

# Retaining Sophomores at Stan State

Part II



# History

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

## Retaining Sophomores

Student Success  
Committee launches  
Retaining Sophomores

2014

2015-2016

2016-2017

2018



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reported to campus  
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Semi-structured interviews  
with non-retained and  
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## Analysis & Reporting Out

Data analysis of interview  
transcripts

2016-2017

2018

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Semi-structured interviews  
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The university has limits to its support of student needs





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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

**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?



These focus groups captured retained at-risk sophomores, but what about the non-retained ones?



**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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**2016-2017**

- 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



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5 students who had resumed coursework

13 individuals who stopped out

4 self-identified as male

14 self-identified as female



# Part II Findings



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## 1. Misaligned Expectations



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1. Misaligned Expectations

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





# 1. Misaligned Expectations

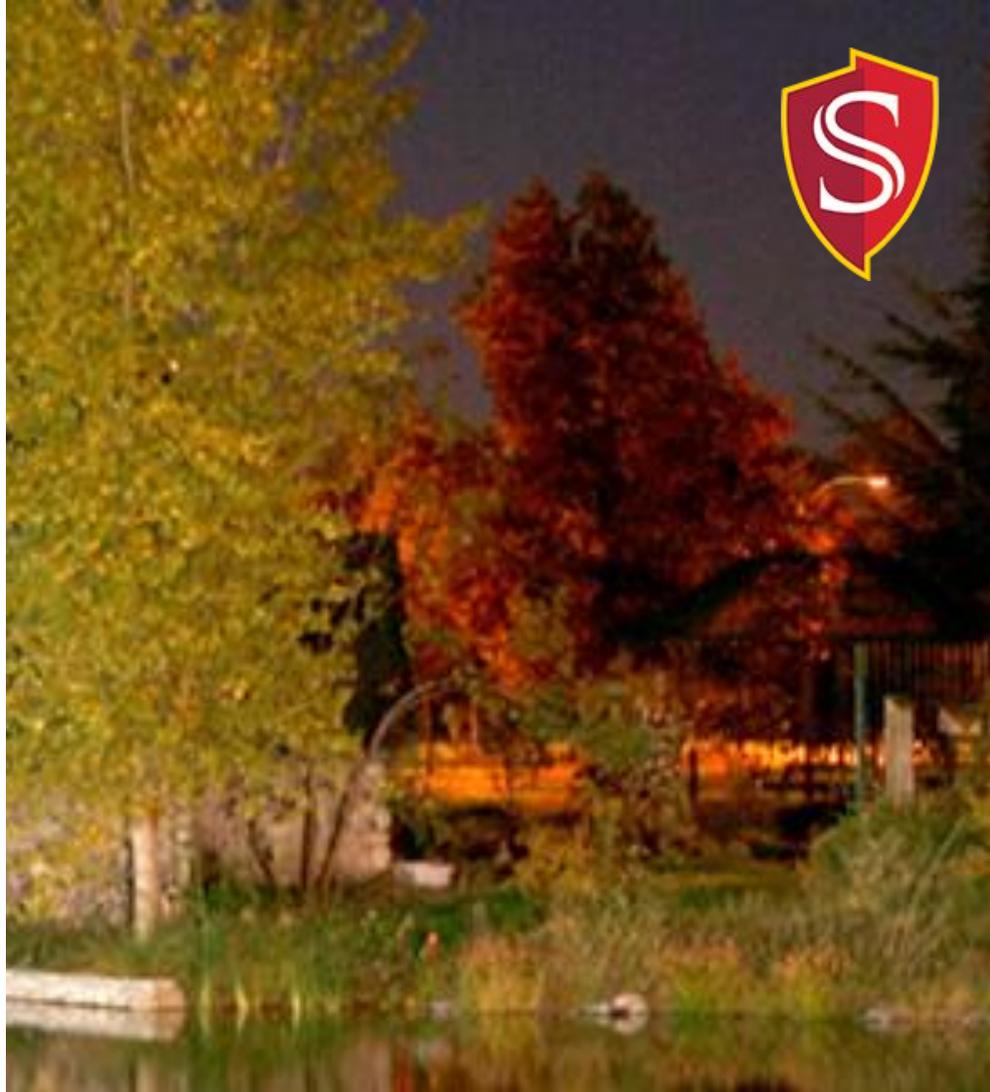
- **“It’s not for me”**
- “I bit off more than I could chew”
- Challenges add up



# Misaligned Expectations

## It's Not For Me.

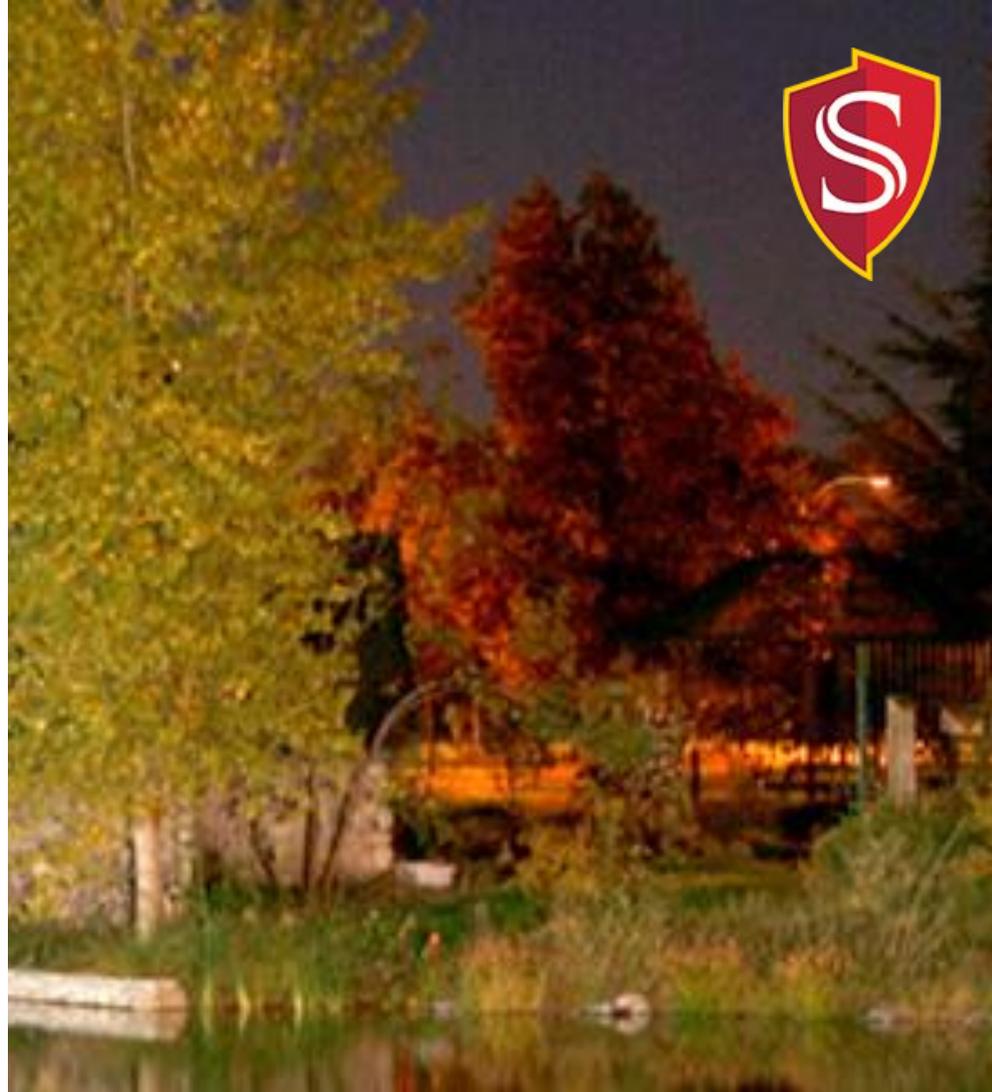
“I had originally wanted to go to college, that’s all anybody said to do, just ‘Go to college, go to college.’ Once I was there and after a few classes, I was just like, ‘Okay, not really feeling this anymore.’”



# Misaligned Expectations

## 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.”





# Misaligned Expectations

## It's Not For Me.

"I had a rough time at Stan.  
was Computer Science...and  
learning what I really want

### **Implicit**

Non-retained students frequently cited not being able to see the value of their degree as a reason for stopping out





# 1. Misaligned Expectations

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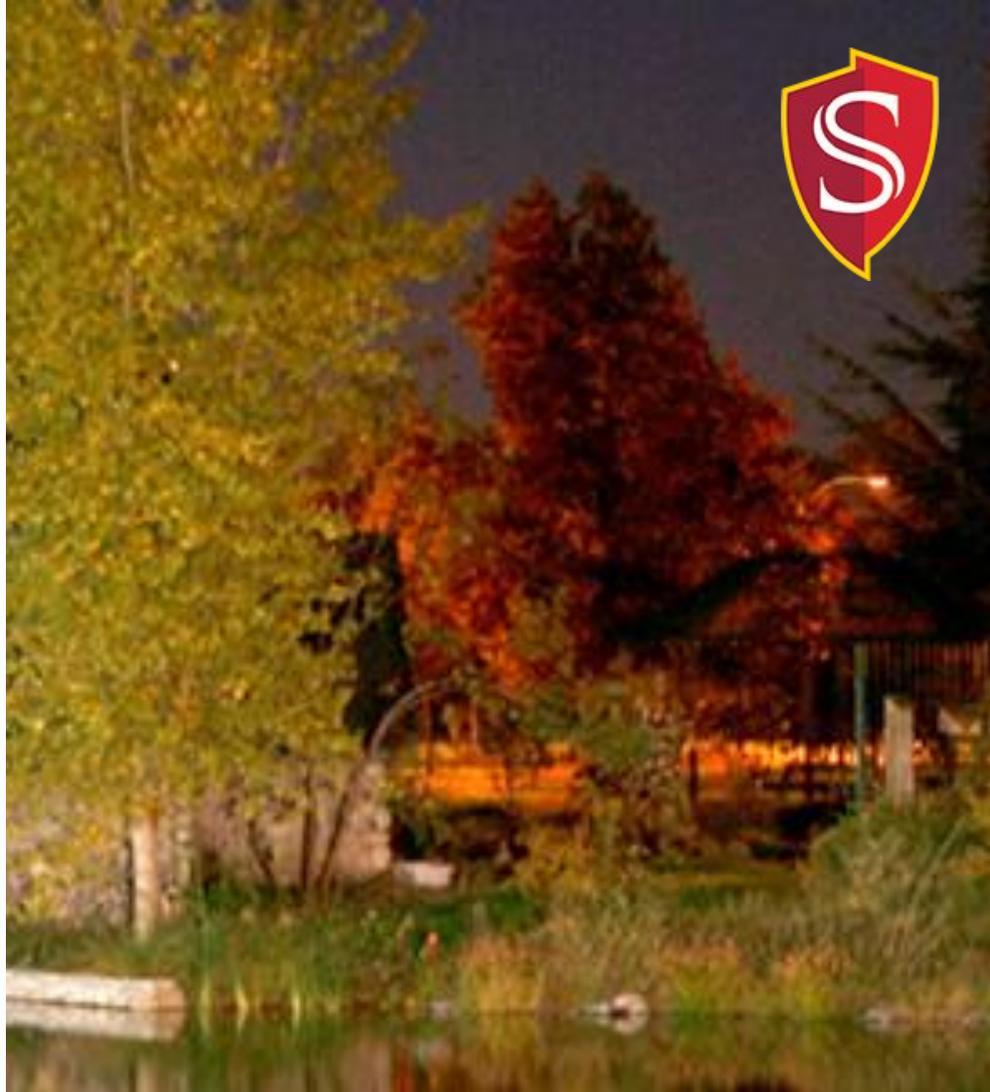


# Misaligned Expectations

**“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

**“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.”



# Misaligned Expectations

**“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.”



# Misaligned Expectations

“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.

# Misaligned Expectations

“I bit off more than I could chew.”

## Implicit

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

“It’s not really the freedom you think it is, it’s the freedom you have when you realize that it’s all on you and sometimes I would like to go home, that. There would be a lot of things, where ‘I don’t want to go’.”



## Interview Question

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



# 1. Misaligned Expectations

- “It’s not for me”
- “I bit off more than I could chew”
- **Challenges add up**



# Misaligned Expectations

## 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.”



# Misaligned Expectations

## Challenges Add Up

“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.”



# Misaligned Expectations

## Challenges Add Up

“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





# Lack of Community

## Students Discount Their Own Success

Students view success as degree completion.

The longterm picture can seem overwhelming.



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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.”





## Lack of Community

### Students Discount Their Own Success

Completing their freshman year isn't perceived as success if they ultimately stop out as a sophomore.

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Completing their freshman year isn't perceived as success if they ultimately stop out as a sophomore.

### Implicit

They don't feel like we're calling out or celebrating their accomplishments





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## 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.”





## Lack of Community Connection to other students

### Misaligned expectations

The student's perception did not align with what they found in reality



“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 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.”



# Lack of Community

## 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.”





## 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**



A photograph of two young women sitting on a metal bench outdoors. They are looking down at a book or document held by one of them. The background is filled with trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and red. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

# Lack of Community Feeling Lost in Large Classes

## Interview question

Did you feel like you understood what was discussed in your 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.”



# Lack of Community

## 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.”

### 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

# Campus Resources

“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%.”



## Interview question

What did the university do to help you?

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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- **Family Concerns**
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# Family Concerns

“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?

# Family Concerns

“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?

# Family Concerns

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



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# Campus Resources

## New Student Orientation

“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?



# Campus Resources

## 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.”

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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

