Underrepresented Students Perceptions of Their Second Year in College

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Underrepresented Students
Perceptions of their Second-Year in College

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Outline of Presentation

- Background of the Study
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Questions
- Review of the Literature
- Theoretical Framework
- Summary
Background of the Study

- Gaps in literature for second to third year retention (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005)

- Difference in persistence rates for minority students from second to third year (Smith, 1995)

- Issues of retention and persistence for minority students are viewed similar to those of majority students (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000)
The purpose of this study was to build upon the existing base of research pertaining to the second-year experience in college.

The goal of the study was to better understand the experiences of underrepresented college students in their second-year of college and to discover ways to improve their in- and out-of-class learning experiences.
Primary research question
- What are the experiences of underrepresented college students during their second-year at a college or university?

Secondary research questions
- How do underrepresented students experience the in-classroom and out-of-classroom environments during their second-year?
- What relationships are important for underrepresented students during their second-year?
Review of the Literature

- Second-Year Student Needs
- Student Development Theory
- Second-Year Student Development
- Identity Development Theories
  - African American Identity Development
  - Latino/a Identity Development
Second-Year Student Needs

- Career and major decisions (Gardner, 2000)
  - Students have not had an opportunity to take classes in major (Graunke & Woosley, 2005)

- Mentoring relationships
  - Fewest encounters with faculty outside the classroom (Gardner, 2000)

- Intellectual engagement
  - Reduced motivation or “sophomore slump” (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000)
Student Development Theory

- Chickering’s Psychosocial Identity Development Theory
  - Struggle with developing competence, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, establishing identity, and developing purpose

- Perry’s Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development
  - Still in dualistic position were there are definite right and wrong answers (Boivin, Fountain, & Baylis, 2000)
Research Institution

- Large, residential, public, four-year research institution in the Southeast
- 14,000 undergraduate students
- 2,700 undergraduate students in second-year of study
Conducted during Spring semester 2011

Three undergraduate African American students in their junior year

Two themes emerged from data
  ◦ Academic adjustment
  ◦ Relationships

Significance of pilot study
  ◦ Yosso’s (2005) Cultural Capital
Conducted during 2012–2013 academic year

Twelve undergraduate students in their second-year
  ◦ 11 African American/Black
  ◦ 1 Hispanic/Latino

Focus groups, individual interviews, and observations
Emergent Themes

Five themes emerged from coded focus groups, interviews:

- Family matters
- Finding my community
- The power of commitments
- Quest for balance
- Strategizing second-year student success
Family member, teachers, or coach influenced choice of institution

“I decided to go to Southeast ... it was actually because my biology teacher from my high school, actually recommended that I come here because I was so in love with biology and science and she thought that this school was the best one ...”

*(Tiffani, 19, Biological Sciences major)*
Finding My Community

- First-year at institution was mainly finding friends, faculty, and other support systems

  “My first year here, it was really good. It was a lot of stress, too. Just trying to find friends and everything. It was kind of just a huge shock to be around so many people because the high school I went to had about 200 people ... And so, I really struggled to find friends early on, but I got involved with CRU campus ministry and, I found my best friends through that, so that’s a blessing.”

(Stefano, 19, Philosophy with Religious Studies major)
Nine (9) out of twelve (12) participants indicated they considered leaving the institution after their first year. 

“As far as organizations are concerned that made me want to stick around, Southeast Black Student Union was the main one, because I realized that in me leaving Southeast and going to another school, I would not only be giving up on Southeast, but I would be ... I felt I would be giving up on the people that I had met here, like, more specifically like the Black community, and then other incoming, like, Black students.”

(Brian, 19, Communication Studies major)
All twelve (12) participants indicated that their second-year was “better” or “going better” than the first year, but struggled to find balance.

“Yeah, there’s a lot of pressure and it’s always pushed in your face that you need to be well-rounded, so you try to get in a little bit of everything, but a little bit of everything ends up being so much.”

(Sophie, 20, Environmental Engineering major)
Strategizing for Second-Year Student Success

- Common words used were:
  - Hard work
  - Determination
  - Motivation
  - Strong study habits
  - Prayer
  - Involvement
  - Time management
  - A support system
  - Learning from mistakes
Strategizing for Second-Year Student Success (cont.)

“You have to have your own self-motivation. You have to be organized, responsible, and … prayer, or course. But there’s something else I was going to say, but I forgot. But … yeah, you just have to realize your own potential and utilize it correctly.”

(Sophie, 20, Environmental Engineering major)

“… an aspect of being a successful student is being forward-thinking because a lot of students get stuck in thinking of ‘the now’ … but if you can just remember and imagine that everything is leading for a greater purpose, you will be a successful student.”

(Brian, 19, Communication Studies major)
Implications for Practice

- Incorporate structured reflection into curricular and co-curricular initiatives or programs
- Utilize strengths-based approaches in programming
Future Research

- More longitudinal studies on college student experiences
- Intersectional approaches to understanding second-year experience
- Incorporating Environmental Theory (Strange & Banning, 2001)
Group Discussion

- Get into groups of 4–5 with individuals around you

- Talk about the second-year experience at your institution:
  - How would your student population describe their second year?
  - Do you think it would be similar or different for underrepresented groups?
  - What support structures are in place to help students through their second-year at your institution?
Thank you!

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