Second Year Native Students' online Survey: findings

Context

The term "sophomore slump" has been around for many years. However, the literature on sophomores – slumping or not – has been far less salient than that on more easily surveyed students such as new freshmen and departing seniors. Retention rates over the years have fairly steadily indicated that after the first year of college, the majority of students who leave an institution of higher education before degree completion do so in good academic standing – that is, with a cumulative grade point average at or above the minimum needed for graduation. What is less mentioned in the literature is the degree to which the slump phenomenon contributes to withdrawing students' decision to discontinue enrollment in higher education before degree completion.

What literature there is that focuses on sophomore slump (e.g., Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Margolis, 1976; Richmond & Lemons, 1985; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000) suggests that symptoms include but are not limited to:
- Prolonged indecisiveness about selecting a major
- Inappropriate decision-making about academic course selection
- Low levels of academic engagement
- Low levels of commitment
- Dysfunctional behavior which interferes with academic success (drugs/alcohol; internet/computer addiction)
- Disappointment and frustration with the academic experience
- Increased time-to-degree completion rates
- Absenteeism
- Lack of co-curricular involvement; apathy; indifference
- Lack of academic and social integration

Procedure

To better understand the attitudes, expectations and experiences of sophomores at UM, and to learn more about sophomore slump, the Retention subgroup of the Campus Assessment Working Group designed an online survey for second year students who entered UM as first time freshmen. We chose an online survey because there are no classes at UMCP specifically for sophomore level students, and because all students entering UMCP are given an email account when they register for classes their first semester.

We obtained the email addresses of all students who matriculated at UM as first time freshmen in the fall semester of 2001. A message from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies was mass-emailed to these students in April 2003. It described the recipient as belonging to an important and yet under-surveyed group of students whose UM experience was critical for policy makers and program planners to understand. And it asked the recipient to complete an online questionnaire, and gave the survey's URL.

A follow-up message from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies was emailed two weeks later to those in the sample who had not accessed the URL, reiterating the importance of their survey responses to administrators.

Sample

The online questionnaire was accessible for a three week period. From a population of 3870 second year native students, a total of 617 completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 16%. (Another 2% accessed the URL but did not complete the survey and hence were not included in the analyses.)

A comparison of the population of second year native students with the sample of respondents shows no significant differences in race/citizenship. However, there were significant differences on gender - with more women among respondents than in the population - and on class level - with more juniors and seniors among respondents than in the population. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Comparison of the population of second year native students with the sample of respondents and non-respondents   (Column percents)

	Population	Respondent	Non-respondent
RACE/CITIZENSHIP			
American Indian:US	.2	.2	.2
Asian:US	13.5	12.4	13.7
Black/African American:US	11.5	8.1	12.1
International	1.4	1.6	1.4
Hispanic:US	4.5	4.5	4.5
Unknown:US	4.9	5.8	4.7
White:US	64.0	67.4	63.4
GENDER			
Female	47.9	58.0	46.0
Male	52.1	42.0	54.0
CLASS LEVEL			
Freshman	3.0	1.6	3.3
Sophomore	77.2	64.5	79.5
Junior	18.5	30.5	16.3
Senior	1.2	3.4	.9

Given the unexpectedly high number of upper level students among our respondents, we revised the goal of our analyses, seeking to better understand the attitudes, expectations and experiences of undergraduates at UM, as they relate to engagement in and satisfaction with academia. To do this, we divided our respondents into four groups on the basis of the self-reported degree both of their engagement in non-classroom academic activities and of their satisfaction with aspects of their college experience.

Figure 2 lists the variables that were included in the engagement/satisfaction variable used to categorize respondents.

Figure 2. Engagement and Satisfaction Variables used for Group Classification

Engagement Variables

Attend a lecture or scholarly presentation other than your regular class
Read an article from a professional journal
Discuss research/profession interests with a faculty member
Assist in a faculty/staff research project
Attend an academic conference
Make a presentation at an academic conference
Internship, coop, study abroad
Service learning

Satisfaction Variables

Being taken seriously academically by faculty
Being taken seriously academically by fellow students
Knowing a faculty member well enough to ask for a letter of recommendation
Feeling physically safe on campus
Feeling a sense of belonging at UM
Participating in programs and activities on campus that highlight the perspectives of different groups

Figure 3 shows the resulting group sizes. The largest group consisted of those who reported low engagement and low satisfaction.

Figure 3. Engagement/satisfaction groups: numbers and percents

Group	N	Percent
High engagement/high satisfaction	94	15
High engagement/Low satisfaction	139	22
Low engagement/High satisfaction	81	13
Low engagement/Low satisfaction	303	49

Findings

Comparison of the four engagement/satisfaction groups showed some interesting significant differences. Table 1 depicts the variables for which the four engagement/satisfaction groups showed significant differences at the .05 level or less, using the chi square statistic.

Table 1. Variables for which the four engagement/satisfaction groups showed significant differences

Percents	Hi Engagement Hi Satisfaction	Hi Engagement Lo Satisfaction	Lo Engagement Hi Satisfaction	Lo Engagement Lo Satisfaction
Participated in a living/learning program	61	56	37	32
If had it to do over, would live on campus	84	84	84	72
Had declared a major by S'03	98	95	95	86
Highest degree sought:				
- undecided	19	15	17	22
- bachelors	5	10	16	18
- masters	25	34	42	35
- doctorate	50	40	25	24
Anticipated time to degree = 4 yrs. or less	85	81	63	66
Scholarships a MAJOR source of support	48	41	27	26
Difficulty having enough money for personal expenses	45	53	31	51
HIGH satisfaction with knowledge of campus resources	61	38	58	35
Mentor:				
- have one	34	19	14	10
- would like to have one	28	45	25	40
- don't want one at this point (S'03)	38	36	60	50
Percent NOT AT ALL LIKELY to leave UM before degree completion because of:				
- disinterest in study; motivation issues	84	79	65	65
- feeling burned out	72	53	58	51
- grades	84	79	73	61
- insufficient academic skills	85	79	76	62

Those students who had high levels of engagement <u>and</u> satisfaction were most likely to report having a mentor, and to report that if they were to leave before completing their degree it would not be because of feeling burned out.

The two groups with high engagement – regardless of degree of satisfaction - were most likely to report: having participated in a living/learning program, their anticipated time to degree would be 4 years or less, that scholarships were a major source of financial support, and that if they were to leave before degree completion it would be not at all likely to be because of disinterest in study or motivation issues.

The two groups with high satisfaction – regardless of level of engagement – were mostly likely to report high satisfaction with their knowledge of campus resources, while the two groups with low satisfaction – regardless of level of engagement – were most likely to report they didn't have a mentor but would like to have one.

The two groups with low engagement – regardless of degree of satisfaction – were least likely to have participated in a living-learning program, and also least likely to want to have a mentor.

Those with Low Engagement <u>and</u> Low Satisfaction were least likely to report: they would live on campus if they could do their second year over again, they had declared a major, they were undecided about the highest degree they will seek, and that it would be not at all likely

that they left before completing their degree program because of grades or insufficient academic skills.

There were some interesting similarities among the four groups as well. For example, there were no statistically significant differences among the groups on race/citizenship or gender. Further, there were <u>no</u> significant differences among the four engagement/satisfaction groups on several variables, including items that were related to financial issues such as sources of financial support, and employment; perceived importance of second year advising and advising tasks; and status of their career planning. See Table 2.

Table 2. Variables with no statistically significant differences among the groups

	Overall percents
Women	58
Caucasian	67
Difficult/very difficult to cover expenses of:	
- tuition	47
- rent/food	48
- transportation costs	28
- books and supplies	49
Major sources of financial support:	
- parents/relatives	79
- current job	10
- summer employment	20
- educational grants	15
- student loans	22
- bank loan	6
- personal credit cards	4
Currently employed	50
Not at all likely to leave UM before degree completion because of:	
- accepting a good job	73
- cost	56
- family issues	74
Knowledge of campus resources *somewhat* or *very* important	72
Importance of advising in second year at UM:	
- equally as important as my first year	39
- more important than in first year	26
- not as important as in first year	35
Satisfaction with advising in second year at UM	
- equally as satisfied as my first year	48
- more satisfied than in first year	23
- not as satisfied as in first year	28
Advising tasks that are "very important":	
- advice about course selection	55
- major selection/fit	48
- information about learning opportunities	31
- information about internships, research opportunities	54

(Table 2, continued)

	Overall percents
Career status (S'03):	
- I have known since high school what my career area will be	22
- After considering several possibilities I have decided on a career area	20
- I am still considering possibilities	46
- I am very uncertain about what my career area will be	12

It appears that financial issues were largely unrelated to levels of engagement and satisfaction in these second year native student respondents. The only finance-related variable that showed differences was the role of scholarships as financial support (Table 1). Nor were there differences among the engagement/satisfaction subgroups on advising issues. It is interesting that while the 72% overall reported that knowledge of campus resources was important, it was the high engagement groups that reported high satisfaction in that knowledge.

There were a number of respondents who indicated they either had a double major (18%) or planned to have one (18%). To address the concern that having more than one major would have a negative impact on a student's time to degree, we analyzed the retention/graduation rates for those who actually had more than one major, those who planned to, and those with a single major. See Table 3.

Table 3. Graduation/retention rates by major status in Spring 2003

	Enrollment status end of Spring 2005		
Status of major at the time of the survey (S'03)	Graduated	Registered	Not registered
Double major	74	23	3
Planned to have a double major	51	42	7
Single major	69	24	7
Undeclared major	51	42	7

Those respondents who had matriculated as a native student in the fall of 2001 and had a double major at the time of the survey – Spring 2003 – had the highest graduation rate at the end of Spring 2005.

Table 4 shows the relationship between engagement/satisfaction levels and persistence/ graduation as of the end Spring 2005 - four semesters after matriculation at UM as native students. For comparison purposes, the rates for second year native students in the sample who did not respond to the survey are also included in Table 4, and their graduation and retention rates are lower than for those who responded to the survey.

Table 4. Retention and graduation rates as of end of Spring 2005, by engagement/satisfaction level of students who matriculated as first time students in Fall 2001

row percents	Graduated	Registered	Not registered
High Engagement/High Satisfaction	77	20	3
High Engagement/Low Satisfaction	73	21	6
Low Engagement/High Satisfaction	65	31	4
Low Engagement/Low Satisfaction	60	31	9
Did not respond to survey	**57**	**33**	**10**

Graduation rates were highest for those with high engagement and high satisfaction, followed by those with high engagement and low satisfaction. The surveyed group with the highest percent not registered (9%) was the Low Satisfaction/Low Engagement group.

References

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