



Mission

The Student Life Division is a partner in student learning. With students, faculty and staff, the Division creates a dynamic environment that encourages love of learning, ethical and caring behavior and respect for difference. In all our programs and services, we seek to serve the public good.

Division of Student Life Diversity Statement **Our Commitment to Diversity**

We believe that every person matters. We respect and embrace the uniqueness of identities, gifts, perspectives, histories and life experiences of all members of our community.

We are committed to creating an empowering, accessible, and equitable environment for a plurality of voices by:

- Building relationships through kind words and actions
- Examining how our actions individually and institutionally affect members of our community
- Confronting those who speak or act insensitively while inviting challenges to our bias, assumptions, and positions of privilege
- Taking the time and the risk to build genuine connections with others with whom we do not typically interact
- Promoting the achievement and support of a diverse student body, staff and faculty team

Congrats on being a Pioneer Parent!

This guide is designed to assist you in your interactions with your second year student. The Division of Student Life is committed to working with all students throughout their college career, but we noticed that second year students were in a unique situation. They are not first years any more, but not quite upperclassmen. The University implemented a class council structure to provide a greater sense of community for each class, including our second years. We know you are a big part of your student's life so we partnered with Parent Programs to create a place for you to get answers to questions or information to point your student in the right direction as the year moves ahead.

Research says that the greatest transition is the one between first and second year. We know it as the "sophomore slump." The "sophomore slump" is seen at institutions of higher education across the country and is often marked by indecisiveness, depression, and a feeling of being "lost". As your student transitions from her or his first year to second year at DU, the array of services that were readily advertised in their first year are less visible. These resources and services are still available but historically, universities have assumed that second year students know where to get help.

The Student Life Division advertises services, community engagement opportunities, and addresses specific needs around major and career choice, academic advising, campus connections, and study abroad. Some examples of Second Year programs are: A Second Year Conference held before the second year begins, a One Stop Shop Program which enables second year students to complete a variety of tasks all in one night, and a monthly e-newsletter, the "Pioneer Pride" which is sent to every second year's personal announcement channel of Web-Central.

I very much look forward to working with you and assisting you with any concerns you may have about your student. The "sophomore slump" does have a habit of creeping up on students, but there are resources here at DU to help assist your student through this transition and the decisions that lie ahead.

Carl Johnson, Executive Director
Campus Life
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Sophomore Slump

Over the years research has shown that second year students receive the least amount attention of any class. Though many institutions are succeeding in reducing first-year attrition rates through various programming initiatives, it seems this is just postponing the inevitable. Particularly, because second year students have not yet fully started their majors or have yet to choose one, limited faculty resources are available to assist them in navigating through the difficulties of their second year of college.

What is the Sophomore Slump?

There isn't really a comprehensive or textbook definition of the Slump, but it is widely accepted that the Sophomore Slump is characterized by "reduced motivation or apathy, declining grade point averages, or a letdown from their first year" (Schreiner and Pettengale, 2000). Other characteristics of the Sophomore Slump include depression, feelings of social alienation, dissatisfaction with one's current institution, and a questioning of personal identity (Lemons and Richard).

What causes the Sophomore Slump?

It is believed that the Sophomore Slump is created by a second year student's unrealistically high expectation of college life, which institutions often fail to meet. The added support, programming, and investment into a student's first year of college also adds to this slump as institutions often withdraw these resources at the beginning of a student's second year.



STAY ON TARGET!

Target tips: Watch for these targets throughout this guide with tips to help your second year student.

Common Characteristics

Academic pressures of upper-level classes, uncertainty about the direction of one's life, social pressure to find a niche on campus, and decreased friendship ties at home are stresses that add to the slump.

Costs, financial and emotional, are high to both students and institutions if the Sophomore Slump is not addressed successfully. By focusing on the needs, expectations, and experiences of second year students, families can begin to address the Sophomore Slump to ensure second year students return as energized and successful juniors.

Common characteristics of the Slump:

- Burnout
- Sick of the same thing
- Too used to routine
- Beginning to slack off
- Not getting anywhere with their goals
- Difficulty staying motivated
- Tired of working so hard
- Excitement of college is over
- Nothing's 'new'
- Real life is sneaking up on them
- Caught between directions
- Don't know which path to take
- Want to hurry up/graduate
- Think they know it all
- Feeling invisible

Concerns

The information below was created by surveying over 100,000 second years from over 1,000 colleges and universities in the United States. This list is not tailored to any specific college or university. It provides only a starting point to better serve second year students, and improve the college experience for all students.

What does a second year student value?

- An environment that promotes intellectual growth
- Valuable course content and excellent classroom instruction
- Knowledgeable, fair, and caring faculty
- Approachable and knowledgeable advisers
- Tuition that is a worthwhile investment
- Adequate financial aid
- A smooth registration process with a good variety of courses
- An enjoyable experience being a student

A small survey, conducted at DU in 2005, revealed a list of top concerns of second year students:

- Housing – junior year and after study abroad
- Study abroad – deadlines, classes, how to apply
- Financial aid
- Finding new friends
- Getting off campus
- Campus connections and campus involvement
- Finding an internship
- Finding a job
- Choosing a major
- Deciding whether to go to graduate school

Major Issues and Needs

The best way to address second year needs is to provide students with the resources they need, before they need them. Major issues, needs, and/or tasks of second year students are academic, developmental, and institutional.

Academic:

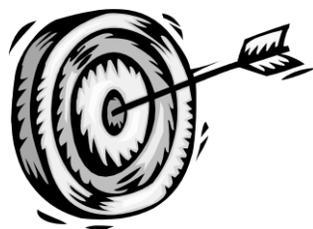
Second year students are challenged by an intensified curriculum and writing standards. They are not yet fully experiencing courses in their major because they are taking mostly general education courses, but they are also not receiving the benefit of first-year programming and services. There is often a romanticized image of college life, and reality hits hard. Professors academically challenge students at a higher level.

Developmental:

Second year students are often trying to figure out why they are in college and why they should stay at DU. Assuming responsibility for self and making decisions becomes even more important. Relationships may be changing with peers or family, and significant others may become more important.

Institutional:

There may be tension with parents and families over selecting a major, pressure from the college or friend to pick a major, or disillusionment with a major they have already chosen. The major does not pick up where first year programs left off, or if it does, it does not do it in the same way.



Have conversations with your student about their major and what they want to do post college. It is possible that your student is struggling but is not sure where to go for help.

Challenges

Second year students are no longer naïve about college or the future. They are painfully aware of what they are not interested in or good at doing.

They begin realizing that this is their life, and that they must begin considering what they want for themselves, instead of what parents, family, and peers believe is best for them.

Students leaving college after their second year often cite issues related to academic, social, financial, and motivational struggles as reasons for leaving.

These causes fall into four main categories; achieving competence, developing autonomy, establishing identity, and developing purpose.

To successfully address the Sophomore Slump, it is important for family members to try and identify these four main challenges with their student and intervene when necessary.

Achieving Competence:

With entry into upper-level general education and entry level major classes, second year students must perform at higher standards than were accepted for high school and the first year of college. Second year students often have difficulty with upper-level general education and entry level major classes. Another concern can be the writing standards. Expectations change as students move through college. This, along with academic challenges, interpersonal relationships, and personal challenges, are precursors to a “crisis of confidence” that often leads to the Sophomore Slump.

Developing Autonomy:

Second year students are typically expected to become less reliant on family/home and institutional support during their second year of college. Academic and social demands of the second year are at many times greater in comparison to the first year. Withdrawing too much support, or withdrawing it too fast, can be detrimental as second year students continue to adapt to their college experience and new autonomy. A second year student’s social, moral, and interpersonal needs are also closely linked with her or his autonomy.

Challenges

Establishing Identity:

The second year is a time when students often re-examine and establish an identity. During their second year, students often experiment with varied roles, are exposed to alternate goals and beliefs through their peers and professors, experience autonomy, and meaningful achievement. This is a time also for reflection and introspection. As such, the second year can be a turbulent time as students begin to address numerous issues such as major and career choices, study abroad, religious beliefs and values, political opinions, sexual standards, gender roles, and relationships.

Developing Purpose:

Second year students may be able to achieve competence, develop autonomy, and establish an identity with ease. However, they often question, what is the point of all this? As a result, many students entering the second year experience a crisis of meaning and purpose. Discovering a sense of purpose for their education and their lives is a pressing issue second year students in particular deal with. Institutions and families can assist students on their journey in developing a purpose for their lives. Without this support, students often find themselves simply moving through the motions of life. Assisting students with identifying their strengths and interests, and helping them develop a plan to capitalize on, can benefit a student greatly.



Listen to your student's concerns about their second year, validate their feelings, and let them know that there are many services at DU that can help guide them in their decision making.

Addressing Challenges

Many of the DU programs mentioned go far beyond simply providing second year students with a formal education. Instead, these programs are designed to mold DU students into adults, ready to enter the professional world energized and proficient.

Character Development:

The development of conscience, character, citizenship, and social responsibility is more prevalent in today's society than any time in the recent past. As second year students choose and begin their majors, character development and educating the whole person becomes an important task that is essential to their professional education.

Scaffolding:

Second year students are faced with a transitional year. Too often institutions withdraw support to 'teach' students to become self sufficient and autonomous. This is seen as part of their education and entrance into their profession and the 'real world'. However, second year students still need support. As such, scaffolding is a concept that provides second year students with a framework, or structure, of basic support that can see them through a turbulent year. This structure should not be permanent however. Scaffolding is a concept that must be conveyed to and recognized by second year students as a temporary support system that should be set aside later as a student becomes more self sufficient and autonomous.

Praxis:

Praxis is a sociology concept that suggests we are changed by doing. Encouraging your second year student to participate in an internship or a service learning project within their field of study can be really helpful. The experiences they gain from these activities can shape a second year student's feelings and attitudes toward the world. They allow them to make relevant connections and apply the theory they have learned in class to practical content. This 'learning by doing' concept is a particularly relevant practice for second year students as it allows them to reflect upon real world experiences cognitively, vocationally, ethically, and socially. It also allows second year students to assimilate these experiences into their educational, career, and life goals.

Second Year Questions

Being away from your student can be difficult in helping her or him address the complicated issues associated with the Sophomore Slump. Below is a short list of questions created by Saint Michael's College, adapted for the University of Denver. It can help you identify if your student is in a slump. If she or he is in the Slump, utilizing some of the advising techniques provided on the next page can be helpful.

If your student has asked three or more of the below questions since arriving at DU, your student could be suffering from Sophomore Slump, and it's time to get help.

- What am I doing at the University of Denver?
- What am I doing in this program?
- Why do I have more questions than when I first got here?
- Who are these people I thought were my friends?
- Why am I majoring in this if I don't even like it?
- Why am I completely overwhelmed all the time?
- Why don't I have any time to relax?
- Why don't I have any idea what I want to do when I grow up?
- Why don't my parents/family leave me alone about not knowing what I want to do when I grow up?
- How could I have acted like that last year?
- Why am I not having nearly as much fun as I did last year?
- Does everyone think I am weird?
- Why do I feel like I could cry if someone looks at me the wrong way?

Advising Techniques

To address your second year student's need for involvement and engagement in learning in and out of the classroom, an effective advising relationship can foster students' participation in college life. Here are some ways you could encourage your second year student to engage in college life and their education:

1. Encourage your student to apply to become an RA or an Orientation Leader.
2. Encourage your student to seek out leadership opportunities working with campus offices or student organizations.
3. If your student is really interested in their major, encourage them to pursue an internship or volunteer opportunity in that field.
4. Encourage your student to take a faculty member to lunch. The university, in the past, has offered a program called "Let's Do Lunch" to encourage students to interact and learn from faculty outside the classroom.
5. Service learning opportunities are a strong priority at DU and a great way for students to connect with the community. Encourage your student to visit the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning for more information.
6. As you have read, the Sophomore Slump involves a lack of (or loss of) direction. Talk to your student about visiting the Career Center or talking honestly with an academic adviser about a plan for their major choice.
7. Assist your student in developing a Plan B. Once students begin to move down a path, they may figure out that path is not for them. If they have a Plan B, this realization won't be as daunting.



Mentoring: Human relationships are powerful. Engaging students in mentoring, service learning, volunteerism, and other programs encourages them to build their relationship with the community.

Suggestions

So now you understand the themes that can be present in a student's second year. But how can you help? Below we have listed some practical interventions to help guide your second year student through this often difficult time.

Leadership:

Second year students can benefit from leadership positions on campus; however, it is important to recognize that leadership opportunities are not exclusively found on a college campus. Students who are balancing multiple responsibilities should be encouraged to look at what they are experiencing on campus and its relationship to the development of leadership skills.

Second year students could take on a leadership role in a student organization or student government. At DU, second year students can apply to be an Orientation Leader to help guide incoming first year students in their first week at DU. By encouraging second year students to take leadership positions on or off campus, they can stay active with campus and community activities. It also allows them to gain counseling from faculty involved with programs they are leading and to participate in service learning projects. DU's Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning can connect students to opportunities in the community and assist them with gaining life skills.

PINS Projects:

Second year students, more than any other group of students, gain from small group interactions with peers and faculty. One of the ways second year students may connect is the Partners in Scholarship (PINS) program that allows undergraduates to create a research or scholarly project from scratch – from writing the proposal to doing the research to presenting their findings. Even better, PINS projects are funded by the university. DU provides up to \$1,500 for students to travel to an academic conference or scholarly meeting, and DU also provides up to \$3,500 for a research grant. A faculty mentor will work closely with the student to guide and challenge them.

Suggestions

Campus Programming:

A good way to engage second year students in campus life is by encouraging them to apply to become a Resident Assistant or an Orientation Leader. These campus positions have been beneficial for second year students in establishing an identity because they can learn about their institutions, are able to network with faculty, and connect with their peers and first year students with similar interests.

Each year at the conclusion of Orientation week, DU holds the Pioneer Carnival. Over 150 student organizations participate in the carnival. It is a great way for students to reconnect. Often thought of as only for first year students, this fair casts its net much wider.

Peer Counselors:

All students, but particularly second year students, benefit greatly from counseling. As such, many institutions are training counselors and peer counselors to address the specific needs of second year students. The DU Health and Counseling Center has a variety of counselors to assist second year students with the concerns they may have.

The Health & Counseling Center has also developed a peer education program. Peer educators can answer questions on a variety of wellness related issues. The group is called DU Healthy Peer Empowerment (HYPE). More information can be found on the Health Resources tab at www.du.edu/duhealth.

University Chaplain:

The University of Denver Chaplain's Office supports the integrity of each individual community member's quest for truth, meaning, and belonging, advocates for the inclusion of religious/spiritual voices and values in the University's conversations about, and commitment to, the Public Good. The Chaplain's Office celebrates the diversity of the world's religious and spiritual traditions and their expression. The Chaplain is available for conversation and counseling – sharing the trying times and the celebrations. All students are welcome to contact Rev. Gary R. Brower, PhD by email, gary.brower@du.edu, or the website www.du.edu/studentlife/religiouslife/, or (303) 871-4488.

Suggestions

Active Questions:

Asking active questions will provide you with more than the usual “Uh-huh” or “Yeah” answer from your student when asking how they are doing in school. The following questions can help your student reflect on their identity, purpose, and their DU experiences so far.

- How are you different from a year ago?
- What impact has college had on you so far?
- Is college what you hoped it would be? How is it different?
- What are your goals for your second year?
- What have been your greatest disappointments?
- What strengths have helped you through the difficult times?
- What would you need to do to say next year, “This has been a really good year”?
- Tell me about your roommate, your friends, the activities you are involved in on campus, and how you feel about your classes. How are you fitting in as a second year student?
- Have you discovered a system of learning, studying, or achieving goals that works best for you?
- What helps you succeed academically?
- What have been your favorite classes?
- What, if anything, would need to change for you to feel DU is the right place for you to be?

DU is dedicated to assisting second year students with transitions that are challenging them. Encourage your student to seek assistance through Student Life staff. If we work together, we can transform the slump, into a success.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Parent & Family Relations

(303) 871-3708 or (303) 871-2744

www.du.edu/studentlife/parents/

Academic Advising & Career Development

(303) 871-2150

www.du.edu/studentlife/advising/

www.du.edu/studentlife/career/

Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning

(303) 871-3706

www.du.edu/engage/

Partners in Scholarship

(303) 871-3596

www.du.edu/pins/

Study Abroad

(303) 871-4912

www.du.edu/intl/abroad

Writing & Research Center

(303) 871-7456

www.du.edu/writing/wrc.htm



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