The Sophomore-Year Experience

Belmont University

Proposed Quality Enhancement Plan

Site Visit February 15-17, 2011

Dr. Robert Fisher, President
Dr. Patrick Raines, Interim Provost and SACS Liaison
Dr. Thomas Burns, Provost and SACS Liaison Effective 1/2/11

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I. Executive Summary
 a. **Title** of the Quality Enhancement Plan: *The Sophomore Year Experience*
 b. **Purpose** of the Sophomore Year Experience: Sophomores will engage in focused exploration of themselves and their places in the world
 c. **Key Elements** of the Sophomore Year Experience
   i. The Sophomore Transitions Center will facilitate the Sophomore Year Experience
     1. Student Service Tasks
        a. Guide and hold accountable individual students as they develop and carry out their focused exploration plans
        b. Plan, execute, and assess a convocation series for Sophomores
     2. Administrative Tasks
        a. Manage Sophomore Year Experience Steering Team as that group plans and executes all aspects of the Sophomore Year Experience
        b. Lead the development and execution of the "Sophomore Summit" each Fall
        c. Track all aspects of student involvement with the SYE and use that data as the basis for assessment of the program
     3. Staff: One full-time Director and two part-time professional "coaches"
   ii. Academic Components
     1. COM 1100, Fundamentals of Speech Communication (required of all undergraduate majors prior to completion of 60 credits). Course revised to address needs of Sophomores
     2. Linked Cohort Courses revised such that each pair of linked courses is required to include significant engaged learning experiences. These courses are required of undergraduate students in 2nd, 3rd, or 4th semesters (with exceptions made for transfer students)
   iii. Social and Community Components
     1. Sophomore Living Experiences; concentrated housing in Thrailkill, Kennedy, and Wright-Maddox with enhanced residential experiences such as increased self-governance, Grab-n-Go food options, and residence hall programming specific to Sophomores
     2. Sophomore Summit; held in Fall immediately prior to the start of school, runs several days, and focuses on issues of concern to Sophomores
     3. Sophomore Service Project (probably a Habitat build)
   iv. Spiritual and Character Components
     1. Belmont's "Living a Better Story" initiative
     2. Spiritual discernment convocation series
     3. Spring Break Immersion Trip
   v. Assessment: A regression analysis will be applied to dependent variables of self-efficacy test score, meaning of life test score, retention rates, and graduation rates with a variety of features of the SYE program serving as independent variables

II. Process Used to Develop the QEP

  a. Formed broadly representative Steering Team to generate a list of potential QEP topics Spring of 2009.

  b. Team members:

Amarayah Armstrong, student	Lori LeBleu, COBA staff
Sybril Bennett, CAS faculty	Marcia McDonald, Provost
Amy Coles, Student Affairs staff	Scott McPhee, Health Science faculty
Kim Daus, CAS faculty	Katy McWhirter, student
Lindsay George, student	John Paine, CAS faculty
Paula Gill, Enrollment Services staff	Wes Rainer, student
Jose Gonzalez, COBA faculty	Cheryl Slay, CEMB faculty
Sally Holt, Religion faculty	Rodney Smith, Development staff
Eric Hobson, Health Sciences faculty	Micah Weedman, Univ. Ministries staff
Ike Ikenberry, Inst. Research staff	

  c. Early Spring 2009. Campus-wide invitation to submit QEP ideas online. See Appendix A for an abbreviated list of 63 suggestions and the author of each.

  d. Late Spring 2009. Steering Team narrows list to 6 topics and formed series of broadly representative teams to develop proposals for each. See Appendix B for committees and topics.

  e. Summer 2009. Steering Team created six committees of faculty, staff, and students to develop proposals in each topic area

    i. See Appendix B for a list of topics and committee members and copies of each proposal

    ii. Ideas presented to full faculty in the annual Fall Faculty Workshop, August 2009 and made available online at the same time.

    iii. Feedback at Fall Faculty Workshop and via online response form

      1. Results from faculty survey:

Plan name	1	2	3	total top 3 votes
Planned Collisions: a Belmont Learning Commons	22	12	6	40
Intercultural Competence	8	10	12	30
From Here to Everywhere: Belmont's Global Initiative	9	14	6	29
Discerning Vocation: A Lifelong Path Toward Meaningful Work	8	2	10	20
Community/University Partnership Center	4	6	9	19
Sophomore 2-3-4: Putting the "I" in "Intersections"	1	7	8	16

  f. These results provided to Provost's Council in October, 2009 (comprised of the Provost, all Academic Deans, and Associate Provosts for Student Affairs and

Enrollment Services) who recommended, after discussion, Sophomore 2-3-4 as the spine of the QEP with other ideas included as possible. The Sophomore proposal was seen as superior because it provided a way to connect three of the proposals (Sophomore, Learning Commons, and Discerning Vocation) and was better situated for implementation.

g. QEP Refinement Team formed April 2010 to convert the approved idea into a SACS-ready proposal. Team met twice each week May-August 2010 and as-needed in Fall 2010 to finalize the proposal.

Jimmy Davis (Chair)	Associate Provost and Dean of the University College
Jeff Coker	Director of General Education and Professor of History
Mary Vaughn	Professor of Communication Studies and Department Chair
Annette Sisson	Professor of English and Graduate Program Director
Patricia Jacobs	Director of Career Services
Becky Spurlock	Associate Dean of Student Affairs
Micah Weedman	Director of Outreach for University Ministries
Rachel Scott	Reference Librarian
Kayla Lyftogt	Graduate Student Intern, Vanderbilt University

III. Identification of the topic

Over the past decade, institutions and organizations of American higher education have begun to acknowledge and address the sophomore year as a crucial time for college students—a time when many experience the "sophomore slump." As Sara Lipka reports in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, many sophomores experience anxiety and feel pressured; some panic while others withdraw or begin to fail in response to the overwhelming reality of college. No longer are they in the freshman bubble, focused on making friends, learning campus life, and reaping the benefits of freshman experience courses, programs, and other support systems. With this intentional help no longer in place during the sophomore year, students are faced with taking classes they have avoided in their freshman year; selecting a realistic major that truly aligns with their interests, gifts, and goals; and charting a course that will help them define their futures. In response, many colleges and universities have created "sophomore experience" programs of various types.[1] The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition website lists nearly 50 schools, public and private, that have developed intentional programming geared to sophomores, taking into account development issues that are pertinent to them.

Since the First-Year Experience at Belmont University consists primarily of Towering Traditions, First-Year Seminar, and for most students First-Year Writing, all of which occur before and during the first semester, Belmont students are well-supported as they make the transition to college. However, the Linked Cohort Courses, which follow, may be taken either in the second or third semester of college, meaning that after the first

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[1] Lipka, Sara. "After the Freshman Bubble Pops," Chronicle of Higher Education. September 8, 2006. Web, December 13, 2010: http://chronicle.com/article/After-the-Freshman-Bubble-Pops/4556

semester, their academic path is less coherent; moreover, it is much less intentionally supported through the co-curriculum.

The BELL Core was implemented in 2004 with a focus on the First-Year Experience, which is likely to have been a factor in the improved retention we have achieved in the freshman year. But during the sophomore year—when they are searching for who they really are and what they really want to study, after the first blush of transitioning to college is over—we have no coherent support system in place either in the curriculum or co-curriculum. The Office of Career Services offers an extensive "Belmont and Beyond" program for Juniors and Seniors who are transitioning out of college, but the content of this program addresses specific job-search strategies and is not well suited to the needs of Sophomores.

According to Belmont's retention data from 2000-2001 to 2007-2008, the university loses about 7-9% of our freshman class during the second year of college, and this has remained steady over the past eight years. In other words, since 2000, we have made no gains in retention during the sophomore year and from sophomore to junior year. In the meantime, we have made steady increases in our retention of freshmen, moving from roughly 73% to roughly 80% over that same eight-year period. Although losing additional students during the sophomore year is a national phenomenon, we remain concerned about losing a significant number of second-year students and believe that we should do a better job of serving these students, given that we are a private institution with relatively well-prepared, high-achieving, and economically advantaged students.

IV. Desired Student Learning Outcomes

    a. Primary Goal: <u>Belmont Sophomores will become increasingly engaged in "focused self-exploration."</u>

        i. See the review of literature in section VI for a more detailed explanation of "focused self-exploration."

        ii. To date, no direct measure exists which determines whether a student is engaged in "focused self-exploration," the primary purpose of this QEP. In time, we hope the Belmont QEP will contribute to the development of such a measure, but in the meantime we expect to depend on several alternative measures.

        iii. Student Engagement Measures.

            1. The extensive tracking system we will put in place will provide a comprehensive record of the SYE-related curricular and co-curricular activities for each student.

                a. Such a system will be an expanded and improved version of our current system for tracking student convocation credits. The Belmont Convocation Program is a co-curricular graduation requirement for all students. Students must engage in at least 60 hours of Convocation Programming in a variety of subject areas. Several hundred such programs occur on campus each year with student participation recorded via optical scanning of student id cards. We are confident that our current understanding of

tracking student co-curricular activity will provide a solid foundation for the expanded tracking system required for the Sophomore Year Experience.

    b. Variables to be measured include participation in a wide variety of events, programs, and activities spelled out in the Section VI of this document. The level of engagement in these activities will serve as a surrogate for actual measurement of "focused self-exploration."

2. We will add the 15 questions from the "Engaged Learning Index" (see Appendix C for list of items included in this instrument) to the College Senior Survey given to all Belmont Seniors in their final semester. Response to this instrument can be tracked to the individual student level and, consequently, can be included in our database of information about each student. We will be particularly interested in the relationship between this final engagement score and level of student activity in SYE programs.

b. <u>Belmont Sophomores will demonstrate increased levels of Academic Self-Efficacy and higher scores on the Meaning of Life Questionnaire in proportion to their engagement in SYE programs</u>.

    i. Attitudinal Measures. We expect to use two established measurement tools to indicate changes in perspective among Belmont Sophomores. Each of these instruments has demonstrated impact on positive development of Sophomores.[2]

    ii. <u>Improved Academic Self-Efficacy Scores for Sophomores.</u> Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly stronger Academic Self-Efficacy Scores (see Appendix C for list of items included in this instrument) than those with lesser levels of engagement. Self-Efficacy measures student confidence in academic ability and is positively connected to cumulative GPA and persistence

    iii. <u>Improved Meaning of Life Scores for Sophomores</u>. Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly stronger scores on both parts of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (see Appendix C for list of items included in this instrument) than those with lesser levels of engagement. While student scores on this scale have not been strongly associated with external outcome measures (retention, GPA, etc), both the "Presence" scale and the "Search" scale are directly relevant to Belmont's mission as a "Christian community of learning and service" in that we aim to prepare students to find the place where their passion and abilities meet the world's needs.

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[2] Hunter, M. S., Tobolowsky, B. F., Gardner, J. N., Evenbeck, S. E., Pattengale, J. A., Schaller, M. A., & Schreiner, L. A. (2010). *Helping Sophomores Succeed: Understanding and improving the second-year experience.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Pages 50-51

c. Student Response Measures. <u>To the extent that they are involved in Sophomore Year Experience activities, Belmont students will remain at Belmont and persist to graduation in higher numbers</u>.

    i. <u>Improved Retention Rates for Sophomores</u>. Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly improved rates of retention than those with lesser levels of engagement. Measurement of this goal will depend on the system currently used by the Belmont Office of Institutional Research (see above for data on current Sophomore rate of retention).

    ii. <u>Improved Graduation Rates</u>. Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly improved graduate rates than those with lesser levels of engagement. Measurement of this goal will depend on the system currently used by the Belmont Office of Institutional Research.

d. Process Measures. While these measures are not, strictly speaking, about the impacts of the Sophomore Year Experience on our students, we expect to collect data on them to indicate how well the processes involved in the program are working. We expect to closely track student participation levels in the Sophomore Summit, the Sophomore Transitions Center, Living a Better Story, and a host of additional Convocation and service activities. Levels of participation will give an indication of the effectiveness of our SYE promotional efforts as well as telling us which activities students see as most valuable to them.

V. Literature Review and Best Practices[3]

Similar to the first-year experience, much of the foundational research for the sophomore year experience has been laid by the National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina (NRC). Two monographs and the recent book *Helping Sophomores Succeed: Understanding and Improving the Second-Year Experience*, all published by the NRC, are the cornerstone of the last decade of research on the topic.

As the gap in research and information on the sophomore year closes, many researchers believe that the sophomore year presents a unique set of needs worthy of attention and improved understanding. Leading researchers Jerry Pattengale and Laurie Schreiner (2000) suggest that the trend to focus on the first year experience highlights the already difficult transition from first to second year. They argue that emphasis on the first year leaves many sophomores with a sense of abandonment by their institutions. Many practitioners have long called this in-between period in the college experience the "sophomore slump".

The following literature review will further define and diagnose the sophomore slump and demonstrate the need to address the sophomore year as a unique transitional period important to both retention and persistence concerns.   Emphasis will be given to

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[3] This section based on the work of Kayla Lyftogt, our summer graduate student intern from Vanderbilt University.

the specific academic, developmental, and institutional needs which lay the groundwork for best practices in addressing the sophomore slump.

The Sophomore Slump Defined
   The first attempt to define the sophomore slump appeared in Freedman's 1956 article *The Passage Through College* in which he claimed that sophomores were the least satisfied of all college students. In a later study on student interactions Baur (1965) noted boredom and apathy as common themes among sophomores. Feldman and Newcomb (1969) added, more concretely, that the sophomore year was a time of dissatisfaction not only with the institution, but also with the personal experience at college. Margolis (1976) first asserted the need for sophomore-specific counseling and noted the need to focus on their three-pronged social, academic, and personal identity crisis.
   Described as a time of great confusion and uncertainty by Furr and Gannoway (1982), and a veritable "no-man's land" by Richmond and Lemons (1985), the condition of sophomores has been a subject of interest for higher education scholars for more than half a century.

Key Institutional Drivers for Sophomore Support
Retention
   Concern over student retention is one of the key drivers that induces institutional support of the sophomore year experience. Efforts to increase retention are not only important to an institution's bottom line, but they are also important to students, especially students who drop out or transfer after their second year since these changes jeopardize double the credit hours, tuition dollars, and time over freshman who take similar action.
   Astin (1977), in his seminal work *Four Critical Years*, points out that 85 percent of students who drop out of college do so in the first two years. Retention trends suggest that of this 85 percent, most drop out after the first year. The narrowing "retention funnel" in subsequent years demonstrates that , for each progressing year in college, students are half as likely than they were the year before to drop out. For example, if 30 percent of students are lost in the first year, 15 percent are expected to be lost in the second year, and so on (Noel and Levitz, 1991)
   In the first sophomore-specific study on retention, however, a notable difference in this trend was found. In his dissertation, *Sophomore Retention: The missing strategy in small college retention efforts,* Flanagan (1991) found that in many small private colleges, levels of attrition were greater from the sophomore to junior year than in the freshman to sophomore year. This finding was not in line with the retention funnel proposition of sophomore year attrition as linked to the freshman year rate and prompted Flannagan to consider the possibility that significant differences in the sophomore year in private schools push sophomores to leave in higher numbers.

Concern for Sophomores Who Stay
   In addition to the desire to decrease attrition, Pattengale and Schreiner (2000) recognize an additional symptom of the sophomore slump. They suggest that, "even when sophomores remain in higher education, we have seen many suffer from reduced motivation or apathy, declining grade point averages, or a letdown from their first year." (pp. vi, 2000). Many directionless students decide that because of personal goals, or

societal and parental pressure, quitting school or transferring are not options. While they remain in school they are fighting to find satisfaction and success. These authors suggest that paying attention to the sophomore year transition is important both to reduce departure and to positively impact the educational experiences of those who persist.

Recognition of the Sophomore Transition

Since the late 1970's, student transition theory has focused on freshman students' entry into college (Hunter, 2006). This movement then progressed into a focus on senior year transitions because of the natural coupling between freshman and senior transitions which include breaking ties with families and institutions, respectively. These transitions are highly visible and socially amplified periods of young adult life and thus take precedence over the sophomore year transition. The reality is, however, that the sophomore transition may actually be more important since some of the most critical academic decisions are made during the sophomore year (Gardner, Pattengale, Tobolowsky, & Hunter, 2010). While it is crucial to remain committed to the freshman and senior efforts, it is also important to add legitimacy to this third transition.

The sophomore transition differs in significant ways from other student transitions. Tinto's (1987) research demonstrates that student decisions to persist is multifaceted and includes the need to recommit to their goals. While freshman face a transition more external in nature, as they break ties with family and learn to navigate institutional systems (Schaller, 2005) there is no conclusive evidence that sophomores, as a whole, have completed this transition. Graunke and Woosley (2005) caution against using strategies from the freshman transition for the sophomore transition. Schaller (2010) argues that, different from the freshman experience, the sophomore year is the time to look inward to explore personal fit both at college and in the world at large. In this way, the decision-making skills required to understand residual external concerns, leftover from the freshman year, while additionally redefining their internal goals, makes the sophomore year transition exceptionally difficult.

From this discussion three major issues are clear. First, sophomore attrition rates are uncomfortably high for most institutions nationwide. Second, even students who remain until graduation suffer undesirable effects brought on by the sophomore year, causing low levels of success and satisfaction. Finally, understanding the sophomore year in its context as a critical transitional period creates the opportunity to define and address sophomore's unique needs.

Sophomore-Specific Issues

In the first chapter of *Helping Sophomores Succeed*, Schaller (2010) lists ten specific issues and challenges faced in the second year of college: choosing a major, academic self-efficacy, academic engagement, faculty contact, student motivation, career development, financial issues, student values, social integration and involvement, and overall satisfaction. These ten specific items may be profitably organized using Pattengale's (2000) framework for identifying sophomore needs. Sophomore student concerns center around three broad themes: academic needs and decision-making, developmental concerns, and lack of institutional attention.

Academic Needs and Decision-Making

Major selection is one of the primary objectives of the sophomore year (Gardner, Pattengale, Tobolowsky, & Hunter, 2010). It is also a significant source of stress and,

for some students, the pressure to pick the most appropriate major becomes a self-defeating cycle. The inability to confidently decide on a major is referred to as a lack of academic self-efficacy and is not simply isolated to undeclared students. Even declared students may struggle with coursework in their desired degree program, may not be selected into their major of choice, or may no longer be certain that their initial major choice was appropriate (Schaller, 2010). A lack of knowledge about their own gifts and passions may also play a role in indecision and so the roles of both academic advisors and student development professionals are critical in enlightening sophomore decisions regarding major choice.

A second problem which exacerbates the indecision of sophomores is the fact that they are still completing general education requirements. According to Gaff (2000) sophomore students begin questioning the relevance of courses that are not highly valued by faculty and not connected to their major. Many sophomore students feel that general education courses are a roadblock to integration into their major field of study. Sophomores often lack the benefit of an intentional curricular structure and feel as though they are in a "curricular dead space" (Gaff, 2000).

Anderson and Schreiner (2000) contend that the underlying issues for both major and curricular problems are lack of academic integration and its accompanying lack of motivation. Two ways to address these concerns are through faculty contact and academic engagement, however, these solutions are less often present in the sophomore year.

Developmental Concerns

As sophomores struggle to choose a specific major while navigating a general core, they are also experiencing a set of developmental challenges distinct from their freshman year. Schaller (2007) demonstrates that sophomores feel the pressure of negotiating three key developmental areas: psychosocial, intellectual, and moral development.

Psychosocial

The most commonly utilized psychosocial theory in higher education is Chickering's (1969) seven vectors for college student identity development. Using this theory, Lemons and Richmond (1987) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) concluded that developing competence, autonomy, and purpose as well as establishing identity were the most important areas of development for sophomore students.

Freshmen engage in developing competence by successfully making the transition from high school to college. For sophomores, however, developing competence is more specifically addressed by excelling in any given task related to academics, athletics, or student social or co-curricular organizations. Without a particular avenue in which to excel, sophomore students easily fall into the slump by experiencing dissatisfaction and self-consciousness.

For sophomores, developing autonomy manifests itself through the continuation of emotional and instrumental independence from parents. Emotionally independent students no longer seek or desire approval from parents. A lack of emotional independence can appear in major indecision as "chronically undecided students have low levels of autonomy" (Guay, Ratelle, Sevécal, Larose, & Deschenes, 1996, p. 19). Instrumental independence also relates to the ability to provide for oneself and frequently materializes in sophomores as increased concern surrounding loan burdens and college cost.

The questions "who am I?", "what do I have to offer?", and "what is my place in the world?" are commonly associated with the ideas of establishing identity and developing purpose. While answers to these questions are developed over a lifetime, students must simultaneously work to develop identity and purpose during their time in college as well as for life after graduation. Development along these vectors occurs as students define their social and extracurricular circles as well as their knowledge and expertise. Time spent purposefully developing identity and vocational goals leads sophomores to make more appropriate commitments both to the institution and to their own futures.

Intellectual

A second area of development for sophomore students, as identified by Schaller, is intellectual development. Marcia Baxter Magolda (1992) presented a simple, four-step explanation of student intellectual development. Her research into these four stages (the absolute knower, the transitional knower, the independent knower, and the contextual knower) shows that 46% of sophomores were in the absolute knower stage, viewing knowledge as certain and transferred from authority figures to the knower. Another 53% tested as transitional knowers, a movement from simply gaining information to internalizing and understanding information. Just 1% of students were labeled as independent knowers. This percentage split between absolute and transitional cognition is indicative of the difficulty in assuming blanket characteristics for the sophomore class. It is an important factor to keep in mind as decisions are made in relation to both teaching styles and programming choices for sophomores.

Moral

Sophomores also reveal a unique set of needs in regard to their moral development. Kohlberg (1969) offered an explanation of moral reasoning to help understand sophomore students which included three levels, each with two stages. The levels include pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional reasoning predicated on the self, others, and a set of universal principles, respectively.

Kohlberg and Kramer (1969) found that most sophomores are at either stage 3, where moral choices are tightly coupled with the positive views of others, or at stage 4 where students desire the maintenance of law and order in creating social order. Interesting to note is that their study indicated students often drop from a higher stage of moral development to a lower one during their sophomore year. They speculate that this may be necessary for the development of moral reasoning, and the regression is probably due, in part, to the high volume of changes present in other areas of their lives.

Lack of Institutional Attention

Sophomores, more than any other class of students, name problems related to the institution and its ability to meet their initial expectations as their reason for leaving the institution (Boivin, Beuthin, and Hauger, 1993). This may be in response to the inevitable progression of difficulty that occurs during the second year. Pattengale and Schreiner (2000) assert, however, that the institution is more apt to tolerate negative behavior in the first year but during the second year expectations for performance are raised without accompanying institutional support. In her study of the topic, Juillerat (2000) notes that private college sophomores tend to have high expectations and at the same time require more attention and guidance; neither of which is generally addressed by their institutions. This leaves struggling students feeling unsupported, frustrated, and disappointed.

In order to meet the needs of students considering dropping out or transferring due to negative experiences, it is necessary for individual institutions to understand the specific needs of their students and campus climate. Faculty and administrators must seek to discover the pertinent academic and developmental needs of their sophomore students. By addressing sophomore needs, and with an institutional awareness of the policies and practices that affect them, the likelihood of sophomore retention, satisfaction, and success increases.

Institutional responses to Sophomore needs

The best way to engage sophomores during their transition is to create an environment of both challenge and support. Since many sophomores are going through some type of "identity crisis", defined by Erikson (1968) as one's exploration of occupational, religious, social, and political goals and beliefs, institutions should offer support services relating to these concerns. In an extension of Erikson's work, Marcia (1987) suggested that difficulties among sophomores not be viewed in a negative light, but as active engagement of alternatives in order to settle on appropriate personal commitments.

Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) work, however, showed a lack of college students who grapple with these issues when they found that 40-67% of students graduate with their identity status unchanged. Another way to engage sophomores, then, is to recognize that many second year students may not reach a point of meaningful self-exploration without intervention and intentional challenge offered by the institution. If educators believe that exploration is pertinent in higher education, then the challenges faced by sophomores offer excellent opportunities to intervene and create intentional challenge for these students.

In response to the nexus of personal difficulty and the need for reflection and choice among sophomores, research by Schaller (2005) found that sophomores fall into four different stages as they explore issues relating to themselves, their relationships, and their academic experiences and decisions. Of these four stages include:

- Random exploration: a time in which students are aware of pending choices but delay decisions and engage in little reflective self-exploration.
- Focused exploration[4]: a period of frustration and questioning of past decisions or perceived mistakes in which students actively seek understanding of themselves, their relationships, and their futures
- Tentative choices: students recognize the responsibility of their choices and are anxiety-ridden by the uncertainty of their choices.
- Commitment: students are firm in their decisions but some are decided out of a sense of relief, without considering other options.

Schaller (2005) noted that most sophomores begin their year moving out of random exploration and into focused exploration while some sophomores make tentative choices or commitments in one or more areas of their lives. She suggests that the students who remain in focused exploration longer more thoroughly examine their choices and warns, "if we don't allow our students to stay in [focused exploration] long enough or in deep ways, then they may resort to powerful external forces such as parents, peers, faculty, society at large, or old notions of themselves to make decisions for them" (pg. 19) rather than making a carefully considered best choice for themselves.

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[4] Note that this construct serves as the primary goal of the Belmont Sophomore Year Experience Plan

If students move into the commitment stage too soon or are too dependent on other's opinions, they are more apt to revisit decisions such as their choice of major, wasting valuable resources and risking dropout.

In response to Baxter Magolda's (1992) findings that only 1% of sophomores have moved on to the cognitive development stage of independent knowing, in which students think for themselves, Schaller (2005) argues that guiding students to explore in focused ways is an institutional responsibility. It is a task that helps challenge students to make independent decisions regarding themselves, their relationships, and their academic decisions.

In what ways, then, can institutions create an environment of both challenge *and* support for sophomores? Keeping in mind the unique academic needs, developmental concerns, and institutional grievances of sophomores, Schreiner (2010) offers the following practical suggestions for university faculty and administrators to increase sophomore success and satisfaction and by offering them both challenge and support:

- Connect Students to Faculty and Engage Them in the Learning Process
- Focus Sophomore Advising on Connecting Present and Future Identities
- Build Purpose and Peer Satisfaction Through Selective Campus Involvement
- Empower Students to Navigate the Institution's Systems
- Help Sophomores Connect Their Strengths to Academic Success

Key suggestions regarding implementation also include creating a holistic, integrative, and comprehensive approach to the sophomore year experience that includes partnerships between academic and student affairs (Tetly, Tobolowsky, & Chan, 2010; Baxter, Magolda, & King, 2004). Tobolowsky & Cox (2007b) suggest, further, that fostering community, creating educationally purposeful activities, and making concerted efforts to communicate with students help lay a solid foundation on which to build a sophomore year experience.

Many schools have already begun work on sophomore year experiences. Table 1 below provides an overview of the types of programs offered by institutions with sophomore year experiences. This 2005 survey data is includes information from 382 public and private 4-year institutions (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007c). They offer the caution that academic endeavors aimed at Sophomores may be under-represented as the survey was sent only to student-affairs professionals.

Table 1
Institutional Initiatives Specifically or Intentionally Geared Toward Sophomores

Initiative Type	Number	Percentage
Career Planning	89	74.2
Programs to assist with selection of major	79	65.3
Academic Advising	75	61.0
Class events (e.g., trips, dinners, dances)	56	46.3
Peer mentoring *by* sophomores	54	46.2
Student government (e.g. sophomore council)	46	38.7
Residence life (e.g. sophomore –specific living arrangements	40	33.6
Community service / service-learning	38	32.8
Faculty and staff mentors for sophomore students	37	31.4
Credit-bearing course (e.g. sophomore seminar)	24	21.1
Opportunities to co-teach or assist in teaching a class	24	20.7

Financial Aid (e.g. sophomore scholarships, loans)	23	19.3
Cultural enrichment (i.e. plays, musical events, multicultural fairs)	22	18.8
Curricular learning communities (i.e. linked courses)	20	17.7
Publications for sophomores (e.g. sophomore newsletter or website)	20	16.8
Peer mentoring *for* sophomores (i.e., student mentoring)	18	15.4
Other initiatives (n-77)	22	28.6

Note. N's for each initiative type ranged from 113 to 123 (of the 128 institutions with at least one initiative). Percentages reported are calculated from the *N* for each specific item

Next Steps

This brief review of the literature on the experience of sophomores provides a foundation for five critical components of the Belmont University Quality Enhancement Plan: a sophomore transition center, sophomore-related components for select academic classes, attention to spiritual and character formation, and a strong emphasis on the social and community experience of sophomores. There is solid evidence to suggest that specific, interconnected programming in these areas can have a positive impact on the learning experience of sophomores at Belmont. Some schools, such as Indiana Wesleyan University and Beloit College, have already found positive impacts on retention and graduation rates due to their sophomore year programming (Reynolds, Gross, & Millard, 2005; Flannagan, 2007). However, research demonstrating tangible outcomes of sophomore year experience programs is in relatively short supply. Consequently any programming for sophomores must include continuous and robust efforts to assess program impact on our students.

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VI. Actions to be implemented

a. Establish new initiative titled: Sophomore Year Experience
b. Purpose of the Sophomore Year Experience: Sophomores will engage in focused exploration of themselves and their places in the world
c. Action Step: Create the *Sophomore Transitions Center* (see item iv below)
d. Key Components of the SYE

i. Academic Component

1. COM 1100, Fundamentals of Speech Communication: Emphasize this course as a critical "sophomore" academic experience and integrate key objectives of the QEP into the curriculum. This course is required of all undergraduate students and mist be taken prior to the beginning of the junior year. Because of enrollment pressure, virtually no students take it in their first semester which means the course fits well the QEP focus on 2nd, 3rd, and 4th semester students. Course revisions will include:

   a. An assignment that enables students to take the FOCUS assessments, reflect on the sophomore experience, and articulate how their talents, interests, and future plans connect with the world's need.
   b. Introductory Speech (4-5 minutes in length; worth 10-15% of grade)
   c. Written reflection on personal strengths, weaknesses, and career planning
   d. Reading Pieces (e.g., "Destination Unknown"; career, generational)
   e. *Focus Assessment* (taken online) with written reflection (student will turn in printed assessments and written reflections)
      - Career & Educational Goals
      - Academic Strengths
      - Career & Planning Status
      - Personal Development Needs
      - Work Interest Assessment
      - Personality Assessment

- Skills Assessment
- Values Assessment
- Leisure Interest Assessment

 f. Answer (thesis): How do the results of this assessment map with your current major and career plans? What did you learn in your research and reflection that you didn't know before? To what extent did this process reaffirm your self-perceptions and reinforce your major and career plans? How and to what extent did this help you develop or sharpen your understanding of yourself and your place in the world?

2. Necessary Resources for COM 1100
   a. Minor revisions to advising to emphasize COM 1100 as a "2-3-4" class (e.g., identify programs that are scheduling COM 1100 as a first-semester course)
   b. One additional full-time instructor…search is underway
      i. Prioritize this pre-existing position request from CAS
      ii. Why? Heavy Adjunct Reliance: In the fall of 2010, 68% of COM 1100 sections will be taught by adjuncts. Bringing in full-time instructors will enable the department to train, manage, and assess the SYE components of the course
   c. Training of COM 1100 faculty – funded annual retreat ($200)
   d. Adjunct stipends for training – approximately 8 x $200/semester = $1600/year

3. Linked Cohorts: Enhance this key 2nd-3rd-4th semester academic experience by better supporting it and aligning its goals with the needs of sophomores. In Belmont's general education curriculum students are required to take two courses which are substantively "linked" to one another. Students choose which two courses to link, based on their interests, major, or schedule, from a list of courses in the Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences. The linked courses are taken in the same semester and typically have sequential meeting times (i.e. the first course meets at 8:00am and the second one meets at 9:00am) with the same group of students in both classes. Changes to the Linked Courses would include:
   a. Change nomenclature from "Linked Cohort" to "Learning Communities" (in process)
   b. Classes to be held back-to-back in the same room to create a more meaningful and integrated learning community
   c. Experiential Component required in each link that will improve students' academic, civic, and social engagement (assessed through course evaluation); this Experiential Component will also address and reinforce students' sense of "competency" in the subjects studied, through the experience and application of learning;

it will also address their need for mentoring relationships with faculty and for being part of a peer group.

        i. Examples: Field Trip, Service Project, Study Away

4. Linked Cohort Resources Needed

    a. Engaged Learning Support: $1,000/link X 40 pairs of courses = $40,000

        i. Competitive funding. Only strong projects funded. Faculty must request funds. No mandate to spend the funds if worthy projects are not submitted.

        ii. Distribution of funds to support this initiative will be managed by the Associate Provost in cooperation with the Director of the Sophomore Transitions Center, the Director of General Education, and the Provost

        iii. Prioritize this pre-existing position requests from CAS for Sociology and Math or Biology (searches currently underway)

        iv. Faculty Training on "engaged learning" through the Belmont Teaching Center

        v. Pursue FIPSE Grant for faculty workshops on "engaged learning"

ii. Social Component

1. <u>Sophomore Living Experience</u>

    a. Concentrated sophomore housing in Thrailkill, Kennedy, and Wright-Maddox

    b. Enhanced self-governance in these facilities with more student choices about hall rules (within reason and at the discretion of Student Affairs leadership)

    c. Pick 4/Grab and Go food vending in the dorms

    d. Dorm Convocation[5] programming focused on Sophomore needs

2. <u>Sophomore Summit</u>

    a. Held in the days prior to the beginning of school each Fall

    b. Managed by Sophomore Transition Center Director and staff in close cooperation with Student Affairs and University Ministries

    c. Preliminary Schedule

        i. Early Arrival Welcome Dinner on Thursday evening

        ii. Conference Sessions Friday morning, assist with Freshman Move-in Friday afternoon and Saturday

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[5] The Belmont Convocation Program is a co-curricular graduation requirement for all students. Students must engage in at least 60 hours of Convocation Programming in a variety of subject areas. Several hundred such programs occur on campus each year. For the QEP we will intentionally develop Convocation programs specifically for Sophomores.

        iii.   Summit will include completion of measures relevant to program assessment as well as the "StrengthsFinder" inventory which will serve as a basis for further conversation

        iv.   Main Summit sessions held on Sunday and Monday prior to classes starting on Wednesday

iii. Spiritual/Character Component

1. <u>Sophomore Serve</u>
   a. *Living a Better Story* program managed by Spiritual Affairs. This program is based on the work of author Donald Miller (The New York Times best seller *Blue Like Jazz*), whose latest book, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, has inspired Living a Better Story. Each student is given an envelope containing cash (between $5 and $20) and is asked to consider, for 21 days, how use this money might be used to make a difference in the lives of others (they are urged to consider this "God's money" and to take care as they consider what to do with it). Then they use the money in that way! At the end of 21 days students are asked to write and tell us how they spent the money and we hold a large-group meeting for students to share their experiences.
   b. Community Service Projects managed by Office of Service Learning in partnership with University Ministries. Belmont Sophomore groups will be organized to participate in service projects which currently lack a volunteer base (example: Spring 2011 they are three Habitat for Humanity houses in Nashville which have been funded from sources which cannot provide volunteers…Belmont Sophomores could help fill that service gap)

2. <u>Faculty-Staff-led small groups</u>
   a. University Ministries will offer sophomore-only book discussion groups throughout both semesters in 6-8 week segments and at no cost to the students. Probable book options include:
      i.   Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose: Vocation and the Ethics of Ambition, by Brian J. Mahan
      ii.   A Sacred Voice is Calling: Personal Vocation and Social Conscience, by John Neafsey
      iii.   Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do
      iv.   Who We Should Be, edited by Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass

3. <u>Spiritual Discernment Convocation Series:</u> University Ministries and Spiritual Development will provide convocation options that address the needs, concerns and issues faced by sophomores at Belmont

4. <u>Exploration Retreats:</u> Weekend-length retreats that give students space to explore their beliefs, values, convictions, especially as they relate to

vocation and character development. An example of what these retreats would be like can be found at http://www.ptev.org/video.aspx
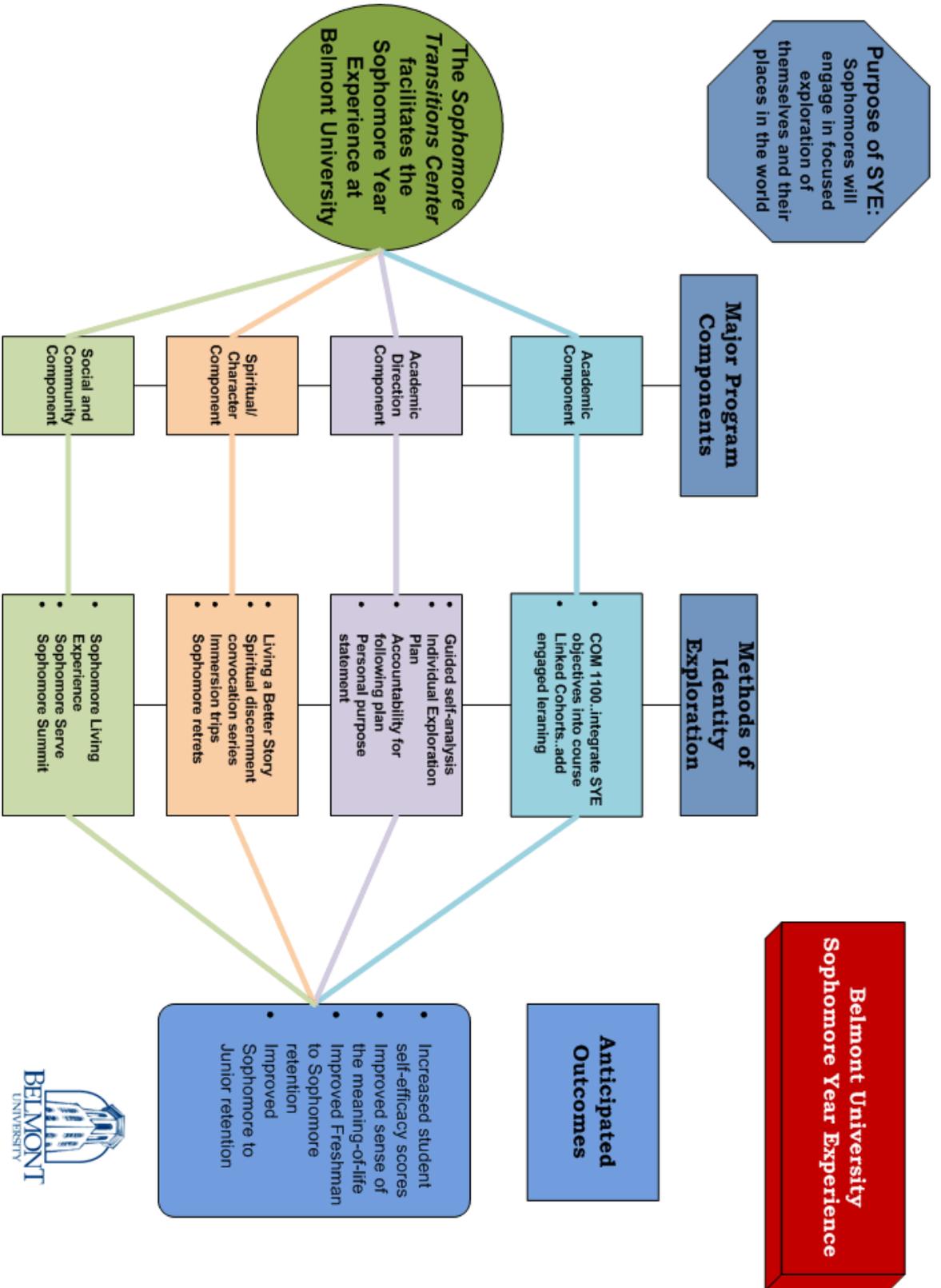
5. <u>Spring Break Immersion Experiences.</u> Using the already-existent immersion trip format, University Ministries will encourage Sophomores to participate in an immersion trip during spring break.

6. <u>Lumos Grants:</u> University Ministires will sponsor programs which encourage sophomores to apply for Lumos Foundation Grants. These grants, funded by a Belmont Trustee offer support for several months of "service away" work for recently graduated students. Students are responsible for proposing what their service work would be, so beginning to think about that as a Sophomore would be very helpful.

iv. Academic Direction Component

1. Contact: students will be invited to visit the Sophomore Transitions Center in person or via the website.

2. The Goal of each contact is to develop a plan by which each student will systematically explore themselves and relevant possible vocational choices and majors

3. Steps in the "coaching" process
   a. the student will be asked to respond, in writing, to several critical questions (probably in an online environment designed for this purpose):
      i. Briefly describe three classes from college or high school which you liked the most. What was it about those classes that captured and held your interest
      ii. Briefly describe three activities which you have been a part of which were significant experiences and enjoyable to you
      iii. Briefly describe the values which drive your life and give examples of things you have done which demonstrate those values in action
      iv. Think about your responses to the three questions above and briefly describe the strengths you recognize in yourself
   b. Meet with individual staff member to review responses and develop an Individualized Action Plan (IAP):
      i. Series of individualized activities to further understanding of self and place in the world
      ii. Individualized Action Plan (IAP) may include StrengthsFinder Assessment
   c. Upon completion of this meeting staff member recommends the StrengthsFinder Assessment as a next step, unless the student took it as part of the Sophomore Summit. Belmont to pay for the inventory so that it's free for students who have satisfactorily completed a and b above or attended the Summit

      d. Student attends group meetings to review StrengthsFinder results and are grouped by theme categories (Relating, Impacting, Striving and Thinking)

      e. Student takes the FOCUS Assessment (if not already taken), and reviews the majors and careers which seem most compatible with their responses

      f. Student meets with the Sophomore Year Experience staff to review all results to date

      g. Student chooses new major or the Individualized Action Plan (IAP) is revised as necessary

4. Tracking system:
      a. Purchase "Collegiate Link" software tracking system.

      b. Database to include name and contact for all students who connect to the Center, to the website, or who attend the Sophomore Summit or any convocation event related to the SYE

      c. Connect to the name all information related to that student including written answers to the questions to the steps above, StrengthsFinder results, and all Sophomore Year Experience events attended, due dates for various desired student responses,.

      d. Develop a system for reminding Sophomore Year Experience staff and students of critical due dates in the for each student's IAP.

5. Staff meets students, careful notes of contact, follow-up with students

6. One full-time director and two part-time Sophomore "coaches" will serve as staff for the Center

e. Belmont SYE Program Diagram

The Sophomore Transitions Center facilitates the Sophomore Year Experience at Belmont University

Purpose of SYE: Sophomores will engage in focused exploration of themselves and their places in the world

Major Program Components

- Social and Community Component
- Spiritual/ Character Component
- Academic Direction Component
- Academic Component

Methods of Identity Exploration

Social and Community Component
- Sophomore Living Experience
- Sophomore Serve
- Sophomore Summit

Spiritual/Character Component
- Living a Better Story
- Spiritual discernment convocation series
- Immersion trips
- Sophomore retrets

Academic Direction Component
- Guided self-analysis
- Individual Exploration Plan
- Accountability for following plan
- Personal purpose statement

Academic Component
- COM 1100..integrate SYE objectives into course
- Linked Cohorts..add engaged leraning

Anticipated Outcomes

- Increased student self-efficacy scores
- Improved sense of the meaning-of-life
- Improved Freshman to Sophomore retention
- Improved Sophomore to Junior retention

Belmont University Sophomore Year Experience

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VII. Timeline

- Fall 2010: Text run of new COM 1100 model in Mary Vaughn's classes (Mary is a member of the QEP Steering Team)
- December 10, 2010:
  - Move QEP program code in Banner to Associate Provost's budget
  - Submit new position requests for Sophomore Transition Center full-time director and two part-time staff members
  - Submit QEP proposal to SACS
- January, 2011: Establish Sophomore Year Experience Steering Team (SYEST) under the direction of the Associate Provost and Dean of the University College and begin planning for Sophomore housing for Fall
- February, 2011: SACS visit and final revisions of plan
- March, 2011:
  - SYEST drafts job description for staff positions and begins search
  - SYEST continue planning for Sophomore move-in activities for Fall 2011. This will not be a full-blown Sophomore Conference since necessary staff will not be in place until June
  - Invite Linked Cohort faculty to apply for engaged learning support
- April and May, 2011
  - Continue Search for Director
  - Continue Planning for Fall
  - Linked Cohort faculty training on engaged learning conducted by Gen. Ed. and Teaching Center
  - COM 1100 faculty training
- June, 2011: Staff begins work (temporarily housed in student study room on Library, 2nd floor)
  - Sophomore Transitions Center Director assumes lead role for SYEST
  - Continue planning for Fall
    - Sophomore Conference (abbreviated version)
    - Fall programming
    - Set up database and make data entry system functional
  - Establish Transition Center facility in Library
- July, 2011: Continue June activities
- August, 2011:
  - Welcome students and begin programming
  - Second round of Linked Cohort and COM 1100 faculty training
- September, 2011
  - Begin pursuit of grants to support SYE activities
  - Launch new version of COM 1100 and Linked/Learning Community courses
- December, 2011
  - Review data from first semester
    - Did the data tracking system work properly?
    - Did the changes in COM 1100 work well from the faculty and student perspectives?
    - Did we establish a baseline of student contact with the Sophomore Transition Center?

- Did we have a good number of well-attended Convocation events for Sophomores?
  - January, 2012: begin planning and promoting the first full-fledged Sophomore Summit
  - May, 2012
    - First year data review…repeat all the questions above
    - Do preliminary results show anything of note regarding student time on the task of "self exploration"?
    - Do preliminary results indicate changes in retention rates?

VIII.   Organizational Structure

a. The Director of the Sophomore Transitions Center will report to the Associate Provost and Dean of the University College and the two part-time employees will report to the Center Director. The Associate Provost reports to the University Provost.

b. The budget for the Center will be housed as a "program code" under the Associate Provost's budget (as is currently the case for other areas which report to the AP such as the Honors Program and the Teaching Center).

c. The Director will develop and regularly convene the SYE Steering Committee to assist in coordination of programming and program assessment/improvement. This group will include representatives from Student Affairs, University Ministries, Service Learning, and General Education.

IX. Resources

Financial commitments from the University are sufficient to cover all aspects of the Sophomore Year Experience, as outlined in this document. Parts of the proposal not specifically funded with new budget allocations fall into four categories:

1. Those which require no funding (e.g. concentrating Sophomore living into three dorms and participation in Habitat for Humanity builds),
2. Those which will be funded using current resources (e.g. Spring Break Immersion Trip and funds for residence hall governance),
3. Those which require no funding (e.g. Sophomore specific convocation events),
4. Those which have already been funded (e.g. new faculty lines in the Social Sciences which will support SYE related academic courses…searches are underway).

X. Assessment

A regression analysis will be applied to dependent variables of Academic Self-efficacy Score, Meaning of Life Questionnaire Scores, Retention Rates, and Graduation Rates with a variety of other features of the SYE program serving as independent variables. Our model for this system of assessment is the "Summary of

Hierarchical Regression Analyses in Private Institutions: Survey of Sophomores" found in Appendix A of *Helping Sophomores Succeed*[6].

The key assessment question for this QEP is not so much "did it work?" as "how does it work?" We are interested in using assessment data to determine which components of the program are the best predictors of our four main outcome measures (dependent variables listed above and described in section IV above). The question of how our Sophomore Year Experience programs work to change student behavior is key to continuous improvement of the SYE at Belmont.

a. Outcome: <u>Belmont Sophomores will become increasingly engaged in "focused self-exploration."</u>
   i. See the review of literature in section VI for a more detailed explanation of "focused self-exploration."
   ii. To date, no direct measure exists which determines whether a student is engaged in "focused self-exploration," the primary purpose of this QEP. In time, we hope the Belmont QEP will contribute to the development of such a measure, but in the meantime we expect to depend on several alternative measures.
   iii. Student Engagement Measures.
      1. The extensive tracking system we will put in place will provide a comprehensive record of the SYE-related curricular and co-curricular activities for each student.
         a. Such a system will be an expanded and improved version of our current system for tracking student convocation credits. The Belmont Convocation Program is a co-curricular graduation requirement for all students. Students must engage in at least 60 hours of Convocation Programming in a variety of subject areas. Several hundred such programs occur on campus each year with student participation recorded via optical scanning of student id cards. We are confident that our current understanding of tracking student co-curricular activity will provide a solid foundation for the expanded tracking system required for the Sophomore Year Experience.
         b. Variables to be measured include participation in a wide variety of events, programs, and activities spelled out in the Section VI of this document. The level of engagement in these activities will serve as a surrogate for actual measurement of "focused self-exploration."
      2. We will add the 15 questions from the "Engaged Learning Index" (see Appendix C for list of items included in this instrument) to the College Senior Survey given to all Belmont Seniors in their final semester.

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[6] Hunter, M. S., Tobolowsky, B. F., Gardner, J. N., Evenbeck, S. E., Pattengale, J. A., Schaller, M. A., & Schreiner, L. A. (2010). *Helping Sophomores Succeed: Understanding and improving the second-year experience.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Pages 50-51.

Response to this instrument can be tracked to the individual student level and, consequently, can be included in our database of information about each student. We will be particularly interested in the relationship between this final engagement score and level of student activity in SYE programs.

b. Outcome: <u>Belmont Sophomores will demonstrate increased levels of Academic Self-Efficacy and higher scores on the Meaning of Life Questionnaire in proportion to their engagement in SYE programs</u>.

   i. Attitudinal Measures. We expect to use two established measurement tools to indicate changes in perspective among Belmont Sophomores. Each of these demonstrated impact on positive development of Sophomores.

   ii. <u>Improved Academic Self-Efficacy Scores for Sophomores.</u> Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly stronger Academic Self-Efficacy Scores than those with lesser levels of engagement. Self-Efficacy measures student confidence in academic ability and is positively connected to cumulative GPA and persistence See *Helping Sophomores Succeed*, pages 48 and 51 for a brief description of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale and a list of the eight items included in the measurement instrument.

   iii. <u>Improved Meaning of Life Scores for Sophomores</u>. Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly stronger scores on both parts of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire than those with lesser levels of engagement. While student scores on this scale have not been strongly associated with external outcome measures (retention, GPA, etc), both the "Presence" scale and the "Search" scale are directly relevant to Belmont's mission as a "Christian community of learning and service" in that we aim to prepare students to find the place where their passion and abilities meet the world's needs. See *Helping Sophomores Succeed*, pages 48 and 51-2 for a brief description of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire and a list of the ten items included in the measurement instrument.

   iv. We expect to collect data on these measures at several points:

      1. Sophomore Summit…Belmont's orientation for new freshmen held the week before school starts each Fall,

      2. First Year Seminar…an academic course required of all new freshmen in their first semester at Belmont. We expect to collect the data between Thanksgiving and the beginning of Christmas break.

      3. COM 1100…this academic course is typically taken in the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th semester and these measures will become part of the standard course requirements. Obviously, variability in when students take this course will make our assessment/research model more complex, but we still expect this data to be important in our understanding about how our students do, or don't, engage in focused-self-exploration.

4. During the Senior year as part of our regular College Senior Survey process.
5. During visits to the Sophomore Transitions Center, as needed.

c. Student Response Measures. <u>To the extent that they are involved in Sophomore Year Experience activities, Belmont students will remain at Belmont and persist to graduation in higher numbers</u>.

    i. <u>Improved Retention Rates for Sophomores</u>. Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly improved rates of retention than those with lesser levels of engagement. Measurement of this goal will depend on the system currently used by the Belmont Office of Institutional Research (see above for data on current Sophomore rate of retention).

    ii. <u>Improved Graduation Rates</u>. Students who participate actively in Belmont Sophomore Year Experience programming are expected to have significantly improved graduate rates than those with lesser levels of engagement. Measurement of this goal will depend on the system currently used by the Belmont Office of Institutional Research.

d. Process Measures. While these measures are not, strictly speaking, about the impacts of the Sophomore Year Experience on our students, we expect to collect data on them to indicate how well the processes involved in the program are working. We will closely track student participation levels in the Sophomore Summit, the Sophomore Transitions Center, Living a Better Story, and a host of additional Convocation and service activities. Levels of participation will give an indication of the effectiveness of our SYE promotional efforts as well as telling us which activities students see as most valuable to them and will provide a measure of student engagement.

XI. Appendices

Appendix A

Initial list of submitted QEP Ideas (abridged version)

<u>Name and Status</u>	<u>QEP Title</u>	<u>QEP Idea</u>
McDonald, Marcia - Faculty	Learning together: expanding service learning across campus	Service Learning impacts only about 200 students a semester, less than 5% of our total enrollment. We know this is a powerful learning experience for students. What if every student had a service learning experience? What if every major required one service learning class?

LeBleu, Lori - Staff	Strengths across campus	Basic idea: Integrate the use of Strengths (Clifton StrengthsFinder and Marcus Buckingham's work). Assisting all of our students to identify, build and apply their strengths in an intentional manner.
Hobson, Eric - Faculty	Living with Gravity -- Pine Wood Derby Across the Curriculum	This project engages all students, staff, and faculty in a cross-campus project to craft a pine wood derby culture at Belmont. Working within the major, student and faculty learn to accept the inextricable pull of gravity as a factor in their lives: the pine wood derby car each student, faculty and staff builds each year serves as a metaphor for life -- regardless of desire, we are all pulled down the track of life toward an ultimate end.
Holt, Sally - Faculty	TEST	Enhancing the quality of education at Belmont might involve providing students with an opportunity to work with people from several different faith traditions as a way of modeling/encouraging interreligious dialogue.
Armstrong, Amaryah - ugrd	Belmont Sustained Conversation Series	In think it would be helpful to create a series of sustained conversations about sexuality on campus, race and racism, gender issues, etc. These are often difficult to discuss, but Belmont, as a Christian institution, should have a hand in facilitating them.
Zimmerman, Carrie - Ugrd	massey computer lab printers	There needs to be something done about the printers in the Massey computer lab on the third floor. They are old, horribly slow, and the PowerPoint notes that nursing courses require take far too long to process and print.
Coyle, John - Ugrd	Flying High at Belmont	Ever since I have been a student here at Belmont, and I am now in my third year, I have never once seen the American flag fly on Belmont's campus, except during home soccer games. Being the highly distinguished university that Belmont is, and being the same institution that boasts its claim as the host of the 2008 Presidential Debate, one would assume, without a doubt, that Belmont proudly flies the American flag on campus.
Biddle, Jason - Ugrd	Honors Program Should Adopt American History Course	Problem: Upon recently hearing two-time Pulitzer Prize Winner, David McCullough speak here at Belmont, I have been made aware of the importance of a strong education that centers on history. As of now, the Honors Program curriculum has a strong foundation in teaching history, but one aspect is lacking: American History. I propose to add an additional 4 hour course for American History
Henley, Sierra - Ugrd	More Online Courses	After taking an online health course, I would like to propose the idea of additional online course offerings. I believe this teaching method is very effective and beneficial to the overall learning experience..

Henley, Sierra - Ugrd	More 8 Week Courses	I absolutely love the 8 week courses. I have been able to grasp the material in 8 week courses and not get overwhelmed as I would in full length semester courses. Discussion is more open in these classes, in the classroom and on Blackboard, which ultimately allows students to develop relationships and gather a different spin on the material.
Henley, Sierra - Ugrd	More 3 hour courses-Less 50 minute courses	Though we all get tired in longer 3 hour classes that meet once a week, with adequate breaks we survive. And I have actually been able to gain more from meeting once again with a solid time frame than meeting 3 times a week for 50 minutes. I would much rather show up on Monday and be finished with that class meeting for the week.
Henley, Sierra - Ugrd	More evening classes.	More evening classes would be amazing! Evenings just work better for some and that should be offered in all subject areas.
Luke, Lancaster - Ugrd	A new method for pairing advisers and advisees.	I would like to see a more focuses method for pairing advisers and advises, especially in the school of sciences. … By simply giving incoming freshmen a "what are you interested in" survey we could pair them with a professor with similar interest.
Koonce, Meredith - Ugrd		Make Belmont more affordable!!!! I'm having to take a year off because I can't afford it
Mitchell, T. David - Ugrd	SuccessPrep:	SuccessPrep is an academic preparation course. It involves increasing Belmont student's chances of succeeding in college by improving their study skills, test taking, and writing abilities.
Sisson, Annette - Faculty	The (Donor's Name Goes Here) "Belmont Goes Global" Program	In keeping with the "from here to anywhere" theme, as well as the "Belmont and Beyond" theme (senior capstone/transitional programs), and in expanding upon our proud tradition of study abroad, a "Belmont Goes Global" initiative would not only allow, but urge and enable every student to study abroad for no extra charge (except plane tickets and spending money, perhaps) to their regular Belmont tuition.
Siami, Emily - Grad	"From Here to Anywhere" Realized.	I propose a class designed specifically to the interviewing process so that students not only feel prepared to go out into the world, but they can represent Belmont University in the best way possible.
Whitehead, Chris - Ugrd	PARKING Enhancement	Something needs to be addressed about reserving parking spots all over campus when students need to park for class. We pay big money for these spots.

Patts-Fagley, Patricia - Ugrd	Providing additional structured tutoring for core classes.	As we all know, there are certain core classes in every major that are more difficult to grasp then others. My proposal would be to identify these core classes and provide additional "tutoring" in a more hands-on method.
Jacobs, Patricia - Staff	Belmont Learning Center	The Learning Center would be a university-wide resource which would bring together many of the existing campus services and resources that support learning.
Sisson, Annette - Faculty	Sophomore Experience: The "Identity Search"	Out of the mouths of students, then, comes this suggestion: That we intentionally work on how to meet our students' needs by supporting them in particular ways during their sophomore year through both our curricular and co-curricular offerings.
Dishman, Tina - Staff	First Year Student Advising Center	With the implementation and current success of our Curb College First Year Experience and Advising Center, under my direction, I feel that this same idea and model should expand to include the entire Belmont University's first year student population.
Smallwood, Lauren - Ugrd	redo the core curriculum... again.	It was hard enough trying to graduate under an outdated catalog (think multiple substitution forms), but what I wanted most out of my Belmont education and did not receive was the ability to take classes I was interested in.
Hurd, Ryan - Ugrd		If Belmont truly desires to become an elite southern university, then we will most certainly have to stop the ridiculous practice of the 4X4 workload for professors. As we grow, we will most certainly have to abandon the efficiency perspective in regards to education and we will have to concentrate on quality, which is not our current system.
McCommons, Alison - Staff	Swimming Pool	Installing a swimming pool would be a significant project and it would greatly improve our learning outcomes and environment by allowing new opportunities for exercise, recreation, physical therapy, social events, community outreach, chemistry studies, health studies, scuba diving instruction, swimming lessons, athletic competition, student employment, and more.
Jackson, Allison - Ugrd	Student Affairs	I believe that there needs to be a better system for student organizations to use certain spaces on campus. Student organizations and greek life should be able to use MPAC or any other facility on campus like it for events.
Martin, Dustin - Ugrd	Improvements for the Audio Engineering Program	Although, as a school Belmont has one of the best audio engineering programs there a few areas in which we could improve. 1. Studio time: 2. Studio Etiquette: 3. Better communication 4. Advising: The advising in the

		AET program has been the worst of any program I have been a part of
Kaufman, Benjamin - Ugrd	A few Changes.	I really wish however that there could be a more centralized place for Belmont students to be together. …My one other request for change is the meal plan in the cafeteria. The meals you don't use in the week should not just disappear.
Braam, Brandon - Ugrd	Freshman Parking	Belmont is unique in that they allow freshman to bring cars to school. Unfortunately, this campus cannot handle the extra traffic. The school should follow the same procedures that other Universities follow and either (1) Do not allow freshman to bring vehicles, or (2) require those wanting to bring vehicles pay parking fees.
Braam, Brandon - Ugrd	Student Fitness Facilities	Four years ago, Belmont had a great fitness center. But, as the years pass, the center has been neglected in its maintenance. When the school had 3000 students, the fitness center was running at its limit. Now that there are 4000 students, we can see that it is not capable of handling the increased volume. It is not very big and does not house enough equipment for all who use it.
Coggins, Jeff - Ugrd	Music Building Parking Proposal	Many Belmont music students, especially those that are in ensembles, have trouble parking near the MPAC/WMB/HSB area. This is particularly true for those who have red parking stickers (i.e. those for the Commons, Hillside, Bruin Hills apartments).
Celentano, Gregory - Ugrd	Share The Vision!	It has come to my attention that many students (and most likely staff) in the Belmont community feel inconvenienced by and disconnected from the many construction efforts taking place on campus. My proposal is to establish a Belmont "Share The Vision!" or "Share Our Vision!" initiative. This type of initiative could be applied to all Belmont activities that directly affect the Belmont community, not just the construction.
Mettetal, Meredith - Ugrd	Professionalism and Politeness in Today's World	I am a University student and am amazed at the lack of consideration many students have toward Belmont faculty and guests. I propose a mandatory freshman course that would go over things that are issues today, and are not being taught.
Caresse, John - Faculty	Gender Studies Program	In the past year at Belmont, I have had more discussions about gender inequality than I can count (and that's saying something, considering I did my graduate work in Women's Studies). I think it is high time Belmont University took the steps to put in place a Gender Studies program, one that would, at the very least, provide students with an option to minor in this field.

Pinter, Mike - Faculty	Campus Learning Center	Our campus would benefit in many ways from the development of a campus learning center (CLC) that would serve students primarily but also faculty and academic programs. The CLC could pull together a variety of existing services as well as develop new ones, potentially including but not limited to The Writing Center, a Math Center (could include the current math lab), Language Lab, Speech Lab and a Testing Center
Braam, Brandon - Ugrd	Going Green?	I don't disagree with this latest fad of Going Green, however, I feel like it has been handled somewhat poorly. Recycling bins appear around campus, which was great until trash bins started disappearing from classrooms, hallways, etc. Belmont could use a real marketing and PR director to present these new ideas to campus. And they should be able to do it in a positive manner while presenting ALL the facts.
Bennett, Sybril - Faculty	Digital Integration: Critically, Socially and Virtually	Given the technological changes, it is imperative that students are immersed in the digital world in order to compete globally. Giving the faculty as well as students the opportunity to critically analyze this monumental shift from the industrial age to the digital age would better prepare our students for the real world
Warren, D. Lee - Faculty	Making Peace: Educating Peacemakers	College is a time for finding your voice, honing your personal philosophy and testing new ways of interacting with the world. So much of our language and tactics use metaphors of challenge and fighting. We indicate that the rest of the world will at best challenge for, and at worst, rob them of, their "fair share." What if we prepared peacemakers? What if we assumed that all of us, collectively, want to make choices that protect and expand, rather than limit and isolate? What if we could actively train our students to approach challenges cooperatively? What if we practiced making bigger pies rather than protecting the fairness of individual slices? We have the opportunity to be a leader in adopting a culture and practice of making peace.
Black, Felicia - Ugrd	Diversity in the Classroom	I think all students would benefit from having more diversity within the classroom setting. This includes having more diverse teachers, but also I think more important teaching about different cultures and their contributions to the field.
Heard, Ernest - Faculty	Belmont University Learning Commons	Enhance student learning at Belmont University by creating a Learning Commons within Lila D. Bunch Library. Learning Commons are becoming immensely popular on university campuses, mainly because they bring together in one location programs and services that are often scattered across the campus and located in places difficult for students to find. A learning commons on Belmont's campus would be a single place to go for a myriad of services to improve writing skills,

		research skills, speech skills, computer skills, math skills, and general learning skills.
Miller, Andy - Faculty	Quantitative Literacy Across the Curriculum	When teaching my Junior Cornerstone Course on consumer credit in Fall 2008, I noticed that my students struggled with certain basic quantitative skills: they found it difficult to apply spreadsheets to real world problems; they had trouble presenting charts and tables clearly in formal writing; and they found it challenging to take an analytic approach to assessing situations and solving problems. I propose that Belmont assess our success at educating our students for quantitative literacy, and, if necessary, consider programs that will improve our efforts in this regard.
Overby, Jeffrey - Faculty	From Here to the World	Consistent with the words in our mission to transform the world, I propose that Belmont University develop a Strategic Internationalization effort.
Maxwell, Brandon - Ugrd	Committing to the Improvement of Racial Diversity on Campus	Belmont University is a University that seems to be committed to being more racially diverse. There are a few ways in which the ball can begin rolling more quickly: - Create a Center for Racial Ethics and Reconciliation or an Office of Multicultural Affairs - Actively recruit non-white faculty so that students of color see themselves reflected in the classroom. - Offer African American History/Hispanic History (etc.) classes on a more frequent basis - Establish a consistent rotation of classes to be offered regularly that teach from different racial perspectives.
Tabar, Andy - Ugrd	School of Entrepreneurship	Starting a business (at some point in life) is an aspiration to the majority of Belmont students. It is only appropriate to establish Belmont even further as THE premier institution of entrepreneurial studies.
Tabar, Andy - Ugrd	Real Music Venue	Belmont should buy "Athlete's House", and turn it into a real music venue, a la 3rd and Lindsley. Create an atmosphere to debut Belmont's best music talent, and feature accomplished national artists in a "Live at Belmont" format.
Martin, Steven - Ugrd	Belmont Needs to Become more racially diverse	As a minority student on Belmont's campus, I can personally attest to the fact that Belmont University should aim to be more diverse. I do acknowledge that we have tried to move in that direction. However, I feel that we are from the goals that we have in mind, and there are more things that we could implement in order to reach our goals.
Tabar, Andy - Ugrd	New Cafeteria	Belmont should change its primary dining offer entirely. The university should look at other colleges that have dining programs that students speak highly of, rather than despise. Ashland University (same size as Belmont) is an excellent examplehttp://www3.ashland.edu/newsroom/view.php?i

For the high cost of tuition, quality at all levels is expected. There is no area that students would rather have improved, and there is nothing more important than the health of Belmont's students.

Tabar, Andy - Ugrd	Information kiosk	A couple years ago at a leadership event, I heard Amy Coles talk about the possibility of establishing an "information kiosk" at the center of campus. This would be a central location to feature promotional posters, upcoming events, live music information, etc. Belmont needs more systems that bring students together, and this would be a simple, yet effective, way of doing so.
Tabar, Andy - Ugrd	Start a Football Program	Plain and simple. Yet, it can be done in a way that brings an exponential amount of growth and interest in Belmont, and can be done with the level of class and prestige that Belmont has maintained as an academic institution.
Grammer, Robert - Faculty	Learning Center	A Learning Center should be established at Belmont which is a single location housing at least the following: * Writing Center * Mathematics Lab * Speech Lab * Educational Testing (for learning styles) The location should be staffed appropriately by faculty and other professionals with training specific to the area of concern.
Chumney, Elinor - Faculty	Student health insurance!	We desperately need to implement a basic health insurance policy to cover all undergraduate and graduate students. Without a mandatory and standardized policy, countless administrative hours are spent updating records and trying to ensure that students maintain coverage.
Shadinger, Richard - Faculty	Library at the Center	Because of a stronger academic environment and growth of graduate programs, Belmont should enhance its library in several ways: enlarged stack space, larger, more attractive study areas, increased acquisitions budget, special collections of historical materials and archives, increased electronic sources of information, centers of excellence which attract scholars to the space, and yes, a coffee shop/study space.
Chumney, Elinor - Faculty	Standardized room reservation requests across campus	At present, anyone wishing to hold a function of a certain size must check with different people for different campus venues sequentially, after they hear back about the unavailability of their preferred site, and by the method most preferred by each unique keeper of the rooms. It would be FAR better to have an open access system showing all available venues at a given time with an easy-to-use reservation request form.
Skinner,	First Year	Begin a program to allow freshmen to study abroad their

Kathy - Staff	Study Abroad Experience	first semester at Belmont. This would: give students a non-traditional first semester experience, ease housing in fall on campus, allow students to get to know each other and their professors well while abroad, improve retention rate, allow students to enter a small, focused learning community the day they begin college, provide an organized and safe way to study abroad, start to pathway to study abroad which hopefully will last 4 years.
Stewart, Tim - Staff	Expand and Strengthen Service-Learning Across the Curricula	Service-Learning, done well, has been shown to improve student learning and improve student retention. In addition, service-learning aligns itself well with Belmont's vision of providing a Christian community of service and learning and its mission of helping students engage and transform the world. Developing a comprehensive strategy to take full advantage of these resources and this commitment could be an important component of a Quality Enhancement Plan.
Cochran, Howard - Faculty	Virtual Belmont Goes Global	The QEP idea is to create a virtual environment that will digitally connect faculty, students, and institutional partners in real time, from here to anywhere at any time. Virtual Belmont would include at least three components: virtual library, virtual classroom, and virtual teams. Time and distance will no longer be barriers to offering university services.
Tough, David - Faculty	Clarity of faculty roles	What is the role of the department chairs? For example, does the chair perform supervisory responsibilities, and if so to what extent (performance reviews; keeping official personnel file, etc)? Where the Chair structure is newly implemented within a college, does the college have a responsibility to define and disclose these roles within the college? [I am submitting this on behalf of a colleague who sent the email to me pursuant to my announcement at an internal faculty meeting that I would be happy to forward ideas to the QEP team. I can also forward the original email from Prof. Tough. Submitted by Cheryl L. Slay]
Lake, Todd - Staff	Exploring Christian Intellectual Insights Across the Curriculum	Exploring the Christian intellectual tradition in each academic discipline can serve as a hallmark of a Belmont education. Our mission to "uphold Jesus as the Christ and as the measure for all things" gives us the freedom to incorporate the best insights of Christian understandings in each field of study into Belmont's life as a "Christian community of learning." As part of our QEP, we could choose to encourage faculty in each department to learn more about Christian approaches to their discipline.
Clement, Suzanne - Staff	QEP Models	Would the CEMB Advising Center serve as a good example of providing a positive learning environment? [Submitted by Cheryl L. Slay on behalf of Suzanne Clement; received the original question via email and

can provide original email.]

Slay, Cheryl - Faculty	Quality Faculty	It seems that part of providing a sound and positive learning environment includes the acquisition of qualified faculty and the retention of same. My early sense (as relatively new faculty) is that every effort is made to accommodate students' needs and wishes, e.g., requests of faculty to help with move-in day and other accommodations that would be helpful for them. What I am still assessing is whether the same spirit of accommodation exists for faculty.
Engle, Mary - Ugrd	More practice rooms.	More practice rooms, more practice rooms, more practice rooms! Also a student lounge for the music students would be great. That closet with the photocopier in the basement of Wilson Music Building hardly counts. ;) Seriously, though, students are flocking and causing serious congestion in the Wilson Music Building lobby, which I've seen cause confusion for visiting students and parents who either can't find the office for all the lingering students, or think there's a line to get in! Please, please, please a student lounge. With sofas. (You can even move the soda machines and copier over there!)
Davis, Jimmy - Faculty	The Fisher Fund for Study Abroad	Under the leadership of Bob Fisher Belmont has embraced the idea that we are preparing students to engage and transform the world. One critical step in achieving that goal is for our students to actually learn, first hand, about the world. Hence, my proposal is that we combine the recently announced move to Belmont of the Cooperative Center for Study Abroad with substantial new investments from Belmont in order to subsidize study abroad for Belmont undergraduate students

Appendix B

Full Text of QEP ides chosen for further development:

 Listed below are the QEP topics under consideration as well as the team members. If you have any questions or suggestions about the various topics, please feel free to contact the team leader(s).

QEP Topic Teams
Summer 2009
Planned Collisions: A Belmont Learning Commons

- Co-leaders: Andy Miller (CAS) (andrew.miller@belmont.edu)
  and Patricia Jacobs (CS) (patricia.jacobs@belmont.edu)
- Mike Pinter (CAS)
- Dan Wujcik (CEMB)
- Wes Rainer (St)
- Ernest Heard (LIB)
- Renee Schultz (Acad. Coord, Ath)
- Amy Coles (SA)
- Bonnie Smith (CAS)

Community/University Partnership Center (Service-Learning)
- Linda Holt (CAS), Team Leader (linda.holt@belmont.edu)
- Tim Steward (SL)
- Kristine LaLonde (HON)
- John Gonas (COBA)
- Amy Hodges Hamilton (CAS)
- Josh Mainer (St)
- Lindsay George (St)
- Scott McPhee (CHS)

Sophomore 2-3-4: Putting the "I" in "Intersections"
- Annette Sisson (CAS), Team Leader (annette.sisson@belmont.edu)
- Jeff Coker (GenEd)
- Regine Schwarzmeier (CAS)
- Kristine Neeley (SA)
- Madeline Bridges (CVPA)
- Rachel Rigsby (CAS), consultant
- Jim Kimmel (CVPA)
- Katy McWhirter (St)
- Eric Hobson (CHS)

Intercultural Competence
- Sally Holt (REL), Team Leader (sally.holt@belmont.edu)
- Caresse John (CAS)
- Bernard Turner (Ent
- Deborah Baruzzini (Org.Dev.)
- Brandon Maxwell (St)
- Amaryah Armstrong (St)

Discerning Vocation: A Lifelong Path Toward Meaningful Work
- Lori LeBleu (Career Planning, COBA), Team Leader (lori.lebleu@belmont.edu)
- Lorraina Scholten (CHS)
- Lee Warren (COBA)
- Anthony Donovan (Res.Life)
- Judy Skeen (REL)
- Micah Weedman (Outreach)

Here and Everywhere: Belmont's Global Initiative
- Jeff Overby (COBA), Team Leader (jeff.overby@belmont.edu)
- Kathy Skinner (Int'l Ed)
- Jimmy Davis (UC)
- Howard Cochran (COBA)
- Maggie Monteverde (CAS, CCSA Dir.)
- Heidi Paderson (St)

Detailed QEP Topic Proposals Developed Summer 2009 and Discussed Fall 2000

Topic: Global Initiative
FROM HERE TO EVERYWHERE: BELMONT'S GLOBAL INITATIVE

Description
In order for Belmont University to truly engage and transform the world, a global mindset must become prominent among students, faculty and staff. The "From Here to Everywhere Global Initiative" will foster global knowledge, skills, and attitudes among the Belmont community by making global issues more evident and essential in our curriculum at all levels while ensuring real-life practical application of these ideas through study abroad and engagement with internationals in the university, local, and global communities.

Purpose
Though part of the Belmont University (BU) mission is to engage and transform the world, the University has fallen short of this mission (see figures in Appendix A and other evidence in Appendix B). For example, though the percentage of BU undergraduate students that study abroad has increased from 3% in 2000-2001 to 4.5% in 2008-2009, these figures are significantly lower than the ANAC average (7.7%) and many BU peer institutions. In addition to study abroad, BU is also weak in terms of cultural awareness and foreign language study. For example, the 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE) reveals that Belmont seniors perceived BU to place significantly less emphasis on the following two education experiences than ANAC schools and Carnegie Peers: 1) Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds, and 2) understanding people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. The 2007 NSEE study also revealed that the percentage of seniors completing foreign language coursework before graduation at BU (38%) was much lower than ANAC schools (56%).

Belmont's anemic progress appears especially critical when considering the challenge issued by the American Council on Education (ACE) in 2000 regarding the state of internationalization within higher education in the United States:
"The challenge to higher education institutions is clear. We need to increase the participation of students in international programs, reshape and internationalize the curriculum and co-curriculum of our higher education institutions, and develop a comprehensive international agenda for undergraduates across the curriculum. Now is the time to begin better preparing our graduates for productive roles in a world of new and rapidly changing realities."[1]

An ACE survey of the American public in 2000 revealed that the public expects U.S. colleges and universities to provide students with international skills and knowledge suitable for the global workforce:
Over 70 percent of respondents stated that college and university students should have a study, work, or internship experience abroad at some time during their college or university education.
More than three out of four respondents indicated that international education opportunities are an important consideration when selecting a college or university.
Nearly eight out of 10 respondents remarked that the presence of international programs would positively influence the choice of college or university for them or their children.
In a similar survey of incoming students, ACE reported:
More than 80 percent of students said it was very or somewhat important that colleges and universities offer opportunities to interact with students from other countries.
Nearly three out of four students said that they believe it is important that their college offer courses on international topics. More than 70 percent of respondents said it is important that their college offer study abroad programs.

The ACE study concludes that high school students poised to enter post-secondary education "will increasingly arrive at colleges and universities expecting international training to

be available. In this climate, institutions will need to meet their demands, on campus and abroad, or risk losing students to colleges and universities that do."

Consistent with this challenge, Belmont University's goal should be to create a campus with a global mindset among its students, faculty, and staff. This global mindset would involve a significant 'climate change' which would take internationalization at the university in a new direction, a direction which is more closely integrated with Belmont's vision, mission, and values. In fact, one of the four General Education goals is to help students develop an understanding of the complex nature of the world, including multiculturalism and international and global perspectives. We intend for every student to understand the international aspects of their majors and ultimately their professions.

The "From Here to Everywhere Global Initiative" will be achieved through the following broad programmatic goals:

- Create a university community more open to multiculturalism while increasing the number of students who graduate with global awareness and cultural competence in the international practice of their major.
- Increase the number of Belmont University students that study abroad and the number of faculty members that teach abroad.
- Increase the number and diversity of international students and faculty on the Belmont University campus.

Evaluation

Ultimately, the exact character of evaluation will be dependent upon the final design of the QEP. However, the following measures would certainly help to evaluate the overall objectives of the proposal

- Increase the percentage of incoming freshmen and students entering with fewer than 30 hours that have a study abroad experience
- Increase the percentage of students that have some form of interaction with international students and/or the immigrant community
- Increase student and faculty study abroad participation over a 5-year period
- Increase the percentage of international students studying on the Belmont University campus over a 5-year period
- Make the Open Doors list of Top 40 Master's Institutions by Undergraduate Participation in Study Abroad
- Increase the percentage of graduating class with credit at an intermediate foreign language level
- Establish a percentage of university revenue that is dedicated towards internationalization efforts
- Imbed a measure of change in global awareness in every senior capstone course

Strategy

In order to plan, implement, and oversee university-wide internationalization and the stated programmatic goals, we propose the creation of an Assistant Provost for Internationalization position along with a permanent Provost's Council on Global Learning (CGL).

The Assistant Provost for Internationalization will be a half-time faculty position and will chair the CGL. The Assistant Provost will be expected to develop a strategic plan and budget that addresses institution-wide internationalization, including initiating and promoting grant activities and development successes.

The CGL should be led by the Assistant Provost and will include the Director of Study Abroad, the Director of International Student Programs, and the Director of General Education, along with one faculty member from each College. The CGL will serve as the central coordinating agent for global learning support services, education abroad, international partnership agreements, faculty/staff development, collaborative research and scholarship, global competence certification, and intercultural engagement at the domestic and international levels.

Among the most immediate priorities of the CGL and the Assistant Provost will be to secure funding for recruitment of international students, identify opportunities for international

partnerships (e.g., the emerging relationship between BU and Kenya's Daystar University), and develop strategic initiatives to fulfill the three proposed QEP goals.

Though the following initiatives are not intended to be definitive or all-inclusive, they do represent potential ideas for implementing the three goals of BU's "From Here to Anywhere Global Initiative."

Goal 1:
Create a university community more open to multiculturalism while increasing the number of students who graduate with global awareness and cultural competence in the international practice of their major.

Goal 2:
Increase the number of Belmont University students that study abroad and the number of faculty members that teach abroad.

Goal 3:
Increase the number and diversity of international students and faculty within the Belmont University community.

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[1] Fred M. Hayward, Preliminary Status Report 2000: Internationalization of U.S. Higher Education, p. 4.
[2] "International Learning Outcomes" American Council on Education, http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/res/assess/intl_learn_Outcomes.htm.
[3] "The Wall Street Journal Guide to Top Business Schools" Wall Street Journal September 27, 2005.
[4] John Hudzik, Why Internationalize NASULGC Institutions: Challenge and Opportunity, http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=38.

Topic: Community/University Partnerships
QEP Brief: The Community/University Partnership Center
Description

In order to make service opportunities available to many more of Belmont's students, and thereby enhance the transformative nature of the education Belmont offers, we propose that Belmont strengthen the organizational capabilities and reach of its existing Center for Service-Learning and Social Entrepreneurship. The goal of such an initiative would be to expand service opportunities widely and deeply within the academic structure of the campus. The Community/University Partnership Center we propose will act as a clearinghouse for all short (2-3 weeks), intermediate (semester), and long-term (academic year or more) service projects that involve community outreach and will include the following partnerships: 1) academic components within designated service learning classes; 2) Social Entrepreneurship projects; 3) University Ministries outreach projects; 4) SIFE projects; and 5) Student Affairs projects. The Center's primary functions will include community partner due diligence; project coordination; training of faculty and students; and facilitation of the integration of projects across colleges and programs. The Center will serve faculty, students and the community by coordinating existing service-learning activities and broadcasting opportunities to the student body.

Purpose

Belmont's Mission Statement asserts, in part, that it empowers its students "to engage and transform the world with disciplined intelligence, compassion, courage, and faith." Belmont works to provide that transformative education in numerous ways, including course offerings, volunteer opportunities, and service-learning programs. Such efforts have resulted in a marked increase over the last several years in the number of courses offering service learning options and the hours students have spent volunteering. Yet recent NSSE and CIRP surveys indicate a significant gap between students' anticipated level of engagement and their actual engagement in

the community. NSSE further indicates that only 16% of first-year Belmont students have participated in service learning courses; and by graduation, 52% of Belmont students claim to have never taken part in service learning activities. Research indicates that service learning "has a positive effect on [students'] sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills"; that "volunteer service in college is associated with involvement in community service after graduation"; and that "service learning has a positive impact on students' academic learning" (Eyler et al. 1-2). Consequently, the increased availability of service opportunities could provide enriched learning opportunities for Belmont students while helping to fulfill the goals of the University's mission statement.

Currently, opportunities to engage in service learning and community service are available in numerous areas of campus life. Student Affairs and University Ministries have been instrumental in fostering a culture of service, and they provide many opportunities for students to participate in community outreach. Professors, administrators, and students follow both their passions and the needs of the world as they develop courses with service learning components, create organizations dedicated to community service, and develop and nurture relationships with community partners. Yet our efforts have been entrepreneurial and independent, resulting in a scattershot approach. For example, during the last academic year several separate programs engaged the issue of criminal justice, incarceration, and rehabilitation. Both a sociology class and a Christian ethics class were taught in a local prison, with both students and inmates making up the class roster. An honors project involved the expansion of a transitional housing program for recently released convicted felons. Many more students could take advantage of and benefit from service opportunities if we developed a more formal framework for expanding service-learning widely and deeply within the academic structure of the campus.

The current Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Service-Learning, in operation since January of 2009 and overseen by Tim Stewart, Director of Service-Learning, and Bernard Turner, Director of Belmont's Center for Social Entrepreneurship, is a natural starting point. Tim has already established a community partner network and a database of service-learning faculty and classes. Bernard has worked to embed Social Entrepreneurship programs within various schools, including the School of Social Work, the School of Nursing, and SIFE projects within the School of Business. Yet another active service area on campus is Student Affairs, whose administrative oversight includes University Ministries, Towering Traditions, and all Belmont student organizations, including Greek life. An umbrella Center will make possible better coordination of the efforts of all these areas.

Specific duties of the proposed Community/University Partnership Center:

- Maintain a cadre of community partners who understand Belmont's mission, as well as the limitations, objectives, and expectations of service learning partnerships with Belmont
- Centralize training for students and faculty and standardize service-learning and social entrepreneurship agreements that bind Belmont, its students, and its community partners
- Facilitate the creation of more service-learning classes across disciplines
- Administer release time and training for Belmont faculty engaged in service-learning
- Encourage and facilitate faculty from diverse disciplines to collaborate within single community partnerships, thereby leading to partnerships that are woven through colleges across campus
- Enable campus and community stakeholders to more easily monitor and view Belmont's service-learning and social entrepreneurship projects and outcomes, thereby more effectively sharing our programs and accomplishments with community members
- Enable students and faculty/staff to obtain a clear understanding of the availability of service-learning and social entrepreneurship opportunities across campus as well as projects that are tied to particular programs or classes

Evaluation

Teagle Grant: Belmont is currently involved in a three-year Teagle Foundation grant to assess the impact of experiential learning in the core curriculum. Grant goals include developing instruments that will effectively measure the impact of experiential activities on student learning.

Current survey instruments: The Service-Learning Committee and the Service-Learning office have cooperated in developing and administering an assessment tool made available to students enrolled in service-learning courses. With a designated Center, more assessment tools could be implemented and could be distributed more widely.

CIRP and NSSE data: These two surveys provide a wealth of information about students' attitudes toward community service, actual participation in service, and dispositions upon entering and leaving Belmont. Continued monitoring of this data should indicate increased participation and/or shifts in dispositions toward service.

Strategy:
Belmont funds a Center with a coordinator, a faculty representative, and 2-3 administrators:
The coordinator will be responsible for representing Belmont to all local, national, and international non-profit community partners, as well as overseeing the due diligence, coordination, and integration of service learning projects across campus.
The faculty representative will be responsible for acting as a liaison between the Center and the faculty, as well as coordinating training.
The administrators will manage the Center and all logistics related to the development and implementation required when linking students and faculty to different partnership opportunities.
The Center intensifies current efforts to maintain a website for faculty/student resources, community partner information, project information, training opportunities, and linked courses.
The Center conducts full due diligence of existing service-learning/opportunities and social entrepreneurship partnerships on campus.
The Center creates a comprehensive "Assumption of Risk and Release Agreement" and gathers that document from all service participants.
The Center prepares an annual report of all service-learning and social entrepreneurship activities on campus.

Work Cited
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Submitted by: John Gonas (Finance), Amy Hamilton (English), Tim Harms (student), Linda Holt (English), Kristine LaLonde (Honors), Josh Maisner (student), Scott McPhee (Occupational Therapy), Tim Stewart (Service-Learning Director)

Topic: Vocational Discernment
Discerning Vocation: A Lifelong Path Toward Meaningful Work

Short Description
We propose a Belmont Center for Vocational Discernment whose primary mission is to operationalize the Belmont Mission of equipping men and women of diverse backgrounds to engage and transform the world. The center would coordinate and enhance related existing programs, pull together resources, and develop new programming.
The mission of the center would be to provide resources, tools, conversation and guidance to aid in the vocational discernment process.

Purpose
We believe meaningful living includes meaningful work. For the purposes of this proposal, vocation is to be understood as a central and deep calling which gives shape to this meaningful work. While humans develop throughout their lives, in our culture the years of young adulthood are focused on discerning how to participate and contribute through work and relationships. The Center for Vocational Discernment would facilitate the process of listening and

learning about oneself and the world that leads to a life of meaningful work for the greater Belmont community.

The center would create a synergy among existing programs and develop specific focus and excellence related to vocational discernment throughout the college and graduate school experience. Across campus our students are involved in several activities that could lead to vocational discernment. However, we see the need for a method for students to integrate the many activities of talent identification, community service, internships and spiritual development into an understanding of the broader concept of their vocation and calling

Connection to Mission The concept of vocational discernment is central to the Mission and Vision of Belmont University. Quoting directly from the Mission statement: "Belmont University empowers men and women to engage and transform the world " and "Faculty and staff commit themselves to guide and challenge students to develop their full potential in order to lead lives of meaning and purpose."

Internal Supporting Data Existing survey data indicates a gap in understanding and competency in vocational discernment. Currently available surveys and data address this topic only indirectly. However, trends in several key areas support the implementation of comprehensive vocational programming to assist students in connecting their talents, service and educational experience to the development of vocational understanding.

Spiritual Growth and Development From the Senior Survey, 40% of students reported "very little gain" or "no gain" in spiritual growth and development while at Belmont. NSSE data shows 50% of seniors in 2007 and 52% in 2008 answered the question of "Developing a Deepened Sense of Spirituality" with the response of "very little" or "some."

Career and Life Planning One of the NSSE Lowest Performing Areas for Belmont in 2007 related to First-Year Students' response to the question "Talked about career plans w/a Faculty member or advisor. Belmont responses were 26% compared to ANAC(33%), Carnegie Peers(30%), and NSSE 2007 (29%).

Student Expectations: Based on the CIRP Freshman Survey Data, responses to "Developing a meaningful philosophy of life" Under "Objectives considered to be essential or very important" has trended upward in each of the past 6 years of available data and in the 2 most recent years more than 54% of incoming students rated this objective as essential or very important.

Academic Advising From NSSE 2008 data under the section "How important is each of the following in your expectations for advising at your institution?" First year students rated "Help connecting your academic, professional and personal development" at 4.09 on a 5.0 scale. We also know from the Senior Survey that 40% of students reported being "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with the quality of academic advising.

Community Service From NSSE data we know that a high percentage of students complete community service [82% (2007) and 83%(2008) of seniors]. However, NSSE data also shows that 40% (2007) and 45%(2008) answered the question of "Contributing to the Welfare of your community" with a response of "very little" or " some."

A successful Quality Enhancement Plan that provides structured and intentional programming related to vocational discernment meets the needs of all of our students and would have a positive impact on these related survey items. Detailed supporting survey data in each of these areas can be found in the appendix.

Additionally, if this topic is chosen, we can add specific questions to the freshman and senior surveys that directly relate to students' understanding and competency in vocational discernment over the coming academic year to develop more targeted support in this area.

External Studies Numerous studies indicate a growing trend in higher education to increase the emphasis on vocation. In a recent plenary address to the Council of Independent Colleges, historian and Wake Forest University President Nathan O. Hatch noted the need for vocational discernment in higher education: "Our culture and our students are thirsty for reconnecting issues of meaning and purpose to vocational discernment, but colleges and universities today have a much harder time doing this than in the past." Research conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA overwhelmingly suggests that Hatch is right, at least when it comes to students and their quest for meaning and purpose. According to "The Spiritual Life of Students: a National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose," nearly 70% of college students expect their college or university to play an essential role in their development of a

sense of purpose and meaning. Given the resources poured into colleges and universities through initiatives like the Lilly Endowment's Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation and the Council of Independent Colleges Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education, it is clear that institutions nationwide are responding to students' expectations by developing intentional, resourced and innovative programs to help students develop a clear sense of vocation.

Evaluation

Projected Student Learning Outcomes
The programs of the center will involve leading participants through a process of self reflection and application including: listening to one's life, observing and identifying signposts and transitions, learning from failure and disappointment as well as success, and identifying areas of deep interest. We envision the following learning outcomes:
Each participant has an understanding of vocation as deeper calling to engage and transform the world which directs humans toward contexts and jobs.
Each participant develops an awareness that vocational discernment is a lifelong process.
Each participant is capable of integrating doing and being within their understanding of their vocation.

> *Measurement*
> While we consider it included in the mission of the center and director to create more specific and significant evaluative methods related to developing programs, we suggest the following for consideration:

- Develop mid academic career survey (after 4th semester)
- Add targeted survey questions to existing freshman, senior and NSSE tools to measure discernment skills
- Develop alumni survey to inform both success of experience and needs which develop after graduation
- Conduct focus groups to assess the effectiveness of particular aspects of the programming
- Develop portfolio over 4 years of student experience
- Track number of students participating in events which are voluntary
- Track number of students making contact with center
- Track faculty and staff attendance at training and development events

- **Strategy**
  Initial Steps
  The implementation of the plan would involve the following steps:
- Establish interrelationships to already existing programs (teaching center, advising, career services, residence life programs, university ministries) including where center would be housed and under what supervision
- Designate budget line and initiate formation of center
- Develop job descriptions and identify the right individuals for director and support staff positions
- Develop advisory board with representatives from student, faculty, staff, alumni and community
- Develop programming that integrates existing programs
- Suggested Programming
  The Center would implement programs including curricular, co-curricular and integrative opportunities across campus focusing on skills and content needed to develop vocational awareness. The following are suggested programs and action items for the Center to consider developing:
- Use all programmatic means possible already on campus and create a grid/categories for classifying these experiences to which we could add 4 developmental levels of competencies

- Utilize FYS, newly created Sophomore retreat experience, Jr. Cornerstone and Capstone courses, adding advising relationship to enable integration of experiences throughout
- Connect FYS to capstone while addressing uncertainty of Sophomore and Junior years in relation to vocational understanding
- Create the following four "retreat like" experiences for undergraduate students to experience throughout their time at Belmont which shape this conversation of discernment (shared sources/common book/ portfolio):
- Leading students to discover their own passion - (first 6 months)
- Leading students to discovering strengths - (2nd -3rd semester)
- Broadening one's view and understanding of the world - (roughly 3rd year) - (could include Jr cornerstone, study abroad, internships)
- Mastery and transition - (2nd semester Jr. year through graduation) - (developing the skills and vision for meaningful work and lifelong discernment)
- Change one category of convocation to "Vocational Discernment" creating a limited set of events with specifically created content that all students are required to take in order
- Create additional event for students who self identify as needing extra conversation
- Create training opportunities for faculty and staff in vocational conversations
- Create programming and events for graduate students

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Topic: Intercultural Competence

Description

The topic of this proposal is intercultural competence. The QEP committee has chosen to utilize the phrase "intercultural competence" in this proposal rather than diversity because this phrase allows for more specificity when referring to conversations about diversity and inclusion. The phrase centers attention on the idea of cross-cultural competence and a level of awareness and responsibility that competence requires. Intercultural competence in this context includes, but is not limited to, conversations about racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic and class status, religion, etc. and means that students become competent, responsible citizens in a number of cross-cultural areas: for example, conversation, experience, awareness, understanding, and action. Intercultural competence may be defined as "student knowledge and understanding of people from a variety of backgrounds" (Hampden-Sydney College 2006) and is achieved when students grow from an ethnocentric perspective to an ethnorelative perspective (Bennett & Hammer 2005). This process of growth is made possible when students not only acquire knowledge about a variety of peoples and cultures but are also able to interact with individuals from different racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Covenant College 2007). In this ongoing process of growth and understanding, students learn to search for the commonalities in humanity while seeking to navigate, appreciate, and respect the differences (Harris 2000).

Purpose

Belmont's current assessment or survey data support the need for this project. In fact, these data indicate that all levels of the Belmont community have discussed the need for more diversity and intercultural competence. Lack of diversity was noted in both student and faculty populations as well as in perspective and thought. Further, on the 2007 and 2008 NSSE reports, students' responses to questions about racial and ethnic diversity were significantly lower than their responses to questions about religious diversity. On a 4-point Likert scale, the questions about racial and ethnic diversity received means that ranged from 2.18-2.55; the questions about religious diversity garnered means of 2.70-2.9. Moreover, on the questions that asked students if their school encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds and provided understanding of people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, Belmont is lower than the comparison groups, ANAC and Carnegie peers. While it is encouraging to know that Belmont is achieving part of its mission to provide students with a Christian community, these results show that Belmont has room to improve; in order to also "empower [our] men and women of diverse backgrounds to engage and transform the world," we need to engender a community of diverse backgrounds.

Evaluation

Belmont can use the results from the NSSE report annually as one form of assessment. However, the University will also need to use other assessment mechanisms. Some possibilities that may be implemented are: student pre- and post-surveys after events on intercultural competence; intercultural competence dialogue sessions; faculty development workshops; commitment to a statement on intercultural competence; number of students attending events on intercultural competence; reflection essay contest on intercultural competence; focused attention to intercultural competence in course syllabi; questions on the senior survey; and the annual report from the designated intercultural competence coordinator/department. While these types of assessments can provide invaluable assistance in measuring the effectiveness of any initiatives on intercultural competence, Belmont will need to have a dedicated faculty/departmental unit that will lead this initiative if it is to truly commit to preparing students to be appreciative and respectful of the changing demographics of the 21st century.

Strategy

This proposal is multifaceted and involves Belmont's campus as a whole. The QEP is a five-year plan and is to be implemented by year three.

Year One

The committee recommends that a director be appointed to oversee all pieces of this initiative. The director would have the responsibility of monitoring implementation and assessment of the proposal. The committee also recommends a pilot program for faculty professional development be implemented during this year. One example of a possible place to begin is with the Mentoring for Mission group. However, a broader, campus-wide conversation is a necessity. The Mentoring for Mission group is an example of how conversations could be initiated. The group includes tenured faculty and relatively new faculty; members of the group could be invited to continue in this program to specifically address issues of intercultural competence. The Teaching Center could be pivotal in assisting with these conversations. Mike Pinter leads this group and is open to this possibility.

The committee recommends that an Office of Intercultural Competence or an Intercultural Competence Task Force be established during this year. This task force would include members of administration, staff, faculty and students. The task force would have involvement in issues such as student, faculty, and staff recruitment, and promotion of intercultural activities on campus. The group would also be available to assist with curricular questions. This task force would help hold the University accountable for the results it hopes to attain and would be available to consult on important issues regarding the future state of intercultural competence at the University. This would necessarily involve offices of admissions, human resources, spiritual development and student affairs; pivotal individuals involved with BELL core would also play a role.

Year Two

The committee recommends that initial curricular changes be made during this year. FYS and third-year religion courses are considered possible places to begin. Other areas of the University would be invited to begin to make curricular changes suggested by the committee. Convocations in intercultural competence could begin to be offered during this year, and any changes made to Towering Traditions and service learning could also take place. The Office of Student Affairs and director of service learning would be involved.

All faculty members, staff and administration would have an opportunity for professional development in intercultural competence; resident directors, resident assistants, campus tour guides and spiritual life assistants would be provided with similar opportunities. The Office of Student Affairs and the Office of Spiritual Development could be involved in this initiative. The coordinator of the Office of Intercultural Competence would oversee this process.

Year Three

During this year, the first writer/artist/scholar in residence could be invited to Belmont for either fall or spring semester. Changes made to curriculum would be implemented in all suggested areas. Linked cohort courses could begin inclusion of divergent learning events and BURS could begin inclusion of showcasing research in interdisciplinary understanding. By the third year of implementation, all academic departments would be asked to have made necessary modifications to support the initiative for intercultural competence. Achievement of these goals would involve human resources, faculty/deans and the BURS committee.

Year Four and Year Five

Assessment would be a focal point and student data would be evaluated to determine the success of the QEP. The Office of Organizational Development is responsible for faculty and staff assessment and could be involved in surveying and evaluating these portions of the Belmont community. Belmont could participate in the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities hosted by the Washington Center or some similar gathering or conference during year four and/or year five. This would result in the formation of new living and learning communities during years four and five. New living spaces or modification of existing living spaces may be needed, and this would necessarily involve offices of advancement and development.

Topic: Learning Commons
Planned Collisions: A QEP Brief in Support of a Belmont Learning Commons
Short Description

Research and local knowledge suggest that Belmont would benefit from the creation of a learning commons, a permanent home for key academic support services that includes space for the Belmont community-including students, faculty, and staff-to gather and share intellectually. The addition of a learning commons to Belmont's campus would improve learning, facilitate collaboration, and foster innovation. If carefully planned and thoughtfully designed, a learning commons could provide an academic heart for our somewhat fragmented campus. Additionally, a learning commons could result in fruitful collisions and conversations for students, faculty, and staff. Borrowing language from Belmont's Mission and Values statements, we see the learning commons as a place where we can "guide ... students to develop their full potential," develop the "skills and dispositions necessary for lifelong learning," and support the core values of inquiry and collaboration in a spirit of service.

Purpose

Our conversations and research lead us to view a learning commons as a nucleus of learning on campus, a "Belmont Central" for academics. The learning commons would provide flexible meeting space for students, faculty, and staff to interact in the shared work of the university. At the same time, services would be provided to help students with the academic skills that we at Belmont have identified as the core of their learning: writing, information literacy, oral and visual communications, collaboration, and quantitative reasoning. As envisioned by library planner Scott Bennett,

A learning commons, as imagined here ... would bring people together not around informally shared interests, as happens in traditional common rooms, but around shared learning tasks, sometimes formalized in class assignments. The core activity of a learning commons would ... [be] the collaborative learning by which students turn information into knowledge and sometimes into wisdom.1

To "students," in Bennett's vision, we would add "faculty and staff." Further, learning commons are designed around the idea of "knowledge production" rather than "information retrieval" and, at their best, learning commons include space for productive "collisions," for people, ideas, and learning to come together intentionally and productively.

Considerable evidence points to the need for such a space at Belmont. Although we have a wide range of excellent academic support services for our students, such as the Writing Center, the Speech Lab, and the Math Lab, these services are scattered around campus. This haphazard diaspora presents a challenge for students and for the larger culture of our university. Respondents to a national survey on best practices in learning centers reported that it is important that academic services "are located around the high traffic patterns of the student body and that they do not require the student to go to many locations for the services that are required."2 In addition, all five sites identified as "best practitioners" in a 1997 Department of Education study of student support services had integrated ("holistic") services, dedicated staff, and employed group learning and instruction.3 The 2005 Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) study used graduation rates and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data to identify colleges that have been successful in producing better-than-average student outcomes. The study found that, among other factors, DEEP colleges "are especially good at effectively front-loading multiple resources to help students learn what it takes to succeed and to establish themselves as independent and then interdependent learners.... Early warning systems and not-so-invisible safety nets are in place to 'catch' students who are teetering on the edge;" additionally, "student services at DEEP institutions were centrally located and easy to find." One of the study's key recommendations to institutions was this: "in planning and constructing new facilities or renovating existing ones, dedicate space for 'socially catalytic' interactions, areas where students and faculty can meet informally or where students can work together on projects."4

Belmont's NSSE data also point toward a need for a learning commons, as responses from the 2007 survey indicate that we compare unfavorably to ANAC peers on items relating to active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Open responses on the 2008-2009 survey indicate that some students would like better advising, increased student-student interaction, more study areas, additional tutoring, and an improved campus focus on student learning. In addition, the Belmont Student Government Association has advocated for many years for the creation of a 24/7 study space. All of these concerns could be addressed by a learning commons.

Benefits and Evaluation

We argue that all of Belmont's students and many of our existing programs would benefit from a learning commons. In the first place, bringing our scattered academic support services into an integrated center will make the services more easily available to students and, presumably, lead to their increased use.

Further, we suggest that introducing a learning commons to Belmont could enable us to strengthen and expand existing programs and offer new innovations. For example, when examining universities and colleges with highly regarded academic support services, our team found that nearly all of them provide "supplemental instruction," in the form of peer tutoring. Like our academic support centers, our peer tutoring program is scattered, and peer tutoring on our campus has little collaboration or oversight. Commenting on the use of "student paraprofessionals" (such as Peer Tutors), the authors of the aforementioned DEEP study noted that DEEP institutions provide extensive training to such students. The staff of a Belmont learning commons could provide such training, enhancing our Peer Tutor program. Additionally, one can imagine synergistic effects from having several academic support programs living under one roof. For example, having the Writing Center and the Math Lab in close proximity could support faculty who wish to assign sophisticated writing and quantitative reasoning assignments such as those

developed at Carleton College.5 It is not hard to think of other Belmont programs-Engaged Scholars, Writing Fellows, and residential foreign language programs, for example-that might be improved by having a permanent home in the learning commons.

We also expect a learning commons to improve more directly measurable learning outcomes. Keimig (1984) observes that "comprehensive" and "institutionalized" learning improvement programs are associated with better grades and higher retention rates.6 In a self-assessment, the Academic Success Center at Clemson University found that freshmen retention rates and academic scholarship retention rates were statistically significantly better for students that used the center's services, and the effect was stronger for students who used more services.7 In addition, since the learning commons would support the collaborative, interdisciplinary activities at the heart of the Bell CORE, we might expect it to improve learning outcomes previously identified as objectives in, for example, First Year Seminars, Linked Cohort Courses, and Junior Cornerstone Seminars.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning commons, we would want to track student use of the services along with outcomes such as freshman retention rate, HOPE scholarship retention rate (which we know is of great concern to many of our students), and GPAs. To measure the expected community benefits, we can use responses from NSSE, which assesses the level of student-faculty interaction and includes items that ask, for example, whether the institution provides "the support you need to help you succeed academically." There are many award-winning campus learning centers which provide excellent models for the type of self-assessment necessary to evaluate the success of a learning commons.

Strategy

Given the diversity of services being brought together in the learning commons and the number of difficult issues that will have to be resolved to bring it into fruition, implementing this QEP project will begin with an intensive planning phase. In year one, a full-time learning commons director will need to be hired or appointed. The director will be in charge of identifying which services will be located in the learning commons. Our team contends that the learning commons would include, at minimum, the Math Lab, Speech Lab, Writing Center, and our flourishing Peer Tutor program; other academic support services, such as a faculty development center, advising and disability services, and space for foreign language students should be considered as well. Recognizing the role that food plays in social gatherings, we also recommend that the learning commons include a small cafe. Once the components of the learning commons are finalized, the director and QEP team will determine the specific space and facility needs for the learning commons and find a location on campus-to be renovated or built-to house the commons. This initial phase will also be when initial data is collected, either from existing surveys or newly developed instruments, to support the assessment of the learning commons' effectiveness. In this first year, site visits to nationally renowned learning centers-such as those at Colorado College, Allegheny College, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and Clemson University-may be useful.

By year three, we expect that the learning commons will be fully operational, with a full-time director and other support staff as necessary. Faculty may serve as part-time directors of subprograms, much as a faculty member serves as Writing Center director now, and the learning commons might employ students as tutors or supplemental instructors. We hope as well that the learning commons will be a focal point of academic collaborative activity on campus, providing space for group meetings, extracurricular faculty-student conversations, and other "collisions" which lead to productive learning.

By the final year of the learning commons project, we will have collected ample data to assess the effectiveness of the learning commons in improving learning outcomes on campus. At this time, we will also be able to evaluate any needed changes and plot the future course of what will undoubtedly be a rewarding and distinctive addition to our campus community.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Jacobs (co-leader), Andy Miller (co-leader), Amy Coles, Ernest Heard, Patricia Patts-Fagley, Mike Pinter, Wesley Rainer, Renee Schultz, Bonnie Smith, Dan Wujcik

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Topic: Sophomore Year Experience
The Sophomore 2-3-4: Putting the 'I' in 'Intersections'
Rationale and Description

Over the past decade, institutions and organizations of American higher education have begun to acknowledge and address the sophomore year as a crucial time for college students—a time when many experience the "sophomore slump." As Sara Lipka reports in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, many sophomores experience anxiety and feel "pressured"; some panic while others withdraw or begin to fail in response to the overwhelming reality of college. No longer are they in the "freshman bubble," focused on making friends, learning campus life, and reaping the benefits of "freshman experience" courses, programs, and other support systems. With this intentional help no longer in place during the sophomore year, students are now faced with taking classes they have avoided in their freshman year; selecting a realistic major (for the first time, or making a change) that truly aligns with their interests, gifts, and goals; and charting a course (leadership, study abroad, service, internships?) that will help them define their futures. In response, many colleges and universities have created "sophomore experience" programs of various types (Lipka, "After the Freshman Bubble Pops," *CHE,* Sept. 8, 2006). The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition lists nearly 50 schools, public and private, that have developed intentional programming geared to sophomores, taking into account development issues that are pertinent to them.

Since the First-Year Experience at Belmont University consists primarily of Towering Traditions, First-Year Seminar, and for most students First-Year Writing, all of which occur before and during the first semester, Belmont students are well-supported as they make the transition to college. However, the Linked Cohort Courses, which follow, may be taken either in the second or third semester of college, meaning that after the first semester, their academic path is less coherent; moreover, it is much less intentionally supported through the co-curriculum.

Thus, the sophomore experience we are proposing focuses on the second, third, and fourth semesters of college (hence "The Sophomore 2-3-4"), during which we would support and encourage our sophomores more deliberately and systematically as they experience the "identity search" that so many undergo after they make the first-semester transition to college. This intentional support would include both curricular and co-curricular elements, which would undergird their second year while also encouraging them to plan for their third and fourth years of college (hence "2-3-4" is also forward-looking).

The sub-title of our program, "Putting the 'I' in 'Intersections,'" points to the fact that we would encourage our sophomores to "intersect" in many ways: offering them more points of support at Belmont, as well as more opportunities to think about important "intersections" in their college curriculum that reflect the world at large, all of which we hope will facilitate their personal reflection on how they might more clearly, deeply, and authentically identify, interact, and engage with their educations and the world at large. Thus, "The Sophomore 2-3-4" would include a multi-

faceted co-curricular program that would help them "intersect" effectively with one another, with staff and faculty, and with the broader world as they consider the path(s) to their future.

The primary components of this sophomore program are:

Co-Curricular: The Center for Exploration and Planning (aka "The CEP")—a professionally staffed center to support the sophomore "identity search." The CEP would help students (not limited to sophomores, of course) explore their potential and options, engage in reflective conversation, find a "neutral" sounding board, and plan for the future; in doing so, it would support their search for (new?) majors, for co-curricular options to enhance their majors and personal growth, and for career possibilities. (This Center would complement, build on, and possibly incorporate the support offered by Career Services.)

Curricular: The special designation of COM 1100 ("Public Speaking") as a "2-3-4" course with a focus on "intersections," deriving in part from a "common book" chosen by the Communication Studies faculty. This course is the only "core" course that Belmont students take after First-Year Seminar and First-Year Writing—the only course for which there are not a list of options. In focusing on COM 1100 as THE "core" 2-3-4 course, we have a way of creating academic coherence and common conversation for our sophomores; this course and its common book would also reinforce the disciplinary "intersections" that the Linked Cohort Courses (taken in the second or third semester) demonstrate.

**Please see the Appendix A for a listing of additional co-curricular and curricular components that are strongly suggested as further ways to develop and enhance this program.

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is chiefly to pay attention to our sophomores, supporting them as they transition out of the freshman bubble and into the reality of college and their futures. In doing so, we hope to create positive opportunities:

To increase our student retention rate during the sophomore year and into the junior year;

To make more strategic use of the BELL Core Curriculum for sophomores and integrate it with a focused "sophomore" co-curriculum.

The BELL Core was implemented in 2004 with a focus on the First-Year Experience, which is likely to have been a factor in the improved retention we have achieved in the freshman year. But as many Belmont students have pointed out, during the sophomore year—when they are searching for who they really are and what they really want to study, after the first blush of transitioning to college is over—we have no coherent support system in place either in the curriculum or co-curriculum.

This proposal aims to extend that freshman support into the "2-3-4" semesters so that students do not feel abandoned by the institution as they are beginning to re-evaluate their lives as well as their college goals and plans. In doing so, we hope to get students through the 2-3-4 "identity search" period and help them settle into a new vision of themselves at Belmont in their junior year.

According to Belmont's retention data from 2000-2001 to 2007-2008, the university loses about 7-9% of our freshman class during the second year of college, and this has remained steady over the past eight years. In other words, since 2000, we have made no gains in retention during the sophomore year and from sophomore to junior year. (In the meantime, we have made steady increases in our retention of freshmen, moving from roughly 73% to roughly 80% over that same eight-year period.) Although losing additional students during the sophomore year is a national phenomenon, we do seem to lose a significant percentage of students given that we are a private institution with relatively well-prepared, high-achieving, and economically advantaged students.

Thus, we are hopeful that paying careful attention to our sophomores at Belmont will improve sophomore retention, as well as our 4- and 5-year graduation rates, thereby increasing our base of satisfied alumni, many of whom support the university in various ways after they graduate.

Benefits

This program will provide long-term "just in time" support for our students—support between the First-Year Experience and the Junior piece of the BELL Core (that is, Junior Cornerstone Seminar and Third-Year Writing), which includes experiential learning and which brings them back to broader issues in the third year. In addition, with the majority of students being well-launched in their majors by the Junior year, they usually benefit from key support offered by their major programs.

This program will support several of Belmont University's key Learning Goals:
The incorporation of a "common book" in COM 1100 chosen by the Communication Studies faculty will enhance the development of sophisticated rhetorical skills, including a.) effective writing and speaking; b.) recognition, evaluation, and construction of written and oral arguments; The co-curricular programming, along with the focus on "Putting the 'I' in 'Intersections'" within the curriculum, will enhance students' development of critical thinking skills, including a.) critical reading and reflection; b.) engaging and solving complex problems; c.) understanding systems and relationships including interdependencies and interconnections. These co-curricular programs and curricular emphases will also help students develop an understanding of the complex nature of the world and their place in it, encouraging them to a.) become responsibly engaged with the larger whole; b.) incorporate into their perspectives and understandings local, national, international, and global perspectives; and c.) recognize the consequences of individual decisions in an interdependent world.

Creating the Center for Exploration and Planning (CEP) will be a significant investment (curricular and co-curricular) in the support of our sophomores and other students. Many of these students have come to Belmont with a particular major/career in mind, but later find themselves searching for their emerging identities and life paths, literally trying to discern how their passions and talents intersect with the world's need. This facility will eliminate some of the burden from our Counseling Center, allowing those professionals to focus on students in crisis; it will also support "undeclared" academic advisors. Most of all, it will support students who need "neutral resources" that will support them as they approach professors in particular fields and as they talk with their parents about their unfolding journeys and self-discoveries.

Identifying COM 1100 as a "Sophomore 2-3-4" course will create a new sophomore (or "2-3-4") "core" curricular experience, endowed with a special place and significance in the BELL Core; this will increase the "commonness" and coherence of the students' academic experience.The use of a "common book" in this course will ensure that conversation will extend beyond the classroom walls, creating a common academic conversation among each "2-3-4" cohort. It could propel students to research and give speeches about various relationships, systems, and interconnections that they would like to explore, which might have relevance to themselves, their majors, their careers, their futures, and/or their outside interests. Thus, it might provide not only a springboard for conversation with fellow sophomores and for speeches in COM 1100, but it might ignite curiosity, exploration, and research that would have personal relevance and value to them as they re-think their vision of their lives, their passions, and their place in the world.

Identifying COM 1100 as a "Sophomore 2-3-4" course will discourage students from taking this course late in their career since it is clearly identified as being "for sophomores." In spite of the "pre-60 credit hour" requirement, about 25% of Belmont students now take COM 1100 as Juniors or Seniors, only some of whom are transfer students who enter Belmont with more than 60 hours.

Evaluation

First, the statistics on the students who make use of the Center for Explanation and Planning will be a significant measure of this program's effectiveness. In addition to user rates, surveys would be given to students to discover their satisfaction with the facility and its services

Second, the co-curricular programs and extended programs can include evaluations that would provide feedback about the effectiveness of the various programs and opportunities.

Third, while there are already specialized course evaluations for the Linked Cohort Courses, these could be tweaked with the "Sophomore/Intersections" ideas in mind.

Fourth, COM 1100 could add a customized evaluation question or two to the institutional course evaluation that would focus on the effects of the "common book" both in and outside of the class and about the course's emphasis on "intersections."

Fifth, students can be engaged in holistic reflection on the overall "Sophomore 2-3-4" either in Third-Year Writing or Junior Cornerstone Seminar; this might be in the form of a written survey, a reflective journal-write, or a facilitated/mediated small-group conversation.

Finally, a significant measure of this program's overall effectiveness will be the student retention data during the sophomore year and at the outset of the junior year. It will also be the 4-year and 5-year graduation rate. Although the sophomore experience will not be exclusively responsible for improvements in these numbers, it will play a key role, and this will be evident especially if there are not other significant factors that change at the same time.

Strategy

Significant resources will be needed to augment professional staffing and resources for the CEP, although the university can build on the professional staff, resources, and body of work represented by Career Services and, to a lesser extent, "undeclared" advising;
COM 1100 would be a featured "core" course, meaning that it could no longer participate in the Link Cohort Courses, which it has done recently on a limited basis (4 links 2007-2008, 3 links 2008-2009, 1 link Fall 2009);
Since students would take COM 1100 in their second, third, or fourth semester, a few more sections of Math and/or 1000-level Religion courses would need to be offered in the fall semester; alternatively, freshmen may take more of their "choice" Gen. Ed. Courses, but in areas with tight majors such as Music, students would not have as many discretionary hours and will need to be strategic in taking one of these "pre-60 credit hour" designated courses;

More COM 1100 would need to be offered in the spring semesters than in the fall, since it would be a "2-3-4" course, meaning that 2/3 of the students would be vying for it in the spring (COM 1100 already offers a few more sections in the spring than in the fall);

More full-time faculty would be needed to teach COM 1100—and additional positions may be needed since about 50% of COM 1100 is taught by adjunct instructors; since sophomore faculty would be educated about "sophomore developmental" issues and would be asked to distribute information about sophomore co-curricular programs, it would be fitting for our full-time tenure-track faculty to play a strong role here to provide a true "core" experience as well as continuity;
More full-time faculty would be needed to teach LCCs for all of the same reasons that are listed in the previous bullet;
Academic advisors would need to be educated about the fact that COM 1100 is a "2-3-4" course.

If complementary components are incorporated in this program the following would also be relevant:
Funds will need to be allotted in the Financial Aid office for merit-based book scholarship, and these funds would need to "carry-through" beyond the sophomore year;
If extended programming such as "interest groups," Spring Break service learning or Study Abroad trips, or a "Fall Follies" type of show were developed, staffing and support of these projects would have to be addressed (although Study Abroad and service learning trips may involve faculty members teaching in the spring semester who may lead the trips as part of their courses);

Adjustments would need to be made in housing strategies in order to designate Sophomore Residence Hall(s)—and if sophomores were required to live on campus in dorms, that would require advanced planning and communication; (currently sophomores are required to live on campus, with similar exceptions as freshmen, but they typically live in apartments).

Submitted by: Madeline Bridges, Jeff Coker, Eric Hobson (consultant), Katy McWhirter (student), Kristine Neeley, Rachel Rigsby, Cam Sarrett (student), Regine Schwarzmeier, Annette Sisson (chair)

Some possible co-curricular enhancements of the "Sophomore 2-3-4" might be:

- Sophomore residential experience (i.e. a "sophomore dorm"), which might involve some rules for sophomore living that differ from those for freshmen (altered visitation hours and practice hours, furnishings, etc.);
- Convocations, residential programs, and possibly film/discussions that focus on "sophomore" developmental and "interest" issues;
- Ongoing sophomore activities, such as:
  - "interest groups"
  - sophomore Spring Break service learning project or trip (ideally tied to a specific spring course)
  - Spring Break Study Abroad trip (ideally tied to specific spring courses)
  - a humorous "Fall Follies" type of show, put on by sophomores for their peers and for freshmen about the glories and vicissitudes of the sophomore experience
  - "Sophomore 2-3-4" electronic newsletter, featuring "sophomore" events, convocations, activities, and links to resources, as well as highlighting various Financial Aid programs;
- "Sophomore Scholarships":
  - the Dan McAlexander Academic Retention Scholarships already available in the sophomore year to high-achieving freshmen who also have financial need
  - two kinds of book scholarships: $500 book scholarships in the sophomore year (and beyond) for students who achieve a 3.7+ in their freshman year, and $350 book scholarships for freshmen who improve their grade point average by 1 full point from their first semester at Belmont to their second semester.   Some possible *curricular* enhancements of the "Sophomore 2-3-4" might be: Education of faculty who teach Linked Cohort Courses and COM 1100 about sophomore "developmental" issues; Use of COM 1100 and the LCCs to provide information about co-curricular "sophomore" programs and opportunities; Increased emphasis on the "intersections" aspect of the LCCs—highlighting how the world is overlapping, inter-related, interdependent, contingent, and complex—and reflecting on how people (the "I" in intersections) can sometimes find clarity and definition of self and the world by understanding and grappling deeply and honestly with untidiness and unexpected relationships.

Appendix C: Survey Instruments to be used.

See: Hunter, M. S., Tobolowsky, B. F., Gardner, J. N., Evenbeck, S. E., Pattengale, J. A., Schaller, M. A., & Schreiner, L. A. (2010). *Helping Sophomores Succeed: Understanding and improving the second-year experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Pages 50-51.

1. Academic Self-Efficacy (7-point scale with 7 high)
   a. I know how to schedule my time to accomplish tasks.
   b. I know how to take notes.
   c. I know how to study to perform well on tests.
   d. I am good at research and writing papers.
   e. I am a very good student.
   f. I usually do very well in school and at academic tasks.
   g. I find academic work interesting and absorbing.
   h. I am very capable of succeeding at this institution.
2. Meaning of Life Questionnaire (7-poing scale with 7 high)
   a. I understand my life's meaning.
   b. I am looking for something that makes my life meaningful.
   c. I am always looking to find my life's purpose.
   d. I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.

e. I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
f. I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.

3. Engaged Learning Index (5-point scale with 5 high)
    a. I am learning a lot in most of my classes.
    b. I often discuss with my friends what I'm learning in class.
    c. I regularly participate in class discussions in most of my classes.
    d. I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person.
    e. It's hard to pay attention in many of my classes.
    f. I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else in my life.
    g. I ask my professors questions during class if I do not understanding something.
    h. In the last week, I've been bored in class a lot of the time.
    i. I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class.
    j. Sometimes I am afraid to participate in class.
    k. I feel energized by the ideas that I am learning in most of my classes.
    l. I usually think about how the topics being discussed in class might be connected to things I have learned in previous class periods.
    m. Often I find my mind wandering during class.
    n. When I am learning about a new idea in a class, I think about how I might apply it in practical ways.
    o. Sometimes I get so interested in something I'm studying in class that I spend extra time trying to learn more about it.