Comparing Australian Sophomore Science Experiences Across the Pacific

Sarah-Jane Gregory & Ann McDonnell
School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
Griffith University, Brisbane
Australia
Australian Context vs US

- 23 million people
- 24% born outside Australia
- 38 Public & 4 private
- Go8

- 308 million people
- Approximately 2500 private & 1700 public unis
- 2 or 4 year colleges

RobCubbon.com
What does it take to get a degree?

**Australia**
- 3 year undergraduate degree
- 1-3 year postgraduate degrees
- Most students reside off campus

**USA**
- 2 year associate’s degree and/or 4 year undergraduate degree
- 1 year postgraduate certificate
- Students generally reside on campus in 1st year

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
Established 1975
5 Campuses (Nathan is 2nd Largest)
Research & Teaching
4 Groups
(Science, Engineering, Environment & Technology,
Health, business, Arts/Education/Law)
43000 Students
17000 commencing/year
74% Bachelors : 26% RHD
73% Domestic : 27% International
59% Female
3500 Staff (2000 academic)
540 Teaching only : 500 Research only : 980 Combined Profile

School BPS
61 Academic staff: 18 scientific & technical staff: 11 administrative staff
Our Faculty & School Context

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences

Centre for Quantum Dynamics

Eskitis Institute for Cell and Molecular Therapies

Environmental Futures Centre
Clean, resilient and sustainable environments
University Experience in Australia

James, Krause & Jennings Report 1994-2009 on FYE
- 1st yr advisors
- O-week
- Student mentoring
- Common time
- Starting @GU (Lizzio)
- PASS

VERY SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

1st Year

2nd Year

3rd Year

SYE
- Information sessions on pathways
- Planning skills
- Job acquisition skills
- CEQ
- Alumni

IDENTIFYING LINKS TO CAREER SUCCESS
Australian Institutes Addressing Sophomore Slump Issues

- Griffith University
  - Glenn Harrison (2005)
  - Jessica Vanderlilie (2011)

- Deakin University
  - Janine McBurnie, Jan West & Malcolm Campbell (2009)

- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
  - Tara Quinlivan (2010)

- University of Newcastle
  - Katherine Lindsay (2012)

- Macquarie University & University of Notre Dame
  - Jayde Cahir, Justin Dutch, Boris Handal, Elaine Huber & Mark Nixon (2012)
Discussion:

What projects are currently running your institution specifically addressing issues around Sophomore Slump?
Research Design

STUDY 1
GPA Analysis

- Track full time continuing students across degree
- Looked at Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Biomedical Science

STUDY 2
Perceptions of 2nd Year

STUDY 3
Reflective Sophomore Experience Survey

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
Bachelor of Science
(3rd Year 2011) GPA Analysis

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Mean GPA: 5.46 4.85 4.46 4.16 4.62
Bachelor of Biomedical Science (3rd Year 2011) GPA Analysis

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Mean GPA

- **Mean GPA**
  - 5.36
  - 5.20
  - 5.02
  - 4.85
  - 4.70

- **1st Year Decline by 0.5-1 GPA unit 2nd sem 1st year**
- **2nd Yr Decline by 0.5-1 GPA unit 1st sem 2nd year**
- **2nd Yr Decline by 0.5-1 GPA unit 2nd sem 2nd year**
- **3rd Yr Recovery by 0.5-1 GPA unit 1st sem 3rd year**

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
Research Design

STUDY 1
GPA Analysis

STUDY 2
Perceptions of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Year

- What were the major concerns regarding 2\textsuperscript{nd} year
- What types of strategies would they utilise
- Timing of potential activities
Second Year Perceptions

Aspects of the 2nd Year Experience that our students have expressed concerns regarding

- Academic Workload
- Academic expectations
- How to gain work experience before graduation
- How 2nd year content will help my career
Research Findings

Activities students indicated they would participate in:

- Week 1: Content Refresher (70%), Science professionals (60%), Career Information (50%), Academic Research (40%), Effective Study Strategies (30%), Exam strategies (20%), Interaction with Alumni (10%)
- Week 2: Resume development (50%), Social Activities (40%), Informal study groups (30%), Balancing uni with work & life (20%), 2nd year peer mentors (10%), Common time 1st semester (0%)

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
STUDY 1
GPA Analysis

STUDY 2
Perceptions of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Year

STUDY 3
Reflective Sophomore Experience Survey

- Developed by Prof. Laurie Schreiner
- Thriving Quotient
- Adapted by Glenn Harrison & Sarah-Jane Gregory
- Run as a trial in 2 schools at GU in 2012

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
Sophomore Experience Survey (Thriving Quotient)

- GPA
- Learning Gains
- 3rd Year 1st semester as reflection of 2nd Year experiences in 2011
- Institutional Fit
- Intent to Graduate

Dr Laurie Schreiner

Highly Stringent & Statistically Reliable

Adapted to Australian Linguistics

Online
Sophomore Experience Survey
Predictors of Successful Experience

Key Indicators

- Engaged Learning
- Academic Determination
- Diverse Citizenship
- Social Connectedness
- Positive Perspective

Academic Social Psychological predictors of the 4 parameters for successful experience

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
Are Australian sophomore students similar to international cohorts?

Sophomore Experiences Survey
(Thriving Quotient)

- Pilot run of the survey in April 2012 in two school at Griffith although only the BPS results will be reported here

- Low response rate for trial but representative of cohort diversity (n=53; 21%) but representative of cohort for self reported majors, gender, academic capacity.
% Comparative of Declared Major Distribution from all respondents
1. Demographic Comparative

**Gender**

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**Race/Ethnicity**

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</table>
1. Demographic Comparative

Students who are First in Family

% of Respondents

International  BPS

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
2. Assessment of College Performance

Students who DO NOT live on campus

% of Respondents

International

BPS
2. Main Item Scores

- Of the 46 main item questions on the survey there was no significant difference between School of BPS students and International cohorts.

- The only trend observed was that the international cohorts appeared to be slightly more spiritually conscious than either Australian cohort (Qu 27, 34 and 38).
3. Assessment of College Performance

First choice of Institute/School

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3. Assessment of College Performance

Hours/Week worked OFF campus

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<td>International: 5% BPS: 5%</td>
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3. Assessment of College Performance

Degree Aspirations

% of Respondents

- None
- Bachelor's Degree
- Post-Graduate Diploma
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate (PhD)
- Medical or Law Degree
- Other
- Other Graduate Degree

Legend:
- International
- BPS
3. Assessment of College Performance

Surety of Major Selection

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3. Assessment of College Performance

Self Reported Grades in College so far:

- Mostly High Distinctions (A's)
- High Distinctions and Distinctions (A's and B's)
- Mostly Distinctions (B's)
- Distinctions and Credits (B's and C's)
- Mostly Credits (C's)
- Credits and Passes (C's and D's)

% of Respondents

International
BPS
Differences between Griffith Science & International Sophomores

Dissatisfaction Items Comparison

- Your living situation LAST year
- Your level of physical health LAST year
- Staff sensitivity to the needs of diverse students
- The amount of money you personally have to pay to attend college here.

% of Respondents indicating Dissatisfaction

- International
- BPS

GU School of Biomolecular & Physical Sciences
Differences between Griffith Science & International Sophomores

Satisfaction Items

- The amount you are learning in your classes LAST semester.
- Your overall experiences on this campus LAST year.
- The grades you earned LAST YEAR.
- The academic advising you have received LAST year.

% respondents expressing satisfaction

- International
- BPS
Differences between Griffith Science & International Sophomores

Participation in Campus Associated Co-curricular Activities

- Student organizations on campus
- Campus events or activities
- Leadership of student organizations
- Music or theater performance groups on campus
- Community Service
- Religious services or activities

% of Respondents who Sometimes-Frequently Participated

- International
- BPS
### Sophomore Specific Items

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<td>Participation in a Learning Community</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
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<td>Dropped or withdrawn from courses</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
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<td>One or more courses receiving a Fail grade</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
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<td>Two or more weeks of international travel during 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
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<td>One or more courses taught by adjunct (sessional) staff</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
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Sophomore Specific Items

This year compared to first year

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Sophomore Specific Items

This year's COURSES compared to first year's:

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</tbody>
</table>
Sophomore Specific Items

**Studying for classes**

- International: Never, <1hr-7hrs, 8-14hrs, >15hrs
- BPS: Never, <1hr-7hrs, 8-14hrs, >15hrs

**Online social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)**

- International: Never, <1hr-7hrs, 8-14hrs, >15hrs
- BPS: Never, <1hr-7hrs, 8-14hrs, >15hrs
Sophomore Specific Items

Hanging out with friends

- International Never: 0.00%
- BPS: 10.00%
- International <1hr-7hrs: 50.00%
- BPS: 80.00%
- International 8-14hrs: 30.00%
- BPS: 20.00%
- International >15hrs: 10.00%

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4. Thriving Quotient Key Indices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (6-point scale with 6 as high)</th>
<th>International Norms (n=999)</th>
<th>BPS Data (n=53)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Learning Index</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Determination</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Perspective</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Connectedness</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse Citizenship</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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How much are they thriving?

Thriving is defined as getting the most out of your college experience, so that you are intellectually, socially, and psychologically engaged and enjoying the college experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not even surviving</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barely surviving</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surviving</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat thriving</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriving most of the time</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently thriving</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Student Open Responses

- I would change my grades
- Come to each class unprepared and unknowledgable
- When I was sick as I won't be able to study and concentrate anytime
- I found last year quite a struggle to keep up with the content in my courses. I also struggle with having enough money to pay for the essentials
- To obtain better results
- Most of the problems I faced originated from home.
- I wish I had figured out my learning style quicker and figured out how to be better at exam style assessment
- Took on too high a study load that work and family commitments would allow
- Communication between staff members and students
- I wish I could change my level of motivation. University seemed really difficult. All of a sudden you are in second year and lecturers/tutors expect you to hand them the world on a plate. I was difficult trying to add more study time to my already crowded life. Balance was hard. Having no one to talk to was harder. Family problems didn't help. I wish university was more of a university and less of a business.
- I wasn't motivated enough to handle so much more work. I'm thriving now in my third year because I learnt from my mistakes last year. I wasn't aware that going higher would mean 10 times the amount of work from the year before. So in second year, I wasn't ready I guess. It hit a little harder than I had hoped
And these gems that sum up those who are feeling the effects of Sophomore Slump

- I wish I could change my level of motivation. University seemed really difficult. All of a sudden you are in second year and lecturers/tutors expect you to hand them the world on a plate. It was difficult trying to add more study time to my already crowded life. Balance was hard. Having no one to talk to was harder. Family problems didn't help. I wish university was more of a university and less of a business.

- I wasn't motivated enough to handle so much more work. I'm thriving now in my third year because I learnt from my mistakes last year. I wasn't aware that going higher would mean 10 times the amount of work from the year before. So in second year, I wasn't ready I guess. It hit a little harder than I had hoped.
Implications

Transferability

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Initiatives

- Starting@GU survey comparison of 2012 BPS Cohort
- Working on a collective of different activities to address various elements of sophomore slump – but will they work? How should we measure improvement?
- Primer meeting for first year program members to meet and greet
- Second year reintroduction to university at the beginning of 3rd semester (this will include both social and academic elements including an online component)
- Getting to know the other part of your academics’ world – “What do you do when you’re not teaching me?” – including podcasting
- Career sessions specifically for sophomores
- Community of Practice for teaching staff who are working with sophomore students regularly (this element is still in the development phase)
Summary

- GPA analysis indicates that SOME students are experiencing grade decline.
  - That first year grade decline in some degree programs can indicate students who may be more susceptible to multiple effects of sophomore slump.

- Second year expectations indicate that they have concerns regarding key elements identified within the literature, including academic expectations, academic workload, personal development, career development, and richer interactions with faculty members.

- The Sophomore Experience Survey pilot was successful and provides a very usable in-depth snapshot of where students are at.

- We will continue to collect a variety of data regarding the experiences of sophomore students in Australia with the aim to enhance awareness and develop a whole of institution approach to student university experience not just individual year groups.

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- Development of staff awareness of issues surrounding sophomore year experience has been supported by a Science and Mathematics network of Australian University Educators (SaMnet) Action Learning Project

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References

- Quinlivan, T. (2009). Investigating the transition process across the undergraduate degree: implementing a peer mentoring program to address the second year slump. PhD Dissertation for RMIT.