Retaining Sophomores at Stan State

Part II
Stan State historically has had problems retaining sophomores - the “Sophomore Slump”

In 2014, the university Student Success Committee launched a project known as “Retaining Sophomores”

The faculty-led project conducted focus groups with at-risk sophomores
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2014-2016

Primary Investigators included Dr. Keith Nainby (Communication Studies), Dr. Katie Olivant (Liberal Studies), and Dr. Gerard Wellman (Public Administration)
Retaining Sophomores Milestones

Student Success Committee launches Retaining Sophomores

- 2014
- 2015-2016
- 2016-2017
- 2018
Retaining Sophomores Milestones

Retaining Sophomores
Student Success Committee launches Retaining Sophomores

2014  2015-2016  2016-2017  2018

Focus Groups
Retained at-risk students participated in focus groups
Retaining Sophomores Milestones

Retaining Sophomores
- Student Success Committee launches Retaining Sophomores

Focus Groups
- Retained at-risk students participated in focus groups

Findings Reported
- Focus group findings reported to campus community in Fall 2016

2014  2015-2016  2016-2017  2018
Retaining Sophomores Milestones

- **Retaining Sophomores**
  - Student Success Committee launches Retaining Sophomores

- **Findings Reported**
  - Focus group findings reported to campus community in Fall 2016

- **2014**
  - Focus Groups
    - Retained at-risk students participated in focus groups

- **2015-2016**
  - Focus Groups

- **2016-2017**
  - Findings Reported
  - In-Depth Interviews
    - Semi-structured interviews with non-retained and at-risk students

- **2018**
Retaining Sophomores Milestones

**Retaining Sophomores**
- Student Success Committee launches Retaining Sophomores

**Findings Reported**
- Focus group findings reported to campus community in Fall 2016

**Analysis & Reporting Out**
- Data analysis of interview transcripts

**Focus Groups**
- Retained at-risk students participated in focus groups

**In-Depth Interviews**
- Semi-structured interviews with non-retained and at-risk students
Part 1 Findings

Three primary themes emerged from the 2015 focus groups.
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1. **I Need the Help**
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1. I Need the Help
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2. It Doesn’t Cover Everything
   The university has limits to its support of student needs
Part 1 Findings

Three primary themes emerged from the 2015 focus groups.

1. **I Need the Help**
   Students highlighted the help they need from advisors, counselors, mentors, and faculty.

2. **It Doesn’t Cover Everything**
   The university has limits to its support of student needs.

3. **We’re Wasting Time**
   We’re being evaluated by students’ perceptions of our ability to be flexible and timely in addressing their needs.
These focus groups captured retained at-risk sophomores, but what about the non-retained ones?
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In 2016...

we determined to conduct phone interviews with non-retained students, so we contacted 58 non-retained individuals. Only 1 participated in an interview.
The Practice of Co-Inquiry

Students are trained in interviewing and focus group facilitation, data analysis, and dissemination.

Students as co-investigators are critical to developing questions, methodologies, incentives, and interpretation of data.

Student-Centered Assessment

Faculty, staff, and administrators are not capable of conceptualizing accessible assessment questions without student input.

Maybe students will be more willing to talk to other students.
We hired two students, Naraith Lopez & Josey Hazelton, to conduct interviews with non-retained individuals.
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- 18 one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted.
- Average length of interviews was 17 minutes.
The Interviewees...

5 students who had resumed coursework

13 individuals who stopped out
The Interviewees...

5 students who had resumed coursework

13 individuals who stopped out

4 self-identified as male

14 self-identified as female
Part II Findings
1. Misaligned Expectations
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2. They don’t feel part of the campus community
Part II Findings

1. Misaligned Expectations

2. They don’t feel part of the campus community

3. Campus resources are used differently (or not at all) by non-retained interviewees
1. Misaligned Expectations

→ "It’s not for me"
→ "I bit off more than I could chew"
→ Challenges add up
“I had originally wanted to go to college, that’s all anybody said to do, just ‘Go to college, go to college.’ Once I was there and after a few classes, I was just like, ‘Okay, not really feeling this anymore.’”
It’s Not For Me.

“I had a rough time at Stan. My major was Computer Science...and I wasn’t learning what I really wanted to learn.”
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1. Misaligned Expectations

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→ Challenges add up
“I bit off more than I could chew.”

“I made the decision to give work more time than school so I would have control over my decisions, but I didn’t take it the right way.”

“I feel like I focused too much on my actual work instead of my schooling.”

Misaligned Expectations
Misaligned Expectations

“I bit off more than I could chew.”

“I think that it was procrastination, having a full-time job, and commuting. I gave myself a full plate and thought I could take it... But I feel like if I didn’t have that much on my plate, I would still be at Stanislaus today.”
"I bit off more than I could chew."

“I ended up taking two science classes at the same time, or I took two or more difficult classes at the same time, so it really stressed me out. I didn’t know how to balance difficult classes with somewhat easier classes.”
“I bit off more than I could chew.”

“It’s not really the [academic] difficulty, it’s the freedom you have. Knowing that it’s all on you and unstructured, sometimes I would take advantage of that. There would be days, you know, where ‘I don’t want to go’.”

Interview Question

Tell me about the mistakes you think you made during your college career.
“I bit off more than I could chew.”

“It’s not really the academic difficulty, it’s the freedom you have. Knowing that it’s all on you and unstructured, sometimes I would take advantage of that. There would be days, you know, where ‘I don’t want to go.’”

A lot of our students struggle to balance competing demands and managing their time.

Non-retained students frequently cited not seeing the value of their degree as a reason for stopping out.

Interview Question
Tell me about the mistakes you think you made during your college career.

Misligned Expectations
Value
Implicit
1. Misaligned Expectations

- “It's not for me”
- “I bit off more than I could chew”
- Challenges add up
Challenges Add Up

“I left because of financial aid. I am looking forward to going back... I never wanted to leave... I didn’t have the financial capacity to pay it on my own without financial aid. That was the school that I chose, and that’s where I wanted to go.”
“Coming from a low-income family, I knew I didn’t have the funds to do housing. So my only choice during my time at Stanislaus was to commute and live at home.... I had no choice.”
“My biggest challenge [my sophomore year] was commuting [from Los Banos]. I had a lot of issues with transportation. That was the only thing allowing me to not always be there. That was my biggest issue at Stanislaus.”

“Commuting. It’s a drag. It really sucks....and it’s really hard to find parking spots.”
Misaligned Expectations

Challenges Add Up

“Sometimes I’m like, ‘Ugh, I have to wake up so much earlier because of the drive, and there’s traffic.”
2. They Don't Feel Part of the Campus Community

Their lack of assimilation to campus culture is seen in a variety of ways

➔ Students discount their own success
➔ They don't feel connected
➔ They feel lost in large classes
Students view success as degree completion.

The longterm picture can seem overwhelming.
Lack of Community

Students Discount Their Own Success

Students view success as degree completion.

The longterm picture can seem overwhelming.

Non-retained interviewee:

“Honestly, I don’t think I had any successes that semester.”
Completing their freshman year isn’t perceived as success if they ultimately stop out as a sophomore.
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Their lack of assimilation to campus culture is seen in a variety of ways

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➔ They don't feel connected
➔ They feel lost in large classes
“I feel like the reasons I went to Stanislaus was not only because it was close by, but because there was a lot of diversity, and that was something that I wanted to have around me, being Mexican. I wanted to be around other people like me.”
Lack of Community
Connection to other students

“I feel like the reasons I went to Stanislaus was not only because it was close by, but because there was a lot of diversity, and that was something that I wanted to have around me, being Mexican. I wanted to be around other people like me.”

Misaligned expectations
The student’s perception did not align with what they found in reality.
Connection to Faculty

“I don’t think I ever connected with them.”

“It was actually nice to be one-on-one with them. But I felt like I was taking up their time.”
Connection to Faculty

When I interacted with professors, “it felt like the first day of school all over again. I never really had conversations with them to where if I had a question I would ask them. I would kind of second-guess myself...I would rather ask my classmates.”
Lack of Community

Connection to Faculty

“I feel like I had one or two professors who were just there to collect a paycheck...they tended to be a little bit larger classes. It made me feel like I was just being taught at, more like a speech. Being told rather than teaching.”
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Lack of Community
Feeling Lost in Large Classes

“In the smaller classes I did. I had a biology class that was super hard for me because it was a huge class.”

“No way. In some of my classes that were really small classes, I feel like the professor did have the time to zero in with us. But most of my classes were huge and the professor wouldn’t even realize if I was there or not.”

Interview question
Did you feel like you understood what was discussed in your classes?
Feeling Lost in Large Classes

In my major, “they know me on a first name basis. That’s something I really like. It makes me feel good about myself. I think a lot of professors don’t really care; they lecture, they let you go and then you’re on your way.”

“No, I was just another one of the students sitting there.”

Lack of Community

Interview question

Did you feel your professors knew who you were?
3. Resources

Interviewees are aware of on-campus resources but are not utilizing them.

- Different campus communities
  - Family Concerns
  - New Student Orientation
  - Advising in the Major
Retained students who struggled in their freshman and/or sophomore year indicate they later began to utilize campus resources, and that is when things improved.
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Resources most frequently mentioned:
- Tutoring Center
- Writing Center
- Library
- Advising Center
“The fact that they had a tutoring center. I would not have passed some of my classes without the tutoring center. And I was so stubborn as a freshmen to not go and then I went, and it changed my game 100%.”
There is a difference between the campus communities that non-retained students describe compared to retained students. Non-retained students do not discuss a sense of community. If they do, it's usually in non-academic groups, particularly sororities and fraternities.
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“Personal issues that I have gone through in life. Having family go in and out of prison, and thought I would do the opposite, go on a different path.”

Interview Question:
What influenced your choice to go to college?
“In my family, there aren’t many of my family members who have gone to college or successfully finished it. I always wanted to pursue a career after I graduated.... I wanted to be the role model, and I wanted to be the one that my family would look up to.”

**Interview Question:**
What influenced your choice to go to college?
Non-retained students were far more likely to live with family members and cite family responsibilities as one reason they didn’t do as well as they would have liked.

The Conflicting Role of Family

Non-retained students frequently want to make their families proud, but face challenges with family responsibilities.
3. Resources

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➔ Family Concerns
➔ New Student Orientation
➔ Advising in the Major
“At NSO I just talked with the students who were working there and I basically went off of their experience. And then after my first semester, I went off of what I thought was the right thing.”

Interview question
How did you decide which classes to take?
New Student Orientation

“I think it was toward the end of the orientation where we were discussing what we wanted to do and there was a girl who helped me and she was helping me get through the GEs that semester.”

Campus Resources

Interview question

How did you decide which classes to take?
3. Resources

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- Family Concerns
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- Advising in the Major
Retained interviewees often refer to their program advisor as instrumental in their success.

Non-retained students report having to make the determination of what classes to take and when by themselves.
A bit of good news

“I had a really good advisor. I knew every time I had a problem he was always looking out for me. And he saw my grades were dropping, and even when I got out of Stanislaus he was constantly calling me to see if I was still interested in going to school and make sure I was taking the right courses. So he kept in contact with me even after I left Stanislaus.”
Retaining Sophomores at Stan State Part II