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Stress and the Sophomore Slump: A Phenomenological Study at a Mid-Size Public University in Rural Pennsylvania

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STRESS AND THE SOPHOMORE SLUMP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL

STUDY AT A MID-SIZE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN RURAL PENNSYLVANIA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Title: Stress and the Sophomore Slump: A Phenomenological Study at a Mid-Size
          Public University in Rural Pennsylvania

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Sophomore year tends to pose many concerns for college students academically, personally, and socially. College sophomores are making monumental career and personal decisions, which can lead to undue stress, anxiety, and depression coupled with developmental challenges. In recent years, universities across the United States have started to pay closer attention to college sophomore student concerns; however, the empirical literature is lacking in this area. Through the lens of Cognitive Appraisal Theory, this qualitative study analyzed the lived experiences of 18 junior college students who reflected on the tribulations of their sophomore year. A Husserlian descriptive phenomenological approach, with the assistance of NVivo software, was used to analyze the data. Participants report high stress ranging from seven to ten on a 10-point scale. Participants were academically, personally, and socially stressed. The findings indicate that most participants used positive coping techniques to handle their stress. The findings also show that faculty and campus resources played a role in helping the participants with successfully working through their difficult experiences.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to all students who have questioned their abilities to succeed in the academic world; do not ever give up on your dreams.

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feedback during the entire process. You are simply amazing, brilliant, and a true joy. I am thankful for your friendship.

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Thank you to my husband: Justin, you are my rock. You have always supported me no matter what crazy journeys I decided to pursue. As long as you have known me, I have always been a student, which I am sure is not the easiest thing in the world. This journey was as much yours as it was mine. I truly could not have done this without you. Also, thank you for picking up my slack around the house and taking care of our babies. You are so special to me; love you always.

Lastly, but most importantly, to my children: Claire and Lincoln, I am sorry for taking countless hours of bonding away from you, but I hope this will one day make you very proud of me. I also hope this helps you to see that you can do most things you put your mind to. Education is so very important, and I hope that one day you understand just how important it is. Always reach for the stars and do not ever give up on your dreams. I love you both to the moon and back; you are the very best part of my life. Love you always. Dream big, my babies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The college years have the potential to be one of the most demanding times in a

person's life. The complexities of college life and being away from home can cause

anxiety, depression, and stress for many students. Sophomore students are known to

experience stress at a more profound rate than other class years. For over 30 years, the

sophomore slump has been described as a period of developmental confusion resulting

from students' struggles with achieving independence, resolving identity issues, and

finding a purpose in life (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). In order to introduce the concerns

surrounding the sophomore population, this chapter begins with a statement of the

problem. The researcher provides the background of the study while describing the

purpose of the study. Next, the researcher introduces the research questions and

methodology employed during data collection and analysis. In order to further explain

the importance of the topic, the researcher introduces the significance of the study.

Lastly, this chapter presents limitations, assumptions, delimitations, and definitions of

terms before the summary is given.

Statement of the Problem

Studies on the topic of student stress identify sophomores as students in frequent

turmoil (Lee & Leonard, 2009; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Tobolowsky, 2008). The

sophomore year of college is described as the sophomore slump or the "forgotten year" in

current and past research. Important academic outcomes and adjustment to college life

directly correlate with the stress that students experience in the learning environment

(Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton, & Osborne, 2010). College students experience

demands in all aspects of their lives, including personal, school, employment, family, and love, all of which induce stress and can cause many psychological and physical illnesses. Additionally, they experience this stress due to the pressure of assigned course work coupled with their busy personal lives. While higher education professionals easily recall experiences working with anxious students concerned about the complexities of life and feeling depressed, limited empirical research exists on the topic of the sophomore slump (Lenz, 2010).

Background of the Study

Over the past decades, higher education professionals have increasingly focused on student transitions (Tobolowsky, 2008). Tobolowsky argues that one of the transitions researchers and scholars should be interested is the sophomore year. During this time, students make monumental career, major, and personal transitions. Students clarify their sense of purpose, which may lead to difficulty (Tobolowsky, 2008). During the sophomore year, students could potentially leave school because they lack the support needed to continue their educational journeys. Students who have not clarified their reasons for attending college or have not selected a major may feel disinterested and confused, which may result in stress that defines the sophomore slump (Tobolowsky, 2008).

The sophomore slump may occur in certain students for various reasons. Multiple students in different class years are reporting many causes of stress and emotional strain such as personal, academic, and social issues; however, sophomore year is monumental. Cress and Lampan (2007), using different types of surveys and a multiple regression analysis, report that numerous students also deal with daily responsibilities such as

finding healthcare, completing coursework, meeting financial needs, and other tasks related to living on their own. Students, in turn, engage in negative health behaviors to deal with stress and self-esteem issues. Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2012), in a longitudinal study, find that emotional anguish causes many students' behaviors to deteriorate after a year of matriculation into college, such as frequent partying leading to behaviors like binge drinking. Weight gain, caused by students' unhealthy eating habits, excessive drinking, and inadequate exercise or activity, is another common outcome of student stress. All of these negative behaviors are due in part to students feeling overwhelmed. Economos, Hildebrandt, and Hyatt (2008), in a quantitative cross-analysis study, report that males and females gain weight in college for reasons directly related to feeling overwhelmed, anxious, and stressed. Due to the extensive array of new life circumstances that exist when students leave for college, many are ill equipped to handle the new life surroundings (Darling, McWey, Howard & Olmstead, 2007). Westefeld, Homaifar, Spotts, Furr, Range, and Werth (2005), in a quantitative study, find that some students who mention that they are depressed and anxious state that they eventually began to feel suicidal or attempted suicide to deal with their feelings of hopelessness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to use Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) to understand and analyze students' perception of stress and their coping strategies during their sophomore year of college at one rural mid-size institution in Pennsylvania. The researcher interviewed junior students; therefore, this is a retrospective study regarding the sophomore year. The researcher also used

Cognitive Appraisal Theory to further analyze students' ability to process and cope with their academic, personal, and social lives during the sophomore year.

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological study explores, analyzes, and answers the following research questions.

RQ 1. How do college juniors describe their stress level, contributing factors, and its influence on their (academic, personal, and social) performance during their sophomore year?

1a. Were college juniors stressed as sophomores?

1b. What was sophomore student stress like?

1c. What factors contributed to their levels of stress as sophomores?

1d. How did sophomore student stress contribute to (academic, personal, and social) performance?

1e. Was there an academic, personal, or social difference in the stress experienced by sophomores on-campus versus off-campus students' stress?

RQ 2. What strategies or coping strategies did college juniors employ during their sophomore year?

2a. As sophomores, how did they draw on academic, personal, and social resources to cope with their stress?

2b. Was there a difference in the coping strategies of sophomore on-campus students versus off-campus students' coping strategies?

RQ 3. What support did they receive during their sophomore year?

3a. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on family support?

3b. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on peer support?

3c. How did they, as sophomore students, feel supported by faculty and staff at the university?

Methodology

Phenomenological research is the most appropriate method for finding a common meaning, phenomenon, or theme from a group of sophomore students (Creswell, 2013). In chapter four, the researcher presents the lived experiences of sophomore students in order to better understand the perception of stress and further explain the phenomenon of sophomore slump from the data collected. The researcher identified and analyzed the beliefs, attitudes, and needs surrounding the sophomore slump as it relates to perceived stress of students regarding their sophomore year. Data collection occurred by interviewing juniors about their sophomore year at one rural mid-size institution in Pennsylvania. The researcher interviewed students through multiple in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. This strategy allowed the interviewees to respond freely with meaningful conversations (Roulston, 2010).

Significance of the Study

Due to the critical nature of the sophomore year, many colleges and universities are starting to implement programs designed to address the complex emotional, academic, and social needs of this group of students. Although some students are able to adjust to college life better than others, those who drop out of college early often cite emotional distress as one of the reasons for leaving (Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz, 2007). In the past, educators were primarily concerned with students' first and last years of college, due to the transitions that take place within those years; however, the

sophomore year is when many students make important decisions about their major course of study and career paths (Tobolowsky, 2008). During their sophomore years, students struggle with identity development and a sense of self, which further contributes to the overall stress they may be experiencing (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). Adjustment-induced anxiety, depression, stress, coping, mood, mental illness, and negative adaptation are well documented in the literature and link students' emotional distress with their decision to prematurely leave college (Clinciu, 2012).

This phenomenological study adds to the current body of literature on the sophomore slump. The study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of what may cause depression, anxiety, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation in sophomore college students. Looking forward, the study may help college/university staff and counselors who are trying to provide better programs for all students, particularly sophomore students. In addition, the findings may help faculty and staff in advising college students and meeting students' needs during their sophomore year. The researcher hopes to provide insight to others who are interested in helping and studying the sophomore experience. This study will also provide sophomore students gain a better understanding of what their peers are experiencing during their sophomore year. Findings may also provide admissions staff with knowledge and resources on sophomore student retention and programming. Lastly, the study may provide university faculty and staff working at small and mid-size public rural institutions with insight into the adjustment to the sophomore year at these specific institutions.

Limitations

  Described here are constraints beyond the researcher's control. Data collected at one mid-size rural state school may not be representative of all sophomore students across the state at similar institutions. The semi-structured interviews were limited to the interviewees' willingness to share information; there is the possibility that interviewees omitted specifics of their individual experience. The potential exists that the interviewee may have altered or embellished responses to fit the nature of the study. Students' majors are not included as sampling criteria, and levels of stress across majors may vary. The data provided rich internal validity but lacked external validity. To gain external validity, future research could be conducted with surveys and the use of quantitative analysis.

  Before each interview, the researcher asked participants to focus on their sophomore year and to think back on their experiences. It may have been challenging for students to recall details a year later, but it allowed the participants to have a comprehensive discussion about sophomore year experiences. Participants were excited to reflect on their experiences and see how much they have improved. Some were jovial in their discussions and appropriately reflected on their experiences.

Assumptions

  The following assumptions are listed below. First, it was assumed that participants would answer the interview questions in an honest, open, and sincere manner because their identity was confidential throughout the study and de-identified in the results. The researcher assured each participant of confidentiality before, during, and after the data collection phase. Each student chose a pseudonym in order to maintain privacy. Sampling criteria ensured that all experienced the phenomenon of sophomore

slump. Participants had a sincere interest in participating in the research and did not have any other motives, such as sabotaging the results, because of the time commitment associated with participation in the study. The researcher ensured that each participant understood the time commitment before the interviews started.

Delimitations

The following delimitations are not considered for the study: The researcher did not study slump in freshman, juniors, or seniors. The researcher did not include sophomore international students in the study because they may experience the slump differently since they may be experiencing a new culture.

Definition of Terms

1. *Sophomore Slump:* A phrase used to describe sophomores or second-year students who may lack inspiration, feel detached, and struggle academically (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006).

2. *Phenomenological Study:* Describes a shared meaning for several individuals related to their lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

3. *College Studen*t: Emerging adult potentially between the ages of 18-24 years who is transitioning into adulthood and may be attending college (Arnett, 2007).

4. *Anxiety:* A disorder characterized by at least six months of unrelenting anxiety, which also causes worrisome behaviors *(*American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

5. *Depression:* Depressed mood most of the time as specified by either personal report or comment made by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

6. *Stress:* The vital feature of severe stress is the development of anxiety and other signs that ensues within one month after experiencing an extremely stressful event (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

7. *Suicidal Ideation:* When a person has feelings of death or suicide and has indicated a plan for suicide (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

8. *Grit:* Considered a mixture of persistence, determination, and reliability of interest over time (Bowman, Hill, Denson, & Bronkema, 2016).

9. *Self-reported stress:* Participants self-reported stress was how they rated their stress during their sophomore year: "High stress" was operationalized as a self-reported score between seven-ten, "moderate stress" was operationalized as a score between four-six, and "low stress" was operationalized as a score between one-three.

Summary

Many college students feel stressed, overwhelmed, depressed, and anxious for reasons including academics, personal issues, and adjustment to college life. This chapter discussed the purpose for qualitative research related to the phenomenon of the sophomore slump (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Also discussed in this chapter were the research questions, methodology, limitations, assumptions, delimitations, and definition of terms for this study. Chapter Two presents a literature review that supports the research design. The researcher also presents the theoretical basis for the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Entering college or another educational institution is a joyous time; however, it

can be stressful for many students (Wong, Cheung, Chan, Ma, & Tang, 2006). This

study focuses on stress in sophomore students. After introducing and explaining stress,

the researcher discusses related literature to explain areas related to this topic such as

causes of stress, housing issues, financial issues and coping strategies used by students.

The researcher then describes the sophomore slump, including its origin and the

researchers that play a key role in the study of sophomores. Finally, the researcher

presents the theoretical framework of Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1985) and how it

relates to the study of the sophomore slump and to students' perception of stress.

Explaining Stress

There has been a significant change in young adult students experiencing stress,

specifically during the college years (Lipson et al., 2015; Mahmoud, Staten, Hall &

Lennie, 2012; Robotham & Julian, 2006). On college campuses across the United States,

mental health problems are prevailing, growing at an astronomical rate, and often being

left unresolved (Lipson et al., 2015). Stress is a major problem for college students as

they cope with a variety of challenges related to academic, personal, and social life (Lin

& Huang, 2014; Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008). Daily stressors are

important risk factors for mental health status (Schonfield, Brailovskia, Bieda, Zhang, &

Margraf, 2016). Berghdahl and Bergdahl (2002), using a quantitative study and

perceived stress questionnaire, explain that stress is a result of how people interact with

their environments and surroundings on a daily basis. Stress can directly affect a

person's psychological and physical health in an adverse manner, and most people understand that too much stress can be harmful to one's body. However, everyone responds to stress differently, and, in some cases, individuals can withstand stressful circumstances and not be adversely affected (Carr & Umberson 2013; Cress & Lampman, 2007).

Crisis and stress occur when one thinks that there is an obstruction from obtaining an important life goal such as employment or schooling (Berghdahl & Berghdahl, 2002). The first few weeks of college can lay a foundation for psychological success; therefore, transitioning into college is a crucial period for student development (Feldman, Davidson, Ben-Naim, Maza, & Margalit 2016; Wong et al., 2006). Researchers have long attempted to understand the relative contributions of hereditary versus social influence of stress on health (Carr & Umbersom, 2013). Carr and Umbersom (2013), in a cross-sectional longitudinal survey study, report that a person's stress might be related to factors such as race, age, gender, socioeconomic status, psychological factors, and the ability to cope with stressful situations properly.

There are several reasons for popular interest in stress, as well as in students' ability to be successful at institutions of higher education. There is also a greater interest in student health and well-being because of the potential financial impact student stress has on colleges and universities as well as individuals due to absenteeism and impaired work performance (Robothan & Julian, 2006).

Causes of Student Stress in College

The American College Health Association identifies stress as the main cause of declining academic performance in the college student population (Wong et al., 2006). Students frequently face an assortment of stressful situations and anxieties when they enter college, including living away from home for the first time, having the freedom to create a class schedule, and selecting their degree programs. Saleh, Camart, and Romo (2017), using a qualitative approach with 482 students from ages 18 to 24, find that college students suffer from psychological distress (72.9 percent), anxiety (86.3 percent), and depressive symptoms (79.3 percent) during their college careers. Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, and Lennie (2012) in a qualitative study with 508 undergraduate students ages 18 to 24, also report that sophomore students aged 18 through 19 report higher depression scores than any other class of students. Also reported by Mahmoud et al. (2012), college students who live with friends or belong to a social group or organization are less likely to feel depressed. Factors including student background and social involvement are important considerations when looking at student mental health (Mahmoud et al., 2012).

Many situations produce stress in college students; some students believe that hereditary factors and/or external forces cause stress in their lives (Ivakchenko, 2007). Heastie and Hicks (2008), in a quantitative questionnaire study with 514 college students, find that first-year first-time college students who reside on campus have adjustment issues and experience stress at higher levels, specifically during their first year of college. Lenz (2010), using a questionnaire regarding stress and mental illness with 50 psychology students, finds that stress and mental illness continue to increase over time with each new class of students.

Students' lives may be overwhelming for personal, academic, romantic, and/or family reasons. Misra and McKean (2000), in a quantitative study with 249 full-time undergraduate students and using a perception of stress questionnaire, find that emotional and mental reactions to stressors occur more often than behavioral and biological stressors. A high level of stress causes college students to have stress-related illnesses (Lenz, 2010). Students experience higher levels of stress due to pressures of the work assigned and self-imposed stress coupled with busy personal lives.

In a quantitative study with 495 participants, Ulyani, Aini, and Zulkifli (2010) find that students' life satisfaction can be measured on the basis of occupation, relationships, income status, housing availability, and essential physical needs such as food, clothing, and housing. Therefore, examining student access to housing and roommate concerns is an important component when investigating student stress levels.

On-Campus Housing

Decades of professional literature, infused with individual studies and research reviews, have explored the impact of student housing on programming, student development, retention, academic achievement, and persistence (Palmer, Broido, & Campbell, 2008). Adequate physical facilities that contribute to student learning include proper room furnishings, soundproofing, and proper lighting. Decoster and Riker (2008) report that satisfactory furnishings are beneficial to student achievement and learning. Five components considered important in student housing are satisfactory physical environment, maintenance of facilities, structured community living, a personal environment that replicates responsible citizenship, and opportunities for individual growth and improvement (Decoster & Riker, 2008). Housing offices may be

unsuccessful at providing inclusive and developmental experiences for their students

unless the five goals are met (Decoster & Riker, 2008). Heightened attention to the role

of residential facilities and the programming provided by the staff is becoming

increasingly important as well (LaNasa, Olson, & Alleman, 2007).

Many campuses are building state-of-the-art facilities to help retain students, and,

in a crowded education market, the availability of quality student housing is attractive for

students and parents. Najib et al. (2012), in a quantitative study with 290 residential

students, finds that suitable housing is the basic requirement of modern day living for

students and adults. The basis of these findings started many years ago when Astin

(1984) introduced his student development theory. Astin notes that when compared with

commuter students, resident students are more likely to be satisfied with the overall on-

campus experience of student friendships, faculty-student relations, and social life.

In general, housing satisfaction also depends on several personal factors,

including a student's phase of life, social and cultural background, financial situation, and

expectations. Macintyre (2003) studied progresses in student housing by comparing

traditional housing and newer housing developments and amenities. Macintyre reports

that students are becoming more demanding about the quality of their accommodations

and are looking for a wide range of available spaces with single rooms, computer labs,

laundry facilities, and gymnasiums/recreation centers. For many students, the aesthetic

structure of the building also lends to overall satisfaction with the living environment.

Thomsen and Eikemo (2010), using a quantitative survey with 1,444 student responses in

Norway, find that the overall living environment from the bricks, mortar, and structure to

programming initiatives and support are all-important when considering housing

satisfaction and student access to housing. Even for students abroad, questions related to how and where to accommodate students have generated ongoing discussion. Since empirical research is limited on the topic of student housing, student-housing professionals can seek to understand how students would like to be accommodated by conducting needs-based research at their own institutions. Professionals in housing can also seek to understand students' social class and their ability to afford different types of housing accommodations.

Off-Campus Housing

As defined by the National Clearinghouse of Commuter Programs, commuter students are those who do not live in campus-owned housing (Jacoby, 2000). Over the past several years, the lines between on-campus housing and off-campus housing have blurred. Colleges and universities often work together with off-campus developers to build apartment complexes to accommodate the ever-growing population of students. However, no matter where students live, there is still a clear difference between commuter and resident students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

Some researchers find that commuting adversely correlates with attainment of bachelor's degrees and enrollment in graduate school. Commuting also has undesirable effects on self-esteem because of the stress related to being a commuter and the lack of students' needs being appropriately addressed (Astin, 2001). Although commuter students are different in their needs, a common set of needs include transportation, multiple life roles, integrating support networks, and feeling a sense of belonging (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). All of these needs can create unnecessary stress for commuter students.

Transportation. The most tangible concern for commuter students is transportation to campus because of parking, traffic, public transportation schedules, costs, and locating alternate forms of transportation, when needed. No matter how commuter students get to campus, commuting to and from campus draws on commuter students' time and energy (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wilmes & Quade, 1986).

Multiple life roles. For most commuters, being a student is only one of many daily life roles. Most commuters work to cover costs related to school, children, siblings, and relatives they care for, and possibly managing a household. Some students work full time and attend school in the evening. Commuter students' do not have an excess of time because of the many competing demands and limited resources. This situation can create added stressors for the student (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wilmes & Quade, 1986).

Integrating support networks. Commuter students often lack the supportive campus environment that most campus residents receive from faculty, staff, and administrators. Since on-campus support may lack support networks, commuters rely on parents, spouses, children, colleagues, and employers. Although all of these relationships can be helpful to commuters, students must assess their priorities when trying to juggle social and academic lives. Friends and family members may not understand the multiple roles of commuter students, which can also complicate students' lives (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wilmes & Quade, 1986).

Sense of belonging. Commuter students can feel detached from the university community because they are not as involved in daily campus life. In addition, colleges and universities forget to provide commuters with helpful amenities such as lockers, lounges, and activities, which could help students feel more connected to their campuses.

People seldom feel connected to a place where they have no important influences or relationships to aid in integration to campus life (Jacoby, 2000; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wilmes & Quade, 1986).

Financial Concern

Limited research is available on college student financial literacy; most studies are from a single university and give little insight to the overall scope of the topic. However, in one larger quantitative study, 1,800 students from 14 college campuses that included both public and private schools were surveyed. Responses indicate that students have limited financial literacy because they never learned about the topic prior to attending college (Chen & Volpe, 1998). Therefore, with limited financial literacy and an increasing amount of student debt, students assume increasing amounts of financial risk (Chen &Volpe, 1998).

Financial knowledge is important in helping students to manage finances appropriately. Grable and Joo (2006), in a quantitative study that included 110 participants, report that with the combination of debt, educational loans, and poor financial management, some students experience financial failure. The ability to manage finances has become increasingly important, and people must plan for long-term investments early in their adult lives (Chen & Volpe, 1998). The current financial environment has complicated financial decisions for young consumers. Young people often carry large amounts of credit card debt and student loan debt. Large amounts of debt early in life can create long-lasting financial predicaments and can hinder the ability to save money or pay off debts (Lusardi, Mitchell & Curto, 2010). Using a questionnaire and quantitative analysis during a financial workshop with 110 participants, Grable and

Joo (2006) find that the combination of debt and poor financial management skills is leading students down a dark financial path.

Students who work many hours while enrolled in college courses may experience a poorer sense of belonging and report less social involvement on campus. Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2011) explain that students who fail to pay or perceive themselves as having a lack of ability to pay for their education may fail to develop social assimilation with their peers in a university setting. Students also risk losing scholarships or financial aid when their grade point averages are lower than required; therefore, those students may either transfer or choose not to continuously enroll full-time (Hunter et al., 2010).

Young people's financial positions and incurred debt can negatively affect their learning and persistence in college (Halliday-Wynes & Nguyen, 2014). Educators are becoming more aware of this trend and understand that students are under increasing stress while taking classes and trying to sustain employment. Halliday-Wynes & Nguyen (2014), in an Australian mixed methods study with 51 participants, find that 27 percent of students interviewed felt that there was not enough time to study because of their need for outside work. Participants in this study were only asked to participate further if they responded that they were having a difficult time with financial management.

For many college students, cost, motivation, and persistence are correlated (Hunter et al., 2010). Rising tuition and housing costs, easy access to credit cards, and a declining economy can place students at a higher risk for financial distress (Worthy, Jonkman, & Blinn-Pike, 2010). Joo, Durband, and Grable (2009), in a qualitative study with 110 workshop participants, find that 38 percent of students they interviewed were

concerned about their finances, and more than 8 percent of those students were exceptionally concerned about their finances. In this study, 79 percent of respondents were female and the average age of the respondents was 21. Student debt increased by more than 58 percent from 1999 to 2009; therefore, the average student debt rose from $9,250 to $19,200 (Lusardi, Mitchell & Curto, 2010). In addition, a certain percentage of students are not concerned about their finances, and some may be financially literate or financially secure; this may not reflect adequate knowledge about finances (Britt, Canale, Fernatt, Stutz, & Tibetts 2015). Financial knowledge and resources are important; however, financial knowledge and resources do not entirely reduce financial stress and burden for students. Xiao, Tang, and Shim (2009), in a quantitative study, report that financial issues influence the number of students who withdraw from or do not attend college. Higher education institutions have not given enough attention to how money management skills affect students; therefore, college campuses should teach financial knowledge to increase student understanding (Joo & Grable, 2006).

College students have limited financial means, choice, and flexibility when making financial decisions, which can lead to many other financial concerns (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Soria and Bultmann (2014), using The Student Experience in the Research University Survey (SERU) (2008), argue that social class shapes a student's background and experiences; many student advisors fail to address this aspect of the student experience. SERU (2008) was administered to 213,160 undergraduates from eight large public universities in the Midwest. The results indicate that working-class students experience a lower sense of belonging (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). The survey

provides a means for examining the undergraduate experience and is conducted by the Center for Studies of Higher Education.

Social class. A student's social class shapes the college experience and is a predictor of student engagement and success. Simply being aware of the social class of a student can be the first step to helping the student succeed in areas related to university housing, academics, and social relationships. A student's social class influences stress levels concerning living arrangements, academic progress, and social integration/relationships. To ensure fairness in academic policies, social class needs to be understood by faculty, and staff (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Income levels, scholarship, work-study, and part-time work status can reflect student economic status and social class. Students from higher income families have the opportunity to choose better housing options with more luxurious amenities, whereas students who come from lower income families must choose the most affordable options, which may be lacking in amenities (Najib et al., 2012). Alienation of working-class students can create ongoing challenges. Compared to their peers, these students may not have the tools necessary to navigate the postsecondary experience and therefore may become increasingly stressed (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

Student Employment

Working is now a necessity for many undergraduate students, simply due to financial need (Perna, 2010). Boatman and Long (2016), investigating a range of outcomes on student financial aid and assistance using the human capital model first developed by Becker (1964), find that most college faculty and staff indicate that full-time students can work about 10 to15 hours per week without jeopardizing their

academic performance. Perna (2010) explains that retention rates are higher for students who work modest hours. Students receiving financial aid may be able to work fewer hours and participate in out-of-classroom experiences because the aid may ease the extra financial responsibility; therefore, less work can lead to student success, satisfaction, and persistence to degree completion (Boatman & Long, 2016). Perna (2010) finds, however, that 80 percent of undergraduates work more than 30 hours per week. Coates (2011) looks at Australian student data and reports that student learners working 20 or more hours per week have a wide range of grades, but mostly, their grades tend to dip in the lower range compared to their peers. Participation in paid off-campus work has a strong correlation with grades and academic performance. Students who work 10 or fewer hours per week tend to have higher grades, whereas those who work more than 10 hours have average grades and those who work over 20 hours tend to earn varied grades. Poorer academic performance is seen for those who work fewer hours (Coates, 2015). Coates (2015) also indicates that students work for a myriad of reasons such as needing money, developing employability skills, and reinforcing academic skills. Despite the research that indicates student employment can be problematic, employment is a necessary and critical component to student survival in college. Student employment is no longer an isolated matter among college students. Many students must work to ensure they can take care of their personal and academic necessities.

The literature on the topic of student employment indicates that in some cases, student employment can have a positive impact on student retention, grades, and social relationships (Riggert et al., 2006). Student employment has benefits and provides students with the means to continue their post-secondary education. Student affairs

professionals should make connections between where students find work and their

classroom activities. A student's workplace may have untapped potential in helping to

bridge the gap between student employment and academic success (Lundberg, 2004).

There could be opportunities for students to start experiencing areas of interest or their

field of study with student jobs, while taking credits.

The issue of student employment and school satisfaction is not isolated only to

one group or social class of students; rather, this issue seems to affect all groups and

classes of students (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). Student employment is an added stressor

to the ever-growing list of challenges for college students.

Student Stress and Coping

Student stress has increased in recent years. Holinka (2015), in a quantitative

study with a general population of students, using an on-line survey, finds that prolonged

stress might cause chronic fatigue, inability to concentrate, irritability, continuing

headaches, eating disorders, unhappiness, and heart disease. College students who

experience more stress experience a lower quality of life and less satisfaction.

Student Stress

Student stress and suicidal ideation usually come from a mixture of personal and

academic issues and lack of coping strategies. Westefeld et al. (2005) administered a

quantitative study with a questionnaire to 1,865 students from the upper Midwest, the

Ohio Valley, the Southeast, and the South-Central United States. They find that out of

1,865 students, 40 percent knew someone who contemplated and attempted suicide.

Although the surveyed students were aware of suicide and may have known a person to

attempt, contemplate, or complete suicide, many participants indicated that they did not

think this was a problem on their own campus. Twenty-eight percent of the students

surveyed mentioned they knew someone who completed suicide.   All of the students

who noted that they attempted suicide stated that they were struggling with school,

relationships, family problems, depression, and hopelessness. Most of the students

surveyed gave the same responses as to why they were struggling. Others in the study

who had attempted suicide expressed similar issues, including anxiety, financial stress,

feelings of social isolation, and issues with work, trauma, drugs, and alcohol (Westefeld

et al., 2005).

College students must learn to balance the competing demands of academics, new

social contacts, and responsibility for their daily needs. Wang, Xie, and Cui (2016), in a

quantitative study using questionnaires, find that successful students are capable of

judging stressful situations and finding ways to cope with the stressors. When the

perception of stress is negative or becomes excessive in nature, a student's overall well-

being may begin to deteriorate. Academic and social problems will become extensive

and have adverse effects in all aspects of a student's life (Lin & Huang 2014).

Academic stress. Negative correlations have been found between time

management behaviors, leisure activities, and perceived academic stress. Time

management behaviors are shown to have a greater effect on academic stress than any

other factors. Misra and McKean (2000), through a self-administered, voluntary, and

anonymous questionnaire with 249 full-time undergraduates, find that students who have

negative perceptions of their control over time are more stressed than their peers. The

survey questions addressed the relationships between academic stress, anxiety, time

management, and leisure activities. Effective time management seems to lower academic

stress. In another study regarding academic stress, Misra, McKean, West, and Russo

(2000), using a quantitative cross-sectional survey of 249 students and 67 faculty

members, find that students are academically stressed for many reasons. Those reasons

include schedule changes, conflict, and frustration; however, time management is the

most stressful for students. At one Midwestern university, Ross, Niebling, and Heckert

(1999) find that out of 100 undergraduate students, 73 percent reported academic

stressors related to course workload and time management. Academic stress in college is

unavoidable, but educators can do a better job at preparing students for the hardships they

face (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999).

 Social stress. Social connectedness is defined as an enduring and universal sense

of personal closeness with the social world (Lee & Robbins, 1995). When adverse

individual experiences persist across time and numerous settings, they can be understood

as a lack of social relationships with peers. People who lack a sense of connectedness do

not feel that they belong anywhere and are prone to continued loneliness, lower self-

esteem, and greater social mistrust (Lee & Robbins, 1998). Students sometimes develop

feelings of negativity toward campus when they experience loneliness and isolation; this

can lead to students prematurely leaving school.

 Educators must understand stress in college students, recognize how to empower

college students, and understand the causes of their underlying stress-related issues

(Holinka, 2015; Hunter et al., 2010). Compas, Conor-Smith, Saltzman, Harding,

Thomsen, and Wadsworth (2001) analyze findings from coping questionnaires and

measurements; they find that the emergence of the ability to adapt and cope with stress is

a central phenomenon in the human population throughout development into

adulthood. Successful adaptation encompasses how one manages negative feelings, thoughts, aggression, and how one is able to transform a bad situation into something positive (Compas, et al., 2001).

Coping

The above research is consistent in showing that psychological issues and stress can be debilitating for individuals who struggle with the noted concerns; however, there are ways of coping with stress-related illness. How students cope with stress-related issues is an area of concern for university faculty and staff. Given stressful situations, students may find their own meaningful and healthy ways to cope with stress. Some students are able to articulate a number of ways they cope with stress, such as talk therapy, physical activity, positive self-talk, deep breathing, journaling, music, and discussing their problems with peers (Aselton, 2012). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) is one measure used to rate students' behavioral stress and self-esteem. The results of the scale show that having an optimistic approach to stress proves to be a coping mechanism in itself (Fernandez-Gonzalez, Gonzalez-Hernandez, & Trianes-Torres, 2015).   In addition, many college campuses are set up to combat stress-related illness and depression by offering more comprehensive counseling services and depression screenings for all students (Aselton, 2012).

Coping with academic stress. Besides counseling, psychotherapy, and personal life adjustments, there are many ways students can cope with academic stress. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) find that academic advising is consistently effective in promoting student persistence. Participation in undergraduate research has also proven effective for student persistence in retention and academic achievement; this effect is stronger for

sophomores than any other class year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Hunter et al.

(2010) also find that factors outside of the classroom have a great impact on sophomore

academic achievement, such as residential living learning communities, availability of

financial aid, and peer relationships. Perhaps the best summary of what institutions can

do to support student academic success and academic coping are the benchmarks put

forward by the National Survey of Student Engagement (2008), based on ten years of

research with over 1,300 institutions. These benchmarks include academic challenge,

active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational

experiences, and supportive campus environments (Hunter et al., 2010). Institutions must

develop academic initiatives consistent with their missions, resources, students, faculty,

and leadership (Hunter et al., 2010).

      Coping with social stress. Entering college requires a period of social adjustment

(Fischer, 2007). Social integration is viewed as important for persistence and coping; it

contributes positively to student development. Planned social events are organized to

assist students in developing social and emotional association to the university early on

(Hunter et al., 2010). In addition, growing friendships on campus may reduce the

possibility of leaving college and issues related to social stress (Fischer 2007). Social

involvement has the greatest impact early on for students; therefore, students getting

involved in social activities can help them cope with social stressors imposed in college

(Hunter et al. 2010).

Empowering Students

Recommendations on how to empower students to be more successful include helping them to develop attainable goals. For example, educators need to engage, empower, and recognize students appropriately (Hunter, et al. 2010). All suggestions for student success involve important student connections with faculty, peers, family, and staff. With that, critical connections between the students and learning are also deeply important to empowering students. Dennis, Phinney and Chuateco (2005), in their overview of implementing service learning, report that the motivation to attend college is based on personal interest, intellectual curiosity, and the desire to attain a rewarding career. The university community and students need to make a profound connection that ensures success in and out of the classroom. To begin helping students feel empowered, faculty and staff need to understand the unique challenges the second year poses to students (Hunter et al. 2010).

Leadership Development

Leadership development is important for matriculating college students. Kiersch and Peters (2017), using a multi-disciplinary approach, find that developing a student leader who is dependable, driven to succeed, and dedicated to serving others is not only good for the student and the institution but is also important for student career development. In addition, improving student leadership programs, especially for undergraduate students, has a positive return on investment because of early intervention with students (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). Furthermore, Kahu (2013), using the conceptual framework of engagement, antecedents, and consequences, explains that student

engagement and development is widely recognized as an important influence on achievement and learning in higher education.

Service learning can have an important impact on the leadership development of students because of the important skills that can be pursued after and developed. Hinck and Brandell (2000), in a quantitative study, use an author-developed questionnaire to address the issue of service-learning practices and support. They find there are important factors that play a role in how a student may develop in times of adversity and stress. These researchers indicate that students should become involved in leadership opportunities on campus to help alleviate some of their personal burdens and stressors.

Since the establishment of the first colleges in the United States more than 300 years ago, higher education professionals have viewed the growth of the student and the nurturing of character as vital to the integrity of the institution. Effective leadership is an essential component of positive social change in education, communities, and families. In recent years, professionals have seen the power of leaders and leadership to transform institutions and confront the challenges faced by organizations and institutions of education (Astin & Astin, 2000). Several decades ago, the Truman Commission proclaimed that higher education should help students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable them to live fairly in an unrestricted society (Hinck & Brandell, 2000). Eich (2008), using a case study approach, finds that leadership development is undoubtedly an important part of higher education. Developing a student with leadership qualities adds value to a student's education. When placed in positions of leadership or volunteerism, students gain insight into who they are in addition to learning about others and about the world around them. Leadership opportunities are proven to enhance the

student experience and introduce more students to the leadership programs that exist (Eich, 2008).

All aspects of participation and campus involvement matter for student success. Astin (1993), in his student development theory, conjectures that a highly devoted student takes time to prepare for studies, interacts with peers, and becomes involved on campus. Students are more likely to succeed in an environment that assesses and hones their skills, monitors their progress, and provides feedback about their learning (Astin, 1993; Hunter et al. 2010). In addition, students involved with campus life, on multiple levels, are more likely to graduate from college. Likewise, students who engage with faculty and peers more frequently have better chances of persisting to graduation. Educators must take seriously the importance of the classroom settings when looking at student retention (Astin, 1993; Hunter et al. 2010). Educators can restructure educational settings to ensure that the environments are conducive to success. Colleges and universities must provide faculty with the means necessary to provide successful learning environments to help ensure student success (Tinto, 2002).

Service learning is an educational experience that gives academic credit and meets identified community needs. In addition, service learning can lead to the growth of positive self-concept in students. Morgan and Streb (2001), in a quantitative study with more than 20 student participants, find that educators can attempt to create this sense of positive self-concept in students by allowing them the opportunity for positive experiences that enhance personality and create growth. The authors identify service learning as a way to enhance optimistic thinking in students (Morgan & Streb, 2001). Bringle and Hatcher (1996), in their overview of service learning in higher education,

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explain how service learning provides an additional means for reaching educational objectives and therefore merits earning academic credit.

Faculty who use service learning think that it brings new life to the classroom, enhances the learning and performance of students, increases interest, and makes teaching more enjoyable (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Warren (2012), using meta-analysis, shows that service learning projects are likely to have a positive impact on student development and leadership.

Family Support

Other than service, leadership, and campus programs, support networks already exist for students and are available to them to assist with the stress they may be experiencing. Family support can be an especially important predictor of academic persistence and achievement. Cheng, Ickes, and Verhofstadt (2011), using a quantitative longitudinal study with 240 university students and an online survey tool, find that college students rely on family support. They also find that coping with academic demands is usually stressful for students. McNallie, Timmermans, Dorrance-Hall, Custers, Van den Bulck, and Wilson (2017), using a cross-cultural comparison, find that students with higher family support report less isolation. Furthermore, lower GPAs correlate with lack of family support in college. Academic and social support comes from peers, whereas emotional support is from the family, especially for first generation college students (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).

Depression is a common mental illness that affects more than 19 million Americans (Levens, Elrahal, & Sagui, 2016). Family support can serve as a buffer against the effect of high stress-related reactivity and further protect against the onset and

development of depression. Levens, Elrahal, and Sagui (2016), using a quantitative survey with 181 students, examine the protective effect of family support. They also find that depression can be especially damaging to students when it occurs during the college years, as it may influence or change adult development (Levens, Elrahal, & Sagui, 2016). Involving families in college transitions may help protect against depression, anxiety, and other mitigating responses to stress (Levens, Elrahal, & Sagui, 2016). Ratelle, Larose, Guay, and Senecal (2005), in a longitudinal study of 729 young adults, indicate that a more practical way to achieve parental support for students is to educate caretakers on what it means to be supportive while still allowing the autonomy their children need to be successful.

"Helicopter" parenting has been described as overly protective, intrusive, and a developmentally inappropriate style of parenting. Higher levels of "helicopter" parenting predict lower levels of well-being for males and females alike (Kouros et al. 2017). Parental involvement, when appropriate, is linked to developmentally positive outcomes for children (Kouros et al. 2017). One-hundred and eighteen participants in Kouros' study (recruited from two universities' psychology pool databases) completed questionnaires online. This study finds that higher levels of autonomy support predict lower levels of discontent and social anxiety among students. Levens, Elrahal, and Sagui (2012), in their quantitative study, find that parental support was most helpful to students when they were experiencing depressive symptoms. Therefore, during stressful periods parents can be supportive but still give autonomy by acknowledging students' feelings. Parents can also show support by being interested in their children's work and also being present when needed while giving the student their own space to learn and grow. When

permitted, school officials can keep parents informed about academic requirements, where students are living, and types of activities students are involved in. Supporting children while in school but giving them the autonomy to be successful can be the vital piece to student persistence and positive self-concept (Ratelle et al. 2005).

Student Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Self-concepts are beliefs and attitudes about oneself, and they differ among individuals, depending on their different social hierarchies and involvements (Sander & Sanders, 2006). Self-efficacy refers to one's conviction to execute the course of action required to obtain a desired goal (Bandura 1977, 1997). Crocker and Luhtanen (2003), in a quantitative longitudinal study using a three-hour long survey of 642 students, report that Americans are also deeply engaged in the pursuit of self-esteem. Empirical research consistently finds that self-efficacy plays a critical role in achievement-related cognition, affect, and action (Pajares, 1996). Often, university officials are teaching students how to have self-esteem and how to increase self-esteem in order to feel worthy. Individuals may feel appreciated if they can satisfy some standard of physical appeal, competence, or an ethical ideal. Individuals feeling admired, approved, or respected can lead to feelings of adequacy (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003). Low self-esteem often predicts social problems and can even correlate with demographic and personality traits. Low self-esteem can also predict financial difficulties and poor grades in school. Lastly, poor self-esteem also contributes to problems later in adult life (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003). Self-concepts that students bring with them to college guide their experiences academically and personally. It is likely that university life greatly affects self-esteem and self-concept either positively or negatively (Sander & Sanders, 2006).

Self-esteem and self-worth also contribute to the overall experience of stress in college (Lopez & Gormley, 2005). Students who lack self-confidence may have mental health issues when leaving home and entering college. College students with low self-efficacy can sometimes have attachment anxiety and feel lonely. These same students may also experience subsequent depression and attachment anxiety issues without the proper integration into college. Students with attachment issues may have uncertainties with disclosing information about anxiety and depression, and these same students often feel that others will not listen to their concerns and assist as needed (Wei, Russell, & Zakalik, 2005).

Pajares and Miller (1994), in a quantitative study, note that poorer performance in college academics is largely due to students' lower judgments about their capabilities. Students then experience confidence based on their opinions of their abilities. Wesson and Derrer-Rendall (2014), in a quantitative study, explore the relationships between total optimism scores and goal achievement and find a positive correlation. When students find a goal to be difficult, the more optimistic they are about their academics and future, the better the outcome for goal attainment. Self-belief does play an important role in goal attainment (Wesson & Derrer-Rendall, 2011). What people actually believe about their capabilities can predict what they accomplish and how successful they are. If self-efficacy beliefs help students succeed, then practitioners and school leaders need to develop counseling techniques and useful ways to enhance the way students feel about their proficiencies (Pajares & Miller, 1994). Students who lack skills in a certain area are not likely to engage in those activities. The research indicates that educators must find

ways to help students be more productive in the areas in which they hold fear (Pajares &

Miller, 1994).

Academic Confidence and "Grit"

Increasingly, self-beliefs are key components of achievement and motivation

(Sander & Sanders, 2006). Nicholson, Putwain, Connors, and Hornby-Atkinson (2013),

in a quantitative study, find that academic behavioral confidence might benefit a

student's academic performance. In this study, students with realistic expectations and a

sense of responsibility toward educational goals, performed better at the end of the

semester than other students. Sander and Sanders (2006) created the Academic

Behavioral Model (ABC model) to assess student academic confidence and to measure

what keeps students academically motivated. The results of the ABC model indicate that

students who hold higher expectations for independent study and take responsibility for

their learning are more successful. Student confidence predicts students' ability to be

academically successful and to earn better grades (Nicholson et al. 2013; Sander &

Sanders, 2009). Student capability to persevere and engage in learning in order to

continue achieving key goals, along with the ability to reflect on their progress, can lead

to amplified self-efficacy and self-confidence as students learn that they can reach their

goals through determination (Conley & French, 2013).

"Grit" is among the most discussed concepts in educational research and practice

today (Sellingo, 2016). "Grit" is defined as the mixture of perseverance, effort, and

reliability of interest over time. Academic "grit" is the concept that students may

overtake others based more on drive and talent than IQ score (Duckworth & Quinn,

2009). One analysis on college student academic "grit" showed positive correlations

with educational outcomes and perseverance. This tended to produce stronger

interpersonal relationships (Bowman, Hill, Denson, & Bronkema, 2016).

The study of grit finds that most successful people master not only self-discipline,

but also determination in accomplishing a task no matter what the difficulty may be

(Sellingo, 2016). Many studies have found that "grittier" students have the perseverance

to succeed and complete long-term challenging goals. For example, Duckworth and

Quinn (2009) found that student engagement in self-regulated learning can serve as one

key pathway to academic success (Sellingo, 2016). Others have found that students who

perceive themselves as hardworking tend to report more use of emotionally appropriate

tactics dominant to individual learning styles. Students who report greater consistency in

pursuing their goals also tend to report increased use of time and better study skills

(Wolters & Hussain, 2014). Regarding academic integration, issues such as major

selection, academic self-efficacy, and other related concerns play a role in the sophomore

year experience, which can affect student grit (Hunter, et al. 2010).

Sophomore Slump

An extensive review of empirical studies and literature related to the sophomore

slump yields few results. Hunter et al. (2010) discussed questions focusing on another

transitional period in higher education. However, there is literature that explains why the

sophomore year is a significant part of a student's successful transition period. Although

there has been an abundant body of research on first-year student experiences and

programs that support first-year students, many institutions of higher education have

found that attrition remains a challenge between the second and third years of college as

well (Hunter et al. 2010). The literature discussed here provides a review of the scholarly

work on the second year of college and the issues many students face during this time. The themes discussed will help give insight into the issues second-year students are facing and the perceptions that faculty, staff, and other higher education professionals have regarding these students.

History and Understanding of the Sophomore Slump

While some may think that the sophomore slump or questions about the sophomore year represents a fad, this discussion dates back to 1956 when Freedman coined the term sophomore slump (Tobolowsky, 2008). Freedman (1956) describes the sophomore year as a monumental year for decision making regarding a major or career path. Freedman (1956) also explains, based on awareness and evaluation of one's life plan, comes a student's major choice. The sophomore population is the least satisfied group of students (Freedman, 1956). There is no denying that the first two years of college are monumental for students; however, research suggests that the first-year experience is where most university officials place their focus (Beal & Noel 1980; DeBoer, 1985). The first-year experience movement, which began in the late 1970s, set the platform for questions about the sophomore year (Hunter et al. 2010).

Programs and initiatives designed to address the first-year are common at colleges and universities (Hunter et al. 2010). Students' experiences during the first year of college have been transformed on many college campuses. After World War II, there was an enrollment boom that resulted in students taking enormous and impersonal classes, lacking the individual attention many students need (Hunter et al. 2010). Today, students are still placed in larger classes but also have better access to faculty assistance and first-year seminars. First-year orientation, welcome activities, and other campus

programs offer students structure and opportunity during this important transition (Hunter et al. 2010). Lessons learned from the success of many first-year initiatives can be applied to sophomore-year initiatives (Tobolowsky, 2008). Most professionals focus their attention on students transitioning to their first year; therefore, sophomores tend to be a forgotten population.

Traditionally, college counselors and other university personnel have used the term sophomore slump to describe a group of feelings often experienced by late adolescents who are college sophomores. The slump can last for several years or start earlier than the sophomore year and can encompass different areas related to performance, attitude, and/or relationships. Margolis (1976), through clinical observations, notes that sophomore students do slump and experience the world's complexities in different ways. Historical perspectives on the slump also acknowledge the need for sophomore student workshops, counseling, faculty involvement, study-abroad initiatives, and service-learning experiences (Margolis, 1976). Furr and Gannaway (1982) argue that sophomores need a moderate degree of structure to be successful. The second year is very difficult to describe and, therefore, so are issues of the slump that occur in our sophomore student population (Hunter et al. 2010). It is much easier to define the beginning and end of college because those periods are more distinct and pronounced (Hunter et al. 2010).

Scholarly researchers have suggested that educators are mostly concerned with a student's first and last years of college because of the major transitions that occur within these years: leaving high school and entering colleges, and graduating from college and entering the workforce (Tobolowsky, 2008). The focus on these important transitions can

leave the sophomore student feeling less supported during a very important academic and developmental stage. The sophomore year is when students make important decisions about their major courses of study and career paths (Hunter et al. 2010; Tobolowsky, 2008). Sanchez-Leguelinel (2008) reports, in a quantitative study with 210 sophomore participants, that sophomores are known to have more instances of identity exploration, which contributes to overall stress. The study focuses on the effectiveness of a program used to evaluate a sophomore peer-counseling program. Understanding what causes student stress and mental health issues can assist with the creation of appropriate programs for the sophomore population.   Clearly, the sophomore year is very important.

Several important transitions occur during the sophomore year. Over the past decade, student transitions have become a primary focus for higher education officials, faculty, and staff. The sophomore year is a time for students to look inward and define how they fit into college life and life beyond academics; this year can be a unique time with defining moments (Hunter et al. 2010). However, the lack of support, combined with the immense pressure students feel in their second year of college, has also contributed to a general understanding of the sophomore slump (Lee & Leonard, 2009; Tobolowsky, 2008). Students who have not clarified a major or chosen a career path may feel confused, conflicted, and stressed. Pattengale and Schreiner (2000) describe the term sophomore slump in more depth to clear the confusion that college administrators, faculty, and staff have surrounding this topic. Slumping sophomores are not just leaving institutions to join the workforce or transferring to other schools; they are truly lacking in academic, personal, social, and emotional aspects (Lee & Leonard, 2009; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000; Tobolowsky, 2008). In addition, courses become more stressful during

the sophomore year, which may cause students to feel even more overwhelmed (Tobolowsky, 2008). Psychotherapists often view the sophomore slump as a time of emotional struggles and inconsistency, which can sometimes result in depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders in students (Miller, 2013). Miller (2013), a psychotherapist, believes that students will go on to develop adult adjustment disorders when stressors are present, especially if professionals overlook those stressors.

When students enter college, challenges exist that they may not fully be prepared to handle. Identified as a salient period, the sophomore year is a time when students are to make important decision about their educational journeys (Tobolowsky, 2008). Kiser and Price (2008), in a quantitative study using a survey model with 1,014 students, note that colleges and universities have an obligation to explore the best retention tools for their own students and what factors lead to academic persistence. First-year initiatives frequently have academic and social integration as objectives, but it would be too simplistic for higher education professionals to assume that this is enough for student success in years to come (Hunter et al. 2010). In an effort to develop student connections to the community, recognition of the sophomore slump has started to spawn programs for this population of students, and, although not widespread, colleges and universities are starting to catch on (Hirsch, 2008). Regression in sophomore students starts to kick in after the first year of college, and universities with sophomore programs typically have goals including retention, academic and career self-efficacy, and overall student success (Hirsch, 2008).

Addressing the Sophomore Slump

Colleges and universities are becoming more conscious of the sophomore slump issues that students across the nation face. Since students experience unique issues during the sophomore year, a larger problem results if educators ignore this phenomenon (Gump, 2007). More than 6 percent of students leave flagship universities during their sophomore year due to lack of overall support (Stainburn, 2013). Few programs have originated across the United States to address the sophomore slump, but additional programs are slowly starting to launch (Lee & Leonard, 2009). However, to date there are relatively few colleges and universities with organized second-year programs, and fewer still into which service-learning is integrated (Hunter et al. 2010). Many students describe being dissatisfied during their sophomore year and feeling like the overlooked child at the university (Stainburn, 2013). Many students feel that they do not engage enough with faculty during their sophomore year and report very few faculty-student interactions outside of the classroom (Hunter et al. 2010; Lee & Leonard, 2009). Ohio State has created a program in which students can become more involved with faculty in their residence halls (Stainburn, 2013). Faculty visit the halls to interact and engage with the sophomore population of students at a deeper and more meaningful level. Programs similar to this one are shown to be helpful in providing the support the sophomore population needs (Stainburn, 2013).

Programs. Sophomore students feel more supported when they are actively engaged with their faculty and peers (Lee & Leonard, 2009; Stainburn, 2013). Yu, DiGangi, Jannasch-Pennell and Kaprolet (2010), with a data mining approach, find that student retention is an important tool for universities specifically because of the

institutional image, career path of the students not retained, and the student's ability to be successful. Tower, Blacklock, Watson, Heffernan, and Tronoff (2015) measured students' interactions on Facebook by monitoring the frequency of communications between cohorts of students. Students were able to measure their sense of belonging by answering peer-to-peer questions. Feeling a sense of mastery toward a skill or academic project can lead students to improved self-efficacy. Tower et al. (2015) explain that strong self-efficacy is important when students are trying to navigate their way through the academic world, specifically during their sophomore year because of the important decisions they are making during this time in their academic career. Students with high academic self-efficacy are confident in their capacity to meet academic requirements, organize their learning, and to avoid negative impacts on their educational journeys (Bandura, 1997). Students in the study mentioned above were drawing on one of the core components of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and peer learning and with their peer-to peer interactions (Tower et al. 2015; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Academic self-efficacy and commitment to the institution are excellent predictors of sophomore student success (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013).

Retention. The retention of sophomore students can be improved by implementing comprehensive programs to keep students involved and help them feel supported. Sanchez- Leguelinel (2008), in a quantitative study, finds that to engage more sophomore students, institutions are continuing to look at programmatic efforts that will assist with retaining students at the institution. For example, the Department of Counseling at John Jay College of Criminal Justice has designed and implemented a comprehensive counseling program for sophomore students. Within this counseling

program, students can connect with their peers on various levels. The program targets

sophomore students who have taken between 30 and 44 credits.   All sophomores who

complete this number of credits are required to attend the program to avoid an academic

hold on their account. In all, 412 students participated in the counseling and 210 agreed

to participate in the study, with a return rate of 51 percent on the survey (Sanchez-

Leguelinel, 2008). Students reported that they liked interacting with their peers but

disliked having to complete activities included with the counseling sessions (Sanchez-

Leguelinel, 2008).

       C-Scape is another unique sophomore year integrated learning experience

designed to help students plan for their future careers. C-scape was created at the Tabor

School of Business; the aim of this program is to engage sophomores in the process of

taking responsibility for their career plans and their own learning. Isakovsi, Kruml, Bibb,

and Benson (2011) explain that C-Scape offers students the opportunity, starting during

their sophomore year, to fully take control over their future.

       Initiatives. Institutions such as Beloit College, the University of Richmond, and

Miami University of Ohio have developed sophomore initiatives for career, life, and

major exploration, including engaged learning opportunities (Tobolowsky, 2008).

Colgate University and Colorado College have followed in the development of

sophomore year initiatives that involve multiple departments and take a comprehensive

approach to assist sophomore students (Hunter et al. 2010). Belmont University in

Nashville, Tennessee, for example, has taken a unique approach to helping students

navigate the sophomore slump (Vaughn & Perry, 2013). The university asks students to

demonstrate their ability to develop an innovative theme, to structure a message in two to

four main points, and to tailor a message to the demographic and situational factors of a targeted audience. The faculty then ask students to develop a convincing message that differentiates them from their peers. This activity is helpful to students who are looking for a major, pursuing internships, and/or who need to have serious conversations with their parents about their plans (Vaughn & Perry, 2013). Students in the study were content to know that their peers did not have their futures completely mapped out (Vaughn & Parry, 2013).

Brandt-Brecheisen (2015), in the *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, note that some sophomore students are choosing to get involved with other offices and social activities in order to become more engaged in campus life. Sophomore students who become resident assistants (RA) have two very demanding roles. These students are working in a position that demands large amounts of their time. However, the benefits received during RA training include decreased stress, greater emotional resiliency, improved counseling skills, confrontation skills, and basic helping skills. These benefits support all avenues of students' educational goals and assist with navigation into and through the sophomore year (Brandt-Brecheisen, 2015).

By enhancing learning experiences and opportunities for these students, educators can design environments to guide sophomores in ongoing structured exploration of the world and of themselves (Schaller, 2005, p. 23). Margolis (1989), through clinical observations, proposes that one of the definite concerns of the sophomore year is that there are not as many exciting challenges built into the sophomore year; enjoyment diminishes, which leads to dullness of daily life. Students react to their universities and the difficulties of the sophomore year in distinctive ways (Hunter et al. 2010). In recent

years, some colleges and universities have been implementing supportive programs for sophomores; conversely, not enough programs currently exist to assist sophomore students (Hunter, et al., 2010). Educators can assist by supporting sophomore students and recognizing the importance of the sophomore year. Hunter et al. (2010) state that colleges and universities are starting to implement sophomore programs to address the complex emotional, academic, and social needs of this group of students. During the sophomore year, students have more issues in terms of exploring identity and finding a sense of self, therefore contributing to the overall stress they may be experiencing (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). The literature on adjustment to college life has led to numerous theories that link adjustment-induced anxiety, depression, stress, coping, mood, mental illness, and negative adaptation that can lead to a student prematurely leaving college (Clinciu, 2012).

Ross, Niebling, & Heckert (1999) indicate the need to find ways to assist sophomore students with managing stress. For example, educational programs on sleeping habits, time management, financial education, job searching, law violations, religious beliefs, increased class workload, and change of major can relieve the stress for undergraduate students, especially first-generation students (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999). Some students avoid stress while others confront it directly. Cohen and Williamson (2012) suggest that some stress allows us to learn and grow while developing our negative feelings into positive situations.

Theoretical Framework

In order to help psychologists, therapists, and psychiatrists understand and predict human reactions under varying conditions, further understanding and explanation of

theory is needed (Lazarus, 2000). The Cognitive Appraisals approach uses underlying

motivational and evaluative roots of emotions to explain influence on human behaviors.

An important feature of Cognitive Appraisal Theory is that the personal meaning, which

inspires the emotional response, refers to a specific relationship between the person and

the, environment (Lazarus & Smith, 1988). Empathy, feeling what others feel, is a

distinct phenomenon that is separate from other emotional experiences. Emotion

concepts say little about feelings for others, and empathy concepts say little about how

feeling emotions for others relates to normal, direct emotional experience (Wondra &

Ellsworth, 2015). The following sections provide a brief description of Cognitive

Appraisal Theory and its relation to the core of the study.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

The theory and study of cognitive appraisal dates back more than 60 years.

Lazarus and Alfert (1964) discuss the interpretation of Cognitive Appraisal and the

beliefs that a person has about a stimulus and consequences. However, existing measures

of stress appraisal suffer from theoretical and procedural problems. There are diverse

opinions as to what causes emotions. Lazarus (1991) asserts that emotions occur because

of cognitive appraisal of the person-environment situation. The study of human behavior

and response applies Cognitive Appraisal Theory frequently to help researchers

understand elicited response from an occurrence. The Cognitive Appraisals approach

offers a more thorough understanding and explanation of a person's behavioral responses

to emotions. For example, winners and losers of a specific game or event may have

different responses to the same stimulus event. Cognitive Appraisal offers the

opportunity to advance an understanding of how emotions affect decisions made by

individuals and consumers (Watson & Spence, 2007). Individuals' emotions arise from their perceptions of their situation; they are immediate, imagined, or triggered from a memory. Most of the time, thinking and feeling are exclusively related (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Cognitive appraisal theory discusses whether a particular encounter is relevant to the well-being of individuals and the environment in which they are present.

The basic premise of Cognitive Appraisal Theory is that the person's evaluation of his or her own circumstances plays a crucial role in the elicitation and differentiation of his or her emotions (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Two levels of appraisal are discussed in this theory: primary and secondary appraisal. In primary appraisal, individuals decide whether there is anything immediately at stake for this encounter. For example, they may question the harm or the good that could come from a situation. In secondary appraisal, they also evaluate if harm could come from the situation and then consider various coping options, such as how the situation changed, to benefit all involved (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). Lazarus (1984) describes the Cognitive Appraisal Theory as the human mind being capable of making stable distinctions that allow for interpretation in any situation, which may elicit an emotional response. Before creation of the actual theory, Lazarus (1982) argued that elicitation of emotional response is an evaluative perception that is complex for humans. Humans think complexly about the significance of an event for one's well-being (Lazarus, 1982). Interpreted differently and in different ways, human emotion is a continuous process. The same person can interpret one situation on a continuous basis, and different outcomes are present.

The early work of Folkman and Lazarus (1985) focuses on primary appraisal as well as instruments to measure appraisal of human emotion and coping. Folkman and Lazarus (1985) argue in their study on emotion and coping during three stages of a college examination that the essence of stress, coping, and adaptation is change. Human emotions may change during the same encounter several times; the sequence of feelings reflects the changing meaning of what happens as an encounter unfolds (Folkman & lazarus, 1985). Folkman and Lazarus (1985) describe the measurement of Lazarus' early primary appraisal paradigm as being limited to three instruments. The instruments rest on the idea that the emotions people describe while experiencing a stressful encounter are suggestive of three dominant feelings: harm, threat, and challenge. In Folkman and Lazarus' (1985) Appraisal/Emotions Scale, threat is associated with three negative emotions, which are worry, fear, and anxiety. Harm is associated with five negative emotions, which are anger sadness, disappointment, guilt, and disgust. Challenge is associated with three pleasurable or positive emotions: confidence, hope, and eagerness. Scale scores are derived by summing participants' 5-point ratings (0 = not at all; 4 = a great deal) on the extent to which each of the emotions is experienced with respect to the situation or identified stressor.

With both phases of appraisal, Lazarus proposes that coping is another important variable that mediates among aspects of the person, situation, and stress reactions. Winter (2010), in her dissertation, describes both phases of appraisal and the relation to coping. Primary appraisal is the assessment of environmental cues regarding the nature and amount of threat for one's commitments and beliefs in a particular encounter. Secondary appraisal involves evaluative personal judgements of whether or not one has

the necessary coping resources available for controlling the stressor. Coping mediates the stress reactions in two ways. For example, coping efforts are either problem-focused, which means that they are directed at changing harmful, threatening, or challenging conditions within the troubled environment. Otherwise, they are emotion-focused, directed at regulation of emotional stress (Lazarus, 1993). Once the initial reaction to a situation has subsided through the utilization of a coping strategy that matches one's appraisal and personality disposition, the situation is considered less threatening than originally thought (Lazarus, 1984).

Research Citing Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Scholars have used and adapted the work of Folkman and Lazarus (1985) to enhance their own studies regarding coping and appraisal. An emotional experience cannot be understood solely in terms of what happens inside a person's mind, but grows out of interactions with the environments that are assessed (Lazarus, 1984).

Cooley and Klinger (1989) use Folkman and Lazarus' scale in their quantitative study in order to assess student coping strategies twice before taking an exam. More specifically, the study investigated the influence of cognitive variables, students' typical attributions for academic outcomes on students' coping behaviors, appraisals, and emotional reactions to a specific test situation. The scale was adapted by adding two extra coping emotions. The results indicated that the relationship between appraisal/emotions and the six attributional factors was very similar for the appraisal/emotions checklist completed two days before the test and immediately before the test (Cooley & Klinger, 1989). Bippus and Young (2012) also use Folkman and Lazarus' theory to predict emotional and coping responses to hurtful messages. The

study presents a significant step forward in its operationalization of both primary and secondary appraisal variables by treating hurt as an outcome rather than an antecedent of the appraisal process.

The studies mentioned above are related to coping strategies for cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of a person's life because the process of cognitive appraisal is assessment of an emotional situation (Lazarus, 2000). Using this theory, the current study will assist in assessing the emotional state of the sophomore students interviewed.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The literature synthesized above indicates that some sophomore students feel emotionally overwhelmed, stressed, and anxious for many reasons. These reasons may include finances, personal challenges, romantic relationships, difficult family relationships, and academic instability. The sophomore year is a time for deciding a major and thinking about life goals, which induce stress for students (Tobolowsky, 2008). Very few institutions are addressing the sophomore slump, which may not be perceived as strong enough to make an impact on the sophomore student population and their struggles (Lee & Leonard, 2009). Many of the studies described encourage instruction and research on the topic of student stress to create better ways to assist with sophomore student adjustment to college life. The next chapter describes the methodology of the study and the theoretical framework used to design the interview protocol. The researcher also discusses how the data were analyzed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Sophomore college students may experience major stress and depressive issues when faced with challenges during their second year, including major selection, career choices, and daily life struggles (Lee & Leonard, 2009; Tobolowsky, 2008). To plan for sophomore student success, colleges and universities should understand this population of students and their unique challenges and needs. This chapter begins with a restatement of the problem in order to reintroduce the context of the study. The researcher thoroughly outlines the procedures of the study, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. The researcher then introduces and describes the population and sampling procedures to help the reader understand the type of participants included in the study. Finally described is the data collection, instrumentation, data analysis, and validation/quality of data collected to help the reader understand procedures used to collect and validate data.

Restatement of the Problem

Research studies on the topic of student stress identify sophomores as students in frequent turmoil (Lee & Leonard, 2009; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Tobolowsky, 2008). The sophomore year of college is described as the sophomore slump, or the "forgotten year," in current and past research. Important academic outcomes and adjustment to college life directly correlate with the stress that students experience in the learning environment (Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton, & Osborne, 2010). College students experience demands in all aspects of their lives, including personal, school, employment, family, and love, which induce stress and can cause psychological and

physical illness. Additionally, they experience this stress due to the pressure of assigned course work coupled with their busy personal lives. While higher education professionals easily recall experiences working with anxious students concerned about the complexities of life and feeling depressed, limited empirical research exists on the topic of the sophomore slump (Lenz, 2010).   Most research available is older; therefore, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the body of literature on the topic of sophomore slump.

Background and Context of the Study

Rural colleges tend to be smaller and less funded than their counterparts in larger regions; therefore, they have less funding for programming, student activities, and other important service-learning related activities (Hoffman, 2016). Schultz (2004), based on results from a phenomenological study, finds that many retention theorists and practitioners consider first-generation and rural college students to be at-risk populations. Many Pennsylvania regions are classified as rural. In 2015, approximately 3.4 million people, about 27 percent of the state's 12.7 million residents, lived in Pennsylvania's 48 rural counties. Access to higher education for rural students, especially low-income and minority students, remains a priority among policymakers, education professionals, and the public (Prins, Campbell, & Kassab, 2014). In 2015, there were 57 degree-granting institutions (colleges and universities) and 47 non-degree granting institutions (trade and technical schools) in Pennsylvania (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2017).

Synopsis of the Institution in Which the Study was Conducted

The university where this study was conducted is located in a small rural Pennsylvania town, with fewer than 4,000 total residents. The campus is scenic and

sprawls out over 600 rolling acres. Recently, the campus has sustained multiple updates and renovations with many ongoing campus beautification projects. The town website describes the area as a safe community and an ideal place to live with affordable housing, low taxes, and an excellent educational system from kindergarten through college.

According to the university website, the school is a four-year fully accredited public institution, and offers a variety of undergraduate and select graduate programs. The university enrolls approximately 8,500 students. It was founded in 1889 and, by 1926, the school was purchased by the commonwealth and renamed. The school became a college in 1960, and then a university is 1983. The website describes a commitment to serving a diverse student body while educating students intellectually, socially, and physically, with the goal of developing strong leaders.

Demographics of Study Site Population

The study included junior students enrolled at a rural institution in Pennsylvania. Students were asked to reflect upon their sophomore year; therefore, the study is retrospective in nature. This school currently enrolls undergraduate and graduate students. Enrollment increased by approximately 2.98 percent since 2016; the university has plans to continue increasing enrollment. As of 2018, the university has a persistence rate of 82.6 percent, which is higher than the national average.

According to an enrollment report found on the institution's website, in fall 2018 the school enrolled 1,704 sophomore students. Over the past five years, the sophomore student enrollment has consistently been around 1,600-1,700 students each year. The school currently enrolls 1,663 junior students for the fall of 2018.

The persistence rate is the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year (National Student Clearinghouse, 2016). The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2016) reports that of all students in the United States who started college in the fall of 2015, 73.4 percent persisted at any U.S. institution in fall 2016, while 61.1 percent stayed at their starting institution.

According to statistics listed on the university's website, the institution has shown vast improvements in the graduation rates overall for underrepresented populations as well as white students from 2010-2018. The graduation rate for underrepresented populations is 48.9 percent, which is up 17.4 percent over the same 10-year span. The graduation rate for white students is 62.8 percent, an increase of 11.2 percent from 2010-2018. See Figure 1 to compare persistence of the study site to the national average.

Figure 1. First-Year Persistence and Retention by Starting Enrollment Intensity (all institutional sectors)
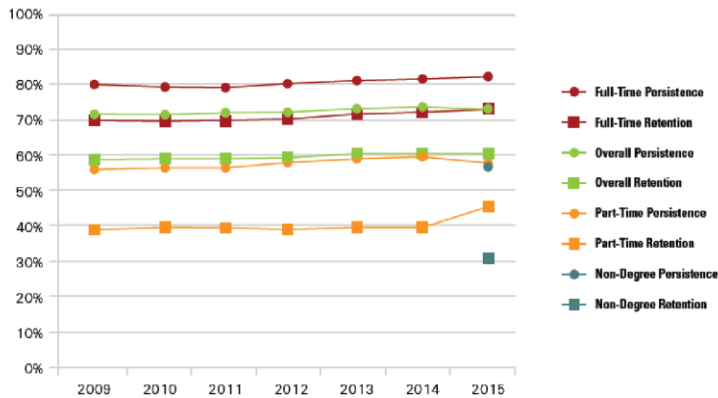
Figure 1. National average of first-year persistence. Adapted from the "National Student Clearinghouse,"   by *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center,* 2016. Retrieved from https://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshotreport-persistenceretention22/

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to use Cognitive Appraisal Theory to understand and analyze student perceptions of stress and coping strategies during their sophomore year of college at one rural, mid-size institution in Pennsylvania. The researcher used Cognitive Appraisal Theory to analyze student's ability to process and cope with their academic, personal, and social lives during their sophomore year.

Research Questions

Guided by three overarching, comprehensive research questions, this qualitative phenomenological study explores sophomore students' perceptions of stress, its influence on performance, and their coping strategies.

RQ 1. How do college juniors describe their stress level, contributing factors, and its influence on their (academic, personal, and social) performance during their sophomore year?

> 1a. Were college juniors stressed as sophomores?
>
> 1b. What was sophomore student stress like?
>
> 1c. What factors contributed to their levels of stress as sophomores?
>
> 1d. How did sophomore student stress contribute to (academic, personal, and social)
>
> performance?
>
> 1e. Was there an academic, personal, or social difference in the stress experienced
>
> by sophomores on-campus versus off-campus students' stress?

RQ 2. What strategies or coping strategies did college juniors employ during their sophomore year?

2a. As sophomores, how did they draw on academic, personal, and social resources to cope with their stress?

2b. Was there a difference in the coping strategies of sophomore on-campus students versus off-campus students' coping strategies?

RQ 3. What support did they receive during their sophomore year?

3a. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on family support?

3b. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on peer support?

3c. How did they, as sophomore students, feel supported by faculty and staff at the university?

Phenomenological Approach

There are three schools of phenomenology: eidetic or descriptive, hermeneutics, and the Dutch school of phenomenology (Dowling, 2007). The researcher relied on the eidetic school of phenomenology, guided by Husserl's work (Dowling, 2007); this approach aims to obtain fundamental knowledge of phenomena and has a strong psychological alignment (Maggs-Rapport, 2001). Husserl founded phenomenology during World War 1, and, from there, the approach expanded and evolved with the work of other scholars such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Taylor, and Van Manen (Dowling, 2007). Phenomenology is not understood as a method, a project, or a set of tasks. In its historical form, it is primarily a set of people who worked with Edward Husserl, the founder of phenomenology (Moran, 2001). Husserl helped to develop a deep understanding of the approach (Moran, 2001). The language in phenomenology is sometimes unclear; however, this is because phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research method (Cohen & Omery, 1994).

The descriptive phenomenological approach was chosen for this study in order to answer the proposed research questions and to describe the sophomore experience at one rural state institution in Pennsylvania. Descriptive phenomenology refers to the study of a person's experience and requires a description or explanation of the significances of phenomena experienced by participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The descriptive process of phenomenology is used to understand the data from interview responses and does not go beyond that point for analysis (Giorgi, 2009). The researcher chose this approach because this study focuses on what the participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon of the sophomore slump. The researcher studied similarities in attitudes, perceptions, and the lived experience of the sophomore student. The aim of this study was to explore in detail how participants experience and respond to stressors in their personal, social, and academic worlds. This approach also has a theoretical assurance to each participant as a cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical being. In addition, this approach assumes a chain of connection between people's talk, thinking, and emotional states (Seidman, 2013).

Humans are motivated by many aspects of life; this study allowed the researcher to describe the experiences of what motivates sophomore students. Lopez and Willis (2004) explain that Husserl believed that personal information should be important to scientists or researchers seeking to comprehend human motivation because human actions are influenced by what people identify to be real. Cited by Lopez and Willis (2004), Husserl recommends transcendental subjectivity, whereby researchers constantly check for bias so that preconceived notions of the researcher do not influence the study. The researcher used bracketing techniques throughout the study in order to minimize

researcher bias. This approach facilitates an understanding of the essential structure of a larger issue; in this study the researcher intended to understand the essential structure of student stress and the "sophomore slump."

The practical approach for this study included the use of 30 to 90-minute semi-structured interviews. This structure allowed the researcher to address the phenomena intensely and provide time for the participants to express their experiences in detail, approaching the topic as authentically as possible (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The research questions and interview protocol are consistent with the descriptive approach in assuming there is significance to sophomore students experiencing stress, which can be abstracted from the data collected (Lopez & Willis 2004).

Sampling Procedures

The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique. If the proposed sampling technique, purposive sampling, did not yield the required number of participants, then a snowball approach was to be employed. Details about each phase are provided in the sections that follow.

Phase one: Purposive sampling. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique to identify potential participants who experienced struggles during their sophomore year. Purposive sampling is precisely what the name suggests; the researcher chooses participants with a purpose in mind (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). In purposive sampling, the researcher seeks out individuals and groups of individuals who are knowledgeable about a specific phenomenon (in this case, the experience of sophomores at a public university in rural Pennsylvania), who are available to the researcher, and who

can discuss their experience in an articulate and reflective way (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

For this study, ideal participants were those students enrolled at the university, after the census date, in the fall 2018 semester. The students had earned 60 or more credits by either the preceding spring or summer semester, placing those students at the beginning of their junior year in fall 2018. To meet the stipulations of the Institutional Review Board, the researcher included only students who had completed their sophomore year at the site. The researcher based the decision to invite students who had completed 60 hours on the assumption that they would have completed their sophomore year. Also, they articulated and reflected enough information to provide the researcher with valuable insight into the sophomore year experience.

To identify students who met the stated criteria and who were physically available to participate in the study, the researcher visited on-campus classes that typically enroll a large number of students. In a four-year course of study, it is assumed that the plurality of students in 100-level courses are freshmen, in 200-level courses are sophomores, in 300-level courses are juniors, and in 400-level courses are seniors. Although there are many instances that may violate this assumption, 300-level on-campus course enrollments were more likely to include students who would both meet the stated criteria and be willing to participate in the study.

After reviewing the class schedule for the semester -- which included the course numbers (to select only 300-level courses), the locations (to filter out online or off-campus courses), and the instructors -- the researcher emailed those professors with whom she had a prior professional or academic relationship. The researcher asked those

professors for permission to attend each section of their 300-level courses, at which time the researcher would provide students in the class a brief overview of the study. The researcher explained the type of student invited to participate, the method by which an interested student could volunteer for the study, and the remuneration for selected participants.

In order to volunteer for the study, the researcher instructed interested students who met the stated criteria to email her indicating their interest by a specified date and time. More than 18 students volunteered to be part of the study (and met the stated criteria); the researcher selected 18 students who had immediately responded via email. The researcher contacted the selected students via email and created appointments for the first interviews with each participant.

Snowball sampling. If sampling procedures described above had failed to yield the desired sample size, the researcher planned to engage in a snowball sampling technique by asking those students who had volunteered to participate in the study to help by recruiting their friends, classmates, or other peers who met the stated criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1991).

In addition, the researcher planned to ask those professors who had agreed to let her visit their classrooms to ask faculty colleagues who were also teaching 300-level on-campus courses in the fall 2018 semester to grant permission to the researcher to visit those classrooms. Again, the initially chosen classrooms of faculty who had a prior relationship with the researcher yielded enough participants. The researcher was successful in getting student participation by visiting classrooms.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) maintain that 18 to 20 participants is appropriate for a phenomenological study conducted with interviews. This number allowed this researcher to collect rich data from a random sample of student participants. After visiting the classrooms and meeting interested participants, the researcher responded with an email that provided students with further details about the study and the informed consent forms (Appendix A) and the Interview Protocol (Appendix B, D, E). Interviewees returned the consent forms at the first interview.

In order to understand the lived experience of the student, the researcher employed a three-interview structure, shown in Table 1, which ensured elicitation of information (Seidman, 2013). Table 1 provides an overview of interviews 1 through 3, including time allotted, connection to theory, and information discussed in each interview.

Table 1

Interview Questions Organized by Seidman's Three-Interview Structure

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Time	30-90 minutes	30-90 minutes	30-90 minutes
Focus	Basic information about interviewee	Interviewee academic experiences	Interviewee personal and social experiences
Connection to Theory	Cognitive Appraisal, Primary: Perception and reactions to stressors in the environment.	Cognitive Appraisal, Secondary: Coping with the perceived stressors.	Cognitive Appraisal, Resources: Resources students are using to cope with the perceived stressors.

Scheduling Campus Interviews

The onsite research took place over several weeks; the researcher met with 18 participants to conduct three interviews. The participants consisted of 17 females and one male student, all with various majors. Most of the participants resided on campus during their sophomore year. The interviews took place during the fall 2018 semester from mid-September through the beginning of October. The researcher conducted interviews each day to meet the needs of each participant's schedule.

During the time of the interviews, classes had gotten underway for the semester; the researcher wanted to avoid busy and stressful times of the academic year. The researcher was flexible with meeting times. Most were during normal business hours; however, some interviewees requested evening appointments. The researcher did not have any problems with participants missing scheduled interviews.

Structure and Sequence of Interviews

In three-interview structure, each interview serves its own purpose and has a connection to the underlying phenomenological assumption (Seidman, 2013). The researcher used a semi-structured interview process with a series of open-ended questions. The researcher then followed up with probes to elicit additional detail about the questions asked (Roulston, 2010). Interviews typically lasted around 30 minutes to one hour (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The three interviews allowed interviewees to reconstruct their experiences, put it into context of their lives, and fully reflect on its meaning (Seidman, 2013). The interviews took place over several weeks, allowing the researcher and interviewee to be more comfortable with the interview process (Seidman, 2013).

The researcher's use of a semi-structured interview approach created an

opportunity to explore deeper meaning from the interviewee responses. In order to

develop a positive relationship during the interview process, the researcher established a

safe and comfortable environment by sharing personal experiences related to the topic

(DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Student interviewees also engaged in the research

study by fully participating in three face-to-face interviews; this helped to ensure

accuracy of information and build trust (Seidman, 2013). Face-to-face interviews

ensured the information was confidential and in a private setting, which allowed the

interviewee to feel more comfortable (Seidman, 2013). Interviews were confidential and

audio-recorded with the use of an application called Temi. During the interviews, the

researcher took detailed notes on interviewees' nonverbal behaviors, dispositions,

willingness to answer questions, and personal perceptions.

Interview one. Each interview had a specific purpose and provided a foundation

that helped illuminate the next (Seidman, 2013). During the first interview, the

researcher asked each student to introduce himself or herself and give basic information

about experiences as a sophomore student. The first interview focused on putting the

interviewee's experience in context by asking the interviewee to reveal as much as

possible about himself or herself in light of the topic. The researcher asked questions that

were in-depth and related to the phenomenon (Appendix B).

Interview two. In the second interview, the researcher started by member

checking the first interview with the interviewee. The researcher gave the interviewee

time to look over and discuss the notes from interview one and make any changes

necessary. Next, the researcher explored the interviewee's academic experiences as related to the topic (Appendix D).

Interview three. Before beginning interview three, the researcher used member checking with the interviewee, and the same procedures took place for member checking as in interview two. The researcher allowed time for the interviewee to review the notes and make changes as necessary. During the third and final interview, the researcher asked interviewees to discuss their personal and social experiences as related to the topic. Interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on personal, social, and academic connections to the experience rather than satisfaction or reward (Seidman, 2013) (Appendix E). After the third and final interview, the researcher emailed notes and transcripts of the final interview to each interviewee.

Privacy of the participant during interviews. During the first interview, the researcher provided each interviewee with a copy of the consent forms, if they had not filled it out prior to the interview. Furthermore, the researcher reviewed all documentation provided and asked each interviewee to fill out the participant information form (Appendix C). The form requested basic communication information such as preferred telephone number, class schedule, preferred email address, and the best time to contact the interviewee. In the event that any student decided not to participate in the study, the researcher planned to destroy information given. The researcher reiterated that the interviewees could leave the study at any time and all information shared during the interview process was voluntary. Each interviewee was told that he or she could retract statements made without concern of repercussion from the researcher. Each interviewee was also directed to visit the counseling center if they had further personal or private

matters they would like to discuss. The researcher's contact information was available on the consent form and in the formal research letter in case interviewees needed further clarification about the study.

The recorded interviews, notes, and additional data collected were stored in the researcher's office and home. Only the researcher has access to the information collected. When the study is published, all personal and identifying information will be concealed. A pseudonym is used for each interviewee. Materials used and collected are being kept locked in a safe location or password protected computer. Materials will be destroyed after a period of three years, per federal regulations. Table 2 presents the interview questions organized by research questions and Seidman's (2013) proposed three-interview structure.

Table 2

Research Question-Connection to Theory and Interview Question Matrix

Research Questions	Interview 1 Focus: general	Interview 2 Focus: academic	Interview 3 Focus: personal/social	Connection to Theory
RQ 1. How do junior college students describe their perceived stress level, contributing factors, and its influence on their (academic, personal, and social) performance during their sophomore year? 1a. Were college juniors stressed as sophomores? 1b. What was sophomore student stress like? 1c. What factors contributed to their levels of stress as sophomores? 1d. How did sophomore student stress contribute to (academic, personal, and social) performance? 1e. Was there an academic, personal, or social difference in the stress experienced by sophomores on-campus versus off-campus students' stress?	Tell me about yourself, as a sophomore student. On a scale of 1-10 can you rate your level of stress during your sophomore year and describe why you felt that way? In what ways is the stress that you felt during your sophomore year different from that you felt as a freshman?	Describe your level of overall academic stress. How did your level of stress harm, threat, or challenge your academic performance?	Describe your level of overall personal/social stress during your sophomore year. How did your level of stress harm, threat, or challenge your personal/social performance? Name something or someone that added meaning to your personal/social experience and how this helped to enhance your sophomore year. Describe the areas of strengths in your personal life. Describe the areas that need to be improved in your personal/social life. How have you been accountable for your own personal/social experiences?	Cognitive Appraisal, Primary: Perception and reactions to stressors in the environment. • How are students perceiving and reacting to stressors in their academic and personal/social lives? • Do students perceive harm, threat, or challenge when reacting to stress? • How significant are the stressors that students are perceiving during the primary phase of cognitive appraisal theory?

RQ 2. What strategies or coping strategies did college juniors employ during their sophomore year?

2a. As sophomores, how did they draw on academic, personal, and social resources to cope with their stress?

2b. Was there a difference in the coping strategies of sophomore on-campus students versus off-campus students' coping strategies?

What academic challenges did you anticipate facing during your sophomore year?

Describe the areas of strengths as well as areas that needed to be improved in your academics during your sophomore year.

How were you accountable for your own academic experiences during your sophomore year?

Name something or someone that added meaning to your academic career and how this helped enhance your sophomore year.

Are there any specific coping strategies or strategies you use when you are feeling overwhelmed? If so, can you please describe them?

How did you maintain control of stressful situations that were occurring?

Name some important people in your life who assisted with control of stress.

Cognitive Appraisal, Secondary: Coping with the perceived stressors.

- How are students coping with perceived stressors in their environment?

- What coping strategies are being used in the secondary phase of cognitive appraisal?

- Do students perceive harm, threat, or challenge when coping with stress?

RQ 3. What support would they like to have received during their sophomore year?

3a. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on family support?

3b. How did sophomore students draw on peer support?

3c. How did sophomore students feel supported by faculty and staff at the university?

What are you involved in on campus and how do you interact with others?

How do you interact with others off campus?

Did your peer group mostly consist of other sophomore students/ second year students? Why? OR Why not?

How did you first meet the friend group you interact with here on campus? Please explain?

How did you connect with faculty and staff during your sophomore year through email, office hours, individual appointments, etc.?

How did being an on-campus student helped or hurt your academic experience? Please explain.

OR

How did being an off-campus student helped or hurt your academic experience? Please explain.

How did being an on-campus student helped or hurt your personal/social experience? Please explain.

OR

How did being an off-campus student helped or hurt your personal/social experience? Please explain.

Cognitive Appraisal, Resources: Resources students are using to cope with the perceived stressors.

- What resources are students using to cope, tolerate, or eradicate the stress they may be experiencing?

- Do the activities that students are involved in help students to cope with the harm, threat, or challenge perceived by the stressors?

- Do the interactions students have with peers help students to cope with the harm, threat, or challenge perceived by the stressors?

Instrumentation and Design

Due to a paucity of published research on the topic, there are no existing interview protocols that could be adapted for the study; therefore, the researcher created the interview protocol. The researcher developed each question separately to align with the purpose of the study and Cognitive Appraisal Theory.

Validation of instruments. Qualitative research requires the researcher to check the protocol, data collected, and other important aspects of the study multiple times before being able to analyze the findings (Pyett, 2003). The researcher used multiple methods to validate the interview protocol's face validity. Face validity ensures that the protocol will measure what is intended and answer the research questions, and vice versa (Hardesty & Bearden, 2004). The researcher started the process by engaging two staff members from the university counseling center to analyze the research questions and protocol. One counseling faculty and one non-faculty therapist reviewed the protocol to assist with validation. The counseling center staff both mentioned that a few of the questions needed to be open-ended in order to elicit response. Both staff members also mentioned that the protocol was appropriate for students; the questions were relevant and made sense. Next, two graduate students in the College Counseling program, who also work in Housing and Residence Life with undergraduate students, were asked to validate the interview protocol. Both students indicated the questions were appropriate and flowed nicely. Neither student recommended any changes.

Finally, sophomore psychology students were also asked to validate the interview protocol. The researcher had the counseling faculty member assist in identifying three students who participate in a counseling and psychology club. The students mentioned

that the protocol was appropriate, easy to understand, and the questions were relevant to student life.

Pilot Study

Following IRB approval, the researcher tested the three interview protocols. One of the main purposes of the pilot was to ensure that the researcher was comfortable with the use of the interview protocol and follow-up probes. The researcher took note of the time accrued during each protocol. Next, the researcher recorded the data from the pilot study and analyzed it. This way the researcher ensured that the data collected was related to the phenomena being studied. Lastly, the researcher made a few edits to the questions to ensure the tense was appropriate for a retrospective study. The pilot study results are not included in the results of the study.

<div align="center">Data Analysis Plan</div>

Phenomenology is often associated with qualitative studies because it is a philosophy that offers logic and rigor (Giorgi, 2009). The researcher applied a descriptive phenomenological data analysis approach, which employed several steps of data analysis.

The researcher first gave each interviewee a pseudonym and an assigned number. For example, Emily Smith, interview one, ESI1.Transcription of all information began before data analysis. The researcher transcribed each interview using an application called Temi. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read all transcriptions to ensure accuracy of the application. Some of the transcriptions were re-typed for accuracy. The researcher then gave interviewees time to review each transcript before the subsequent interview started.   The researcher followed the procedures and

preliminary analysis presented within Table 3 and described below. Table 3 shows the

preliminary preparations, three- step interview procedures, and the ongoing data analysis

plan employed by the researcher.

Table 3

Data Collection and Plan for Analysis

Preliminary Preparations	3 Step Interview Procedures	On-going Data Analysis
1. RTAF completed and approved.	Steps 1-4 were completed before the interviews, transcription, and data analysis occurred.	
2. Secured IRB approval.		
3. Secured site approval.		
3. Recruited junior college student participants, who reside on and off campus.		
4. Secured informed consent of participants.		
Phase 1:		
Sent reminder emails/texts to confirm time and place.	Interview 1 Warm up and welcome, interview protocol number 1. Audio recorded and took notes. (See Appendix B	Phase 1: Transcripts and preliminary analysis.
Sent reminder emails/texts to confirm time and place.	Interview 2) Warm up, member checked prior to interview, used interview protocol 2. Audio recorded and took notes. (See Appendix D)	Phase 1: Transcripts and preliminary analysis.
Sent reminder emails/texts to confirm time and place.	Interview 3 Warm up, member checked prior to interview, used interview protocol 3. Audio recorded and took notes. (See Appendix E)	Phase 1: Transcripts and preliminary analysis.
Sent student last interview via email to member check.	Member checked last interview via email.	Phase 2: Completed in-depth interview analysis after member checking was complete.

Phase 2:
- Multi-step systematic coding of interviews took place after each interview was completed.
- Generation of categories and themes.
- Temi was used as the key software to transcribe interviews.
- Line-by-line analysis of each interview completed.
- Researcher employed a descriptive Husserlian approach for data analysis.

Phase 1: Transcripts and Preliminary Analysis

The researcher used color-coding and various font sizes of Times New Roman to label different parts of the interview. Preliminary thoughts were added after each interview; these thoughts were identified with asterisks, Times New Roman 12-point font, and yellow highlighting. The researcher memoed patterns, observations, thoughts, and ideas throughout the analysis process (Creswell, 2013). Noting patterns, themes, seeing plausibility, and clustering helped the researcher to make sense of the data. The researcher also was able to build a logical chain of evidence and create conceptual/theoretical coherence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once the researcher obtained a description of a phenomenon, the researcher read it through in order to determine an explanation. Afterwards, each description was broken down into units of meaning and then transcribed in the researcher's own words for use in Chapter 4. From that point, specific conclusions regarding the phenomenon were noted (Giorgi, 2009).

Phase 2: In-Depth Interview Analysis

The researcher analyzed each transcript to describe the lived-experience and essence of the students interviewed using a descriptive Husserlian approach. The descriptive Husserlian approach was conducted through methodical analysis of the data collected through recorded data, and analyzed using multiple steps as described by Kleiman (2004).

The first phase involved reading and understanding the interviews and their data for a complete understanding. This phase included obtaining a universal sense of the entire interview (Kleiman, 2004). In the second phase, the interview transcripts were read again more slowly in order to divide the data into meaning units. Each meaning unit

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was determined when the researcher experienced a shift in meaning when re-reading the description. Thirdly, the researcher integrated meaning units that had a similar focus or content, therefore combining similar responses from interviewees responses to create themes. The fourth stage required the researcher to stay faithful to the disciplinary viewpoint of psychology and look for psychological meaning. For example, the researcher used the theory of humanism, which emphasizes the study of the whole person and his or her experiences from a psychological perspective (Kleiman, 2004). In the fifth phase, the researcher looked for essential meanings. This phase can also be described as free imaginative variation (Kleiman, 2004). During this phase, an experience might be subjected to every conceivable difference to see how far it could be pushed before it loses identity with the study. Meanings that are not relevant to the phenomenon were deemed extraneous to the study and therefore were removed from the analysis. An example of this would be an interviewee speaking about a non-related item or getting off track during the interview. The researcher only included essential meanings that are relevant to the study and the phenomenon under study. In the sixth phase, the researcher elaborated on the findings of the study. This included describing the essential meanings discovered. The researcher used specific keyword descriptions and quotes to elaborate on the conclusions. In the seventh phase, the researcher articulated a structure based upon the essential meanings present in the descriptions of the interviewees. The researcher created a model of the phenomenon and ways key stakeholders could be of support during sophomore year. This process was determined by the insights obtained from the process of free imaginative variation. Lastly, in the eighth step, the researcher went back to the raw data and used it to extract the essential meanings and the general structure. For help

in discerning the themes in the data, NVivo software was employed; the transcripts of the interviews were coded and interpreted with the assistance of this software. A codebook was then developed to enhance the data and meaning extracted from NVivo (See Appendix F: Codebook).

Critical Analysis

After the phenomenological examination of the data was completed, the researcher turned to a critical examination of the work. The critical examination included verifying that concrete, detailed descriptions were obtained from interviewees. The phenomenological reduction was maintained throughout the analysis, essential meanings were discovered, a structure was articulated, and the results were verified in the raw data (Kleiman, 2004). This information is presented in Chapter 4 with the findings of the study.

<div align="center">Data Quality</div>

Numerous steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and increase the value and quality of this qualitative research study (Krefting, 1991). The three-step interview structure with each interviewee allowed the researcher to understand how each interviewee deals with conflicts between perspectives. Additionally, this prolonged engagement assisted in detecting response sets in which interviewees consistently gave the same responses (Krefting, 1991). It also allowed the interviewees to move beyond their expression of cynicism and discuss idealistic perspectives (Maxwell, 2008).

Bracketing the Data

The researcher used bracketing as a method to lessen the potential harmful effects of unrecognized prejudices related to the research and thereby to improve the rigor of the project (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher solely focused on the interview material and the transcribed information to create meaning of the interview. The researcher made further notes while memoing about the process, taking specific note of any non-spoken communication such as pauses, emotion, and inflections.

Member Check

Following each interview, the researcher used respondent validation, commonly referred to as member checks, to ensure quality of the data. The researcher solicited feedback about data and conclusions directly from the interviewees (Maxwell, 2008). This technique is the single most important way to rule out misinterpretation; furthermore, this technique is fundamentally more valid than the interviews themselves (Maxwell, 2008). Member checking occurred by allowing the interviewees to view their own interview transcriptions to ensure reliability of data collected. Before subsequent interviews, the researcher allowed each interviewee to view his or her transcribed information and preliminary analysis. Interviewees could have become hesitant or internalized information when employing this strategy (Krefting, 1991). Therefore, the researcher was also strategic in the approach during this process in order to enhance trustworthiness of data. To minimize harm to the interviewee, the researcher avoided re-opening previously recorded responses for further questioning (Krefting, 1991).

Memoing

  The researcher used memoing throughout data transcription and analysis to draw specific conclusions about the data. Memoing is an effective tool that can be used to enhance the research experience in all qualitative methodologies. Memo writing is a recurrent process that leads naturally to generalization of the essence of the phenomenon being studied. Memos can help the researcher to raise the data to a conceptual level and develop the properties of each category to begin defining them conceptually (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Memos work together with other sources of data and data analysis to provide supportive documentation for the study (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). Memoing serves to assist the researcher in making abstract leaps from raw data to those abstractions that explain research phenomena in the context in which it is examined (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008).

Summary

  The focus of this phenomenological study is to describe junior students' perception of the sophomore slump. The study took place at one rural mid-size institution in Pennsylvania. The researcher engaged several faculty members, staff members, and students in validation of the three interview protocols. Following IRB protocol, the researcher piloted the interview protocol with one university student. The researcher then selected 18 participants for the study. To ensure quality of the study, the researcher interviewed each participant three times for 30-90 minutes each, per Seidman's (2013) three-interview structure. This allowed for enough data to be gathered and for the interviewees and researcher to be comfortable during the interviews. After each interview, the researcher allowed each interviewee to view the transcript to ensure

the information gathered was correct. The researcher then used a two-phase analysis plan. The first phase of the data analysis was a preliminary interview and transcript analysis, and the second phase was the in-depth interview analysis after all interviews were conducted. Chapter four presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

Sophomore college students are known to have a more difficult period of adjustment for various reasons related to academics, personal development, relationships, and personal concerns (Hunter et al., 2010; Lee & Leonard, 2009; Tobolowsky, 2008). The researcher used a phenomenological approach to examine this experience. This chapter begins with an overview of the research design and a reintroduction to the research questions used to guide the study. Next, a description is provided of 18 juniors' experiences during their sophomore year. The researcher then presents a summary of data organized by each research question, while also connecting a summary of themes to Folkman and Lazarus' (1985) Cognitive Appraisal Theory, which was used to guide the study. Finally, the researcher presents a summary of the results.

Overview of Research Design

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of sophomore student stress at one rural university in Pennsylvania. The study was conducted to better understand the stress sophomore students experience, the coping strategies they employ, and the supports in place at the institution where the study was conducted. The following research questions and sub-questions were addressed in this study:

RQ 1. How do college juniors describe their stress level, contributing factors, and its influence on their (academic, personal, and social) performance during their sophomore year?

1a. Were college juniors stressed as sophomores?

1b. What was sophomore student stress like?

1c. What factors contributed to their levels of stress as sophomores?

1d. How did sophomore student stress contribute to (academic, personal, and social)

performance?

1e. Was there an academic, personal, or social difference in the stress experienced

by sophomores on-campus versus off-campus students' stress?

RQ 2. What strategies or coping strategies did college juniors employ during their

sophomore year?

2a. As sophomores, how did they draw on academic, personal, and social

resources to cope with their stress?

2b. Was there a difference in the coping strategies of sophomore on-campus

students versus off-campus students' coping strategies?

RQ 3. What support did they receive during their sophomore year?

3a. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on family support?

3b. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on peer support?

3c. How did they, as sophomore students, feel supported by faculty and staff at

the university?

Research related to the sophomore slump and Folkman and Lazarus' (1985)

Cognitive Appraisal Theory was used to develop the three interview protocols

(Appendices B, D, and E) and analyze the lived experiences of each participant.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory was used to analyze each participant's emotional experience

in order to better understand how certain experiences affected the well-being of that

individual (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). A descriptive Husserlian approach was used to

analyze and categorize the data into themes. Trustworthiness of analysis and

interpretation was enhanced by memoing, reading the interviews multiple times, and using NVivo software. The researcher also described any intersections and variations found within the data and evaluated whether and how the data answered each of the research questions and sub-questions. This process was conducted through systematic evaluation of the data gathered through interviews and then analysis using a multiple step process as described by Kleiman (2004).

Description of the Sample

The sample consisted of college juniors ($N = 18$) who had completed 60 or more credits. Table 4 summarizes participants' demographic information. At the time of the study, all participants were current students who had completed their prior year (sophomore year) at the school where the study was conducted.

Table 4

Characteristics of Interviewees Organized by Housing

Housing	Interviewee	Gender	Age	Major
On-campus	ABI1, Kelsey	Female	21	Education
	ANI2, Sage	Female	21	Biology
	COI16, Lucy	Female	21	Environmental Studies
	AWI7, Rose	Female	20	Education
	HPI4, Elizabeth	Female	20	Communications
	RDI8, Nicole	Female	21	Education

	ASI9, Joanne	Female	21	Music Therapy
	KRI10, Elizabeth	Female	20	Education
	CPI12, May	Female	21	Exercise Science
	KRI13, Sam	Female	20	Recreation Therapy
	SBI14, Lou	Female	20	Education
Off-campus	KMI3, Ann	Female	20	Education
	KDI5, Ann	Female	20	Marketing
	JPI6, Marie	Female	19	Psychology
	HBI11, Caroline	Female	20	Education
	MVI15, Kennedy	Female	20	Education
	HCI17, Jenna	Female	20	Hospitality
	KHI18, Brian	Male	20	Computing

The majority of participants were female ($n = 17$). Most participants were in-state residents from areas within a few hours of the university where the study was conducted ($n = 16$). The out-of-state participants were from states neighboring Pennsylvania ($n = 2$). Table 4 also shows that all on-campus participants were female ($n = 11$). The off-campus participants included one male ($n = 1$) and six females ($n = 6$). Participants had various majors that represented four of the university's colleges: The

College of Education ($n = 8$), The College of Health, Environment, and Science ($n = 5$),

The College of Business ($n = 4$), and the College of Liberal Arts ($n = 1$).

Research Question One: Participants' Stress Level, Contributing Factors, and

Influence on Academic, Personal, and Social Performance

Research question one explores how college juniors describe the influence that

sophomore stress had on their academic, personal, and social lives. This question relates

to perceptions and reaction to stressors. Many of the participants had immediate

reactions to the stressors in the environment during their sophomore year; all participants

described sophomore year as stressful and mentioned stress multiple times ($N = 80$). (See

Appendix G, Number of Times Participants Mentioned Each Code.)

Participants reported different levels of stress during their sophomore year as a

response to occurrences in their lives. Joanne, a Music major, revealed ending up in the

health center because of a panic attack. Participants such as Sage (Biology major), Jenna

(Hospitality major), Elizabeth (Communications major), Ann (Education major), and

Brian (Computing major) felt extremely stressed during their sophomore year because of

the many changes they experienced.

The key components of reactions to stressors were lack of support, stress, anxiety,

depression, and feeling out of place. Elizabeth, a Communication major, succinctly

summarized sophomore year as the time that she felt out of place on campus. She

explained that there are many programs for first-year students and similar programs for

upper-class students, but sophomores were the forgotten group.

Participants' Stress Levels

The researcher asked each participant to describe his or her stress level by picking a number between one and ten. (See Appendix B, Interview Protocol One, Item number 7.) Many of the participants expressed feeling highly stressed ($n = 14$), stating their stress levels ranged between seven and ten. A few of the participants ($n = 4$) mentioned feeling moderately stressed, by picking a number between four and six to describe their stress levels. Only two participants rated their stress levels during their sophomore year between one and three. Figure 2 shows the number of times each participant mentioned stress during the sophomore year. Ann ($n = 9$), Ann ($n = 8$), Sam ($n = 7$), and Sage ($n = 7$) discussed sophomore student stress the most frequently.
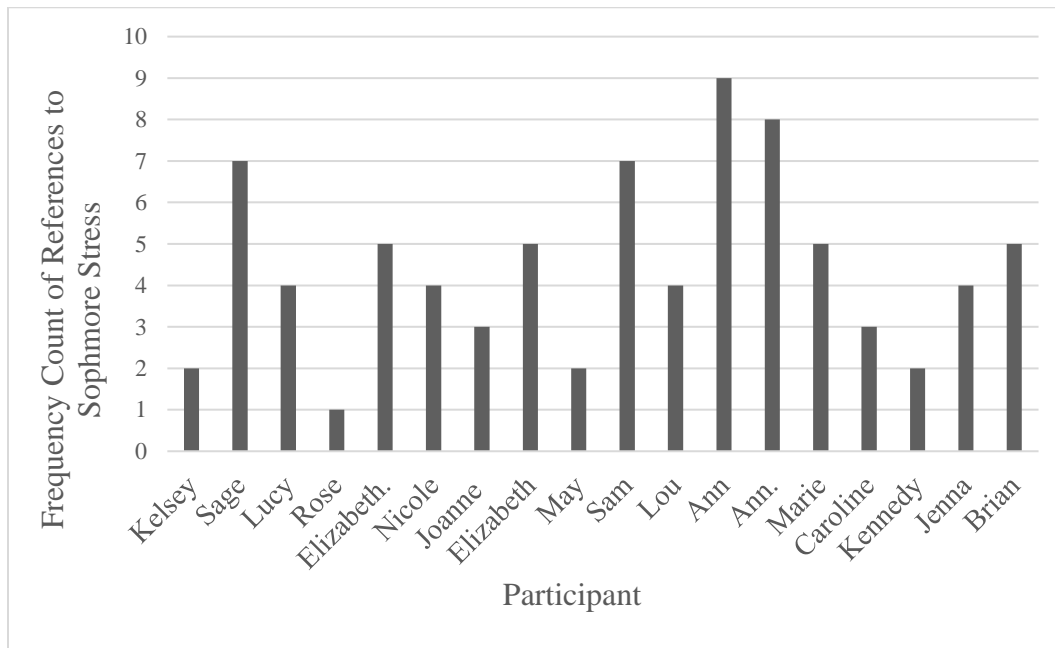
Figure 2. Frequency count of references to sophomore stress.

High stress level. Of the 18 participants, 14 mentioned high levels of stress numerous times. They experienced stress for different reasons related to the sophomore year. Many participants discussed high levels of stress in relation to academics ($N = 68$).

Some categorized their stress levels as high when thinking about graduation ($n = 2$) and working while being a student ($n = 2$).

The majority discussed having high levels of stress related to academics during their sophomore year. Lou, an Education major, was very stressed about meeting course requirements in her major. The Education Department requires their students to meet certain standards for teacher candidacy, and she was not fully prepared. She also mentioned not making any friends and not having a good support network. She stated:

> I would say probably say it was around seven. Just because like I was starting to get into major classes and I was still taking liberals. However, I also had a whole bunch of other stuff going on personally. I took a summer class right after that because I found out I was behind on everything. It was definitely stressful. (Lou SBI24, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

Lou spent a lot of time trying to catch up in her major classes. She also spent a lot of time alone focusing on her academics and preparing for assignments.

Jenna, a Hospitality major, discussed working full-time while being a full-time student. Jenna's parents wanted her to understand and value the cost of a college education. She would attend class all day and then go straight to work. This caused Jenna to miss some assignments due to lack of time. She mentioned feeling extremely overwhelmed by stating:

> My stress level was probably like a nine or ten. I was working full time and I did not realize until I stopped working. I work by myself and I was in charge of a lot, but I was not necessarily being compensated for that. They trusted me and I was a good worker so they somewhat just like put a lot on me and I did not realize that

at the time. I also had 8 AM classes every day along with other classes. So

looking back, I was really stressed in the courses I had. Therefore, I would say

my course load was a lot. (Jenna HCI18, Personal Communication, September 26,

2018)

Elizabeth, an Education major, also stated that she was highly stressed. She had a high-

stress campus job and was working many hours. She was required to work with the

residents on her floor. She planned programs and activities for students, all while being a

full-time student. She said she did not have enough time to balance her work, school, and

friends. She stated:

I would put it at a seven because being a Community Assistant was really

stressful and it was a lot of work all the time. Just balancing being a CA and all

of my classes and still having time for friends, I was trying to find time when I did

not have homework or have to work. (Elizabeth KRI12, Personal Communication,

September 21, 2018)

Others discussed thinking about the future. Brian, a Computing major, mentioned

feeling overwhelmed by thinking about life after college. Brian stated that when he

entered college, he was taking extra credits so he could graduate early. However, once he

realized that he would be completing a job search in three years instead of four, he

became overwhelmed at the thought. He stated:

I was consumed with thinking about graduation, what I was going to do in the

future, and what kind of job I would have. In addition, I wondered if the people

who I see every day would still be people who I saw in the future. I was also

deciding if this was something I really wanted or if I just went to college just

because my parents wanted me to. (Brian KHI5, Personal Communication, September 25, 2018)

Moderate stress level. Moderate stress was discussed by four participants five times ($N = 5$). Their stress was related to academic expectations and attempting to boost their GPA. They also felt moderately overwhelmed by taking core classes and working to meet major requirements.

Kennedy, an Education major, mentioned feeling moderately stressed while trying to boost her GPA after having several difficult semesters. She also described how her stress levels fluctuated throughout the sophomore year because of the increase in course difficulty. She reported being moderately stressed by stating:

> During my first semester it was probably like a five or six. I was coming back to school, changing my major and everything. Then in the spring, it was like an eight or nine towards the end of the semester because of more difficult courses. (Kennedy MVI26, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

Lucy, an Environmental Studies major, mentioned also feeling moderately stressed because of two classes that lowered her GPA. She was working exceptionally hard to change her grades. She stated, "Overall, I would probably give it a six just because of the two classes that lowered my GPA" (Lucy COI12, Personal Communication, September 27, 2018). She was struggling until she changed her major but now, as a junior, feels more connected to her major and really enjoys the course work.

Marie, a Psychology major, mentioned feeling somewhat overwhelmed because she had to commute back and forth from home where she cared for her sick grandmother

while managing course work and her class schedule. Ann, Caroline, and Kennedy (Education majors), on the other hand, felt mostly calm about assignments; at times, they would become moderately overwhelmed with their busy schedules. However, most participants were anxious because of academic adjustment and keeping their grades at an acceptable GPA.

   Low stress level. Only two of the participants, Caroline and Rose (Education majors), experienced low stress. They felt this during busy periods of work and studying for tests. Otherwise, they reported feeling calm. Both felt prepared for their work and did not struggle to keep up with assignments. Caroline mentioned always keeping up with her work and sometimes working ahead to stay organized. She attributed feeling well adjusted during her sophomore year because she had the support of many friends. She stated, "I kept up with my work very well. I do not miss assignments. I am always studying for my tests and sometimes I go overboard and study for future tests and assignments" (Caroline HBI11, Personal Communication, September 21, 2018). Rose kept up with her work as well. She enjoyed both her major and the assignments. She also had a supportive network of faculty, family, and friends. She would reach out to them when she felt she needed assistance. She described her highest stress level at a two out of ten.

Factors Contributing to Stress and Influence on Performance

   While each participant described their sophomore year in different ways, they also had some similar stress-inducing experiences. Eighteen participants referenced stressful experiences numerous times ($N = 80$). This section presents data related to transitions and academic, personal, and social factors of stress.

Transitions. All 18 participants entered into the sophomore year feeling some sort of transitional stress. Participants discussed the different expectations that led them to feel higher levels of stress. Elizabeth, a Communication major, described why she felt the sophomore year transition was more difficult than her first year. She thought sophomores experience slump because there is nothing fun to look forward to during sophomore year. She stated:

> I think that sophomores often feel like they are in a slump and I am guilty of thinking this way sometimes, because being a sophomore seems so lousy. You are not a freshman so you are not experiencing everything for the first time but you still are not quite an upperclassman so you do not have the special opportunities or even titles that juniors and seniors do. (Elizabeth HPI4, Personal Communication, September 18, 2018)

Ann, a Marketing major, mentioned that students, faculty, staff, and coaches kept warning her that the sophomore year was going to be the hardest of all, but they did not give a specific reason why. Things were picking up in her sport as well as in her academics. She described feeling more pressure academically, personally, and socially than ever before. She reported that it was, in fact, the most difficult year for her. She described how her coaches were placing more pressure on her by explaining:

> Practices were getting harder. I started to play more during my sophomore year. I also started getting more critique from my coaches. Early on in the preseason coaches were telling me the sophomore year was going to be the hardest; that mentality was getting put into my head before I even started. (Ann KDI6, Personal Communication, September 19, 2018)

Sophomore year stress included changes in daily routines. Ann, who lived off campus during her sophomore year, felt that because she did not have a roommate in the same room and a Resident Assistant or residence hall staff nearby, her apartment felt empty. She stated:

I felt like freshman year I was sent away to camp and then sophomore year it actually felt like college, I was actually living on my own and apartment life is very different from dorm life. You do not have anybody watching you. There is no RA to see what you are doing all the time. I felt like freshman year was very structured and sophomore year you are on your own. You don't have anyone watching over you. (Ann KDI6, Personal Communication, September 19, 2018)

Like Ann, participants described feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and unprepared for the difficult transition. They discussed feeling left out during their sophomore year and feeling extremely overwhelmed by the many changes that were occurring. Sage said:

Out all my years of college, I will say it was, like, the hardest and the most stressful time. I do not know if that was just from just sophomore year in general, but I definitely had the hardest time my sophomore year than any other year. (Sage AN12, Personal Communication, September 17, 2018)

Other participants identified classes, time management, and academic expectations as stressors during the transition to sophomore year. Sage, a Biology major, described feeling completely overwhelmed by the new classes and expectations of the sophomore year. She elaborated:

I feel the difficult transition was from my freshman to my sophomore year. The classes were harder and time management was more difficult. It was not like; oh,

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you are a freshman, so it is not a big deal. It was like you are a sophomore; you should know what is going on by now. (Sage AN12, Personal Communication, September 17, 2018)

Some participants mentioned lack of support during their sophomore year. Ann, an Education major, described how the transition to sophomore year was terrible. During her freshman year she had plenty of support and friends, and she felt very connected to campus in a positive way. Once her sophomore year started, she felt isolated and alone; she did not socialize with friends. She said:

I literally cried the first month of my sophomore year. My parents did not know what to do for me and I felt like they gave up on me entirely. I felt like I just could not get it together. I just kept telling myself that I did not want to be here and that I do not like it here. So that definitely contributed to my stress. I was always waiting for the weekend to come so I could go home. (Ann KMI4, Personal Communication, September 18, 2018)

Ann also mentioned feeling a bad "vibe" for the entire year. She mentioned not wanting to be in school and wanting to go home often. She could not break out of her bad mood, which tainted her entire sophomore year experience. Ann stated:

I kind of felt a bad vibe the whole year. It did not get any better. Spring semester I still did not feel any better and I went home a lot. The entire first semester I could not get into it at all. I did not want to be here. (Ann KMI4, Personal Communication, September 18, 2018)

Jenna, a Hospitality major, described similar experiences and feeling unsupported during her sophomore year:

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There was many things that I could not participate in, but they wanted juniors and

seniors and then focused more on freshmen too. There is a bunch of stuff for

freshman, like freshmen seminar and other things that freshmen can get involved

in. Therefore, sophomores really do not have anything directed toward them

specifically. (Jenna HCI18, Personal Communication, September 26, 2018)

Brian, a Computing major, also expressed similar sentiments as Ann and Jenna.

Although he expected to feel stressed during his first year because it was a new

experience, he felt supported during his first-year of college. However, that support did

not continue; after entering sophomore year he was not sure where to turn for help. He

stated:

Freshman year it felt like there's more of a support system. It felt like if you were

stressed, it made sense to be stressed because you are a freshman and doing

something new. When you are a sophomore, it kind of feels like you already have

been here. No one really cares as much because you are stressed and you should

know how to deal with this by now during your sophomore year of college. (Brian

KHI5, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

Overall, participants felt university support was lacking during their sophomore year.

Some also reported dissatisfaction with the lack of specialized programming to assist

sophomores with the difficult transition.

Academic factors and influence on performance. Data analysis showed that

participants discussed academic concerns and challenges more than other stressors

experienced. All 18 participants referenced academic stress multiple times ($N = 68$).

The majority felt immense pressure to do well and keep up with work. Participants

mentioned how the level of academic expectations changed during their sophomore year. Some participants felt the classes were a lot harder and required more work than their first year of college. Figure 3 shows that all participants experienced academic stress based on the number of times they mentioned it during the interviews. Sage ($n = 5$), Marie ($n = 9$), and Lucy ($n = 10$) discussed academic stress most often.
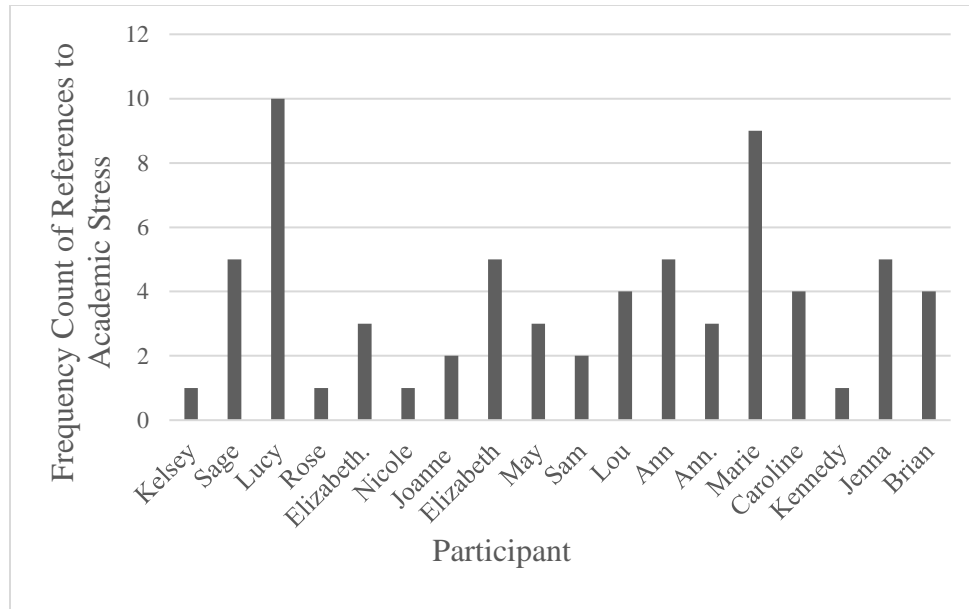
Figure 3. Frequency count of references to academic stress.

Anticipation of higher faculty expectations and course difficulties were common themes among participants. Both Lucy (Environmental Studies) and Marie (Psychology) were preoccupied with future academic stress. Marie stated, "It was definitely rough, I was pretty much stressed all the time. Looking down the road for all of the classes that were coming up was definitely stressful as well. I was stressing before I even got there" (Marie JPI9, Personal Communication, September 19, 2018).

Lucy, an Environmental Studies major, discussed the stress of coursework along with trying to balance her schedule during her sophomore year. She said:

It was stressful, but stress comes along with college. There is no way to escape

that, but I feel like I picked some good courses that kind of balanced the stress

because, like, some of the classes I took were, like, more up my alley versus some

courses that I took that were newer to me or that I didn't understand. So I felt like

it was very balanced out. (Lucy COI16, Personal Communication, September 26,

2018)

Sage, a Biology major, described feeling similar pressure to do well so she could

continue in her program at an acceptable pace. She stated, "It was a lot of pressure to do

well so you can move to your upper-level courses. You have to do well because your

other classes are going to build on that class as you go and continue forward" (Sage

ANI13, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018).

Participants recounted that faculty expected students to know their teaching style,

which was worrying for some. Sage provided another example by stating, "I had one

professor who got up in the front of the class and said that we have been through this

before and we should know what to do and then just kept teaching" (Sage ANI3, Personal

Communication, September 18, 2018). However, as evident in the comment below, Sage

understood why faculty expected more out of students during their sophomore year. She

said:

The professors just expect you to know what to do and some of them do things

differently. So some people had that professor freshman year and known what

they do, but they'll give exams differently, expect different levels, and especially

going from your freshman year to your sophomore year, they expect more out of

your work, which I think they should as you are taking different course levels.

(Sage AN12, Personal Communication, September 17, 2018)

Others explained that difficult tests, courses, fieldwork, and overwhelming course loads added to their stress. Sam, a Recreation Therapy major, mentioned feeling as if she did not have her sophomore year organized academically the way it should be. Her grades were suffering and she had to work extremely hard to bring them back up to an acceptable level. Sam stated, "I definitely struggled my first semester sophomore year. My GPA was lower and I spread myself way too thin" (Sam KRI15, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018).

Some also described difficult requirements for their major. Education majors have to prepare for candidacy by taking a series of tests. Caroline, an Education major, described how the anticipation of the academic skills test contributed to her stress level:

The most challenging thing I anticipated was the skills test. I mean that didn't have to do with my grades, but that did have to do with my major because I had to take two out of the three tests because my SAT scores were not up to standard. I did pass but I had to take the math portion twice, which was stressful, but I passed and then the writing I did pass for the first time. Therefore, that was probably my only stressor that caused me to worry. (Caroline HBI11, Personal Communication, September 21, 2018)

Along these same lines Joanne, a Music major, mentioned that her major was more difficult because of clinical experiences coupled with more difficult course work. Joanne mentioned:

Second semester of sophomore year we started clinical work with music therapy so that was added stress. We were required to do so many ensembles so I was in ensemble rehearsals and clinical rotations. I was taking difficult courses and trying to take liberals and I ended up in the health center because of anxiety. (Joanne ASI19, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

Joanne also mentioned that trying to complete observation hours for her major requirements while trying to take extra classes and complete all requirements was intense. Joanne stated:

Academic stress is when your planner is filled with things to do and there is no more room to write, but you have to write more things. That is what academic stress is to me, just no time to do anything else. (Joanne ASI19, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

Some participants compromised in terms of their assignments. They mentioned having to skip classwork or assignments to catch up on other assignments. They also acknowledged turning in incomplete work, because they simply did not have time to finish the assignments. Lou, an Education major, specifically discussed turning in assignments late:

I would try to at least turn everything in, but sometimes it would be only half completed, but I mean at least try to turn it in, but sometimes it wasn't anywhere as good as I know it could have been. (Lou SBI24, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

One participant, Elizabeth, a Communications major, specifically mentioned stepping down from on-campus leadership roles because of difficulty in a few classes;

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her academics were most important. In terms of her activities, she evaluated what felt most important to her and dropped the activities that were not. For many there was no time for anything other than academics and a few select extracurricular activities.

Personal factors and influence on performance. Not only did sophomore year bring many new academic challenges, personal stress was also experienced as overwhelming for many. Personal stress was the second type of stress discussed by participants. Of the 18 participants, 15 discussed personal stress multiple times ($N = 40$). This section describes how medical, family, and relationship concerns caused students' personal stress during their sophomore year.

A few of the participants, like Joanne (Music major) and Ann (Education major), reported medical concerns by stating they experienced anxiety and depression issues. Ann had many personal issues happening while Joanne was trying to adapt to her busy sophomore year. As evidenced by the next comment, she was unaware of the source of her anxiety: "I was struggling with anxiety for forever and I could not identify it at first and, like, what was causing it. I am on medication for it too, so that helps" (Joanne ASI19, Personal Communication, September 25, 2018). She reported connecting to campus resources during her sophomore year by using counseling and health services for assistance with her anxiety and depression. She was able to have medications prescribed to her, which helped her immensely.

Two other participants discussed how specific medical issues caused them to lose focus during their sophomore year. Marie, a Psychology major, discussed having an enlarged pituitary gland and needing to go home for multiple medical appointments. She was commuting back and forth from home while being a full-time student. This was

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stress-inducing for her. Sage a Biology major, mentioned severely injuring her hand during a fishing trip. This negatively affected her sophomore year personally and academically. She discussed having difficulties after the accident occurred; she had to seek assistance with personal matters such as dressing and eating. She also had to seek assistance with academic work and tests. She too was able to use campus resources including the student health center and disability services to help address her concerns.

Participants also discussed family concerns and relationship concerns with significant others during their sophomore year. Of the 18 participants, one participant experienced family issues, while two experienced burdens from their significant other's personal issues, and one participant experienced a bad break-up.

One participant mentioned family concerns by discussing the high expectations family had. Jenna, a Hospitality major, discussed working full-time while being a full-time student because her parents expected her to understand the value of a college education. She stated that she would leave the university after class and head straight to work until midnight or later. Jenna would then have to be back on-campus early the next morning. She kept this schedule for several semesters and was working more than forty hours per week. Her concerns are reflected in her comment, "My parents are supportive but they also want me to value how much it costs. Looking back I can appreciate this, but at the time I did not appreciate it" (Jenna HCI18, Personal Communication, September 26, 2018). She ultimately decided that a full-time work schedule was not worth the stress. She described how she ended this routine and left her job once she started her junior year.

Lucy, an Environmental Studies major, discussed that her significant other had a drug overdose after borrowing money from her. She felt extremely responsible for what happened and spent a great deal of time feeling guilty. Lucy stated:

> Personally, and for a while I would beat myself up telling myself that it was my fault everything happened. It was my fault because I did not notice the signs. I could have done more. However, I had to get past that because it was obviously not my fault so I had to talk myself down and being able to focus on everything that I needed to do for me. Yeah, that was like a big problem that came up but it was not my problem, if that makes sense and so that was not my mountain I needed to cross, mine was finishing the end of my sophomore year. (Lucy COI16, Personal Communication, September 27, 2018)

Lucy was able to find comfort from friends during this difficult time and was able to use counseling services to move forward; she reported she was doing better personally and academically.

Ann, an Education major, also mentioned having stress related to her significant other's personal stress. Her boyfriend had to make a decision regarding ending life support for a parent. She was one of the only supports for her boyfriend at the time, which put a personal strain on her. Ann described the past situation as being one of the worst experiences in her life. She stated, "I spent so much time in my own misery, I just wanted to lay around and do nothing instead of reaching out to friends" (Ann KMI4, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018). Ann's stress was related to her own personal struggles coupled with the stress from her boyfriend.

A few participants also mentioned bad break-ups during their sophomore year.

Brian, a Computing major, broke up with his girlfriend during his sophomore year, which

caused him severe stress and anxiety. Brian went into total isolation after the break-up.

He did not feel connected to campus resources for various reasons; therefore, he ended up

finding his own online resources to cope with his stress and anxiety. Brian stated:

> I went to sleep one night and had a panic attack in my sleep, so I said to myself
>
> this is not good, I need to go and get help. I walked to the counseling center at
>
> five in the morning and they were closed. Therefore, I waited in the health center
>
> until they opened. I think they open at eight, so I just sat there for like three
>
> hours. I walked to the counseling center and they asked me if I was suicidal and I
>
> said I do not know. Then they said we will call you in two weeks. I gave them
>
> my number and then they did not call me. (Brian KHI5, Personal Communication,
>
> September 24, 2018).

Brian also mentioned having multiple panic attacks during this time and his grades

significantly dropped. The only friends he had to support him were those in the same

clubs and organizations. Eventually, he was able to pull through the difficult time with

the help and support from a few of his friends and the online resources he was using.

Social factors and influence on performance. Social stress was not mentioned

as often as personal and academic stress; 12 participants discussed social stress 17 times.

Participants described social stress as not having enough time to spend with friends and

classmates because of how busy they were with assignments. Marie, a Psychology

major, discussed trying to find time to spend with friends and juggling academic work by

stating:

Socially, it was finding that balance between being with your friends and

schoolwork. Even just like a simple Sheetz run that could take 20 minutes, but

that is 20 minutes you could be studying. So, it just a tough decision between

staying home and hanging out with friends all the time. (Marie JPI9, Personal

Communication, September 19, 2018)

Sage, a Biology major, stated that she did not want to lose touch with her friends.

She explained the importance of keeping open lines of communication, "If you are too

busy then just talk to your friends and let them know it is nothing that they did and you

are still friends" (Sage ANI13, Personal Communication, September 20, 2018).

Some participants described their social lives as great during their sophomore

year; they did not have many issues with peers. Some spent time alone when they needed

it, which allowed them to focus on studying. Others who spent time alone would read,

watch a movie, or plan for the coming weeks. They even described isolation in a positive

manner. Rose, an Education major, stated, "My roommates would go home on the

weekends so I would just be by myself and re-adjust for the week, but I don't mind alone

time so it was not a bad thing" (Rose AWI10, Personal Communication, September 20,

2018). Overall, social concerns were not a huge factor for the sophomore participants in

this study. While balancing relationships with friends and academics was difficult, they

managed to do this in an appropriate manner.

Differences in Stress Level by Housing Location

Data analysis revealed some differences in academic, personal, and social stress

based on housing location. Table 5 presents the number of times on and off-campus

participants referenced each stressor. It is clear that on-campus participants referenced

the three stressors many more times than off-campus participants.

Table 5

Type of Sophomore Stress by Housing Location

	On-Campus	Off-Campus
Academic	37	31
Social	15	7
Personal	23	17

On-campus students mentioned social stress twice as many times as off-campus

students. Participants felt there was not enough time to socialize with friends, complete

coursework, and participate in activities. At times, participants had a difficult time

deciding between friends and homework. Some were concerned they would lose friends

if they did not seem them often enough. Participants that lived off campus expressed

positive sentiments about campus life. Brian, a Computing major, discussed the

differences in his social life from freshman to sophomore year. Freshman year he lived

on campus, and sophomore year he moved off campus and, therefore, had to make a

greater effort to see friends. He stated:

> Freshman year I could just go outside and talk to people, there was no real effort.
>
> Sophomore year I had to make a real effort, which is something I was not used to.
>
> Through your first semester being in the halls if you step outside your room and
>
> look right or left there are people around. Sophomore year if you step outside of

your apartment and look right and left there is no one. (Brian KHI5, Personal

Communication, September 26, 2018)

Brian was not the only one to mention similar experiences to living in the halls and

socializing with friends. Ann, an Education major, also stated that she really enjoyed

being able to interact with peers at all hours of the day while living on campus. Moving

off campus limited her ability to socialize with friends. Both Brian and Ann were able to

make the best of their off-campus experience and create a routine that worked well for

them.

Participants who lived on campus also cited more academic stress than those who

lived off campus. They mentioned that time management was an issue because of trying

to maintain multiple roles. Some felt pressure to excel academically. Others were trying

to impress their parents, maintain work-life balance, and participate in extracurricular

activities. Those who lived off campus missed the easy access to academic resources.

Marie, a Psychology major, discussed missing the ability to walk to the library and print

documents when needed. She discussed that living off campus was not always

convenient. Marie stated:

If you live off campus you cannot just run down to the library to print something

or if there is something you need to look up that you can only look up in the

library. You definitely have to schedule your time around what you need to get

done for school before you go home. (Marie JPI9, Personal Communication,

September 24, 2018)

Ann, an Education major, also discussed that she missed living on campus for the same

reasons as Marie.

On-campus participants also mentioned more personal stress than those who lived off campus. They reported issues with significant others, family concerns, and general health issues. They were trying to manage numerous personal crises and maintain coursework at the same time. It was hard for some to find the proper balance between academic work and personal life. Conversely, Ann, an Education major who lived off campus, said she would not recommend it because it takes away from personal experiences. She explained that she was unprepared for simple responsibilities such as meal prepping, shopping for food, paying bills, and dealing with unexpected expenses. She indicated that she lost weight because she only ate one meal per day when she first moved off campus. She stated:

> I would definitely not recommend it to other freshman. I think it takes away a lot of the experience. When you are a freshman you really don't have a ton of time to think this stuff through. You think about living off-campus but you don't think a lot about the expenses that come with it. (Ann KMI4, Personal Communication, September 26, 2018)

She also mentioned feeling lonely because she was removed from her friends; she missed the camaraderie of the residence halls, and that added to her stress.

Research Question Two: Strategies and Coping Skills of Participants During Their Sophomore Year

Research question two explores coping strategies college juniors used to deal with stress during their sophomore years. (See Appendix E, Interview Protocol three, Item number 6.) The question also explores different resources participants used to cope with stress (See Appendix E, Interview Protocol three, item number 1, 2). The last part of the

question (See Appendix E, Interview Protocol three, Item number 9) also addresses the differences between on- and off-campus participants' coping strategies.

Participants described how they felt during stressful periods and how they reacted with coping strategies. The researcher linked research question two to the coping with perceived stressors aspect of the Cognitive Appraisal theory. Participants' primary and secondary responses were noted in this section for both positive and negative coping. Some participants engaged in primary appraisal by evaluating what type of event was occurring. They evaluated whether the event appeared significant and if it caused a threat, harm, or opportunity. Afterward, some of the participants engaged in secondary appraisal by selection of coping strategies. Participants employed both positive and negative coping strategies. Lastly, participants described the use of resources, which included peers, family, and faculty.

Positive Coping Strategies

Sixteen out of 18 participants discussed using positive coping strategies multiple times ($N = 60$). Analysis of the data reveals that four participants described high levels of positive coping strategies as sophomore students. Figure 4 shows the number of times each participant referenced positive coping.
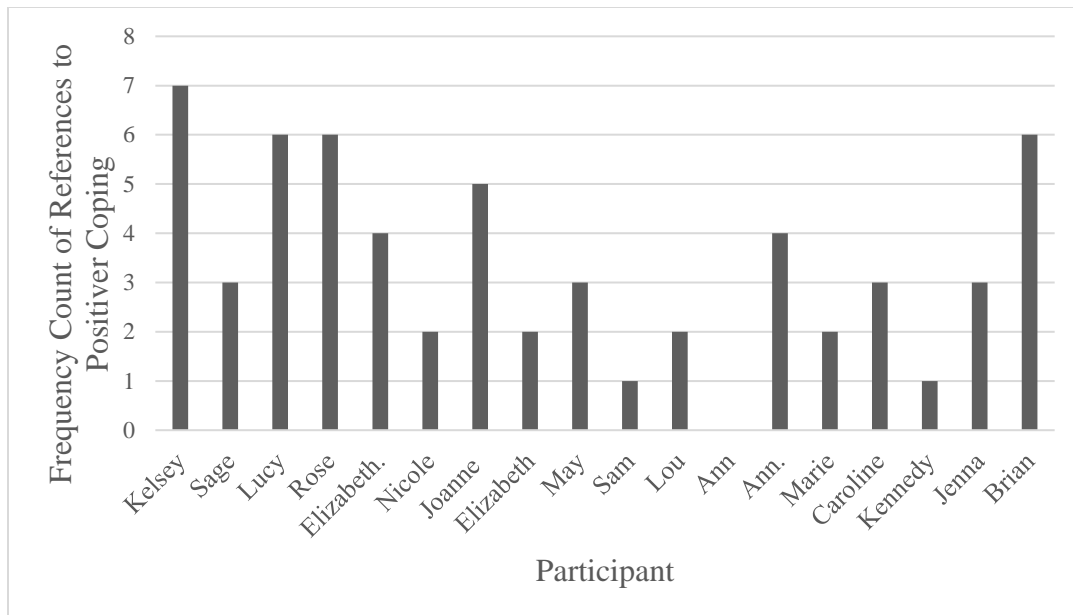
Figure 4. Frequency count of references to positive coping.

Kelsey (*n* = 7), Brian (*n* = 6), Lucy (*n* = 6), and Rose (*n* = 6) mentioned positive coping

most often. This section will include brief narratives that discuss each participant's

experiences in relation to positive coping.

Kelsey. Kelsey, an Education major and an on-campus student, reported that at

the beginning of her sophomore year she was stressed and anxious for various reasons

relating to academics (*n* = 1) and personal life (*n* = 4). Kelsey reported her stress level to

be seven out of ten. She was nervous about taking more than a full-time course load of

18 credits. Taking 18 credits caused constant studying, which led to exhaustion. She

reported that on most days she felt extremely tired and overwhelmed. She also felt

overwhelmed by trying to impress her parents with decent grades.

When Kelsey experienced stress, she would engage in primary appraisal first by

evaluating how detrimental the situation was for her. Next, she would engage in

secondary appraisal by finding positive ways of coping. She referenced positive coping

seven times (*n* = 7).

Kelsey discussed peer support as one of the most important aspects for positive coping ($n = 3$). She would spend time working out with friends at the campus recreation center. She mentioned that working out was one of the greatest forms of stress relief; she would use the breathing techniques she learned in yoga to cope and stay calm:

> I started to work out more regularly and eat better to feel better; I went to Yoga
> every week to spend time in the ARC with friends to help with stress. Spending
> time with friends was also helpful to eliminate stress. (Kelsey ABI1, Personal
> Communication, September 13, 2018)

She remained close to her peers throughout her sophomore year and acknowledged them in helping her work through her difficulties.

Outside of classwork and friends, Kelsey would also rely on her boyfriend as a constant support. During the interview when she discussed support from her boyfriend, she became emotional and started to cry. She credited his support as one of her most effective positive coping strategies. She described herself as shy and her boyfriend as helping her to integrate into clubs, activities, and new networks of friends. She expressed that without his support; she would not be as involved in campus life and would not have as many friends.

Family was also an important factor in helping her tackle whatever stressful experiences she encountered. She discussed family support twice ($n = 2$). Kelsey has a supportive family that she did not want to disappoint, so asking their advice was crucial to her success as a student. She would often call her parents and siblings, which would help her to calm her fears and work through her challenges.

Lastly, Kelsey discussed the importance of faculty relationships ($n = 3$). She

worked with international students and attended a few international trips with faculty

members in order to broaden her campus experience. She felt that this experience

provided many connections to others outside of her major. Participating in these

activities also helped her to branch out and meet new people while experiencing different

cultures. Since she is a very shy person, participation in these types of events was crucial

to her positive coping and campus experiences.

Brian. Brian, a Computing major and an off-campus student, expressed that he

had a difficult sophomore year for many reasons, including a bad break-up and lack of

campus support. Brian reported his stress level as eight out of ten. For Brian, breaking

up with his girlfriend was a horrible experience. He missed the constant support she

offered. Due to the break-up, he reported extreme overwhelm, inability to get out of bed,

and lack of class attendance. He felt extremely depressed on most days, which caused

him to earn failing grades in some of his classes. Due to the multiple issues he was

facing, he discussed personal stress ($n = 7$) and academic stress ($n = 4$) as major

difficulties during his sophomore year.

As a student of color, Brian had additional challenges with the counseling staff.

He engaged in primary appraisal of his situation and realized he needed counseling.

When he met with them, he discovered that he could not relate to the counseling staff.

He then immediately engaged in secondary appraisal and looked for online coping

resources. He used an application on his phone, which gave him a guide for positive self-

talk. Brian discussed positive coping multiple times ($n = 6$); he described the resources

he found on his own, and he engaged in positive self-talk. His coping strategies are reflected in the comments below:

> I just breathe and I try to think of it as a different way out. Like okay, maybe we are stressed right now and while those are valid feelings, it does not mean we are going to be stressed forever. I kind of see being stressed out as a good thing in a way because before stuff was bad it was good. (Brian KHI5, Personal Communication, September 25, 2018)

Brian often connected with his peers, but during this time distanced himself from everyone. He mentioned he would attend programs or club meetings and feel emotionally absent from what was happening in the room. He was also angry with his peers because they did not notice a change in his personality and reach out to help him. Ultimately, Brian was able to overcome his challenges just by working through these difficult experiences and reconnecting with peers.

Brian did not often connect with his family. Both of his parents worked full time, and he did not want to bother them with his personal issues. He mentioned that his dad worked more than 50 hours per week to make ends meet; therefore, when he came home from work he wanted to relax. For these reasons, Brian felt he should be able to handle personal issues on his own and not place extra burdens on his parents.

Although Brian's sophomore year was stressful, he built positive connections with faculty who helped him work through his concerns. He mentioned one faculty member in particular; she taught an African American History course. At first, he mentioned being concerned about her ability to teach a course about African-Americans because she is Caucasian. After the first week of class, he described how he changed his

mind and was able to relate to this faculty member. This professor, like many others, made a positive impact on his life.

Lucy. Lucy, an Environmental Studies major and an on-campus student, discussed stress and anxiety surrounding academic and personal issues. She discussed academic stress ten times ($n = 10$) and personal stress three times ($n = 3$). She also reported her stress to be an eight out of ten. Initially, she failed a few courses and her GPA went down. She explained she had to work even harder to get her GPA back up to an acceptable standard. She would spend hours studying and working to improve her grades; she hated earning anything other than an "A." She also changed her major; which caused more stress:

> I switched to environmental studies from environmental science. Therefore, this
> is my major now and has no math. It is also directly related to human aspects of
> sustainability and things. Therefore, yeah, the first semester I took pre-calculus
> and chemistry and those were not my friends at all; no matter how hard I tried, I
> just could not grasp the material. (Lucy COI16, Personal Communication,
> September 26, 2018)

In the midst of her academic stress, Lucy also had many personal stressors during her sophomore year. Her boyfriend borrowed money and overdosed on heroin. She felt responsible for what happened to him.

Despite her many challenges, Lucy reported positive coping six times ($n = 6$). When she received information that her boyfriend had an overdose, she engaged in primary appraisal and immediately felt overwhelmed with emotion. She then engaged in secondary appraisal and looked for positive coping techniques to assist her; these

included meditation and time with family. She would also read for fun and hang out with her animals.

Lucy had many supportive peers. She discussed peer support four times ($n = 4$). Her roommate was largely supportive and always listened to her concerns. She supported Lucy through her darkest moments. She also reported being able to rely on her roommate for stress relief and positive social interaction. She mentioned other helpful friends she could rely on for support. During her down time, she would take time to go off campus for stress relief; she and her friends would visit the local mall to shop and have dinner.

Lucy described positive family support on two occasions ($n = 2$). She felt a high level of support from her entire family. She mentioned calling her mom multiple times per day for support. She also reported talking to extended family as needed like siblings, aunts, uncles, and her grandmother. Lucy would also FaceTime her mom so she could see her cat. She reported this to be extremely helpful during intense periods.

Lastly, Lucy also discussed faculty support during her sophomore year ($n = 2$). She changed her major after failing a few courses. She reported that her faculty advisor was supportive; he helped her decide on a different path and mapped out a plan for different courses. He also helped her to balance her schedule so it was more manageable. She was thankful for the support that faculty gave her and enjoys her new major.

Rose. Rose, an Education major and an on-campus student, reported academic stress surrounding the fieldwork she was required to complete for her major. Rose reported her stress level at a seven out of ten. She discussed academic stress once. In addition to her academic work she had to leave campus to visit different schools to complete observation hours. At times, this was overwhelming to her.

Rose discussed positive coping six times ($n = 6$). She would engage in primary appraisal to understand her stress and then secondary appraisal to decide on coping strategies. She was able to evaluate her stress appropriately and take time to decompress. Rose would isolate herself in a positive manner; she felt alone time was a healthy way for her to recharge.

Rose also discussed peer support six times ($n = 6$). She felt supported by others in her major as well as her friends and roommates. She felt that her peers in the Education Department were extremely helpful and supportive. She also mentioned being very close with her roommates and feeling as if she could confide in them during difficult times. She explained that when she would stress about school, she would take time to decompress with her roommates. Overall, Rose felt supported by those around her; she was able to utilize the support as part of her positive coping strategies.

She also discussed family support three times ($n = 3$). Rose reported that she could connect with her family about her major because they understood what she was experiencing. She would call home to discuss her classes and schoolwork with her mom and sister, who were teachers. She would also call home every few days to check-in with her family and catch up on anything she missed while at school. Rose reported that her family is supportive of her and always pushes her to do the best she can. She felt very encouraged and supported.

Rose also discussed faculty support three times ($n = 3$). She mentioned talking to her advisors and faculty as needed. She felt comfortable emailing or calling them to ask questions about course work and assignments. She also discussed visiting office hours

and asking questions during class. Rose rarely missed class; she felt this helped her better connect with faculty.

Negative Coping Strategies

Six participants referenced negative coping multiple times ($N = 11$). These references are related to isolation from peers, not turning in academic work, and avoiding asking for help when needed. Participants engaged in primary and secondary appraisal to decipher stressors and evaluate resources to overcome stress.

Although participants discussed negative coping, the data did not reveal extremely damaging or self- destructive behaviors. Figure 5 shows the number of times participants referenced negative coping. Though the coping strategies employed were not ideal, they were not permanent fixtures in participants' lives. Of the six participants who mentioned negative coping, Joanne ($n = 3$), Ann ($n = 3$), and Sam ($n = 2$) mentioned it most often. The negative coping patterns discussed by all three participants were very similar. They would isolate themselves and not engage in proper self-care.
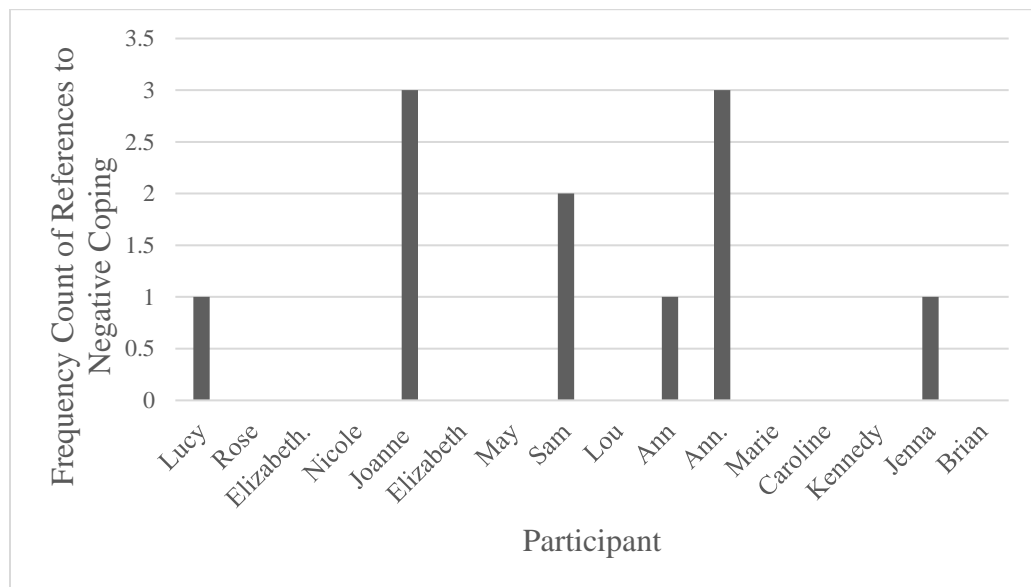
Figure 5. Frequency count of references to negative coping.

Joanne. Joanne, a Music major and an off-campus student, reported her stress score as ten; she even joked by asking if she could rate her stress higher than the scale provided. She was not eating, sleeping, or socializing with peers due to her busy schedule. She would go home, take a shower, and go right to bed. She reported that her stress was due to lack of time and the demands of her major. Her planner was so full because of all her academic demands, there was no more room to write; therefore, she would slack on studying. Joanne discussed negative coping three times ($n = 3$). She said, "My bad coping strategies were busying myself with everything around me so I did not have to actually think about what was wrong. That was my negative ways of coping" (Joanne ASI2, Personal Communication, September 21, 2018). Joanne engaged in primary appraisal by realizing the level of stress she was experiencing; she understood that she was in a negative and unhealthy pattern that was affecting her health in an adverse manner.

She then engaged in secondary appraisal by using campus resources to help her cope in a healthy manner; she used counseling services and the health center for help with her mental health. The health center prescribed anti-anxiety medications; she also took advantage of counseling services. She reported both resources to be extremely helpful, and she was able to get back on track mentally.

Ann. Ann, a Marketing major and off-campus student, reported her stress at an eight out of ten. She explained that she did not feel properly connected to resources, peers, or faculty because of her hectic schedule. She felt isolated because she would not have time for anything other than soccer and schoolwork. She was also adjusting to life off campus; she was not used to living alone and missed the availability of building staff.

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She was in a continuous cycle of isolation for many months. Ann realized that she was coping negatively with the stressors in her environment:

> I was just waking up, going to class, and working out for soccer. We also have soccer workouts that I had to do separately. Then I would wake up, go to class, go to soccer, come home, eat dinner, do homework, and sleep. That is what I did for like a week straight. I started going completely crazy and I needed social interaction. I needed to put stuff on the back burner. I realized that at one point it hit me. I needed to break out of this cycle. It is a good thing to be structured and good thing to be, like, academically positive, but I realized I needed to relax at some point. It is like your brain and your body needs it. (Ann KDI6, Personal Communication, September 18, 2018)

Ann also discussed negative coping three times ($n = 3$). Her comment above illustrates how she realized the level of stress she was experiencing; she understood that it was detrimental to her health. Due to her involvement in athletics, she did not have time for other activities. She eventually discovered that she needed to break out of her negative habits and socialize with friends. Through secondary appraisal, she began relying on her friends as a support network. She also relied on her mother for support; she reported this to be extremely helpful in working through her issues. It took her many months to adjust and break out of her negative habits.

Sam. Sam, a Recreation Therapy major and an off-campus student, also mentioned similar coping tactics as Joanne and Ann ($n = 2$). She reported her stress level at a nine out of ten. Sam would isolate herself to work on assignments or just to be alone. Academics and involvement in social organizations were her biggest stressors. Sam did

not want to ask for help unless necessary. In the comment that follows, she describes

how she would withdraw from everyone around her: "I basically did not talk to anyone

unless it was necessary, especially my roommates. I almost went two weeks without

talking to anyone. I also went a couple of weeks without speaking to my best friend"

(Sam KRI15, Personal Communication, September 27, 2018).

During her stressful periods, Sam would engage in primary appraisal by trying to

understand what stressful encounters were occurring. She then became aware that she

was blocking the important people out of her life. She would then engage in secondary

appraisal, eventually break out of this cycle of negativity, and communicate with those

around her. It just took her time to adjust and cope with the demands of her life.

Coping by Housing Location

Data were analyzed to determine if there was a difference in the way participants

coped based on housing location. Participants who lived on campus discussed the

convenience of housing and feeling more connected to campus resources to assist with

coping. Participants were closer to peers who were able to meet for homework or just to

socialize. They were able to walk to class or to the library to study. They could also

sleep in longer because they did not have to worry about finding a parking space. Those

who lived off campus had to find ways to connect with peers since they were not living

close to friends. They also had to worry about other responsibilities like buying groceries

and cooking, which took time and energy away from academics, social outlets, and

personal lives. Eventually those who lived off campus were able to adjust, but initially

there was a difficult transition period.

Table 6 shows on- and off-campus participants' stress levels coupled with their default coping strategies, the type they chose most often. Two interesting findings emerged with participants who reported both high and low stress; they were both able to cope positively. All of the off-campus participants reported positive coping, but there was variability in terms of how on-campus participants coped with stress.

Table 6

Characteristics of Interviewees Organized by Stress, Coping, and Housing

Housing	Interviewee	Age	Major	Reported Stress Level	Coping Method
On-campus	ABI1, Kelsey	21	Education	8	Positive
	ANI2, Sage	21	Biology	6	Positive
	COI16, Lucy	21	Environmental Studies	6	Positive
	AWI7, Rose	20	Education	2	Positive
	HPI4, Elizabeth	20	Communications	7	Positive
	RDI8, Nicole	21	Education	10	Positive
	ASI9, Joanne	21	Music Therapy	10	Negative
	KRI10, Elizabeth	20	Education	7	Positive
	CPI12, May	21	Exercise Science	5	Positive
	KRI13, Sam	20	Recreation Therapy	9	Negative
	SBI14, Lou	20	Education	7	Positive
	KMI3, Ann	20	Education	8	Negative
Off- campus	KDI5, Ann	20	Marketing	8	Negative
	JPI6, Marie	19	Psychology	7	Positive
	HBI11, Caroline	20	Education	3	Positive
	MVI15, Kennedy	20	Education	6	Positive
	HCI17, Jenna	20	Hospitality	10	Positive
	KHI18, Brian	20	Computing	8	Positive

Research Question Three: Resources Used by Participants to Cope

Research question three explores the support college juniors received or would have liked to receive from faculty, family, and friends during their sophomore year. (See Appendix E, Interview Protocol three, Item number 6, 7, 8.) Research question three is linked to the resources aspect of the theoretical framework.

Participants attributed their success during their sophomore year to peers, family, and faculty support. Sixteen participants referenced peer support ($N = 61$), and family support ($N = 38$). Similarly, 15 participants described how they cherished family support multiple times ($N = 38$). Participants spent time with friends during stressful periods, went to faculty office hours when they needed help with course work, and contacted family members during difficult times.

Table 7 shows participants' use of resources organized by housing location. On-campus participants discussed use of resources more often than off-campus participants did. On-campus participants referenced peer support 11 more times, faculty support 10 more times, and family support four more times than those who lived off campus.

Table 7

Participants' Use of Resources Organized by Housing Location

	On-Campus	Off- Campus
Peer Support	36	25
Faculty Support	24	14
Family Support	22	16

Off-campus students struggled with many factors, including making regular contact with friends. Participants were accustomed to walking down the hall to visit a friend; once they moved off campus, they had to arrange meetings in advance. Those who lived on campus valued the friendships they made and enjoyed being in close proximity to their friends. Some who moved off campus reported losing touch with friends. They often missed the convenience of campus life.

Off-campus students also struggled to make regular contact with faculty. In general, it was more difficult to utilize campus resources for those who moved off campus. They did not want to make several trips to campus because of the difficult parking situations. Therefore, they would avoid coming back to campus unless necessary. A few participants discussed living off campus and not having access to transportation, so they would have to walk a distance to access campus resources. In some cases, this caused a strain on student relationships with faculty. This also caused students to feel disconnected from campus life.

Those who lived off campus reported more independence than those who lived on campus. Some of the participants who lived off campus stated they did not have close connections with family; they chose to separate from family once they came to college. One participant explained that she liked her freedom away from home and felt comfortable talking to her peers instead of family. Another participant did not want to bother his family with his concerns; he said they were working hard to support him while in college.

Peers Support

The number of times participants mentioned peer support shows the importance of peer relationships. Participants mentioned their peers were extremely helpful in navigating through difficult courses, academics, and personal crises. Seventeen out of 18 participants mentioned friends' support multiple times ($N = 68$). Figure 6 shows that Rose ($n = 6$), Ann ($n = 8$), Sam ($n = 5$), Caroline ($n = 5$), and Kennedy ($n = 5$) discussed peer support most often. Lou explained that she did not make friends during her sophomore year because she was focused on her academics.
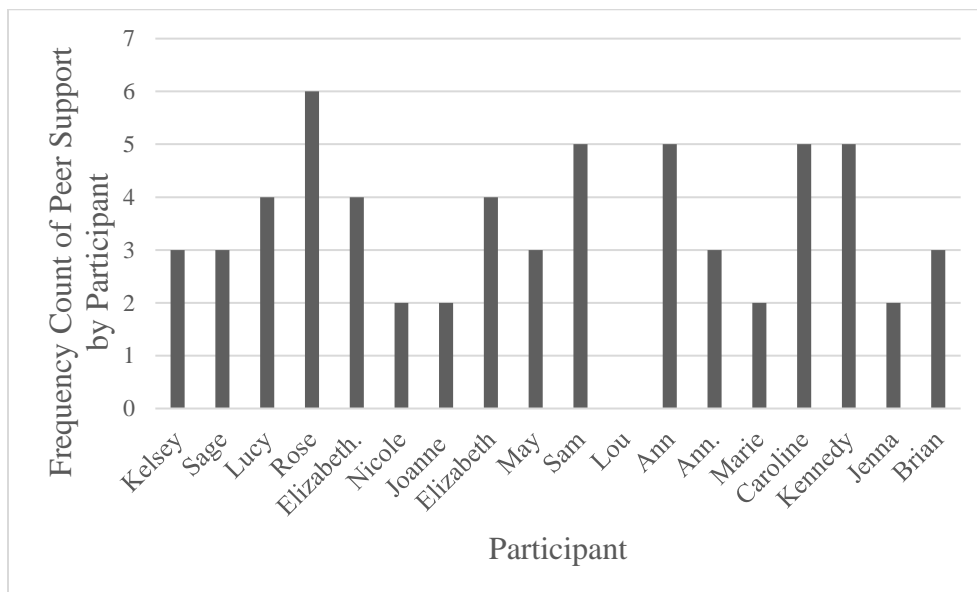
Figure 6. Frequency count of peer support by participant.

The four Education majors – Rose ($n = 6$), Ann ($n = 8$), Caroline ($n = 5$), and Kennedy ($n = 5$) – and one Recreation Therapy major, Sam ($n = 5$), elaborated on peer support more than others. Rose, an Education major, relied on friends in the Education Department to assist her with requirements of the major. She was overwhelmed by how to manage the requirements of becoming a teacher. She appreciated the support from older peers:

I would work a lot with the people in my major on long-term projects. I would be

at my academic buildings a lot during my day, so I connected with other people

who are going through the same thing and I was talking a lot to those in the

education club. Two girls were older than I was and they would help prepare me

for what you need to do for teacher candidacy. (Rose AWI10, Personal

Communication, September 21, 2018)

These participants indicated that they felt closely connected to their peers in their majors;

they spent time working on projects and assignments together.

Sam (Recreation Therapy) was the other participant who discussed peer support

often. She and Ann (Education) participated in Bible study and connected with peers

who had similar interests. Ann described the importance of finding friends with the same

values and morals:

It definitely helps having that core group of people that like we all believe in, like,

the same thing. So knowing where their values are. It definitely helped with

making friends and. like, happening sometimes during the week and thinking

about something other than schoolwork all the time. (Ann KMI4, Personal

Communication, September 18, 2018)

Many others also discussed peer support and how it helped enhance their

sophomore year. Sage discussed the invaluable advice from her friends during her

sophomore year. She was happy to have older friends who already knew how to navigate

their sophomore year:

I do not know how people do it without having friends that are older. Last year, I

do not know if I would have made it through my sophomore year without having

my friends that are juniors because they stayed there to help me. I was just like

completely overwhelmed and everything. Even now, if I ever stumble, I would

go and talk to them, but especially last year I think that would be very helpful for

people to make older friends. I always tell people to make friends that are older

than you and your classes. Find those upperclassmen in your major. (Sage

ANI13, Personal Communication, September 19, 2018)

Like Sage, Elizabeth, a Communication major, had a large support network of

friends who helped her navigate difficult times. She stressed how important her

friendships were by explaining, "Whenever I am really stressed out, I have such great

friends and such great family, and they are always there for me during those times"

(Elizabeth HPI8, Personal Communication, September 20, 2018). She went on to discuss

how peer relationships can be mutually beneficial:

Well actually, I have another person, my friend Evan; we started a nonprofit

together last year. He definitely influenced me; he had a good impact on my

social life. I had impacts on his life too. He went through a lot of anxiety and

depression, like through high school and little did I know, during my freshman

and even the beginning of my sophomore year that I really helped him overcome

that without even knowing that he had it just because I was always a nice person

to him and so positive. (Elizabeth HPI8, Personal Communication, September 20,

2018)

Seventeen out of 18 participants connected with their peers regularly. Their time

with friends gave them relief from stressful situations. Some would spend time on

campus eating and watching movies in the residence halls, or they would leave campus

for the day and spend time shopping at local stores.

Faculty Support

Faculty support was also important to many of the participants. Fifteen out of 18

participants discussed faculty support numerous times ($N = 38$). They reached out to the

faculty by attending office hours, emailing to ask for assistance, or simply passing by

them in a hallway and asking a question. They mentioned inspirational faculty by name.

Eight out of 18 participants mentioned one faculty member from the Education

Department multiple times. This faculty member was supportive, inspirational, and

helpful. They felt they could contact her when they had questions or concerns.

Elizabeth, an Education major, said:

> She was my mentor and so I worked with her on different projects. I continue to
>
> work with her at open houses for the department. She is that professor that I
>
> always go to. It is nice having an education professor who has been through
>
> everything and with her experience, she knows the process, and she knows
>
> everything that goes on. (Elizabeth KRI12, Personal Communication, September
>
> 21, 2018)

Other participants explained they admired this faculty member for her hard work and

willingness to help students.

Elizabeth, a Communications major, was heavily involved with her academic

department and worked closely with several faculty members. In the comment below,

she describes the nature of her involvement with the faculty in the Communication

Department:

It was more like a friendship but not like too much of a friendship. Then you feel

comfortable going to them if you need help with your academics or with anything

in your field. Even like helping you with your resume. If you can make that

close connection with your faculty, I think it is important. (Elizabeth HPI8,

Personal Communication, September 20, 2018)

Joanne, a Music major, also spoke positively about a faculty member in the Music

Department. She mentioned feeling discouraged and wanting to quit, but this particular

faculty member was able to assist in helping her to overcome the difficult times. She

describes the attributes she admired and the manner in which he influenced students in

the comment below:

He was my advisor my first year in clinical, and he is one of my professors, so I

was having a lot of music therapy classes. I just really enjoyed the way he treats

students and he does it in a way that does not make feel a power differential

between the professors and students. He will also push you because he knows

what you are capable of, but he does it in a way to not stress you out. (Joanne

ASI2, Personal Communication, September 26, 2018)

Jenna, a Hospitality major, also connected with the faculty in her department. She

talked about how comfortable she felt attending office hours to discuss her difficulties

with one faculty member:

He never made me feel stupid for asking a question and he is just so passionate

about what he does. If he saw someone with a little bit of passion, he would help

you in any way he could. He knew I was working a lot, so even with certain

classes he was supportive. I went to him at one point and I was failing a class the

beginning of my sophomore year I ended up turning around. I end up getting a B

in it, but I went to him and I said, I do not think I am going to pass it. He said;

just pass the class it does not matter what you get in it. (Jenna HCI8, Personal

Communication, September 26, 2018)

Participants like Joanne (Music major), Elizabeth (Education major), and Jenna

(Hospitality major) referenced faculty by name who were important to their success.

Others did not name individuals; instead, they frequently discussed the importance of

faculty relationships and bonding with the academic departments to ensure success. They

explained that they felt comfortable asking for assistance from faculty and emphasized

that faculty were pivotal to their success. Overall, faculty relationships were extremely

important to the participants of this study.

Family Support

Participants described the importance of family support during their sophomore

year. Sixteen participants referenced family support numerous times ($N = 38$). They had

several family members, including parents and extended family they could rely on. The

majority discussed calling home for different reasons. Some participants like Rose, an

Education major, mentioned being on a similar career path as family members, so she

could call home and talk to her mom or sister about her education classes.

Participants also mentioned that they could call family to talk about their day or to

discuss difficult issues that were occurring. Sage, a Biology major, mentioned calling

home to chat with her grandparents and simply talk about her day. Lucy, an

Environmental Studies major, mentioned her closeness with her parents and extended

family. She would use them as a support system when needed. Ann, a Marketing major,

explained needing to call her mom constantly. She would ask her mom for advice. She mentioned that she was an only child to her mom, but she had stepsiblings; therefore, her relationship with her mom was very important to her. She stated, "I talk to my mom about everything. I call her all the time. When soccer season is over, I usually meet her for lunch once per week; this helps me de-stress" (Ann KDI6, Personal Communication, September 26, 2018).

Caroline, an Education major, described the type of support each parent gave her. Her dad was a little more difficult on her academically, while her mom was supportive. Caroline did feel pressure from her father to do well. She stated:

My dad has always been a little tougher with schooling. Then my mom said 'you tried, and that is what matters most.' However, my dad pushed me to get good grades. I think he instilled some values on me, which is why I am always keeping up with work and always having a good relationship with faculty. (Caroline HBI11, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

Caroline also described how her mom wanted her to make friends and be social while excelling academically. She had different types of support from both parents; she was thankful for the support and help both parents gave her. She stated:

For the social aspect is probably my mom. She always told me, 'yeah, school is important, but, like, make sure you have time for yourself and to have fun when you can.' She is kind of like more like the laid-back parent and she always tries to tell me that I worry too much. She always tells me 'you are always are doing too much, just relax,' and so she brings me down a little bit. (Caroline HBI11, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

Two participants, Brian (Computing) and Joanne (Music) did not describe family as a support. Brian reported that his parents were working full time jobs to help him through college, so he did not want to bother them with his issues. Joanne did not want to elaborate on her family life; she did mention enjoying being away from home and exercising her independence. Both described close faculty and peer relationships. They seemed to enjoy their independence and were excited to be away from home.

Theoretical Analysis

The section is organized by the three elements of Folkman and Lazarus' (1985) theoretical framework of Cognitive Appraisal Theory: *primary*, or perception of and reactions to stressors in the environment; *secondary*, coping with the perceived stressors and resources; and *resources* students use to cope with the perceived stressors. Each of the 18 participants engaged in primary and secondary appraisal differently. Entering into the sophomore year was a difficult transition for some; therefore, different expectations caused participants to feel overwhelmed and anxious. Each of the research questions and sub-questions is connected to different aspects of the theory. Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1985) was used for both instrument design and data analysis. Table 8 outlines the themes and related quotes that emerged using Cognitive Appraisal Theory.

Table 8

Themes and Quotes Related to Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Cognitive Appraisal Theory	Themes Within Each Factor	Illustrative Quotes
Primary: Perception and reactions to stressors in the environment.	The majority were overwhelmed and stressed by academics, transitional stress, and planning.

Several participants experienced depression and anxiety. Some had to visit the health center or used counseling services. | Classes were harder during the sophomore year and classes were starting to pick up (Caroline HBI11, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018)

It was pretty rough. I was pretty much stressed all the time and I was anticipating what was coming down the road with course work (Marie JPI9, Personal Communication, September 19, 2018). |
| Secondary: Coping with the perceived stressors. | Positive coping: exercise, academic planning, campus involvement.

Negative coping: isolation from friends and campus in an unhealthy manner. | … meditating, reading, taking long showers, and going home to see my animals (Lucy COI12, Personal Communication, September 26, 2018).

… writing stuff down and seeing it on paper helps me a lot (Caroline HBI11, Personal Communication, September 25, 2018). |
| Resources: Resources students use to copy with perceived stressors. | Influential people: faculty, friends, and family.

Campus services: recreation center, health center, and counseling services. | I always go and see my professors and go to their office hours for help (Ann KDI6, Personal Communication, September 19, 2018).

I call my parents every few days just to catch up, we have an hour-long phone conversation (Rose AWI10, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018). |

Table 8 shows that there are different aspects to primary appraisal that may help a person react to environmental stressors. One part of primary appraisal is determining if people perceive harm, threat, or challenge; how significant the stressors are; and if their academic, personal, and/or social lives are impacted by what is occurring. Participants described primary appraisal when describing their level of stress specific to the events

during their sophomore year. They reported stress as high (7-10), moderate (4-6), or low (1-3) during their sophomore year.

Participants also engaged in secondary appraisal by using coping strategies. This aspect of appraisal still looks at threat level to the student and if there is harm, threat, or challenge. Once threat level is decided, individuals can then choose appropriate coping. Some participants discussed both positive and negative coping. Positive coping was reported as exercise, healthy eating, and calling home for support. Negative coping was reported as periods of isolation that lasted for several weeks.

Participants used a variety of resources for coping. They referenced peers, influential faculty, and family as supports. They reported that the influential people in their lives were helpful in tolerating and eradicating stress. They also reported involvement in campus activities as a resource to assist with coping. Participants proved to be resourceful in their coping abilities.

Summary

This study uses Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1985) to shape the research questions and related sub-questions. This chapter presented the data collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 students at one rural mid-size institution. Although each participant had diverse experiences during the sophomore year, some common themes emerged. Representative quotes illustrate the themes of the study, which emerged from the data, to build a better representation of the interviews conducted.

Participants reported stress during the sophomore year, explaining it was the hardest year academically, socially, and personally. Several participants rated their stress level as high as seven out of ten. Many reported that living on campus was the best

choice because they were close to campus resources like the dining halls, library, and their friends. The few who moved off campus had a difficult period of adjustment because they had limited access to certain resources.

Participants had many different sophomore experiences, both positive and negative. Most attribute their overall success to their faculty, families, friends, campus involvement, and campus resources. Participants were also heavily involved in numerous clubs, organizations, and Greek life. Some participants discussed enhanced educational experiences such as studying abroad with faculty. Others reported spending time with faculty outside of the classroom and working on various academic events. Specific faculty were also mentioned to be particularly supportive for students during the sophomore year. Overall, participants reported feeling confident and comfortable while approaching faculty. Chapter five presents a list of the findings and a discussion of recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though Mervin Freedman coined the term "sophomore slump" more than 50 years ago in 1956 and described it to be a time when college students were least satisfied, this area remains under-researched. More than two decades later, Margolis (1976) and Furr and Gannaway (1982) defined the sophomore year as a largely unsatisfying time in a student's life for various reasons related to academics, personal, and social experiences. In 2010, Hunter et al. encouraged higher education institutions to study the sophomore population and identify ways to support these students. In response to this call for research, this study describes sophomore students' experiences at a small rural university. This chapter begins with an overview of the study followed by a list of key findings. The researcher then presents a discussion of findings, limitations, challenges, and lessons learned. This chapter also presents recommendations for administrators, faculty, and students.

Overview of the Study

This study was conducted to further understand students' perception of stress during the sophomore year at one rural institution in Pennsylvania. Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1985) was used to construct the three guiding research questions and sub-questions presented, along with the interview protocol. Listed below are the central research questions that guide the study:

RQ 1. How do college juniors describe their stress level, contributing factors, and its influence on their (academic, personal, and social) performance during their sophomore year?

1a. Were college juniors stressed as sophomores?

1b. What was sophomore student stress like?

1c. What factors contributed to their levels of stress as sophomores?

1d. How did sophomore student stress contribute to (academic, personal, and social)

performance?

1e. Was there an academic, personal, or social difference in the stress experienced

by sophomores on-campus versus off-campus students' stress?

RQ 2. What strategies or coping strategies did college juniors employ during their

sophomore year?

2a. As sophomores, how did they draw on academic, personal, and social

resources to cope with their stress?

2b. Was there a difference in the coping strategies of sophomore on-campus

students versus off-campus students' coping strategies?

RQ 3. What support did they receive during their sophomore year?

3a. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on family support?

3b. How did they, as sophomore students, draw on peer support?

3c. How did they, as sophomore students, feel supported by faculty and staff at

the university?

The researcher conducted three semi-structured interviews with each of the 18

participants in order to understand sophomore students' perception of stress during their

sophomore year. The researcher used Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1985) along with

qualitative phenomenological methods to gain insight into participants' experiences.

Many common concerns of sophomore students were identified through the study. In the

sections that follow, the researcher presents the key findings of the study, and a discussion of findings and recommendations.

List of Key Findings

Guided by the phenomenological approach and Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1985), the following key findings resulted from the study:

1. Participants reported difficulty with the transition to sophomore year.

2. For this study, "high stress" was operationalized as a self-reported score between seven and ten, "moderate stress" was operationalized as a score between four and six, and "low stress" was operationalized as a score between one and three. Of the 18 participants, 14 reported high stress, four reported moderate stress, and two reported low stress.

3. The stress participants experienced during the sophomore year stemmed primarily from anxiety related to academics, feeling like they did not fit in, and the belief that they did not have the support they needed. Participants reported academic stress as difficult course work and higher faculty expectations.

4. Participants identified personal stress that included break-ups, medical issues, and family problems.

5. Participants reported social stress resulted from not having enough time with their friends.

6. On-campus participants referenced academic, personal, and social stress many more times than their peers who lived off campus.

7. Of the 18 participants, one on-campus and three off-campus students experienced depression and had to seek medical assistance; participants reported using health

services ($n = 3$), counseling services ($n = 1$), and disability services for assistance ($n = 1$). This information was volunteered by participants during the interview process.

8. Participants reported missing the extra layer of support they experienced in freshman year; they also reported feeling like there were no programs provided for the needs of sophomores. Participants also missed the novelty that comes with being a college student for the first time.

9. Participants who lived on campus enjoyed being close to peers, easy accessibility of on-campus resources, easy access to faculty, and not having to fight for parking. On-campus participants made many more references to having easy access to campus resources the use of campus resources such as counseling, health services, dining, and the library.

10. Off-campus participants described how they missed quick and easy access to campus resources such as peers, faculty, and campus services.

11. Of the 18 participants, 16 referenced positive coping; they would meditate, exercise, read, call home, and hang out with friends to cope with stress.

12. Of the 18 participants, only six discussed negative coping; they would isolate themselves and not ask for help when they were overwhelmed.

13. There does not appear to be any relationship between participants' reported level of stress and the type of coping methods they chose to employ.

14. All of the off-campus participants reported positive coping, but there was variability in terms of how on-campus participants coped; on-campus participants demonstrated both low and high stress but were able to cope in a positive manner.

15. Seventeen out of 18 participants discussed peer support; participants relied on friends for support by spending time off campus, having someone to talk to in times of stress, and for general companionship.

16. Of the 18 participants, 15 relied a great deal on family. Some participants reported calling home often to talk with parents and extended family. Others reported travelling home on weekends to spend time with parents and siblings. Two participants reported not spending a great deal of time with family; they enjoyed their independence.

17. Students who need counseling services may not use university-provided services because they do not feel welcome by counseling personnel. This may be especially true for students of color at predominantly white institutions, as was the case with the sole African-American participant in this study.

18. Fifteen out of 18 participants reported closely connecting with faculty members. Participants stated that visiting faculty office hours to discuss academic concerns was very helpful; they also felt comfortable approaching faculty outside of office hours to discuss academic concerns.

Discussion of Findings

The keys to student success include complexities far beyond student ability and enthusiasm; many other influences such as stress, connectedness to the university, and student support come into play (Hunter at al., 2010). Sophomore year is a monumental year, with many important decision points taking place including course of study, living arrangements, and campus involvement. Focusing on one population of students, such as sophomores, encompasses many challenges and major difficulties (Hunter et al., 2010).

This section presents a discussion of the findings listed above, organized in the following sections: Factors that Contribute to Sophomore Stress and Strategies of Coping and Use of Resources.

Factors That Contribute to Sophomore Student Stress

Towbes and Cohen (1996) find that different types of stress are likely to occur because of the transitional nature of college. This global issue continues to grow each year. In a later study, Westefeld et al. (2005) find that students are reporting significant levels of stress, which negatively affects the way students perform academically, personally, and socially. In 2018 the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that one in four young adults under the age of 24 have a diagnosable mental health disorder, and quite often students mention depression and anxiety as the leading barriers to their success in college. Colleges and universities spend significant amounts of time and resources planning for first-year students; this programming should occur with other populations who are experiencing more intense concerns (Hunter et al., 2010).

Misra, Mckean, West, and Russo (2000) find that college students experience high stress each semester due to academic obligations, financial stresses, and absence of time management skills. Hunter et al. (2010) explain that the so-called sophomore slump is not a regression from first-year academic and personal issues. Rather, it is a multi-faceted problem including academic issues, disengagement, dissatisfaction with college, career indecision, and developmental confusion. In this study, participants identified stress for various reasons relating to academics, personal, and social issues. Consistent with the literature, the majority of participants in this study rated their stress between seven and ten on a scale of ten. Academic stress during the sophomore year appears to be

the primary reason for elevated stress levels; students attribute this stress to difficult courses and higher faculty expectations. None of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with college career indecision or financial pressures. However, there was evidence of developmental confusion relating to academic and personal concerns. Participants did not cite social stress often

The findings in this study mirror those of Misra, et al. (2000) and Beiter, Nash, McCrady, Linscomb, Clarahan and Sammut (2015); both studies find that students experience similar symptoms during difficult periods of academic adjustment. These symptoms include the perception that the pressure was higher compared to the freshman year. Students were overwhelmed by the amount of academic work assigned, coupled with lack of understanding of course materials. Participants reported not being fully prepared for what to expect when entering their sophomore year, and, after the year began, they were unhappily surprised as the expectations kept getting higher.

Macan, Shanani, Dipboye, and Phillips (1990) several decades ago found that college students become overwhelmed in trying to keep up with academic work, deadlines, jobs, and extracurricular activities. It appears that these challenges continue to prevail exponentially with students' time management skills. Participants in this study reported that they were occasionally too busy to complete all requirements; they missed important deadlines because they had to prioritize competing demands. This, too, had a cumulative effect on academic performance. Participants also reported missing classes to work on other assignments.

Among the personal concerns that affect sophomores are personal relationships, family issues, and lack of purpose (Hunter et al., 2010). Personal stress is felt by many

students, especially the sophomore population, who are in constant turmoil. Pattengale (2000) found that students may also be at odds with parents over classes, grades, and work schedules. Participants articulated similar personal challenges; they experienced relationship issues and tried to impress parents with decent grades. Some struggled with medical concerns, which hindered their success. Despite the challenges, none of the participants felt inclined to leave the university.

Hunter et al. (2010) explains that social integration is an important component to student satisfaction, persistence, and student development. Positive peer support was one of the most discussed topics; those who cited social stress stated that it did not have to do with dissatisfaction with peers or arguments among friends. Hunter et al. (2010) reported that peer satisfaction continues to be a strong predictor of overall student satisfaction. Many of the students who discussed social stress were concerned about not being able to spend enough time with friends. They reported that positive social relationships helped them to focus on their sophomore year experience in a more meaningful way.

When examining the broader picture of college students and housing concerns, many issues have been cited over a period of years. Colleges and universities across the nation have been adding more expensive housing units to accommodate students in response to studies showing that housing plays a crucial role in student success. Generally, students who live on campus are more successful and persist to graduation. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) find that residential students also have slightly better perceptive growth and develop intellectually faster than their peers. Similarly, Lopez Turley and Wodtke (2010) observe that living on campus promotes desirable outcomes. This study, however, yielded different results. On-campus participants referenced

academic, personal, and social stress many more times than those who lived off campus. Participants on campus explained that stress was higher due to feeling pressure to excel, dealing with medical issues, and not having enough time to maintain multiple roles and friendships simultaneously. Although on-campus participants described stressors more fully, they appreciated access to campus resources and their peers. This could be attributed to the fact that participants hailed from small rural towns.

Beiter et al. (2015) report that most students cite higher stress in all facets of student life while residing off campus. A similar pattern was noted here; participants who lived off-campus as sophomores expressed sentiments about missing campus life and the conveniences they experienced when living on campus. They were not yet prepared for the independence that had to be immediately employed upon moving off campus. They also discussed missing living next to their friends and floor mates.

Strategies of Coping and Use of Resources

Hunter et al. (2010) find that there is an absence of scholarship on how sophomores handle periods of stress, such as developmental issues and developmental crisis. This study sheds light on positive and negative coping and strategies, particularly those that participants employed to deal with the academic, personal, and social challenges they experienced during the sophomore year. When they experienced significant events, they believed that they had the ability to cope successfully; they became motivated to achieve their goals (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000).

Hunter et al. (2010) report that sophomores' levels of interaction and satisfaction with faculty is a variable that helps predict student outcomes. Participants relied heavily on faculty interaction to cope with academic stress. Many established a powerful

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connection with faculty. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that self-reported

learning gains and grade point averages improve due to faculty relationships. Participants

in this study described faculty as supportive, helpful, and caring about their futures; they

were able to support student needs and give helpful advice.

Astin (1993) and Hunter et al. (2010) find that peer relations are also critical for

academic progress because they allow students to feel socially connected to the university

while giving them the support they may be missing. This study also supports Astin

(1993) and Hunter et al.'s (2010) findings; participants found many successful and

supportive interpersonal relationships, which played positive roles in their academic

persistence. Astin (1993) mentions that peer relationships are crucial to the success of

students during difficult periods. In this study, participants heavily relied on peer support;

they would take time to study with peers or would relax to socialize with their friends.

Hunter et al. (2010) argue that, due to how important family interaction is for

many students, advisors and university professionals should welcome consultation from

family members. Families can give helpful advice on their students' abilities to cope and

to complete course work, as well as what drives them to be successful. Participants were

open to the role of family in giving advice and other pivotal choices facing college

students. Participants would call home for academic assistance in planning schedules or

choosing majors. Advisors should also be aware of the roles that families play in

students' academic and career decision-making (Hunter et al., 2010). Above all,

participants attributed successes to having a supportive family they could rely on when

needed.

Astin (1993) reports that positive social interaction has a lasting impression on students' personal lives. As participants adjusted to the sophomore year, their stress levels decreased because of a supportive peer network (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). Most participants relied on peers for positive coping in times of personal stress; these positive social interactions helped participants feel more connected to the university. Participants found comfort in spending time with people who held similar values, and they looked forward to time spent with friends. None of the participants mentioned difficult social interactions that negatively impacted their college experiences.

Astin and Antonio (2004) identify several factors that could help with positive sophomore development and coping. Family was identified as a strong force that can help shape a student's life in a positive manner. Parents can have a positive impact on students' personal lives, especially if students trust their families during difficult times. Family members need to be aware of the specific needs of their sophomore children. Parents should be aware of on- and off-campus resources that can assist their sons or daughters in times of need. Like college, family can act as a source of help and referral in times of need (Hunter et al., 2010).

Hunter et al. (2010) report that research consistently shows peer satisfaction to be a strong contributor to overall student satisfaction. Because social stress was a minor concern in participants' lives, many participants did not need extra support from family or peers for social stress. Interestingly, negative social interaction was not a concern for these sophomore students. Strayhorn (2012) reports that a sense of peer belonging helps students do well in college and stay at their current school. Participants missed friends when they were too busy to interact because of academic work; they would keep open

lines of communication to interact when they had time. Peers were seen as an important

influence on students rather than a stressor.

Astin (2004) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that students who reside on

campus are more successful than off-campus students because they are more connected to

their peers and campus life. Participants who lived on campus relied more on support

from peers, faculty, and family. Many of the housing changes made were intended to

foster student learning and growth as well as heighten happiness and increase retention of

students (Strange & Banning, 2001). Students felt better and were able to access campus

resources more quickly. They could easily connect with their peers and reach out to them

for support.

The campus at which the study was conducted has newer residences, which are

continuously being renovated. Those students who lived on campus as sophomores were

thankful for easy access to the dining halls, the library, and other resources. They were

also grateful they could sleep longer in the morning because they did not allow for extra

time to commute or find a parking spot. However, the ability to access academic

resources changed for sophomores who moved off campus. Participants felt ill-prepared

to handle the differences in housing location. These participants could no longer walk

down the hall to visit a friend or knock on a neighbor's door to chat.

Recommendations for Students, Faculty, Staff, and Parents

Higher education stakeholders need a vision and purpose and should work

towards creating spaces where sophomores can thrive. Hunter et al. (2010) encourage

universities to focus more on sophomore programs. Pattengale and Schreiner (2005)

published the first book on the second college year in the United States. The University

of South Carolina developed a Students in Transition Program with an expanded mission to advocate for a broader focus on the second year of college (Hunter et al. 2010). Other programs have been created to enhance the sophomore year; the university at which the study was conducted recently created a program for sophomores to help students work together and engage in discussions about their challenges. They have also created a living-learning space in the residence halls for students to reside together; specific programming is also geared toward these students on their floor sections.

Sophomore Students

- Engage with peers, faculty, and staff.
- Participate in support programs to ensure success.
- Attend faculty office hours.
- Visit counseling center and health center as needed.
- Take an active role in planning student events that support sophomores.

Faculty

- Create more opportunities for student engagement: research, teaching assistant, and mentorship opportunities.
- Encourage students to attend office hours.
- Take an active role in student organizations.
- Include parents in academic discussions.
- Encourage students who are at risk to seek counseling.

Administrators

- Create more intentional welcome activities and yearly programs for sophomore student support.
- Create meditation rooms on-camups.
- Allow students to assist in planning events.
- Ensure appropriate funding is alloted for sophomore success programs.

Parents, Family, and/or Guardians

- Encourage participation in university events.
- Give support to students as needed.
- Encourage faculty and peer engagement.
- Enagage with faculty as needed without overstepping.

Figure 7. Recommendations for sophomore student support.

More can be done to help sophomore students succeed and thrive. Figure 7

illustrates recommendations for sophomore student support and programming that can

assist with sophomore success. Participants mentioned some of the supports below as

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key components to their successes. Institutions of higher education can create more opportunities for students by programmatic efforts with the suggestions below.

Hunter et al. (2010) report that sophomore students can take an active role in their own success by learning how to apply their strengths to their challenges. Students can participate in programming that assists with bettering their overall academic performance. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2019) explain that High Impact Practices can assist in retention and successful degree completion for all students. As part of these practices, sophomores can take an active role in creating relationships with faculty. They should also be taking full advantage of campus services such as counseling, health services, tutoring, and academic advising.

Hunter et al. (2010) report that faculty can also have an active role in the success of sophomore students by allowing them to assist with research, hiring them as teaching assistants, and connecting them with viable career opportunities. Faculty and/or advisors can also pay very close attention to those not performing well in their majors; they can use this situation as an opportunity to have honest discussions, potentially saving the students time and money. Other High Impact Practices include further encouraging students to participate in co-curricular activities to help them develop career or academic skills (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2019; Hunter et al., 2010). As reported in the Sophomore Experience Survey (2007), 48 percent of students enjoyed working with faculty and talking to them about aspects of their educational experience. However, even though participants may establish a good rapport with the faculty, there is no guarantee that faculty will be able to reach millennials. They need to be constantly

working to upgrade their skills by attending workshops and training programs related to advising.

Smith and Gordon (2008) report that, because specific populations like sophomores are at risk for increased failure, including parents in conversations about their students could be extremely helpful in pushing them to succeed. While being careful to abide by the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), advisors should welcome family involvement. Likewise, students who can easily rely on their family in times of need have an easier time progressing in their academic studies (Hunter et al., 2010).

Lastly, administrators can play an active role with students, faculty, and parents to ensure success of high-risk groups. Faculty and staff can work together to ensure that students are properly advised and referred to campus services as needed. Administrators from different university departments can also take on active roles in planning sophomore welcome programs, enhancing living-learning communities, and working to ensure proper supports to welcome sophomores to campus (Hunter et al., 2010). Even though the majority were able to find resources that help them, this may not be the case for all sophomores. Hunter et al. (2010) report that we tend to lose students during difficult transitions; they may leave college to work or transfer elsewhere. The ones interviewed were the lucky ones who persisted and became juniors.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study has grazed the surface regarding sophomore student struggles. Scholars can contribute to the body of knowledge on this salient topic, by considering the following:

1. Conducting comparative case studies across multiple institutions is a reasonable approach to enhancing the research on the topic. This would yield a better understanding on how students from different institutions experience the sophomore slump. Also, it would allow for comparison from different regions across rural, urban, and suburban areas of the United States and how those students experience the issue.

2. The study site for the current research is a predominantly white institution and therefore did not yield data related to students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Researchers should study minority or international students and the way they experience the sophomore slump. Historically Black Colleges and Universities are potential sites for a similar study to look further at how minority students experience the sophomore year. Looking at specific universities to compare and contrast the differences, including using schools with larger minority populations, would enhance the research on this topic and provide helpful insight into working with various student populations.

3. Researchers should also consider finding more males to participate in a sophomore experiences study. This study encompassed all females except for one student. The information shared from that sole male student was helpful; it would be beneficial to include more male experiences.

4. Waiting for site approval could take months; researchers should build a rapport with the study site in advance. Researchers should take the time to contact Institutional Review Board offices or other site approval personnel to meet and discuss all requirements of research. This can expedite the process and limit

issues that could arise during the approval process. These actions can also help

build a positive rapport with the study site and demonstrate positive intentions

with participants.

5. Researchers should consider employing a mixed methods approach; preferably a

QUAN-QUAL study that begins with a survey, followed by interviews and focus

groups. This will allow more participants to respond and will allow the researcher

to gather more responses. Although quantitative research is less personable, it

gives participants an opportunity to answer privately and on their own time.

6. Future research should also include interviews with students, parents, and faculty

members to include different viewpoints on the topic. The researcher could

interview and compare information from different perspectives to enhance the

findings. Comparing different views from various stakeholders can assist with a

deeper understanding of the sophomore year.

Conclusion

Sophomores are stressed for various reasons related to their academic work,

personal concerns, and social issues. Participants in this study reported a difficult

transition into their sophomore year. In their sophomore year, participants mostly used

positive coping strategies to work through the issues they were experiencing. Although

on-campus participants were more stressed, they valued being close to campus resources.

At times, off-campus participants missed campus life after moving into apartments.

However, this factor alone was not detrimental to their success as sophomores.

Participants reported that support from family, faculty, and university officials is

important to sophomore success. Universities across the nation need to plan

programming to support this group of students and enhance their successes, while including important university stakeholders. Universities can employ High Impact Practices (AACU, 2019) in working with sophomores while also consulting professional organizations that specialize in working with students who are in transition. The National Resource Center for First-Year Students and Students in Transition (2019) hosts a yearly conference on sophomore student success; this would be a valuable opportunity for many professionals to gain a deeper understanding of this population of students.

Some universities have begun to create sophomore programs; however, there are not nearly enough. Higher education practitioners have a moral obligation to act for students' success. Higher education practitioners who work with sophomores should continue to study the topic. This study was intended to contribute important information and help professionals understand more about this complex population of students.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

My name is Natalie Burick; I am employed at ██████████████████ █
██████████████████████████████████, and plan to complete my research
study on the phenomenon of the sophomore slump at ██████████████████.
The term sophomore slump was coined many years ago; however, limited empirical
research exists on the topic. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand
and analyze student perception of stress and the coping strategies students employed during
their sophomore year of college at one rural, mid-size institution in Pennsylvania.

This research will involve your participation in three face-to-face interviews on-
campus at a time and place of your choice. Each Interview could take 30- 90 minutes. The
interviews will take place over a three-week period of time. The interviews will be audio-
recorded and transcribed by me. Each participant will receive a summary of the transcripts
before the start of the next interview, to ensure validity of the information transcribed. The
last interview will be emailed to you for your review. There is minimal risk in participation
of the study, there is no more risk that what you would experience in your everyday life.
Also, to participate in the study you must be a domestic student between 18-22 years of
age, minors will not be considered.

To ensure confidentiality several steps will be taken. You will be given a
pseudonym and number and the audio-file will be kept in my possession at all times and
stored in a locked desk. I will not tolerate coercion to participate in the study by faculty or
staff at the university. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Participation has no
weight on your academic and social life at ████████. You may change your mind later

and stop participating, even if you already agreed. To leave the study at any time simply contact me, the lead researcher, by using the contact information listed below. In this instance, the researcher will destroy all materials, interviews, and forms related to your participation. Any new information developed during the course of the research, which may relate to the subject's willingness to continued participation will be shared with each participant. Each participant will receive a $20.00 gift card, at the last interview, of your choosing and a certificate of participation in a research study.

Data and consent documents will be maintained for three years to meet federal regulations.

Lead Researcher: Natalie Burick Doctoral Candidate Indiana University of Pennsylvania Davis 307, 570 South Eleventh Street Indiana, PA 15705 Phone: 724/357-2400 Email address: N.E.Burick@iup.edu (we will only use IUP email addresses as the official communication).	Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Crystal Machado Associate Professor Indiana University of Pennsylvania Davis 307, 570 South Eleventh Street Indiana, PA 15705 Phone: 724/357-2400 Email address: crystal.machado@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730)

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name

(PLEASE PRINT)

Signature

Date

Phone number or location where you can be reached

Best days and times to reach you

Student Counseling Center Contact Information is provided in case you feel you need to

reach out after the interviews. ███████████████████████████

██████████████

Appendix B

Interviewee Protocol One

General warm up questions/comments.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on sophomore student slump

I want to reassure you of your privacy in this interview, your personal information will not be associated with this interview. If you use any identifiable information it will be replaced during the transcription of the interviews by the researcher. Which pseudonym would you like me to use for this interview?

I need to review the purpose of the study and get your oral consent to participate on record? May I turn on the recorder at this time?

(Recorder is now turned on and interview begins)

Pseudonym, thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to further understand the challenges that sophomore students may experience, which is better known as the phenomenon of the sophomore slump. This interview will help me to collect the data I need to better understand the phenomenon and complete my dissertation on the topic.

Have you read and completed the informed consent form?

Have you read and complete the participant information form?

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview One, Basic Information About Interviewee

1. Tell me about yourself, as a sophomore student, on this campus?

2. What were you involved in on-campus and how did you interact with others?

3. How did you interact with others off campus?

4. Did your peer group mostly consist of other sophomore students/ second year students?

5. How did you first meet the friend group you interact with here on-campus, please explain?

6. How have you connected with your faculty and staff during your sophomore year through email, office hours, individual appointments, etc.?

7. On a scale of 1-10 can you rate your level of stress currently and describe why you feel that way?

8. In what ways is the stress that you felt during your sophomore year different from that as you felt as a freshman?

Thank you for participating in the first interview, there will be two more before we are

completed with your individual data collection. Are you good with moving forward?

Appendix C

Participant Information Form

Full name_____

Email address (school and personal)

_____

Phone number (Cell preferred)

_____

Preferred method of communication_____

Reside on or off campus_____

List the address of your _student_

residency_____

Age_____

DOB_____

Major_____

Gender_____

How many credits have you accumulated_____

Did you transfer to ███_____

How long have you lived in Pennsylvania_____

Informed consent signed (Y or N) _____

Please list days and times that work best for you, for potential interviews, please note that these interviews could take between 45- 90 minutes. The researcher will be asking you to participate in three face-to-face interviews.

1._____

2. _____

3. _____

Do you have a preferred meeting location <u>on-campus</u>, if so, please list.

1. _____

Contact Information of Principal Researcher: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ OR

N.E.Burick@iup.edu

Appendix D

Interviewee Protocol Two

General warm up questions/comments.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on sophomore student slump

I want to reassure you of your privacy in this interview, your personal information will

not be associated with this interview. If you use any identifiable information it will be

replaced during the transcription of the interviews by the researcher. Which pseudonym

would you like me to use for this interview?

I need to review the purpose of the study and get your oral consent to participate on

record? May I turn on the recorder at this time?

(Recorder is now turned on and interview begins)

Pseudonym, thank you for agreeing to participate in this second interview. The purpose

of this study is to further understand the challenges that sophomore students may

experience, which is better known as the phenomenon of the sophomore slump. This

interview will help me to collect the data I need to better understand the phenomenon and

complete my dissertation on the topic.

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Have you read and commented on the transcript from interview one?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Note: The probes may change in each interview and the questions will be different in

each

interview. Each interview will have a specific purpose.

Interview Two, Interviewee Academic Experiences:

1. Describe your level of overall academic stress during your sophomore year?

2. How did your level of stress hurt or enhance your academic performance during your sophomore year?

3. What academic challenges did you anticipate facing during your sophomore year?

4. Describe the areas of strengths as well as areas that need to be improved during your sophomore year in your academic situation.

5. How have you been accountable for your own academic experiences up to this point in your college career?

6. Name something or someone that has added meaning to your academic career and how this helped enhance your sophomore year?

7. How has being an on-campus student helped or hurt your academic experience, please explain. OR How has being an off-campus student helped or hurt your academic experience, please explain.

8. Before our next interview would you be willing to review the transcript of this interview to verify that I have accurately captured your thoughts and feelings on the topic? I will bring the transcript with me, if that's ok with you.

Thank you for participating in the second interview, there will be one more before we are

completed with your individual data collection. Are you good with moving forward?

Appendix E

Interviewee Protocol Three

General warm up questions/comments.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on sophomore student slump.

I want to reassure you of your privacy in this interview, your personal information will

not be associated with this interview. If you use any identifiable information it will be

replaced during the transcription of the interviews by the researcher. Which pseudonym

would you like me to use for this interview?

I need to review the purpose of the study and get your oral consent to participate on

record? May I turn on the recorder at this time?

(Recorder is now turned on and interview begins)

Pseudonym, thank you for agreeing to participate in this third and final interview. The

purpose of this study is to further understand the challenges that sophomore students may

experience, which is better known as the phenomenon of the sophomore slump. This

interview will help me to collect the data I need to better understand the phenomenon and

complete my dissertation on the topic.

 Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Have you read and commented on the transcript from interview two?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Note: The probes may change in each interview and the questions will be different in

each interview. Each interview will have a specific purpose.

Interview Three, Interviewee Personal and Social Experiences:

1. Describe your level of overall personal/social stress during your sophomore year?

2. How did your level of stress hurt or enhance your personal/social performance?

3. Name something or someone that has added meaning to your personal/social experience and how this helped enhance your sophomore year?

4. Describe the areas of strengths as well as areas that needed to be improved during your sophomore year in your personal/social life.

5. How have you been accountable for your own personal/social experiences up to this point in your college career?

6. Are there any specific coping strategies or strategies your use when you are feeling overwhelmed, if so, can you please describe them?

7. How do you maintain control of stressful situations that are occurring?

8. Name some important people, in your life, that may assist with control of stress?

9. How has being an on-campus student helped or hurt your personal/social experience, please explain OR How has being an off-campus student helped or hurt your personal/social experience, please explain.

10. You be willing to review the transcript of this interview to verify that I have accurately captured your thoughts and feelings on the topic? I will email the transcript directly to you, using your pseudonym, if that's ok with you.

Thank you for participating in the third and final interview, I will send you the data to review. Are you good with moving forward?

Appendix F

Codebook

Code Names	Description of Code	Example
	Research Question One Codes	
ACADEMIC ST	Sophomore students contributing factors: Academic Performance	Faculty higher expectations Level of work assigned was difficult
PERSONAL ST	Sophomore students contributing factors: Personal Performance	Medical and family issues
SOCIAL ST	Sophomore students contributing factors: Social Performance	Not enough time to spend with friends
SOPH EXP	Sophomore student stress/experiences	Transitional issues Not fully prepared to handle difference in work level or expectations
HIGH ST	Factors of sophomore students' levels of stress: High	Rated stress between seven and ten
MEDIUM ST	Factors of sophomore students' levels of stress: Medium	Rated stress between four and six
LOW ST	Factors of sophomore students' levels of stress: Low	Rated stress between one and three
ON-CAMPUS	Stress by Housing location, is there a difference: On-Campus	Being close to resources and friends
OFF-CAMPUS	Stress by Housing location, is there a difference: Off-Campus	Having to make plans to come back to campus for use of resources Not fully prepared to live on their own
	Research Question Two Codes	
COPING POS	Coping Skills: Positive	Use of campus resources Meditation
COPING NEG	Coping Skills: Negative	Isolation and not asking for help
FACULTY	Coping using Faculty	Approachable faculty
FRIENDS	Coping using Friends	Spending time with friends to relax
FAMILY	Coping using Family	Calling home when needed
ON-CAMPUS	Coping: On-Campus	Use of resources
OFF-CAMPUS	Coping: Off-Campus	Coming back to campus to use resources, proximity

	Research Question Three Codes	
TYPE	What type of support did students like to receive	Who did students rely on the most: faculty, family, friends
FAMILY SUP	Student Support: Family	Used most often to call home, to vent, for support, or going home to take a break from campus
FRIENDS SUP	Student Support: Friends	Used often to relax and go off campus for non-academic purposes
FACULTY SUP	Student Support: Faculty	Used often to attend office hours, work on assignments, and for general academic support

Appendix G

Number of Times Participants Mentioned Each Code

Type of Housing	Participant	Major	Academic Stress	Personal Stress	Social Stress	Peer Support	Faculty Support	Family Support	Sophomore Student Stress/Experiences	Off-Campus Housing	On-Campus Housing	Positive Coping	Negative Coping	High Stress	Moderate Stress	Low Stress	Campus Involvement
On-Campus	Kelsey	Education	1	4		3	3	2	2		3	7		1			3
	Sage	Biology	5	3	1	3	6	1	7		4	3				1	4
	Lucy	Environmental Studies	10	3		4	2	2	4		4	6	1	1	1		2
	Rose	Education	1		3	6	3	3	1	1	2	6		1		1	1
	Elizabeth	Communications	3	1	2	4	5	1	5		4	4		1			5
	Nicole	Education	1	2		2	2	1	4	1		2		1			2
	Joann	Music Therapy	2	2		2	1		3	3		5	3	1			2
	Elizabeth	Education	5	5	5	4		3	5		2	2		2			3
	May	Exercise Science	3	2		3	1	3	2	1		3				2	2
	Sam	Recreation Therapy	2	1	2	5	1	5	7	2	3	1	2	1			1
	Lou	Education	4		2			1	4		3	2		1			

Off-Campus	Ann	Education	5	1	2	5	2	3		9	4	1		1	1			1
	Ann	Marketing	3	2	1	3	1	3		8	6		4	3	1			2
	Marie	Psychology	9	3	1	2	2	3		5	7		2		2			6
	Caroline	Education	4	1	1	5	2	3		3		3	3				1	2
	Kennedy	Education	1			5		1		2		2	1			1		2
	Jenna	Hospitality	5	3	1	2	2	3		4	2		3	1	1			1
	Brian	Computing	4	7	1	3	5			5	5		6		2			2
			68	40	22	61	38	38		80	32	31	60	11	17	5		41

Appendix H

Interview Protocol One Researcher Copy

General warm up questions/comments.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on sophomore student slump

I want to reassure you of your privacy in this interview, your personal information will

not be associated with this interview. If you use any identifiable information it will be

replaced during the transcription of the interviews by the researcher. Which pseudonym

would you like me to use for this interview?

I need to review the purpose of the study and get your oral consent to participate on

record? May I turn on the recorder at this time?

(Recorder is now turned on and interview begins)

Pseudonym, thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this

study is to further understand the challenges that sophomore students may experience,

which is better known as the phenomenon of the sophomore slump. This interview will

help me to collect the data I need to better understand the phenomenon and complete my

dissertation on the topic. Have you read and completed the informed consent form?

Have you read and complete the participant information form?

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Note: The probes may change in each interview and the questions will be different in

each interview. Each interview will have a specific purpose.

Interview One, Basic Information about Interviewee:

1. Tell me about yourself, as a sophomore student, on this campus?

a. Can you explain this in further detail?

b. How does being a sophomore student feel?

2. What were you involved in on-campus and how do you interact with others?

c. Were you involved in clubs, organizations, and activities?

d. Did you spend time with other students outside of class and activities?

e. What are some activities you did for fun while interacting with others?

3. How do you interact with others off campus?

f. Did you drive or walk off campus to visit friends or classmates?

g. What are some activities you may have participated in with off campus friends or classmates?

h. Did you peer group mostly consist of other sophomore students/ second year students?

i. What are the ages of the peers you hang out with?

j. How did you first meet the friend group you interact with here on-campus, please explain?

k. Did you meet them living in the residence halls, classes, or campus employment?

l. How have you connected with your faculty and staff during your sophomore year through email, office hours, individual appointments, etc.?

m. Why is it important to make these connections with your faculty?

4. On a scale of 1-10 can you rate your level of stress currently and describe why you feel that way?

n. Is this the norm for you or do you feel more or less stressed during different times of the year?

5. In what ways is the stress that you felt sophomore year different from that as you felt as a freshman?

o. Do you feel better adapted during your sophomore year or worse?

Before our next interview would you be willing to review the transcript of this interview to verify that I have accurately captured your thoughts and feelings on the topic? I will bring the transcript with me, if that's ok with you.

Thank you for participating in the first interview, there will be two more before we are completed with your individual data collection. Are you good with moving forward?

Appendix I

Interview Protocol Two Researcher Copy

General warm up questions/comments.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on sophomore student slump

I want to reassure you of your privacy in this interview, your personal information will not be associated with this interview. If you use any identifiable information it will be replaced during the transcription of the interviews by the researcher. Which pseudonym would you like me to use for this interview?

I need to review the purpose of the study and get your oral consent to participate on record? May I turn on the recorder at this time?

(Recorder is now turned on and interview begins)

Pseudonym, thank you for agreeing to participate in this second interview. The purpose of this study is to further understand the challenges that sophomore students may experience, which is better known as the phenomenon of the sophomore slump. This interview will help me to collect the data I need to better understand the phenomenon and complete my dissertation on the topic. Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Have you read and commented on the transcript from interview one?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Note: The probes may change in each interview and the questions will be different in each interview. Each interview will have a specific purpose.

Interview Two, Interviewee Academic Experiences:

1. Describe your level of overall academic stress during your sophomore year?

a. What word could you use to describe your academic stress, or is there a number that could best describe it?

b. What does academic stress look like?

2. How did your level of stress hurt or enhance your academic performance?

c. Does stress make you feel too overwhelmed to study or complete assignments?

d. What helps you with academic performance when you are stressed?

3. What academic challenges did you anticipate facing during your sophomore year?

e. Why do you feel you will face the challenges you mentioned?

4. Describe the areas of strengths as well as areas that need to be improved during your sophomore year in your academic situation.

f. How did you identify your areas of strength and areas of improvement?

g. What made you realize these are the items you need to improve upon?

h. What made you realize these areas of those of strength for you?

5. How have you been accountable for your own academic experiences up to this point in your college career?

j. How do you stick to your academic goals so you have positive experiences?

6. Name something or someone that has added meaning to your academic career and how this helped enhance your sophomore year?

j. How did you realize this person was someone of meaning and helped your career?

k. How did you realize the item/activities you mentioned added meaning to your academic career?

7. How has being an on-campus student helped or hurt your academic experience, please explain. OR How has being an off-campus student helped or hurt your academic experience, please explain.

l. What's it like living on-campus in relation to your academic experiences?

m. What's it like living off-campus in relation to your academic experiences?

8. Before our next interview would you be willing to review the transcript of this interview to verify that I have accurately captured your thoughts and feelings on the topic? I will bring the transcript with me, if that's ok with you.

 Thank you for participating in the second interview, there will be one more before we

are completed with your individual data collection. Are you good with moving forward?

Appendix J

Interview Protocol Three Researcher Copy

General warm up questions/comments.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on sophomore student slump

I want to reassure you of your privacy in this interview, your personal information will not be associated with this interview. If you use any identifiable information it will be replaced during the transcription of the interviews by the researcher. Which pseudonym would you like me to use for this interview?

I need to review the purpose of the study and get your oral consent to participate on record? May I turn on the recorder at this time?

(Recorder is now turned on and interview begins)

Pseudonym, thank you for agreeing to participate in this third and final interview. The purpose of this study is to further understand the challenges that sophomore students may experience, which is better known as the phenomenon of the sophomore slump. This interview will help me to collect the data I need to better understand the phenomenon and complete my dissertation on the topic.

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Have you read and commented on the transcript from interview two?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Note: The probes may change in each interview and the questions will be different in each interview. Each interview will have a specific purpose.

Interview Three, Interviewee Personal and Social Experiences:

1. Describe your level of overall personal/social stress, during your sophomore year?
a. Why do you think you have this personal/social stress and what is it related to?

b. Is there a direct reason you are personally/socially stressed?

2. How did your level of stress hurt or enhance your personal/social performance?

c. How did you realize your level of stress has hurt your personal/social performance?

d. How did you realize your level of stress enhanced your personal/social performance?

3. Name something or someone that has added meaning to your personal/social experience and how this helped enhance your sophomore year?

e. How is this person related to you?

f. In what ways did this help you enhance your sophomore year?

4. Describe the areas of strengths as well as areas that needed to be improved during your sophomore year in your personal/social life.

g. How did you realize these areas needed to be improved?

h. How did you realize these areas are your strength?

5. How have you been accountable for your own personal/social experiences up to this point in your college career?

i. How do you keep yourself accountable for your own personal/social experiences?

j. Are there specific tactics you use to keep yourself accountable?

6. Are there any specific coping strategies or strategies your use when you are feeling overwhelmed, if so, can you please describe them?

k. How did you come to the realization that these coping strategies/strategies work for you?

7. How do you maintain control of stressful situations that are occurring?

l. Name something or someone that keeps you in control when you are feeling stressed?

m. Can you describe what you feel is maintaining control (staying calm, counting to ten? Etc.

8. Name some important people, in your life, that may assist with control of stress?

n. How do these specific people assist you in maintaining control?

9. How has being an on-campus student helped or hurt your personal/social experience, please explain OR How has being an off-campus student helped or hurt your personal/social experience, please explain.

o. Do you think where you live impacts your personal/social experiences and why do you feel this way?

p. Are you more socially involved staying on-campus or off-campus? Why do you feel this way?

10. After this interview would you be willing to review the transcript of this interview to verify that I have accurately captured your thoughts and feelings on the topic? I will email the transcript directly to you, using your pseudonym, if that's ok with you.

Thank you for participating in the third and final interview, I will send you your data to review. Are you good with moving forward?

Appendix K

Email to Participants

Hello Student,

I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying the semester. During your sophomore year, were you struggling to be successful, overly stressed, and are having a difficult time making decisions? If you answered yes to any of those questions, then you are not alone in this struggle! Research indicates the sophomore year actually poses many issues for sophomore students. I am writing to ask if you are interested in participating in a research study on the topic of "sophomore slump." I am interested in this topic of research because I currently work in higher education and work with many sophomore students who are struggling.

In 1956 a scholar named Mervin Freedman who researched student development coined the term sophomore slump to describe this complex developmental period. This topic is very interesting and deserves more attention; currently there are very few studies on this topic. Therefore, I am hoping to contribute to the body of research with your help.

The sophomore year is a monumental year because it may be time to choose a career path, declare a major, and decide what appropriate courses to take to stay on path for graduation. Sophomores tend to have a difficult time adjusting because they are receiving less attention than their peers. This study will aim to help students, parents, researchers, and educators further understand why sophomores struggle and how they cope with the phenomenon.

Students willing to participate will simply have three face-to-face interviews with me which should only take 30-90 minutes each. We will establish the dates, times, and

meeting places. All interviews will take place on-campus. The interviews can take place via phone or skype if absolutely necessary. The questions I will ask are exclusively about the sophomore year, academics, and struggles students may be experiencing. All information collected will be kept confidential, including your name, name of the college where the study was conducted, and any personal/identifying information. Each student participant will be given a $20.00 gift card to a place of their choosing and a certificate of participation.

If you are interested in contributing to the limited body of research on the topic of sophomore slump please respond back to this email *within one week from today* and let me know! If you respond back, I will follow-up with more details on how to participate! Thanks again. If you have, further questions feel free to use the contact information listed below.

 Sincerely,

Natalie Burick

Name of Principal Researcher: Natalie Burick

Contact Information of Principal Researcher: ███████████ OR

N.E.Burick@iup.edu

Name of Organization: Indiana University of Pennsylvania

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

Lead Researcher: Natalie Burick

Doctoral Candidate

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Davis 307, 570 South Eleventh Street

Indiana, PA 15705

Phone: 724/357-2400

Email address: N.E.Burick@iup.edu (we will only use IUP email addresses as the official communication).

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Crystal Machado

Associate Professor

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Davis 307, 570 South Eleventh Street

Indiana, PA 15705

Phone: 724/357-2400

Email address: crystal.machado@iup.edu

Appendix L

Email Request Sent to Faculty and Students for Validation

Hello,

I know you are busy so I thank you for your willingness to assist. I am attaching the questions for my interview protocol for my dissertation. As part of my validation process for my dissertation, I am having professional staff and students validate the questions for my protocol. My study is qualitative and will focus on the sophomore slump phenomenon for ███ sophomore students. I just need staff and students to look at the questions and give feedback on appropriateness for students, do you think this will elicit a decent response, do they make sense, are these age appropriate, etc. In addition, students willing to assist from ██████████ would be awesome! Let me know if you should have questions.
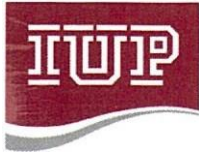
 Sincerely,

Natalie E. Burick

████████████████████████

██████████████

████████████████

Appendix M

University Approval

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
www.iup.edu

Institutional Review Board for   p 724-357-7730
the Protection of Human   F 724-357-2715
subjects   irb-research@iup.edu www.iup.edu/irb
School of Graduate Studies
and Research Stright Hall,
Room 113
210 south Tenth Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-
1048

April 23, 2018

Dear Natalie Burick:

Thank you for submitting your research site approval from ████████████████ for your
proposed research project "A PHEMOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STRESS AND THE SOPHOMORE
SLUMP AT ONE MID-SIZE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN RURAL PENNSYLVANIA," (Log No. 18-119). On
behalf of the
IRB, I have approved your project for the period of April 23, 2018 to April 22, 2019. This approval
does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including,
but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of
university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter as it contains important information about conducti ng your
study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal
Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:
You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.
Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are
implemented.
You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.
You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are
necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

Should you need to continue your research beyond April 22, 2019 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at irb-research@iup.edu or 724-357-7730 for further information.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research
Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not

IRB to Natalie Burick, April 23, 2018

yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www .iup.edu/page.aspx?i d=91683 .

While not under the purview of the IRS, researchers are responsible for adhering to US copyright law when using existing scales, survey items, or other works in the conduct of research. Information regarding copyright law and compliance at IUP, including links to sample permission request letters, can be found at http://www .iup.edu/page.aspx?id=165526 .
I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.
Sincerely,

Timothy Runge, Ph.D.
Interim Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Professor of Educational and School Psychology

Cc: Dr. Crystal Machado, Faculty Advisor

Appendix N

Site Approval Request Letter

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear IRB Team:

I am writing to request permission to conduct my dissertation research at ███████ ███████████. The study I will be completing will ask for sophomore student participation. The study is titled: *A Phenomenological Study of Stress and the Sophomore Slump at one Mid-Size Public University in Rural Pennsylvania.*

I am currently enrolled in the Administration and Leadership Studies Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and am in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation. ██ ███████

If permission is granted, I will be reaching out to request student participation via email (Appendix C). Due to the nature of the study, each participant will complete a participant information form and a participant consent form. Students participating must be between the ages of 18-22 years old, minors will not be considered.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit 8-10 participants who reside on-campus and 8-10 participants who reside off-campus to complete a three-phase interview process. Each interview will last 30-90 minutes. The student will assist the researcher in choosing the location and time of each interview.

Student chosen pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality. All student information will be kept confidential and personal/identifying information will not be

included in the study results. As per federal law, each student's personal information will be destroyed after three years.

The school or the individual participants will incur no costs. The researcher plans to give each participant a twenty-dollar gift card, to a place the interviewee chooses, and a certificate of participation in a research study.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you agree, kindly email a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey/study at your institution. If you should have questions you may contact me or the faculty sponsor. Both of our contact information is listed below.

Attached, you will find the IUP IRB application, the IUP approval letter, and relevant appendices. If there is anything else you need please do let me know. Thank you. Sincerely,

Lead Researcher: Natalie Burick Doctoral Candidate Indiana University of Pennsylvania Davis 307, 570 South Eleventh Street Indiana, PA 15705 Phone: 724/357-2400 Email address: N.E.Burick@iup.edu	Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Crystal Machado Associate Professor Indiana University of Pennsylvania Davis 307, 570 South Eleventh Street Indiana, PA 15705 Phone: 724/357-2400 Email address: crystal.machado@iup.edu

Appendix O

Site Approval Request Form

██

██████████████████████████████

█████████████████████████

Principal Investigator: Natalie Burick
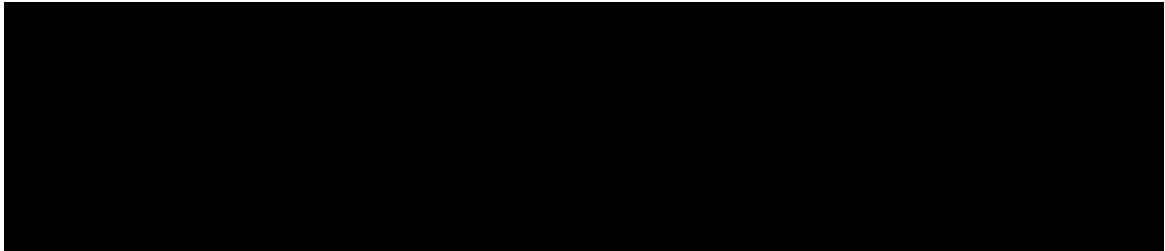
Home Institution: Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Mailing Address: 1011 South Drive, Indiana, PA 15705

Telephone: (724) 357-2100   Email Address: ██████████████████;
Project Title: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STRESS AND THE SOPHOMORE SLUMP AT
ONE MID-SIZE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN RURAL PENNSYLVANIA

Project Period: 09/01/2018 to 05/15/2019

██
██
██
██
██

Provide a brief description of the project. Include the data collection methods (i.e., surveys/

questionnaires, interviews, etc.) and the procedures to be used to carry out the research (i.e.,

electronic, face-to-face, etc.).

 I originally planned to get the sample for my study by emailing all sophomore students asking

for participation. After working with various staff at ██ we devised a better plan that will be

more feasible for such a small sample of participants. This new plan will also allow a more

personal connection with the students, which is a better for a qualitative study. This change will

also assist me in gathering a better more cohesive group of participants.

I have contacted several faculty and many gave approval for me to enter their classroom.

Instead of interviewing current sophomores, I will now interview junior students to do a

retrospective study. Below is the formal write up for the new sampling method: ███████

██

██

██

████████████████████████████████

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to use Cognitive Appraisal Theory to understand

and analyze student perception of stress and coping strategies during their sophomore year of

college at one rural, mid-size institution in Pennsylvania. The researcher will use Cognitive

Appraisal Theory to further analyze students' ability to process and cope with their academic,

personal, and social life while navigating their sophomore year.

I am seeking participants who are juniors and have already completed their sophomore year

(retrospective study).

To understand the lived experience of the sophomore students the researcher will ¬employ a

three-interview structure with each interviewee, which ensures elicitation of information

(Seidman, 2013). Interviews typically range from 30 minutes to several hours (DiCicco-Bloom

and Crabtree, 2006). The three interviews will be 30- 90 minutes each to allow interviewee to

reconstruct their experiences, put it into context of their lives, and fully reflect on its meaning

(Seidman, 2013). The interviews will take place over a two to three-week time span; this will

allow the researcher and interviewee to become more comfortable with the interview process

(Seidman, 2013). The interviews will be face-to-face.

The three-interview structure is exceptionally important; each interview serves its own purpose

and has a connection to the underlying phenomenological assumption (Seidman, 2013). Please

see the three interview protocols that will be used with each interviewee (Appendix F, H, J).

The researcher's use of a semi-structured interview approach will create opportunity to explore

deeper meaning from the interviewee responses. In order to develop a positive relationship

during the interview process, the researcher will establish a safe and comfortable environment

by sharing personal experiences related to the topic (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Student

interviewees will engage in the research study by fully participating in three face-to-face

interviews, this will help to ensure accuracy of information and build trust (Seidman, 2013).

Face-to-face interviews will ensure information is confidential, in a private setting, and allow the

interviewee to feel more comfortable (Seidman, 2013). Interviews will be confidential and

audio-recorded. During the interviews, the researcher will take detailed notes on interviewee

nonverbal behavior, disposition, willingness to answer questions, and personal perceptions.

Due to limited research on the topic, there were no existing interview protocols that could be

adapted for the study; therefore, the researcher created the interview protocol. The researcher

developed each question separately to align with the purpose of the study and Cognitive

Appraisal Theory. (Questions attached for your review).

Interview One. Each interview will have a specific purpose and provide a foundation that will

help illuminate the next (Seidman, 2013). During the first interview, the researcher will ask each

student to introduce himself or herself and give basic information about their experiences as a

sophomore student. The first interview will also focus on putting the interviewee's experience in

context by asking the interviewee to reveal as much as possible about himself or herself in light

of the topic. The researcher will ask questions that are in-depth and related to the phenomenon

(See Appendix F).

Interview Two. In the second interview, the researcher will begin by member-checking the first

interview with the interviewee. The researcher will give the interviewee time to look over and

discuss the notes from interview one and make any changes necessary. Next the researcher will

explore the interviewee's academic experiences as related to the topic (See Appendix H).

Interview Three. Before beginning protocol for interview three the researcher will member-

check interview two with the interviewee, the same procedures will take place for member-

checking as in interview two. The researcher will allow time for the interviewee to review the

notes and make changes as necessary. During the third and final interview, the researcher will

ask interviewees to discuss their personal and social experiences as related to the topic.

Interviewees will be encouraged to elaborate on personal, social, and academic connections to

the experience rather than satisfaction or reward (Seidman, 2013) (See Appendix J). After the

third and final interview the researcher will email notes and transcripts of the final interview, to

the interviewee to make changes, if necessary.

Describe the participant population chosen for this project. Include the rationale for requesting

participants from ▮ and how the ▮ participants will be contacted.

Sampling Procedures

The researcher will employ a purposive sampling technique. If the proposed sampling

techniques do not yield the required number of participants, then snowball sampling will be

employed. Details about each phase will be provided in the sections that follow.

Phase One: Purposive Sampling. The researcher will use a purposive sampling technique in order

to target those students who experienced struggles during their sophomore year. Purposive

sampling is precisely what the name suggests; the researcher chooses participants with a

purpose in mind (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). In purposive sampling, the researcher seeks out

individuals or groups of individuals who are knowledgeable about a specific phenomenon (here,

of interest is the experience of sophomores at a public university in rural Pennsylvania), who are available to the researcher, and who can discuss their experience in an articulate and reflective way (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

For the present study, ideal participants will be those students enrolled at the university, after the census date, in the Fall 2018 semester. The students should have earned 60 or more credits in either the preceding spring or summer semesters, placing those students at the beginning of their junior year in Fall 2018. To ensure the students' experiences are specific to the approved site university, all participants need to have completed the prior academic year of study at that institution. It will be assumed that the very nature of being an enrolled college student with at least 60 credits earned will serve as evidence that those invited to participate in this study are articulate and reflective enough to provide the researcher with valuable insight into the sophomore year experience. Students will be asked to participate only if they meet the above mentioned criteria. They will be asked and verified before participating, via email, if they meet the above mentioned criteria.

To identify students who meet the stated criteria and who are physically available to participate in the study, the researcher will seek out on-campus classes in which a considerable number of juniors are enrolled. In a four-year course of study, it is assumed that the plurality of students in 100-level courses are freshmen, in 200-level courses are sophomores, in 300-level courses are juniors, and in 400-level courses are seniors. Although there are many instances which violate this assumption, 300-level, on-campus course enrollments will likely include enough students who would both be available to participate in the study and who would meet the stated criteria. The researcher will contact professors at the approved site university who are teaching 300-level courses in the Fall 2018 semester (see above for those who have agreed to help the researcher by allowing her into their classroom). After reviewing the class schedule for the

semester -- which includes the course number (to select only 300-level courses), the location (to filter out online or off-campus courses), and the instructor -- the researcher will email those professors with whom she has a prior professional or academic relationship. The researcher will ask those professors for permissions to attend each section of their 300-level courses at which time the researcher will provide students in the class a brief overview of the study, the type of student who is invited to participate, the method by which an interested student can volunteer for the study, and the remuneration for selected participants.

In order to volunteer for the study, the researcher will instruct interested students who meet the stated criteria to email her indicating their interest by a specified date and time. Assuming that more than 18 students volunteer to be part of the study (and meet the stated criteria), the researcher will select 18 students from the list of volunteers using a randomization algorithm available in common spreadsheet software. Selected students will be contacted by the researcher and appointments for the first interviews with each participant will be scheduled. OR, students are able to indicate during the class period by filling out an index card with their information, if there is enough allotted time by the faculty. The researcher can also email the class list, by asking the faculty member to share the class list information ONLY after the researcher has discussed the study with the class. The researcher will not access emails before entering the classrooms to speak. The researcher will only access emails through the faculty and not through any other software program used in her daily work.

The researcher will use a tiered method to launch the participant selection. Therefore, if 18-20 participants have volunteered before going into all mentioned classrooms, the researcher can stop at that point and not proceed with seeking more participants. The researcher will visit classrooms until enough participants are selected.

Snowball Sampling. If sampling procedures described above fail to yield the desired sample size, the researcher will engage a snowball sampling technique by asking those students who have volunteered to participate in the study to help by recruiting their friends, classmates, or other peers who meet the stated criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1991).

In addition, the researcher will ask those professors who have agreed to let her visit their classrooms to ask faculty colleagues who are also teaching 300-level, on-campus courses in the Fall 2018 semester to grant permission to the researcher to visit those classrooms. The tactic of snowball sampling students and classrooms will continue until the researcher has the desired sample size.

I am interested in completing the research at ███ because ████████████████. My sophomore year was the most difficult; therefore, I am looking to connect with students in a meaningful way and gain information regarding their sophomore year experience at ███ ████████████████ and work with several sophomore students in turmoil. My hope is to be able to better understand the sophomore population. I would be happy to share any findings with ███ faculty and staff who are interested in reviewing my work. I also wish to share the information in hopes of the university creating more sophomore initiatives. I would like to also contribute to the limited body of knowledge and research currently available on the topic.

Describe how the results of the project will be used (i.e., presentations, publications, thesis, dissertation, etc.).

The results will be used in a dissertation and possibly published. The researcher will be presenting the information to her dissertation committee at her final defense. All members of the committee are full-time faculty. All identifying information about the university and student participants will be removed, before defense and publication of the materials. There is potential

that this research could be used for conference presentations in the future, again all information

about the institution and student participants will be kept confidential.

The recorded interviews, notes, and additional data collected will be stored in the researcher's

office or home. Only the researcher will have access to the information collected. When the

study is published all personal and identifying information will be concealed. A pseudonym will

be used for each interviewee in published documents. Materials used and collected will be kept

locked in a safe location or password protected computer. Materials will be destroyed after a

period of three years as per federal regulations.

 Attach the following documents: Approved Protocol
IRB approval letter from home institution

IRB approval letter from ███

Consent form or informational letter to be given to participants

Copy of the survey/questionnaire or interview questions

****

Appendix P

University Site Approval

TO: Ms. Natalie Burick ██████████████

FROM: ██

DATE: April 19, 2018

RE: Protocol Title: A Phenomenological Study of Stress and the Sophomore Slump at one Mid-Size Public University in Rural Pennsylvania

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of ██████████████████ accepts the approval of the IRB at Indiana University of Pennsylvania for the study titled, A Phenomenological Study of Stress and the Sophomore Slump at one Mid-Size Public University in Rural Pennsylvania (Log No. 18-119).

The investigator may proceed with the study as described in the methods. If there are changes to the protocol, or reportable events, the principal investigator must inform the ███ IRB.

Once full approval has been granted from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, please forward the approval letter to ██████████████████████

IRB approval does not guarantee access to ██████████████████ data or personnel. Permission for access to the campus for your study should be sought directly with the Research Permissions Committee. Please visit our website at ████████████████████████████████████ - ████████████████████████████████████ to review the external researcher's guidelines and to complete the application form and instructions on where to submit the form.

██
████████████████████

Appendix Q

External Reviewer Approval

September 6, 2018

Natalie Burick
1011 South Drive
Indiana, PA 15705

RE: Research Project Entitled "A Phenomenological Study of Stress and the Sophomore Slump at One Mid-Size Public University in Rural Pennsylvania"

Dear Ms. Burick:

The ▮▮ Research Permissions Committee has reviewed your request to conduct a study with students as research participants. The Committee found this to be a worthwhile study and has given their approval for you to proceed. Keep in mind, however, that this approval does not obligate the individual students to participate in the study. It merely means that ▮▮ administration is aware of the project and has given approval to contact the potential research participants. Please contact the individual faculty members listed in your Application Form to assist you with visiting their classes to speak with the students about the research study.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, ▮▮▮▮

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