

An Overview: Key findings of the second year experience



The Second Year Experience Initiative is a collaborative effort across the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus led by the Office of Undergraduate Education. The goal of the initiative is to provide a more coordinated and intentional second year experience for students to enhance their overall success, retention, and ultimate graduation from the University of Minnesota. The second year experience (SYE) cohort is defined as new high school admits who have completed one year of college at the University and who are in their second year of undergraduate studies.

SYE Initiative Goals

- Increase overall student satisfaction
- Improve retention from 2nd to 3rd year ultimately leading to an increase in overall graduation rates
- Increase overall engagement of second year students
- Contribute to the overall achievement of the SYE student outcomes (sense of purpose, self, community) and University Learning and Development Outcomes

SYE Student Outcomes

By the end of the second year, we hope students gain a greater:

Sense of Purpose

Students with a sense of purpose possess a clear understanding of why they are at the University of Minnesota and what direction they are heading. They have experienced success in the classroom and engage in the academic life of the campus. They possess enthusiasm for their academic path and understand appropriate career options. They have set realistic and obtainable goals for themselves. They have hope and optimism for their remaining two years at the University.

Sense of Community

Students with a sense of community feel like they belong at the University of Minnesota. They have the support they need to be successful from peers, faculty and staff. They are engaged in campus life and feel a sense of ownership in creating their own University experience.

Sense of Self

Students with a sense of self have increased their overall self-awareness. They experience a safe, supportive, and respectful environment in which to explore aspects of their own identity and the diversity of others. Students have improved their overall well-being relating to financial, physical, spiritual, career and academic aspects of their lives.

Literature Highlights

According to the 2007 *Sophomore Experience Survey*, about 14% of second years report their second year is “worse or much worse” than their first year. Students that experience this “sophomore slump” may be at risk to leave the institution. In identifying impactful practices to promote persistence, Schreiner (2012) has revealed characteristics found in students who thrive in college:

- High confidence in their academic ability,
- High engagement with their learning,
- Higher levels of hope to reach their goals,
- A sense of purpose or meaning in life,
- And a “growth mindset” which frames intelligence as malleable over time through practice and work (Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012).

Academic

- Many second year students are in between completing liberal education credits and entering the core of major coursework; the progressive pedagogy of first-year seminars may be lacking in the second year, contributing to **academic disengagement**. (Hunter, Tobolowsky, Gardner, & Associates, 2010). Engaging with the learning process is predictive of student success.
- Courses in the second year can be difficult “weed out” courses for major requirements or the tough courses delayed from first year, which can lower motivation and confidence toward coursework (Hunter, et al, 2010). Combined with findings that second years study less than other years, sophomore year is crucial to academic success and persistence (Gardner, 2000).
- Meaningful **student-faculty contact** is a strong indicator of student persistence as well as outcomes related to intent to re-enroll, intent to graduate, efficacy and career/major decisions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A national survey revealed that a third of sophomores have never talked to a faculty member out of class (2007). This is consistent with feedback from the UMN SERU data.
- By the end of the second year, the biggest gaps between students who leave and stay for their third year are in areas of:
 - Progress toward degree,
 - Academic performance (GPA), and
 - Curricular engagement (Hunter et al, 2010).

Career & Major

- Students learn that answers are less “black and white” and more gray, which can be confusing as they make decisions about their majors and careers (Pattengale, 2000).
- **Satisfaction** with the second year experience is a major predictor of re-enrollment for their third year (Pattengale, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
- Second year students are usually in the stages of *focused exploration*, reflecting on their experiences and seeking possibilities, or *tentative choice*, where they make initial decisions about potential careers and jobs (Schaller, 2005).
- Second years are less likely to engage in the classroom and less likely to discuss their major with their peers until they have selected one (Pattengale, 2000). Students may also discover they are not eligible for their first-choice major (Richmond 1987).
- Academic advising is one of the most crucial factors for sophomore retention (Nealy, 2005). At this time, students are more likely to be dissatisfied with: getting incorrect information, difficulty making advising appointments, and confusion over prerequisites and major requirements. Students also note this in the UMN SERU comments.
 - This time period is most important for exploring student values, life goals, reasons for being in college, and how to connect those ideas to an ideal “future self” to create actionable plans and meaningful goals.
 - Important time to teach second years skills on how to navigate the complex university system (Nealy, 2005).

Engagement

- Second year students feel less excited about the college experience after first-year, and are more likely to be disappointed by university services and experiences (Cuseo, 2005).
- After first-year, where programs tend to provide a lot of support, second-years feel abandoned by the institution and have a lower sense of guidance (Hunter et al, 2010).
- As students return to college their second year, they are more selective about how they will get involved. **Student groups** become more aligned with personal interests as opposed to a place to make new friends (Hunter et al, 2010).
- Students who were able to connect their **strengths** to academic success were also more likely to connect meaningfully with faculty during office hours, see advisors more, take on leadership roles, engage in class (Nealy, 2005).
- Some key factors for success in the second year also include:
 - Living on-campus and staying connected to campus community and opportunities,
 - Being engaged in co-curricular activities,
 - Working part-time on campus,
 - Involvement in undergraduate research,
 - And utilizing career counseling and advising services (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Hunter et al, 2010).
 - These endeavors help students explore their needs related to self, interpersonal, and academic development as they move through stages of development (Jones & Franco, 2010)

Finances & Daily Life

- Financial aid is a strong predictor of student persistence and success (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010). At the U of M, many second years move off-campus their second year and experience many financial realities regarding loans, loss of first-year scholarships, and living costs that can create financial pressure regarding re-enrollment and completion in 4 years. This pressure is also congruent with data from the UMN SERU.
- Students may be living on their own for the first time off-campus and struggling to become self-sufficient and autonomous as well as interdependent with a support network (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).
- Students must continue to practice self-care in concert with balancing their work, including physical and mental health.
 - Important time to teach second years skills on how to navigate the complex university system (Nealy, 2005).

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The [Second Year Experience](#) is an initiative coordinated by the [Office of Undergraduate Education](#) in conjunction with the Second Year Experience Advisory Committee. For more information, please contact LeeAnn Melin, Director of Undergraduate Student Initiatives at melin002@umn.edu.