions of higher education. The study's results show one cannot define students by a

single aspect of their lives. Rather, many different facets of their lives continually develop and need challenge and support. If a student does poorly in an academic setting, one should not assume he simply does not understand the material. Viewing the student holistically may prove more beneficial, understanding that some form of stress may impact another part of his life, which, in turn, negatively affects his grades.

As a final implication taken from this study, academic faculty and student development departments hold the responsibility to collaborate. As discussed, students are more than just academically minded and do more than co-curricular activities. For the betterment of whole person development, higher education professionals, no matter their job description, must develop partnerships between one another. These partnerships will better foster learning and development within the lives of students, no matter their phase in their college career.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Fifty percent of all seniors had a difficult semester within their junior year. Future research should explore the reasons for students struggling during their third year and investigate resolutions to the problem. If juniors require more attention than they currently receive, higher education professionals need to know areas in which the students need further support.

Researching gaps within first-year experience programs would also benefit institutions of higher education. If 67% of participants claimed one of their worst semesters fell within their freshman year, it would help to know if that statistic could improve. Any transition has the potential to cause turmoil, followed by a time of adjustment. Keeping in mind that the statistic likely will not disappear completely

because of this time of adjustment, providing students with additional help during the transition to college becomes a worthwhile and admirable goal.

The researcher conducted the study at an institution at which each year is represented in each residence hall. Sophomores live among seniors and juniors among freshmen. All four years are integrated into each hall, an uncommon trait at other colleges and universities. This study could be duplicated at an institution with required freshman dorms in order to understand better how students adjust after their freshmen year surrounded by only other freshmen. Further research could explore if transitioning from a freshmen dorm to another location would impact the manifestation of the sophomore slump.

The researcher collected the data for the current study gathering information on participants' major fields of study. Another opportunity for research involves duplicating this study or one similar but asking the participants to list their chosen major fields. Results could find that certain majors contribute significant amounts of stress at different years during one's college career.

### **Limitations**

This research, exploratory in nature, sought to prove and further explain the sophomore slump. Seeking to show the reasons sophomores slumped, the study wanted to demonstrate that academic problems do not solely cause the slump and that other issues may result in those academic concerns.

The participants in this study attended a single institution. The small faith-based university emphasizes the liberal arts. The sophomore slump remains a phenomenon throughout the country, and this study only acknowledges a single type of institution.

This study also did not allow for further detail in gathering information from the participants. Due to the essay format of the surveys, students often answered the questions without going in depth. The essay structure used also prevented the researcher from asking additional questions, as typically done in an interview setting of a qualitative study. The form given to the students also did not ask extensive demographic questions, limiting both the findings and the researcher's ability to organize the research in more ways. The essay form also did not allow participants to ask questions as freely as they might have in a one-on-one interview setting.

The researcher asked students to reflect on four past years of college. Students may have struggled in reflection, considering the clarity of recent memories compared to distant. Student also ran the risk of assessing the past as either better or worse than in reality. In this way, students may have strained to transcend the entirety of their college experience. Also, because this study used self-report, some students proved more prone to report all of their woes, while others did not divulge the extent of their issues.

## **Conclusion**

During college, students commonly have a difficult semester or year. Some sophomore students are prone to slump. While the sophomore slump has become typically defined as poorer overall academic performance and decreased interest, this study found only 24% of the reasons indicated academia as the cause for slumping during the second year. The remaining 76% highlighted other reasons, 32% of which related to interpersonal relationship stressors. Professionals within higher education will find it helpful to understand the sophomore slump, notice and support struggling students, and discover what they as practitioners can offer to students during difficult times.



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## Appendix A

### Survey Questions

Please do not write your name on this survey

Please mark your current year in school:

Freshman       Sophomore       Junior       Senior

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Gender:       Male       Female

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Directions:

- On the back of this page, please answer the survey questions truthfully.
- When answering the questions, please remember, as humans, we have the tendency to romanticize the past, believing it was better than it actually was. We also tend to allow our current pain or struggles to overrule how we felt at other times.
- When answering the questions, please try to transcend your current and past situations in order to see them clearly and reflect on them with accuracy.

Considering your entire college experience, what were your two worst (most disappointing, dissatisfying, difficult) two semesters of college? Rank them using either **1** or **2**. Please only mark two semesters.

\_\_\_ First Semester (*typically the beginning of **Freshman** year*)

\_\_\_ Second Semester

\_\_\_ Third Semester (*typically the beginning of **Sophomore** year*)

\_\_\_ Fourth Semester

\_\_\_ Fifth Semester (*typically the beginning of **Junior** year*)

\_\_\_ Sixth Semester

\_\_\_ Seventh Semester (*typically the beginning of **Senior** year*)

\_\_\_ Eight Semester

\_\_\_ Ninth Semester (*typically beginning of fifth year*)

\_\_\_ Tenth Semester

---

In the semester you rated as **1**, what were the top two reasons why you rated that as your worst semester of your college career? Please explain thoroughly.

1.

2.

In the semester you rated as **2**, what were the top two reasons why you rated that as your second worst semester of your college career? Please explain thoroughly.

1.

2.

## **Appendix B**

### **Research Participant Consent Form**

#### **Researcher Information**

Sophomore Slump: How is the sophomore year impacted by relationships?

Taylor M. Eddy

Taylor University

#### **Purpose of research**

Determine, from a student perspective, why sophomores slump during their second year of college

#### **Procedures**

1. During a senior level course, students are given an essay form to complete
2. Participants are given a consent form to sign
3. Participants given fifteen minutes to complete the essay form
4. Essays and consent forms are collected separately

#### **Duration**

The research will occur Spring 2015.

#### **Risk**

There are no known nor anticipated risks in this research. Any risks are equivalent to those that students would expect to encounter in daily life.

#### **Benefits**

Direct benefits are unknown. There is the potential of increased reflection of the college experience.

#### **Compensation**

Participants will receive no compensation.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Involvement in this research is voluntary. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in the research. You have the option to not participate in data collection but will participate since the interventions will be a part of the course instruction.

#### **Confidentiality**

All information will be kept confidential to standard guidelines of Taylor University and FERPA, and no names will be released in research findings. All hard copy information

will be in a filing cabinet in a locked office. Hard copy information will be destroyed at the end of the fall semester of 2016. All electronic information will be kept on a password protected computer. At the conclusion of the research, all electronic data will be assigned a number ID which will not be connected to the respective participant, ensuring that participants will no longer be identified with the data. Data will then be kept in perpetuity for the purpose of a longitudinal study.

### **Sharing the Results**

The findings of this research will be shared at the end of the fall semester of 2016 in a formal thesis defense. There is the potential that this research, including the results, would be shared with practitioners and researchers in the field of higher education (e.g., presentation at a conference, publication, etc.). No personal information would be given. Information shared would not be able to be linked back to specific participants.

### **Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

Participation is voluntary, and students may withdraw at any time.

### **Who to Contact**

If you have any questions at any time concerning this research, contact Taylor Eddy at (937)533-5741 or taylor\_eddy@taylor.edu or Scott Gaier at scgaier@taylor.edu.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Taylor University's IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. Questions regarding institutional research, including this research project, can be directed to Ms. Sue Gavin, Chair IRB, 765-998-4315 or ssgavin@taylor.edu.

You may ask questions concerning the research before signing the following consent form.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

---

Participant's Signature

Date

---

Participant's Name

---

Researcher's Signature

Date

Credit: Purdue University IRB Guidelines

[http://www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschadmin/rschoversight/humans/forms/Consent\\_Form\\_with\\_instructions\\_8-07.pdf](http://www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschadmin/rschoversight/humans/forms/Consent_Form_with_instructions_8-07.pdf)

