

# **INTENTIONAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING AND GUIDING DECISION MAKING IN THE SECOND YEAR: APPLYING NATIONAL INSIGHTS TO UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE**

---

Molly A. Schaller, Ph.D.  
University of Dayton

Presented at University of Louisville  
June 2016

# Learning Outcomes for our Time

- ❖ Participants gain an understand of current research on second-year students.
- ❖ Participants gain an understanding of issues that impact success/engagement for second-year students.
- ❖ Participants will leave with four or five key ideas to implement in current practice

# Learning Goals for Higher Education (Derek Bok, 2006)

To develop students' abilities to:

- communicate
- engage in critical thinking
- develop moral reasoning
- act as good citizens
- live with diversity and in a global society
- develop a breadth of interests
- prepare for work

# Learning Goals for Higher Education (Derek Bok, 2006)

To develop students' abilities to:

- communicate
- engage in critical thinking
- develop moral reasoning
- act as good citizens
- live with diversity and in a global society
- develop a breadth of interests
- prepare for work

# Chickering and Gamson (1987)

- Good practice encourages student - faculty contact
- Good practice encourages cooperation among students
- Good practice encourages active learning
- Good practice gives prompt feedback
- Good practice encourages time on task
- Good practice communicates high expectations
- Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning

# Engagement...

(Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 2005)

Highly Engaged Institutions Seem To Have:

- “Living” Mission and “Lived” Educational Philosophy
- Unshakeable focus on student learning
- Environments adapted for educational enrichment
- Clear pathways to student success
- Improvement-oriented ethos
- Shared responsibility for educational quality and student success

# Institutions that do this well have...

(Kuh et al.)

- Academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student-Faculty interaction
- Enriching educational experiences
- Supportive campus environments
  - Transition programs
  - Advising networks
  - Peer support
  - Multiple safety nets
  - Special support programs



# QEP Learning Outcomes (in progress)

- **Intellectual Independence** – students gain practice and confidence in their reasoning abilities and are more aware of their practices and habits of thinking that are essential to their academic success
- **Academic self-efficacy**– students will strengthen their belief that they can successfully achieve at a designated level on an academic task or attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997).
- **Major and Career Clarity** – students will gain a greater sense of meaning and purpose through the exploration of their own major and career choices.
- **Sense of Belonging** - students will demonstrate an increased feeling of acceptance and membership in a group and exhibit increased self-efficacy for learning and social integration



## Tools:

- intellectual inquiry,
- evidence-based thinking,
- and critical reflection

# Purpose of Intentional Design

- Evidence Based [allows us to select programs, practices that yield greatest learning]
- High Impact Practices – those that provide contradiction and confirmation, based on a sense of engagement and empowerment
- Design should increase likelihood that we will build a developmentally **VITAL** environment
- Designing for probability

It's Complicated

# WHY SOPHOMORES?



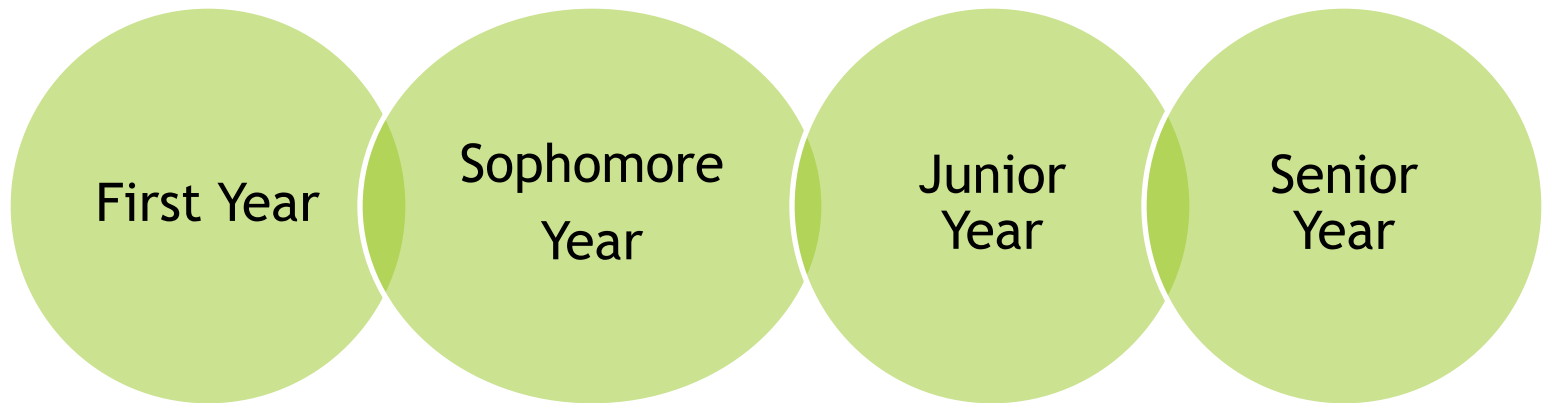
- This is not a chance to talk about another “initiative” or simply jump on a national “bandwagon.”
- This is...
  - A question of intentional design **FOR STUDENT LEARNING** across the entire college experience at University of Louisville
  - A realistic evaluation of the struggles in design of American higher education
  - National and local data point to some important opportunities for positive impact

# Key Findings:

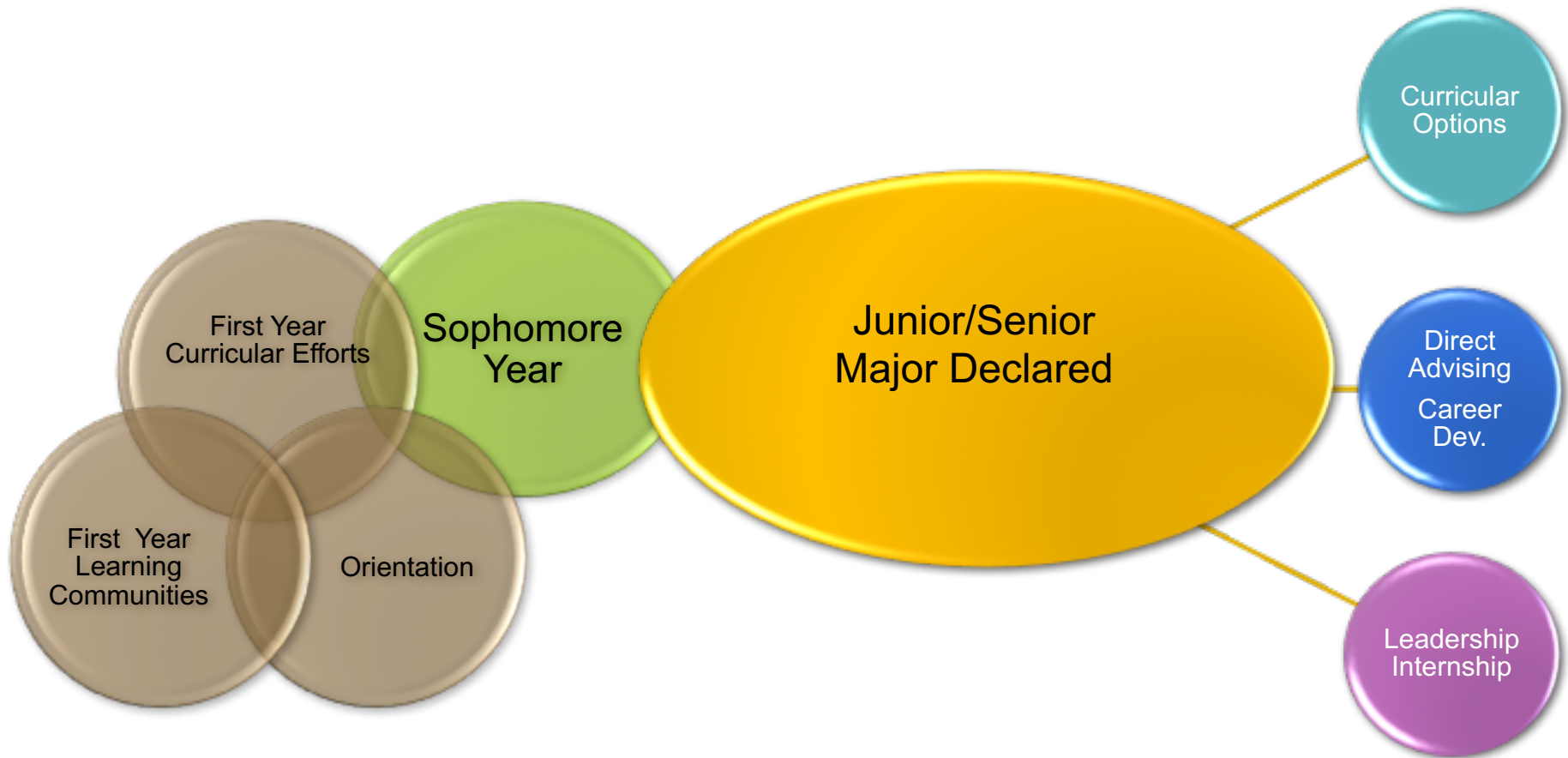
- Sophomore year experience appears to be unique or distinct and yet very diverse!
  - **Implication: our services should attempt to “isolate” specific experiences while “grouping” populations**
- Frontloading of services may have an impact on how sophomores interpret the second year
  - **Implication: our curricular and co-curricular experiences should be intentional across full experience**
- There are significant engagement, satisfaction, and success issues tied to design AND student development.

# RETROSPECTIVE

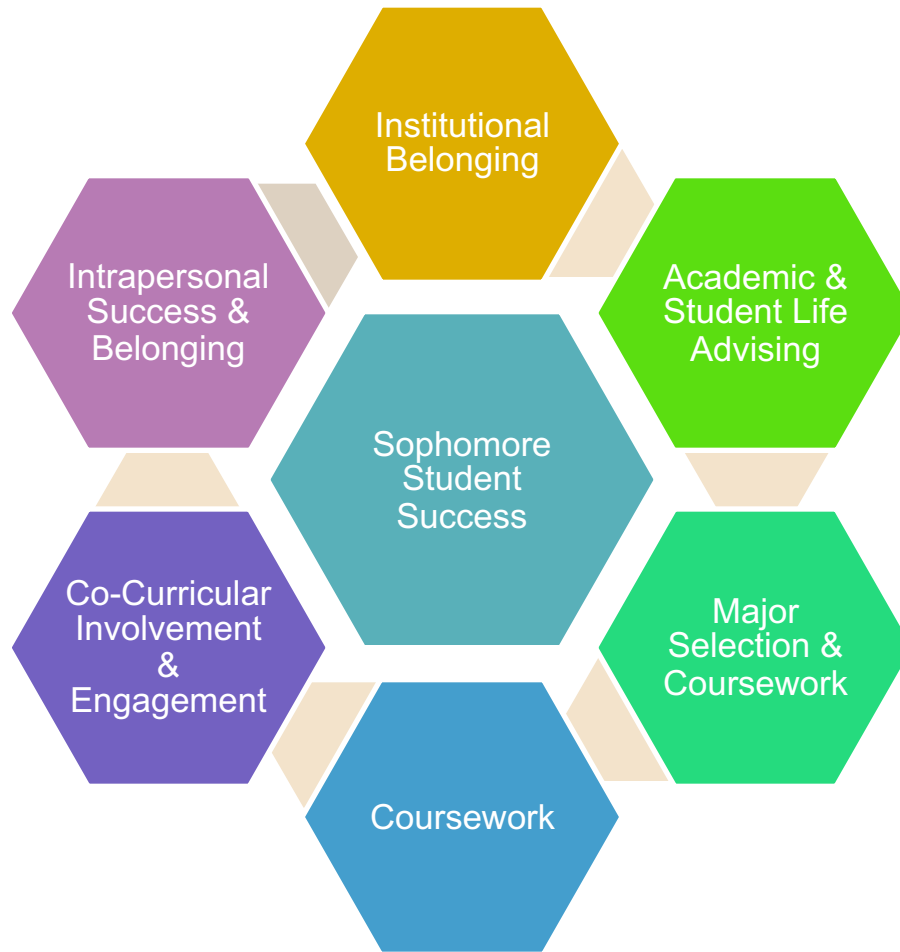
What are the current educational efforts and services on your campus?



# Is this our students' experience?

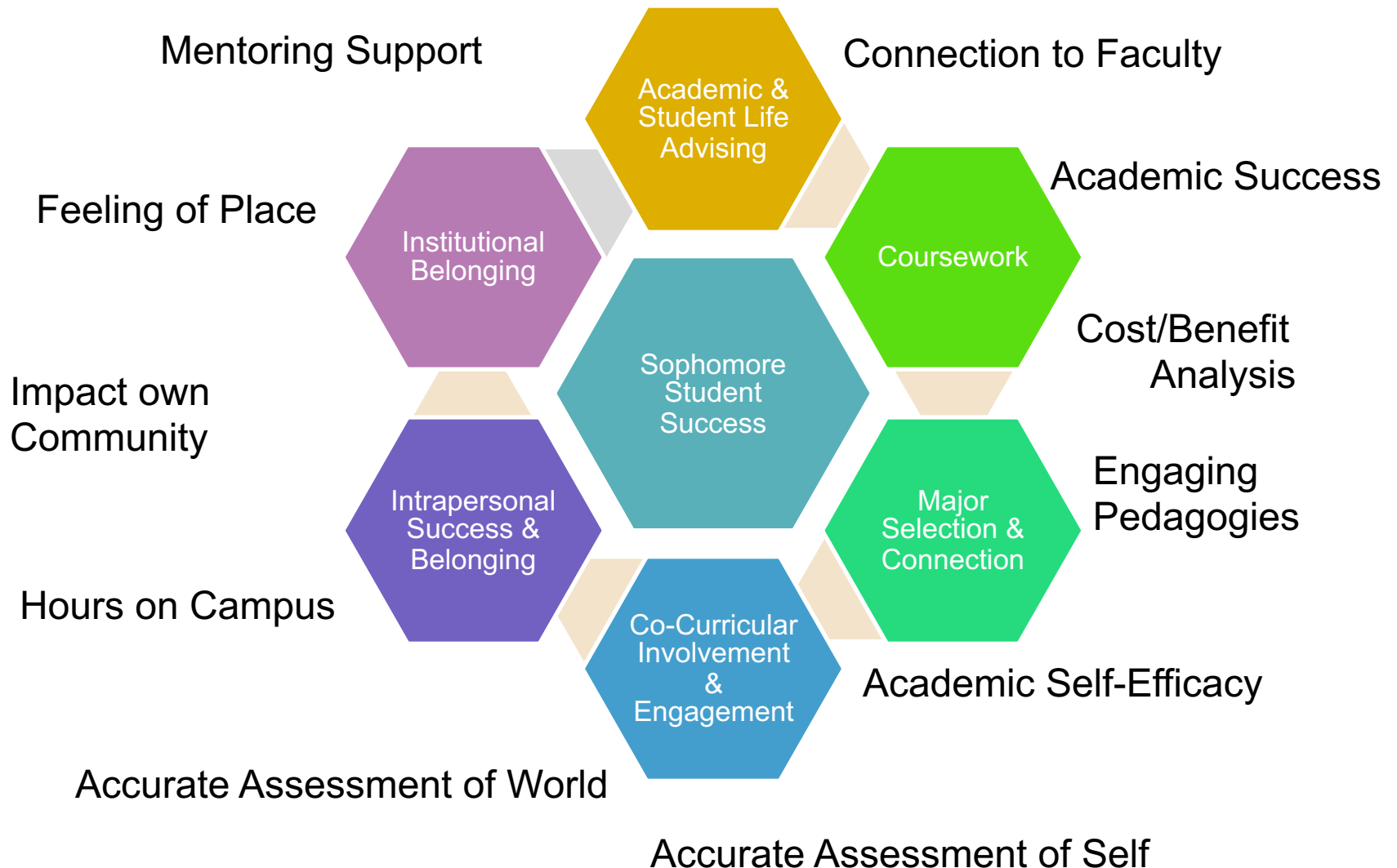


# How might sophomore students experience and interpret...





# How might sophomore students experience and interpret...



# Jullierat (2000) Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey™

## ❖ What do sophomores value most?

- Environment that promotes intellectual growth
- Valuable course content and excellent classroom instruction
- Knowledgeable, fair, and caring faculty
- Approachable and knowledgeable advisors

# Key Approaches – Simplistic Form

- ❖ Students must believe that college is worth the TIME, ENERGY, MONEY, INCONVENIENCE
- ❖ Students must believe that this is “their place”, that you care for them and about them
- ❖ Students need to make connections between what they are studying and their current/future life
- ❖ Students must believe they will be successful \*  
this is their definition!

# Sophomore Self-Efficacy

- ❖ Academic Self-Efficacy as a central construct:
  - ❖ The self-evaluation of one's ability or chance for success (or both) in the academic environment (Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2001; Robbins et al., 2004)
  - ❖ Poor predictor of success in 1<sup>st</sup> semester
  - ❖ Good predictor at end of 1<sup>st</sup> year (Gore, 2006)
- ❖ By the sophomore year, students have often gained enough information about abilities and the expectations of college to make a more accurate assessment.

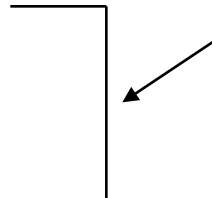
# Is there a common Sophomore academic experience?

- ❖ Kuh and Hu (2001)
- ❖ effort and student reported learning and personal gains increased in a linear way from the first through to the senior year.
- ❖ Sophomores significantly lower than seniors on
  - ❖ cooperation among students,
  - ❖ reading and writing,
  - ❖ effort sum (total amount of effort put into school),
  - ❖ gain sum (total perceived gains from school),
  - ❖ active learning, and
  - ❖ faculty contact.



# Common Sophomore Academic Experience?

- ❖ Kuh and Hu (2001)
- ❖ effort and student reported learning and personal gains increased in a linear way from the first through to the senior year.
- ❖ Sophomores significantly lower than seniors on
  - ❖ cooperation among students,
  - ❖ reading and writing,
  - ❖ effort sum (total amount of effort put into school),
  - ❖ gain sum (total perceived gains from school),
- ❖ **active learning, and**
- ❖ **faculty contact.**



**Actually decreased from  
First to second year!**

# Satisfaction with Advising (Schreiner, 2010)

- ❖ Fewer than half of the sophomores surveyed met with their advisor regularly in their sophomore year
- ❖ 60% of the sophomores were satisfied or very satisfied with advising – but this is the lowest level of satisfaction with any college experience
- ❖ Negative student comments about advising far outweighed positive ones



# Issues for the Sophomore Year

- ❖ Dealing with an intensified curriculum
  - ❖ Being in an academic twilight zone—no major yet but not a first year
  - ❖ Career and major selection issues
  - ❖ Having “Plan B” ready
  - ❖ Who am I and why am I still here?
  - ❖ Reality hits hard
  - ❖ Institution is not as supportive as during the first year
  - ❖ Peer issues
  - ❖ Cost/benefit ratio
  - ❖ Trading up—grass is always greener elsewhere
  - ❖ Negative behavioral patterns catch up to them
- (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000)



# Sophomores Slumping?

Schreiner (2015) SES 2014 – N=4472	
Sophomore year is worse or much worse than first year	17.7%
Courses are worse/much worse than first year	21%
Getting grades below a B average	16.4%
Still unsure of my major	9.9%
Surviving...barely	27.3%

# Sophomores Slumping?

(SCHREINER, 2015)

Dissatisfied with....	Percent
My grades	19.9%
Advising	20.3%
My living situation	20.3%
My health	18.4%
My interactions with faculty	13.1%
My peer relationships	12.8%
The whole college experience	12.3%
The amount I'm learning	14.1%



2014:  
About 1 in 5  
sophomores are  
experiencing a  
“slump” in  
motivation,  
grades, or  
satisfaction with  
the college  
experience

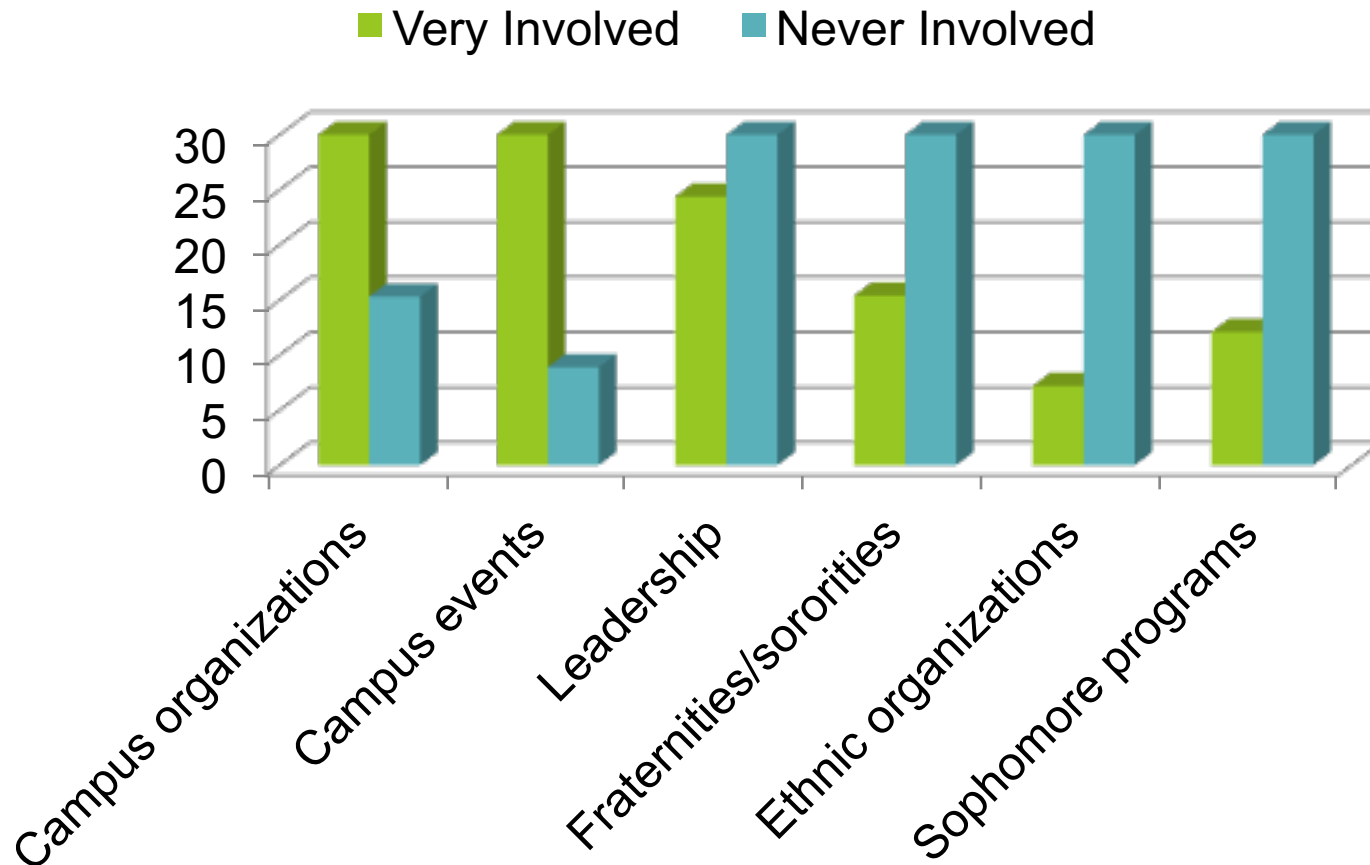
# What Contributes to Sophomores' Thriving?



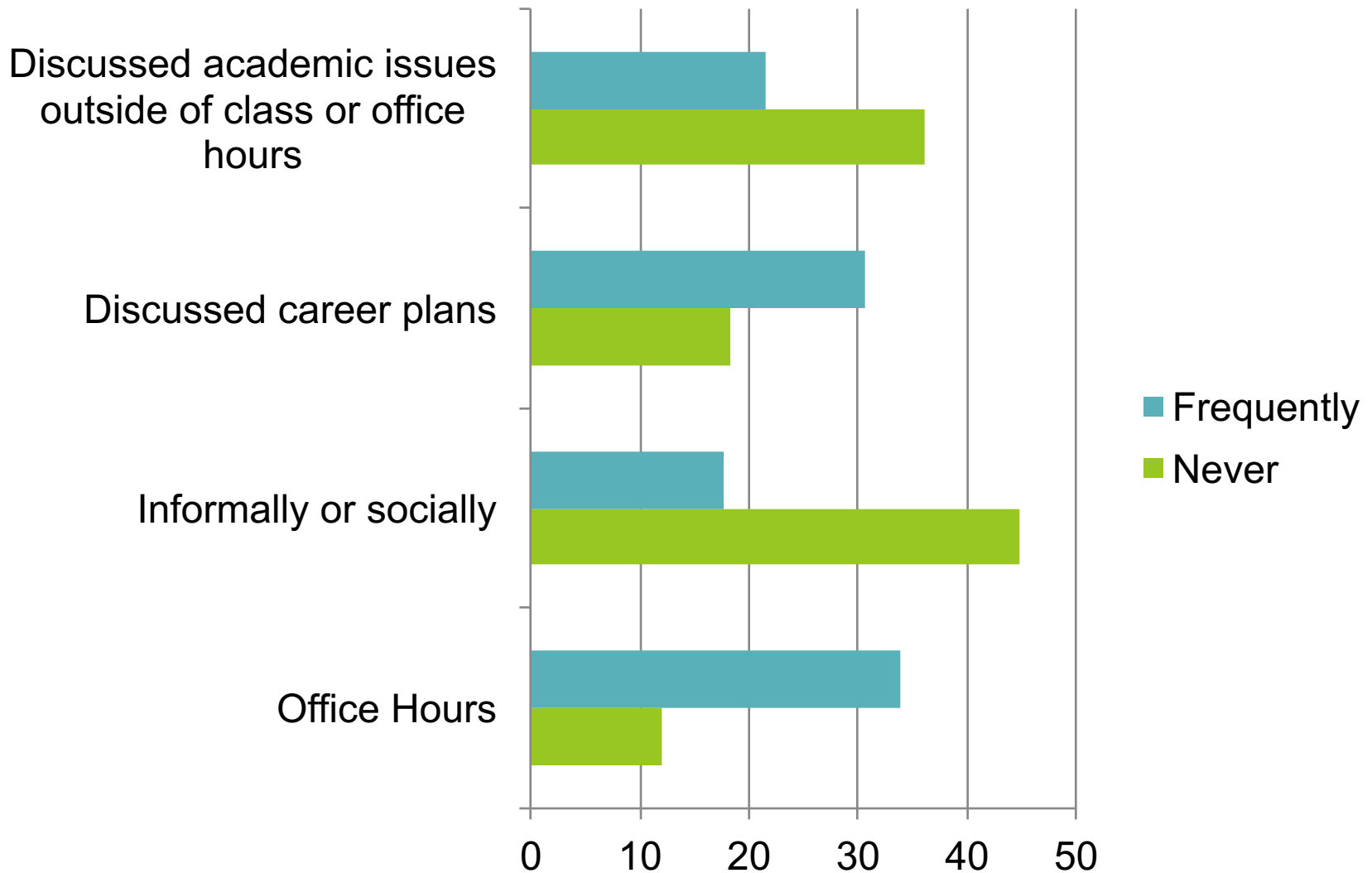
- Sense of community
- Spirituality
- Interaction with faculty
- Institutional integrity
- Sophomore year being better than the first year
- Being sure of their major
- GPA
- Working
- Not dropping courses
- Campus involvement
- Aspirations for graduate school
- Advising frequency

$R^2 = .53$

# How Involved are Sophomores?



# How much do sophomores interact with faculty?



# Connection to Faculty

Sophomores' level of interaction and satisfaction with faculty was the only campus experience variable in our study that significantly predicted **every** positive student outcome.

**But there were racial differences in the degree to which faculty interaction helped students thrive.**



Schreiner, 2015

# Second Year & Sophomore Year on a Continuum



May be deeply committed to major

May have yet to explore or consider how major is connected to future


May be purposeful in college life

May be following others, withdrawing, or living out stereotypes

May be making friends for life

May be unsophisticated in selection of friends/relationships



- 
- The diagram features a central light blue pressure cooker with a brown rim. To its left is a large green arrow pointing right, and to its right is a large green arrow pointing left. Each arrow contains a bulleted list of topics.
- First Year Learning
  - Epistemological Development
  - Insights into Self

## The Pressure Cooker: The Sophomore Year

- Major Selection
- “Adulthood”
- Career Future

### Key Questions:

- Do students **stay with the pressure** long enough to resolve key issues?
- Do students **have the experiences needed** to make insightful decisions?
- Do students have a **complex enough understanding of the world** to make insightful choices?

What are ways to  
handle  
“pressure cooker”  
moments in life?

# Undecided

# Pre-unit

- First Year Learning
- Epistemological Development
- Insights into Self

## The Pressure Cooker: The Sophomore Year

- Major Selection
- “Adulthood”
- Career Future

Key Questions:

Do students **stay with the pressure** long enough to resolve key issues?  
Do students **have the experiences needed** to make insightful decisions?  
Do students have a **complex enough understanding of the world** to make insightful choices?

# Career Decision Making

## V. Gordon (1998)

- **Very Decided:** confident, knowledgeable, satisfied with current decision
- **Somewhat Decided:** may or may not be comfortable with choices, may lack information about self or occupations, may have been thwarted

+++++

- **Unstable Decided:** high goal instability, high anxiety, have chosen a path – may keep them from seeking help

# Career Decision Making (Gordon, 1998)

- **Tentatively Undecided:** have vocational maturity, aren't worried about undecidedness, may be relatively well adjusted or may be avoiding, may need more exploration
- **Developmentally Undecided:** expanding possibilities, need to gather information
- **Seriously Undecided:** have external locus of control and identity, moderate levels of state & trait anxiety
- **Chronically Indecisive:** have external locus of control and identity, high levels of state & trait anxiety

# DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK

---

# Developmental Framework

## ❖ Epistemological Development

- How is it that students *view knowledge*?
- Key to understanding the pedagogical challenges with sophomore students
- Includes moral development – as the question of frame of reference is a key to understand the inherent pressures facing students

## ❖ Psycho/social development

- How one sees self in relation to the world or others
  - impacts choices on many levels.

# How do “typical” sophomores make meaning?

Truth

- There is an answer!
- I need to find it.

OR

Answers  
are more  
elusive.

- I need to figure it out.



# How do “typical” sophomores make moral choices?

Referent  
Group

- What would my peers do?

OR

Societal  
Needs

- How will others be impacted?

# Stages of the Sophomore Year

Schaller (2005)

Stages have *tone* and *content*

Students may experience multiple stages at one time

Major content areas: **Relationships, Self, Academics**

- ***Random Exploration:*** exuberance, lack reflection
- ***Focused Exploration:*** frustration, reflection begins
- ***Tentative Choices:*** relief, some lingering anxiety – action begins
- ***Commitment:*** confidence



# Transition Theory

- Transition into college has been completed.
- This transition is primarily external.
- Bridges (1980) calls this first step of transition the “Ending Process.”
- Services are frontloaded to assist in the transition in to college.
- Students (often sophomores) begin to experience the “Neutral Zone.”

# “Neutral Zone”

(Bridges, 1980)

- Period of great insight.
- Students have gathered a good deal of new information about self, peers, the world.
- Loevinger (1976) called this the “conscientious” stage as students come to be self-evaluative, self-critical, responsible.



# Stages of the Sophomore Year

Schaller (2005)

Stages have *tone* and *content*

Students may experience multiple stages at one time

Major content areas: **Relationships, Self, Academics**

- ***Random Exploration:*** exuberance, lack reflection
- ***Focused Exploration:*** frustration, reflection begins
- ***Tentative Choices:*** relief, some lingering anxiety – action begins
- ***Commitment:*** confidence



1. What do I want out of college?
2. Who do I want to become?
3. Where have I succeeded in the past?
4. Where am I succeeding now?



# Stages of the Sophomore Year

Schaller (2005)

Stages have *tone* and *content*

Students may experience multiple stages at one time

Major content areas: **Relationships, Self, Academics**

- ***Random Exploration:*** exuberance, lack reflection
- ***Focused Exploration:*** frustration, reflection begins
- ***Tentative Choices:*** relief, some lingering anxiety – action begins
- ***Commitment:*** confidence

Key Concerns	Decided Students	Undecided Students	Pre-Unit Students



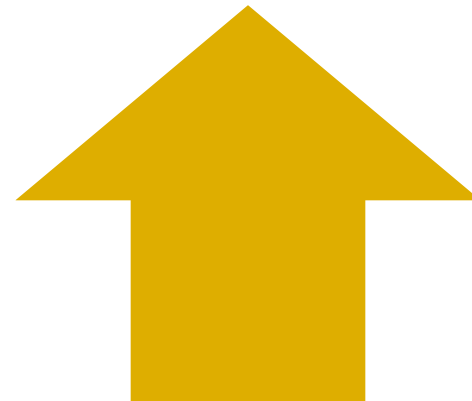
Tool # 1



Challenge



Support



# Tool # 1

## Developmental Contradiction

- New content
- New experiences
- Relationships with new people (I value!)
- Good reflection: Where does that belief come from? How did you decide? What might be other options? What might keep you from broadening your perspective on this?

## Developmental Confirmation

- Experiences that BUILD on prior decisions
- Acknowledgment or appreciation for contributions/ thoughts/ cognitive energy: e.g. “I want to give an example of someone who really worked hard to get to...”
- Good reflection: How did you come to this decision? What are you particularly pleased about?

# Tool # 1

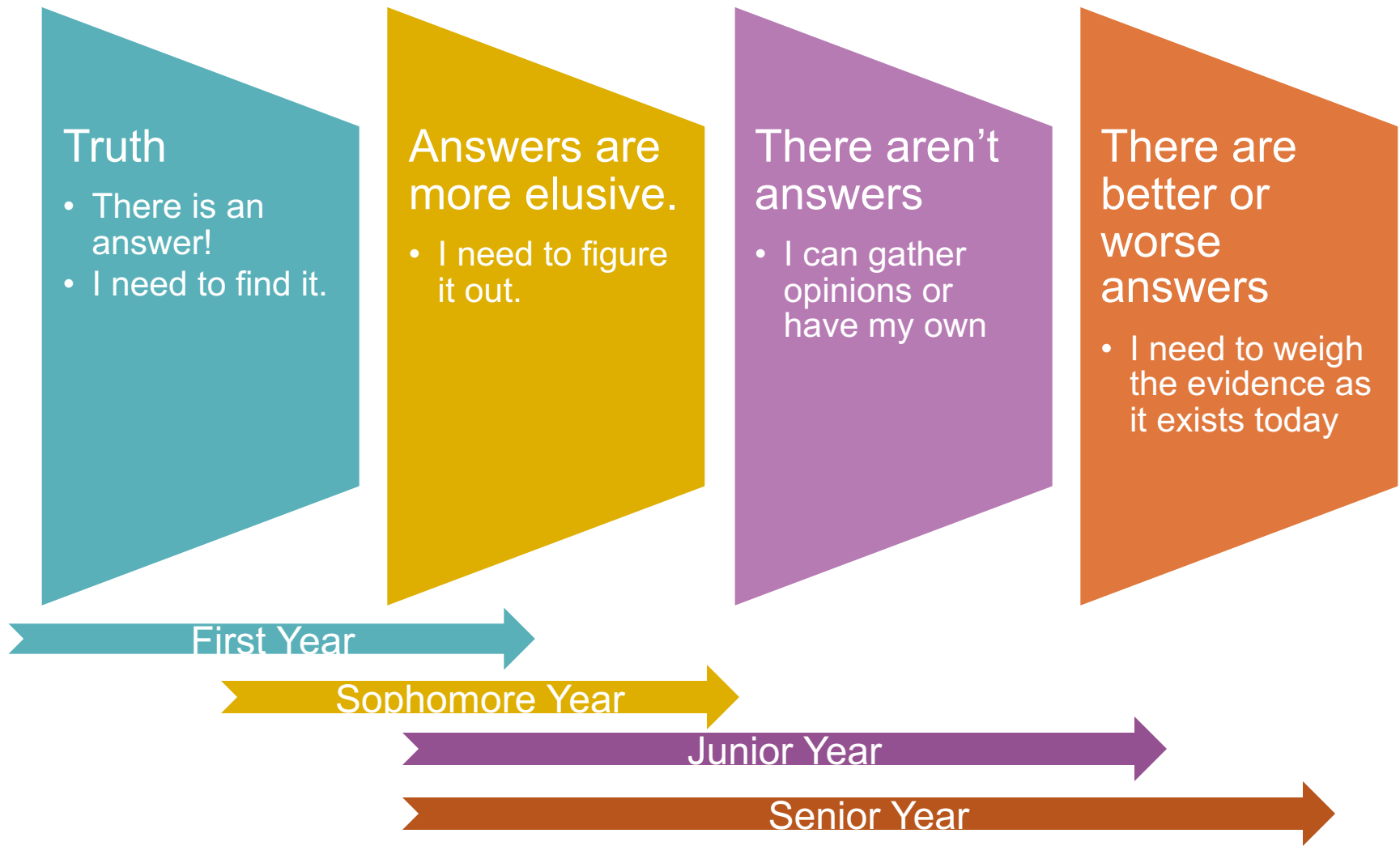
## Developmental Contradiction

- Look for times when students are stuck, resistant, on the verge of “settling”

## Developmental Confirmation

- Look for times when students are overwhelmed, answering lots of other questions, coping with too much stress, or just seem “ready”

# Baxter Magolda (1992)



# Tool #2

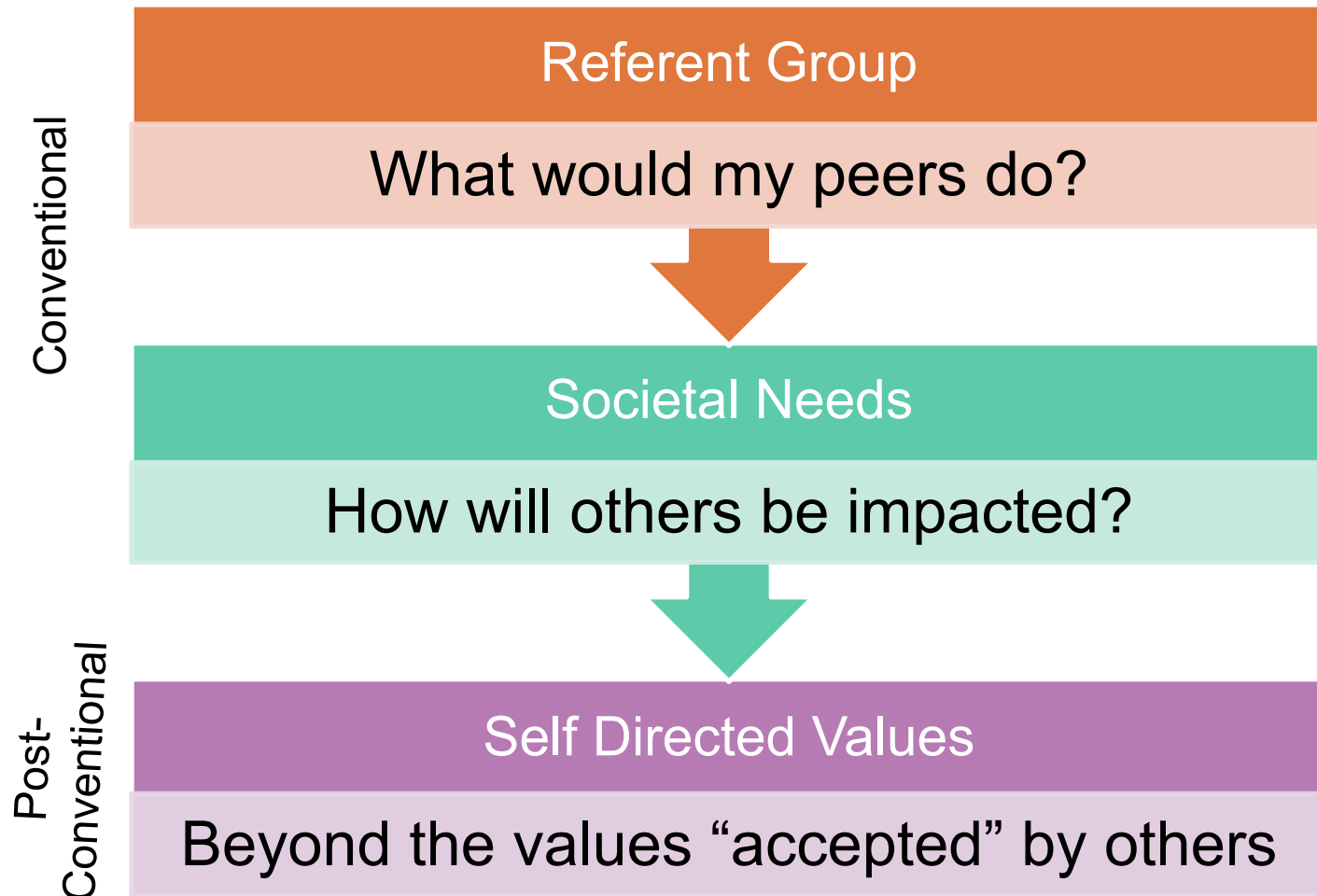
- Work actively on moving students' intellectual development!
  - How?
    - Validate students as knowers
      - Don't give the answers, send them to seek
    - Situate learning in student experience
      - 1) validate experience, 2) use what students bring
    - View knowledge as co-constructed
    - Normalize and label the importance of “understanding” (self, the university, major, content, etc.)
- (Baxter Magolda, 2004)

# Your QEP Should:

- **Validate students as knowers**
  - Increase confidence and autonomy such that students can construct their own ideas
- **Situate learning in students' experience**
  - Help students to feel respected as knowers by providing a foundation for their learning
- **Define learning as mutually constructing meaning**
  - Help students to clarify their own perspectives and learn to work with others to enhance mutual understanding
- **Normalize and label the importance of “understanding” (self, the university, major, content, etc.)**

(Baxter Magolda, 2004; Pizzolato, 2008)

# Moral Choices are related to sense of self and society (Kohlberg, 1969)



# Tool #3

- Complicate moral questions (how do you decide how to be, how to treat others, how to use your resources, etc.)
- Most important tool is multiple referent groups
  - Encourage diverse work groups
  - Encourage students to compare and contrast their peer groups (or even with family, home, church, friends, etc.)
  - Encourage involvement in more than one activity/organization
  - **YOU CANNOT SUPPORT THIS IF YOU DO NOT KNOW THE STUDENT!**



# Goals for Sophomore Year Initiatives

1. Increase student connections to campus
2. Help sophomores feel welcome, a part of your community, as if they have a role
3. Support students in their major decision
4. Support students in academic challenges
5. Provide opportunities for growth outside of the classroom

# Tool #4

- Normalize the “search”
- It is ok to:
  - Not know
  - Be in search
  - Shift friend groups
  - Change the way you think about college
  - Become more responsible

# Pushing Development

- **Great Tools:**

- Multiple Referent Groups
- New, valid\* ways of thinking
  - \*remember, what is “valid” is dependent upon epistemology

- **Experiences**

- Study abroad
- Service learning
- Internships/ co-ops
- Campus employment
- Leadership development

- **Reflection**

- Meaning Making
- Personal contact with wisdom holders