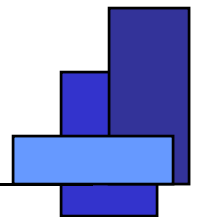




The Unique Challenges and Opportunities of the Second Year at Grinnell College

**Second-Year Retreat, September 2008
Y Camp - Boone, IA**

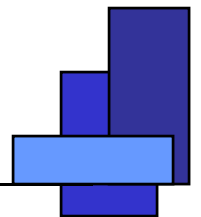
Joyce Stern
Dean for Student Academic Support & Advising
JRC 3rd Floor





National Research on Second-Year Students

- “Sophomore slump” (Freedman, 1956)
- Developmental Factors in the Second Year:
 - Second year is a time of development confusion (Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Schaller, 2005)
 - Sophomores are “between” in every aspect (Boivin, Fountain, & Baylis, 2000)
- Institutional/Environmental Factors:
 - Services provided for first-years are no longer available
 - Need assistance but find little outreach (Kramer, 2000)
- Redefine the “slump” – not characterize it as a pathology but as a unique set of issues, circumstances and challenges in the second year





Background of Study

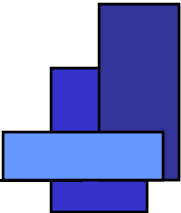
Co-researcher: Ann Gansemer-Topf, Research & Assessment Analyst, Iowa State University (formerly at Grinnell)

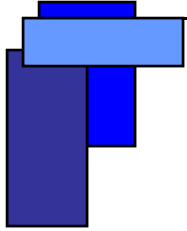
Purpose: Explore the needs and experiences of second-year students

Why?

- Second year involves unique challenges – known, but not understood
- Simultaneous planning by others at the college for the Second-Year Retreat

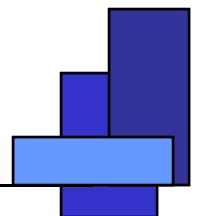
Methodology

- 21 focus groups with 109 students
 - 10 groups of 2nd-year students (N=54) and 11 of 3rd-year students (N=55)
 - Represents about 20% of each class
 - Used a non-standardized interview technique
 - Focus groups were audio-taped and transcribed
 - Reviewed data separately, coded data into specific categories, and organized that data into broader themes
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Hearing from students:

What was distinctive about your second year
in terms of your academic experiences?





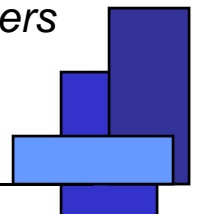
Academic Life

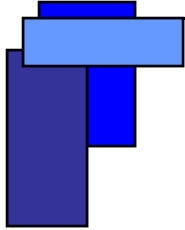
- Coursework becomes more rigorous
- Question academic abilities related to choice of major
- Significant decisions: choosing a major, four-year plan, off-campus study, internships
- Feeling “constrained” and “limited”
- Wrestle with larger questions: “What am I going to do with my life?”
- A changing advising relationship

“...in your second year you start getting really hard courses and then you are not performing as well as in your introductory courses and you start to realize, ‘Am I really fit for this major? Am I really stupid? What’s happening or is this just really hard?’ You kind of doubt yourself sometimes.”

“I can understand why they want us to do a four-year plan because, I mean, it is helpful to try to figure out when you’re going to fit things in, but I don’t know a single person who’s ever stuck to their four year plan. It’s impossible. I mean...my four-year plan changed two days after I turned mine in.”

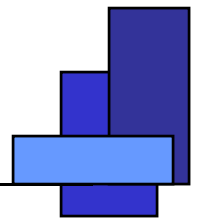
“For me, decisions just got a lot harder to make because the first two semesters I could take [any] intro I wanted to take. ...But now it hit me that, ‘Ok, you’ve got six semesters left; that’s not that long.’”





Hearing from students:

What was distinctive about your second year in terms of your social lives?





Social Relationships

- Solidifying previously established relationships
- Developing new relationships
- Friendships of choice vs. friendships of convenience
- Social relationships compete with other priorities
- Students describe a “window of opportunity” in which to connect with people.

“[Second year] was less traumatic because you don’t have that added stress of making friends.”

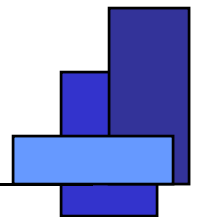
“My first year there were like six girls around us, and we all became pretty good friends, and so my social life was basically centered around that.”

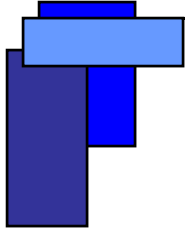
“Your social group [in the second year] becomes the people that are inside your major. . . . Not just people you’re in class with, but whatever your major is, especially science majors because we have like our area in the building.”

“I think that my social life has been very influenced by my academics. I have so much more work and I have also two jobs. . . so, I don’t have as much free time as I used to have my first year. So, I’ve definitely lost a lot of my friends who are like, ‘Why are you never with us?’”

“I made new and different friends sophomore year but I expected I would stay friends with those I met first year.”

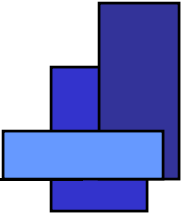
“I found it to be not as good ‘cause freshmen year there are a lot of opportunities to meet people and everyone and make new friends and then sophomore year I [felt like] here’s all these people I haven’t met yet but they didn’t seem as open to making new friends. I sort of felt stuck.”





Hearing from students:

What was distinctive about your second year in terms of your extra-curricular lives?





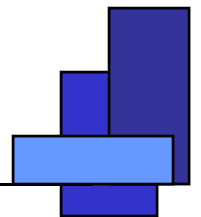
Extracurricular Activities

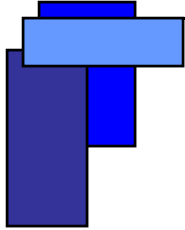
- Continue with activities and out-of-class involvements
- May pare back on some activities, focus on fewer - “I can’t do it all”
- Accept leadership positions
- Extracurricular activities define them

“I think part of where my stress comes from this year, is I really like all the classes I’m in, and all the extra-curriculars that I’m involved with, and I adore my friends, and I just don’t have time to give as much to all of those areas, and I wish I could.”

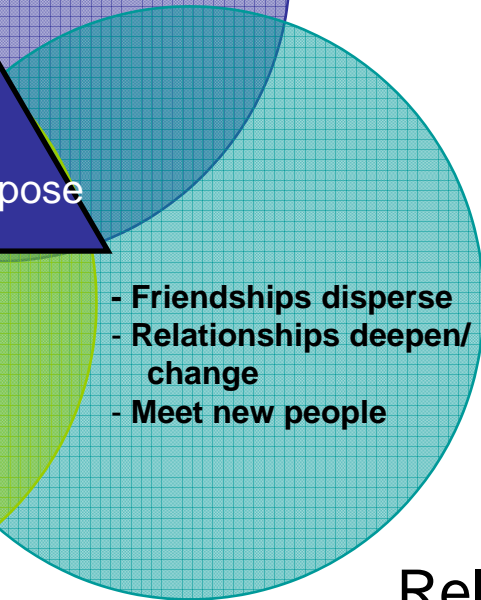
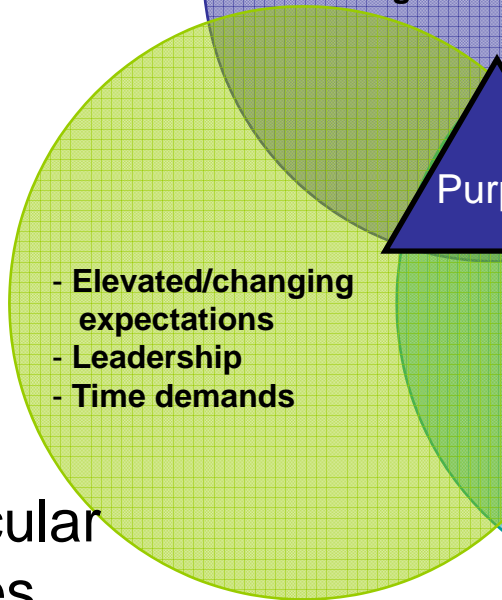
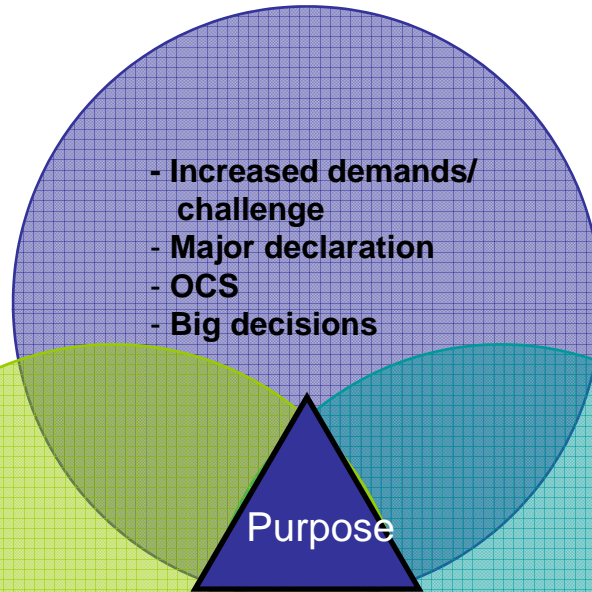
“You get a lot more responsibility [your second year] – you go from going to a meeting, to being the meeting...”

“Even the extracurriculars you’ve chosen are kind of how you define yourself...as opposed to just kind of this big array of confusing choices...your freshman year.”



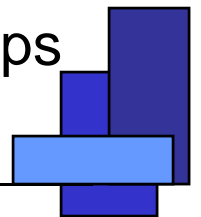


Academic Life



Extracurricular Activities

Social Relationships





Other Findings

- **Most Stable Year**

- *“You are in a safe place. You’re not a first year or an upper-class student. There’s a lot more pressure as a junior to start thinking about life after college. Second year is a stable place.”*

- *“I was no longer new but I still didn’t have to worry about what to do after Grinnell.”*

- **Unexpected changes and changing expectations**

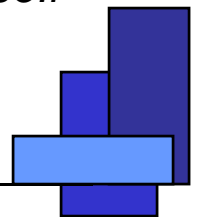
“I just felt like, sophomore year I was expected to know what I wanted to do, who I was, and kind of in general just be comfortable with an understanding of myself and where things were going and how I related with other people...”

- **I have to do this myself**

“It’s just you – I mean you still have help and you still have support, ... but it’s kind of like, ‘All right, now you’re on your own.’”

- **Painful, but beneficial**

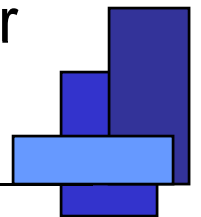
“I think that the second year was more about learning about who you are, just aside from academics. I know I personally learned a lot about myself just as a person.”





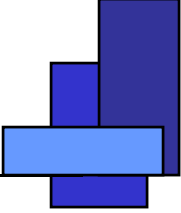
So How Do I Deal with These Challenges?

1. Don't assume that this year is going to be a rocky road. Many sophomores indicated that second year was great.
2. Challenges in life are normal.
3. Like with all complex/multi-faceted problems, there is no easy answer or "quick-fix."
4. Ask, ask, ask.
5. Allow time for reflection and discussion about balancing your obligations, personal goals, and fitting in time for your personal wellness.
6. Make the effort to meet new people with common interests and to stay connected with old friends.
7. Remember that your friends don't necessarily "have it all together." They may be questioning, too.
8. This is indeed your own personal journey, so do your best to remain engaged and be courageous.





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