CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND YEAR OF COLLEGE

Molly A. Schaller

What is the rationale for a focus on sophomores? Is the sophomore-year experience different from any other college year? Clearly the authors and editors of this book argue that the sophomore year, whether defined by credit hours or the actual second year of college, is a unique and important developmental period when students are examining their life purpose. The sophomore year is a time for turning inward and for exploring how one fits into college life and the world at large. Gardner, Pattengale, and Schreiner (2000) assert that the most compelling reason for attending to sophomores is the possibility of students dropping out during or after their second year. They also contend that prolonged indecisiveness, poor academic course selection, low levels of academic and cocurricular engagement and integration, behavioral problems, and increased time to degree completion all can manifest themselves in the sophomore year.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the structure of the college experience affects sophomores in a unique way; it emphasizes the relationship between the institution and the student by looking at issues of persistence, engagement, satisfaction, and major choice, including academic self-efficacy and motivation.

The Development of Sophomore Programs

Questions focused on the second-year experience have not been raised broadly in higher education. In fact, limited literature, even descriptive research, exists regarding the sophomore year. This lack may be due to the fact that research strategies on four-year institutions have focused on the magnitude of change seen in college students over the entire four years of the college experience, thus research designs often call for measurements in the first and senior years of college. The diverse enrollment patterns at community colleges, which may range from one term to many years, complicates research further. Therefore, an empirically based understanding of the second college year remains illusive. (For more information on available research, see Chapter Two.)

Although research is sparse, sophomore-year programs do exist throughout the country in focused academic programs, which support sophomore students in specific majors or from specific service areas such as residence life, student leadership development, career development, or even campus ministry. However, more comprehensive programs, across academic divisions or beyond single offices, are few and far between. Liberal arts colleges seem to have been the first to respond specifically to the needs of second-year students. Beloit College's sophomore-year experience program is one of the first of its kind in providing a unified program for sophomores, which focuses on the academic and social integration of sophomore students. Colgate University, Colorado College, and others have followed in the development of sophomore-year experience programs that involve multiple departments and, therefore, offer a more comprehensive approach. These institutions recognize that sophomore students have unique needs that are not being served, perhaps because these students tend to be placed in cohorts, beginning the college experience together and moving as a class to the sophomore year.

Do sophomores at liberal arts colleges differ from those at other types of institutions or are faculty and student affairs professionals at smaller institutions more likely to be in relationships with students that allow them to notice when students have concerns? The reality is likely much more complex than this simple question; however, the underlying question remains: What are the issues that our students face at various times during their academic experience? How do we find ways to notice and respond to these issues as they arise? Issues of persistence, academic success, student engagement, and satisfaction when coupled with the unique developmental experience of many sophomores make for a complex time in college life.

The First-Year Experience Sets the Stage

The first-year experience movement, which began in the late 1970s (Hunter, 2006), in many ways has set the stage for the questions we ask about the sophomore year. First-year programs were developed to support students in making the transition from high school to college by focusing on the academic and social transitions that new students negotiate (Tinto, 1987). In many ways, these programs are designed to bridge the gap between the K–12 experience and the postsecondary experience. Higher education has designed transition programs for the first year of college because this connection is not provided in high school (McDonough, 2004).

Programs and initiatives designed to address first-year issues are now commonplace. In a national survey of curricular first-year programs, researchers found that 96 percent of institutions had a new student orientation program, 89 percent offered first-year English classes with 25 or fewer students, 62 percent offered faculty development programs on teaching first-year students, more than 60 percent of institutions collect and report midterm grades for first-year students, 80 percent of four-year and 62 percent of two-year institutions offer first-year seminars (Barefoot, 2005). As institutions across the country identify programs that support first-year students, those approaches quickly become identifiable as best practices. Relatively new initiatives in higher education, such as learning communities, Supplemental Instruction, or service-learning programs are found in more than one quarter of institutions (Barefoot, 2005). However, Barefoot asserts, many of the programs that exist throughout the country do so without a coherent, purposeful strategy. On many campuses, first-year programs are not intentionally woven into the fabric of campus life or the curriculum.

The student experience of the first year remains a key focus and rightly so. Numerous theories and models have provided a framework for understanding the experience of college students and have assisted in focusing institutional attention on key areas (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Tinto, 1975, 1987). Academic preparation, financial burdens, academic and social integration, involvement, faculty contact, time away from campus, institutional commitment, and other factors have been identified and studied. However, there is no reason to believe that students who survive the first year of college are suddenly successful in their second year.

Implications for the Second Year

Students' experiences during the first year of college have been transformed on many campuses. In reaction to the enrollment boom that followed World

War II, first-year students were often warehoused in massive, impersonal classes with little additional support. Today, first-year students may still have some large classes but they may also have access to faculty in first-year seminars, first-year interest groups, and learning communities. Students were once left on their own to respond to the academic rigors of college. Today, institutions provide tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, developmental coursework, and other supports (Barefoot, 2005). First-year orientation, welcome week activities, and the other programmatic additions make the first-year experience a time filled with structure and opportunity.

What then, is the experience of those students who return for the second year of college? One of the unintentional consequences of enhanced first-year initiatives may be a sense of abandonment in the sophomore year (Flanagan, 1991; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). Although first-year experience programs are pervasive (Barefoot), few of these initiatives extend to the second year (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). This fact alone is not a reason to develop second-year programs, but it does provide a powerful argument for truly comprehensive institutional responses across academic years that are related to the developmental and academic needs of students.

One challenge facing institutions is that there is little known about how sophomores may differ from first-year students. Although the literature on the first-year experience is extensive, major gaps exist with regard to persistence beyond the first year (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005). Furthermore, Graunke and Woosley (2005) warn that we need to be cautious in applying what is known about first-year students to students in other years, because student issues vary dramatically during particular college years. Their text identifies the complex differences that exist between the two years and how those differences affect students in unique ways during this time.

Retention and Persistence

In an examination of students beginning college in the 1995–1996 academic year, Berkner, He, and Forrest (2002) found only 51 percent of students who began at four-year institutions successfully completed a degree within six years at their original institution. When transfer students are included, the six-year graduation rate rises to 58 percent. While first- to second-year retention is followed closely, there is less attention paid to retention beyond the first year. For students who intend to complete a four-year degree, at least as many students leave after the second year as do the first year (Berkner et al., 2002).

Why do students drop out? In their meta-analysis of research of four-year college student performance and persistence, Robbins and others (2004)

concluded that factors such as academic self-efficacy, academic goals, and academic skills are the most salient factors once students have attended college. Although precollege academic markers, such as high school grade point average and scores on standardized tests, remain important in predicting retention to the sophomore year, academic success in the first year (Allen, Robbins, Casillas & Oh, 2008) is most likely to predict persistence beyond the second year.

In the second year of college, first-generation students face the highest risk for departure (Ishitani, 2006). Risk factors include enrolling part-time, delaying entry, not having a regular high school diploma, having children, being a single parent, being financially independent, and working full time (Berkner et al., 2002). First-generation students who delay entry are 81 percent more likely to depart in the second year.

Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) revised Tinto's student departure theory and in the process identified 16 propositions to consider when examining departure from commuter institutions. While many of the propositions are related tangentially to the sophomore year of college, others may be of primary concern to persisting students. Ongoing accumulation of debt or the evaluation of the worth of continued enrollment, motivation to make steady progress toward degree completion, students' ability and need for control in daily life, general self-efficacy, affiliation needs, participation in learning communities, and academic integration may have an impact on the persistence of students during or after the sophomore year.

Student Issues in the Sophomore Year

Tinto (1987) suggests that the decision to persist is a series of recommitments to personal goals that are mediated by factors both internal and external to the institution. Though first-year initiatives frequently have academic and social integration as a goal, it is a mistake to suggest that such integration is fully achieved within the first year. This section examines the issues that contribute to students' academic and social integration in the sophomore year of college. When considering academic integration, issues such as major selection, academic self-efficacy, career development, connections with faculty, motivation, and financial viability each play a role in the sophomore experience.

The Major and Academic Self-Efficacy

Most four-year institutions require that students select a major near or at the end of the second year of college. Whereas some programs and institutions

emphasize earlier major selection, only 8 percent of colleges require students to select a major upon entry (Barefoot, 2005). Thirty-six percent of liberal arts institutions do not allow first-year students to officially declare a major, and more than half of all institutions report allowing students to declare a major but do not force or strongly encourage students to declare in their first year (Barefoot, 2005). As students accumulate credit hours, coursework selection is increasingly directed by one's interests and majors. As students explore academic interests, they evaluate their ability to be successful in their major(s) of interest.

Academic self-efficacy is best defined as the self-evaluation of one's ability or chance for success or both in the academic environment (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Robbins et al., 2004). Academic self-efficacy beliefs are a poor predictor of academic success in the first semester of college but are a good predictor at the end of the first year (Gore, 2006). This suggests that as students gain awareness of the college setting and of their own abilities in this setting, academic self-efficacy is based upon more accurate understanding of one's abilities. The impact of having a strong belief in one's ability to succeed is clear. Academic self-efficacy remains the best psychosocial predictor of grade point average (Robbins et al., 2004). It has been found to moderate the effect of stressors on perceived stress (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). However, academic self-efficacy may be of concern in the sophomore year for those students who have faced difficult academic challenges in the first year, for those who have not been selected into majors of their choice, or for those who decide to change academic focus areas from their college entry plans. There is some evidence that academic self-efficacy can be increased by enrollment in a study skills course (Boysen & McGuire, 2005). Programs that help to build student's academic self-efficacy and study skills are often focused on first-year students as they make the transition into college. However, as students begin to narrow options for their majors or enroll in more challenging courses, the connection between course selection, major selection, and one's sense of success becomes clearer.

The selection of the major is a complex process requiring students to have the academic ability for the specific coursework, awareness and understanding of available options, and decision-making skills particularly in balancing interests with future career or life goals. Galotti (1999) found that between winter of the first year and winter of the second year, the number of major alternatives under consideration by students dropped. Declaring a major requires that sophomores have an attachment and commitment to ideas, interests, and a group of faculty members at a time when they may well be continuing to separate from their original plans and family (Margolis, 1989). In the community college setting, over 50 percent of enrolled students are in terminal occupational programs

(Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Students enrolled in occupational programs or professional schools may find major changes particularly difficult as they accumulate credit hours.

The positive impact of being decided or clear about one's major cannot be understated. Sophomores with higher degree of certainty in their major had higher grade point averages (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Some research indicates that undecided students have lower academic performance and lower persistence rates than those who are decided (Leppel, 2001). Therefore, even though we cannot posit categorically that undecided students will have lower persistence rates, this must be considered on an individual institutional basis. Reverse transfer, or transferring from a four-year to a two-year institution, may be more likely for those second-year students who do not select a major (Hillman, Lum, & Hossler, 2008).

Career Development

A great deal has been written about the impact of prolonged adolescence on college students (Howe & Strauss, 2000). One concern is that students are not prepared to make decisions about a career direction during the college years because there is little societal pressure for students to take responsibility for their own or family members' lives. It is interesting that students who are more autonomous are more decided in their career direction (Guay, Ratelle, Sevécal, Larose, & Deschênes, 2006). With college students showing signs of strong connections to their parents (Howe & Strauss, 2000), developing autonomy and separating from parents may be a particular challenge. Still, undecided students can be characterized in two distinct ways: (a) those who are developmentally undecided, whose status as undecided will shift as they become more self-aware and develop a sense of purpose and life direction or (b) those who are chronically undecided and do not seem to improve their career or major decision-making skills. Chronically undecided students have low levels of autonomy; developmentally undecided students show signs of increased self-efficacy during early college years (Guay et al., 2006). Sophomore students who remain undecided at the end of the academic year face particular challenges. These students may choose to either withdraw from school or to select a major that allows for career decision making later. Major selection and career decision making do not always go hand in hand. In some cases, students move far enough along in coursework that finishing the degree of study may take precedence over a true commitment to a career path. Older students seem to exhibit greater career maturity; however, they may also face more life pressures in their decision-making process (Luzzo, 1999). (For more on career issues, see Chapter Six.)

Faculty Contact

Student contact with faculty is one of the strongest predictors of retention, persistence, engagement, and academic success. In the sophomore year, students may find it particularly difficult to build relationships with faculty as the student changes majors, leaves the first-year academic advisor, or enrolls in large classes. In a study of nearly 4,000 students in the first and second year of college, Fischer (2007) found that student connections with faculty were related to higher grades for all types of students. Furthermore, another study found that the quality of faculty interaction is a predictor of sophomore success (Graunke & Woosley, 2005).

Many majors are structured in ways that have the highest student-faculty contact in the junior and senior years. Although many first-year experience programs have increased faculty interaction with first-year students, second-year students are often completing general education or foundation courses in larger classes and with non-major faculty or with adjuncts. As one engineering faculty member suggests, there may be a need to adjust the curriculum to increase faculty contact in the first two years (Dym, 2006). And in the sophomore year, substantive, educationally meaningful student-faculty interaction will not just automatically happen; instead, it will need to be expected, nurtured, and supported (Kuh et al., 2005). (For more on faculty development, see Chapter Eight.)

Student Motivation

Student motivation to attend college may be quite different from the motivation to persist in college. Although there are a variety of motivational descriptors, one thing is clear: students who do not have defined goals may lack the motivation to make the types of decisions necessary for persistence in college (Hull-Blanks et al., 2005). Côté and Levine (1997) identified five motivators for college attendance: (a) careerism or a desire to enter a specific career area, (b) personal development, (c) humanitarian interests or a desire to help others, (d) parental or societal expectations, and (e) default motivation or going to college because there is no other perceived choice. Phinney, Dennis, and Osario (2006) studied a more diverse population and subsequently added three additional motivators: (a) a desire to help one's family, (b) the encouragement of others, and (c) a desire to prove oneself. In their study, they found that career, personal, and humanitarian motives were positively related to college self-efficacy, college commitment, and confidence in one's ability to accomplish degree goals. Attending college to avoid less desirable options, holding what Côté and Levine (1997) called a default motivation, was negatively related to

these measures (Phinney et al., 2006). Helping one's family is important for some students, but meeting parental expectations is also important to the success of students.

Parents' lack of educational expectations may have an impact on the student's view of the college experience. First-generation students whose parents do not have specific educational expectations are most likely to depart in the second year of college (Ishitani, 2006). When these students are unsure about their own educational expectations, they are 1.3 times more likely to leave their first college in the second year (Ishitani, 2006).

Yet in a study of sophomores at one institution, commitment to a specific major or career was not related to degree completion (Graunke, Woosely, & Helms, 2006). Rather, higher levels of student commitment to completing their degree at the specific institution and commitment to obtain a bachelor's degree were significant predictors of degree completion (Graunke et al., 2006). Students from higher socioeconomic classes who aspire to complete advanced degrees are more likely to persist in college, suggesting that their long-term goals are motivators (and also they have the economic means to do so without financial problems becoming a disruptive variable) (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). However, Paulsen and St. John found that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who aspired to complete an advanced degree were less likely to persist in college or were more likely to stretch out the costs of college by enrolling sporadically. Costs, then, play a mitigating role in terms of persistence for many students.

Students' Values

Students' values about work and career goals are complicated. While there are no studies of sophomore student values, Duffy and Sedlacek's (2007) research does provide a model for understanding what second-year students may face. They described four types of values: (a) *intrinsic,* such as autonomy and interests, (b) *social,* such as working with people and making a contribution to society, (c) *extrinsic,* such as money and job security, and (d) *prestige-related,* such as careers that are highly respected. In recent studies, men were most likely to describe extrinsic values such as career and financial success; women were most likely to describe social values or prestige-related goals (Duffy & Sedlacek; Hull-Blanks et al., 2005). Women's goals were found to be more directly related to persistence, were longer range, and were more specific than extrinsic goals (Hull-Blanks et al., 2005). Duffy and Sedlacek found that students from households with a median parental income described intrinsic values, whereas students from low and high parental income households described extrinsic values. In a sample of more than 3,500 first-year students, 29 percent were seeking careers consistent

with their interests; 47 percent were seeking careers consistent with their values or desired career outcomes.

A connection between interests and major is an important consideration. Tracey and Robbins (2006) found that individuals who were in majors similar to their interest profile had higher grade point averages than those with lower interest-major match. However, having a match between major and interest was not a predictor of persistence for all students. Students who are less able to identify a set of interests seem to be particularly sensitive to an environmental mismatch. These findings suggest a dynamic and complicated relationship between interests and major.

Financial Issues

As noted above, cost, motivation, and persistence are related for many college students. The impact of loans on persistence and degree attainment is complicated by the conditions that surround loan taking (Dowd & Coury, 2006). One important question is the financial return on investment. Students who struggle to pay or who perceive themselves as having less of an ability to pay may fail to develop a sense of social integration (Braxton et al., 2004). Students risk losing scholarships when they earn a low grade point average, do not continuously enroll full-time, or decide to transfer institutions. In addition, there is a complex relationship among race, socioeconomic status, type of financial aid, and persistence in the first year of college (St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Beyond the first year of college, there is little research to explain how financial aid affects persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Loss of one-time grants and scholarships in the second year, loss of scholarships due to academic difficulty, understanding potential earning power, and the increasing pressure to find meaning in the college experience all come into play in the sophomore year.

Social Integration and Involvement

Institutions put numerous resources into encouraging involvement for first-year students. Organizational fairs and social opportunities are structured to assist students in developing a social and emotional connection to the people at the institution. One the one hand, Fischer (2007) found that becoming involved in formal organizations or activities on campus is related positively to academic success in college. On the other hand, developing more informal friendships on campus may reduce the likelihood of leaving college (Fischer, 2007). Social integration, first identified by Tinto (1987), is related to students' entering characteristics and ability to pay, initial level of institutional commitment, proactive social adjustment strategies, and psychological engagement

(Braxton et al., 2004). Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) suggest that students become committed to their institution when they perceive that the institution has integrity, has a commitment to the welfare of students, and that there is a potential social community at the institution.

Involvement in extracurricular activities is important for all groups, but especially for minority students. For these students, such involvement reduces the likelihood of leaving college by at least 83 percent (Fischer, 2007). Graunke and Woosley (2005) found that institutional commitment and involvement in student activities were not predictors of grade point average in sophomores. Although Foubert and Grainger's (2006) study had a low effect size, they found that involved sophomores exhibited greater development in academic autonomy and lifestyle planning than less involved students. This developmental difference was not seen in the senior year between involved and uninvolved students, thus suggesting that involvement may have a greater positive effect on the development of students early in the college experience. Whereas social integration has been viewed as important for persistence, it is also contributes positively to student development. In the sophomore year, students may well have lost their informal contacts from the first year of college because of changes in living arrangements, discontinued learning communities, and enrollment in larger classes outside the major.

Satisfaction

Students' satisfaction with the college experience at their institution is a frequent research outcome. Satisfaction indicates not that students are pleased with the amenities of the college setting, but that they are making academic progress and developing a sense of belonging and mastery over the environment. In an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen, Fischer (2007) found that for most students high school grade point average has a significant impact on satisfaction in college. Formal involvement in organizations or support programs and informal social ties are also related to satisfaction. Formal social ties seem to be especially powerful in increasing African American student satisfaction. Racial climate, if negatively perceived, has a negative relationship to satisfaction for all groups. For all students, higher levels of college satisfaction reduced the likelihood of leaving college (Fischer, 2007).

In her analysis of the satisfaction of students, Juillerat (2000) found that sophomores at public institutions value an institutional system that works well, is easy to negotiate, and is responsive to students. These students also identify approachable faculty and excellent instruction as a value. Sophomore students at private colleges tend to have higher expectations than students in any other

class. Juillerat suggested that this may be related to the special attention paid to first-year students and students' perception that the junior and senior years are filled with more positive experiences.

Academic Engagement

If the sophomore year produces any type of slump, boredom, or lack of interest (Gardner et al., 2000; Margolis, 1976; Wilder, 1993) then certainly academic engagement is an important factor for sophomore students. Margolis (1989) suggested that one of the real issues of the sophomore year is that there are not as many challenges built into the roles of sophomore students and thus excitement gives way to boredom. Student engagement has two key components that contribute to student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). The first component is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success. The second factor is the way institutions allocate resources and organize learning opportunities and services to entice students to participate in and benefit from such activities.

Kuh and colleagues (2005) found that students who write more papers, read more books, meet more frequently with faculty and peers, and use informational technology appropriately show greater gains in critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship. Sophomore students may be less likely to engage in these behaviors. Wilder (1993) compared students whose grade point average (GPA) declined in the sophomore year with those whose GPA did not. They found that absenteeism was a significant factor for those whose grade-point average declined in the sophomore year compared to those that did not. In their examination of the experiences of more than 50,000 full-time students enrolled from 1990 to 1998, Hu and Kuh (2002) found that the largest percentage of both first-year and sophomore students were in the disengaged group with smaller fractions in the engaged group. In their examination of learning productivity indicators of an even larger sample, Kuh and Hu (2001) reported two key findings that are important to the sophomore-year experience. First, they found that the amount of effort and student-reported learning and personal gains increased in a linear way from the first through the senior year. However, sophomores had statistically lower scores from seniors on six key indicators: (a) cooperation among students, (b) reading and writing, (c) the total amount of effort they reported putting into college, (d) their self-reported gains from college, (e) active learning, and (f) faculty contact. Scores on these final two indicators decreased from the first-year to the sophomore year.

Student Diversity

When considering designing programs or initiatives for any student population, it is important to recognize the specific challenges and opportunities that different students experience. Whereas there is little research about specific populations in the sophomore year, there are clear concerns and needs for many identifiable groups on our campuses. This section takes a brief look at gender, socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic diversity, age, sexual orientation, and academic ability because each of these characteristics affect students in the sophomore year in important ways.

Gender Issues

The selection of majors continues to be influenced by gender. Women are more likely to persist if their majors are education, health, and humanities or liberal arts and are less likely to persist if their major is business, even with high academic performance levels (Leppel, 2001). Men, on the other hand, are more likely to persist if business is their major and are less likely to persist if education is their major even when they performed well academically (Leppel, 2001). In making major and career decisions, women are most influenced by specific career paths and long-range goals. Women may begin college with hopes of stepping into nontraditional (for women) majors (such as the hard sciences, math, engineering) and find the climate too uncomfortable, resorting back to more accepted majors by the sophomore year. At the same time, men seem to be under tremendous pressure to be successful and this pressure has an impact on their selection of major and career planning (Bellani, 2007).

At the University of Richmond, attrition of sophomore men is of greater concern to the institution than the attrition of first-year students (Bisese & Fabian, 2006). These men, even though they enter with similar SAT scores, are four times more likely than women to be placed on academic probation. In a survey of their male students, the university found that men tended to have significant concerns about their future, including worries about getting a job, getting into graduate school, and reaching their career plans. Those designing interventions for sophomore students should examine the experiences of men and women on their campuses in order to best meet students' unique needs.

Socioeconomic Status

Social class is an important factor in college selection and persistence and therefore should be a consideration in the development of institutional policies and

programs (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be most impacted in their transition by parental expectations and their own educational aspirations (Peng & Fetters, 1978). While there are some support programs for first-generation or lower socioeconomic status (SES) students, these support programs are often not sustained throughout the four years of college. Students from lower SES families are more likely to work while in school, attend part-time, live off campus, attend public institutions, and be cost conscious in their college selection (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). These characteristics suggest that academic and social integration (Tinto, 1987) may be a particular challenge for lower SES students. In the sophomore year, when institutions provide fewer support programs, this is of particular concern. In their study of third-year college retention, Allen, Robbins, Casillas, and Oh (2008) found that economically disadvantaged students are more likely to leave college prior to the junior year.

Upper- and middle-class students may not be challenged by cost issues in the same ways; however, their social class standings may suggest interesting challenges in the sophomore year. These students may come to college with vast life experiences, including studying abroad or international travel, exposure to foreign language, music lessons, and other opportunities. Career decision-making under these circumstances may be a particular challenge if students come to college with multiple notions of possible careers. These students may also feel pressure to be financially successful in their future careers and therefore find conflict between personal interests and a desire for career or financial success. The sophomore year is a critical time in decision making for future career direction. (See Chapter Six for more on career development.)

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

As we will see in Chapter Four, sophomore students often face identity develop-ment issues, a growing sense of self, and the need to make sense of self in a new environment. Although most students face these issues, diverse students, par-ticularly those who are in the minority on their campuses, may find additional challenges on their campus and in their identity development process. The intersection between racial and ethnic diversity, social and academic integration, and persistence is well researched overall and while not explored specifically for sophomores, is an important consideration. For example, institutional contacts are particularly important for students from underrepresented groups (Fischer, 2007). Students who do not develop these contacts early in the college career may need additional supports in the second year of college. By contrast, main-taining connections off campus has a negative effect on grades for Caucasian

and African American students but does not have this same effect for Asian and Hispanic students (Fischer, 2007). This suggests that different approaches may be needed in supporting students from a broad range of family or cultural values.

Career and major selection are often influenced by one's cultural values. For example, in one study African American sophomores in majors with economic potential such as health, business, engineering, or computer sciences were more likely to persist (St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, & Weber, 2004). Students' perceptions of worthy or acceptable majors are influenced by their culture of origin. Students' decisions are also influenced by their perception of barriers. African American women anticipate more career barriers than other college women (Lopez & Sujin, 2006). In addition, students' motivations for attending college are influenced by their cultural background. Understanding student experiences in the sophomore year requires that institutions to pay particular attention to the priorities, values, and challenges faced by students and to examine these issues by using race and ethnicity as one lens.

Age

Nontraditional age or adult students make up a significant portion of college students. Donaldson and Townsend (2007) reported that 43 percent of college students were over the age of 24. Hagedorn (2005) identified ''four corners of friction'' for adult students (p. 24). Access, success, retention, and institutional accommodation are challenges facing many of these students. Although access may not be an issue in the sophomore year, adult students face other issues regardless of the number of credit hours accrued. In a study of 5,000 nontraditional age students, these students reported that finding time for college, family responsibilities, and job responsibilities were obstacles to success (Hagedorn, 2005). As students continue into the second or sophomore year, maintaining endurance and focus may be particularly difficult for students who have multiple life demands. Structures, therefore, should be flexible, allowing for students to enroll and move through the academic program at their own pace (Kazis et al., 2007). As student populations diversify, it will become increasingly important for institutions to carefully study the obstacles to success for students on individual campuses and at multiple points throughout enrollment.

Sexual Orientation

As discussed previously, making sense of one's self in a new environment is a challenge for many college students. Few student groups are at more risk in the

identity development process than gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. These students may come to college having negotiated their sexual orientation with appropriate support networks in place to move through this developmental period as other students do. However, many gay, lesbian, and bisexual students come to terms with their sexual orientation after college begins, when they are away from home and their communities of origin (D'Augelli, 1992). Often, these students are at particular risk during the college years because of societal views of their sexual orientation (D'Augelli, 1989). In the sophomore year, students are questioning their lives, their position in college, and their future. For students who are also dealing with the coming out process, the second year may be a particularly difficult time.

Academic Ability

Students arrive at college with a full range of academic abilities. Although the range is important in the college experience, students on either end of the continuum are of particular concern during the sophomore year. Honors students may find challenge in determining a career direction when there are multiple options. For these students, there may be a struggle to identify a single goal (Graunke et al., 2006). This may be a particular issue during the sophomore year when students are required to choose a specific direction.

On the other end of the continuum, students who enter college with academic deficits are becoming commonplace. According to Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006), 40 percent of traditional-aged undergraduate students take at least one remedial course (specifically: 58 percent of students at two-year colleges, 31 percent at non-selective four-year institutions, 14 percent at selective, and 2 percent at highly selective). What is even more striking is that 52 percent of students from the lowest socioeconomic quartile and 24 percent of students from the highest socioeconomic quartile take at least one remedial course. For students at four-year institutions, taking remedial coursework has a statistically significant negative effect of on a student's likelihood to graduate (Attewell et al., 2006). This negative effect was not found at two-year institutions. In the second year, students who enter taking remedial courses, particularly those taking multiple remedial courses, may not have earned enough credits to hold sophomore status. These students may be considered first-year students by the institution, depending on how it defines sophomores, while their classmates are sophomores. This leaves students feeling inadequate as they are unable to progress at the pace of their peers. In traditional four-year institutions, for students who have difficulty selecting a major and for those who face financial difficulties, this may be a period of heightened risk for withdrawal.

Summary

Students respond to their institutions and the demands of the sophomore year in unique ways. Increasing academic self-efficacy, student involvement, integration, engagement, and satisfaction; supporting students as they make major, career, and life purpose decisions; developing pedagogies and experiences outside the classroom that engage sophomores in relationships with faculty and staff; attending to financial and academic concerns; and responding to diverse needs of students are each important in the sophomore year. This text sets out to assist faculty and administrators in developing approaches that will recognize the importance of the sophomore year. While the literature on the second year is not yet robust, this chapter identified specific topics for concern for students and institutions in the sophomore year.

If, as Kuh and his colleagues (2005) suggest, institutions are to have an unshakeable focus on student learning, they must examine the experiences of sophomores. Specifically, institutions must use data to examine the departure rates, academic experiences, level of engagement, and satisfaction of sophomore students. Sophomore students must feel a ''specialness about being a student here'' (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 315). Focusing on sophomore student success does not need to be any different than focusing on students' success in general. Kuh and his partners provide us with a straightforward approach in designing such initiatives. They suggest that institutions must have many complementary policies and practices to academically and socially support sophomore students. Institutions must find ways to induce large numbers of sophomores to use programs and resources that will assist the sophomore student in becoming more engaged in the college or university environment and clearer about a career and life direction. And institutions must set and hold sophomores to standards that stretch them to perform at high levels, inside and outside the classroom.