Sophomores, a Work in Progress: A Reflection of the Importance of the Sophomore Year and an Evaluation of the Sophomore Year Experience (SYE) Program

Abstract

The sophomore year is one that is of high importance in a students’ academic career. After students progress from numerous freshman affiliated programs, they are often overlooked and deserted. Without individualized attention, these students feel lost and lack commitment. Random exploration is a period of time that is often experienced by incoming freshman, however, some Sophomores become fixated at this stage and face academic difficulty (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). These Sophomores do not reflect, nor do they engage in critical decision making about the future (Schaller, 2005). Commitment to a major, involvement on campus, and satisfaction with faculty interaction has shown to be significant predictors of Sophomore’s academic success and retention to the University (Graunke & Woosley, 2005).

In Fall 2012 a program was created at Salisbury University that was coined the Sophomore Year Experience (SYE) Program, which is often referred to as “Sophomore September.” This program targets second-year students with goals of improving retention, satisfaction, and engagement. Specifically, the SYE program creates a comfortable environment in which students can engage with peers and staff to discover various opportunities and resources on campus and within the community. The SYE Program proudly promotes a series of activities and events that allow students to explore their academic career and their community.

Methods:

- 394 current Salisbury University students completed an online survey to assess their general awareness, satisfaction, and engagement in the Sophomore Year Experience Program on campus.
- 308 (78.2%) Female; 84 (21.3%) Male
- 53.6% of respondents were between the ages of 18-20 years.
- Age mean was 20.84
- Race: 71.9% White/Caucasian, 10.7% African American/Black

Awareness scale measured using dichotomous categories where 1= somewhat aware or very aware, and 2= not aware

Importance scale measured using a 5 point Likert scale from 1=Very Important, to 5=Very Unimportant

Introduction

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Events
- Student Activities Fair
- Study Abroad Fair
- Major and Minors Fair
- Departmental Gatherings
- Third Friday
- Sophomore Dinner
- Surfmore Dinner

Promotional items
- SYE Photo Contest

Giveaways
- 1st year t shirt
- 2nd year t shirt
- Surfmore t shirt
- Cups
- Stickers

Results:

- All Salisbury University schools were well represented (See Figure 1)
- Event Awareness: (See Figure 2) o Those campus events open to all academic year students were rated with slightly higher awareness o SYE eligible were more aware of several events
- Event Importance: (See Figure 3) o Overall, students thought each of the SYE affiliated events were important. Those campus events open to all academic year students were rated of a slightly higher importance o A series of One Way ANOVAs reveal no significant differences between SYE eligible and all other students
- Giveaway/Promotional items Awareness: (See Figures 4 and 5) Chi Square Analyses compare SYE eligible to non-eligible students o SYE eligible students were more aware of giveaways and promotional items than all other students o Non SYE eligible students were aware of giveaways and promotional items
- The SYE Program overall awareness, and the Purpose and Goals Overall Awareness were higher among SYE eligible students than all other students (see Figures 6 and 7)

Discussion:

- All students, regardless of SYE eligibility, rated the Sophomore Year Experience (SYE) Program as being important
- SYE eligible were more aware of SYE events, giveaways, and promotional items
- Findings show campus wide awareness of the SYE Program was high. Of particular note, the fact that non SYE eligible students were aware of the SYE Program, especially freshman, suggest that future participation may increase.